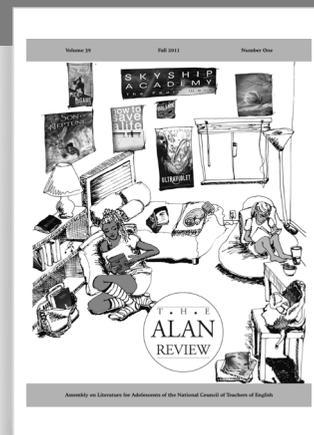


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Number 1

Fall 2011



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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

If you take a book with you on a journey . . . an odd thing happens. The book begins collecting your memories. And forever after you only have to open that book to be back where you first read it. It will all come into your mind with the very first words: the sights you saw in that place, what it smelled like, the ice cream you ate while you were reading it . . . yes, books are like flypaper—memories cling to the printed page better than anything else.

—Mo, *Inkheart* (Cornelia Funke, 2003)

This issue of the *The ALAN Review* coincides with the 100th anniversary of NCTE. Anniversary points like this often make us stop and think about the history of the organization or the journey that we have travelled as members of that organization. ALAN and *The ALAN Review*, like NCTE, have been integral aspects of many teachers' professional journeys by introducing them to new ideas, opening forums for sharing instructional choices, and developing personal and professional relationships. Last year in Orlando, I (Melanie) reconnected with a young woman who had been one of the student teachers I worked with years ago. She said, "I look forward to these conferences all year. I learn so much and go back to my school recharged." She followed that statement by saying, "I still remember my first NCTE and ALAN conferences. It was like coming home. I learned a ton of new things from people who were interested in me being successful."

Over the course of both conferences, I heard again and again how people made connections and built memories while at these conferences. These educators, media specialists, and authors pored over conference booklets and connected with presentations they'd seen, people they'd met, and authors they'd heard. The strength of both organizations and conferences is in the people who make up the membership.

Those of us working in the field of young adult literature celebrate anniversaries as well—the publication of *The Outsiders*, Harry Potter, or *Speak*, for example. We look back at particular books and remember the students with whom we read them. We open the first page of a novel and remember the student engagement or the young reader who consumed it and then begged for more. Many of the young adult novels carry with them memories of our teaching, our reading, and our moment-to-moment experiences with the texts that touched our students. One tenth-grade student wrote in her journal for her English class, "*Speak* was less than two hundred pages, but it seemed bigger than that because so much happened to me reading it. I reread sections for my paper, and it was strange because I could remember the discussions we had and what other people said." As a teacher, I have many books that are "bigger" than the number of their pages. Rylant's *Missing May* is one such book for me because I remember the reactions of my seventh graders as they connected with the main character's loss and her poverty. When I reread the book now, I hear their voices; the book is layered with my memories of reading it with them.

Jackie, Steve, and I are at a milestone with this issue as well; this is our seventh issue as editors, and there is so much growth that has happened for us in

our editorial journey. We have countless numbers of people we would like to take a moment to thank. Editors rely on the people who review manuscripts to provide thoughtful, detailed, and helpful critiques in a short amount of time. The reviewers who have read and commented on the manuscripts we have sent to them have been outstanding; they read and re-read challenging texts and provide feedback that is helpful to us as editors and to our authors. We appreciate our reviewers' willingness to contribute their time. They are a huge part of why *The ALAN Review* is a strong journal.

As the editor who works with the book reviews, I appreciate the readers who submit reviews on current young adult literature as well as the publishers who send review copies to us. Keeping current on what is being published in young adult literature is a challenge for all of us, and the reviews that our readers submit definitely help. The reviewers of *The ALAN Review* also deserve a thank-you; we appreciate your reading and responding to the articles we publish. As an organization, ALAN is incredibly supportive and helpful to us.

Wendy Glenn, president of ALAN, introduces this issue with a column that looks at both where young adult literature has been and where it is going. The theme of her column, Flash Back—Forge Ahead, dovetails nicely with this issue's theme on the role of young adult literature in schools and English Education. Glenn's address—The President's Connection—is also one of the two new features introduced in this issue of *The ALAN Review*.

In "An Investigation of Student Preferences of Text Format," Miriam G. Martinez and Janis Harmon examine which texts students might prefer to read. In a world that continually produces many texts with a range of formats (traditional, graphic novels, digital texts, interactive formats), this article raises an important question. Determining what kids prefer to read might lead us to understand what they will read or perhaps help us develop pedagogies that will reach more students more frequently.

In his article "The Verse Novel and the Question of Genre," Mike Cadden asks us to consider the verse novel in new ways. He recognizes that reading verse is often challenging for students, but explains that if student readers consider the various voices of the verse novel, the value of its white spaces, and

the ways in which verse novels are like dramas, then perhaps the novel might be less difficult to read.

Ruth Caillouet asks us to consider the models that the characters in the novels of both Wyeth and Woodson offer to young readers. She joins with other researchers and teachers who suggest that readers often find hope and rejuvenation through the vicarious lives of fictional characters. Her piece, "To Be Young, Gifted, Black, and Lesbian: Wyeth and Woodson, Models for Saving a Life," provides a discussion of the importance of hopeful characters for young readers.

In "Beyond a Good/Bad Binary: The Representation of Teachers in Contemporary YAL," Amy Cummins examines the representations of teachers in several young adult novels. She argues that it is not easy to characterize the contemporary teacher in these works as good or bad, as has often been the case; it is more helpful to discuss how teachers fall into a number of performative roles. Using a critical pedagogy framework, Cummins argues that educators can learn a lot about how to deal with students based on the representations of ourselves in their books.

René Saldaña, Jr., in "The Case of the Missing Mexican American Detective Stories: Mystery Solved?" explores the tradition of the detective novel featuring a young protagonist. He considers the small but growing number of novelists who are writing mystery novels and short stories featuring Mexican American protagonists and the importance of providing role models for readers that are more recent than the Nancy Drews and Encyclopedia Browns who have long dominated this genre.

After conducting a survey about their students' perceptions of people with mental disabilities, Bruce Menchetti, Gina Plattos, and Pamela Carroll recognized the potential role young adult literature could play in "exploring, and exploding, societal stereotypes about people who have disabilities." Their article offers a guide for identifying quality young adult literature that features characters with mental disabilities. It also provides suggestions for quality titles to use with students and ideas for how to incorporate this literature into teacher education programs.

In her article "YA Literature in Translation: A Batch of Batchelder Honorees," Kristana Miskin both reminds us about the Batchelder Awards and introduces us to many of its honorees. By including adolescent novels written in other languages but trans-

lated to English, our classrooms are enriched and our boundaries expanded. Jody N. Polleck's "Adolescent Literature Book Clubs: Cultivating Peer Relationships with Urban Adolescent Females" provides a vision of how book clubs can help students to analyze literature. The article also highlights how many students found more active voices in the safe places beyond the classroom.

In "The Worst Tomboy Ever," Jennifer Lynn Barnes, a young adult author of *Raised by Wolves* and *Trial by Fire*, talks about herself as a writer and how elements of her life experiences show up in her novels. The Author's Connection is the second of two new features in this issue; the intent behind The Author's Connection is to provide, in print, one of the great strengths of The ALAN Conference—the voice of the author giving the reader that secret tidbit that makes the novel that much more exciting to read. Like Meggie in *Inkheart*, many of our readers have never "before met anyone who wrote the words that filled a book's pages" (p. 250). This column hopes to bridge that gap. Jerry Weiss's The Publisher's Connection—"This Is My War!"—focuses on the battles that media

specialists and teachers are fighting to keep literacy essential in schools. He points out that budget cuts often target libraries and classroom books because these seem "non-essential." He argues that literacy is always essential.

This issue concludes with three stories about falling in love with books. In the first, Sarah Hahn recounts her first attendance at an ALAN Conference and how she carried that experience back to her students with a large box of books. In the second, Kimberly Powers reinforces the importance of choice in fostering a love of learning in her students. Virginia Pasley completes this trio with a personal tribute to the great author Brian Jacques and her special relationship to his books as a young reader. These stories from the field reinforce the magic of books and the "magic of the written word. Nothing is more powerful for good or evil" (Funke, p. 415).

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Funke, C. (2003). *Inkheart*. New York: Scholastic.
Rylant, C. (1992). *Missing May*. New York: Scholastic.

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**.

Flash Back—Forge Ahead:

Dynamism and Transformation in Young Adult Literature

“Here’s to all the places we went. And all the places we’ll go.”

—John Green, *An Abundance of Katherines*, p. 6.

When contemplating the selection of a theme for the 2011 ALAN Workshop, I was reminded of the roots and branches that structure our field and organization and was inspired by the ways in which both have successfully shifted and swayed with time and changing elements, while maintaining a core commitment to young people and the books written for them. The process of flashing back and forging ahead implies a dynamism, a dedication to honoring what has come before and a willingness to proceed into the lesser known, to grow and reach and expand—and thus avoid stagnation. This back and forth generates the necessary knowledge and momentum to adapt and survive and is evidenced in the books that define us, the readers who read them, and the advocates who believe in the value of both.

The Books That Define Us The Topics

The field of young adult literature boasts a cadre of authors who, from the start, tackled matters of

consequence— addiction, family dynamics, war, pressures to conform, gender and sexual identities and preferences, among others. These writers trusted in their readers’ abilities to grapple with complexity and willingness to lose and find themselves in stories. When Robert Cormier wrote *After the First Death* (1979), for example, he posed difficult questions of morality and understood that readers were capable of considering multiple perspectives, even those that might challenge their understandings of themselves and others. Similarly, in *The Pigman* (1968), Paul Zindel expected readers to consider the consequences of their actions and the fragility of life. M. E. Kerr exposed them to a critique of adult-child relationships and the seeming do-gooder parents in *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!* (1972). And, in *Annie on My Mind* (1982), Nancy Garden traced the romantic relationship of two 17-year-old girls, engaging readers in a topic so emotional that it led to the burning of the book in Kansas City.

Over time and amidst a chang-

ing world, the field embraced new topics and reconsidered established ones in novel ways—without losing faith in readers and what they are capable of contemplating. Cris Beam’s transgender protagonist in *I Am J* (2011) encourages readers to reimagine gender as they know it, to wonder if how it has been is how it should stay. In *The Realm of Possibility* (2004), David Levithan extends this reimagining by describing a community in which being gay, straight, or otherwise is simply a part of being. In the world that Levithan describes, there is hope, as the realm of possibility is “always expanding, it is never what you think / it is. Everything around us was once deemed / impossible. . . . Most of the limits / are of our own world’s devising. And yet, / each day we each do so many things / that were once impossible to us” (p. 198).

The Voices

Given the contemporary nature of young adult literature, new voices continually enter and enrich the field, often bringing perspectives

that have been historically ignored, marginalized, or silenced. As a result, the field calls into question assumptions of culture, race, language, and economics. The resulting stories offer counternarrative representations of characters that defy stereotypical and over-generalized depictions—depictions that, by their very nature, lead to inaccurate representations and encourage behaviors that reify and perpetuate negative beliefs.

Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (1995) describes a road trip that blends the fictional experiences of a black family with nonfictional violence, highlighting the ways in which individuals were circumscribed by the realities in which they lived. Alice Childress's *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* (1973) centers on the social and psychological circumstances that contextualize how Benjie Johnson becomes a 13-year-old heroin addict. More recently, Jacqueline Woodson's *After Tupac and D Foster* (2008) describes a richly realized example of everyday life that features young people of color making sense of their world and their place in it, revealing the ways in which we are all products of the sociocultural and sociopolitical norms that govern our lives. And Matt de la Peña's *Mexican WhiteBoy* (2008) encourages readers to connect with characters across lines of difference and reconsider how they see the seeming "other."

The Forms

Young adult literature contains numerous examples of authors employing cutting edge, innovative forms to convey function, another

example of the ways in which the field has embraced change and transformed over time. In *Monster* (1999), Walter Dean Myers experimented with screenplay. Although the resulting text is written in third person, it centers on the protagonist's perceptions and is crafted through his interpretation of events. As such, the form both provides intimacy into his character and raises questions about his reliability as a narrator, thus highlighting tensions between innocence and guilt, motive and circumstance. Similarly, Ellen Wittlinger infused zines (personal magazines containing poems, narratives, images, etc. created by each character) into her novel, *Hard Love* (1999). The resulting effect is a wonderfully complicated, multigenre glimpse into the myriad layers of identity and expression held by her characters. With new technologies, of course, come new forms, and YA authors increasingly honor the rapidly changing means and modes of communication valued by teen readers. Lauren Myracle's *ttyl* (2004), for example, was the first novel written fully in the form of instant messaging. As a collective, young adult authors have not only successfully kept pace with change, but forged new means of expression.

The Readers Who Read Them

The best young adult authors have always recognized the complexity of the adolescent experience. Virginia Euwer Wolff's exploration of socioeconomics and the cycle of poverty, Judy Blume's frank discussions of sexuality, Cynthia Voigt's reconfigured definitions of family,

and Rosa Guy's analysis of friendship all demonstrate these authors' keen understandings of the multiple forces that act upon adolescents in the process of transitioning into adulthood. While today's readers navigate similar realities, they do so in a world of more significant extremes; this is particularly evident in the increased diversity, global expansion, and rapidly changing technologies that influence their daily lives. Today's authors for young adults address these changing times by providing stories that guide and challenge.

Given changing demographics, young people increasingly encounter diverse perspectives and ways of knowing and doing that don't necessarily align with their own understandings and assumptions. Titles like Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), Padma Venkatraman's *Climbing the Stairs* (2008), Ben Mikaelson's *Tree Girl* (2004), Coe Booth's *Tyrell* (2007), and Siobhan Dowd's *Bog Child* (2008) expose readers to cultures and lifestyles they may not have encountered, reminding them that the world is larger than their bedrooms, schools, neighborhoods, towns, and nations. These authors both educate readers about unfamiliar people and places and, through the development of sincere and candid characters, highlight the connections we all share. These connections inspire empathy and encourage critical consideration of the social and economic inequities that permeate our world. Such texts might help readers realize the obligation to recognize their own privilege and find ways to use it to fight for social justice within borders and beyond.

Given the current pace of tech-

nological change, today's readers must be aware and critical of new means and modes of communication that have come to define the way of life for many. Young adult authors have refused to ignore this development and instead use it to tell compelling tales that both reflect the world in the moment and stop that moment to afford readers the distance and objectivity necessary to evaluate life within and beyond the text. M. T. Anderson's satirical novel *Feed* (2002) asks readers to consider the implications of a society overly dependent upon technology at the expense of independent thought. Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) examines the tension between freedom and privacy in our information age. And Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009) reminds readers to evaluate carefully the credibility of those they trust, given easy access to online communities that pose risks.

In response to each of these titles, readers can look more objectively, more contemplatively, at the implications of the technological realities that shape their fast-paced lives. These readers might also look to fiction to flash back to times less extreme, to use story as a means to learn about the past and potential alternatives for the future. Richard Peck, Karen Hesse, Markus Zusak, and Jennifer Donnelly are among the many YA authors who provide such glimpses into what was and inspire consideration of what could (or shouldn't) be.

The Advocates for These Books and Their Readers

Throughout our history, young adult readers have been fortu-

nate to have publishers who take chances on books that challenge, librarians who stock these books on their shelves, and teachers who bring them into classrooms and curricula. These shareholders have all worked toward a common goal of inspiring young people to engage in reading for reasons personal and profound, even as the pendulum of politics and policies swings from extreme to extreme.

This same tradition of faith and advocacy continues within our professional organization—a group defined by these very publishers, librarians, and teachers—and is evidenced by multiple initiatives that have been completed this year or are currently underway. I offer the following in the spirit of celebrating the ways in which our organization has flashed back and forged ahead.

Public Relations Committee: Ensuring our organization's adaptation to life in a technology-oriented world, we have created an Ad Hoc Public Relations Committee designed to increase ALAN's presence on several social networks. David Gill chairs the committee, and Bucky Carter and Ricki Ginsberg serve as members. Check out our Facebook and Twitter pages at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Assembly-on-Literature-for-Adolescents-ALAN/187671031252280> and <http://twitter.com/#!/ALANorg>.

Presidents Advisory Council (PAC). The recent creation of the ALAN Presidents Advisory Council (PAC) intimates our organization's deference to and recognition of leaders who offer expertise and institutional memory. Committee members Virginia Monseau (Chair), Jim Blasingame, c. j. Bott, Michael Cart, Lois Stover, and Connie

Zitlow invited all former ALAN Presidents to participate in the PAC in order to provide support and guidance to the ALAN President and Board in decisions important to the organization. Twenty-two members whose terms as ALAN President date back to 1974 (that would be M. Jerry Weiss) agreed to serve. The Council has an elected Chair (Virginia Monseau) and a Representative to the ALAN Board (Sissi Carroll), each serving a two-year staggered term. The first charge of the PAC is to help support the creation of a policy manual that describes the general operating procedures of our organization, including items relative to elections, the make-up and roles of standing committees, etc.

Constitution Review. To ensure both continuity and necessary change, a committee has been convened to review the ALAN Constitution. The group has been busy generating a list of constitutional items that are outdated, unnecessary, and in need of revision, as well as identifying new items for potential inclusion. This list will be brought to the Board for review and discussion. Proposed changes will then be decided upon by a vote of the full membership. Thanks to Gary Salvner (Chair), C. J. Bott, Jennifer Buehler, Pam Cole, Shannon Collins, and Walter Mayes for their work on this endeavor.

Nilsen-Donelson Award. Indicative of their long-standing commitment to the organization, Drs. Alleen and Don Nilsen have generously donated \$10,000 to ALAN for the establishment of a Nilsen-Donelson Award. The award will honor Alleen Nilsen and Ken Donelson for their work as the

original editors of *The ALAN Review* and be given at the Workshop to the authors of the best article published in the journal each year. Teri Lesesne, Steve Bickmore, and Chris Crowe collaborated to create the selection criteria; Steve Bickmore (Chair), Mary Arnold, Mark Letcher, and Cleo Rahmy serve on the inaugural award committee. The 2011 recipient(s) will be announced on Tuesday morning of the ALAN Workshop.

Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award (AEWA). Reflecting ALAN's increasing presence in the larger field of young adult literature, the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award continues in its third year. Established in 2008 to honor the wishes of young adult author Amelia Elizabeth Walden, the award allows for the sum of \$5,000 to be presented annually to the author of a young adult title selected by the ALAN Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award Committee as demonstrating a positive approach to life, widespread teen appeal, and literary merit. This year's selection committee members include: Teri Lesesne (Chair), Carolyn Angus, Jean Boreen, Lois Buckman, Ricki Ginsberg, Jeff Harr, Jeff Kaplan, Daria Plumb, Diane Tuccillo, Jennifer Walsh, and Barbara Ward. The 2011 award winner (Francisco X. Stork) and finalists (Kristen Chandler, Matt de la Peña, Matthew Quick, and Jordan Sonnenblick) will be honored at the AEWA reception on Monday evening of the 2011 ALAN Workshop.

Mission Statement. To capture the core values of our organization, an Ad Hoc committee was created to draft a mission statement for ALAN. Committee members included: Virginia Monseau, Past

President, 1993; Lois Stover, Past President, 1997; Connie Zitlow, Past President, 1999, and Committee Chair; Michael Cart, Past President, 2003; James Blasingame, Past President, 2009; and c. j. Bott, President Elect, 2011. The efforts of this esteemed group resulted in the statement below:

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

- **Defines** young adult literature as works in a wide variety of genres and forms, including multimedia formats, with topics relevant to the interests and needs of young people in middle and high school.
- **Promotes** the inclusion of young adult literature as a bridge to other curricular works and as a stand-alone curricular selection in both the English language arts program and across the curriculum.
- **Supports** educators and librarians in their use of the literature, **advocates** the right to read the literature, and **defends** freedom of choice for independent reading, inclusion in classrooms, presence in library collections, and in book clubs.
- **Provides** opportunities for teachers, librarians, teacher educators, and others involved in the use of young adult literature to enhance their practice and **teaches** the educational community and general public about the value of this literature.
- **Celebrates** the ever-changing nature of the field and welcomes artistic innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking by authors, publishers, and others involved

in the creation of young adult literature.

- **Evaluates** young adult literature on its individual merits and in the context of larger bodies of literature as appropriate and **engages** in ongoing rethinking of the literary canon.
- **Cooperates** with other organizations that advocate similar goals and objectives.

Faith in Our Future Given Our Past

"This is what happens when you try to run from the past. It just doesn't catch up, it overtakes . . . blotting out the future"

—Sarah Dessen, *Just Listen*, p. 340

It sometimes seems as though we inhabit a world seemingly dead set on *flashing forward* and then scrambling to *forge a way back*, moving ahead so quickly that the foundation begins to crumble before we realize what we've lost. Always looking ahead to the next great gadget or time-saving method or entertaining distraction, we are blind to what we're missing as we engage in the pursuit. Given our foundational past and ability to change with the future, it is clear, however, that our field and organization are prepared to withstand the winds of change, to flash back and forge ahead. Our authors, past and present, and advocates, longstanding and new, hold a shared belief in the power of story to keep us grounded as we wonder—and shape—what's around the bend.

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Kylene Beers—2011 CEL Exemplary Leader Award Recipient

Kylene Beers is the Senior Reading Advisor to Secondary Schools for the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University. Through her books, workshops, summer institute presentations, consultations, and numerous publications, she has influenced an incredible number of teachers of reading. She has helped teachers of other disciplines understand that they must help students learn to read if they are to succeed in their subject. Dr. Beers's book *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6–12* is the capstone of contributions she has made through her writing. She has been the senior author or contributing author for numerous national textbooks for public schools, including *Elements of Literature, Grades 6–12*. She was coeditor of *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice/A Handbook for Teachers, Principals, and Policy Makers*, a book that serves as the guide for teacher learning communities. Beers was two-term chair of the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition, a coalition of over 60 national organizations working together to solve issues of adolescent literacy. She has served NCTE in varied capacities, including as editor of *Voices from the Middle* for seven years and as President of NCTE 2008-2009. Dr. Beers has served the Council, the profession, and students of all ages with energy, commitment, and distinction throughout her career.

An Investigation of Student Preferences of Text Formats

Today, young adults increasingly embrace our multimedia world. They communicate with their friends through texting and social networking sites. They seek information via the Internet and find entertainment through participating in global electronic games with people all around the world. Some even spend time creating their own electronic video games. This digital generation of learners is redefining the meaning of literacy. In large part, students engage in these sophisticated multiliteracy practices out of school, leading to a mismatch with the academic literacies in school.

While there is a growing body of research that focuses on student use and increasing engagement with 21st century multiliteracies both in and out of school (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, & Phelps, 2006; Hagood, 2003; Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009), there remains concern about students' achievement levels with conventional texts (NAEP, 2009). These achievement results, along with the pervasive use of technology by students, suggest that we may be at a critical juncture in regard to the types of literacy experiences that we offer adolescents in school settings.

In addition to the increasing influence of digital media on students' literacy lives, there is yet another phenomenon that we believe needs to be considered related to the issues of adolescent literacy—the growing availability of diverse text formats found in young adult literature. In particular, many of these text formats include strong visual elements that may well appeal to this digital generation of adolescents. In light of these changes, we wondered how changes in text

formats may be influencing the reading preferences of middle school students. As a result, we conducted a study that was guided by the following questions:

- What is the relationship between text format and reader preference?
- What text factors do students identify as influencing their preference for texts?
- What text factors influence students' choices when selecting books to read?

In this article, we first provide background information that informed our study, focusing both adolescent literacy and the changing nature of books for young adults. We then share our findings and offer instructional implications.

Background

Adolescent Literacy

To be a “literate” adolescent today means moving beyond handling the traditional literacy demands of school to engaging in the multiple literacy practices needed in this digital age (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006). Adolescents now “read” and interpret film, websites, multimedia, and other electronic texts that contain numerous visual images. They also communicate in writing in graphically different ways through blogs, texting, and social networking sites. All of these new literacy activities require an understanding of how the elements of sound and visual images work to convey meaning (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009).

Yet, simultaneously, there still remains a great

need to support acquisition of traditional literacy competencies. As early as 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development noted that middle schools may be the “last best chance” for many students to acquire proficiency in literacy necessary for future success. Studies have raised deep concerns about the wide disparity in the reading proficiency of young adolescents and their fading interest in reading (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994).

More recently, large-scale assessments continue to indicate that middle-grade students are not moving beyond basic levels in significant numbers. Nationwide, approximately 26% of students in grade 8 read below the basic level (NAEP, 2009). Further, in this latest report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the overall reading scores for students in grade 4 in 2009 remain unchanged from the scores in 2007, whereas the average scores for eighth-grade students showed only a slight increase since 2007. These numbers indicate that a substantial number of eighth-grade students are still unable to read critically and perform other higher-level thinking tasks.

Another concern at the middle school level is the increasing number of students who are aliterate (Beers, 1998). Many middle school students have developed negative attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Worthy & McKool, 1996) and consequently read less than in previous years (Ley et al., 1994). Such negative attitudes toward reading and a lack of interest in reading lead to lower academic performances, not only in the language arts but also across different subject matter disciplines (Anderson et al., 1988; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Ivey’s work (1999) suggests a possible means of countering students’ negative attitudes toward reading. She found that opportunities for choice in reading motivate middle school students to read. Hence, teachers need to offer diverse reading materials that appeal to disengaged readers (Alvermann, 2002; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

Young Adult Literature

In recent years, there have been many changes in the world of young adult literature—changes that hold promise for motivating adolescent readers. First, there has been a dramatic increase in the volume of young adult novels being published (Donelson & Nilsen,

2008; Wolf, 2008). There have also been changes in the nature of books for adolescents (Koss & Teale, 2009). In particular, we are seeing an increasing use of visual features in books written for adolescents (Dresang, 1999; Wolf, 2008). In fact, Wolf (2008) argues that the inclusion of these visual elements in contemporary young adult fiction results in the creation of an engaging literary genre for the adolescent audience. She analyzed 60 young adult novels published since 2000 and found that approximately 20% included illustrations of some sort. The illustrations in these books had the potential to support the efforts of readers in constructing meaning by: (1) providing a preview of an upcoming element in the book; (2) highlighting key elements; (3) supplying background information; (4) helping readers organize and track information; (5) helping readers visualize settings; and (6) injecting important information not included in the text. In addition to identifying the functions of illustrations in young adult novels, Wolf also noted other graphic design elements that are often used to convey meaning, such as the use of visual symbols and varied font types and point sizes.

Furthermore, new formats have emerged in the world of young adult literature. Scholars have noted increases in books in journal format, novels in verse (Campbell, 2004), and, more recently, graphic novels (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2011). Some authors experiment with highly innovative formats in which visuals are used in creative ways to convey critical elements of the stories. Examples of these “hybrid novels” include Deborah Wile’s *Countdown* (2010) and Brian Selznick’s *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007).

Historically, educators have considered picturebooks (a format that is inherently visual) to be for young readers. Yet this format has also undergone changes in recent years that broaden its appeal to include older readers. There are many picturebooks now that address previously forbidden subjects, a radical change that Dresang (1999) calls “changing bound-

In recent years, there have been many changes in the world of young adult literature—changes that hold promise for motivating adolescent readers.

aries” (p. 17) and Elleman (2004) calls “blunt realism” (p. 13). This “blunt realism” is evident in Huck, Hepler, Hickman, and Kiefer’s (1997) listing of topics explored in recent picturebooks. These topics include environmental concerns as well as personal and social issues relevant to adolescents, including gang violence, bullying, and peer relationships. Picturebook authors also write about historical issues relevant to

young adults, including the Holocaust, Civil Rights, the Depression, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. In effect, this new breed of picturebook often explores challenging subjects and addresses mature themes, thus blurring the lines between children’s and young adult books

(Osborn, 2001; Zvirin, 1998). Hence, this highly visual format has found a place in the field of young adult literature.

Text Preferences of Young Adult Readers

Offering the appropriate choice in reading materials is dependent upon an understanding of the text preferences of students. While research on text preferences goes back many decades, there are few contemporary studies. Those more recent studies identify a number of factors linked to text preferences, including topic or subject matter, genre, literary devices (e.g., humor and happy endings), and external factors such as author, length of text, and appeal of title or book cover (Sebesta & Monson, 2003). These factors, however, are by no means inclusive of all potentially significant text factors. In particular, publishers are marketing fictional texts written in a variety of diverse formats for older readers. These diverse formats do not always follow the traditional chapter book format that has dominated the field of young adult literature. Today’s adolescent reader will find novels in verse, graphic novels, novels in journal format, and picturebooks. Of particular note is the significant role of visual elements in a number of these formats. While the visual elements in picturebooks and graphics are obvious, visual elements also include the use of varied fonts and distinctive print layouts found in books such as

Monster (1999) by Walter Dean Myers and *Witness* (2001) by Karen Hesse. However, there is little or no research that addresses reader preferences for these types of formats and visual features, let alone the impact these elements may have on reading choices.

In light of these changes in young adult literature and the continuing need to engage adolescents in traditional literacies, we posed the following three questions for this study:

1. What is the relationship between text format and reader preference?
2. What text factors do students identify as influencing their preference for texts?
3. What text factors influence students’ choices when selecting books to read?

Methodology and Data Sources

The Research

Participants were 20 proficient eighth-grade readers in one section of a reading class at a Title I middle school in an urban school district in the Southwest. All students were Hispanic and spoke English fluently. At three different points in the study, we shared with the students six historical fiction books, each representing a different format. We selected books from this single genre to ensure that genre did not influence student choice in book selections. Historical fiction was chosen because of the availability of books written in a variety of formats appropriate for middle school students. The text formats included a novel in verse (*Out of the Dust*, Hesse, 1997), picturebook (*Pink and Say*, Polacco, 1994), traditional novel (*The Well*, Taylor, 1995), graphic novel (*The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane, 2006), novel in journal format (*Pedro’s Journal*, Conrad, 1991), and hybrid novel (*The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, Selznick, 2007). (This hybrid novel tells a story by alternating sequences of pictures with multiple text-only pages throughout). We shared the books with the students in each of three different phases of our study.

PHASE 1

We met with the students individually and asked each to preview the books and rank order them in terms of reading preference. We then interviewed the students individually, asking them to explain the basis of their ranking. If students did not talk about text format as a

Offering the appropriate choice in reading materials is dependent upon an understanding of the text preferences of students.

factor in their decisions, we then provided a label and description for each book format and asked, “How did this influence your selection?”

PHASE 2

In preparation for the second interview, we had asked the students to read approximately 10% of each book in order to select two books to read in their entirety. While reading the 10%, students completed a note-taking chart to document reasons for wanting or not wanting to read a book. We then interviewed the students individually, asking them to explain the reasons for their selections of the two books. Again, if students did not talk about text format as a factor in their decisions, we explicitly addressed text format by asking, “How did the format influence your decision to read these two books? How did format influence your decision not to read the other books?”

PHASE 3

For the final phase, students read the two books chosen in Phase 2 and completed an opinion chart in which they wrote about their reactions to each book. We again conducted individual interviews in which students talked about the two books they preferred. In an attempt to capture students’ views about text format, we asked, “If you had to describe these books to a friend, what would you say?” If text format was not addressed with this prompt, we followed with an explicit probe about text format.

Findings

PHASE 1

As the students previewed the books, we noticed that half of them conducted superficial inspections of the books looking only at the front and back covers. The other half looked more closely at the books, sometimes reading the dust jacket and flipping through pages. When we asked the students to tell us how they made their top two selections for reading, almost half of them (47%) offered only general valuing comments (“It looks interesting,” “It looks mysterious and fun,” or just “It looked good”). Students offering more concrete rationales for their selections talked about the pictures in the books (18%) and the genre of the books (18%). For example, one student commented that she was interested in *Pink and Say* because she “likes books with pictures.” Another student placed

The Invention of Hugo Cabret as one of her top choices because “I can tell what the story is about when I see pictures.” In regard to genre, one student selected *The Well* because “it’s a fiction story.”

PHASE 2

In this phase, students sampled 10% of each of the six books to select two books to read in their entirety. Approximately 83% of the students’ top two choices were books in which pictures played an integral role. This included the hybrid novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the picturebook *Pink and Say*, and the graphic novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. The other three books altogether were selected by students as a first or second reading choice only seven times. Length of book did not appear to be a determining factor, since *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* with 526 pages was selected by 18 students as a first or second choice, whereas the 40-page *Pink and Say* was chosen as a first or second choice by only 6 students. The graphic novel *The Red Badge of Courage* was selected as a first or second choice by 11 students. In effect, students gravitated toward the two books that used pictures in more creative ways (*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *The Red Badge of Courage*) rather than the traditionally illustrated picturebook (*Pink and Say*).

In explaining their top two book choices, students offered a variety of reasons, including characterization, pictures, genre, plot, subject matter, point of view, and setting. The rationale most frequently given was the inclusion of pictures in the books (44%). For example, one student selected *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* because “it showed me the pictures and what was happening.” Another student selected the same book because “it had many pictures and words and it made me understand the story.” A student who selected *The Red Badge of Courage* stated that he “likes graphic novels and comic books.”

PHASE 3

In this final phase, students read their top two choices in their entirety. They again overwhelmingly chose books in which illustrations played a predominant role in telling the story. As their first choice, 86.0% of the students selected books with pictures as their favorite—*The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *Pink and Say*. Of these three, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *The Red Badge of Courage*

were the most popular. As their second choice, 89.4% of the students selected books with pictures. Perhaps of particular note, none of the students selected as their first or second choice to read *The Well*, the novel representing the traditional format. One student explained, “There are no pictures and it looks kind of boring.”

Those students who considered pictures to be an important factor in their book selections talked about how these pictures influenced their choices. Some students felt that pictures engage them in the book. For example, one student said, “Pictures just made me want to read them.” Other students talked in a general way about how pictures helped them understand what they were reading. For example, one student stated, “I understand it more. I got a better view of what was going on.” Other students gleaned character and setting information from the pictures. One of these students commented, “I like seeing how the characters actually look and how something absolutely looks that they are describing.” Still others mentioned that pictures clarified the plot of the stories. For example, in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the main character becomes obsessed with getting an “automaton” to work. The concept of an automaton is obscure, one that most students would grapple with while reading the book. However, with the pictures of the automaton providing a visual explanation of the concept, readers are able to grasp the meaning of the word. In talking about the value of pictures, one student explained how pictures aided in understanding an “automaton” with this comment—“the sketches, the designs of the dad helped me know what they were talking about.”

Implications for Teaching

Our findings suggest that today’s young adults gravitate toward books with visual elements. Our task as educators, then, is to find and use high-quality books with visual elements that appeal to today’s students. In this section, we present an in-depth look at books representing five distinctive formats. These formats represent different ways in which contemporary authors of young adult books are incorporating pictures and other visual elements into their writing. We selected a documentary novel, a novel with pictures that support complex descriptions, a picturebook, a wordless book, and a graphic novel. We conclude by

offering a list of high-quality books containing distinctive visual elements that hold potential for capturing students’ interest and attention. The list contains book summaries as well as instructional suggestions for exploring visual, literary, content, and literacy foci. (See Table 1.)

A Documentary Novel—*Countdown*

Deborah Wiles’s new work of historical fiction, *Countdown* (2010), is set in 1962 during the era of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Eleven-year-old Franny experiences normal growing pains as she works through her tenuous relationship with her best friend and deals with complex family issues. Overshadowing these tensions are the larger tensions of the era, including the fear of Communism and the imminent threat of nuclear war spawned by the Russian missile crisis in Cuba. In addition, societal structures are in transition as the civil rights movement gains momentum. These larger tensions have a direct impact on Franny’s everyday life as she is required to participate in fearful civil defense drills, view films about nuclear attacks, and watch her college-age sister become caught up in the civil rights movement.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

What makes this book unique is its reliance on a variety of visuals interspersed throughout the pages to recreate the societal tensions of the time—tensions that directly affect Franny, her family, and her friends. What sets this book apart from other historical fiction books is Wiles’s masterful use of visuals to capture key elements of the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the era. For example, she includes pictures of nuclear explosions, political cartoons, signs announcing fallout shelters, newspaper headlines of political events, photographs of major political figures (such as Kennedy and Khrushchev), and photographs depicting civil rights events (such as the bombing of a Greyhound bus with Freedom Riders as passengers). In addition, Wiles intersperses these political visuals with cultural artifacts, such as song lyrics, photos of famous people (Miss America, James Bond, Cassius Clay, Lucille Ball, and Desi Arnaz, to name a few).

A Novel with Supporting Pictures—*Leviathan*

Leviathan (Westerfeld, 2009), a mixed-genre novel blending science fiction, fantasy, and historical

Table 1. Samples of books utilizing visual elements

NOVELS		
Title and Author	Summary	Instructional Potential
<i>Monster</i> by Walter Dean Myers	Sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon is on trial for the murder of a convenience store owner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—ways in which authors use variations in typeface and font size to signal different genres (e.g., journal, movie script); pictures • Literacy focus—characterization
<i>Nothing but the Truth</i> by Avi	Freshman Phillip Malloy is misunderstood by his English teacher when he hums the National Anthem during homeroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—ways in which textual layouts relate to genre (e.g., letters, memos, plays scripts, diary) • Literacy focus—plot
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie	Junior, a Native American Indian with a talent for drawing cartoons, leaves the high school on the Spokane reservation to attend the all-white school in a neighboring town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—contribution of drawings, doodling, sketches, and cartoons contribute to storytelling • Literacy focus—characterization • Content focus—contemporary Native American life
<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> by Jeff Kinney	The ups and downs of being in middle school are highlighted in this humorous series of books.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of cartoon-style illustrations with dialogue bubbles to complement storyline • Literacy focus—Promoting recreational reading
<i>Trial by Jury Journal</i> by Kate Klise	Sixth-grader Lily Watson becomes a sequestered juror in order to complete a research project and avoid summer school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of representations of environmental print (e.g., carnival ride tickets, excerpts from newspapers, commercial ads, pictures) to tell the story • Literacy focus—Promoting recreational reading
GRAPHIC NOVELS		
Title and Author	Summary	Visual Elements
<i>One Bad Rat</i> by Bryan Talbot	Struggling to overcome the devastating impact of childhood sexual abuse by her father, Helen Potter runs away from home and begins a journey of recovery that is linked to the life of her namesake—Beatrix Potter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of characters' intense facial expression and variations in color to depict character emotions • Literacy focus—characterization and the life and works of well-known author Beatrix Potter
<i>Ethel and Ernest</i> by Raymond Briggs	The story of a British couple's life plays out against the tumultuous changes of the twentieth century beginning with the Great Depression and continuing through the cultural upheaval of the 1970s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—variation in which dialogue is presented to the reader (e.g., speech bubbles and free-standing dialogue); pictorial depictions of setting • Content focus—life in the 1930s–1970s
<i>Maus I: A Survivor's Tale</i> by Art Spiegelman	In a somewhat allegorical fashion, Spiegelman recounts his father's experiences during the Holocaust by using animal figures to represent Germans as well as the Jews and other victims. He also recounts the impact of the Holocaust on the characters' later years and the lives of subsequent generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—symbolic use of black and white to tell this story • Content focus—Holocaust and its impact
<i>To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel</i> by Siena Cherson Siegel and Mark Siegel	This memoir traces Siena Cherson Siegel's involvement in the world of ballet from her early years in Puerto Rico to her adolescent studies at the American School of Ballet in New York to the beginning of her professional career as a ballerina.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—contrasts of color; variations in panel sizes; frequent use of illustrations alone to tell the story line; conventions used to convey dialogue and narration • Literacy focus—memoir genre

continued on next page

Table 1. Continued

PICTUREBOOKS		
Title and Author	Summary	Instructional Potential
<i>The Wretched Stone</i> by Chris Van Allsburg	A mysterious glowing rock brought aboard a ship turns the shipmates into apes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of pictures to convey plot • Literacy focus—theme
<i>Rose Blanche</i> by Roberto Innocenti	This picturebook is a World War II story of a German schoolgirl who discovers the horrors of concentration camps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of illustrations establish the mood of this somber story • Literacy focus—mood • Content focus—World War II
<i>The Wall: Growing Up behind the Iron Curtain</i> by Peter Sis	Peter Sis chronicles his early years growing up behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—use of color to convey symbolic meanings and the use of diverse visual artifacts to establish time and place • Literacy focus—symbolism and setting • Content focus—Life behind the Iron Curtain
<i>Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School</i> by Mark Teague	When Ike the dog is sent to obedience school, he writes letters to his mistress documenting his “mistreatment.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual study—ways in which illustrations and texts can convey contradictory information • Literacy focus—humor

fiction, is about the young heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the advent of World War I. Aleksandar Ferdinand, running for his life, becomes caught up in the conflict between two great empires of the time. For defense, the Austro-Hungarian and German empires rely on Clankers, steam-powered iron machines. The opposing British Darwinists and their allies use fabricated beasts as weapons.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Scott Westerfeld uses few visuals, but those he does include are critical in supporting readers’ understanding of the story. He uses pictures to help readers better understand and visualize both the fabricated beasts and the fantastic Clankers weaponry. The author also uses endpapers (the first pages one sees when opening a book and the last pages one sees before closing the book) as another visual device to convey important information—in this case, information about the setting of the story. Westerfeld reinforces the concept of fabricated beasts and Clankers through his representation of a map of Europe where machinery motifs represent Austria-Hungary and beast motifs represent the Allied countries. The use of endpapers to convey story information is a technique more commonly used by the creators of picturebooks than by authors of novels.

