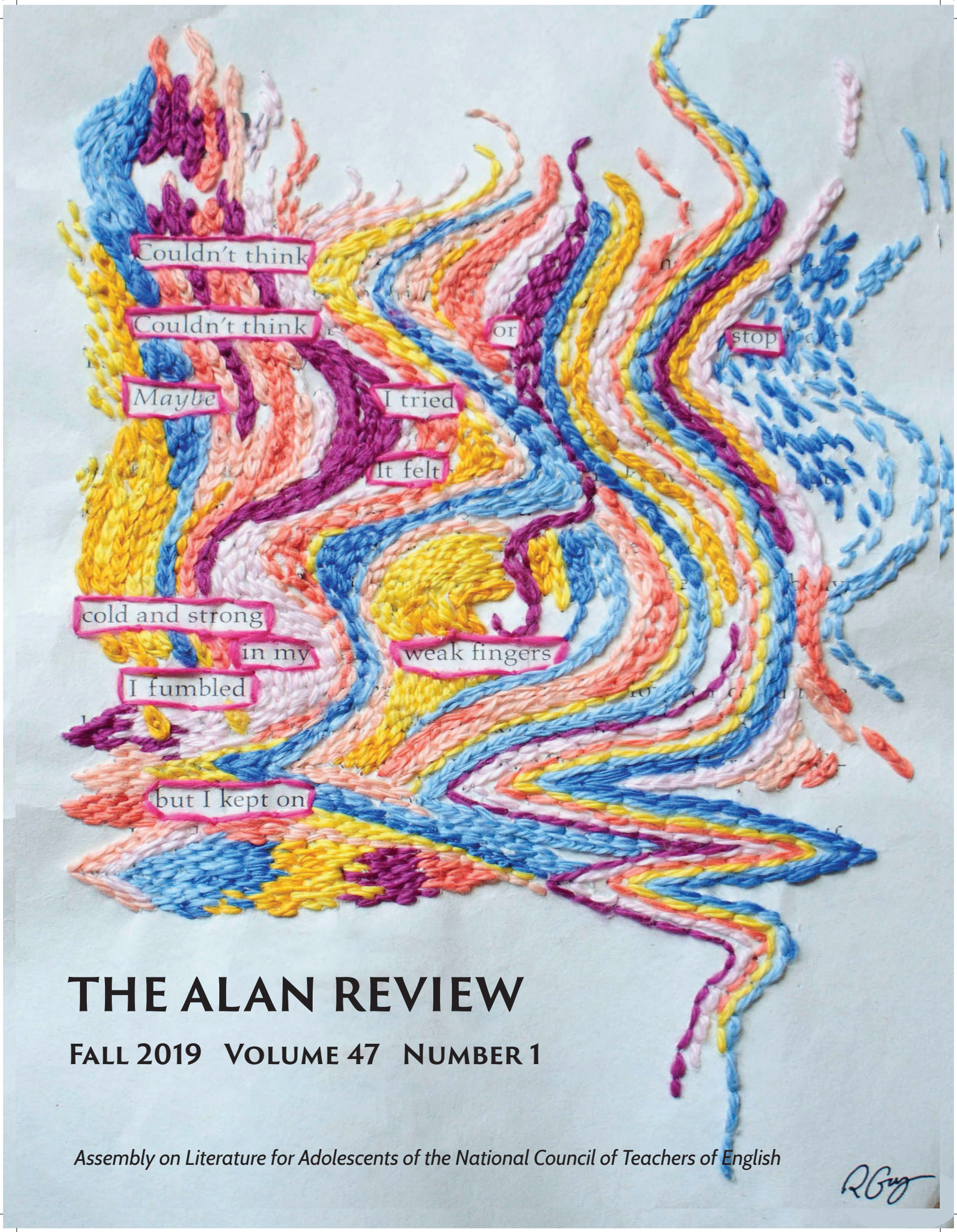

THE ALAN REVIEW

FALL 2019 VOLUME 47 NUMBER 1

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English

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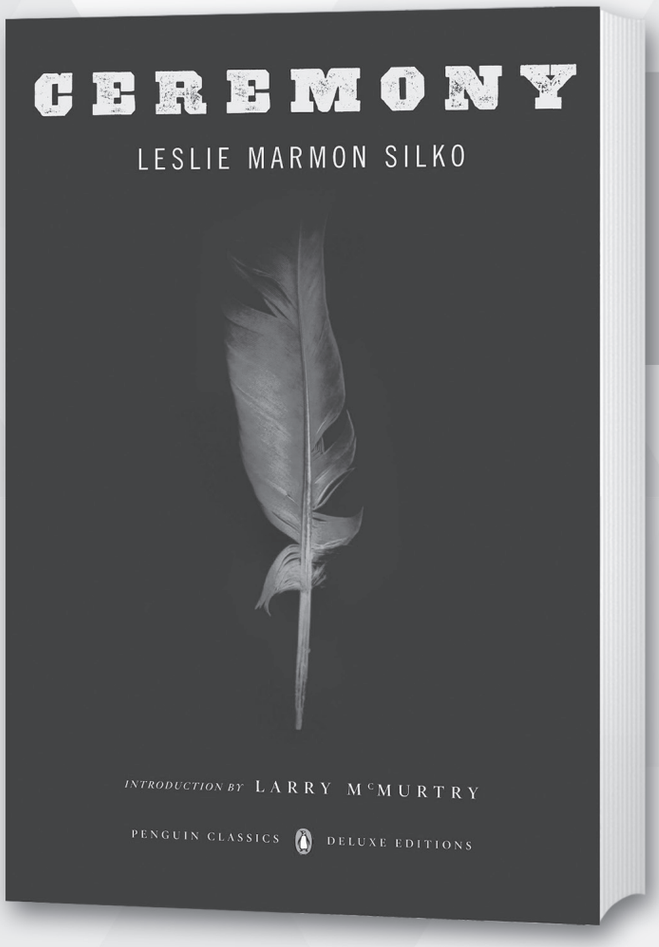

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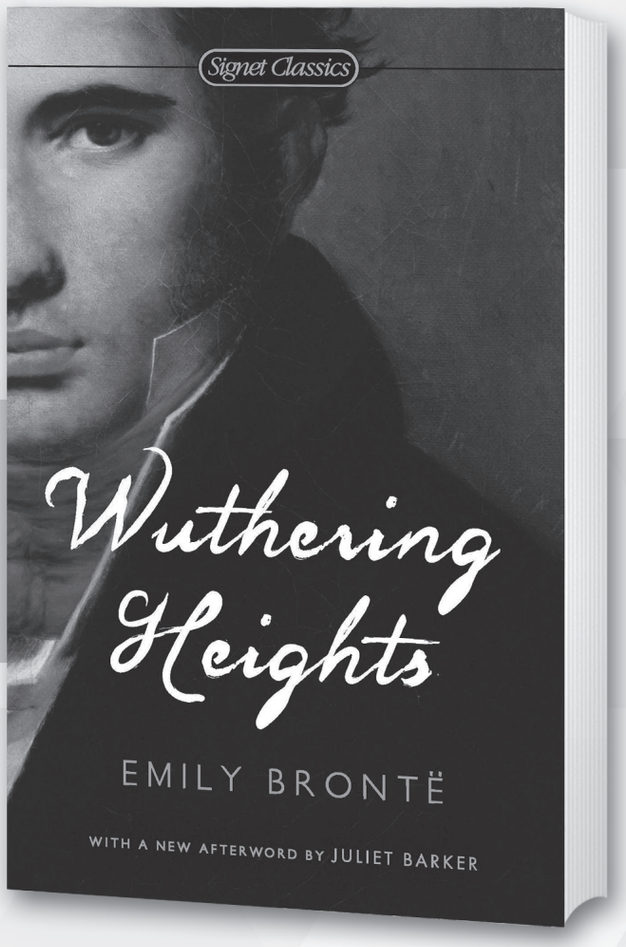

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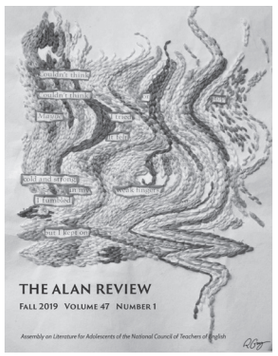

Engaged Reading with Young Adult Literature

Instructions for **Authors**

ABOUT *THE ALAN REVIEW.* *The ALAN Review (TAR;* ISSN 0882-2840 [Print], ISSN 1547-741X [Online]) publishes articles that explore, examine, critique, and advocate for literature for young adults and the teaching of that literature. Published pieces include, but are not limited to, research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genres and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews with YA authors.

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.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors should submit manuscripts electronically to tar@utk.edu. In the subject line, please write: ALAN Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA bibliographical format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: 1) An abstract of no more than 150 words; 2) A manuscript without references to the author(s) and with name(s) removed in the Properties section under the File menu to ensure the piece is blinded; 3) A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100- to 150-word professional biographies for each submitting author, as well as a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editors and at least three members of the Editorial Review Board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks. Manuscripts are judged for the contribution made to the field of young adult literature and mission of *The ALAN Review*, scholarly rigor, and clarity of writing. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of the editors. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

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**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

Suzanne **Sherman**, Caitlin **Metheny**, Susan **Groenke**, Arianna **Banack**, and Mary Cate **LeBoeuf**

From the Editors

Engaged Reading with Young Adult Literature

Hello! We are the new editors of *The ALAN Review.* We couldn't be happier to serve as ambassadors of the young adult literature we love so well and stewards to our readers and writers who keep us abreast of what's happening in the field. We know we have big shoes to fill and are forever grateful to the former editorial team for their leadership, advocacy for the genre of young adult literature, rigorous representation of trends and issues in the field, and finally, their commitment to the readers of *The ALAN Review.*

We are delighted to kick off our inaugural issue with a focus on something we think is so very important—reading engagement. We know reading engagement increases adolescents' academic achievement, but perhaps more important, we know reading engagement positively influences most aspects of young adults' intellectual, social, and moral development.

Those of us who are lucky enough to read with adolescents know what engaged reading looks like—adolescents enter the social worlds of the narratives, begin to feel emotionally connected to the characters, and negotiate the characters' dilemmas and development right alongside them. As a result, engaged adolescent readers find connection with characters and other readers; find different identities for themselves; find other people's humanity; and find a sense of agency or power to make positive changes in their relationships, academic and personal lives, and communities. All of this, and they also turn into motivated readers!

To highlight these possibilities and the importance of engaged reading, we are honored to begin this issue with a conversation between adolescent reading researcher Gay Ivey and popular classroom teacher and author Penny Kittle.

As Gay and Penny remind us, adolescents experience engaged reading when they read young adult literature. We think this is a very powerful reason to advocate for the genre. We also think this fact opens up new territories for us to consider in our classroom work with adolescents and our research. In this inaugural issue, we feature several authors who explore these new territories. In "Franchised Fictions: Youth Navigating Social and Parasocial Readings across Branded Young Adult Literature," Nora Peterman explores the ways a group of Latinx ninth-grade students position themselves as both readers and consumers of popular YA franchises. She examines how these students form connections with commodified literature and considers the ethical and pedagogical implications of their engagement.

In "'The Fact of a Doorframe': Adolescents Finding Pleasure in Transgender-Themed YAL," Ryan Schey and Mollie Blackburn take up Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) "windows and mirrors" metaphors as they conceptualize doorframes or frames as a necessary addition to these metaphors. They report on a study of adolescents reading a nonfiction transgender-themed YA text and consider how students used frames of pleasure as they reflect on the need for ethical and humanizing framings of pleasure when

reading YAL in secondary classrooms. In "What Matters for Eighth-Grade Female Readers: Experiences and Consequences of Sustained Reading Engagement," Julie Smit extends Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston's work by describing what reading engagement looks like with eighth-grade female students who are already motivated readers. And finally, in "'She's Saying the Thoughts I Didn't Know Anyone Else Had': YA Verse Novels and the Emergent Artistic Voice of Young Women," Emilie Curtis considers how the YA verse novel's form in popular, contemporary verse novels such as *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014), *Poet X* (Acevedo, 2018), and *Blood Water Paint* (McCullough, 2018) can facilitate adolescent readers' emotional involvement and character identification and encourage readers to develop their own artistic voices and identities.

And, as if these rich articles didn't give you enough to read and think about, we also want to introduce to you three new columns we will feature in *The ALAN Review* during our editorship. Our "Teacher Talk" column will share highlights and insights from classroom teachers who are working every day to advocate for YA literature. This column is led by Mary Cate LeBoeuf, a high school English teacher in Knoxville, Tennessee. In our first "Teacher Talk" column, Mary Cate reached out to both Stacey Reece, a long-time English teacher and 2018 winner of the Penny Kittle Book Love Foundation grant, and Erin Claxton, one of Stacey's former students. Stacey and Erin remind us that a passionate teacher who reads and shares her reading life with her students is key to engaging adolescent readers with YAL. Stacey is an avid reader of YAL and a regular attendee at ALAN, and this helps her stay abreast of trends in the genre, thus helping her match the right books to the right readers at the right time. Our second column, "Master Class in YAL," is written by Mark Letcher, past president of ALAN; it will report on the 2018 "Master Class" session at the ALAN conference. Read this column to learn more about the motivations for and history behind this session at ALAN and our column. We feature Neal Shusterman in this first edition of the column. Our third column reports "From the Library," an important place where engaged reading happens, too. Our own Suzanne Sherman will lead this column and kicks it off with some tips on how librarians can collaborate with classroom teachers to create a safe space for reading in the classroom.

To end this issue, we are so very honored to share Michael Cart's ALAN Award acceptance speech. Read our introduction to this speech to learn more about the annual ALAN Award, as well as why Michael Cart was the highly deserving recipient of this award in 2018.

Thanks for reading!

Susan Groenke *is a professor of English Education and Children's and Young Adult Literature at the University of Tennessee, where she also directs the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Dr. Groenke has served on the ALAN Board of Directors and has also served as a columnist and reviewer for The ALAN Review prior to beginning her term as Senior Editor. Her research interests center on adolescent reading motivation and engagement and using young adult literature (YAL) in anti-racist teacher education.*

Arianna Banack *is a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee in the Literacy Studies program with a specialization in Children's and Young Adult Literature. Arianna is a graduate research assistant and works in the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature under Dr. Susan Groenke. Her research interests focus on the connections between adolescent reading engagement and YAL. Prior to enrolling at UTK, Arianna was a ninth-grade English teacher in a large, urban district in Connecticut, where she integrated six multicultural YA novels into her classroom curricula.*

Caitlin Metheny *is a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Caitlin's concentration is in Literacy Education, with a specialization in Children's and Young Adult Literature. She is a graduate research assistant under Dr. Susan Groenke in the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Prior to starting her doctoral studies, Caitlin was a middle school Gifted and Talented English teacher for five years. She prioritized bringing diverse and engaging literature into the classroom to motivate and meet the needs of highly advanced readers.*

Suzanne Sherman *is a former English and Spanish teacher turned librarian! She has been a school librarian for 14 years and is going on her 12th year at Hardin Valley Academy, a public high school in Knox County, TN. Her transition from a classroom containing 30 some students*

to one that encompasses close to 2,000 began when she realized that the very best part of her day was when she got the right book to the right student, at the right time, and that she could do that on a larger scale. In addition to her role as a school librarian, Suzanne also teaches for the School of Information Sciences at UT Knoxville.

***Mary Cate LeBoeuf** is a secondary ELA teacher in Knoxville, TN. She holds a master's degree in Secondary English Education from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and teaches Secondary English and Creative Writing in Knoxville. She believes in the power of the written word and strives to have every student that enters her classroom leave loving to read more than they did before.*

Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

All submissions may be sent to tar@utk.edu. Please see the ALAN website (http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines) for submission guidelines.

Summer 2020: Exploring Adolescent Neurodiversity and Mental Health in YA Literature
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2019

Approximately one third of adolescents nationwide show symptoms of depression, and one of five adolescents has a diagnosable mental health disorder. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15- to 24-year-olds, and the majority of adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression. Yet teen depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses may go unrecognized, misunderstood, or ignored by teachers and other adults, and an ongoing stigma regarding mental health illnesses inhibits some adolescents and their families from seeking help.

As YA author A. S. King shared at the 2018 ALAN Breakfast, her teenage daughter's depression was often written off by teachers and other adults as "drama and a need for attention." Fortunately, authors of young adult literature have begun to explore issues associated with mental health in the genre, confronting the stigma of mental illness head-on while presenting narratives of inclusion, validation, hope, agency, and empowerment for adolescent readers. For this call, we are interested in hearing from you about the YA literature depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity you are reading, teaching, and using in your research. We invite correspondence about ideas for articles as well as submission of completed manuscripts. Here's a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- How can young adult literature help us navigate conversations in our classrooms and communities about what it means to see and experience the world in different ways? How can young adult literature help us think about the idea that neurological differences (e.g., ADHD, depression, anxiety, autism) should be recognized and respected as any other human variation? What does it mean to be a "normal" human being? What does it mean to be abnormal, disordered, or sick?
- Neuroscience increasingly identifies the complexity of human brains and is beginning to shift cultural perceptions of mental health. Some psychologists explore and celebrate mental differences under the rubric of neurodiversity. The term encompasses those with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, schizophrenia, depression, dyslexia, and other disorders affecting the mind and brain. The proponents of neurodiversity argue that there are positive aspects to having brains that function differently. But others, including many parents of affected youth, focus on the difficulties and suffering brought on by these conditions. What experiences of adolescent mental health and neurodiversity—and discursive constructions of neurodiverse youth—are presented in young adult literature?
- Whose stories are being told, and by whom? Whose stories are missing?
- Do YA books stigmatize, romanticize, and/or normalize adolescent mental health and neurodiversity? What are the dangers of these representations?

- How can young adult literature help us examine and better understand the intersectional identities (e.g., race, class, [dis]ability, gender, religion, age, geography, sexual orientation) of neurodiverse adolescents?
- How do TV and movie adaptations of YA novels depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity (e.g., the Netflix series "Thirteen Reasons Why") affect readers' understandings of adolescent mental health? What intertextual connections about adolescent mental health can be drawn from multiple representations of the same story?
- Popular YA author John Green admits to writing his own mental illness into his latest novel, *Turtles All the Way Down,* explaining that "having OCD is an ongoing part of my life." Similarly, in Jessica Burkhart's edited collection *Life Inside My Mind: 31 Authors Share Their Personal Struggles,* YA author Sara Zarr describes her ongoing struggles with depression ("Sometime between getting out of bed and standing in front of the coffeepot, I feel the cloud...Maybe more like quicksand than a cloud….I feel fear and worthlessness, or fear that I'm worthless" [p. 260]). In the same collection, YA author Francisco X. Stork describes his own suicide attempt and experiences with bipolar disorder ("When I talk about bipolar disorder, I use words like 'loneliness' and 'uncontrollable longing' rather than words like 'depression' and 'mania' because the former are more descriptive of what I actually feel, even though depression is a bundle of feelings and thoughts more complicated than loneliness, and mania is more than irrepressible longing" [p. 284]). We wonder: When YA authors disclose their own struggles with mental health, how does this impact teen readers?

Fall 2020: Are You There, God? It's Me, a Secularist, Humanist, Areligious, Questioning, Gay Committed Christian, Atheist: Adolescence and Religion in YAL
Submissions due on or before March 1, 2020

Former *TAR* editors Wendy Glenn, Ricki Ginsberg, and Danielle King-Watkins asked teachers, researchers, and other YA advocates to consider the questions, "What's Now? What's New? What's Next?" in their final issue, published in 2019. *TAR* readers responded, writing predominantly about religion and areligion (not influenced by or practicing religion) in YAL. A year later, we wonder: How are diverse adolescents and their a/religious or atheist affiliations, beliefs, and practices represented in the YA genre? How are a/religious and atheist teen characters portrayed? What religious affiliations get dominant positive representation in YAL? Who gets to be a/religious or atheist in YAL? Do adolescent agnostics, humanists, non-believers, questioners, and skeptics get any attention in the genre? Why does religion (especially areligion and atheism) in YAL still seem like a taboo topic?

We invite correspondence about ideas for articles as well as submission of completed manuscripts. We would especially love to hear from teens about how they feel about the portrayal of a/religion or atheism in YAL, if they find a/religion or atheism to be of central importance in YAL, and why. Here's a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- Is religion still a taboo topic in YAL? If so, why? Longtime YA scholar and advocate Patty Campbell has claimed the greatest of all taboos in YAL is religion. In a recent (2018) *New York Times* article (https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/books/review/religion-taboo-young-adult.html), YA author Donna Freitas shared: "This feeling of mine—that a YA writer had best stay away from the topic of faith—is elusive, a kind of vapor that began swirling around me a decade ago when I wrote my first YA novel, *The Possibilities of Sainthood,* about a Catholic girl who longs to become the first living saint. Being too overt about religion in a YA novel seemed a mistake, maybe even an act of self-sabotage—unless one is writing about cults or lampooning religion." Why does writing about a/religion in YAL seem off-limits?

- In Patrick Ness's *Release* (2017), Adam Thorn grapples with love and heartbreak while living under strict rules in an Evangelical household where he hears "I love you, but . . ." from his family who have always struggled to believe Adam "might be a bit gay." The religious teachings of his father and the lack of general acceptance from his family force Adam to question if the love he felt for his ex, Enzo, was *real* love: "Because what if they were right? What if there was something wrong with him? What if, on some level, way deep inside, right down to the very simplest, purified form of what he was, what if he was corrupted?" Manuel, an openly gay teen and committed Christian also has some thoughts on love in Alex Sanchez's *The God Box* (2009). Manuel tells his closeted lover, Paul: "Pablito, the Bible was meant to be a bridge, not a wedge. It's the greatest love story ever told, about God's enduring and unconditional love for his creation—love beyond all reason. To understand it, you have to read it with love as the standard. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Always remember that." Finally, Julia Watts's YA novel *Quiver* (2018) presents Libby, an evangelical Christian, and Zo, her feminist, gender-fluid neighbor who must both navigate their families' cultural differences to fight for their friendship. What can readers learn from YAL about how to navigate romance, friendship, family values and beliefs, *and* multiple intersectional adolescent identities that include gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and fundamentalist religious affiliations?
- Why is religion so divisive? Religion can be used as a weapon or to exploit and oppress. How can we use YAL to talk about what religion is and isn't? How can YAL show us how to bridge differences and create unity rather than disunity? A claim of the field of young adult literature is its power to be a window or sliding glass door into unfamiliar cultures [see Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, *1*(3, 1990, pp. ix–xi.]. Can YAL encourage its readers to be more empathetic toward individuals from different religious backgrounds and to be more understanding of other religious perspectives? What would this look like in scholarship, pedagogy, or in a YAL novel?
- Atheism is featured in several YA novels, including *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018), by Adib Khorram; *Heretics Anonymous* (2018), by Katie Henry; *Blind Faith* (2006), by Ellen Wittlinger; *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life* (2006), by Dana Reinhardt; *Godless* (2004), by Pete Hautman; and *Tina's Mouth: An Existential Comic Diary* (2012) by Keshni Kashyap. How can these YA novels be used to better understand atheist affiliations and beliefs? Why do teens choose to be atheist or areligious? What can we learn from these teens about the limits of religion? Where do these teens find community and connectedness?
- Volume 46, Issue 3 of *TAR* focused on the representations of Christianity in YAL, and we wonder: How does the field of YAL take up non-Christian or nondominant religious affiliations? What would it look like to have an American Muslim protagonist whose religious beliefs are not defined as threats of terrorism? Do texts like this exist? In *The Serpent King* (2016) by Jeff Zentner, parishioners of the protagonist's Pentecostal church handle serpents and drink poison as a sign of faith; they are thusly positioned as stereotypical, ignorant, small-town Southerners. How can YAL be used to "talk back to" too simplistic, limiting, problematic portrayals of religion in the genre?

Penny **Kittle** and Gay **Ivey**

Engaged in Young Adult Literature:

A Collaborative Conversation with Penny Kittle and Gay Ivey

We are so very honored to converse with two of the leading voices on adolescent reading engagement in our inaugural issue. Penny Kittle teaches freshman composition at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. She was a teacher and literacy coach in public schools for 34 years, 21 of those spent at Kennett High School in North Conway. She is the coauthor of *180 Days* (2018) with Kelly Gallagher, and is the author of *Book Love* (2012), and *Write Beside Them* (2008), which won the James Britton Award. She also coauthored two books with her mentor, Don Graves, and co-edited (with Tom Newkirk) a collection of Graves's work, *Children Want to Write.* She is the president of the Book Love Foundation and was given the Exemplary Leader Award from NCTE's Conference on English Leadership.

Dr. Gay Ivey is the William E. Moran Distinguished Professor in Literacy at the University of North Carolina–Greensboro. Her research centers around engaged reading as a tool for improving the academic and relational lives of children and adolescents. She is particularly interested in helping teachers and school districts solve problems related to reading instruction and children's achievement and engagement. She is an elected member of the Reading Hall of Fame and 2018 President of the Literacy Research Association. Her important research on adolescent reading engagement can be found in such publications as *Reading Research Quarterly, Reading Teacher, Journal of Literacy Research,* and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.*

Gay, you suggested in your Presidential Address at the Literacy Research Association (LRA) conference in 2018 that you were surprised in your research with 8th graders by the "depth" you saw in their reading engagement. We also noticed that "depth" is one of the words in the title for* Book Love. *Talk about what the word "depth" means to you in terms of your work with adolescent readers: What is it? How do you know it when you see it? Why is it important?

Penny: Reading is an individual journey using all kinds of texts—those we read for pleasure or entertainment, those that confirm what we already know, and those that challenge us with new thinking, new experiences, and new ways to consider how we live and why. I believe that students should be on that journey throughout their years in school, setting the stage for a life lived between the pages. When I moved from my years as an elementary and middle school teacher to the high school, I was struck by how limited the journey in reading had become for students. There were only a few books each year in the curriculum, and all students read at the same slow pace. The K–12 curriculum in reading had moved from expansive to narrow, and I couldn't make sense of it.

I was concerned about the overall lack of engagement with the act of reading in high school students, of course, but also that the reading lives of students bound by this curriculum map would remain in a shallow place—as those who experi-

enced great texts from a distance, not as a transaction (Probst, 1988, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1978) between the ideas in the text and their own lives. Literature is about big questions, but students weren't asking them. English curriculum was about extracting the history and context and "worth" of great books, not reading to imagine and discover. When I opened up the wide expanse of literature and nonfiction to my high school students as a daily part of our time together, they responded by becoming deeply engaged in building their own understanding of what they read. They deepened their thinking about the ideas in books, and they hungered to experience the lives of people far from our tiny mountain town. You cannot find depth until you wade in, and without agency as readers, students will stay in shallow water. In fact, some won't even leave the shore.

