

Volume 28
Number Three

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ALAN
REVIEW

Spring/Summer 2001

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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 spring) 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 author and/or publisher.

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 Modern Language Association. A 3 1/2-inch MS-DOS disk in either a recent version of Word or Word Perfect format must accompany all manuscripts. Disks must be clearly labeled with author's name, manuscript title, disk format, and file title.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Send three clear copies and a disk of the manuscript to:

Pamela S. Carroll, Editor, *The ALAN Review*, 209 MCH, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4490.

Include a self-addressed stamped envelope to which return stamps are clipped. The manuscript cannot be returned if the envelope and stamps are not included. Articles submitted only by facsimile or e-mail cannot be considered, except when sent from overseas.

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.

A manuscript published in *The ALAN Review* is considered to have been copyrighted by the author of the article.

DEADLINES. Please follow these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*:

FALL ISSUE Deadline: JULY 15

WINTER ISSUE Deadline: OCTOBER 15

SPRING ISSUE Deadline: MARCH 15

Please note that the journal will be organized to reflect the following focus in each issue, but that the focus will not restrict attention to other issues:

Fall Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for High School Readers

Winter Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for Middle School Readers

Spring Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in Using YA Literature for Interdisciplinary Instruction

A Note from the Editor

Eudora Welty, one of the most influential writers of our time, grew up in a home in which reading was constant and natural. Reading was for Welty what we in education would refer to as an “interdisciplinary” pursuit. In *One Writer’s Beginnings* (Harvard UP, 1984), Welty shows us that she was surrounded by the reference books that demonstrated her father’s belief “in progress, in the future” (5) and the books of fiction that “stayed on in her [mother’s] imagination” (7) from childhood. Welty describes her early interdisciplinary literacy experiences:

I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to. My mother read to me. She’d read to me in the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together, which ticked in rhythm as we rocked, as though we had a cricket accompanying the story. She’d read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire, with our cuckoo clock ending the story with “cuckoo,” and at night when I’d got into my own bed. I must have given her no peace.

It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming up of themselves like grass . . .

Besides the bookcase in the living room, which was always called “the library,” there were the encyclopedia tables and dictionary stand under windows in our diningroom. Here to help us grow up arguing around the diningroom table were the Unabridged Webster, the Columbia Encyclopedia, Compton’s Pictured Encyclopedia, the Lincoln Library of Information, and later the Book of Knowledge. And the year we moved into our new house, there was room to celebrate it with the new 1925 edition of the Britanica, which my father, his face always deliberately turned toward the future, was of course disposed to think better than any previous edition.

There was the set of Stoddard’s Lectures, in all its late nineteenth-century vocabulary and vignettes of peasant life and quaint beliefs and customs, with matching halftone illustrations: Vesuvius erupting, Venice by moonlight, gypsies glimpsed by their campfires, I didn’t know then the clue they were to my father’s longing to see the rest of the world. I read straight through his other love-from-afar: the Victrola World of Opera, with opera after opera in synopsis, with portraits in costume of Melba, Caruso, Galli-Curci, and Geraldine Farrar, some of whose voices we could listen to on our Red Seal records.

My mother read secondarily for information; she sank as a hedonist into novels. She read Dickens in the spirit in which she would have eloped with him.

*I believe I’m the only child I know of who grew up with this treasure in the house. (Welty, *One Writer’s Beginnings*, 5-9)*

Welty’s words provide an eloquent rationale for the focus of the spring issue of The ALAN Review—young adult literature

in interdisciplinary contexts. In this issue, we have the opportunity to read about how several contributors have conceived of interdisciplinary instruction that involves young adult books.

The issue opens an interview by language arts teacher Debbie Erenberger with Chris Crutcher, the author who, perhaps more than any writer for young people, gives attention to all aspects of the world of today’s adolescents. It is followed with an essay in which ALAN Executive Secretary Gary Salvner shares his own story of learning the importance of words. Next are four articles and our Interdisciplinary Connections column; all five pieces directly suggest uses for YAL in interdisciplinary contexts. Maryanne Bednar and Francis Ryan describe their secondary methods course, and how teacher education majors from disparate subject specialties use characters from YAL to develop deeper understandings of, and to question conventional wisdom about, adolescents. Charles Frey shows us how literature can introduce the history of the northeast in his article on Malaeska. Sunya Osborn gives us help in choosing picture books that will balance our classroom shelves. Jim Brewbaker, our enthusiastic Interdisciplinary Connections editor, treats us to a discussion of his Moffettization—a conversion that led him from teaching English in isolation to teaching it as an interdisciplinary subject. Gail Radley discusses issues related to the portrayal of religion in YAL.

Cheryl Dickson takes us into the summer with a critical look at teen romances; Lisa Hale and Chris Crowe present information about changes in adolescent readers’ preferences, across time. Laura Lipsett urges us to find ways to include poetry in middle and high school curricula, and provides recommendations for poetry collections that we can add to our YA bookshelves. Susan Elkins and John Nicklas present us with books about Jamaica Kincaid and Rudolpho Anaya, both authors who are frequently taught in high schools, but who are not yet recognized as full members of the traditional school canon club, in Kathleen Carico’s Professional Connections column. Jeff Kaplan and his team of reviewers introduce us to books that we will want to linger over during the summer months, as we store up reading moments as if they were warm rays of the sun.

Welty states, “Learning stamps you with its moments. Childhood’s learning is made up of moments. It isn’t steady. It’s a pulse” (9). Our classrooms, especially when books are used to spark conversations and expand thoughts across the disciplines, can be filled with the pulse of learning.

A quick personal note: This spring, I have had the pleasure of wishing two leaders in the fields of young adult literature and reading happiness during their retirement: Terry C. Ley—my mentor and guardian angel at Auburn University, and John S. Simmons—my colleague and guide at Florida State University. Each continues to be both anchor and wings for me.

Thank you. Sincerely.



Pamela Sissi Carroll

***Are you looking for information about using
YA literature in the classroom?***

***Do you long to meet and listen to award
winning authors of literature for teens?***

Would you like to receive FREE BOOKS?????

If you answered **YES** to those questions,
make plans now to attend the next ALAN Workshop.

WHEN: November 19-20, 2001

WHERE: Baltimore, Maryland

WHO: LOOK WHO'S COMING! *(There may be more!)*

Laurie Halse Anderson courtesy of Farrar Straus Giroux and Putnam

Joan Bauer courtesy of Putnam

Eliza Carbone courtesy of Random House

Michael Cart courtesy of HarperCollins

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WHAT: Panels on humor and mystery, breakout sessions featuring new authors,
book talks, small group sessions, and much, much more!

Keynote presentations by Harvey Daniels and Dick Abrahamson.

HOW: To register, go to the NCTE Web site at www.ncte.org, click on Fall Conference,
2001, then find ALAN under Two-Day Workshops!

A Teacher of High School Language Arts Speaks with Chris Crutcher

An Interview by Debbie Erenberger

Editor's Note: The following interview was conducted June 23-June 26, 2000. Debbie Erenberger is a teacher of language arts at Prarie High School, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

In 2000, Chris Crutcher was the recipient of the Margaret A. Early Award for his contributions to writing for teenagers. He has also received the ALAN Award for his contributions to young adult literature, and has spoken frequently at the annual ALAN Workshop.

Chris Crutcher's newest novel, Whale Talk, was released in April 2001; it is his seventh novel for adolescents, and his eighth book for teen readers. Each of Crutcher's novels, and the stories in his collection, use sports as a backdrop against which adolescents' lives are painted by an artist who knows his subjects from the inside.

Crutcher's books are published by HarperCollins Greenwillow:

Running Loose (1983)
Stotan! (1986)
The Crazy Horse Electric Game (1987)
Chinese Handcuffs (1989)
Athletic Shorts (1991) (a collection of short stories)
Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes (1993)
Ironman (1995)
Whale Talk (2001)

For more information on Crutcher, I suggest that you visit his Web site, www.aboutcrutcher.com, or the HarperCollins site at www.harpercollins.com. —psc

Crutcher the Writer: Influences and Intentions

DE: Tell us about your life and origins as a writer.

CC: My early life had a lot to do with my origins as a writer, but I didn't get into doing any writing at all until I was about 35 years old. The early writing I did was mostly articles for my high school newspaper, where I was considered just mostly a smart aleck. If you read *Sarah Byrnes*, you get a little bit of an idea in their *Crispy Pork Rinds* publication of what I was doing when I was writing in high school. I was pretty anti-academic and I wasn't much of a student. I had a really short attention span and did not get a lot out of high school academically. I think college was a little the same way. I was a swimmer more than I was a student. But I grew up in a small town. I grew up paying real close attention to the people around and who my friends were and why they did what they did and why I did what I did. I looked at other people's parents and compared them to mine. That later turned into creating characters for stories.

And then when I was just out of college, I contacted a friend from college, Terry Davis, whose original work was a book called *Vision Quest* and who recently wrote one called *If Rock and Roll Were a Machine*. He was down at Stanford and I was working at an alternative school in Oakland, and we would meet once a week. Terry would bring a chapter and he would read it to me to get a feel for it. And I would tell him what I thought worked and what didn't work, and he would go away and come back and it would be edited. After we had done most of the book, it occurred to me he hadn't done anything I couldn't do. Nothing was impossible. If you were willing to stay with the story and if you had a good story and were willing to do the editing and pay real close attention to the characters, you could write a book. It wasn't some kind of magical worldly thing which, up until that point, I probably thought it was.

So I kind of waited around because I had a story to tell, and I was finishing up my work at the school. I'd been there about ten years and I wanted to move back to the northwest. I had this four and one-half month period where I was between occupations, so I sat down and just started writing *Running Loose*. It surprisingly seemed right. I liked the story, and I didn't have anything to lose other than the embarrassment of sending it in someplace and having somebody tell me I've had an ugly baby. So I went ahead and did it and got hooked up with Terry's agent, who had already marketed *Vision Quest*. She hooked me up with Susan Hershman at Greenwillow and within a week, I think, they bought it. I was pretty lucky.

When I finished writing *Running Loose*, I had written as many books as I had read: *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the one and only!

DE: In terms of style, who or what *were* the early influences on you as a writer?

CC: *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of those books that just hangs in my head and I go back and look at it once in a while just to kind of see how she wrote it. That's one. Any writer my age almost can't get away from being influenced by Kurt Vonnegut, partially because of his simple, clear way of stating things. To read Vonnegut is to learn how to use economy words. If you get a sentence down which seems Vonnegut-like, then you think you have the perfect sentence. So he was probably the biggest influence . . . and Tom Robbins, who is a wild man. I could never, never imitate his writing, but I did develop my own sense of metaphor reading *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* and *Another Roadside Attraction* . . . his old stuff. I don't write like him at all, but one of the things read-

ing him did was say, “if you do it well, you can write anything you want to.” I don’t know if that is stylistic, but it certainly gave me a sense of freedom.

DE: A hallmark of your work is your choice of themes, such as sports, adolescents whose lives include crisis situations, friendship. [Can you] comment on these?

CC: I would never sit down and say, “I’m going to write a book and this is what the theme is going to be.” I never consider that for a moment. But what happens is I sit down and I’ll have a story to tell, and the story itself and the characters I choose to put into that story are what create the theme. A lot of times I have no idea where the story is going, and so probably that idea of theme—or the kind of budding theme—is actually helping me tell the story. I just haven’t named it yet and I’ve left myself wide open in case I get brilliant along about chapter five.

I throw the sports thing in because I grew up in a town where you had to play sports. You played because they needed enough bodies, so you didn’t have to be a great athlete. No matter if you were a talented athlete or not, you had that experience. So if I’m going to tell a story, and I’m going back into my 17-year-old sensibilities to do it, the athletics theme just pops up. It’s always been in my life.

The other themes come with the story. My creative capability depends on that. It depends on my ability to be telling the story and all of a sudden something will pop up in front of me which just absolutely fits. And the minute that happens, it usually elevates the entire story.

DE: What changes through time do you see in your own work?

CC: I began working as a child abuse and family therapist just after I finished *Running Loose*, so the Nortie Wheeler stories and *Stotan!* were spurred by real stories and my imagination. And then you get to *Crazy Horse* and *Chinese Handcuffs*. It’s almost an honor to be allowed in the way you’re allowed when you are trying to help him or her find a way through it. If they get to the place where they trust you, you hear things you thought you’d never hear. In some cases I work with kids who have been abused, but I also work with abusers. And the problem is abusers have been abused and some of them are real . . . I mean, if you look at their acts, they look like real devils. But when you start messing around in their lives a little bit, you see they were once in this other place, and their acts are not the acts of devils, but that’s their response to the world . . . You know how bad it can get and how good it can get. And so all of a sudden you see the relativity of it all, the relativity of heroism comes through. You’ll see some bad dad . . . some guy who is working to be

different and to break away from his old patterns. Sometimes he doesn’t make it and sometimes he does, and usually he makes it just barely far enough. It’s a tough, tough ride. But I recognize the heroism in that and then I try to get that down. So a simple love story like I might have told in *Running Loose* isn’t anywhere that simple in *Chinese Handcuffs*. In *Chinese Handcuffs* it is a love story that cannot be.

One of the things that happened to me is I just get more understanding working with little kids. I remember I was at the mental health center one time and we were having an 18th birthday party for this kid who had been in our abuse project for about five years. I remember sitting in the back of the room kind of watching him open his presents. (If you are having your birthday party at the mental health center you’re in pretty rough shape already.) But I was look at him and I thought, “Boy, this is the worst day of your life, because yesterday you were the victim and tomorrow you’re the guy.” And, you know, two years later I had his kids [in counseling]. It is absolutely perception. I mean, this guy was without tools.

DE: Has your work as a counselor helped you to be a better writer?

CC: I think if I hadn’t done the other stuff I wouldn’t have been a writer. I wouldn’t have had any stories. My stories would have been too shallow.

DE: Another exemplary feature of your work is the ability to authenticate your characters, especially those who are your heroes. Is this a conscious effort on your part?

CC: It’s conscious in the sense that I know I want a character to be three-dimensional. I want to look at this character from all points of view. I know I don’t want to make them all good or all bad or all anything . . . the story itself often helps create the character. An incident will come up in a story, and I don’t know exactly how my character will respond to it until I put the event in there and try it. Sometimes I blow it the first two or three times until I get the right response. But there’s a certain part of it where the events of the story are what help create the character. And one of the

things I always ask myself—and this part is very intentional—is “Could this be true?” If it couldn’t be true then I better get out of there. And if it is highly unlikely, I am going to at least address it. But for the most part, I want this kind of range within which this character would respond based on what he knows, you know, how long he’s been alive. The intentional part is I don’t want to leave any pieces not thought of, even if I don’t write them down. If I have this character in my head and I give him a history, . . . I want him to be consistent . . .



Photo of Chris Crutcher by Amanda Koster. Used by permission of HarperCollins publishers.

I would never sit down and say, “I’m going to write a book and this is what the theme is going to be.” I never consider that for a moment.

DE: How would you define “hero” as it relates to your characters?

CC: The standard line I use is, “A hero is a person who learns to stand up for him or herself.” I truly believe that there is no act of heroism that doesn’t include this.

DE: Would you discuss your reason behind casting males in the majority of the hero protagonist roles in your works, while putting females in supporting roles?

CC: Yeah, because I’m male. That’s the only reason. It’s because I have a better look and because I’m so sensitive about not being able to do justice to a character. I think I can do a female character. I’m a lot more comfortable with it now having written Sarah Byrnes and . . . the Jennifer Lawless character in *Chinese Handcuffs*. In this latest book, *Whale Talk*, I went even further toward boys because I was basically working on a different thing. I think I can do—and I will do—a good female character. But it’s one of those things where I’m just hypersensitive about getting it right.

. . . And it is very important to me for the female characters to have a profound influence on the male characters. For example, Lemry in *Sarah Byrnes*, the Lisa in *Crazy Horse Electric Game*, those coaches, and then the girlfriends, you know, certainly in *Ironman*, Moby’s girlfriend, and those kind of stories, and of course Sarah Byrnes herself. Nobody is tougher than Sarah Byrnes. This piece is important to me because I grew up in a family where women didn’t have much voice. And because they didn’t have much voice there’s a real difference between what risks I’m willing to take in the world and the risks my sister’s willing to take because of what we both grew up believing . . . So it’s very important for me to get a balance between males and females. Some kid asked me the other day, “Boy, a lot of the women—or girls—in your books—they’re so aggressive. How come you do that?” And I said, “Well, because I think everybody has the right and the obligation to stand up, and it’s a lot easier for men to do that in this culture than it is for women.” So it’s important for me to get female characters into my stories.

DE: What can you tell me about the adult heroes in your stories?

CC: They’re my chance to say what I have to say as an adult. There’s a certain character who hangs kind of on an Eastern . . . philosophical edge in most books. It’s Dakota in *Running Loose*. It’s Max in *Stotan!* It’s Sammy in *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*. It’s the coach in *Chinese Handcuffs* . . . it’s how I get an adult perspective injected into the story. I probably wouldn’t be as successful if I tried to bring that perspective through a teenager.

Crutcher’s Literature in the Classroom

DE: Give us your definition of young adult literature and comment on your criteria surrounding the issue of adult versus young adult literature.

CC: When I started writing stories I didn’t even know they had such a characterization as young adult. I don’t like the term anyway, because if you are a young adult, you have to be at least eighteen years old or you’re not an adult. I figure it’s one of those terms like “special ed.,” —two days

after somebody uses the term everybody knows what “special” means and it kind of ruins the word. And young adults don’t think that *we* think they’re young adults, so I usually call it “coming of age” or “adolescent” or whatever. But when I sat down to write the [first] story, I had no idea it even mattered . . . My criteria is if the protagonist is over twenty it’s adult; if the protagonist is under twenty, it’s young adult, and I don’t do anything different in terms of story telling. However, I may have to edit. There may be some parameters I’m agreeable to. But the one thing that I won’t ever do is candy-coat something because somebody thinks, “I don’t want my kid to hear that.” Or, somebody thinks if Chris Crutcher uses that word, then all kids in the world are going to rally and start screaming that word at the top of their lungs . . .

And, of course, young adult literature truly is the stepchild of *real* literature, and young adult writers are *almost* writers. That’s the way we are categorized. Early on it bothered me . . . but as far as I’m concerned I’m going to tell the best story I can tell and if I’m telling it first person, it will be limited, because the kid’s experiential basis is going to be smaller. Other than that I don’t pay any attention to the label.

DE: As you know, high school teachers are faced with teaching a plethora of information in a short period of time. What is your view on time spent teaching the classics versus time spent teach-

ing young adult literature?

CC: I think we spend way too much time on the classics because what we do when we teach the classics to kids without teaching them an equal amount of contemporary literature is we ruin literature for them. The only thing I can think of that would be worse than *being* Silas Marner is to have to read about him. The reason I didn’t read when I was in school was because nobody would give me a story I cared about. I would have read if teachers had given me some stories I could care about and let me draw parallels between the classic stories.

. . . I think stories are . . . a great equalizer. If somebody sits down with a good story and the teacher talks about it and the kid talks about it, it levels the playing field. “What did you think about it?” “How did you like this character?” “What did you think when this adult character did this?” You know, all of a sudden my opinion is every bit as important as your opinion because it’s about true appreciation. We don’t do that.

If a Chris Crutcher book is used in a school, it’s used someplace basically for people who don’t want to read. I hear that all the time, and I love it . . . But the reality is I also hear back from people who love to read—those who are surprised that somebody got a hold of one of my books. I’ve heard kids in college say, “How come nobody told us these books were here?” Because you were going to college and they wanted you to read the classics. That’s why.