A Picturebook—*Voices from the Park*

In this innovative picturebook about a day in the park, Anthony Browne (1998) uses four different perspectives to tell the story. A well-to-do woman, who is

also a dominating mother, and her meek son walk their dog in the park. That same day, an out-of-work father and his lively daughter also walk their dog in the park.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

While the plot of the book is simple, character is the critical literary element in *Voices from the Park*. It is through the illustrations that the author/illustrator reveals the dynamics of character relationships and feelings. For example, Browne visually conveys the disparity between the two adults through their clothing, bodily stances, and even facial expressions. In one key scene, we see the two adults near the same park bench, yet clearly separated by a large pole that is between them. Readers must carefully examine the pictures in order to understand the subtle meanings that the author expresses in this book.

A Wordless Book—*The Arrival*

In *The Arrival* (2006), Shaun Tan tells a complex story of immigration. Initially, the story appears to be a traditional or straightforward tale of the immigrant experience. We follow him as he leaves his family and appears to travel to the New World. Soon, though, it becomes apparent that this new world from the perspective of the immigrant is not the world as we know it.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

This story is told solely through the visual. The early pages alternate between a series of panels and full-

page spreads to depict the immigrant's preparations for departure. As the story progresses to his arrival in the new world, Shaun Tan captures what must often-times be the confusing, shocking, and overwhelming experiences faced by an immigrant. The visuals create a surreal context that begins to move us away from a realistic representation of the immigrant experience to a fantasy representation. Some of the fantasy elements encountered by the immigrant include ships and elevators that float through the air, cone-shaped structures, bizarre creatures, and even an invented alphabet. Taken together, these elements capture the overwhelming confusion that many immigrants experience when arriving in a new world. The endpapers also play a role in telling the story by featuring rows and rows of pictures of immigrants from around the world. In addition, the sepia-toned title page features visual elements that include an old photograph as well as official stamps that are found on passports and other travel documents.

A Graphic Novel—*American Born Chinese*

Gene Luen Yang in *American Born Chinese* (2006) uses the graphic novel format to tell what initially appears to be three separate stories. The first story tells of an unhappy monkey king who sacrifices his own sense of self in his quest to be accepted and revered as a god. In the second story, Jin Wang, a Chinese American boy, encounters resistance and bigotry when he attempts to win the favor of Amelia, an American girl of European descent. In the final story, another character, Danny, is embarrassed by his visiting Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, who is portrayed in a highly stereotypical fashion. The three stories come together in unexpected ways at the end to address issues related to ethnic identity and self-acceptance.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Gene Luen Yang uses visual representations in the graphic novel format to convey both character and plot throughout the story. While most of the pages contain the typical panels found in graphic novels, he also occasionally inserts pages containing no panels, instead using a single illustration to tell the story. The visuals are particularly critical for revealing characters' feelings and actions as well as for representing stereotypes of one Chinese character and an American bully. On the final page of the book, Yang includes

an intriguing coda—a single YouTube frame related to the story (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt_m7qooZfo).

Final Thoughts

Our investigation of student preferences for text formats was exploratory in nature and, as such, was limited in several ways. First, we realize that our relatively few participants represented one particular demographic, and we acknowledge the need for research with a broader population. In addition, while we controlled the impact of genre on student choices by limiting the books to historical fiction, the subject matter of the books was varied and could have influenced students' selection of books.

However, these findings still have important implications for the ways in which teachers select books for their classrooms. While more traditional fictional formats certainly have a place in classrooms, teachers need to keep in mind student preferences for books containing visual elements. Today, publishers offer increasing numbers of high-quality books that use visual elements in very sophisticated ways. Reading such books can be demanding for some students, which underscores the importance for visual literacy instruction (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008).

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The Verse Novel and the Question of Genre

The long poem for young readers is not a new phenomenon. Donelle Ruwe (2009) reminds us that book-length dramatic monologues were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to present young readers with didactic stories, reflecting the belief that the physical action of recitation would reinforce the moral message (p. 219). The revival of the verse novel began tentatively in the 1990s with works for adults by writers such as Derek Walcott, Dorothy Porter, and Fred D’Aguiar, and for young adults at roughly the same time with novels by Virginia Euwer Wolff and Karen Hesse. The form for young adults has become an important publishing trend since the turn of this century. A quick look at one of the better Internet lists of verse novels for young adults—the one provided by the Edmonton, Alberta, public library (<http://www.epl.ca/>)—shows that of the 125 books in their holdings under that category, only five were published in the twentieth century. And as seems to be true in the smaller adult market for the verse novel, the young adult market features writers who have published more than one such novel. Karen Hesse, Ron Koertge, Allan Wolf, Margaret Wild, Angela Johnson, Ellen Hopkins, Nikki Grimes, Mel Glenn—each has more than one verse novel to his or her credit.

Many a verse novel advertises on the cover that it is “a novel by,” presumably because it would otherwise be misidentified by genre. This may be the publisher’s or author’s attempt to help the reader understand that there is a story here (and not “just verse”), or perhaps the writer and/or publisher fear that the potential reader will be intimidated by the

format. The novel is still the most popular genre in the young adult literature market, and so by calling it “a novel,” publishers and authors reassure readers that this is what they’ve come to enjoy. Equally important, booksellers will shelve the book with other novels rather than with poetry, though my own experience is that the shelving process in bookstores and libraries is an inconsistent and idiosyncratic one across locations. Librarian Ed Sullivan (2003) notes that “The Library of Congress obviously cannot make up its mind whether these books are fiction or poetry, both, or neither” (p. 45).

Those few who have written about the verse novel take the genre’s label at its word and just accept that the “problem” of the verse novel is about reconciling the poetic and prosaic. However, thinking of the verse novel solely in terms of either poetry or prose may be pursuing a false choice by insisting that the verse novel be one thing or the other. After a consideration of what is special (though hardly unique) about the voice of the verse novel, I offer some claims about the genre’s use of voice and its affinity to drama as a form; then I argue that we can learn a great deal about (and teach) the relationships among novel, poetry, and drama through an investigation of the qualities of the verse novel. Figure 1 offers a list of successful verse novels that could be valuable in your classroom.

Voice(s)

Ron Koertge’s *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003) features a character that writes in conventional poetic forms, but self-consciously. The protagonist asks,

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Figure 1. Other verse novels of note

“Why am I writing down the middle / of the page? / It kind of looks like poetry, but no way / is it poetry. It’s just stuff” (p. 5). The protagonist, a teenaged baseball player sidelined by mononucleosis, has found a collection of poetry at home and is trying to write in different poetic forms. The narrative seems to be constructed in order to justify the use of poetic form and its variety in the novel, ultimately settling on what becomes a self-conscious use of free verse that distances the reader from the frame of mind that formal poetry inspires. At one point, our garroted first-baseman writes, “I gotta say, though, that the poems before / the free verse one were better in a way” (p. 79).

It *is* free verse that dominates the verse novel form, however, and it is usually not a self-conscious exercise for the narrator but something that we are to take as natural expression, just as we understand that characters in musicals are not “unnatural” for bursting into song on the street; we accept that what we are seeing is a convention that the characters are unselfconscious about as a form of expression and that elicits from the viewer an emotion and a way of thinking that is different from dialogue. Billy Jo from *Out of the Dust* (Hesse, 1997) betrays no awareness of employing form or of writing verse. But beyond being an unselfconscious convention, there is a focus on the

rhythms of the character’s spoken voice that does ask the reader to “hear” the speaker. It is enjambed prose written to emphasize a preferred pace and rhythm of speaking to the self. Joy Alexander (2005) makes the case that “free verse accentuates the oral dimension” (p. 270), and it is an opportunity to dictate for the reader where the speaker’s stresses and pauses reside. She goes on to argue, and I agree, that “The most prominent feature of the verse novel is voice” (p. 282). Who speaks, to whom, and where?

The voice of the verse novel is usually in the form of character narration rather than in the external narrative voice of the traditional long story poem or epic. The verse novel differs from Milton’s neo-epic or the voice of the Victorian long poem of Tennyson. Browning’s dramatic monologue is a close poetic parallel to the feel of the verse novel, for he provides us personal, natural voice and a sense of the scenic, but unlike Browning’s characters, the verse novel’s speakers do not tend to address directly within the poem a character “narratee”—or person addressed in the context of the poem. In Browning’s shorter dramatic monologues, such as “Fra Lippo Lippi,” “My Last Duchess,” and “Porphyria’s Lover,” as well as in *The Ring and The Book*, there is a strong sense of a narratee “in the room.” In a Browning poem, the reading audience can take on the narratee’s position, but Browning’s narrators are clearly speaking to someone in their presence. There is a pleading of a case, a rhetorical appeal, and the narratee is there being held by the elbow in the speaker’s time and place.

Joy Alexander (2005) claims that verse novels “are a modern means of rendering soliloquy or dramatic monologue” (p. 271), but she equates the two, and I believe they are different. The voice of the verse novel is still dramatic, but it usually employs the soliloquy in free verse form—even often when there are multiple voices at play in the story. As soliloquy tends to pull the speaker to the edge of the stage, perhaps as the background darkens, the verse novel tends to produce a similar feeling. The soliloquy is more of a self-address without regard for a listener: it muses. Consider this example from Karen Hesse’s *Witness* (2001):

i don’t know how miss Harvey
talked me into dancing in *the fountain of youth*.
i don’t know how she knew I danced at all.
unless once, a long time ago, my mama told her so.

but she did talk me into dancing.
i leaped and swept my way through *the fountain of youth*.
separated on the stage from all those limb-tight white girls. (p. 3)

The implied reader is no one and everyone. We can see Leanora Sutter during the first stanza—standing, arms folded, looking down, brow furrowed; in the second, she has arms akimbo, looking up, eyes bright, swaying at the memory. The prose form of diary or journal fiction is the most approximate reading experience. Overt uses of this form include Hesse’s *Out of the Dust* (1997), Koertge’s *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003), Jen Bryant’s *Pieces of Georgia* (2006), and Norma Fox Mazer’s *What I Believe* (2005). In the case of *Out of the Dust*, entries are headed by the month, day, and year. Mazer’s book is divided by titles like “Memo to myself” (p. 1). Journal or diary fiction often feels like a series of soliloquies. The verse novel doesn’t seem as interested in justifying the context of speaking as other novel forms do, however; in diary fiction, we have a “where” of the moment of speaking/writing—the diary itself.

When there is a single speaker, we are provided a sense of characterization, but that character usually remains less than full and certainly less objectively rendered than we might get in a text with external narration, so the single-speaker verse novel usually builds a view seen through the eyes and heard from the voice of one, often-conflicted source. In this way, it is very much like other young adult character-narrated novels, despite its tendency toward soliloquy. After all, we have to decide about the character and even the reliability of young adult narrators—such as Holden Caulfield from *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), Ponyboy Curtis from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), T. J. Jones from *Whale Talk* (Crutcher, 2001), Titus from *Feed* (Anderson, 2002), and others—based on what they say or report others have said.

A more significant difference is when there is a cast of speakers who are presented from no particular perspective other than their own, and so reliability is much less of an issue, as in drama. The verse novel genre often features texts that are multiply narrated; these are often quite different than a YA novel told through either character or external narration. Verse novels with ensemble casts are not often stories that contain dialogue but rather alternating soliloquy.

Neither do we typically get stories that offer conflicting and competing viewpoints. In verse novels, the multi-voiced ensemble cast is often designed to produce a full account often lacking with a single character narrator: dead relatives clear up family history in Allan Wolf’s *Zane’s Trace*; townsfolk give a full account of Klan activities in Karen Hesse’s *Witness*; the story of a thwarted school shooting is given a full account in Ron Koertge’s *The Brimstone Journals* (2001).

These ensemble casts are intersubjective. Rather than using a cast of characters that divide the duties of one protagonist, we are given the story through characters’ alternating soliloquy; verse novels seek to make a whole larger than the sum of its separate parts. As

though we were watching the action on a stage, we see the spotlight move from one speaker to the next, and those characters’ respective soliloquies build a story that might well be acted out in dumb show behind them. The aesthetic of the polyphonic soliloquy novel is that it provides narrative wholeness through the fragmented and often unconnected soliloquies of different characters. For instance, Allan Wolf’s *New Found Land* (2004) alternates 14 distinct speakers over 400 pages, and in Terri Fields’s *After the Death of Anna Gonzales* (2002), there are 47 characters offering individually fragmented accounts that result in a collectively clear sense of story following a suicide.

Like traditional novels that are polyphonic, the first voice is usually reserved for the perceived central character—Despereaux’s voice comes before the rat’s or girl’s (DeCamillo, 2003), Morning Girl’s comes before her brother’s (Dorris, 1999), Stanley Yelnats’s comes first (Sachar, 1998). Allan Wolf’s verse novel *New Found Land* gives voice to no minor character before Sacajawea, Oolum (Lewis’s Newfoundland alter ego), Lewis, Clark, and Jefferson; *The Brimstone Journals* begins with the voice of the kid who thwarts the shooting; *Witness* begins with Leonora, the African American girl at the center of the Klan story. Voice order is its own narrative logic in a novel with

The aesthetic of the polyphonic soliloquy novel is that it provides narrative wholeness through the fragmented and often unconnected soliloquies of different characters.

alternating voices, and that is certainly true for the verse novel.

Virginia E. Wolff has denied that her work is poetry (Alexander, 2005, p. 274), despite its layout on the page that suggests a free-verse arrangement that is mindful of the implications of voice through enjambment, as we see here in *Make Lemonade* (1993):

This word COLLEGE is in my house,
and you have to walk around it in the rooms
like furniture.

Here's the actual conversation
way back when I'm in 5th grade
and my Mom didn't even have her gray hairs yet. (p. 9)

Alexander (2005) reports that “Wolff consciously writes for the ear” (p. 274) and sees her work as manipulated prose; this might mean that it is best to consider her verse novels in terms of drama. Consider

how drama is necessarily prose that is written for the ear (or tongue), making it a bridge between the orality of poetry and silence of novelistic prose. Consider that the verse novel *Ann and Séamus* (2003) by Kevin Major has been converted into a chamber opera with words and music by Stephen Hatfield. The verse novel lends itself,

Voice is the most important signature feature of the verse novel, but there are other qualities and conventions that point to the genre of drama.

and has for centuries, to a physical, oral rendering, which adds the visual to the voice and provides what the genre of drama gives us.

Author backgrounds and creative contexts point to a strong relationship between drama and the verse novel. Consider that the 2008 Newbery-winner, *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village* (2007) by Laura Amy Schlitz, is written as a set of soliloquies that was used as a play in her Baltimore school. Allan Wolf spent years working with *Poetry Alive!*, a group that dramatizes poetry for live audiences; his first two novels are verse novels.

Verse, Novel, Drama

Voice is the most important signature feature of the verse novel, but there are other qualities and conven-

tions that point to the genre of drama. Amy O’Neal (2004) says of the verse novel to “forget introductory paragraphs, transitional phrases, and summations. Just the facts; you draw your own conclusions” (p. 39). I think what we have in actuality are *few* facts rather than just the facts. What is missing is the exposition, the description, any external narration. What verse novels do is invite imaginative speculation about the things that are left unsaid by either characters or absent narrators—the descriptions of characters, settings, movements, and background information provided in the traditional prose novel that here are gaps, white or negative spaces, silences.

Wolf’s *New Found Land* is the exception that proves the rule: it allows characters to dwell on rich description of the journey (for instance, Sacagawea’s opening is a narration of her abduction, rich with description rather than just her feelings about it), but the novel requires 478 pages as a result, and it provides a character narrator in Oolum (the true name of Lewis’s dog) who behaves like an external narrator.

Consider Oolum’s opening dramatic monologue—a true dramatic monologue, as he is speaking to a narratee other than himself about the events of the journey: “*I mean to tell you this story in the only way I know how. That is to say, I will tell it like a river. It may meander here and there, but in the end it will always find its way to the sea. [...] And I am a seer. Though I cannot speak human languages, I understand them all, and on this journey there were many. But there is a universal language shared by all living things. It is called Roloje. Ro-LO-jee. You feel it in your heart. You see it when you sleep. It is spoken through the eyes and carried on the air but never heard. It is the language of longing. It is the language of anticipation and exploration, hopes and dreams. This is how I speak. This is how I am speaking to you now.*” (Wolf, 2004, p. 8). Oolum’s sections are always in past tense (as opposed to most of the present tense of the book); interestingly, Sacagawea’s parts are always in present tense. Most important, Oolum’s section is never in verse form; it stretches across the page between traditional margins. It is rich and fat.

In most other cases, however, we see how the white or negative space is the space in which description of setting and character is missing, and all of that blankness is pointed to as one element of the attractiveness of the verse novel to prospective readers. At

one point, Kevin, the protagonist of *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003), provides some perspective on the issue of white space on the page as he reflects on his life had he never “found” poetry: “I wouldn’t know you like I do now. I would / have missed the way you pour down the / middle of the page like a river compared / to your pal, Prose, who takes up all / the room like a fat kid on the school bus” (p. 115).

The verse novel typically looks like any play or screenplay: it leaves a good deal of space on a page. In the printed form of drama, information of the scene’s appearance, character’s clothing, and other visual elements are often separate from the space of dialogue or monologue, if given at all. The verse novel leaves all of this description to the reader’s imagination, as when we read a play rather than see one. It is the work of the person staging the drama to make those visual decisions, and that same task belongs to the reader of a verse novel. The person reading is put in the role of a play’s director.

What the verse novel provides are the character’s words. When we have actual dialogue rather than soliloquy, the look of the play on paper is even more striking. Consider this from Allan Wolf’s *Zane’s Trace* (2007):

She: That’s too bad.

Me: What?

She: These door locks. They’re all electric.

Me: I like `em.

She: Once you start dating, you’ll know what I mean.
(p. 41)

We might well be reading a play, and Wolf is arguably left little choice but to label the speakers in this way as a result of the lack of narration and description to provide the necessary information about who is speaking.

The verse novel often resorts to listing in the peritext—the apparatus outside of the narrative itself—those things that can’t be easily provided in a text bereft of description or external narration, just as playwrights provide their own peritextual apparatus in print form, whether in the written play or in the notes

provided the audience at a performance. Allan Wolf’s *Zane’s Trace* begins with a list of “Dramatis Personae” containing each character’s name and description: “Zane Harold Guesswind: A seventeen-year-old boy driving a stolen 1969 Plymouth Barracuda.” We are given the settings for the entire story: “A tangle of highways and back roads from Baltimore, Maryland, to Zanesville, Ohio. A diner. Two McDonald’s drive-through windows. Two graveyards. A motel. And a funeral home.” The names and descriptions of the Corps of Discovery come before the journey begins in Wolf’s *New Found Land*.

Ron Koertge’s *Brimstone Journals* begins with a page listing all of the names of the characters in a unique cursive form. Karen Hesse’s *Witness* leads with a character page on which the names, ages, and pictures of the eleven speakers are presented. The polyphonic verse novel is strongly

presented as drama. Ironically, the book with “Shakespeare” in the title has the least dramatic quality of the books I discuss here.

Two polyphonic verse novels—Karen Hesse’s *Witness* and Ron Koertge’s *The Brimstone Journals*—are written in five parts, and it’s easy to see that they follow a five-act play’s structure: set up, rising action, crisis and confrontation, climax, and conclusion. Nothing marks this structure but the use of numbers separating sections. In their discussion of *The 2005 Lion and the Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Poetry*, Richard Flynn, Kelly Hager, and Joseph T. Thomas (2005) note that “the poet who chooses this form fashions an over-arching narrative, making explicit the links between the individual poems and foregrounding the teleological structure of the whole” (p. 429), which implies a five-act structure that helps the reader consider the relationship between those individual poems in any “act.”

Campbell (2004) argues that “the structure of a verse novel [...] can be quite different from the novel, which is built with rising conflict toward a climax, followed by a denouement. The verse novel is often more like a wheel, with the hub a compelling emotional event, and the narration referring to this event

The verse novel leaves all of this description to the reader’s imagination, as when we read a play rather than see one.

like the spokes” (p. 615). We can see this analogy in a book like Hesse’s *Witness*, in which a murder is the central event to which all character soliloquies refer, or Koertge’s *The Brimstone Journals*, in which it is the thwarting of a shooting that is the event to which all voices refer. This describes the way that the individual soliloquies or dialogue provide an unmediated narrative that collectively fleshes out the story.

I would contend that even the loosest verse novel has a conflict that is resolved over the course of the book, just as diary and epistolary fiction manage what life often doesn’t provide—a plot. Even in those verse novels unmarked by act, one sees that the immediate juxtapositions that seem random have, from a distance and a handful of monologues at a time, forged the causal chain that creates story rather than simple narration. It’s rather like one of those picture mosaics that create from individual and unrelated pictures a larger image. I might go so far as to call some of these “mosaic novels.”

One last parallel to the experience of drama is also a reception issue. Though many of these verse novels are well over 100 pages—and many are much longer—there are few that can’t be read in one sitting. This “single effect” is the same experience that drama and short fiction provide, the lack of which Poe believed was a serious detriment to long prose fiction. The verse novel, like drama, privileges the aesthetic of experiencing story in one sitting.

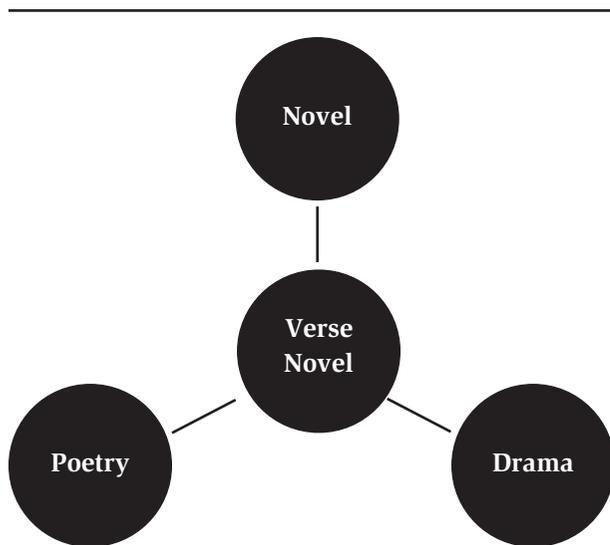


Figure 2. Verse novels demonstrate the interplay of genres.

Implications

That the verse novel form has such strong associations to three distinct genres strikes me as an opportunity for students to learn more about the novel, poetry, and drama in relation to each other instead of as separate and unrelated forms. Instead of worrying about which of two genres the verse novel is most like, possibly creating a version of genre tug of war, we should use the form as a gateway to three genres in the nexus that it forms between them all (see Fig. 2). In fact, the verse novel could be the touchstone text for transitions among units on the novel, poetry, and drama. While the gap between the novel form and poetry might seem great, and the forms discrete and autonomous, the use of various short forms of narrative poetry, followed by the epic, and then the free-verse novel provide three points of transition along a continuum from lyric poetry to the novel. In that transition, students will see the subtle changes in form rather than two completely unrelated literary genres. The consideration of each of the three genres of novel, drama, and poetry in terms of one of the others is facilitated by the verse novel as transitional text.

In its place between poetry and drama, the verse novel employs the lyricism and rhythm of poetry with the voice of the spoken word emphasized in drama. In its place between drama and the novel, the verse novel combines the sustained development of the long prose form with the description-free, character-rich nature of the written play. Perry Nodelman (1991) notes that picturebooks for children are theatrical forms of prose that provide the images in picture form rather than written description; so, too, the verse novel forces the reader to plug in the stage images left undescribed in print. In all cases of serving as a nexus among the three genres, the verse novel combines the most complementary aspects of those forms. In fact, the verse novel may well be a playwright’s best option for reaching an audience in the young adult fiction market.

Studying the verse novel will build in students an appreciation for other blends and crossovers so common in contemporary literature, such as multimedia texts, multigenre texts, intertextuality, and cross-audience texts. We tend to want to present literature as divisions of genres and modes with their own separate conventions rather than as a set of relationships in

and across time. The verse novel seems to be a form demanded by our age, and contemporary young readers seem to acknowledge its timeliness.

The verse novel is so successful in large part because it is so readable. Rather than bemoaning its failure to be one thing or another—thus making it out to be some sort of monstrous and insufficient form—we should be celebrating its rich combination of generic strengths, its melding of the most engaging aspects of three genres to create a very appealing form. We have the sustained story typical of the novel, the guided pace provided by free verse's use of enjambment, and the dialogue-rich nature of drama. What the verse novel lacks in description and extended narration, it makes up for in its insistence that the reader provide those things on his or her own, both demanding and enabling the reader to imagine appropriate and personally satisfying images that match the context of the soliloquy and/or dialogue-driven narrative. By using the verse novel as touchstone text to learn more about three distinct genres, we would be learning how the verse novel itself is its own thing rather than a failed version of something else.

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To Be Young, Gifted, Black, and Lesbian: Wyeth and Woodson, Models for Saving a Life

“I wish to live because life has within it that which is good, that which is beautiful, and that which is love.”
—Lorraine Hansberry (1969, p. xvii)

“The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect—even if rejected—enrich and enlarge one’s view of existence.”

—Alice Walker (1983, p. 4)

On a warm spring day last April, just a few blocks away from my home near Decatur, Georgia, an eleven-year-old boy got home from school, greeted and high-fived his mother with a glowing report card, went to his room, and hung himself in his closet with his own belt. Tormented by classmates who called him “gay” and bullied him daily, this young boy chose to end his life rather than continue fighting the abuse. No one will ever know whether this young man was gay or not, nor does that fact really matter. What does matter is that his being called “gay” by the bullies of his school was enough to make him lose all hope in life—to blind him to “that which is good, that which is beautiful, and that which is love” (Hansberry, 1969, p. xvii).

While Hansberry may not have been writing to address issues of homosexuality, there can be no denying that gay and lesbian teens often face oppression and despair and need us to point them toward “that which is good,” to give them strength and some hope of acceptance. With the suicide of Rutgers’s student Tyler Clementi, one of at least five gay teen suicides over a three-month period, many educators and community

members question how they can make a difference—how they can save a life. Those of us who believe in the power of words need the tools that can truly lift the clouds and help young people find a place in this world. This article will introduce two phenomenal books that should be added to the toolbox: Sharon Dennis Wyeth’s *Orpheus Proud* (2004) and Jacqueline Woodson’s *The House You Pass on the Way* (2003). But before we can understand *how* to use the tools, we need to understand the *why*—Why are these books and others like them needed in our classrooms? Why do English teachers need to take on this role of saving a life?

In her essay, “Saving the Life That Is Your Own,” Alice Walker (1983) attempts to answer a very similar question, quoting from a letter written by Vincent Van Gogh about a year after he cut off his ear and six months before he committed suicide. Van Gogh writes, “‘Society makes our existence wretchedly difficult at times, hence our impotence and the imperfection of our work. . . . I myself am suffering under an absolute lack of models’” (p. 4). According to Walker, “The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say

nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect—even if rejected—enrich and enlarge one’s view of existence” (p. 4). This growing of spirit and intellect, this enriching and enlarging the view of existence—that is the complex role of the English teacher.

Another Georgia writer, Carson McCullers (1984), speaking through the words of Berenice Sadie Brown in *The Member of the Wedding*, says, “We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don’t know why. But we caught anyhow” (p. 113). And although Berenice’s words may indeed be true, those of us who teach and love literature must surely believe that through books, we find a way to be less “caught,” less alone in life, that we do indeed find models in the pages of books. If we, as English teachers, believe that one of literature’s highest ideals is providing readers with a sense of self—a sense of place in a complex world—and that this is certainly one of the primary purposes for young adult literature, then we must also realize that there are many pockets of diversity, even within literature of diversity, that are often overlooked.

Finding Diversity in Diversity: African American Lesbian Adolescent Literature

One example of the “often overlooked” pockets of diversity would be the young African American lesbian, who must search a bit harder and with a more creative mind than other young adults who find themselves in literature. Another is questioning teen girls, who will have to search harder than questioning teen boys. And rural or southern teens will find fewer stories that reflect their lives than those from urban areas. Finding themselves through the pages of young adult literature and feeling less “caught” could be a challenge for these marginalized groups—even in today’s more tolerant world.

A quick review of the list of Lambda (an organization that celebrates and promotes LGBT literature) award winners and nominees since 2000 reveals some surprising facts. With over 25 books nominated in the children’s/young adult category for 2008 and more in 2009, we can celebrate the fact that more and more titles are being published, but we must also notice the gaps in this growing field. Although the list of winners

since 2000 contains approximately 17 male protagonists to 11 female characters, there are far more Caucasian characters than any other racial group, and while Lambda, the American Library Association, and countless publishers and authors should certainly be praised for their tremendous work in expanding this field, it does appear that even in our efforts toward diversity, we may find that the stories are not very diverse. In fact, of the 40 books honored by Lambda since 2000, only one book centers on the life of an African American female. A young African American lesbian may indeed have great difficulty finding herself in the pages of young adult fiction. The Newbery list includes several honor books by Jacqueline Woodson, an openly lesbian writer of young adult fiction, but only one of those books contains a gay African American male, and even he is not the protagonist of the story. (For a list of recommended books, see the sidebar on p. 30.)

Middle and high school teachers may still fear the repercussions from teaching literature with homosexual content, but we know that our classrooms contain many teens who are questioning their sexual identities. Teens growing up in rural or isolated areas are no less confused than the teens of California or New York City, and yet these adolescents must often try to find their way with very few community resources and frequently in complete isolation from a gay community. These young people are not only struggling with the normal angst of adolescence and coming of age, they are also tormented by their own confusing thoughts and desires, usually with very little support from their own homes and schools. And although some community members and school administrators will question our motives for bringing gay literature into the classroom, statistics show that these young people often consider suicide as their solution to feeling “caught.”

Homosexual teens are often shunned, teased, and harassed by their classmates if they are open about their sexuality, often causing these students to hide their true feelings and remain closeted. So, while all teens may face some issues of isolation and feelings

There are many pockets of diversity, even within literature of diversity, that are often overlooked.

Other Recommended Young Adult LGBTQ Texts

- Benduhn, T. (2003). *Gravel queen*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Boock, P. (1997). *Dare truth or promise*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Garden, N. (1982). *Annie on my mind*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Garden, N. (1996). *Good moon rising*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Howe, J. (2001). *The misfits*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.
- Howe, J. (2003). *The misfits*. Audio CD. Syracuse: Full Cast Audio.
- Howe, J. (2005). *Totally Joe*. New York: Ginee Seo Books.
- Kerr, M. E. (1994). *Deliver us from Evie*. New York: Harper Trophy.
- Levithan, D. (2003). *Boy meets boy*. New York: Knopf.
- MacLean, J. (2004). *Rosemary and Juliet*. New York: Alice Street Editions.
- Miller, I. (1969). *Patience and Sarah*. New York: Fawcett Crest.
- Myracle, L. (2003). *Kissing Kate*. New York: Penguin.
- Peters, J. (2003). *Keeping you a secret*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Peters, J. (2004). *Luna*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Peters, J. (2005). *Far from Xanadu*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Reynolds, M. (2001). *Love rules*. Buena Park: Morning Glory Press.
- Ryan, S. (2001). *Empress of the world*. New York: Penguin.
- Shimko, B. (2002). *Letters in the attic*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers.
- Watts, J. (2001). *Finding H. F.* Los Angeles: Alyson Books.
- Wittlinger, E. (1999). *Hard love*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

of nonconformity due to height, weight, race, socio-economic background, disabilities, religion, and a host of other issues that make them feel “caught,” homosexual and questioning teens may hide their deepest feelings even from their closest friends and family members. Teachers and librarians may be the only lifeline for queer and questioning teens in an intolerant world, so this article will offer a few threads of hope to guide educators in braiding stronger lines of help for today’s adolescents. (See the sidebar on p. 31 for additional valuable resources.)

Since teachers, librarians, parents, and the young people they love may need a bit of guidance in finding books that echo the lives of these questioning teens, this article will include lessons and teaching tools to help enlighten today’s classrooms and libraries. Many teachers may be much more fearful of taking literature with homosexual content into the classroom than they are of other contemporary controversial topics, such as rape or incest.

Judith Hayn and Lisa Hazlett (2008) provide a wonderful recommendation list in their 2008 article, “Connecting LGBTQ to Others through Problem Novels: When a LGBTQ is NOT the Main Character,” but in school systems that have banned books such as the Harry Potter series, teachers are reluctant to bring in novels that they fear will stir up more trouble. With those teachers and schools in mind, along with their questioning students, this study centers on *Orphea Proud*, the 2004 young adult novel by Sharon Dennis Wyeth and lone African American winner of the Lambda Honor award, and *The House You Pass on the Way*, Jacqueline Woodson’s 1997 novel and winner of the Coretta Scott King Award. Both books follow the experiences of young strong African American female protagonists who question their sexual identities and struggle with feeling “caught.” Both books are also set in rural areas and reveal a strong connection to family and heritage while celebrating the power of arts and creative expression.

Growing Up Proud: Wyeth’s Model for Saving a Life

Why This Book?

Orphea Proud’s life and story begin with death—the death of her friend and lover, the death of her minister father, the death of her kind-hearted, loving mother,

as well as Orphea's own attempted suicide—and even with all of these deaths in the first few chapters, Wyeth's novel is still an upbeat story. The pain that Orphea suffers over her lover's death—unfortunately a very common plotline in lesbian love stories—is worsened by her stepbrother and guardian Rupert's cruelty in reaction to her newfound sexual identity. When Orphea is beaten by Rupert on the same day that Lissa is killed in a car crash, she reaches an all-time low and swallows pills. All of these struggles—from the rejection and beating by a family member to the attempted suicide to Orphea's complete confusion about her own sexuality—echo the lives of many queer and questioning teens. When she is eventually kicked out of the house to live with her aunts in Virginia, her story also mirrors the rejection of countless homosexual adolescents.

In Virginia, we meet Orphea's eccentric aunts whose first words to her are, "Welcome home. You must be hungry" (p. 79). We also meet her distant white cousin and a variety of other folks who give the story a very southern feel and who also give Orphea the healing that she so desperately needs and deserves. Even though Rupert forbade her to tell her secret to her aunts, she still finds solace in their company.

Proud Road is another country. You'd probably think it's the middle of nowhere or even the end of the world. I think of it as the land of softness in honor of the quilts and pillows my two aunts gave me to take up to a loft, where I slept for a week. (p. 79)

As Orphea wakes in her mother's bed surrounded by the quilts of her family, she slowly finds the comfort, love, and acceptance that she needs in order to begin loving herself. And after staying with the aunts for months and learning her heritage in her mother's home, Orphea slowly tells her story, first to her cousin and later to Aunt Cleo and Aunt Minerva. Their reaction, "You're family, honey child. The fact that you're gay, as you call it, doesn't take away from that" (p. 160). We can only hope that all real life teens get the same reaction when they come out to family and friends.

Another wonderful strength of Wyeth's book is its connection to the arts, with tremendous variety of artistic expressions—from singing and quilting to painting and writing—with each character demonstrating a new art form. Alice Walker's landmark essay,

"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1983), presents African American women as the ancestors of creative spirit and courage who inspire strength and energy in the art of writing. Wyeth's book echoes that sentiment as Orphea discovers her own artistic strength through the creative energies of her aunts.

With the entire book structured as a stage performance, we hear Orphea's story through a series of monologues and poems, a celebration of the spoken word. Orphea remembers her mother, in love with music and the power of lifting her voice, sneaking in visits with a singing coach while she is supposed to be buying groceries. Lissa, Orphea's friend and lover, is a

Additional Resources

- Bauer, M. D. (Ed.). (1994). *Am I blue? Coming out from the silence*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. A. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969–2004*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Day, F. A. (2000). *Lesbian and gay voices: An annotated bibliography and guide to literature for children and young adults*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Howey, N., & Samuels, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Out of the ordinary: Essays on growing up with gay, lesbian, and transgender parents*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Levithan, D., & Merrell, B. (Eds.). (2006). *The full spectrum: A new generation of writing about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and other identities*. New York: Knopf.
- Rich, A. (1986). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Blood, bread, and poetry: Selected prose 1979–1985* (pp. 23–75). New York: Norton.
- Richardson, J., & Parnell, P. (2005). *And Tango makes three*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Sonnie, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Revolutionary voices: A multicultural queer youth anthology*. New York: Alyson Books.

talented artist, as is Ray, Orphea's cousin, who paints loving life-sized images of the horse who injured him long ago. And Aunt Cleo's story quilt not only retells the family history, it also transforms the scraps of her loved ones' belongings into a work of art. So each of the characters that help Orphea on her journey possesses skills in a different art form. Like Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, the book illustrates the power of artistic expression in transforming lives

Like Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, the book illustrates the power of artistic expression in transforming lives and finding inner strength.

and finding inner strength. Oddly enough, because of this connection to the arts and heritage, one of the strengths of the novel is that it is more than a lesbian love story. Homosexuality is part of the story, but it is not *the* story. What follows are suggestions for teaching this novel, but even if teachers are reluctant to incorporate the book in their curriculum units, educators should include the novel in library book orders and on classroom bookshelves. We need more diversity in our diversity collections, and this is a great start to that process. These teaching suggestions focus on ideas for artistic expression, but this is a book that could be taught in conjunction with a variety of other disciplines from speech and drama to mathematics, geography, and history. The ideas listed here allow for differentiated instruction and student choice in all projects. Students could certainly help to generate the list of activities during the reading of the novel, allowing for student ownership in the learning process and for the option to create projects that tap into their individual learning styles.

Teaching Suggestions

Quilt squares are a great way to begin the unit, build community, and study one of America's oldest art forms. In this project, each student creates a quilt square—using construction paper if sewing is too time-consuming—representing his or her own identity. Students in my classes have included sports images, hobbies, pets, family, and even food on their quilt squares. A quick slide show illustrating some of the intricate patterns used by quilt makers, such as those

included on the Crossroads of the Heart website for the Mississippi Quilting group (Mississippi Arts Commission, 1999) or the Virginia Quilt Museum (2008) is a nice way to introduce some of the history and pattern names that might add more creativity to student choices. (All websites mentioned in this article can be found in the sidebar on p. 33.) The squares could be assembled into a classroom quilt as a way to bring the community together and illustrate the power of individuality and creative expression.

Quilting projects are also a great way to bring mathematics into the English classroom, as many quilt patterns require precise measurement and even geometry skills. As to other literature that would be useful in discussing quilts and their symbolism, many Faith Ringgold books, including *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991), provide wonderful visuals and an illustration of how story quilts work. Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" (Walker, 2003), a short story that explores family heritage and loyalties through representations of two very different sisters and the fight for a mother's quilt and affection, also provides a nice contrast to *Orphea Proud*. While Orphea finds comfort and an understanding of her own identity through her return to Proud Road, Walker's Dee Wangero remains completely lost in her own search for self and heritage. So, beginning with a quilting exercise can do much more than tap into visual and tactile learning styles and other content areas. The activity can also introduce countless literary skills from symbolism to theme to conflict; more important, quilting provides a metaphor for the artistic process that Orphea must explore.

This is also a book that could easily kick off an oral history project where students collect their own family stories. In teaching this process to my students, I have required them to interview their oldest living relative. In the case of students who cannot find a willing family member or who may simply not be connected to their own families, I collect names from the local Council on Aging group. An interview with some of the oldest community members can be just as revealing as talking with a family member. Churches are also a good resource for collecting names of willing interviewees. I require students to develop interview questions, but I also emphasize the importance of knowing when to ask follow-up questions. And when interviewees are open to allowing the interview to be video- or audio-taped, the recordings become valuable

to the entire family. The final product can be a short essay, a slide show, or even a YouTube video that is presented to the class or community. As Orpheia pieces together her family heritage through the stories she gathers, so can our students collect their own sense of identity. What a valuable lesson that can be.

Involving the speech or drama teacher in the book project would allow the class to create a stage performance of monologues or even a poetry slam. A wonderful pattern for this process can be found in *With Their Eyes: September 11—A View from a High School at Ground Zero*, a book edited by Annie Thoms, who guided her students through interviews following the events of September 11 and helped them create monologues for the stage. Each family or community interview could become a monologue, or students could write their own creative poems for a performance poetry night with Orpheia's poems as a model.

For students who enjoy creating drawings or paintings, this book might serve as inspiration for artists to create a mural of the community represented in the interviews or monologues, much as Orpheia's cousin Ray did. A nice literary connection to this idea of a community mural can be found in Toni Cade Bambara's "The War of the Wall" (2007), the story of a stranger who appears one day in a small town and begins painting a mural on a wall. Though some of the town's young people lay claim to that wall and initially reject the outsider artist, they eventually learn about themselves and their community's heritage through the painter's artwork. The young people in Bambara's story, like Orpheia, discover complexities about their own identities through the eyes and art of others.

Orpheia Proud is a book that inspires artistic expression, a book that speaks to all teens struggling with identity—sexual, racial, or just average teenage angst. Orpheia's strength and creative spirit may be the lifeline that a troubled teen needs, but her story—her quilt square—cannot become a part of the rich tapestry or quilt without the insight of open-minded educators. According to Alice Walker, we need to gain an understanding of the larger perspective if we are to become happy and healthy in this world.