Gay: I second Penny's observations about the real reasons adolescents read deeply! I worry that "depth" in K–12 English/language arts classrooms is reduced to the idea of being able to critically analyze a text or to use so-called higher-level comprehension skills. The students in the 8th-grade classrooms Peter Johnston and I studied over a period of years (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; 2015) made clear that such a focus is not only short-sighted in terms of reading development, but also in terms of how students might come to view and use reading as a way to manage and improve their lives and relationships. Like Penny, the teachers in these classrooms prioritized reading engagement. They arranged for students to have meaningful experiences by providing a vast collection of relevant books, letting students choose, and giving them ample time in class to read, all with no strings attached–no comprehension questions, journal responses, projects, or requirement for reading a set number of books, and so forth.

These decisions resulted in students reading more, and willingly so; they were also reading more strategically and analytically, but far surpassing what is expected on any set of curriculum standards I have seen. For instance, when students became confused in their reading, it was common for them to reread entire chapters and sometimes the whole book. It is hard to imagine students going to that much effort in a required reading of *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850). Likewise, they were quick to point out literary devices, such as the use of flashbacks and figurative language, not merely as exercises of analysis or critique, but as necessary tools the author used to make reading mind-expanding. Students were especially drawn to books with shifting narrators, such as *Jumping Off Swings* (Knowles, 2009), because of the access to multiple characters' minds at once. As one student told another one day, "These books go into all sorts of point of view. It will help you understand things." The "things" she is referring to are not the books themselves, but other people outside of books, and in turn, themselves.

This gets me to a kind of "depth" in reading that has gotten far too little attention both in the classroom and in research. Engagement with characters' emotions and motives, particularly as characters face moral dilemmas, raises more questions than answers for adolescent readers. These questions are about themselves, ultimately, rather than the books. When readers are engaged, they are not trying to get to the bottom of the story or to learn a lesson or a "universal theme" of a novel (if such a thing exists). They want to dig in further, seek out new perspectives on the problem, sometimes from other books and often from each other. A number of students who read *Living Dead Gir*l (Scott, 2008), for instance, were frustrated that the main character did not try harder to escape from her sexually and psychologically abusive captor, and they spent months recruiting new readers and reading related texts (e.g., *Stolen*, Christopher, 2010) in search of ways to knock the edges off of their own thinking, not just in relation to the character's motives, but also in how they viewed others. Uncertainty, coupled with caring, is a powerful motivator. Engagement at this depth is easy to spot in classrooms: students will be compelled to talk about what they are read-

You cannot find depth until you wade in, and without agency as readers, students will stay in shallow water. In fact, some won't even leave the shore.

ing—as one student said to me, "to rage" about it—and they will work at convincing others to read what they are reading as a way to create conversation partners.

Penny, you also talk a lot about the "joy" of reading—the title of your popular book is* Book Love*, emphasis on the "love." You also have the word "passion" in your title. These are powerful emotions that you suggest adolescent readers feel when they are engaged readers. Gay, you also talk about the "socio-emotional" outcomes of reading engagement, including empathy and concern for others. Tell us more about the role you think emotions play in engaged reading and in positive reader identities.

Penny: I often say love is the highest standard. When we love something, we are relentless in pursuing it. I want students to love the act of reading, and I believe we see it when they burst into our rooms ready to share what they found in a book. I see it when my students arrive in class well before the bell to be back in the pages, making use of every minute. When a hockey player tells me he has never gone home to read after an important match, but he had to finish his book club book: the ideas and the challenge of *Just Mercy* (2018) by Bryan Stevenson compelled him to keep reading. We know the difference between engaged and compliant reading when we watch and listen to students. We can see empathy in how students treat each other, how conversations in book clubs move as students wrestle with difficult ideas, and how seriously students attend to the experiences of characters they meet in books they choose. When we confer with students, we hear how they understand, but also how they feel about what they read.

Gay: I want to pick up on Penny's fantastic description of the student who was pulled in by *Just Mercy*. Peter Johnston and I saw the same phenomenon over and over: adolescent readers drawn to books that cause discomfort. Oftentimes, the phrase *pleasure reading* is associated with students choosing their own books or reading on their own time. We had a hard time labeling much of the reading students in our research did as *pleasurable*. The situations students encounter in their preferred books are often quite unsettling, or "disturbing," as students told us. As it turns out, these engagements are productive spaces for substantial socio-emotional work. We shortchange student-preferred reading when we assume their experiences are light, or we assume that if they love it, it must not be complex.

When students are engaged in reading narrative, they enter the social worlds of the books, take up the perspectives of the characters, and experience their emotional and relational lives. Students told us repeatedly that such experiences caused them to be slower to judge and quicker to forgive. But what is more, they reported also recognizing antisocial behaviors in themselves (e.g., bullying; lashing out), and they explained how these realizations caused them to change. It is important that these transformations occurred when students experienced a sense of autonomy, a sense of competence, and a sense of relatedness in their reading. It is doubtful you would see the same outcomes in an assigned reading of any one text, from the canon or even from the latest award-winning or best-selling young adult book list.

In our research, we asked questions such as, "Have you changed as a person this year?" and "Have you read anything lately that made you think about things differently?" These would be great conversation starters with the whole class for lots of reasons. Teachers can get a sense of students' engagements, for sure, but students' thinking would also be made available to each other. One thing we learned is that once students realize that reading and talking with each other can lead to these kinds of transformations, they go about this intentionally.

Gay, you challenge literacy researchers to focus on student agency and engagement in future research, encouraging us to think about reading as a "collective and interdependent" process (as opposed to something we do alone and solely "in-the-head"). You also say we have to do this research in classrooms, "side-by-side" with teachers and their students. Penny, you've been doing practitioner research in classroom(s) for a long time, paying close attention to your students as readers. (You say in your book on writing instruction to "write beside them"). What can you both say about why it's

important to focus on student perspectives in reading engagement research, and why it's important to work "side-by-side" with young people to gain insights into their reading lives? What do you think adolescents want to teach us about reading and reading instruction?

Penny: One of the most obvious missteps we make when we leave the student's perspective out of data-gathering is a shallow understanding of what the student knows. We give meaningless tests (like multiple-choice comprehension "checks") to standardize responses for ease in grading, but the personal connection between reader and text is entirely absent. We don't know what we don't know. Because Alan brings his love of sports to his reading of *Moneyball* (2008) by Michael Lewis, he uses his background knowledge to understand a text that is considered to be far beyond his reading level. Alan has always been told he's a poor reader, but he is as willing to be engaged as anyone when given a text he finds valuable and other students to discuss his thinking with. If we honor his need to read slowly, we will watch him set goals that push him far beyond what we once believed he could do.

We waste a lot of time in secondary classrooms trying to motivate students to read what we believe they should be reading, squeezing out time for them to develop an allegiance to authors and genres that will keep them seeking meaning in reading for years to come. We waste even more time testing students on their understanding when odds are they haven't read the book (they often use summaries found on the Internet, half-listen in class, or simply pretend to read) or asking them to write essays on books they haven't read. When a teacher makes time to connect students with books and then confers with them to listen and respond to their thinking, the teaching of reading is seen differently. Our work is to differentiate our teaching to respond to the individual challenges in our classrooms. When we ignore them, students read less and learn less.

Gay: Studying student perspectives on reading for the past 25 or so years has changed my thinking on reading, teaching, and research. As a teacher of middle school readers, I thought I had two main jobs: to find books for individual students that matched their "level" and interest and to help them become engaged in silent reading. Then I would do it all over again, one student at a time. Students in engaged classroom communities taught me that first, peers bring a level of influence that a teacher alone cannot. The processes leading to engaged reading are heavily social. In engaged reading classrooms, it is the students who do the heavy lifting of persuading others to read and helping each other decide what to read. I have also learned from working in classrooms, side-by-side with students and their teachers, that adolescents often leverage their reading to develop and expand relationships. Countless students have reported making friends over book conversations, using conversations about books to break the ice with acquaintances and to ease interactions with parents.

Engaged reading no longer means, for me, just an individual student's experience with a text; rather, it encompasses also the conversations that happen before, during, and long after reading, as well as the thinking that happens outside the presence of the book, over time and space.

I also learned that going for silent reading alone was terribly limited. Deep meaning making is social—students' thinking is expanded as they talk to each other through and about books. I have come to think of engaged reading not as the product of a reader–text relationship, per se, but instead a complex network of reader–text–other. Engaged reading no longer means, for me, just an individual student's experience with a text; rather, it encompasses also the conversations that happen before, during, and long after reading, as well as the thinking that happens outside the presence of the book, over time and space. But as students have reminded me, this talking and thinking is not only about the book; it is inseparably about their own lives.

For a long time, I studied what motivates adolescents to read. I was interested in that because of the link between time spent reading and reading achievement. That was all well and good until students helped me see that they do not spend time reading in order to work on their reading or get better at it. They read to work on their lives. Re-shifting my focus, I was able to see what students perceive as benefits of engagement—a sense of agency around their reading, a greater sense of social and moral agency, the development of relationships, emotional and academic self-regulation, more positive outlooks on their futures, and even happiness. The students I studied indeed got higher test scores due to engaged reading, but that outcome seems to pale in comparison with these other dimensions of human development. Now knowing these things that were previously in my own blind spot, I hope to nudge teacher friends to deliberately arrange for students to have these kinds of experiences with these goals in mind. Believe me, I am still learning.

Penny, you say in* 180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents *(co-authored with Kelly Gallagher) that choice drives engagement, and you try to give students choice in what they read 75% of the time. You're also a big proponent of independent reading, as it gives adolescent readers more control over their reading lives and practices, and independent reading doesn't mean students aren't thinking critically or practicing strategic reading. Gay, you've noted in recent research that adolescents choose "emotionally disturbing" books to read when given opportunities to choose. Talk more about any insights you have gained about adolescents' reading choices through your work, and the role(s) choice/autonomy continue to have in reading engagement.

Penny: I love the idea that readers perform "imagined rehearsals" (Burke, 1966) as they read. We are looking for ways to experience the world from the safety of home. I read of the deep sadness in a character contemplating suicide to better understand where that sadness begins and how it grows. I believe I am a better friend because I am willing to make that journey. I live inside the mind of a young man determined to avenge his brother's death in *A Long Way Down* (2017) by Jason Reynolds and feel how complex his decision is. I empathize more easily with young people who are trapped in a cycle of violence. My students experience similar journeys of understanding, but each of those journeys begins with where they are.

This fall I had three students who had lost a parent before entering their first semester of college. Each struggled to understand that loss: one read ghost stories to imagine the afterlife, one read memoirs of others who had survived the loss of a parent and emerged whole, and the other read romance novels wondering how her future might help protect her from her past. The alchemy of individual experience is complex, and I don't try to prescribe the reading that might meet a student's needs, but I provide many, many books that speak to issues that are important to all of us. When we read to understand and to answer questions that haunt us, the hunt for meaning wraps us tightly around the strategies that strong readers practice without prompting. I reread a passage because it says exactly what I'm thinking. I might copy it in my notebook. I have students collect passages that matter to them from books they've chosen, and they amaze and delight me with their insight. Because we hold the author's words in our notebooks, we return to them, hear those words again, and remember why they mattered. That's engagement.

Gay: Adults worry so much about what adolescents will choose to read. That is probably because we see "disturbing" texts through our own eyes and life experiences rather than theirs. We worry that exposure to certain situations will be harmful to students. Like Penny, though, I have found that adolescent readers are drawn more to the moral and emotional complexities of the stories than to any of the necessary graphic details used to create the social world of the book. More often than not, students have shared with me that reading young adult literature, in particular, makes them more aware of potential dangers in the world—and thus less likely to participate in risky behaviors—and even more respectful and appreciative of their own parents. Like Penny said, it gives the students the

opportunity to imagine themselves into experiences and see the possible consequences without putting themselves in actual peril. One boy even told me that his parents had warned him about the risks of certain behaviors, but he did not actually believe what they said until he saw it happening to characters in books. It also helps when students can encounter "disturbing" narratives in the company of the teacher and other students, who can offer different perspectives on the topic.

What I have also learned from adolescent readers' choices is that it is difficult to predict which books will resonate with individuals, and what part of a book will mean something. Coe Booth's *Tyrell* (2006) was the favorite book of an eighth grader who, like the main character, had a father who spent time in jail. He managed to bring that book into nearly every other book conversation that happened in his English class that year! What he zoomed in on, though, was Tyrell's shaky relationship with his mother, and he used that as a way to reflect on and improve his relationship with his own mother. Lots of times we try to find books based on what students "like" (e.g., basketball, hunting), but what they really find meaningful in texts—emotional and relational dilemmas—is something they cannot quite articulate until they encounter it. That is why it is important for students to get to hear other students in conversation about the deep stuff in narratives—so they will have a better idea of what books will be engaging for them.

Gay, you have said that kids become different people—perhaps better people—when they are engaged readers, and that reading = agency to become the person you want to be. Penny, you say in* Book Love *that "kids will find time to read if given books that name what's in their hearts." Share, if you will, a time—either as an adolescent yourself or a moment from your adult life—when a book helped you find meaning in your own life. What was the book? What did it name in your heart at the time? And also, how has what you've learned from adolescent readers shaped your own reading practices?

Penny: As a sixth grader, I found *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh. I believe I picked up my notebook writing habit from Harriet. She was a great observer of people. Whenever I am struggling to write, I describe what is around me: on a plane, in a coffee shop, in my office looking out at the woods around my house. The act of putting words on paper gets my brain working. But more important, this act of observation paved the way for my understanding of kid-watching—the importance of paying attention to the students before me and listening to them to understand what I need to teach next.

My reading practices have certainly been shaped by adolescent readers. I have expanded what I read in order to share in their enthusiasm for popular books like *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009). I also have learned to appreciate audiobooks, especially of my favorite novels. Recently I have been happily listening to Rosamond Pike's reading of the works of Jane Austen, and each one is delightful. Another strategy that I used initially with students that I've been able to incorporate into my own reading is note taking. I often help students track their thinking in their notebooks when they are juggling multiple characters and plot lines. I find that the same strategy helps me stay with a complex book when I read it in pieces. I can get back to experiencing the world of each character if I have notes to remind me of my thinking. Last, I ask my students to collect beautiful passages and sentences from books they love. I have done this for years because I love rereading beautiful writing. It inspires me to write better and to listen to the musicality of sentences. The beauty and careful attention in their two-page notebook spreads inspire and encourage me to create my own.

Gay: Other than professional literature, I read young adult fiction more than anything else. It is so good! Certain characters have taken up permanent residence inside my head, and I am often reminded of the decisions they made. There is a character in *Hate List* (Brown, 2009) who is so unbelievably forgiving of a main character who was linked to a school shooting, and you are able to see the good that comes from that. I love Coe Booth's books (as do many students I know), and in *Kendra* (2008), the title character becomes involved with a boy who, on the surface, seems like bad news. What happens as the story unfolds, though, is we get to

know much more about him, and it becomes difficult to maintain that judgment. I carry that experience around with me. *The Way I Used to Be* (Smith, 2016) really rocked me and without a doubt made me think more deeply and more compassionately about people dealing with the long-lasting repercussions of trauma. Books like these have definitely helped to shape who I am still trying to become.

How have engaged adolescent readers helped to shape my reading practices? Well, they have certainly made me read more! As with Penny, they have inspired me to branch out. I have never been drawn to books that dabble in the supernatural, but after students hounded me to read things by Neal Shusterman, I was sold. *Bruiser* (2010) is one of my all-time favorites. It is heartbreaking and helped me realize that I do like to read books in this genre because of the realistic and complex human emotions that drive the story.

Anything else you'd like to say or share? Please do!

Penny: We have students pretending to read from early middle school through AP English, and they are being rewarded for talking and writing about books, even though they are not reading them. Teachers and parents know this. We have made excuses for it (kids are too busy, overscheduled, always on devices, etc.) instead of acting on it. As Kylene Beers said, "If we teach a child to read, but fail to develop a desire to read, we will have created a skilled nonreader, a literate illiterate. And no high test score will ever undo that damage." However, we are experiencing a revolution in thinking about reading, particularly in high school. Many educators are taking disengagement seriously, shifting their teaching to balance independent reading, book clubs, and a few core texts each year. The movement to create reading lives that last is growing. It is exciting to live in this time, to imagine all of the joy possible for both students and teachers as they share a true engagement with reading. Engagement is everything.

Gay: In countless conversations I have had over the years with Peter Johnston, we have wondered what it would be like if all students had 12 straight years of English language arts class like what our eighth-grade research participants experienced. We are convinced that students would leave senior year not only much more proficient and versatile readers, but perhaps more important, as human beings who would change the world in positive ways presently unimagined. And what about teaching? I know the teachers in our studies were as invigorated as the students. Imagine if it became normal to assume that an English teacher's main job is to help students—through supporting engagement with books and with each other—become happy, agentive, socially secure, open-minded young adults who have come to view reading as a way to grow themselves. I am hopeful moving forward. Thanks for the opportunity to think more about all of this!

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Nora **Peterman**

Franchised Fictions:

Youth Navigating Social and Parasocial Readings across Branded Young Adult Literature

Children's and young adult (YA) literature has always been marketed and sold for profit. However, the scale and scope of franchised adaptations of literature, tie-ins, and commodities have exponentially increased in the past few decades (Mackey, 2011). Positioning J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books as paradigmatic, Taxel (2011) argued that "the Potter phenomenon" represents a comprehensive transformation of the publishing industry in which books are branded and merchandised in a self-replicating cycle of consumerism: book series promote associated films, television programs, and merchandise, while films, television programs, and merchandise promote the associated books (p. 282). The publishing of young adult literature is now characterized by the production of series and sequels, cross-media merchandising, and even the branding of authors themselves (Taxel, 2011). These YA franchises are comprised of a variety of print, media, and material texts, all of which contribute to and reflect the commercial "brand" while developing the larger storyworld (Sekeres, 2009).

For example, Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games series (2008—2010) is associated with blockbuster films generating millions of dollars in revenue, as well as a vast array of commercial products that adolescents (and their parents) may purchase. A Hunger Games fan might signal her affiliation with the series by brandishing mockingjay jewelry, wearing a "Team Gale" t-shirt, or purchasing limited edition Capitol-themed makeup and nail polish. School supplies are another large market for YA franchise merchandising, with items such as branded backpacks, notebooks, binders, pens, and mobile phone and laptop computer cases available for purchase.

Despite its immense popularity, we know relatively little about how adolescent readers are navigating and valuing the range of commercial texts that are increasingly part of their reading experiences. There currently exists a complicated combination of forces influencing the proliferation of branded young adult fiction, as youth buying power shapes the publishing industry, and that industry markets to youth. Are adolescents passive consumers of fortune, or are they savvy in their choices based on critical reviews of the market? What is the "value" of these books to the adolescent reader, and what ideological work is performed between branded YA fiction and the readers who engage with these texts?

In this article, I examine how a group of Latinx high school students read between and across the varied print, media, and material (such as related merchandise) texts in popular YA fiction franchises. I explore the ways in which these students positioned themselves as both readers and consumers of commodified young adult literature through social and parasocial transactions with these texts, and I consider the ethical and pedagogical implications of their engagement.

Market Values and the Commodification of Young Adult Literature

It is helpful to situate current trends in YA publishing within the broader industry context. The proliferation of branded young adult fiction is reflective of wider

economic shifts in the marketplace. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, independent publishers began to merge with larger publishing houses as well as transnational conglomerates such as the News Corporation, Disney, Viacom, and Bertelsmann. As these conglomerates gained control over the "culture industry," the practices of serialization, spin-offs, and merchandising of young adult fiction became common in order to maximize profits through transmedia production (Martens, 2010; Taxel, 2011). Diana Sekeres (2009) defined these texts as "branded fiction"—a genre including books that are created and sold as one of many products under a single brand name (p. 400). This recursive relationship is similarly described by Hade (2001), who has suggested that "publishers understand that they are not in the book business; rather they sell ideas they call "brands," and they market their brands through "synergized" goods designed to infiltrate as many aspects of a child's life as possible" (p. 159).

Although fans of branded YA novels welcome the myriad products and opportunities for interacting with these texts, many teachers and researchers have expressed concerns that publishers prioritize the earnings potential of franchised young adult fiction over literary quality (see Bullen, 2009 Erzen, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Taxel, 2011). Zipes (2001) has cautioned that while the publishing industry is progressively more "driven by commodity consumption," it "at the same time sets the parameters of reading aesthetic taste" (p. 172). These two purposes are not easily reconciled in transmedia branding—profitable young adult literature properties require the rapid production and launch of multiple products, and the integrity of an individual text is less important than its capacity to expand the potential audience and strengthen the total franchise-brand awareness (Aarseth, 2006). Reflecting the new industry norms, Sekeres (2009) argued that:

> Publishers and marketers also want children to be consumers as well as readers. Therefore, in marketing terms, a book that is a stand-alone product is valuable for its intrinsic purpose, but a book that is tied in with many other products has added value—it can enhance brand awareness, dispose children to want to buy other products in the brand, and promote a broader conception of story and character through all the brand products. (p. 403)

The market-driven logic of transmedia branding has thus amplified fears that rampant commercialization of young adult literature repositions reading as an act of consumerism, rather than an intellectual or imaginative endeavor (Garcia, 2013; Taxel, 2011).

However, it is also important to note that despite persistent assumptions to the contrary, the commodification of children's narratives is hardly a new phenomenon. One of the earliest manifestations of "spin-off" merchandising occurred in 1744 when children's publisher John Newbery sold his book, *A Little Pretty Pocket-book*, alongside toys, including balls "for Little Master Tommy" and pincushions "for Pretty Miss Polly" (Bernstein, 2013, p. 459). Widely recognized for his pioneering role in constructing the notion of children as a distinct market, Newbery specified that both the book and attendant toys were "Intended for the Instruction and Amusement" of children and supported moral development (Bernstein, 2013; Sekeres, 2009).

The market-driven logic of transmedia branding has thus amplified fears that rampant commercialization of young adult literature repositions reading as an act of consumerism, rather than an intellectual or imaginative endeavor.

While Newbery thus defined children's literature in relationship to play, many other well-known authors subsequently explored the possibilities of branding their stories and characters. Popular children's literature commodities included Elsie Dinsmore paper dolls; Lewis Carroll's approval of a *Wonderland* Postage-Stamp Case (Mackey, 1998; 2011); the myriad products of Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* franchise, such as a plush Peter Rabbit doll, Peter Rabbit wallpaper, and Peter Rabbit games; and Kewpie dolls and wallpaper associated with Rose O'Neill's comic strip (Sekeres, 2009). L. Frank Baum further extended the commercialization of children's narratives by adapting and re-telling *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in a stage musical and hand-colored film, in addition to marketing toys and games as related tie-ins (Hearn, 2000; Mackey, 2011).

Although this historical context has been largely overlooked in addressing more recent developments in the commercialization of children's literature, Robin

Bernstein has called for a reconceptualization of the field of children's literature that acknowledges and foregrounds this fundamental relationship between children's literature, material culture, and the actions of playing. Bernstein (2013) argued that "the history of children's literature exists not in opposition to but in integration with the histories of children's material culture and children's play" (p. 459). Ahistorical beliefs ignoring this triangulation ultimately erect arbitrary and counterfactual barriers that dangerously mask the market-driven powers that influence the publishing and distribution of this literature.

However, this erasure of difference becomes even more pronounced when these texts are commodified and transmediated into television, film, and commercial merchandise. The overwhelming majority of branded young adult fiction franchises feature conventionally attractive, white, straight, cis-gendered teenagers in either suburban or uber-wealthy urban settings

Bernstein's position is especially salient given both the increasing commodification of young adult literature and the relationship between hyper-commodification and hyper-homogenization in popular culture and media (Wee, 2010). Western capitalism is inexorably intertwined with white supremacy and patriarchy (hooks, 1997), and these intersections influence the production and distribution of popular young adult literature. The lack of diversity in YA publishing is a pervasive and well-documented issue. Numerous scholars have examined the persistent disparities in representation of diverse cultural identities in young adult literature, as well as the continued institutional exclusion of authors and editors of color by publishing houses (e.g., Bickmore, Xu, & Sheridan, 2017; Brooks & Cueto, 2018; Garcia, 2013; Larrick, 1965; Thomas, 2016).

However, this erasure of difference becomes even more pronounced when these texts are commodified and transmediated into television, film, and commercial merchandise. The overwhelming majority of branded young adult fiction franchises feature conventionally attractive, white, straight, cis-gendered teenagers in either suburban or uber-wealthy urban settings (Wee, 2010). This is not accidental—young adult franchises are produced for specific demographic markets, aimed at maximizing profitability by targeting audiences with purchasing power. Within this system, youth of color and LGBTQ youth are underrepresented (or misrepresented) in these texts by design, yet due to what Garcia (2013) terms "the machinations of capitalism" and the saturation of the market, these same youth actively read and consume these texts.

As a teacher and researcher, I questioned what this means for youth whose cultural identities are portrayed problematically or excluded altogether. How does this wide range of print, media, and material texts collectively shape a teen's reading universe, and how might living and engaging with branded products influence how they make sense of the associated stories and the characters?

Conceptualizing Adolescent Literacies, Reading, and Identity

In order to investigate these questions, I drew from critical, sociocultural perspectives of literacy that conceptualize reader and text as broadly construed. This includes scholarship aligning with New Literacy Studies and theories of multimodality (Gutiérrez, 2008; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress & Street, 2006) that conceptualize *texts* as symbolic resources or signifying practices with varying affordances, as well as from Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) theory of artifactual literacies, which materially situates literacy, multimodality, and culture. Reading within this framework is participatory, collaborative, and distributed, and the interconnectedness between novels and their accompanying texts creates an immersive world in which each aspect recursively informs the others.