DE: What are the most frequent questions you get from young readers?

CC: “Where do you get your ideas?” is far and away the most frequently asked question. What I always tell people is

that I get my ideas the same place you get them. I get them from TV. I get them from people saying things to me. I get them from things I see. I get them from anything that moves me at all. Things that make me laugh, cry, mad...it's an idea. And when I'm in the business of telling a story, I'm just hypersensitive to it. I'm constantly looking. Almost everything I hear or see goes through this kind of filter . . . "Could I use that?"

The other one they ask is, "Did these things happen to you?" Any character who feels real to them . . . they want that character to be real.

DE: Which of your characters best reflects you as a young adult?

CC: Louie Banks. He was my first story, and I think when I look back on it, it took a tremendous amount of courage to even sit down and write a story . . . He may have been more courageous than I would have been and may have been a little more articulate, because I could edit him better than I could edit myself when I was making those smart remarks in the first place. And he lived in the town I grew up in. Trout, Idaho, is Cascade, Idaho, with a different name.

DE: In my "Values in Literature" class, we read a number of the stories from *Athletic Shorts*. A lot of the kids have never read an entire book and they tell me so. We talk about those short stories in great depth—we don't just read them and go on. We discuss all the "stuff" in them. After students become connected with the characters (this is very easy for them), they're eager to read one of your novels, which we do. Last year, we read *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. As an author, how do you feel about his "hook" approach?

CC: I love it because, for one thing, I was one of those kids. I read one book the whole time I was in high school and as you know, it was a mistake that I read it. But it was a hook. The flap hooked me, actually. In this particular case, the whole idea of a hook works well because it tells you a little bit about the characters. It gives the kids a running start going into the book . . . I think the only thing about literature that's worth anything is the business of connection and learning about what the world is like. What other reason is there to read? Stories are for hooking us up with each other. It's an art.

DE: In the past, students have questioned me as to your characters who are homosexual and situations which address homosexuality. I promised them I would ask you about this during our interview. Do you have any specific reasons for

the topic of homosexuality being incorporated into your stories?

CC: One of the reasons I use homosexuality is that I have worked so long in the Bay area and I have a lot of gay friends. I came from a lumber town; it was easy for me to have the same kind of prejudices which go with growing up the way I did. And one of the things I became aware of was that I started believing we would some day look back at this time in terms of the gay population like we looked back on the early sixties and the fifties in terms of ethnic populations, and particularly Blacks. We were so shameful, and we still are, but to a lesser degree, in the way we just blatantly treated minorities . . .

I get my ideas the same place you get them. I get them from TV. I get them from people saying things to me. I get them from things I see. I get them from anything that moves me at all.

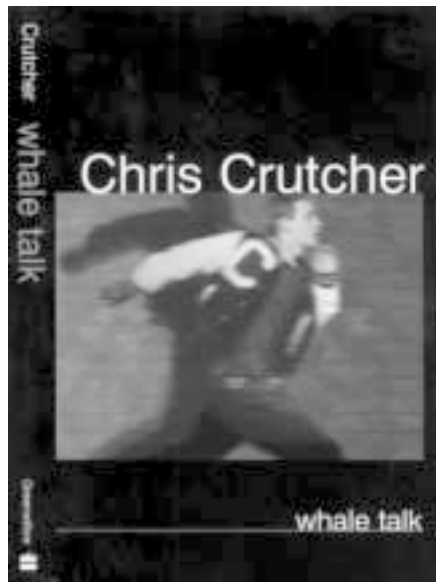
I can walk through a high school and never hear the word "nigger" or "spic" or any other of a million racial epithets, but I can hear "faggot" anyplace, and it's school sanctioned. It doesn't get jumped on. Generally you get away with "faggot," which is exactly the same kind of word for that population. It's the same venom, and nothing is done about it.

When I'm looking for the kind of out front bigotry, where it's just accepted, that's what I use. It's the easy one to get close to. If you're Black or Oriental, you've always been that. But during adolescence, you're just getting your sexual identity. You're trying to figure it out, so you're just totally vulnerable. Then you get Joe Jock in your face about it. The chances for depression, the chances for absolutely losing your self-esteem, are great. It's easy for story material.

DE: You recently finished *Whale Talk*. I can't wait to read it!

CC: I was a little nervous about this one because I had been with it so long. I wasn't sure whether or not it was as smooth and if it hung together the way my other stories did. I took some of the characters and pieces out of the old Columbine book. I was putting them in [Whale Talk] and I shouldn't have been doing it, so I didn't know. But it fell together! [Crutcher began a based on the story of the first kid in the United States to walk into his high school and shoot

his classmates, but he permanently discarded the full manuscript following the Columbine High School tragedy. He has explained that he kept some of the parts and characters to use elsewhere.] My editor and I got on the phone and talked for maybe forty-five minutes. We corrected most things right there. By the next day it was edited [and as of April, 2001, it has been in print]. They moved quickly. I think they were in a hurry to let people know I'm not another dead white author!



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Lessons and Lives: Why Young Adult Literature Matters

Gary M. Salvner

Gary M. Salvner gave the talk that is published below as the keynote address at the November, 200, ALAN Workshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —psc

In the Anglican church, Christmas Eve night is traditionally spent in a service entitled “A Procession of Lessons and Carols,” during which sacred music, Biblical readings, and prayers blend into a ceremony of art and thought that anticipates and introduces the festival of Christmas Day.

I offer that ceremony as a metaphor for my intentions this morning. Over the next two days we will have the opportunity to hear a most distinguished group of writers for the young and to converse with fellow teachers and scholars in the field of young adult literature. Consider this keynote, if you will, as a procession into that experience, a collection of “Lessons and Lives” that anticipate this celebration and initiate our inquiry into Connie Zitlow’s inspiring workshop theme: “Literature Matters: Young Adults and Their Stories.”

OK. Are you settled in your church pews and ready for the first reading? Let’s begin with two stories of young people meeting books.

Meet Missy, an eighth grade girl. As a requirement for attending our annual Youngstown State University celebration of reading and writing called the English Festival, Missy reads Harry Mazer’s World War II memoir *The Last Mission*, and then at the Festival she gets to meet Mazer and hear his own recounting of those war experiences. At the end of the day, after the other kids have drifted off, Missy sneaks quietly up to Harry Mazer with her copy of *The Last Mission* and asks for an autograph.

“Sure,” says Mazer. “What’s your name. Shall I sign it to you?”

“Put it ‘To William,’” Missy replies. “That’s my grandpa’s name. He was in the Air Corps during World War II like you, and when I finished the book, I gave it to him to read.

“Did he like it?” asks Mazer, a new interest in his voice.

“He did. One night he came to our house and asked us all into the living room. You know I was in the War,” he said, “and that I’ve not talked about it. It was pretty bad, and I don’t like remembering, but I think it’s time I did talk about it.”

“And he told us stories,” Missy explained to Harry Mazer. “All night long he talked to us, and he was crying, and my mother was crying. Please put my grandpa’s name on the book.”

Here is a second story. Last month, while paging through an issue of *USA Today*, I came across an article reporting that Scholastic, J.K. Rowling’s U.S. publisher, had sponsored an essay contest asking young people to explain “How the Harry Potter Books Have Changed My Life.” Ten thousand children had written in, and the newspaper had reprinted the ten winning essays. Reading them over, I was struck by the direct connection that these muggle readers saw between the young wizard Harry Potter’s life and their own. Ashley Marie Rhodes-Carter, 14, wrote, “There were amazing similarities between Harry Potter’s background and mine. Here was a boy exactly my age who also didn’t have a caring family. My mother’s neglect put me in foster care for ten years.” Tyler Walton, 9, explained, “My life has not been easy. At the age of five I was diagnosed with leukemia. After 3 1/2 years and with just 3 months left to go on treatment, the leukemia came back . . . Harry Potter helped me get through some really hard and scary times. I sometimes think of Harry Potter and me as being kind of alike. He was forced into situations he couldn’t control and had to face an enemy that he didn’t know if he could beat” (8D).

What might we learn from the stories of Missy and these young Harry Potter fans? An obvious lesson is that literature has the capacity to enter our lives, to interact with what we already know and believe, and perhaps even to change us. Louise Rosenblatt, in her classic work *Literature as Exploration*, puts it this way as she describes the nature of the literary experience:

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

Those young Harry Potter fans had put Rowling’s work alongside “the other kinds of desirable experience that life may offer” and had used it as a way of understanding and affirming themselves. Missy used a story about the Second World War as a means for coming to know her grandfather and perhaps her whole family. “Put it ‘To William,’” she said. “All night long he talked to us, and he was crying, and my mother was crying. Please put my grandpa’s name on the book.”

Time for another story, this one about a ninth grader named Martin who each day endures a demon English teacher, a woman stern and demanding, whose students have given her the nickname “Moose” because of her large, fleshy features and dominant, booming voice.

Martin is afraid of the Moose, whose daily lessons honor the god of correctness—getting grammar quizzes right and constructing sentences that are properly phrased—and whose grade book is filled with C’s and D’s. But on occasional Fridays, Martin and his classmates witness a transformation—of a type and magnitude that would confound any ninth grader’s brain—as this Moose-teacher stops the normal exercises of the week, tells the students to clear their desks, and, in a loud but incredibly expressive voice, reads them poems.

Most are those wonderful narrative classics of middle grade anthologies: Alfred Noyes’ “The Highwayman” and John Greenleaf Whittier’s 1828 ballad, “Skipper Ireson’s Ride,” about a Massachusetts sea captain who is accused by his townspeople of ignoring a distress call from another ship. For days after the reading, Martin can’t get the Whittier poem’s melodic refrain out of his head, about the vengeance brought on Ireson by the wives and mothers of those lost sailors: “Old Floyd Ireson, For his hard heart, Tarred and feathered and carried in a cart, By the women of Marblehead!” (225).

One Friday, early in spring, the Moose offers her charges a poem that is altogether different from those dramatic ballads. It starts like this:

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother’s countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt (Roethke, 45).

“That poem,” Martin’s Moose-teacher explains, “is entitled ‘My Papa’s Waltz,’ written by Mr. Theodore Roethke. He is from your home town.”

And young Martin, walking home that afternoon still drunk and scraped by the poem’s tensions and rhythms, daydreams about whether Mr. Theodore Roethke, the famous poet, walked down these same sidewalks once. And he further wonders, “If Mr. Roethke could come from this place and write, then could I?”

A fourth story emerges out of my experience as Gary Paulsen’s biographer. Several times since the publication of that biography, I’ve been invited to schools to discuss this noted author. (I’m sure this is out of resignation on the part of teachers, who reason that since they can’t get the real Gary to their school, their students might at least get a little some-

thing out of listening to the Gary who has written about that Gary.) Several years ago I received such an invitation from a librarian at a rural Ohio middle school and went there to talk to two groups of fifth and sixth graders who were just finishing their reading of *Hatchet* and *The River*.

What was different about this visit is that, two weeks thereafter, I received a huge stack of thank-you letters from the students I had met—148 of them in all. (Yes, I admit it; I counted. Even reflected glory casts a nice glow sometimes.) Most politely thanked me, and a few (if you’ll allow me a brief digression) told me more than I needed to know. Dalton, for example, wrote, “Your presentation was great, but next time you might want to speak up.” Jane wrote, “Thank you for coming to our school. We got to miss science class when you came.” And Amanda exclaimed, “I think that it is so cool that you get to speak to Gary Paulsen in person. I know that must cost a lot of money.”

But back to the real point of this story, which is certainly not about me and my humbling fan mail. Virtually all of these young letter writers exclaimed their love of Paulsen’s works, but as I read them through one letter in particular jumped out at me—by a sixth grader named Jonathan. His was among the shortest letters in the stack, containing three brief sentences: “I really like Gary Paulsen. Right now I’m reading *The River*. I might be an author.”

Listen to it again: “I really like Gary Paulsen. Right now I’m reading *The River*. I might be an author.” How remarkable, I thought, that a young person would mention a book he loved and immediately speculate about himself as a writer. How wonderful to have read and to feel empowered by that reading to say, “I might be an author.”

Are there further lessons in the stories of Martin and Jonathan? Both have found themselves somehow connected to the experience of literature, and both speculate about their own relationship to the world of words, wondering if literature might continue to hold them not only as readers of stories and poems, but also as writers.

Toni Morrison once remarked, “If there’s a book you really want to read but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it” (Safir and Safir, 38). I wonder if both Martin and Jonathan have stories to tell, and I wonder whether their exposure to literature has given them the boldness and wisdom to tell those stories. In my most hopeful moments, I imagine them in their adult years affirming with their lives an exclamation once made by Henry James: “To live in the world of creation—to get into it and stay in it—to frequent it and haunt it—to think intensely and fruitfully—to woo combinations and inspirations into being by a depth and continuity of attention and meditation—this is the only thing” (Safir and Safir, 57).

It is time for a fifth story. As you all know, our friend Robert Cormier died two weeks ago, and he was to have followed me to this lectern. Here is a Robert Cormier story.

Bob visited Youngstown twice, the first of which was in 1988, when he served as featured author for our tenth anniversary English Festival. The crowds attending the Festival were exceptionally large that year, with over a thousand students in attendance on each of its three days, and I remember talking to a few teachers on the first morning as the students filed in for the opening ceremony.

“My kids aren’t so sure about this Cormier,” one of them

remarked, perhaps capturing the sentiments of many. “They read his stuff, and it upset a lot of them. I don’t know how they’re going to respond to a guy who ends *The Chocolate War* with a beaten Jerry Renault trying to warn Goober not to disturb the universe.”

And so, armed with suspicion, hundreds of uneasy students at a time filed into the large meeting room in our student center day after day to see this Robert Cormier and to hear what he had to say.

How 3,000 students responded to this author and what he had to say became vividly clear at the end of the third day, when a roomful of tired junior high students sat restlessly waiting for the Festival’s awards ceremony to start. It is customary for our featured authors to assist us in handing out prizes to students at the end of each Festival day, and Bob had obliged happily, exclaiming at one point that he was stunned that a huge roomful of kids could be stomping and cheering to honor their peers for their accomplishments in reading and writing. “It sounds like a pep rally,” he had remarked.

On that third day, Bob was delayed in arriving, and just as the awards ceremony was to begin he snuck in a side door and made his way quietly to the stage. What happened next was wholly unexpected and electric, and it will always remain for me the ultimate image of literature’s power and of the influence of compassionate and truth-telling authors. A few students at the corner of the room saw Bob enter, and instantly they stood up and pointed, after which more students stood, and within seconds—and it was literally seconds—a thousand junior high school students, some of them the very same students who had begun the day suspicious of this starkly honest story-teller, thundered to their feet and clapped and cheered so loudly and long that Bob himself was left speechless.

Robert Cormier, if he were here, no doubt would deflect the point of that story away from himself, perhaps by remarking about our good kids in Youngstown or, if pressed, about the energizing power of literature. The point in part was about literature, but more specifically it was about Robert Cormier’s literature, and about his capacity to share with young readers what the British educator and novelist Aidan Chambers suggests are the two functions of the literary work: “That it is conciliatory, comforting us in our shared humanity; and that it is subversive, challenging our prejudices and ingrained attitudes” (10).

Perhaps Robert Cormier’s standing ovation came because many young readers understood Jerry Renault’s willingness to “disturb the universe” as he tried to make a place for himself. Perhaps they cheered because they knew Cormier was telling the truth by showing that such a struggle sometimes has harsh and difficult consequences.

Before going on, I wish to pause for one more moment on Aidan Chambers’ observation that good literature both comforts and subverts, particularly on this issue of the subversive

power of books. Few of us as educators are out of hearing range of the censors’ cries these days; nor are authors and publishers. It is helpful, however, to look at this problem historically in order to understand that the complaint is not just with modern works, including young adult novels, but with books themselves. Here is a critic named T. DeWitt Talmadge, writing in 1889 in a book entitled *Social Dynamite; or, The Wickedness of Modern Society*:

A man who gives himself up to the indiscriminate reading of novels will be nervous, inane, and a nuisance. He will be fit neither for the store, nor the shop, nor the field. A woman who gives herself up to the indiscriminate reading of novels will be unfitted for the duties of wife, mother, sister, daughter. There she is, hair disheveled, countenance vacant, cheeks pale, hands trembling, bursting into tears at midnight over the fate of some unfortunate lover, in the daytime, when she ought to be busy, staring by the half hour at nothing: biting her finger nails into the quick. (175)

A century later, we still live with that suspicion of the story’s power to take us, and perhaps it is this worry that gives censors their adrenaline, for fear can be a most energizing force.

*Why do the young need literature?
Because good books and poems—the
kind that comfort and subvert—
cannot be cynical. Because stories
that address the questions of our day,
and allow students to ponder and
decipher real answers, overwhelm
cliché.*

Modern society, it seems, is obsessed with keeping the young in an illusory bubble of protective insulation—in other words, with pretending that we can keep our young innocent. In doing so, what they scarcely consider is the powerful lesson that Lois Lowry offers us in *The Giver* about the personal and cultural price of such presumed safety. Sitting with the baby Gabriel one night after learning the cost of his society’s “sameness,” Jonas ponders, “Things could

change, Gabe. Things could be different. I don’t know how, but there might be some way for things to be different. There could be colors . . . And grandparents . . . And everybody would have the memories.” And then, leaning over the sleeping baby, Jonas whispers, “There could be love” (128-9).

Why do the young need stories today? Why do they, and we, need young adult literature? Perhaps because, in this age of superficial protections that, in truth, offer little safety, we have become lost in cynicism and cliché. Schools, Columbine reminded us, are not safe, and the emotionally and physically battered students we see every day in our classrooms remind us that homes are not safe either. At the same time, the young move through institutions that seem ludicrous for their disregard of these real perils. The consumer culture forms the pretense that security comes from wealth, and school proficiency tests and other regimens perpetuate the illusion that learning is about answers rather than questions. How many of our students truly come to school to have questions answered? How many even imagine that in school they might voice an opinion about what issues are raised, or what books are read? Schools, with their test-driven curricula, and commercialism, with its pitches to “be all you can be” and “just do it,” offer little security because they do nothing to honor and strengthen either self or community. Does it serve our young to learn that Dr. Pepper is the most “misun-

derstood” soft drink? How cynical an appeal that is to their own insecurities about being misunderstood and unaccepted.

Why do the young need literature? Because good books and poems—the kind that comfort and subvert—cannot be cynical. Because stories that address the questions of our day, and allow students to ponder and decipher real answers, overwhelm cliché. Authors—when they laugh as Joan Bauer does; and reassure as Kimberly Willis Holt, Christopher Paul Curtis, and Katherine Paterson do; and challenge in the way of Chris Crutcher and Robert Cormier—are searching for real answers. Such authors assume authority and influence, becoming, to use Shelley’s phrase, “the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (508).

All of this, by the way, means that the censors are right about one thing—books do have extraordinary power, and literature can change us. What is wrong about the censors’ reading of the problem is the world view it reflects—the conclusion that life should be protected against rather than lived, that difference should be stifled rather than embraced. Their perception of living is cliched, not honest; cynical, not hopeful.

And in the midst of all the protestations, Jonas whispers, “There could be love.”

Let me get ready for another story. Having made the claim that schools should be dangerous places and books should question with passion and honesty, let me with equal honesty propose that probably at times we ourselves have been in awe of a book’s power and thus worried about its impact on a young reader. I myself will confess to being so shattered by the ending of Robert Cormier’s *After the First Death* at first reading—so completely devastated by it—that I could not go back to the book for a year, let alone recommend it to someone else.

