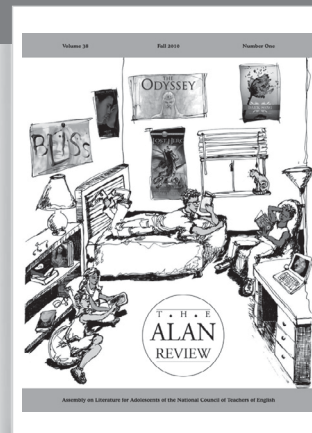


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ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW. *The ALAN Review* is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. It is published three times per academic year (fall, winter, and summer) and is sent to all members, individual and institutional, of ALAN (The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE). Members of ALAN need not be members of NCTE.

THE ALAN REVIEW publishes reviews of and articles on literature for adolescents and the teaching of that literature: research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genre and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews of 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 adolescent literature, librarians, authors, publishers, reading teachers and teachers of other related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 states and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than fifteen double-spaced, typed pages. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for adolescents 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 adolescents 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. A **title page** with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. 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** of the copyright owner.

Author interviews should be accompanied by **written permission of the interviewed author** to publish the interview in *The ALAN Review*. Interviewers should indicate to authors that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. The title of *The ALAN Review* should not be used to gain an interview.

Original short **tables and figures** should be **double-spaced** and placed on a **separate sheet** at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text for proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review prefers the use of the Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors are to submit manuscripts electronically to alanreview@lsu.edu. In the subject line please write: **ALAN manuscript submission**. All manuscripts should be in a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: (1) A manuscript without references to the author(s). (2) A separate title page with author's name, contact information, affiliation, and a 2-3 sentence biographical sketch. In the case of multiple authors, the author submitting the manuscript will serve as the primary contact unless stipulated otherwise. (3) 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 editor and at least two 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 they make to the field of adolescent literature, clarity and cohesiveness, timeliness, and freshness of approach. 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 ALAN Review*. 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 ISSUE Deadline:	MARCH 1
WINTER ISSUE Deadline:	JULY 1
SUMMER ISSUE Deadline:	NOVEMBER 1

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From the Editors

Note from former ALAN President Alleen Nilsen

Hugh Agee, who passed away this March, was ALAN president in 1980–81. At the time, *The ALAN Review* was being edited by Guy Ellis who, along with Hugh, was on the faculty at the University of Georgia. This “Georgia connection” was a big step for ALAN. Bob Small was the organization’s secretary, and the Board of Directors during Hugh’s term consisted of Dick Abrahamson, Marilyn McCaffrey, Anne Web, Mike Angelotti, Dwight Burton, Jackie Cronin, Tom Gage, Don Gallo, and Geraldine LaRocque. Ken Donelson was the immediate Past President and I was the “past-Past President.” Hugh was highly respected, both as a scholar and an administrator, and he served with a kind of elegance and grace that did much to transform ALAN from a relatively small group of YA fans into a nationally respected professional organization. Those of us who knew and worked with Hugh are grateful to have had the experience, and we send our condolences to his family and colleagues.

About This Issue

It seems to me (Jackie) as if everyone I know is reading young adult fiction these days, whether they call it by this name or not. I say this because of the large number of emails I get from current and former students and colleagues whenever they come across something regarding young adult literature that I might find interesting. For example, a colleague in another department recently sent me *Bitch Maga-*

zine’s list of the top 100 young adult novels (Wallace, 2010) featuring “kick ass teens and feminist themes.” Minutes later, she sent me a response to that list from *Fiction Writers Review* blogger Charlotte Boulay, who outlined the attention *Bitch Magazine* has received after it dropped five novels from the list (replacing them with other titles) because some readers considered them unsuitable. Topping the “appropriate” list were *Estrella’s Quinceañera* by Malin Alegria, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez, *Choir Boy* by Charlie Anders, and *Speak* and *Wintergirls*, both by Laurie Halse Anderson. One of the five dropped was Elizabeth Scott’s *Living Dead Girl*—a novel that coeditor Melanie cautioned me was going to be disturbing but to read anyway. As an apology, *Bitch Magazine* is going to host a virtual book club on all 100 novels plus the five they removed and let participants vote on the list.

I think that it is this aspect, the edgier side of these texts, that scare many of our preservice and practicing teachers from teaching books like Kathe Koja’s *Bhudda Boy* (which I was recently told by an eighth-grade teacher has the word “fuck” in it three times, though that wasn’t enough to deter her from teaching it). However, to me, these aspects are part of what makes this genre so important and cutting edge and responsible for creating (forgive me for using jargon here) lifelong readers. For many years, others in our field have pointed to the power of these texts for not softening the lived experiences of youth, for authors’ courage to represent the harsh realities of adolescence (and, of course, the wonderful moments as

well). I'll be interested in reading the reading group's responses to those novels pulled from the list.

The idea for this issue stems from my own work and the work I observed some graduate students conducting in their own environments. Bruce Parker, Chaunda Allen, and Cerise Edwards, all who work in multicultural affairs at my university, created a young adult book club (funded by a Gallo Grant) with their colleagues. The books they chose to read each featured protagonists who tackled issues their students faced all the time, such as homophobia, discrimination, and addictions. They are still sifting through the transcribed sessions, questionnaires, and written reflections, but their findings support what many of us suspect—*young adult literature does not belong just in the classroom*.

The pieces in this issue consider how young adult literature develops communities of readers outside of the classroom. In the first article, Allison L. Baer describes a four-year reading group she facilitates with incarcerated youth; she highlights their engagements not only with powerful texts but also with several of the authors who wrote them.

Several articles in this issue address the question, "How has cyberspace influenced the way you discuss young adult literature?" They reveal that our field continues to explore the possibilities for holding conversations about young adult literature in virtual spaces. Rosemary Hathaway and Kim Richard both demonstrate how those online discussions blossom into multimodal engagements that provide opportunities for students to share their thoughts about young adult literature in intimate ways.

Susan L. Groenke, Theresa Venable, Stephanie Hill, and Ann Bennett's article as well as Gary Salvner's piece explore the question, "In what way or ways does young adult literature become part of a young adult's life outside of school?" The first of these two examines a summer reading program whose purpose is to reach out and encourage young adults to develop a love of learning. Those involved with the program chose books they think will speak to these students, who are mainly African American, and the issues they face in their lives. Gary Salvner describes the Youngstown English Festival, which has been in existence since 1978 and has a rich tradition of bringing young adult authors and their works to

college, high school, and middle school students. Both programs highlight ways to expose students to high-quality young adult literature that will hook them into lifelong reading.

The three pieces written by Vandana Saxena, Sarah Barber and Hayley Esther, and Deanna Garza each explore how magical realism texts represent cross-racial encounters, and what role allusions play in reworked versions of Shakespeare and Harry Potter. Each piece offers ways to incorporate these texts into traditional curricula that consist of mainly canonical texts and examines the possibilities for students to think about their own identities in doing so.

Jeffrey Kaplan and Joan Kaywell, both long-time members of ALAN, report on the current status in our field. In a valuable compilation of scholarship on young adult literature, Kaplan highlights the research studies published in the last year and reports on his findings. Kaywell keeps alive Hipple's tradition of researching the top young adult novels in the past decade through an extensive survey to which I hope all of you were able to contribute.

For those of you unable to attend the 2010 ALAN Conference in Orlando, we include in this issue Darren Shan's address. In this piece, he once again demonstrates the incredible thought and craft that goes into the writing of these books; his latest, *The Thin Executioner* (which deals with important issues of religion, politics, and community), is no exception.

This issue's Stories from the Field include two moving examples of how these novels touch young adults in ways we might not anticipate—much like the story Shan shares with us.

Finally, we would like to extend a warm thanks to Gary Salvner for his service and leadership to ALAN as our Executive Secretary and an equally warm welcome to Teri Lesesne, who is our new Executive Secretary.

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Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at <http://www.alan-ya.org/the-alan-review/>.

Summer 2012 Theme: Exploring Identity and Identities in Young Adult Literature

James Baldwin argues that all “roles are dangerous” and that the “world tends to trap you in the role you play.” Too often, teens feel trapped by the role they think they must play. The theme of this issue asks us to consider the influences and intersections of race, class, gender, culture, and sexual identity in young adult literature. What roles do adolescents feel trapped in or empowered by? How are issues of race, class, gender, culture, and sexual identity explored or challenged in YAL? Who is silenced or marginalized by an aspect of their identity? Which novels help students explore or try on different identities? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation, and we welcome manuscripts addressing pedagogy as well as theoretical concerns. General submissions are also welcome. **Submission deadline: November 1, 2011.**

Fall 2012 Theme: Poetry and Young Adult Literature

Billy Collins says that he wants to “walk inside the poem’s room.” Marianne Moore wants “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” Poetry in all its varied forms is used in a myriad of ways in young adult literature. Some authors (Karen Hesse, Ellen Hopkins, Virginia Euwer Wolff, Mel Glenn) create novels in verse, while other authors (Jacqueline Woodson, Nikki Grimes, Sharon Flake) weave poetry into their prose. Still others write collections of poems for adolescents (Gary Soto, Rita Dove, Paul Janeczko). Adolescent readers can take many, many paths to poetry in YAL. The theme for this issue invites us to consider the ways in which we can walk inside a poem’s room or find that imaginary garden with adolescents. What is it about poetry that grabs adolescent readers? Many young adult authors are experimenting with the ways in which they use poetry to tell their stories; how does this help adolescent readers and writers? How does the way in which authors use poetry to tell complex narratives push adolescents to be stronger readers? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation, and we welcome manuscripts addressing pedagogy as well as theoretical concerns. General submissions are also welcome. **Submission Deadline: March 1, 2012.**

Stories from the Field

Editors’ Note: Stories from the Field invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to: jbach@lsu.edu.

ALAN Foundation Research Grants

Members of ALAN may apply to the ALAN Foundation for funding (up to \$1,500) for research in young adult literature. Proposals are reviewed by the five most recent presidents of ALAN. Awards are made annually in the fall and are announced at the ALAN breakfast during the NCTE convention in November. The application deadline each year is **September 15th**.

Diversions:

Finding Space to Talk about Young Adult Literature in a Juvenile Home

Every week for the past four years, I have walked into the building, pushed the buzzer, and waited. Sometimes I waited less than a minute. Sometimes more. Waiting patiently, book in hand, I was eventually admitted. Once inside, I signed in, walked to the next door, pushed the buzzer, and waited again. After eight buzzers, eight waits, and eight doors, I was greeted by young faces, sometimes eager, sometimes annoyed, but all waiting. We pushed tables together, sat down, and I asked, “So, what have you read this last week?” Thus began the weekly discussion group, Diversions, held with the incarcerated youth at the Giddings County Juvenile Home (all names are pseudonyms).

The purpose of this article is to describe this program as it has been implemented over the last four years and to provide a rationale for reading books that are culturally relevant to urban youth. Many kids have gone through the sometimes “rotating door” of the Juvie Home, and some of them have read countless books and talked about them in Diversions. While these young people have made some terrible mistakes that have landed them in a detention center, they are more than capable of having intelligent, meaningful conversations about books, especially when those books connect with their prior knowledge and current lives. In addition, I am not alone (see Garth-McCullough, 2008; Janks, 2010; Tatum, 2005, 2009; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) in thinking that there are far too many adolescents—incarcerated, not incarcerated, or perhaps not yet incarcerated—sitting in our classrooms waiting for something to read that is of

personal interest to them. It is our ethical and moral responsibility to introduce them to this literature.

The Giddings County Juvenile Home and Diversions—Partners in Reading

The Giddings County Juvenile Home (GCJH or Juvie Home), is a secure detention center for youth ages 11 through 17. Located in a small midwestern city, it was first built in 1936; more recently, the people of the county appropriated monies for a new facility that opened in the summer of 2009. The new building has four pods of 15 beds each, totaling 60 beds for youth in secure detention. According to their website, the GCJH has some core beliefs that drive their programming:

- We believe a Juvenile Home with comprehensive services is an asset to our community.
- We believe Secure Detention should be a safe, secure learning environment that promotes growth, choice, and alternatives.
- We believe youth should engage in a balanced approach to repairing the harm they have done in the community.
- We believe youth have the capacity to change. (Kalamazoo County Government, 2009a, ¶ 5)

The idea of the “rotating door” of the Juvie Home is based on the fact that many young people find themselves coming back all too frequently because of parole infractions or repeated offenses.

The Juvenile Home School is run by the local Regional Educational Service Agency and has two

centers—the Youth Center School, designed for incarcerated youth, and the Intensive Learning Center (ILC), for youth who live in the community but are ordered by the court to attend school at the Juvie Home (Kalamazoo County Government, 2009b). Because of the core beliefs, every student in the detention center attends school on a daily basis, whether he or she is there one day or four months. Classes cover all core content, are small, and are taught by certified Special Education teachers who strive to build relationships with their students. In addition to the schools, the Juvie Home has many programs for residents supported by local people, one of which is Diversions.

Diversions was created as a result of a bar mitzvah project designed to give books to teens faced with a serious or long-term illness. Over time, this project expanded to include residents in the Juvie Home, involving them in weekly discussions about a book they all read in common. The program has been supported by Teen Services at the local public library, a local hospital, and a community foundation. Multiple copies of books are bought through grants provided by the Juvenile Home Foundation or other outside funding sources and are given to the students to read. All books must be in paperback, as hardback books are not allowed on the units; they can and have been used as weapons.

During the past four years, the gender make-up of the group has changed. At first, the group was a mix of boys and girls, which made for some often intense interactions, as they are rarely together at the Juvie Home. There was usually some typical boy/girl posturing as they checked each other out, but, depending on the personalities of the group members, the girls would also often challenge the boys' thinking about a book, which occasionally led to some electrifying exchanges. More recently, Diversions has evolved to be for girls only, so some of the tension is eliminated. Unfortunately, because of a lack of book discussion leaders, there was not a book group for the boys. This arrangement also seems to allow the girls to speak more freely. In fact, Toni told me that she thinks "it's a good idea to discuss books because we can express our feelings about the book. You have conversations about what you think."

The nature of the "rotating door" at the Juvie Home does present some challenges, and flexibility is key. Teens who attend one week may be gone the

next, only to be replaced by new members with different personalities and needs. Last week's group might have seven out of eight new faces this week. A plan to read half a book during the week may fall apart when circumstances result in five students not having read the book, two having read part of it, and one having finished it. Discussion leaders in this program learn to adapt, revise, and persevere.

Over the years, paperback books have been either donated or bought so that each pod has a rolling library shelf of fiction and nonfiction books for free reading. It is a testament to the teens' strong desire to read that new titles need to be added constantly to keep them current and interesting. Our weekly discussions usually began with the question, "What have you read this week?" Answers came freely and enthusiastically as they shared what they had read from the books available within each pod. Once everyone had a chance to talk about her personal reading, the attention inevitably turned to the Diversions text. Book discussions usually lasted around an hour and could be lively and spirited or subdued and quiet. As with any group of readers, much of that depended on the book read. For this constantly changing group of readers, other contributing factors could include a new group member who was

afraid of being in the Juvie Home and was thus unwilling to share, the emotional turmoil of learning that someone was going to jail, or personal issues, such as abandonment, anger, or some other emotional state, all of which could result in a lot of off-topic, almost therapeutic, talk. But Chrystal understood the importance of these weekly discussions when she said, "This helps you understand it better 'cause maybe somebody can explain it to you. They have another point of view or can explain it."

The one constant was the idea of making connections. Very simply, we hoped to help these young readers make the same mental connections that are a vital part of any reader's active reading—the kind

Very simply, we hoped to help these young readers make the same mental connections that are a vital part of any reader's active reading—the kind of reading we hope for and teach in our classrooms.

of reading we hope for and teach in our classrooms (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). Of course, they have to meet us halfway—they either had strong connections to the book or they didn't. The importance of making connections was apparent to Kyana when she explained, "I can relate to the books. Sometimes something in their lives is like yours." Tamara said that a book could "relate to how my life is right now."

Isn't this what we hope for our students—to make strong personal connections with literature that lead to real discussion?

If that connection was particularly strong, the conversation tended to be vigorous and could be, at times, downright intense. An example of this is when we were reading *Rooftop* (Volponi, 2007), and they were discussing the "blue wall of silence" associated with the police in the book. They were arguing

loudly with each other about what that phrase meant, and they cited their own experiences with local police. The supervisor of the Juvie Home happened to walk past just then and, looking concerned, turned to say something to the kids when I told him that they were actually not angry at each other but were involved in a heated discussion about the book.

Sometimes they learned something important from the books. When reading *Right behind You* (Giles, 2007), one of the girls remarked, "I wondered about if you did kill someone, what would your life be like after that? This book told what really happened. It's not all happily ever after." This is the kind of life lesson that, unfortunately, can become all too real to these young people. Learning it through the safety of someone else's fictionalized story is obviously preferable.

Isn't this what we hope for our students—to make strong personal connections with literature that lead to real discussion? To read something that makes them think deeply about life decisions? Such is the vibrant, passionate, and ever-changing nature of *Diversions*.

The Importance of What Book We Read

It has become common knowledge that, in order to comprehend a text, one of the many things good readers do is to make active connections to what they are

reading (Beers, 2003; Burke, 2001; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). In particular, as Keene and Zimmerman (2007) explained, readers make text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections that make reading far more personal, enjoyable, and relevant. When discussing the aesthetic stance—reading that is centered on a lived experience—Rosenblatt (1978) noted that the reader may make strong connections "identifying with one character, seeing glimpses of a relative in another, impersonally sitting in judgment on a third" (p. 67). Those connections are made to that which the reader already knows, demonstrating that activating or accessing prior knowledge is also vital to active, meaningful reading (Smith, 1978; Wilhelm, 2008; Weaver, 2002).

Building on these two important components of reading, Garth-McCullough (2008) researched the importance of culturally bound prior knowledge on reading comprehension. Culturally bound prior knowledge is defined as "items that members of a cultural or ethnic group would be more likely to know as a result of their interactions or experiences with other members of that group" (p. 12). Working with 117 urban eighth-grade African American students, identified as low-, medium-, and high-achieving readers, she researched the relationship between these students' culturally bound prior knowledge and their comprehension of six texts from three different cultures (African American, Chinese American, and European American). The study showed that these students' comprehension of the African American stories was significantly higher, regardless of their reading level (Garth-McCullough, 2008).

Ebe (2010) created a Cultural Relevance Rubric that she used with English Language Learners (ELLs). Working with young ELLs, the researcher asked the students to first rate a given text to determine its cultural relevance to the reader. She then administered an In-depth Miscue Analysis Procedure (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005) using the same text. It was found that the students' comprehension was better for the text they rated as being more culturally relevant (Ebe, 2010). From these studies, it is apparent that matching readers to books that reflect their own culture(s) can have a significant effect on their comprehension and engagement. It is these kinds of books that may encourage them to want to know and

read more as they relate to the characters, setting, and plot on a personal level.

When working with urban youth in general, and the incarcerated youth in the Giddings County Juvenile Home specifically, issues of social justice also come into play. When speaking of social justice, Nieto and Bode (2010) assert that “social justice is not about ‘being nice’ to students, or about giving them a pat on the back” (p. 46). Rather, social justice is about providing education that confronts untruths and stereotypes and focuses on topics related to inequality. Teaching with a social justice perspective means providing all students with the resources necessary for a quality education that draws on the talents and strengths of our students, thereby rejecting the deficit perspective that is far too prevalent in our schools. In addition, social justice is about “creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (Nieto & Bode, 2010, p. 46).

Janks (2010) adds another perspective to social justice issues when she speaks of the need for students to have access to various forms of discourse, such as different audiences, platforms, or modes of distribution (e.g., publications). In the context of education, one form of discourse can be book discussions (Daniels, 2002) in which students are free to express their thoughts and opinions about books they have read in common with others. When done in safe environments—ones in which students can take the risk to disagree and have spirited interactions based on the reading, knowing that their own experiences and knowledge are valued—these discussions often become important support for the students, addressing not only literacy needs but also the personal and social needs of the students.

Diversions—Weekly Spirited Interactions

My position has been to serve as the main facilitator of the weekly discussions; as such, I have chosen and ordered the books. As an avid reader of young adult (YA) literature myself, I make it a point to keep up with the latest in YA lit by reading *The ALAN Review*, attending the annual ALAN (Assembly of Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English) Conference, checking in with the Teen Services head librarian at the local public library on a

regular basis, and keeping my eyes and ears open for anything new.

Typically, a book is read and discussed for two to three weeks. The average stay in the Juvie Home is 11 days, with students coming back all too frequently because of probation violations or other personal issues. This fact made flexibility a vital component in planning and conducting the book discussions; although it took about two to three weeks to get through a book, the members of the discussion group could change drastically from week to week. Further complicating the process was the fact that many of the students were struggling readers and received extensive Special Education services. In spite of their struggles, however, they genuinely wanted to read the YA books that were presented so they could be a part of the group. In general, the participants in Diversions wanted to be there, had read some portion of the chosen book, and wanted to talk about it—although the weekly snacks and frequent pizza helped, too!

In addition to reading many excellent YA books, there were frequent visits by YA authors, co-sponsored by the local public library and the Juvie Home. For example, in the four years I’ve been involved with Diversions, we’ve brought in John Green, Allan Stratton, Ron Koertge, Paul Volponi, Sharon Flake, Angela Johnson, Sharon Draper, Lisa McMann, Kadir Nelson, and Joseph Bruchac. In each case, at least one of the author’s books was read in preparation, and during the visit, we had a small-group discussion with the author, who also personally signed copies for the readers. These books went home with the students when they left the Juvie Home.

The next section describes a few books by some of the visiting authors and brief descriptions of their related visits. A bibliography of books read over the years is included at the end of the article.

Books We Have Read

Chanda’s Secrets (2004) by Allan Stratton. Set in Africa, Stratton tells the story of Chanda and her struggle to keep her family together as her mother is dying of a disease no one wants to name—AIDS. Chanda’s love of her younger siblings, Iris and Soly, keeps her fighting those who would tear them apart. Adding to the struggle is the fact that Chanda is a good student and would like to stay in school, but the horrors of the

disease and its effects on her family make life continually difficult.

Chanda's Wars (2009) by Allan Stratton. Taking place soon after her mother died, this sequel to *Chanda's Secret* (2004) finds Chanda and her young siblings facing the terrors of war in their home country. When they go to visit their mother's family, Soly and Iris are kidnapped and forced to be child soldiers. Chanda's commitment to always care for her brother and sister is put to the ultimate test as she tries to save them from the many horrors of war.

Rooftop (2006) by Paul Volponi. Addison and Clay, two cousins separated by a family argument, find themselves thrown together at Daytop, a drug treatment center. While they struggle to get their lives together, trouble seems to follow Addison wherever he goes, eventually leading to a fatal shooting on a rooftop that introduces questions of innocence and truth.

Black and White (2005) by Paul Volponi. Marcus (aka Black) and Eddie (aka White) have been buddies for years. Both star basketball and football players at their high school, they are inseparable. Even when plotting to steal enough money for senior dues and new kicks for the team, these two stick together . . . until one robbery goes awry and questions arise about which one was seen at the scene of the crime. Issues of racial profiling and betrayal tear the two friends apart.

The Skin I'm In (1998) by Sharon Flake. Maleeka, who has clear, smooth, ebony skin, is taller than others in her class and is under constant attack for that dark skin. She wishes she looked different, more like the lighter-skinned girls in her school. When a new teacher, Miss Saunders, who has a giant white stain across her dark face, challenges Maleeka to accept the skin she's in, Maleeka starts to see herself for who she really is and her life slowly begins to change.

Money Hungry (2001) by Sharon Flake. Raspberry Hill loves money. She buys cheap candy and sells it at her school, cleans houses, washes cars, and skips lunch, saving the proceeds so she and her mother will have enough money to never be homeless again. But no amount of money can quiet the questions that disrupt her sleep as she struggles with acceptance, fear of homelessness, and constant doubt.

The First Part Last (2003) by Angela Johnson. Bobby and Nia love each other as only two young

teenagers can. When Nia tells Bobby she is pregnant, they must inform their families, both of whom had high hopes of college and careers for their children. Their lives change as they struggle with what they should do once the baby is born; should they keep the child and raise it as their own or give it up for adoption? Unfortunately, no decision is ever easy.

Heaven (1998) by Angela Johnson. Fourteen-year-old Marley's life is turned upside down when she realizes that the people she thought were her parents are, in fact, her aunt and uncle, and her "Uncle Jack," who travels all the time, is her father. Searching for answers, she seeks wisdom and help from her friends, including Bobby (from *The First Part Last*) and his young child, Feather.

Authors We Have Met

Sitting down and discussing a good book is essential to understanding (Burke, 2001; Daniels, 2002). Sitting down and discussing a good book with the author is pure joy. Several authors have graced the many locked doors of the Juvie Home, and each one has brought his or her own story to share with the kids. Below are brief descriptions of a few of the author visits we have enjoyed in the past four years, with personal reflections by two authors, Allan Stratton and Paul Volponi.

Allan Stratton

Allan Stratton visited the Juvie Home before *Chanda's Wars* (2009) was published and talked with the kids about the research he did in preparation to write *Chanda's Secret* (2004). While they could not relate to the setting of the book (Africa), the students made strong connections to Chanda's fears of abuse and being alone. They also had much to say about Esther, Chanda's friend, who was involved in prostitution to help her family survive. The discussions were lively and personal as they shared their own stories with Stratton, and he encouraged them to write their stories, as they, too, could be authors. Everyone benefited from this visit; as Stratton states:

One of the most memorable and moving readings I ever gave was for the Juvie Home. It was at a detention lockdown for kids who were serious offenders. I had lunch with the teens—a very friendly and delightful group; you'd never have guessed they were in trouble—and then I did a presentation as I read from *Chanda's Secrets*. Usually teens

connect most to Chanda, but this group connected mostly with her friend, Esther, a young woman whose parents had died of AIDS and who had gone to work the streets in hopes of earning enough to care for her brother and sisters who had been taken from her.

I'll never forget the concern of these young women and the heartache they felt for Esther, whose story paralleled so many of their own. Truly a humbling and moving event that I have cherished—and will continue to cherish—forever. (A. Stratton, personal communication, January 28, 2011)

Paul Volponi

Volponi's books are frequently set in New York City and involve issues that the Juvie Home kids could easily relate to—family, friendship, and betrayal. Many of the kids loved his books, so we arranged for Volponi to pay a summer visit. He shared a small luncheon with the participants and conducted large-group discussions about his books, which the kids had read voraciously. He told stories about his life as an English teacher on Rikers Island, the jail in New York and the basis for one of his newest novels, *Rikers High* (2010). As an added incentive for the kids, Volponi asked to play basketball with them. Two teams—Volponi and the staff of the Juvie Home versus the kids—played multiple games and enjoyed every loud, raucous minute. The time spent with Volponi was informative and inspiring to everyone—students, staff, and the author. He states,

I was just blown away by how this outside reading program captured the kids on every level, how it meant so much to their routine, and gave them so much stability and hope in themselves. I almost couldn't believe that Allison and her coworkers were providing that level of service and getting this kind of incredible response. And later that night, before lights-out in the facility, when a student and I took turns reading over the PA system to the teens in their rooms, I felt like the promise of a better tomorrow had been delivered. (P. Volponi, personal communication, January 30, 2011)

Sharon Flake

Sharon Flake visited the Juvie Home late one evening and met with a group of girls who had read many of her books. As they sat around the table, Flake asked the girls questions about their lives, and they willingly shared their stories. In turn, they asked her questions about her daughter and her life as a mother and an author. Flake encouraged them to write their own lives as they are the experts and their stories need to

be told. The mood around the table was one of trust and acceptance as these young women shared their lives with an author who obviously understood them.

Angela Johnson

Angela Johnson joined us one day for a luncheon discussion about her books. The girls had many questions about Bobby in *The First Part Last* (2003) and were enthralled by the boy in the photograph on its cover. Johnson told them that this boy was found walking down the street and agreed to have his picture taken for the cover. The conversation included teenage pregnancy, parenthood, and raising small children. Johnson's acceptance of and interest in these readers was sincere and meant a lot to each one of them.

As an added incentive for the kids, Volponi asked to play basketball with them. . . . [They] played multiple games and enjoyed every loud, raucous minute.

And So

The Giddings County Juvenile Home is a vibrant place filled with young people who have made some bad decisions in their lives. It is also a safe place for them, as they are cared for and listened to and have both support and multiple opportunities to make new and better decisions. Discussions about YA literature frequently lead to stories and connections about personal mistakes that mimic those in the books read, making *Diversions* one of those opportunities for change. These books provide another safe space where we can talk about our own lives through the lens of fictionalized characters that become real to the reader.

When I asked them what kinds of books they read in school, in one voice they said "boring books." Then they listed textbooks—science, math, history, algebra. When I asked them what kinds of books they read in their English classes, they said, "Grammar." They admitted to reading a page or two of some required book but quickly putting it down, since "there was nothing in there that made sense to me." And yet, from what I've learned in *Diversions*, there are so many powerful YA books that interest these young people. Why wouldn't we take the risk to let them read books in

school that speak to them on a personal level? Why wouldn't we want to open up these vital discussions and help our students become better readers?

I'm often asked why I continue to read books with these kids. Do I really think these books will make a difference in their lives? Yes, I do, for multiple

I believe that somewhere, sometime, when faced with a difficult decision, some choice that could be potentially harmful, they will have a fleeting memory of someone else who had that choice.

reasons. First, I believe that the more they read, the better they will read. Reading, as we know, is vital to a successful life, and these incarcerated youth need all the support they can get to achieve some level of success. Being literate will surely contribute to their education and personal lives. Second, I believe that somewhere, sometime, when faced with a difficult decision, some choice that could be potentially harmful, they

will have a fleeting memory of someone else who had that choice. Maybe it was Bobby, Addison, Eddie, or Marley. Maybe those connections they made with the characters in the books read during Diversion will remind them that there are other choices they can make. Maybe when they think about what happened to those people, they just might make the right decision and those hours of reading and discussion will be life changing.

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NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal*. In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011**. Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

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A Powerful Pairing: The Literature Circle and the Wiki

Study after study has shown that one of the best predictors of reading achievement is how much independent reading a young person does.¹ And yet, as secondary English language arts teachers feel more and more pressure to prepare students for standardized tests, independent reading is likely one of the first things to be dropped from the curriculum. Combined with pressures to teach digital literacy, media literacy, and 21st century skills, English language arts teachers may well feel overwhelmed by the challenge of meeting, much less synthesizing, all these demands.

In the process, as Gallagher argues in *Readicide* (2009), student motivation and curiosity—the very qualities most teachers want to nurture, and the ones that most often lead to student success—are extinguished (p. 10). The outlook need not look so grim, however. Fortunately, the English language arts discipline can adapt quite readily to many of these “new” requirements, since many are simply reconfigurations of skills we have been teaching all along: critical thinking, critical writing, interpretation, and creative response. And independent reading can be seamlessly integrated into approaches that meet many of these diverse requirements.