This intertextual framework of young adult branded fiction draws heavily from bodies of scholarship on transmediation and transmedia entertainment. Transmedia as a stand-alone term literally means "across media," referring broadly to the range of textual relationships that exist within an entertainment franchise (Jenkins, 2013). Jenkins (2006) theorized "transmedia

storytelling" is a narrative approach that is distributed and participatory, and entails systematically spreading the elements of a story across multiple media platforms of varying interactivity for the purpose of creating a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (par. 3). Jenkins argued that each of these texts reflects the unique affordances of its respective medium in order to contribute to the development of the larger storyworld. For the purposes of this article, I use the terms *branded young adult fiction, young adult fiction franchise,* and *commodified young adult literature* interchangeably. However, it is important to note that although branded fiction can be understood as a transmedia franchise, the reverse is not true: Per Sekeres (2009), the term *branded fiction* signals the inclusion of books within its intertextual genre. However, many transmedia franchises do not include printed texts, nor are books required of transmedia storytelling.

In order to understand how participants were responding to branded texts, I drew from transactional theories of reader response (Rosenblatt, 1983) that examine the social practices of youth engaging with these texts, as well as the social conditions underlying these reading processes (e. g., Brooks & Browne, 2012; Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000). Rosenblatt (1994) characterized reading as "at once an intensely individual and an intensely social activity, an activity that from the earliest years involves the whole spectrum of ways of looking at the world" (p. 1089). These social readings are necessarily mediated by culture and by identities that are multiple, mutually constitutive, and intermeshing (Lugones, 2014). Anchored by bell hooks's conception of "homeplace" (hooks, 1990), Brooks and Browne (2012) theorized a culturally situated theory of reader response that examines how "responses are overlapping, transient and often revised" (p. 83), representing a reader's multilayered cultural identity and shifting positions. Within this framework, the identity work that adolescents are performing in their textual engagement is a socially mediated and embodied practice of interpersonal authorship, continually written and rewritten across various interactions and histories of participation (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; Moje & Luke, 2009) and shaped by intersecting systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).

My understanding of "social reading" thus stems from scholarship that encompasses contexts (e.g., the ways in which the intersecting social, cultural, and political positionings of an individual influence their construction of meaning) as well as activities (e.g., a social activity that communally constructs meaning), cohering with the work of scholars including Dressman (2004), Dressman and Webster (2001), Park (2012), and Twomey (2007). This is also situated in conversation with communication and media studies that examine parasocial relationships between readers/viewers and characters/actors (e.g., Calvert, Richards, & Kent, 2014; Giles, 2002; Gola, Richards, Lauricella, & Calvert, 2013; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Jennings & Alper, 2016). Parasocial relationships can be understood as short- and long-term emotional connections and intense, wishful identification that youth construct with popular media. The capitalist structure of the media industry ensures that popular YA characters are ubiquitous in the lives of youth, as cross-media promotions elicit these responses by saturating the market with commercial texts and positioning actors as branded commodities for youth to consume (Johnson, 2013).

Framework, the identity work that adolescents are performing in their textual engagement is a socially mediated and embodied practice of interpersonal authorship, continually written and rewritten across various interactions and histories of participation and shaped by intersecting systems of oppression.

Methods of Inquiry

This qualitative study draws from intersectional, feminist, research traditions (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ellsworth, 1992) that attends to the ways in which systems of power intersect with multiple and multilayered identities, value the experiences and identities of research participants, and collaboratively generate knowledge. Throughout the study, I attempted to adopt an inquiry stance that was both perspectival and conceptual (Cochran-Smith &

Lytle, 2009); therefore, central to this project was a privileging of uncertainty and improvisation in developing relationships and learning in shared dialogue with students.

I conducted my research at Unidos Academy (all names are pseudonyms), a public charter high school in a large Northeastern city that served a primarily Latinx student body. I had previously worked as a substitute teacher at this school, and I had longstanding personal relationships with some teachers and administrators. These relationships facilitated my (re) entry into the building, this time as a researcher, and I drew from these individuals' emic understanding of the context to design a study that would allow me to participate in the fabric of the school and contribute meaningfully to the learning community. I began my research as a participant-observer in ninth-grade Advisory class and English Seminar classes. My role within these classes was somewhat fluid—I provided literacy support to individuals and groups of students and occasionally led instruction, but did not grade or otherwise evaluate or manage students. I also participated in the school's "Homework Zone" twice a week, working with students who attended an open study hall held during last period and after school in the library.

I continued this participant-observation during the second phase of my research, which began after the winter break. In this phase, 11 ninth-grade students voluntarily participated in a weekly after-school group in which we collectively engaged in an inquiry into branded young adult fiction. One participant self-identified as male, and the remaining 10 students self-identified as female. All of the focal students self-identified as Latinx or Hispanic, with varying Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, and Brazilian heritages (see Table 1 for additional details).

I did not define any specific practices or dispositions that "counted" as reading or engagement with branded young adult fiction, instead choosing to invite students to construct (and reconstruct) their own understandings of these terms as part of our collective inquiry. As such, participants' own perspectives and questions drove this inquiry, which took place over

Table 1. *Inquiry group members and their self-identified race/ethnicity and fandoms*

Name	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	YA Brands
Marilyn	Female	14	Puerto Rican & Brazilian; Latina	The Hunger Games; Divergent; Harry Potter; The Fault in Our Stars; The Maze Runner
Rosa	Female	15	Puerto Rican	Twilight; The Fault in Our Stars
Marena	Female	15	Hispanic; Mexican & Puerto Rican	The Vampire Diaries; The Fault in Our Stars; The Hunger Games
Lucy	Female	14	Hispanic; Puerto Rican	The Fault in Our Stars; The Hunger Games; Twilight; Divergent; The Maze Runner
Anna	Female	14	Hispanic	The Hunger Games; Immortal Instruments; Divergent; The Maze Runner; The Perks of Being a Wallflower; Marvel Avengers
Sophia	Female	14	Hispanic; Latina	Divergent; The Vampire Diaries; The Fault in Our Stars; If I Stay; The Hunger Games
Inez	Female	14	Hispanic; Puerto Rican	The Hunger Games; The Fault in Our Stars; Harry Potter; Teen Wolf
Brooklyn	Female	14	Latina; Dominican & African American	The Fault in Our Stars; If I Stay; Twilight; The Hunger Games
Tiffany	Female	15	Hispanic; Dominican	If I Stay; The Fault in Our Stars; Twilight; The Vampire Diaries; The Hunger Games
Cassia	Female	14	Latina	The Vampire Diaries; The Hunger Games; Divergent; The Perks of Being a Wallflower
Xavier	Male	14	Puerto Rican	The Maze Runner; The Hunger Games; Divergent; Marvel Avengers; Twilight

six months. I tried to position myself as a resource and helper in these spaces in order to gradually develop more equitable, reciprocal relationships with students (hooks, 1990). However, I also remained aware of the automatic power and privilege stemming from my identity as a white, cis-gendered adult, and from my education status and role as a researcher. As a white woman working with Latinx youth, there existed an inherent challenge not to replicate patterns of oppression within the inquiry group that my research was intended to resist (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Collins, 2015). Rather than attempting to ignore or diminish the significance of my own identity, I endeavored to continually interrogate the implications of my positionality on my relationship with participants, and to ethically and transparently question my assumptions and perceptions of our interactions, as well as the limits of my understandings (Mohanty, 2013). Our collective inquiry centered students' experience, knowledge, and values. I shared content and discussion prompts during our meetings, but primarily served as a facilitator so that participants could explore the questions and topics that were personally important to them, even if these diverged from my own intended purposes for that week (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Our meetings took place within the school library and lasted approximately one hour each. Members of the after-school inquiry group also participated in focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews in the first and last months of the study. I collected additional data through participant-observation in these students' English Seminar and Freshman Advisory classes, surveys, and documentation of student artifacts (including personal possessions, artwork, and media texts), as well as a group Tumblr page co-created by participants during the school year.

Triangulated data was intended to provide multiple dimensions of understanding in examining how branded fiction was taken up by participants over time and across contexts; reflexive review and inductive coding of the data was ongoing throughout the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I also invited students to provide member checks in the form of follow-up discussions and group review of coding and analysis (Maxwell, 2013). In this article, I draw primarily from transcripts of inquiry group meetings, class sessions, and interviews to focus on the social behaviors of participants, drawing "telling cases" (Mitchell, 1984) of their engaged positions and positionings.

Findings

Students entered this study expressing their affinity for the most popular branded young adult fiction franchises in the marketplace, including The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Maze Runner series (dystopian fiction), the Twilight, Harry Potter, and The Vampire Diaries series (supernatural fiction), and *The Fault in Our Stars, Paper Towns,* and *If I Stay* (romantic fiction). As a group, participants engaged with almost all of the most successful and widely recognized young adult fiction brands in circulation at the time of the study. Our collective inquiry revealed that in contrast to popular notions of reading as an individual activity, participants engaged in embodied and material transactions with a range of branded YA texts to build and negotiate social and parasocial relationships. While many of their practices ascribed to conventional expressions of fannish devotion (Jenkins, 2006; Stein, 2015), students' transactions also revealed possibilities for transgression and resistance against hegemonic narratives, challenging binary or teleological characterizations of critical agency and subjectivity.

Whether reading a novel, watching a film or television series, or interacting around material artifacts, students' responses to YA texts primarily served to signal their affinity and brand commitment to other members of their friend, family, and digital communities.

Forming Social Connections in/through Emotional Responses

Whether reading a novel, watching a film or television series, or interacting around material artifacts, students' responses to YA texts primarily served to signal their affinity and brand commitment to other members of their friend, family, and digital communities. One of the most frequently shared responses were embodied performances of high emotion, defined by Louisa Stein (2015) in her research on millennial fandoms as a combination of intimate emotion and high performa-

tivity. This response was especially common among the girls in the inquiry group, who were all in decisive agreement that sharing extreme emotional response in both face-to-face and digital contexts served as a defining characteristic of "true" fans. For example, Marilyn characterized her responses to branded texts as one of two extremes, saying that she would "rant when I'm upset and fangirl when I'm happy. There's no in-between." Marilyn shared her "rants" with friends, teachers, and on her personal Tumblr blog, where she described "pages and pages of ranting" about various plot developments and characters. In contrast, she shared that "fangirling" included activities such as:

Crying served as an identity marker for participants, connoting particular understandings and orientations toward the brand that are shared with other fans, thus establishing and reasserting their belonging in particular social milieus.

> Cry and happy cry, and be like "Oh my God, this is so great!" And just talk about how it's so great, about dumb little things, like, "God, it's so great!" And just kind of repeat and repeat. Repeat all over the floor, eat cookies, and cry and question your life.

Whether "ranting" or "fangirling," Marilyn's responses reflect the high performativity that is integral to insider participation within a "culture of feels" (Stein, 2015, p. 134). She valued YA texts that elicited extreme emotional responses, especially crying. Other participants echoed similar sentiments. Nearly all of the girls had read and/or watched John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, and frequently brought it up in conversation during their individual interviews, inquiry-group meetings, and informal conversations throughout the school day. In nearly every instance, participants repeatedly mentioned crying in response to the text in order to illustrate the depth of their commitment to the brand. For example, Lucy stated that *The Fault in Our Stars* was her favorite movie because "It really made me cry. Like even when I put it on now, it just makes me cry". Moreover, she was not interested in *Paper Towns*, another branded John Green novel and film, because she thought it would "not really make me cry." Similarly, Anna both read and watched *The Fault in Our Stars*, and when asked to share her thoughts, she responded, "I liked it. I mean, I cried for a long time." Inez also shared a similar response while watching the movie with her mother and her best friend after first reading the novel:

> Oh my God, so much tears. I was already fangirling soon as he said, "The fault is . . . ." I was like, "Oh my God!" Me, my mom, and my best friend went to watch it and when we went in, there was a couple of girls beside her. She was like, "Oh my God, did you read the book?" She was like, "I hope I'm not weird. Like don't find it weird if I touch you or anything," because she was fangirling too. She was like, "Oh my God, did you read the book?" And then she was crying, mascara running off her face.

Like Marilyn above, Inez characterized her response to *The Fault in Our Stars* (as well as the response of the girls sitting nearby) as "fangirling," and her description of this experience suggested an implicit expectation for readers to demonstrate an intense, visible reaction. In fact, it was through their shared demonstrations of high emotion that Inez and these girls formed an immediate social bond. Crying was thus understood as a communal activity, serving as social currency both in the moment of transacting with the text or afterwards in recounting the experience.

At one point, I wondered whether it was even possible for someone to be considered a *TFIOS* fan if they did not cry. This question was indirectly raised during an inquiry-group conversation about *The Fault in Our Stars*, when Rosa shared that she had recently seen the movie. Although she initially stated that she "doesn't really cry at a movie," Rosa reentered the conversation after other group members shared their own emotionally driven transactions with the brand, emphatically stating that she wanted to read the novel:

> **Nora:** Why do you want to read those?
>
> **Rosa**: 'Cause I've seen the movie, *The Fault in Our Stars*.
>
> **Nora:** So you would read the book after seeing the movie?
>
> **Rosa**: Yeah, I want to cry . . . I'm emotional. Like really, really emotional.
>
> **Nora:** Was *The Fault In Our Stars* something that you were crying over? Or something else?
>
> **Rosa**: I didn't really cry when I was watching the movie, but I'm gonna read the book, and then, I'm gonna cry. […]

Brooklyn: You can't not cry.

Rosa's deliberate intention to read and cry, and Brooklyn's affirmation of her approach to these texts reflected the importance of affective economics (Jenkins, 2006) at work in their intertwining of emotional commitments and consumption. Brooklyn expected Rosa to cry because it was a collectively shared expectation for affirming (and reaffirming) fannish devotion. I compare this response to Stein's (2015) discussion of fan reblogging practices on Tumblr, which she characterized as "individual collective affirmation" (p. 155). Like Tumblr blogging, crying, and then talking or writing about crying with others, was a way for participants to make visible and celebrate communally shared emotion. These emotional commitments were sedimented through repeated enactment of these transactions in public, participatory locations. Crying served as an identity marker for participants, connoting particular understandings and orientations toward the brand that are shared with other fans, thus establishing and reasserting their belonging in particular social milieus.

On the surface, participants' heightened and highly performative emotional responses might appear to reflect a passive and uncritical consumption of YA franchises. Their aesthetic responses in many instances may also reflect the emotional intensity of the novels themselves, leading to a shared readerly intimacy. Such perceptions are also gendered, as teen girls are considered especially likely to engage in a "fantasy crush" or "celebrity worship" (Murray, 2007). Yet the exchange between Rosa and Brooklyn illustrates their consciousness and intentional navigation of the "rules" guiding the performance of emotional transaction, as well as the social benefits of cultivating this intense vulnerability. Berlant (1998) has suggested that "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relations" (p. 282). In such instances, it seems important to note that emotional amplification does not necessarily signify unqualified acceptance or approval, but rather access to social currency and intimate belonging within a particular context of relations.

Forming Parasocial Connections through Immersive Engagement

In addition to emotionally driven social interactions with their peers, inquiry-group participants highlighted the possibilities for teen fans to immerse themselves within a branded YA series using material artifacts, joining and interacting with their favorite characters. Describing these parasocial transactions, students shared that they desired, purchased, and used products associated with branded YA novels "to feel like I could be somewhat closer to the book while reading it, to feel a part of it," contradicting depictions of adolescent consumption as merely fad or fashion (Brooks, 2008). They also characterized their engagement with products such as t-shirts, jewelry, make-up, and technology accessories as a form of "grown" or "more mature" play, a way for teens to defictionalize a brand and make it feel real. Xavier made this distinction while discussing Hunger Games merchandise:

> "People say like, 'Oh, like, um, I feel like I'm in the movie *Hunger Games*.' Or like everyone does the pointing thing and they'll be like [enacts the District 12 salute and whistles], like on the *Hunger Games*. [Laughs] . . . So people do it so they can pretend that they're in the movie then. Or pretend that they're in the books if they're fans of the books, I guess. They do it to show other people that they like it.

In addition to emotionally driven social interactions with their peers, inquiry-group participants highlighted the possibilities for teen fans to immerse themselves within a branded YA series using material artifacts, joining and interacting with their favorite characters.

Other participants similarly owned and/or desired products that allowed them to live with, and live within, their favorite branded storyworlds, emphasizing the importance of products that reflected something that was personally meaningful to them in the novel, film, or television show. Inez shared that she especially wanted t-shirts, a phone case, or a wall decal with the "tribe tree" or a quote that she would "want to be part of my life," something that would remind her "that's what I love . . . and then it gives you imagery to live with it, too, and you're just mind-blown." Anna also shared that when she read a book and it impacted her, having the shirt or necklace "keeps that impact . . . ; it reminds me of something important,"

while Marena explained that branded material texts "have to be like a saying or something, like a little thing that they had said that was meaningful and stuff like that."

These comments reflected a negotiated identification by participants in which they explored transactive approaches for positioning themselves in relation to and with the storyworld (Murray, 2007). While their identities and lived experiences were excluded from "official" narratives, these material texts allowed students to adopt and adapt elements of the storyworld into their lived experiences and to make them their own. This identity work was further complicated by participants' affinity for multiple YA brands. Few participants would exclusively purchase branded products associated with a single novel, instead transacting with and entangling multiple brands and storyworlds.

This perspective was taken up within the inquiry group during a conversation about Hunger Games merchandise. In the first novel of The Hunger Games series, Katniss wears a pin in the shape of a mockingjay (a fictional bird) as her "tribute token" in the arena. Over the course of the series, her pin takes on increasing significance as the mockingjay becomes the symbol of the rebellion against the Capitol. In the following excerpt, Anna shared a necklace with a similar mockingjay charm that she found online.

Anna: I like it. I don't know, 'cause it's cool. I saw this online, it's like a necklace with a mockingjay bird.

Marena: I was gonna say that, too!

Anna: And it's really pretty.

Marilyn: Especially stuff like that, it can make you feel like you're part of it. Like, merchandise like that, I think it makes you feel like you're a part of it, like you're part of the rebellion.

Nora: Would you ever buy something like that?

Anna: If I had the money.

Marena: But you wouldn't, 'cause you're broke. [Marena and Anna laugh]

Nora: Would you ask for it as a gift?

Anna: Yeah, yeah definitely.

Marena: I think it's cool that it's a necklace. Just like the pin that she has, that's a necklace.

Anna: I don't know, it's pretty. But it's also like you have her actual pin, so you've joined in. You've joined the rebellion. [Marena nodding.] They have it online.

Marilyn: Yeah, like a part of the big rebellion. You get to be in that world, which makes you love it even more, then, because you make it the way you want. Like with choosing Gale and not Peeta.

Xavier: I don't buy merchandise. What am I gonna to do with it?

Lucy: Wear it?

Rosa: Look. I have almost everything. Wait—yeah, almost everything Twilight. I have the poster board, I have the t-shirt of Jacob that my grandmother buys me, I have a necklace that says "I love werewolves." I have all of that for Jacob. So I can be with him.

Unlike other texts that feature a branded logo or reproduce specific phrases or images, Marilyn suggested that this type of product invites an especially desirable engagement with the story by making a reader feel "like you're a part of it, like you're part of the rebellion." Her position was affirmed by Marena and Anna, both of whom pointed out the resemblance of the necklace to Katniss's "actual pin" and their potential for feeling like they "joined in the rebellion."

However, these students did not only seek to enter a fictional universe, but to revise and remake it as well. By positioning themselves within this imagined context, students were resisting their narrative erasure and asserting their interpretive authority over the brand. This is illustrated in Marilyn's suggestion to "make it the way you want," in which she challenged the resolution of the central love triangle (and the conclusion of the series) by "choosing Gale over Peeta." Similarly, Rosa listed the many Twilight-themed products that she owns, noting that "I have all of that for Jacob. So I can *be with him*" (emphasis mine). Given the liminal boundaries between readers and branded fiction texts, transactions with these material products may be understood as a parasocial practice in which adolescents perform and play with marginalized storytelling identities; by manipulating the material texts of branded fiction, participants were negotiating their understanding of the anchor story and inserting themselves into its overarching narrative. While students in this instance did not offer an explicit critique of cultural (mis)representations within the storyworlds, their confidence in revising the narratives reflects their resistance and transgression of interpretive authority.

Resisting Narrative Erasure through Social and Parasocial Connections

It is unlikely that adolescents who purchase a mockingjay necklace believe that this will actually transport them into a rebellion, yet this product allows the reader to become more immersed in the Hunger Games universe, to blend the physical and imaginative worlds so that the reader becomes a character within the narrative. Such parasocial activities reflect an ongoing "becoming" in relation to the text(s), a commitment to "the playing of the game . . . . being lost in the text, then, is finding oneself hidden in the play of the text. Paradoxically, it is the playing, the hiding, the losing, that allows one to be sought and eventually found" (Sumara, 1996, p. 69). For example, during a conversation about characters in the Twilight and Vampire Diaries series, Marena asked:

> **Marena:** What if this was about Hispanic vampires, imagine we'd be like . . .
>
> **Marilyn:** [laughter] I feel like Hispanic vampires, like we would always be getting together and calling each other cousins and stuff . . . watching out for each other.
>
> **Lucy & Marena:** [shouting in unison] Prima!
>
> **Anna:** [shouting] Primaaaa!! [group laughs]

While Marilyn, Marena, and Sophia were all enthusiastic consumers of both the Twilight and The Vampire Diaries series, this exchange illustrates the ways in which their consumerist practices may coincide with a critical interrogation of culture, diversity, and racial and ethnic inequality. When Marena directed the other group members toward a conversation about Hispanic vampires, she discursively included herself and her peers in this category by asking her fellow group members to "imagine *we'd* be like . . . ." Marilyn subsequently supported this positioning, suggesting, "*We* would always be getting together and calling *each other* cousins and stuff" (emphasis mine). Lucy, Marena, and Anna all affirmed Marilyn's statement while concomitantly signaling their own belonging in this community. They were laughing as they loudly shouted "Prima!"—a Spanish term for cousin and popular form of address among friends at Unidos Academy—doubly confirming their shared, contextual understanding of a Latinx identity.

Adapting semiotic elements of the branded texts, students were performing a creative recontextualization that connected storylines and characters to their individual and shared cultural identities. In this context, "the story itself is no longer discrete or sequential because there are many other voices and intentions populating its pages and many other products that add to it," and this fluidity thereby creates spaces for individual appropriation and repurposing of texts that may subvert the intentions of publishers and merchandisers (Sekeres, 2009, p. 412). Their identities were performed and produced, not transmitted, through their consumption of popular culture for specific purposes—purposes that may serve multiple and contradictory roles in the identities and positioning of these youth by dominant forces (Baudrillard, 1970/1998). From this perspective, forming parasocial connections through commercially branded products may in fact create opportunities for marginalized readers to challenge hegemonic texts, rewriting themselves and their identities into a more culturally conscious narrative.

Forming parasocial connections through commercially branded products may in fact create opportunities for marginalized readers to challenge hegemonic texts, rewriting themselves and their identities into a more culturally conscious narrative.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings provide insight into the ambiguous positioning of print novels within YA franchises, contest traditional notions of reader, author, and interpretive authority, and suggest pedagogical opportunities for conceptualizing engaged reading and reader response as embodied and materially situated. We can therefore understand students' transactions with commodified literature through McRobbie's (2005) concept of agency as a reinventing of identity(ies) through multiple discourses, as students' formation of social and parasocial connections illuminates the fluidity of agency and subjectivity informing their literacy practices. As students engage with commodified literature, their negotiations offer new understandings of the agency enacted by youth as they, through their entangle-

ment with popular culture and prevailing consumerist forces, take critical positions, audition different identities, and create and inhabit multiple worlds.

However, I note that these interactions do not suggest an unproblematic engagement with commodified texts. For example, textual accuracy was not the only consideration voiced by students when constructing the value of Anna's necklace. Despite their enthusiasm for tangibly entering the world of the Hunger Games, none of the students expressed a desire for a reproduction of the original mockingjay pin or for creating their own version of this object. Rather, they wanted something that was sufficiently authentic as well as something "cool." As such, Marena specifically drew attention to the fact that this product was a necklace instead of a pin, while Anna repeatedly emphasized that that necklace was "really pretty." In addition, this type of play required the purchase of a specific commodity, rather than encouraging individual creativity and invention.

Whether reading YA fiction for private or public purposes, adolescents' embodied experiences with commodified literature can be self-transformative, creating new imagined selves and recreating their relational experiences with others.

This mindset echoed warnings by Linn (2008), who cautioned, "fans of the Harry Potter books don't have to make the imaginative effort to transform sticks into magic wands when detailed replicas are available at toy stores . . . . The underlying message is that children will actually be unable to play without them (pp. 33–34). Similarly, Hannaford's (2012) practitioner research on the "popular-culture literacy space" of free Internet game websites documented how experiences with these commoditized fantasy narratives influenced the creative play of her students, while Hill (2011) argued that an aggressive commodification of childhood is occurring unabated in "North American communities." Hill described youth as being immersed in a "buy and consume modality" that connects the ideologies and behaviors of material consumption to the development of identity and self-image. Hill cautioned that this has especially insidious effects on girls, who are inundated with marketing designed to connect femininity with consumerism—in effect, the feminine ideal is something that girls must purchase as part of the performance.

Nevertheless, the data revealed youth transactions that defied straightforward classifications as "good" or "bad" engagement with texts. Students were clearly susceptible to the marketing campaigns and commercial products that are central to branded young adult fiction franchises. However, their passions and intentions also shaped their participation in this community, and it would be dangerously reductive to imagine that youth are merely passive "dupes." Adolescent reading is connected to the broader social and cultural contexts in which these texts are situated, spaces in which norms and values can be reproduced, as well as agentively resisted and renegotiated. Whether reading YA fiction for private or public purposes, adolescents' embodied experiences with commodified literature can be self-transformative, creating new imagined selves and recreating their relational experiences with others. They negotiate meaning on their own terms, interacting with branded products in order to adopt, imitate, contest, or expand available worlds. Exploring transmediated and branded young adult literature deepens our understanding of the rich practices through which teens are engaging with texts across real and imagined locations and enacting critical agency in (re)constructing identity, their lived contexts, and youth culture.

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Ryan **Schey** and Mollie **Blackburn**

"The Fact of a Doorframe":

Adolescents Finding Pleasure in Transgender-themed YAL

During a cold, Midwestern morning in January of 2015, the two of us met the students in the LGBTQ-themed[1] literature class for the first time and excitedly gave them copies of the first young adult literature (YAL) text we read together, Kuklin's *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2014), a nonfiction text comprised of interviews with and photographs of trans-identifying youth. We picked this book because we wanted them to like it; we wanted them to get pleasure out of it. The cover features a picture of Cameron, a white gender queer youth with short brown hair, smiling and wearing a pink button-up shirt with a Black bow-tie, jeans, and a rainbow belt. As the students passed the books around, they immediately started talking; a few saw Cameron and immediately described them as cute.