Is it not possible that a young reader might find something hurtful in a book that hits too close, might be injured by all of that honesty? Perhaps so, but that is why we teachers are there, and why parents should be there, reading alongside their children. And that is why we need to consider this final story, the point of which is that children who need to can make themselves much safer than we usually imagine is possible.

Several years ago a Youngstown junior high teacher, in the midst of an acrimonious censorship outburst in our community, prepared some of her students to attend our English Festival by having them read Jacqueline Woodson’s touching novel *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*. She did so with a bit of nervousness, realizing that the book dealt with some challenging issues, among them the fact that the character Lena carries the terrible secret that she is being sexually abused by her father.

This teacher’s general worry eventually became located in her concern for Susan, a seventh grader in her class whom she knew had also been abused by a parent. She worried how Susan might react to such an open portrayal of her very problem in the book.

One afternoon, in a private conversation, the teacher had an opportunity to ask Susan about her reading of *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This*. “I liked it,” Susan commented, “and I felt sorry for Lena, what she was going through.” After which the teacher, taking a deep breath, asked, “Yes, Susan,

tell me about what she was going through. What was Lena’s secret?” And what Susan said both startled the teacher and taught her something about the resilience of young readers. “Her secret?” asked Susan. “She was poor. I felt bad for Lena because she didn’t have anything.”

How can it be that Susan, an honors student and perceptive reader, had never seen the incest that Lena and her friend Marie discuss openly in the story? Perhaps she read so as not to see it because it was too close, because she wisely needed to protect herself from that which might threaten her world and identity. And the teacher did the only thing she could logically and compassionately do in that circumstance: she allowed Susan to keep her reading of the text.

And the lesson in Susan’s experience? Maybe it is that the young have more resilience than we think they do. Maybe it is that the young, like all of us, have that ability to put thoughts and experiences away until they are ready to deal with them.

But what would have happened if Susan had, indeed, seen her own tragic abuse in the story of Lena? Knowing Susan’s teacher, I can imagine that only reassurance and healing would ultimately result. There is no safety in denying or ignoring tragedy, but there is protection in facing it, and we who teach must responsibly acknowledge that “happily ever after” is not the ending of all of life’s stories. Facing struggles—through books and all other means—affirms life. In it, “There could be love.”

Before the last chorus of this procession, I wish to acknowledge that all of the individuals you have met this morning—Missy and Jonathan; Martin and the Harry Potter fans; the kids who stood for Robert Cormier; and Susan, who protected herself from Lena’s secret—are real, although I have not always used their real names. One you’ve met, however, is to me much more real than all the others, for in the ninth grade, I was privileged to have a teacher whom my classmates and I called Moose, and I was, and am, the Martin of my tale. The story is in fact even more remarkable than I have given it to you, for Moose’s real name was Miss June Roethke, and she was the kid sister of Pulitzer Prize winning author Theodore Roethke, one of the twentieth century’s great American poets. Before coming to her class, I knew nothing of Ted Roethke, including the fact that he grew up about three miles from my home, and even more serious than that, I knew nothing of what the music of literature could be and how it could transform.

If literature is a living force, then it is the June Roethke’s of the world who deliver it fully born to our youth. It is teachers who do that, and despite my worries about her sternness, June Roethke was certainly a teacher, a great teacher. And if literature is to remain alive, then it is we teachers who must sustain that life force by testifying to its power and by offering young people those stories, those young adult novels and poems, that reflect and embrace life, that—to repeat once more Aidan Chambers’ words—comfort us in our shared humanity and challenge our prejudices and ingrained attitudes.

In speaking once to a group of fellow science fiction writers, Ray Bradbury offered this exhortation: “May you live with hysteria, and out of it make fine stories—science fiction or otherwise. Which finally means, may you be in love every day for the next 20,000 days. And out of that love, remake

the world” (Safir and Safir, 23). For our author friends here, I offer that wish for you—that you remake the world. And for those of us here who read these books and teach young readers, may we do the same, facing in our lessons and lives our own struggles to love and remake the world.

And now for the final song. One other poem Miss June Roethke taught me those many years ago, also written by her brother and my almost-neighbor Theodore Roethke, is entitled, “The Waking.” It goes like this:

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go (108).

So let us, for these two days, learn by going where we must go in honoring young adults and their stories, and let us take the lively air of the wonderful authors and teachers who are spending these days with us.

Let the celebration begin.

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Placing Fictional Facts on Imaginary Audiences: Using Adolescent Literature to Teach Lesson- Planning in Secondary Methods Courses

Maryanne R. Bednar and Francis J. Ryan

One of the challenges confronting teacher educators is devising productive activities that will help their students understand how pedagogical theory informs practice. Courses in educational psychology and in methods of teaching frequently include assignments that expect students to generate lesson plans which address the needs of “imaginary learners.” Oftentimes, such classes have field components that require students to spend time in “real classrooms,” engaging learners in tutoring, small-group instruction, and eventually large-group teaching—all in an attempt to illustrate how theory should guide practice.

All of these approaches are beneficial preparations for the student teaching practicum, where student teachers are finally confronted with the daily demands, frustrations, and rewards of the teaching enterprise. Despite the thoroughness of methods course instruction as well as the richness of pre-practicum fieldwork, many student teachers still become perplexed when required to address the needs of specific learners. The “imaginary audiences” that functioned well in methods courses fade in contrast to these real demands. For example, methods professors, when teaching lesson planning, might restrict the proposed lessons to the “imaginary audiences” of “Advanced Placement Senior English” or of “Basic Business Writing,” but these activities are helpful in providing prospective teachers only a general context for constructing theory-driven lessons. These “imaginary audiences” do not have specific personalities that would force student teachers to examine the psychosocial, behavioral, motivational, and overall instructional needs of these learners.

At La Salle University in Philadelphia, we have had considerable success using “adolescents” from young adult fiction as a way of placing “real faces” on the “imaginary audience.” In general, our secondary methods course, “The Art and Science of Teaching,” covers topics such as decision-making, planning, instructional strategies, questioning techniques, assessment, management, and discipline. A two-hour per week field component in a secondary classroom also provides opportunities for students to observe, examine, and actually “test through practice” the fine points of these topics as each student moves from individual tutoring and small-group instruction to large-group teaching. Students record

these activities in journals, and once back on campus, they share their experiences in focus groups with their peers. About mid-semester, after our students have struggled with planning various activities for real students, we provide a common experience for all of our students—an experience that requires them to build on their most recent field-based activities and to draw from the principles of pedagogy. The following phases demonstrate how we put into operation the fictional faces activity. The activity occurs over two class periods, totaling four instructional hours.

Placing Fictional Faces on Imaginary Audiences

Phase I

We asked our students to read closely a common selection from young adult literature. We have found Joyce Carol Oates’s “Boy and Girl” especially effective. This short story portrays two adolescents who are struggling with numerous personal and family problems. We asked our students to read this story and to come to class prepared to discuss the characterization of the two protagonists.

Phase II

In class, the students brainstormed the fine points of the characters and generated a series of observations from which three general classifications surfaced: physical attributes, emotional attributes, and setting.

Boy Character, Alex

Physical

Looked fifteen
Stooped
Muttering
Odd
No real friends
Bad Skin
Physical deterioration

Emotional

Loner
Questioning
Needs to feel special
Problem-solver

Girl Character, Doris

Sixteen
Slight
Colorless, fluttery
Powdery mouth
Popular
Freckled
Saliva around mouth

Popular
Flirtatious
Brisk
Brassy

Attracted to the abstract
Felt something was wrong
Disassociated from his body
Held onto rejection
Goal oriented

Settings

Recognized influence
of his changing suburbs

Acting out to get attention
“Druggy” demeanor
Manic, nervous
Sensor
Retained feelings

Liked to change partners,
and different music

From this brainstorming exercise, the students concluded that the girl, Doris, was “worldly but flighty, outgoing and possibly overly aggressive, and wannabe popular.” In addition, they felt that she demonstrated “lack of awareness of self and lack of empathy for others.” The most common trait presented was that Doris was a “risk taker.” The students characterized the boy, Alex, as a “shy, reserved, nerdy intellectual who was uncomfortable with social situations” due to his embarrassment about his perceived physical shortcomings, primarily his pronounced acne and slight build. They emphasized intellectual curiosity and inventiveness as the character’s strong points.

Students were quick to caution that there was a danger of inferring too much about the characters’ inner lives, especially their feelings and motivation, based solely on a few narrative descriptors. This observation prompted a lively discussion that focused on stereotyping “real students” in classrooms based upon inaccurate, incomplete or misleading information. Students pointed out basic concerns with use of informal and formal labels that categorize, and possibly dismiss, learners. For example, M., an English education major, questioned the validity of using Myers-Briggs (Lawrence, 1993) type preference and teaching style labels, extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, judgment/perception, or Gregorc mind style labels: random, abstract, sequential and concrete learners. She posed: “Don’t these labels also limit our understanding of the individual in his or her world?” Several students argued that labeling, either using educational terms or informal stereotypical terms, would ill serve the teacher in the specific case of “Boy and Girl” as well as in real secondary classrooms. S, a German education major, presented herself as a case in point. She explained that most people assumed that she was a math or science major because she is Asian-American, and they expressed astonishment when she informed them that she was a secondary education German major. “They put one and one together and came up with an Asian-American who excels in the science and math world. They didn’t see me at all. I’m rotten in those fields.” Most students acknowledged the possible shortcomings associated with assuming too much, too quickly from the limited fictional snapshots provided by Oates. But they also countered that educators, as well as most individuals, tend to form and then rely upon snapshots of people whom they encounter daily. For instance, P., a social studies education major and S., an English education major, added that as Dean’s List varsity athletes, they continue to be irritated by those who are surprised by their academic achievement. The students noted that such people retained the stereotype of the university-athlete as someone who cuts class, needs extensive tutorial assistance, and rarely excels academically.

These cautionary comments seemed not to provide any resolutions to these issues, although the entire discussion did

reveal insight into the students’ development as readers and as teachers. Attesting to several features and effects of reader-response theory (Tompkins, 1980), almost everyone in the class exhibited a greater awareness of themselves as individuals and a heightened appreciation of their own identities. They registered, too, a sensitivity to the uniqueness of their peers’ personalities, as well as a realization of the needs of their students. In this latter context, they especially responded to the shortcomings of prematurely categorizing their prospective students and, in some cases, with the destructive effects of any type of psychosocial labeling.

Phase III

The students were then grouped into teams representing the academic concentrations present in the seminar: two English teams, two Social Studies, and one Foreign Language team. The student-teams were asked to develop activities and instructional methods to meet the needs of one or both of these two fictional characters. They were also asked to identify effective methods of assessment for these activities. Students were required to connect their selected strategies, activities, and techniques to major pedagogical principles and theories discussed in coursework. Some of these strategies and theories included learning style (e.g. Gregorc, Myers-Briggs), information processing theory (e.g. Bruner, Dale), multiple intelligence theory (e.g. Gardner), moral development (e.g. Damon, Kohlberg), cognitive development (e.g. Piaget, Vygotsky), and psychosocial development (e.g. Erickson).

Phase IV

Teams presented their lesson plans with accompanying rationale and justification on an overhead transparency. When appropriate for clarification or extension, the teams responded to questions by their peers and the instructor. The student teams addressed the fictional characters in a range of ways. Each team was able to supply clearly the theoretical reasoning for their instructional or assessment decisions.

Social Studies Team One. The first Social Studies team targeted Doris and developed an interesting lesson to “utilize Doris’s risk taking extroverted personality to get her involved in learning.” They proposed that Doris become a co-presenter of the teacher’s set induction highlighting the role of photojournalism during the Vietnam War. They intended for Doris to be a member of the photojournalism team scouring Vietnam for human interest and conflict stories. They stated that this “acting opportunity” would capitalize on Doris’s interpersonal intelligence and outgoing style. They explained that “she likes to have attention so why not use it for positive purposes — get attention for academics. Maybe it will help to win her over.” Furthermore, because Doris seems to reflect some of the characteristics of Erikson’s (Good & Brophy, 1990) “identity confusion,” students argued that this activity might help her to find a vocational focus that would actually cause a chain reaction in her personal life, resulting in more responsible behavior and overall improved academic achievement.

Social Studies Team Two. The second Social Studies team used a similar approach when they proposed to have Doris become the central figure in a segregation activity that was part of larger unit on human rights. Again, this team proposed a role-playing scenario to “get the students motivated,

especially Doris, to learn about civil rights.” Such a role-play or re-enactment would prompt her “to recognize the importance of consciously being aware of actions and their effects on others.” Here, they emphasized that the character Doris lacked empathy for others. Based on Damon’s (1995) model of the moral system, this role-play would provide Doris an opportunity for experiencing empathy for others, an emotion that is a primal building block for pro-social behavior and ultimately for moral conduct.

English Team One. This team developed a culminating assessment for a literature unit on a local color artist, such as Twain, Cather, or Runyon, that would address Alex’s and Doris’s respective learning styles and social development as suggested by Erikson (Good & Brophy, 1990). The group’s goal was two-fold: first, to “create an activity that would help Alex to become a more versatile thinker and learner . . . , an activity that would invite Alex to tap into an ‘abstract random’ learning style” [as described by Gregorc (Guild & Garger, 1985)]; and second, to construct a way that would “allow Doris an academic moment to shine” by appealing to her outgoing personality and her interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983). The assessment activity involved an eight-to-ten minute group presentation highlighting the connection of at least two of a targeted author’s works to the author’s region and/or personal life. For instance, Alex would be encouraged to create the scene and the dialogue for the presentation, whereas Doris would be one of the actors.

Because Alex has a propensity for abstract theorizing [as represented in the short story by the English paper he wrote on reality], this team believed that this form of assessment would permit him to use his intellectual abilities to theorize about the possible connections between an author and regional issues. In addition, they felt that it would help Alex to be part of a group and to stretch his interpersonal skills (Gardner, 1983) in a positive social situation where he would have a strong possibility of success because of his abilities to write and to abstract.

Other presenting groups voiced concern about Alex’s forced participation in a classroom social activity that afforded him neither physical nor emotional escape. The presenting group clarified its position, claiming that they anticipated this to be a low-stress situation for Alex because the teacher would provide ample support while monitoring the group work. Reflecting their concern for Alex’s emotional well-being, many students speculated on whether they were teachers or social workers, and they then questioned the degree to which their lesson plan objectives should go beyond the cognitive and include the affective and perhaps even the psychomotor domains. This was countered by comments that to meet more of the students’ needs, more of the time, teachers need to be able to individualize learning tasks and materials. The balance of the discussion revealed their overall concern about accommodating their students’ learning needs in a realistic way in a real classroom, while tending to the instructional constraints of the curriculum.

English Team Two. In a lesson that introduced satire, this team developed a lesson format designed to address each of the fictional student’s learning styles as presented by Gregorc (Guild & Garger, 1985). Using a video clip from *Saturday Night Live* that satirized President Clinton’s eating habits and his ability to wordsmith to fit any occasion, the lesson intro-

duced the basic elements of satire. After some direct instruction to present definitions, students were provided with political cartoons and other examples of satire in everyday life. To reinforce satirical concepts, students could choose to demonstrate their understanding by selecting from a menu: role-play, political cartooning, or short essay satire. The group believed that Doris would benefit from the video clip because it presented an abstract concept in a more concrete and entertaining manner. In addition, they felt that the extroverted risk-taker Doris would be drawn to the role-play option possibly as a way to use her love of music and dance—Gardner’s musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences—to demonstrate her content knowledge. Similar to the other groups, this team recognized Alex’s introspective nature, his desire to work on his own, and his abstract learning style. They believed that the cartooning and/or satirical essay would enable Alex to use his specific learning style effectively.

Foreign Language Team. This team also attempted to use Doris’s strengths, her extroverted style and risk taking, to help complement Alex’s introverted style and lack of comfort with his peers. Citing Myers-Briggs’ (Guild & Garger, 1985) introversion-extroversion polarities and Erikson’s (Good & Brophy, 1990) social developmental principles, they proposed to pair the two characters as “grammar and conversation partners.” While “Alex knew academically about Spanish, he may not be able to demonstrate his knowledge due to his introverted nature. Doris could help him bring this knowledge to the conversation level.” In turn, they believed that Alex would help “to strengthen Doris’s understanding about the structure of the Spanish language.” Here, the group pointed out that the reciprocating dynamics of each character’s personality would activate their respective “Zones of Proximal Development” (Good & Brophy, 1990), resulting in academic improvement for both Alex and Doris. This assertion prompted questions from other groups regarding the limits of Vygotsky’s construct. Could the “Zone of Proximal Development” be understood as describing emotional growth as well as cognitive mastery of a skill or concept? How would this work? What would count as growth? How would this be measured?

This discussion then shifted into the characters’ moral growth, with the presenting group claiming that this “pedagogical pairing” could be used to assist Doris in moving from Kohlberg’s (Good & Brophy, 1990) conventional level to a more principled stage of moral awareness. This ignited controversy, with other students questioning Alex’s position on the Kohlberg Scale. Others doubted Alex’s maturity and strength of personality to influence Doris’s moral development. Others reminded the presenting group that, to effect moral growth, the “pairing” of the characters should focus not on Spanish grammar and conversation, but on Spanish literature that contains some sort of moral dilemma. All groups contributed to this debate, resulting in the Foreign Language team not having sufficient time to present their measures of assessment.

Conclusions and Implications

This fictional character analysis provided students from various academic disciplines the opportunity to examine the nuances of adolescent motivation and behavior that, through fiction, is “clinically freeze-framed” or “arrested in time on

the printed page” and to use this examination as a base-line to construct appropriate lesson plans based on pedagogical principles. It also revealed how these nuances of behavior within the fictional characters frequently generate variations of interpretation, thus leading to variations in selecting teaching strategies and methods of assessment. This reality reinforces the perspective that teaching is both an art and a science—a process based on personal understanding of specific students in particular learning contexts and judicious application of researched-based pedagogy to these contexts. This approach can be used with all prospective student teachers, although for English education majors, the process provides additional opportunities for applying and refining their skills of literary analysis. Equally important, this approach can be used with poetry, drama, and film. In short, we have found the practice of placing fictional faces on imaginary audiences an engaging, synthesizing, and helpful activity. While it may lack the control and design features of a clinical, psychological case-study, this approach nonetheless can clearly guide students to appreciate the richness of adolescent life and to construct meaningful lessons that can penetrate and utilize this richness in relevant and pedagogically sound ways.

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Dr. John H. Bushman, Director

For(e)knowledge of Youth: *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*

Charles H. Frey

Once upon a time, long ago in our country's colonial past, a group of settlers lived in wilderness between New York's Catskill mountains and the mighty Hudson river. The settlers considered the neighboring tribe of Mohawks to be "savage Indians," but a roving hunter in the region, William Danforth, had befriended the tribe's chief and then taken to wife the chief's beautiful daughter, Malaeska.

Malaeska loved William Danforth passionately and bore him a son in gladness, but, when war broke out between the settlers and the Mohawks, Danforth fought on the side of the settlers. In the course of the fighting, he was mortally wounded even as he killed Malaeska's father. Malaeska came to the dying Danforth. He enjoined her to love the white man's God and to take their son to the home of Danforth's parents in Manhattan. Armed with a sealed letter from Danforth, Malaeska made her way down the Hudson with her baby boy and managed to find the home of Danforth's parents.