But the perennial question for teachers is *how* to nurture students’ independent reading habits, especially at the secondary level, when pleasure reading tends to drop off significantly (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, pp. 7–8). The pedagogy of literature circles can provide the missing link between school reading and pleasure reading, since lit circles consti-

tute “a form of independent reading” (Daniels, 2002, p. 38). Creating literature circles around young adult texts, in particular, incorporates the best aspects of independent reading into the classroom by allowing students to choose what they want to read and then discuss it in peer-organized, peer-managed groups that encourage them to develop critical interpretations independently, under the guidance (not control) of the teacher. Asking students to create a wiki based on their chosen book and their group process gives them a dynamic forum for crafting responses to what they have read. Combining the two methods has proven to be an ideal way to synthesize the “learning and innovation skills” of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity with 21st century technology skills.² Merging the low-tech literature circle with the higher-tech wiki can foster interest in autonomous reading, develop tools for collaborative meaning making, and encourage students to become better critical thinkers, which may lead to better performance on standardized tests.

Both the literature circle and the wiki emphasize collaborative meaning making through an ongoing process and, as such, complement each other in very powerful ways. I have combined literature circles and wikis in a college-level young adult literature course for preservice teachers and found that the two to work extremely well together, especially for the “sharing out” that is essential at the end of each cycle of the literature circle process. Given the many digital literacy tools available to English language arts teachers, the wiki is perhaps more flexible and adaptable

to the goals of the English language arts classroom than many others. Indeed, wikis can function as an interpretive extension of students' reading, as well as a physical space where readers can construct, discuss, revise, and fine-tune their understandings and interpretations of a text.

Making an "Old" Pedagogy New Again: Revisiting the Literature Circle

In 1994, Daniels published *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* with the goal of meeting pressures to improve reading skills in the most liberating and student-directed way possible. Though the pedagogy is now widely known and practiced, in his 2002 revision, Daniels warned against what he referred to as "terminology drift," in which the term "literature circles" occasionally balloons to describe any sort of classroom-based literature discussion, regardless of format. The 2002 edition strives to bring practitioners' focus back to the fundamentals of the literature circle process, particularly the key concepts of choice and student-directed discussion.

Despite the explosion of classroom computer and Internet use since the first edition's appearance in 1994, however, Daniels' second edition makes only a couple of passing references to possible connections between the literature circle and digital literacy tools. The only substantive application is a description of a variation of the traditional literature circle that is conducted online (2002, p. 21). This absence likely has to do with the fact that the second edition itself is nearly a decade old; it was published before the explosion of blogs, vlogs, wikis, social-networking sites, and Nings, to name but a few of the digital literacy tools now employed in many English language arts classrooms. And yet, many of these "Web 2.0" digital literacy technologies provide the perfect technological counterpart for the interactive, collaborative, creative nature of the literature circle.

Of course, one of the strengths of literature circles is that they provide rich opportunities for complex learning without requiring expensive technology or even a full classroom set of a novel. However, the essential parts of the process could not be more readily translatable to Web-based creation and sharing. Certainly, there are other digital literacy tools (blogs, for example) that could be used equally effectively as

part of the literature circle, but the wiki, in particular, perfectly addresses the last of the eleven "key ingredients" of literature circles listed in the 2002 edition: "When books are finished, *readers share with their classmates*, and then *new groups form* around new reading choices" (2002, p. 18, emphasis Daniels'). The wiki also provides built-in assessment tools throughout the literature-circle process.

Why Wikis?

First, a brief definition of "wiki" might be in order. Most teachers are all too familiar with Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia open to anyone's contributions and revisions. As Richardson (2006) notes, however, while "most people get the 'pedia' part of the name, only a few really understand the first part, the 'wiki'" (p. 59). He goes on to define a wiki simply as "a Website where anyone can edit anything anytime they want" (p. 59). In short, a wiki is a tool for creating collaborative websites that can either open authorship and editorship to anyone (as in the case of Wikipedia), or can restrict authorship and editorship to a select group of contributors.

In *Literacy Tools in the Classroom: Teaching through Critical Inquiry, Grades 5-12*, Beach, Campano, Edmiston, and Borgmann (2010) address the educational value of wikis, noting the wiki's ability to help students "acquire a sense of the power of collective action, where the sum of everyone's contributions is greater than the isolated parts"; this, in turn, "challenges traditional academic ideologies of individual expertise and authorship" (p. 117). Indeed, I would argue that creating a wiki as part of the literature-circle experience allows students to construct a parallel text alongside the one that they are reading: the wiki becomes a contextual and interpretive extension of the book, as well as a physical space where readers can construct, discuss, revise, and fine-tune their understandings and interpretations of a text. Depending on the structure, focus, and time devoted to the wiki project, groups' wikis can function as anything from a student-generated version of "Spark Notes" on their particular book to a collaborative, multimedia essay on the text. Regardless of the ultimate goal of the wiki, using it in conjunction with the traditional literature circle allows students even more opportunities to transition from being passive consumers of text

to being active co-participants—even coauthors—of the text.

Pairing literature circles with digital or electronic communication is nothing new; previous studies have described “virtual literature circles” (Burgess, 2006; Kolu & Volotinen, 2004), some conducted via e-mail (Pate-Moulton, Klages, Erickson, & Conforti, 2004; Klages, Pate, & Conforti, 2007) and others through

Facebook (Stewart, 2009). In Stewart’s study (2009), students made use of “the features and applications of Facebook to respond to tasks and collaborate with members of their group” (p. 29). The study by Klages et al. (2007) had preservice teachers enrolled in reading classes at two different Texas universities—Texas State University/San Marcos and the University of Houston/Victoria—forming literature circles around Holocaust-themed books.

The wiki’s inherently collaborative and dynamic nature has the potential to deepen, extend, and literally make visible the fundamental goal of literature circles: to get students to make meaning collaboratively.

These groups met in person in their separate classes, and then exchanged thoughts about the text one-on-one with their “distance learning partners” on the other campus (Klages et al., 2007). At the end of the process, the groups collaboratively used “e-mail, instant messaging, file-transfer protocol (FTP), and the World Wide Web (WWW) [to] create a Web page that presented an analysis and discussion of their selected book” (2007, p. 298). Both approaches were successful; however, there seem to be drawbacks to each. While integrating the literature circle with Facebook provides an ideal environment for the kind of “networked social scholarship” Stewart describes (p. 29), the site is, unfortunately, blocked by many school districts (although a similar kind of networked environment might be duplicated by creating a classroom Ning). Wiki technology allows for the creation of the kind of Web page Klages et al.’s students were assigned to create, while providing a user-friendly interface and template for doing so.

The wiki has a number of additional advantages over these other digital literacy tools, which func-

tion primarily to replace face-to-face discussion with virtual asynchronous or synchronous discussion, or to widen the scope of the literature circle beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom/school/community. Specifically, the wiki’s inherently collaborative and dynamic nature has the potential to deepen, extend, and literally make visible the fundamental goal of literature circles: to get students to make meaning collaboratively. As Beach, Campano, Edmiston, and Borgmann (2010) argue in *teachingmedialiteracy.com*, “Collaborative writing of a wiki text requires that students establish a division of labor based on the roles each student is assuming in the collaboration” (p. 14). Sound familiar? Literature circles, too, depend on discrete roles and collaboration to be effective.

Combining Literature Circles and Wikis: Several Approaches

To illustrate how these techniques work in tandem, I’d like to describe how I have used literature circles and wikis together in a college-level class that I teach on young adult literature. The majority of the students in the course are preservice teachers, most of whom are seeking certification to teach middle or secondary English language arts. Surprisingly few of them have heard of literature circles; among those who have, many know of them only through other teacher-preparation courses, but have not actively participated in one. Even fewer have heard of wikis (aside from the megalith Wikipedia). Though their lack of experience is a bit surprising, it is probably not unusual: often, preservice teachers have heard the jargon connected to “21st century skills,” but have little exposure to them in practice. The lit-circle/wiki project thus allows them to experience both in a short time frame, and also models how to match pedagogies with appropriate digital literacy tools.

Toward the end of each semester, students choose one young adult novel and form a literature circle around that text. As part of the literature circle process, students collaboratively create a wiki based on their chosen novel—texts as diverse as Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak* (1999), Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling* (2008), Christopher Paul Curtis’s *Bud, Not Buddy* (1999), David LaRochelle’s *Absolutely, Positively Not* (2005), and Michael Northrop’s *Gentlemen* (2009) among others.

On the first day of the project, students meet with the other folks who are reading the same text; typically, the groups have a total of five or six people. They draw up a reading schedule and determine who will play which “role” on each of the several days when they’ll be meeting in their groups. They have read selections from *Literature Circles* (Daniels, 2002) and have the role sheets for each of the basic roles. Even as college students and as future teachers themselves, they often want to treat the role sheets as “homework” or worksheets. Daniels’s lament that the role sheets have been misconstrued (or downright abused) is borne out by the fact that even students trained to think critically about pedagogies see a piece of paper with directions and empty space and instinctively go into completion mode, asking, “Do we have to fill this out before next time?” We generally have to revisit Daniels’s reminders that the roles need to be interpreted loosely, and that the sheets are only there to provide guidance, not a rigid framework.

On the first day, I also introduce students to wiki technology, since many are not familiar with it. I create the literature circle wiki on pbworks.com, which has an advertising-free option for educational users, though there are other choices. Prior to the first day, I set up a series of folders in pbworks, one for each book that students will be reading. I then create a page in each folder for each of the lit-circle roles: there’s a page for the Summarizer, the Discussion Director, the Travel Tracker, the Illustrator, the Vocabulary Enricher, the Literary Luminary, and the Connector. When introducing these elements, however, I encourage students to modify or even delete traditional roles and add their own, especially if they think something else would better fit their specific text. For example, a group of students reading Rita Garcia-Williams’s *Jumped* (2009) decided that they needed a role for a “Character Analyst,” who would interpret the actions and words of the novel’s three narrators. Another group of students reading Lynne Rae Perkins’s *Criss Cross* (2005) created a role for a “Multigenre Expert,” since the novel includes so many different kinds of writing. In other instances, groups combined several roles or simply interpreted them differently.

Of course, all of this setup could be done by the students themselves; I do it in advance mostly to save time and to keep the students from being

overwhelmed, since both the lit circle and the wiki are usually new to them. Also, while I create a single wiki for the entire class, each literature circle group could have its own separate wiki (as is the case with Wertsch’s book-group wikis, discussed below). I chose to set up a single wiki so that students can easily navigate between their own wiki and those of the other groups in class, since it seems to be helpful for students to see how other groups are putting together their wikis. Not only do they get ideas from each other, but the knowledge that others are looking at their wiki increases accountability and often gets students interested in the novels that they’re *not* reading.

Prior to each class, each group member gets on the wiki site and enters material for the role she or he will be playing during the next group meeting. So, the Summarizer posts a synopsis of the section the group is to read for the next meeting, the Discussion Director posts questions about it, and so forth. In my classes, the person in the Illustrator role usually embeds images and photographs found on the Web rather than creating original artwork, though a few do scan in their own drawings and add them to the Illustrator page. Interestingly, many students who weren’t confident about their drawing skills emphasized how much less stress they felt about playing the Illustrator role when they knew they could use ready-made images; in fact, several students commented on how much fun it was to look for relevant images online. This is a strength of translating the traditional “Illustrator” role into a digital context. While much of the material students entered into their wikis was text-based, many students also embedded videos, created wordle clouds related to the novel, posted MapQuest or Google Maps showing where the story was taking place, and added links to outside sites and resources related to their chosen book. A number of them expressed surprise at how much it helped their understanding of the text to reflect on it using such a rich variety of media; though most English-education majors are understandably word-oriented, through building their wikis, they truly came to understand that there are also valuable, non-text-based ways to respond to a piece of literature.

During class, students met either in their traditional face-to-face literature circles or as one large group gathered around a computer responding to the materials everyone had posted. Whichever method they chose (groups would often morph in and out

of both contexts), they usually ended up working collaboratively on the wiki site by the end of class, adding pertinent links, images, and other insights and information that had come up during discussion. At the end of the process, students presented their wikis to the full class and gave a brief book talk that summarized their responses to the novel they read.

The project helps these future teachers develop an understanding of how both the literature circle approach and wikis might be useful to them in their own classrooms. They appreciate the openness of the literature circle approach, the collaborative and process-oriented nature of the wiki, and the ways in which combining the two techniques fosters peer-to-peer interpretations of literature, rather than the top-down, “teacher-as-literary-authority” stance that most of them claim they do not want to replicate in their own classrooms.

From my own perspective, the lit circle/wiki project is an enlightening way to end the semester. These college students go from responding to young adult texts from the perspective of a future teacher—from which they evaluate texts primarily for their “teachability”—to responding to them simply as readers. Unsurprisingly, there’s often a radical difference

between these two modes of response, and I think the students themselves notice the gap and ponder what it might mean in terms of how they select and approach “appropriate” literature for their future students. By participating in the literature circle and creating the wikis, they also come to appreciate the collaborative, student-driven nature of both, and the ways each can enhance reading comprehension and hone interpretive skills. Even those students who claim to be very traditional, nonvisual learners enjoy finding images and video clips to embed in their sites, linking to other sites, and generally making sense of their chosen novel in a variety of non-text-based ways, thus gaining valuable insight into learner differences.

Students immediately appreciated the wiki’s potential as a visual record of the group’s work and as a way of sharing their book with others. Daniels (2002) stresses the importance of this kind of sharing and suggests a number of sharing devices that could be developed at the end of the literature circle process—posters, letters, dramatizations of parts of the novel, and so forth (p. 91). Of thirty-some possible sharing devices listed, however, technology is a component of only a few; even then, “technology” is limited to using a video camera to record dramatizations or mock

Digital Literacy Terms Used in Article

Blogs	Short for “weblog,” a blog is a personal website where one or several individuals can post writing, photos, and videos. Readers generally can comment on posts. Popular hosting sites include Blogger.com and Wordpress.com.
Vlogs	“Video weblogs.” Serve a similar function as blogs, but—as the name suggests—are video-only.
Wikis	Tools for creating collaborative websites that can either open authorship and editorship to anyone (as in the case of Wikipedia), or can restrict authorship and editorship to a select group of contributors. Hosting sites include pbworks.com, wetpaint.com, wikia.com, wikispaces.org, and wikispot.org, to name just a few.
Nings	From Ning.com, an online platform that allows users to create their own social networking groups around specific interests or commonalities (special-interest, mini-“Facebook”-type communities). Initially free, there are now three levels of service available, all of which have a monthly fee.
Web 2.0	Generic label applied to all digital technologies that allow interaction and collaboration among Web creators and users. Also known as the “Read-Write Web,” since it allows users not merely to read static content posted by others, but to comment on existing content and to create new content.

interviews with characters. Clearly, there are now many digital literacy tools that can be used creatively to share student work and their selected books with others. Daniels cautions, though, that these sharing devices need to be natural extensions of the literature circle, not tacked-on assignments at the end of the process just to provide the teacher with an assessable product.

In that spirit, the wiki is the ideal sharing device, since it is an organic part of the literature circle process, one that students create and revise throughout their reading of the book. It not only provides students with all the materials they might need to share their book with others, the wiki *becomes* the way they can share the book with others. As students conclude their reading and begin thinking about their wiki presentations, they often revise and clarify the content of their site in order to make it more accessible to people outside their group. In addition to allowing them to review what they've discovered in the process of reading, this kind of revision also reinforces the skill of writing and revising for a specific audience and purpose. And the process of building the wiki itself provides visual evidence of just how collaborative meaning making really is in the literature classroom. Here are some of the observations the preservice teachers in my young adult literature class made about both the literature circle and the wiki as pedagogical techniques:

It was interesting to read the book knowing that you were looking for something specific, such as vocabulary or key phrases. I feel like it made me pay a lot more attention to details that I might have otherwise missed. It also made me more conscious of how other readers would think while reading the book, which is an important skill for English teachers to have. (Sara, blog post, Fall 2008)

The Wiki allowed us to get a feel for what everyone else thought and was working on before we actually met. I really enjoyed looking through my group's Wiki site a day or two before class just to see what everyone else thought. (Rebecca, blog post, Fall 2008)

The Wiki aspect gives the students a concrete view of what they've accomplished together. They can use it as a before and after record of what they've learned along the way. I think it's an awesome tool that does all of this while combining their love of technology and playing online. (Jenn, blog post, Spring 2010)³

These comments underscore the shared strength that links literature circle pedagogy and wiki technol-

ogy: the power to develop students' abilities to think and write collaboratively about literature. And if the fundamental purpose of the literature circle is to help students better engage with a text by focusing their efforts toward particular roles, and then bringing the group together to broaden everyone's understanding, the wiki deepens this engagement by making those roles more visible and permanent. It allows students to document both their individual and their collaborative work while continuing to reflect on their discussion as they modify, edit, and add on to each other's work on the wiki.

Of course, my approach is only one possibility; there are many other ways to combine literature circles and wikis. Wertsch, a high school English language arts teacher, has students in his literature courses form book clubs around their choice of texts. Wertsch creates a separate wiki site for each book, although students can navigate back to a home page to link to other groups' wikis. Rather than including pages devoted to specific literature circle roles, as my setup does, Wertsch requires students to devote sections of their wiki to characters, plot, setting, conflicts, and themes, in addition to posting questions about their reading and creating a collaborative review of the book describing each student's response to it. Wertsch's students' wikis are well worth checking out, both to see the range of books they have created wikis for (everything from the nonfiction memoir *A Child Called It* [Pelzer, 1995] to the graphic novel *Maus* [Spiegelman, 1986, 1991] to a "cheesy vampire book no one wanted to read," as the link describes it) and to see how different groups constructed their pages, even within the fairly prescriptive parameters of the required sections. (See <http://wertsch.pbworks.com/Book-Club-Wiki-Pages>.)

Wertsch's use of literary terms and concepts for the sections of his wiki illustrates the adaptability of both the literature circle and the wiki approaches. Both Wertsch and I predetermined the general content and structure of the wiki, but this would not have to be the case. Just as Daniels advises students to throw out the role sheets once they have mastered the lit-circle process, groups could make their own decisions about how to organize and add content to their wikis, once they understand how wikis work. Wertsch's approach—organizing the wikis around traditional literary concepts—functions well to reinforce

those concepts for students while also giving them some freedom to interpret and describe those aspects of their chosen books in their own ways. However, Daniels—a firm believer in reader response theory—

Combining wiki technology with the literature circle becomes especially powerful and beneficial, since the wiki organically fulfills many assessment needs by supplying documentation of each participant's work.

cautions against trying to put too much of a didactic template over the work of literature circles. As he says, “Though some teachers do seek ways to infuse literary terminology and analytical procedures into their literature circles, I do not see this as one of the structure’s defining ingredients,” because it tends to undermine the pedagogy’s basis “on a faith in self-directed practice” (2002, p. 23). Nevertheless, for teachers wishing to use literature circles and wikis at the high school level,

such an infusion may be necessary to meet curricular requirements and other standards.

Another model for combining literature circles and wikis comes from Emily Gray Junior High School (EGJHS) in Tucson, Arizona, where eighth graders participate in literature circles focused around their choice of young adult texts in the categories of Southwestern literature, fantasy/science fiction, and historical fiction, among others. The EGJHS approach to constructing literature circle wikis falls somewhere between my structure, based on literature circle roles, and Scott Wertsch’s, based on literary terms. EGJHS’s wikis organize their content into pages based on roles *and* traditional literary concepts.⁴ Groups are required to create pages based on characters, plot, and setting, as with Wertsch’s wikis, but some groups have additional pages with information about the author or links to published book reviews, for example. Apart from the required information about characters, plot, and setting, students are required to create some kind of “original media” response to their novel, which could take the form of a drawing (done by hand or computer), a podcast, a wordle, or a creative text, such as a poem written in response to the reading. In some cases, these media are embedded on pages titled

to reflect traditional literature circle roles, such as pages for “pictures” or “graphic illustrations”—variations on the typical “Illustrator” role. Each group’s wiki also includes a tab marked “discussion,” which is used flexibly to informally fulfill the roles of the summarizer, connector, and questioner. Its blend of required elements and open-endedness makes the EGJHS formulation a good way to address curriculum needs while allowing for reader-response, as well.

What about Assessment?

The complexity of assessing literature circles has been one of the major obstacles to their implementation. But this is where combining wiki technology with the literature circle becomes especially powerful and beneficial, since the wiki organically fulfills many assessment needs by supplying documentation of each participant’s work. One of the typical challenges in evaluating any collaborative effort is determining how much work any individual member of the group did—and doing so without pitting group members against each other to “rat out” the slackers. As Richardson (2006) explains, wiki technology makes this highly charged process transparent, if not virtually objective: “Each page on a wiki . . . comes with another very important feature: a page history. . . . when you click it, you can see when changes were made, by whom, and what was changed” (p. 63). Most wiki sites, such as pbworks, send email updates to the wiki’s writers, editors, and administrators with a detailed report of who made what specific changes to the site, and when. The technology itself generates a detailed record of student participation. As Moreillon, Hunt, and Ewing (2010) put it, “Accountability is inherent in the wiki space” (p. 27).

Of course, students and teachers will still need to figure out ways of assessing the quality of individual contributions, and how any individual’s work fits into the production of the whole. These more subjective concerns can likely be addressed via one of the methods Daniels describes in the chapter on assessment in the second edition of his book, or through the kind of self-reflection that Beach, Campano, Edmiston, and Borgmann (2010) advocate for use in conjunction with literacy tools such as wikis. They suggest that at the end of the process, students ask themselves questions such as, “How effectively am I [or are we] using this

tool to engage my [our] audience? . . . What might I or we do differently?” (p. 145). Of their own literature circle/wiki project, Moreillon et al. (2010) note that this kind of reflection arose naturally in groups as students “became more aware of their own thinking and learning processes and applied metacognition to the self-assessment of their work” (p. 28). If a more concrete artifact is desired, this kind of self-reflection could take a number of forms: a traditional paper, a journal entry, a blog post, a letter, and so forth.

Most important, however, each group’s wiki functions as a final project that the literature circle group generates organically through its process. As discussed above, while Daniels sees a sharing device as one of the key ingredients of a literature circle, he cautions that it is not itself the goal or requisite “end product” of the process. Most of the sharing devices he describes, however, require significant work and time to create once the group finishes reading and discussing the book. Since the wiki is being created and revised as part of the reading and discussion process, it is more or less complete as a sharing device once the group’s work is done. Students may choose to revise it to make it more appealing to an outside audience, but essentially, the process and the product are one and the same. Students can then, as Daniels (2002) advocates, move immediately to reading and discussing the next book (pp. 89–90). In this way, especially, the wiki is the perfect digital literacy pairing for the literature circle.

Conclusions

There are many challenges to incorporating either the literature circle or the wiki into the secondary English/language arts classroom, “especially for departmentalized middle and high school teachers, who must often deliver a huge mandated English curriculum in forty- or fifty-minute periods” (Daniels, 2002, p. 81). The amount of time required to get something like this off the ground, coupled with the need for holistic assessment techniques, may render either of these strategies a pipedream. However, my own experience suggests that students grasp the concepts of both the literature circle and the wiki very quickly; their initial anxiety dissipates almost as soon as they get started, and is replaced by an atmosphere of focused, student-centered work.

While my observations are of college students, I suspect a similar dynamic would occur in the secondary classroom. Teachers do need to allocate time to train students in both the lit circle and the wiki at the outset, but after students have gone through the process once or twice, there is usually no need for additional instructional downtime; students know what to do and can begin work immediately. I would argue, too, that the wiki further enhances this kind of autonomy by giving students a concrete and endlessly revisable framework for tracking their thoughts and their work. Time “lost” to the setup is easily recouped when teachers no longer have to repeat instructions or introduce new ones and when the creation of the wiki both documents student work and generates an assessable final project. No additional assignments or assessments need to be tacked on to the end of a unit.

Is all of this worth it? When we consider the startlingly clear statistic that “reading achievement is more highly correlated with independent reading than with any other single factor” (Daniels, 2002, p. 33), then the answer is clear: as teachers, we need to build independent reading into the curriculum as much as possible. And literature circle work can motivate students to continue reading beyond the classroom: students in my classes, on looking at other groups’ wikis, often discover other books that they want to read on their own. In these ways, the literature circle technique may offer a surprisingly direct way to encourage independent reading and, in turn, lead to higher scores on standardized reading-comprehension assessments.

Meanwhile, the wiki offers a very accessible, easy-to-master tool to meet 21st century skills mandates. Most important, though, both the literature circle and the wiki bring us back to the deepest foundations of our discipline—instilling in students an appreciation of the value of reading, and helping them develop skills both for interpreting what they read and for communicating their ideas about that reading to others. The student-centered approach of both the literature circle and the wiki gives students a sense of investment and ownership that few other pedagogies allow. As Richardson (2006) says of online publishing tools like blogs and wikis, “We can now offer our students a totally new way of looking at the work they do. . . . It’s not meant to be discarded or stored in a folder somewhere; it’s meant to be added to the

conversation and potentially used to teach others” (p. 132). But I like the ways my own students explain the value of these strategies best:

The beauty of the lit circle/wiki [is that] both are flexible structures within which individualized learning can happen. Once a teacher knows her students, she can help guide them into books and roles they might enjoy. (Andrea, blog post, Fall 2009)

Wikis are a good way to integrate technology and group work, and they rip open the traditional parameters of any assignment. It might be tough for some to become comfortable with the flexibility of wikis (I’m thinking about issues in grade objectivity, etc.), but as educators more willingly adopt experiential learning models into their curricula, I foresee wikis taking a major role in classrooms. (Emma, blog post, Fall 2009)

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Notes

- ¹ See, for example, studies by Cunningham & Stanovich (1991), Krashen (1993), Stanovich & Cunningham (1993), and the National Endowment for the Arts (2007).
- ² My definition of “21st century skills” comes from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills at http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=120.
- ³ The student comments about literature circles and wikis come from blog posts written by students in my English 405: Young Adult Literature classes at West Virginia University during Fall 2008, Fall 2009, and Spring 2010 semesters. I thank them for their willingness to go along with my crazy scheme, which they always approach with skepticism, and for giving me such substantive, valuable feedback about the process. This paper would never have come into being without them.
- ⁴ This literature circle/wiki project is discussed in Moreillon, Hunt, & Ewing’s (2009) article “Learning and Teaching in WANDA Wiki Wonderland: Literature Circles in the Digital Commons.” The students’ wikis themselves can be viewed at <http://wandawiki.wikispaces.com/>.

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Voices from the Ning:

How Social Networking Created a Learning Community in a YAL Classroom

In an age where information and communication can be exchanged quickly and efficiently, being able to read, think critically, and communicate via an online venue is just as important as competence with the more traditional means of literacy, such as reading a book or writing a letter to a friend (Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004). Larson (2009) challenges educators to respond to the ever-changing ways that technology can enhance our learning by offering students new opportunities to expand their learning community into virtual spaces. Furthermore, the International Reading Association (2009) and the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) call for teacher education programs to prepare preservice teachers to integrate and utilize the new literacies in the classroom by providing them with the training they need to amalgamate technology into instruction. This article will demonstrate how I used the Ning (www.ning.com), a Web-based online service that allows users to create their own social network, to establish a learning community in a college classroom. The Ning operates in much the same way that Facebook does, but you can create a social network for a particular group of people. I created a social network for my undergraduate students who were enrolled in my Young Adult Literature class during the spring 2010 semester.

Today's students not only use the traditional pencil and book as tools for learning, they also use new literacies, including electronic books, online reading, and online social networking (Larson, 2009). Research has confirmed that today's student needs to acquire the skills and strategies to navigate constantly changing information and communication technolo-

gies (Larson, 2008). While the International Society for Technology (2008) has published the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) to provide guidelines to help teachers prepare students for a changing digital age, it is crucial that teachers gain a thorough and practical understanding of the technologies that are available to enhance students' learning.

As Larson (2009) points out, today's student has a keen knowledge and awareness of technology, especially when it comes to communicating with others. There is an urgent need for teachers and researchers to find ways to mesh together students' traditional types of literary experiences with the more technologically advanced literary experiences that are part of their daily lives outside of school. Ferenstein (2010) observed how using Twitter helped to boost student engagement in a college classroom where students tweeted comments and questions to a teaching assistant who responded to them in real time. He found that using Twitter in the classroom pulled more students into a discussion, particularly those who were too shy to talk in class. He also found that Twitter chatter often spilled over into students' free time as they continued an online conversation long after the class was over, building community in and outside of the classroom.

Rogers (2009) noticed that her teacher certification students created a Facebook page just for those members of the course so that they could talk about what they were learning. When Rogers asked her students about the benefits of this online forum, students relayed that they used Facebook to discuss assignments, ask and answer questions, bounce ideas

off of each other, post pertinent information, and support each other. Rogers (2009) called for professors to utilize social networks to enhance their teaching, as social networking can “promote student reading through book clubs, book discussions, and shared readings” (p. 34).

Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study were 19 undergraduates, ranging from sophomores to seniors, enrolled in a course called Young Adult Literature. A majority of the students were preservice teachers, while others were taking the course as an elective. An assignment for this course was for students to post a blog each week on the Ning. Students were assigned a young adult novel to read each week and were free to post anything they wanted on their Ning page. Each student created a My Page space in the Ning and invited members of the class to join the Page and its discussion forum (in the form of a blog) to discuss course readings and relevant topics. Students managed their own My Page, enabling them to experience from a teacher’s vantage point the operation of a blog in an actual classroom setting wherein the professor receives email alerts for approval of new posts. Figure 1 shows the assignment description for the Ning given to students on the first day of class.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data source used for this research study was the content of participants’ blogs throughout the

course, consisting of 220 posts and 464 comments. As a final course evaluation, students also answered the following questions:

1. How has the use of technology helped or not helped you to learn?
2. What (if anything) have you learned about technology (or anything else) in this class that will help you in your future endeavors?
3. What can you tell me about the use of technology to enhance learning and teaching?

Prior to collecting the data, a preliminary list of codes was created. After the data were collected, I created folders, or nodes, on NVivo 8, a data management software tool that organizes and stores data. This software allowed the coding process to run quickly and helped me to better connect with the data so as to generate themes and patterns (Basit, 2003). Participants’ blogs, comments, and final reflections were placed on NVivo 8 and reviewed line by line. Data were analyzed to determine how they answered the research question and how it correlated with the codes created to compare participants’ views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences. By looking for frequency (items that are identified because they are numerous), omissions (items that never appear, even though the researcher suspected that they would), and declarations (items that participants identify as present or significant), themes emerged (LeCompte, 2000).

Once the data were coded, I used thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to organize the data by mapping out three classes of themes: (1) basic themes; (2) organizing themes (categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles); and (3) global themes (super-ordinate themes that capture the principal findings in the study as a whole). Using thematic networks allowed me to not only look for frequency of occurrence, omission, and declaration, but also create patterns of “things that go together” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 150) in meaningful ways. Once thematic networks were created, I revisited the data not in a linear way (line by line in the raw data), but rather through the global, organizing, and basic themes in order to bring together the data and the interpretation (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Ning Assignment

Part of your grade will also be your participation on the Ning, an online social network created specifically for this course. Each week, prior to our class, you will need to post your thoughts and reactions to the book that you read for that week. You also need to respond to at least two other posts. My hope is that this experience will create a conversation that will continue beyond the walls of our classroom!

Figure 1. Ning assignment description

Findings

As the blogs and comments were coded, it became clear that students were constructing knowledge and critically thinking about young adult literature with the other members of the class, and the Ning gave students the time to do this. This finding is evident not only in the number of posts and comments the participants' made (220 posts and 464 comments), but also by the depth and breadth of the comments.