After we read the chapter featuring Cameron's interview, Mollie invited students to share moments they would like to discuss with the class. Riley immediately jumped in, saying the chapter is "so cute!" Jayla agreed and wondered aloud, "Where has this person been my whole life?" Riley's and Jayla's comments suggest that they experienced pleasure in reading *Beyond Magenta* and wanted to share their enjoyment with other readers. While these moments might appear to be small, to us they are also significant, and they are one reason we undertook co-researching and co-teaching the course. We believe that youth need to have opportunities to read, write about, and discuss diverse LGBTQ-themed literature in classrooms for a variety of purposes, including learning, fostering political alliance, and experiencing *pleasure*.

We understand pleasure through two related definitions. The Oxford Dictionary's definition of the noun as "a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment" is the most common, but we recognize that this word often holds a sexual connotation, particularly when defined as a verb—that is, to "give sexual enjoyment or satisfaction to" (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pleasure). It is important to consider both of these definitions when conceptualizing pleasure in the realm of the queer. Ahmed (2015) reminds us that "Queer pleasures are not just about the coming together of bodies in sexual intimacy. Queer bodies 'gather' in spaces, through the pleasure of opening up to other queer bodies. These queer gatherings involve forms of activism" (p. 165). In the opening vignette, students seem to get pleasure, defined as a noun, from the book. We can also imagine an interpretation of this vignette as students experiencing sexual attraction, perhaps the initial stirrings of sexual pleasure. More important, we see evidence of Ahmed's understanding of pleasure, that is, students "opening up to other bodies" in ways that motion toward activism.

Classroom moments like these, along with discussions in the fields of young adult literature and education, prompted us to wonder about the pleasure adolescents experience in and through reading YAL texts that represent people both different from and similar to themselves, conjuring the oft-referenced metaphors of sliding glass doors, windows, and mirrors. We wondered about the consequences of adolescents finding pleasure in YAL, whether they serve as sliding glass doors, windows, or mirrors. We believed these

consequences were not trivial, but we wanted to look more closely at what they were.

In an effort to do so, we begin by discussing previous scholarship on sliding glass doors, windows, and mirrors. We then conceptualize doorframes as a metaphorical addition to help us understand how and when readers experience pleasure. Using the concept of doorframes, we return to the LGBTQ-themed literature course and explore instances when pleasure was voyeuristic and compassionate and consider what this means in terms of the text, the recognizability of lives, and, thus, activism.

Unfolding Perspectives on Sliding Glass Doors as Windows, Mirrors, and More

It was almost three decades ago when Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) articulated the incredibly generative metaphor of literature as sliding glass doors that can function as windows or mirrors for readers, particularly African American readers of children's literature. In this foundational article, she explains how books are sliding glass doors in that "readers only have to walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author" (p. ix). Sometimes, she explains, books are windows "offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange" (p. ix). But what really seems to ignite her passion is when the "lighting conditions are just right" and the sliding glass door can be a mirror, offering reflection and affirmation to readers. Sims Bishop (2012) asserts, "All children need both" windows and mirrors (p. 9), but as articulated in this early article, these windows and mirrors are always also sliding glass doors.

Sims Bishop (2012) asserts, "All children need both" windows and mirrors (p. 9), but as articulated in this early article, these windows and mirrors are always also sliding glass doors.

Sims Bishop's metaphor has been taken up over and over across the decades, and, in the process, it has been complicated. Some scholars have narrowed the focus on African American characters and readers specifically to Black girls (Toliver, 2018). Other scholars have shifted the focus from texts with African American themes to those with Latinx themes (Rhodes, 2018) and even queer themes (Bittner, 2018). Scholars have also broadened the focus from African American characters and communities to people of color (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018), multicultural representations (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), and "underrepresented" characters and communities (Halko & Dahlen, 2018). Still others have challenged the metaphor to attend to multiple and variable identities (Bittner, 2018; Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018; Halko & Dahlen, 2018; Toliver, 2018), a challenge we discuss further below. For now, though, we note that our taking up of Sims Bishop's metaphor includes a shifting to queer people, specifically trans people, in this case. This constitutes a broadening, in racial terms, that is most aligned with Boteho and Rudman's (2009) focus on multicultural literature, but it also constitutes a complicating of the concept, given our efforts to honor multiple and variable identities. We understand such adaptations of Sims Bishop's metaphor to come with both gains and losses. With focus, breadth is lost; with broadening, depth is lost. We work to navigate this tricky terrain, and for this particular project, we find value in this approach.

The application of the metaphor has also shifted in terms of genre. Whereas Sims Bishop looked at children's literature, with particular attention to contemporary realistic fiction, more recent scholarship has applied the metaphor to different genres. Toliver (2018), for example, explicitly analyzes the genre choices of Black girls, including contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, and urban fiction. Durand and Jiménez-García (2018) consider the ways in which speculative fiction offers windows that serve restorative purposes for readers of color. We also add to this effort by focusing here on nonfiction—specifically on photo essay, thus acknowledging the importance of the visual, as Sims (1982) emphasizes in her praise of "image makers."

Beyond changes in focus and genre, aspects of the metaphor get dropped, troubled, and added in some scholarship. Oftentimes the door part of the metaphor gets dropped, even though Sims Bishop describes the windows and mirrors as functionalities of the sliding glass doors, particularly of the glass. Botelho and Rudman (2009) build on Sims Bishop by attending to

the functionality of the door itself, rather than that of the glass. They assert that it is the "doors that invite action" (p. 265); it is through the doors that readers can critically engage with the "ideologies of class, race, and gender imbedded in the literature" (p. 265). We find this functionality compelling, but scholars have recently troubled the functionality of the doors, windows, and mirrors.

Toliver (2018), for example, draws on Sims Bishop to point out that doors can be "locked, when there [a]re misrepresentations or omissions of specific groups" (p. 2). Similarly, Sims Bishop (2012), herself, comes to reflect on the possibility that a "window could be a barrier, allowing children to look in but not be a part of the observed experience" (p. 9). Complementary, Reese (2016) has noted the dangers of observers looking through windows but misunderstanding and misrepresenting what they have seen, resulting in what she describes as the need for curtains, particularly for Native American communities. Toliver further notes that windows can be "opaque or boarded" (p. 2). Considering mirrors, Reese (2017, as cited by Rhodes, 2018) talks about how sometimes literature functions more like "fun house mirrors, which throw back a distorted portrait of reality" (p. 1), a possibility Sims Bishop names in her 1990 piece. Similarly, Toliver references Sims Bishop's 1990 article to write about "broken mirrors" (Toliver, 2018, p. 2). These concerns, ones that we share, are essentially about when literature represents minoritized people in inauthentic ways, fails to represent pertinent populations entirely, or represents communties fairly but these representations get corrupted by readers. These scenarios have consequences for readers' experiences and scholars' understandings of doors, windows, and mirrors.

Another troubling of the metaphor is related to the concern we mention above about the complexity of multiple and variable identities, or the "futility of seeking fixed or isolated representations" (Halko & Dahlen, 2018, p. 3). For instance, no reader is *only* raced or *only* gendered, so readers might see some aspect of themselves in a book but not others. Similarly, some of these aspects or identities might matter to certain readers at one time but other readers at other times. For example, Bittner (2018) writes about when his Christian identity matters more than his gay identity, and vice versa. Moreover, some aspects of readers' identities might shift over time, as when a reader identifies as straight in fifth grade but queer in tenth. So, scholars, ourselves included, are interested in how the metaphor might be enhanced (Toliver, 2018) such that it "acknowledge[s] youth identities as fluid, overlapping, and intersecting" (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1).

Durand and Jiménez-García (2018), drawing on Appleman (2000), address this desire for enhancement by adding the idea of lenses, *theoretical* lenses, such as Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory, Postcolonial and Decolonial theories. They assert, "In addition to mirrors and windows, we also need lenses through which we might more aptly perceive the nuanced and complex identities of youth of color in literature" (p. 19). We share the desire to enhance the metaphor in ways that recognize youth identities as "fluid, overlapping, and intersecting" (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1). As such, we followed Durand and Jiménez-García's guidance to look through a theoretical lens, and for the purpose of this project, we turned to queer theory. Even in doing so, though, as we considered the possibility of additions, we remembered that according to Sims Bishop, those windows and mirrors are always, first, doors. And, as it turned out, a queer lens helped us see a potential addition to the metaphor of doors that might address concerns about when literature misrepresents or oversimplifies minoritized people.

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Queer as a Lens, Frame as an Addition

Butler, a scholar foundational to queer theory, challenged us to attend to *frames*. She (2009) argues that everything has a frame, whether or not we acknowledge it. She says, "There is no life and no death

without a relation to some frame" (p. 7). We understand frames to be comprised of ideologies, values, and practices (see also Goffman, 1974). She imagines the frame around an image, and for the sake of our argument, we understand that image as literature—as a door, a sliding glass door, that can function as a window and mirror. In other words, we understand the frame as a *door*frame. Butler says a frame "tends to function, even in a minimalist form, as an editorial embellishment of the image" (p. 8). She argues that the "frame implicitly guides interpretation" (p. 8). It may complement the image—or in this case, literature—and it may not. It may even interrupt what the image or literature was created to convey. She says the frame can even be a "false accusation" (p. 8), but still, it is there. Thus, Butler challenges us to see what Rich (1984) calls "The Fact of a Doorframe" (p. iv).

If frames influence the ways we, meaning readers, understand whatever it is that they contain, and if they are permeable and changeable, then they also influence the ways we understand the world beyond them. They have consequence.

In conceptualizing frames, Butler (2009) draws on Callon (1998), who argues that frames establish boundaries, they work to contain; it might be argued that they impose and maintain norms. They are not, however, either impenetrable or immutable. Indeed, Callon asserts they are "fragile" (p. 252). There is, in his words, a "proliferation of overflows" (p. 244). Overflows are, he says, "irrepressible and productive" (p. 250); they may be positive or negative or more likely some combination, but they are bound to happen, and not in a unidirectional way. That is to say, ideas from literature, which is framed, spill out over the frame into the world just as ideas from the world pour into literature. The frame is there, but it is penetrable. As a result, that which is inside of the frame does not just shrink or expand; rather, it is "continuously emerging and re-emerging" (Callon, 1998, p. 244). Further, the frame itself is vulnerable, in Butler's (2009) words, to "reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization" (p. 10). Frames "break themselves in order to re-install themselves" (p. 12). They are negotiated, contested, and reshaped. As frames change, understandings and experiences of that which they contain, however tenuously, also change, meaning that texts also emerge and re-emerge.

This is really the importance of frames. If frames influence the ways we, meaning readers, understand whatever it is that they contain, and if they are permeable and changeable, then they also influence the ways we understand the world beyond them. They have consequence. They can, according to Butler, "decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not" (p. 12). So, we are interested in frames of sliding glass doors that function also as windows and mirrors. Such frames can create conditions of livability (Butler, 2009, p. 23), promote understandings of interdependence (Butler, 2009, p. 19), and foster "justice and even love" (Butler, 2009, p. 61). According to Rich (1984), "The Fact of a Doorframe/ means there is something to hold/ onto with both hands" (p. iv).

So, if a book is a sliding glass door that readers might walk through (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), might look through to see "others," and might look into to see themselves (Sims Bishop, 1990), then a frame—comprised of ideologies, values, and practices—guides readers' understandings of what they experience, see, and find in reading a book. They are like lenses in this way (Appleman, 2000), but they cannot be put on and taken off. They are always there, even though they are not always recognized and not always the same. We can imagine a frame—for Rich (1984), it is a wooden frame—constructed by people who market a book, people in a bookstore who might sell the book, parents and guardians who might buy the book, and readers who might choose to read it. For the purpose of this article, we choose to focus on a frame constructed by teachers who selected a book, administrators who purchased it, and students who read and discussed it among themselves and with their teachers. And, with the doorframe in mind, we ask, "What do adolescents find in the book?" More specifically, we ask whether they find pleasure, and if they do, so what? What are the consequences of such a finding?

While we view these questions as speaking more broadly to the fields of YAL and education, we understand them to be especially vital for the teaching and learning of LGBTQ-themed texts in secondary class-

rooms. In a review of empirical scholarship of this field, We (Blackburn & Schey, 2017) found found that teachers typically framed LGBTQ-themed literature in ways that guided students to find a *lesson* about LGBTQ people, who were understood as others, rather than to find political power or pleasure in relation to LGBTQ people, whether or not students identified as such. But we know, from the LGBTQ-themed literature course that we co-taught, that alternative frames are possible. So our focus here is to analyze a frame that invited adolescent readers to find pleasure in YAL, with a goal of fostering classrooms where more readers can find enjoyment in reading about LGBTQ lives and communities.

The LGBTQ-Themed Literature Class

We taught the LGBTQ-themed literature course at an arts-focused public charter high school in a midsized Midwestern city. The school explicitly strove to recruit and support youth who struggled in other local public and charter schools. Administrators and other school personnel communicated an expectation that students would not be homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic. They expected that students would be supportive of LGBTQ students. These expectations contributed to an environment that was relatively welcoming to queer youth and many such youth chose to attend the school. During the 2014–2015 academic year, over 300 students were enrolled at the school. Adminstrators approximated that 30–40% of them were queer identifying. Approximately 56% received free or reduced-price lunch, a statistic commonly used as an index of families' socioeconomic status. With regard to race and ethnicity, the school's records[2] indicated that 56% of students were White, 26% were African American, 10% were multiracial, 6% were Latino, 1% were Asian, and 1% were Pacific Islander.

The class was a semester-long (18-week) elective English language arts course that was offered as an elective to juniors and seniors for fulfilling their English graduation requirement. It was the first time the class was taught at the school, and a total of 14 students enrolled, 13 of whom participated in the study. All identified as white except for one, who identified as biracial—white and Asian. Five identified as both straight and cisgender, with the other youth being more fluid with respect to their sexual identities and gender expressions. We learned about these identities in various ways. At times, students chose to reveal this information to us during classroom discussions, such as when they discussed how their personal experiences related to those represented in a text. At other times, they included these identities in written assignments, such as when they wrote memoirs or autobiographies. At still other times, they shared this information with us through informal conversations in and around class. Finally, during interviews, we also elicited information about students' identities.

We understood our collaboration to be grounded in a commitment to transforming schools to be more livable, just, and compassionate for queer people.

The course was organized into five curricular units. In this article, we focus on the first, which explored nonfiction memoir and biographical/autobiographical reading and writing. We focus specifically on the reading, discussing, and presenting of *Beyond Magenta,* and even more specifically on the taking up of two chapters—one featuring Jessy and another featuring Luke.

We approached the project as a blending of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and ethnography (Heath & Street, 2008), reflecting our different roles.[3] Mollie worked with the high school's principal to establish the course, proposing it, designing the curriculum, and taking primary teaching responsibilities. As a result, she most frequently foregrounded a practitioner inquiry stance. She invited Ryan, who was her advisee in a university doctoral program at the time, to join her, serving as a research apprentice. He typically foregrounded an ethnographic participant-observer stance. Both of us shared experiences collaborating for over a decade in a teacher-inquiry group focused on combatting homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in schools (see Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2010; Blackburn, Clark, & Schey, 2018). We understood our collaboration to be grounded in a commitment to transforming schools to be more livable, just, and compassionate for queer people. We come to this work with different positionalities—Mollie identifyies as a white queer cis woman, and Ryan identifyies as a white straight cis man. We

recognize that working for social change is complex, coalitional work that necessarily remains incomplete and partial. Understanding that we make missteps, we strive to adopt a stance of solidarity, listening to and learning from communities who experience oppression so that we may work effectively against those forces in ways that are compassionate and consequential.

Typically, both of us attended and participated in each class session. We constructed data through a variety of methods, including writing daily fieldnotes, gathering classroom documents (such as curricular materials and student writing), audio- and video-recording class sessions, and interviewing students. We started recording in the second month of the class, meaning that most of the class sessions we discuss in this article were documented via fieldnotes. We analyzed these data using a blending of coding techniques from Saldaña (2016), including structural, descriptive, and initial coding. This approach existed in a dialectic with our reading and studying of previous scholarship, which helped us consider frames of pleasure when adolescents read *Beyond Magenta*.

Frames of Pleasure

Here, we consider frames of pleasure and focus on two different illustrative vignettes to explore the overflow, its impact on the readings of texts, and what difference these things make to the recognizability of lives, particularly trans lives. The first vignette features Stacy most prominently as she focused on Jessy's story. The second highlights Riley, as the class focused on Luke's story. Both students' actions and statements suggest that they were experiencing pleasure, as we will show below. In the first vignette, the overflow was playful but also voyeuristic. In the second, it was exuberant, passionate, and compassionate. In both cases, the texts re-emerged in the students' presentations, and the lives represented in them were more or less recognizable, in Butler's terms.

Voyeuristic Overflow

In the memoir, autobiography, and biography unit, one assignment entailed students working in pairs to present one of the youth from *Beyond Magenta* to the rest of the class. To do so, students needed to re-read the chapter and choose key information to present. Stacy, who was a straight, biracial (white and Asian), cisgender woman, and Tori, who was a straight, white, cisgender woman,[4] worked together on the assignment; they chose to present Jessy, a Thai trans man who, although he does not explicitly self-identify in terms of sexuality, only conveys desire for women. Jessy characterizes himself as being funny, loud, and happy. His chapter describes his childhood and adolescence, which included time living in Thailand and the United States. When he was younger, Jessy described himself as a tomboy and later questioned his sexuality, identifying as a lesbian, and later as a trans man. At times he encountered acceptance and support, such as when his family and neighbors complimented him as being handsome ("Prince Charming") or he connected with people at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, which provides healthcare and related services to New York's LGBT communities. At other times, his experiences were less positive, occasionally being isolated from peers in school or experiencing tension with his mom when he came out to her, first as lesbian and then as trans. Stacy and Tori both expressed excitement about this chapter and appeared to be fascinated by Jessy.

Prior to the day of the presentations, students had time to work in small groups in class, and both of us circulated in the classroom during this time, offering feedback. During this work time, rather than revisiting the book for information, Stacy and Tori were online, searching social media sites in an effort to find the youths from *Beyond Magenta*. Tori had noticed in one photo essay that a featured young person, not Jessy, had on a nametag. She used the last name on the tag in order to find that person online. While Stacy and Tori were not able to find everyone featured in the book, they did find Jessy, who had many pictures posted across social media sites.

Stacy lingered over the images, especially some showing Jessy on a beach, laying down on a large beach chair and wearing sunglasses but no shirt; his bare torso was visible. She appeared to be looking for evidence of Jessy having had top surgery. In another picture, he wore a tank top, and Stacy commented on how well-defined his biceps were. In yet another photo, Stacy and Tori commented on his mustache. As they continued to view these images, Stacy commented over and over that Jessy looked "really cute." Several other students—Jamie, Jayla, and Kimberly,

youth who all had named experiencing attraction to men, although not only men—sat nearby and joined in on the conversation. They talked with Stacy about their ages and tried to figure out how old Jessy was, combing through ages mentioned in his chapter, publication information in the book, and details they found on his social media accounts. They debated who could and could not potentially date him, considering whether or not he was too old compared to them. It seemed like they were trying out what it might be like to desire—perhaps romantically, perhaps sexually—a trans man, and they did so publicly in front of peers.

The next day, Stacy and Tori presented Jessy and his chapter to the class. However, most of their presentation was not concerned with what was in the chapter, but rather what he had done since the end of the book. They described his current life, including the fact that he had broken up with his girlfriend who was a part of his story in *Beyond Magenta*. Stacy and Tori used the classroom's digital projector to show some of his social media accounts. They clicked on the picture of Jessy on the beach without a shirt, leaving this projected as they spoke. In another image, they commented on his mustache. They also brought up a video of Jessy and his dog, explaining that they wanted to hear his voice. When the video played, they commented on how low it was. As they finished, Stacy said that the comments online from Jessy's family were mainly positive, at least those in English. She expressed surprise about this, using her own family's biculturalism and bilingualism as a reference point to gauge levels of transphobia in Southeast Asian communities.

Stacy may have experienced Jessy's story as a window, looking into the life of a trans man. She may, too, have experienced it as a mirror. She gravitated toward Jessy, the only Asian person in the book, choosing him for an assignment. She compared her Asian family members with his and considered dynamics of bilingualism across the two. In these ways, she saw aspects of herself and family reflected back to her, and she explicitly considered race, ethnicity, and language where other students failed to do so. In other ways, she experienced Jessy's story as a sliding glass door, imagining possible futures where Jessy and she dated.

All of these experiences, though, were framed with ideologies, values, and practices that invited her to find pleasure in the reading. Certainly, with respect to pleasure as a noun, Stacy enjoyed the text. Perhaps, too, as a verb, since she conveyed her attraction to Jessy. She commented on his moustache. She praised his biceps. And she valued his deep voice. She was, in Ahmed's words, "opening up to other queer bodies" in ways that "might also bring [them] to different ways of living with others" (p. 165). Jessy said, "I was attracted to straight women. I was attracted to girls who like men" (Kuklin, 2014, p. 8). Further, he said, "I really wanted to look muscular . . . . Every time I saw a guy working out, I thought, *I want that body! I want to be able to do that!*" (Kuklin, 2014, p. 21). The clear implication was that not only was he attracted to straight women, he wanted them to be attracted to him as a straight man. But Stacy was not just attracted to him, she was examining and exposing him. With Tori, she studied the skin of Jessy's torso, which we believe was an effort to examine it for surgical scars. And, then, the text re-emerged in Tori and her presentation, leaving Jessy's topless image on the screen while they talked about his masculine features.

All of these experiences, though, were framed with ideologies, values, and practices that invited her to find pleasure in the reading. Certainly, with respect to pleasure as a noun, Stacy enjoyed the text.

While we believe all of these texts representing Jessy were pleasurable for Stacy, we also believe that at some point she, as a reader, became voyeuristic, knowing, of course, that the two are not mutually exclusive. Rather than relying on the intimate, nuanced, and vulnerable portrait of Jessy in *Beyond Magenta*, Stacy and Tori went beyond it and into social media to investigate other details of his life. We see this move as one beyond Jessy's consent. Jessy likely knew the chapter could be read closely by many strangers, and he did not include pictures of himself topless. He did, however, post such images on social media. Jessy likely imagined that the audience for his social media accounts was comprised of people who followed him—that is, people he knew to one degree or another. He might have been well aware that it

was a public audience, one that could include anyone; we cannot know, but the question raises our concern regarding consent. We do not know whether Jessy would have been flattered or bothered by Stacy's attention, but, still, he never had the power to decide for himself, and she did not recognize her obligation to consider his choice.

We believe Riley enjoyed presenting Luke's story—an enjoyment grounded not in sexual attraction or desire, but in activism.

Further, when Stacy and Tori began to use Jessy's images on social media to scrutinize and then display his body, especially given Stacy's comments on his body, we interpreted their readings and writing of him as objectifying, dehumanizing. We saw them reduce him to particular body parts and discuss them in relation to their own pleasure. We saw them express desire in relation to the degree to which Jessy's body approximated hegemonic (cis)masculine norms of man-ness. In other words, the life of Jessy, as a trans man, became less recognizable, to draw on Butler. In short, the overflow was voyeuristic. We found ourselves wanting Reese's curtains.

Compassionate Overflow

During the same presentation assignment, Riley also got pleasure out of reading *Beyond Magenta*, but the overflow and re-emerging text were quite different. Riley was white and queer, with their identification with gender being multiple and layered during the semester.[5] They were passionate about writing and literature and had authored several pieces about LGBTQ youth in a local queer magazine. Riley worked with Jayla, who was white, straight, and cisgender. Moreover, Jayla was a spoken word poet. Riley and Jayla chose to present Luke, a white trans man who referenced having had a girlfriend and who was also a poet and performer. He describes himself as shy, feeling much more outgoing and energized on stage than off. Much of his chapter focuses on his experiences at Proud Theater, a nonprofit, volunteer organization that supports youth—LGBT youth, allies, and children of LGBT parents—in creating and performing activist art. The chapter is organized into eight "scenes," as if it is a play or theater piece itself. Several of these describe Luke first attending Proud Theater, auditioning for parts, being mentored by a trans playwright, and eventually performing on stage in front of his friends. Other scenes describe his experiences in school (such as being bullied) or with his family (particularly navigating coming out and staying out with his mom and dad).

Riley explained that the choice to focus on Luke's story was connected to their appreciation of the writing style and structure of the chapter. Riley was attuned to questions of writing and representation as the class discussed *Beyond Magenta*. In one conversation, Riley commented that they liked how Kuklin left in words and comments like "whatever" when she represented Cameron, for example, rather than remove them in editing. These phrases helped readers get a sense of the personalities of the people in the book. According to Riley, these choices helped readers to "see different aspects of what [trans teens'] lives are like with more details." Riley commented that they liked Kuklin's writing choice because it reflected Luke's identities and interests.

When it came time to present Luke and his chapter to the class, Riley walked up to the front of the room wearing a jean jacket that they seemed to have brought just for that occasion. They were, essentially, conjuring Luke, who is shown most often in the book wearing denim and flannel and, in one blurred image, pulling on a jacket. In a spoken word style, Riley performed the poem written by Luke that Kuklin used at the start of the book chapter and from which the name of the collection came: "Said, 'What are you?' said, 'you gotta choose'/ said, 'Pink or blue?'/ and I said I'm a real nice color of/ magenta" (Kuklin, 2014, p. 150). We believe Riley enjoyed presenting Luke's story—an enjoyment grounded not in sexual attraction or desire, but in activism. Later, Riley commented that Luke used theater and spoken word performances to share who he is with other people, which we take to show that Riley's performance choices reflected attention to how Luke wanted to present himself to public audiences. Thus, the text that re-emerged in this presentation was one very much aligned with the one offered in the book and, it seems, aligned with Luke, himself.

As the *Beyond Magenta* presentations finished for the day's class session, the entire class discussed the book as a whole. Riley presented a mild critique,

stating that they didn't like the lack of details about the feelings and experiences of going through surgery. These details might have been helpful for people trying to understand trans experiences or to think through their own options. However, Riley also recognized that it could be challenging to share this type of information about oneself.

As a youth who was not then participating in any type of biomedical transition, Riley appeared to approach *Beyond Magenta* as a window that could help them better understand and envision an array of possible futures, whether for themselves or other people, by considering trans youths' experiences in relation to surgery. Riley might have experienced Luke's story as a mirror, reflecting back whiteness and queerness, but also reflecting a writer. This seemed to be pleasurable for Riley as they connected with the ways in which Luke opened himself up to readers.