So shocked was Danforth's father at the news of his son's death and of his biracial marriage and issue, that at first he wanted nothing to do with Malaeska or the baby. Slowly, however, John Danforth's wife, together with the pleading Malaeska and her bright-eyed babe, softened the old man's heart, at least partly. Malaeska and the boy were permitted to stay, she as a menial servant and he as grandson, but Malaeska was forbidden to reveal her identity to the child, called William.

The child grew from baby to boy, attended by a white nurse, and watched lovingly by his mother, Malaeska, who managed only casual and sporadic contacts with him. After enduring several years of this torment, she could stand it no longer and, dressing in her Indian finery, and promising a grand adventure, she lured young William Danforth into a small rowboat she had secured. Together they rowed up the Hudson. After a day or two of play in the woods, William asked to go home. Malaeska momentarily dissuaded him, but the Grandfather, with some other men, had tracked them down. The men took the boy ruthlessly away from her and back to Manhattan. Soon young William was sent abroad to study in France for several years.

Though her tribe had moved away, Malaeska went back to her old wigwam near the Catskill settlement of whites. For years she lived by selling her handiwork to the settlers. One of the settlers, Arthur Jones, had been a close friend of Malaeska's husband, and Jones's daughter, Sarah, now fifteen, befriended Malaeska. For two years, Sarah made daily visits to Malaeska who taught Sarah many refinements of natural graces in bearing, movement, and domestic skills and also an appreciation of natural religion.

At eighteen, Sarah was sent to Manhattan to the boarding school of Madame Monot. Sarah's school happened to neighbor the property of the elder Danforths, young William's grandparents. One day, when Sarah looked down from her room into the Danforths' garden, she saw the old man fall to the ground, afflicted by a stroke. She rushed downstairs, out of her house, and into the neighboring garden where she called

for help and ministered to Danforth. Thereafter, she came under the wing of Mr. and Mrs. Danforth, who arranged for her to live in their home and go over to the boarding school only for day-lessons.

When young William Danforth returned home from his stay abroad, he and Sarah

were delighted with each other's company and soon fell in love, to the anxious approval of the grandparents. Before William and Sarah could bring their love to the altar, however, the elder Danforths died, so that William and Sarah decided to marry at Sarah's home in the Catskill settlement.

A day or so after the engaged couple had been joyfully welcomed to Sarah's home, Sarah invited William to come visit Sarah's beloved Indian friend. Sarah did not mention the woman's name. William angrily refused to go, citing the extreme antipathy to Indians that had been bred into him by his grandfather. Sarah was forced to visit Malaeska alone.

Upon learning from Sarah that her fiancé's name was William Danforth, Malaeska, in extreme agitation, sent a note by Sarah to the youth asking him please to visit her and writing her name. William recognized the name of his boyhood servant and came to Malaeska at her prescribed meeting place, atop a cliff jutting out high over Catskill Creek. Malaeska there embraced him, called him "son," and proclaimed herself his mother. She told the whole adventure of her love for

Malaeska sold several hundred thousand copies and arguably sparked the enormous popularity of dime novels that became the favorite reading fare of American teenagers for four

his father, his own birth, his father's death, and her journey with the boy to Manhattan. Aghast at this discovery of his true heritage and enraged by "the deep prejudice which had been instilled into his nature," William then broke from Malaeska, rushed to the cliff's edge, and leaped to his death in the stream below.

Young William was buried beside the grave of his father. Sarah came there and found the lifeless form of Malaeska stretched upon the new-made grave. Thereafter, Sarah lived a lonely but useful life and even came to Manhattan once to see the Danforth home demolished to make way for commercial progress. Thus ends the story of Malaeska, Indian wife of a white hunter.

Ann Stephens, who lived in New York City and wrote many extremely popular stories and novels of romance, penned this tale in 1839. In 1860, a slightly revised version of the original magazine story was taken up by the firm of Beadle and Adams as the first of their soon-famous series of dime novels (Stephens, Ann S. *Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, New York: I.P. Beadle, 1860). *Malaeska* sold several hundred thousand copies and arguably sparked the enormous popularity of dime novels that became the favorite reading fare of American teenagers for four decades.

Malaeska is thus significant in the history of books read by youth, yet that historical significance might not itself qualify *Malaeska* to be read by youth today. One could argue that *Malaeska* possesses neither the literary merit nor topical relevance to vie with modern bestsellers. Still, in contexts other than bookstore competition, *Malaeska* deserves strong consideration for reading by young adults.

In schools and colleges, teachers of language arts and social studies may wish either to teach *Malaeska* directly or to recommend it as supplementary reading. Here are some reasons:

1. For boys and girls it's a "good read" in the conventional sense: offering suspense, dramatic action, some but not too much romance, varied characters, strong emotions, stylish writing, and issues of interest to youth today.

2. *Malaeska* shows that young adult literature is a real "subject" of study, a kind of literature appealing to youth through not necessarily about youth and neither high-brow nor low-brow in appeal, a literature reaching back over a century and a half, if not further. Such a work lends the subject of young adult literature greater range, integrity, historical depth and worth than is often granted by non-experts in the field.

3. In particular, certain issues raised in *Malaeska* should interest youth between ten and twenty. These issues can be discussed with reference solely to *Malaeska*, or the issues raised through *Malaeska* can be compared with analogous issues raised in contemporary young adult novels. What are those issues?

Issues in American History of the Colonial Period

Malaeska is set in the early to mid 1700's after the British had defeated the Dutch throughout New York. The Catskill settlement is vaguely Dutch in character and Dutch terms are still applied, for instance, to geographical areas about the settlement.

Sarah's mother, Martha Fellows, and her then fiancé, Arthur Jones, both emigrated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with Martha's family, the year before the story opens.

There are thus three tiers of cultures superimposed here: Indian, Dutch, and British-American. In *Malaeska*, the Mohawks are first termed, by the narrator, "a savage Indian tribe" (7) who, despite their alleged savagery, are noted to have left the settlers' "unmolested" (7). When Danforth and Jones come upon the Mohawk camp near the white settlement, they see a peaceful scene where "three or four half-naked Indian children lay rolling upon [the grass], laughing, shouting, and flinging up their limbs in the pleasant morning air. One young Indian woman was also frolicking among them, tossing an infant in her arms, caroling and playing with it. Her laugh was musical as a bird song, and as she darted to and fro, now into the forest and then out into the sunshine, her long hair glowed like the wing of a raven, and her motion was graceful as an untamed gazelle. They could see that the child, too, was very beautiful . . ." (12). Four pages later, however, "a half-naked Savage" tries to shoot Jones, for no discernible reason other than inveterate hatred. Jones kills the "savage" and, in "an impulsive of fierce excitement" (18) scalps his victim and runs off in a "fearless spirit of a madness" (18). Stephens may be suggesting that white claims to superior civilization were a fragile veneer.

Stephens says the Mohawks, angry over the death of their brave, give signs they are about to attack the settlement, but then the male settlers go to the woods seeking battle with the Mohawks. In general, Stephens seems to depict the Mohawks as savage but also in tune with sublimity in nature, and Stephens' comparisons of Indians to whites also invoke certain gender issues (discussed below).

Malaeska, then, invites students to imagine colonial life along the Hudson, a nearly rural Manhattan, the effacement of Dutch settlements as well as Mohawk/Iroquois nations, the early commingling of fur trade with farming and town commerce, colonial emulation of French manners, and, finally, colonial attitudes toward race, class, gender, and religion as seen through eyes of a nineteenth-century American author. Not merely a gripping tale, the book has something to teach youngsters today about their colonial past. (Please see Figure One for samples of schematic handouts that can help students grasp generational and historical contexts of the action in this novel.)

Issues of Race and Culture

Though the relation of Malaeska and Danforth is at one point termed "an unnatural marriage" (253), it is defended as between "two warm young hearts that forgot every thing in the sweet impulse with which they clung together" (241). Malaeska tells her son: "I know that I am an Indian, but your father loved me" (246). In discussing his racial prejudice with his fiancée, Sarah, young Danforth says, "I acknowledge the prejudice too violent for adequate foundation" (222), and Sarah replies, "You would not have me neglect one of the kindest, best friends I ever had on earth, because the tint of her skin is a shade darker than my own?" (223). Of course, the whole book depicts the tragic and unnecessary suffering endured by Malaeska and, at the end, by Danforth and Sarah as a result of racial prejudice. Beyond that, the story explores the phenomenon of racial "passing" from an interesting perspective, for young Danforth does not know until the very end that he is "half Indian," and students may search usefully for points in Stephens's descriptions that would hint at his supposedly racial doubleness.

Then there is the intriguing question of whether the author attributes Malaeska's character, skills, and beliefs to her race, to her culture, to her gender, or to individual distinction. How, for example, would students assess the mix of condescension and admiration in the following description of Malaeska's love for Danforth: "her untutored heart, rich in its natural affections, had no aim, no object, but what centered in the love she bore her white husband. The feelings which in civilized life are scattered over a thousand objects, were, in her bosom, centered in one single being; he supplied the place of all the high aspirations — of all the passions and sentiments which are fostered into strength by society" (31-32)? It seems to me that Stephens here critiques civilized society for inducing a fragmentation and distraction in affections. Malaeska's purity of heart in willing one thing is not racial in our sense but rather a product of her life close to the natural scene.

Race, in the hands of Stephens, includes not merely our more recently-developed, and questionable, notions of biological difference, but also what we would think of as cultural affiliation. Here we see Stephens' determination to privilege in Malaeska a kind of combined religious and aesthetic appreciation, "a wild poetic faith" (56) that, to Stephens, is a matter of "race" in a more inclusive, cultural sense. Thus, when Malaeska looks on her dying husband and imagines meeting him in the final hunting-ground, Stephens comments: "the wild religion of her race gushed up from her heart, a stream of living poetry," poetry rendered by Stephens as follows:

The hunting-ground of the Indian is yonder, among the purple clouds of the evening. The stars are very thick there, and the red light is heaped together like mountains in the heart of a forest. The sugar-maple gives its waters all the year round, and the breath of the deer is sweet, for it feeds on the gold spire-bush and the ripe berries. A lake of bright waters is there. The Indian's canoe flies over it like a bird high up in the morning. The West has rolled back its clouds, and a great chief has passed through. He will hold back the clouds that his white son may go up to the face of the Great Spirit. Malaeska and her boy will follow. The blood of the red man

is high in her heart, and the way is open. The lake is deep, and the arrow sharp; death will come when Malaeska calls him. Love will make her voice sweet in the land of the Great Spirit; the white man will hear it, and call her to his bosom again! (55)

I quote at length in hopes of stimulating your interest in this strangely formulaic yet affecting novel, one that many teenagers would find worth reading and discussing not only for its conventional themes but also for such hints of natural religion as just invoked. Religion of Nature is a perhaps surprisingly common feature of great fiction for youth. Think of *The Wind in the Willows*, *Huckleberry Finn*, Sarah Orne Jewett's neglected youth novel, *Betty Leicester*, and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, not to mention youth-favored novels such as Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Stephens devotes several paragraphs to the power of natural beauty to affect Malaeska. She says, for instance, "There was something in the sublime and lofty handiwork of God which fell soothingly on the sad heart of the Indian" (67), and Stephens, echoing the nature worship of romantic poets such as Wordsworth, insists that Sarah's "mind had become vigorous by a constant intercourse with the beautiful things of nature" (158) that were shown to her by Malaeska, thus teaching a "pure and simple religion which lifts the soul" (159). Here, I think, is a dimension of fiction for young adults not often addressed but attracting interest among today's youth. Our culture still privileges Nature in many ways, and it can be instructive to help students consider origins and varieties of this privileging by comparing works such as Malaeska to romantic poems, other youth novels, and materials from environmentalists today.

Issues Concerning Family and Peer Group

Another cluster of issues in *Malaeska*, a cluster central to many young adult novels, concerns family feelings and adolescent development towards independence. While Malaeska's husband says he's ashamed of fathering a son of mixed races, he nonetheless pleads with his dying breath for Malaeska to take the boy to his grandparents. Blood or familial love here overrules social scorn. But then questions may be raised as

Figure One

Schematic handouts, such as the charts below, can help students grasp generational and historical contexts of the action in *Malaeska*:

Chart of Relations in *Malaeska*:



Chart of Dates in History:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1861-65 | American Civil War |
| 1860 | <i>Malaeska</i> published by Beadle and Adams as first dime novel |
| 1839 | Ann S. Stephens first writes <i>Malaeska</i> . |
| 1776 | Declaration of Independence |
| 1675-1750 | British expansion in NY region, time period in <i>Malaeska</i> (?) |
| 1664 | New Amsterdam becomes New York |
| 1615-1675 | Dutch settlements in New York region giving way to British |
| pre 1600 | Native American control |

to whether the boy would have fared better being brought up as a Mohawk and why Malaeska acceded to the dying Danforth's request. This points in turn toward gender inequalities depicted throughout the book and often implicitly critiqued. Not only are Malaeska and the elder Mrs. Danforth oppressed by their husbands' imperious certainties, but also Sarah Jones's mother, in her courtship with Arthur Jones, mingles adulation for him with resentments at his fault-finding jealousy and his tendency to lecture her. This resentment of male domination could be compared to the same phenomenon depicted in more recent young adult novels.

Another developmental issue raised in many novels for young adults stems from the circumstance that many youth protagonists are either orphaned or semi-orphaned. I think one reason is that adolescence often *feels*

like losing one's family as one moves from a primary identification with family to identification with an outside peer group. In *Malaeska*, young Danforth is semi-orphaned as he goes to live with his grandparents, does not know his mother is in the house, and soon goes off to France to finish his education. Sarah, too, receives crucial instruction not from her mother at home but from Malaeska in the woods and leaves home for boarding school. How will young readers assess such semi-orphanage?

Young adult literature is filled, too, with portrayals of youths who identify themselves as social outsiders. Adolescents often see themselves as different from all others. In *Malaeska*, Ann Stephens cleverly creates a situation in which young Danforth is an unknowing outsider, yet he and Sarah share a secret affinity in being so deeply influenced, in blood or training, by the same Mohawk woman. One could argue that, instead of affinity between William and Sarah, there is actually a kind of cross-over in which part Mohawk William has been socialized so as to abhor his Indian self, whereas white Sarah has been socialized so as to love Malaeska and accept Malaeska's "ascendancy over her feelings" (158). I believe that many teen-agers, upon reading the novel, would become intrigued with its challenging depictions of nature/nurture debates still vital today.

Other interesting issues could be pursued in teaching

Figure Two Complementary Texts

YA Books That Might be Studied in Conjunction with *Malaeska*:

- Alden R. Carter, *Dogwolf* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1994).
 Lynda Durrant, *Echohawk* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1996).
 Virginia Hamilton, *Arilla Sun Down* (New York: Scholastic, 1995).
 Virginia Hamilton, *A White Romance* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).
 Nella Larson, *Passing* (New York: Penguin books, 1997).
 Eloise Jarvis McGraw, *Moccasin Trail* (New York: Junior Literary Guild: Coward-McCann, 1952).
 Elizabeth George Speare, *Calico Captive* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

Secondary works such as the following may help teachers place *Malaeska* in rich contexts of biographical, historical, and political studies:

- American Indian Studies Center, University of California, *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1998).
 Suzanne Clores, *Native American Women* (New York: Chelsea Juniors, 1995).
 John Demos, *The Tried and True: Native American Women Confronting Colonization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
 Elaine K. Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).
 Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).
 Julie M. Mueller, *The Image of the Native American in Young Adult Fiction (1960-1985)* 1986 (Springfield, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service 1992).
 Karen Patricia Smith, *Multicultural Children's Literature in the United States* (Champaign, Il.: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1993).
 Madeleine Stern, "Ann S. Stephens: Author of the First Beadle Dime Novel, 1860" *New York Public Library Bulletin* 64.6 (June 1960) 303-322.
 Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Malaeska: issues such as how to place the story in traditions of American romance that include Cooper's Leatherstocking tales and their Mohawk hero, or how to assess the attempted tragic exaltation by Stephens of Malaeska's (and later Sarah's) *sacrificial* love. Is there really a beauty in such love? Would such a beauty help explain why tragic romance can be a pleasure to read, why literary sadness may be gratifying? Then there are the issues of how to assess *Malaeska* as a dime novel, resembling much young adult literature in being a series book and neither clearly high-brow nor low-brow in its appeals.

I offer two final suggestions: (1) *Malaeska* is a good companion to teach beside one or more recent young adult novels on related themes (Please see Figure Two for lists of complementary texts); (2) *Malaeska* offers fine passages for reading aloud or, better, for class dramatization. Few classroom activities can do more to bring a book alive than performance can, especially memorized and rehearsed performance. Students then achieve a physical and emotional memory of the book that can enhance their confidence in understanding and evaluating it.

In summary, *Malaeska* reveals the deep roots of young adult literature. It can help strengthen claims of young adult literature to serious consideration as literature, and it can help teachers of young adult literature show students that "their" problems have been shared by their forebears in youth,

that there is an older foreknowledge of their current knowledge. To help our students discover that foreknowledge and knowledge, let us teach not only contemporary young adult novels but also strong forerunners such as *Malaeska*.

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Editor's note:

When I asked Charles Frey about the availability of *Malaeska*, which was originally published in 1860, he explained that it is still listed among Books in Print and is found in hundreds of libraries, and that it is also available on-line as part of the Dime Novel Digitization Project at Northern Illinois University. Following is the Web address for access to the Dime Novel Digitization Project: <http://libws66.lib.niu.edu/badndp/dn01.html>.

The novel will also appear as part of an anthology, *Classics of Young Adult Literature*, that Charles H. Frey and Lucy Rollin are preparing for publication by Prentice Hall.

—psc

Charles H. Frey teaches literature for youth and literature of the early modern period in the Department of English, University of Washington. He is co-author of *The Literary Heritage of Childhood (Greenwood, 1987)* and *Classics of Children's Literature (5th edition, Prentice Hall, 2000)*.

Picture Books for Young Adult Readers

Sunya Osborn

As my class was doing historical research in the library, I pointed out to my students that they should study the pictures in the books to help them understand their topics. I was met with some blank stares, and one boy raised his hand and said, "But, I thought we were too old to look at pictures in books. I didn't think we should." Many other students murmured their agreement. It was sad that they were denying themselves an important aspect of their research and more particularly of their reading. As I looked at the ones who felt this way about picture books, I realized they were also poor readers. Knowing some of their backgrounds, I believed they probably had never been read to as children. It was sad that they were *still* denying themselves the pleasure of enjoying picture books.

Picture books are a great asset to reading and a useful tool for teachers. An important trend in publishing and marketing is picture books for young adult readers. "Dramatic changes in children's and YA publishing over the last decade have blurred the lines between children's and adult books. The fact that a book has 32 pages, full-color illustrations, and a 9-by-13 inch trim size no longer automatically means it's "for children only" . . . (Zvirin, 1998, 1716). Although it is difficult to define an exact age limit for picture books, some criteria for picture books for older readers are that they use:

- Mature themes
- More complex illustrations than those that would be easily appreciated or understood by younger readers
- More text or difficult text than would be appropriate for the short attention spans of younger readers
- Subtle meanings beyond the understanding of younger readers
- Two levels of meaning — one for younger readers and one for older readers
- Fiction or non-fiction

Picture books for young adults have mature themes that would be neither understood by nor appropriate for younger readers. For example, *I Never Knew Your Name* (Garland, 1993) is told by a boy who is troubled because he didn't reach out to another teen who committed suicide. *Just One Flick of a Finger* (Loribecki 1996) is the story of a boy who brings a gun to school, and of the disaster that results. The theme of drugs is illustrated in *The House That Crack Built* (Taylor 1992). These are all topics of concern to young adults, but inappropriate for most younger readers.