The Ning Gave Students Time to Respond

When the topic for the week was reading the classics, Sue's blog created an online conversation over the classic Steinbeck novel, *Of Mice and Men*. In this early Ning conversation that focused on the pros and cons of using the classics in a young adult classroom, four students participated in an online dialogue about the book. They pulled out themes on the American dream and gender representations, and tried to make sense of the novel, particularly the complexity of the characters. This in-depth conversation actually lasted for a week, as students went back and forth trying to make sense of the story and wondering how young adults would connect with the book. This might not have happened in the classroom, especially since the class only met once a week. Even when I organized students into smaller groups during class to generate conversation, dialogue was often superficial as students tried to respond to each other's comments and answer each other's questions. As one student noted in her final reflection of the course,

I think that using technology throughout the course of the semester really helped me to look a little deeper into each of the books we read. While I was able to formulate my own opinions and personal questions about each piece of literature, I think reviewing the comments and insights of others really helped drive certain issues home, or helped me see things differently. For example, I wasn't crazy about *Mexican White Boy*, but after reading a couple blog posts from the other people in class, I was able to appreciate the text a little more. Additionally, I think that reviewing how others would incorporate each book into their own classroom really helped me think outside the box—just because we were reading YA literature does not necessarily mean that only teens should be reading these books. Sure we talked about a lot of this stuff in class, but many times people do not get the chance to speak, or simply do not want to, so posting on the Ning really helped everyone have a voice.

Using the Ning gave students the time they needed to provide a written reflection on the novels as well as to respond to others' reflections.

Critically Thinking about the Books

Because the Ning allowed students the time to reflect and respond, they were able to critically think about the books that they were reading. They became "active thinkers" (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 52) as they questioned the author's purpose (What do you think were Steinbeck's purposes for doing this?), tried to understand the power relationships in the novel (I thought the book was about prejudice and social class. To me, there were 3 tiers—the ranch owner and Curley [and by marriage his wife], then the guys in the bunkhouse, and then finally Crooks), promoted social justice (Another theme could be treating people with dignity even though they are different), and recognized those voices that were marginalized in the story (She is simply always referred to as "Curley's wife"). Critical literacy is a significant skill because it encourages the reader to read text in a deeper and more meaningful way. Critical literacy allows the reader to move beyond just accepting the text as is, and to become more active in the reader-author relationship (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

The Ning provided these students with opportunities to critically think about young adult literature because they were feeding off of each others' responses and trying to make sense of the themes, issues, and characters in the books. Furthermore, the Ning allowed students the time to generate conversations before the class met so that we could use class time to continue thinking critically about the novels we were reading, answering questions collectively, and commenting on the novels.

Connecting with Their Peers before Coming to Class

The Ning became a helpful tool to use in this college classroom because students were able to not only reflect on the novels they were reading, but also

Using the Ning gave students the time they needed to provide a written reflection on the novels as well as to respond to others' reflections.

comment on other reflections before coming to class. It also became a way to begin a conversation during class (since students had already begun talking about the novels) or continue conversations that were started in class. The following comment comes from a blog about the book *Hard Love* (2001) by Ellen Wittlinger:

You raise some great questions and I hope that we can talk about them in class. The significance of John's zine, *Bananafish*, is perplexing. What is a bananafish (I am going to google it)? As for Marisol, I couldn't quite put my finger on that girl. I did want her to "switch sides" but I think it's because then everything and everyone would fall into place—a happy ending (at least in my weird little world?). Let's bring up these questions in class and see what everyone else thinks.

The Ning made class discussions more meaningful because students created the conversation online first. They were able to process the books, think

about their reactions to the books, then reflect on their thoughts and reactions.

The Ning allowed them the time to do all of this. As one student wrote in her final reflection of the course, "The Ning helped me as a learner to make my thoughts concrete, which helped me articulate them better. I am always better

at writing them than saying them on the spot. In other words, it gave me time and helped me process."

Connecting to Other Avenues in Their Lives and the Lives of Their Students

Finally, students used the Ning to construct knowledge and critically think about how other avenues in their lives connected to the young adult literature they were reading. Students in the class sat in on a lecture given by Dr. S., an assistant professor, who discussed his research on the migration of people and how globalization makes the world more culturally diverse. On Cindy's blog, entitled *How to Become a More Globalized/Culturally Aware Student/Teacher*, she connected the books *Bang!* (Flake, 2007), *Tree Girl* (Mikaelsen, 2005), and *Mexican White Boy* (De la Peña, 2010) with Dr. S.'s seminar and other courses that she had completed. She writes,

I love . . . when classes begin to relate to one another . . . and to life . . . Dr. S. discussed the role of education as a social institution for this identity construction and further understanding of the cultural influences that accompany identity . . . not only dependent on legal status, but on one's cultural sense of belonging . . .

In her blog, Cindy continued to reflect on the three novels—*Mexican White Boy* and Danny's struggles with his own identity, the political underpinnings and issues of culture and border crossing presented in the book *Tree Girl*, and the ways that a family copes with the death of a child in the book *Bang!*—and challenged her peers with the following question: "Does your perspective on teaching some of the books that we are reading as a class change based on your own personal connections to these books?" Her peers responded:

Cathy: . . . Culturally diverse, am I prepared? Professionally, yes, personally, no. I have been taught up the waaazoo about how to be culturally sensitive. . . . we all know culture is not limited to ethnic background or race What's been on my mind lately is the "migration" I am about to make. We "Northerners" have a very different culture from the lovely people in the South. The way we interact professionally, speak, socialize personally, EAT, dress . . . it all varies from school to school, from town to town, from state to state From East coast to West coast . . . I've studied abroad before, but I don't think anything has prepared me to move from where I have lived for 22 years.

Cindy: It's nice to have someone who will be experiencing a big culture shock with me. . . . It's funny because life is all about "border crossing" and "culture leaping." We will make it . . . I promise.

Barb: Thanks for bringing up Dr. S.'s lecture! I was there and I also saw some great connections and it caused me to consider my cultural thinking. This is right on time for me to begin my student teaching next fall in [Big Town], which is one of the most diverse towns I know of. . . . It is so hard to define culture and I think it is important for us as teachers to have our students examine their multiple cultures, whether they are from another country or not. Everyone has multiple cultures and it is

The Ning made class discussions more meaningful because students created the conversation online first.

important to recognize and appreciate them! I love making connections between my classes, my field studies, my readings. ANYTHING I can wrap my brain around. If I can find how something relates, it makes my learning so much easier and my understanding deeper. I definitely see how *Bang*, *Tree Girl*, and *Mexican White Boy* all relate to one another and with the topic of transmigration.

What is interesting in this blog is that these students were helping each other out as they were coming to terms with their own biases, and their reflections on diversity influenced others as they wrestled with the contents of the lecture, their other classes, and the books that they were reading. Throughout this blog and its comments, students were valuing the opinions and views of others, discussing how their courses have prepared them to be teachers, and basically experiencing an “aha” moment as all that they have learned began to come together and connect.

Students used the Ning to construct knowledge and critically think about the books they were reading for this course. The Ning proved to be an outstanding tool for this class because it gave students the time to respond to the novels and to each other with breadth and depth.

Final Thoughts

This article attempts to add to the emerging literature on what a social network classroom could look like with young adults. Blogs on the Ning were used to create discussion groups to enhance conversations about young adult literature and build a positive learning community. Social networks not only bring together a community of people who share an interest, they also allow them to talk to each other on their own terms. Zawilinski (2009) reminds us of how literature response blogs can provide students with an “out of school” tool as a different means to respond to literature (p. 653).

After a careful analysis of the electronic conversations, I can conclude that the asynchronous nature of online discussions encouraged students to think deeply about their reactions to the books and to other members’ responses. Online entries allowed students the time to respond thoughtfully to their peers’ postings. This finding is similar to those of Larson (2009)

and Grisham and Wolsey (2006), in which students’ entries created a more authentic discussion than a traditional face-to-face discussion would in a literature circle. As Larson (2009) points out, online reader response encourages students to “respond deeply to the literature, share their ideas with others, and carefully consider multiple perspectives and thoughts” (p. 646). Furthermore, using the Ning allowed students the time they needed to reflect and respond to the literature, as well as to think critically about the complexity of the characters and themes. As Grisham and Wolsey (2006) indicate, “When students are given the opportunity and appropriate structures, they are competent and willing to think critically about complex situations and to work together to construct an understanding” (p. 648).

It became apparent that undergraduate students were learning through their interactions with other members of the class. They were refining their identities as teachers as they wrestled with the pros and cons of the issues and themes in the books that they were reading. They were encouraging each other, sympathizing with the characters in the books, and mentoring each other as they shared their thoughts and reflections. They were not only dialoguing and connecting to young adult literature, they were also making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections as they made associations between this course and other courses and lectures.

Finally, the students gained a sense of authority over the use of the technology, while also experiencing the collaborative nature of a blog in which public discourse generated enthusiasm for engaging in written communication. Thus, although the students met the goals of the curriculum—to engage in reading Adolescent Literature and plan lessons and units based on the literature—they also saw the benefit of using an online social network as a public collaborative writing space and could envision ways in which such an environment could enrich the educational lives of their future students. As one student said,

Social networks not only bring together a community of people who share an interest, they also allow them to talk to each other on their own terms.

“The Ning has shown me that I can create small, private networks for my classes, which I fully intend to use as a teacher. Having people post responses to their readings is a great way to track who is reading and how they understand the materials; it also generates opportunities for talking points in class.”

As exemplified in this small study, the blog posts and comments issued by these undergraduate students created an important form of social interaction—one of the goals of social networks. While posting their blogs on the Ning provided these undergraduates with the opportunities to express their thoughts, concerns, and dilemmas about the books that they were reading, comments by their peers gave them the opportunity and the time to collaborate, encourage, and support each other.

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Not Your Typical Summer School Program

Reading Young Adult Literature in Freedom Schools

*I know that I can make it
Though you're doin' me wrong, so wrong*
—from “Something Inside So Strong,” music and lyrics by Labi Siffre, 1988

It's 8:30 a.m. on an already-hot June day, and 50 young people—predominantly African American youth, grades 3–8—attending the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools program at the local youth community center are singing the motivational song “Something Inside So Strong.” Singing songs, clapping hands, and reciting chants are part of “Harambee,” a Kiswahili word meaning “all pull together,” which marks the beginning of each day at Freedom Schools. The idea is to get all the young people (called “scholars”) pepped up and motivated to spend the day reading and learning how to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others.

Obviously, the Freedom Schools program doesn't offer your typical summer enrichment. Some summer enrichment programs focus on pairing low-income adolescents with positive role models and mentors (e.g., “Big Buddy”; “Big Brothers/Big Sisters”) or improving graduation rates and providing access to postsecondary education (e.g., “Project GRAD”; “Gear Up”).

School-based summer programs often maintain a narrow focus on the mechanics of reading or remediation of perceived reading difficulties. Not so with Freedom Schools, whose main goal is to help African American youth “fall in love with books” and experience an “overwhelming *desire* to read” (Children's Defense Fund, 2010).

Underlying the Freedom Schools movement is the knowledge that a correlation exists between voluntary reading, civic engagement, and positive life outcomes.

Grounded in the history of Black slavery, the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, and African American pedagogy, the Freedom Schools program “holds sacred the two goals of freedom and literacy. Literacy is inseparable from the struggle for freedom because education interrogates power” (Jackson & Boutte, 2009, p. 110).

At Freedom Schools, scholars are encouraged to make connections between the issues they read about each day and ways they can empower themselves and their communities. The program builds

At Freedom Schools, scholars are encouraged to make connections between the issues they read about each day and ways they can empower themselves and their communities.

on the theme of “I Can Make a Difference,” and culminates in a “Day of Social Action.” Ultimately, reading and empowerment are at the heart of the Freedom Schools movement, as are “dimensions of African American culture . . . that schools are lacking . . . (e.g., spirituality, harmony, verve, creativity, movement, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, social time perspective, and oral tradition)” (Jackson & Boutte, 2009, p. 110).

Why Freedom Schools?

Preventing Summer Reading Setback

The founder of the Freedom Schools program, Marian Wright Edelman, and national director, Dr. Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, are aware of the long history of research that describes the significant link between summer access to books and reading achievement. As Heyns (1978) reported, “The single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning is reading” (p. 161). More recently, Kim (2004) found that summer reading activity stemmed summer setback in a sample of 6th-grade students in an urban school system. In 2006, Kim reported on a single summer intervention that provided 252 randomly selected low-income 4th graders in 10 schools with books to read during the summer months. The study found small positive effects on reading achievement as measured by standardized tests, and gains were especially evident among African American students.

In an experimental, longitudinal study, Allington et al. (2007) found that high-poverty students who had access to books over the summer scored significantly higher on standardized tests than children without such access. Both Kim (2004) and Allington et al. (2007) found that easy access to varied reading materials in the summer correlated with reading volume, and increased summer reading improved fall reading proficiency. In a 2009 evaluative study of the Freedom Schools program, researchers saw reading levels as measured by the Basic Reading Inventory rise for 60% of its 51 program participants (Portwood, Parara-Rogers, & Taylor).

We know that students from low-income families have more restricted access to reading material at home than their more advantaged peers do (Constantino, 2005). Neuman and Celano (2001) found roughly 10 times greater access to reading material in

higher-income neighborhoods than in lower-income neighborhoods in the same large urban center. As researchers have shown, providing low-income youth easy access to books and rich literacy models in the summer is certainly one way to raise literacy achievement and motivate voluntary reading. This is one of the reasons why Freedom Schools exist, but this is only part of the story.

A Necessary Counter-Story

The lyrics to “Something Inside So Strong,” two lines of which open this article, reference the idea that African American youth are being “done wrong” in public schools: public schooling in the US has been unsuccessful in improving the school experiences and academic achievement of African American students (Jackson & Boutte, 2009, p. 109). There are many who believe that African American students do not read or like to read. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) explain that it is important to recognize the power of White privilege and domination in the construction of such narratives, or “majoritarian stories” that serve to “distort and [silence] the experiences of people of color” (p. 29).

For example, when impoverished African American youth attending high-minority/high-poverty schools score poorly on standardized reading achievement tests, the standard “majoritarian” story would have us believe that students of color (and their families) are 1) literacy-poor; 2) struggling, reluctant readers who place a low value on reading; 3) “culturally deficit” and short on optimism and a strong work ethic to persevere in education (cf. Ogbu & Simons, 1998); and 4) lacking in cognitive skills that, when learned or gained, unlock reading comprehension. Some claim minority youth come from an “anti-intellectual strain, which subtly but decisively teaches them from birth not to embrace school-work too whole-heartedly” (qtd. in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31).

Freedom Schools serve as a powerful and much-needed counter-story to these discourses, proving that they can successfully engage African American youth with reading and civic engagement, *and that African American youth are indeed avid, passionate, skilled readers.*

As Jackson and Boutte (2009) explain:

The goal of African-centered education is not to prepare children to fit within the present [educational] system, but

to revolutionize the system toward the promise of democracy articulated in the documents (but not the deeds) that shaped America. Hence, Freedom Schools employ the use of *counternarrative* strategies [that] oppose the dominant society's notions about the intellectual capacity of African Americans, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school, and the power of their intellect. (p. 110)

In what follows, we describe the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) that is the core of the Freedom Schools' summer program and the young adult literature specifically selected for use by the Level III scholars (grades 6–8) in the program.

The Freedom Schools' Integrated Reading Curriculum

Twice a year, a committee comprised of teachers, school media specialists, university professors, Freedom Schools site project directors, and members of the Coretta Scott King book award committee meet at the Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, to read multicultural young adult literature and select the books that the Level III scholars will read in the six-week summer program. It is expected that each week, the Level III scholars will read a different, whole young adult novel that young people may not know about. The committee's rationale for reading a novel in its entirety is that young people need practice reading longer, sustained, complete texts (rather than short excerpts from texts or worksheets) in order to better understand and monitor such literary elements as theme, plot, and character development. The committee also feels the need to introduce books to African American youth that feature characters who look and talk like they do. Committee members believe that non-White students need to know that authors of substance and value come from their culture.

It is well known that there is a lack of multicultural literature in use in public middle and high school language arts/English classrooms. As Applebee (1989) and Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) suggest, many language arts and English teachers continue to teach the same White-male-centered canonical works taught over two decades ago (e.g., *The Great Gatsby*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Hamlet*). Stallworth et al. (2006) further contend that even the multicultural literature that is predominantly taught in high schools—*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Invisible Man*, *Black Boy*, *Things Fall*

Apart—describes people and events that occurred in the past. Thus, students reading such works may get the sense that racism and oppression are also things of the past or that the racism and oppression some students experience on a daily basis out-of-school (and in-school) are not important or relevant to their teachers or school officials. Stallworth et al. (2006) also explain, "It is troubling that [*Black Boy* and *Invisible Man*] may be the only representative literature about black experiences that students in most high schools will read. It would be similar to having Huck Finn as the single spokesperson for the white experience" (p. 487).

Thus, the committee looks for novels that will resonate with and reflect—in respectful ways—the Freedom Schools participants themselves. The youth who attended the Freedom Schools program we worked with this summer tended to be self-identified Black or biracial youth, living below the poverty level, usually with an extended family member (e.g., grandparent, aunt) or foster family. The novels selected for Freedom Schools readers illuminate these social contexts, reflecting what the authors see as an accurate, authentic sense of people who live in such contexts. In addition, the novels often depict vernacular language and discourse styles of many African Americans, privileging Black oral communication and rhetorical strategies. Jackson and Boutte (2009) call such literature "liberation literature," explaining that the books chosen for Freedom Schools

. . . allow African American students to have a mirror of and window into social, cultural, and historical awareness that centers their culture, not as an additive or referent, but as a factor worthy of serving as curriculum in its own right. These books . . . can be inclusive of authors who are not Black, as long as the work reflects the significant features of African American children's literature: (1) celebrates the strengths of the Black family as a cultural institution and vehicle for survival; (2) bears witness to Black people's determined struggle for freedom, equality, and dignity; (3) nurtures the souls of Black children by reflecting back to them, both visually and verbally, the beauty and competencies that we as adults see in them; (4) situates itself, through its language and its content, within African American literary

It is expected that each week, the Level III scholars will read a different, whole young adult novel that young people may not know about.

and cultural contexts; and (5) honors the tradition of story as a way of teaching and as a way of knowing. (Bishop qtd. in Jackson & Boutte, p. 110)

Ultimately, all the books chosen for the Freedom Schools summer program must meet the criterion of being affirming for Black children and their culture.

Additionally, the committee looks for young adult novels that fit the theme of Freedom Schools: "I Can Make a Difference!" For week one, the novel must

Ultimately, all the books chosen for the Freedom Schools summer program must meet the criterion of being affirming for Black children and their culture.

reflect a character making a difference in one's self and promoting a positive self-image (Children's Defense Fund, 2010). For week two, the novel must reflect a character making a difference in one's family through positive interactions with family members, other adults, and peers. For week three, the novel must depict an

appreciation and ownership of community and the ability to strengthen one's community. For week four, the novel should depict the lives of people who have changed the course of this country's history. For week five, the novel should encourage readers to explore the world and what they can do to make the world better, as well as what obstacles they must overcome to achieve their goals. For week six, the novel should depict Americans who made a difference in their own lives and the lives of others with hope, education, and action. The books for this final week should motivate students to do all they can to ensure that they get a high quality education and empower them to take action to make their hopes and dreams become a reality.

Finally, because the directors of the Freedom Schools program do not want the Freedom Schools to "feel like school," the book selection committee also designs an activity-oriented, rather than a skills-oriented, curriculum to accompany each book that is taught.

So what did Freedom Schools Level III scholars read this past summer, and what did they have to say about the books? In what follows, we describe the six young adult books chosen for the 2010 Freedom Schools summer program and then share some in-

sights about the Freedom Schools reading experience from two program participants.

Reading Young Adult Literature in Freedom Schools

Week One: I Can Make a Difference in My Life

The first novel the Level III scholars read was Sharon G. Flake's (2007) *Begging for Change*. In this book, due to a domestic "turf war," Raspberry Hill's mother has been beaten with a metal pipe and lies in a hospital. Raspberry's father is an alcoholic and a drug addict. No wonder Raspberry decides to steal money from her well-off friend, Zora, even if it is Zora and her father, Dr. Mitchell, who treat Raspberry and her mother like family. But Raspberry's stealing does not stop there, and soon she has lost the trust of people she cares about most. When her own father steals from her, Raspberry begins to wonder if she is any different from him. As Raspberry's mother tells her and other thugs on the street, "To be better, you gotta want better." Ultimately, Raspberry must do some hard soul-searching to decide who she is going to be and what "better" looks like for her.

Activities that the Level III scholars participated in while reading this book included creating self-portraits, role-playing the conflict between Raspberry and Zora, and researching social service agencies that could be helpful to people who find themselves homeless and living on the streets. For this last activity, the scholars listed names of agencies in the community, investigated the services they provided, and described how those services could be helpful to people in the community.

Week Two: I Can Make a Difference in My Family

Next, the scholars read *Joseph* by Shelia P. Moses (2008). This young adult novel tells the story of 14-year-old Joseph Flood, who is a victim of his mother's chronic drug abuse. Spending all of the child support money sent by Joseph's dad, who is away fighting in Iraq, Joseph's mother lands the two in a homeless shelter. Joseph has the opportunity to go live with his mother's sister in the suburbs, where he can attend a good school and join the tennis team. But Joseph does not want to leave his mother. Who will look out for her? Who will take care of her? Joseph must navigate the slippery slope between loyalty to

family and self as he scrapes out a stable future for himself.

Activities accompanying this book included drawing family portraits, conducting research on alcohol/drug abuse, role-playing conflict resolution strategies, and identifying things young people can do to help others living in poverty.

Week Three: I Can Make a Difference in My Community

For week three, the scholars read another Sharon G. Flake novel, *Bang!* (2005). This young adult novel depicts the violence that mars some impoverished urban neighborhoods and the constant state of terror its residents live in as a result. Mann, the main character, has just seen his little brother, Joseph, shot to death on the front porch of their house—an innocent victim in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mann’s mother and father are grieving in their own ways, none of which are helpful to Mann, who has started smoking weed with his best friend, Kee-Lee, and skipping school. When Mann’s father decides Joseph was shot because he was “too soft,” he abandons Mann and Kee-Lee miles from town and tells them to find their own way back home. Mann’s journey back to self-hood is fraught with violence, disappointment, mistakes, and regrets, but Mann ultimately decides what kind of man he is going to be and what it might take for Black men to stop killing one another.

Activities accompanying this book included discussing Sharon G. Flake’s poem that opens the book, “Boys Ain’t Men . . . Yet,” creating cards commemorating people who have died in the community, researching news articles regarding deaths in their neighborhoods, and comparing Luther Vandross’s song, *Dance with My Father Again*, to the book.

Week Four: I Can Make a Difference in My Country

During week four, Level III scholars read Phillip Hoose’s (2009) National Book Award-winning *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. This nonfictional work gives voice to the 15-year-old girl who refused to give up her seat to a White woman on a segregated bus nine months before Rosa Parks did. But instead of being celebrated, like Rosa Parks was, Claudette found herself shunned by her classmates and ignored by the Black leaders of Montgomery, Alabama. Why was Claudette shunned and ignored? Why did she not

get credit for jumpstarting the Civil Rights Movement? This book answers these questions and elucidates a little-known piece of American history.

Activities accompanying this book included watching and discussing Reginald Bullock’s YouTube video, “A War for Your Soul”; creating a visual timeline of the events taking place in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955; identifying civil rights issues that continue to plague their communities; and conducting research on the “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” and creating a commercial about its content (The “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” is a CDF report—see <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/cradle-prison-pipeline-report-2007-full-highres.html>).

Week Five: I Can Make a Difference in the World

For week five, scholars read Sharon Draper’s (2008) Coretta Scott King Book Award-winning young adult novel, *Copper Sun*. This novel, told in two voices, depicts the lives of Amari, an African girl brutally stolen from her homeland and enslaved on a rice plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, and Polly, a White indentured servant girl hired to help Amari learn English and her place in the new racialized hierarchy. Gradually, the two become friends and seek their freedom together, although as Amari reminds Polly, she can escape at any time and not be killed, because her skin color will always protect her.

Accompanying activities included discussing Countee Cullen’s poem “Heritage” that opens the book; tracing the sun motif while reading; locating South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida on US maps; comparing the plight of Mexican immigrants to slaves; tracing the route to freedom Amari and Polly took; and reading Tom Feelings’s (1995) adult picturebook, *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*, about the horrific transatlantic slave journey that claimed millions of lives and brought enslaved Africans to their American prisons.

Week Six: With Hope, Education, and Action, I Can Make a Difference!

Finally, for the last week of Freedom Schools, the Level III scholars read David Colbert’s (2009) young adult biography, *Michelle Obama: An American Story*. This rich biographical portrait traces Michelle Obama’s life from her ancestors, who were slaves on

a rice plantation in South Carolina, to her working-class, Southside Chicago childhood and her rise as one of the most influential women living today. Unique to this biographical telling, Colbert contextualizes Michelle Obama's life story within larger movements in African American history: slavery, freedom, the Reconstruction era, the Civil Rights movement, and finally, the 21st century.

Activities accompanying this book included conducting research on Ivy League (e.g., Yale, Princeton) and Historically Black Colleges or Universities (e.g., Claflin, Allen, Benedict), including a look at male/female ratios, majors offered, and cost of attendance; researching the Urban Prep Academy and debating whether or not integration or isolation in schools is better; and describing dream jobs and what it will take to land one.

What Do Freedom Schools Scholars Say About the Books?

Four months after the Freedom Schools program ended, we interviewed DaShaun and Brittany (pseudonyms), brother-and-sister Level III scholars who participated in the 2010 Freedom Schools program in Knoxville, Tennessee. Even though it had been some time since DaShaun and Brittany had participated in the program, they were excited to talk about the books and could recall specific details and provide thorough summaries about each book. When asked how they could remember so much about the books, DaShaun and Brittany explained that they had continued to read the books over and over again since the program ended. When asked why they read the books again and again, Brittany responded, "They're that good," and explained that she had read *Begging for Change* and *Copper Sun* "at least 2–3 times" and "[shared] and [talked] about the books with her friends" (personal communication, October 26, 2010). Both DaShaun and Brittany looked for the books in their school library. Brittany stated that she also looks for other books by the authors Sharon G. Flake, Sharon Draper, and Shelia P. Moses. When we asked DaShaun and Brittany if they would have known about these young adult novels or authors if they had not participated in Freedom Schools, both responded, "No," and said that they had never heard of these authors before the summer program.

DaShaun and Brittany went on to describe several reasons why they liked the young adult novels they read during Freedom Schools. Brittany said, "They're contemporary, they're real. People are like this out in the world." DaShaun explained he liked books that showed "violence, but with solutions." He revealed that he liked a "hopeful ending." Brittany added that, "[The characters in these books] think that maybe because their dad is a drug addict they may end up like that in their life. But you see that they don't have to end up like that." DaShaun and Brittany also said that they felt the books "don't try to tell you how to live your life, but they are examples. They are suggestions." Brittany elaborated, "If you want to change your life, you have to change it yourself, don't let someone else do it for you. You have the power to do that" (personal communication, October 26, 2010).

When asked to pick a favorite book from that summer's reading, Brittany said she could not pick just one. DaShaun said it would be between Sharon Draper's *Copper Sun* and Sharon G. Flake's *Bang!*, which were probably the two most intense books of the six. DaShaun stated, "These set you up for more mature books."

Brittany was currently re-reading *Copper Sun* for the third time. Both Brittany and DaShaun liked *Copper Sun* because, as DaShaun said, "It relates to our heritage," and Brittany said, "It's Africa." They both indicated that they had read books about their heritage before, but DaShaun said, "In school, they just give you the social studies book," and Brittany explained, "It's like 'just read it.' It's no details, it's like 'slavery was blah, blah, blah.'" DaShaun added, "It will show you like 17 peoples' points of views in the textbook, but in [*Copper Sun*], you get one person's point of view and you get to see how they felt and how they reacted to the situations they were in."

When we asked if they thought *Copper Sun* was too intense or hard to read in some places (Amari is raped repeatedly in the book) and told them that some teachers may not think the book is appropriate for middle school readers, Brittany declared, "We're mature enough to handle it. And all the details let the people know about what really happened. Some books don't tell you the truth . . . you gotta let the people know" (personal communication, October 26, 2010).

DaShaun liked what he called the “realistic fiction” books, but he did not like the nonfictional works (*Claudette Colvin*; *Michelle Obama*) as much, because he said that he “couldn’t relate to these in any way.” DaShaun believed that they were like “social studies books, not like stories.” DaShaun further stated that “I’m not saying they weren’t good, I’m just saying they didn’t hook me in like the others did.” Brittany said she was inspired by Claudette Colvin’s story about a teenager who stood up for justice, and she liked reading about how Michelle Obama met her future husband.

We think it is safe to say these novels made quite an impact on DaShaun and Brittany, who described intense reactions and responses to the books. That DaShaun and Brittany revisit these books when they don’t have to, and look to these books as both mirrors and windows reflective of their own and others’ lives reinforces the importance of putting multicultural young adult literature in young people’s hands.

We ended the interview with questions about DaShaun’s and Brittany’s experiences as readers in school. Both DaShaun and Brittany are 8th graders in Honors reading classes at their urban middle school. DaShaun and Brittany indicated that they predominantly read short stories out of the textbook (e.g., “Raymond’s Run” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”) and not novels in class. They said that they do not read books in school like they read at Freedom Schools. When asked if DaShaun and Brittany felt that their teachers really knew them as readers, both replied “No.” Brittany explained that if her teachers really knew her and what she liked to read, mystery books and romance/drama books would be available in class for independent reading. DaShaun expressed that many of his teachers didn’t know he loved comic books and graphic novels. He stated that he was expected to read every day, but all he was able to do with his reading was write in his journal about it. He said that the teacher collected his journals and gave him grades for doing the writing. Both he and Brittany acknowledged that they wanted opportunities to talk about what they read, like they had in Freedom Schools, instead of always writing about what they read.

Conclusion: Stemming the Tide of “Readicide”

As we have described in this article, the Freedom Schools’ summer program serves as a necessary counter-story to negative discourses about minority adolescent readers, and as research has shown, the program motivates reading engagement and achievement. Therefore, we think the program also serves as a resistant force to what California award-winning teacher and author Kelly Gallagher (2009) deems “readicide,” an overemphasis on testing in public schools that is killing students’ love and joy of reading. Much research supports the fact that reading engagement and motivation increase when students get to choose what they read and, when given opportunities to choose, teens choose to read young adult literature over more canonical works (Cole, 2008).

Unfortunately, however, less and less time in English classes is devoted to the instruction of whole novels; even less time is focused on instruction around multicultural young adult literature or independent reading time. As former IRA president Richard Allington (2005) suggests, school reading programs designed to raise test scores actually limit the volume of in-school reading, even though a potent relationship exists between volume of reading and reading achievement. Allington further contends that what really matters in raising reading achievement is giving kids time to read a lot, giving kids books they can read, and helping kids learn to read fluently (which depends on reading volume and access to books).

In school, adolescents learn to associate reading with passing a test. Layer the stress of taking high-stakes tests with the invisibility and lack of affirmation of the worldviews of diverse adolescents in typical classroom content, and it becomes clearer why reading disengagement among youth might ensue. This does not mean adolescents become nonreaders or do not want to read: this means they become “dormant” readers or “underground” readers (Miller, 2009), who must rely on programs like Freedom Schools to affirm their reading identities.

