Three years ago, ALAN journal’s editor (fondly known as the Belle of Tallahassee) allowed me to appear in these pages — a move not unlike inviting Spanky and Alfalfa to an embassy brunch. Since then, I’ve experienced a dizzying rise from total obscurity to vague familiarity. Thanks in part to ALAN, I’m mistaken for much more important people these days than ever before.

To honor the end of Dr. Carroll’s reign as editor, I’ve been asked to write another article. After a great deal of thought, and after accepting the sad truth that I have a hard time making decisions (I’ve been known to hover for twenty minutes in the produce department trying to pick the right tomato or, more importantly, avoid picking the wrong tomato), I realized there’s only one possible topic worthy of this event. Everything. So, in this article, I’ll cover the entire history of YA literature, past, present, and future, describe the important people and organizations in the field, and explain everything I’ve learned as a writer of YA novels. If there’s space left over, I’ll toss in my wife’s recipe for cream of broccoli soup.

The History of Young Adult Novels

In 1951, J.D. Salinger, author of such action-packed works as “A Perfect Day for Banana Bread,” and Franny and Zoooommey, creates a new genre with Catcher in the Rye, spawning an industry frenzy for novels with red covers. Teachers rejoice, and celebrate this emerging literature by assigning The Brothers Karamazov. Also in 1951, three-year-old Chris Crutcher grows his first mustache.

Ten years later, Harper Lee creates a YA classic that doesn’t have a single YA character. A short time after that, S. E. Hinton, realizing that she’s just as qualified as Salinger to go by her initials, writes several ground breaking YA novels while still in utoer. Teachers across the land respond by assigning Silas Marner. Robert Cormier, feeling that Holden Caufield got off too easily, kicks the crap out of his characters. Things start to get interesting. Judy Blume and Stephen King write about girls getting their first period, with broadly different outcomes. Someone points out to M. E. Kerr that she also has two initials.

In the eighties, angst reigns supreme. During that decade, YA novels give us 837 rapes, 943 murders, 1,247 suicides, 12,457 dead parents, 19,382 dead pets, and three smiles. Le- gions of dogs are bred for the sole purpose of dying in the penultimate chapter. So many parents drown that the Red Cross steps in to offer free adult swim lessons to any interested fictional characters. Loneliness runs rampant — nobody wants to be the main character’s best friend because that’s almost a guaranteed death sentence. During this period, I attempt to write books using my first two initials, but people misread the meaning of D. R. Lubar and hound me for am- phetamine prescriptions.

The nineties bring us a huge diversity and bold experimenta - tion. Characters get drunk, use bad language, and contemplate intercourse, just like Holden Caufield, but authors bravely use their whole first names. Except for J. K. Rowling, but then again she can do whatever she wants, even if it means that an entire generation of her book-toting fans will eventually suffer scoliosis. (One youngster was already tragically crushed when he tried to bring his entire Harry Potter collection to school in his back pack. This represents an alarming trend in page-count injuries affecting younger and younger kids. It used to be only Robert Jordan fans who got hurt.)

The next ten years should be just as exciting, especially when a wave of adult authors dives into YA novels, allowing teens to share the joys of deciphering enigmatic references, plotless meanderings, epiphanies by the cart load, and the many other wonders of the finest literary and academic fiction. It’s about time. There’s no reason all of this joy should be the exclusive property of New Yorker subscribers.

Beyond that, two or three decades hence, we’ll see the end of the printed word as ebooks take over the world. Or as glo- bal warming raises the ambient temperature above 451 degrees Fahrenheit (which, as any science fiction fan knows, is the kindling temperature of banana bread). While the end of the printed word was also predicted by the advent of educational radio, educational television, personal computers, laser disks, computers, and Jim Carrey movies, the prognosticators are bound to be right sooner or later. If not this time, maybe next time.

Some Key People in the Field

(Voice shift alert — I really like the people in the field, so this section might not have quite the same tone as the rest of the piece. On the other hand, I’ve been known to shoot myself in the foot, so we’ll just have to see what happens.)

Between the reader and writer lies a vast array of other folks. Foremost among them is M. Jerry Weiss, who realized that he could slip cleverly into the middle ground by using just one of his two initials. M. (as we like to call him) has a marvelous talent for getting publishers to send writers to conferences at
places we'd never get to see otherwise, like New Orleans, San Francisco, Hoboken, and Toronto. For this, we all love him.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there's that one guy who has absolutely no sense of humor. His name eludes me at the moment, but you know who I mean. The same guy who's proud of the fact that he doesn't like teens. On second thought, let's just move on. No point making him cranker than he already is. I'd rather talk about those who've chosen the light side of the Force. And they are legion. The array of folks who promote good books is amazing. There's probably no field on the planet where everyone is so cool.