Today's picture books contain beautiful artwork. However, the tastes of many young children are not developed enough to fully appreciate the meaning or effect of some more sophisticated picture books. "Although young children can enjoy the pictures in *Ammo's USA*, the visual references in the book are subtle and beyond their grasp. Readers must

have a solid background in American history, literature and folklore to truly appreciate the breadth of Anno's celebration of America" (Flack 1994, 54). The contemporary paintings of Wayne Theibaud, in *O Beautiful for Spacious Skies* (Bates 1994), are beyond the understanding of most children. Some of the potential to make meaning when encountering a picture book would be lost if the reader did not understand the complexity of the illustrations. "A picture book uses both text and illustration to create meaning; one is not as powerful alone as it is with the other" (Giorgis 1999, 51).

Picture books for young adults are often boring to younger readers because of the longer, more complex texts. However, older readers would find these texts and pictures entertaining and engaging.

Younger children are unlikely to grasp the subtleties in young adult picture books. Although much of the humor, allusions, and situations would have little meaning for them, young adults pick up on these elements and find enjoyment in them. For example, *Snow White in New York* (French 1986) has the wicked step-mother looking in the newspaper the *New York Mirror* to get her information instead of in a looking-glass mirror. This is appreciated by older readers not children. In the book *A Little Pigeon Toad* (Gwynne 1988) the humor is based on puns that are delightful to older readers but might be meaningless to children.

Many picture books can be enjoyed by both older and younger readers. *My Great Aunt Arizona* (Houston 1992), *The Rag Coat* (Mills 1991), and *Dandelions* (Bunting 1995) are examples of stories that have strong themes and enjoyable stories for young and old alike.

Young adult picture books are written in fiction as well as non-fiction formats. Enjoyable stories in all genres and information texts on all subjects abound. Young adult readers would have no trouble finding picture books to match their tastes in literature of any kind. Picture books increase their understanding and pleasure no matter what mode they select to read.

Implications for Teachers of Young Adults

Young adult picture books are valuable tools for teachers. These books lend themselves to all content areas. Picture books help students be more strategic readers. Readers use many of the same skills to interpret pictures as they do to interpret print, such as determining their purpose for reading; drawing upon their background knowledge, experience, and attitudes; asking and answering questions; inferring; and visualizing. Putting these skills together through both illustrations and text enhances comprehension and the creation of meaning.

There are several types of picture books that a teacher may consider:

- *Wordless books*: The story is told completely through pictures. No text is included.
- *Picture books with minimal text*: There is a small amount of text, but the illustrations reveal most of the story.
- *Picture storybooks*: Pictures and text have about the same presence and interact to tell the story.
- *Books with illustrations*: There are more words than illustrations, but the illustrations give enlightenment and clarification to the story or informational text. (Vacca and Vacca 1999, 99).

Each type of picture book could be used by teachers to teach comprehension strategies as well as to increase reading comprehension itself.

Janet Allen, an expert in reading strategies, explains the importance of picture books. "Creating images of scenes or events is an expression of a mental model (Johnson-Laird 1983; Sanford and Garrod, 1981; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). I think that's one reason children's picture books were such a hit in my classroom. The beautiful illustrations gave my [secondary] students a mental model they were often unable to create for themselves because they were struggling with the words" (Allen 1998, 51).

In *You Gotta Be the Book*, Jeffrey D. Wilhelm tells how picture books helped his struggling readers. "Once students were introduced to picture books and encouraged to read them, they did so vigorously. I wrote in my journal that 'I just have to wonder if school conveys a very limited view of literature that does not include picture books and comics, and if this limited view of literature contributes to how bummed out and distanced many of my student readers become from literature and the literary experience,'" (Wilhelm 1997, 123).

Picture books support readers by helping build schema. Letting students read books with pictures and text can help them understand concepts and facts that would be difficult without such support. Picture books are on students' independent reading level, while literary "classics" and content textbooks are on their instructional or often on their frustration level. Picture books can bridge the gap in students' understanding.

Picture books are available in any content area. Some useful, educational and interesting content area picture books are:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Math: | <i>Sir Cumference and the First Round Table</i> (Neuschwander 1997) <i>Math Curse</i> (Scieszka and Smith (ill.), 1995) |
| Science: | <i>Dinosaurs</i> (Unwin 1997) <i>One Giant Leap</i> (Ran 1996) <i>Your Amazing Senses</i> (van der Meer 1987) |
| History: | <i>Across the Wide Dark Sea, The Mayflower Journey.</i> (Van Leeuwan 1995) <i>Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp</i> (Stanley 1992) <i>The Gettysburg Address.</i> (Lincoln 1995) |
| Biographies: | <i>Charles Dickens, The Man Who Had Great Expectations.</i> (Stanley and Vennema 1993) <i>Emily.</i> (Bedard 1992) <i>A Picture Book of Helen Keller.</i> (Adler 1990) |

Picture books may be used to awaken interest and tie new learning to old. For instance the book, *Postcards from Pluto* (Leedy 1992) would be an interesting way to begin a unit on astronomy. The double meanings on the postcards are amusing as well as informative. *The Jolly Postman* (Ahlberg 1996) with its varied types of mail can be used to introduce a unit on letter writing.

These books provide springboards to discussions. For instance, the books *The Wall* (Bunting, 1990) and *A Picture Book of Anne Frank* (Adler 1993) would be good discussion starters on war and prejudices. *A Day's Work* (Bunting 1994) could evoke a discussion on integrity. They may be used as models for literary development, as well. *I Hate to Read* (Marshall 1993) introduces the idea of reading and literacy, what reading does for the reader, and what makes a good story.

Picture books are also great for sparking ideas for writing. *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (intro by Van Allsburg 1984) is a sure way to inspire the imagination, with its mysterious pictures, captions, but no text. To go along with writing, there are picture books on the parts of speech by Ruth Heller — definitely a more interesting way to introduce grammar to young adult readers (1987-1990). *Picture Books, An Annotated Bibliography for Use with the 6-Trait Analytic Model of Writing Assessment and Instruction* (Spandel and Culham 1994) suggests picture books that may be used to teach the six writing traits.

A plus for using picture books in the classroom is their length. "An important reason for reading a picture book aloud is that the story can be shared in one class sitting, an ideal situation in secondary schools, where class periods are often brief and reading and response to picture books is possible within a single period. Of course, the book can be re-read time and again, but the impact will be lost if the story is carried out over several days." (Giorgis 1999, 54)

Some of the very best writing may be found in picture books and should not be missed by young adults. Mem Fox, a picture book author, makes this point very well: "In my experience, the best-loved picture books are so well written that they leave a lasting impression on the reader . . . They have a passionate quality. By passionate, I mean a constant undercurrent of tension combined with compassion, which makes readers care desperately about the fate of the main characters. It's not easy to achieve, but I am convinced that writing without passion is writing for oblivion . . . If we don't laugh, gasp, block our ears, sigh, vomit, giggle, curl our toes, empathize, sympathize, feel pain, weep or shiver during the reading of a picture book, then surely the writer has wasted our time, our money, and our precious, precious trees." (Spandel and Culham 1994, introduction).

Young adult picture books are useful and effective tools for teachers. The trend of publishing and marketing young adult picture books is a positive one. It provides enjoyment and education for the young adult reader. Pictures and text together can leave a profound and lasting impression on this age group.

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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION

Words on World: Defining English as an Interdisciplinary Subject

by Column Editor
James Brewbaker

It was James Moffett—along with personal experience as a teenager and young teacher—who taught me to define English as an interdisciplinary subject. In my adolescent lit class the other evening, my graduate students visited and critiqued web sites they might use as they taught or helped kids write poetry. You know how, on the web, one link leads to another and yet another. One group of students, following such a path, ended up at a site where someone had quoted *me* of all people. “At its best,” I intoned, “my literature class is about life first and literature second.”

Deep Thought 71. Yes, life first, everything else second. School comes divvied up into subjects. Life comes all mixed up in themes, topics, and worries.

Familiar though Deep Thought 71 was, I hadn’t the foggiest idea where the quote came from. This is not because my publications are so extensive but because they are a bit modest for someone whose first *English Journal* article is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. Well, I suppose I have shared the idea frequently enough to pre- and in-service teachers that it stuck in someone’s consciousness. Good for them. Good for me.

How did I get to this point? How, for that matter, does any teacher decide what her English class—her literature class—is about? What does the curriculum dictate? What about standardized tests? What will teachers across the hall and in the teachers’ lounge think about what I do my classroom? How do I translate into practice what I believe about kids and language and learning and the rest of it?

In our own fashion, each of us answers these questions. Our answers are apparent in units and lesson plans, in classroom discussions, in the questions we pose to kids. Here as elsewhere, what you and I do reveals more than what we say.

Episodes from my own schooling laid the foundation for my growing into the English teacher I became thirty-five years ago. They also whetted my appetite for the theories of Moffett and others that I absorbed in the late sixties and early seventies.

The first episode is this: I am an eighth grader at Jefferson Junior High School in Arlington, Virginia. I take Core, an interdisciplinary mix of social studies and English that meets in a double period. In Core, Mrs. Matheny’s class puts the final touches on its dramatization of the Constitutional Convention. We’ve researched the Convention for a week or more, and we’ve written a script based on our research. It’s time for

the fun part now. Randy Blackman, playing old, tottery Ben Franklin, brings an ornate carved cane with a brass handle to use as a prop. Betty Robinson, the tallest kid in the class, plays George Washington with fatherly forbearance. Other kids clump into state delegations—South Carolinians, Rhode Islanders, New Yorkers, and others.

My role, that of Virginian George Mason, is simple enough. Early on, maybe on the second day, I will become angry (“What about our rights? Our religious freedom? Our free speech?”) and, in an aristocratic huff, storm out without signing the document. Later, we eighth-graders learn, Mason’s Bill of Rights, the ten amendments he co-wrote with Thomas Jefferson, will become part of the Constitution.

Fast forward four years to senior year at Washington-Lee High School. This memory—most of it, anyway—is less vivid, more a blur of small events than one or two big ones. Among other classes, I take civics (heterogeneously grouped) and English. We in the latter group are rumored to be the English hotshots in a big school that is eighty percent college bound, a school that routinely sends its brightest and best to the Ivy League, the service academies, and the most selective publics.

From time to time, we in Miss Stephens’ English class drag out the literature anthology, the umpty-third edition of *Literature and Life*. In class, or when I read the assignments at home, I fail to see the connection. Literature and life? Life and literature? No, literature in Miss Stephens’ class is Shakespeare and Tennyson, research on serious Englishy topics, and lists of poems (just the titles) and British poets single-spaced on purple-ink dittos. Our final exam consists of matching up more long purple lists of novelists, dramatists, and poets and their works—works we hadn’t read but knew about, sort of. All year long, Miss Stephens earnestly doses us with cultural literacy decades before E.D. Hirsch coins the term.

To me, though, life is somewhere else, something else, most assuredly not anything in English class. Life is fishing, planning for college, first love, school desegregation, rhythm and blues, Elvis, politics. My father is a lobbyist, and at home we breathe politics. We also breathe other things, ugly things we don’t talk about much at home *or* school, things like alcoholism and mental illness. My reading—my out-of-school reading, the real stuff—follows predictable lines: political thrillers, World War II non-fiction, mysteries, the Kinsey Report (in

Life magazine), history and historical fiction, science fiction.

Life is also what we do in Mr. Book's civics class. It is a Presidential election year. Mr. Book requires us to choose a candidate on any level—national, state, or local—and work in that candidate's campaign. We stuff envelopes, we put up signs, and (best of all) we distribute campaign literature at the polls on election day. And we write real pieces for real readers, other kids mostly—opinions about the issues of the day and various Constitutional amendments, among others. We read some of these aloud in class. Most interesting to me, we research and write a demographic profile of the precinct we live in, describing the kind of people that live there, what they do for a living, and their tendencies as voters. I feel like an investigative reporter.

Six years later, BA in hand, I become a teacher, an English teacher, an untrained English teacher. I've never heard of NCTE or a methods course, much less completed one, and I am subject to the same pressures all new teachers experience. For the first year or two, I serve up a diet of lit crit terminology, I teach the canon for the canon's sake, and I rely on end-of-chapter questions that budding English majors may grasp but that most of my kids find pointless. Most of all, I take comfort in the familiar—that is, in the detailed notes, the *explication de texte*, the Deep Thoughts of the English professors who taught me.

But I sense that something is wrong, or maybe I sense that something is missing. I relate well enough to the kids, and they do what I ask most of the time. They pass my tests. Other teachers think I'm okay. I fit in. But something is still wrong.

Then—as I contemplate what to do with my ninth-graders and *Great Expectations*—my librarian gives me a copy of *English Journal*. Not only are there teaching ideas in this red little journal, but (of all things) ideas about teaching Dickens! A week or so later, while browsing through a table of used books near the University of Miami, I stumble onto a much-used third or fourth edition of J.N. Hook's *The Teaching of High School English*. The following summer, I enroll in graduate school at Virginia, my alma mater. I keep coming back each summer until I decide in 1969 that it will take full-time study to complete what I had begun, a transformation of sorts.

As I said at the outset, it was James Moffett who helped me understand that English should be an interdisciplinary subject. In graduate school, under the gentle direction of Richard Meade, I read about the early days of NCTE, about the development of *An Experience Curriculum in English*, published by NCTE in 1935. I read the romantic critics, among them Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Kozol's *Death at an Early Age*, Herndon's *The Way It Spozed to Be*, Holt's *How Children Fail*, and Fader's *Hooked on Books* and *The Naked Children*. Collectively, I draw two main ideas from these works: first, that student-centeredness is not a new idea (NCTE, in fact, had been promoting it since before I was born); second, that conventional schooling is frequently no better than innocuous and far too often lethal. In a gentlemanly way, I become radicalized.

In the late sixties English education is astir with talk of what came to be called the Dartmouth Conference, the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English (1966). The Dartmouth Conference, a slap in the face to conservatives in the teaching of English, serves as a catalyst for a number of books, the most influential of which are Dixon's *Growth Through English* and Muller's *The Uses of English*.

Among the participants at Dartmouth is James Moffett, who seems to have both shaped what went on there and been shaped by it. His two books published soon thereafter—*Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1968) and *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers* (1968, 1976, 1983)—become the theoretical core of my beliefs as to how kids learn English and how language arts teachers at all levels should structure school learning.

This is not the time for a full elaboration of Moffett's ideas in either of these books in their various editions. To attempt to do so would be an injustice. But two ideas bubble to the surface when one applies his thinking to the shape of the curriculum.

First, Moffett argued that English is different from other school subjects. It is, he stressed, a communication system, not a body of content similar to history or biology. In this sense, he insisted that English resembles mathematics more than any other discipline. "Language arts or English," he wrote, "should be a kind of intellectual homeroom." By this I envisioned an English classroom where kids brought language to bear on history, science, and other subjects. Moffett went on to say that much that goes on in English classrooms—language study, academic analysis of great works of literature, conventional research—would be just as well tossed out. He also believed that English, after Sputnik in 1958, became distorted by efforts to align it with linguistics or contemporary literary theory, neither of which had what he called "psycho-logic." Anticipating teacher concerns that, without literary criticism, vocabulary drills, and grammar, they might be out of work, Moffett went on, "You need not fear you have no subject and try to manufacture one by making kids read about writing and write about reading. Words on words strengthens nothing but doubts, because they merely shadow what you're trying to teach, which is words on world" (Moffett 1976, p. 23).

Words on world! Get it? A powerful idea. That's what Mrs. Matheny has us do when we wrote a play about the Constitutional Convention. That's what we did in Mr. Book's class, use words to make sense of the world we were growing into in the late 1950s.

And words on world is a powerful mechanism for learning.

Thirty years after eighth grade, in fact, I visited Independence Hall. The whole scene came back to me. I recalled what Ben Franklin, cane in hand, said about the rising-sun design of the chairs delegates sat in. "This is a rising sun," he had said, or words to that effect—"not a setting sun. We are at the beginning of something here, not the end."

That leads me to a second major idea of Moffett's, which is this: school—inevitably an artificial place in many re-

spects—should promote naturalistic learning to the greatest extent possible. Bring real events into classrooms—real talk for real purposes, real inquiry into topics that matter to learners, real games, real books, real writing. Thus Moffett simultaneously echoed the progressives and anticipated the whole language movement. Children learn most of what they know out of school, not in it, and they learn without instruction. Consistent with his belief in natural learning, Moffett also favored heterogeneity—that is, the more diverse the group or class, the greater will be its human resources. He argued for student choice about both what to study and how, with skillful teacher modeling and guidance, to study it. He believed teachers should use trade books illustrating different modes of discourse, not textbooks. Finally, he compared children and adolescents to chess players who know all the moves (in terms of language patterns and communication skills) but haven't played the game very much. "What they need is massive practice," he insisted.

As I wrote in *California English* following Moffett's death, I was, in addition to being radicalized in graduate school, *Moffettized*. When I became a teacher educator, I set out to Moffettize everyone else. Interdisciplinary curriculum had to be in the foreground of Moffettization.

In one class, I asked graduate students—working teachers for the most part—to envision what English might be like were Moffett's ideas widely adopted. Together we developed a series of interdisciplinary teaching units built around core readings, individual and small-group inquiry and activities kids selected from cards, and presentations to class members. One of these units—focusing on early marriage, was spotlighted briefly in *English Journal* in 1982.

With this background—these instincts and experiences affirming the power of words on world in English classrooms—I couldn't resist Sissi Carroll's invitation in 1998 to be an occasional contributor to *The ALAN Review*. Interdisciplinary Connections Editor? Sure. I've been practicing since junior high school.

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Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli
Alfred A. Knopf, 2000, 186 pp., \$15.96

Individuality/Popularity
ISBN: 0-679-88637-0

From the day that Stargirl, a previously homeschooled sophomore, arrives at Mica High School, she is noticed for her eccentricities: the way she dresses; her overt friendliness and spontaneity; the fact that she plays her ukulele and sings loudly in the school cafeteria; and her genuine lack of concern for what others think of her.

At first the school is stunned and doesn't know what to make of her. Then she sparks a school-spirit revolution at a football game, and instantly everyone wants to be her friend. But just as suddenly, the school turns on her and shuns her because she doesn't want to play by the rules of normal school life – namely, uniform conformity and spiteful competition.

Narrated by Leo, a boy who falls for Stargirl, we listen intently as Leo desperately tries to make her acceptable to others by pleading with her to be someone she is not. Will Stargirl change? Or will she remain the same, charming rebel? This is a delightful, sometimes painful, but always provocative story of first love and teenage popularity.

Another well-written work by Spinelli that will particularly appeal to young people and their eagerness to discuss today's high school culture.

Diana Mitchell
Williamston, Michigan

The Likes of Me by Randall Beth Platt
Delacorte, 2000, 244 pp., \$15.95

Coming-of-Age
ISBN: 0-385-32692-0

Cordelia Lu Hankins has more problems than the average teenager. An albino who is half-Chinese, half-Caucasian, Cordelia lives in a logging camp in the Pacific Northwest with her distant father and her stepmother, Babe. In the summer of 1918, when she is fourteen, she receives her first kiss from Squirrel, a seventeen-year-old logger. Immediately, Cordelia's father, who disapproves of Squirrel's attention to his daughter, fires him.