What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity, a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and the public world. And yet, in our particular society, it is the narrowed and narrowing view of life that often wins. (p. 5)

Choosing this book for classroom instruction will seem like a political act to some educators. To others, it may stray too far from the curriculum's focus on classic literature. To our students, however, books like *Orpheia Proud* may be as comforting as the quilts of Aunt Cleo, speaking to them like Orpheia's aunts, "Welcome home."

Passing in a White Straight World: Jacqueline Woodson's Model for Saving a Life

Like *Orpheia Proud*, Jacqueline Woodson's *The House You Pass on the Way* centers on the struggles of a young African American girl questioning her sexual identity. Unlike Orpheia, however, Staggerlee also struggles with issues of racial identity, as she is the daughter of an African American father and Caucasian mother. She sees her mother as a woman with

Web Resources

American Library Association Stonewall Book Awards
<http://www.ala.org/ala/glbtrt/stonewall/stonewallbook.htm>

Crossroads of the Heart (Mississippi Quilting)
<http://www.arts.state.ms.us/crossroads/quilting.htm>

It Gets Better
<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>

Lambda Literary Awards
<http://www.lambdaliterary.org/>

Michael L. Printz Awards
<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward/Printz.htm>

San Francisco Public Library
<http://sfpl.lib.ca.us/>

Virginia Quilt Museum
<http://www.vaquiltmuseum.org/>

no friends, unable to fit into the black community and rejected by the white community. This biracial issue confuses Staggerlee, who even begins attending church so that she can find Jesus and is surprised to discover that He appears to look like her, “not black, not white, but both and all of it” (p. 8).

Staggerlee, whose real name is Evangeline Ian Canan, confides most of her problems to her dog, Creek, who is her constant companion as she re-thinks

the relationship with her friend, Trout. The rejection Staggerlee experiences from Trout and the confusion she feels because of her mixed racial background are the primary struggles for Staggerlee. When Trout arrives for her visit and remarks at Staggerlee’s light skin and how she could pass for white, Staggerlee

reacts, “Why would I want to pass? . . . I know what I am” (p. 59). She also spends much of the novel piecing together the story of her celebrity grandparents’ deaths from a 1969 bomb set off during a civil rights protest. Unlike Orphea, Staggerlee has the love and support of both parents and caring siblings throughout the story, so she never experiences the complete loss that we see in *Orphea Proud*, but she also struggles with multiple layers of identity issues in a household that is not known for sharing and talking through difficult topics.

So, while Staggerlee and Orphea suffer from very different complications, their stories also contain some important parallels. With both books set primarily in the rural countryside, the two stories show a connection to the land and nature, a connection that offers comfort to both protagonists. Staggerlee spends much of her time walking the banks of the nearby Breakabone River with her dog, Creek.

She walked slowly along the river, picking up shards of ice that had formed along the bank and gazing into them where rainbows shot through in every direction. She stopped walking and turned slowly, full face toward the river. Where would it take her? she wondered. She wished the river were time itself and could take her back to someplace before now. (p. 2)

A rural setting offers solace for Orphea, also. When

her brother kicks her out of her city home, she finds herself in a very different world—the countryside with her aunts, learning to split wood and survive the cold. Looking out at the scenery, she sees “The fields and mountains were covered with a sugar frosting of fresh snow” (p. 109)—just one of many references to snow in the story, since it was ice and snow that caused Lissa’s car accident and snowy footsteps that she observes in a picture with her mother. Images of snow and ice, symbolizing stark isolation mid nature’s beauty, fill the pages of both books.

Both stories also celebrate artistic expression, as Staggerlee is a gifted musician, taking after her professional singer–dancer grandparents. She studies the old videos of their performances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and even names herself after one of her grandfather’s songs. Staggerlee escapes to the barn to play her harmonica and dream of “traveling around the world and finding all the people in it who loved to be alone, who loved the sound of music” (p. 74). Music is her solace, and through her art form, she eventually finds her place in the community, as she is a member of the choir by the end of the book. The music teacher invites her to join, claiming, “I remember your grandmother. . . . You have her gift of song,” a comment that reminds Staggerlee of the connection she has with her loved ones (p. 105).

Quilting also plays a part in *The House You Pass on the Way* as Trout describes her love for needlework. “I thought I was going to hate quilting at first, but it’s like . . . it’s like you take all these pieces from all these parts of your life and you sew them together and then you have your life all over again, only it’s . . . in a different form” (p. 70). In both books, each young girl needs to express herself through art in order to claim her identity and find a place in the world.

Because of Staggerlee’s search for her place in her own family and her quest for discovering her own heritage, this book would also be a great introduction to the family history project described above. An interview with the oldest relative, an art project of designing the family tree, or even a bit of genealogy research would all work well in motivating students to follow Staggerlee’s path toward family identity. The art projects suggested for *Orphea Proud* would also work well with *The House You Pass on the Way*. Quilting and knitting play a role in the plot of the story and work as a metaphor for Staggerlee’s search, but

In both books, each young girl needs to express herself through art in order to claim her identity and find a place in the world.

music is of primary importance in her self-discoveries. Students love projects in which they get to pick the soundtrack music for the screenplay of a book. They could also do a bit of research in tracking down the lyrics of the many songs mentioned throughout the story. Woodson's novel is also filled with historical references to the civil rights movement, so this is a book that calls for some cross-discipline work, with students researching bus boycotts, integration, early African American entertainers and their role in these struggles, and even the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

While these two novels have tremendous literary merit as seen in the above projects and discussion, they were also chosen here for their specific portrayal of questioning teens. Both Woodson and Wyeth handle the subject with delicacy and respect. Educators who fear that LGBTQ books contain explicit scenes that would raise issues with parents can be assured that neither of these novels has more than a kissing scene. Both novels are also free of any language issues that would cause problems, making them much "safer" to teach than many of the recent Printz Award winners. The literary merits for teaching either book are obvious, but what these novels also do is bring questioning sexuality into classroom discussion in a positive, natural light. These stories are about young girls who really do not know who they will become. Like Orphea, Trout is sent to the country for the summer because, according to Trout, her adoptive parent "does not like the person I'm growing up to be" (p. 71).

The pain of family rejection is clear in both stories, but that pain is also complicated by confusion. A conversation between Trout and Staggerlee echoes the dialogue of Orphea and Lissa. Trout, who has spent her life in the city, claims, "I see guys in Baltimore wearing these pink triangle pins and I know it's about . . . about being gay" (p. 95). But both girls are still questioning, and Staggerlee answers, "Gay . . . I don't know that's what I am, Trout" (p. 95). When Trout assures her that if she likes kissing girls that she must be gay, Staggerlee answers, "It sounds so final. I mean—we're only fourteen" (p. 95). In *Orphea Proud*, on the evening before her death, Lissa reacts violently when Orphea kisses her, "What the hell do you think you're doing? Do you think I'm some kind of queer?" she demands, and later claims, "I'm a girl. You're my friend. That's it, understand? I'm not queer" (p. 93).

But later in the same night, Lissa returns Orphea's kiss and tells her, "I can't help who I love" (p. 97).

The Saving of Lives: A Call to Action

In recent times, media coverage concerning the tragedy of the Rutgers' student and the deaths of four other gay teens has sparked a host of questions. How can we help these young people? How can we stop the bullying? How can we make a difference? The "It Gets Better Project" began in September of 2010 as a place for lesbian, gay, and transgendered individuals to see how happiness can be a reality in life (www.itgetsbetter.org). The website features appearances from many popular figures and includes a Youtube video from President Obama in which he reminds questioning teens that they are not alone. These resources can begin to make a difference to teens who struggle with both their own identity and the torment shown to them by their peers.

If we believe Alice Walker's words, that we all suffer under an "absence of models" and that art can bring a "larger perspective," or if we understand Carson McCullers's description of feeling "caught" or Lorraine Hansberry's plea for young, gifted, black writers to "write about the world as it is and as you think it ought to be," then the need for books like *Orphea Proud* and *The House You Pass on the Way* is very clear. Trout writes in the dust, "Staggerlee and Trout were here today. Maybe they will and maybe they won't be gay," and after sweeping away the evidence, Staggerlee asks, "You think the day'll come when you can write something like that in the dust and it won't faze anybody?" With a smile as she rewrites the names, Trout answers, "Guess it won't ever come if it doesn't start someplace, right?" (pp. 95–96).

We as English teachers have to start someplace, too. Orphea claims, "I don't know about in your school, but in mine, one of the worst things you can call someone is 'faggot' or 'dyke'" (p. 90), and at least one young boy in Decatur, Georgia, would have

These resources can begin to make a difference to teens who struggle with both their own identity and the torment shown to them by their peers.

agreed with her. Alice Walker writes about the power of a writer in her essay about the suicide of Vincent Van Gogh, but a teacher must surely also hold some of that same power. In her words, “It is, in the end, the saving of lives that we writers are about. Whether we are ‘minority’ writers or ‘majority.’ It is simply in our power to do this” (p. 14). She continues by explaining why writers carry the responsibility. “We do it because we care. We care that Vincent Van Gogh mutilated his ear. We care that behind a pile of manure in the yard he destroyed his life . . . We care because we know this: the life we save is our own” (p. 14). As caring teachers, we too must realize that “the saving of lives” is what we are about, that one book can make all the difference in relieving the “absence of models,” and that we share the responsibility of opening minds and saving a life.

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siana public schools, and adolescent literature.

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Beyond a Good/Bad Binary: The Representation of Teachers in Contemporary YAL

Preservice teachers in my university classes on children's and young adult literature draw attention to the interactions among teachers, students, and principals in the fiction we read. Perhaps because these situations parallel what they might face in the field, these future teachers are eager to analyze why the characters behaved as they did and how they might have acted differently. Students wonder whether the teacher appearing briefly in Angela Johnson's *The First Part Last* (2003) could have helped the teen father more (p. 44). Reading journals and class discussion consider the long-term influence of characters such as Coach Clarke in Viola Canales's *The Tequila Worm* (2005) and geometry teacher Mr. P. in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007). Preservice teachers learn from the depictions of professionals in roles they hope to fill (Carter, 2009).

While films and television programs are recognized for creating popular visual representations of teachers, young adult fiction also contributes enduring images (see Fig. 1). The portrayals of teachers in fiction reflect contemporary perspectives on the teaching profession and influence teen perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Contemporary YAL reveals the diversity among 21st-century teachers. The more favorably depicted teachers help students develop their identities and resist dominant and oppressive educational paradigms; the less favorably perceived teachers often represent the authority against which the adolescents and good teachers rebel. Based on my reading, approximately as many teachers are depicted negatively as positively in the last decade of

YAL, but authors undermine the simplicity of a good/bad binary by complex portrayals, kinetic characters, and changes in the young adults' perspectives on the teachers.

This study emphasizes realistic YA novels set in the present and featuring a "good" teacher and a "bad" teacher: Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), Chris Crutcher's *The Sledding Hill* (2005), Anne Schraff's *The Petition* (2001), and Carl Hiaasen's *Scat* (2009), as well as Gordon Korman's *No More Dead Dogs* (2000), in which a teacher changes to become more effective. The realistic novel is a classification "that emphasizes truthful representation of the actual," a novel in which fiction corresponds closely with the real world (Harmon & Holman, 2005, p. 433). I argue that the more effective teachers are characterized by use of critical pedagogy; that Anderson, Crutcher, Schraff, and Hiaasen use the contrasts of a good/bad binary to animate conflict; and that Schraff and Hiaasen also challenge the idea of such a dichotomy. The more effective teachers correspond with education theorist McLaren's (1988) formulation of the teacher role-ideal of the "liminal servant," while less effective teachers fit the mold of the "hegemonic overlord" or "entertainer" (pp. 164–165).

Relevant Scholarly Literature

Scholars have analyzed the possible impact of the representations of teachers in popular culture products, particularly in film. Dalton (2008) acknowledges that "we are shaped by popular culture just as we shape popular texts," because the texts "inform our identi-

Standing Up to Mr. O. (1998) by Claudia Mills
Speak (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson
No More Dead Dogs (2000) by Gordon Korman
The Misfits (2001) by James Howe
The Jumping Tree (2001) by René Saldaña, Jr.
The Petition (2001) by Anne Schraff
Happenings (2002) by Katie Cobb
Does My Head Look Big in This? (2005) by Randa Abdel-Fattah
Prom (2005) by Laurie Halse Anderson
The Sledding Hill (2005) by Chris Crutcher
Sexy (2005) by Joyce Carol Oates
Teach Me (2005) by R. A. Nelson
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007) by Sherman Alexie
Schooled (2007) by Gordon Korman
Scat (2009) by Carl Hiaasen
Gentlemen (2009) by Michael Northrop
The Secret Life of Ms. Finkelman (2010) by Ben Winters
A Good Long Way (2010) by René Saldaña, Jr

Figure 1. Chronological list of recent, realistic YA novels with noteworthy teacher characters

ties and our collective and personal sense of the possibilities and limitations our life stories hold” (p. 9). Trier’s (2005) preservice teachers found that the project of analyzing “inner-city school movies” and box covers was “instrumental in setting the stage” for their perceptive “transformations” after student teaching (p. 185). Trier argues for teacher educators’ use of “a variety of different texts” in popular culture to contest negative images of students and schools (p. 187). In analysis of films that depict classroom instruction of works by William Shakespeare, Bach (2009) finds that teaching strategies differed on the basis of whether the school was urban, suburban, or elite, and that “these representations risk reinforcing the class stereotypes found in this genre” of teacher films (p. 324).

Describing how popular culture creates unrealistic expectations of “teaching as a divine vocation” and contributes to poor working conditions, Carter (2009)

argues that educational communities and methods classes need “to expose and critique the saint-teacher metaphor” that alternately idealizes and scorns teachers (pp. 84, 83). Muzzillo (2010) likewise expresses concern that the portrayal of teachers in films such as *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese, 2007) could establish “impossible teacher-personhood paradoxes, especially when viewed by our novice colleagues” (p. 180). The self-sacrificing, inspirational teacher who almost martyrs herself for the sake of the students is heroic, but not a model for sustaining a long-term career in the profession. Bach and Jolly (2011) point out that even the postmodern mock-documentary film *Chalk* (Akel, 2006) critiquing the “teacher hero” paradigm still reinforces “modernist mechanisms” in the classroom (pp. 89, 90). Forms of popular culture merit interrogation for the messages conveyed to viewers.

While much less attention has been devoted to the teacher’s role in contemporary YAL, scholars have examined YAL from the past to uncover how teaching and learning are represented. Attempting to classify teacher roles, Smedman (1989) reviews teacher portrayals in 15 novels published before 1980 and finds favorable treatments outnumbering unfavorable treatments (p. 148). Burnaford (1994) analyzes fiction published in the 1970s and 1980s for readers aged 10 to 14, finding myriad images that are “often not orderly, neatly categorizable, or easily typed” (p. 227). Burnaford observes that most of the fictional teachers who breach expectations of acceptable conduct or belief get dismissed from their jobs (p. 225), akin to Dalton’s (2008) finding that iconic teachers in films often leave their schools at the end of the movie, sometimes unwillingly (p. 12). In contrast, today’s YA novels have more successful nonconformists, and rebellion against norms often characterizes favorably depicted teachers.

In an essay in *Children’s Literature and Education*, Gates (1989) argues that in her study of initiation in the *Little House* and *Anne of Green Gables* book series, the heroines who become teachers “learn to humanize their childhood images” of the teacher’s role, thus complicating the dichotomy in which “The Good Teacher has no faults; the Bad Teacher, no redeeming qualities” (pp. 171, 166). Because these protagonists grow to adulthood in the course of a book series, a longer span of development is shown than in single books, in which a protagonist may not get to revise

opinions held in adolescence. Gates established the appeal and limitation of the good/bad binary.

The ALAN Review has addressed the representation of teachers in YAL. Albritton (1994) applies the description of archetypes from Carol Pearson's *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* (1989) to interpretation of teachers in Cynthia Voigt's 1982 novel *Dacey's Song* (p. 56). Emphasizing the teacher's process of becoming and changing, Albritton sees teaching as a heroic journey and a process of growth (p. 59). He does not assert that the best example, music teacher Mr. Lingerle, is a model all must follow, but rather argues that growth into better teaching can occur continually if teachers have "willingness to experience levels of honesty and vulnerability" (p. 59). In a 2006 essay, Town assesses the depiction of coaches in nine novels by Chris Crutcher, finding that the basic principle of Crutcherian good coaching is that the coaches "let kids figure out what they need for themselves, and provide them with all the backup they need to make these discoveries" (p. 68). This is similar to the constructivist approach, considered among best practices for any subject, in which teachers create an environment where students "construct their own understandings" and actively participate in making meaning (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005, p. 18). These studies interpret YAL insightfully but do not examine how individual examples are part of a larger pattern.

To help with categorization of the teachers in the novels, the present essay applies an interpretive framework of education theorist Peter McLaren in "The Liminal Servant and the Ritual Roots of Critical Pedagogy" (1988). McLaren bases his theories on the application of anthropology to education and on direct observations in middle and high schools, both public and private. McLaren argues that teachers can be categorized as three distinct types or ideals of performers of ritual: the liminal servant, the entertainer, and the hegemonic overlord (1988, pp. 164–165). The actions and responses of students determine the classification of teachers into these performative roles.

A teacher is in McLaren's (1988) identified role of the entertainer when students are "viewers of the action," with the classroom as a theatre and the teacher "as a propagandist—or even worse, an evangelist—for dominant cultural, economic, or ethical interests" (p. 165). The entertainer model suppresses individual-

ity and conditions students "for sameness" (p. 173). When the teacher is a hegemonic overlord, information gets transmitted "perfunctorily—as though it were a bite of food pushed under a cell door" (p. 165). The hegemonic overlord follows lessons "strictly and mor-
dantly by the book" and is unconcerned with student empowerment (p. 174). In these two roles, students become spectators who do not participate, and the knowledge they gain is outside of lived experience and not applied to their realities (p. 167). As Broz (2011) explains, McLaren "reveals a common circumstance in many smoothly operating classrooms: teachers pretending to teach and students pretending to learn" (p. 16). Students remain passive and orderly, going through the motions.

The most effective ideal, the liminal servant, exemplifies critical pedagogy by empowering students to question domination and their own assigned places. The liminal servant is found when the teacher's students respond with "immediacy or purpose," becoming "the primary actors within the ritual of instruction" (p. 165). The learning process is "characterized by intense involvement and participation" (p. 165). This teacher removes obstacles to "allow students to 'embody' or incarnate knowledge through an active interrogation of its ideological precepts and assumptions" (p. 173). Classes with this type of teacher have conditions conducive to *flow* ("the holistic sensation present when individuals act with total involvement") and *communitas* ("temporary camaraderie which occurs when roles or status are suspended between fellow liminals") (p. 173, notes 5 and 6).

Fundamentally, the activity of a liminal servant "takes the form of a critical pedagogy"; the teacher "must excavate the 'subjugated knowledges' of those who have been marginalized, vanquished, and disaffected, whose histories of suffering and hope have rarely been made public" (p. 171). René Saldaña creates a character embodying this value in *The Jumping Tree*, in which Mrs. Saucedo empowers Rey by instilling Chicano pride, correcting errors in the

Today's YA novels have more successful nonconformists, and rebellion against norms often characterizes favorably depicted teachers.

Texas history book, and providing tools for opposing the dominant culture. A liminal servant “is as much a social activist and spiritual director as a school pedagogue” who helps students examine the codes around

them and develop “a critical class consciousness” (pp. 172, 175). These ideals involve creating an exploratory educational environment in which the teacher is less of an authority than a co-participant or co-creator. When we examine the teachers in contemporary YAL through McLaren’s interpretative framework, the favorably depicted and effective teachers are closest to the liminal servant

ideal, while some less effective teachers fit the roles of the entertainer or the hegemonic overlord.

Novels with a “Good/Bad” Teacher Pairing

The pairing of good and bad teachers appears regularly in realistic YAL. In Richard Peck’s historical novel *The Teacher’s Funeral* (2004), set in a one-room schoolhouse in 1904, the weaker teacher, Myrt Arbuckle, dies and is succeeded by the effective Tansy Culver. In Kimberly Fusco’s *Tending to Grace* (2004), a passive high school English teacher, Mrs. Paul, is indifferent to her pupils, while Mr. Browne recognizes a good reader and brings Cornelia into his class. As Town (2006) notes, Chris Crutcher uses a good coach/bad coach combination in novels such as *Running Loose* (1983), *Chinese Handcuffs* (1989), and *Whale Talk* (2001) (pp. 66–69). The good/bad contrast serves to bring attributes of the better teacher into greater relief.

Readers may well find that the binary creates a false dichotomy; they may prefer, instead, to show that real teachers could be positioned on a continuum of effectiveness. Some authors create complex portrayals through assigning both positive and negative attributes to the same teacher. The biology teacher in Claudia Mills’s *Standing Up to Mr. O.* (1998) embodies all three of McLaren’s models at different moments. Mr. O’Neill manifests his “angry edge” when a

student, Maggie, questions the ethics of his dissection labs and grows “as disappointed in him as he was in her” (pp. 96, 156). Maggie’s perception does not prove Mr. O’Neill a bad teacher, only a complicated and realistic one.

As mentioned in the introduction, four novels from the last decade (or so) offer a pairing in which a favorably depicted teacher who is a major character in the book contrasts to a negatively depicted teacher: Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak* (1999), Chris Crutcher’s *The Sledding Hill* (2005), Anne Schraff’s *The Petition* (2001), and Carl Hiaasen’s *Scat* (2009). In each work, the better teacher corresponds with McLaren’s ideal of the liminal servant, while the poorer teacher is the hegemonic overlord or entertainer. These authors, whether intuitively or calculatedly, support constructivist learning theory and the teacher in the role of facilitator, both in classroom activities and beyond course content. Through the pairing of textual teachers, the authors are in effect supporting the best in contemporary teaching practice and critiquing less desirable methods. A fifth novel, Gordon Korman’s *No More Dead Dogs* (2000), shows how a teacher can change to let the students create their own learning experience.

Mr. Freeman (from Anderson’s *Speak*) is a gifted artist who models what he expects of students and exposes the reality of the institutional power structure. For example, at one point he paints artwork likening a school to a prison to criticize underfunding of the arts (p. 62). Mr. Freeman’s importance for ninth-grader Melinda Sordino’s recovery from a rape the previous summer is seen by his presence throughout the book. As Ward (2008) argues, Mr. Freeman is “one of Melinda’s only allies” and is “essential in the healing process” (pp. 69, 75). His encouragement to Melinda includes both praise and criticism of her painting (p. 152). She finally reaches a state of flow and completes her art project, but only after she has spoken out about being raped in an attempt to protect other women. Mr. Freeman’s shamanistic role is enacted because he invites students to enact the ritual of painting and paints with them. His classroom is psychologically, educationally, and socially removed from the ordinary routines of school and characterized by heightened, individual meaning making on the part of the students and a great sense of community both among the students and between the students and the teacher.

Through the pairing of textual teachers, the authors are in effect supporting the best in contemporary teaching practice and critiquing less desirable methods.

In the mold of the hegemonic overlord, a social studies teacher (known only by the nickname Mr. Neck) behaves in a bigoted, unprofessional way—a contrast to the positive effects of Mr. Freeman. Mr. Neck’s techniques in social studies class not only endorse the status quo, but also assail anyone questioning it. After complaining that affirmative action policies kept his son from getting a job, he announces a class debate on the claim that “America should have closed her borders in 1900” (p. 54). In this one-sided “debate,” Mr. Neck limits expression by students who disagree with him, an exclusion of opinion that cannot be excused by time constraints. Class member David Petrakis stands up against Mr. Neck and eventually wins the struggle after many chapters. Mr. Neck intimidates Melinda in class and during an assembly, even punishing her for friendship with the rebellious David by changing an assignment. When Melinda resists his authority, Mr. Neck sends her to the principal’s office for insubordination and assigns her work a D grade (p. 157). Mr. Neck embodies the forces that suppress students who oppose him at their peril.

As Bartolomé (2004) explains in *Teacher Education Quarterly*, teachers who do not “identify and interrogate their negative, racist, and classist ideological orientations often work to reproduce the existing social order” (p. 100). Never self-assessing, Mr. Neck openly supports a racially and socially exclusivist America. He represents the opposite of critical pedagogy, which encourages teachers to develop “counter-hegemonic positions” and to understand discrimination better through having “personally experienced or witnessed someone else’s subordination” (Bartolomé, p. 116). Another hegemonic overlord, Alexie’s (2007) Mr. P., perpetuates oppression in a reservation school and participates in deculturalization, offering no corrective other than a verbal apology. Mr. P. is the counterbalance to Junior’s outstanding basketball coach at his new school (pp. 43, 148).

The antagonist of Chris Crutcher’s *The Sledding Hill* (2005), English teacher Mr. Sanford Tarter, also represents the hegemonic overlord type. Mr. Tarter is physically and intellectually restrictive of students. Reveling in his own power, Mr. Tarter responds to all disciplinary infractions with physical “techniques of torment,” such as making students stand for long intervals in “stress positions” (pp. 22–23). Trying to ban a novel from his public school, he organizes protests

of the book, manipulating the members of a student organization and the congregation for which he is pastor. Although he means well, Mr. Tarter intrudes excessively in the life of Eddie, a ninth-grader whose father and best friend have recently died, and tries to force Eddie to come to a quick decision about religious salvation. For other novelists, a teacher who is also a minister could be a favorable role model, but not for Crutcher, who has faced much censorship.

In contrast to the book-banning Mr. Tarter, the other English teacher in *The Sledding Hill* gives students choice and power. Ms. Ruth Lloyd teaches a freshman elective class in “Really Modern Literature” in which students choose their own readings; the only required book is *Warren Peerce*, a text that causes a censorship battle but that comforts a grieving student (p. 85). Ms. Lloyd believes the book has merit because it “challenges” students “to stretch”; she believes that it will “get some of you who tend to get your book reports from the backs of cereal boxes to actually read a book cover to cover” (pp. 89, 87). When opposed by a parent who asserts she should cover only noncontroversial material, Ms. Lloyd insists, “You are offering me a solution that makes kids hate to read, and that is simply not acceptable” (p. 207). Ms. Lloyd wants students to have the power of choice, freedom to read, and ability to question the status quo. However, the last chapter indicates that Ms. Lloyd makes the choice to leave her job because so many works are being “cleansed” from the high school library (p. 226). She takes a job at the city library instead, where she presumably hopes to practice her counter-hegemonic ideology with fewer reprisals. Not really subverting the good/bad binary, Crutcher’s text implies that any teacher who isn’t a Ms. Lloyd in advocating for relevant, contemporary literature in English class is a Mr. Tarter who tortures students, covers boring material, and demands fealty.

Challenges to the Good/Bad Dichotomy in Representing Teachers

Mr. Pedroza, the best teacher in Anne Schraff’s short novel *The Petition* (2001), initially seems like a hegemonic overlord but comes to be recognized as a liminal servant, a “transformative intellectual” (McLaren, 1988, p. 174) who pushes and assists students, while Ms. Corey fits McLaren’s descriptions of both the

entertainer and the hegemonic overlord. Although protagonist Izzy senses the correct classifications of these teachers throughout the whole novel, other students, parents, and a coach are skeptical about Mr. Pedroza until convinced otherwise. The demanding Mr. Pedroza is proven to be more effective and more respectful of his Mexican American students than the easygoing teacher who gives “freebie grades” because she does not believe the students are capable of doing better work (Schraff, 2001, p. 35).

Ms. Corey, who is Anglo American, reinforces the status quo and does not empower students to improve their lives. Students voice a personal liking for Ms.

Corey because she is “a young, new teacher” who relates to them, is funny, makes it “easier to pass,” and is generous about grades and assignment completion (pp. 6, 35). However, Izzy overhears Ms. Corey revealing her ignorance and biases to another teacher. Ms. Corey knows students cheat but will not “make a fuss”; she pities the students because “it can’t be much fun living in the *barrio*”; and worse, “we just can’t expect as much from them

as we expect from our Anglo students” (p. 7). Ms. Corey’s superficial niceness barely covers her bigotry. Unfortunately, some students have already internalized racist attitudes. Ramona, for example, holds a low opinion of her own abilities and seeks only “easy” classes (pp. 34, 52).

Mr. Pedroza, who is Mexican American like protagonist Izzie, does not surrender to an unjust system that establishes low expectations and fewer resources to Latino students (p. 19). He appears to be the only teacher who grades honestly and rigorously (p. 93). Yet one student says Mr. Pedroza is “the meanest teacher he’d ever had” (p. 73), and the baseball players fear being ineligible to play because their grades are too low. Izzy resists peer pressure to sign a petition to the school board to fire Mr. Pedroza, instead writing in a letter to the city paper that “Some of the

other teachers don’t expect much from their students. But Mr. Pedroza expects us to be the best we can be” (p. 83). Students representing three decades of Mr. Pedroza’s teaching career speak up in the school board forum and describe “an esteemed teacher who made a difference. A teacher who had seen the latent abilities in kids when no one else had” (p. 97). The final testament to Mr. Pedroza’s position as a teacher who works for the “clearing away of obstacles to the embodiment of knowledge” (McLaren, 1988, p. 172) is when his top student offers to tutor the members of the baseball team who want help despite their previous insults to her (Schraff, 2001, p. 99).

Much as Schraff illustrates with her character representation in *The Petition*, Hiaasen’s *Scat* (2009) shows that students assume strictness makes a teacher bad and perceive teachers as mean when they have high expectations. (A variation on this assumption appears when Advanced Placement English students in Katie Cobb’s *Happenings* [2002] respect their teacher only when she challenges them, disdaining her when she gives easy work.) Schraff weakens the good/bad binary by showing that the teacher many current students believe to be bad enough to merit immediate firing is actually the school’s best teacher. Hiaasen also undermines the good/bad dichotomy. One teacher seems bad and unquestionably is so; the other teacher initially seems cruel but is in fact good. Both Schraff and Hiaasen show perspectives toward the teacher changing to recognize excellence.

For Hiaasen, even the protagonists must modify their view of the teacher, Mrs. Bunny Starch, who is introduced as “the most feared teacher at the Truman School” in Florida (p. 1). Yet at the conclusion, her eighth-grade biology students give a round of applause when she returns to the classroom after an injury sustained during environmental activism. Mrs. Starch, whose top concerns are teaching eighth-grade biology and saving endangered species, is eventually perceived as a well-rounded person by protagonists Nick and Marta and to a truant, Duane, whom she tutors. The students investigate the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Starch and are “stunned” to find her caring gently for an abandoned baby panther, because “this was a side of their teacher that they’d never observed, or had even imagined to be part of her buzz-saw personality” (p. 261). They have misinterpreted her strictness as evidence of an uncaring person, but

Crutcher’s text implies that any teacher who isn’t a Ms. Lloyd in advocating for relevant, contemporary literature in English class is a Mr. Tarter who tortures students, covers boring material, and demands fealty.

Mrs. Starch has always emphasized student learning. She tells her biology class: “A teacher’s job is to identify and cultivate each student’s strengths, and then encourage him or her to utilize those strengths in the pursuit of knowledge” (p. 7). Mrs. Starch fosters student abilities both in and out of the classroom; ultimately, we see her as a liminal servant to whom activism is as essential as her teaching.

Because the students of the liminal servant, like Nick and Marta with Mrs. Starch, are authentically engaged in making personal and individual meaning, they do challenge the status quo and cause problems for administrators. Despite running afoul of their principal, the success of their environmental activism to rescue panthers and their exposure of criminal behavior by an oil-drilling company brings positive publicity and donations to the school and dissolves his anger (p. 350). The rebels are welcomed back by the principal, not despite but *because of* their activism. In this, as in Hiaasen’s prior YAL about environmental activism, middle school students find intergenerational partnerships to advocate for Earth and are ultimately celebrated for challenging norms.

Dr. Wendell Waxmo is Hiaasen’s caricature of an unqualified, eccentric substitute. Students know he is “a legendary wacko” whose bad behavior and methods have banned him from public schools, yet he substitutes in private schools when they get “desperate” (p. 98). Dr. Waxmo takes caprice to the extreme, teaching erroneous material and confusing students, who consider their time wasted. Ultimately, his narrative presence in *Scat* seems intended for comic relief, although he is hardly an entertainer, and this incompetent substitute makes the students more appreciative of their regular, strict teacher.

A final YAL text destabilizing the good/bad teacher trope features an English and drama teacher whose voice is heard in the multiple-perspective novel *No More Dead Dogs* (Korman, 2000), in which Mr. Fogelman’s kinetic characterization changes from mixed to good. Initially, students regard Mr. Fogelman unfavorably, yet both he and their attitudes change for the better. The book is told through multiple perspectives, including the teacher’s view in two chapters that take the form of journal entries with memos to himself. Mr. Fogelman becomes a liminal servant almost in spite of himself. He recognizes that his play script is too faithful to the sentimental original of *Old*

Shep, My Pal and allows football star Wallace Wallace to rewrite it. While anger is one reason Mr. Fogelman gives Wallace detention, the punishment ultimately benefits the student and Mr. Fogelman, who acknowledges that Wallace taught him, “If you mold the *play* to showcase the talents of the *students*, the sky’s the limit” (p. 134, emphasis in original).

Mr. Fogelman moves toward a constructivist approach that works out well for the students and their performance. As the club advisor, Mr. Fogelman is responsible for the musical drama, yet he understands that he must let the students build their own learning experiences. His memos chart the changes, going from “A director must *never* lose control of his play” to “When things start falling into place, get out of the way; it’s a happy avalanche” (pp. 93, 135). He relinquishes directing to Wallace and temporarily becomes a Dead Mango by joining the student rock band accompanying the musical. Mr. Fogelman equalizes himself with the students reluctantly but wisely, because, as McLaren writes, “To fully understand the subtext of the student, the liminal servant must ‘become’ the student” (p. 174). They achieve with their play a sense of *communitas*, the “temporary camaraderie which occurs when roles or status are suspended” (McLaren, p. 173, p. 5). Mr. Fogelman merges with the cast and crew for one transcendent night as 700 audience members rise to their feet ecstatically and dance.

Conclusion

YA novelists Anderson, Crutcher, Schraff, and Hiaasen all work with the binary of the “good teacher” and “bad teacher,” while Schraff, Hiaasen, and Korman undermine this false dichotomy. The idea of better teaching is still present, as the teachers might be positioned on a continuum of effectiveness, but the novelists uncover the variance in perception of teacher practice. As Christenbury (2011) describes, “there is no definitive recipe, no immutable formula” for effec-

The student’s role is active rather than passive, more like an exploratory risk taker than a person who works only for right answers to yield a grade on an assignment.

tive teaching, but characteristics may include methods “premised on students’ intellectual curiosity” and should be considered variable, because teachers try diverse strategies as they “change and refine” methods over time (p. 48). Rather than being static, educators may be traveling on what Albritton describes as a “heroic journey” of “growth into better teaching” (1994, p. 59).

Whether deliberately or unintentionally, the novelists appear to endorse types of progressive pedagogy. There is a correlation between favorably depicted teachers and the practice of constructivism as well as critical pedagogy. In constructivism, the teacher is a facilitator who demonstrates skills and respects student responses rather than a dispenser of knowledge; the student’s role is active rather than passive, more like an exploratory risk taker than a person who works only for right answers to yield a grade on an assignment. A critical pedagogue goes even farther in helping students adopt tools to combat oppression and domination. Textual evidence suggests that these approaches are used by the favorable teachers—Mr. Freeman in *Speak*, Ms. Lloyd in *The Sledding Hill*, Mr. Pedroza in *The Petition*, Mrs. Starch in Hiaasen’s *Scat*, and Mr. Fogelman in *No More Dead Dogs*.

Furthermore, the more favorably depicted teachers show correspondence with Peter McLaren’s (1988) “liminal servant” teacher role-ideal in which the teacher “must excavate the ‘subjugated knowledges’ of those who have been marginalized, vanquished, and disaffected (p. 171). The liminal servant is a critical pedagogue who crafts an exploratory educational environment in which the teacher is a co-participant or co-creator, like Mr. Freeman making artwork alongside his students, Ms. Lloyd and students discussing literature by living authors, Mrs. Starch rescuing animals in the forest with her biology students, and Mr. Fogelman performing in the collaboratively written drama with his students. Some of the more negatively portrayed teachers correlate with McLaren’s formulations of the “hegemonic overlord” and “the entertainer.” These latter types reinforce the status quo rather than challenging it.

Students at any grade level reading YAL benefit from analyzing depictions of teaching and learning. Preservice teachers preparing for the profession would benefit from considering not only how school works now, but also how it could be improved through

individual and collective efforts. Fiction does not substitute for lived experience, but it does provide an additional venue for understanding contemporary education. All students, through taking different perspectives on texts, can gain broader views of their own educational situations. As Kornfeld and Prothro (2005) have demonstrated, students should have opportunities to read fiction about schooling and to examine the classroom, the curriculum, and “their own positionality in their formal education,” because in life as in fiction, students can become “agents of change” who motivate teachers and coaches to challenge administration or fellow teachers “in the interest of the students” (pp. 218, 223). Students who consider what they hope to gain from schooling could make their experiences more meaningful and increase motivation to stay in school. Good teachers can help students identify goals and achieve them.

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The Case of the Missing Mexican American Detective Stories:

Mystery Solved?

I'm on the Case

In 2010, I joined young adult (YA) author Ray Villarreal and poet/anthologist Sarah Cortez on a preconference panel sponsored by the Young Adult Round Table of the Texas Library Association for their annual conference, during which we each spoke about our early reading experiences, specifically how they involved the detective/mystery genre. We also shared our thoughts on the state of the genre as it pertains to young Mexican American readers. It was a well-attended panel, and the presentations and short readings were lively and enjoyable. But the highlight for me as a participant, as often happens, was the question and answer period that followed. Of all the fine questions and insightful observations from the floor, one stood out for me because I didn't have a ready answer, and as a former English language arts teacher and Mexican American YA writer, I felt I should have. The lack of a response bothered me then, and it has continued to nag at me since. So, in order to find a suitable response, I have donned the hat of literary gumshoe. I'm on the case.

The question/commentary combination came from Jeanette Larson, Texas librarian, children's

picturebook writer, and author of *Bringing Mysteries Alive for Children and Young Adults*. Here is what she wanted to know: "Here we have three Latino writers of mystery, but aside from you, are Latino writers not writing mysteries for kids, or are publishers not publishing them? Why is there not the diversity in children's mysteries that there is in mysteries for adults?"

I must be frank: I was stumped. I had been brought in by my publisher, Arte Público Press out of Houston to join Villarreal and Cortez to share my two-cents' worth on a panel titled "Tell Young Adults to Get a Clue with Latino Writers of Mystery Fiction," and I was more than happy to take part in the discussion. The presentation afforded me the opportunity to

visit with librarians, meet Villarreal for the first time, and spend some time with Cortez, a good friend. Villarreal is the author of a handful of novels, among them his mystery/thriller for older elementary and middle level readers, *Who's Buried in the Garden?* Cortez, better-known for her poetry, is quickly building a solid reputation as an anthologist of short fiction and essays. The book she was showcasing at TLA was *Hit List: The Best Latino Mystery*, a collection of noir by Latino/a authors that she coedited

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with Liz Martinez. Though not aimed at the younger readership, it is a project that prompted her to suggest to Dr. Nicolás Kanellos, the independent press's founder and publisher, a second anthology of mystery fiction, this one expressly intended for the younger reading audience.

Mention at the panel of this new book sparked significant interest in the crowd of librarians in attendance. I was excited, too, because Cortez asked me right before we started the panel to submit a story for consideration. Glad as I was about having accomplished so much in one presentation, there was yet this irritating buzz in the back of my head quickly beelining to the fore. Larson's question would soon grow from that bothersome hum into an annoying racket. The educators, panelists, and teacher librarians present that day understood the serious implications of her questions. They originated out of a concern for a segment of the population that, on the whole, remains academically underserved in terms of culturally relevant resources. Certainly books are accessible to them in classrooms and libraries, but there is a noticeable shortage of titles that racial/ethnic/cultural/language minority students can identify with thoroughly. If such books are not there, it follows that readers are not going to find them. If they don't discover them, chances of readers becoming engaged in stories that speak about them and to them decrease, and so, too, do their literacy abilities.

Why make such a specific community of readers my center of attention? When you come right down to it, limiting my focus like this is important due to the latest statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the most recent findings, the total population in the US of those identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino is 16.3% (*2010 Census Data: United States*), and though that number doesn't seem so significant when compared to the population in a state like Texas, the increase nationwide is 43% from 2000. In Texas, those identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino now number 37.6% of the population, a 41.8% increase from 2000 (*2010 Census Data: Texas*).