Wait — it's coming to me even as I write this. Let's bag the descriptions and just do the thing we all enjoy the most: give out awards. But these will be fun awards. None of this stuff about enduring literary value or redeeming social messages.

Okay. The envelope, please. In the category of best hair on an individual over six feet seven inches tall, the winner is Walter Mayes (aka Walter the Giant Story Teller). For best hair, couples division, the winners are Don Gallo and CJ Bott. The award for best drawl on an answering machine message goes to Dr. Pamela Sissi Carroll. (Not that I'd ever admit to calling her office when I knew she was out just to hear that cheerful southern phrasing). Bill Mollineaux wins best punster, in the division of important guys I'm trying to suck up to. (Yikes — wait — I ended that with a preposition. Let's make it "important guys to whom I am trying to suck up." Wait. Darn. That won't work either. Okay — got it — "important guys up to whom I am trying to suck." There. Perfect.)

Okay — back to the awards. Di Tixier Herald wins the Green Earth award for building her new house out of recycled Advanced Reading Copies (ARCs). The "It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time" award goes to Cathi Dunn MacRae for letting me write whatever I feel like in VOYA. And, in a tightly fought contest among dozens of candidates, Richie Partington wins best impression of a goat farmer.

The nineties bring us a huge diversity and bold experimentation. Characters get drunk, use bad language, and contemplate intercourse, just like Holden Caufield, but authors bravely use their whole first names.

P.S. Bye-bye, Dr. Sissi. You done good.
Adolescent Readers *Flip* for David Lubar

Siss Carroll

With a mind that orbits at warp speed, David Lubar offers readers an amazing gift with each of his books: a reason to have good, silly, deep, full, long-lasting laughs. His newest novel, *Flip* (Tor, July, 2003) continues the zany tradition that Lubar began when he penned books like *Psychozone: Kidzilla and other Tales* (Tor, 1997) and when he took us and with young readers for a wander down *Monster Road* (Scholastic, 1997).

**Flip**

*Flip* features 13-year-old twins. Taylor is the intelligent student and dutiful daughter; Ryan, on the other hand, cemented his reputation as the family failure when he was only six years old. By chance, Taylor and Ryan discover hundreds of disks that have been dropped by a space craft near their backyard. Ryan learns, by trial and error, that the disks carry powerful magic; when he flips one then catches it in his palm, it melts into his skin, and imubes him with the strength, mind, and talent of a legendary figure from history. While hosting the spirit of Babe Ruth in his long-legged 13-year-old body, Ryan shocks his friends and the school coach by swatting one homerun after another. When the disk that melts into his skin turns out to contain the essence of Queen Victoria, Ryan suddenly develops a distaste for the unruly behavior and unclothed presence of the guys in his gym class. He entertains the school when he flips and absorb the Elvis disk, and in the book’s climactic scene, he settles a feud with the school bully by invoking the non-violent spirit of Gandhi. Ryan knows that if he could decode the odd writing on the surface of the disks, he might be better able to predict what would happen with each flip. Yet the mystery of what will happen each time Ryan flips a different disk is part of the entertainment in this fun and frenetic novel.

**David Lubar’s Books and the Classroom**

Today, maybe more than ever, we need to find reasons to laugh with the adolescents with whom we spend time. That need is a good reason to welcome David Lubar’s books and stories into middle and high school classrooms and media centers. He delivers punch lines with perfect timing, but his talent as a writer for adolescents is not limited to his humor. Lubar’s books are appealing to adolescent readers—even reluctant readers—for many reasons. They are popular in part because Lubar often plays around with the conventions of fiction, in ways that welcome readers into an appealing school setting by breaking up the narrative tradition that Lubar began when he penned books like *Psychozone: Kidzilla and other Tales* (Tor, 1997) and when he took us and with young readers for a wander down *Monster Road* (Scholastic, 1997).

Lubar’s novels and stories, and take a visit or two to his Website: [www.davidlubar.com](http://www.davidlubar.com). You will find links to excerpts from his literary works, as well as links to humor, his biography (your students will recognize *Frogger II*, the computer game that he created), a schedule of school visits, and—you guessed it—plenty of good reasons to laugh.