Girls will enjoy this exciting well-written story of Cordelia's escape to Seattle to find Squirrel, where, quite unexpectedly, Cordelia becomes part of a carnival act – because she learns that her odd appearance can turn a profit. There, the action becomes both hilarious and complex because Cordelia soon discovers – through the carnival grapewine – that there is a reward for her stepmother's capture. Rumor has it that her stepmother Babe has allegedly murdered her first husband. Feeling defensive, Cordelia will not betray who she believes is her innocent stepmother.

Populated with offbeat characters, this book moves rapidly with Cordelia eventually reuniting with her family, but not after enduring much pain and hardship. The book's real power, though, is the vivid description of early frontier life in Seattle.

Joyce Litton
Athens, Ohio

Dream Soul by Laurence Yep
HarperCollins, 2000, 245 pp., \$ 15.95

Coming of Age/Chinese
ISBN: 0-06-028389-0

Moving from Ohio to West Virginia in search of a better fortune, Joan's parents work hard in their laundry business, and they don't expect less from her – even if at fifteen, Joan feels her parents are too dependent on her for all their needs regarding overcoming cultural barriers.

Joan and her family are Chinese-Americans, and to Joan's dismay, her parents are constantly reminding her and her siblings, Bobby, 10 and Emily, 8, of their cultural heritage.

Joan and her brother and sister, though, want to celebrate American holidays –like Christmas. Papa, however, is not ready “to give in” so easily – after all, he plans to return to China one day. “Why would he want his children to be spoiled in such an American way?” Papa believes only “very good” children deserve such an abundance of gifts on this special day. Soon, Papa, Joan and her siblings strike a deal – to behave splendidly – so they, in turn, can celebrate Christmas in style.

The arrival of a new friend – a Victoria Barrington – proves the spark that prompts Joan to see her proud Papa in a new light. Defending her heritage to Victoria, Joan sees the power of her Chinese heritage, and the wisdom of a lasting and true dream soul.

Ana B. Ramo
Orlando, Florida

Young Adult Books In Review

Recently Published Titles

Jeff Kaplan, Editor

3x5 inches to “Clip & File”

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| <p><i>McKendree</i> by Sandra Belton Greenwillow, 2000, 260 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>“Tilara is too black...” are the words overheard during childhood by one African-American young girl, Tilara Hayes. As Tilara moves towards adolescence, she tries to accept herself and her skin, a tone she describes as “the color of a Hershey chocolate bar.”</p> <p>The summer before her first year of high school, Tilara Hayes arrives at her Aunt Cloelle’s West Virginia home. This shy, young girl finds herself coerced into volunteering at McKendree, the local retirement home, or as the locals call it, the home for “colored people.” There, Tilara makes new friends with some of the teenagers who are spending the summer helping out at McKendree. They call themselves the “MC’s,” short for the McKendree Crowd.</p> <p>While working at McKendree, Tilara learns to face the vestiges of racial prejudice and age discrimination. She also recognizes, both directly and indirectly, that loving oneself is the first step towards becoming a real person.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tracie M. Michalski Orlando, Florida</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">Coming of Age ISBN 0-688-1590-8</p> <p><i>It’s A Woman’s World</i> edited by Neil Philip The Albion Press Ltd, 2000, 93 pp., \$17.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Women’s Poetry ISBN: 0-525-46381</p> <p>A symphony of women’s voices beckons the reader to the world of the Twentieth Century where female poets use the power of language to describe the “woman’s world.” The poems are arranged around the themes of birth, childhood, awareness, falling in love, homemaking, developing a sense of oneself, and growing old. Well-known poets like Gwendolyn Brooks, Sandra Cisneros, Adrienne Rich weave their words with lesser-known voices of women from multicultures, including Nigeria, India, Africa, Japan, and China. Their poems speak of political repression, economic domesticity, inner strength, and power and control. No longer are women poets expected to write only about love, children, and nature. Rather, the poems in this collection form a melody where various themes underscore the freedom and power that women have earned over time. All the voices seem to be saying, “Take your power and fly.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jeanne M. Gerlach Arlington, Texas</p> |
| <p><i>Eggs in One Basket</i> by Kathy Mackel Harper Collins, 2000, 195 pp., \$15.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Humor/Fantasy ISBN: 0-380-97847-4</p> <p><i>Eggs in One Basket</i>, a sequel to <i>Can of Worms</i>, is about the weird things that keep happening to star quarterback Scott Schreiber.</p> <p>Scott’s life has not been the same since his best friend, Mike Pillsbury, made contact with aliens. In fact, during a football game, Scott has hallucinations and develops superhuman powers. Soon, Scott discovers a new talent for flying, which he can’t control. Moreover, his flying leads him and his friends to the Lyra, a peaceful but powerful birdlike alien and her eggs.</p> <p>Adventure soon ensues, as Scott and his friends struggle to protect a prized possession – Lyra’s eggs – from the Shards, the cruelest life form in the galaxy. Together, Scott, his girlfriend Stacia, and Mike are joined in their heroic attempts to save the planet from the dangerous race of conquerors by a strange creature named, Ditka, a Sirian, who resembles a talking dog. In the end, this fearsome foursome – Scott, Stacia, Mike and their pet, Ditka, battle the evil Shards, save the Lyra’s eggs, and prevent intergalactic battle.</p> <p>This is a funny, fast-paced fantasy-filled read, perfect for middle schoolers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Amy Overman Orlando, Florida</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">Relationships/Homosexuality ISBN: 1-55583-613-5</p> <p><i>Just A Mom</i> by Betty DeGeneres Advocate Books, 2000, 188 pp., \$21.95</p> <p>This book is written for anyone who has trouble accepting a gay child, or any gay child who has difficulty wanting to come out to his or her parents. Betty DeGeneres, mother of famed comedian Ellen DeGeneres, chronicles the journey of a mother and daughter, marked first by disappointment and later by compassion, acceptance, and love.</p> <p>DeGeneres weaves together a memoir that is insightful, supportive and practical. Reinforced by anecdotes, DeGeneres covers timely topics that any parent or supporter needs to eliminate longstanding myths and to embrace tolerance and understanding. She provides an especially helpful guide for such groups as Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG).</p> <p>Above all, she shows that being gay is not about sex. With her co-author, Dr. Dina Bachelor Evans, she writes, “it is about the human spirit and a choice made to demonstrate that love is not limited by gender.” In this moving account, both mother and daughter learn that the path to understanding begins with breaking human silence.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Katherine McFarland Shippensburg, Pennsylvania.</p> |

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| <p><i>One Nation Under a Groove: Rap Music and Its Roots</i> by James Haskins Rap Music Hyperion, 2000, 160 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-786-80475-85</p> <p>This book should be a must read for anyone who thinks the history of rap begins in the 1970s. In this book, Haskins covers a wide range of time showing that the roots of rap actually began an ocean away in Africa. Haskins chronicles how spirituals sung by slaves influenced the Blues, Ragtime and Jazz, and how the themes prevalent in these musical genres have followed through to rap.</p> <p>Also discussed in vivid detail is the place of women in rap, and how rap has transcended its roots in urban African-American culture to become a worldwide phenomenon. For young people, you will find information on present day rappers such as Eninem, Tupac Shakur, and Queen Latifah.</p> <p>Most teenagers think they know all there is to know about rap. Reading this book should show them so much more. The book will be of enormous benefit to engage young people about the innovations in today's music and its handy glossary will help even the most knowledgeable music lover.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kendra Lacy Merritt Island, Florida</p> | <p><i>Girl of Kosovo</i> by Alice Mead Warfare in Europe Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000, 128 pp., \$16.00 ISBN: 0-374-32620-7</p> <p>Set in Kosovo during the Albanian-Serb battles of 1999, this realistic novel brings war up close and personal, with its devastating effects on those really unable to comprehend what it's all about – and why.</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Zana, an Albanian whose best friend is a Serb, experiences graphically portrayed horrors she cannot understand: her father and two brothers are killed in a Serb-inspired explosion, one that shatters her leg; the neighborhood wise man is executed; bodies are burned; bombs explode. It's not an easy read, but it is an accurate one and a good one.</p> <p>Author Mead has spent considerable time in Kosovo and bases much of this novel on events she has seen or heard about from those who endured them. A useful historical forward opens this book and provides some background information for young readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ted Hipple Knoxville, Tennessee</p> |
| <p><i>Say You Are My Sister</i> by Laurel Stowe Brady Growing Up/Family HarperCollins, 2001, 208 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-06-028307-6</p> <p>Georgie, Mony, and baby Keely Faye Keddrington find themselves orphaned in Georgia during the early 1940s. Alone with no one to take care of them, sixteen-year-old Georgie and fourteen-year-old Mony set out to save the family and their land.</p> <p>When faced with having no food left, Mony dreams of finding the Keddrington family fortune, which was hidden during the Civil War. However, until that time can come, Mony secretly accepts a job doing cooking and housekeeping for one Dr. Fellowes in hopes of saving the family from starvation. It is Dr. Fellowes who becomes the family's salvation by anonymously leaving food for the girls and hiding the Keddrington family fortune for Mony to find. Unexpectedly, though, it is while working at Dr. Fellowe's house that Mony comes across a medical file that states that Georgie is not a Keddrington, and to make matters worse – half-Negro. When confronted with the news, the girls prove the strength of family ties.</p> <p>Through a series of life altering events, this story is a touching testament to the power of the human spirit and the importance of family.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Victoria E. Schram Winter Park, Florida</p> | <p><i>When I Get Older, I'll Understand</i> by Coming-of-Age/Africa American Barbara Bailey ISBN: 1-56315-211-8 Sterling House Publisher, 2000, 184 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Joan Williams, an African-American teenager growing up in Chicago in the 1960s, appears to have everything going for her. Her parents, both educators, decide to move to Hyde Park to provide her with greater opportunities for the "right" friends and a better education. Joan's mother tries her best to help Joan become popular, but nothing seems to work. Joan is still a social outcast at school for the simple reason she is brilliant.</p> <p>Although Joan is bright and inquisitive, she lacks self-confidence, but she eventually develops it through heartfelt conversations with her father, a boyfriend who nearly breaks her heart, and the realization that she doesn't have all the answers to life's questions.</p> <p>Readers who find themselves at this difficult age, and who must make decisions about friendship, dating, and college, will appreciate Joan's struggle and ultimate conviction to be true one's self.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Susanne M. Miller Youngstown, Ohio</p> |

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

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| <p><i>Rundown</i> by Michael Cadmun Puffin Books, 1999, 168 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Honesty/Rape ISBN: 0-14-1311087-1</p> <p>As a game, sixteen-year-old Jennifer Thayer reports a crime that never happened, and claims that she is the victim. She pretends that she was attacked by a serial rapist and reports it to the police. She plans the crime to happen while she is out for a jog, falling into blackberry bushes, making sure to get scrapes and scratches from the bushes to make it look as if she were really attacked.</p> <p>At first, this seems to be a great way to attract the attention she is craving from her family and takes their focus of her sister's wedding. The only problem is that things are going further than Jennifer had expected. Detectives are beginning to dig deeper and pry her for information on her alleged attacker. Jennifer is starting to realize that her plan is not perfect, and her one lie is turning into numerous lies. She may have other people convinced so far, but she knows the real truth and it is eating her up inside.</p> <p>A gripping tale of a criminal investigation and the dark reality that telling a lie may fool others, but there is always one person who knows the truth.</p> <p>Casie Champlin Port Orange, Florida</p> | <p><i>Forgotten Fire</i> by Adam Bagdasarian DK Publishing, 2000, 273 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Nonfiction/Armenian Genocide ISBN: 0-7894-2627-7</p> <p>Vahan Kenderian, at the tender age of twelve, was used to a plush life as a member of one of the most influential Armenian families in Turkey. That is until a Turkish soldier appears on his doorstep, escorting his father away permanently. This event marks the beginning of a journey that will force Vahan to grow from a boy into a man in a few short years.</p> <p>Vahan will feel the loss of home and his family. He will feel hunger and thirst. He will become a drifter, a slave, and an orphan. He will be free and then, a prisoner the rest of his life – all in the name of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.</p> <p>This is a true story of a young boy who finds the survivor within himself, allowing him the ability to rise out of the ashes of hate. This amazing, descriptive and detailed tale makes it a must read for young adults.</p> <p>Alison Bostick Winter Park, Florida</p> |
| <p><i>The Year of Revolution: Love and Rebellion in the 1960s</i> by Judith Ortiz Cofer Puffin Books, 2000, 131 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Coming-of-Age ISBN: 0-14-13097-1</p> <p>In this collection of fictional anecdotes, journal writings, and poems, Judith Ortiz Cofer captures the inner psyche of a female teenager growing up in the tumultuous 1960s.</p> <p>Mary Ellen, a Puerto Rican living in New Jersey, is the narrator who recounts the upheavals and joys of adolescence in this insightful book. She speaks of her growing awareness of her own sexuality, early sexual encounters, involvement in political uprisings, awareness of the effect of drugs, and memories of the pain of war and death. Mary Ellen reflects upon her passage into adulthood and her changing views of parents, their conflicting value systems, and the world around her.</p> <p>Through Mary Ellen's narration, Confer captures the depth and complexities of adolescent emotions, drawing upon common themes such as the struggle for peer acceptance, rebellion from adults, and the search for identity. This book lends itself to an interdisciplinary study of the 1960s, masterfully weaving different literary genres into a historical account of important events such as the assassination of President Kennedy and the perspectives of Cuban exiles in America. Educators can use this work to increase awareness of Latino cultures. Teachers should be cautioned about explicit sexual content.</p> <p>Jennifer Good Auburn, Alabama</p> | <p><i>Run If You Dare</i> by Randy Powell Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001, 195 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Father-Son Relationships ISBN: 0-374-39981-6</p> <p>Gardner's father has spent his whole adult life not knowing what he wants to do, except play golf. Now, at 49, he's unemployed, unhappy that his life hasn't turned out the he envisioned it, and thinking of running away to start a new life. This revelation, expressed during an infrequent father-son talk, shocks 14 year-old Gardner, who has idolized his father, especially now that Gardner is trying to establish his own identity.</p> <p>While Powell's humor and Gardner's relationships with friends Sheeph and Annie lighten this depressing scenario, reading the novel is like watching a TV documentary of a nice family's internal struggles. As readers, we know the story won't end happily, because this isn't a Disney movie, even though we feel Gardner is going to be okay. Although <i>Run If You Dare</i> is one of the best novels about father-son relationships that you will ever read, I found it more disturbing than entertaining.</p> <p>Don Gallo Salon, Ohio</p> |

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| <p><i>A Year Down Yonder</i> by Richard Peck Dial, 2000, 120 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Historical/Growing-Up/Family ISBN: 0-8037-2518-3</p> <p>This sequel to Newbery Honor book, <i>A Long Way from Chicago</i>, focuses on Mary Alice's junior year of high school and her deepening bond with her feisty Grandma Dowdel in rural Illinois. Mary Alice and her family are living in Chicago, where they are trying to get back on their feet after feeling the effects of the Great Depression. The most intriguing character is clearly the wise and very unconventional grandma, a Depression-era Robin Hood who continues to embarrass and outsmart locals most deserving of her tricks and to help those most needy without making them feel that she has done them a favor.</p> <p>Several other adult characters and a handful of classmates round out this story, including Royce McNabb, another newcomer to the community who announces at the end of the school year that he'll write to Mary Alice from the University of Illinois. In an afterward, Mary Alice returns to Grandma Dowdell's house for her wedding to Royce, which occurs during World War II. She ends the story by telling the reader, "We lived happily ever after." An odd ending to an otherwise entertaining, light read about everyday life as managed by people who survived the Great Depression.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sheila Gullickson Moorhead, Minnesota</p> | <p><i>The Truth Out There</i> by Celia Rees DK Publishing, 2000, 240 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Autism/Mystery ISBN: 0-789-42668-4</p> <p>Staying at his sick grandmother's house was the last thing Joshua wanted to do for his summer vacation. Joshua knew that his mother needed to be there for his grandmother, but it meant a whole summer away from his friends in a boring town where he did not know anyone.</p> <p>Soon after he arrives, however, Joshua discovers that there is a secret in his family, a secret that no one wants to talk about. In a dusty old room, he finds UFO magazines and paintings of alien ships that belonged to his Uncle Patrick. Uncle Patrick died at a very young age, but no one in the family ever talks about how he died and strangely enough, there is no known grave. As Joshua discovers the secrets of a summer long ago, he realizes that his computer game, Alien State 3, is actually the story of Uncle Patrick's life. The resulting story answers the question – what is the family secret behind Uncle Patrick's mysterious disappearance?</p> <p>This novel – full of mystery and intrigue – is an easy read, aimed at young people who enjoy tales of fantasy and mystery. This engaging summer yarn is perfect for young reluctant readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Terri Reilly Orlando, Florida</p> |
| <p><i>Shelly Shock</i> by Donna Jo Napoli Dutton Children's Book, 2000, 165 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Middle School Sports ISBN: 0-525-46452-2</p> <p>Adam (the protagonist in <i>Soccer Shock</i> (1991) and <i>Shark Shock</i> (1995)) is a busy middle school kid, and this book can barely keep up with all his misadventures. His math and soccer schedules are in conflict, and he suddenly has to cope when a young girl named Shelley who tries out for the soccer team and proves to be a better player than Adam. On top of that, it seems that Adam is always unintentionally hurting the feelings of Kim, his secret love.</p> <p>As in previous adventures, Adam seeks advice from a most unusual yet typical middle school source – the freckles on his knees. In order to hear what they have to say, he has to receive a mild electric shock – so he exposes himself – foolishly – to the current in an electric fence.</p> <p>Adam survives, and in the end, he learns that despite everything, the quality of a team is more important than whether it is made up boys or girls. He also learns to use his love of poetry, especially e. e. cummings, to express himself and his admiration for Shelley and Kim. Indeed, as his soccer coach tells him, Adam is a "real mensch," a Yiddish slang for "true gentleman." Well-drawn family members and friends help fill out this easy to read, often hilarious short novel of a few days in the life of a middle school boy. English teachers will enjoy using this book in conjunction with a creative writing unit.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nancy E. Zuwiya Binghamton, New York</p> | <p><i>Adaline Falling Star</i> by Mary Pope Osborne Scholastic, 2000, 170 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Survival ISBN: 0-439-05947-X</p> <p>This historical novel tells the story of Kit Carson's daughter Adaline. Carson did have a daughter with an Arapaho woman, but little is known of her after she was sent to live with relatives in St. Louis. In Osborne's vision, she is an intelligent, strong, and determined young woman who refuses to accept her life as a little better than a slave. When she believes her father is not coming back, she runs away.</p> <p>Adaline's struggle to survive along the river is realistic, but more appealing to readers is her struggle to resist the dog she finds in the woods. She accepts its company, even as she declares, "I ain't going to love him." Readers will feel her pain when she must leave the dog behind in order to get her work on a steamboat going upriver. Kit Carson's reappearance after the steamboat explodes is a trifle convenient, but overall this is a solid and artistic historical fiction.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ellen A Greever Milwaukee, Wisconsin</p> |