We wish it did not have to be this way: We wish we did not need programs like Freedom Schools, be-

cause all young people are being affirmed as capable readers in public schools, and multiple purposes for reading are celebrated in school curricula. Sadly, this is not the case, especially in public schools that struggle to meet federally mandated accountability demands. Thus, we second the emotion Brittany expressed at the end of our interview, “Thank goodness for Freedom Schools!”

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Outside the Classroom:

Celebrating YA Lit at the English Festival

In the 1976 Coda to her seminal work *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt characterizes effective literature study with a metaphor:

In the teaching of literature, then, we are basically helping our students to learn to perform in response to a text. In this respect we are perhaps closer to the voice teacher, even the swimming coach, than we are to the teacher of history or botany. The reader performs the poem or the novel, as the violinist performs the sonata. But the instrument on which the reader plays, and from which he evokes the work, is—himself. (p. 279)

I've often thought of that performance metaphor during my 30-plus-year love affair with a program sponsored by my university, the Youngstown English Festival. The English Festival is a program to encourage and reward reading and writing among young people in grades 7 through 12, and it uses young adult literature as an anchor for the experience. That the Festival emerged from a university English department (that "ivory tower" of literary history and criticism) is remarkable. That it has survived, even thrived, for more than three decades defies all logic, for it is a profoundly challenging program to pull off each year, requiring thousands of dollars in grants and contributions, hundreds of volunteers, and untold hours of planning and effort from an organizing committee that, to put it bluntly, has no common sense about a proper investment of time and energy. By all measures, the Festival should have been buried by its own demands decades ago. That it hasn't speaks to the opportunities it presents for young readers and writers, and for the intangible rewards it provides for everyone involved in the experience—young readers,

area teachers, university professors, and the community itself.

This issue of *The ALAN Review* is shaped by the theme "What Does YA Literature Look Like in Spaces Other than the Classroom?" The YSU English Festival provides a case study answer to that question.

The YSU Festival

What is this program called the English Festival? Founded in 1978, the Youngstown State English Festival is an annual celebration of reading and writing. Students are invited to the Festival in the fall through their schools (approximately 175 middle and high schools in our region of Northeast Ohio and Western Pennsylvania participate each year); to attend, they must read seven books on a preapproved booklist. While there is no stipulation that these titles be YA, most of them are. The book selection policy reveals the program's intentions:

The aims are to encourage students to read more, thereby improving all of their communication skills; to enhance their interest and enjoyment in reading, thereby building pleasurable and positive associations with reading as an activity; to indicate to students that "literature" is not merely an academic course but can and should be an integral part of their lives; to introduce students to authors and works of sufficient caliber to lead students to a recognition of and respect for writing of high quality; and to develop a lifelong taste for works of superior literary quality. (*Youngstown State University English Festival Information Brochure*, p. 22)

Once enrolled through their schools, students spend the fall and early winter reading the titles on the Festival list. As spring approaches, teachers do an

informal check (through writing assignments, quizzes, or conversations) to verify that students have read the Festival books and are prepared for the event. This



The Shuttlesworth children

relatively simple step is important for several reasons. First, it sends a message to students that the English Festival is asking something from them. This is not a free day from school but rather an alternative educational experience, and for it to be successful, students must have prepared themselves through reading. Second, because the English Festival is an immensely successful program, we have had to limit the number of students attending from each school. The message for students is that Festival participation is a privilege, and if they do not read to prepare themselves, there are other students ready to take their place who are prepared.

Students are also invited to participate in pre-Festival competitions. These include the Candace Gay Memorial Essay Contest, a writing competition that invites response to the books; an art contest in which students create original works that would be suitable for cover or promotional art for a book on the reading list; and the Jeremy Salvner Memorial Music Contest, in which students compose original music inspired by a character or event in one of the stories.

The English Festival itself occurs in April. Because of its scale, it takes three consecutive days to complete, with nearly 3,000 attendees annually. Senior high students (grades 10–12) attend on Wednesday, and different groups of junior high/middle school students (grades 7–9) attend on Thursday and Friday. Despite public claims that student interest in reading and academics drops off precipitously in middle

school, we reserve two full days for these students because response is so great at this level. Hundreds of students are turned away each year, the largest portion of them in grades 7 through 9.

The English Festival itself is a juggernaut. Students arrive at our student center around nine, are welcomed to campus, and are quickly sent off to their first sessions. The day is divided into five periods and, through a tracking system, students attend a variety of workshops, discussions, and competitions. These include impromptu writing contests (in which they respond to topics about the Festival books); writing game competitions (in which they collaborate with students from other schools on fanciful writing tasks); poetry and prose workshops; “renga riot” poetry-writing contests; “not-so-trivial-pursuit” contests, challenging students to recall essential details from the books; “insight” sessions, which make use of university faculty or community volunteers to lead book discussions; journalism workshops, during which student journalists interview authors or others associated with book topics; writing labs, which are noncompetitive collaborative writing workshops used to enhance students’ awareness of the elements and pleasures of writing successfully; presentations featuring the winning entries in the art and music competitions; talks by young adult literature experts or librarians about recommended YA authors and titles; presentations by university faculty from other disciplines whose expertise relates to book topics (e.g., biology faculty to explicate the science in John Fleischman’s *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science* [2002] or art faculty to provide additional context for Sandra Jordan and Jan Greenberg’s *Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist* [2001]); and, finally (and very important), presentations by at least one young adult author whose books are represented on the reading list.

We’ve been bringing YA authors to campus for 30 years, and we are at the point where the Festival would probably not survive without them, so vital are they to students’ expectations. As anyone who has sponsored an “author day” at school can attest, most young readers normally see writers as removed from them (and often, sadly, dead). Allowing students to hear a writer talk about how a book is crafted—particularly a book that they have read—increases their understanding of what writing is, how stories are

made, and what authors draw upon as the basis for their books. Over the years, we've hosted a stellar cast of YA authors, including Richard Peck, M. E. Kerr, Robert Cormier, Chris Crutcher, Naomi Shihab Nye, Bruce Brooks, Sue Ellen Bridges, Joan Bauer, Jacqueline Woodson, Christopher Paul Curtis, Paul Zindel, Will Hobbs, William Sleator, Cynthia Voigt, Joseph Bruchac, Graham Salisbury, Paul Janeczko, Suzanne Fisher Staples, Harry Mazer, Norma Fox Mazer, Sharon Dennis Wyeth, Virginia Euwer Wolff, and Jennifer Armstrong. Each year, we sponsor at least one author, and in some special anniversary years, we've sponsored as many as five. (For a complete list of authors and further information about the English Festival, visit its website: www.ysuenglishfestival.org.)

We bring other guests to campus, also, to enrich the reading/writing experience for students. These include academics (e.g., Alleen Pace Nilsen, Ken Donelson, Jim Blasingame), librarians (e.g., Nancy Pearl), and musicians and performers (e.g., Poetry Alive! and blues guitarist Guy Davis). Twice we've hosted the children of Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, whose childhood involvement in the Civil Rights Movement was featured in Ellen Levine's *Freedom's Children* (1993). In a sense, this was like having characters from a book present, and students were moved by their stories of the equal rights struggle, as well as by their passion and decency.

Each Festival day ends in an awards ceremony in which student readers and writers are recognized for their accomplishments. It has been a longstanding intention of the Festival to recognize many students at this event, not just a select few. So, for example, there are 30 honorable mention prizes in the impromptu writing contest and multiple teams of students who win in writing games. In all, more than 200 students march to the stage each Festival afternoon to receive books, merchandise, and cash awards that total more than \$20,000 annually. And the students in the audience? They cross their fingers for their names to be called, and they cheer, stomp, do the wave, and otherwise go a little nuts each time someone from their school comes forward. Robert Cormier, who visited the Festival twice, likened the awards ceremony to a pep rally and was ecstatic to see young readers and writers, instead of athletes, being acclaimed by their peers for their accomplishments.

So that's a snapshot of the Youngtown English Festival, but it's not yet a full answer to the question, "What does YA literature look like in spaces other than the classroom?" For that, a bit more context is needed.

The Pleasure of Reading outside of the Classroom

In his provocative book about young people and reading, *Better than Life* (1999), Daniel Pennac tells the story of a young boy who, first captured by the magic,

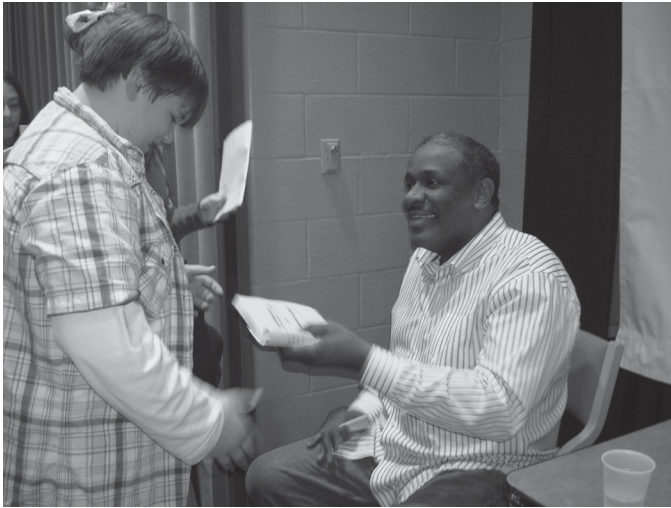


Joan Bauer at the festival in 2004

the "alchemy" of reading, somehow loses that magic, that pleasure, as he proceeds to school and into adolescence. Pennac is an equal-opportunity scold about how this happens, placing responsibility for the loss of reading joy and competence upon parents, schools, and a culture of immediate, nonprint fixations. "How did books become objects?" he asks. "A curious metamorphosis: magic working backwards toward banality" (p. 58). Referring to parents' roles in the reading development of this young person, he notes, "First, we were his storyteller. Later, we became his accountant" (p. 59).

In discussing the role of schools in this transformation of a young, curious reader into a nonreader, Pennac notes what often happens when teachers replace the experience of reading itself with external expectations about reading:

Those of us who read and say we want to spread the love of reading, much of the time we'd rather be commentators, interpreters, analysts, critics, biographers, exegetes



Christopher Paul Curtis in 2008

of works silenced by our pious respect for their greatness. Imprisoned in the fortress of our expertise, the language of books is replaced by our own language. Instead of letting the intelligence of stories speak through us, we turn to our own intelligence and talk *for* the stories. We have stopped being the messengers of literature, and turned into the fervent guardians of a temple whose miracles we praise with the very words that close its doors. You must read! You must read! (p. 112).

Let me categorically say at this point that, whatever Pennac's point here, mine is not to blatantly indict teachers as a primary cause of students' loss of reading pleasure. Certainly some understand and are committed to transferring the love of reading more than others, but regardless of dedication and passion, these teachers are like Sisyphus, endlessly rolling the reading boulder up the hill and having it rumble back down, often through no fault of their own.

In another essay about literature teaching in schools, I've observed what many others have noted long before me—that the very structures within schools, even their very goals, inflict this damage on the love of reading:

“One of the problems that plague many literature classes is that of authority, in which students see themselves as subservient to, and controlled by, both the text being read and the teacher who chooses the text and directs the reading” (Salvner, 2000, p. 94).

Grades do this, and so do state assessments and accountability measures that reduce literature to a process of reading for facts (e.g., Who is Dimmes-

dale in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*?), for inference (e.g., What is the scarlet letter symbolic of?), even for cultural knowledge (e.g., What does *The Scarlet Letter* reveal about Puritanism?).

Another impediment to reading pleasure can sometimes be the literature itself. In other words, literary works sometimes carry their own authority. Consider the weight of the label “classic” upon reading. The implication of the title is that others have ascribed greatness to the work, have labeled it as “timeless” or “important” or “profound.” Reading under those circumstances is pressured by expectation, responsibility, and accountability not only to the text, but also to the traditions of literature.

There is no escaping this authority on some level. Virginia Monseau alludes to it in her article on student response, “Seeing Ourselves in the Mirror: Students and Teachers as a Community of Readers” (2000), in which she makes use of Walker Gibson's distinction between the “real” reader engaging a text and a “mock” reader “whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language” (p. 79). All readers, in other words, are compelled to accept constraints set up by the author of the work. All readers are invited into a story through an interesting narrator, a compelling situation, and carefully chosen language; those who accept the invitation have access to the rewards of the experience, while those who cannot, or will not, engage the experience will conclude that the book is “not for them” or, to put it more crassly, is “not a good book.” This is another characterization of authority. A book sets up premises, expectations, and demands for a reader; the reader chooses to play along, or not.

Enter young adult literature and a lesson of the English Festival. One of our Festival aims is “to help students become lifelong readers,” and such development hangs partly on employing a collection of works that “invite a student in”—that, in other words, allow a student with authority over, or experience with, what it means to be young, to bring that experience to his or her reading and become a “mock reader” who believes in, and thus accepts, the premises of the book.

One of the activities of the English Festival is an “Insight Session,” which is really nothing more than some form of literature discussion. Insights may not be appreciably different from what teachers attempt

day after day in their classrooms, but we've been impressed by how many teachers conducting these sessions at the Festival report that something here seems different, that Festival sessions are engaging, lively, boisterous even, while their correlates in schools are appreciably less so.

One reason has already been stated—that the Festival is not adorned or weighted with the authority of grades, homework, coercion. Students come willingly to our event, and they enter our sessions with a mindset more exploratory and adventurous than obedient and cautious.

Battle for the Books

But the other factor has to be the works themselves. As anyone knows who has watched young readers read YA books, adolescents feel a confidence about reading these works, not only because they may be streamlined and less adorned with plot complexities and an overabundance of characters, but also because these books are, in some way, about themselves. These are their stories, and while they may not have experienced everything in a particular book, they do understand the adolescent questioning (and sometimes angst) that drives the plot forward. They have authority over YA books because they understand their premises.

For more than 30 years, we've observed young people flood to our English Festival with excitement and anticipation, and we've kept the Festival alive only because we can't possibly imagine cutting off that energy if students keep bringing it. This is the excitement over reading and writing that sustains all teachers, and it has brought us closer to those who toil in the classrooms within our region.

The YSU English Festival has also gotten us in trouble on occasion, for the same reason that teachers who use lively and honest books also get into trouble—censorship. Over the years, some parents, teachers, and school administrators have occasionally objected to books on our reading list that contain offensive language, references to sex, controversial topics, and challenges to authority. One epic battle, in 1997, was over our inclusion of the book *Letters from the Inside* (1991) by John Marsden; that battle mobilized large parts of the community, including the Catholic Diocese of Youngstown, radio talk hosts, lo-

cal newspapers, and many school officials. (For a full report on that battle, see my 1998 article "A War of Words: Lessons from a Censorship Case.")

We don't look for controversy by deliberately choosing books that will provoke an angry response, but, in a sense, the English Festival is a good place for addressing these censorship issues that swirl around young adult literature. Because ours is a volunteer activity and no students are required to attend, parents or young people may simply opt out of the event in a particular year if a selected book is unsettling to them. (This has not stopped objections, however. Some parents complain that their children are being deprived of this wonderful experience because we are using books they don't like, but we can address those concerns much more easily than can a teacher who is requiring a book for a course unit or lesson.)



Students engaged in a writing activity

During the *Letters from the Inside* controversy, we turned the battle over this book toward a positive end. At the Festival, we discussed with students what censorship is and what some see as "offensive" subject matter in books. We also sponsored public sessions in which we invited teachers, librarians, and community members to engage the same questions. In that way, we were contributing to an essential community conversation—about young adult books and their content, about literature in general, about how stories might challenge readers, and about what "truth" is in literature. (I've frequently heard from complaining administrators or parents, "With all the good books out there, why did you have to choose that one?"—a

perfect opening for conversation about what “good” literature is and what we expect stories to do.)

Conclusion

Young adult literature has an important role to play in the English classroom, providing as it does compelling reading experiences that young people engage in and respond to. YA lit belongs *outside* the classroom also, however, and the YSU English Festival offers one test case of its potential there. Establishing an environment where reading and writing are celebrated rather than tested fulfills the promise for literature that Louise Rosenblatt characterized thus:

The literary work is not primarily a document in the history of language or society. It is not simply a mirror of, or a report on, life. It is not a homily setting forth moral or philosophic or religious precepts. As a work of art, it offers a special kind of experience. It is a mode of living. The poem, the play, the story, is thus an extension, an amplification, of life itself. The reader's primary purpose is to add this kind of experience to the other kinds of desirable experience that life may offer. (p. 278)

The YSU English Festival recreates this experiential dynamic for literature, and it places YA lit at center stage in this enterprise. Teachers in area schools, we know, understand the transformative value of literature as exploration, but we also understand the constraints placed upon schools that distort authentic interactions with books. Those of us allied with the English Festival see ourselves as partnered with teachers in the effort to share the gift of reading with young people. At the Festival, individual readers engage texts personally and express their views in discussion sessions, writing, art, and music. At the Festival, young readers form communities to collaborate in response

to books, discovering the pleasure of a shared literary experience. At the Festival, YA books stand at the center, and students, authors, teachers, university faculty, and community members gather around them and applaud.

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Magical Worlds, Real Encounters:

Race and Magical Realism in Young Adult Fiction

One of the defining features of magical realism is the way it resonates with the postmodern concern with peripheries and margins. The oxymoron that yokes together two antithetical realms—that of the magical and the real—explores the liminal zone between the two categories, a zone where boundaries are blurred, where the two distinct currents mix and flow into each other. Since it questions the tenets of realism, magical realism emerges as

a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. (Zamora and Faris, 1995, p. 5-6)

The present study focuses on the way some young adult narratives appropriate the magical realist mode of storytelling to explore cross-racial encounters.

In the context of young adult fiction, a magic realist text can be seen as an epitome of a space that lies outside the institutional frameworks that guide and frame processes like growth, education, and training, a place from where engrained modes of thinking can be explored and challenged. It emerges as a narrative mode suited to the experience of adolescence in the Western culture. Adolescence itself can be seen as the liminal space of magical realism. An adolescent can be seen as an “other,” an outsider to the categories of child and adult, embodying the gap between the two states of being in the chronology of growth. Even as an adolescent inevitably grows up to become a part of his/her cultural milieu, the narratives of adolescent

fiction are preoccupied with questioning and destabilizing the conventions and establishments of the adult world. While the main function of adolescent literature is socialization and acculturation, subversion and transgression are equally integral elements.

According to Latham, magical realism offers a narrative mode through which adolescent literature can achieve the goal of “socialization through subversion” (Latham, 2007, p. 60). This becomes even more prominent in the narratives centering on racial encounters. Focusing on Louis Sachar’s *Holes* (1998) and Isabel Allende’s *City of the Beasts* (2002), I argue that the magical realist zone of adolescence destabilizes the established attitudes and narratives that organize racist discourses, hence opening space for renegotiation, revision, and redressing of official history of racial encounters.

In these two texts, as the magical elements destabilize and often take over the realistic elements, they also deconstruct the official narratives of the adult world, its history, its knowledge systems, all of which are imbricated with racist ideologies. *Holes* and *City of the Beasts* focus on the coming-of-age of young American boys as they encounter the racial “others.” The texts use a variety of folkloric traditions and fantasy motifs like the American tall tale, heroic quest, ceremonial initiation rites, and others, along with the conventions of literary realism. The encounters, set in places that lie outside the borders of the protagonists’ cocooned worlds—a juvenile delinquent camp in Sachar’s text and the Amazonian forest in Allende’s—are as real as they are magical. The adolescents are

located within a network of politics—a web of social, historical, and cultural relationships through which they negotiate their encounters with other races, often deconstructing the official accounts in the process. This leads to the formation of an identity that is mobile, fluid, flexible, and enriched by the dangerous encounters between the self and the other.

Adolescent Zone of Magical Real

Faris lays out the defining features of magical realism thus:

First, the text contains an “irreducible element” of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile the two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity. (Faris, 2004, p. 7)

Magical realism emerges as a dialogue between the centre and the margins, the dominant and the repressed.

The “irreducible element” of magic forays into the realistic descriptions of the text, disturbing the established modes of seeing and hinting at alternative or parallel realities. Through a complex interweaving of the magical elements—mythical, religious, folkloric—along with the mimetic tradition of liter-

ary realism, magical realism emerges as a dialogue between the centre and the margins, the dominant and the repressed.

Similar cultural negotiation underwrites adolescent fiction. Just as the magical is rooted in the real, individual coming-of-age stories are told in conjunction with the discourses that construct, validate, and strengthen cultural institutions and situate an individual within them. An individual’s negotiations with cultural discourses and that person’s dialogue with the social institutions in which she or he tries to find a place (in other words, socialization and acculturation) are the elements that define young adult literature. According to McCallum (1999), in adolescent fiction, “preoccupation with personal maturation . . . is commonly articulated in conjunction with a perceived

need for children to overcome solipsism and develop intersubjective concepts of personal identity within this world and in relation to others” (p. 7). Young adult literature emerges as a volatile field of engagement with institutional politics and social construction. Adolescents are located firmly within in their cultural networks, their identities overdetermined by historical, social, and political discourses.

At the same time, magical realism offers a literary mode suited to the interrogations and subversions of YA literature. Magical realism or the intrusion of the magical in realistic settings “serves to socialize the young adult reader by portraying an alternative—and perhaps subversive—view of society” (Latham, 2007, p. 62). Hence, in its dialogic mode, as well as in its preoccupation with questions of identity, especially with respect to institutional authorities, magical realism mirrors the concerns of adolescent literature, “the very determined way that YA novels tend to interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between the society and the individual . . .” (Trites, 2000, p. 20).

Because it is subversive in nature, destabilizing the dominant narratives and exploring alternate realities, magical realism is often appropriated by texts “written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered” (Bowers, 2004, p.68). Hence, magical realism is often associated with the narratives of particular ethnic or national groups that have been dispossessed or disenfranchised.¹ Adolescents constitute a similar disempowered group that exists within the cultural boundaries. The age group is defined as much in terms of growth and development as in terms of immaturity, deviance, and delinquency. Pointing out the extraordinariness and surprise that magic arouses in realistic settings, Faris highlights the existential nature of its presence that insists, “‘I Eksist.’ ‘I stick out’: . . . the magic in these texts refuses to be entirely assimilated into their realism; it does not brutally shock but neither does it melt away, so that it is like a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism” (2004, p. 8–9). Similar to “otherness,” “EKsisting” characterizes the adolescent impulse of exploration, adventure, and testing boundaries—impulses that cultural institutions attempt to reign in by the discourses of acculturation, education, pathology, thereby fixing and holding adolescents in the place that society has ordained for them.

Hence, rebellion and angst are intricately tied up with an adolescent's social and cultural backdrop against which growth happens. Racial encounters are one of the recurring themes, along with encounters of gender and class. Studying the theme of racism in children's literature, Leonard points out that "the ways in which race is represented in the fantastic provide a measure of the concern the culture has for matters relating to race" (1997, p. 3). Racial attitudes are integral to the central preoccupation of the genre—formation of an individual's identity through personal interaction with others. Growth occurs through such intersubjective interactions between an individual and the members of his or her social group, as well as with the members of other groups. In such trajectory of growth, racism emerges as one of the prominent institutions as it influences identity politics by dictating intersubjective interactions—how one interacts with people of other racial groups.

Studying the tradition of adolescent literature in America or "the adolescent reform novel," Trites (2007) insists that in these novels, social critique serves as an extension of the narrative of individual growth (p. ix). By depicting an ethical individual growing up in a less ethical society, these narratives undercut the dominant values and traditions of the adult world. Hence, in adolescent novels, the reformist impulse seeks confrontation rather than conformity. The idea of growth embodies this cultural confrontation; it highlights the hypocrisy of the adult world and the potential of the adolescent protagonist to reform and revise the biased attitudes. Citing novels that center on adolescent protagonists—from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* published in the nineteenth century to recent books like Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974/ 2004) and M. T Anderson's *Feed* (2002)—Trites argues that as the growth of the protagonist unsettles various dominant attitudes, it also implies the need for society to develop a more tolerant and liberal outlook. An adolescent's growth thereby indicates the need for social growth.

This engagement with collective aspects of a culture, therefore, is another common link between adolescence and magical realism. Cultural narratives like myths, legends, and other popular traditions of storytelling interlace with the narrative of individual growth. Narrating adolescent subversions and trans-

gressions, they unsettle the unidirectional pattern of growth as well as the linearity of official accounts. Menton (1982) insists that the element of magic in magical realism can be attributed to the collective relatedness rather than to individual dreams. The collective narratives—magical ones that come from the oral and folk traditions and "real" ones that come from the social, legal, and political systems—both form an integral and crucial part of the magical realism in adolescent fiction.

At the beginning of his stay, Stanley naively believes that there is no racial tension among them.

Sachar's Holes: Debts of Past

Each novel under discussion juxtaposes these collective, cultural accounts—official histories and unofficial legends and myths—in order to weave complex coming-of-age narratives. Adolescent protagonists are the central players in these racial encounters; events of the past cast a shadow on their present until the two are reconciled, until the adolescent protagonists assume the responsibility of the past wrongs before they take up the responsibility of the future, because the two are intricately linked.

Sachar's *Holes* begins with Stanley Yelnats's conviction for a crime he did not commit. Subsequently, he is sent to Camp Green Lake, a place for juvenile delinquents in Texas. At Camp Green Lake, bad boys are taught to be good citizens under the eye of the State authorities, who seem to believe that "If you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy" (Sachar, 1998, p. 5). Stanley is assigned to Group D in the Camp, which consists of six other boys, all from different communities mirroring the multicultural American society. At the beginning of his stay, Stanley naively believes that there is no racial tension among them.

Stanley was thankful that there were no racial problems. X-Ray, Armpit, and Zero were black. He, Squid, and Zigzag were white. Magnet was Hispanic. On the lake they were all the same reddish brown color—the color of dirt. (Sachar, 1998, p. 84)

However, as Coats (2004) points out, Stanley is living in denial—the "white denial of the privilege

that comes from being a white male” (p. 133). At the beginning, it is difficult to associate any kind of privileged position with Stanley. Even in the world outside the Camp, Stanley is a misfit—he is overweight, bullied by teachers and children much smaller than he, and he belongs to a family that “always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Sachar, 1998, p. 8).

While the legal system finds Stanley guilty of stealing shoes belonging to a well-known baseball player, for Stanley, it is the bad luck that his family has suffered ever since his “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather” Elya Yelnats stole a pig from a one-legged Gypsy, who put a curse on him

and his descendents. Years ago, in Latvia, Elya Yelnats had sought Madame Zeroni’s help to win over a pretty but empty-headed village girl, Myra, and her miserly father. Madame Zeroni gave him a pig, instructing him to carry it to the mountain top every day and sing a lullaby while the pig drank water from the spring. At the end of the year,

when Elya was strong and the pig was fat enough to please Myra’s father, Madame Zeroni asked Elya to carry her to the spring and sing her a lullaby while she drank from it. Elya does not keep his promise—not because he never meant to, but because he discovers that Myra does not love him, and, brokenhearted, he sails off to America. According to Coats (2004), “in thinking only of himself and in exercising the privilege of the white male to travel and make his way in the world, he has failed in his responsibility to the Other” (p. 133). This failure haunts the generations of Yelnats until the debt from the past is repaid.

Though Stanley does not have any part to play in this ancient family history, he is still a part of the cultural and social setup that privileges a white boy over others. Though he has been a misfit outside, in the Camp, this privileged position as a white boy surfaces. Zero, a fellow prisoner and a black boy, agrees to dig his hole if Stanley agrees to teach him to read and write. In Group D, Zero’s identity is what his name suggests—a cipher. Mr Pendanski, the counselor, says he is Zero “because there’s nothing inside his head”

(Sachar, 1998, p. 19). He is the fastest digger, but last in the queue to get water. Zero assumes the position of a black subject, deprived of racial privilege, hungering for its substitute—literacy. When Stanley agrees to teach Zero in exchange for digging, the other boys immediately resort to the racist subtext of the deal: “They’d say ‘Who died and made you king?’ or ‘It must be nice to have your own personal slave’ (Sachar, 1998, p. 117). Later, the other black boy, X-ray, quips:

“Same old story, ain’t it, Armpit?” X-ray had said. “The White boy sits around while the black boy does all the work. Ain’t that right, Caveman?” (Sachar, 1998, p. 117)

Hence, the inmates of the juvenile delinquent camp reenact the racist history of America at Camp Green Lake. The desert space of Camp Green Lake itself is a magical place that bears the burden of racial violence. It is a place where various narratives of racial conflicts converge. Zero’s and then Stanley’s escapes from the Camp set in motion the events that echo back to the violent history of an American small town—violence that shaped its geography by magically transforming a once-flourishing town into a desert camp. Over a hundred years ago, the townspeople, led by Trout Walker, killed a black man, Sam, the Onion man, for falling in love with the white schoolmistress, Miss Katherine Barlow. While the tragedy turned the schoolmistress into “the most feared [outlaw] in the West” (Sachar, 1998, p. 115), the town turned into a “dry, flat wasteland” (Sachar, 1998, p. 1) where not a single drop of rain fell for 110 years.

The irrational association of a natural calamity with a particularly violent racist incident and the assertion that Camp Green Lake continues to suffer for the murder of a black man constitute threads of the past that are magically tied up with Stanley’s present. If one of the tenets of magical realism is destabilizing the boundaries between life and death (Zamora & Faris, 1995, p. 6), this story qualifies, as it invokes the history of racial privilege in the Yelnats family as well as in Camp Green Lake and reveals the ghosts of the past that have to be put to rest.

A series of coincidences make it seem that fate has organized history into a narrative of debt and repayment. The outlaw, Kissin’ Kate Barlow, stole Stanley’s grandfather’s fortune and buried it in Camp Green Lake. Hence, Miss Walker, the warden, prob-

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ably a descendent of Trout Walker, makes the boys dig holes. Fugitives from the Camp, Zero and Stanley are saved in the desert by “Sploosh” (pickled peaches) that Katherine Barlow made for Sam more than 100 years ago. Stanley carries Zero up the mountain where he discovers Sam’s onion field and a spring. Back at the Camp, much to the Warden’s dismay, the box containing the fortune that Kate Barlow robbed carries Stanley’s name. Hence, Stanley gets his grandfather’s fortune, which he shares with Zero.

In *Holes*, rather than weakening the realist effect, these coincidences elevate the story to the domain of magical realism. Fate and providence actively guide the efforts of adolescent boys as they unconsciously settle the scores of the past. The linear narrative is destroyed in favor of a multilayered pattern: the smallest events of the present seem to be intricately tied up with those of the past and yield unexpected results. For instance, Zero turns out to be the great-great-grandson of Madame Zeroni. When Stanley carries him up the hill, nurses him back to health, and sings a lullaby while Zero drinks from the spring at the mountaintop, the Yelnats family finally seems to be free of the curse. Mascia (2001) insists that Sachar “has employed literary forms in which magic and the outrageous are expected so that unlikely events might happen and enjoy reader acceptance” (p. 55). These narrative forms not only justify the presence of magic in *Holes*, but also problematize the dominant narratives. Myths, legends, and personal narratives reveal the reality of racial violence, poverty, and systems of justice. Talking about the use of coincidences in children’s fiction, Pinsent (2007) remarks that coincidences “create a sense of a benevolent providence overseeing the exploits of the characters and ensuring that good comes out of evil” (p. 210). More important, in *Holes*, this benevolent providence reveals a system of social injustice even as it resolves the individual narrative of Stanley and Zero into a fairy-tale closure.