All of these experiences were framed with ideologies, values, and practices that invited them to find pleasure in the reading. The overflow was compassionate in nature, and the text re-emerged, this time in a presentation in which Riley worked to conjure Luke in ways aligned with his chapter and the performance documented by his chapter. They dressed like Luke and performed like Luke. They recognized the difficulty of sharing intimate details about one's life even as they were curious to know more. And their love and respect for Luke was evident. Luke's life was decidedly recognizable.

Complicating Frames

We, as teachers, tried to frame the book in pleasure, and students contributed to that construction. However, through their reading and presentations, students introduced overflows that shaped the consequences of their pleasure. In Stacy's case, the overflow was voyeuristic, such that the text re-emerged in ways that made Jessy's life less recognizable. In Riley's case, the overflow was compassionate, and the re-emergent text helped Luke's life be recognized. Through such an analysis, these two cases offer an illustration of "The Fact of a Doorframe" (Rich, 1984, p. iv). As Butler argues, these frames become vulnerable to transformation, and such transformations have consequences that become evident in how people use them to recognize some lives as valuable while defining other lives as disposable. So, it might be argued that Stacy used the frame of pleasure to define Jessy's life as usable, if not disposable, and Riley used that same frame to define Luke's life as valuable.

But it is not that simple. Doors, windows, and mirrors are not so reliable, nor are people's lives and experiences so singular. Thus, any consideration of frames and overflows must necessarily entail attention to youth identities as "fluid, overlapping, and intersecting" (Durand & Jiménez-García, 2018, p. 1). Butler offers a helpful insight when she explains that people must recognize how lives are always interdependent, meaning that people have obligations to one another and obligations to sustaining collectively the conditions for life to flourish. Through this perspective, we come to see more complex and layered interconnections among readers, texts, and the people who surround them, as well as to consider the nature of people's obligations.

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As Ahmed reminds us, when reflecting on queer people and pleasure, we can neither ignore the sexual nor attend only to the sexual. This is tricky in schools, where sexuality is typically marked as inappropriate, as are sexual desire and behavior. Further, queer sexuality, desire, and behaviors are often entirely censored explicitly and understood in only hyper-sexual terms implicitly. It is our contention that sexuality as well as sexual desire and behaviors need to be acknowledged among adolescents in schools—for queer as much as straight—but the requirements of and explorations of the understandings of consent and mutual obligation must come along with such acknowledgments. In the case of Stacy and Tori's experiences of pleasure in relation to Jessy, we respect their embrace of their attraction to and desire for Jessy, but not their scrutiny and display of his body. In other words, their desire did not absolve their objectification and voyeurism—one did not negate the other—but these overflows

coexisted as they spilled into and beyond the frame of pleasure.

In contrast, even though Riley honored and understood Luke as a complex, whole person, in some ways it seemed tied to race in general and whiteness in particular. Riley and Tori chose to focus on Luke, but in doing so, they also chose not to focus on the three teens of color represented in *Beyond Magenta*. Moreover, when Riley talked about Christina's and Mariah's stories—the only stories about Latina and African American trans teens represented in the book—they and other students described those stories as very "difficult" or "tough" to read. At best, such commentary might be understood as Riley's comfort with white normativity; at worst, as racism. So, while Riley recognized their obligations to empathize with white trans youth, they eschewed such obligations with trans youth of color. That is not to say that Riley's potential racism erased their deep respect for Luke; it did not. But the two overflows existed simultaneously as they permeated the frame of pleasure. In both cases, there were connections, intimate connections, between the readers and people featured in the book, but also, in both cases, those connections were flawed. Pleasure is a complicated frame, as are they all.

Conclusion

Pleasure is valuable and too frequently an impossibility in classrooms when people read LGBTQ-themed texts (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Yet not all pleasure, sexualized or not, is ethical, humanizing, and loving. Moreover, even when pleasure does contain such qualities, it can still have problematic and exploitative intonations. Pleasure experienced through reading needs to be combined with compassion, with an ethical consideration of the experiences, desires, choices, and values of people who are represented, whether real or fictional, in and through a text. Compassionate pleasure must recognize people's interdependency as well as their mutual responsibility to and for one another, even as it also contributes to conditions that help everyone, including trans people and people of color, flourish. This type of compassionate pleasure is hard work, though. As Stacey's and Riley's stories suggest, it takes listening and learning in sensitive ways. It takes a continued effort. Sometimes one might experience frustration or curiosity, but this does not justify a compromise or dismissal of other people's humanity. So, when we discuss pleasure, we do not understand it to be trivial or frivolous, but rather a deep joy grounded in the possibilities of freedom and community.

One way we might have insisted on such an experience of pleasure, for example, is to ask whether their experiences of pleasure would have been pleasing to Jessy. We might have named Stacy and Tori's desire, acknowledged their sexuality, and also asked them to reflect on the role of consent. We might have challenged them to reflect on how Jessy might have felt being discussed in sexualized terms, being followed into his social media worlds, being so closely examined, and being put on display for the class. While there would be no right answer to find, we could ask them to listen and learn from Jessy's words and even his silences. In doing so, we might have asked them to consider their connections and obligations to others, including but not limited to Jessy.

Pleasure without compassion, or pleasure that only defines certain lives as worthy of compassion, is exploitative and destructive, and as such, it reproduces oppression. Such pleasure is deeply problematic, and as literacy educators and scholars, we argue that it is essential to construct alternatives where pleasure is compassionate and thus ethical, humanizing, and loving. Based on our teaching and research in the LGBTQ-themed literature course, texts such as YAL nonfiction are not enough on their own. They are important and valuable, of course, and we need stronger, more diverse, and more nuanced representations in YAL, particularly from #OwnVoices scholars (Duyvis, 2019). However, the work of authoring textual representations cannot and will not stand on its own. While texts function as sliding glass doors that might become windows and even mirrors, "The Fact of a Doorframe" remains (Rich, 1984, p. iv), and through overflows, these texts re-emerge in new and unexpected ways. Our task becomes to cultivate frames and respond to overflows in ways that help young people experience and express pleasure that is ethical and compassionate and thus radically liberatory and communal.

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Notes

1. There is a necessary proliferation of terms that people, within and beyond the academy, use to discuss sexual and gender diversity. We seek to balance inclusivity and precision in our usage (on this point, see Blackburn & Schey, 2017). We use the term LGBTQ-themed literature because it was the name of the course (the curriculum featured lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer identities in addition to other sexualities and genders) and is a commonly recognized genre in YAL. However, we recognize that our discussion in this article mostly focuses on trans identities and gender diversity. In the title, we use the term *transgender* to be explicit about our focus on non-cisgender identities specifically and gender more broadly (as opposed to other topics, such as transnationalism or translanguaging). Within the article, we use *trans* because we see this term used most commonly within and beyond the academy during conversations about gender diversity and non-cisgender identities.
2. In naming racial and ethnic demographic percentages here, we use language supplied by the school's records with the goal of providing readers with a general description of the school. However, we recognize that these records have limitations, especially as students used a broader range of terms to self-identify.
3. For readers who have further questions about the school, the course, and our methodological approach, see Blackburn & Schey, 2018.
4. Both Stacy and Tori consistently identified as straight and cis during the semester, and they indicated to us to use she/her/hers pronouns to reference them, as we do throughout this article.
5. In the class, Riley identified as a girl and used she/her/hers pronouns at the start of the semester but used he/him/his pronous at the end of the semester. One of Riley's friends said that Riley used he/him/his across the semester outside of class. Here we use the plural pronouns they/them/theirs to reference Riley in an effort to describe this multiplicity rather than to convey gender fluidity. For the same reasons as Stacy and Tori, we reference Jayla using she/her/hers pronouns.

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Julie **Smit**

What Matters for Eighth-Grade Female Readers:

Experiences and Consequences of Sustained Reading Engagement

Reading engagement is a necessary component of education if teachers expect adolescents to read widely, deeply, and critically among a range of high-quality and increasingly challenging texts (Alvermann, 2002; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Baumann & Duffy, 1997). When adolescents are engaged, they are fully invested, take responsibility for their learning, persevere when confronted with difficulties, and become aware of measurable skills and strategies they use in reading (Johnston, 2004). English classrooms have traditionally been spaces in which adolescents can "develop habits of mind that promote sustained and enthusiastic reading, which in turn, would provide the natural foundation for the development of skills such as interpretation, prediction, analysis, and comprehension of literary texts through constant negotiation of meaning with others" (Soter et al., 2008).

Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory (1987) explains how engaged reading of young adult literature can have a significant impact on the adolescent reader: "The aesthetic reader experiences and savors the qualities of the structured ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, emotions, called forth, participating in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions as they unfold" (p. 7). These transactions with text become objects of thought, just like other real-life experiences that readers encounter: "A poem, novel, a play . . . is an event in the life of a reader. It is an experience she or he lives through, part of the ongoing stream of life" (Donelson, 1990, p. 19). These engagement experiences become the foundation for increasingly sophisticated understandings of the human condition. This may happen when adolescents feel approval or disapproval of the characters' actions and behaviors and become aware of the tensions between their expectations about real life and the story world (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Young adult literature can give adolescents a different viewpoint that may encourage them to reconsider and update their own understandings about themselves, others, and their social worlds (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994). When adolescents have the opportunity to share these experiences with others, they can work out their tensions by sharing personal reactions, extend one another's ideas, clarify uncertainties, and verify or reject interpretive hypotheses of the text. These collective problem-solving processes can further encourage complex critical-analytical and socio-emotional thinking. Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory has been supported by exploratory case studies about adolescent literature circles that demonstrate growth in complex thinking (Park, 2012; Polleck, 2010; Smit, 2015, 2016; Smith, 2000).

Ivey and Johnston (2013, 2017) described what engaged reading looks like in a classroom of eighth-grade students as they had the opportunity to read and talk about multiple, high-interest, edgy, contemporary young adult fiction. Students reported how they related to characters, imagined what was going on in characters' minds, and struggled with emotional states of characters. Such connections led them to think about morally significant decisions in their own

lives. For example, one student reported that she learned about handling personal situations, such as how to stop bullying or how to engage with someone who is grieving. Ivey and Johnston also reported changes in students' self-perceptions as readers and an increased sense of agency.

This study extends Ivey and Johnston's (2013, 2017) conceptualization of adolescent reading engagement by describing what engagement looks like to eight eighth-grade female readers who have experienced extensive reading of multiple genres of young adult literature. Through interviews and group discussions about their reading experiences, I intend to answer the following questions:

1. What matters to eighth-grade female readers as they engage with young adult literature?
2. What are the consequences of sustained reading engagement with young adult literature on adolescents' understandings of the self, others, and the social world?

Finding out what matters to adolescents as they read has implications for teachers in selecting texts and promoting engaged learning communities for adolescents.

The Study

These readers were eighth-grade girls, ages 13–14, from a middle school in the Northeastern United States. I chose to focus on girls because I thought they would feel more comfortable talking to me (also a female) and each other about their experiences with young adult literature. Research on adolescent talk about literature has noted possible power dynamics involved in mixed-gender groups that has led to a silencing of voice (Evans, 2002; Evans, Anders & Alvermann, 1998). I thought that creating a same-gender discussion group would create an environment in which all students felt comfortable expressing their thinking.

With the help of the reading intervention coordinator, I approached two eighth-grade English teachers and asked them to select 10 girls who they believed to be readers—that is, girls who have expressed an interest in reading beyond the assigned classroom texts and who the teachers thought would enjoy additional opportunities to talk about books they love to read. I invited these girls to a recruitment session in which I explained my intentions for knowing more about how they engage with books. I asked them to join a discussion group that would be held during their lunch hour. As an added incentive, the intervention coordinator allowed the girls access to her extensive collection of the latest young adult fiction for them to take home, enjoy, and return. From this recruitment session, eight girls volunteered to join: Athena, Aviaei, Cassidy, Cookie, Jess, Katie, Liz, and Veronica (all self-chosen pseudonyms). Jess and Katie were from Asian heritage backgrounds, and the others were from Caucasian backgrounds.

Discussions involved their personal histories with reading, their favorite genres, components of young adult literature that mattered to them, and experiences talking to others about the books they read or were currently reading. I was interested in hearing about memorable experiences reading young adult literature that led the girls to think about themselves, others, and the world in new and different ways. (See Figure 1 for a semi-structured discussion protocol.) The girls discussed their favorite books from the public library, assigned classroom novels, and their own personal libraries. While these girls mentioned that they would recommend books to each other, they claimed that this was their first experience in engaging in extended talk about the books they love to read.

From the interviews and conversation transcripts, I used inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) to generate categories from the raw data. Table 1 and Table 2 display a sample of codes and their descriptions. These codes evolved to two primary themes: components of young adult literature and consequences of reading young adult literature.

- Have you read something recently that was so memorable, you kept thinking about it or you had to tell someone else about it?
- What about the experience of reading it made it special?
- Have any of the books you have been reading made you think differently about yourself? About others? About the world?
- How do you choose the books you read?
- When you are reading a book, what makes you keep reading?
- Do you normally talk with others about the books you read? Tell me about it.

Figure 1. Initial interview questions

Table 1. Codes that generated the theme "Components of young adult literature"

Codes	Description of code (examples from transcript)
Unexpected moments	Unexpected plot twists that surprised the girls Storylines that kept the girls in their seats: "I can't believe they did that" moments; "Why did that happen?" "WHAT IS GOING ON?" Putting the book down or throwing it on the floor but picking it right back up because they could not wait to find out what happened next "Reading it over and over, finally getting it in my head"
Book endings	Book endings that involve love or death (most likely where a character dies in the end) Book endings that are "bittersweet" "It can't be a fairy tale ending, there has to be some kind of twist." "A book has a good ending when it stands on its own." If girls find it lacking, then they alter it to suit their own storybook needs.
Choosing books to read	Looking at the front cover Reading the front inside cover and the back (synopsis) Wandering the young adult section and looking at titles that seem to be appealing Reading the first page and if it sounds really good, then reading the rest
Preferences and favorite genres	Drama and romance "A little romance but not overdoing it" Action (violence in books—wars—this is what fantasy provides) Twists on the stories we all know and love Details (sensory imagery) "Books that are like a movie in your head" "Cliffhangers that make you want to jump off of a cliff" The girls get angry when important book details in movies are overlooked. Ex.: In Percy Jackson movies and *Eragon*, they got the age and the appearance of the characters wrong. Love for strong female characters

Table 2. Codes that generated the theme "Consequences of reading young adult literature"

Codes	Description of code (examples from transcript)
Emotions elicited from books	Excitement, anticipation: "I need to find out what happened!" Sadness: "Not all stories have happy endings." Disappointment at unexpected moments/endings Anger and frustration that something happened that should not have happened Disappointment at how other characters treated others Endings cannot end in a happily ever after; it has to follow the reality of the context. Disappointment that the book ended: "Book Hangover" because there is nothing left to read.
Relating books to real life and connections to characters	"The main character wasn't confident, so she did bad things; it taught me to learn how to be comfortable with myself." Relating to the characters themselves Seeing yourself as the character: "You feel everything they are feeling." "By using sensory imagery, it makes you feel like you're there in the book." "Pretending I am a character in my mind—then I will get upset if something happens to them." The girls added themselves into the story world: "I had a date in my mind with a character from a book." The girls connected to the character's quality traits (for example, *The Outsiders*: "We have a lot in common and so it was easy to figure out their personality and why they did what they did in their situation. I'm totally like Cherry, a soc but a greaser at heart.")
Multiple perspectives	"Books can put you into other people's perspectives. They can open up your heart." Connection to characters: "Sometimes when there are characters in a book that remind you of somebody else that you know in your life, then it shows you that there is a perspective; what might be happening in their life may make you think differently about other people that you know." Delving into worlds unfamiliar with their own: "You see the differences in how poor people deal with things and it makes you realize how lucky you are from seeing things in different perspectives." Multiple perspectives in books: "When one chapter is in one person's perspective and the other is in another person's perspective, you can see both sides of an argument."

Continued on next page

Table 2. Continued

Talking to others about books	"If it's weird or exciting or unexpected, I have to tell someone. You don't want to keep it to yourself. It's in the pit of my stomach and I have to get it out!" Other people do not have to read the book for talk to occur. Recommended series to brother, who was not as enthusiastic about reading, but now trusts her judgment in choosing books. The girls needed to talk to others for clarification ("Why did this couple break up? What were the problems in the relationship?").

The Readers

The girls came from middle-class families in which their parents had professional occupations. Most of the girls recalled fond experiences of family members reading to them when they were younger. When I asked them at what age their parents stopped reading to them, there were a variety of answers. Athena claimed, "Last year!" which resulted in a chorus of "aaws" from the other girls. Liz stated fourth grade was when she became proficient enough in reading; "I was able to comprehend most things, so [mom] made me read it to her instead of her reading it to me." Veronica did not recall experiences reading at home with her parents, but considered herself a strong reader:

> When I was in preschool, I was one of the only people in my class who could read, so I felt special. In kindergarten, I was ahead of everyone because I knew a bunch of words that other people didn't know, and it made me feel special to be reading a chapter book.

The girls considered themselves different from other students by recalling these kinds of literacy achievements. Yet, such examples demonstrate the perceptions they hold of themselves as competent readers.

Table 3 displays favorite genres, favorite young adult novels, and a brief description of each participant. During our discussion sessions, the girls mentioned a variety of genres they loved to read: realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, dystopian novels, mystery, horror, and psychological thrillers. Interestingly, this included memorable literature they read when they were younger, such as *The Two Princesses of Bamarre* (Levine, 2001); assigned classroom texts, such as *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967); as well as current self-selected genre fiction, such as their obsession with Rick Riordan's Heroes of Olympus series. Yet, the books they mentioned were not necessarily edgy or disturbing books that grabbed their attention, as highlighted in Ivey and Johnston (2013), but literature that helped the girls understand possible human interactions and their problems.

The girls' unique personalities created vibrant and fascinating conversations about their favorite books. Athena, the youngest of eight cousins and the only girl, was an advocate for strong female characters and empowering women. Avaiei drew on her experiences as an aspiring author who was working on publishing her first fantasy novel. The group frequently pulled from Aviaei's writing as a reference within our conversations. Cassidy was interested in encouraging the group to think through relational situations and would frequently mention the relationships between their favorite characters. Liz, an active member of a Christian community, shared her church experiences and teachings with the group. She frequently brought moral problems she faced while reading to the group to help her solve them. Liz noted:

> When you read a book and get to know the character, you find out they are a lot like you . . . and you see how other people figure things out, and you use it in your own life to figure your own problems out.

Jess, known to the other girls as being soft spoken and quiet, contributed ideas that the other girls thought were revolutionary. For example, she advocated that all people have "goodness inside of them." This was an understanding that none of the other group members considered before. Cookie, identified by her friends as the "lawyer," asked important explanation-seeking questions that drove our discussions forward, especially in our conversations about gender inequality. Katie encouraged us to look at our language carefully in terms of developing our ideas. Veronica left the project early because she had other commitments vying for her time.

Table 3. Student participant profiles

Name (age, heritage)	Favorite Genre	Favorite Book	Additional Description
Athena (13, Caucasian)	Fantasy	*Mark of Athena: Heroes of Olympus* (Book 3) by Rick Riordan	Athena has expressed an interest in reading books she read when she was younger because now she believes that she can understand them better. Athena believes that "books should have strong female characters."
Aviaei (13, Caucasian)	Fantasy	*Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011); *Wolf Brother: The Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* by Michelle Paver (2006)	Aviaei is an avid fantasy reader and is currently in the process of publishing her trilogy of fantasy fiction. She was writing a fourth in the series. Aviaei believes that "books should have lots of action and less romance."
Cassidy (14, Caucasian)	Fantasy and Realistic Fiction	*Mark of Athena; Heroes of Olympus* (Book 3) by Rick Riordan; *Story of a Girl* by Sara Zarr	Cassidy is interested in classical music and plays the violin. She loves to read the Percy Jackson series as well as realistic fiction, especially books that involve music. Cassidy believes that "books should have a touch of romance."
Cookie (13, Caucasian)	Fantasy and Dystopian Fiction	*Blood Red Road: Dustland Series* by Moira Young *Divergent* by Veronica Roth*; Matched* by Ally Condie	Cookie loves to read books about "messed up societies." Cookie claims to throw the book across the room when she reacts to disappointing, unexpected, or surprising endings in books. Cookie believes that "books should have logical endings."
Jess (13, Asian)	Fantasy (Vampire Fiction)	*The Legacy of Trill: Soulbound* by Heather Brewer; *First Kill: The Slayer Chronicles* by Heather Brewer	Jess is interested in books that have vampires as the main character. Jess states that books should not be discarded but treasured. Jess believes that "books should have characters with different perspectives."
Katie (13, Asian)	Realistic Fiction	*The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton	Katie loves stories that keep her at the edge of her seat. She especially loves to read Aviaei's fantasy stories. Katie believes that "books should contain different worldviews and sensory imagery."
Liz (13, Caucasian)	Realistic Fiction and Romance	*Ingenue* by Jillian Larkin; *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell	Liz loves historical fiction. Liz has been designated by the rest of the group as reading the most books of anyone. Liz feels she has to talk out the problems she encounters in books with others. Liz believes that "books should have a lot of drama and details."
Veronica (14, Caucasian)	Fantasy Twist on Fairy Tales	*Snow Child* by Ivey Eowyn	Veronica loves to read and tries to encourage her brother and mother to read as well. Veronica is new to the school. She left our group halfway because she had other commitments on her time. Veronica believes that "books should be psychologically thrilling."

Results

Components of Young Adult Literature

The girls described the storyline as a component of young adult literature that was key to their engagement: "If it [the storyline] was like really, really good and it kept you on your seat, then I guess that would keep making me read" (Katie). Veronica mentioned how the tempo of the plot was a factor in her engagement:

> Usually, there is a book that is exciting in the beginning, then in the middle, it gets sooo slow and boring, and then in the end it's like, OK. I absolutely hate that. Usually if it gets boring in the middle, I usually give up on the book.

For these readers, the storyline should contain unexpected moments: "Those exciting moments where you don't think something is going to happen and it does . . . . Cliffhangers that make you want to jump off a cliff!" (Cassidy). Veronica described them as "plot twists. I like books that make me go 'WHAT?'" The girls described their feelings about these unexpected moments: "I throw the book across the room and then two minutes later it's like, 'Oh, I've got to read the rest,' so I go get it. Oh! I'm so sorry, book!'" (Cookie).

Endings

These readers were specific about endings in their favorite young adult literature. Endings "have to have something wrong with it, it can't be perfect. It can't be some happy-ever-after ending" (Cookie). For example, they discussed their frustrations with the ending in *The Sacrifice* (Duble, 2008), a novel they read in English class:

Athena: It was about the Salem witch hunt . . .

Veronica: Witch trial. She [main character] was sent to jail, but the judge in the story was saying how he was going to evict the Salem witch trials. So, it's like the story inferred that she [main character] got out.

Athena: The author could have made it a really good book but they . . .

Katie: they wasted it.

Cookie: You call this an ending? For shame! "You've been shunned! Now get out of my face!" [mocking the trial in the story] . . . It could have had a crazy ending but they [the author] were just like, "Yeah, whatever, let's just get this over with." Like what the heck!

The girls were insulted that the author would write an unbelievable and historically inaccurate ending that allowed the main characters to come out of the Salem witch trials unscathed. These findings were similar to Ivey and Johnston's (2017), who found that students routinely reject books with "*happily ever after* endings because they were left with little to ponder" (p. 160; italics in original).

However, a great ending is one that is also an unexpected moment. For example, the girls mentioned bittersweet endings in which "a main character or a semi-main character is in love and dies—like Romeo and Juliet" (Aviaei). Cliffhanger endings or endings that leave the reader wanting to know more are joyfully frustrating for these girls. For example, Athena described her hesitation and anticipation in finishing the *Mark of Athena* (Riordan, 2012):

Athena: I am so excited about reading *Mark of Athena,* but everyone is telling me that the bad parts are coming!

Cassidy: You have to keep reading, you have to!

Athena: I'm scared because Cookie said that when she read the ending, she threw the book across the room and then picked it up one more time to just read it again.

Cassidy: It's horrible, but if you read it slowly, it makes it even worse.

Liz: Just tear the Band-Aid off!

Jess: That's a good metaphor!

Liz: Instead of just going really, really, really slow.

Athena: I don't want a scab!

Athena followed the advice of her friends and soon after shared how she screamed and threw the book across the room because the ending "stabbed her in the heart." The book ended with the main characters of Percy and Annabeth jumping into the pit of Tartarus and not knowing whether they were going to survive. She mentioned how her father had to come in to see if she was all right. She continued to share with us about how she could not wait for the next installment of the series and would go on YouTube to satisfy her cravings for the "Percy Jackson experience."

Yet, endings also must provide a resolution or sufficient details to wrap up a story or lead to the next book in the series. Aviaei shared, "I will know if a book has a good ending if I stop imagining the ending in a different way. If I keep imagining something different happening in the ending to condolence myself, then the book has a bad ending." Cassidy had a different approach:

> If I don't like an ending, I will just change it. I will change everything in the book to make it how I want it, and I would literally start believing that that happened. People would be like, "No, it didn't happen that way," and I would be like "Yes, it did."

These readers were able to imagine additional details about the plot or the characters if the ending did not provide this for them.

Connections with Characters

According to these readers, the number and development of characters in young adult literature were important considerations for engagement. According to Katie, "A good book would have a limited amount of characters, especially if it's not really big." Veronica suggested, "A book shouldn't have seven characters, but maybe two or three. These readers described qualities or traits of characters that would allow them to make an emotional connection. Athena had a preference for strong female characters: "They are just inspirational; they make you want to be role models where you want to be more strong because of the female versus the male thing." Liz liked characters who shared some of her own personality traits and experiences. She described her connection to the main character in *There You'll Find Me* (Jones, 2011): "I related to her a lot because of everything she had been through and how she's just trying to find herself through the midst of tragedy [the death of her brother] and she was Irish." Liz also talked about her connections to *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967): "Ponyboy and Johnny—we have a lot in common, and so it was easy to figure out their personality and why they did what they did in their situation. I'm totally like Cherry, a Soc but a Greaser at heart."