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| <p><i>A Riddle of Roses</i> by Caryl Cude Mullins Second Story Press, 2000, 222 pp., \$6.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy ISBN: 1-896764-28-2</p> <p>When recently orphaned thirteen-year-old Meryl is caught reading – without permission – the ‘Great Bard’s of Taliesin’s Collection of Songs and Adventures,’ she is suspended from training to be a bard, and sentenced to be the servant of the Mistress of Woodcraft for a year. Angry, bored, and disappointed, Meryl gains the Hall’s permission to pursue an alternate route to hardship: fulfilling a quest, as did the bards of old.</p> <p>In spite of being unsure of what she is supposed to do on this quest, Meryl sets out into the forest. When she meets wisecracking Halstaff, the forest oracle, who accuses of Taliesin of stealing his magical rose, Meryl becomes determined to discover why Taliesin stole the magical flower and, of course, to find this missing rose.</p> <p>Believing the rose is in Avalon, where the magic cauldron of Ceridwen (anyone who sips from it becomes old) is located, Meryl and Halstatt begin a spellbinding, humorous adventure filled with amazing and unforgettable characters, continuous action, and a wonderful message: it is through hard work, not magic, that you attain your goal.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Bill Mollineaux Granby, Connecticut</p> | <p><i>The Time Bike</i> by Jane Langton HarperCollins, 2000, 176 pp., \$15.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy/Time Travel ISBN: 0-06-028437-4</p> <p><i>The Time Bike</i>, Newbery Honor author Jane Langton’s sixth book about the extraordinary Hall family, is a magical account of the perils – and surprises – of travel in the fourth dimension.</p> <p>It all begins when Eddy Hall receives an old-fashioned bicycle from his mysterious uncle, Prince Krishna. The bike possesses the ability to travel through time and both Eddy and his sister, Eleanor, take some fantastic time travel trips that have some surprising results – including, saving their family home which is being foreclosed by the bank.</p> <p>Eddy pushes off for Julius Caesar’s time, and ends up on a deserted beach after realizing that he has pedaled in the wrong direction, while Eleanor wheels back to 1938 in a vain effort to save the life an ancient movie star, one Derek Alabaster. The two subplots seem to have nothing in common – until Eleanor and Eddy find clues in their respective travels to their life today.</p> <p>Indeed, while trying to save the life a famous movie star, Eleanor just happens to pick up a piece of paper from 1938; it turns out to be the missing deed to their house. Relieved, she returns home to her family, rescuing Eddy along the way, and saving the day.</p> <p>Light and easy reading for middle school students, the characters are rich in their everyday goodness.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Linda Donley Orlando, Florida</p> |
| <p><i>A Short Guide to a Happy Life</i> by Anna Quindlan Random House, 2000, 50 pp., \$12.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Inspirational ISBN: 0-375-50461-3</p> <p>Excellent insight and advice is what columnist and novelist Anna Quindlan offers in this short and inspiring collection of essays. Saddened by her own mortality since the death of her mother, Anna Quindlan writes of love, marriage, parenthood, disappointment, and death. Her purpose is to explore these topics in their complexity and to underscore that life is a gift of God and not a mere existence.</p> <p>For Anna Quindlan, life is a school where everywhere, there is a classroom. Lessons can be found in falling snowdrops; glistening daffodils; small children nestling on a couch; and quiet conversations with the homeless. Written in plainspoken language, Quindlan’s work will resonate with adolescents, no matter what their religious or ethnic affiliation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gilberto Davis Ponce, Puerto Rico</p> | <p><i>Dream Water</i> by Karen Rivers Orca Book Publishers, 2000, 186 pp., \$6.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Overcoming Tragedy/Animal Rights ISBN: 1-55143-162-9</p> <p>At the Vancouver School of the Arts, seventeen year-old Cassie studies dance. Back in Holden, Victoria’s hometown, sixteen-year-old Holden paints alone, all day, in his studio attic. What do these two have in common? Years ago – as children on a field trip to the Victoria Seaquarium – they witnessed a fatal accident when a young woman trainer fell into the killer whale pool and was drowned by the whales. Forever, they are both haunted by images and dreams of this horrific event.</p> <p>Offering no support, Cassie’s psychologist father is too busy with patients to recognize her trauma, while Holden’s dad deals with his wife’s four-year desertion, her sudden return home, and her newly discovered case of full-blown AIDS. Holden deals with his pain by turning to painting and drinking, and Cassie turns to Holden for emotional and physical support.</p> <p>With mutual support, but not without struggle, they are ultimately able to help each other and continue on with their lives. Although this is a busy novel, young adults will relate to the family struggles as well wrestle with the issue of holding whales in captivity.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kay Haas Ottawa, Kansas</p> |

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| <p><i>No More Dead Dogs</i> by Gordon Korman Hyperion Books, 2000, 180 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>This funny tale begins when a high school football player with the unlikely name of Wallace Wallace is asked by his eighth-grade English teacher to write a book review on <i>Old Shep, My Pal</i>. Humor results when Wallace Wallace, a boy reknown for his unbridled honesty, tells his teacher that this is “the most boring book that he has ever read” because he knew that Old Shep, the dog, was going to die before he even read page one. As Wallace Wallace says matter of factly to his teacher, “every book with a dog on its cover always dies.”</p> <p>His teacher, though, takes affront at Wallace Wallace’s remarks. His teacher loves the book, and moreover, is directing the school play entitled – that’s right – <i>Old Shep, My Pal</i>. The play becomes the source for his teacher’s punishment for Wallace Wallace’s blunt review, and soon, Wallace finds himself assigned to a part in the production. The teacher hopes to change his student’s independent mind, but Wallace Wallace has different plans.</p> <p>Wallace Wallace begins to ad-lib, and soon this touching story of a boy and his beloved dog becomes a rollicking “roller-blade, rock and roll” rendition of a classic tale of friendship and love. Young teens will enjoy this story of a young boy who could not tell even a tiny lie.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Selenia Rodriguez Orlando, Florida</p> | <p><i>Carolina Crow Girl</i> by Valerie Hobbs Puffin Books, 2000, 138 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Friendship/Animals ISBN: 0-14-130976-8</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Carolina Lewis, her mother, Melanie, and her baby sister, Trinity, live in a school bus. The bus is hidden on the Crouch estate, behind a stand of eucalyptus trees near the ocean, not far from Santa Barbara, California. Melanie has driven the bus across the United States. They stop whenever there are opportunities for Melanie to find enough work to pay for food and other necessities. Now, they have taken up residence in a field above the Pacific Ocean.</p> <p>Carolina meets wheel chair-bound Stefan Crouch III, whose father owns the field, and is 11 years old, like she is. They fast become buddies. In fact, when Carolina’s mother decides to move to Oregon, Carolina chooses to stay behind and live with Stefan and his family. The resulting friendship is made stronger by the fact that Stefan had a sister who died; Carolina has come to replace this much beloved sibling.</p> <p>Through their friendship, Carolina teaches a hurt family to love again, and models for a wheel chair-bound friend the power of animals to heal the soul. When Stefan’s family returns her love, Carolina is able to accept herself as she is and to recognize and value her love for her own family.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">MaryAnnelle Baker Overland Park, Kansas</p> |
| <p><i>The World at Her Fingertips: The Story of Helen Keller</i> by Joan Dash Scholastic Press, 2001, 256 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Biography ISBN: 0-590-90715-8</p> <p>The author paints a comprehensive picture of Helen Keller with this fascinating biography. Readers will gain new perspective of the historical, political and cultural climate in which Ms. Keller lived and worked, along with an understanding of her relationships with those close to her.</p> <p>Besides enjoying the wealth of new information unearthed by the author, young readers may take comfort in the typically familiar vignettes of Ms. Keller’s life. Notes from her own autobiography and descriptions of movie scenes from <i>The Miracle Worker</i> are woven throughout the story.</p> <p>With flowing narrative, the author offers insight into Helen Keller’s determination to bridge the gap between two worlds. A couple of awkward moments, with which younger students may need transitioning help, almost disappear as the author skillfully personalizes Helen Keller’s inspiring, productive life. Readers will come away with an appreciation of her childhood and of her adult role as a champion of human and civil rights.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kristen Sternberg Deland, Florida</p> | <p><i>The Princess Diaries</i> by Meg Cabot HarperCollins, 2000, 238 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Fathers and Daughters/Identity ISBN: 0-380-97848-2</p> <p><i>The Princess Diaries</i> is the diary of Mia Thermopolis, who is living a confused and hard to believe life. She is the not most popular girl in school, but is in love with the most popular boy. She lives in New York City with her artist mom, who is divorced and is dating her algebra teacher – a class Mia is failing.</p> <p>One day, her father arrives and upsets her troubled life. He tells her that he has cancer, and then, to her disbelief, that she is the Princess of Genvoia. That’s right! As it turns out, her father is not just the European politician he’s always led to her believe, but actually the prince of a small country. Before long, the New York paparazzi arrive at her school and front door, eager to take pictures of real live princess.</p> <p>Offbeat Mia will win the hearts of teenage girls dying to fit in without too much fanfare, and Meg Cabot’s writing is silly and entertaining enough to capture the fancy of young readers who are looking for a fun story about ordinary people caught in extraordinary circumstances. With tons of pop culture references, this book will make today’s teens feel right at home.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Michelle Rich Oviedo, Florida</p> |

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| <p><i>The Colors of My World</i> by Lynn Joseph HarperCollins, 2000. 138 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Poetry/Dominican Republic ISBN 0-06-0282320</p> <p>Ana Rosa is about to turn 13. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, she now dreams of becoming a writer. Yet Ana knows how unusual this wish is since the only person she knows who write books in her country is the nation's leader, President Baluaguer. Moreover, Ana's mother fears for her daughter's safety if she writes. As her mother says, those brave enough "to hurl words at the government," have died.</p> <p>Much to her mother's dismay, though, Ana does write. Encouraged by her older brother, Guario, Ana begins writing her thoughts on her brother's notepad, but soon, Ana's words become deadly. When the government evicts the residents in her town to make room for foreign investors, Ana Rosa writes an article for the local newspaper, quoting her older brother's anger, and as a result, Guario is brutally shot down.</p> <p>Sadness ensues, but Ana does not lose her desire to write. Soon, as a gift, Ana receives a typewriter and hundreds of sheets of paper. Enthused, she begins typing furiously her brother's story. Ana's dream is that the world will know of her brother's short but heroic life.</p> <p>With every chapter beginning with a poem, readers of all ages will relate to this moving story of the triumph of the human will.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Dena R. Wheeler Orlando, Florida</p> | <p><i>Run the Blockade</i> by G. Clifton Wisler Harper Collins, 2000, 122 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-688-16538-9</p> <p>Fourteen-year-old Irish lad Henry Serven finds adventure as a ship's boy and lookout aboard the Banshee, a British ship that carries goods between The Confederate states and Britain during America's Civil War.</p> <p>Henry is lured by the spirit of his father to follow the sea, despite the objections of his mother. But the reality of the poverty that surrounds the Serven's after the death of her husband forces the widow to leave Ireland, and reluctantly, to allow Henry to follow in his father's footsteps. With the help of his cousin Robert, Henry finds work in Britain at a shipping company and eventually, he is promoted to ship's boy aboard the Banshee.</p> <p>Danger looms ahead, though. An American "Yankee" ship discovers the Banshee as it delivers goods to America's Confederate army and fires upon the vessel. Swinging into action, young Henry risks his life and limb to save his new found home from ever-present disaster.</p> <p>Based on actual events, this retelling of a little known Civil War adventure will delight readers who enjoy being aboard the high seas.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Pat Incantalupo Apopka, Florida</p> |
| <p><i>I Believe in Water: Twelve Brushes with Religion</i> Edited by Marilyn Singer Harper Collins, 2000, 280 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Short Stories/Religion ISBN: 0-06-028397-1</p> <p>If you have deep faith, or did and lost it, or never experienced the meaning of faith, there is at least one story in this short story collection that mirrors your personal experience. Each story revolves around a different religion, making it an excellent choice for a course exploring various religions of the world. The varied impact religion has in different cultures is explored as well as its significant relevance to the particulars of each story.</p> <p>For example, author Virginia Euwer Wolff shows us three different girls confronting unwanted pregnancies, praying in the context of Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. Novelist Jacqueline Woodson shares a glimpse of her own childhood as a Jehovah's Witness, while young adult novelist Joyce Carol Thomas takes us into the shivery practice of religious snake handling.</p> <p>The characters in these short stories are varied, ranging from young children to those at the end of their long life. Adolescent characters play a prominent role throughout the collection. The contemporary settings, smart dialogue, and eternal themes make this an excellent choice for adolescents coming to terms with their own religious feelings.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Marcyana Mead Deltona, Florida</p> | <p><i>Tree Girl</i> by T. A. Barron Philomel, October, 2001, 138 pp., \$14.99</p> <p>Identity/Belonging ISBN: 0-399-23425-x</p> <p>Like watching a child play happily in the sun, reading this book is a simple and rich pleasure.</p> <p>Young Rowanna, called Anna, has a special connection with nature; she expects the natural world to be kind to her, and it is. Anna has conversations with "Old Master Burl," the mighty fir tree that she climbs and jokes with; she adopts a weak sparrow that she names Eagle, and the two become inseparable; she romps with Sash, who appears first as a bear cub, then—when Anna badly wants a human playmate, transforms into the form of a boy—and who finally explains that he is actually a tree spirit, and that it is not he, but her perception, that has transformed him from bear cub into boy.</p> <p>There is only one dark spot in Anna's life: Master Mellwyn, who has raised her since he found her when she was an abandoned infant, has warned her against traveling into the deep forest. When Mellwyn finds her at The High Willow, he drags her home with him; when in the forest, instead of playful spirits, he sees only fiendish ghouls. Later, when Mellwyn is badly hurt in an accident, Anna chooses to stay with him; her loyalty inspires Mellwyn to reveal the truth to her: she, like Sash, is a tree spirit, and her mother is The High Willow. She chooses to return to the ridge of High Willow to live as a tree spirit, and encourages Mellwyn to visit her there.</p> <p>This modern legend suggests that, in many ways, our lenses determine how we see the world. I have read few books that address the idea so gently and beautifully.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sissi Carroll Tallahassee, Florida</p> |

Spiritual Quest in Young Adult Literature

Gail Radley

Religion and fiction can be a troublesome blend in literature for young people. While the early history of children's literature is rife with message-driven works, secularism predominates in education and hence in literature for young audiences. Can religious concerns be the focus in this literature when prayer in the schools is a regular news item? When classrooms are a garden of skin tones, nationalities and belief systems? Whose truth shall we tell? The evangelical Christians'? The atheists'? The Jews's? The Moslems'? That of the latest messenger of doom? As Yeats put it, "The best lack all conviction while the worst/Are filled with passionate intensity" (qtd. in Gardner 41). Who are we to put forth opinions that might shape young lives in the innermost sense? Shoghi Effendi, a central figure in the Baha'i Faith, pointed out that "moral issues which were clear a half century ago are now hopelessly confused."

Many writers have found it simpler to avoid spiritual issues altogether, to stay with the safe and secular. "[W]e keep ourselves occupied with surfaces", according to John Gardner (60). But as a writer for *The Dallas Morning News* pointed out, each new year is a time of taking stock, of making resolutions to guide us through the year to come. A new millennium would seem to be an occasion for yet more serious evaluating and resolving (1G). This is no less true for young people who will be saddled with many of the very difficult questions technology continually brings us. If we avoid the questions intrinsic to religion—who are we? why are we here? how should we conduct ourselves—what is there to guide and sustain young readers?

One solution a number of writers have grasped is to portray protagonists as learning to seek the answers within themselves—not bad advice, in many respects. Organized religion, then, is presented as quirky, repressive, even destructive. Wisdom dictates passing it up for one's inner code. For example, in Cynthia Rylant's *A Fine White Dust*, Peter falls under the spell of a traveling revivalist who breaks his promises to Peter. Rather than reject God along with the preacher, Peter turns to his personal vision of God and spirituality. It is a strengthening message with which to shield oneself from inevitable disillusionment. But what will feed the soul? What will one find when one turns inward if the soul has not been fed?

Lois Ruby's *Miriam's Well* would seem to be heading in the same direction. The story is told through the alternating viewpoints of Miriam, an ardent follower of an offbeat Chris-

tian sect, and Adam, Jewish by heritage if not by commitment. Because Ruby has created a sect wound around the teachings of a fictitious preacher, Christian readers are unlikely to feel offended. Adam stands in for a sort of everyman. On a scale of one to ten, Adam rates his religion as number ten in reflecting his identity (8). Adam serves as a contrast for Miriam in both religion and commitment; his disinterest allows his Judaism to escape critique.

Both characters grow throughout the course of the story. Adam once dismissed Miriam as "the dearest girl in class" (6) and "a religious fanatic" (7). But after being paired with Miriam for a school project and learning that she has cancer, Adam begins to care about the plain, straight-laced girl. Her commitment impresses him. Visiting her church, he notes, "I felt 100 percent sure that she believed" (100). Gradually, Adam, whose thoughts initially centered on sliding through school and on his girlfriend, finds himself becoming more serious. He is offended when his friend, referring

Many writers have found it simpler to avoid spiritual issues altogether, to stay with the safe and secular.

to Miriam, crudely says, "Isn't she going to croak anyway?" although he realizes not long ago he "would have said the same thing" (218). When Miriam accompanies Adam to his brother's wedding, Adam easily explains the sights and sounds at the synagogue to her—he has absorbed more of his religion than he realized.

Most readers will share Adam's disbelief and alarm as Miriam, stricken with cancer, fights medical treatment. She soon becomes the focal point of a legal battle, her mother and church represented by Adam's lawyer father on the one side and Adam, the medical personnel, and most of the community on the other. As her pain and desperation grow, the reader assumes Miriam's growth will come through rejecting the restrictions of her faith and accepting treatment. But Ruby does not yield to this frequently-used theme. Miriam remains firm in her commitment though a sort of compromise is reached. She is legally compelled to accept a limited form of treatment. She also experiments with metaphysical healing. And, of course, her church rallies with prayer. Which approach effects her eventual remission? Any or all of the approaches might be responsible. But Miriam credits divine intervention; she has come through a challenging test and remained firm. One final test for her, as presented by her preacher, is to bring Adam into the fold.

This is where Miriam manages to draw a line between her preacher's view of Christianity and her own conscience. The wedding gives Miriam genuine respect and appreciation for an alternative approach to spirituality, making her unable to

convert him: “. . . now that I’ve met the grandmas and the rabbi, and now that I’ve seen [Adam] stand up there under the wedding canopy, with that purple skullcap on [his] head” (261). This respect is real progress for Miriam, but it comes at a price: she tells him that she can’t see him any more. “I’m fish, and you’re fowl,” she tells him. “We can’t live in the same medium” (260), and Adam soon agrees, “We were fish and fowl, apples and oranges. It had to end” (262).

Certainly, the respect, appreciation, and commitment demonstrated in *Miriam’s Well* are qualities that will serve young people well into the new millennium. But this separate but equal sort of toleration shortchanges a generation described as “the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the country’s history” (*Times Picayune* A22).

The Samurai’s Garden by Gail Tsukiyama takes multiculturalism a step farther. The time is World War II. Stephan, a 20 year old Chinese student is sent to his family’s beach house in Japan to recuperate from tuberculosis. The forced exile becomes a time of retreat and introspection for the young man. He finds he has much empty time to fill in sparsely populated Tarumi. At first, walks on the beach, letter writing, and painting occupy him. “Even the light [in Tarumi] is revealing,” he notices. “[Y]ou can’t miss the smallest nuance, the slightest sound” (20). With this heightened sensitivity, Stephan looks toward the few people that make up his new world for company. Matsu, the reclusive caretaker of the beach house, is a man who has worked for the family most of his life, yet Stephan feels that he barely knows him. Matsu quietly assumes the role of Stephan’s caretaker.