Rather than lulling the reader into expecting a happy resolution, the marvelous motifs from folklore and fairy tales complicate the process of coming-of-age in such a way that it is no longer a narrative of socialization, of an adolescent finding a place in society; it is an account of an adolescent finding himself in a society that is, or rather has been, unjust and unethical. Rather than depicting a process of coming-of-age where the adolescent members assume a place

ordained for them by society, the text uses magical realism to question the social and cultural ideologies of the world in which the adolescent protagonists find themselves. It throws its adolescent protagonists into a zone that questions the expected trajectory of growth, identity formation (as a social construct), boundaries between the self and the other, and the place of self vis-à-vis the other. Hence, the process of growth is deeply linked with the history and ideology of the community. The progress of Stanley’s growth is intricately and magically tied up with the history of racial violence in Camp Green Lake and also with the discourses of white privilege. Coming-of-age then means taking active part in the discourses that shape a community—an active engagement with the past is crucial for the future.

Becoming a part of a particular group means endorsing and assuming the responsibility of its role in history as well as in the present. Stanley Yelnats atones for the promise broken by his great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats, by saving Zero. The bonds formed by these magical encounters attempt to rewrite the racial tensions that characterize multicultural America. Rather than a narrative of socialization, *Holes* emerges to be a narrative of the revelation of racial tensions, of the violent communal history of contemporary multicultural America; at the same time, the magical motifs linked to the coming-of-age story assert the hope and promise of atonement possible in the present as well as the future.

City of the Beasts: Magic in the Heart of Darkness

Compared to Sachar’s complicated narrative structure, Allende’s story follows a seemingly simpler pattern—a group consisting of an anthropologist, a reporter, a photographer, and many others journey into the heart of the Amazonian forest in search of elusive, terrifying beasts that have been sighted in its dense parts. The expedition is funded by the magazine *International Geographic*. It follows the route taken by the early explorers who came to the continent looking for

Fate and providence actively guide the efforts of adolescent boys as they unconsciously settle the scores of the past.

the mythical El Dorado, the city of gold. The expedition into the unmapped territories of the third world echoes the colonial narratives of the last century. The plot structure reflects some great texts dealing with colonial politics and racism (for instance, the expedition itself reminds the reader of a similar journey in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*).

However, *City of the Beasts* also takes up a theme that is central to adolescent literature—an adolescent's journey from a dissatisfied, angst-ridden misfit to a mature member of society. The novel begins with an

upheaval in a suburban American household, the Cold family. The illness of the mother completely ruptures the safe and comfortable routine of the three Cold siblings. Alexander Cold is further upset when he discovers that his mother is suffering from cancer. As the mother goes in for a long and painful treat-

ment, the siblings go to live with various relatives. Alex is sent to live with his idiosyncratic grandmother Kate. Kate, a fearless and celebrated reporter, takes him along with her on the expedition to the dangerous rainforests of Amazon.

From the start, the expedition is surrounded with the discourses of scientific discovery, culture studies, medicine, and economics. Heading the expedition is Dr. Ludovic Leblanc, who is famous for his anthropological study of Indian tribes. Dr. Leblanc believes that the Indians "are brutal warriors, cruel and treacherous . . . they kill to prove their courage, and the more murders they commit, the higher their place in the hierarchy of the tribe" (Allende, 2002, p. 54). Armed with this knowledge about Indian tribes, Leblanc is heading the expedition funded by *International Geographic*. The magazine is interested in the accounts of rare, beastly creatures in the forest that could turn out to be a yet undiscovered species. Accompanying them is Dr. Omyra Torres, an employee of National Health Services, whose mission is to "protect the Indians. No foreigner may come in contact with them unless the necessary preventive measures are taken. They are extremely vulnerable to disease, especially those carried by Whites" (Allende, 2002, p. 76).

Alex and Nadia (the daughter of the guide) are unwanted members of the expedition. Dr. Leblanc insists, "This is not a kindergarten, it is a highly dangerous scientific expedition" (Allende, 2002, p. 114). Ironically, it is the children who are aware of the real motif behind the expedition. Before embarking on the trip, they discover the scheme of a wealthy local entrepreneur, Mauro Carias, to use the expedition as a cover-up for his plan to eliminate the Indians and thus gain complete and safe access to the farthest parts of the forest and its resources. These are the discourses—the missions, the plans, and the schemes of the adult members of the crew.

These discourses are challenged by magic that intrudes right from the beginning of the trip, especially in the lives of the young protagonists. As Alex discovers the unpleasant aspects of his culture—the greed of Mauro Carias, the violent nature of the military captain, Ariosto, and the megalomania of Dr. Leblanc, he and Nadia also discover their affinity to the "other," the ancient tribe of the Amazon forests called People of the Mist. As they distance themselves from the adult crew, Alex and Nadia grow closer to the People of the Mist until they finally become members of the tribe.

The process begins on the night before the expedition embarks; Alex has a mystical encounter with the caged jaguar of Mauro Carias. As the jaguar seems to fix its eyes on him, Alex enters a trance-like state:

. . . in a human voice, but one that seemed to issue from the depths of a cavern, it spoke his name: Alexander. And he answered in his own voice, but it, too, sounded cavernous: Jaguar. The cat and its counterpart repeated those words three times: Alexander, Jaguar; Alexander, Jaguar; Alexander, Jaguar, and then the sand of the plain became phosphorescent, and the sky turned black and the six moons began to whirl in their orbits and scatter like slow-moving comets. (Allende, 2002, p. 105)

Like magic in magical realism, which intrudes into an otherwise realistic environment, Alex's trance intrudes on the realistic setting of the narrative. Nadia explains that Alex could communicate with the jaguar because the jaguar is his totemic animal. Hence, though strange and magical in terms of the Western parameters of "reality," Alex's experience is easily explainable through the tribal world view. According to Nadia, Alex ranks among tribal greats, like warriors and shamans, since he found his totem without look-

The expedition is surrounded with the discourses of scientific discovery, culture studies, medicine, and economics.

ing (Allende, 2002, p. 108). He has a similar experience at the funeral of the tribal chief and also during his initiation rite. Therefore, like in Conrad's text, the journey through the Amazon forest is the journey to the inner most recesses of the self. However, the elements of magic and folk belief are integral to this journey. Alex discovers that like a jaguar, he is powerful, strong, and courageous. Gradually, as the narrative progresses, Nadia and Alex become members of the tribe.

As one of the most ancient and isolated tribes of the Amazon, the People of the Mist are marginalized and culturally disempowered. However, the members of the tribe possess magical skills—most prominently, that of becoming invisible. Whether it is stunning camouflage or magic is never clear. Because of this trait, the community has not been touched by the world outside the forest. It also turns out to be a powerful weapon, since their undetectable presence terrifies the crew. In their direct encounter with the crew, they become invisible and therefore difficult to target until they surrender themselves. One of the members of the tribe is Walimai, the shaman who is always accompanied by the ghost of his dead wife.

Hence, People of the Mist blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality and also between life and death. Once Alex crosses over his cultural boundaries, he is “born” again as a member of the tribe. Alex himself experiences a death-like state during the initiation ritual when he loses “his sense of time, space, and his own reality” and sinks “into a state of terror and profound fatigue” (Allende, 2002, p. 233). Remarking on the centrality of rituals in magical realist narrative, Faris (2004) notes that

the fact that the cultural pasts and beliefs present in magical realism often include encounters with the dead takes on additional significance. In a process analogous to initiation rites that enact ritual experiences of symbolic death and rebirth, readers and their societies strengthen themselves through narratives that bridge the worlds of living and eclipsed dying cultures. (p. 137)

Afterwards Alex recognizes that “he had left his childhood behind and that from that night on he would be able to look after himself” (Allende, 2002, p. 236). The journey through the heart of the mountain to the city of the beasts itself is like a heroic journey to the world of the dead. Alex and Nadia return from the City of Beasts capable of saving the tribe.

The acceptance of magic and the alternative world view of the Indians compel Alex to question the values of his own culture. His belief in the efficacy of medical science is jolted by Dr. Torres's betrayal, and when he visits his mother in a Texas hospital in a dream, he comes to accept his out-of-body experience. The climax of his quest occurs when he captures a few drops of precious water of health to take to his mother. Though he knows that “his hopes had no logical base,” he has learned to “open his mind to the mysteries” (Allende, 2002, p. 318). Hence, in this liminal space of the forest where magic holds sway, the official explanations prove inadequate. On the other hand, the totemic rituals of the tribe, the initiation rites, the dreams and trances—all antithetical to the forms of knowledge endorsed by Dr. Leblanc and Dr. Torres—seem to hold the answers. Alex

and Nadia go deeper and deeper into this mysterious world. Yet they are pragmatic enough to realize that the City of Beasts is not the mythical El Dorado, a city made of gold. It is mica or fool's gold. On the way to the city, Alex also realizes that what seem to be the precious stones on the walls could be worthless rocks.

Alex and Nadia also work out the symbiotic relationship between the tribe and the beasts—that the beasts record the history of the tribe in return for protection. They realize the extraordinary and unique nature of the relationship; it is something that their own culture is incapable of, as becomes evident in the violent encounters between the crew and the People of the Mist. They also discover that Dr. Torres, sent to protect the tribe, is actually the secret accomplice of Mauro Carias. Her real mission is to vaccinate the tribe with a deadly virus and ultimately wipe it out. While Nadia and Alex are able to stop Dr. Torres and Carias, Leblanc changes his view once he witnesses the bloodthirsty nature of his own crew members. The crew proves to be dishonest, heartless, and cruel, displaying all the faults that Dr. Leblanc had accused the natives of. In contrast, the People of the Mist offer a model of communal living, a civilization at peace with their habitat in the forest. The adolescent protago-

People of the Mist blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality and also between life and death.

nists, Alex and Nadia—the jaguar and the eagle to the People of the Mist—save the tribe from extinction.

Hence, in Allende's text, the process of identity formation occurs through active agency, through a careful negotiation between "us" and "them." Rather than a story of passive acculturation, Alex's coming-of-age, like Stanley Yelnats's, involves an active nego-

tiation with power structures and ideological networks. Alex matures as he recognizes the unpleasantness of the culture that he comes from and to which he is meant to return. In the end, Nadia and Alex are as much members of the ancient tribe as of the American expedition.

Alex's coming-of-age, like Stanley Yelnats's, involves an active negotiation with power structures and ideological networks.

As they decide to use diamonds they acquired on the trip to save the rainforests and the People of the Mist, they emerge as adults whose magical encounters have helped them to rise above greed, vanity, and cruelty, unlike the adult crew.

Conclusion

Adolescents, the "others" existing within our own cultural boundaries, discover affinities with racial others and their alternative world views; as the protagonists from these two novels recognize the shortcomings of the culture they come from, they discover another set of cultural and social practices that had hitherto been misunderstood and maligned.

Though it is doubtful whether it was digging the holes in Camp Green Lake that reformed "delinquent" boys, Stanley and Zero do change at a deep level during their stay at the Camp. At the beginning, Stanley is concerned only with his ill luck and the injustice done to him. He chooses to come to Camp Green Lake because he thinks it will be like a holiday Camp. However, after sharing the ordeals at the Camp and later, Stanley refuses to leave the prison camp until his friend and fellow sufferer, Zero, is also acquitted. In the epilogue, as family and friends gather to celebrate him, Zero is an inseparable part of this group. Similarly, at the beginning of *City of Beasts*, Alex thinks of himself as "a pretty normal person" (Allende, 2002,

p. 15). He is a typical teenager at home—a finicky eater, fond of sports and music, and in love with the prettiest girl in school. However, in the forest, as the vestiges of civilization are shed, he emerges as a responsible member of the expedition, a brave warrior, and protector of the People of the Mist.

In these racial encounters, the magical elements serve as a catalyst that undoes the boundaries between various racial groups. Fixed ideologies and official narratives are questioned, challenged, and modified. Faris (2004) insists that "rather than containing and ultimately dissolving impulses toward social disruption, or skirting political issues, magical realism often provides a narrative space that both models and questions them" (p. 160). In young adult fiction, it creates a space for active political engagement and negotiation for the adolescent protagonists and, therefore, the reader.

While the two novels considered above focus on racial encounters, several young adult writers have used magical realism to narrate coming-of-age stories vastly different from linear *bildungsromans* of growth and development. Writers like Francesca Lia Block have used the genre to approach volatile issues like gender and sexuality. Her Weetzie Bat books merge fairy tale elements with the ordinary as her young protagonists navigate through the world. David Almond's *Skellig* (1998) calls into question institutions of education and formal training, critiquing the adult society by presenting adolescent characters who display capacity for greater kindness and discernment. The element of magic in these stories complicates the linear process of growth that a culture envisages for its young.

And so we return to Latham's (2007) observation, "[I]t is this merging of magical and the real that serves to socialize the young adult reader by portraying an alternative—and perhaps subversive—view of society" (p. 62). In the liminal zone of magic, the unofficial myths, legends, and tales are as legitimate as the official discourses, making it possible for the adolescent protagonists to transcend the realities of their culture, to engage with alterities, and to mix with the Other. It offers them great power of renegotiating and settling debts of the past, preventing injustices, and, hence, influencing the course of the present as they move into the future.

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Note

¹ Magical Realism has been mostly associated with the post-colonial writers of Latin America. Carpentier (1995/1949) argues that rather than subverting or transcending reality, "fantastic" exists in the natural or human reality of Latin America due to its varied history, culture, geography, demography, and politics. Scholars like Chanady (1995), Flores (1955/1995), and others have also studied the literary expression in conjunction with the culture, politics, and history of Latin America.

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Supplementing Shakespeare: Why Young Adult Novelizations Belong in the Classroom

What if Ophelia had been more like the assertive Juliet? Might she have been able to save Hamlet and her nation from tragedy? “Yes,” answers the young adult novel *Dating Hamlet* (Fiedler, 2002). In it, an intelligent Ophelia uses a sleeping potion to fake her drowning death and, with Hamlet, escapes the corruption of Denmark for—where else?—Verona. Because it is so radical, *Dating Hamlet* may seem like an isolated instance of our ongoing engagement with the *what ifs* so tantalizingly presented by Shakespeare’s plays. But along with its sister texts *Romeo’s Ex* (Fiedler, 2006), *Saving Juliet* (Selfors, 2008), and *Ophelia* (Klein, 2006), these works represent an effort by contemporary young adult novelists to refigure the plays for young readers.

Because of their fiery and likable heroines, extended love scenes, and frequent and heated disagreements between the main characters and authority figures, these novels seem to perform as chick lit for young adult readers. Indeed, they have already gone “viral.” Yet, young readers are far more likely to encounter one of these novels in the public library or from a friend than in the classroom. Why? we wonder. We believe these novels belong not merely in libraries, but also in the secondary classroom. There, they become an ideal vehicle for teachers who seek to enable their students not only to identify with the plays’ characters, but to critique their themes.

Theoretical Concerns

There is, of course, a long history of revising Shakespeare in order to better introduce young readers to

the plays. Bowdler’s (1807) *The Family Shakespeare* and the Lambs’ (1807) *Tales from Shakespeare* excised or softened objectionable elements, while Cowden Clarke’s (1850) *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* imagined the childhood and adolescent years of the heroines for young Victorian women. In these early examples and in more recent efforts to adapt Shakespeare for young people—such as Nesbit’s (1897) *The Children’s Shakespeare* and (1907) *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare*, Burdett’s (1994–2002) *Shakespeare Can Be Fun* series, or Coville’s (1996–2007) *William Shakespeare* series—there seem to be two significant assumptions at work.

The first is the notion that Shakespeare’s plays are valuable and necessary reading. As Bottoms (2000) asserts, “So accepted has the idea become that Shakespeare should be taught to children that we hardly query why or where it arose” (p. 11). Garber’s (2008) point that the plays have “almost always seemed to coincide with the times in which they are read” (p. xii) suggests why many, as Dakin (2009) puts it, believe Shakespeare “transcends the isolation of the human being and the barriers of time, place, gender, race, and status that divide us” (p. xiv). This widely held belief in the universality of the plays explains not only older efforts like those of Bowdler, the Lambs, and Clarke to bring Shakespeare to young people, but also our continued reliance on Shakespeare in the secondary classroom and the recent growth in texts presenting Shakespeare to children. Yet the idea of Shakespeare as required reading fits awkwardly with the second most frequently made assumption about

his work: that it is somehow not suitable, as is, for young readers.

Many worry that the difficult and freighted Renaissance language of the plays may present comprehension problems. The plots, however, are generally believed to be readily accessible. Here is where Fiedler, Klein, and Selfors break with the approaches of other writers. Not only does each seek to incorporate something of the flavor of Renaissance English into her style, but each is also unwilling to leave the plots unaltered, as do most contemporary adaptors targeting young people. We believe that this new approach is especially suited to helping teachers demonstrate the potential for varied interpretations and critiques to their students.

Risks and Opportunities

Fiedler, Klein, and Selfors have identified the representations of women as sites necessitating radical change and have altered their own plots accordingly. When they do not wholly eliminate the tragic elements of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, these three writers dramatically soften them in order to offer happier endings for the heroines. Theirs is a project of resuscitation: the heroines are freed from their Renaissance plots and remade as characters whose personalities are both more accessible and appealing to contemporary readers. The weak Ophelia becomes self-aware and powerful, and Juliet becomes a young woman struggling to establish her personal identity.

Each of these four novels seeks to meet its young readers by adopting a single, female narrative voice. The generic shift from the dramatic form to the novel necessitates a corresponding turn of the writer's and reader's attention to a particular character, the narrator. Choosing a female narrator radically readjusts our attention to focus on the heroines or on the invented main characters, like Rosaline in *Romeo's Ex* and Mimi in *Saving Juliet*, who serve as their foils. The books thus invite the young female readers who clearly are, given their covers' prominent depiction of adolescent women, the target audience to reimagine *Hamlet* from Ophelia's perspective or to insert themselves into the story of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Yet this invitation can present dangers, as we have suggested. While combining our voices with Shakespeare's can lend us his authority, it can also

require us to deal with attitudes and assumptions that are less than comfortable for contemporary audiences. Shakespeare's female characters rarely conform to contemporary ideas of femininity. Characters like Ophelia and Juliet hardly do so, and Fiedler, Selfors, and Klein are thus at pains to present them as feminist characters. Where this proves difficult (especially in the case of Juliet), they intercede by creating an additional character whose beliefs and behaviors match those of the young adult reader.

Approaching the texts from a feminist standpoint can also run the risk of alienating young male readers who may be less attracted to stories of heroines discovering their girl-power. Yet the feminist approach offers teachers a valuable opportunity. The novels allow for attention to the real historical circumstances of women in the period. Admittedly, such questions may be more immediately appealing to young women than to young men. But for young men as well as women, the questions these texts raise can encourage discussion about just what our contemporary perspectives on gender roles are. They can thus aid teachers in helping young adult readers of both genders develop into critical consumers of Shakespeare and literature in general by questioning the assertions and assumptions of canonical texts rather than remaining passive receivers of them.

The relative ease (compared to finding time and resources for performance and video) of bringing a book into the classroom for independent or additional reading is one practical recommendation for including young adult novels like *Romeo's Ex*, *Saving Juliet*, *Dating Hamlet*, and *Ophelia* in lesson plans for *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet*. Another reason is theoretical. As Rosenblatt (1995) argues, young adult literature "offers the adolescent an opportunity to test his or her life experiences against the experiences offered in the text" (p. 42). It thus meets adolescents at what Carlsen (1980) identifies as a crucial developmental moment—the stage where concern with the self shifts to speculation about relationships with others and the wider world.

Because of this, young adult literature has recently made a place for itself in the secondary classroom, often as independent reading. Crowe (1998) reminds us that, "[T]hough alarmists may claim otherwise, young adult literature isn't meant to water down the core of literary study in secondary schools. In some

cases, young adult literature might serve as warm-up or bridges to classic works” (p. 121). Coville (2003) claims that his own adaptations are motivated by the belief that “if you tell your tale well enough . . . [readers] will follow it into new venues—venues into which they might not otherwise have ventured, such as Shakespeare in text or performance” (pp. 59–60). That is, young adult literature works as a bridge for young readers. In practice, teachers like Dakin (2009) note that their students enjoy the sense of “balance” that young adult literature as independent reading brings to the classroom; in the area of Shakespeare, particularly, “The students who chose to read the modern Shakespeare spin-offs consistently remarked that these books enhanced their comprehension and enjoyment of Shakespeare’s early modern text” (p. 212).

Dating Hamlet

Because Shakespeare has presented her as an adolescent, Ophelia seems ideally suited to young adult adaptations, yet her passive role in *Hamlet* makes her difficult to relate to for contemporary young women. Fiedler acknowledges as much by noting on *Dating Hamlet*’s book jacket that the novel began in response to college classes in which she realized that “female characters like Ophelia always got a raw deal, so she borrowed them from classic literature and gave them the guts to change their own destinies.” This claim itself might be profitably interrogated by teachers and their students, who might choose to ask whether Hamlet is also given a raw deal and left with little choice as to his destiny. Indeed, his more decisive actions in the novel might assist young male students in critiquing the interiority and passivity that even adult readers can find frustrating in the play.

The novel also raises questions that are relevant to young adults emerging into their sexuality. Lia and Hamlet are in love, and they try to decide whether or not to move into a sexual relationship. The two are presented as equal partners. Though Fiedler includes a version of the famous “nunnery” scene, Hamlet does not reject Lia in it, for she collaborates with him to trap Polonius and Claudius. When Hamlet launches into the play’s famous speech accusing Ophelia of dishonesty and unchastity, he winks at her (p. 78), and she is confident enough in their relationship to marvel at his acting ability and “how gracefully these false-

hoods fall from his lips” (p. 78).

The author herself seems to wink, doubling the play’s dramatic irony, when, by inserting the actual text of the play into her own text, she presents Hamlet and Lia as actors. By rewriting Shakespeare’s plot, she overwrites the play, reducing the misogynistic rhetoric Hamlet deploys against both Ophelia and his mother to a game. She reduces the play’s significant anxiety about women’s chastity to a joke between Hamlet and Ophelia, who, like the strong young woman she is, informs him that she is not amused: “I prefer we talk not on your notion of frailty and women, sir. In fact, I warn thee—go not there” (p. 57). Putting the pop culture catch-phrase “don’t go there” into the Renaissance heroine’s mouth, Fiedler makes her sharp and sassy. Presumably, she hopes her young readers see themselves this way.

Ophelia

While Fiedler’s Ophelia is exciting, appealing, and remarkably contemporary, Klein’s is a good contemporary post-feminist young woman constrained by her Renaissance period. And, as a creature of dual eras, her options are both limited and limitless. Klein’s *Ophelia* thus raises questions regarding the (im)possibility of self-determination, self-expression, and the exertion of power under a patriarchy, not to mention the anxiety of acting on or expressing sexual desire when that sexuality is socially and religiously regulated.

As a lady-in-waiting to Gertrude, Klein’s Ophelia is nicely positioned to reflect on and critique the status of women in the period. Young readers must wonder along with her why she faces double standards regarding sexuality. Teachers might encourage young men and women to debate the existence of contemporary double standards regarding sexual activity. Rozett (1994) argues that in her experiences reading Shakespeare with young people, such questioning marks the beginning of sophisticated reading: the “complaints, advice, questions, and firmly rendered judgments [of students] testify to a real engagement with the plays, however naïve these might seem to a seasoned Shakespearean” (p. 14). Rozett also suggests that readers who “confront a play on their own terms” can build “their own bridges to the values and conventions of remote time and place” (p. 14).

One such bridge between contemporary conventions and those of the past might be found in the treat-

ment of Ophelia's fellow lady-in-waiting, Cristiana. Cristiana longs to marry Rosencrantz, for love as well as for status. Here, students might be prompted to study the historical circumstances that linked status to marriage for women in this period and to question whether such a linkage still exists. Because Hamlet and Ophelia reject Cristiana's goals as unworthy, they set a trap for her: the two lead her to believe she is going to meet Rosencrantz and consummate their relationship, but actually set her up to sleep with Guildenstern. With her reputation in tatters, Cristiana becomes a subject of court gossip and even Hamlet rejects her as "a light one" (p. 80). Ophelia's response is conflicted. Guiltily, she realizes she has irreparably harmed Cristiana. Yet, as contemporary readers of both genders might, she notices a double standard: because Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are none of them "men of honour" (p. 80), they have no right to criticize Cristiana. She confronts him, insisting that "when you men wrong one of my sex, I cannot be silent" (p. 80). Male and female students might together debate whether Ophelia's criticism of Hamlet is justified when she herself has played a role in wronging her friend.

Ophelia's relationship with Gertrude in the novel is also fraught with anxieties about desire and infidelity that are simultaneously period-specific and contemporary. The Queen forces Ophelia to read to her from the bawdy *Heptameron* of Margaret of Navarre:

This was no book of prayer. I blushed and my voice was barely above a murmur as I read the tale of a noble woman seduced from her foolish husband by a handsome knave. . . . night after night, Gertrude and I spent an hour or more in such devotions, reading tales of love and desire. . . . I would go to my room heavy with guilt yet consumed by curiosity. (pp. 41–42)

Gertrude admits to keeping her reading from her husband, "a godly and proper man" who "would be grieved to know that I read such tales, which men say are not fit for a lady's ear" (p. 42). Furthermore, it will do Ophelia good "to learn the ways of the world and the wiles of men, so that you may resist them" (p. 43). In essence, while Hamlet studies at Wittenberg, Ophelia's education is limited to the reading of romance, Renaissance-era chick-lit. Ophelia's situation parallels that of contemporary young women to whom publishers aggressively market more highly and problematically sexualized young adult series like von

Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* (2002–2007) and Meyer's *Twilight* (2005–2008). Young readers might be prompted to question whether their reading is similarly circumscribed.

While Ophelia feels repelled by and yet drawn to Gertrude's romances, she also struggles with her growing desire for Hamlet. Just as Fiedler's Lia does, Klein's character finds herself unable to resist Hamlet's persuasions. The scene in which Ophelia yields to Hamlet is fascinating, as readers can sense that Ophelia is naïve to believe Hamlet's pleading and melodramatic professions of love: "His voice broke with emotion as his fingers traced the outline of my lips . . . 'I vow to love you most truly and for ever,' he whispered in my ear" (pp. 101–102). At first, Hamlet's love seems like the genuine article as the two marry secretly the next morning. Yet his behavior toward Ophelia undergoes a marked change after their sexual encounter. Here, Klein sensitively renders young women's fear of being used in a way that may move young readers of both genders.

In Klein's version of the nunnery scene, Ophelia proves to have been misled and used. When Hamlet asserts, "I gave you nothing," Ophelia stage-whispers the reminder that he gave himself in marriage and asks, "Was that nothing?" (p. 145). Hamlet's reply is hardly the reassuring wink that Fiedler offers. Klein's Hamlet replies, "I did not. It was not" (p. 145); Klein's Ophelia is left to wonder "Why, oh why did I grant him my love? I am undone" (p. 148). While Fiedler's is a winking twenty-first century version, in which a half-smiling frown conquers double standards, Klein's scene is brutal. She emphasizes the enormity of Ophelia's mistake by literally sending the now-pregnant Ophelia to a convent, where she must act out a sort of penance before she can achieve true happiness and self-determination.

Despite her willingness to incorporate some historical reality (she is a former professor of English), Klein is careful to give Ophelia a happy ending. In the convent, Ophelia discovers a space where women

In essence, while Hamlet studies at Wittenberg, Ophelia's education is limited to the reading of romance, Renaissance-era chick-lit.

find shelter from an oppressive system. However, because few contemporary women readers are likely to be seeking the monastic life, Ophelia gets a man as well. The fantasy is complete when, after she has established a place for herself within a generous and loving community and developed a secure livelihood (she works as a medic for the nuns), Horatio arrives to declare his love for her.

Working against Identification

Despite their different treatments of the character's decisions regarding sexuality—which might be put down to differences in the personal moral agendas of the authors—both Klein and Fiedler insist on reviving Ophelia. Each has her surviving the dramatic events at Elsinore. Most striking, however, is that in each text, Ophelia finds the very same means for escaping—a sleeping potion she concocts allows her to fake a drowning death. The sleeping potion that saves Ophelia in both Klein and Fiedler is a crucial plot device in *Romeo and Juliet*, of course, but when young adult authors confront the famous teenage lovers directly, the same potion strangely proves less reviving. Part of the problem here may be a resistance to identification.

If we acknowledge, as Stephens (1992) does, that “Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience” (p. 3), we can see the root of the problem. Romeo and Juliet embody a number of behaviors and attitudes that contemporary society would seek to discourage in young adults—including their nearly instantaneous decision to act on their sexual attraction. Their decisions are, at best, over-hasty; their willingness to deceive their families is troubling; and their suicides at the conclusion of the play are irredeemably tragic.

In short, the play can hardly be understood to fit comfortably into a curriculum that, as Isaac (2000) describes it, is contradictory, at the very least.

On Monday we invite students to join a debate about conflict resolution tactics. Tuesday we assign students to begin studying those peace-loving clans, the Montagues and the Capulets. Wednesday's health class is devoted to safe sex. On Thursday we explicate the balcony scene. Friday brings a lecture on mental health and preventing teen suicide. (p. 50)

In spite of such conflicts, the play continues to be

required reading in the secondary classroom because these themes are considered particularly relevant for adolescent readers. While Isaac acknowledges this, she also condemns “the decisions and conclusions the play provides” as being in “direct opposition to the sorts of behaviors we hope students will themselves employ” (p. 50). Her resolution of these oppositions is to claim “Teaching the play often means teaching against the play” (p. 50).

If *Romeo and Juliet*, despite its privileged position as cultural capital, requires such careful dodging from teachers, it is even more challenging for adaptors. As Pinsent (2004) puts it, “The extra authority conferred by a figure of the status of Shakespeare lends a good deal of conviction to the ideological position espoused, whether deliberately or involuntarily, by the novelist” (p. 116). In a culture as sensitive as ours regarding what young adults are reading and learning, an author needs to be especially careful to avoid enabling the kind of sympathetic identification with Juliet or with Romeo that would leave the text open not only to criticism but, given the current climate in communities across the country, perhaps even censorship.

Romeo's Ex

The major characters in *Romeo's Ex* are not Romeo and Juliet but Rosaline and Benvolio. Invoked only by name in the play, Rosaline narrates most of the novel. Fiedler's Rosaline is an outspoken critic of sympathetic readings of the main characters. Rosaline, well aware of the biological facts of sex in 1595 (the year in which the novel is set), acts as a kind of sex educator to contemporary readers. In her role as apprentice to the Healer, a female apothecary and midwife, Rosaline has witnessed a string of catastrophes resulting from sexual activity—catastrophes that help her choose chastity. As she explains,

I cannot count them, these women young and old who have arrived on this doorstep—some bruised and bleeding from having been beaten by their husbands, others fallen ill from pining o'er men who refuse to love them in return, their anguish so profound that many hath e'en begged us to administer some evil draught designed to end their very lives and thus their misery. . . . And there are girls mine own age and younger, unwed, who come to us in mortal shame, asking if there is not a way to rid themselves of the growing babe inside them. . . . That is the condition of women in love. And I refuse to join their tortured number. (p. 38)

The list looks remarkably contemporary and may be more honest about the risks inherent in sexual activity than some of our contemporary curriculum.