These readers loved young adult literature in which they could immerse themselves within the story world, becoming a character and interacting with other characters. They admitted, "We're the only group that can say that we had a crush on someone from a book" (Liz). Aviaei added, "I put myself in the character's position a lot of times, pretending that I am the character in my mind, and then if something happens, I'll get upset." Katie attributed her engagement to sensory imagery: "By using sensory imagery, it makes you feel like you're there in the book. It makes you feel everything the character feels."

Consequences of Sustained Engagement in Reading Young Adult Literature

One major consequence for these readers was their compulsive need to keep reading, once they were hooked on a book. Cookie told us:

> I will read until the very end and you can't even stop me. My mom will call me down for dinner and I'm like, "Hold on!" Thirty minutes later, she's like: "Get your butt down here!" She rips the book out of my hands and it's like, "Fine!" So I shove my food in my mouth really quickly, and I go back to reading until I'm done, and then I'm like, "I have nothing to do!"

For these readers, their compulsions are born out of discovering unexpected moments and wondering about what is to come. Cookie explained, "You don't really know what's going to happen next. It's the curiosity that gets you. You have no idea what could happen." Athena agrees, saying, "You have to find out what's next! I need to know what the heck happened to this person!"

These readers loved young adult literature in which they could immerse themselves within the story world, becoming a character and interacting with other characters.

For these readers, a great young adult novel will leave them with a sense of emptiness. Veronica stated, "After I finish a book that I have been reading a long time, after I finish it in one day, I'm disappointed because there is nothing left to read." Liz labeled this feeling as "book hangover": "It's like when you have a book hangover, you are reading a new book but you are still talking about the old one." A great book will leave the reader craving for more immersion in the author's story world. The girls mentioned some of the ways they re-engaged in the world after they finished a novel. Cookie mentioned how she would "search the Internet for the next book coming out because I'm like, 'I've got to read this! I've got to read this!' And then, I figure out that the series ended and I'm like, 'WHY! That was like Wow!'" In particular, Athena mentioned how she watched Percy Jackson fan videos on YouTube, visited fan blogs, and read fan fiction by others who also "crave the Percy Jackson experience."

A great young adult novel also encourages readers to share their experience with others. In the following conversation, the girls noted some of the reasons they wanted to talk to others about the novels they read:

Liz: Because they are just so damn good!

Katie: You don't want to keep it to yourself.

Athena: You feel like you have this pit in your stomach; you feel like you are going to explode if you don't get it out.

Liz: When I'm reading a really good book, I want to tell somebody—not because it's so good, but to figure things out sometimes, because I'm like "Why did you do that?"

Athena: You want people to help you out with it.

These girls recognized the need to talk to others about their experiences to help them solve the tensions or problems they faced as they read. These readers mentioned turning to friends and family: "We like sharing books a lot and we are like, 'This is really good. You have to read this!'" (Cassidy). Liz talked often about a male best friend with whom she would discuss themes from books they would read. Oftentimes, they talked to their parents about books: "I talk to my parents about it because sometimes I get really frustrated with characters, and I'm like, 'Mom, this person is being really stupid!'" (Liz). Veronica's friends and family did not share her experiences with young adult literature, but she would share them anyway, because "If it's so weird and exciting, then I have to tell someone; I can't just hold that story in." These adolescents appreciated when teachers engaged them in conversations about books. Athena remembers:

These readers attributed their transactions with young adult literature to new understandings about themselves and their larger social worlds.

> Mr. R, the seventh-grade teacher, he would talk to us about stuff that normally no other teacher would talk about, and he would help us relate it to real life. That helped me enjoy reading better. I loved reading before, but then I actually saw it in a different way.

Conceptual Understandings of the Self, Others, and the Larger Social World from Reading Young Adult Literature

These readers attributed their transactions with young adult literature to new understandings about themselves and their larger social worlds. Liz talked about how young adult literature had opened her mind to "the way the characters look at themselves; it influences the way that I look at myself." Jess said, "There are a lot of books where you learn how people act toward each other and you are like, 'Hey, that's exactly like sometimes how your life is.' Maybe learning from that you can apply it to real life."

When I asked the girls to give examples of their thinking, they had a variety of responses. They mentioned self-discovery or identifying lessons or guidelines to live their lives by. For example, Cassidy discussed the unusual friendship between the main character and her horse in *Chancey of the Maury River* (Amateau, 2011):

> He [the horse] was blind, and he was trying to live his life and learn how to be blind, and he meets this girl and she takes special care of him because he was abused before. That was really good because they learned to live together and became each other's best friend.

From this novel, Cassidy learned the importance of friendship and adapting to life-altering events: "Everything can change for you even though you don't expect it to."

Transacting with characters in their favorite stories also helped them to imagine possible selves. Athena often talked about how she loved strong female characters in stories such as *The Two Princesses of Bamarre* (Levine, 2001) because it allowed her to imagine herself as a strong female. Oftentimes, she discussed the main character of Annabeth from Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series because Annabeth "was a tough and smart blonde." Athena (a blonde herself) recounted that she was the only girl in a family of seven boy cousins and would get picked on. She could relate to Annabeth and was inspired with how she reset the "dumb blonde" stereotype. In their conversations about Rick Riordan's Heroes of Olympus series, the girls talked about how the female characters saved the lives of the male characters, both physically and emotionally. According to Athena, "Percy had moments all the time. When Percy was having those weak moments, she pulled him up, and then when Annabeth was having those weak moments, Percy pulled her up." This led them to envisioning themselves as strong females who could stand up for "weaker" people. According to Liz, "All girls look for that. We look for someone strong to have

when we are going through weak moments, but when we are having a strong moment, we don't mind saving someone." Cassidy mentioned how she wanted to be a person that:

> Doesn't torment them [victims] and who will stick up for them, even though you aren't friends with them. They can see that maybe's there's hope and that I'm not going to be that kid that everyone picks on for the rest of my life.

Self-discoveries often included guidelines for how to think about, interact with, and treat others. Oftentimes, the girls would wrestle with this information by bringing relational problems to the discussion group. For example, Liz discussed the novel *Eleanor & Park* (Rowell, 2013), a story about two misfit teens who found each other and formed an intimate relationship:

> Park's mom absolutely hates Eleanor, and Eleanor is not your usual type of person; she is extremely funky, and I love her for that. She is very unique and dresses amazingly. I really don't get why she hates her so much.

In discussing this situation from the book, the other girls offered her a possible perspective from the mother's point of view. They imagined how the mother might not want her son to grow up and have a girlfriend, or how the mother could possibly see Eleanor as being a bad influence for her son.

Through literature, the girls experienced life situations and worldviews that they would not normally encounter. These experiences helped them to wrestle with concepts such as tolerance and difference. In another example, Katie was discussing the classroom text *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967):

> They show that there is separation between classes because of money. The Greasers or the poor and the Socs or the rich. The book shows how the Greasers have to face so many problems. But, the Socs have to face problems, too, and they unleash all their anger on the Greasers by jumping them. . . . it helped me to see that there are so many people who are less fortunate than me, and they face lots of problems.

Katie expanded this thinking by claiming, "You shouldn't judge a person by how rich they are, what they do, what race they are, how tall they are, what gender they are, and their age."

By extension, the girls also considered other social issues they never thought about previously. Athena explained her discovery about child poverty through her transactions with *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2003):

> Yeah, they are desperate, but there is this guy who is holding them captive, and it's like entire perspectives. There is one person that just needs to make more money, but there are some people who are working all day for three cents a day and not getting any of it at all, just giving it right to their families. I never realized how difficult it was.

Additionally, the girls claimed that they had an increased interest in nonfiction through reading their favorite series—Heroes of Olympus by Rick Riordan. Athena discussed how she enthusiastically absorbed facts about Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythology:

> With the Percy Jackson books, I absorbed a bunch of the stuff. I can remember the names of the gods and the stories. That never happened to me before; I usually have a bad memory for that kind of thing, but when I was reading it, I could remember stuff like that because you needed to know that stuff for the books.

Self-discoveries often included guidelines for how to think about, interact with, and treat others. Oftentimes, the girls would wrestle with this information by bringing relational problems to the discussion group.

Discussion/Implications

Guthrie et al. (1996) described intrinsic motivation as internalized goals, values, and beliefs regarding reading: "Students that are intrinsically motivated have an inherent interest in what they are reading and enjoy figuring out meanings for themselves" (p. 309). Motivation is important for the maintenance of behavior in reading, particularly when the task can be cognitively demanding (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). Literature has provided support for the idea that intrinsic motivation can lead to sustained engagement in reading, resulting in overall increases in cognitive proficiency and academic achievement (Guthrie et al., 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012), as well as gains in socio-emotional learning (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Smit, 2016). This study continues to illuminate what intrinsic motivation looks like by providing perceptions from eighth-grade female readers as to what matters for their sustained engagement in reading, and

what they perceive are the benefits from their engagement with their favorite books, especially their new understandings about themselves, others, and their social worlds.

Adolescents read young adult literature because they want to be intellectually thrilled. These girls loved experiencing what Almasi and Gambrell (1994) labeled as socio-cognitive conflict (i.e., encountering characters and worldviews different from their own that made them reconsider, restructure, or update their current understanding of themselves, others, and their social worlds). While "emotionally disturbing books" (Ivey & Johnston, 2017), which tackle commonly taboo subjects, can promote this type of thinking, less disturbing books, such as Rick Riordan's series Heroes of Olympus, or *Ingenue* (Larkin, 2011) can also be significantly thought provoking because they provide complex situations and relationships that adolescents can wrestle with.

Ultimately, the most significant consequence arising from their engagements with young adult literature was their compulsive need to keep reading once they were hooked on a particular story.

In selecting young adult literature for adolescents, these girls suggested books with descriptive details, relatable characters that allow for close personal interactions (Parsons, 2013), unexpected and bittersweet moments that are frustrating yet enjoyable, and endings that make readers want to throw a book across the room, but then pick it back up because they had to know what happened next. Similar to Ivey and Johnston's (2013, 2017) study, these readers also hated the happily ever after endings. They insisted on plausible or realistic endings.

When asked what they have learned from reading young adult fiction, the girls talked about a variety of new understandings about themselves and their larger social worlds. Table 4 is a collection of their responses. Some of these examples were taken from a previous investigation (Smit, 2016) as foundational understandings these girls have gained from reading their favorite novels. From there, I continued to explore how these understandings evolved to more sophisticated understandings, as the girls continued to connect to their favorite characters and to each other in subsequent discussions. Table 4 highlights moral discoveries or guiding lessons, visions of possible selves, discoveries involving interactions with others, discoveries about social concerns, and their developing appreciation for nonfiction texts. The girls imagined themselves as being certain kinds of people, those who are strong women or those who do not bully others. Like the eighth graders studied by Ivey and Johnston (2017), they too became more sensitive to what others endure, and, in turn, learned about important social issues, like child labor. Teachers can take advantage of the kinds of understandings adolescents gain from young adult literature by supporting their interests in certain topics, such as pairing a discussion on *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2003) with an article on current-day child labor.

Ultimately, the most significant consequence arising from their engagements with young adult literature was their compulsive need to keep reading once they were hooked on a particular story. These girls complained of feeling empty or having a "book hangover," during which they would think about the book well after they finished it. Similar results have been documented in personal recollections and student self-reports (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, 2017; Reed-Schuster, 1999; Tracey, 1999). Results of this study also confirm previous findings that students also have a powerful need to talk to others about what they read (Ivey & Johsnton, 2013; 2017; Nichols, 2006). These girls needed to talk because they "have to get it out." It did not matter whether it was friends, family, or teachers, as long as someone was willing to share in the reading experience with them.

These findings are not entirely surprising because research has long investigated discussions, literature circles, and book clubs as beneficial classroom practices (Broughton, 2002; Encisco, 1996; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Parsons, 2009; Reninger & Rehark, 2009; Soter et al., 2008). What is noteworthy is that adolescents can engage in sophisticated conversations about young adult literature without having all discussants necessarily read the text beforehand. Adolescents can pull from their own personal life experiences, experiences encountered from reading books in the same genre, or experiences from other media forms or

Table 4. Knowledge gained from experiences with young adult literature

Categories	Evidence from individual interviews and initial group sessions
Self-Discoveries: General	That everything is not always going to go in your favor but it will work out eventually in the end. Just in some way. It might not be perfect, but it will all work if you have someone standing beside you. (Cassidy) [Describing the book *Chancey of the Maury River*, Amateau, 2011] It was about horses—he [the horse] was blind, and he was trying to live his life and learn how to be blind, and he meets this girl and she takes care of him because he was sort of abused before. That was really good because they learned to live together and became each other's best friends. . . . How I'm lucky to not have any problems or disabilities and how important friendship is and how everything can change for you even though you don't expect it to. (Cassidy) Maybe you're not as special as you think. Like don't make a big deal out of nothing. . . . Don't brag. (Veronica)
Self-Discoveries: Possible Selves	The author of *Ella Enchanted* wrote a book called *The Two Princesses of Bamarre* (Levine, 2001). . . . I would read it a lot because it was about these two girls who were strong. I like strong female characters . . . they are just inspirational; they make you role models where you want to be more strong because the female versus the male thing. . . . Sometimes it would switch where the woman had to rescue the man, instead of the damsel in distress thing. (Athena) [Discussing the series Heroes of Olympus (Riordan)] I want to be someone who doesn't torment them [victims] and who will stick up for them, even though you aren't friends with them; they can see that maybe's there's hope and that I'm not going to be that kid that everyone picks on for the rest of my life. (Cassidy) I read a book, I think it was last year or before, elsewhere; it made me really question what happens when you actually die. It just opened up a whole new scenario. A whole new way to imagine what it would be like after you died. (Veronica)
Self-Discoveries: Interactions with Others	People have different motives for why they do things. . . . all people have different views and relationships and people are never perfect. (Aviaei) I think the way that I treat other people, because if you lie to them continuously, then your relationship will be like nothing at all; it will be a lie. (Liz) [Describing the book *Blood Red Road* (Dustlands trilogy, Young, 2011)] I don't understand, if they are trying to help her, why is she pushing them away? There are some things you just can't do by yourself. She should be grateful, they helped her get out of that cage-fighting place, and she's pushing them away. . . . Don't push people away. (Cookie) [Describing the book *Eleanor & Park* Rowell, 2013)] Park's mom absolutely hates Eleanor, and Eleanor is not your usual type of person. She is extremely funky, and I love her for that. She is very unique and dresses amazingly. I really don't get why she hates her so much. (Liz) I realized that everyone has a story and you can't just judge a book by its cover. Literally and figuratively. (Athena) [Discussing the book *The Outsiders* (Hinton 1967)] You shouldn't judge a person by how rich they are, what they do, what race they are, how tall they are, what gender they are, and their age. (Katie)
World Discoveries: Social Concerns	One of the books that I read this summer that gave me a different aspect on third-world countries and like how they live, and I literally almost cried when I read that because I was so awestruck about just how bad it was. (Liz) [Talking about *Iqbal*, D'Adamo, 2003] Yeah, they [the characters] are desperate, but there is this guy who is holding them captive and it's like different perspectives. There is one person that just needs to make more money, but there are some people who are working all day for three cents a day and not getting any of it at all, just giving it right to their families. I didn't realize how bad it was. (Athena) I once read this series Companions Quartet [Golding, 2006–2007] and it was all these Greek and Mythological creatures and stuff. The creatures got mad because everyone was polluting the sea and they almost destroyed the world because of it, and they didn't want humans around so they just tried killing all the humans. So yah, just the cause of pollution. I didn't really know how bad it was until I read that. Maybe this is worse than we think it is. (Cookie)
World Discoveries: Nonfiction	With the Percy Jackson books, I absorbed a bunch of the stuff. I can remember the names of the gods and the stories. That never happened to me before; I usually have a bad memory for that kind of thing, but when I was reading it, I could remember stuff like that because you needed to know that stuff for the books. (Athena) Even some fiction, like fantasy, even in the Percy Jackson books, it's fantasy but you learn Greek Mythology, and even in his other series you learn Egyptian mythology and stuff, so you get something out of it. (Aviaei)

expository sources to help solve problems and generate new understandings. When adolescents are invited to pull from multiple sources, rather than a singular text, conversations naturally grow to sophisticated understandings about themselves, others, and the social worlds they live in.

The girls discussed how it is acceptable for characters and, in turn, people in real life to have different perspectives on issues from their own.

In my recent study (Smit, 2016), I discuss how the girls gradually developed complex conversations—from their initial discussions about the actions and consequences of heroes and villains to more sophisticated discussions on society's conceptions of good and evil, such as whether criminals should be forgiven for their crimes and whether good people can commit bad acts for noble reasons. This article also explored their resulting understandings about themselves, others, and their social worlds through the concept of perspective. The girls discussed how it is acceptable for characters and, in turn, people in real life to have different perspectives on issues from their own. They also valued the different perspectives their friends brought to the conversations and learned that they did not always have to agree with each other. The girls also claimed that their current transactions with literature had changed in that they were paying closer attention to character development and details in the books. They also noted how their academic writing had broadened to include different perspectives. As they wrote, they wondered what others in the group might say on a particular issue and tried to include those views in their writing.

Developing reading communities of young adult fiction can be the first step in developing inquiry communities of self-directed learners. I found that toward the end of my time with the girls, they started bringing in their own resources to share in the form of comics, newspaper articles, and photos about social issues that mattered to them. Such self-directed inquiry communities are ideal, as students who have an invested interest in their own learning become more reflective about their own thinking, become more intentional as listeners, and more open to alternative ways of thinking; they are also often more willing to engage in the kinds of complex and critical thinking needed to be college and career ready. Re-envisioning the way we structure talk surrounding young adult literature may provide a comprehensible way to navigate the multiple reading interests, reading abilities, and expertise of students in English language arts classrooms.

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Emilie N. **Curtis**

"She's Saying the Thoughts I Didn't Know Anyone Else Had":

YA Verse Novels and the Emergent Artistic Voice of Young Women

While collections of poems for young readers are not a new phenomenon, the verse novel has emerged as a powerful trend in young adult literature since the turn of the century (Cadden, 2011). This movement began slowly with just a few notable works such as Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make Lemonade* (1993), Mel Glenn's *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale? A Mystery in Poems (*1996), and Karen Hesse's Newbery Award-winning *Out of the Dust* (1997), all published in the 1990s (Van Sickle, 2006). The trickle became a flood post-2000, and the verse novel form has gained greater critical acceptance and earned more widespread acclaim with the publication of award-winning multicultural works such as *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom* by Margarita Engle (2010), *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2011), *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (2014), and *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (2018).

As the verse novel has enjoyed increased popularity, its form has inspired research and debate regarding genre (novel, poetry, or hybrid), uses in education, and the reasons why this literary form has been enthusiastically embraced by young adults. However, aside from Krystal Howard's recent publication, "Influence Poetry and Found Poetry: The Reflection of Creative Writing Pedagogy in the Verse Novel for Young Readers" (2018), little attention has been paid to the fact that a considerable number of recently released verse novels for young adults concentrate on the education and development of the young writer or artist, as well as the way these depictions might act both as mirrors in which young readers can see themselves and as maps that delineate a path to becoming artists in their own right.

In this article, I first consider how the verse novel and characteristics particular to its form facilitate emotional involvement and identification with the character on the part of the adolescent reader. Reading narratives that resonate with their own experiences allows readers to grapple with questions of identity and perceptions of agency by participating in imaginary situations, exploring themselves through the world of the story, and considering how to approach similar episodes in their own lives (Rosenblatt, 1994). The discussion then focuses on the verse novels *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson (2014), *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo (2018), and *Blood Water Paint* by Joy McCollough (2018), and the way that these texts portray complex, realistic protagonists whose stories are reflective of the contemporary experiences of young women who develop voice and identity as artists through telling their stories. Finally, I consider implications for classroom practice, specifically regarding how these texts might be used to make creative writing more accessible to students in the secondary classroom by modeling a path that young adult readers can follow to embrace their own voices and become writers themselves.

I chose to focus on verse novels that tell young women's stories of empowerment and self-discovery, specifically as they relate to developing identity as an

artist, because of the growing realization (propelled by the #MeToo movement) that the voices of young women have often been silenced, distorted, or underrepresented in media, art, and literature across the board. At a young age, girls are often exposed to subtle messages in stories and in their own experiences that invalidate their feelings, limit their ambitions, and encourage them to doubt their own potential (Lamb & Brown, 2006). Because adults often do not want to recognize the discomfiting (and often traumatizing) depth of experience to which girls may be exposed, young women are habitually encouraged to push their feelings and desires aside in order to please others or "for their own sake," because they are told that making waves and demanding recognition and resolution will only cause further harm. Therefore, this article will concentrate on stories of emergent voice and artistic identity among young women.

Theoretical Framework

Bean and Moni (2003) point out that adolescent readers tend to perceive characters in young adult novels as engaging with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens, and that these challenges often center around questions of character identity and values. A critical literacy framework is especially suitable for exploring these themes because it "begins by problematizing the culture and knowledges in the text—putting them up for grabs, critical debate, for weighing, judging, critiquing" (Morgan, 1998, p. 157), allowing students to evaluate "information, insights, and perspectives through an analysis of power, culture, class, and gender" (Lapp & Fisher, 2010, p. 158). In questioning these knowledges, students may also be encouraged to examine the ways that "they are being constructed as adolescents in the texts and how such constructions compare with their own attempts to form their identities" (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 639).

Moreover, because "critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world" (McDaniel, 2004, p. 474), students are inspired to question the world in which they live and explore the ways in which change can be achieved. In this article, voice is understood as a principal element of self-realization, with voice being defined as a "metaphor for human agency and identity" (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 70). As the protagonists challenge the preconceptions and roles that have been imposed upon them, they develop their own sense of self, specifically in regard to their identity as artists, and realize that their voices have the power to change not only the way that they are viewed, but also the world as a whole. In the books examined here, "voice" takes on an additional layer of meaning as the characters' agency and identity manifests through creative expression, whether it be writing or painting, in telling their own stories. As students read these stories and identify with the characters who are developing their voices in terms of agency, identity, and artistic expression, the students themselves "create, through the stories they're given, an atlas of their world, of their relationships to others, of their possible destinations" (Myers, 2014, n.p.) that they can draw upon as they discover their own voices.

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Literature Review

Holland (1980) maintains that identity can be understood as constantly undergoing a process of recreation and reconfiguration, and that by reading, "we use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation" (p. 124). The reader accomplishes this act by identifying with particular characters and storylines that resonate with and give insight into her own struggles and transformations. Hubler's (2000) research supports this supposition, suggesting that the influence of reading on identity construction is much stronger than commonly recognized. After interviewing more than 40 adolescent girls, she found these readers "are not passively shaped by their pleasure reading, but, as reader-response critics argue, actively construct the

meanings of the texts they read" (p. 90). Indeed, she found in her study that "identification with female characters that the girls describe as 'outspoken,' 'strong,' 'independent,' 'caring,' and 'different' clearly aided them in their rejection of a stereotype of women as quiet, passive, dependent, compliant, and timid," while enabling these readers to reflect on the way that gender and gender roles are constructed and imposed by dominant groups (Hubler, 2000, p. 91).

By building a view through the eyes while telling the story from the perspective of a single conflicted source, the single-speaker verse novel's use of a "relentless first-person point of view and minimal word count strips a story down to the raw inner monologue of the main character," thereby creating a sensation for the reader of being trapped inside the character's head.

Similarly, the cultural and ethnic identity of adolescents is often shaped by a critical life episode or encounter that causes the individual to question "previously held attitudes and beliefs about others and oneself" (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 642). Reading about these critical life episodes allows adolescents to "participate in imaginary situations, look on at characters living through crises, explore [them]selves through the medium of literature" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 45), and consider how to approach similar experiences in their own lives. In addition, when students adopt a critical lens, they are more apt to question and actively challenge the position in society to which they have been relegated (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001).

Certain aspects of the contemporary YA verse novel make it particularly suited to do the sort of work that Holland mentions, not the least of which is its form as a novel written in a series of free-verse poems that do not have a regular rhyming scheme or meter, and thus "elicits from the viewer an emotion and a way of thinking that is different from dialogue" (Cadden, 2011, p. 22). Campbell (2004) points out that this type of narration tends to convey a "a vivid and imaginative sense of experience" that is "intensely internal, focused on the characters' feelings," with the action centering on emotional or critical life events, "and the rest of the novel dealing with the characters' feelings before and after" (p. 613). Therefore, the structure of the verse novel often differs greatly from that of the traditional novel; rather than being "built with rising conflict toward a climax, followed by a denouement, the verse novel is often more like a wheel, with the hub a compelling emotional event," issue, or theme that the narrator and the reader revisit throughout the text (Campbell, 2004, p. 615). This is important because questions of identity are rarely resolved all at once. Moreover, by building a view through the eyes while telling the story from the perspective of a single conflicted source, the single-speaker verse novel's use of a "relentless first-person point of view and minimal word count strips a story down to the raw inner monologue of the main character," thereby creating a sensation for the reader of being trapped inside the character's head, and fewer words "often lead to greater emotional development and less emphasis on description of the plot and the scenery" (Friesner, 2017, p. 33). All of these aspects of the verse novel serve to deepen the reader's identification with the main character. Consequently, as "the narrator grows and changes, often through trauma, experience leads to self-knowledge and a new perception of reality" for both the narrator and the reader (Roxburgh, 2005, p. 7).

Brown Girl Dreaming

In *Brown Girl Dreaming,* Jacqueline Woodson (2014) gives the reader what can best be described as a fictionalized memoir of her childhood as an African American girl growing up in the 1960s and moving between Greenville, South Carolina and Brooklyn, New York. The story is told in verse form and concentrates on her search for identity and developing conception of herself as an author. Woodson's choice to tell this story in verse is particularly appropriate because the young protagonist is enamored with words and their meanings, and it is through writing imitation poems of Langston Hughes's work that she first begins to discover her artistic voice and ability. In addition, Woodson subtly draws on both the child's perspective and the adult's perspective in a way that allows the reader to gain a more nuanced understanding of the way that the experiences she describes affected her

growing understanding of herself as an individual and as a writer.