So, my reason for writing this article is, in large part, to address Larson's question/observation: Does there exist a list of mysteries by Mexican American authors written primarily to attract young Mexican American readers whose main characters are also Mexican American detectives? (Though Larson was

specific in her use of the term *Latino*, I've taken the liberty to further limit my topic to Mexican American YA detective stories, due to my own cultural background and my expertise in Mexican American YA literature; I understand that there does exist this same gap for all Latino groups, as well as for African American and Asian American readers, but those questions I'll leave for others who are experts in those fields). My second reason for writing this article is that I, as a Mexican American assistant professor in a college of education, have a vested interest in the use of culturally relevant literature in the ethnically and racially diverse classroom, particularly regarding Mexican American children and young adults who are labeled reluctant or nonreaders. The need for solutions to the problems of illiteracy among Mexican American students is obvious, but the resources are few.

Before moving on to this more serious subject, I feel I must give some background on my own reading evolution.

Getting a Clue

Looking back on my early days of reading, I would classify my younger self as an engaged reader. If it had words in or on it, I read it. While I cannot recall every single book (or cereal box ingredients panel) I got my grubby little hands on in and outside of the classroom, I do remember my first favorite character. His name was Wet Albert, and back in second or third grade, I met him on the pages of our basal text. He was a boy clad in a yellow rain slicker and matching hat and boots. Aptly named, the book's unlikely hero is drenched from head to toe, 24/7, because everywhere he goes a grey cloud is sure to follow, pouring down on him. He seemed to me a very lonely boy because who in his or her right mind would want to play with him and chance getting soaked?

It turns out the only one who does play with him is his sister, but only if it's on a see-saw—wet on his side, dry on hers. Later in the story, Wet Albert turns this apparent curse into a work of epic heroism. Accompanied by his little cloud of rain, he travels the world-over by helicopter to wherever there is a drought. In those days, I did not know he existed as the lead character of his own picturebook titled *Wet Albert*, written and illustrated by Michael and Joanne Cole in 1968. What I did understand then, even though I wouldn't have had the language nor the

academic wherewithal to express this knowledge, was that if another story was going to entice me into the reading act as *Wet Albert* did, it would have to include undeniably compelling characters in search of solutions to problems, large and small.

It makes sense, then, that the next character who generated in me a like response was one Leroy “Encyclopedia” Brown, the young boy detective from Idaville created by Donald Sobol in 1963. In the series, Bugs Meany, the town’s bully, has made it his mission in life to look for any and every way to cause trouble for the gumshoe, who then goes about the business of solving whatever mystery he is presented with, thus thwarting his nemesis’

scheme time and again. In retrospect, I can say it was partly my rooting for one character’s triumph and hoping for another’s ruin that kept me coming back for more. Another had to do with the mystery angle. That is saying something, because even with Sobol’s explanations at the end of the book, I was hardly ever able to figure out the mysteries as they unfolded before me. But I tried. I was growing as a reader, and that meant that a character alone would no longer suffice as the sole motivation for my taking up a book. Now I needed the complication of a plot to keep me turning the pages. The more problematic the better.

I eventually outgrew Encyclopedia Brown but not the detective/mystery genre. I searched the school library’s shelves and came across the Hardy Boys series to fill that gap. Frank and Joe Hardy easily took Brown’s place. The sibling-sleuthing duo did much the same work as their younger counterpart, but due to the lengthier nature of these books, their characters could be fleshed out and the mysteries in need of solving could be multilayered and therefore more complex. Just what a maturing reader needed. Around the fourth and fifth grades, I also became more acutely aware of the opposite sex as such, and not as the cootie-carriers I had assumed them to be. So, when my classmates mentioned Nancy Drew as a detective with her own series, I basically dumped the Hardy Boys for this gorgeous, tough-as-nails girl detec-

tive. Joe and Frank had served their purpose, but they were not as intriguing, in more ways than one, as was Nancy. My elementary school teachers supported my classmates and me by teaching us to choose what we wanted to read and by continuing to send us to the library during class time. It was a magical time. We were reading, and that was enough.

Then came my junior high and high school years, better known to me as the dry years. *Wet Albert* was a thing of the long-ago past, and though the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew were more recent reads, my English language arts teachers made it abundantly clear that these were not works of high literary merit, and therefore would not be assigned to us. Instead, we were required to read de Maupassant’s “The Necklace” or any number of O. Henry’s heavily plot-driven stories with the frequently far-fetched twists at the end. I soon lost interest in reading because I simply couldn’t read myself into the Classics, nor was there the sense of intrigue I had grown accustomed to in my reading to date. Sad to say, my teachers weren’t able and/or willing to make of these pieces what I’ve discovered them to be in adulthood: stories of scheming and trickery. If they had, the stories may well have made a difference at this stage in my reading life. Unfortunately, I was not mentally capable of making that connection independently. The result? I fell out of love with reading. I went from being an active and engaged in-class reader to an aliterate, although some of my teachers would likely have classified me as a non- or reluctant reader.

While middle and high school were dry years for me as far as *school* reading went, I found my way back to the library during my eighth-grade year and rediscovered I enjoyed spending time there. Mornings leading up to the opening bell, during lunch sometimes, and after school waiting for football or band practice to start, I snuck in and scoured the shelves, looking for I don’t know what. I’d pull a title from the shelf and literally judge the book by its cover. If it looked appealing, I’d read the flap copy, then move on to the opening paragraphs or replace it. Depending on whether I enjoyed what I’d read the previous visit, I would go straight back to it or move on to the next book. There was no method to my madness. Without knowing it, though, I was in search of a story that would take me back to the days when I read for the pure enjoyment of it. Jim Trelease (1982) calls this find a “homerun book,” a title so engaging it will

Without knowing it, though, I was in search of a story that would take me back to the days when I read for the pure enjoyment of it.

serve as an initial entry or eventual re-entry into the reading act.

Then one day, I found it. Back then, I didn't keep track of authors and titles, so I didn't know that the book I now credit for bringing me back to reading was Piri Thomas's *Stories from El Barrio*, a collection of tales about Puerto Rican youth growing up in El Barrio in New York City. The first piece I read was called "The Konk," (2006b) about 14-year-old Piri who, like a great many of his friends, is "trying to pass for white" (p. 41). One day, he decides to straighten his "nappy" hair by getting a konk (p. 42). At Roy's Barber Shop, Roy warns, "If you want white man's hair, there's a price you gotta pay" (p. 44). It's a beautiful story of suffering shame because a boy doesn't fit in, and when he attempts to pass for someone he's not, he suffers ridicule at the hands of his own, except for his parents who know what his "hurting [is] all about" (p. 49). His mother wraps him in her arms and says, "Don't ever be ashamed of being you. You want to know something, *negrito*? I wouldn't trade you for any *blanquitos*" (p. 49). I found the story compelling because it was both hilarious and tragic. Its brutal honesty moved me enough that I made sure I reshelved the book where I knew I'd find it on my next visit.

I was happy I did, because the following story I read was "Blue Wings and Puerto Rican Knights" (2006a). This piece is about a boy, Pedro *Pistolas* (Pistol Pete), who is the smallest of the Puerto Rican Knights: "At fifteen, he still looked ten years old, with a baby face and a voice that sounded as if it belonged to a girl. Somehow, wearing a name like *Pistolas* made him feel he was seven feet tall" (p. 70). To compensate, Pedro romanticizes gang life and makes of himself a banger bigger than the universe; unfortunately, his bravado costs him his life. Another tragically stirring tale.

This was the first time in my whole reading career that I'd ever met a character this attractive. Though Pedro *Pistolas* was a Puerto Rican teen living in El Barrio and I was a young Mexican American boy growing up in deep South Texas, the boy spoke my language, and his story, so to speak, was my own. In addition, this story included elements of the thriller I had become familiar with while reading mysteries, but it also contained the cultural connection that I now realize had been missing in the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series.

Though "Blue Wings" by Thomas is not classified as mystery on its face, it most certainly met the criteria for me in junior high school. Dr. Teri Lesesne, in her book *Naked Reading* (2006), describes the appeal of stories of this sort: "Perhaps a large part of the attraction lies in the mentality adopted when we read mysteries. A mystery is a puzzle waiting to be solved by the reader in tandem with the protagonist of the story. Reading mysteries is, in effect, becoming part of the game, part of the puzzle" (p. 33). To me, "Blue Wings" was a puzzle. I was anxious to find out whether Pedro *Pistolas* would make it back alive after a pretty violent gang fight. If he did, would he become a leader among his gang? Or would he be relegated to the rank of follower? Questions like this swirled through my brain. Reading "Blue Wings" served as a solution to my growing aliteracy, and I haven't stopped reading in the thriller/detective/mystery genre since.

Today, I prefer the works of Henning Mankell, Dennis Lehane, Jeffery Deaver, and Patricia Cornwell, among others. When I'm in the middle of any one of their titles, I feel the same excitement that I must have felt as a young reader tip-toeing alongside Nancy Drew as she approached a purportedly haunted house; hunching over a crime scene with Encyclopedia Brown, collecting clues in order to foil Bug's evil plan; or growing increasingly concerned that Pedro has not returned long after the fight. I lose myself in the puzzle like I did in childhood. Nothing matters except turning to the next page and the next, attempting to figure out who did the crime and how, wondering how that tale's hero will fare, and, if I must, falling asleep nights living in the book until I'm done with it.

I count myself among the fortunate ones, though, who was turned on to reading early enough in life, whose parents, in their own ways, promoted reading, and who found for myself the entryway into the act so that in spite of losing touch with it for a couple of years, I picked up the habit again when I found just the right book, with its fascinating characters,

Nothing matters except turning to the next page and the next, attempting to figure out who did the crime and how, wondering how that tale's hero will fare.

its riveting tales full of exciting plots and twists, and more than satisfactory resolutions. Just as important, in Thomas's *Stories from El Barrio*, I discovered the cultural connection. Others are not so privileged.

A Perplexing Piece of the Literary Puzzle

Though not surprised when I read the latest statistics on young adults and their reading lives, or lack thereof, when I do look at the numbers, I cannot help but become concerned. In one of its recent reports, the National Endowment for the Arts (2004) shows that among young adults (identified as those aged 18–24) between the years 1982 to 2002, there was a 28% drop in literary reading, defined as reading “any novels or short stories, plays, or poetry” (*Reading at Risk*, p. 1). There does appear to be some good news. In NEA's 2009 *Reading on the Rise*, then-chairman Dana Gioia writes that the most current findings point toward “a significant turning point in recent American cultural history” (p. 1). According to this study, reading among young adults has increased almost 10% between 2002 and 2008, from 42.8% to 51.7% (p. 4).

I continue to be troubled, though, when I pick up these or similar studies and surveys. Allow me to explain. First, I am distressed because I am a teacher of literacy in a college of education, whose primary duty is to equip my students, future educators themselves, with the tools necessary to ensure that their children can read. When there is a report, formal or anecdotal, that states that children are not reading at a higher percentage, I feel that I am not doing my part well enough. Second, I am unsettled because the findings for my cultural/ethnic group indicate that Mexican American youth are not keeping pace with their white and black classmates. In NEA's reports, for instance, Hispanic young adults trail White and African American young adults by 24.9% and 10.1% in the 2004 report, and by 23.8% and 10.7% in 2008, respectively. The difference remains stark.

The research on the use of culturally relevant literature is by now plentiful and easily available, so I will not spend too much time rehashing it here, but let's take at least a quick glance at it. Simply put, culturally relevant literature is literature in which characters and themes other than those of the dominant culture are presented accurately and respectfully for the express purpose of reaching out to students from nondominant backgrounds who are not active read-

ers. The hope is that these students who are reluctant or nonreaders will see and hear themselves portrayed in the stories they're being asked to read and find a means into the reading act. Much like happened with me and Thomas's “Blue Wings.”

Yvonne Freeman and David Freeman (2004) describe the positive outcome when this literature is made available to these underserved students: “When teachers use culturally relevant books, students understand the books more fully, and, as a result, become more engaged in their reading. When students become more engaged in texts, they are motivated to read more” (p. 7). According to Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2010) in their *Essentials of Young Adult Literature*, “Relatively few Latino books for young adults are published in the United States despite the fact that Latinos represent the largest microcultural group . . . and are the fastest-growing segment of the population” (p. 152). What titles are published, they argue, are largely confined to a few recurring themes, including “life in the barrios . . . , identifying with one's native heritage and the culture of the United States . . . , life under repressive Latin American political regimes . . . , and immigration to the United States for economic or political reasons . . .” (p. 152).

Certainly these themes are of cultural interest to many Latino/a young readers. They might well do for non- and reluctant readers what Victor Villaseñor's epic novel *Rain of Gold* (1991) did for Francisco, who arrived in the United States from El Salvador as a young teen with no working knowledge of English. Francisco eventually graduated from high school and enrolled in college. Still insecure about his reading abilities in his second language, Francisco forged ahead nevertheless, opting for a multicultural literature course rather than an easier way out. According to Freeman and Freeman (2004), “once he started reading the book, Francisco couldn't put it down” (p. 7). One reason might be because of the cultural connections he was able to make with this novel.

But the recurring themes listed by Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown may not be applicable across the board. Not all Hispanics make the journey northward into the United States from Mexico, Central America, or South America seeking a better life for themselves and/or their children. Not all Latinos/as are political refugees leaving house and home in Cuba or the Dominican Republic due to opposition to one dictator's regime

or another. Such was the case with Ray Villarreal. He recalls his early days of teaching, “when bilingual education was in its infancy”: “In an effort to demonstrate cultural diversity, the district provided me with books for Latino students. Mostly the literature was about the lives of the Aztecs and the Mayans. I was also given biographies of famous Latinos, such as Cesar Chavez and Rita Moreno. The materials were pretty boring, and the kids didn’t really like reading them” (email interview, Feb. 7, 2011).

Today, there are more culturally authentic titles, but this problem that Tomlinson, Lynch-Brown, and Villarreal point out still exists. Sometimes, brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking characters are not enough. So, if these texts that address such serious subject matter do not draw Mexican American children and young adults into the act of reading like *Rain of Gold* did Francisco, what will?

I contend that introducing this group of non- and reluctant readers to the detective/mystery genre just might do the trick. After all, aren’t most children a curious lot? Aren’t they innately attracted to puzzles? So why not provide them with puzzles to solve on the page? Lesesne (2006) further maintains that “[r]esearch finds over and over again that the one genre enjoyed equally by male and female readers is mystery. . . . What is it about mystery that attracts readers of both genders and from a wide range of ages and abilities?” (p. 33).

That there is no mention in her statement of race, culture, or ethnicity is perhaps the very clue that might lead to a solution for Mexican American children and young adults. That is to say, it is conceivable that the detective/mystery genre alone may be enough to invite a Mexican American child or young adult into the reading community. It stands to reason that if the genre is gender-inclusive and spans across age and ability, it might persuade the Mexican American student, too. Villarreal remembers: “As a kid, I read Alfred Hitchcock mysteries, the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, the tales of Robin Hood and his Merry Men, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and Greek and Roman mythology. I was also hooked on comic books . . . they were ‘guy’ stories, with lots of action, adventure, and suspense. I never read Nancy Drew or the Hardy Boys. [But] Alfred Hitchcock and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle satisfied my taste for mysteries” (email interview, Feb. 7, 2011).

It makes sense, then, that if mysteries grabbed Villarreal’s and my attention, why would they not also attract other children who happen to be Mexican American and in need of just the right kind of book to serve as the catalyst for them?

But the research on the use of culturally relevant literature also suggests minority readers will more genuinely take on a work that tells their story. Much of my work on the subject has been informal and the data anecdotal. For instance, a former student in deep South Texas studying to become an educator described her fourth-grade daughter as a soon-to-be nonreader . . . until, that is, the girl found her book of entry back into the reading act. Not only did the girl finish reading Xavier Garza’s *Creepy Creatures and Other Cucuys* (2004) on her own in one evening, she also took her mother’s class copy to school the following day to share with her good friend—this without her mother’s knowledge. The girl later admitted to having “stolen” Garza’s collection of Mexican American bogeyman stories because she knew them so well already, having heard her mother, aunts, and grandmothers tell the exact same Mexican American tales around the dinner table over coffee and sweetbread. The means for her to fall back in love with reading was that these were her stories, tales representative of her culture. Another book, one by R. L. Stine perhaps, may not have done the trick. Garza’s, though, did. Proof like this abounds. Reluctant and nonreaders are more likely to keep turning the pages of a book if the story is somehow about them, if it uses the language(s) of the reader, or if it includes references to his or her culture and history in a meaningful way.

And so now I return to Larson’s big-picture question: Are there any other Mexican American authors writing mysteries/detective stories for and about Mexican American children that could possibly interest them as mysteries, culturally relevant texts, or both? Fortunately, the number of Hispanic titles is on the rise, though not at the rate necessary to keep up with

After all, aren’t most children a curious lot? Aren’t they innately attracted to puzzles? So why not provide them with puzzles to solve on the page?

the growth of the various US Latino groups in recent and coming decades. The list of Mexican American mysteries for kids is even smaller, almost nonexistent. After a cursory search, I uncovered almost no titles. Then I delved more deeply into this puzzle, the case of the missing Mexican American mysteries for young readers. After speaking with a handful of Latino publishing insiders, I was directed to a few titles (an annotated listing follows), but not more than that. Interestingly, the entire list consists of titles published by Piñata Books, Arte Público's children's and YA imprint, and one of the few presses that concentrate on publishing material by Hispanics.

The call is simple: educators know well that mysteries work to attract a child's attention. They also know that culturally relevant texts do the same for the reluctant and nonreader. Webster (2002) writes that "choosing and using materials that foster these connections [to texts] rests at the center of a culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. vii). Educators understand exactly what Webster means. Their goal has always been and continues to be to provide every single student the opportunity to succeed in his or her literacy life, so they will most certainly put to use such a list, killing two birds with one book. Teacher librarians already search high and low to stock their shelves with the books they know their readers will crack open and love. But if the list of Mexican American YA mysteries is short, what else can educators do but point out the obvious gap?

I argue that it is up to Mexican American authors to write the books teachers and librarians will utilize. After all, if we writers are asked to remember back to our younger days, a great many of us share nearly identical reading experiences: we were fans of the Hardy Boys and/or Nancy Drew, the Hitchcock stories, or other similarly thrilling and mysterious tales. Today, as adults, we continue to read thrillers. We escape into them, trudging next to Kurt Wallendar down snow-covered sidewalks in Malmo, Sweden, in search of as yet unidentified killers. We are hot on the trail of a serial murderer with Scarpetta. We know our heroes will most undoubtedly get their man, or woman. The endings, though not the details, are givens to those of us who follow the genre, yet we continue to read them. So, why not write them? Anthologist Sarah Cortez concurs: "What I would like to see is more of the accomplished Latino/a writers delve into the mys-

tery genre for the YA market" (email interview, Jan. 6, 2011). Chances are that young Mexican American readers will take a similar liking to them. Especially if we combine two irresistible elements—mystery and cultural connections.

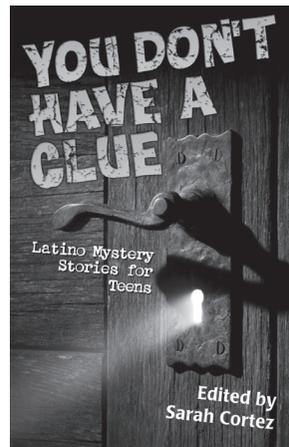
Throw the Book at Them

Following is a short list of titles, the result of my search that meets both the cultural relevance and mystery genre criteria, with accompanying notations:

- Cortez, Sarah (Ed.). (2011). *You Don't Have a Clue: Latino Mystery Stories for Teens*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.

This anthology includes 18 stories of varying kinds of mysteries, from the paranormal, to the more traditional detective story, to straight-up noir. The instant success of the adult *Hit List*, according to Cortez,

propelled me into an immediate consideration of *What's next?* Given my own penchant for reading mystery fiction as a pre-teen and teen, the idea was a "natural" for me. My intuition was that people of all ages loved to read mystery and solve crimes in their imaginations. Once I researched statistics about teen readers, my gut-level feelings were confirmed—teens in overwhelming numbers choose mystery to read when given free selection choices. (email interview, Jan. 6, 2011)



Among the selling points of such a book is "that so many of the authors who contributed excellent stories to *You Don't Have a Clue* were first-time YA writers," Cortez states. Many of them are well-regarded and solidly established in the adult mystery and literary circles, and yet they see the need in the young Hispanic community for stories

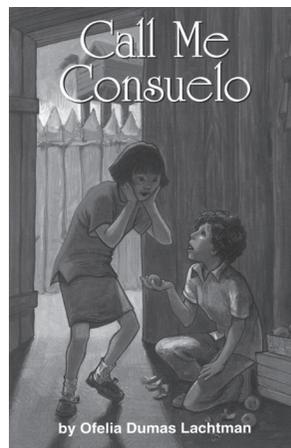
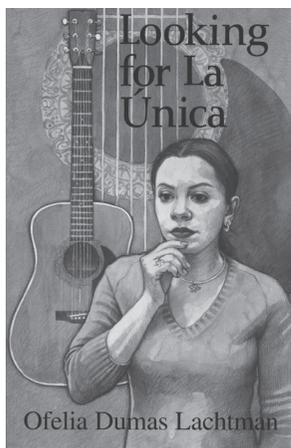
written specifically for them. The collection includes a story titled "No Soy Loco" by Mario Acevedo, author of the Felix Gomez detective-vampire series. His story is not a whodunit in the traditional sense. There is no detective on the case. There is an accident, though, that leaves the narrator hearing voices, but these are no ordinary voices. His search for where the voices

are originating and what they are trying to communicate to him bring him face-to-face with the mysterious woman who seems to pop up everywhere he goes.

Diana Lopez, author of *Confetti Girl* (2009) also contributed a short story. In her piece, titled “All the Facts, A to Z,” we meet Abigail, a failed journalist who is told by the school paper sponsor that her news reporting days are over for not digging deeply enough. On her way home from school, she comes across a suspicious-looking Mrs. Garza, a neighbor who’s “peering through some bushes” (p. 152). More curious still, the old woman claims she’s wearing binoculars because she’s out bird-watching. Readers are also introduced to Abigail’s grandmother, who is not the kindest person, and so it comes as no surprise when her *santitos* go missing. Our failed reporter turns gumshoe to find who pinched the old woman’s saints. She collects fact upon fact, thus solving the case, concluding it’s a dog-eat-dog world out there.

Other contributors include R. Narvaez, Ray Villarreal, Sergio Troncoso, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Daniel A. Olivas, myself, and many others. Teachers will enjoy reading through the whole to find the stories that best fit their grade levels, since the pieces range from middle school through high school. Rest assured, there is something for everyone in this anthology.

- Lachtman, Ofelia Dumas. (2004). *Looking for La Única*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.
- . (1997). *Call Me Consuelo*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.



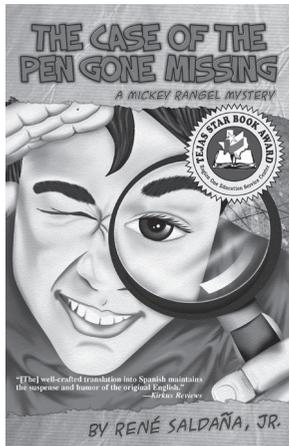
Lachtman has authored various books for children and young adults, among them *Looking for La Única* in which Monica Ramos has recently moved with her

father from their posh home and neighborhood in the DC area to a barrio in Los Angeles. On the heels of solving her first mystery on Lucia Street in *The Summer of El Pintor*, the tables are turned in *La Única*: she is thrown into the role of alleged criminal on the defensive, blamed for being an accessory to a theft. Missing is a guitar, an heirloom in the Salcedo family. She must discover who the real rat is and thus clear her name. During her investigation, she uncovers more than she anticipated, something more precious than any heirloom—her mother’s childhood diary that helps her understand who she is and what this new place means to her family.

Lachtman has also authored *Call Me Consuelo* (1997), a mystery meant for younger readers, as the main character is 12-year-old sleuth, Consuelo, who faces the bad guys on an abandoned movie lot. Of all the authors mentioned, Lachtman is the one who has the longest list of mysteries for children and young adults, including *The Girl from Playa Blanca*, *Leticia’s Secret*, and *The Truth about Las Mariposas*. Interestingly, Lachtman said in an interview that she fell into writing mysteries. It isn’t her favorite form, she says, preferring instead problem-based fiction, as found in her Pepita picturebook series. But she lists as among her reasons for tackling the genre the innate curiosity in children and young readers; like Lesesne, she compares mysteries to “puzzles.” She argues that “Young people love to solve puzzles, love to solve mysteries.”

- Saldaña, Jr., René. (2009). *The Case of the Pen Gone Missing: A Mickey Rangel Mystery*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.
- . (2011). *The Lemon Tree Caper: A Mickey Rangel Mystery*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books.

Also from Piñata Books is my own bilingual Mickey Rangel mystery series that includes *The Case of the Pen Gone Missing* and *The Lemon Tree Caper*. Rangel is my tip of the hat to Sobol (Rangel being my Encyclopedia Brown skin, if you allow me the play on words). Mickey is a full-fledged P.I. who got his badge and certificate by taking online classes. On his first case, he must discover who stole Eddy’s dad’s pen given to him by the president of the United States. Toots Rodriguez, the prettiest girl in the fifth grade, is the obvious suspect. She is just too pretty, though, to be the culprit, according to Mickey. Instead, he knows in his gut the real rat is Bucho, his long-time



arch-nemesis. With the assistance of his “angel,” who leaves clues for Mickey in the form of notes, our hero exposes the thief.

In the second installment, Mickey goes in search of the villain who plucked every prize-winning lemon off of Señorita Andrade’s tree, a crime more scandalous since she won’t be able to enter her sure-to-win lemonade recipe into the annual Lemon Festival and Lowrider Bicycle Show that is only a couple of weeks away. The clues all point to Tina, Bucho’s baby sister. In spite of her being the complete opposite of Bucho, she’s Mickey’s only suspect. Until, that is, he finds another note left behind by his “angel,” putting him on the right path.

- Villarreal, Ray. (2009). *Who’s Buried in the Garden?* Houston, TX: Piñata Books.



In Villarreal’s third novel, though his first mystery, three boys set out to solve a murder, but their skills as gumshoes are lacking, to say the least. According to Josh, the narrator, his childhood pal Artie is a fabricator of tales, a nice way of calling him a big, fat liar, and his latest whopper involves Mr. and Mrs. Foley from the neighborhood. The way

Artie tells it, he heard from his cousin that the elderly couple fought all the time, yelling, cursing, calling each other names. Then one day, the fighting sud-

denly stopped, and Mr. Foley has mysteriously disappeared. Next thing you know, there’s a new mound in Mrs. Foley’s backyard, which can only mean one thing to Artie: it’s got to be Mr. Foley’s final resting place. Well, Josh isn’t having any of it. Not at first, anyway. Then one afternoon, he, Artie, and another friend named Wolf Man overhear Mrs. Foley and a lady friend talking: “He never seen it coming,” Mrs. Foley says (p. 69). Then the two women walk over to the flowerbed/graveyard where Mrs. Foley adds that she didn’t have any problems mixing the poison. She then kicks at the dirt and says, “Well, look at you now. Dead, dead and gone” (p. 70). Only then is Josh convinced that Mr. Foley is worm food. Artie hatches a plan: Josh will serve as lookout while he and Wolf Man dig and dig until they uncover the corpse, at which point our bumbling detectives will dial 9-1-1 and become famous. Josh is iffy about the plan and would prefer to tell the police now what they suspect. Always the conniver, though, Artie works it out so that Josh has no choice but to take part in the plan. What happens next is completely unexpected. Older elementary and middle school readers of mystery will enjoy Villarreal’s story for its twists and turns. But they will have the most fun reading about this blundering trio as they fail miserably at the work of investigation.

There you have it: mystery solved. Or is it? My take is that the case is nowhere near resolved, not until even a cursory search for Mexican American YA mysteries online yields a minimum of 20 pages of entries.

I keep telling myself this is not such a bad place to be. At least there is a handful of books available that might assist teachers and librarians attract the young Mexican American reluctant and nonreader. But try as I might to shake that annoying buzz in the back of my head, I just can’t. This short list of titles is not enough for Larson and other like-minded educators to even begin to help remedy the problem of illiteracy and aliteracy among their Mexican American students. The absence of this sort of title is so glaring, the need so obvious, my hope is that this article might serve as a clarion call to other Mexican American writers of mystery who are similarly concerned about our community’s reading problems. Let’s write mysteries for them and in so doing, crack the case.

René Saldaña, Jr. is the author of several books for young adults, including *The Jumping Tree*, *Finding Our Way*, *The Whole Sky Full of Stars*, *The Case of the Pen Gone Missing: A Mickey Rangel Mystery*, and *A Good Long Way*. He is an assistant professor of Language Literacy in the College of Education at Texas Tech University.

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The Impact of Fiction on Perceptions of Disability

My sister, Peggy, had severe mental retardation. Five years older than me, she had no language ability, always wore diapers, and had to be fed every meal for the 53 years of her life. Many people who saw Peggy pitied her for what she lacked. Some even pitied my parents, brothers, and me, since we “had Peggy to deal with,” as though she were an uninvited visitor or an overdrawn bank account. But few realized what Peggy had to offer us. She grew up without ever feeling jealousy or pride, without knowing envy or self-doubt. Instead, she understood and responded to the love of her family, and returned it to us in her own unique way. She giggled when we approached her, and cooed when Mom or Dad or our grandmother took her for a car ride. She loved vanilla ice cream and crisp saltine crackers. Peggy taught my family and me many lessons. Among them is the lesson that the value of human life, through the power of love, transcends our limited definitions of “normal.”

—P. S. Carroll

Literature instruction in middle and high school classrooms can be a powerful vehicle for helping adolescents learn about the human experience (Applebee, 1993). Books and movies that feature characters who live with developmental disabilities can expand readers’ understandings and insights about the lives of those who live with these disabling conditions. Developmental disability, which is defined as a specific category of disability that comprises more severe

conditions—including intellectual disability (another name for mental retardation), cerebral palsy, and autism—represents a kind of diversity that is seldom included or celebrated in classroom discussions of differences. In fact, literature that features characters with developmental disabilities invites rich classroom conversation about these markers of diversity.

Often, however, even in today’s adolescent and young adult fiction, characters who are portrayed as having developmental disabilities are depicted stereotypically instead of realistically. These inaccurate portrayals, along with accurate ones, need to be examined by adolescent readers—readers who are building their own catalogues of criteria regarding human behavior and the human condition as they develop their own value systems. Teachers can introduce adolescents to fictitious portrayals of characters with developmental disabilities in books and movies, and help them analyze and evaluate these characters. In so doing, they are helping their students explore their own attitudes and assumptions regarding these types of significant disabilities.

A Research Project Emerges from Teacher Educators’ Conversations

We three, colleagues who work in the two areas of English Education and Special Education, talk often about the roles of K–12 special education teachers in general education classrooms. Not long ago, we

noticed that our informal conversations often circled around the question of how and when the university students in our special education teacher preparation program—those who would soon teach children and adolescents in K–12 classrooms—developed their perceptions and understandings of a key component of their specialized education: developmental disabilities. We wondered if they were drawn to special education because they had life experiences with people who live with disabilities, or if they relied primarily on media depictions to inform them about life for those with developmental disabilities and their families/caretakers.

In order to find answers to our questions, we decided to engage in a three-pronged project. First, we determined that we would find out more about the special education (or Education for Exceptional Students) preservice teachers' recollections regarding how they learned about developmental disabilities. We would probe especially the role of books and movies in informing their understanding, using a survey and an essay that preservice teachers in Education for Students with Exceptionalities (ESE, or Special Education) would complete. Next, we would develop a guide to help our ESE preservice teachers (and practicing teachers of all subject areas) evaluate, select, and teach works of fiction that include characters who have developmental disabilities. Finally, in order to increase attention to diversity and deepen understanding, we would provide teachers of all content areas with some initial resources to help them include more award-winning books that depict characters with disabilities in their classroom collections.

We enlisted the help of a cohort of 40 preservice ESE teachers to explore how contemporary books and films shape their attitudes and beliefs about individuals with developmental disabilities. The preservice teachers, most of whom were in their initial semester in the special education major, answered a survey and wrote an essay about their early experiences with books and movies and about the impact that those had on their current beliefs and assumptions about developmental disabilities. We compiled the survey responses and coded the essays for common themes in order to develop a picture of how the preservice teachers' early attitudes were shaped by the depictions of fictitious characters.

After we examined teacher preparation materials

in special education in light of their suggestions for the teaching of adolescent and young adult literature, we decided that we could contribute to beginning and veteran teachers' professional development by preparing a "Teacher's Guide for Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Developmental Disabilities." This "Teacher's Guide," is a practical guide for teaching fiction that includes characters with developmental disabilities (see the Appendix, p. 59). The purpose of the *Teacher's Guide* is to assist teachers in all middle and high school content areas to select literary texts using criteria of literary quality *and* accuracy in portrayal of character(s) with developmental disabilities. The guide also provides suggestions for aligning literary goals with instructional goals for introducing students to developmental disability as diversity. Finally, we gathered information on awards given for children's and adolescent books that address disabilities in order to provide another resource for teachers and teacher educators.

The Lasting Impact of Fictional Representations on Future ESE Teachers

Our analysis of the preservice teachers' surveys and essay responses revealed myriad statements that we labeled "depictions," a general category for statements about how literary works portrayed characters with developmental disabilities in terms of accuracy or inaccuracy, optimism or negativity. A deeper analysis of our respondents' statements revealed four themes about the nature of literary depictions of developmental disabilities: positive and accurate; positive but inaccurate; negative but accurate; and negative and inaccurate. We describe each category and populate each with samples of the preservice teachers' comments in Table 1.

The study participants, like Beirne-Smith, Patton, and Kim in the popular textbook, *Mental Retardation: An Introduction to Intellectual Disabilities* (7th ed., 2006), frequently differ on whether or not they feel a work of fiction, whether book or movie, is a positive or negative portrayal of people with disabilities. Many of our 40 preservice teachers discuss *I Am Sam* (Nelson, Herskovitz, Zwick, & Solomon, 2001), for example, as an uplifting story demonstrating that a man with intellectual disabilities or mental retardation does not have to accept the boundaries that society dictates

Table 1. How teachers recalled early experiences with fiction depicting characters with developmental disabilities

Four main themes that emerged from ESE preservice teachers' essays	Excerpts from student essays about the impact of their fiction experiences on perceptions of disability
<p>Positive and Accurate The prospective teachers have been informed by fiction that has characters with disabilities and by authors whom they believe present the disabilities realistically. Tracie Vaughn Zimmer's 2008 Schneider Family Book Award for Middle School Books recipient, <i>Reaching for Sun</i> would be an example of this kind of text.</p>	<p>Individuals with disabilities have feelings and can fall in love. Individuals with disabilities can get a job, such as an actor in a movie. Individuals with disabilities can form friendships. Individuals with disabilities can live on their own.</p>
<p>Positive but Inaccurate The preservice teachers' perceptions have been influenced by fiction in which characters who have developmental disabilities are portrayed in a positive storyline or theme, yet they think that the depiction of the disability is implausible or presented through stereotypes. The eponymous character of <i>Forrest Gump</i> (Finerman, Tisch, Newirth, & Zemeckis, 1994) is an example. He is someone most of us would like to meet, but his blend of guilelessness, humility, trustworthiness, intelligence, and perseverance despite some cognitive limitations are unlikely.</p>	<p>Individuals with disabilities possess special powers (e.g., can save the world). Individuals with disabilities can be cured and become geniuses. People with disabilities are more generous with their time than other people. People with disabilities can work hard to overcome or outgrow most of them.</p>
<p>Negative but Accurate Preservice teachers recall the impact of fiction in which characters' disabilities lead to their being portrayed as negative people in the story (a focus is on the character's limitations, instead of what they can do, for example), even though the author accurately describes the developmental disabilities. Many preservice teachers commented on the power of <i>Rainman</i> (Guber et al.,1988) and its portrayal of a savant with pity for his limitations instead of celebration for his strengths.</p>	<p>Having a mental disability is difficult for the individual. Parents are often overprotective of their child with mental retardation. Having a child with mental retardation is difficult for the entire family. Individuals with disabilities often become objects of ridicule.</p>
<p>Negative and Inaccurate Several students remarked on fictitious characters who have developmental disabilities but who, instead of being fully drawn as people, are assigned negative stereotypes commonly associated with having a disability. The most obvious popular example named by preservice teachers is in the movie <i>Dumb and Dumber</i> (Krevoy, Farrelly, & Farrelly, 1994).</p>	<p>Individuals with disabilities are scary and dangerous. Individuals with disabilities are childlike and weird. Individuals with disabilities are helpless and need constant supervision. Individuals with disabilities are mischievous. Individuals with disabilities are non-social. People with disabilities are depressed even if they act happy.</p>

for him when raising his family. One writes: "One of my favorite movies is *I Am Sam* . . . about a man with mental retardation's struggle to fight this world's stereotypes about him . . . and he won. . . . It reinforced my belief that people with MR are not limited in anything as long as they have the proper supports." Another participant notes that *I Am Sam* is a "great catalyst in showing the world that people with MR can be independent and live on their own with little or no intervention from the outside world. . . . It is one of the most touching movies that I have ever seen."

Others vehemently disagree, stating that the portrayals of Sam and his daughter are unrealistic and staged primarily to appeal to viewers' sense of sentimentality. One participant explains that Sam and his daughter ". . . are almost being poked fun at. Even though *I Am Sam* is a very heartwarming film because everything works out for the best at the end, I still feel that as a whole we are looking down on those people." Beirne-Smith et al. (2006) identify *I Am Sam*, specifically, as one of the films that encourage a negative stereotype or "disablism" (p. 48).

This range of differences in interpretations is apparent in the preservice teachers' responses to canonical literature as well as popular movies. *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937), which is cited more often than any other book by study participants, received strong responses in terms of the message it presents regarding the negative portrayal of a man with mental retardation through the depiction of the character Lennie. Notice the variety of interpretations offered in the following excerpts from participants' comments about this often-taught literary work:

"In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie . . . acts just like a child, . . . who does not know his own strength, which ends up being very, very dangerous. This is one of the reasons why I was scared of these particular people. I feared that they would try to touch me or grab me in some way and not realize their own strength or what they were doing."

"In *Of Mice and Men* . . . [the] story perpetuates society's belief that [people with MR] are dangerous b/c they do not know what they are doing and could potentially hurt someone. Growing up and even now, I love to watch Looney Tunes cartoons, but it wasn't until I read *Of Mice and Men* that I really understood the joke behind the character that always says, "Which way did he go, George, which way did he go?" It is just now hitting me how those cartoons are portraying people with MR in such a negative light."

"I remember reading *Of Mice and Men* in junior high school. When having the discussion about . . . Lennie, everyone in my class viewed him as a criminal, but I saw otherwise. . . . I have always been a shy student and usually never express my opinion in class discussions, and this was the first time I remember disagreeing and expressing how I felt . . . I felt that Lennie . . . didn't know how to act and he didn't understand the difference between right and wrong; it's something that he needed to have been taught and he wasn't, so therefore it wasn't his fault that he killed the girl."

These mixed interpretations demonstrate the wealth of possibilities that responses to characters with developmental disabilities offer to both students and teachers. Teachers can use literary texts, including movies and books, to examine with our students the problems and stereotypes promulgated by inaccurate and insensitive character portrayals, but we can also discuss the accurate character portrayals that often reveal realities of living with physical, cognitive, emotional, and social differences. More specific ideas for teaching texts that include attention to characters with developmental disabilities are found in the Appendix, which contains our "Teacher's Guide for

Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Developmental Disabilities."

Appendix: Teacher's Guide for Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Developmental Disabilities

Recommendations for Teachers

It is important to take advantage of the real impact that books and films have on preservice teachers' early ideas about people with developmental disabilities, regardless of the content areas for which they are preparing. This understanding creates ideas about how books and movies might be built into middle and high school curricula so that teachers can lead students to explore the depiction of characters with developmental disabilities in meaningful, informed ways. Some misconceptions and negative experiences can be avoided through teacher-led instruction across all content areas, in both regular and special classes. In addition, a better understanding and acceptance of developmental disabilities, and of people who have them, may emerge among middle and high school students.

One of the benefits of using literature in the general education curriculum, as well as in the special education curriculum, is that through discussions of texts in which characters with developmental disabilities are presented, honest, direct, informational classroom conversations about perceptions and preconceived notions can occur. It is during those discussions that myths can be dispelled and information can be introduced to replace suspicion and fear. To this end, we have developed a simple guide that teachers of all subject areas can use. Our goal is to assist all teachers and students in broadening their understanding of the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

This guide consists of two parts. Part I is the evaluation rubric, which incorporates suggestions from two fields of research: literature that promotes inclusion (Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Nasatir, 2002; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006), and literature that addresses selection criteria for adolescent and adult literature (American Library Association, 2008). Part II is a list of learning objectives based on the findings of our inquiry. The objectives in Part II are offered to assist teachers in accomplishing some of

the important goals for literature instruction identified by Applebee (1993).

Part I: Evaluation Rubric

Use the following rubric in any content area to evaluate adolescent and young adult fiction that includes individuals who have developmental disabilities.