Fiedler's *Rosaline* also offers a critique of the play's exaltation of the teenaged lovers' bond that may enable young readers to voice their own reservations about it. When Juliet accepts Romeo, *Rosaline* is there like a critical reader, questioning and probing her cousin: "I will admit, he is handsome, but dost thou not remember those hopeless, hollow declarations of love he showered upon me?" (p. 103). Readers see that Fiedler's Juliet is a dupe because, after *Rosaline* saves his life, Romeo believes he is still in love with *Rosaline*; he has reduced his love for and marriage to Juliet to a mere dream. When *Rosaline* reminds him of his marriage to Juliet, he tries to make up for the fact that he had forgotten it by vowing to *Rosaline* that he will now "love her [the dead Juliet] forever" (p. 225). *Rosaline* points to the absurdity inherent in such extreme claims of devotion. As she explains, "Your recklessness, yours and Juliet's, was an affront to true devotion. . . . You met and admired one another and impiously called it love. 'Twas quick and bright and dangerous and magical. But you did not *think* . . . did not allow for love" (p. 226). Such a speech makes clear that neither Romeo nor Juliet offers a model for young readers.

Saving Juliet

In Selfors's *Saving Juliet*, similar criticisms of the lovers are made. Selfors's heroine is Mimi, a girl acting in a contemporary theatrical performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. Like *Rosaline*, Mimi is also a critic: she claims, "*Romeo and Juliet* totally sucks because everybody just dies and none of the characters get what they want. What kind of ending is that, anyway? I'd totally write a different ending" (p. 28). She gets her chance when, in a fit of stage fright, she breaks a necklace that holds the ashes of the very quill Shakespeare used to compose the play and is magically transported (along with her co-star, Troy) to fifteenth century Verona, just as the Capulet party is about to begin. When Mimi meets Romeo and Juliet, she begins to wonder, "Could this be my story, not Shakespeare's?" (p. 112). Unlike Mimi, who wants to save Juliet from death as soon as she realizes it is a possibility, Troy believes that they must get Shakespeare's story back

on track. Teachers might encourage students to debate which choice they should make.

The novel also raises questions about how the characters define themselves in contrast to their parents' goals for them. Juliet has an unhappy relationship with her parents. So does Mimi, whose mother rejects her desire to become a veterinarian and forces her instead into the family business, acting. Like Mimi's own mother, Lady Capulet is overbearing and dominating. Selfors makes Juliet fight against her planned marriage to Paris by eating onions and telling him she has a boil on her buttocks to dampen his desire for her. The unwanted marriage is finally staved off when Juliet and Romeo (who also wants to escape from his family's expectations that he continue the famous feud) escape from Verona.

In essence, the novel raises the question of how young adults can assert their own identities. In an online interview with Smith (2008), Selfors identifies her novel less as a love story than as "a quest for self-discovery. . . . a girl trying to figure out who she is—like most teen girls, trying to find her own voice and find courage to let others hear that voice." But Juliet's struggle and eventual triumph are relevant to students of both genders. Teachers might encourage students to reflect on their own quests for self-discovery. Additionally, Romeo and Juliet's attempts to define their futures—unacceptable to their families in both the play and the book—can be highlighted by comparing the two texts.

Conclusion

We believe young adult novelizations like *Romeo's Ex*, *Saving Juliet*, *Dating Hamlet*, and *Ophelia* can be more beneficial in the classroom, where teachers may direct students' reading of them, than outside it. Alone, not all young readers will be able to move from the pleasure of identification with the characters to critique. For example, a fan named Marisa writes on Selfors's website (Letters from Readers, n.d.) that "[W]e are reading *Romeo and Juliet* in my freshman

Alone, not all young readers will be able to move from the pleasure of identification with the characters to critique.

english [sic] class, and every time a part in your book comes up and they say what really happens my best friend and I giggle because we are like that's not right, or that's not what really happens, or where's Troy and Mimi?" With more assistance, young adult readers might be able to articulate in more sophisticated ways what feels "not right" to them in Shakespeare's plays. A teacher might prompt a student like Marisa to question why Troy and Mimi seem more interesting to her than Romeo and Juliet. As Isaac (2000) reminds us, "[T]he defects of children's versions should not be mistaken as an argument for dismissing them. Instead, these flaws can be viewed as a terrific opportunity to enable young readers to become critical readers and astute interpreters of Shakespeare" (p. 9). And given that Shakespeare is, as Dakin (2009) puts it, "in the water supply" (p. xiv)—surfacing even in Taylor Swift's 2008 Billboard Hot 100 hit "Love Story"—it might be to our benefit to introduce young readers to what are, perhaps, more carefully considered efforts to adapt the plays.

Young adult novelizations are not replacements for Shakespeare but supplements. Yet their value as supplements can be remarkable. Miller (2003) cautions us that, "[O]f all the new audiences for Shakespeare, children and young adults are at once the most open and enthusiastic as well as potentially the most likely to be misdirected or even disappointed by their initial encounters with the Bard" (p. 2). We see contemporary young adult novelizations as a way to prevent some of that disappointment by reducing students' linguistic anxiety and giving them new points of access from which to identify with and critique the plays. With the careful interventions of a teacher, the revisions these novels make can help students to acknowledge the interpretive nature of any act of reading.

And the novels may be more beneficial than the film and theatrical performances that are often presented alongside the plays. Students coming of age in our visual culture may prove less capable of dissociating image and authority; the power of a film or play may shut down the multiplicity of interpretation that we wish to promote. Additionally, films may adhere closely to the original plot, foreclosing alternative readings. It is crucial, as Bottoms (2000) asserts, that when introducing young readers to Shakespeare, we "stand out of the way as much as possible, let them *be*

there, ask their own questions, even answer back in their own way, and 'think about it'" (p. 23). Film and theatrical adaptations may not allow us to stand far enough out of the way, but two texts that "disagree" may be positioned more equally than a script with a performance. They may, in fact, be literally set beside one another, page to page.

Though schedules are tight for teachers working within a strict curriculum, Shakespeare's status in the canon has always demanded more time than other works studied in high school English classrooms. The addition of another text will obviously increase the amount of time devoted to the already lengthy Shakespeare unit, but four to five weeks should be sufficient for teachers wanting to include young adult novelizations in the required unit reading. (The four novels described here—with the exception of Klein's—run to about 200 pages in fairly large type).

Alternatively, because the plots of the novels are modern and the language less rigorous, a few chapters in the novels can also be assigned, paired with the relevant acts of the play. Independent reading is a third option. During class time, teachers could focus on promoting responses that encourage a creative engagement with both play and novel: journal entries tracking responses to characters and themes; Facebook-style "status updates" for various characters; diagrams comparing the texts; drawings; dramatic readings; alternative endings; and, as final projects, either YouTube videos, storyboards, or written adaptations of individual scenes. Students could present their work to the class in groups organized by the teacher to emphasize the diversity of readings, which may provoke participation even from those students less likely to respond in traditional classroom discussions.

While the use of novelizations may not lend itself to the emphasis on testing mandated by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, it does offer the opportunity for more interaction, analysis, and creativity. We believe these promote more sophisticated reading strategies, which is surely the end goal, not only when introducing students to Shakespeare but to any text. And regardless of the format in which we encourage them to respond, students will gain authority and confidence in their interpretive capabilities through the effort to respond, just as the professional adaptor does. In any of our classrooms, we may be nurturing—or stifling—the creative minds who will, in the next decades, take

up the task of remaking Shakespeare. Perhaps reading these revisions of Shakespeare will inspire today's young adults to revisit this work on pages and stages and film sets of their own. For all their flaws, young adult novelizations like these four are part of the desire that seems to renew itself every few decades: to remake Shakespeare in our own image. Because they impact how contemporary adolescents interpret Shakespeare, the authors of young adult novelizations are inevitably helping to craft the "Shakespeare" that the twenty-first century will come to know; their efforts thus deserve not only a place in our classrooms but also the attention of adaptation theorists, Shakespeare specialists, and scholars of young adult and children's literature.

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Finding Yourself in Books as a Teenager

Note from the editors: Those lucky enough to be able to attend the 2010 ALAN Conference were able to listen to the droll, witty, macabre, yet surprisingly optimistic author Shan deliver this address. For those of you unable to join us, here it is.

I had great pleasure in speaking at the NCTE/ALAN conference in Orlando in November, although I had to chuckle when informed of the subject of my speech. The last time I had spoken to an adult audience in the USA had been at an event in Reno a few years earlier, where I had spotted lots of teachers and librarians finding themselves. Finding themselves at slot machines, finding themselves at roulette wheels, finding themselves at . . .

Pretty much all of my novels for teenagers deal with the issue of teens finding themselves. I think that's what our teenage years are all about, discovering and defining who we are. They're years of self-exploration, and my books deal with that, through the medium of horror and fantasy. I think horror and fantasy lend themselves very well to this. They're a way for teenagers to look at themselves indirectly, to have fun while they are busy finding out who they are.

A phrase I hate more than any other is, "Books are good for you." I think that's the kiss of death for a children's book! Of course reading IS educational—but we need to keep that a secret. No self-respecting teenager wants to do what is good for them! We have to slip our messages in behind a screen of entertainment. And what can be more entertaining for your average, bloodthirsty teenager than stories about demons, vampires, and cannibals?!?

My novel, *The Thin Executioner*, deals head-on through the medium of fantasy with the theme of a

teenager finding himself in this conflicted, confusing twenty-first century world which we inhabit. On the one hand, it's a fantastical, action-packed quest novel about a particularly unpleasant boy who wants to chop off heads for a living. On the other, it's a story of redemption and hope, of making connections with our fellow human beings and learning from them, about how each one of us has the ability to change if we can force ourselves to look inwards and ask questions, and not simply accept as truth all of the things which we are told by our elders.

Jebel Rum, the central character in *The Thin Executioner*, has been brought up to believe that might makes right, that slavery is acceptable, that execution is a fit punishment for any and all crimes. He's a nasty, self-centered, arrogant, merciless piece of work—but, as the novel makes clear, that's because he is the product of a nasty, self-centered, arrogant, merciless society.

In the novel, Jebel sets off on a quest to gain magical powers which will allow him to become an executioner when he grows up. Along the way, he comes into contact with all sorts of people who see the world differently. At first, he dismisses them out of hand. He views them as heretics, savages, lesser creatures. He doesn't respect their views, their beliefs, their right to live their lives as they see fit. He judges everyone by his own people's standards, and if they fall short, he treats them with scorn and contempt.

But as the novel progresses, he starts to change. He begins to question what he has been taught. He examines the values on which he has been raised. He dares to think critically of those who have tried to shape him into a mirror image of themselves.

Jebel is a reluctant rebel. He doesn't hold himself

to be morally superior in any way, shape, or form. He simply can't stand by and meekly accept doctrines that he no longer can believe in. He loses his faith in what he has been reared to hold as true—and in doing so, he discovers his humanity and emerges as a fully-formed, self-determining individual.

What I love most about teenagers is that they all possess this ability to change. They're not the finished article. They can learn from our mistakes and become better people than we are—at least in theory! They're in the process of becoming, and I think teen literature should reflect and encourage this.

I hope that when teenagers read *The Thin Executioner*, they identify with Jebel Rum, that they see echoes of their own flaws and prejudices in him. While they're enjoying their action-packed adventures with Jebel, I want them to take a closer look at their own beliefs and standards. And if they see the need for change, I wish with all my heart that Jebel's experiences can help them find the strength and determination within themselves to start working on those changes.

I also think teenage books can serve as a call to arms, that they can encourage teens to find themselves through self-expression. A good book can fire them up, get them excited, and motivate them into trying to grab life by the throat and shake up the universe. I have an example of this in a letter that a girl called Darci wrote to me a few months back. *The Thin Executioner* is a political book, an allegory about the times in which we live. As well as trying to help teenagers to look at themselves, I was also asking them to look piercingly at the world around them. Darci took my subtle urgings to heart and was stung into both thought and action by the book. I find her enthusiasm to share what she has learned contagious and exciting. If this was the only bit of positive feedback I had ever received about the book (luckily, it isn't!), even by itself it would have made every day that I worked on the novel a worthwhile, rewarding experience.

Dear Mr. Shan,

I had been expecting the usual Shan experience from your latest book—dry, ironic, macabre, somewhat cute in a ghoulish way. I figured there would be a “deep” hidden message somewhere between the pages—there always is a message if you look hard enough—but I was not quite expecting what I found between the covers of *The Thin Executioner*.

Mr Shan, I am being absolutely honest and blunt when I say that this book needs to go down as required reading in the States for the next few generations. I have searched but have not found a book that deals so eloquently with the mistakes of the west other than your book. On the surface, the story is engaging and fascinating, without much bloodshed, pretty universal, and ageless. But it was with further inspection that it became apparent just how fantastic the novel is and how important it really could be to my country.

The concept of religious and racial tolerance, the clear reworking of the west/east battle into this truly beautiful work of art makes it stand out so fantastically. While reading it, I remember my jaw dropping once I realized that this wasn't a book I could read recreationally. This was a book that I had to absorb into me, a book that would have a clear, resounding moral message that was going to carry much weight. There are so many layers to the novel that I am excited to go back and reread it and see just how many more I can reach.

Mr Shan, I have to thank you for writing this. I think that it may be one of the single most important pieces of literature to come out of this whole mess of a war. The book came into my life at a sort of ironic time—our collective summer reading book for my high school was a novel about a bunch of American soldiers going to Iraq during the first wave of attacks in 2002. The book, while having good intentions, missed its mark pretty clearly. Although it could have been a wonderful piece of commentary and it could have really opened minds and changed hearts, it failed. I had been really disappointed in it and wondered why on earth the school was having us read it.

*Then, of course, I found *The Thin Executioner*, and could only sit in awe as I devoured it. Where that other book failed, your book succeeded, passing every test with blinding accuracy.*

I want you to know that I am going to fight to get this book on our summer reading list next year. I am going to argue with every teacher I have to in order to at least get it considered—because I think it is a clear choice. It's simple enough for all the kids in the school to get something out of it, but deep enough that with gentle pushing and prodding by teachers, I think the kids could really get the message out of it.

I have never been so proud to call myself a Darren Shan fan.

Darci

And I am very proud to have Darci as a fan. In fact, I'm rather relieved that I have her on my side; with that sort of drive, commitment, and passion, I think she could be a truly formidable enemy!

While I hope that my novels help teenagers learn a bit more about who they are, and help them find ways to express that, I'm all too aware that when it comes to teen literature, no writer exists in a vacuum. We're all in this together—readers, writers, teachers, librarians, parents, etc. As Darci pointed out, teachers and librarians who use books as inspirational tools are just as important in helping teenagers find themselves in books as writers are. They can direct children toward books that will help them grow and develop. They can help children get the most out of those books, to zone in on messages they might otherwise miss. They can start discussions and debates and encourage their students to think, question, and explore.

Obviously a teacher or librarian's job is easy if they're dealing with uplifting, respectable books and authors. But what happens when their kids are drawn to a degenerate rogue like *me*?! Well, I wrote a piece about this some years ago, focusing on teenagers who, perhaps inspired by my books, were writing gross-out horror stories. I think it links in neatly with the argument I've been making thus far, so here it is.¹

In school, I once wrote a bloodthirsty story for a student teacher, thinking, "She'll be young and hip enough to dig it." She wasn't, and I almost got expelled.

I've had more than a few letters over the years from children and parents complaining about teachers who don't understand them, who criticise them if they choose to write horror stories, who demand blood-free, family-friendly tales. In my books, I've buried a child alive . . . killed off dozens of characters . . . cannibals have cavorted merrily . . . in one, a boy witnessed a demon using his split-in-two sister as a hand-puppet. Nice!

Oddly, I don't get many complaints about my books, because as bloody as they are, most adults note the moral resonances. I write about kids who take responsibility, who put their lives on the line for family and friends, who learn the meaning of duty, courage, self-reliance. Horror is the web I weave to capture the attention of my teen readers. But they learn about much more than the workings of vampires and demons. Yes, I like bloody, action-packed fight scenes,

but I'm more interested in exploring emotions and the problems my characters face, using fantasy to mirror and probe the more complex real world.

But as a teenager, I wasn't concerned with using horror and fantasy to take my readers on a voyage of self-discovery. I wasn't able to. Writers develop over time, with age and experience. At thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, I knew I wanted to be a writer. That's when I began working hard, writing lots of short stories in my spare time, making my first stab at novels. I yearned to make an impression, create a story that readers would respond to, that would excite and thrill.

Lacking the ability to craft such stories, I went for full-on gore and violence instead. I travelled down many vile, vicious paths with my imagination, coming up with the sorts of stories that never see the light of day, being far better suited to as dark a setting as possible! But I learned to write good stories by churning out these crimson shams. Where writing is concerned, practise makes perfect. The advice I give young, would-be writers—the only advice I think they ever really need—is, "The more you write, the better you get."

Naturally, having been stung by showing one of my more colourful stories to an outraged teacher, I kept these stories to myself. I withdrew into my own secret world. I couldn't let anyone into it because I feared the repercussions. My late teens were a negative time, because I was exploring a dark landscape and had undertaken the task by myself, with no one to guide or encourage me.

If I'd had a teacher I felt free to show my work to, and discuss it with, maybe I'd have come through the darkness earlier and easier than I did. I needed someone to tell me less is more, that I didn't have to go into disgusting details to impress. Someone who wouldn't criticise me for going off in the directions I took, but who could explain why they weren't worth taking and lead me back to the road I eventually, luckily found by myself.

I think many teenagers have a terrible sense of feeling alone, especially if they're of a creative bent and that creativity leads them to places that are frowned upon by the adults they interact with. Yes, it's fun to be a rebel—but it can be scary, isolating, and depressing, too. We don't live in an ideal world. I know teaching's a hard job, that it's easier to mark essays about what kids did in their summer holidays than give a free rein to surly teenagers who want to write about

zombies. But creativity isn't a smooth ride. Sometimes it demands detours down grimy alleys of the mind, places no adult might want to visit, but which developing teens feel drawn to. As a teacher, you can choose to demand your students tread the straight and narrow line, forcing them to give up on writing or labor on by themselves, alone in the dark. Or you can encourage their imagination and try to help even the most creatively wayward students find their true direction. If you do, you might help the next Poe, Mary Shelley, or Stephen King to blossom. Of course, you might inadvertently create the next Charles Manson, too—but isn't that a risk worth taking?!?

Finally, I want to return to something I said earlier about believing that every child has the potential to change. I truly do believe that. And I believe that books can help even the most unlikely of children rise above the stigmas and lowly positions that society might have laboured them with. And I believe that horror and fantasy books in particular can shine the light of literature and self-discovery deep into even the darkest of teenage minds.

The reason I believe all of that can be explained far more eloquently than I could ever manage by a letter I received some months ago, from a teacher called Melissa in Illinois. I do have to apologize in advance at this point, because the letter contains a swear word. And it's one of the really bad swear words! I considered censoring it, but there's a reason why I'm not going to, which I'll talk about briefly after I've shared Melissa's moving, uplifting letter with you.

Dear Mr Shan,

I would like to thank you for your series of Cirque Du Freak. As a Special Education teacher, I struggle every day with ways to motivate and excite my students about reading. My job is even more of a challenge for several reasons. First, many of my students' parents are Spanish speaking and are unable to assist their children. Second, my students live in extreme poverty and unsafe neighborhoods. It is not uncommon for my students to hear gun shots outside their windows on a nightly basis. Third, and probably most difficult, many of my students have been labeled behavior problems, and some have been told that they will never amount to anything.

Your series has changed my students' views on

my class and reading as a whole. I can't tell you how wonderful it is to hear them talking about my class, mainly your books, in the halls, at breakfast, and at lunch. They are learning about foreshadowing, inferences, and predictions. They now know how to write mind maps, and they are starting to read with intonations instead of in just a monotone voice. Through your books, I am able to relate to my students, and for that I thank you.

In closing, I would like to leave you with a sentence that one of my most difficult students (one of your biggest fans) told me the other day. "Fuck free time! Let's read more!"

*Sincerely,
Melissa.*

Again, I apologise for the swearing—but at the same time, in truth, I'm not the least bit sorry! Because that letter was one of the most humbling I have ever received. I honestly found myself blinking back tears when I was first reading it. Then I got to that last line, and I punched the air with joy. Partly because of the sheer exhilaration and joy captured in that simple—albeit crude—outburst by the problem student. But mainly because I loved Melissa's pride in her student. She didn't criticise him for the way he expressed himself, because she was too delighted by *what* he was saying.

I think there's a message in that for all of us. We *can* help teenagers find themselves with the help of books, but sometimes it means re-finding our own inner teenager and meeting them on common ground, first accepting them for who and what they are, not just who and what we hope we can help them become.

Note

¹ This piece can be found in Shan, D. (2006). Giving reign to horror. *English Teaching Online*, Vol. 1. Retrieved from http://www.teachit.co.uk/custom_content/newsletters/newsletter_sep06.asp.

Darren Shan is the author of the New York Times best-selling *Cirque du Freak* and *Demonata* series. You can learn more about him at his website <http://www.darrenshan.com> and play *The Thin Executioner* computer game, if you have an extra minute or two to race across the icy bridge dodging bats.

Harry Potter and the Enchantments of Literature

Today, we hear over and over again how young people hate going to school; they hate reading “boring” books. Educators make school laborious and uninteresting by not incorporating texts that appeal to young adults or have relevance in their lives. I babysit children who clamor and shout for story time. I join in my teenage cousin’s rabid consumption of the Twilight series, sighing over the sappy romance of it. I watch my sister flip through her guitar catalogues, reveling in the musical potential, while my brother studiously researches video game cheat codes, online or in books, for access to hidden weapons on *Call of Duty: Black Ops* to gain an advantage over his opponents. Young people do enjoy reading.

Why, then, doesn’t this attitude transfer to the reading they do in school? In Wolk’s (2010) article, “What should students read?” he takes up the argument that teachers should bring what students read outside of class into the classroom. If we as educators take an interest in what students enjoy reading, we can utilize their eagerness about the texts to teach the elements of literature we want them to learn and more. Admittedly, not everything written has the potential to be used as literature for classroom instruction, but many texts outside of the established, worn-out canon do merit further attention, like the Harry Potter series.

J. K. Rowling’s books have been the cause of so much controversy over the last 10 years that they still top the charts for most challenged books; they have also been so successful that the *New York Times* created a separate “children’s” bestseller list to accom-

modate the monopoly. So why not invite *The Boy Who Lived* into our classrooms? J. K. Rowling has masterfully crafted a work of great literature with the richness of language and literary devices. Reluctant students who balk at terms like *allusion* or avoid eye contact at the mention of *themes* in books that they either did not relate to or just could not understand may be able to extract and enjoy these same elements from Harry Potter, simply on the grounds that it interests them. By introducing Harry Potter into the English classroom, teachers will observe their students becoming enchanted by literature and, hopefully, through merely tracing the allusions found in Harry Potter, will choose to pursue the original alluded-to texts.

The Wonder of Allusions

The Wizarding world, forced to go underground with the International Statute of Secrecy in 1692 due to trouble with Muggles (non-magic folk), establishes an apt setting to learn a new curriculum—one of wandlore, care of magical creatures, and the history of magic, vastly different from the Muggle education. In this context, students gain a fresh perspective on learning, one that becomes magical again. The Wizarding world not only holds its own history, it also references ours. The Harry Potter series is rife with allusions to Greek, medieval, and Biblical literature, as well as other folklore. Students will recognize familiar mythological creatures, such as unicorns, goblins, dragons, and giants. Mostly, the associations for good and bad follow the established norm of legends. Unicorns still reign as majestic beings, goblins still scheme with cunning

treachery, and dragons still embody adventure and great danger. However, a deeper study will lead us to notice close ties with ancient texts that we can use to introduce our students to other works, from Ovid to Malory to the Bible.

Greek Mythology

In Greek mythology, Cerberus is a three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the Underworld. When Orpheus visits the Underworld to retrieve Eurydice, he lulls Cerberus to sleep with his gift of music. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Fluffy is a three-headed dog who guards the entrance to an underground maze that leads to the Sorcerer's Stone. Playing a whittled flute that Hagrid gave him, Harry and friends lull Fluffy to sleep and gain entrance to the trapdoor he guards. Another dog in Greek mythology is Sirius; Sirius was the dog of Orion, who the goddess Artemis falls in love with. When Artemis unknowingly kills Orion, she places him in the heavens as a constellation with his faithful dog, Sirius, at his heels. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, we learn that the character Sirius Black is an Animagus (a wizard who can transform into a certain animal at will). His animal form is a dog and, fittingly, he is the faithful friend. As Harry's father's best friend, Sirius soon joins him in death, protecting Harry. Students who do not know the story of Orion may still question the connection between Sirius Black and Sirius satellite radio, whose logo is a dog with a star-shaped eye—Sirius is the Dog Star. This particular example reinforces the idea that understanding literature is relevant to students' lives. They are surrounded by these remnants of thought and beliefs, these connotations, in their everyday lives. Reading Harry Potter brings it all together in the classroom.

The names of some of the characters also pertain to some Greek predecessors. Professor McGonagall, deputy headmistress to Albus Dumbledore and professor of Transfiguration, keeps her class at attention with a stern look. She is set as the rational character against Professor Trelawney, the professor of the mystical art of Divination. Professor McGonagall's first name, Minerva, is the Roman counterpart for the Greek goddess Athena, the goddess of wisdom and craft. Professor Trelawney's first name, Sybil, also derives from an allusion to the ancient gods. Sybil was the name for the high priestesses of Apollo, the

god of prophecy. The school caretaker, Argus Filch, shares his first name with a mythological figure as well. Zeus, who often strayed during his marriage to Hera, became enamored of Io, eventually transforming her into a heifer to protect her from his wife's potential wrath. Always suspicious, Hera sets Argus of a hundred eyes to watch over Io so that she cannot resume her former shape as a beautiful young woman. Likewise, Filch is set over the student body, always watchful to catch students out of line. With his cat, Mrs. Norris, as a second pair of eyes, he sees every misdeed committed by students in the castle.

Nymphadora Tonks, spritely and cheerful for an Auror (dark wizard catcher), reminds the reader of the nymphs that haunt the woods and waters of Greek mythology. As a Metamorphmagus (a wizard who can change appearance at will), she

inherits the gift of the nymphs to change forms. Her name means gift of the nymphs, *dora* being the Latin word for gift. Interestingly, her mother, Andromeda, also has a Greek history. She was the daughter of an arrogant woman, and was sentenced to be punished for it before being rescued by Perseus. In Harry Potter, Andromeda is the sister of Narcissa (who like Narcissus is in love with outer vanity) and Bellatrix, from a highly arrogant "Pureblood" family. She is saved from the same bigotry by her marriage to a Muggle-born man. (Another shape-shifter in Greek mythology was Proteus; Hermione uses a protean charm on coins to announce meetings for their secret gathering.)

They are surrounded by these remnants of thought and beliefs, these connotations, in their everyday lives.

Arthurian Legend

Arthurian legend has become so ingrained in our social consciousness that even though I had never actually read the medieval tale until college, I was able (via Disney, among other sources) to recognize the most important symbols: the sword in the stone, Excalibur, Merlin, Knights of the Round Table, the Holy Grail, King Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot. After studying Malory's account of King Arthur, I was able to read *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, if not the entire series, in a new light. As Prinzi (2009b)

asserts in his book, *Platform 9 ¾—Harry Potter & Imagination: The Way between Two Worlds*, “The Wizarding world is an Arthurian world” (p. 86). While I noticed Merlin’s appearance on the Chocolate Frog wizard trading cards in *The Sorcerer’s Stone*, I counted it as a clever insert rather than as part of the richness of Arthurian allusions in the text. However, Prinzi’s (2009b) extensive list of Arthurian influences in Harry Potter (pp. 86–87) certainly merits attention:

- Harry and Arthur were both orphaned, taken from their parents at an early age.
- Both became orphans as a result of some kind of prophecy.
- Both returned to their original “worlds” with no idea of their own special status—Harry as vanquisher of Voldemort and Arthur as heir to the throne.
- Both were protected by a wise old wizard (Dumbledore/Merlin).
- Dumbledore and Merlin were both very powerful and wise, but when they made mistakes, they made monumental ones.
- Accomplished wizards are given the “Order of Merlin”; the secret society of wizards fighting evil (Voldemort) was the “Order of the Phoenix.”
- Arthur pulls the sword out of the stone (and is given Excalibur by the Lady of the Lake), and Harry pulls the Sword of Gryffindor out of the Sorting Hat. In both cases, it is their special status that allows them to be able to pull the sword (heir to the throne and “a true Gryffindor”). Later, Ron would also pull the sword out of a small body of water, and Neville will pull the sword out of the hat.
- Both stories employ the symbolism of a griffin as well as a white stag.
- Arthur marries Guinevere; Harry marries Ginny (Ginevra, an alternative spelling of Guinevere).

The Wizarding world is indeed an Arthurian world. Apart from Prinzi’s observations, the young reader will note that the Hogwarts castle itself fits into the medieval setting. The halls are lined with suits of armor; at least one painting of a knight-errant is mentioned, Sir Cadogan; the Great Hall mirrors those of old with a high table set at the front. Also, the wizard trading cards found in the Chocolate Frogs wrappers feature medieval figures (see http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizards/card_wizards.html). For instance, Merlin

is a popular card and Morgan le Fay, referred to as Morgana, also appears on the cards. Wizard children collect these cards, they expand their knowledge of the world, and our students may follow their example, collecting and sharing allusions and references as if they were valuable trading cards.

Deathly Hallows can be read as an Arthurian quest structure, also. It was customary for knights-errant to take a year to seek adventures in the forests; Harry, Ron, and Hermione leave before their last year of school to seek Voldemort’s Horcruxes (items that hold pieces of a dark wizard’s soul to preserve his immortality), visiting and hiding in various forests around the country. In the legends, errant knights always happened upon some great adventures throughout the forest, meeting giants and fellow knights alike. In *Deathly Hallows*, we find a parallel. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione move through forests hoping to chance upon some clue of hidden Horcruxes and how to destroy them, they find it. They discover the identity of the mysterious “R.A.B.” and manage to obtain the real locket Horcrux with the help of Kreacher, the house elf.

A mysterious symbol found in the book Dumbledore leaves Hermione in his will leads them to both Godric’s Hollow, where Harry’s parents lived and danger awaits, and to Xenophilius’ home, where they learn of the Hallows and again are forced to make a narrow escape. As Harry follows the doe Patronus (King Arthur chases a stag) into the woods, he chances upon the very sword they are looking for, but they must prove they are worthy of obtaining it, which Ron does. Even in the forest, with no signs of civilization, our quest seekers find their way through unexpected adventures; it is an established archetype that we have been taught to recognize, even more so through a pop-cultural transformation of the Arthurian legend.

Christian References

When Harry Potter took his first stroll down Diagon Alley, it brought him back into the wizarding world his parents had inhabited, but in this world, so far, he was just as alone as he was in the Muggle world with the Dursleys. He was still an orphan. On this trip, Hagrid buys Harry a white snowy owl, whom Harry decides to name Hedwig. She is loyal and con-

stant, and always knows where he is, even when he doesn't know himself. Over tedious summers spent with his Muggle relatives, Hedwig provides a source of comfort, a source of hope; she brings good tidings. It comes as no surprise then to find out that in the Catholic canon of saints, St. Hedwig is a patron saint of orphans (Paulsell, "A saint for hard times," 2009). In the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*, Harry is not alone anymore, and he can look after himself. Rowling emphasizes his maturity by having Hedwig give her life for Harry, making it easier for him to escape Voldemort's clutches once again. He is no longer the little lost orphan boy we meet in book one; he will be fine without his patron saint.