This story begins with the narrator's birth in 1963 and reaches even further back in time to trace her genealogy, but the text primarily concentrates on young Jackie's feelings of being torn between two worlds and her sense of inadequacy when compared with her older sister. Just as she describes America as "a country caught/ between Black and White," she feels a similar split even from birth, saying that "I am born in Ohio/but the stories of South Carolina already run/ like rivers/through my veins" (Woodson, 2014, p. 2) and "I am born a Negro here and Colored there" (p. 3). This dichotomy deepens after her parents separate and her mother takes her and her siblings to South Carolina, where they spend much of their early years with their grandparents and are raised as Jehovah's witnesses. While Jackie's mother eventually leaves Greenville to look for work in New York City, before she goes, she carefully instructs her children on how to behave in the segregated South: "Step off the curb if a white person comes towards you/don't look them in the eye. Yes sir. No sir. / My apologies" (p. 31). The children are also liable to face punishment at home if they lapse into what their mother views as "Southern" or "subservient" speech—"ain't," "y'all," and "ma'am." The narrator describes in "the right way to speak" how

> The list of what not to say
> Goes on and on . . .
> *You are from the North*, our mother says.
> *You know the right way to speak.*
> As the switch raises dark welts on my brother's legs
> Dell and I look on
> afraid to open our mouths. Fearing the South
> will slip out or
> into them. (p. 69)

Jackie's sense of inner conflict intensifies after her mother establishes herself in New York and returns to take Jackie and her siblings to Brooklyn, because while she is overjoyed to be reunited with her mother, she experiences a deep sense of loss on leaving her grandparents, saying: "How can we have both places?/ How can we leave/ all that we've known . . ." (p. 132) for a place where "there is only gray rock, cold/and treeless as a bad dream . . . where no pine trees grow/ no porch swing moves/with the weight of/ your grandmother" (p. 143). Once they leave their grandparents, Jackie and her siblings also struggle with the decision to continue the strict religious observances required by Jehovah's witnesses; they suffer from feelings of separation as they leave the room during the Pledge of Allegiance and of jealousy as they miss out on the celebrations of Halloween, Christmas, and birthdays. As time progresses, and the children are split between two places—living in Brooklyn throughout the school year and Greenville during the summer—Jackie is increasingly torn, writing that

> Our feet are beginning to belong
> in two different worlds—Greenville
> and New York. We don't know how to come
> home
> and leave
> home
> behind us. (p. 195)

Jackie is also plagued by feelings of inadequacy when she is compared with her brilliant older sister, a circumstance that she finds all the more painful since she wants to be a writer. This desire is particularly intense; when reflecting on her first composition notebook, the young narrator says that "long before I could really write/ someone must have known that this/ was what I needed" and describes how "Hard [it was] not to smile as I held it, felt the breeze/as it fanned the pages" (p. 154). However, for a long time, Jackie feels that this dream is out of her reach, calling herself "the other Woodson" (p. 219) and saying that "I am not gifted. When I read, the words twist/ twirl across the page. / When they settle, it is too late. / The class has already moved on" (p. 169). Eventually, though, the young writer gains validation and resolve through seeing a "book filled with brown people, more/ brown people than I'd ever seen / in a book before" and realizes "that someone who looked like me had a story" (p. 228). Jackie is further inspired by poets of color like Langston Hughes, and first finds her voice in using his poems as a template

The last poem in the novel, "each world," can be read as an ode both to self-acceptance as the narrator embraces her duality and to agency as she realizes that she possesses the ability to transform the world.

for her own (p. 245) before writing her own book of seven haikus about butterflies (p. 252).

Finally, the narrator gains confidence in herself as writer, recording that "I didn't just appear one day. / I didn't just wake up and know how to write my name/ . . . knowing now/ that I was a long time coming" (p. 298). In doing so, she realizes that the world is hers, both "inside my head and/somewhere out there, too. / All of it, mine now if I just listen/ and write it down" (p. 316). The last poem in the novel, "each world," can be read as an ode both to self-acceptance as the narrator embraces her duality and to agency as she realizes that she possesses the ability to transform the world.

> Each day a new world
> opens itself up to you. And all the worlds you are—
> Ohio and Greenville
> Woodson and Irby
> Gunnar's child and Jack's daughter
> Jehovah's Witness and nonbeliever
> listener and writer
> Jackie and Jacqueline—
> gather into one world
> called You
> where You decide
> what each word
> and each story
> and each ending
> will finally be. (p. 320)

Her shift from "you" to "You" in this poem not only further signals the narrator's empowerment and emergent voice to the reader, but also acts a powerful reminder to the reader that she can shape her own story of self and action.

The Poet X

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo (2018) is the story of Xiomara Batista, a teenage girl born to conservative Dominican parents in Spanish Harlem. She struggles with accepting and expressing herself, eventually using poetry, both written and spoken, to break free from the definitions of identity and worth that are imposed on her. This novel's message of empowerment through words and community offers particular impact for the adolescent reader thanks to the combination of Acevedo's strong imagery and the way that "the pacing of words conveys the protagonist's mood, forcing the reader to feel as she feels and board her train of thought" (Freeman, 2018, p. 1). Although not strictly autobiographical, Acevedo does mention in her interviews that while she was inspired to write this story so that her students could see themselves represented in literature, the "emotional truths are her own," and she, in some ways, is telling the story of her own empowerment through poetry ("Follow the Fear," 2018).

Akin to their male counterparts in YA novels, female protagonists encounter and surmount challenging, unexpected events, but, in addition, "their coming of age is often marked by specific female characteristics"—experiences such as sexual harassment and dealing with cultural standards of beauty and gender (Brown & St. Clair, 2002, p. 81). In *The Poet X*, Xiomara struggles with all of these issues. She suffers from a sense of hypervisibility, both because her birth and that of her twin brother Xavier to aging Dominican parents is viewed as a miracle in her Harlem community, and because at a young age she developed what her mother calls "a little too much body for such a young girl" (Acevedo, 2018, p. 5), thereby drawing unwanted attention and advances from not only boys and but also fully grown men in the neighborhood. She struggles to reconcile her conflicting feelings of pride and shame in her appearance, saying in the poem "Questions I Have" that

> It's so complicated.
> For awhile now I've been having all these feelings.
> Noticing boys more than I used to.
> And I get all this attention from guys
> But it's like a sancocho of emotions.
> This stew of mixed up ingredients:
> Partly flattered that they think I'm attractive,
> Partly scared they're only interested in my ass and my boobs,
> And a good measure of Mami-will-kill-me fear sprinkled on top. (p. 32)

Xiomara often seems to blame herself for this harassment, or at least feels that she should accept it with more equanimity, stating that "I should get used to it./ I shouldn't get so angry/ when boys—and sometimes/ grown-ass men—/ talk to me however they want,/ think that they can rub against me/ or make all kinds of offers./ But I'm never used to it" (p. 52). The young poet finds relief only when she is able

> To grab my notebook,
> and write, and write, and write
> all the things I wish I could have said.

Make poems from the sharp feelings inside
that feel they could
carve me wide
open. (p. 53)

Thus, even early in the text, the reader can see how Xiomara uses writing as an outlet for her emotions, but at this point her words are still secret, which implies that she has not yet been able to penetrate the veil of silence inflicted on her by others. She laments that "the only person in this house/ who isn't heard is me" (p. 6).

Xiomara's self-image and sense of self-worth are further complicated by the expectations imposed on her by both her conservative mother and the church of her childhood. Xiomara not only feels that "[her] body takes up more room than [her] voice" (p. 5), but she is further silenced by her conservative mother's insistence on keeping to what is traditionally supposed to be a woman's place. Thus, she is required to act as "la niña de la casa" and help around the house while her brother is encouraged to concentrate on academic pursuits (p. 42). Moreover, she is punished when she steps out of the feminine role that others have decreed for her: she is rebuked by her mother for defending her brother, for not being "a lady," even though her "hands became fists for him" and "learned how to bleed when others/ tried to make him into a wound" (p. 45). Perhaps more painful to Xiomara, though, is the way that she is sexualized by not only her peers, but also her mother and her church. Her mother makes her ashamed of her developing body, slapping on her the day that she gets her period because "eleven was too young" and implying that Xiomara is a "cuero," or whore, whose body will corrupt her (p. 40). The church is not a source of consolation either, because Xiomara sees "the way that the church/ treats a girl like me differently./ Sometimes it feels /all I'm worth is under my skirt" (p. 14); she cannot bring herself to "have faith/ in the father the son/ in men . . . the first ones/ to make me feel so small" (p. 58).

These circumstances have divested the 16-year-old of her ability to explore or articulate her own beliefs and doubts anywhere outside of her journal, with the consequence that she feels unheard and unseen. Xiomara's journal, however, gives her the space and a place to challenge what others deem to be her place in the world and allows her to develop her own identity and voice through her writing. In what is presented in the book as a draft of a school assignment, Xiomara explains that by giving her the notebook as a place to collect her thoughts, her brother also made her believe that perhaps her thoughts were important. Now she writes in the journal every day, often as a way to keep from hurting (p. 41). Perhaps even more essential to facilitating the development of Xiomara's voice is the realization that she is not alone—a revelation that comes to her when her English teacher shows a slam poetry video in class. For Xiomara, the poet "is saying the thoughts I didn't know anyone else had," and she realizes that "when I listen to her I feel heard" (p. 76). This leads Xiomara to memorize her first poem, even though she still has no intention of performing in public, and to embrace her physical self; she vows to "let my body finally take up all the space it wants" as she acts out how she would deliver the poem (p. 79).

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The tension builds when Xiomara falls in love with a boy from school and enters into a secret relationship with him. Again, she suffers inner conflict, this time between the desire she feels for him and her waning religious faith. Xiomara's mother eventually finds out about her clandestine relationship, and Xiomara ends it (at least temporarily). However, Xiomara's depression over the breakup leads to a discussion with her English teacher, who encourages her to join a slam poetry club. For the first time, Xiomara has a place to speak out loud and be heard. The first time that she reads, she reflects that "I can't remember/ the last time that people were silent/while I spoke, actually listening/" and is shocked that "My little words/ feel important, for just a moment" (p. 259).

The young protagonist faces an even greater challenge, though, when her mother discovers her notebook, which her mother sees as a catalogue of Xiomara's sins. For this reason, she proceeds to burn it in spite of Xiomara's protests and the intervention of Xiomara's father and brother (p. 304). This painful experience serves as a catalyst for Xiomara's develop-

ing empowerment and voice, as she shows her mother that she still carries the poems within, writing:

> All of the poems and stanzas I've memorized spill out,
> Getting louder and louder, all out of order,
> Until I'm yelling at the top of my lungs,
> Heaving the words like weapons from my chest;
> They're the only thing that I can fight back with. (p. 305)

Xiomara then takes a further pivotal step in asserting her agency by leaving to stay at her erstwhile boyfriend's house, but she does not adhere to the stereotypical narratives of "losing" herself in him or becoming a "lost" girl, but rather defends her physical boundaries while still staying with him that night before going to school the next day (pp. 328–331).

Xiomara also shows her agency by returning home to deal with the conflict with her mother rather than running from it; she overcomes her silence regarding her mother and her religious doubts in group counseling (p. 343). Realistically, this counseling does not lead to perfect understanding between mother, daughter, and priest, but it does "work to break up the things that have built up between [them]" (p. 342). Perhaps more meaningfully, she performs for both her family and her priest after her English teacher reminds Xiomara that "words give people permission/to be their fullest self" (p. 345), and so she should not feel doubtful about expressing herself to those whom she wants to be close to.

Ultimately, Xiomara becomes cognizant of her own agency and ability to transform self and world. She acknowledges to herself

> That my poetry has become something I'm proud of
> The way the words say what I mean,
> how they twist and turn language,
> how they connect with people.
> How they build community.
> I finally know that all of those
> "I'll never, ever, ever,"
> stemmed from being afraid but not even they
> can stop me. Not anymore. (pp. 287–288)

The story culminates with Xiomara explaining that "learning to believe in the power of my own words has been the most freeing experience of my life" (p. 357), words that testify to her emerging sense of self and agency and thereby serve as a powerful inspiration for a reader struggling with similar challenges and critical life experiences.

Blood Water Paint

Penned by Joy McCollough, *Blood Water Paint* (2018) is based on the true story of painter Artemisia Gentileschi in early 17th-century Italy. Today, she is considered one of the most talented artists of the period, but during her lifetime, she struggled for recognition, since her father took credit for most of her early work. Her tale is told primarily in free verse from the 17-year-old protagonist's perspective, but it is juxtaposed with stories of the Biblical heroines Susanna and Judith. These stories are told in prose, presumably to emphasize that they were told to Artemisia by her mother as she lay dying from a fever after giving birth to a stillborn daughter. These Biblical tales not only function as a source of strength for Artemisia as she struggles with adversity, but also serve as her inspiration for some of her most acclaimed paintings. As such, they show the empowering qualities of voice in a variety of art forms passed through generations and genres.

As Brown and St. Clair (2002) point out in *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature*, we live "in a world where growing up is often equated for girls with the shutting down of possibilities and the diminishing of expectations" (p. 127). Therefore, it can be particularly empowering for young women to read stories in which the heroine proves herself successful creatively, artistically, and economically in a sphere traditionally dominated by men, especially when they face adverse situations based on the gender roles that have been forced upon them. This is the struggle that Artemisia Gentileschi confronts and successfully overcomes in Joy McCollough's depiction of her early life.

From the earliest pages of the novel, it is clear to the reader that Artemisia is an artist as words are used to paint a picture of Artemisia seemingly becoming one with her work. The first-person narrator explains how

> I train my eyes
> on what's ahead: my purpose
> and listen only to the rise and fall
> of my own breath as I connect
> the brush to the paint to my breath to the canvas.
> (p. 4)

However, while Artemisia and the reader know that the true artist is

the one with pigment smeared into her skin
the one whose body
is as permanent as a fixture
in this studio, palette, easel,
the only one whose heart is flung across this canvas

her father denies her that acknowledgment, and he is the one who gets to sign his name to the canvas and take the gold (and credit) for her compositions (p. 5). While Artemisia initially tries to assert herself, her father reminds her that she would never have been allowed to paint in the first place if her brothers had shown any promise, and she silences herself because "dwelling on/ my talentless brothers/only incites him" (p. 7) and may result in his ending her apprenticeship out of spite. Thus, she does not vocally protest as his gaze "lays claim/ to palette knife and easel, / stretcher bars, apprentice" (p. 73) or when he invites men into her studio, her sanctuary, who also make sure that they convey the idea that she is merely "beauty for consumption" (p. 12).

One of Artemisia's greatest struggles is to hold on to the knowledge that "I am not a thing/Or a possession" (p. 74), since she is objectified on so many levels. Not only is she expected to produce paintings for commissions without acknowledgement of her talent and work, but she is also expected to use her charms at the market and to convince other artists to include her father on commissions despite his subpar painting skills (p. 60). Even when she is successful, her father is sure to remind her of "her place" as an object and a tool, requiring her to pose for him as "he stares/ analyzes/ uses my body" (p. 75) for his own purposes. He even goes so far as to punish Artemisia for her ability when he finds out that one of the requirements of his being included on an important commission is that she do the actual painting: he decides that rather than just showing her calf, she will need to disrobe completely to model for him (p. 75).

Artemisia has a hidden source of strength, though: the stories of strong women that her mother told her as "a child, not the woman of the house" (p. 23). When dying soon after the birth of her last child, Artemisia's mother

Spent the last of her strength
To burn into my mind
The tales of women
No one else would
Think to tell. (p. 24)

These stories of Susanna, "a righteous woman whose virtue was questioned through no fault of her own," and of Judith," a widow with nothing left to lose," (p. 24) will take on particularly deep meaning beyond simple touchstones for Artemisia as she is cast into both of those roles. Perhaps more important, though, these stories "stoke the flames inside" when Artemisia is objectified

Every time my father shoos me
down the stairs
away from his studio
each time he speaks to buyers
    as though I am not there,
each time they leer at me
    as I descend in seething fury. (p. 28)

Artemisia is able to channel this rage into inspiration and a quest for justice because she knows that she is the only one who can paint these women authentically; she understands that "one can't truly tell a story/ unless they've lived it in their heart," and the repeated insults and objectifications that she suffers make Artemisia more certain that

I can do Susanna justice
I can do my mother justice.
I can have justice. (p. 29)

Artemisia draws even more deeply on this source of strength when she is raped by her teacher, the same man that her father had her beguile into giving them an important commission. The betrayal is all the more painful because Artemisia thought that she had finally met someone who saw her as artist first, rather than a woman—an artist who was

an audience,
and not just eyes,
but a mind that understands
the skill required—. (p. 38)

Her teacher, Agostino, flatters and flirts with her, and ultimately leads her to believe that he wishes to share his studio with her as a true equal, only to make his real intentions clear when he explains that he will "make better use of my live model than your father does" (p. 125), implying that he will use her for sex as well. Agostino reacts with rage when she refuses him, destroying her sketches of Suzanna, and then raping her when she still refuses to yield to his advances. He then taunts her with the knowledge that the laws of Rome do not allow women to bring charges before the

court, so she will have to convince her father to do it for her, which Agostino doubts he will be willing to do (p. 204).

Artemisia is initially silenced by this reservation, but gains strength from the visions of Susanna, who reminds her that "My own voice saved me. Use your voice" (p. 197), and of Judith, who tells her that "You are not small" (p. 200) and encourages her to face her accuser. And indeed, Artemisia's father is unwilling at first, trying to dissuade her by convincing her that it was just a "lover's quarrel," before finally rationalizing that if she does this, then

> Even if you are believed
> You are the one who will no longer
> be able to show her face.
> No society.
> No marriage.
> What's more, if this defines you,
> there will be no painting. (p. 215)

Artemisia demands that her story be heard, though, deriving resolution from the stories that her mother told her, "the sharpest blade/that she could leave me on her death" (p. 216). The apparitions of Susanna and Judith stay with Artemisia all through the painful trial, encouraging her to "mirror Judith's stoic face, match Susanna breath for breath" (p. 246) as she testifies, has her reputation besmirched, and is violated yet again when midwives "pry me open, debate the state of my sex" (p. 245). Finally, Artemisia is given a choice: undergo torture and likely lose the use of her hands permanently to prove her virtue and the truth of her statement, or drop the suit (p. 251). Though losing the ability to paint is a terrifying prospect, Artemisia remembers her mother telling her that sometimes a woman must risk her place, and indeed, her very life to speak a truth that the world despises in order to be believed, and she decides that anything is worth it to have her voice and truth heard (p. 252).

Artemisia does eventually receive a somewhat hollow justice: her good name is restored and her rapist, Agostino Tassi, is sentenced to five years banishment from Rome. While the inadequacy of her rapist's punishment initially devastates her, especially when compared with all that she has been through, Artemisia draws strength once more from Susanna and Judith as they assure her that she will paint a masterpiece, and "plunge [her] fingers into the paint, smear them across the outstretched cloth" in a way that "feels more precisely right than anything that she has ever done before" (p. 288). The story ends with Artemisia vowing that "I will show you/what a woman can do" (p. 291), which serves as a powerful inspiration for young women who have experienced similar traumas and struggled to regain their sense of self-determination and agency. Indeed, for the author, this novel "is ultimately about how important and powerful it is to tell one's story and be heard," because "the more survivors share their stories, the more others feel the support to tell their own stories, or even face and name stories they'd maybe never even recognized as assault" (Miller, 2018, n.p.).

Implications for Classroom Practice

As shown in the discussion, these three books use the verse novel format to share stories of strong young women who make themselves heard and who act to fight the definitions imposed upon them. "The images children glean from books have a powerful impact on their sense of self and their view of others" (Ford, Tyson, Howard, & Harris, 2000, p. 236), so by creating these characters who are inspired by the poetry and stories of others to develop their own artistic craft and voice, the authors supply not only a window through which young readers might see themselves becoming poets, but also a path that they might follow to do so—first reading model poets, then crafting poems in response, and finally workshopping and revising these poems. This progression is one used in many college-level creative writing courses where one of the earliest exercises is often reading works by published authors, and then writing an "influence" poem modeled after some aspect of their work (Howard, 2018). Thus, YA verse novels that focus on the education and development of the young artist, such as those discussed in this article, may be particularly suitable for use in the secondary ELA classroom to model writing behavior. When young readers see the characters in these texts benefiting from reading and writing poetry and becoming artists themselves, they may be less intimidated by the creative process; moreover, "inserting a created protagonist's own poems into a narrative is inherently pedagogical as it models for young readers how a poet might begin her own writing practice" in regard to getting ideas, choosing form, and developing a unique voice (Howard, 2018, p. 233). In the words

of Jacqueline Woodson, poetry is not some "secret code . . . poetry belongs to all of us" (2015), and these texts may help students embrace this truth.

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Teacher Talk

Mary Cate **LeBoeuf**

Book Love for All:

A Conversation with Stacey Reece

While getting my master's degree in English Education at the University of Tennessee, I read Penny Kittle's book, *Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Reader*s (Heinemann, 2012), and knew that my main goal as a teacher would be to help kids learn to remember that they love to read. One of my teacher mentors and fellow booklovers, Dr. Stacey Reece, has a mission to find representation for every child though YAL, and I am regularly challenged and inspired by her love of reading and her motivation to get students reading. For my first column, I had the opportunity to sit down with Stacey and one of her students, Erin Claxton, to discuss Stacey's experience winning Penny Kittle's Book Love Foundation Grant in 2018. This grant awards classroom teachers $1,500 to build their classroom library and help students develop their own love for books and reading. With her foundation money, Stacey has chosen to purchase a wide variety of novels to allow for as much student choice as possible in her classroom.

LeBoeuf: How did you come to love young adult literature?

Reece: Oh gosh. I was in the 7th grade, and I found Judy Blume. I went to a very small school, so my elementary school didn't have a library; we had a media bus. The bus came every two weeks and was just a converted school bus. I'd never been inside a library, and I remember going into the library when I was in middle school and thinking "Whoa, there's a lot of books in here," and Judy Blume was the first one I picked up. I can't remember which one it was . . . I think it was *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret*. But anyway, after that one, I read all of Judy Blume. Then, I hadn't read Beverly Cleary when I was younger—and it was kind of "younger" for 7th grade—but the stories of Ramona and *How to Eat Fried Worms* (Thomas Rockwell) were so funny, I went back and read all of those, and that's how I just kept going [with reading].

LeBoeuf: What was access to YAL like for you growing up?

Reece: Honestly, Judy Blume is the big name I remember. Once I discovered Stephen King, I kind of fell out of that [and moved more into adult lit]. Once I started teaching in Johnson County, I discovered *13 Reasons Why* and *The Hate List*, and it was kind of a rediscovery of YA Lit in that class. I bought *13 Reasons Why* four times because kids kept asking to read my one copy. I started thinking "There's something here," so I started trying to refamiliarize myself [with the genre].

LeBoeuf: You taught in Johnson County and then moved to Knoxville for grad school, and then came back into the classroom. What is it like coming back into the classroom after spending so much time reading and studying YA Lit while getting your PhD? Do you have a different focus?

Reece: Yes! So much more of a different focus because [YAL] is accessible. It's just rich. There's so

much in YA books and it's so diverse. There's a YA book for everybody. I feel like in schools, especially, we get caught up in "dead white guys" and the canon. Noticing that in Johnson County and then taking classes about YA allowed me to build on what I'd already seen in my own classroom; I could really see how YA works in a class. As a result, I think I'm a better teacher.

LeBoeuf: Talk to us about the process of applying for and winning the Book Love Foundation Grant.

Reece: I don't know if I was aware of the Book Love Grants, but I had just started following Penny Kittle on Twitter after reading *180 Days* (Heinemann, 2018). And right about the time I started following her, the Book Love Grants were close to being due. I thought, "I'm going to try this because the worst thing that could happen is that [I] don't get it." After all, I always tell my students [the same thing], and I didn't want to be a hypocrite. I decided to apply at the last minute. I knew I needed reference letters, and I knew a student letter from Erin would bring this home for me, so I reached out to her over spring break as well as to a colleague to write recommendation letters. After I sent it in, the waiting was hard. I kept checking Twitter and thought I didn't get it because others had been notified and were announcing their wins on Twitter. Then I got a second email [the first email had gotten lost], and I realized I *won*. I kind of just sat there and looked at the screen for a minute, and there was my name. I won it!

LeBoeuf: That is amazing. Talk to us about what winning this grant means to you and your kids.

Reece: It's incredible. It's very humbling to be one of just a few dozen educators in the entire United States and Canada to be chosen out of the hundreds of applications. What a gift. Penny Kittle is a treasure—she is and the whole foundation is. Having someone invest in you, knowing that you're going to reinvest that in students is pretty awesome. And for my kids? I do a lot of book talks, and they are constantly asking, "What should I read next?"—more this year than ever before. Having a variety of books where you can match a kid with a book, like I did with Erin, means I can be more successful in developing lifelong readers.

LeBoeuf: What advice do you have for other teachers in applying for grants like The Book Love Grant?

Reece: Well, number one, do it. Don't be afraid of failure, because I know sometimes as teachers we get caught up in that. You have to try. Number two: Make it as solid as you can. Don't be afraid to say what your strengths are and what good things are going on in your classroom. As teachers, we support each other, and we need to know those things anyway, so you've got to "toot your own horn." And then, find a student who buys into it as much as you do who can exemplify what you are doing in your classroom. Finally, do your application creatively. Make yourself stand out. Do a video, do any kind of thing that is creative and makes you stand out.

LeBoeuf: What advice do you have for other teachers looking to bring new books into their classroom to increase engagement?

Reece: First of all, check and see what your kids are reading, because that's a pretty good indicator of books you should be bringing into your classroom. Also *ask* them, "What do you all want me to get? What do I need to add [to the classroom library]?" I buy what I can, but my wish list from students is always long, so when parents ask me what they can do to help support me and my students, I direct them to my classroom Amazon wish list or tell them I need gift cards to bookstores. I also love going to ALAN because it is a huge resource, and I get access to all the current books.

LeBoeuf: In your experience, what increases engagement for your students when it comes to what they are reading?

Reece: Number one is accessibility. My kids are surrounded by books and hear me talking about them constantly. Even if they're reluctant, your kids will read if they know it's the expectation. But really, it's always having a conversation with kids. I think we forget to do that sometimes because everybody

talks *about* teenagers and what they like and what they don't like, but sometimes we just forget to ask. The place I start is always, "The last book I really liked was . . ." and they tell me. Or if they have never really read, I'll ask them to finish this sentence: "If I read a book, it'd have to be like this." And just reading yourself. It's easier for me to recommend a book if I've read it myself. If we want to increase engagement, we've got to read, too. We have to know what we're talking about, and they have to know it's a priority and important. YA is written for young adults! So often in English classes, we make them read things for adults. But being engaged in a book means they have a choice. They can say, "I chose this. This is what I want to read. Nobody's making me read this." That helps, too. Then, having a variety of books about different ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, ability levels, genres, etc. That means they don't have the option to say, "You don't have anything I'm willing to read." There's something out there, and I'm going to help you find it.