Teachers who are unsure of 1/3 or more of these criteria (that is, 13 or more responses) might want to ask a second rater, particularly one who specializes in ESE, to evaluate the text using this rubric. Note,

too, that fiction that is first introduced to students in subject areas outside of language arts classes in order to familiarize them with characters who have disabilities should, ideally, present both positive and accurate portrayals of people who live with developmental disabilities. As adolescent readers/viewers become more aware of characteristics of disabilities and are able to recognize skillful, accurate depictions, they will be ready to engage in more challenging discussions of problems associated with inaccurate and stereotyped portrayals.

Book/Movie Title:				
Literary Feature	Criteria	Rating		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Physical Appearance of Book (American Library Association, 2008; Nasatir, 2002)	Format is appealing for young adults; sophisticated instead of childish.			
	Illustrations and images are realistic and/or appropriate.			
	Illustrations and images show the distinctive personality of the character with a disability. (They do not appear stereotypically alike, as if all people with disabilities look the same.)			
	Illustrations and images show the character with a disability actively involved in the environment.			
Characterization (Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Nasatir, 2002; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006)	Focuses on common traits of all people while showing human qualities of people with disabilities.			
	The character with the disability possesses dynamic qualities and is not only defined by his/her disability.			
	Character accepts his/her own disability and focuses on his/her abilities.			
	Characters with and without disabilities use correct terminology when referring to the disability itself.			
	Meaningful interactions exist among characters with and without disabilities.			
	The character is not presented as a stereotyped case (e.g. violent, laughable, asexual, a burden, pitiable, etc).			
	A positive portrayal of character's strengths exists.			
	Character is portrayed as confident and able to make own decisions.			
	Character is accepted by peers.			
A balance of roles exists between the character with a disability and characters without a disability.				

Literary Feature	Criteria	Rating		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Literary Style (American Library Association, 2008, Andrews, 1998; Prater et al., 2006)	Person-first language is used appropriately (e.g. “a boy with mental retardation” instead of “the mentally retarded boy”).			
	Terms used to describe characters and settings are appropriate.			
	Language/vocabulary is appropriate for adolescents/clear style/appropriate vocabulary.			
	The narrative and dialogue portraying characters with disabilities is appropriate for age of reader.			
	Descriptions provide colorful imagery without being lengthy.			
	Dialogue among characters is genuine.			
	Catches interest within first 10 pages.			
Plot (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Nasatir, 2002; Prater et al., 2006)	The character with the disability plays a major role in the plot.			
	The character’s disability is naturally revealed throughout the plot.			
	The plot highlights the abilities of the character (not just disabilities).			
	Plot is realistic/believable (e.g., character with a disability is not portrayed as a superhero, the character is not cured, parents are not saints, etc.).			
	The plot shows the character with a disability having similar life experiences as peers without disabilities (e.g., similar conflicts, similar goals, similar likes, etc.).			
	Accurate information regarding the disability is provided throughout the plot.			
	All characters are well developed.			
	Interesting plot throughout story.			
	Dialogue and action are used to develop the plot.			
	Uses humor appropriately.			
	Plot progresses in a chronological order.			
Setting (Prater et al., 2006)	The setting allows the character with the disability to be included in society (school, work, recreation).			
	Portrays up- to- date practices regarding living with disabilities.			
	Accurate historical/current perspective of people with disabilities living within society.			
Theme (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Prater et al., 2006)	The theme teaches a valuable lesson about interacting with people with disabilities.			
	The theme rectifies a stereotype/myth about people with disabilities.			
	The theme is familiar and appealing to young adults (making friends, parental conflicts, sibling conflicts, dating, school issues, etc.).			
Point of View (Prater et al., 2006)	Written from the perspective of the character with a disability.			
Total number of unsure responses				

Part II: General Learning Objectives

Teachers across the content areas can use items on the recommended list of learning objectives as examples of how a work of fiction that includes a character with a developmental disability may be used in a lesson. Teachers are encouraged to change the general objectives to meet the needs of their students. For example, teachers may wish to target appropriate alternative views of developmental disabilities to teach their students.

POSITIVE AND ACCURATE DEPICTIONS

Teachers who are interested in how students study a work of fiction such as the movie *Radio* (Gains, Robbins, & Tollin, 2003), in which characters with intellectual disabilities are depicted positively and accurately, might incorporate the following two general objectives:

- The learner will recognize positive accurate portrayals of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- The learner will discuss the societal importance of positive accurate portrayals of individuals with intellectual disabilities within the media.

A note here: For many teachers in content areas outside of English language arts, the idea of increasing a classroom library by adding texts that include characters who have developmental disabilities may be daunting. The best place to start will be with books that have both literary quality and accurate portrayals, such as those identified by the annual Schneider Family Book Awards. These awards, which include categories for young children, middle schoolers, and teens, honor authors (or illustrators) whose books embody “an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences.” (Please see “Other Resources for Teachers and Teacher Educators” below for more information on these and other recommended books.)

Recent Schneider Family Book Award recipients that can complement a collection on developmental disabilities include the following titles.

- *Rules* by Cynthia Lord (Scholastic) features a 12-year-old and her brother, who has autism, and a paraplegic and nonverbal teenager whom she meets. 2007 Middle School Award
- *Small Steps* by Louis Sachar (Delacorte) presents a young girl who has cerebral palsy and her unlikely

friend—a young, recently released, juvenile delinquent. 2007 Teen Book Award

- *Reaching for Sun* by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer (Bloomsbury USA) introduces Josie through free verse. Not only is Josie navigating adolescence, struggles with her mom, a new kind of relationship with her grandmother, and friendship with a new male neighbor, but also her cerebral palsy. 2008 Middle School Award
- *Jerk, California* by Jonathan Friesen (Speak/Penguin) follows a high school graduate as he travels across the country to find out about his dead father and deal with his Tourette Syndrome. 2009 Teen Book Award
- *Anything but Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin (Simon & Schuster) has readers pulling for Jason, a 12-year-old who wants to be normal, despite his autism and special talents as a writer. 2010 Middle School Award
- *Marcelo in the Real World* by Francisco X. Stork (Arthur A. Levine) introduces us to Marcelo, a teen who is very uncomfortable when his father insists he take a summer job at his law firm. Coping with both an unfamiliar situation and Asperger’s Syndrome, he grows to trust himself and others through the experience. 2010 Teen Book Award

NEGATIVE BUT ACCURATE DEPICTIONS

Teachers of middle and high school students who are interested in having their students study fiction that portrays a character with disabilities in a negative yet accurate way, as *Of Mice and Men* does, might implement these general objectives:

- The learner will discuss the impact on society (for both people with and without disabilities) of negative yet accurate portrayals of individuals with intellectual disabilities within the media.
- The learner will discuss how challenges for people who have developmental disabilities could be managed to lead a fulfilling life.

A note here: The study participants’ comments about negative yet accurate portrayals of people with disabilities echo a point also made in Beirne-Smith, Patton, and Kim’s textbook, *Mental Retardation: An Introduction to Intellectual Disabilities* (2006). The authors cite a 2004 list by Blackbourn, Patton, and Trainor of films that contribute to negative stereo-

types, or “disablisms” associated with disabilities; they contrast those films with a group of films that “accurately portray a person with mental retardation” (Beirne-Smith et al., 2006, p. 48). The pairing is a useful resource for teachers across content areas, serving as a quick reference that can be continually annotated with new movies that introduce characters who have developmental disabilities.

INACCURATE DEPICTIONS (POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE)

Opportunities for teaching abound when texts contain inaccurate depictions of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Inaccurate, dismissive, stereotypical, or other problematic depictions of disabilities in fiction can be useful in helping students understand issues associated with disabilities. Through classroom discussion, writing, and dramatic activities that highlight problems in inaccurate portrayals, students can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for human experience and diversity. Following are a pair of general objectives that might be useful with the study of these texts.

- The learner will discuss how inaccurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities within the media produce negative consequences in society (for people with and without disabilities).
- The learner will demonstrate knowledge of common stereotypes given to individuals with intellectual disabilities and why these stereotypes are harmful.

Texts that present positive stories with accurate portrayals of all characters, such as the uplifting and inspiring movie *Radio* (Gains et al., 2003), are likely to pose few pedagogical problems. However, those that present negative stories, even if the portrayal of characters with developmental disabilities is accurate, still offer rich instructional opportunities. Sad or ambiguous endings, or ones in which a character with a developmental disability is unable to achieve her wishes, are often difficult for adolescent readers to tolerate, but offer many opportunities for teaching about character development while also teaching about specific characteristics of developmental disabilities. Many find that the motion picture *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (Hallstrom & Blomquist, 1993) is representative of this “negative but accurate” category.

Even texts that are negative in terms of story line and inaccurate, as noted earlier, provide grist for exploring, and exploding, societal stereotypes about people who have disabilities, and can present opportunities for rich class discussions. The movie *Dumb and Dumber* (Krevoy, Farrelly, & Farrelly, 1994), mentioned by one study participant as having an influence on his preconceived notions of mental retardation, comes to mind as representative of this category. The message that is most important, though, is that *all* texts that feature characters with developmental disabilities offer opportunities for class discussion. We have found that even the books and films that present negative and stereotyped views of a character with Down Syndrome, for example—texts that we first thought we could not include on a list for teachers—can be very useful. Why? Because those books and movies open up spirited conversations about how people really feel, about those with differences, about what society’s expectations are for teenagers who have Down Syndrome and the bases of those expectations. Even bad texts, if used to teach about how poorly informed many people in society have been, can have a place in classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

Our collaboration was driven by the question, “How does literature shape the early ideas about disability of prospective teachers of special education?” In order to answer this question, we asked a cohort of 40 prospective ESE teachers to share with us their memories of experiences with literature and movies that feature characters who have disabilities. Our analysis suggests that experiences with fiction, both books and movies, shape beliefs through depictions about disability. The depictions that are recalled can be organized conceptually into four categories: positive and accurate; positive but inaccurate; negative and accurate; and negative but inaccurate. We suggest that works of fiction that fall into any of these categories can be used

The message that is most important, though, is that *all* texts that feature characters with developmental disabilities offer opportunities for class discussion.

by teachers to help their students understand disability. To that end, we have offered this guide for middle and high school teachers across content areas that focuses on how to use fiction to foster understanding of disability as a valuable form of human difference, or valuable human diversity.

Other Resources for Teachers and Teacher Educators

We conclude by offering additional resources that teachers and teacher educators might find useful: The Schneider Family Book Awards, presented by the American Library Association; the Dolly Gray Award, presented by the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Developmental Disabilities and Special Needs; and the International Board on Books for Young People's Document Centre of Books for Disabled Young People. Each of these three recognitions gives teachers a place to start when seeking books that present individuals who live with disabilities—in other words, a place to start a conversation with students.

SCHNEIDER FAMILY BOOK AWARDS

In 2003, the American Library Association established the Schneider Family Book Awards to honor authors and illustrators of books for young adults and children that portray individuals living with a physical, mental, or emotional disability. These books should always be considered for inclusion in collections about disabilities. Each year an award is given in three categories: birth through grade school (age 0–10), middle school (age 11–13), and teens (age 13–18). Criteria for the Schneider Family Book Awards include:

- Must portray the disability as part of a full life, not as something to be pitied or overcome, and written so that children and adolescents can understand and appreciate the theme.
- Committee members will consider interpretation of the special needs theme or concept, presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization, development of a plot, delineation of characters, delineation of setting, and appropriateness of style.
- For a picturebook entry, the committee will make its decision primarily on the quality of the illustration, but other components of the book will be considered. The committee will consider excellence

of presentation for a child and/or adolescent audience. In identifying a distinguished picturebook for children, committee members will consider excellence of execution in the artistic technique employed; excellence of pictorial interpretation of a special needs story, theme, or concept; appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept; delineation of plot, theme, characters, setting, mood, or information through the pictures.

- The format and typeface must be appropriate, clear and free of typographical errors.

(Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/ala/awards-grants/awardsrecords/schneideraward/schneiderfamily.cfm> on December 29, 2010)

THE DOLLY GRAY AWARD FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

According to the website announcing the 2010 recipient, the Dolly Gray Award for Children's Literature in Developmental Disabilities was initiated in 2000 to recognize authors, illustrators, and publishers of high-quality fictional children's books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities. The award is a collaborative work by members of the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Special Needs Project (a distributor of books related to disability issues). Every even year, an award is presented to an author and illustrator (if appropriate) of a children's picturebook and/or a juvenile/young adult chapter book that includes appropriate portrayals of individuals with developmental disabilities.

(Retrieved from www.dddcec.org/DollyGray.htm on December 29, 2010.)

INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (IBBY) DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF BOOKS FOR DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE

IBBY is an international network, housed in Basel, Switzerland, that has sections representing 70 countries. Its Documentation Centre has introduced books that feature children and adolescents who have disabilities to an international audience. According to its website:

- The IBBY Documentation Centre of Books for Disabled Young People was established in 1985 at the Norwegian Institute for Special Education at the

University of Oslo. It remained at this location until the summer of 2002, and it moved to the Haug Municipal Resource Centre for Young People with Disabilities in Baerum, just outside Oslo.

- The Centre offers information, consultation, and documentation services for organizations, research workers, teachers, students, librarians, publishers, authors, illustrators, policy makers, and the media who work with young people with special needs. Due to its various international projects, which have been supported by UNESCO, publishers, and IBBY contact persons, the Centre has built up a large international collection of books catering to children and young people but also to adults with language disabilities and reading difficulties. The books are regularly shown at conferences, book fairs, and exhibitions.
- The 2005 and 2007 collections were exhibited around Japan—in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Tehran, Iran.

(Excerpted from www.ibbyorg/php?id=271 on December 29, 2010)

Authors' Note

The authors would like to thank the ALAN Research Foundation, which partially supported this research with one of its grants, and Ms. Young Hee Park, doctoral student in the School of Teacher Education, Florida State University, for her research assistance as we prepared the final version of this manuscript.

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Books and Films That Include Characters with Developmental Disabilities and Cited by Preservice Teachers (Study Participants)

Books

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- King, S. (1990). *The stand*. New York: Doubleday.
- Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Sparks, N. (2000). *The rescue*. New York: Warner Books.
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Movies

- Burton, J. (Producer), Jones, C., & Noble, N. (Directors). (1961). *The abominable snow rabbit: Looney tunes series* [Television series episode]. United States: Warner Bros.
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<p>A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, illustrated by Jim Kay Candlewick, 2011, 224 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Nightmares assail 13-year-old Conor each night. Frightened about losing his mother to cancer, Conor confronts a different type of monster who takes on the form of the yew tree near his bedroom window. The monster tells him three different stories, each revealing the problem with making assumptions, and then demands that Conor tell his own story. While Conor is facing down the monster, he must also deal with school bullies, a grandmother who is completely unlike his mother, and his own demons. When his teachers or classmates offer sympathy for his plight, Conor shuns them, insisting that his mother will be perfectly all right. As the disease ravages his mother, she lets him know that she has known his secret all along.</p> <p>This moving story about loss and the strength that comes from owning up to unpleasant truths is accompanied by haunting artwork that provides complementary texture to the tale.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p>Loss/Grieving/Cancer ISBN: 978-0-7636-5559-4</p> <p>Among Others by Jo Walton Tor Books, 2011, 304 pp., \$24.99</p> <p>After confronting her mother in a tragic battle that leads to her twin sister's death, Morwenna "Mor" Phelps struggles to establish a relationship with her estranged father and adjust to her posh boarding school in England. At school, she would rather be feared than tormented for her Welsh accent and crippled leg. She struggles to recover from childhood with an insane mother who dabbles in witchcraft. Mor seeks solace in science fiction, and things take a turn for the better when she joins a SF book club. Mor, with a bit of magic and support from her books and friends, makes strides toward moving on with her life.</p> <p>For science fiction fans, this is a must read; Walton references many SF books and authors. Those familiar with these references will appreciate them. The book is written in journal format and would be appropriate for ages 13 and up.</p> <p>Annalise Miyashiro Kailua, Hawaii</p>
<p>Anna Dressed in Blood by Kendare Blake TOR Teen/A Tom Doherty Associates Book, 2011, 316 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Not only can Cas Lowood see dead people, but it is his task to put them to rest for good. Ever since his father died while dispatching a ghost, Cas has assumed the responsibility for getting rid of the murderous dead. He and his mother head north to Ontario, following a lead that takes Cas to a murderous ghost named Anna, supposedly killed so savagely that the white party dress she was wearing dripped blood long after her death. Although Cas has always kept any possible friends at arm's length, he is drawn to the high school Queen Bee, Carmel, and to geeky mind-reading Thomas.</p> <p>After a high school prank involving Carmel's ex-boyfriend Mike goes awry, the unlikely trio band together to put Anna's spirit to rest. The consequences of their actions are unexpected, and even more horrors await them in the next room or on the next page.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p>History/Labor Camps/Survival ISBN: 978-0-399-25412-3</p> <p>Between Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys Philomel Books, 2011, 352 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>In 1941, 15-year-old Lina's world is forever shattered overnight. She finds herself arrested with her family by Soviet soldiers, separated from her father, and forced into a cramped cattle car with other "undesirables." In a harrowing journey across Russia and ultimately Siberia, she witnesses and endures horrors that verge on the unthinkable. Forced into slave labor, deprived of human amenities ranging from healthcare to solid food other than stale bread, Lina and her family seem to be in an utterly hopeless situation. Yet, through strength of faith and love, they find hope in the smallest of occasions and mercies.</p> <p><i>Between Shades of Gray</i> is valuable for its historical accuracy and its detail regarding the relatively little-known campaign of deportation and terror that befell many states annexed into the Soviet Union. This multilayered story is accessible, suspenseful, and powerful, delivering startling terrors and redemptive love in equal turns.</p> <p>Simon Gooch Fort Worth, TX</p>

<p><i>Bite Club</i> by Rachel Caine New American Library, 2011, 337 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Vampire Fantasy ISBN: 978-0-451-23318-9</p> <p>The Glass House foursome is back in the 10th installment of Rachel Caine's Morganville Vampires. Claire, Shane, Michael, and Eve are plunged into the middle of another battle for the town of Morganville, Texas, where the peace between humans and vampires is growing unstable.</p> <p>On her first day of fall classes at Texas Prairie University, Claire finds one of her classmates murdered in his dorm room. In a town full of vampires, the suspect list is long, but with the sinister Bishop on the loose, as well as several new faces—Vassily, the vampire martial arts instructor, and the alluring Gloriana—Claire knows it's more than just the normal vampire–human run-ins. When Shane starts training with Vassily, Claire's suspicions about the martial artist grow even stronger. She knows that he, Glory, and Bishop are up to no good, but trying to solve the mystery will put her in terrible danger.</p> <p>Meredith Milligan Jefferson City, TN</p>	<p><i>Carmen</i> by Walter Dean Myers Egmont USA, 2011, 150 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Appropriation of a Classic ISBN: 978-1-60684-155-0</p> <p>In this modern retelling of the classic opera, Carmen is a sassy and bewitching teenage factory worker in Spanish Harlem who falls in love with Jose, a violent, possessive police officer. When Carmen realizes that Jose is not who she thought he was, she leaves him for Escamillo, a wealthy hip-hop mogul who she thinks will get her out of the <i>barrio</i>. But Jose is not willing to let her go easily, and his passion ends in bloodshed.</p> <p>Walter Dean Myers presents his modern retelling in script form, complete with interspersed lyrics and Latino remixes of Bizet's music in the endnotes. Although teens who are not fans of the original opera may struggle to engage with the form and the sparse storyline, this book presents a great opportunity for reading aloud, cross-curricular work, or a study of modern appropriations of classics.</p> <p>Laura Herrmann St. Louis, MO</p>
<p><i>Dead Is Just a Rumor</i> by Marlene Perez Graphia, 2010, 201 pp., \$7.99</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 978-0-547-34592-5</p> <p>The fourth novel in the <i>Dead Is</i> series sees Daisy Giordano solving a number of supernatural mysteries plaguing the town of Nighthshade. Daisy's mysteries commence amidst the return of her father from his abduction and the near conclusion of her high school career. The internal conflict Daisy faces as she enters a new chapter of her life is relatable, but expressed in an often simplistic and predictable manner.</p> <p>This novel, ideal for pleasure reading, would not be suitable for the classroom due to the lack of complexity and depth. Perez's attempts to describe three mysteries and do justice to the emotional turmoil Daisy experiences within her family and with her werewolf boyfriend leave much to be desired. While the relationship between Daisy and her father might spark discussion about child–parent interactions, overall the novel is more suited for the beach, not the classroom.</p> <p>Lakendra Scott Marietta, GA</p>	<p><i>Everything I Was</i> by Corinne Demas Carolrhoda Lab, 2011, 209 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction ISBN: 978-0-7613-7303-2</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Irene is shocked when financial troubles force her parents to sell their Manhattan penthouse and move the family to her grandfather's farm for the summer. As she struggles to fit into her new surroundings, make new friends, and negotiate a relationship with her demanding mother, Irene begins to rethink many of the things she has always taken for granted. Eventually, she must choose between everything she was, and everything she is realizing she needs.</p> <p>In <i>Everything I Was</i>, Demas presents a likeable narrator trying to negotiate friendships, family, and first love. Although Irene's social class sets her apart from many readers, her concerns are universal, and she comes across as relatable and accessible. Readers will likely find themselves on her side as she comes of age in this earnest novel.</p> <p>Laura Herrmann St. Louis, MO</p>

<p><i>Girl Wonder</i> by Alexa Martin Hyperion Books, 2011, 304 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Charlotte Locke is new to Shady Grove High School, and things aren't necessarily going her way. Her luck starts to change when she befriends Amanda Munger, a spunky, pink-haired girl who has it all. Charlotte joins the debate team to get closer to Neal, the cool and intelligent editor of the literary magazine. Charlotte is getting an "A" in life, but when she and Neal begin a secret relationship, things start to fall apart.</p> <p>Through Charlotte's trials, Martin keeps readers engaged, evoking strong emotional ties to the characters. Charlotte, in particular, is relatable to readers who have faced parental and peer pressure. The book is recommended for readers ages 13 and up, as there are incidents of drug usage and sexual situations that require a mature audience. Martin has written a compelling story that lets readers into the world of a girl you'll want to root for.</p> <p>Annalise Miyashiro Kailua, Hawaii</p>	<p><i>Hard Bitten</i> by Chloe Neill New American Library, 2011, 368 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Merit dropped out of graduate school to become an Initiate at Cadogan House, home to 300 or so Chicago vampires, where Master heartthrob Ethan Sullivan engages in serious flirtation with the heroine. Vampire drama takes on a double meaning: the novel is filled with exciting adventures for Merit as she seeks to end the proliferation of V, a drug being circulated to spur vampires to violence and mayhem against humans, while the daily interactions of vampires, shape shifters, trolls, and fairies create angst and tension.</p> <p>Merit is engaging, entertaining, and an exceptional Sentinel for her House as she tries to save her friends from destruction. The city of Chicago—its history, politics, wheeling and dealing—emerges as both a character and setting as the plotlines ebb and flow, the kind of kinky chaos that mature teens will enjoy. This is the fourth in the Chicagoland vampire series.</p> <p>Judith Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>
<p><i>Hothead</i> by Cal Ripken Jr. Hyperion Press, 2011, 144 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Connor Sullivan is the best 12-year-old baseball player around Eddie Murphy Field; the problem is, he also has its hottest temper. Connor's team, the Orioles, is on a winning streak and en route to win the championship with an undefeated season. But when Connor makes a mistake, his anger erupts like a volcano, and his position on the team is compromised. Connor needs to stay on the team, help them win a championship, and keep his temper under control, even with a pesky girl reporter, Melissa Morrow, on his case, and more issues flaring at home.</p> <p>Ripken's depiction of a 12-year-old little leaguer who loves nothing more than baseball is spot on. The baseball lingo throughout the novel makes it a compelling read for young baseball fans. Through the story, Connor learns about himself, his friends, and family.</p> <p>Max Gertz Atlanta, GA</p>	<p><i>I Am J</i> by Cris Beam Little, Brown, 2011, 326 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Transgender/Identity/Self-Discovery/Families ISBN: 978-0-316-05361-7</p> <p>Convinced that he is a boy born in a girl's body, J has always felt different from everyone around him. As his body began to change, he hid the undeniable physical changes beneath his clothing. Now, on the eve of his eighteenth birthday, a betrayal by long-time friend Melissa prompts him to embark on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. No longer will J hide—from his friends, his parents, and even himself. There's a whole new world of possibilities outside his front door, even a school where he might find acceptance.</p> <p>J's unhappiness, expressed through his photography, is palpable, and his journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance is inspiring. Navigating the often unfriendly New York neighborhoods, J embraces a hopeful but not easy future with difficult choices. This heartbreakingly honest book features complex characters, including parents whose acceptance is not certain. Back matter includes an Author's Note and Resources.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>

<p>Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide by Tatyana Kleyn Scarecrow Press, 2011, 227 pp., \$42.00 ISBN: 978-0-8108-6984-4</p> <p>The life of the average United States immigrant is one of hardship and confusion, combined with the pressures of overcoming stereotypes and language barriers in order to survive. While these difficulties seem arduous enough, the added struggles of being a teenager in a new country present youth with increasingly complex challenges. <i>Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide</i> provides these suffering adolescents with the knowledge and comforting guidance they need to understand the demands they face daily, in addition to helping them grasp the realities of living as an immigrant.</p> <p>Kleyn provides a thorough look at the teenage immigrant experience by offering teen readers a chance to see their story in the voices of others. Understandable explanations of history and current events, along with interesting quotes and charts, launch them into personal exploration of topics with the help of additional resources. This book creates a relatable platform appropriate for all impacted teenage students.</p> <p>Hilary Diaz Nashville, TN</p>	<p>Lost in the River of Grass by Ginny Rorby Lerner Publishing Group, 2011, 252 pp., \$17.95 ISBN: 978-0-7613-5685-1</p> <p>Adventure/Fiction/Identity</p> <p>It was supposed to be a simple school field trip.</p> <p>What began as a boring and miserable experience for the new girl in school, Sarah Emerson, quickly becomes a fight for survival when she sneaks away for an unauthorized excursion with Andy, a boy she just met. Sarah finds herself stranded with Andy in the marshes of Florida. While the waters and sea grass appear calm, Sarah is keenly aware of the dangers that lurk within, such as alligators and pythons. As they trudge their way to safety, Sarah learns not only what lies beneath the surface of the waters, but also the depths of her own courage. Over their five-day journey, Sarah faces her fears while coming into her own identity.</p> <p>With the relatable character of Sarah, this novel of suspense with intermittent spurts of humor leads you through the marshes in a way no school field trip ever could.</p> <p>Ashley Whitehouse Franklin, TN</p>
<p>NERDS: National Espionage, Rescue, and Defense Society by Michael Buckley Amulet Books, 2009, 306 pp., \$14.95 ISBN: 978-0-8109-4324-7</p> <p>Fiction/Humor</p> <p>Jackson Jones once lived the joys of being the most popular kid in school. He spent most of his days torturing nerds. As fate would have it, an unfortunate event occurred, and he became a social outcast. Not even the nerds wished to have him as a part of their group. Jackson accidentally discovers that five of the nerds he used to torture are actually spy agents, and he is invited to join their group.</p> <p>Jackson learns the difficulties of being an outcast, and desperately tries to gain acceptance amongst the NERDS. His interactions with the other members of the team help him overcome his superficial judgment of individuals, and appreciate people for their hidden potential. Jackson embraces his inner nerd, and the supporting characters learn how to put aside their personal prejudices to ensure the NERDS' success.</p> <p>Christine Chau Staten Island, NY</p>	<p>Paige by Paige by Laura Lee Gullledge Amulet Books, 2011, 192 pp., \$9.95 978-0-8109-9722-6</p> <p>Voice/Identity/Art ISBN:</p> <p>In order to make New York City her new home, young Paige starts to sketch. Through an inside look at her drawings, the reader sees Paige reinvent herself. Paige embarks with her new best friends to splash the sidewalks and trees of New York with color.</p> <p>The reader follows Paige throughout her journey. Large, expressive pictures dominate the page, allowing the author to portray a greater depth of emotion and duality in the main character. The pictures emulate the skilled hand of a young girl, rather than an expert cartoonist, providing a gateway for a struggling reader to understand the depth of Paige's experience and inexperience.</p> <p><i>Paige by Paige</i> is unique because it inspires its readers to author their own lives. The book has a mix of images and text that sweep the reader along as it conveys a clear message: that one need not fear honestly expressing oneself.</p> <p>Rachel Wheeler Nashville, TN</p>

<p>Personal Demons by Lisa Desrochers Tor Books, 2010, 368 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>Frannie has become excellent at keeping everyone at arm's length. That is, until Luc and Gabe come to town. What Frannie doesn't know is that Luc and Gabe are a demon and an angel sent to fight over her soul. Frannie is very valuable to the powers that be, and they are willing to do anything to win her soul to their side. To add to the problems, Luc is beginning to fall for Frannie. Not only does this mean destruction for him, but more danger for Frannie. Suddenly, they are joined by unlikely allies in order to save Frannie and the human race.</p> <p>Desrochers deals with some heavy themes, such as religion and the existence of God, but it is all done in a very effortless way. Teens can identify with the various struggles that the characters go through, and girls will admire Frannie's independent spirit.</p> <p>Katie Castro Miami, FL</p>	<p>Sidekicks by Jack D. Ferraiolo Amulet Books, 2011, 320 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Scott Hamilton is not the average teenager. When he's not completing his homework or finishing a term paper, Scott is flying across rooftops and halting crime by night as Bright Boy, loyal sidekick to the dynamic crime fighter Phantom Justice. After his latest heroics saving a hostage from the hands of masked villain Rogue Warrior, Bright Boy has a slight wardrobe malfunction and becomes the laughingstock of criminals, fans, and the entire school.</p> <p>What makes matters worse is the discovery that his evil archenemy Monkeywrench is actually the pretty girl who sits in front of him in science class, Allison Mendez. What begins as good old-fashioned hate turns into romance between the two. Scott must make a decision: will he remain loyal to the cause of defending justice, or will he fall for his sworn enemy, whom he must ultimately deliver to the law?</p> <p>Raef Williams Savannah, GA</p>
<p>Skin by Rick Jasper Darby Creek, 2010, 112 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>At first, Nick Barry's troubles, although still traumatic to a teenage boy, seem like nothing out of the ordinary: acne, a rise in anger, feelings of isolation and abandonment. However, Nick's case is too severe for anyone to ignore; something "other" is clearly involved. When Nick is suspected of committing acts of violence and murder, he decides to investigate the outside forces that have set their sights on him.</p> <p>This novel, reminiscent of (and referential to) Steven King, couples a thrilling horror story with a message important to early adolescents: No one is alone. Unlike King's work, however, the protagonist is not a tragic hero, but a victorious hero who resists evil. Accessible to adolescent readers, the story moves quickly (although at times a little too quickly), and the shortness of each chapter paired with the size and arrangement of print helps the novel's exciting pace.</p> <p>Molly Landholt St. Louis, MO</p>	<p>Starfish by James Crowley Disney Hyperion Books, 2010, 320 pp., \$16.99 978-1-4231-2588-4</p> <p>James Crowley's first novel, <i>Starfish</i>, is an exploration of self, culture, and the natural world in Montana in the early twentieth century. The plot unfolds upon discovery of a frozen corpse on the Chalk Bluff Indian reservation. This leads to violence and the desperate escape of siblings Beatrice and Lionel from the Chalk Bluff Boarding School. The siblings' only hope to survive a brutally cold winter (and their sworn enemy, Sergeant Jenkins) is to find their grandfather, a Blackfeet elder who lives on the edge of the reservation.</p> <p>This story is rich with characters and conflict, uncertainty and adventure, and growth and loss. Its nuanced imagery and dialogue draw a realistic depiction of the time and place, and its third-person narration provides detailed, developed characters. Ultimately, we witness Beatrice's story as seen through her younger brother's eyes. She is his leader, mentor, and protector, and she does nothing less than risk her life for their freedom.</p> <p>Kevin McCarthy Charleston, SC</p>

<p><i>Thaw</i> by Rick Jasper Dabry Creek, 2010, 106 pp., \$7.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Thriller ISBN: 978-0-7613-6161-9</p> <p>Dani Kraft's hometown of Bridgewater suffers a major power outage. When the backup generators at the Institute for Cryogenic Experimentation fail, the townsfolk learn that the bodies of 27 dangerous cult members who had been frozen for years are missing. Shortly thereafter, Dani's best friend goes missing.</p> <p>In order to save her friend, Dani must travel to a parallel universe that exists in the dreams of a dangerous cult leader. Along the way, she comes to trust Trey, a boy who she learns is more than just a pretty face. Although she has traveled to a strange and disturbing world and overcome many fears, Dani's character development remains flat. The lesson to be learned from this tale is: "The past—even if it isn't our past—can reach out like a cat's paw and change our lives" (p. 103).</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Russell Helsabeck Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>The False Princess</i> by Ellis O'Neal Egmont, 2010, 318 pp., \$16.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy/Falling in Love ISBN: 978-1-60684-079-5</p> <p>Nalia, the Princess of Thorvaldor, has just been told that she is not actually a princess at all, but a stand-in for the real princess to help ward off a bloody prophecy. Nalia—now renamed Sinda—has been stripped of her old identity and sent away to her aunt's house, where she discovers she has magical powers. Now bursting at the seams with dangerous and powerful magic, Sinda travels back to Thorvaldor, where she and her childhood friend, Kiernan, set out to discover answers about the true princess of Thorvaldor. With Sinda's magic and Kiernan's cunning, they seek to right the wrongs of a false prophecy, which would not only save the life of the rightful princess, but also the fate of all of Thorvaldor.</p> <p>Throughout this story, Sinda struggles between mourning her lost identity and discovering and embracing who she truly is—a powerful wizard.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Katie Riley Columbus, OH</p>
<p><i>The Kissing Game</i> by Aidan Chambers Amulet Books, 2011, 216 pp., \$16.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Short Stories ISBN: 978-0-8109-9716-5</p> <p>This collection of 16 short stories, written by Michael L. Printz Award winner Aidan Chambers, uses seemingly banal circumstances to spark conversations between characters that touch on deep and meaningful topics. In "Sanctuary," a panic-ridden boy finds himself on a wild ride of right and wrong in a suspenseful thriller of abuse and faith. In "Kangaroo," a summer job becomes the site of a teenage girl's struggle with decency and sense of self. "The Kissing Game" gives students the opportunity to engage with how easily a simple situation can escalate to a dramatic and painful end. While all of the stories included might not be beneficial for a young adult curriculum, several would provide more than enough material for a study of major issues relevant to teens.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lakendra Scott Marietta, GA</p>	<p><i>The Outside Boy</i> by Jeanine Cummins New American Library, 2010, 360 pp., \$15.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Identity/Coming of Age ISBN: 978-0-451-22948-9</p> <p>Christy Hurley has grown up on the road. He is a Pavee Gypsy whose family travels Northern Ireland with their horse-drawn trailers and possessions in tow. The year is 1959, and Ireland is starting to change. Automobiles and assembly lines are making the Pavee life more difficult, and Christy and his family have to struggle to find work and welcoming communities. Christy's own life takes a dramatic turn when he discovers a newspaper clipping from his past, which he takes as a sign sent to him by his grandfather from beyond the grave.</p> <p>Jeanine Cummins masterfully crafts her prose with the intonations of an Irish accent while adhering to a writing style that is easily accessible to young adult audiences. Christy's character will speak to any young person who is harboring a guilty conscience or who has lost a loved one.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Russell Helsabeck Nashville, TN</p>

<p><i>The Popularity Papers, Book Two</i> by Amy Ignatow Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2011, 208 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 978-0-8109-9724-0</p> <p>After spending a summer at camp together discussing the coming adventures of junior high, Lydia Goldblatt and Julie Graham-Chang are split apart; Lydia's family is moving to Great Britain. Each of the girls begins to form her own 6th-grade reputation at a new school. Lydia becomes known as the "Violent American," and Julia's acceptance into a popular 8th-grade clique pushes them to analyze their own choices involving friendship.</p> <p>Amy Ignatow puts her own signature style of graphic novels into this book through a series of cartoon correspondence between the girls, highlighting Julie's adjustments to junior high and Lydia's exploration of British culture. Their revelations to each other and themselves will keep the audience laughing about their funny intrigues and relatable tales. More important, the girls learn valuable lessons involving true friendship when exploring the meaning of popularity on two continents.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Erica Cain Decatur, AL</p>	<p><i>The Quicksilver Faire</i> by Gillian Summers Flux Books, 2011, 336 pp., \$9.95 ISBN: 978-0-7387-1571-1</p> <p>Although a bit disjointed at times, <i>The Quicksilver Faire</i> is an engrossing tale of elves, fae, goblins, dragons, talking cats, and other creatures of fantasy. Sixteen-year-old Keelie Heartwood (part elf, part human, and part fae) is on a mission to repair a rift from which magic is pouring, threatening the entire world.</p> <p>Keelie's adventure forces her to reach deep within herself in order to fully understand who she is and what she is capable of. Only by understanding herself will she be able to understand others. She must also maneuver her way through the lies and deceptions of those around her in order to determine who shares her wish to save the world. Readers young and old will enjoy this tale of magic and coming of age.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Neil Klein Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Protectors</i> by Val Karlsson Lerner Publishing Group, 2010, 106 pp., \$7.95 ISBN: 978-0-7613-6159-6</p> <p>Luke leads a life beset by death. His deranged stepfather, Sal, has apprenticed Luke in the mortuary arts at the Signorelli Funeral Home since Luke was nine. His mom serves their town, Bridgewater, as a medium for communicating with the dead. Little seems out of the ordinary until Luke's mom confides in him that her protectors are trying to warn her of impending danger. But when she fails to return home from a séance one evening and is declared dead, Luke, too, begins to receive messages—clues—from beyond the grave.</p> <p>The excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" that opens <i>The Protectors</i> is astutely chosen. Beyond the dark, macabre content that fills the tale, Karlsson weaves a story that is highly readable in one sitting—a quality Poe would appreciate—and a narrative fabric that finds its heritage in Poe's accounts of ratiocination, horror, and the grotesque.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kevin McCarthy Charleston, SC</p>	<p><i>The Sentinels</i> by R. A. & Geno Salvatore Wizards of the Coast LLC, 2010, 297 pp., \$17.95 ISBN: 978-0-7869-5505-3</p> <p>Maimun is a teenage orphan who has already seen more than his fair share of adventures. He is bound to a magical artifact of the goddess of good fortune, Tymora; yet somehow, this good luck charm seems to attract nothing but trouble. In this book, the third of a trilogy, Maimun sets out to destroy the Stone of Tymora with the help of his friend, the young pirate Joen. Maimun soon discovers that things—and people—are rarely as they first appear.</p> <p>The story is set in the world of the Forgotten Realms, a fully developed and richly layered fantasy universe. In this book, Maimun travels through locations such as Waterdeep, Longsaddle, and Silverymoon in search of answers to the many riddles he faces in his quest. He also encounters his occasional rescuer and mentor, the famous elf Drizzt, who is a beloved character in the Forgotten Realms universe.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Simon Gooch Fort Worth, TX</p>

<p><i>The Serpent's Coil</i> by Christy Raedeke Flux, 2011, 312 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Adventure/Conspiracy/Fiction ISBN: 978-0-7387-1577-3</p> <p>Caitly Mac Fireland is back in the second book of Raedeke's Prophecy of Days series. In her continuing attempt to unite the Earth's youth against the <i>Fraternitas</i>—the oppressive Shadow Government operated by the world's elite—Caitly travels across the world decoding mysterious symbols of ancient cultures. Caitly is quick and clever, loving and trusting her parents and the adults who support her while maintaining a distrust of new or unseen authority. <i>The Serpent's Coil</i> unfolds in a fascinating array of cultural, historical, and astronomic information, and readers will be easily engrossed by Caitly's adventures and discoveries. Nonetheless, young readers should maintain a critical attitude toward the information Raedeke presents, as much of the novel challenges the line between fact and faith.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jonathan Tomnick Nashville TN</p>	<p><i>The Water Wars</i> by Cameron Stracher Sourcebooks Fire, 2011, 240 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Dystopia/Environment/Friendship ISBN: 978-1-4022-4369-1</p> <p>Vera lives in Illinowa, a republic located in America's former Midwest region. After years of wastefulness, countries battle to control what little fresh water remains on Earth. Vera lives with a constant thirst and no memories of what Earth was like when water was plentiful. She makes do with little water unquestioningly until she meets Kai, a boy who doesn't mind wasting water because he claims to know the location of a river that could end the world's drought. Vera remains wary of her new friend and his secrets, but when he and his father disappear, she's spurred to begin a life-or-death adventure to rescue them.</p> <p>Stracher's environmental rhetoric is heavy-handed, and he drives the plot with coincidences and helpful strangers. For environmentalist readers or those looking for a fast-paced adventure story, though, this novel provides a compelling enough plot to hold readers' attention all the way to the end.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kelly Gotkin Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>What Can't Wait</i> by Ashley Hope Pérez Lerner Publishing Group, 2011, 234 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Cultural Identity ISBN: 978-0-7613-7163-2</p> <p>Marisa Moreno has been told her whole life what she's expected to accomplish in this world—help her family with her time and money above all, eventually marry a nice Mexican boy, and settle down with children. Internal conflict erupts, however, when she realizes her life goals of acing her AP Calculus exam, attending the University of Texas, and leaving her family far behind are growing increasingly at odds with the ideals of traditional Hispanic culture.</p> <p>In a heart-wrenching struggle of friendship, family allegiance, and finding love, Marisa discovers what it truly means to leave the expectations of everyone else behind and become an individual who follows after her hopes and dreams. Her genuinely relatable voice and passion allow readers to grasp for themselves how freeing oneself from the burdens of the world leads to the discovery that "there's no magic here. Just my own life."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Hilary Diaz Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> Melanie Hundley 1021 Delmas Ave. Nashville, TN 37216-3630 To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Melanie Hundley at melanie.hundley@Vanderbilt.edu.</p>

YA Literature in Translation:

A Batch of Batchelder Honorees

Literature in translation lives *in* the edge. While it belongs to multiple nations and languages, it strangely belongs to neither. Stuck somewhere inside and between childhood and adulthood, teenagers occupy a similar, awkward kind of space. Perhaps because of this commonality, connecting young adults to literature in translation creates unique opportunities to explore both personal and national identity, allowing readers to see the world and themselves in new ways through distinguishing either the foreign or the familiar. Although the nature of the publishing industry makes identifying precise percentages an impossible task (Maczka & Stock, 2006), the United States publishes comparatively fewer translations than other developed countries (UNESCO, 2011), particularly given the size of the American publishing industry. An excellent place to start the search for such books is the list of nominees and winners of the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, an annual prize from the American Library Association granted to the publisher who is deemed to have printed “the most outstanding” children’s book “originally published in a foreign language in a foreign country,” then “translated into English and published in the United States” (ALA, 2011).