Another bird from *Harry Potter* with religious connotations is the phoenix. This mythological bird was said to burst into flames at death and be reborn from its own ashes. Also, according to one website that discusses the meaning behind phoenix tattoos, "Jewish legend describes the phoenix as the one creature that did not leave paradise with Adam, and that its legendary longevity is due to abstaining from the forbidden fruit that tempted the 'first man'" (www.thevanishing-tattoo.com/tattoos_designs_symbols_phoenix.htm). As such, it was a symbol of rebirth and resurrection, of victory over death—a figure reminiscent of Christ rising from the tomb.

As students recall the story of Adam and Eve and their encounters with Satan in the form of the serpent in the garden, a certain scene in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* becomes more poignant. When Harry, representative man, fights the Basilisk, King of Serpents, down in the Chamber of Secrets, he fails; like Adam, he is overpowered by the serpent. In an attempt to combat the Basilisk, he lunges with Gryffindor's sword and a Basilisk fang pierces his arm, injecting deadly venom. Harry feels his life ebbing. Just as God tells the serpent in Genesis 3:15, "he shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel," foreshadowing the coming of Christ, Fawkes, the phoenix, fulfills the promise as the Christ figure in the novel. He appears on the scene with a weapon for Harry and disarms the Basilisk by pecking out its eyes, its source of deadly power. But Harry has already fallen, he's already dying from the serpent's sting, and the phoenix must save him with his tears (phoenix tears are the only known antidote for Basilisk venom). As man is saved from death by Christ's suffering, so the passion

of the phoenix also restores Harry to life. Imbued with new life from the Christ-Phoenix, a regenerate Harry then is able to rise victoriously from the depths of the Chamber with Ginny in his arms.

Harry is also given a Christ-like status in the novels. Again, Prinzi (2009b) points out the descent/resurrection scenes that Harry goes through in each book, to name a few: descent through the trapdoor in *Sorcerer's Stone*, awakening *three days later* in the hospital wing; descent into the Chamber of Secrets, saved by Fawkes who carries him out; descent into the Ministry in *The Order of the Phoenix*, where he again is saved by Dumbledore and Fawkes; and descent into Voldemort's cave in *The Half-Blood Prince*, where he is saved from the *Inferi* (corpses

animated by a dark wizard) by red and gold flames (phoenix imagery) conjured by Dumbledore (pp. 108–109). Hopefully, pointing out these parallels in the books will capture a student's attention. Young people like knowing the answers and finding things that they think no one else has. Given just a few examples, they will often try to find the rest.

In the chapter, "The Forest Again," Harry willingly walks into Voldemort's lair. This solitary walk through the forest toward his death is reminiscent of Christ's willingness to walk to his death. While Harry does not bear the weight of other people's transgressions, he is burdened by the need to save them from the evil of Lord Voldemort. By allowing himself to die for others, Harry ensures that Voldemort kills only the part of his soul that he unknowingly left on Harry—a part that would have enabled him to return to life. Just like it had to be Christ who died on the cross, it had to be Harry who died at Voldemort's hands to fulfill the prophecy. Harry's sacrifice physically protects the castle he died for, just as his mother's sacrifice covered his skin so that evil could not touch him, another reference to Christ's sacrifice that spiritually covers the Christian believer.

Conclusion

Students are reading *Harry Potter*. They are being exposed to a wealth of cultural history, even if they

Hopefully, pointing out these parallels in the books will capture a student's attention.

do not realize it at first. It is our job as educators to bring interest back into learning and equip our students with “literacies” to help them better understand the world we live in and how it came to be. In the textbook, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* (2009), Nilsen and Donelson quote Van Biema who asks, “Wouldn’t the thrill of recognition have been more satisfying if students knew enough to ask for it on their own?” (p. 97). Young people are naturally inquisitive; as educators we *must* continue to nurture their minds by teaching these valuable popular texts that are relevant and stimulating. I hope I have shown just through following the richness of classical allusions in the Harry Potter series that popular texts can be used to augment the education of young adults, and possibly even pique their interest in reading the original “classics.” We need to keep them enchanted with literature.

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Why Literacy (and Young Adult Literature) Matters:

A Review of Current Research

In an era of accountability (and in particular, high-stakes testing), discussion is often centered on “what young people know” and very little on “how young people feel.” Lost in the mad rush to satisfy bureaucrats and parents anxious to see students score well on state exams are any real indicators (or discussion) as to what really matters in the lives of young people and, in particular, their own literary needs and desires. Simply, are we forcing children to perform? To read what they are not ready to read? And if so, at what cost?

What follows are a group of relevant and recent research studies that both highlight and question our (and the world’s) fascination with “racing to the top” of the proverbial academic achievement ranking with little or no regard as to what matters most in the lives of young people. As these research studies illustrate, literacy education is more than measuring academic achievement; it is helping young people find good books to read.

Reading for Pleasure

Young people read for many reasons, one of which is for pure pleasure; as these reviews suggest, reading for pleasure is a noble goal in and of itself. In “Reasons for Reading: Why Literature Matters,” Hodges (2010) suggests that opportunities for children and young people to read for pleasure in school has significantly decreased as a direct result of curriculum mandates and standardized testing. Recent research in England, the author suggests, indicates that there has been a strong emphasis on meeting objectives and managing curriculum to the obvious neglect of why reading matters in the first place. Moreover, the article underscores that no research or policy documentation explicitly states why literature has a clear role to play in English education. Consequently, in England (as elsewhere), young adult literature does not find itself in a prominent place in the school’s curriculum.

Similar arguments for using relevant reading material with adolescents (as well as adults) is underscored in Daisy’s (2010) “Secondary Preservice Teachers Remember Their Favorite Reading Experiences: Insights and Implications for Content Area Instruction.” This cogent article examines secondary preservice teachers’ favorite past reading experiences in light of how their remembrances can improve classroom reading instruction. Using a multilateral qualitative research design, the author examines preservice teachers’ survey results, quotes, drawings, and reflections on several reading strategies to promote content area achievement. Not surprisingly, the researcher finds that preservice teachers’ memories of favorite reading experiences suggest a strong wish for school reading material that is relevant and meaningful to the lives of the young adults they will eventually teach.

Polleck’s “Creating Transformational Spaces: High School Book

Clubs with Inner City Adolescent Females” (2010) is a fascinating read that explores in considerable detail how a high school book club transformed the lives of 12 Latina and African American inner city high school girls. Through their voices and his astute observations, this researcher demonstrates how a single high school book club provides a forum where affective and cognitive development occur simultaneously and results in verifiable evidence of the transformative nature of promoting literacy among adolescents. Using charts, book lists, and recreated dialogue, Pollock demonstrates how dialoguing about teen books can both increase literacy appreciation and meet the social and emotional needs of adolescents.

Continuing in this positive vein, Koss and Teale (2009) underscore how the market for young adult literature has continually grown due to a stronger focus on adolescent literacy; in addition, YA novels are becoming more and more appealing not only to teens, but also to parents and teachers. In their article “What’s Happening in Young Adult Literature? Trends in Books for Young Adolescents,” Koss and Teale compile a list of recent books rated as “high quality” by teachers, selected as favorites by students, and promoted as best sellers by the marketplace. Content analysis reveals that the majority of popular and/or award-winning books are also primarily realistic in content and form and, for the most part, are not multicultural in character or setting. Koss and Teale believe that the focus in YA books—especially those that are popular and best-selling—has shifted from

social issues (race, drugs, and social class) to *social conditions* (fitting in, finding oneself, and major life changes) involving teenagers. Also noted is the lack of LGBT characters in popular YA fiction.

In “Peer Influences on Young Teen Readers: An Emerging Taxonomy,” Howard (2010) outlines the results of a research study to determine the role of recreational or pleasure reading in the lives of 12–15-year-old residents of the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia, Canada. What the author learns is that the results are mixed, at best. The study finds that teens’ attitudes toward peer influence on their pleasure reading is complex, and is best defined by the reading habits of the teens in question; simply, some were influential, and some were simply not. Moreover, the study shows a clear division between boys and girls, with girls doing far more independent reading than their male counterparts. Finally, the study demonstrates the significance of adult mentoring on influencing teen readers, especially males.

Reading for Social Significance

Besides reading for pleasure, young adults often read to learn about themselves and the issues that matter most to them. The reading for social significance is evidenced by the many research and related studies demonstrating the effectiveness of reading for meaning.

Direct evidence of reading for meaning is found in Ma’ayan’s “Erika’s Stories: Literacy Solutions for a Failing Middle School Student” (2010). In this intriguing read, the

author discusses how she was able to help a struggling middle school student overcome her literacy disengagement through reading young adult historical fiction and magazines. By focusing in on one particular middle school girl, the researcher underscores the importance of using culturally relevant and age-appropriate texts to engage even the most reluctant learners.

In “Moving Beyond the Inclusion of LGBT Themed Literature in English Language Arts Classrooms: Interrogating Heteronormativity and Exploring Intersectionality,” Blackburn and Smith (2010) explore the ever so contentious issue of combating homophobia by using lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or questioning-themed young adult novels and texts. The authors assert that schools enforce the establishment of conventional gender roles or heteronormativity and, in so doing, imply that homosexuality is abnormal. Thus, they examine LGBT-themed literature and its impact on the reading lives of young adults.

Author and critic Cart discusses the prevalence of high-risk-taking behaviors in “A Literature of Risk” (2010a). This smart read explores the pervasive culture of violence among teens in the United States and how this culture permeates not only our nation’s classrooms, but our young adult fiction as well. Cart underlines how bullying and cyberbullying, specifically, are often simply a reflection of media orientation and our excessive exposure to the multimodal contemporary expressions that at least encourage violent behavior in adolescents. Thus, Cart recommends that adolescents, educators, and young adult fiction

writers must treat discussions of violence (and the reading thereof) as gateways to promoting empathy and understanding.

Phillion's compelling academic research on what young adults are reading, "The Age of ?: Using Young Adult Literature to Make Sense of the Contemporary World" (2009), discusses the author's project of using young adult literature as a methodology to understand contemporary adolescent social mores and attitudes. By reading 40 young adult novels garnered from the 2006–2007 lists generated by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Phillion was able to discern four themes in the YA books he read—fear, diversity, exceptionality, and creativity; these themes underscore the world in which young adults live and perceive. Each theme, this researcher contends, demonstrates an "evocative idea of the current era and predominant ideal of thought" (p. 49) preoccupied by young people and the age in which they live. The author's thesis is that young adult literature is the window to the contemporary world.

Equally compelling, Sturm and Karin present an intriguing look at why young adults are drawn to problem novels in "The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels" (2009). Problem novels, as defined by Sturm and Karin, are stories realistic in content and style that discuss common problems associated with adolescence—insecurity, loneliness, vulnerability, peer pressure, and anger management issues, among others. Teenagers are often drawn to problem novels for several reasons, most prominently because not only can the

readers identify with the elements of the story—those characters and events that resemble their own lives or lives of people they know—they can also "identify with the feelings of chaos and exaggeration that the structure of these books creates within us" (p. 42). These researchers believe that the feelings generated by problem novels—through short paragraphs; accessible sentences; blunt language; overt sexuality; anti-authoritarian spirit; and sarcastic, often gallows, humor—lead to an easy attraction for teens who are seeking an outlet for their own emotional uneasiness with who they are and what they represent.

In "Reading for a Better World: Teaching for Social Responsibility with Young Adult Literature" (2009), Wolk outlines how young adult books are a natural fit for teaching adolescents about social responsibility. Using Paul Volponi's young adult novel *Black and White* (2005), Wolk describes a curriculum that stresses instilling social awareness, intellectual curiosity, and active citizenship. What is most intriguing about this engaging read is Wolk's extensive research of actual teens to whom he simply asks, "Why do you read in school?" Unfortunately, Wolk writes that the majority respond, "to get the assignment done." Wolk implores teachers to extend their students' reading beyond routine school work and calls for social renewal and justice through inquiry-based learning, critical self-reflection, and service-learning experiences.

Finally, reading for social significance also includes reading for identity, as Yokota explores in "Asian Americans in Literature

for Children and Young Adults" (2009), an intriguing look at how Asian Americans are portrayed in children's and young adult books. Since the 1990s, the author claims that the representation of Asians and Asian Americans in literature has grown substantially. Moreover, Yokota writes, the range and complexity of Asian characters has matured as well—stereotypes are giving way to more roundly developed characters. Thus, reading matters for young people, especially the often-forgotten Asian American minority, who are slowly but surely beginning to see themselves in young adult fiction.

Reading for Literary Merit

In addition to reading for pleasure and social significance, students do read for literary merit, although they might not know it. Their first instinct is to read when they find something "wonderful to read," and these pieces reveal how important it is that teachers and students know that reading for literary merit on the one hand and the direction that popular reading finds itself in the 21st century on the other are often at odds.

In "A New Literature for a New Millennium? The First Decade of the Printz Awards" (2010), Cart addresses how the young adult books are selected for the Printz prize (the winner and three honorable mentions) and their impact, if any, on young adults and their reading habits. Noting that the Printz award is solely for literary merit—not popularity—Cart remarks that not every Printz choice (as of 2010, 10 winners and 38 honorable mentions) is universally popular with

booksellers, media specialists, and librarians who are concerned more about accessibility and interest to teen readers. Hence, these good books—fiction, nonfiction, and all other genres and types—often go unnoticed by both adolescents and adults looking for good books to read.

Questioning popularity is the theme of Johnston's "Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels" (2010). This engaging study raises the question, "Yes, kids are reading, but what are they reading and why?" and then examines popular brand names among best-selling young adult romance series, such as Gossip Girl, A-List, and Clique. Johnston underlines the direct connection between this romantic popular fiction and overt marketing promotions. The researcher's contention is that these ever-popular books promote romantic and sexual desirability, but offer a limited understanding of femininity—in other words, characteristics that benefit publishers and retailers rather than adolescent readers.

Finally, of interest to our readers is a compelling new volume of essays in the journal *Studies in the Novel* (2010) about young adult literature and its impact on the publishing industry and media in general. In the edition's introduction, "Kicking It Up beyond the Casual: Fresh Perspectives in Young Adult Literature," Cappella describes 11 essays that discuss with considerable detail and insight significant new trends and developments toward reconsidering and reconceptualizing young adult literature as a genre. In the first section of the issue, five essays focus on contemporary, realistic YA

novels. The second section includes three provocative essays exploring young adult novels set in the realm of fantasy and/or science fiction. Finally, the third section examines the genre of young adult literature as it appeared in England during the Victorian Era and in America during the 1930s. By discussing historical young adult books, the authors of these intriguing essays demonstrate how contemporary theoretical perspectives can cast new light on young adult books; how social morays can affect the subject of young adult literature; and most important, why reading young adult literature by young adults has always mattered.

Conclusion

All in all, these studies indicate that adolescents do read—when given something worthwhile to read—and that even in the age of competing conflicts (the lure of technology and the bane of high-stakes testing), young people are still drawn to good stories for the same reasons as adolescents before them; they want to read for fun, for meaning, and for the joy of language itself. If only our politicians would take this to heart.

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<p><u>A Love Story Starring My Dead Best Friend</u> by Emily Horner Realistic Fiction/Sexual Orientation/Love Dial Books, 2010, 259 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-8037-3420-3</p> <p>Cass Meyer has always thought of herself as an ordinary, unpopular girl. However, she had one best friend whom she loved more than anyone else—Julia. Julia introduces Cass to the drama crowd, and Cass forms friendships with them through her. When Julia is killed in a car accident, Cass's world is turned upside down. How would she make it without her?</p> <p>In Julia's memory, her friends decide to stage a top-secret play that she had been working on. Cass shifts back and forth from her memories of taking Julia's ashes to California (where they had planned to go together) and the process of preparing the play in honor of their friend. Throughout the story, Cass works through what her true feelings for Julia may have been and what her feelings toward a former enemy are now. This is a story of loss and the importance of friendship.</p> <p>Jessica Long Cincinnati, Ohio</p>	<p><u>Blindsided</u> by Priscilla Cummings Fiction/Blindness Dutton Juvenile, 2010, 240 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-525-42161-0</p> <p>Natalie O'Reilly was born with a congenital eye disease. At the age of 14, her sight had deteriorated so much that she feared losing her vision. Until this point, she believed that there would be a cure, that she would get better.</p> <p>At the start of her freshman year, Natalie's parents send her to the Maryland School for the Blind. They were hoping that she would have time to learn Braille and other ways to survive if she truly did end up losing her sight. One November morning, Natalie awakens to find her sight gone completely. Her world becomes gray. She hasn't spent enough time at the school to learn many things. Natalie is faced with deciding how she's going to react to her new reality. She faces several crises where having her sight wouldn't help her. Dealing with those crises helps her come to terms with the changes.</p> <p>April Wulber Yorkshire, OH</p>
<p><u>Blink & Caution</u> by Tim Wynne-Jones Fiction/Runaways/Crime Candlewick, 2011, 342 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-7636-3983-9</p> <p>The paths of two teens on the run collide on Toronto's streets. Blink survives on the street partly by dining on the leftovers from room service trays in ritzy hotels. But his breakfast is interrupted when he sees a kidnapping that isn't really what it's supposed to be. Through a careless mistake on the part of the culprits, Blink picks up the kidnapped executive's cell phone. When the media report the kidnapping, Blink realizes that he has valuable information. Phone calls from the man's daughter persuade Blink that she needs his help, and he agrees, dreaming of a monetary reward. Caution is also on the run, ostensibly from an abusive drug lord, but in reality from her own past, when a fluke accident changes her world completely. The fast-paced storyline forces readers to consider happenstance, fate, and probability, woven subtly but inexorably through the narrative.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p><u>By the Time You Read This I'll Be Dead</u> by Julie Anne Peters Hypertion, 2010, pp. 198, \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-4231-1618-9</p> <p>Daelyn is a troubled teen who attends a private Catholic girls' school—her parents' misguided attempt to salvage her by switching schools. Daelyn cannot speak due to another thwarted suicide attempt, yet she writes her own painful story. This powerful, disturbing novel covers her ongoing efforts to kill herself as she follows the guidelines of Through-the-Light.com.</p> <p>Daelyn has been victimized by taunting classmates, originally because she was fat. Now thin, she has become a "freak," harassed and isolated as she has always been. Will she carry out her path of self-destruction despite hopeful alliances with Santana, the boy who battles Hodgkin's lymphoma, or Emily, a fellow classmate whose size is setting her up for bullying? Peters writes important, challenging fiction for young adults, and this novel's examination of bullycide offers uncomfortable insights into the world of those who feel like losers from birth and trust no one.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>

<p><i>drizzle</i> by Kathleen Van Cleve Dial Books for Young Readers, 2010, 358 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Mystery/Identity ISBN: 978-0-8037-3362-6</p> <p>Polly Peabody is an unusual girl growing up in an extraordinary place—her family’s magical rhubarb farm. Although she’s at home with her best friend Harry, the chocolate rhubarb plant, and the other creatures on the farm, Polly feels like an outcast at school. When Grandmom dies, everything begins to unravel. Aunt Edith returns to manage the farm. Although the farm and family thrive for years, trouble erupts when Aunt Edith suddenly decides to sell the farm. The rain stops. The plants wilt. Polly’s brother Freddy becomes deathly ill. It’s up to Polly and her organic friends to solve the mystery linking the unfortunate events and save her loved ones from disaster.</p> <p>This fantasy tale combines faith, science, and magic as Polly discovers the farm’s secrets and her true identity.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tamara Fyke Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Entrapment</i> by Michael Spooner Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2009, 320 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Relationships/Modern Communication ISBN: 978-1-4424-0366-6</p> <p>A disgruntled shrew (Annie) and a bored poet-mastermind (Johnson) team up to test the relationships of their friends in this blithe comedy of errors. Annie convinces her two best friends to tell their devoted boyfriends that they will be out of town for a few weeks and unable to communicate. Meanwhile, Johnson tricks the boys into joining a chat room where they will be welcoming two alluring foreign exchange students to their school (the two girls in disguise). The stakes get higher and higher as the girls attempt to steal the hearts of the boys, all the while hoping they will be faithful.</p> <p>Told entirely in chat and blogs, this modern romance is an enjoyable riff on Shakespearean comedy. Love is attacked with barbed words, cynical plotting, beautiful strangers, and staunch disbelief, but still manages triumph. This book would appeal most to students in grades 8 through 10.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jessie Lorimer Rogers, AR</p>
<p><i>Finding My Place</i> by Traci L. Jones Farrar Straus Giroux, 2010, 181 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Prejudices ISBN: 978-0-374-33573-1</p> <p>It is 1975 in the suburbs outside of Denver, Colorado. Tiphania Jayne Baker is new, in the ninth grade, and the only Black girl at her high school. She has learned from her parents, members of the civil rights movement, how to carry herself above the fray and outperform her peers in order to represent her race. But it’s hard for her in the face of glaring eyes and some outspoken bigots in the hallways, especially when her friends from her old school accuse her of becoming “whitewashed” by her new surroundings.</p> <p>When she finally meets Jackie Sue, Tiphania knows she’s found a real friend, and one with an unbelievable vocabulary. But she quickly learns that being Black in a White community is not the only thing that keeps you outside the inner circle in ritzy Brent Hills.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Elizabeth Self Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Flirt Club</i> by Cathleen Daly Roaring Brook Press, 2010, 281 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Growing Up/Humor/Friendship/Relationships ISBN: 978-1-59643-572-8</p> <p>Where was this book when I was in junior high suffering from the anxiety of being the only girl without a boyfriend? Daly’s <i>Flirt Club</i> is a book about two self-proclaimed geeky drama nerds, Annie (Bean) and Izzy (Cisco), who form Flirt Club to help them overcome their shyness around boys and practice flirting with anyone (and <i>anything</i>) that comes their way.</p> <p>Told entirely through notes between Annie and Izzy, diary entries, and club minutes, <i>Flirt Club</i> captures the many struggles of being an adolescent girl caught between childhood and womanhood, while also showing the laughter and silliness that goes along with just being 13 years old. No matter your age, through laughter and tears, Daly’s novel reminds us of how it feels to have butterflies in your stomach just looking at a boy, as well as the value of a loyal friend.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Brittany Vorenkamp Baton Rouge, LA</p>

<p><i>Freak Magnet</i> by Andrew Auseon HarperTeen, 2010, 293 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>When “freak” Charlie Wyatt spies “magnet” Gloria Aboud in a coffee shop, he falls instantly in love and, despite warnings from a friend, does everything he can to meet her. Little does he realize they have more in common than a cup of coffee. Both suffer from incredible loss and grief—Charlie’s mother is bed-ridden with a debilitating illness, and Gloria’s brother was killed in Afghanistan. Charlie copes by feigning courage and wearing his Superman costume under his clothes, while Gloria does everything she can to annoy her mother. The two teens’ friendship is threatened by their families and Charlie’s impending internship.</p> <p>Andrew Auseon tells this unique story from both characters’ point of view by alternating chapters, and he isn’t afraid to touch on timely, difficult topics. Teens will want to root for this unlikely couple to help each other through one of the most difficult times in their lives.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Anne Minton Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Ghost Town</i> by Rachel Caine New American Library, 2010, 338 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>In the ninth installment of The Morganville Vampires series, Claire and her friends are still struggling to protect Morganville from problems inside and outside of the town. Morganville is a unique place where vampires and people coexist (mostly), and protecting the town’s secret is vitally important. Claire discovers a way to use the special powers that Vampires have to increase the town’s protection against discovery. Unfortunately, her discovery has deadly consequences for the people inside Morganville. Both vampires and people alike are forgetting who they are and what they believe in; Claire has to fix the problem before she forgets who she is and what she did.</p> <p>Caine’s series continues to be well developed and thoughtful. Claire and her friend go through typical adolescent struggles in addition to their more difficult challenges of living with vampires. Caine has several twists on vampire mythology that challenge the reader’s expectations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Gone</i> by Lisa McMann Simon Pulse, 2010, 214 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Janie faces her first year of college with an agonizing dilemma before her. This tough 18-year-old is a dreamcatcher: she gets pulled into the dreams of nearby sleepers, who implore her to save them from their nightmares. She has learned to use her ability for others’ good, but at a terrible personal cost. A fellow dreamcatcher has revealed to Janie that if she continues to use her power, she will become blind and crippled in a matter of years. The only solution, it seems, is for Janie to isolate herself from her mother, friends, and loving boyfriend—forever. As she struggles with her decision, her long-absent father appears on the scene, making Janie’s choice more difficult than ever.</p> <p><i>Gone</i> is best enjoyed in conjunction with the other books in McMann’s Wake trilogy, but Janie’s dark struggle is sure to intrigue readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Allison Matthews Columbia, SC</p>	<p><i>Green Witch</i> by Alice Hoffman Scholastic, 2010, 144 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>A horrific explosion has destroyed Green’s city, and she is left an orphan, grieving for what she misses. Her idyllic world is destroyed, but she gradually begins to employ her instinctive gardening skills to create lush surroundings for her solitary hut. Her belief in the future is challenged at every turn, but her spirit of survival triumphs in this lyrical tale of loss and redemption.</p> <p>Green undertakes a quest to tell the stories of the Enchanted, witches who live outside her village. She is soon challenged to seek those who are imprisoned on a lonely island; on the journey, however, she finds strength in herself by implementing magical assistance from the witches, along with their charms and advice. The power of women who persevere is foremost in this lyrical novel of a teen whose bravery eventually destroys evil. This haunting fable will appeal to teens with a bent for soul-searching.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>

<p><i>Half Brother</i> by Kenneth Oppel Scholastic Press, 2010, 384 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Fiction/Experimentation ISBN: 978-0-545-22925-8</p> <p>On Ben's 12th birthday, his mom comes home with an eight-day-old chimp. Both of Ben's parents are scientists, and the chimp is their new project. Ben's father is clear that the chimp is to be used for science, but Ben's mother's project has a different twist, and she wants to really treat the chimp as a member of the family. Ben doesn't like Zan (the chimp) at first, but then he becomes attached to him as if he were his little brother. When Ben's father decides that Zan isn't learning language as well as he should, Zan gets sent to a refuge for chimps. When Ben realizes that Zan is going to be sold for medical research, he steals him back. Eventually, Zan ends up in a sanctuary where he is safe from research and can live with other chimpanzees in an appropriate and protected environment.</p> <p>April Wulber Yorkshire, OH</p>	<p><i>Heart of a Samurai</i> by Margi Preus Adventure/Coming of Age/International Travel Amulet Books, 2010, 304 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 978-0-8109-8981-8</p> <p>At 14, Manjiro is swept away from his homeland of Japan by a terrible storm. At first, survival is all he and his crewmates worry about. But after being rescued by an American whaling vessel, the Japanese fishermen share the fear that the legendary "foreign devils" will poison their minds with barbaric ways of thinking. All except Manjiro. His curiosity and quick mind spur him to learn more about the possibilities of life beyond the shores of his village. He even becomes friends with the ship's captain, who eventually takes him to America as his adopted son. Life in America is full of opportunity and freedom, but not without a price.</p> <p>Preus's fictional retelling of this true story will captivate readers of all ages. Including archival illustrations by Manjiro, this hero's tale is a fascinating look at the original bridges built between the American and Japanese peoples.</p> <p>Julie Phillips Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Home Is with Our Family</i> by Joyce Hansen Coming of Age/Abolition Movement Disney: Jump at the Sun Books, 2010, 272 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-7868-5217-8</p> <p>All that matters to Maria Peters is that she is about to turn 13—the age when she'll be considered grown up enough to attend abolitionist meetings. She's driven by the message of Sojourner Truth and longs to be a part of the anti-slavery movement. Maria's life becomes complicated when the city threatens to tear down the safe haven for free blacks and escaped slaves. Maria discovers that turning 13 may signify much more than she imagined.</p> <p><i>Home Is with Our Family</i> seamlessly weaves Maria's personal story with significant historical events. Hansen's characters, setting, and actions create for the reader a picture of life for free and enslaved blacks in 1855 that cannot be ignored. Readers will find themselves confronting one of the darkest moments in American history and emerging with a sense of hope for the nation and pride in the ones who fought to make it free.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Ilyria</i> by Elizabeth Hand Teen Romance/Family Viking, 2010, 135 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 978-0-670-01212-1</p> <p>The Tierney cousins live shrouded in darkness, held together by memories of a great grandmother. The two who keep the family alive are first cousins—and closest friends—Madeline and Rogan. When they are both cast in roles in the school production of <i>Twelfth Night</i>, their relationship begins to take a turn from friendship to forbidden love. Obsessed with each other, the two begin down a dangerous path.</p> <p>An intriguing combination of magical realism and a story of illicit love, <i>Ilyria</i> at turns surprises and shocks its readers as the characters push the boundaries of acceptability and reality. From magical stages to attic hideaways, Hand traces the characters through their relationships, ultimately shaping a novel that does not simply detail obsession, but one that is unafraid to reveal its consequences as well. <i>Ilyria</i> is an excellent novel for any reader caught up in stories about forbidden teen love and romance.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><i>Imaginalis</i> by J. M. DeMatteis Katherin Tegen Books, 2010, 248 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Magic ISBN: 978-0-06-173286-7</p> <p>For most of Mehera's friends, <i>Imaginalis</i> is nothing more than a fairy tale book series, a story they gave up a long time ago. But for Mehera, <i>Imaginalis</i> is something more—a reality she almost believes in. When publishers decide to cancel the series, she begins a one-girl quest to keep the storyline alive, a quest that leads her right into the drama of <i>Imaginalis</i> itself. As the lines of her world begin to blur, Mehera discovers that she may be the only person capable of saving <i>Imaginalis</i> and, in a dangerous twist, our own world as well.</p> <p>With a story that brings together Narnian-like lions, Middle Earth-style magic, and wizardry that even Harry Potter would covet, <i>Imaginalis</i> is a perfect recommendation for lovers of fantasy writing. A fast-paced but well-developed read, DeMatteis's book leaves readers wondering if the imaginary isn't more real than we might believe.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Misty Gordon and the Mystery of the Ghost Pirates</i> by Kim Kennedy Amulet Books: An imprint of Abrams, 2010, 240 pp., \$ 15.95</p> <p>Fantasy/Mystery/Humor ISBN: 978-0-8109-9357-0</p> <p>Misty Gordon's parents own the Dearly Departed Antiques Store, which they stock with items they purchase from the estates of recently deceased residents of Ashcrumb, a historic town on the Atlantic coast. Though Misty finds her parents' occupation mortifying, her mundane life changes when she discovers a hidden diary tucked inside an old phone from one of these estates. And this is only the first secret she uncovers as she encounters ghosts, a killer mayonnaise addict, and a fur coat that stalks her as she and her best friend Yoshi try to uncover the secret history of Ashcrumb and save the town from approaching ghost pirates bent on taking over the world.</p> <p>Part silly, part scary, and all adventurous, Kim Kennedy's debut novel (she previously collaborated with her brother on the <i>Pirate Pete</i> books for early readers) is a page-turning mystery that will satisfy elementary and middle school readers.</p> <p>Nathan Phillips Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Shine</i> by Lauren Myracle Amulet/Abrams, 2011, 384 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fiction/Drug Abuse/Bullying ISBN: 978-0-8109-8417-2</p> <p>While her former best friend Patrick lies in a coma, Cat investigates the hate crime that put him there, since local law enforcement officials seem reluctant to do so. Then, too, she feels guilt for having become withdrawn for years from everyone around her, including Patrick. Convinced that someone in their small town of Black Creek, North Carolina, is responsible for leaving Patrick brutally beaten with a gas nozzle taped to his mouth, she visits Patrick's local haunts and interviews their mutual friends. During the investigation, Cat unearths secrets about her friends and the production, distribution, and use of meth that permeates their lives. Unrelentingly, she pursues the investigation to its surprising conclusion, discovering truths about herself and conjuring her own strength along the way. As she descends into the seamy underbelly of the place she calls home, she realizes that she must let her own light shine if she ever plans to help others.</p> <p>Barbara Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p><i>Sir Charlie Chaplin, the Funniest Man in the World</i> by Sid Fleischman Greenwillow Books, 2010, 267 pp., \$19.99</p> <p>Biography ISBN: 978-0-06-189640-8</p> <p>How does a Cockney street urchin change his fortune to become one of the wealthiest and most revered comedians of movie history? Fleischman traces the dramatic rise of Chaplin from a boy performing slapstick on a London street corner to an iconic actor who came to forever alter the Hollywood film industry. Fleischman tells Chaplin's tale with a clear fondness for "the Little Tramp," making the reader feel like a privileged listener to the memories of a personal friend. Chaplin's great heights of success and his devastating lows are narrated with carefully researched detail.</p> <p>While the writing style is clear enough for early preteens to understand, Fleischman's spinning of Chaplin's roller-coaster fame will have readers of all ages cheering as Chaplin bucks the bloated studios to follow his own creative instincts and mourns the loss of close family members.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>The Absolute Value of Negative One</i> by Steve Brezenoff Carolrhoda Lab, 2010, 290 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fiction/Emotional Problems ISBN: 978-0-7613-5417-8</p> <p>Lily, Noah, and Simon are teenagers attending classes (when they aren't skipping to smoke cigarettes) at a Long Island high school. When family issues and the pressures of becoming an adult complicate their once-simple friendships, each deals with the changes differently. Lily worries that her love of math will betray her slacker reputation, Noah retreats to his basement to avoid an abusive father, and Simon joins the track team to get healthy and pursue a "normal" girl.</p> <p>The characters narrate the same events but from their own unique perspectives. As the story unfolds and the plotlines interweave, the profound and poignant realization comes to light: how deeply can you know another person—even a best friend? A series of misunderstandings, unspoken truths, and angry outbursts claw away at the trio. As they drift apart, they struggle to balance emotional wounds with the need to create their own identities.</p> <p>Kevin Sawyer Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>The Defense of Thaddeus A. Ledbetter</i> by John Gosselink Amulet Books, 2010, 240 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction ISBN: 978-0-8109-8977-1</p> <p>If you are looking for the definition of a word, trying to remember the lyrics to a blues song, or wanting to rethink the layout of a school bus, then Thaddeus A. Ledbetter is the person to go to. In this story, Thaddeus Ledbetter sets out to defend his actions that have led to In-School Suspension for the rest of the year. Thaddeus finds ISS to be extremely boring but useful. He uses the time to take action to defend his purpose behind The True Emergency Drill, and create greater efficiency in the world.</p> <p>John Gosselink uses a unique page layout to create the feeling of a student file and uses different fonts and illustrations to portray the tone and voice of various characters within the story. Mr. Cooper, Uncle Pete, and Allison have the most contact with Thaddeus and ultimately contribute to his defense strategies and confinement.</p> <p>Kathryn Fry Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Lighter Side of Life & Death</i> by C. K. Kelly Martin Random House Children's Books, 2010, 231 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Sex/Family/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-375-84588-8</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old Mason thought his dreams had come true when he lost his virginity to his best friend Kat, because now they could finally be together. However, it soon becomes clear that Kat wants nothing more than to pretend that the night never happened. While he is trying to figure out what will happen to his relationship with Kat (and their mutual friends, who now seem to be torn between the two), he also meets Colette, a 23-year-old that he didn't think he even had a chance with, until the first time she invites him to her apartment. Unfortunately, Colette is also his new step-mom's sister's best friend, so they must hide their relationship from everyone. A story about a boy juggling his new-found sexuality, changing relationships, and a new family all at once, this novel follows the journey that will change his life forever.</p> <p>Jessica S. Joyner Memphis, TN</p>	<p><i>The Line</i> by Teri Hall Dial Books, 2010, 219 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Science Fiction/Family ISBN: 978-0-8037-3466-1</p> <p>In the not so distant future, Rachel and her mother live on the Property, far from civilization and from the eyes of the oppressive Unites States government. They are dangerously close, however, to the Line, an impenetrable border between the Property and Away. The Line, part of the National Border Defense System, keeps citizens from leaving, but it also keeps the Others from getting in. Rachel and her mother work for Ms. Moore, who owns the Property, and they live a relatively quiet life. But then Rachel stumbles across a garbled recording asking for help—from the other side of the Line. Her attempts to solve this mystery lead her to uncover dangerous secrets.</p> <p>This dystopian story about courage in the face of mortal risk presents a terrifying vision of the future; however, it rings in the end with a tentative but resounding note of hope.</p> <p>Michael Ebling Gainesville, FL</p>