Sometimes I like to see a reflection of my personal experience—what I see around me in high school. Other times, I want to see things that aren't necessarily at my school. It goes with the genre, but I love how real YA books seem to be.

LeBoeuf: Erin, can you talk to us now about your experience with reading? Did you like to read before coming to Dr. Reece's class?

Erin: Growing up, I did not like it at all. In elementary school, we had Accelerated Reading, and it definitely seemed more like a chore then. My mom is an English teacher, and she always wanted me to read, but I just struggled with finding the right books. I read the basics, but I still really never connected with anything I was reading. As I got to middle school, it wasn't very pressed on me to read. When I look back, I don't remember being asked, "Are you reading something right now?" or "You should read this." So when I had Ms. Reece on the first day of sophomore year, and she was telling me I was going to have to read for 15 minutes at the beginning of every class, I wasn't very excited about it. But then I saw how excited she was about reading. She came in just about every day with a book to talk about or recommend to us. And so slowly, with some trial and error, I definitely started to love [reading]. The first book I read and loved was *Everything, Everything.* I started it over fall break sophomore year, and I finished in two days. I think that's the fastest I've ever read a book.

LeBoeuf: What does it mean to you for Dr. Reece to have won the Book Love Grant? What does this mean for students in the future?

Erin: Even though I'm not in her class anymore, I come in here pretty often looking for books. Lots of kids like me are coming into her class, and they don't really enjoy reading whatsoever. But to have that variety of books available for everyone means that these students have the opportunity to find the right book for them—the book that can get them on the path to reading. That just excites me that this experience of having the opportunity to find books can be passed onto someone else.

LeBoeuf: Why do you both think YAL is so engaging for adolescents? For non-adolescents?

Erin: Sometimes I like to see a reflection of my personal experience—what I see around me in high school. Other times, I want to see things that aren't necessarily at my school. It goes with the genre, but I love how real YA books seem to be, and are.

Reece: Yeah, like a window into someone else's world.

Erin: Yes. I don't feel like it's so much transporting me to a new place as people say books do, but it's more of a true reflection of my life and the world currently.

Reece: Most people who buy YA are 30. And yes, part of it is because we have jobs and can afford to buy books, but I think YA is so appealing because, like

Erin said, it doesn't matter who you are; you identify with something. I mean, I'm 48 years old, and I can identify with the conflict that a character is facing. I think there are things we all identify with. There's something about remembering how it felt to be that age and getting behind that feeling.

LeBoeuf: Okay, last question for you both. What books are you recommending to students and classmates these days?

Reece: *Time Bomb* by Charbonneau, *The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* by Sobina Khan, *Jacked Up* by Erica Sage, *Dread Nation* by Justina Ireland, *Voices: The Last Hours of Joan of Arc* by David Elliot, *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein* by Kiersten White, and *People Kill People* by Ellen Hopkins.

Erin: I always recommend *The Female of the Species* by Mindy McGinnis.

Mary Cate LeBoeuf *holds a master's degree in Secondary English Education from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and teaches Secondary English and Creative Writing in Knoxville. She believes in the power of the written word and strives to have every student that enters her classroom leave loving to read more than they did before. She spends her free time reading as much as possible, as well as spending quality time with her husband, friends, and dog. Her next YA reads are* A Little Too Bright *by Samuel Miller and* Two Can Keep a Secret *by Karen M. McManus.*

Stacey Reece *has been in the classroom for nearly 30 years. She has divided her time between middle school, high school, and undergrad and graduate students in Mountain City, Tennessee, and Knoxville, Tennessee. After receiving her PhD from The University of Tennessee, she returned to the high school classroom and is currently teaching 10th- and 11th-grade International Baccalaureate students in Knoxville. She also serves on the Knox County Teacher Advisory Committee and coaches basketball. When she is not working, you can find her reading. Her next YA reads are* Dry *by Jarrod and Neal Shusterman,* The Field Guide to the North American Teenager *by Ben Philippe, and* You'll Miss Me When I'm Gone *by Rachel Lynn Solomon.*

Erin Claxton *is a dancer and recent graduate from West High School in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her love of reading was rekindled in Dr. Reece's 10th-grade classroom. She plans to attend The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the fall. Her next YA read is* Dear Evan Hansen *by Val Emmich, Steven Lawson, et al.*

Master Class in YAL

Mark **Letcher**

An Idea Whose Time Has Come:

Neal Shusterman's ALAN Master Class

As the new editors of The ALAN Review, we are excited to introduce a column that will be featured in each issue of the journal: "Master Class in YAL." Here, Mark Letcher, a former ALAN President, explains the motivations for and some history behind the "Master Class" session at the ALAN conference, and describes our first featured YA author in this column, Neal Shusterman.

Anyone who has attended the annual ALAN workshop can share what a unique experience it is. We enjoy almost two full days of young adult authors, editors, publishers, and scholars discussing their work and how YA speaks to young readers; it can often be a highlight of the year for ALAN members. As a former President of ALAN, it has been my privilege to organize and present the 2018 workshop to our attendees. We know that the ALAN workshop can provide an experience that few other conferences can match, including the generous donation of books, the peeks into authors' writing processes, and the association with other YA advocates in the same ballroom.

In recent years, however, the ALAN Executive Board has explored other opportunities to put YA authors in conversation with teachers and students. Many of us already strive to do this by taking our students to author events in our area and bringing authors into our classrooms, either face-to-face or through Skype or other technological means. But when we, as an organization, have access to a large number of teachers, as we do during the NCTE conference and ALAN workshop, it seems that we can, and should, do more.

With that in mind, former ALAN President Laura Renzi initiated the idea of an ALAN "Master Class" session in 2017. The session was proposed for that year's NCTE conference in St. Louis, which would ideally make it available to both NCTE and ALAN attendees. Most important, the session was proposed to be an extended 75-minute conversation with one well-known voice in YA literature. The author would be free to discuss her/his work in detail, the experience of writing for young readers, or any other aspect of the field that they wanted to talk about. We, as an organization, were excited about this chance to give conference attendees a more intimate and in-depth session with an author. If the session were to be accepted, each ALAN president could then propose the same session format in the ensuing years, with different authors speaking each year.

The first ALAN Master Class session was presented at the 2017 NCTE conference. Even though it was late in the day on Saturday, the room was packed to hear the featured speaker, Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Speak*, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, and *Shout*, among many others. Laurie is a longtime friend of ALAN; she's spoken at many workshops, and she received the 2008 ALAN Award, given to those who have made outstanding contributions to the field of YA literature. During Laurie's Master Class, she touched on a number of topics: her close, symbiotic relationship with her readers, her fierce defense of students' right to read books of their own choosing, and the way her novels have affected her, as she's written and looked back on them. The 75 minutes went by far too quickly, and it was apparent that Laurie could

have continued talking for much longer. Her passion for her work, and her readers, was clearly evident during her session.

With such a successful inaugural session, it was an easy decision to propose another Master Class for the 2018 NCTE conference to be held in Houston. This time around, the responsibility for the proposal was mine, as I was the current president and in the midst of planning that year's ALAN workshop. I wanted to invite an author who was well known and would draw attendees, but I also wanted an author with a large and varied body of work, as well as someone who would be an engaging speaker. Laurie had set a high bar the previous year, and I wanted the 2018 Master Class to be just as interesting and invigorating for attendees as the 2017 session had been. I submitted the session proposal to NCTE in January 2018 without a firm idea of who the featured author would be, but I had my preference.

My choice was Neal Shusterman, the author of books popular with younger and older adolescent readers, including *Bruiser*, the Skinjacker trilogy, the Antsy Bonano books, the Unwind series, and *Challenger Deep*. In 2017, he was also the ALAN Award recipient. As such, he was granted an automatic invitation to speak at the 2018 ALAN workshop. I had been in conversation with his publisher about this and knew that he would be talking to ALAN about his upcoming work, *Dry*. While that would be an excellent topic for the ALAN workshop attendees, my hope was that by also inviting him to lead the Master Class session, he would feel free to talk about other works, as well. Given that the ALAN workshop speaking slots are significantly shorter than a Master Class session, Neal could not only speak longer, but also reach a different audience during the NCTE conference. At least, this was how I pitched the idea to his publisher. After a few negotiations over time slots, I was told that Neal was in. Through his publisher, I was told that he planned to use the Master Class as an opportunity to give attendees "something they've never seen or heard before." I was intrigued and felt confident that others would be, too.

On the evening of the Master Class, I briefly introduced Neal and let him have the room. As he opened his laptop, he again stressed how he wanted this session to be unlike others he had done. His idea, it turned out, was to use the session to share drafts, fragments, and pieces of past work that had never seen the light of day. He described these as stories he "couldn't find a fit for" in his other works, and "the projects that never were." I could see attendees eagerly leaning forward, anxious to hear what would follow.

As he read his stories to the audience, Neal explained the genesis of the ideas and how they did, or did not, fit into larger projects. Some of the stories remained just that: stories that would not be expanded further. But others, he pointed out, led to other ideas, or contributed in some significant ways to his novels. One story, for example, was a kernel that eventually (years later) would lead to his conception of the Unwind series. Neal mentioned that he never deletes these old files; he never knows when an older story may inspire him, so he likes to keep them available. He also shared some insider knowledge on potential movie projects based on his works. Attendees I spoke with were thrilled that they had gained such an intimate look at an author's process and were overjoyed that they now had additional background knowledge about some of their favorite Shusterman books.

Given the success of the past two sessions, we have proposed another Master Class for the 2019 NCTE conference in Baltimore. I am pleased to announce that A. S. King (*Dig, Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*, among many other titles) has agreed to be the featured author for this year. I know she'll be an eagerly anticipated author, just as Laurie and Neal were, and that she will engage her audience as only she can. The Master Class has provided exactly what we had hoped: a different forum for authors and a vibrant session for those who may attend NCTE and/or ALAN. I look forward to this session format continuing in the years to come.

Mark Letcher *is an Assistant Professor of English Education at Lewis University, where he also directs the English Language Arts Teaching program. At Lewis, Mark teaches courses in young adult literature, writing pedagogy, and first-year composition, among others.*

Mark has been an active member of ALAN since 2004, serving on the Board of Directors, as chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award committee, and in 2018, as President of ALAN. He is very pleased to see the Master Class become an established part of the NCTE conference program.

Photo credit: Noah Schaffer

From the Library

Suzanne **Sherman**

The Bookmobile + SSR = A Reading Safe Space in the Classroom

Through intentional and ongoing collaboration, cultivated relationships, detailed collection development, and a strong working knowledge of classroom curriculum and instruction, school librarians *can* and *should* serve as a vital part of engaging young adult readers. When school librarians are connected to the needs of classroom teachers, the benefits that can come from collaboration are powerful. In my 13 years of experience as a school librarian, I have found the easiest entry point into this collaboration is through Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) programs that teachers (usually, but not limited to, English/language arts teachers) implement in their classrooms. I have witnessed firsthand that when these programs follow research-backed methods for success—allowing students to self-select their texts; consistent teacher modeling of reading for pleasure—genuine engagement happens.

I see every invitation to work with teachers as an opportunity to connect students to books that they enjoy and to characters that become a part of their lives.

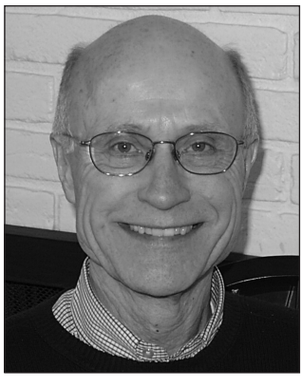
One way that I work with teachers to facilitate the SSR program is to bring my Bookmobile into classrooms so that I can share not only my high-interest, carefully curated collection of books, but also ideas for how to find the right book. Collaborating with teachers beforehand to better learn about students' perceived reading levels and reading interests makes these visits all the more meaningful. Once in the classroom, I find that being honest and straightforward with my high schoolers is the best way to provide a space of trust and often share with them my own excuses for not reading more. I often sympathize with students over the demands on our time or our inability to disconnect fully from technology. But I am sure to remind students that SSR is a time and space that has been carved out for them by their teachers to slow down their busy lives and *just enjoy reading*. Sometimes this space can feel less threatening than the school library, which houses thousands of books (a dream come true for book lovers, but a nightmare for someone who finds the whole process of finding a book to read too much to handle!). I remind them that my Bookmobile is a safe space, too, and we often end up sharing favorite titles with each other and recommending books to one another. We bond over selections as I check the books out right there in the classroom.

For me, the connections I make with the students and the teachers are what drive me and what keep me committed to helping students grow in their desire to read. I see every invitation to work with teachers as an opportunity to connect students to books that they enjoy and to characters that become a part of their lives—and that, ultimately, may lead to them become lifelong readers who trust the guidance of a librarian!

Suzanne Sherman *is a former English and Spanish teacher turned librarian! She has been a school librarian for 14 years and is going on her 12th year at Hardin Valley*

Academy, a public high school in Knox County, TN. Her transition from a classroom containing 30 some students to one that encompasses close to 2,000 began when she realized that the very best part of her day was when she got the right book to the right student, at the right time, and that she could do that on a larger scale. Suzanne loves reading both children's and young adult books and having big conversations with students, as well as helping them navigate the ever-shifting world of technology and digital citizenship. She also thrives on collaborating with teachers and developing lessons with them that drive students toward inquiry. In addition to her role as a school librarian, Suzanne also teaches for the School of Information Sciences at UT Knoxville.

Michael **Cart**



Eavesdropping on the Hearts of Others

One of the many reasons to attend the annual ALAN conference is the ALAN Breakfast, where the ALAN Award is announced. Almost from its inception, ALAN's Executive Board has given the award to honor those who have made outstanding contributions to the field of adolescent literature. The recipient may be a publisher, author, librarian, scholar, editor, or servant to the organization. Then, at the Saturday ALAN breakfast during the NCTE convention, we get to meet and hear from the year's honoree.

The 2018 ALAN Award recipient was Michael Cart, a nationally recognized expert in YA literature. He is the former director of the Beverly Hills (California) Public Library and a past president of both the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and ALAN. He is the author or editor of 20 books, including the coming-of-age novel *My Father's Scar*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature*; and—with Christine A. Jenkins—*The Heart Has Its Reasons*, a critical history of young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content. His many anthologies include *Love and Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*, *Necessary Noise: Stories about Our Families as They Really Are*, and *How Beautiful the Ordinary: Twelve Stories of Identity*. He also appointed and chaired the Task Force that created the Michael L. Printz Award, and he subsequently chaired the 2006 Printz Committee.

We are honored to include Michael Cart's ALAN Award Acceptance speech in our inaugural issue. Michael Cart, as always, reminds us that reading provides us the very necessary ability to "experience empathy and sympathy and the ability thereby to eavesdrop on the hearts of others."

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Receiving this award is not only gratifying but offers me a bully pulpit as well, so forgive me if I use it to preach to you, the choir, for a few minutes. Let me start my "homily" by saying that, unfortunately, we live in . . . *interesting* times. The great poet William Butler Yeats eloquently described similar troubled times in his classic poem *The Second Coming.* Since it seems particularly relevant to today, let me quote these lines from it:

> *Turning and turning in the widening gyre*
> *The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*
> *Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;*
> *Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;*
> *The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere*
> *The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*
> *The best lack all conviction, while the worst*
> *Are full of passionate intensity.*

Passionate intensity? I take that to describe a time when xenophobia, racism, misogyny, and bullying are rampant; when truth is an endangered concept; and when a free press is vilified as being the enemy of the people.

The center will not hold? Unfortunately, there is no longer a center, only a fiercely partisan divide, which seems impossible to bridge. Small wonder, then, that there are days when I worry that civilization itself is at risk.

How have all these . . . *interesting* things come to be? A root cause is, I think, a failure of empathy, of

identifying with and understanding another's situation, feelings, and actions. We seem no longer able to walk the proverbial mile in another's shoes or even to *imagine* such a salutary thing as sympathy. Not only does this seem to be true on the part of too many adults but, more ominously, on the part of young adults as well.

Empathy's absence impacts every aspect of young lives, but is arguably most obviously felt in the ongoing pandemic of bullying and cyberbullying that continue to plague America's schools, parks, playgrounds, neighborhoods, and, yes, public life as well. Consider that 28% of students in grades 6–12 experience bullying, while 30% admit to having themselves bullied. And a total of 71% of young people say they have seen bullying in their schools.

These statistics increase dramatically when applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teens, a group close to my heart. A total of 74% of them were verbally harassed last year, 36% were physically harassed, and 17% were physically assaulted. Tellingly, LGBT students are two to five times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. Cause and effect? I think so.

But *why* do teens bully? Some recent scientific studies suggest it may be due to teen's brains not being *wired* for empathy. While this seems to be an oversimplification, it is true that we now know that the brain's prefrontal cortex is often not fully developed until age 25. And this is the region of the brain that governs impulse control and judgment *and* where *cognitive* empathy originates. Yet other studies demonstrate that empathy can be learned. And one way of learning is surely, *surely* through reading. The great gift that literature can give its readers is the experience of empathy and sympathy and the ability thereby to eavesdrop on the hearts of others. Books can take their readers into the interior lives of characters, showing not only what is happening to them, but also powerfully conveying how what is happening *feels.* The heart has its reasons that the mind cannot know, according to the French philosopher Pascal. I take that to mean we come to understanding others not only through our heads, but also through our hearts, and it is fiction that offers essential opportunities for cultivating empathy, for feeling sympathy, and for experiencing emotional engagement with others.

"Others?" Oh, that word. Too many teens are still cast in the role of the "other" because of their race, color, ethnicity, culture, religion, place of origin, sexual orientation, and more. We do not celebrate our diversity these days but, instead, denigrate it. If literature is the remedy for this, the sad fact is that we still do not have enough of it to invite empathy for the "others." And I talk now of multicultural literature, the literature of diversity. Why the lack of this essential literature?

Well, there are many reasons, but the ones that are most commonly offered are, first, the paucity of editors of color. A 2014 *Publishers Weekly* industry-wide survey revealed the dispiriting reality that the profession is overwhelmingly white: in fact, 90% of the survey's respondents identified as white, 3 % identified as Asian, 3% as Latino, and 1% as African American. Then, second, there is the lack of authors—and illustrators—of color. "We are limited," an editor friend of mine recently told me, "by what people are writing and by what's being offered to us." Third, there is the perceived lack of demand, though, happily, that is changing rapidly—in part because of the work being done by organizations like We Need Diverse Books, a grassroots group of children's and young adult book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry. WNDB's aim is to help produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people, including LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, people with fluid gender identity, people with disabilities, and those belonging to ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.

The great gift that literature can give its readers is the experience of empathy and sympathy and the ability thereby to eavesdrop on the hearts of others. Books can take their readers into the interior lives of characters, showing not only what is happening to them, but also powerfully conveying how what is happening *feels.*

Of these, the category evidencing the greatest growth is, arguably, that of LGBTQIA literature, which is, I believe, in terms of numbers alone, in its first

Golden Age. Consider that this year, to date, 95 books with gay content have been published compared with 64 for all of last year and 78 for the entire decade of the 1990s. Not only is quantity notable, so is quality. Two of the last four Printz Award winners have had gay content, an extraordinary advance for a literature that, in its earlier years, consisted too often of single-issue problem novels. But no more. Art has entered the field and it's about time!

Awards are important, of course, because they acknowledge and, thus, encourage the publication of excellent books. I'm talking about awards like the Printz and, of course, ALAN's own Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, which will be presented at the forthcoming ALAN workshop. And speaking of ALAN reminds me to observe that the organization of which we're proud members is exemplary in its promotion of good books, both through its annual workshop and, of equal importance, through the daily work of its members in bringing young adults and good books together to foster that essential empathy. It is, as someone once observed to me, God's work.

Well, I'm out of time, but in closing, let me simply say that books are important, yes, but only if reading is important. And reading is only important if civilization is important. I vote for civilization and take comfort in knowing that you do, too.

Thank you.

Michael Cart, *columnist and reviewer for the American Library Association's Booklist magazine, is the author or editor of 23 books including his critical history of young adult literature From Romance to Realism and the coming of age novel My Father's Scar, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. He is a past president of both ALAN and the Young Adult Library Services Association. The recipient of the 2019 ALAN Award, he is also the 2000 recipient of the Grolier Foundation Award and the first recipient of the YALSA/Greenwood Press Distinguished Service Award. He lives in Columbus, Indiana, surrounded by books.*

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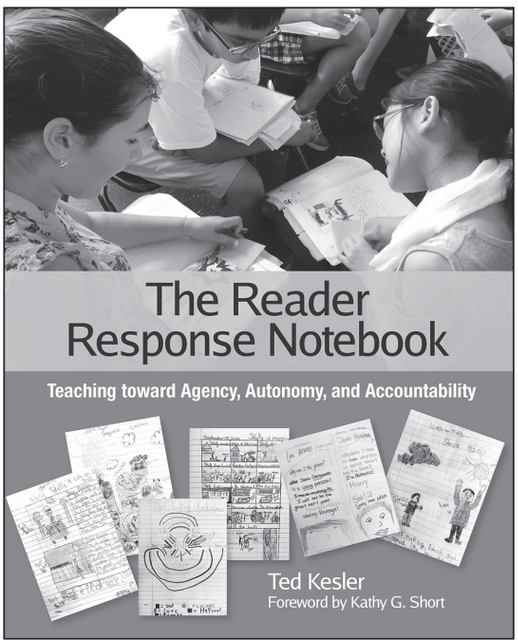

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Ted Kesler

The reader response notebook (RRN) is a tried-and-true tool in elementary and middle school classrooms. However, teachers and students often express frustration with this tool. Responses can read as though students are just going through the motions, with little evidence of deep comprehension. With this book, teacher educator and consultant Ted Kesler reinvigorates the RRN by infusing this work with three key practices:

- Encouraging responses to reflect design work, using a variety of writing tools
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- Making the RRN an integral part of a community of practice

Providing myriad examples of student work and explicit teaching in classrooms, Kesler, with a community of grade school teachers and students, demonstrates how students' creative responses lead to deep comprehension of diverse texts and ultimately help them to develop their literate identities. This book colorfully illustrates how to teach students toward agency, autonomy, and accountability in their reader response notebooks.

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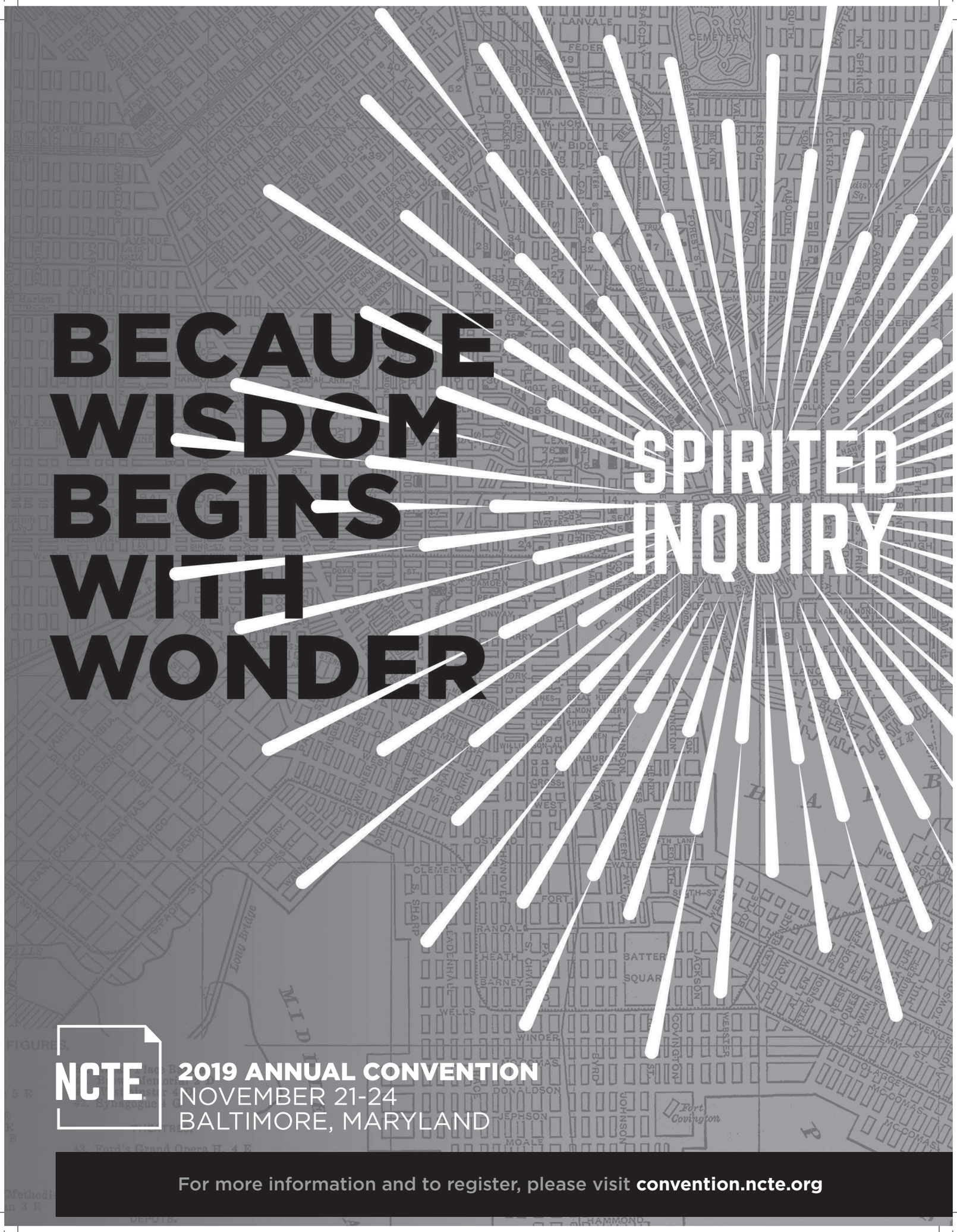
Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE

2019 ALAN Award Winner: John Green

The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) is pleased to announce John Green as the recipient of the 2019 ALAN Award. The Award is given to someone who has made "outstanding contributions to the field of adolescent literature."

Join us at the ALAN Breakfast in Baltimore, Saturday, November 23, and help us honor John Green, the recipient of this year's ALAN Award! Go to http://convention.ncte.org/2019-convention/registration/ to purchase tickets for the breakfast and to register for the ALAN Workshop.



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