Since 1966, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC, a subdivision of the American Library Association) has granted this award in honor of its namesake, a former executive director who promoted cross-cultural understanding through international literature for children; since 1994, they have also designated honor books and publishers (ALSC). The ALSC hopes to encourage US publishers to discover and

publish high-quality literature from around the world. Although the committee also considers picturebooks, its evaluations emphasize textual characteristics, preferring a strong “relationship to [the] original work” in “substance, . . . viewpoint,” and “style.” Committee members further examine the US translation in terms of theme, style, presentation, visual design, and plot and character development. Whatever changes a book undergoes at the hands of translators and publishers to accommodate American audiences, its “readers should be able to sense that the book came from another country” (ALA, 2011). Such a standard is significant, because at times the process of translation scrapes away detectable traces of foreign origin.

But for any translation to serve as an “authentic window onto another culture” (Maczka & Stock, p. 50), some residual, identifying characteristics must remain, whether they come in the shape of a unique sense of place, foreign folkloric elements, unfamiliar idioms, or surprising plot structures. Translators of children’s and YA literature must thoughtfully determine which foreign elements to retain, explain, or adjust in order to remain faithful to a text without also alienating younger, foreign readers. At their most successful, well-translated books can humanize people from other nations, broaden students’ perspectives, help them to develop empathy, and potentially provide more accurate, compelling information about life outside the United States in both modern and historical contexts “without a perspective of either superiority or inferiority” (Lo, 2001, p. 84). Literature from other nations can provide readers with something like a foreign mirror to serve as a “point of intersection . . .

Danish

Reuter, Bjarne. *The Boys from St. Petri*. Trans. Anthea Bell. Dutton, 1994.

Teller, Janne. *Nothing*. Trans. Martin Aitken. Atheneum, 2010.

Dutch

Hotlwijk, Ineke. *Asphalt Angels*. Trans. Wanda Boeke. Front Street, 1999.

Quintana, Anton. *The Baboon King*. Trans. John Nieuwenhuizen. Walker & Co., 1999.

Ruud van der Rol & Rian Verhoeven. *Anne Frank beyond the Diary: A Photographic Remembrance*. Trans. Anne Frank House. Viking, 1993.

French

Bondoux, Anne-Laure. *The Killer's Tears*. Trans. Y. Maudet. Delacorte, 2006.

Bondoux, Anne-Laure. *A Time of Miracles*. Trans. Y. Maudet. Delacorte, 2010.

Lehmann, Christian. *Ultimate Game*. Trans. William Rodarmor. David R. Godine, 2003.

Mourlevat, Jean-Claude. *The Pull of the Ocean*. Trans. Y. Maudet. Delacorte, 2006.

Stolz, Joëlle. *The Shadows of Ghadames*. Trans. Cathrine Temerson. Delacorte, 2004.

Zenatti, Valérie. *When I Was a Soldier*. Trans. Adriana Hunter. Bloomsbury, 2005.

German

Chotjewitz, David. *Daniel Half Human and the Good Nazi*. Trans. Doris Orgel. Richard Jackson Books, 2004.

Frank, Rudolph. *No Hero for the Kaiser*. Trans. Patricia Crampton. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1986.

Härtling, Peter. *Crutches*. Trans. Elizabeth D. Crawford. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1988.

Holub, Josef. *An Innocent Soldier*. Trans. Michael Hofmann. Arthur A. Levine, 2005.

Michaelis, Antonia. *Tiger Moon*. Trans. Anthea Bell. Amulet Books, 2008.

Richter, Hans Peter. *Friedrich*. Trans. Edite Kroll. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970.

Schami, Rafik. *A Hand Full of Stars*. Trans. Rika Lesser. E. P. Dutton, 1990.

Van Dijk, Lutz. *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stephan K*. Trans. Elizabeth D. Crawford. Henry Holt, 1995.

Hebrew

Orlev, Uri. *The Island on Bird Street*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Orlev, Uri. *The Lady with the Hat*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

Orlev, Uri. *The Man from the Other Side*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Houghton Mifflin, 1991.

Orlev, Uri. *Run, Boy, Run*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Walter Lorraine, 2003.

Rabinovici, Schoschana. *Thanks to My Mother*. Trans. James Skofield. Dial, 1998.

Italian

De Mari, Silvana. *The Last Dragon*. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. Hyperion, 2006.

Japanese

Miyabe, Miyuki. *Brave Story*. Trans. Alexander O. Smith. VIZ Media, 2008.

Uehashi, Nahoko. *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*. Trans. Cathy Hirano. Arthur A. Levine, 2008.

Uehashi, Nahoko. *Moribito II: Guardian of the Darkness*. Trans. Cathy Hirano. Arthur A. Levine, 2009.

Russian

Wassiljewa, Tatjana. *Hostage to War: A True Story*. Trans. Anna Trenter. Scholastic, 1997.

Spanish

Llorente, Pilar Molina. *The Apprentice*. Trans. Robin Longshaw. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993.

Swedish

Kullman, Harry. *The Battle Horse*. Trans. George Blecher and Lone Thygesen Blecher. Bradbury, 1981.

where the coercive aspects of imagined communities are turned back on themselves . . . so that their covert presuppositions and ideological inflections become apparent” (Giles, 2002, p. 17). Through their experiences with transnational literature, readers might not only improve their understanding of others, but also more clearly recognize themselves. Literature in translation extends the opportunities for these contacts beyond the English-speaking realm.

With such possibilities for enlightenment, translated young adult literature could provide excellent opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration in the secondary education classroom. English, foreign language, science, politics, and history teachers could all find ways for these texts to enhance their individual and collective curricula (Schwarz, 1996). For example, educators could use translated works to teach a specific geographical area or historical period from a different perspective, analyze layout and design choices and compare them to original English books, use the English translations to support or compare texts in foreign languages, or turn to the Batchelder simply to enrich and diversify recommended reading lists.

Because the Batchelder mark increases the likelihood of library purchase and repeated printing, honored books are fortunately easier to locate than other translated literature. The list of Batchelder Award and Honor recipients includes everything from picture-books to YA novels. To aid secondary educators and librarians, this article lists and reviews only those with potential YA appeal (whether because of linguistic demands, protagonist age, or thematic content).

The dozen reviews that follow include at least one novel from most of the original languages represented on the Batchelder list, examine a fairly representative cross-section of what’s been offered historically, and assess those that might fit most easily and beneficially into middle and high school curricula. Sorted by language of origin, the complete summaries and reviews introduce educators, scholars, and teenagers to a sampling of the translated texts available in the United States. These and other titles not specifically reviewed here appear in a list of Batchelder honorees (copies of those published prior to 1990 are difficult to obtain, unfortunately) that might appeal to a teenage audience (see Fig. 1). The article concludes with a reflection on the award’s limitations and hopes for its future.

Figure 1. Batchelder honor and award recipients with YA appeal

For further information on the history of the Batchelder Award, children's literature in translation, and a complete list of past winners, please consult ALA's website at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward/index.cfm>.

A Batch of Batchelder Book Reviews

Danish, 1995 Award, 215 pages: Reuter, Bjarne. *The Boys from St. Petri*. Trans. Anthea Bell. New York: Dutton, 1994.

Gunnar Balstrup and his adoring younger brother, Lars, live in Nazi-occupied Denmark. There, Gunnar heads the St. Petri Group, a secret band of boys (named in honor of the church where they meet) who pull pranks on the despised German soldiers. Lars guiltily conceals his love for Gunnar's girlfriend, Irene, creating an underlying tension that lurks in the background of the story. When the inscrutable Otto Hvideman joins the group, he pushes their exploits beyond vandalism into arson and the theft of German supplies. The Germans intensify their search for the culprits of the heightened mischief, but the Balstrup boys continue with their plans to bomb a train. The night of the Christmas play, all but one member help to carry out the plot—despite the fact that someone had already informed the Germans. Lars runs back to the school to say goodbye to Irene before he and three others are arrested. Only Otto manages to escape.

Inspired by the real resistance of teenagers in Aalborg, Denmark, and sprinkled with fictionalized names and locations, the book at times reads almost like a historical adventure novel. But it is much more psychological than readers might expect. The text's style is poetic and emotional, layered with metaphors and a good balance of dialogue and description. Occasionally, these poetics preoccupy the story, making some plot elements difficult to follow and getting in the way of the characterization. However, the book still creates genuine sympathy for the characters and provides an interesting glimpse into the various mindsets of citizens in occupied territories as they struggle to preserve their identities while also preserving their lives. The book obviously would connect to the study of historical events and could complement analysis about perceptions of the United States in places the nation's military has occupied.

Dutch, 2000 Honor, 184 pages: Hotlwijk, Ineke.

Asphalt Angels. Trans. Wanda Boeke. Asheville, NC: Front Street, 1999.

After the death of his mother, 13-year-old Alex finds himself living in the streets of Brazil, struggling to survive. Eventually he joins the Asphalt Angels, one of several street gangs, whose members sniff glue and steal. Alex gets used to the thievery, but unlike his friends, he never takes drugs. After he confesses to a journalist that all he wants is "a bed and a mother" (p. 132), the city increases its efforts to get the kids off the streets. Later, the boys borrow some guns and try to stage a holdup of a bus, but their leader is run over in his attempt to escape. The experience sends Alex into a suicidal depression.

The text concludes with a glossary of terms, which follows the afterword on the real-life plight of Brazilian street kids. Despite all of the shocking events and sad stories about each child, the characters carry little emotional resonance. The third-person narration is vaguely told from Alex's point of view, but it almost feels like author Ineke Holtwijk is just using him as a tour guide of sorts through the Brazilian streets. It comes across slightly editorial, and Alex's voice doesn't always have an authentic ring. However, the transatlantic nature of the book itself—the English translation of a Dutch novel about life in Brazil—reflects the world's increasingly nebulous boundaries and might be more useful for investigating European perceptions than about Brazilian culture. Such a novel could afford a framework for comparing depictions of the US's largest cities and might stimulate debate about crime prevention and related issues.

French, 2007 Honor, 162 pages. Bondoux, Anne-

Laure. *The Killer's Tears*. Trans. Y. Maudet. New York: Delacorte, 2006.

In a remote corner of northern Chile, passerby Angel Allegria murders young Paolo Poloverdo's parents

However, the transatlantic nature of the book itself—the English translation of a Dutch novel about life in Brazil—reflects the world's increasingly nebulous boundaries.

but inexplicably spares the boy Paolo. Forming an unlikely bond with each other, Paolo and his parents' killer live quietly together until another stranger wanders in and Angel, thanks to Paolo, spares the

Uniquely blending disgrace, redemption, magic, realism, and a sense of both the timeless and the contemporary, *The Killer's Tears* has a lovely, haunting atmosphere and graceful, lyrical prose.

man's life. After a series of hardships and jealousies, the three head into town, where the man tries to run away with an innkeeper's daughter. Angel and Paolo flee authorities and stumble across Ricardo Murga, a kindly lumberjack who had lost his wife and children in a violent robbery decades earlier. On his mystical property, Ricardo's dead family are somehow able to visit and play with Paolo. Angel hopes for a differ-

ent life for the boy, so he leaves him with Ricardo. The police storm the house the next day, mistaking Ricardo for Angel and killing the old man in the struggle. They apprehend Angel and later sentence him to death, while Paolo is sent away to live in foster care. When Paolo turns 18, he tries to visit Angel, only to find that the killer had been executed a year earlier. The young man returns to his childhood home and starts a new, peaceful life.

Uniquely blending disgrace, redemption, magic, realism, and a sense of both the timeless and the contemporary, *The Killer's Tears* has a lovely, haunting atmosphere and graceful, lyrical prose. While the pace, length, and packaging of the book make it feel like a YA novel, the story is certainly more about Angel Allegria than about young Paolo. It blurs edges by refusing to fit easily into expected styles or structures, but does so while conveying a strangely folkloric familiarity. The story rushes a bit at the end and almost borders on preachy, so its broad appeal is uncertain. But it is a thought-provoking novel with potential for sparking excellent discussions about crime and punishment, folklore, and family structures.

French, 2007 Award, 190 pages: Mourlevat, Jean-Claude. *The Pull of the Ocean*. Trans. Y. Maudet. New York: Delacorte, 2006.

This modernized adaptation of Tom Thumb reveals

each chapter from various characters' viewpoints. One night, Yann overhears a conversation between his parents and convinces his brothers—three sets of identical twins—to run away with him, persuading them that he overheard their parents plotting to kill them. All the boys take off at night and, at Yann's insistence, head toward the ocean. Wise, reticent Yann is so small that they carry him most of the way in a bag. Shortly before the end of their journey, they take brief refuge at a seaside vacation home, but the owner barricades them inside, forcing the boys to spend three days without food, water, or heat until Yann locates a phone and the brothers call home. All but Yann return to the parents, and only the next-to-last chapter reveals his thoughts. The real reason for his departure was anger at his father's plan to kill the kittens recently born on their farm. While no one in the family knows what happened to the boy, the book closes with a skipper's recollection of Yann, happily on board an ocean freight ship.

This charming, little book, which retains the French names and places, reads partly like a fairy tale, partly like a diary, and partly like a transcript of police-recorded interviews. It alludes to the Tom Thumb story just enough to remind the reader of the basic framework and connections, thankfully updating the tale in a believable way that still allows for surprises. Yann is only 10—obviously younger than YAs—but the various narrators range from 10 to 78, covering a spectrum of personalities and age groups. With the large font, spacing, and margins, the novel could be mistaken as a children's book, but the multiple narrative structures promote higher inferential demands suitable at least for middle grades.

French, 2006 Honor, 235 pages: Zenatti, Valérie.

When I Was a Soldier. Trans. Adriana Hunter. New York: Bloomsbury, 2005.

In this memoir, Valérie Zenatti relates her experiences as an Israeli soldier in the late 1980s. Valérie heads to the army quickly after taking the *baccalauréat* (closing high school exam), just like all the other 18-year-olds in Israel. Evolving relationships with her friends and the lingering memory of her ex-boyfriend, Jean-David, weave in and out of her life as a soldier. After training at a base near Tel Aviv, she takes her oath and receives her official assignment to the secret service. There she spends intense days memorizing

large amounts of information and receives nearly perfect marks. After only one less-than-stellar test performance, she's punished by having to give up her weekend leave in order to stay, study, and retake the exam. She feels so ill that she has a painful panic attack, sending her to the hospital. The army attributes it to stress. Psychological evaluations and counseling help her talk things out. Soon the soldiers apply their knowledge to deciphering Jordanian flight transmissions; a year later Valérie's released from her military service.

This book's prose—to the credit of both the author and the translator—is graceful, reflective, and emotionally believable. The translation impressively navigates comments about French, Russian, Hebrew, and other languages with ease. A few footnotes help to explain important words and dates, but they feel natural in the context. The literary level of the language, as well as some content and cultural references, would place this for older readers. This high-interest, well-written memoir is also thought-provoking without being didactic. In some ways, Zenatti's French background places her as both the observer and the observed in the Israeli culture, so readers can look through the window *with* and *at* Zenatti as she develops. The reality of compulsory military service for males and females is far from the kind of life that American teenagers experience, so this book would definitely prove enlightening for teens and humanize the citizens of a politically pivotal region of the world.

German, 2005 Honor, 327 pages: Chotjewitz, David.

Daniel Half Human. Trans. Doris Orgel. New York: Simon Pulse, 2006.

The narration of this book moves between Daniel Kraushaar's thoughts as he revisits his post-war homeland and a third-person account of Daniel's experiences with his friend, Armin, during the rise of Hitler's regime. The two 13-year-olds are enamored with the Nazi movement, but when Daniel demands permission to join the Hitler Youth, his parents reveal his mother's Jewish descent. Daniel reacts against his mother but manages to conceal his identity for quite some time, until a jealous soccer teammate finally reveals his secret. Armin joins the Hitler Youth but maintains a romance with Daniel's Jewish cousin, Miriam. His superiors know about the trysts, but Armin rejects the pressure to betray the family, instead

warning them of the violence to come on November 9, the night now known as *Kristallnacht*. Not many months later, the Kraushaars escape to the United States. During the last flash forward, Daniel arrives at a hearing, where German men are being questioned about their involvement in the war. There, in an American military capacity, he meets his friend again. Though Armin states that he was never a member of the SS or Nazi party, Daniel discounts his claim.

Chotjewitz's narrative strategy proves effective and moving, providing hope for Daniel's future during frightening events. The depictions of stunning, complex characters seem honest, and the

author provides an interesting spectrum of reactions to the disturbing situations. It provides a chilling look at the pervasiveness and influence of propaganda, as Chotjewitz inserts just enough historical background knowledge to illuminate the scenes without overwhelming the reader with detail. Nearly all of the characters straddle the lines of loyalty, class, and heritage, and the story provides rich opportunities for classroom analysis.

German, 2006 Award, 232 pages: Holub, Josef. *An Innocent Soldier*. Trans. Michael Hofmann. New York: Arthur A. Levine, 2005.

Adam, a teenage farmhand, is awoken in the middle of the night and taken to town by his master, where he is signed up for Napoleon's army in place of the master's son. He marches with the Grande Armée on their way to conquer Russia, while the mean-spirited Sergeant Krauter constantly hounds the poor boy. Luckily, an aristocratic lieutenant a few years older than Adam takes him on as a personal servant, and the two form a tight friendship. Adam serves Konrad Klara faithfully, nursing him through sickness, trudging through frustrations incurred by the ever-pursuing Krauter, and narrowly avoiding the freezing, starva-

It provides a chilling look at the pervasiveness and influence of propaganda, as Chotjewitz inserts just enough historical background knowledge to illuminate the scenes without overwhelming the reader with detail.

tion, and violence that surround their journey. Somehow the two manage to survive the ordeal and reunite later in the lieutenant's comfortable home back in western Germany.

Adam's persistent, wide-eyed innocence seems young for the mid-teens he supposedly depicts, and the relationship between him and Konrad Klara never quite connects. However, the book is interesting for

its unusual subject matter—the difficult, daily life of young soldiers in the Napoleonic War—and effectively conveys the confused feeling of being carried away by events completely beyond one's control. At times, the slow-paced, present tense narration of the novel is actually difficult to follow, and the language occasion-

ally feels awkward and out-of-place. The narrative style, however, might itself be a window to another culture. Prominent translator Anthea Bell likes the “immediacy” of the historic present tense but treats it with “caution” when translating for children, because it does not always carry the same implications in English as it does in French and German, where it is more commonly used (Bell, 2006, p. 232). These linguistic considerations might make the book helpful for foreign language teachers illustrating the use and effect of tenses in each language.

Hebrew, 2004 Award, 186 pages: Orlev, Uri. *Run, Boy, Run*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Boston: Walter Lorraine, 2003.

Trying to escape the Warsaw ghetto during World War II, eight-year-old Srulik and his mother are separated from Srulik's father. Soon afterward, the mother also disappears, and Srulik is left to fend for himself. He joins a small group of young thieves, and they narrowly escape to the Polish side, where they live briefly in the forest until German officers break up the crew. Srulik dashes off alone and soon assumes a Catholic identity that includes the adopted name Jurek. Alternately running away and working for various locals and even German soldiers, Jurek endures a series of hardships—including a threshing accident

that mangles his arm so badly it has to be amputated. Through luck, tenacity, and the kindness of strangers, he survives the war and plans to stay with a particular family afterward, but a children's home eventually retains him. There, a kind worker helps the boy to remember his family and his past.

The epilogue explains that the worker eventually helped Jurek to locate his sister, the only other surviving member of his immediate family. He went on to finish his education, have a family, and move to Israel, where the author heard him (now using the name Yoram) relate his story. However, it is unclear whether Orlev had any further contact with the man, so it is uncertain how much of the story is accurately biographical. Like some similar accounts, the weighty subject matter bogs down in specifics, and emotional events feel oddly distant. Still, the story of survival is amazing without becoming maudlin, and the language feels smooth. Despite the younger age of the protagonist, it can be recommended for YAs, especially given some themes and situations. Srulik's adaptability and shifting concepts of identity might intrigue teenage readers engaged in their own quests for self-discovery. Furthermore, Srulik's unique life broadens the range of experiences students usually encounter when reading literature about the Holocaust.

Hebrew, 1999 Award, 246 pages: Rabinovici, Schoschana. *Thanks to My Mother*. Trans. James Skofield. New York: Dial, 1998.

Schoschana Rabinovici (originally Susanne Weksler) wrote this autobiographical account in Hebrew, but the American version of her experiences during the Holocaust comes to English via a translation of the German edition. Rabinovici begins her grim growing-up years in Vilnius, Lithuania, which the Russians occupied from 1939 to 1941. First, her family is terrorized when the Germans invade, and soon the family must relocate to the ghetto. When that is liquidated, most of the family is separated. At an early stop, Susanne's mother, Raja, hides her daughter in a backpack and presses forward to the right of the moving crowds as those on the left are ushered to their deaths. Thanks largely to her mother's ingenuity, Susanne survives *Kaiserwald*, then Stutthof Camp, and a death march to the Tauntzien Camp. Ultimately, mother and daughter are rescued and move to Bialystok after the war, where they reunite with Susanne's

Srulik's adaptability and shifting concepts of identity might intrigue teenage readers engaged in their own quests for self-discovery.

uncle, the only other member of her family to survive.

This is a particularly detailed (at times, graphic) autobiography, providing a grim, heart-wrenching account of the horrors experienced by the author and the unflagging perseverance of her mother. The details weigh down the story at times, making the reading process occasionally laborious. Still, the book excellently recounts Rabinivici's life through a child's-eye memory, stating things simply and bluntly, and revealing details in the way she learned them herself. Like *Run, Boy, Run*, the author's life experiences defy strict national boundaries and illustrate areas of the globe that sometimes occupy the periphery of Holocaust-era study in language arts classrooms.

Italian, 2007 Honor, 361 pages: De Mari, Silvana. *The Last Dragon*. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. New York: Hyperion, 2006.

A woman and a hunter take pity on a very young elf, Yorshkrunsquarkljolnerstrink ("Yorsh" for short), even though it is punishable by death for them to help elves. After the three are captured and sentenced to hang, Yorsh helps them escape and, during their flight, reads an ancient prophecy that involves "the last dragon and the last elf" (p. 61). He recognizes himself as the one spoken of, fulfills the first portion of the prophecy, and pledges to stay and care for a cranky dragon who grudgingly aids the three travelers.

Thirteen years later, Yorsh cares for the dragon until it lays an egg and flies off to die, transferring his duties to the newly hatched dragon. Meanwhile, Robi, the daughter of the now-deceased woman and hunter, lives at a terrible orphanage. After being caught talking to Yorsh, Robi is arrested and condemned to die. Yorsh helps her escape, and the two lead an uprising of orphans and other oppressed citizens, fleeing to a city behind a waterfall as Yorsh urges them forward with his gift of storytelling. The exhausted crowd succeeds only because of a distraction caused by the dragon, who dies in the process.

This fantasy's plot appears predictable at first, but the characters are so sympathetically drawn and complexly portrayed that the story becomes surprisingly fresh, despite occasionally sluggish pacing. The narrative injects a healthy amount of irony, humor, and advanced vocabulary that readers could appreciate at a variety of levels, managing to describe the actions of each character from outsiders' perspectives—illustrat-

ing how ridiculous they appear from a distance while demonstrating how those actions are justifiable from insiders' viewpoints. Although the fantasy setting and style of translation do not betray the book's foreign origins, the plot structure and problem-solving strategies deviate from expectations of British and American tradition. In addition, many themes in the novel easily support discussions about family folklore, responsibility, government structures, genocide, and even simply the art of storytelling.

Japanese, 2009 Award, 248 pages: Uehashi, Nahoko.

Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit. Trans. Cathy Hirano. Arthur A. Levine, 2008.

Balsa, a 30-year-old, spear-wielding, female bodyguard is charged with preserving the life of the Chagum, the Second Prince, who is also Moribito, Guardian of the Spirit and host to the egg of a water spirit linked to a parallel world. Not only is the boy's life at stake, but if he does not survive until midsummer and reach the sea for the egg to hatch, the whole land of New Yogo will suffer from a terrible drought. With the help of a Tanda (a childhood friend and healer) and Torogai (a clever magic weaver), Balsa fends off attackers sent by the Mikado (his father) and supports Chagum through the difficulties he experiences as the egg matures, gradually revealing aspects of her own strange past and discovering secrets about local legends and politics along the way. Ultimately, they succeed in their endeavor, defeating the monstrous earth spirit Rarunga as a sacred bird carries the egg away to safety. After learning that Chagum's older brother has died, leaving him as the Crown Prince, Balsa leaves to return to her childhood home of Kanbal.

As Uehashi states in her author's note at the end of the book, this martial-arts tale is set in a "fantasy world that carries the scent of Japan" (p. 260). The book contains a great deal of fast-paced action, in-

The narrative injects a healthy amount of irony, humor, and advanced vocabulary that readers could appreciate at a variety of levels, managing to describe the actions of each character from outsiders' perspectives.

triguing linguistic and folkloric details, and an interesting set of characters with ages not traditionally considered YA. It is also the first in an extremely popular Japanese, 10-volume series that has been adapted for manga, television, and other media, affording comparisons that span not only countries but genres. The second book, *Moribito II: Guardian of the Darkness*, earned Scholastic a Batchelder honor in 2010.

Russian, 1998 Honor, 192 pages: Wassiljewa, Tatjana. *Hostage to War: A True Story*. Trans. Anna Trenter. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Based on the author's memories and writings, this memoir recounts Wassiljewa's experiences from early 1941 through late 1949 in the form of a diary. The bombing begins in her hometown of Leningrad, where her father becomes ill and food is scarce. Thirteen-year-old Tatjana braves a long, cold journey to collect corn for her family, and her father dies that year. When the Germans take Tatjana to Germany as a captive laborer, she starts work in a bean field. Her lack of strength gets her sent to a factory in the city to sort cartons. She makes friends there and barely survives an illness. After American bombs leave the city in ruins, Tatjana and a friend scramble from town to town until Tatjana finds refuge in Belgium. Almost 18 by then, Tatjana returns to her ailing mother and sister and is dismayed to discover that her homeland treats the previously captive Russians as potential traitors. She finally finishes her education and becomes a teacher, and the book closes with a historical note about Russia and Germany.

The text is an American translation of a German translation of the original Russian, and perhaps as a result, the writing becomes clumsy and choppy at times. From Russia to Germany to Belgium and back to Russia, this book covers a lot of historical and geographical territory. Consequently, the events pass by in a blur, but the range of Wassiljewa's experiences does provide a compelling overview of pivotal events and makes the state in Russia after the war even more disheartening. The author details instances of brutality, flippancy, and selfishness from a variety of sources alongside touching displays of humanity and compassion from Russians, Poles, and Belgians alike. The resulting depictions are well rounded and human, offering students brief glimpses into the lives of people from a variety of Eastern-European nations.

Hope for the Batchelder and Beyond

This sampling of books, as well as a scan of the other available titles, reveals some patterns and limitations. The world as viewed through the Batchelder is not as expansive as it should be. Interestingly, for example, only one originally Spanish children's book graces the Batchelder list. Translations from Western-European languages—especially French and German—dominate. I have deduced three possible reasons for this: (1) They have longer-standing literary traditions for children and young adults; (2) "Some languages are much easier to translate than others and so are less challenging to the American publishers" (ALSC, p. 65); (3) As Emer O'Sullivan argues, there is a "cultural narrow-mindedness" on the part of publishers that "leads to the exclusion of works translated from other languages" (p. 68). Though actually identifying the cause is problematic, it would certainly be refreshing and helpful for all readers if publishers could provide access to worthy titles from all continents and nations.

Naturally, once a book has a reasonable degree of success, publishers are more likely to market additional titles by the same author. Authors Uri Orlev, Kazumi Yumoto, and Anne-Laure Bondoux (whose *A Time of Miracles* earned Delacorte Press this year's Batchelder Award) all have more than one YA book receiving Batchelder recognition. However, translation complicates the very notion of authorship. The translators' imprints on the text, of course, can hardly be overstated, as they mediate both words and systems, cultural norms and genres (Shavit, p. 25). Anthea Bell, Elizabeth D. Crawford, Hillel Halkin, Doris Orgel, Y. Maudet, and James Skofield are among those who've translated multiple Batchelder honorees, at least one of which was marketed for teens. Publishers' influences—determining which texts are translated, who will translate them, and how they'll be marketed to the US audience—almost posit them as authors themselves.

War-related themes—especially World War II—traditionally have led the lists of Batchelder-honored YA titles in American translation, though children's books have enjoyed wider variety by comparison. Fortunately, recent years have expanded the thematic range. The increased diversity is probably due to a general increase in translation, giving the Batchelder committee a larger number of books from which to select winners. Referring to the early 2000s, for example, Bell said she had "translated more children's

books in the last three or four years” than she had in the previous twenty” (Travis, par. 4), and young adult literature is arguably among those translations. Still, according to Bell, publishers want only the “absolutely top titles” and tend to ignore “the perfectly acceptable series of everyday life stories” (Travis, par. 12–13), which, unfortunately, removes potential windows through which teenage readers might see the world.

Ideally, translated young adult literature should encompass a broader spectrum of languages and aspects of life. We can hope that the Batchelder recognition and other efforts will continue to support these offerings so that young adults will have more opportunities to read in the edge—the edge of cultures, languages, classifications, literary markets, and national boundaries.

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Adolescent Literature Book Clubs:

A Forum for Cultivation of Peer Relationships with Urban Adolescent Females

Huddled in a small circle in the cramped guidance counselor's office on the fourth floor of a high-rise building, five Latina and African American teenage girls gather together to discuss *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson. The main character Melinda has been shunned by her peers and treated especially cruelly by her female friends, all because she ruined the biggest party of the summer by calling the police. What her peers do not know is that she made the phone call because she was raped. The girls discuss Melinda and connect to her; they understand that school is often put on the back burner because of struggles adolescents have with their peers:

Fay: She's slacking.

Joy: She's distracted!

Tia: I think she's a little stressed.

Betsy: She's worried about everything that's going on besides school. It's her friends!

Joy: When you're distracted, you can't concentrate on school 'cause you're always thinking about other things, especially when it comes down to friend issues.

Betsy: That happened to me last year. I had so many problems that was going on with people and I didn't care about school so my grades were really slacking. You think her grades were slacking? Oh God. I had to do extra credit. I had to stay after

school just to get my grades up. Thank God this year is a whole new year.

This brief conversation demonstrates how adolescents' emotional, social, and academic development are all affected by their relationships with others. Specifically, friendships and intimate relationships are more central and complex as teenagers enter middle and high school. Despite the centrality of peer relationships to teenagers' emotions and behaviors, our school curricula often ignore how pivotal it is for teenagers to work through these issues. Research (and even just the discussion above) tells us that students' academic achievement is directly impacted by their social and emotional well-being (Elias, 2006; Graczyk et al., 2000; LeDoux, 2000), yet with the pressures to cover mandated curriculum and standardized testing, oftentimes teachers, librarians, administrators, and school support staff lose sight of peer significance.

One way in which we can compensate for this deficit is to create social spaces outside of the classroom where students can collaboratively explore their peer relationships within a safe environment. Book clubs serve as a unique interactive forum in that students not only use each other for insights, but can also utilize the characters and their experiences with peers as examples (or non-examples) of how to understand and improve their social worlds. In my previous research (Polleck, 2010), I discussed how book clubs can be "transformational" (p. 50) when adolescent females use book clubs to improve in their reading and identity development as well as personal and social growth. The purpose of this article is to delve into the

complexities of social growth, since analysis of one year of data revealed that the most frequently occurring discussion was, in fact, around peer relationships (as opposed to literary analysis, family relationships, and identity issues). Thus, it is my goal to more richly reveal and unpack the kinds of conversations the girls had with each other regarding their peers, while simultaneously demonstrating the overall benefits these conversations had on the girls and their understanding and development of social growth.

Entering into the World of Adolescent Girls and Their Peer Relationships

The participants in this study were urban Latina and African American adolescent girls, a population that historically has been neglected or ignored when looking at research in adolescent development (Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999; Way, 1996). Basow and Rubin (1999) explain, “Research has not sufficiently accounted for the diversity of experiences encountered by girls of varying racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds” (p. 25). Therefore, another paramount purpose of this article is to expand the discourse of diverse adolescent females, so that their voices are included in the larger body of literature on female adolescent development.

Across many adolescent studies, we know that these years can be about the establishment of autonomy, as teenagers are often consumed by what is expected of them as they approach adulthood (Basow & Rubin, 1999). These expectations can be especially difficult for girls who receive contradictory messages from their families and communities. Experiencing hormonal changes, girls begin to realize the notion of what is “female” by dominant cultures and mainstream media (Brown, 2003). While perhaps being told “they can be anything,” they are also exposed to standards of what is beautiful by adults, peers, and pop culture (Brown, 2003). How girls respond to these messages, whether through silence, resistance, or conformity, differs based on their communities and their race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and socioeconomic class.

During this time period, young girls also become more concerned about the quality of their friendships and intimate relationships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). In fact, adolescent female identities are profoundly affected by friendships and peer relationships (Brown,

2003). Research shows that positive friendships enhance cognitive, social, moral, and psychological development (Brown et al., 1999; Savin-Williams and Berndt, 1990). Having healthy relationships also helps adolescents improve their cooperativeness, altruism, self-esteem, and perspective-taking (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996). On the other hand, adolescents who have difficulties maintaining relationships are more likely to be unemployed and exhibit poor mental health (Doll, 1996), thus demonstrating the significance of continued research on peer relationships and adolescence.

During preadolescence, same-sex friends are at their peak, yet as youth reach adolescence, the number of these relationships begins to plateau as intimacy with romantic partners begins to increase (Larson and Richards, 1991). Research on female friendships with their same-sex peers, however, is flush with contradictions. While studies have shown that girls depend on close, intimate friendships to help them through life issues, we also see studies that reveal the harsh conflicts that adolescent girls experience (Brown, 2003). Perhaps because of their own recognition of and experience with sexism, racism, or classism, girls take out their frustrations and anger on each other (Brown, 2003).

While dealing with their own struggles with same-sex peers, girls also work toward being successful with intimacy and romance. This poses difficulty for many girls as they begin to understand their desires, particularly in a society that primarily advocates for and promotes heterosexuality. Girls who pursue same-sex intimate relationships are often shunned, while those who pursue opposite-sex intimate relationships are conflicted between a desire for being loved and a desire for voice, power, and legitimacy (Brown, 2003). This article will explore these contradictions that research suggests greatly impact girls’ social and emotional development; the unique space of a book club offers a way for girls to make connections to the texts and each other as they begin to unravel their own struggles with peer relationships.

Using Book Clubs to Enhance Adolescent Peer Relationships

Studies from many disciplines give insight about the power of texts and talk to influence adolescents’ social

and emotional development. In the field of bibliotherapy, where educators, librarians, and therapists use literature to assist adolescents, studies suggest that young adult and contemporary texts help students nurture emotional and social development (Herbert & Kent, 2000; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1986), improve social skills (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001), enhance self-concepts (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000), and promote emotional intelligence (Sullivan & Strang, 2002/2003).

When looking at the social benefits of book clubs with adolescents, Daniels (2002) found they expanded students' discourse opportunities and development, enhanced their awareness of multiculturalism and diversity, and promoted

multiple perspectives on critical social issues. Raphael, Florio-Ruane, and George (2001) used book clubs to help prepare youth who live in diverse environments, while Hill and VanHorn (1995) used literature with incarcerated youth to increase emotional development. Appleman (2006) utilized book clubs to promote literacy development and increased interactions between urban and suburban teenagers, while Smith (2000) found book clubs enhanced middle school females' sense of agency. Similarly, Broughton (2002) discovered that book clubs increased Latinas' understanding of the self.

Despite this large body of literature, however, little research exists on how book clubs can be used to increase students' ability to reflect on and participate in peer relationships. Knowing the profound and significant power these relationships have on students' emotional and social development and academic achievement, it is thus imperative that we expand our focus in this terrain of adolescent literacy.

The Book Club Process: Getting Started

I began my work with book clubs almost 15 years ago, behind the tutelage and expertise of Joan Kaywell, who was my advisor during my Master's program in English Education. Previously, I had worked for two

years as an outreach counselor for homeless youth, and at the time of my collaborations with Dr. Kaywell, I was teaching English and reading in a dropout prevention program. Dr. Kaywell and I co-facilitated small book clubs alongside two social workers in a center for adolescent girls.

The success of these book clubs, while not documented formally, was due, I believe, to three critical components that I have since applied to my current research study. The first was the use of *young adult literature*, as the characters in this genre reflect the lives and experiences of teenage girls. Second, we used the framework of *reader response theory*. Coined by Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995), reader response theory is grounded in "transaction," where the reader and the text "converse together in a particular situation to make meaning" (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 27). The integral piece of reader response theory that makes book club most effective, however, is the "connective dimension," where adolescents directly connect the literature to their lives, learning from their experiences, behaviors, and interactions with others (Wilhelm, p. 68). The third component is the *social nature* of book club, where adolescents' solitary meaning-making experiences are transformed based on dialogue with others. Thus, their understanding of the text, the self, and each other is profoundly affected by the actual social nature and context of the book club itself.

Ten years after my work with Dr. Kaywell, I decided to formally document the conversations and experiences of other adolescent female book clubs. Data collection took place at an urban high school in the Northeast, where I served as the literacy coach. At the beginning of the school year, I recruited students by visiting all of the English classrooms, explaining the purpose of book clubs and my research. I gave students a form to complete where they checked if they were interested or not interested. If they were, I invited them to informational meetings, held before and after school, where I explained in detail what we would be doing in book club. During these meetings, students explained in writing what they wanted out of book club, including (1) the types of books they wanted to read, (2) the topics they wanted to address, (3) the times they could meet, and (4) the students they wanted to work with. Based on this feedback, I created three book clubs: one of seven 11th-grade girls, one of five 9th- and 10th-grade girls, and one co-ed

Their understanding of the text, the self, and each other is profoundly affected by the actual social nature and context of the book club itself.

group of seven 10th- and 11th-grade students. Because this study focuses on females, I only used data from the first two groups for the purpose of this article.

Once the groups were formed, I made arrangements for the location of the book clubs and petitioned for funding of texts through local community organizations and the school administration. Before we visited the library to make our book selections, however, we met as a group in a private room at the school, sitting in a circle so everyone could see one another. During that first meeting with the younger girls, we made introductions, describing our hobbies and reading interests. I posed a series of scenarios to counteract possible problems: “What if I don’t like the book? What if I get upset as I read? What if someone in the group gets angry or sad? What if someone in the group makes me angry or says something that offends me?” The girls discussed these possibilities, negotiating what they would do if any of them occurred, allowing for the solving of problems before they happened. The girls also established group norms: “Treat each other with respect. Wait until other people have finished talking. Don’t offend anyone. Make sure everyone communicates. Don’t be afraid to express your feelings. We all want you here, so come to group.”

With the older group, this first meeting was quite different. Introductions were not needed because the girls knew each other well, since they had attended the school together for two years. When I asked them if they wanted to set group norms or discuss scenarios, one girl responded, “We all know how to act,” and the rest of the girls agreed, saying they were friends who knew how to communicate with one another.

Next, we visited the school library together to find novels that intrigued our group members. All the texts they selected were multicultural young adult literature, as they seemed to best match the students’ literacy levels, diverse backgrounds, and interests. (See the Appendix for a complete list of the books read.) Once books were chosen, locations designated, and times set, the groups met regularly once a week for 45 minutes. The group of 11th-grade girls met during lunch, while the younger group met after school. The girls themselves started and directed each book club session. They came prepared by either writing notes in their books or using sticky notes for questions they had. If someone had not done the reading (which was rare—primarily the girls ended up reading more

than was negotiated the week before), someone in the group would summarize the main details to bring her up to speed.