<p><i>The Prince of Mist</i> by Carlos Ruiz Zafon Little Brown, and Company, 2010, 224 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>There is a war going on and Maximilian Carver, a watchmaker, decides to move his family. Eight years ago, he fell in love with a house on the beach, and he is finally moving his family there. When they arrive and strange things begin happening, Max (the son) chalks it all up to being shaken from the move. When Max and Alicia meet a local boy and go diving with him, there is a turning point in Max's thinking. He hears local legends about the dead son of the previous owners.</p> <p>When they discover that their younger sister, Irina, suffered an accident in their home on the beach, they know something is up. Perhaps the house really is haunted. While Max and Alicia's parents are at the hospital with Irina, they are working with their friend Roland to solve the case.</p> <p>April Wulber Yorkshire, OH</p>	<p><i>The River</i> by Mary Jane Beaufrand Little, Brown, 2010, 224 pp., \$ 16.99</p> <p>Veronica Severance was your typical pouty teen. Angry with her parents for uprooting her fabulous life in Portland for the dull rural countryside, Veronica believes her life is ruined. She is convinced that she will never feel connected to anything or anyone again. But her life begins to change the day she finds 7-year-old Karen Armstrong floating lifeless in the Santiam River.</p> <p>Fixated on finding the child's killer, Veronica begins to hear Karen in her dreams. But another, more urgent voice also finds its way into Veronica's world. Haunted by Karen's memory and the pulsing voice in her ears, Veronica is relentless in her quest for answers. As she searches, Veronica begins to discover pieces of not only her friends and family, but also of herself. Beaufrand's story depicts the beauty of human triumph over the ugliness of human vice.</p> <p>Leslie Ostrowski Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Steps across the Water</i> by Adam Gopnik Disney and Hyperion Books, 2010, 291 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Rose lives in New York with her brother Oliver and her adoptive parents. One day in Central Park, Rose notices an arch of steps over the park's water with small people walking on them. A friend from school introduces her to the magical city of U Nork that exists inside a snow globe and can be reached from New York by the steps across the water.</p> <p>Rose is called upon to rescue the city from an Ice Queen who seeks its destruction. Using the magic tricks she learned from her brother and by thinking fast, Rose combats the Ice Queen and her minions and learns that her family history is closely connected to U Nork. She discovers that although she is small and U Nork is simply part of a snow globe, her mission and the lives of the U Norkers are important, too.</p> <p>Jamie McGee Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>The Total Tragedy of a Girl Named Hamlet</i> by Erin Dionne Dial Books, 2010, 304 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Hamlet Kennedy doesn't just know her Shakespeare, she lives it. Her parents, both Shakespearean scholars, and her genius 7-year-old sister, Desdemona, who will attend the same middle school, all threaten to make this the worst start to a semester ever. It doesn't help that a secret admirer keeps giving her origami pigs and that her best friend, Tyler, might have a crush on her. In a semester filled with multiple embarrassing episodes, failed attempts to protect her sister from so-called friends who use her for her brain, and surrealist art projects, will Hamlet eventually cheer "Huzzah" or keep throwing Shakespearean insults at her classmates?</p> <p>Dionne crafts a sweet, often humorous, romance suitable for upper elementary and middle school readers. This novel also features a contemporary twist to Shakespeare's <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>.</p> <p>Jacqueline Bach Baton Rouge, LA</p>

<p><i>They Called Themselves the KKK: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group</i> by Susan Campbell Bartoletti Houghton Mifflin, 2010, 172 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-618-44033-7</p> <p>Nonfiction/Civil Rights</p>	<p><i>Three Quarters Dead</i> by Richard Peck Dial Books, 2010, 193 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-8037-3454-8</p> <p>Fantasy</p> <p>Kerry is a sophomore who desperately wants to join the popular crowd. During lunch, the coolest girls at school befriend her and include her in their discussion. Kerry will do anything to make sure that they continue to include her during and outside of lunch. Her friends begin inviting her places and then give her tasks to perform. She fails to realize that the assignments given to her by these friends are hurtful to others and that she is being used. Kerry becomes so wrapped up in a world of texting, prom, and gossip that she continues to perform her popular friends' bidding—even after they suffer a fatal car crash. Are her friends still alive? Were they even dead?</p> <p>This story is packed with intrigue and leaves the reader questioning the power of the supernatural world. Kerry begins as a malleable girl, but grows into a strong young woman.</p> <p>Jackie Evans Baton Rouge, LA</p>
<p><i>Whisper</i> by Phoebe Kitanidis Balzer + Bray, 2010, 281 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-06-179925-9</p> <p>On the outside, Joy Stefani is a well-adjusted high schooler whose helpful nature makes her everybody's favorite. Inside, like her sister and mother, Joy is able to Hear Whispers—the innermost thoughts of the people around her. Like her mom, Joy listens to people's desires and helps them. However, she has noticed recent changes as she hears shocking and hurtful thoughts, some of which are directed toward her. She also experiences excruciating headaches that no one seems able to explain or soothe.</p> <p>What's more, Joy's once strong connection with her older sister, Jessica, continues to disintegrate. Jessica views their ability as a curse and tries to sabotage Joy's happiness and popularity. Confused and concerned, Joy begins to question people and experiences. Through questioning, she finds an untapped confidence that leads her on a mission to rescue someone she loves and discover the truth behind who she is.</p> <p>Erin Bridges Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> <i>Melanie Hundley</i> <i>1021 Delmas Ave.</i> <i>Nashville, TN 37216-3630</i> <i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Melanie Hundley at melanie.hundley@Vanderbilt.edu.</i></p>

The Top Young Adult Book Picks from This Decade 1999–2009

Every decade, Ted Hipple would ask young adult (YA) literature experts to identify their favorite books. Using the United States Postal Service, he would send letters, tally all of the responses, publish the results, present those titles at a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention session, and distribute a handout at an Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE (ALAN) workshop. Since Ted passed away in 2004 and because I was asked the last couple of times to participate in his survey, I decided to replicate the survey—with some modifications—in his honor.

The Question

Although admittedly unscientific, on March 16, 2010, I posted this question on the Adolescent Literature Forum of the NCTE Ning: “In your opinion, what are the 10 best Young Adult (YA) books published between 1999 and 2009, with 1 being your favorite and so on?” The following day, I emailed all members of ALAN the same question. In both forums, I requested that members forward my email request to all the YA enthusiasts they knew in order to get as many responses as possible.

The Method

From then until April 15, 2010, individuals could name their favorites. My question was forwarded by ALAN members and posted on several message boards, including Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and other communities on the NCTE

Ning. Respondents were asked to provide three bits of information: the name of the book, the author of the book, and their own professional role as a user of YA literature—university professor, secondary teacher, media specialist, or author.

All submissions were checked via Internet to establish the copyright date of the first edition of each book. Those respondents who identified a book outside of the 1999–2009 range were given an opportunity to modify their submissions. The data of those who did not respond to the request to revise were discarded.

Numerical points were distributed according to the rankings given. If a person listed the book in 1st place, that book received 10 points; 2nd place, 9 points, and so on so that the book in 10th place received 1 point (see Appendix 1: Example of Scoring System Using My Ranked Selections). Another count was done by simply tallying one mark each time a title was mentioned in a person’s top ten list, regardless of ranking.

The Results

In short, responses were obtained from 197 people: 70 university professors (see Appendix 2: Professors’ Picks), 63 secondary teachers (see Appendix 3: Secondary Teachers’ Picks), 44 librarians (see Appendix 4: Librarians’ Picks), and 20 authors (see Appendix 5: Authors’ Picks). In all, 456 young adult titles were mentioned. The following titles led the list; each appears with its earned score representing the points received:

- 662 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
 617 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
 595 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
 459 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*
 by Sherman Alexie (2007)
 270 *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005)
 212 *Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002)
 194 *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
 181 *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher (2002)
 175 *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang
 (graphic novel, 2006)
 172 *Unwind* by Neal Shusterman (2007)
 162 *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007)
 141 *Sold* by Patricia McCormick (2002)
 141 *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005)
 134 *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
 124 *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)
 118 *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing I and II*
 by M. T. Anderson (2008)
 113 *Deadline* by Chris Crutcher (2007)
 102 *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer (2002)
 87 *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan (2005)
 85 *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008)
 63 *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004)
 39 *The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman (2000)
 39 *Godless* by Pete Hautman (2004)

Mentioned in Top Ten (no points for ranking)

- 94 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
 83 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
 77 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
 72 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*
 by Sherman Alexie (2007)
 42 *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005)
 42 *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
 33 *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang
 (graphic novel, 2006)
 31 *Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002)
 30 *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher (2002)
 29 *The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson (2003)
 29 *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007)
 26 *Unwind* by Neal Shusterman (2007)
 26 *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005)
 24 *Sold* by Patricia McCormick (2002)
 23 *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
 22 *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)
 22 *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing I and II*
 by M. T. Anderson (2008)

- 19 *Deadline* by Chris Crutcher (2007)
 19 *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan (2005)
 17 *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly (2003)
 17 *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer
 (2002)
 17 *Marcelo in the Real World* by Francisco X. Stork
 (2009)
 16 *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004)

Discussion

When Ted Hipple published the results of his 2004 Best Young Adult Books of All Time survey in Don Gallo's Young Adult Literature column in the January, 2005, *English Journal*, only 149 different novels were named from 78 respondents. Extrapolated from the full report, these were the top ten at that time, with the parenthetic number representing the votes each received:

- *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier (27)
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (22)
- *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (19)
- *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton (15)
- *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (13)
- *Holes* by Louis Sachar (13)
- *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (13)
- *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher (13)
- *Make Lemonade* by Virginia Euwer Wolff (12)
- *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse (11)

(Incidentally, in 1987, Ted Hipple conducted a very similar survey, and the top three in that survey were *The Chocolate War*, *The Outsiders*, and *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel.)

Of all those titles, only *Speak* was listed on both Ted's 2004 list and my 1999–2009 list; perhaps the comment made by this respondent captures why:

“. . . Certain books such as *Speak* are so powerful, memorable, and life-altering that they will always remain among my favorites. I can still remember the first time I read *Speak*. I was blown away by the author's deftly written prose and the way she blended humor and pathos throughout the story. Her skillful weaving of *The Scarlet Letter* and an English class and Melinda's own experiences was—and still is—impressive.”

Beyond *Speak*, one can only wonder which of the books mentioned in Ted's survey would replace some of the top picks from this current list—if any at all!

It was also interesting that the top four books of this decade were the only books listed on all four groups' top ten lists, and even then, all groups did not agree on the rank order.

- *Hunger Games* was the teachers' and librarians' top pick;
- *The Book Thief* was the authors' top pick;
- *Speak* was the professors' top pick; and
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* was not the first pick in any group, unless one looks at the professors' picks without ranking.

It was humorous that every time someone listed *Twilight* in their top ten, it was also accompanied by an apology of some sort. The following comment represents the predominant sentiment of those who included books from the *Twilight* series in their top ten:

"I chose these books as my top ten not just because I liked them. In fact, there are some I liked better on a personal level that I did not add to the list. I chose the *Twilight* series, for example, because of my students' reactions to them. Anything that instills a love of reading in today's teens deserves some recognition."

Several people hated being limited to "just ten," and some even included an addendum with "Honorable Mentions." Among them is another series endorsement:

"Honorable Mention: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J. K. Rowling (OK, the whole *Harry Potter* series is among the most fun reads—and I think that Ms. Rowling changed who was reading in middle school, so for that alone, I love her)."

The serendipitous comments by people who wanted to justify their selections (since I included no criteria for selecting the best books of the decade) were wonderful:

- "I selected these based on excellent and innovative craft, emotional resonance, and groundbreaking content."
- "I picked these because I feel they are important in some way. Beyond being entertaining, they made me feel more complete somehow after reading them, like I was a fuller person for having read them, either from a shift in perspective, a new insight, or finding a richness that hadn't been there before. That's why. I hope your research on this is successful, and thanks for the chance to participate."
- "I know folks will enjoy reading the article and

arguing over the merits of the books. I often laugh when someone asks me about my favorite book, since it's usually whatever book I happen to be reading at the time. . . . If you asked me another day, I might have a couple of titles that took the place of the ones above, but overall, these books speak to me, and I wouldn't ever want to see them go out of print."

Conclusion

Obviously, with technology, more people have the opportunity to participate, but the increase in the number of YA titles mentioned is astounding, especially since Hipple's survey asked for the Best YA Novels of All Time up to 2004 and mine limited people to one decade of 1999–2009. Another difference is that Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* is the first graphic novel to make the top ten list. When the survey is next conducted, will there be another kind of YA book that gets nominated—perhaps an ebook, interactive book, or a book with a role-playing game? Finally, what does make a good book good? Ted would say this Latin phrase, "De gustibus non disputandum est," which, loosely translated, means, "There is no argument when it comes to taste." As for me, I can honestly say that I have not read every book that was mentioned in the survey, and it is evident that YA literature has come into its own. If you're like me, you have a lot of new books to read. Enjoy!

Note: For a copy of the complete list, email me at kaywell@usf.edu. I'd also like to thank USF students Jenn Gilgan and Courtney Pollard for their assistance in compiling the data.

Joan F. Kaywell is a full professor of English Education at the University of South Florida. She is past president of NCTE's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) and is currently serving as its membership secretary; she is a past-president of FCTE (twice) and is currently serving as its executive director. Dr. Kaywell has edited two series of textbooks and has written two books: Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics: Exploring Critical Issues in Today's Classrooms (2010) and Adolescents at Risk: A Guide to Fiction and Nonfiction for Young Adults, Parents, and Professionals (1993). Letters of Hope (2007) is her first trade book and is available from Philomel. Visit <http://www.coedu.usf.edu/kaywell> for more information.

Appendix 1: Example of Scoring System Using My Ranked Selections

1. <i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)	10 points	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
2. <i>Copper Sun</i> by Sharon Draper (2006)	9 points	<i>Copper Sun</i> by Sharon Draper (2006)
3. <i>Sold</i> by Patricia McCormick (2002)	8 points	<i>Sold</i> by Patricia McCormick (2002)
4. <i>Wintergirls</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)	7 points	<i>Wintergirls</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)
5. <i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)	6 points	<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)
6. <i>Unwind</i> by Neal Shusterman (2007)	5 points	<i>Unwind</i> by Neal Shusterman (2007)
7. <i>City of Ashes</i> by Cassandra Clare (2007)	4 points	<i>City of Ashes</i> by Cassandra Clare (2007)
8. <i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> by Ben Mikaelson (2001)	3 points	<i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> by Ben Mikaelson (2001)
9. <i>Deadline</i> by Chris Crutcher (2007)	2 points	<i>Deadline</i> by Chris Crutcher (2007)
10. <i>American Born Chinese</i> Gene Yang (2006)	1 point	<i>American Born Chinese</i> Gene Yang (2006)

Appendix 2: Professors' Picks

Top Ten Professors' Picks with Points (n = 70)

303	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
271	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie (2007)
264	<i>The Book Thief</i> by Markus Zusak (2005)
171	<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)
130	<i>American Born Chinese</i> by Gene Luen Yang (graphic novel, 2006)
120	<i>Feed</i> by M. T. Anderson (2002)
106	<i>Monster</i> by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
102	<i>Looking for Alaska</i> by John Green (2005)
90	<i>Whale Talk</i> by Chris Crutcher (2002)
75	<i>Sold</i> by Patricia McCormick (2002)

Mentioned in Top Ten (no points)

(NOTE: Two in **bold** not included in top ten.)

40	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie (2007)
36	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
34	<i>The Book Thief</i> by Markus Zusak (2005)
27	<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)
24	<i>American Born Chinese</i> by Gene Luen Yang (2006) graphic
21	<i>Monster</i> by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
18	<i>Looking for Alaska</i> by John Green (2005)
15	<i>Whale Talk</i> by Chris Crutcher (2002)
15	<i>Feed</i> by M. T. Anderson (2002)
14	<i>The First Part Last</i> by Angela Johnson (2003)
11	<i>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing I and II</i> by M. T. Anderson (2008)
11	<i>Sold</i> by Patricia McCormick (2002)

Appendix 3: Teachers' Picks

Top Ten Secondary Teachers' Picks with Points (n = 63)

264	<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)
165	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
140	<i>The Book Thief</i> by Markus Zusak (2005)
116	<i>Unwind</i> by Neal Shusterman (2007)
104	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie (2007)
72	<i>13 Reasons Why</i> by Jay Asher (2007)
70	<i>Deadline</i> by Chris Crutcher (2007)
68	<i>Stargirl</i> by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
65	<i>The Lightning Thief</i> by Rick Riordan (2005)
64	<i>Wintergirls</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)

Mentioned in Top Ten (Teachers' lists - no points)

(NOTE: Four in **bold** not included in top ten.)

37	<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)
23	<i>The Book Thief</i> by Markus Zusak (2005)
22	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
16	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie (2007)
15	<i>Unwind</i> by Neal Shusterman (2007)
13	<i>13 Reasons Why</i> by Jay Asher (2007)
12	<i>The Lightning Thief</i> by Rick Riordan (2005)
12	<i>Monster</i> by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
12	<i>Twilight</i> by Stephenie Meyer (2005)
10	<i>Stargirl</i> by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
10	<i>Wintergirls</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)
9	<i>Whale Talk</i> by Chris Crutcher (2002)
9	<i>Deadline</i> by Chris Crutcher (2007)

(NOTE: 15 Harry Potter series if added all together)

Appendix 4: Librarians' Picks

Top Ten Librarians' Picks with Points (n = 44)

- 190 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
- 124 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
- 98 *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005)
- 92 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
- 54 *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer (2002)
- 48 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007)
- 44 *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005)
- 35 *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007)
- 35 *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
- 33 *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004)

Mentioned in Top Ten (Librarians' lists - no points)

(NOTE: Two in **bold** not included in top ten.)

- 26 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
- 18 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
- 16 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
- 14 *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005)
- 11 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007)
- 9 *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (2000)
- 8 *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer (2002)
- 8 *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005)
- 7 *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007)
- 6 ***Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002)**
- 6 ***The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson (2003)**
- 6 *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004)

Appendix 5: Authors' Picks

Top Ten Authors' Picks with Points (n = 20)

- 89 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
- 37 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
- 36 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007)
- 35 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
- 29 *Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002)
- 25 *The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman (2000)
- 23 *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
- 19 *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008)
- 19 *Godless* by Pete Hautman (2004)
- 18 *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing I and II* by M. T. Anderson (2008)

Mentioned in Top Ten (Authors' lists - no points)

(NOTE: Two in **bold** not included in top ten.)

- 9 *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005)
- 6 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007)
- 5 *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
- 5 *Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002)
- 4 *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
- 4 *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli (2000)
- 3 *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing I and II* by M. T. Anderson (2008)
- 3 *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008)
- 3 ***Crank* by Ellen Hopkins (2004)**
- 3 ***Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan (2005)**
- 3 *The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman (2000)

Stories from the Field

Editors' Note: *Stories from the Field* invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to: jbach@lsu.edu.

The Power of Tears

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We've all had that student—the one who comes into our life for a short time and leaves an impression that will remain forever, the one who shows us that we can make a difference. For me, there was one student in particular; let's call him Juan. Juan was one of those seventh-grade kids who many pegged as a troublemaker. He was a 13-year-old Hispanic gang member. His numerous fights and school suspensions made it clear that Juan would rather be anywhere than in school.

The year Juan graced my classroom was the same year a mentor introduced me to *Tears of a Tiger* (1994), a young adult novel by Sharon Draper that focuses on the life of Andy, a teenage boy who finds himself responsible for the death of his best friend and subsequently facing the downward spiral of depres-

sion and guilt. I fell in love with the story and the characters. I knew I had to incorporate it into my curriculum. As we read the novel together, I noticed Juan appeared more frequently in class. He followed along in the text and was engrossed in the story. When we finished the novel, near the conclusion of the school year, Juan managed a passing grade and continued on into the eighth grade.

The following year, I was sitting in my classroom when the door opened. To my surprise, Juan came to visit me. Without wasting any time, he simply said, "You saved my life."

I was floored. "What?!"

"You didn't know this, but there was a time last year that I was really depressed. I was considering suicide. Then we read that book, *Tears of a Tiger*, and I saw myself. I saw that suicide wasn't the answer. I will never forget that book. I just wanted to say, 'Thank you.' Thank you for that book."

Nothing can ever take that memory away from me. One novel had the power to save his life. I thank God every day that it did.

Looking in the Mirror

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I vividly remember that Tuesday morning in March when young adult literature became real for my

students. We were beginning our study of Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*. In this novel, Hannah reveals her internal and external conflicts in a series of narrative cassette tapes she leaves for a group of her peers. My class was fired up; they debated Hannah's decision to commit suicide. Although there were some students who questioned her fatal choice, others understood—or perhaps *accepted* is a better word—her motivation for taking such a tragic step. The class's discussion turned heated. Over the course of the debate, I noticed Pam (a pseudonym), usually quite vocal, sitting quietly and trying to conceal her tears. I hoped that she did not detect my watching her. I wondered what was going on in her mind.

As if on cue, Pam shouted over the back-and-forth of the class, "I was Hannah!"

Everything stopped. Utter silence. All eyes turned toward Pam.

"What?" Jane, another student, whispered into the open space.

"I was Hannah!" Pam choked as tears streamed down her face.

"No, you weren't," Jane responded, "because you are still here."

"I considered making the same choice as Hannah. Just like her, I had reasons for doing the same thing. High school was hard."

Of course, we wanted to know more. Pam looked around the room at all of us and took a deep breath. She didn't need to say any more. Her words that day have stayed with us, just as Hannah's words stay with those who received the tapes. The power of young adult literature is daunting, for it was through that book we were able to put a mirror up to ourselves and to one another.

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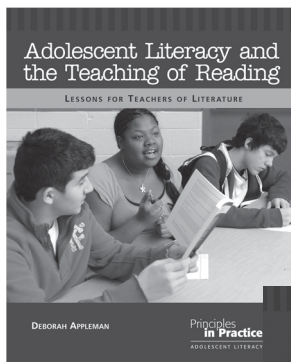
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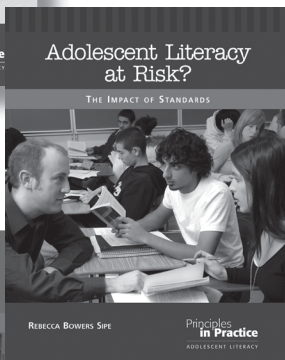
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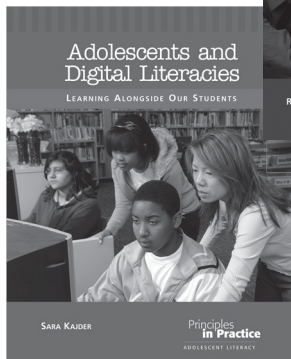
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A Century of American Literacy Education and the National Council of Teachers of English

Erika Lindemann

Foreword by Deborah Brandt

Afterword by Edmund J. Farrell

Reading the Past, Writing the Future celebrates NCTE's centennial by emphasizing the role the organization has played in brokering and advancing the many traditions and countertraditions engaging literacy educators since the organization was chartered in 1911.

Prominent scholars focus on activities and subject matters central to teaching English language arts and college English: teaching reading, writing, language, and literature; using new media effectively; working for social justice in the classroom, school, and community; devising responsible means to assess the work of students and teachers; initiating the next generation into the profession; cultivating an ethos for action among those who support as well as critique this work; and looking toward the work that remains to be done in the century ahead.

An afterword offers a telescopic view of the last 100 years and describes several critical problems currently facing literacy educators.

This rich and thoughtful history of our discipline and organization is for every teacher of the English language arts and English studies who wonders where we've been, how we got where we are today, and where we all might be traveling as literacy educators in the 21st century.

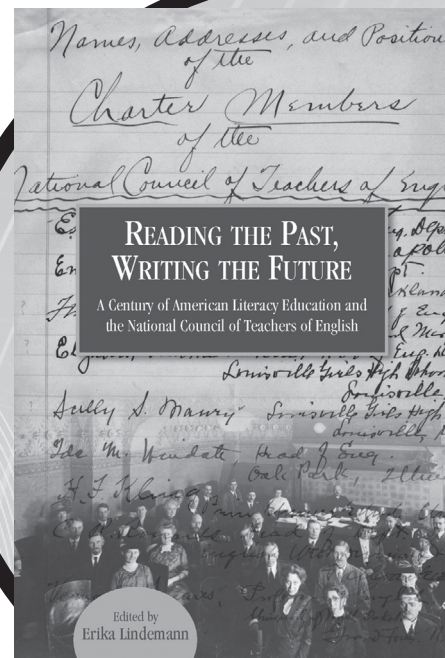
505 pp. 2010. K-College. ISBN 978-0-8141-3876-2.

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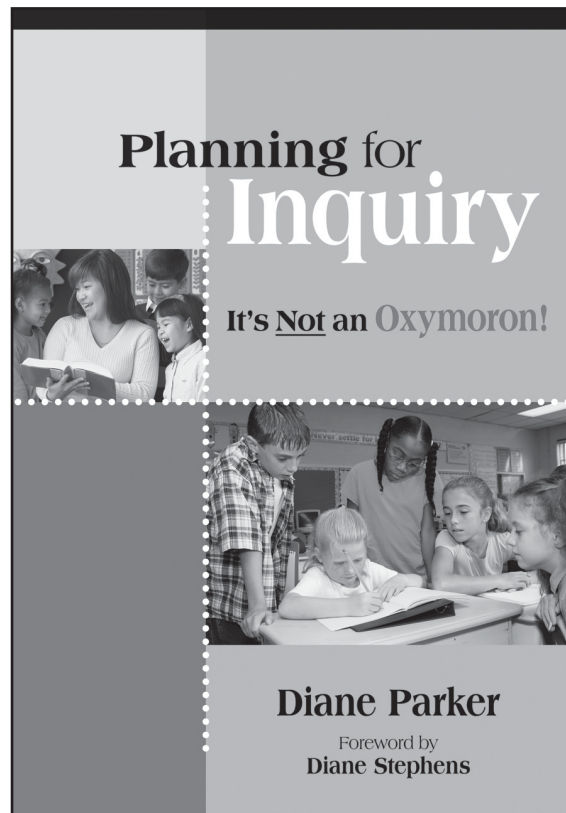
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It's Not an Oxymoron!

Diane Parker

Foreword by *Diane Stephens*

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