In facilitating these groups, my most important task was to provide a safe atmosphere with a consistent structure. In short, I had to “get out of the way” and listen. The only time I initiated conversation was to ensure the girls did not talk over one another or to elicit responses from those who were not talking. While the girls led the discussions, a lull in the conversation would prompt me to ask questions such as, “Can you say more on that? What do you mean by that? How does this scenario relate to your own life?”

These questions were quite different from the formalized line of questioning that I used as a reading teacher. In fact, I had to relinquish my role as educator and become more mentor and facilitator. Without assessments or required curricula, I could let go of the hierarchy of my position and establish a more nonauthoritative rapport by listening to the girls and responding in nonjudgmental ways. Simultaneously, however, I did have to be aware of the power differentials that existed, as I am both a White woman and an employee at the school. Therefore, I had to recognize and affirm their linguistic diversity and validate the girls culturally.

Taylor (1996) insists that adults who work with adolescents of color not only support their development and celebrate their voices, but also “be knowledgeable and respectful of [their] cultural context” (p. 128). Delpit (1995) also explains that when crossing cultural lines, mentors need to listen and open their eyes, ears, hearts, and minds and be willing to put beliefs on hold “to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment” (p. 46). While I certainly agree with Delpit that we must listen, I could not stop “being myself.” While I did not offer my opinions and stories freely, when the girls asked me questions, I shared my literary responses and personal connections. In fact, through being myself—in all my multiple identities as a White

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woman, teacher, coach, facilitator, and mentor—my interactions with the girls became stronger.

Meeting the Girls of Book Club

Younger Book Group

The first members to volunteer were Tia, an African American 14-year-old 9th-grader, and Joy, a Latina 14-year-old 9th-grader. Both girls had classes together and considered each other friends. Joy described herself as quiet and a good student, explaining, “I’m not the best but I do my work.” She enjoys drawing and is an avid reader, particularly of fantasy. Tia is gregarious, the most talkative of the girls in this group. She is a strong reader and student, making all As and Bs.

Recruited by Tia, Fay, a 14-year-old African American 9th-grader, explained that she and Tia had many “things in common,” but were not really “close friends.” Like Tia and Joy, Fay loves to read and draw, and she makes high grades in her classes. Sofia, a 14-year-old Latina 9th-grader who joined book club after Fay, was also recruited by Tia. She loves music and reading and volunteers at a hospital, as she has ambitions of being a surgeon. Betsy, the only 10th-grader in the group, is 15 years old and African American. She described herself as quiet and the “loner of the school.” Being a year older than the others, she did not know any of the girls in the group. Betsy’s hobbies are poetry, computers, and double dutch. She told me that she struggles in her classes, because her attendance is low, explaining she often stays home to take care of her father who is diabetic. All girls identified themselves as heterosexual. Table 1 provides an overview of the girls in the younger book group.

Older Book Group

Like the younger group, this book club started with two girls, 11th-graders Gina (Dominican) and Julie (African American/Puerto Rican), both friends and readers. Out of all the girls, 16-year-old Gina is the talker, explaining, “I’m always loud. I’m always in the way. I’m always like to myself, ‘Shut up, Gina!’” Gina’s favorite hobby is reading, and she has aspirations of going to law school. Like Gina, 16-year-old Julie described herself as a voracious reader. Her hobbies include writing, reading, and hanging out with her friends. She told me she has always done well in school, making all As and Bs.

African American and 16, Keisha was next to join book club. Her favorite hobby is drawing, and she wants to become a fashion designer. Eileen, Puerto Rican and 17, started attending with Keisha. In addition to being a singer and dancer, Eileen works as a sex educator. Latina and 16 years old, Pat is similar to Eileen in that she is soft-spoken. She enjoys reading and says she makes mostly Bs in her classes. Pat’s best friend is 16-year-old Latina Yoana, who she convinced to join book club. Yoana defined herself as the “bad girl” and the “comedian” of the group. The last to join was 17-year-old Carla (Dominican), who likes to listen to music and read. She moved to the United States when she was eight, because she said her father thought she would get a better education overseas. All of the girls defined themselves as either friends or “associates.” They all identified themselves as heterosexual, except for one who said she was “open to possibilities.” Table 2 provides an overview of the girls in the older book group.

Table 1. Younger group participant descriptions

Name	Age—Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Personality Traits ¹
Tia	Age 14—Grade 9	African American	The talker, reader, boy crazy
Joy	Age 14—Grade 9	Columbian/Peruvian	Quiet artist, day dreamer, reader
Fay	Age 14—Grade 9	Trinidadian	Quiet, fun, reader, artist, singer
Sofia	Age 14—Grade 9	Ecuadorian/Cuban	Fun, perpetual dieter, reader
Betsy	Age 15—Grade 10	African American	Loner, poet, outspoken

Research Methodology

For one entire school year, I collected data from my observational log of the book club, pre- and post-interviews, book club transcriptions, and written anonymous surveys. I conducted pre-interviews with all 12 girls before the book club meetings began to obtain background information; I also completed interviews at the end of the school year to document the girls' attitudes toward book club and their potential social growth. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, as were the book club discussions, for a total of 22 meetings with the younger group and 24 with the older group. I also gave the girls exit surveys to be filled out anonymously, in order to triangulate the data during analysis.

I analyzed the data both during and after data collection. Using qualitative methods, I read through the transcripts several times. On the first read, I inductively identified initial codes, which included family and peer relationships, identity issues, and reading strategies. For the purposes of this article, I then re-read the transcripts and double-coded the initial bin of peer relationships, looking for nuances and patterns in the data. On the third read, I revised and finalized my major themes for peer relationships.

The following four sections of this article will present these findings. The first two categories offer detailed descriptions of how the girls discussed their relationships with boys, specifically (a) how they grapple with understanding boys' behaviors and (b) the complexities of heterosexual romance and dat-

ing. The next two sections provide an overview of how the girls' relationships with same-sex peers have evolved, followed by the final thematic trend, which explores mean girls and bullying. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand how peer relationships are perceived and enacted by adolescent girls, while simultaneously revealing the processes of book club in order to make this happen.

Trapped in a Parking Lot: Understanding the Behavior of Boys

Conversations about male relationships were common for the girls in book club for two primary reasons: one, most of the books dealt with romantic, heterosexual relationships; and two, most of the girls were currently struggling with their own understanding of boys. Using literature and negotiated conversation, the girls created their own set of value systems when selecting partners, while simultaneously seeking to understand boys' behaviors. Oftentimes these discussions yielded insightful information about the perceptions and stereotypes the girls shared about boys in the texts and in their own lives.

Many of their discussions focused on the girls' perceived dichotomy of the boys in their own social world: the "good" versus the "bad" boy. They continually used the male characters to define and represent these two categories, and then later worked to understand the boys in their own lives. The younger group was much less sophisticated than the older group in their articulation of these differences, in that they

Table 2. Older group participant descriptions

Name	Age—Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Personality Traits ¹
Gina	Age 16—Grade 11	Dominican	The talker, the reader
Julie	Age 16—Grade 11	African American/Puerto Rican	The writer, the reader
Keisha	Age 16—Grade 11	African American	Confident and silly, fashion designer
Eileen	Age 17—Grade 11	Puerto Rican	Singer and dancer
Pat	Age 16—Grade 11	Mexican	Quiet and sweet
Yoana	Age 16—Grade 11	Ecuadorian	The comedian, the "bad girl"
Carla	Age 17—Grade 11	Dominican	Fun, "family girl"

were just beginning to have relationships with the opposite sex. In fact, throughout the year, Tia was the only girl who had a boyfriend. Despite their general naiveté, they still formulated their own standards and expectations.

The girls in both book clubs read *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* by Carolyn Mackler (2003), which chronicles Virginia's life, especially her struggles with weight. While her family judges her for the food she eats, the boy she is dating, Froggy, does not. Froggy's behaviors impressed the younger girls, who were surprised that he liked Virginia:

Tia: I think that if she loses weight, Froggy's going to be still happy.

Joy: Yeah, cause he liked her when she was fat.

Betsy: Man, that's good. She has a guy who is so into her . . . because you know boys can really be assholes. I'm sorry. They only go for what they see.

Tia: Why do [boys] always go for the short girl with long hair?

Betsy: They all go for lumps and humps.

Sofia: Boys are like if you have big boobs, you're in.

Joy: You have to be like this [*putting up her pinky finger*] or someone won't like you.

In this conversation, we can see how the connective dimension is used both to understand the text and the girls' lived experiences (Wilhelm, 2007). The girls recognized Froggy's sincerity, while simultaneously being disappointed that boys in their reality do not necessarily reflect this character. They used Froggy's character to communicate their own experiences of superficiality, in that the boys in their lives are looking more for beauty than personality.

Another quality the girls associated with boys is infidelity, which comes up repeatedly in *The True Meaning of Cleavage* by Mariah Fredericks (2004). In this young adult novel, the main character Jess is frustrated with her best friend Sari, who has an affair with Dave, a boy who is already dating someone else. The younger girls were furious with him:

Tia: That's my wifey but you my shorty. I don't get that.

Betsy: They'll say they don't have a girl. Then when it all comes together, he does have a girl. He just plays.

Joy: Yeah, they do that to you.

Betsy: That's why I hate boys.

Like the previous conversation, the girls used the male character to understand the boys in their own lives. However, here, Dave is a more accurate representation of their own experiences with boys. "Wifeys" are the girls whom boys commit to, yet "shorties" are the girls boys use. The two oppositional roles for girls in relationships were frustrating for the younger girls, as they are looking for boys who are faithful to them and their female friends.

Another perceived male quality the girls discussed is lack of communication. This topic came up while reading *Upstate* (2006) by Kalisha Buckhanon, where Antonio and Natasha struggle with their relationship. Antonio is in jail for killing his father and has a difficult time reaching out to Natasha, who is torn between living out her life and sticking by his side. The older girls criticized his interactions with Natasha, insisting he should have been more honest with her and not reacted so harshly. Julie posed to the girls, "You know what part pissed me off? The part with the letter where he's like, fuck you." The girls all screamed in agreement, angry that he could not just reveal his true feelings of pain, loneliness, insecurity, and jealousy. They all wished that he had written a different letter to her, where he articulated his true love and asked her better questions. Gina explained, "He's in jail, right? He doesn't know what's going on, what she's doing out in the streets. He doesn't ask questions. He's just insecure . . . and won't tell her he's frustrated that he isn't able to do anything for her but just sit there and write letters."

The girls then shared stories about how boys in their own lives also react to them in this manner, failing to communicate their true feelings and causing all of them great frustrations. They complained how boys often put up different "fronts," depending on the context or the peers they are hanging around.

The critiques the girls have of boys and their behaviors—superficiality, infidelity, and lack of communication—led to many discussions of the kinds of boys the girls wanted to date. Because dating is the central topic in the classic young adult book *Forever* (1996) by Judy Blume, this was the primary conversation. Here, Katherine, the main character, takes the readers through her first relationship with Michael. Unfortunately, the relationship does not last, and the older girls are frustrated with Katherine, believing she never should have broken up with Michael because he was so good to her—a quality they discussed as rare for the boys in their own lives. At the same time, however, they debated their internal contradictions:

Keisha: The nice boys are always boring.

Carla: Or ugly.

Gina: Be nice! They don't have to be ugly!

Carla: You find a nice smart boy, he's ugly. Trust me. That's why he's nice.

Keisha: I hate nice guys!

Gina: I can't be with someone who is dumb.

Pat: I can't be with someone who is stupid . . . I used to date a nice boy but he was dumb. He didn't graduate so he was taking classes to finish, and I was encouraging him to graduate but afterwards, I was like I'm not his mother. I shouldn't have to do this.

Yoana: That's like my guy. He works, but I told him he should go to college, right? And he still doesn't get it. I did so much work to get him to go that finally I filled out his college applications for him.

Gina: My problem is that I don't care if he looks good, because to me, guys that look good are cocky and they treat you worse. I love my boyfriend. I like them sweet because I'm so soft. I'm mushy. I like the romantic stuff. I like the hugs. I can't stand when they call me a bitch or a ho . . . I just can't have bad guys.

Carla: It's not that I like bad guys. It's just that I can't stand guys that are nice. They're just so damn sweet. I don't want them to be nice. I want what I can't have.

In this and similar conversations, it became clear that the girls were equally divided in their value systems when selecting a boyfriend. For Keisha, Carla, and Yoana, "nice" boys are boring and ugly, qualities they find repulsive and unattractive. This is contrasted by Gina and Pat, who insist on dating "nice" boys. Unlike the other girls, they associated good-looking boys with cockiness and vulgarity, instead selecting boys based on intelligence and willingness to reveal a softer side.

While the girls in the older group are split about value systems for boys, they reached consensus during one meeting, when discussing the "perfect man," who the girls find while reading *Jason and Kyra* (Davidson, 2005). Dana Davidson tells the romantic story of Jason and Kyra during high school. All the girls in both groups agreed that Jason has all the qualities they search for: athletic abilities, nice disposition, intelligence, money, and popularity. Both groups, however, did not see Jason as an accurate reflection of the boys in their lives. In discussing their realities in contrast to that of the text, the younger girls provided a metaphor of the "real" boys:

Tia: Guys are like parking spaces. All the good ones are taken and the ones left over—

Joy: Are crap.

Sofia: It's like at Walmart or one of those outlet stores. You have a big parking lot and they're all packed and the ones that are empty have shopping carts on them. (Polleck, 2010, p. 63)

My sense of this analogy is that the girls are generally disappointed by the boys in their lives. For both book clubs, no one boy in their social world has all the qualities they seek, and they are not the boys who they read about in our texts. Confronted with superficiality, infidelity, and lack of communication, the girls are not finding Jason or Froggy, yet within the space of book club, they can do two valuable things: express their frustrations and begin to negotiate what qualities

they do value in boys, so as to make more informed decisions in their selections of intimate partners.

The Girls on Romance and Dating

For many of the girls, romance and dating were integral components of their lives. As seen previously, they were searching for the “perfect boy” and the “perfect relationship.” Book club often became a setting where they could sort out what they wanted, expected, and needed out of love, using the books as fodder for their own aspirations. Thus, young adult literature was used for a “social purpose,” where the characters’ motivations and behaviors were used to define their own cultural and social expectations of intimacy (Probst, 1988).

As stated previously, the younger group was more inexperienced when it came to matters of the heart, but they did often share with each other what they hoped the experience would be in the future. Tia and Betsy were the only ones who previously had boyfriends, while Joy, Fay, and Sofia said they were all forbidden to date by their parents. Because of this lack of experience, the girls used the texts and feedback from each other in order to discern ways to make future romantic relationships successful. For example, while reading *Forever* (Blume, 1996), the younger girls used Katherine as a reflection of themselves:

Sofia: You have to be ready for love.

Joy: Love could just happen. One day you’re just like “I’m in love” and everything. You can’t control that. Like love is weird.

Sofia: Yeah, you get that feeling in your stomach.

Joy: I know what that’s like—even when you just look at a person.

Tia: Butterflies.

The older girls held a similar conversation about Katherine’s readiness for a relationship:

Gina: I think he was more in love with her than she was with him, and I wouldn’t call that love because if you love someone, then you won’t go to a camp

for five weeks and just forget totally about your boyfriend and get someone else.

Carla: I don’t agree, because you could love someone and get reattached to someone else.

Julie: She was just so pure. She had never been in love before so she didn’t know. Can you love somebody but yet be attracted to somebody else? She was having a dilemma. She shoulda asked for help.

These two conversations reveal the maturity of the older group, who are trying to understand Katherine’s disconnect from her current relationship. The older girls were able to more deeply explore Katherine’s experiences, as all of them have dated before. At the time of this study, Gina and Julie were in serious relationships: Gina had been with her boyfriend for ten months and Julie for seven. The rest of the girls did not have monogamous relationships that year. Eileen had just ended a one-year relationship with her boyfriend after a serious argument. Yoana explained that she was “on and off again” with her boyfriend of three years. Pat, Keisha, and Carla had previous relationships but remained single throughout the year. Keisha explained, “I just can’t stay with someone for that long cause I get annoyed very quickly. At first you see everything that you like about the person and then all the stuff you don’t know comes to bite you in your ass and you’re like what are you doing? It’s just annoying.” Carla agreed with Keisha, saying she is a “complicated person” who tires of boys, attributing this to “low tolerance.”

Despite the older and younger girls’ differences, they all used the texts for several different purposes as they worked to understand and maintain their own relationships. These conversations usually involved the discussion of qualities the girls felt relationships needed in order to be successful. For example, while reading *Upstate* (Buckhanon, 2006), the conversation began with the older girls’ anger about Antonio’s “controlling” behavior:

Keisha: He said, “I’ll allow you to do what you want to do as long as something, something,” some bullshit like that. I’m like get out of here . . . I’ll allow it. I’m like you’ll allow it? How you going to

allow me to do something? I'm my own person. I do what I want to do.

Carla: Nobody tells me what to do.

Eileen: If you're going to have insecurity, why be with the person? Why are you wasting your time? I'd be like, "Listen, you don't trust me?" That's all you need. . . . He claims he loves her? Love comes with a big package. It comes with security.

Gina: Look, people get confused. Like, I trust you, meaning like if you call me three hours late, I'm not going to be like, "Who you been with?" I'm going to say, "Did something happen to you? You okay?" Not like "Who you with?"

This conversation reveals three qualities the girls felt were integral to maintaining a relationship: trust, equality, and security. Feeling equal in a relationship was important to them. At the same time, they recognized that often insecurity leads to diminishing trust. Even though both parties may be faithful, if one person is not confident, then the levels of trust begin to crumble.

According to the girls, these feelings of insecurity not only manifest themselves in lack of trust, but also in levels of agency. The older girls wanted to be equal while simultaneously having freedom to do what they please without feeling smothered. While reading *Jason and Kyra* (Davidson, 2005), Gina connected to Kyra, explaining that her boyfriend got "on her nerves." In divulging this information, the girls discussed how equality should be revered and overprotection diminished:

Gina: It's just this constant "Call me when you do this . . . when you do that" . . . I'm like "Do you want to know when I'm peeing? Do you wanna know when I take a breath?"

Jody: Do you talk to your boyfriend about this?

Gina: No, I feel bad. I think I'm going to hurt his feelings because at one point, I was like that too. . . . I really wanted to know everything he was doing, but now I'm like "Go out with your friends. Go, go!"

Keisha: I don't like that at all. I'll be like "I'm going to chill with my friends whatever" He's like "How you going to leave me?" I'm like "You said you didn't want to go, so what the hell you talking to me for? You got friends—all the little hoodlums you be chilling with on the block. Go head!"

Gina: This is my issue! I tell him: "Listen, I'm going to hang out with my girls." He's like "Yeah, babe, have fun. Call me when you get back. I don't want you to be talking to me when you're with your friends." So I enjoy my whole day. I have fun. I call him. "So, there was no pay phone around?" "What are you talking about? You just told me to enjoy my day and not to call you!"

Keisha: Gina has the monkey on her back!

Yoana: Guys are so stupid. They be chilling with so many girls . . . then one of your guy friends tries to call you. He be like "What are you doing? Why you let him hang around with you?" I'm like "That's my cousin. What are you talking about?"

The girls here were displaying their desire for freedom and trust, as they felt constrained by their boyfriends who exhibited overprotective behaviors, both demanding of their time and restrictive about their interactions with others.

In addition to trust and freedom, the girls also agreed that personality was a factor in creating a healthy, intimate relationship. In a conversation about *The True Meaning of Cleavage* (Fredericks, 2004), Gina talked about Dave and Thea's relationship, stating that it is important to not be with someone "just like you." The following conversation ensued:

Gina: [My boyfriend and I are] total opposites! I like to talk a lot. Everyone's like "Gina, how can you go out with someone who does not talk?" 'Cause I can't go out with someone who talks.

Yoana: You can't go out with somebody that acts exactly like you 'cause this guy—me and him think alike. We yell at each other alike . . . we're like brothers—like deep inside—'cause we think, we act, we do the same things. We just don't admit it.

Together, the girls used the characters' relationships to build a set of values and criteria for creating and sustaining relationships with boys. Furthermore, they merged examples from the novel with their own experiences to construct a framework of what constitutes a successful romance: trust, equality, security, freedom, and balance in personality. This negotiation of value systems was accomplished through critiquing the characters' behaviors, often by using their own experiences to justify or

The girls worked to untangle their own stories and weave new frameworks that may transform their current and future romantic relationships.

negate the decisions the characters made. The girls' conversations thus allowed them to define their own expectations and requirements, learning from each other different ways of negotiating relationships. As described by Chambers (1996), this "public effect" of interpreting the characters' relationships and disclosing their own stories creates a space where the girls can verbally take risks and try out a variety of experiences—those within the texts and each other's (p. 14). In this way, the girls worked to untangle their own stories and weave new frameworks that may transform their current and future romantic relationships.

Changing Relationships with Same-Sex Peers

The girls in both groups not only have complex relationships with boys, but with their same-sex peers as well. Oftentimes, the girls discussed relationships between the female characters, recognizing similarities to their own experiences, specifically how these relationships are changing and becoming more complex as they get older. Unfortunately, not all their experiences with same-sex peers were positive; in fact, most shared that in the past, they had strong, healthy relationships with girls, but as they matured, these connections had become much more complicated and difficult.

Before turning to these struggles, however, it is important to note that not all of their stories were negative, especially as the girls reminisced about the

past and how situations and characters in the books reminded them of their female bonds. This conversation occurred most frequently during the reading of *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), where the girls focused on how difficult Melinda's first year of high school was, in that she was no longer friends with the girls she connected with in middle school. This conversation led the girls to discuss their own friendships previous to high school. Tia talked about her friend Cynthia and how they have been able to maintain their friendship throughout the years. Joy also shared that she is still "best friends" with girls from the fifth grade, as is Sofia with her friends from the sixth grade. The girls did say, however, that the connection since high school has been difficult to maintain, in that many of their friends go to different schools now:

Tia: They're at [another school], so they don't have time for me anymore.

Joy: 'Cause they start talking about things, and they understand what's going on, and you're like, "What are you talking about?"

Sofia: It's funny because all my friends are all in different schools, so we all have different stories, so there's never one odd left person out so we can tell stories.

Joy: Now I don't, but in the beginning I did.

Sofia: There's a lot less to talk about.

Tia: Unless you're reminiscing about the past.

Fay: I still talk to my friends since fourth grade in my old school. I talk to my friend every night or one of them, but I always talk to all of them and sometimes we hang out on the weekend and every time we're on the phone and when we don't have nothing to talk about we talk about the past.

This conversation demonstrates how the girls used Melinda's narrative to understand their own relationships with their girlfriends. While the girls spoke about them in positive ways, they still shared with one another the changes that are occurring as they get older. Finders (1997) discussed a similar dynamic between girls and their same-sex peers, exploring how

literacies can be used to help them understand and create their social position in the world: “The girls used literacy as a powerful tool to make allegiances visible, to construct boundaries around friendship circles. Literacy was a means of self-presentation . . . the girls used literacy to control, moderate, and measure their growth into adulthood” (p. 23). The girls in the younger group actively used a written text, *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), as a tool to help them unravel their own friendships and to understand how these relationships change as they get older.

The girls in the older group shared similar stories about the importance of their female friends. Similar to the previous conversation, the older girls spoke about how Virginia, the main character in *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Round Things* (Mackler, 2003), tried to maintain her friendships from middle school. Eileen made a connection to Virginia’s experience, discussing how it was hard for her in high school, in that she had no friends and had low self-esteem. Keisha told Eileen that she, too, felt insecure in high school but shared, “Once you make that one friend, it’ll make you want to do things with them. Go have fun. That’s what brings everything back up.”

The older group also mirrored the younger group in their reminiscence of the past:

Keisha: The ones I had in middle school, we grew apart. We live in the same neighborhood, but we just grew apart, especially with girls.

Gina: Yes! You can’t just be with one person and be happy with them forever.

Carla: I’ve lost track of so many of my friends.

Julie: It’s like they change.

Keisha: It’s like *you* change. Girls change faster than boys do.

Gina: Girls, we just go through so many changes. Like me, I love make up. My best friend in elementary school, she was kind of tomboyish. When we got older, I was so girlie, and she was so not. We didn’t have nothing in common anymore.

Because girls are changing as they enter high school,

their relationships with other girls change as well. This is due not just to physical changes, but personality and interest differences, too.

Despite some of the positive experiences and desires for connections with their same-sex peers, the girls primarily focused on negative dynamics of their interactions with other girls. In fact, the older girls overwhelmingly agreed that having male friends was better. When reading *Upstate* (Buckhanon, 2006), the girls discussed how they preferred male to female friends:

Carla: You get to see things from their perspective.

As a guy, they give you a lot of advice about other guys. Girls are just too picky sometimes . . . or too sensitive. Guys don’t really care.

Keisha: I’ve been hanging with more boys since the eighth grade. I think it’s more because we’re more the same person. There’s just something weird about it. We have the same issues.

Julie: Girls can be mad grimey and stab you in the back.

Pat: That’s true. Sometimes girls can be selfish, even though they have the same interests. Guys are better, but I do hang out with Yoana 24-7, but she thinks like a guy. That’s why she’s so cool. She thinks like a guy but like a girl, too.

Because of the girls’ negative experiences with other girls and because of the stereotypical qualities of girls being weak, jealous, or backstabbing, female adolescents often align themselves with boys, a problematic construct as it demonstrates self-hatred based on gender. Brown (2003) explained, “We are led to believe that boys and men have knowledge and power and that befriending them, being chosen by them, will offer power by association” (p. 154). In this way, girls are often seen as more disposable than boys, which may be due to the idea that many girls feel they have more agency when relating with other girls. While they have more power when confronting females, this agency may be more destructive as a way toward self-preservation.

In having these conversations, the girls also tried to understand why these disconnections occurred.

They hypothesized that friendships became more strained because of the different dynamics of high school. Specifically, this phenomenon was illustrated as the girls discussed *The True Meaning of Cleavage* (Fredericks, 2004). The girls were outraged—but not surprised—that Sari neglected her best friend, Jess, for both a boy and popularity. The older girls analyzed this situation:

Keisha: On Jess’s side, it was like she was more the “I’m just going to hang out with this person because that’s my best friend.” She doesn’t stretch herself out to other people, so when Sari went off with David, she felt by herself. When you do that—just keep yourself to just one person—it makes it even worse when something happens between you and your friend. You’re lonely. You don’t want to be lonely.

Gina: When they started high school, they started to like different things, and they just started to split apart.

Keisha: High school is a very—

Julie: Mean place.

Carla: It’s a turning point.

Keisha: You really grow up in high school because it’s like certain things that you realize that you do that you don’t want to make a habit of it, so you change it and then all your friends might think you’re changing. Just being better than them. That’s not it. It’s like you just want to be a better person.

The evaluation here of Jess and Sari’s friendship demonstrates how book club provided a forum for the girls to grapple with why oftentimes female friendships are not sustainable. The text itself was pivotal, in that it mirrored the girls’ own experiences, allowing them to participate in the connective dimension of reader response theory. The conversations, however, are equally important, in that they allow the girls to share commonalities and struggles so that the fictional and lived experiences are not enacted alone.

The girls also hypothesized that changes in relationships with same-sex peers occurred because

of boys. At this stage in their development, many heterosexual girls are beginning to experiment with their boyfriends and their sexuality. The girls explained that because of this new focus, often boys are put before their girlfriends. While discussing *The True Meaning of Cleavage* (Fredericks, 2004), the girls deconstructed the relationship between Sari and Jess and their own lives:

Eileen: There’s a lesson to learn: Never put a guy before your best friend.

Julie: Yeah. He wasn’t even worth it.

Keisha: Then that’s really not your friend.

Gina: What’s the definition of putting a guy before your friend?

Keisha: It’s being obsessed with this one guy. If they are replacing the person because you don’t hang out. You’re dropping your friends for someone else. This is what my mother told me: boys come and go. Friends are forever, and it’s true.

Carla: How do you know they’re really your close friends? Like I consider them my friends, but then again you always have that in the back of your head like, “What if this person denies me?”

Yoana: There’s always one or two friends that you always put first.

Gina: What about the friend that you do trust is not going to wait? Let’s say that your best friend . . . is jealous. She’s talking behind your back about the guy you’re with. Although you still want to be close and talk on the phone and the person is always busy and, on top of that, she’s talking behind your back.

Keisha: She was never really your friend.

Gina: She did the same exact thing, you know, always on the phone with him. It’s not that she neglected me . . . it was like we could chill but they used to talk more on the phone than with me, and I was always saying I’m happy for [her] . . . I asked

her what's going on—never feeling jealousy even though I didn't have a boyfriend at the time. When the situation was turned and she and her boyfriend were not all that great and I had a boyfriend, she would start saying . . . that I'm neglecting her.

Julie: She's a hypocrite.

Gina: We spoke and I was like, "I'm sorry for neglecting you 'cause I have been on the phone with him all the time," because I can't see him every day like I see her. . . . She felt that I was not good to her because I was not calling her, but I'm like I see you every day . . . I don't see him at all. . . . We spoke it out and everything and . . . she's holding something against me. . . . I don't know what else to do.

Pat: She probably just has a bad history of being jealous.

Gina: But why would she be jealous of me?

Keisha: Because you have all the attention, and she doesn't.

Carla: A lot of people are jealous of each other. You know that saying, "Don't let boys come before your friends?" You be with your boyfriend 24-7, more than you be with your friends. So you know him more than you know her because you're with him.

In this discussion, the girls began by exploring the "lesson" of the book and then analyzed the female characters' motivations. From there, the girls unraveled their own stories and then analyzed social roles, particularly within female friendships. This dialogue then inspired personal connections, where the girls, specifically Gina, shared her personal connections to the text. The girls then offered advice to each other, thus acting as agents of change so that in the future, they can construct and sustain healthy and successful female friendships.

The Bella Mafia: Back Stabbing and Bullying

Losing touch, dealing with changes, and separating from girlfriends were common experiences for

the girls; however, sometimes these interactions with same-sex peers were cruel, harsh, and damaging. When interviewing adolescents, Way (1996) found these same narratives, where teenagers expressed extreme difficulties in trusting their same-sex peers: "Trusting one's same-sex peers may become increasingly difficult for both teenage girls and boys as they become involved in romantic relationships and begin to 'abandon' their friends for their boyfriends or girlfriends or 'steal' each other's romantic partners"

(p. 140). It is not surprising, then, that feeling betrayed became a common complaint that all the girls expressed during book club.

The book that represented this conflict most effectively is *Speak* (Anderson, 1999). Betrayed and abandoned by her best friends, Melinda becomes an outcast during her first year of high school. Being unaware of her rape, Melinda's friends ignore her and treat her maliciously. The younger girls were appalled by the friends' behavior, yet at the same time, were not surprised:

Tia: I know what it is like to be betrayed by a friend. Don't we all, right?

Fay: Don't we all! I'm just tired of that. I'm tired of people just trying to play you, and they want to come up to you and be like oh what up? . . . People try to play you and the next minute when they need you, they want to come up and be like "Can you call me?" Then when you try to help, they not there.

Sofia: I think for the hundreds of girls who are nice and sweet and kind, [there are] a million girls who are catty.

This reflection on the text and the girls' understanding of the social roles females play are what Mayher (1990) coined as "exploratory talk" (p. 241),

The girls then offered advice to each other, thus acting as agents of change so that in the future, they can construct and sustain healthy and successful female friendships.

where the girls created a social community that tried to make sense of the reading by sharing their perceptions “with others and learning further from similar situations” (p. 241). In this way, the text provided the girls with the fodder needed to understand themselves and the world. It also gave them an opportunity to reveal and reflect on their own lived experiences, as demonstrated below:

Tia: I was friends with [this girl]. She liked [my boyfriend] when we were going out. . . . Then when we broke up, [she] lied to me and told me that he call[ed] me a ho, and then gets caught in the lie 'cause he calls me while he's on the phone with her while my phone is on silent, and she's like, “I never said that to Tia. I don't know where she's getting that from.”

Fay: I don't get people sometimes. I went through that, and now Sylvia keep trying to come sit next to me and give me letters. I don't be saying nothing.

Joy, Sofia, and Betsy all later agreed with Fay and Tia, divulging their distrust of other girls and their frustration with girls' betrayal and cattiness.

Another theme that arose from the book club conversations was experiences with collective cruelty. This was demonstrated again while reading *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), when the younger girls discussed the fictional group of female bullies called the “Marthas.” According to the younger girls, the ninth grade at their school had a similar group who they called the “Bella Mafia”:

Tia: You just know not to mess with them . . . The Bella Mafia. . . . They're not ghetto but they're mean bitches. . . . They will sit there and talk about everybody in the class.

Joy: They cannot stop. They do not know what is the limit and the funny thing is that they don't have more than all of us combined.

Tia: Because one of the girls in the group is ugly! How can you call somebody else ugly? Have you looked in a mirror?

Joy: I think that if they were to ask the class who

would you vote out of this class, they would be it right away. You know why I hate people like that? 'Cause sometimes they overdo it and then they think it's really funny, but it's not. It gets really old.

Fay: It happened today. These girls get on my nerves. . . . They mess with people. They just annoy you. They know they mess with people and they still do it and laugh about it.

Betsy: They're trying to make themselves look cute . . . I have girls in my class who do the same thing. They be shouting people out for no reason and they think it's so funny. The people in my class don't want to get back at them because they scared.

Because of the representation of the “Marthas” in the novel, the girls were able to collectively identify and articulate their frustrations with the bullies at their own school.

An important event that occurred out of this conversation, however, was that the girls eventually began to discuss how to confront these problems, thus empowering themselves and each other. The younger girls talked about how the Bella Mafia specifically bullied another student, Cynthia, and how they work to protect her:

Tia: I normally curse people out for Cynthia.

Fay: When I ask what they said, she's like, “Nothing.” I'm like, “Tell me,” and she won't be telling me nothing, and then later on they say something and I look at them.

Joy: They say something, and I'm like, “Just leave her alone!” Why do they hate her?

Fay: You can't let what they say stop you.

Tia: These group of girls . . . have been talking shit about me for awhile now, but I'm not going to do anything about it. It's not that I don't stand up for myself. It's just that I sometimes let things slide until they do something really small, and then I might flip. I'm the type of person that I'm like, “Okay, they'll get what's coming to them later.”

Joy: I leave it alone, because I don't like to look for fights. But if they really start to target me, then I have to. I wouldn't do stupid things like fight. . . . Fighting doesn't do anything. You just get a black eye. And then what? Nothing.

As in the previous progression of conversation, the girls began with interpreting the text, specifically processing the emotions and frustrations of Melinda. The girls then made a series of connections with her, revealing their stories of mistreatment and verbal abuse. Finally, the girls became agents of change, in that they shared with one another ways to confront these issues, thus providing for a transformative experience. This exploratory talk allowed them to articulate their understanding of the text and their world.

Unfortunately, the verbal abuse was not where the mistreatment ended for girl bullies at their school. In fact, often their conflicts with these girls led to violence. In our same discussion of *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), Betsy revealed how she got suspended for getting into a fight with a female bully:

I was in my science class. I had all my stuff in one bag. I get in there and half of my food is gone, so I was like "Aw, hell no. You did not eat my food." She tells me after, "Betsy, I took your food". . . so I threw the food. I was like, "Take the food. Take it. Take my money." I threw my money on the floor and left it there.

Betsy told us the fight began in the hallway after class and continued outside of the school. She explained that she was so mad that she followed the girl home, shouting at her the whole time. The verbal fight eventually escalated to a physical fistfight.

Tia also shared how she almost got into a fight with another girl:

Her name is Toya and . . . I was dancing crazy . . . in the hallway. Next thing you know, somebody popped a joke and everybody . . . started laughing. . . . This girl comes up to us and is like, "If you want to talk shit, then talk shit." So we're like "What?" I'm sitting here like "Did I say something wrong?" My friends were like, "No" . . . so I go . . . into my class and I come out and I'm talking and Toya comes up to me and she's yelling at me. She's like "If you want to talk shit about me, I'll fight you right now." I was like "I don't know you" . . . That all happened for no reason.

Joy also divulged how she, too, nearly got into a fistfight in middle school:

This girl Julia she's real outspoken. . . . I didn't talk to her that much. I just stayed out of her way 'cause I don't like getting into problems . . . but if they take me to this point, then I will stand up to them. So these girls started hating this other girl, and they did so many mean things. In gym, they took a basketball. Julia threw it at her head. I was like "Julia, why did you do that?" She was like "So?" I said, "Don't do that. That's messed up."

Joy explained that Julia wanted to fight her for this after school, but Joy said "forget it" because she thought the whole situation was "stupid." Brown (2003) also found abusive physical and verbal behaviors in her work with female adolescents. She uses Freire's theories on horizontal violence and Tappan's appropriated oppression to explain that girls take out their frustrations on other girls because they do not have the power to take anger out on the oppressors:

When girls enact horizontal violence by using negative stereotypes about femininity against other girls, they do so to distance themselves and thus avoid being victimized by those stereotypes in turn. By joining those with the power to define and enforce such stereotypes, however, they also affirm them as "Reality" and ensure that these stereotypes live to control and denigrate another generation of girls. (p. 149)

This phenomenon is revealed in the texts and the girls' experiences. The powerful mechanism of betrayal combined with projective identification leads to defense mechanisms and oftentimes violence.

These dangerous behaviors and painful interactions are difficult for the girls; the book club, however, is a place where they can work out these issues, using the characters' worlds to understand their problems with female bullies and providing them with opportunities to share their stories and empower each other to overcome horizontal violence and same-sex oppression.

Implications for our Schools

Powerful, pivotal, and controversial topics discussed above, such as horizontal violence, sex, oppression, and intimacy, are more often than not ignored in classrooms across the nation. While some educators are tackling such difficult issues with their students, other teachers, librarians, and administrators search out alternative spaces where young adults can find a voice and an audience in which to release some of their problems with other peers. The findings pre-

sented here demonstrate that these conversations can and should occur within our schools. At the end of the school year, in anonymous written surveys and in individual interviews, I asked the girls to describe the experience of book clubs; almost half of the girls used the nomenclature of “family.” Tia called book club “Oprah’s group,” while Keisha said the sessions were “therapeutic.” Joy explained, “You could express yourself here.”

When communicating how the book club specifically impacted their understanding of their peers, Eileen explained, “I learned how to deal with different relationships,” while other girls like Gina said the conversations helped in understanding intimate experiences. Furthermore, while it was evident from the discussions above that the girls had tumultuous relationships with their same-sex peers, their interactions within the book club were much different. All of the girls told me they are closer now and consider each other friends:

Gina: Pat and me and Yoana got closer. Keisha, me, Eileen, and Carla have been close since forever, but those other girls—now we all hang out. It’s cool. I loved my group.

Fay: We can talk about stuff and you have people that you can relate to.

Sofia: We would see each other on Thursdays or in the hallways or say hi or like Joy, I take the train with her now . . . the books just brought us together . . . and we talked about our own experiences.

Betsy: I figured once I walked into the group, I wasn’t going to be able to relate to anybody about certain situations that I had, but I was able to. And gaining experiences was really good ’cause they’re really cool, and they all had different opinions and ideas about certain things, but most likely we all agreed on the same things. So it was a good . . . I liked working with the girls . . . I felt like I’ve known them a long time. . . . I feel closer to them now.

Through the conversations and the texts, the girls created a bond with one another that felt safe and nurturing. Brown (2003) asserts, “Those girls who remain loyal and supportive of other girls resist these

divisions in spite of the personal and social costs and, through their relationships and commitment to other girls, imagine other possibilities for success and collaboration” (p. 33). Thus, we can learn from these findings that book club is a powerful forum where girls can learn to be loyal and supportive to one another through a safe environment that uses young adult literature to understand the impact of peers on their own motivations, emotions, and behaviors.

Furthermore, when combining this research with other studies on book clubs (Appleman, 2006; Broughton, 2002; Daniels, 2002; Smith, 2000; Hill & VanHorn, 1995), we see that book clubs can be conducted in any setting—whether rural, urban, or suburban—and with a variety of populations. This forum allows us to both provide a way to increase student discussion around integral issues in their lives *and* document and understand the reading experiences and peer relationships of adolescents, thus making it possible to enhance their social-emotional and academic development. The uniqueness of book club allows students the freedom to discuss issues that are often not addressed nor valued in the classroom. Furthermore, for students who may be marginalized, shy, or withdrawn, these spaces can be crucial environments where they find their voices and receive empowerment from their peers.

One year after graduation, I spoke to Joy and Fay about the impact book club had on them. Joy explained, “It got me involved in people. It opened me up. A piece of me opened, and in that room full of screaming girls, I had to open up and that helped a lot.” Fay echoed Joy’s sentiments, reflecting:

I mean I was shy. I felt like I always had the ability to speak up in ways, but I just never did it sometimes. I think book club helped me to . . . participate. . . . I think book club helped me be a little bit more proactive about what I want to say. Even, I don’t know, like especially the way you were. You kind of made it obvious to everybody that whatever everybody had to say was important. I think that was key.

By creating a space where students’ voices are heard and honored, students can safely take risks, vicariously placing themselves into texts or trying on the characters’ experiences and behaviors, so that they can enact pivotal current or future scenarios within a nurturing environment.

The tools, however, that make this possible are those offered by the body of young adult literature

that is both relatable and accessible to adolescents. A burgeoning genre, achieving great success and popularity among diverse populations, these texts directly address such fundamental problems as peer relationships. Research supports the use of this genre in that young adult books provide a realistic perspective of adolescent experiences (Probst, 1988; Smith, 2000). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) advocates for these kinds of materials because students can create links between young adult literature and their “past experience and present level of emotional maturity” (p. 42).

Specifically, as evidenced above, young women like the ones in this study need places where they can work through their relationships with peers on their own terms. Pastor, McCormick, and Fine (1996) explain, “Girls’ and women’s groups can provide insular homeplaces where young women can begin to learn how to transform their isolated analyses and make the ‘personal political’ with profound opportunities for development” (p. 30). The young adult books within book clubs are a unique way for them to confront these issues and later apply them to their own lives, as they work through their interactions with others. When school communities provide girls with this kind of support about how to engage with others and deal with issues of oppression, the girls may be more likely to question hierarchal ideologies, speak up for themselves, and feel less traumatized by problematic relationships.

One year after graduation, Sofia spoke to this very critical phenomenon of the power behind book club and its impact on adolescence:

A lot of the kids at our school just do what they want. It’s a very rebellious age. It’s a time where you don’t wanna accept what the authorities are telling you. You don’t wanna accept what your parents are telling you. You don’t wanna accept what your teachers are telling you. You just wanna fight it all, and it’s just natural for us at that age to feel that way. And having something like this, something controlled and something that you can rely on for—weekly, you know every Thursday, book club. It lets you sort of release those feelings of oppression. You sort of feel something within yourself and within your life, and you wanna get out and do something different.

If we create the time and the space for these experiences, perhaps young women will echo Sofia’s sense of agency—thus feeling more empowered when engaging in intimate relationships and more likely to forge important and powerful connections with others.

Note

1. These personality traits are directly quoted from the girls during the individual interviews I conducted with them before the book clubs began.

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Appendix: Young Adult Literature Read during Book Clubs

Author	Book	Synopsis	Peer Issues
Anderson, Laurie Halse	<i>Speak</i>	Melinda negotiates with family and peer relationships as she deals with being date raped.	Girlfriends, cliques, girl fighting, bullying, coping, understanding boys, sex
Blume, Judy	<i>Forever</i>	Katherine experiences her first boyfriend and sexual relationship with Michael.	Sex, romantic love, understanding boys, being female, dating
Brahares, Ann	<i>Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants</i>	A group of four close female friends struggle with a variety of issues from family to boyfriends.	Being female, understanding boys
Buckhanon, Kalisha	<i>Upstate</i>	After Antonio is put in jail for killing his father, he and Natasha's relationship spins out of control.	Girlfriends, understanding boys, sex, romantic love, dating, being female
Childress, Alice	<i>Rainbow Jordan</i>	Raised in an impoverished neighborhood, Rainbow deals with issues of familial neglect.	Understanding boys, sex, girlfriends
Davidson, Dana	<i>Jason and Kyra</i>	Jason and Kyra work toward building their relationship, despite pressures from family and peers.	Sex, understanding boys, girlfriends, self-esteem, dating, romantic love
Ewing, Lynne	<i>Party Girl</i>	Kata struggles with her best friend's murder, her relationship with her mother, and gang life.	Sex, pregnancy, understanding boys, being female
Fredericks, Mariah	<i>The True Meaning of Cleavage</i>	After entering high school, Jess sees how difficult life can be, as she begins to lose her best friend.	Girlfriends, understanding boys, sex, girl fighting, being female, dating
Mackler, Carolyn	<i>The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things</i>	Overweight and unpopular, Virginia searches for herself while negotiating issues with her parents, her brother, and a love interest.	Understanding boys, girlfriends, bullying, being female, self-esteem, being yourself
McCormick, Patricia	<i>Cut</i>	Dealing with depression caused by her family, Callie begins to cut herself so she can feel again.	Girlfriends, self-esteem, being yourself, being female
Sapphire	<i>Push</i>	Now with two children and HIV, Precious must find the strength to leave her emotionally, physically, and sexually abusive parents.	Sexual harassment, being female
Williams, Rita Garcia	<i>Like Sisters on the Homefront</i>	After getting pregnant for the second time, Gayle is sent south by her mother to get her life in order.	Sex, being female, understanding boys



The Worst Tomboy Ever

I'm not the kind of writer who has to know everything about her characters going into a book. Most of the time, when I sit down to start writing, I know very little: the main character's full name, the book's premise, maybe the first names of one or two supporting players, and that's pretty much it. But there are a handful of questions that I always find myself asking as I write those first few chapters, a motley list of things I end up wanting to know about the characters I'll be spending a large chunk of my waking hours with for the foreseeable future.

I like to know if my characters have any brothers or sisters, and if so, where they fall in the birth order.

I like to know how early they get up in the morning and whether or not their socks typically match (mine almost never do).

If my main character is a girl, I like to know how often she wears her hair in a ponytail and where she keeps extra ponytail holders when her hair is down.

And last but not least, I like to know about my characters' scars: how they got them, what they look like, and whether or not they're

the kind of thing that other people notice at all.

Bryn, the main character in *Raised by Wolves* and *Trial by Fire*, wears her hair in a ponytail whenever she wants it out of her face—which, considering she spends her free time running, fighting, and training to do both of the above, is more often than not.

She starts out the first book an only child, but since she was raised in the middle of a werewolf pack, there are a lot of people she counts as family who aren't related to her by blood.

Bryn doesn't wear socks unless she absolutely has to, and she has three parallel scars—scratch marks—over her hipbone, given to her by the pack's alpha when she was four years old. For Bryn, the scar holds actual, ceremonial meaning, but even in less extreme cases, I'm a believer that you can tell a lot about a character—or a person—by hearing the stories behind their scars.

From that perspective, it seems appropriate that looking at my own life helps me sort out the parts that influenced me to write the *Raised by Wolves* series. Unlike the mark on Bryn's hip, my scars aren't

particularly big or noticeable, and none of them involved overcoming the odds in the way that Bryn has her entire life. My scars are little, the kind of thing you don't even notice unless you're looking, but they tell you a lot about me—and why I write the things I do.

The Worst Tomboy Ever

99% of the scars on my body were acquired before age twelve, most of them before age eight. Every single one of them can be summed up with a single phrase: *Worst. Tomboy. Ever.* I'm naturally a pretty girly person, but growing up, I was surrounded on all sides by guys. My only sibling is a brother, two years older than myself. Our next-door neighbors had three boys who were four, eight, and ten years older than me, respectively. By the time I was in kindergarten, there were a half dozen other boys on our block and exactly one other girl, who was eleven when I was five. I was the youngest and the smallest and the absolutely most determined to keep up with kids literally twice my size.

Seriously, of the guys in my old neighborhood? Four of them

(including my older brother) are now over six foot five.

Suffice it to say that there were many games of pickup basketball in which I never once managed to lay hands on the ball. There were also many games of “hide and seek” in which I was never found. I spent my formative years thinking that I was some kind of hiding prodigy, but eventually, I realized that no one was looking for me, and with that realization came an implicit understanding: if I wanted to be a part of things, I couldn’t just sit back and wait for people to come find me.

I had to find them.

I also had to keep up. And when I really just *couldn’t*—because, hey, I was the youngest and the smallest and they had me outnumbered about a zillion to one—I still had to try, because if the boys were going to leave me behind, gosh darn it, I was going to make them *work* to do it.

As I’m sure my brother—who is one of my favorite people and with whom I’m very close—would tell you, I was a very vexing, very stubborn little sister.

As a result, I fell out of a lot of trees. I skinned a lot of knees. I made an alliance with one of the oldest boys in the neighborhood, in a calculated Pre-K effort to even the score—but I remember *knowing*, with all of my four-year-old soul, that I would always be the smallest and the youngest and the one who had to fight to keep up.

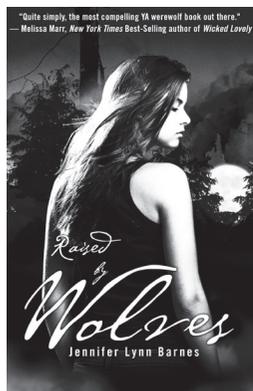
And if someone got hurt? It was probably going to be me.

I have a scar on my hairline from getting hit in the head with a diving stick at the local pool. There’s a patch of slightly discol-

ored skin on my left knee, from one of numerous dives I took on the pavement. The knuckle on my right middle finger is bigger than it should be from being jammed roughly eight million times, and there’s a small vertical line on my upper lip, whose origin I believe began with the phrase “Catch!”

That’s what happens when you’re the baby. And the only girl. And really, really bad at being a tomboy, despite your best efforts to the contrary.

In *Raised by Wolves*, Bryn is in a similar situation—not because she’s not tough—she is—but



because no matter what she does, she is always going to be the smallest and the slowest and the most likely to lose a fight. She’s a human girl who has grown up surrounded almost entirely by werewolves, and it’s just a fact of her life that no matter what she does, she’ll never be as fast as they are or as strong or as lethal. She’ll never be able to take them in a fair fight, and she knows it—but that doesn’t stop her from pushing herself.

It doesn’t stop her from trying.

Not surprisingly, given my own background, in addition to being the only human among her generation in the pack, Bryn is also one of the only girls. In her world, female werewolves are very rare and only occur as half of a set of fraternal twins. As such, the males are very

protective of the females—and as much as Bryn has to fight to keep up, she has to fight doubly hard to convince them that she’s a big girl who can take care of herself.

Remember that brother I mentioned? The one who’s six foot five? He is, to this day, of the opinion that his little sister should never, ever date. He also has a habit of watching the movie *Taken* every time I’m getting ready to leave the country and then calling to coach me in the art of *not* getting kidnapped. If he could, he’d probably fly around with me and glare at anyone who even thought of looking at me askance—and any guy who thought of looking at me *at all*.

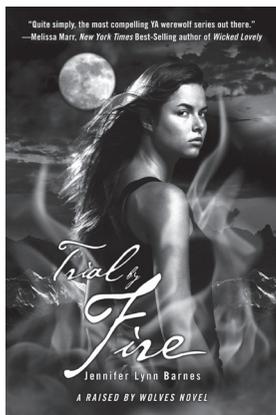
When I sat down to write *Raised by Wolves*, there was never a point where I thought about it and said, “I’m going to write a book about what it means to have to be scrappy, to have to fight tooth and nail just to have a prayer of a chance of *almost* keeping up. And it’s also going to be a book about what it means to be an independent girl who gets underestimated *because* she’s a girl, and who has to fight to keep other people from putting her under glass.”

But, you know, I skinned a lot of knees growing up, and I’m a firm believer that when people say “write what you know,” the most important thing is to write what you *emotionally* know. I write about spies and werewolves, faeries and demon hunters, and a whole slew of other things that I don’t really know—and for the most part, I do very little research. But consciously or not, when a character or premise sticks with me enough to make me want to spend a year

of my life writing and rewriting and polishing a book, it's because it strikes some kind of chord with me. It's because, on some level, I can relate.

That's part of the reason that I feel like one of the most important things an aspiring writer can do—in addition to reading a lot and writing a lot—is to get out and live life. The more experiences you have, the more you know. You might be able to get information from reading or research, but the feelings? The emotional authenticity? That comes from living.

I started writing professionally when I was still a teenager, and part of me was always afraid that



I might look back ten years down the line and think, “Wow, I spent so much time writing books that I missed out on a lot.” And then I'd be out of college and older and wouldn't have had any life experiences other than writing. And if that happened, I figured that I'd eventually run out of things to write about. In order to circumvent such an outcome, I had two rules for my double life as a college student and an author.

First, I was going to major in whatever struck my fancy—even if it had nothing whatsoever to do with English, writing, or books.

And second—I wrote after everyone else went to bed, because

that way, I could be sure I wasn't sacrificing anything other than sleep. I was less well rested than I might have been otherwise, but it was worth it, because there were so many things that I wouldn't have had the chance to experience. It was good for me as a person *and* as a writer.

Because you never know where you're going to get an idea for a book.

Monkey Girl

In addition to scars of the “Worst Tomboy Ever” variety, I also have a tiny, pinpoint-sized scar where my right hand meets my wrist, and one that looks like a fork in the road on the middle finger on my left hand. I refer to them as “monkey scars”—though one of them technically came from working with lemurs.

In middle and high school, when people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, the answer was always “a writer and”—what followed the “and” varied. I went through a doctor phase. And a lawyer phase. Somehow, I ended up a scientist. Starting my sophomore year in college, I worked as a research assistant for a professor whose specialty was primate cognition. I eventually went on to grad school, designing my own experiments and spending chunks of time at a variety of field sites, one of which we affectionately refer to as “Monkey Island.”

The island itself is relatively small—you can hike from one side to the other in a little over twenty minutes—but it's home to nearly a thousand free-ranging rhesus monkeys. No humans live on the island, so if you're among the small num-

ber of researchers who travel there via boat each morning, it doesn't take long to realize that you're massively outnumbered. It also doesn't take long to realize that the whole “Oh, they're so cute and cuddly and funny!” thing is nothing more than monkey propaganda.

I've studied many species of primates in a variety of different locations, and while they are occasionally cute and often funny, “cuddly” isn't nearly as apt a description as “cunning.” These are wild animals, and during my first summer on the island, firsthand experience taught me that thinking like a human around animals who, in many ways, do not is a recipe for disaster.

For example, you might think, “Hey, that monkey is smiling at me!” And you might be very, very wrong, because the monkey facial expression that looks the most like a human smile is a fear grimace, and chances are pretty good that the monkey who's making it at you *doesn't* want you to come any closer.

Eventually, that first summer, I started picking up on the subtleties—the posture, the facial expressions, the importance of eye gaze and the fact that looking certain monkeys straight in the eye might be seen (by them) as a challenge. In some ways, it's like speaking another language—and without even realizing I was doing it, that's something I integrated into Bryn's perspective in *Raised by Wolves*. Growing up around werewolves has made her more or less fluent in the unspoken—and animal—cues that define even their human interactions. Bryn knows what it might cost her if she meets a dominant

wolf's gaze head-on, and she's just as aware of what it communicates if she looks away. A lifetime of experience has taught her how to hold her head, how to keep from showing fear, and how to read their body language for signs of danger.

She's pretty much a werewolf whisperer, and even though that wasn't something I intentionally set out to do, it impacts everything she says and does. Ultimately, the fact that werewolves don't always think about things like violence and survival in human terms becomes one of the driving forces behind the conflicts and themes of the series. The biggest example of this can be summed up in a single word: *hierarchy*. Bryn's mentor in the books—a thousand-year-old werewolf named Callum—is the alpha of the pack she grew up in, and the fact that he is alpha means that he can't always behave the way he would if the two of them were human. Hierarchy matters to werewolves, and a challenge to the alpha is settled in ways best described as *brutal* or *vicious*.

Like my experiences learning how to read monkeys' posture, expressions, and behavior, the importance of hierarchy to pack animals—and specifically the importance of knowing where a given individual falls in that hierarchy—was something I learned firsthand. My first summer on Monkey Island, after I'd just started to feel comfortable as one of the only humans surrounded by a thousand wild animals, I ran into a fairly typical Monkey Island problem.

I wanted my experimental apparatus. Unfortunately, the monkey who was sitting on it wanted it,

too. I waited for him to get up and move. He showed no inclination whatsoever to do so. I inched closer and closer to him, in an attempt to make him just uncomfortable enough to get up to leave.

The monkey was not impressed. He did not get up and leave.

I remember that he looked so peaceful there, sitting on my apparatus, like he was one with the monkey world. I felt horrible for what I had to do next, and even apologized to him for it. I believe the dialogue went something like this:

“Sorry, Mr. Monkey, but they said that if something like this happened, I should just make a mildly threatening motion, and even though you seem like a very sweet, albeit *gargantuan* monkey, I'm going to have to—[insert bloodcurdling scream here].”

I'd been told that most monkeys respond to this type of threat by scampering off—but, as it turned out, the monkey sitting on my apparatus wasn't like most monkeys. Of the thousand monkeys on the island, he had, at one point, been *numero uno*, the alpha of the largest, strongest group on the island—and, therefore, not the monkey a scrawny human girl wanted to halfheartedly threaten.

On the bright side, the monkey did get off my apparatus.

On the down side, he immediately leapt *at me*.

I took off running. He ran after me. I kept running. So did he. I was screaming. He was screaming.

Luckily, this story does not end with me acquiring a rather large and impressive monkey scar. But

it *could have*—all because I didn't know that the monkey I was dealing with was far enough up in the island's hierarchy that he wouldn't respond well to that kind of challenge.

I didn't decide to write a book about werewolves because I had firsthand experience with pack animals. I didn't even make that connection until a friend read the book and pointed out to me that it had that particular aspect of my college experience written all over it. But much like growing up as the youngest and the only girl, the time I've spent on Monkey Island—and at other field sites—has shaped the way I think about the world, and those are the kinds of things that naturally work their way into books.

I'm currently hard at work writing the third book in the Raised by Wolves series (book two, *Trial by Fire*, came out in June). I'm still living a double life, as a PhD student and a writer, and I can see that reflected in Bryn's growing realization that she's always going to be pulled between two worlds, too—but honestly?

I don't think either one of us would have it any other way.

When she's not writing about werewolves, Jennifer Lynn Barnes spends her time playing with monkeys and four-year-old children (who have more in common than one might think), because she's working on a PhD in developmental psychology and does research on child and primate cognition. In the course of her life, she's been a Fulbright Scholar, a debutante, a competitive cheerleader, a volleyball player, and a devoted fan of the supernatural, the spooky, and the surreal. She graduated from

Yale University in 2006 with a degree in cognitive science and Cambridge University in 2007 with a master's in psychiatry. She wrote her first published novel when she was still a teenager and has since written six others, including *Raised by Wolves*,

Tattoo, Fate, and The Squad series. Her obsessions include all things Joss Whedon, potential superpowers (of which she has several, including, but not limited to, the ability to get ready in under three minutes in the morning, really good parking mojo,

and occasionally prophetic dreams), the psychology of fiction, and things that go bump in the night. When she's not visiting Monkey Island or writing in Irish castles, she splits her time between New Haven, Connecticut, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Call for Candidates for CEL 2012 Election

In the 2012 election, CEL members will choose an Associate Chair and two Members-at-Large. The Nominating Committee is now ready to accept nominees for next year's election. *To be eligible for Associate Chair*, a nominee must have been or currently be serving as an elected or appointed member of the CEL Executive Committee. The Associate Chair has many duties, such as presiding at business meetings in the absence of the Chair and coordinating the CEL State Liaison Network and the Exemplary Leadership award. The term of the Associate Chair is six years (two as Associate Chair, two as Chair, and two as Past Chair). *To be eligible for Member-at-Large*, a nominee generally will have attended two or more CEL conventions and volunteered in some capacity, such as working on the Hospitality Committee or presenting/presiding at a concurrent session. A Member-at-Large represents the general membership on the Executive Committee and assists in planning functions of the Executive Committee. The term of the Member-at-Large is three years. Two candidates for Associate Chair and four candidates for Member-at-Large will be on the 2012 ballot. *Those who wish to nominate a qualified CEL member should check with the individual and affirm her/his willingness to serve prior to submitting a nomination letter.* Nominations should include as much pertinent information as possible about the nominee as a leader and her/his involvement in CEL as well as contact information (home mailing address, email address, and phone number). Nominations may be mailed **by November 1** to Ken Spurlock, CEL Nominations Chair, 2705 Tanglewood Court, Villa Hills, KY 41017, emailed to ken46s@fuse.net by November 1, or hand-delivered to Spurlock at the 2011 Convention in Chicago.



This Is My War!

Save teachers and librarians from the onslaught of brutal cuts and criticisms. Schools and libraries, according to many, are places where budgets can be cut. Taxes can be reduced. Some politicians, even governors, have used virtual scalpels to cut to the bone the very essence of a good education for all. In many instances, new purchases of publications have been delayed or curtailed. These are considered “nonessentials.”

Is literacy a nonessential?

Is viewing what is happening in the modern world nonessential?

Is developing critical and creative thinking nonessential?

Reading for me is an integral part of my daily life. Is it because of my education? My age? My concern for the future?

There have been so many books that made me focus on ideas. While others might not feel these are the “prize-winners,” I enjoyed them! We must remember, though, that few things are as personal as reading. When the mind clicks on something that has been written, and the reader is jerked into the ideas, what kind of true evaluation can be developed to assess the qualities of learning? Of teaching? Just look at this variety of books,

with different takes and different literary styles to meet the needs, abilities, and interests of readers.

Around the World

Abdel-Fattah, Randa. *Where the Streets Had a Name*. Scholastic, 2010.

Cross, Gillian. *Where I Belong*. Holiday House, 2011.

Kadohata, Cynthia. *A Million Shades of Gray*. Atheneum, 2010.

Kent, Trilby. *Stones from My Father*. Tundra, 2011.

Shecter, Vicky Alvear. *Cleopatra's Moon*. Scholastic, 2011.

Thompson, Holly. *Orchards*. Delacorte, 2011

Wallace, Jason. *Out of Shadows*. Holiday House, 2011.

Biography

Fleming, Candace. *Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart*. S&W, 2011.

Henry, Nathan L. *Good Behavior*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Holzer, Harold. *Father Abraham Lincoln and His Sons*. Calkins Creek, 2011.

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *Music Was It: Young Leonard Bernstein*. Charlesbridge, 2011.

Sheinkin, Steve. *The Notorious Benedict Arnold*. Roaring Brook, 2010.

Sommer, Shelley. *Hammerin' Hank Greenberg*. Calkins Creek, 2011.

Sundquist, Josh. *Just Don't Fall*. Viking, 2010.

Wooldridge, Connie Nordhielm. *The Brave Escape of Edith Wharton*. Clarion, 2010.

Death

Cabot, Meg. *Abandoned*. Point, 2011.

Haber, Melissa Glenn. *Dear Anjali*. Aladdin, 2010.

Roth, Ty. *So Shelly*. Delacorte, 2011.

Schutz, Samantha. *You Are Not Here*. Push, 2010.

Taylor, Brooke. *Undone*. Walker, 2008.

Vigilante, Danette. *The Trouble with Half a Moon*. Putnam, 2011

Wesselhoeft, Conrad. *Adios Nirvana*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.

Woon, Yvonne. *Dead Beautiful*. Hyperion, 2010.

Family

Bauer, Joan. *Close to Famous*. Viking, 2011.

Bolden, Tonya. *Finding Family*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Conney, Caroline B. *Three Black Swans*. Delacorte, 2010.

Dionne, Erin. *The Total Tragedy of a Girl Named Hamlet*. Dial, 2010.

Hansen, Joyce. *Home Is with Our Family*. Jump at the Sun, 2010.
 Olin, Span. *Brother/Sister*. Razorbill, 2011.
 Standiford, Natalie. *Confessions of the Sullivan Sisters*. Scholastic, 2010.
 Stuber, Barbara. *Crossing the Tracks*. McElderry, 2010.

Fantasy

Black, Jenna. *Glimmerglass*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2010.
 Choldenko, Gennifer. *No Passengers beyond This Point*. Dial, 2011.
 Condie, Ally. *Matched*. Dutton, 2011.
 Marchetta, Melina. *Finnikin of the Rock*. Candlewick, 2010.
 Michaels, Antonia. *Dragons at Darkness*. Amulet, 2010.
 Nayeri, Daniel and Dina. *Another Pan*. Candlewick, 2010.
 Pierce, Tamora. *Tortall and Other Lands*. Random House, 2011.
 Whitley, David. *The Children of the Lost*. Roaring Brook, 2011.

Friendships

Blundell, Judy. *Strings Attached*. Scholastic, 2011.
 Castelucci, Cecil. *Rose Sees Red*. Scholastic, 2010.
 Dessen, Sarah. *What Happened to Goodbye*. Viking, 2011.
 Ferraiolo, Jack. *Sidekicks*. Amulet, 2011.
 Ferris Aimee. *Will Work for Prom Dress*. Egmont, 2011.
 Foreman, Gayle. *Where She Went*. Dutton, 2011.
 Padian, Maria. *Jersey Tomatoes Are the Best*. Knopf, 2011.
 Woods, Elizabeth. *Choker*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Graphic Novels

Bruchac, Joseph (adapted by and art by Will Davis). *Dawn Land*.

:01 First Second, 2010.
 Colbert, C. C. (illustrated by Tani-toc). *Booth*. :01 First Second, 2010.
 Hinds, Gareth. *The Odyssey*. Candlewick, 2010.
 Larson, Hope. *Mercury*. Atheneum, 2010.
 Lee, Tommy (illustrated by Sam Hart). *Excalibur: The Legend of King Arthur*. Candlewick, 2010.
 Neri, G. (illustrated by Randy Du-Burke). *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. Lee and Low, 2010.
 Townsend, Michael. *Amazing Greek Myths of Wonders and Blunders*. Dial, 2010.

Historical Fiction

Dogar, Sharon. *Annexed*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.
 Friesner, Esther. *Threads and Flames*. Viking, 2010.
 Hemphill, Stephanie. *Wicked Girls*. Balzer & Bray, 2010.
 Hughes, Dean. *Missing in Action*. Atheneum, 2010.
 Janeczko, Paul B. *Requiem: Poems of the Terezin Ghetto*. Candlewick, 2011.
 Paulsen, Gary. *Woods Runner*. Random House, 2010.
 Richards, James. *Three Rivers Rising: A Novel of the Jamestown Flood*. Knopf, 2010.
 Rinaldi, Ann. *The Last Full Measure*. Harcourt, 2010.

Identity

Beam, Cris. *I Am J*. Little, Brown, 2011.
 Benoit, Charles. *You*. Harcourt, 2010.
 Collins, Pat Lowery. *Daughter of Winter*. Charlesbridge, 2010.
 Howse, Emily. *Zitface*. Marshall Cavendish, 2011.

Meyerhoth, Jenny. *Queen of Secrets*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
 White, Tracy. *How I Made It to Eighteen*. Roaring Brook, 2010.
 Zalben, Jane Breskin. *Four Seasons*. Knopf, 2011.

Illness

Cummings, Priscilla. *Blindsighted*. Dutton, 2010.
 Draper, Sharon. *Out of My Mind*. Atheneum, 2010.
 Hobbs, Valerie. *The Last Best Days of Summer*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
 Kelly, Tara. *Harmonic Feedback*. Holt, 2010.
 Lowell, Pamela. *Spotting for Nellie*. Marshall Cavendish, 2010.
 Nolan, Han. *Crazy*. Harcourt, 2010.
 Selfors, Suzanne. *Mad Love*. Walker, 2011.

Mystery & Suspense

Abrahams, Peter. *Bullet Point*. Harper, 2010.
 Beaudoin, Sean. *You Killed Wesley Payne*. Little, Brown, 2011.
 Lane, Andrew. *Death Cloud*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
 Lee, Y. S. *The Agency: A Spy in the House*. Candlewick, 2010.
 Myers, Walter Dean, and Ross Workman. *Kick*. Harper, 2011.
 Price, Charlie. *The Interrogation of Gabriel James*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
 Schreier, Eliot. *The Deadly Sister*. Scholastic, 2010.
 Wildavsky, Rachel. *The Secret of Rover*. Amulet, 2011.

Nonfiction

Berkley, Elizabeth. *Ask Elizabeth*. Putnam, 2011.
 Gann, Marjorie, and Janet Willen. *Five Thousand Years of Slavery*. Tundra, 2011.

Guiberson, Brenda Z. *Disasters*. Holt, 2010.

Jocelyn, Martha. *Scribbling Women*. Tundra, 2011.

Macaulay, David. *Built to Last*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.

Marrin, Albert. *Flesh & Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy*. Knopf, 2011.

Moore, Christopher. *From Then to Now: A Short History of the World*. Tundra, 2011.

Problems in School

Carter, Scott William. *The Last Great Getaway of the Water Balloon Boys*. Simon & Schuster, 2010.

Dolby, Tom. *The Trust*. Katherine Tegen, 2011.

Farrar, Josh. *Rules to Rock By*. Walker, 2010.

Myers, Walter Dean. *The Cruisers*. Scholastic, 2011.

Quintero, Sofia. *Efrain's Secret*. Knopf, 2010.

Shulman, Mark. *Scrawl*. Roaring Brook, 2010.

Whitney, Daisy. *The Mockingbirds*. Little, Brown, 2010.

Science Fiction

Black, Holly. *Red Glove*. McElderry, 2011.

Bush, Penelope. *Alice in Time*. Holiday House, 2011.

Lancaster, Mike A. *Human.4*. Egmont, 2011.

O'Brien, Johnny. *Day of Deliverance*. Templar, 2010.

Oliver, Lauren. *Delirium*. Harper, 2011.

Monir, Alexandra. *Timeless*. Delacorte, 2011.

Smibert, Angie. *Memento Nora*. Marshall Cavendish, 2011.

Hurd, Thacher. *Bongo Fishing*. Holt, 2011.

Sports

Cohen, Joshua C. *Leverage*. Dutton, 2010.

Deuker, Carl. *Payback Time*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.

Green, Tim. *The Best of the Best*. Harper, 2011.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Skate Fate*. Rayo/HarperCollins, 2011.

Messner, Kate. *Sugar and Ice*. Walker, 2011.

Shusterman, Neal. *Bruiser*. Harper, 2010.

Weaver, Will. *Checkered Flag Cheater*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Supernatural

Fantaskey, Beth. *Jekel Loves Hyde*. Harcourt, 2010.

Feasey, Steve. *Dark Moon*. Feiwel, 2011.

Littlefield, Sophie. *Banished*. Delacorte, 2010.

Nichols, Lee. *Deception*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Peck, Richard. *Three Quarters Dead*. Dial, 2010.

Pon, Cindy. *Fury of the Phoenix*. Greenwillow, 2011.

Shan, Darren. *The Saga of Larten Crepsley*. Little, Brown, 2010.

Discoveries

Ann McKinstry Micou recently moved to Montclair, New Jersey, and she introduced me to her books—*A Guide to Fiction*, set in Vermont, for children and young adults (Vermont Historical Council, 2008), and *Fiction Set in Vermont 3* (Full Circle Press, 2009). These reference books emphasize the importance of “place in literature.” The works cited are excellently annotated and include useful bibliographies for each author listed. Among them are Peter Abrahams,

Julia Alvarez, Robert Newton Peck, Gregory Maguire, Katherine Paterson, Paul Zindel, Ann Brashares, M. E. Kerr, and Karen Hesse. Absolutely fascinating! Ann is currently researching a book about authors' works set in New Jersey.

Sir Ken Robinson is a strong advocate of creativity and changing the paradigm of schools. I was introduced to this native of Liverpool, and now California, through a presentation on television. He wants students, parents, and teachers to recognize the aptitude and passion within a person and to capitalize on these traits in developing meaningful instruction. His book, *The Element* (Penguin, 2009), is filled with ideas and case studies. Meet Gillian Lynne who loved to dance, but who was tagged as a child with a learning disorder. She then went to a school with a dance program and blossomed. She later auditioned for the Royal Ballet School in London and became a soloist. Later, she met Andrew Lloyd Webber and created with him some of the most successful musical theater events, including *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

In *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (Nation Books, 2010), by Chris Hedges, one learns that “nearly a third of the nation's population is illiterate or barely literate . . . a third of high-school graduates never read another book for the rest of their lives and neither do 42 percent of college graduates. In 2007, 80 percent of the families in the United States did not buy or read a book.”

We must do better. ALAN is leading the way.

Stories from the Field

Confessions of a Bibliophile

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The innocuous brown box sat on the table in front of me, taped on both ends. I glanced around me. In all directions, teachers, librarians, professors, and young adult book lovers, like children at Christmas, ripped into similar looking boxes, delight clear on their faces. I could hear laughter and excited voices talking about books and authors and plots and characters. I sighed, my face creeping into the beginning of a disbeliever's smile.

For anyone who has not attended an ALAN conference, it's a little like going to Disney World for the first time (another first for me on this trip, since the conference was held at one of the Disney resorts). There's a little disbelief, a little magic, and a whole lot of excitement that originates somewhere in the pit-of-the-stomach region, just below the heart. But then again, I am, after all, a high school English teacher.

I know it must seem a little trite, because anyone who has heard of the ALAN Conference has heard of the numerous young adult books one comes home with (for free, might I add), but the books were amazing! Not only did I get books from authors that I desperately adored, but I also discovered quite a few authors with whom my love affair had not even begun!

I slowly pulled the tape away from the opening of the box and opened the flaps, prolonging the excite-

ment as long as possible. Inside, stacked to the very brim, books of all sizes and types waited to be cracked. My fingers twitched in anticipation of the softly rippled texture of the pages.

Aside from the load of new books, the environment—riddled with people who make their living in books—still resonates, weeks later. Every half an hour or so, a new panel of authors took the stage, discussing topics related to the theme of “Looking for the Real Me.” I listened to them speak about their books and their topics and I thought about how I could take all of this back to my classroom.

I am an English teacher to a group of reluctant, rebellious, ridiculously lovable and waiting-for-the-right-book teenagers in a small inner city charter school for students with ADD, ADHD, and Asperger's Syndrome. Until this year, we didn't have textbooks, and our library consisted of class sets of abridged classic novels. Not the way to inspire struggling students to read. Before attending the ALAN conference, I had already decided on and implemented independent reading in my classroom, using a classroom library made up of the meager young adult book collection of two poor and relatively new teachers. It was pitiful. I needed inspiration, support, and BOOKS!

It was like Mary Poppins's box of books. I looked around. Everyone was stacking all of their books on the tables and sorting them. I turned around to the ladies behind me, two librarians from Colorado, peeking at me from behind their own stacks. They must have seen the look of confusion on my face.

“Just sort out the authors that will be here today, and put the rest back in the box,” said the younger one. “First time?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, if you keep out the books for the authors that are speaking today, you can have them signed after they speak.”

I gasped. “Really? That is great!”

“Yeah, the kids tend to get really excited when they see that the books are signed to them.”

Halfway through a day of authors and book signings, the conference temporarily broke into half-hour mini-sessions on various topics related to young adult literature in the classroom. Over two days, I attended two different sessions on using young adult literature to inspire writing, a current passion of mine. I watched. I listened. I took notes.

I met my benefactor, the man responsible for the Gallo Grant, Dr. Donald Gallo, who is not only an advocate for ALAN, but also an advocate for young teachers who advocate young adult literature in their classrooms. For two days, the attendees unabashedly shared in our love for young adult literature.

Three weeks after I returned from the conference, I stand behind my desk in my classroom while a trio of tenth graders sorts through the new books that I brought back with me. The books have been sitting there for two weeks now, and I briefly talked about them when I put them out, but like shy children, slowly making friends, it has taken my students this long to really bury their hands in the pages of these new books. A boy, shaggy hair falling in front of his face, cracks open Silver Phoenix by Cindy Pon.

“Hey, look at this!” he says, holding the book out to his friends. “She actually signed it to our school! That’s pretty cool, actually. It says ‘Keep dreaming.’ Wow.”

Three pairs of hands dig into the bin of books next to my desk. I hear them exclaiming with surprise and delight when they find a signed copy. I hear them reading the summaries, and I see them walking away with books tucked under their arms, like the precious treasures I have been claiming them to be all along.

The Power of Student Choice

Kimberly Powers

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I have taught a Young Adult Literature course for high school sophomores for the past eight years, and I have witnessed a profound shift in my students’ attitudes about reading. My room is filled with 15 bookcases overflowing with young adult titles, and the course is centered on the philosophy that we must provide students the opportunity to choose what to read. This is a radical idea for most English teachers, as we all too often feel the need to make sure our students have read the classics, to prepare them for the world of literary illusions and the high-stakes testing of the Advanced Placement program. But what we fail to understand is that when we force students to read texts that they cannot relate to and see no value in, they do not read them.

To combat this issue, I allow student choice; students choose what they want to read and then blog about their novels weekly on our wiki page. They are engaging in real-world skills. After all, as adults, we read novels and then talk to our friends about them; why should our students be any different? I have had the unique experience to team with a local author, Patrick Jones, who has written six novels for young adults. My students each select one of his novels to read, then participate in a student-led discussion about the themes, issues, and conflicts each present. After processing the novels, Patrick visits my classes and shares his motivations, inspirations, and expertise with my students. By not forcing my students to all read the same text, I provide them with the opportunity to find a novel that speaks to them, that shows them alternative realities, and encourages them to become readers—not only for learning, but for life.

Remembering Brian Jacques

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I don’t remember precisely when I first found a book by Brian Jacques in my school’s library. I remember I was young, and not yet sophisticated enough to guess that some of the letters in his last name might be silent.

I took an immediate liking to everything about the world Jacques created. Each new detail was met with my wide-eyed approval. Mice and moles in an abbey?

Of course. Not only did it make sense—it made me unspeakably happy.

I crawled inside these books and lived there for several years. I read on the bus; I read between classes; I read at night when I was supposed to be in bed. Although I had some close friends, the cliquish atmosphere at my small school was hard on me. I liked to spend our recess period in the library alone—reading in a beanbag chair.

I wrote Jacques a letter once, and faced the impossible task of introducing myself to someone I already knew. I awkwardly announced in the second sentence that my parents “had never been divorced or anything.” I just wanted him to know. I told him for the same reason anyone tells anyone anything—because I thought he would care.

When I was 13, I met Jacques at a bookstore signing. He was wonderful. He answered questions and recited text from memory. He told us a story about

visiting a class of “mixed infants,” and then paused to joke, “I’d like a pound of mixed infants, please!” He took my dad’s hand when demonstrating the mannerisms of the kind old men on whom he’d based the mole characters: men who addressed everyone as “My dear” and “My beauty.”

When it was my turn to meet him, he looked at me and declared, “You have *black hair!*” I was speechless. I handed him my favorite book, *Mossflower*, to be autographed, and he cheerfully threw an arm around my shoulder for a photo.

It’s been more than ten years, and I haven’t read about mice and moles in a very long time. I’ve gone back to school to be a journalist, and spend most of my time in the nonfiction section these days. I thought about writing Jacques again. I wish I had. I would have told him what I’m doing now. I would have thanked him for making my life better. And I know he would have cared.

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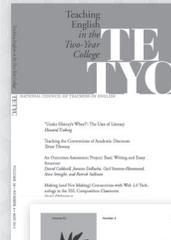
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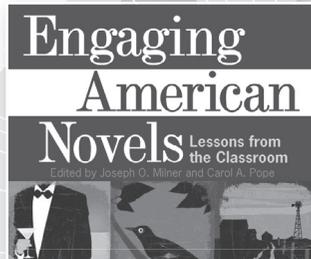
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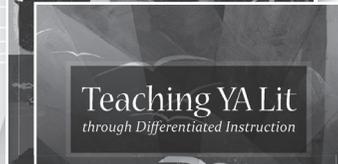
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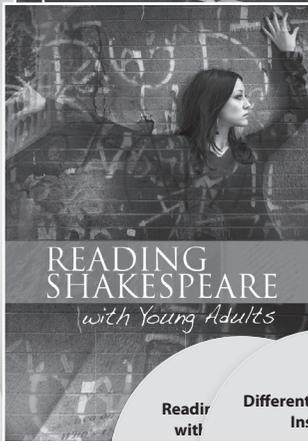
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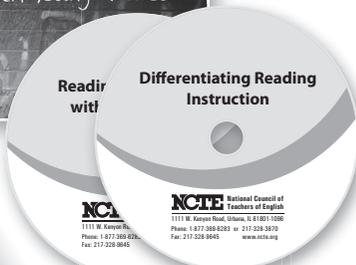
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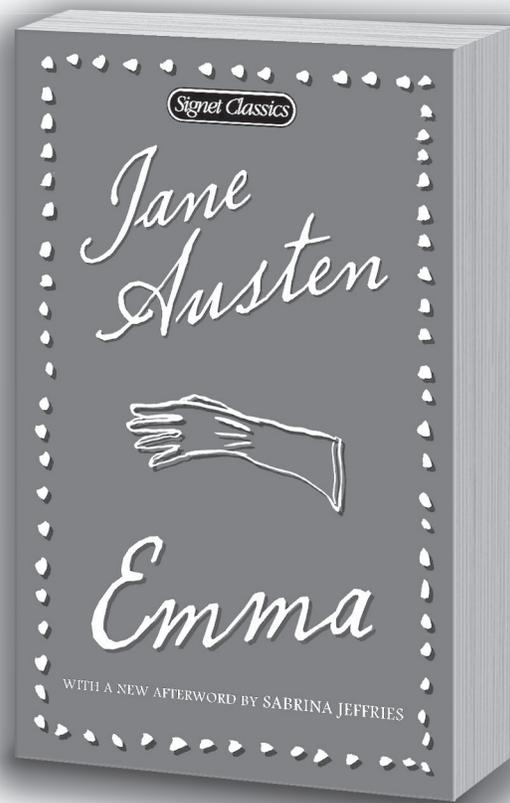
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