After Stephan learns that his father has been having an long-term affair, Matsu takes him to a Shinto shrine. “You never struck me as the religious type,” Stephan comments. “There’s still a lot you don’t know about me,” is Matsu’s cryptic response (87). Stephan reports, “My parents had never placed a great emphasis on religion. What I learned during my childhood was through attending St. Matthew’s, a Catholic primary school in Hong Kong” (87). But as a budding artist, Stephan is drawn both to beauty and to the worlds that exist within people; he is a searcher.

The rituals of the Shinto religion seem foreign and awkward to Stephan. Still, he approaches the shrine, as Matsu demonstrates, claps three times, and pulls the braided rope to ring the bell because, as Matsu explains, “You must let the gods know you are here” (90). Then Stephan attempts to pray, reaching out to God for the first time, perhaps, in many years.

Matsu’s effort is to awaken and comfort, not to convert. He sees no conflict in recognizing the spirituality inherent in every religion. He easily follows the shrine visit with the gift of a Christmas tree so that Stephan won’t feel homesick. The same openness Matsu embodies allows Stephan to discover the spiritual aspects in the Japanese observance of New Year’s, just as Miriam discovers the richness of a Jewish wedding. Says Stephan, “Having grown up in Hong Kong with the firecrackers and vibrant colored celebrations of Chinese New Year, I find there’s something more spiritual in Japan on this day of renewal” (95). But, unlike Miriam, Stephan does not feel the need to separate himself from what is different. Nor does the fact that the Chinese and Japanese are at war turn him away.

Further awakening him to the life of the soul is Sachi, the once-beautiful friend of Matsu’s younger sister, Tomoko.

Stricken with leprosy, the teenaged Tomoko killed herself with her father’s fishing knife rather than bring the dishonor of disease to herself and her family. Then Sachi began to show signs of the rash. Her father let her know that the Samurai “maintained their honor by committing” such a suicide as Tomoko’s (131). But Sachi could not bring herself to that. Her inability to kill herself was yet another blow to her parents.

Telling her “[it] takes greater courage to live” (139), Matsu conducted Sachi to the remote mountain village of exiled lepers, Yamaguchi. There she began a new life, forging new purposes and strengths. Matsu insisted that she cultivate a garden. “He showed me that life is not just from within, it extends all around you whether you wish it to or not,” she says (43). “I am thankful for any kind of beauty that may find its way to Yamaguchi” (127). This affirmation of life is a common theme in books that touch on religion.

But unlike Sachi, Stephan is only a temporary exile. His health steadily improves, and his life in China awaits as tensions between the Japanese and Chinese increase. It seems everything stands between Stephan and the world he has discovered in Japan: nationality, war, religion, culture. Just before he returns home, he pays another visit to the Shinto shrine, performing the rituals as if they were his own. He holds no false hopes:

I knew all the praying in the world wouldn’t stop the war from continuing, or make my parents love each other again. I wanted to leave a message on the wall by the altar . . . so that even if I never returned to Tarumi, something of me would remain. (209)

The wish is doubly fulfilled the next day. When Stephan tries to express to Matsu his fear that the war will change things between them, Matsu replies, “It is another life. It will never have anything to do with us” (211). The sense of interconnection is cemented when Stephan opens Matsu’s parting gift—two blank books. As he begins to write, the reader senses that Stephan’s openness and wisdom will spread beyond himself, just as Matsu and Sachi’s has. It is a quiet, accepting spirituality that draws in rather than excludes.

Books that mention religion often present it as this sort of backdrop—a part of the characters’ landscape, though not a driving force. Sometimes the characters’ religious and cultural training creates the central problem for the protagonist. This is the case for *Shabanu*, by Suzanne Fisher Staples. This young Pakistani Muslim must confront the powerful dictates of family, culture, and religion propelling her into an unwanted marriage in order to be true to herself.

In *The Return*, by Sonia Levitin, religion is presented as the reason for persecution. Desta, a Jewish Ethiopian, flees her home for the Promised Land. While religious issues are not directly addressed, Levitin portrays a young person remaining firm in her faith despite great pressure to turn away.

For Tony of *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya the task is to face hatred, ridicule, and misunderstanding within his Catholic environment in order to reconnect with the positive aspects of traditional mystical beliefs. Religious issues are presented, though they are somewhat obscured by the mist of childhood; Tony is only six when the novel begins. But the lesson he learns is one of affirmation of life and good works, and so the novel serves to reinforce the common thread running through all religious systems, a vital message from the past in coming to terms with the diversity of our futures.

The War of Jenkins Ear by Michael Morpurgo confronts the reader with a still more direct question: would you recognize the messiah's return? Toby, the unhappy inmate of an English boarding school, finds his world turned upside down while walking in the woods with a new student, Christopher. Christopher faints; when he comes to, he reveals that Jesus instructs him during these spells, that he, in fact, is Jesus. "You will be my Peter, my Rock, my first disciple," he tells Toby (43).

Sensing Toby's need for proof, Christopher promises a miracle. Christopher's first "miracle", though persuasive to Toby, can be easily dismissed as luck or coincidence: a valued rugby player is injured and unpopular Toby finds himself on the team and suddenly part of the inner circle. "Bit of a miracle, really" one of the boys comments (50), —and suddenly Toby believes.

The idea that Jesus should reappear among seemingly ordinary schoolboys seems fantastic to modern sensibilities. The physical presence of God or His prophet seems to many a picture from a distant past or a shadowy vision far into the future, certainly not part of day-to-day life. The reader waits for the moment in which Christopher is revealed to be a charlatan like the preacher in Rylant's *A Fine White Dust* or at least a confused, perhaps emotionally disturbed, child. That moment never comes.

Christopher is unwavering in both humility and conviction. His words hauntingly echo those of Christ. When he and Toby become blood brothers, Christopher states, "You are in me . . . and I am in you" (55). Toby asks him if he can heal, and Christopher responds, "If you believe I can, then I can" (57). When war between the boarding school and the town boys threatens, Christopher takes an unpopular stand for peace, advising that "[o]ne of us has to offer a hand across the river" (149). He lays hands on Mr. Binley's critically ill daughter, Jenny, and he foretells events. Toby goes through the usual testing of faith. As Christopher's only disciple, he is bursting with the good tidings and longs for someone with whom to share his knowledge. But when the second disciple, Hunter, joins them and then adoring young Benedict Swann, Toby misses his unique position and Christopher's undivided attention. He wavers between doubt and certainty. His biggest test comes when the headmaster reveals Christopher's claim before the school, insisting that both Christopher and his followers recant. Christopher confirms his belief in the voices that tell him he is Jesus and is expelled. Hunter recants and so will remain at the school. The school awaits Toby's decision. Toby weighs release from the hated school against his parents' disappointment. He turns from self-interest to issues of truth. He believes in Christopher still—yet Jenny is still desperately sick, despite Christopher's efforts to heal her. Toby recants.

Now, the reader thinks, as Christopher departs amid the derision of his peers, and Toby and Hunter sink into embarrassed isolation—now Christopher will be revealed as a false prophet. But the book closes with the sight of Jenny frolicking in the field with her parents.

"My God," Matron whispered, "she's up. She's better. That's the first time that child's been on her feet in a year."

Swann looked up at Toby and smiled. "See?" he said. (171)

On this note, the Biblical words "And a little child shall lead them" ringing in the readers' thoughts, the novel ends,

leaving the question of Christopher's true identity hauntingly open. With it, the reader is forced to ask, *would I recognize the appearance of a messiah amongst us? Would I have the courage to stand apart from the rest, to be one of the faithful?*

The questions are often particularly pressing for young adults. As the chair of a religious studies department notes, "There's an absolute thirst for spirituality" (Katz qtd. in Wheat 1) They don't want to be told what to believe. But they do want to explore issues, and we owe them this opportunity to explore with us. The accent is on explore. Novelist Frederick Buechner, describing his works, says

If you're preaching from a pulpit or otherwise grinding an ax, you only let the things happen that you want to have happen. (56)

Then he indicates the place from which authentic writing comes:

. . . insofar as fiction, like faith, is a journey not only forward in space and time but a journey inward, it's full of surprises. (56)

Even those of us who feel we've found truth are still seeking—or should be. When search ends, faith becomes static. Search should never end because there are always those nagging doubts and confusions, the unsettled feeling of imperfect understanding, deeper levels of understanding to explore. When writers turn to these areas, readers can discover with them.

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A Psychological Perspective of Teen Romances in Young Adult Literature

Cheryl L. Dickson

As a high school teacher, I find it impossible to ignore the bantering of teenagers in love. One week Susie loves Johnny; the next week Susie loves Tommy. Then she hates both Johnny and Tommy and loves Billy. Girls chatting about their hopes of a romantic, candle-lit, pre-Prom dinner; and boys promising to return home from college to be reunited with their true loves in high school. Each adolescent is certain that his/her love is true and will result in a life-long commitment. Each one dreaming of the emotional fireworks, picnics on the beach, a honeymoon in Paris, and the names of his/her first-born. As I sit and listen, I can't help but shake my head and wonder where they get these ideas. I then realize how disappointing it can be when their dreams of romance and love are crushed. I question who gives them the impression that love is always fireworks and roses.

Automatically, I blame the media. With teen movies like *She's All That* and television programs like *Dawson's Creek*, it's no wonder adolescents have unrealistic views of love. Teens watch these programs for a number of reasons. Most viewers enjoy the fantasy world they can enter, or they enjoy seeing other teens facing situations similar to situations they encounter. A problem occurs when teens expect their lives to be like their favorite character. Just as violence on television is hypothesized to increase real-life violence, television romance can likely affect views of real-life romance.

In order to critically analyze the portrayal of teen romance, it is necessary to understand the make-up of their relationships. According to White, the typical adolescent relationship is self-focused. Each person's wants overshadow the wants of the other (Paul, White 3). The relationship is largely based on convenience and shows few signs of strong emotional intimacy. Intimacy, which is typically not attainable until late adolescence, is characterized by empathetic behavior, trust, commitment, and effective communication (12). Young adult relationships are highly egocentric, and these traits are not likely. In addition, Roscoe, Diana, and Brooks determined that teen relationships are motivated by immediate gratification, recreation, and status attainment. Teens want to date the most popular person and have fun. Reciprocity of feelings and support is generally not a major concern (12).

Being a literature teacher, I hypothesized that literature could undo television's mistakes and bridge the gap between real love and fantasy love. In my mind, the literature had to be real fiction, not the supermarket romance novels. I believed teen romance series were likely to be just as damaging as teen movies. I predicted that quality literature would more accurately portray images of teen love than teen romance novels. However, during my comparison of two novels from

the *Love Series* published by Bantam Books and two novels recommended by the American Libraries Association, I learned that I had made some hasty assumptions.

The American Libraries Association (ALA) "Booklist" magazine recommends Nicholas Sparks's *A Walk To Remember* for young readers who have an interest in reading adult books. According to the "Booklist Editors' Choice '99" list, the novel is a "bittersweet tale" which will "enthral teen readers." ALA recommendations are based on the quality of literary merit. The dialogue is realistic, and the plot and character development permit the reader to feel empathetic toward the characters. However, psychologically, this book neglects to portray teen intimacy development realistically.

Told from the first-person point of view of Landon Carter, the novel captures the reader with, "When I was seventeen, my life changed forever." As Landon Carter stands outside the Beaufort Hills Baptist Church in April 1999, in his mind he travels back to 1958 when he was a senior at Beaufort Hills High School in North Carolina. He is not a student who excels in classwork or extra-curricular activities. He is content to spend his senior year hanging out with his friends at the local diner or a nearby cemetery. Landon never expects for his senior year to be so memorable.

Throughout the first chapter, Landon is characterized as an average high school senior interested in girls and not school. By the second chapter, the novel loses its realism. While on a failing mission to find a date for the Homecoming dance, Landon realizes the only girl left to ask in his small school is Jamie Sullivan, the minister's daughter. Jamie, who always wears her hair in a tight bun, "almost looks like a spinster without a touch of make-up" (21). She wears the same brown cardigan and plaid skirt every day and never leaves home without her Bible. She was plain yet not completely unattractive. All the adults love Jamie because of her sweet and caring disposition. While all her classmate think she is irritating because of her constant reference to the Lord's plan, and she was "always so damn cheerful." Since Landon was a child, he and his friends have taunted both Jamie and her father.

Considering psychological findings that conclude teens date primarily for recreation and status achievement (Paul, White 3), Landon should not even consider dating Jamie. He even admits that if he asks her to the dance, "My friends would roast me alive" (35). Dating Jamie, even just for one night, would certainly not improve his status with his friends nor would it be an enjoyable experience. To add to their differences, Minister Sullivan and Landon's father have had a long-

standing family feud with one another concerning Landon's grandfather's business decisions. Nevertheless, Landon, who is so desperate for a date, asks Jamie anyway. While at the dance, Landon's friends avoid him and Jamie rattles on about the Lord's plan for everyone.

Feeling as if he has already "served his penance" (67), Landon does not talk to Jamie much after the dance. Although he was not miserable at the dance, he regrets asking Jamie because his friends continue to ridicule him. Two weeks following the dance, Jamie approaches Landon with a request to star in the Christmas play with her. Given that Landon finds drama class boring and has no obligation to help Jamie, it should be unlikely that he agrees. Nonetheless, Landon agrees, and no real explanation is given. Throughout the many weeks of play rehearsal, Landon remains polite to Jamie yet laughs at her when with his friends. Just days before opening night, he becomes so aggravated with her; he demands that she stop acting like they are friends.

It is unclear where, or why, Landon falls in love with Jamie. Somewhere between opening night and collecting Christmas money for the orphans that she visits, Landon begins to admit to himself that he has feelings for her. Still, he keeps his love and their relationship from his friends. Before their love has an opportunity to progress beyond a casual romance, Jamie discloses to Landon that she is dying of leukemia. Landon is by her side throughout the struggle, and in a predictable, yet unrealistic, ending marries her before she dies. The final chapter returns the reader to 1999, where Landon, now 57, shares that he has never removed the wedding ring and still loves her.

From the beginning their relationship is unrealistic. Their opposite lifestyles, Landon's unsupportive friends, and Jamie's father's hatred of the Carters, should prevent Landon from even asking Jamie to the dance. The lack of realism is carried throughout the novel; therefore, it is difficult to categorize their relationship into White's levels of intimacy because it is so unrealistic. Most teen relationships are self-focused, which means they only exist because of convenience, and each individual's wishes are his/her primary concern (Paul, White 3). Landon and Jamie's relationship is inconvenient to Landon both when his friends ridicule him and when she is dying. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that their relationship is at the self-focused level. This level is the foundation for all relationships (3). If this level is not achieved, which it does not appear to be, then the relationship should not even exist. The next level of intimacy is role-focused which requires that the relationship is socially acceptable, respecting and caring (3). The couple seems to leap to this stage rather abruptly, bypassing the self-focused level, when learning of Jamie's disease. This level is not completely unrealistic in teenagers, but such an abrupt jump into emotional intimacy is unlikely (4). A few months is generally not sufficient time to develop the trust, commitment and empathy needed marriage.

The subject of marriage raises another issue. Why did Landon marry a dying girl? This decision seems very selfless; however, he tells Jamie that he is doing it for himself, not her. Psychologically teenagers are egocentric, which prevents them

from making decisions that do not directly benefit them. The benefits Landon may experience from marrying Jamie are limited to the positive feeling he would get from enabling her to fulfill her dream. Given that single benefit, one would assume that he would eventually love again, yet he never does. Again the realism of the plot is lost.

Taking into account the unrealistic portrayal of intimacy development, a young reader could get an inaccurate impression of high school love. Teen love is typically short-lived because of undeveloped interpersonal and social skills (Shaughnessy, Shakesby 4). By suggesting that teen love can withstand ridicule and even death is encouraging teens to believe that their high school relationships will have a life-long impact on who they are and who they will become. High school relationships do encourage identity development (3), but because they are generally formed to improve status or

have a good time they have much less of an impact than suggested in this novel.

However, in Ellen Wittlinger's novel *Hard Love*, identity development is the only positive result of a one-sided love. Recommended by the ALA's

"Booklist" magazine, this novel handles teen love brutally and honestly. Prom is not a fairytale fantasy, and the protagonist, John Galardi, does not share candlelit dinners and fireworks with his true love, Marisol Guzman. Like so many teen romances, this love is one-sided and quite painful.

John considers himself to be "immune to emotions" (2). Not interested in girls, yet not homosexual, he calls himself a "neuter" (114). A junior in a suburban high school, he is lonely and annoyed by other teen's obsessions with love. He thinks, "I can't even imagine being in love with somebody, and letting her touch me, and tell me things I wouldn't know whether to believe" (19). The he meets the writer of his favorite zine, Marisol, the self-proclaimed "Puerto Rican Cuban Yankee, Cambridge, Massachusetts, rich spoiled lesbian private-school gifted-and -talented writer virgin looking for love" (9).

They share a common interest in zine writing, and their relationship escalates from acquaintances to best friends. John eventually admits to himself that he has feelings for Marisol. He admits, "It (his feelings) was the reason I was no longer comatose after an entire life of sleepwalking. It seemed that, all of a sudden, Marisol was necessary to my existence" (135). In a mistake that nearly costs him her friendship, he misinterprets her subtle touches for similar affection and attempts to kiss her. She does see their relationship as something special not love, but a deep connection (165) between two people who are largely misunderstood by those around them.

Although Marisol makes her feelings clear, John realizes that he cannot change his feelings (175). With an egocentric attitude typical in adolescents, he continues to believe that Marisol will change her mind. Her feelings never change. Like so many teens, John feels lost without her, he is clearly disappointed when he remembers the impact she has made on his life. He decides his life is meaningless without her, "When I look back at my life before Marisol, it seems blank. Erased. Whited out. What had I done then? Who had I been? Who could I be now, without her? What would I do?" (211) For

one brief moment, Marisol's existence triggers thoughts of the end of his existence. He is nothing without her. By the end of the novel, John has not fully accepted Marisol's absence, but he is not ready to give up. He is ready to move on slowly.

To achieve realism, Wittlinger perfectly integrates pieces of John's and Marisol's writing to enable the reader to enter the mind of both characters without straying from the first-person narration. The poems and essays provide a means of communication between characters as well as insight into their feelings. In order to develop a realistic view of the relationship, both characters' thoughts are needed. Without the addition of the writing, knowing Marisol's feelings about her sexuality would be impossible. John's feelings are expressed mainly through his thoughts that are so typical of a teen who does not understand himself let alone the world around him. He remarks on the absurdity of teen love, prom, his mother's second marriage, and his promiscuous father.

In addition to realistic thoughts, the relationship, although never progressing beyond platonic, portrays teen relationships accurately from a psychological perspective. The relationship was extremely self-focused. John's interests cause him to ignore Marisol's feelings. He wants her to be his girlfriend, so when they attend the Prom he pretends that she is. He wants to kiss her, so, not considering her feelings, he attempts to kiss her. He is feeling everything necessary to make a commitment to her, so she assumes she feels the same. He is unable to understand her perspective, which would be essential in attaining intimacy in their relationship. The couple does achieve moderate behavioral intimacy that is common in young adult relationships. They trust one another enough to share personal thoughts. They are each committed to their friendship. They both enjoy the same recreational activities, and they are able to assist one another in developing a deeper sense of identity. Ideally, their relationship would have progressed into a deeper intimate relationship, if not for Marisol's sexual orientation.

This novel provides a useful message for teens through its well-written text, an engaging plot, and realistic expectations for love. Love is not fireworks and roses; it is difficult and hurtful at times. But, the reader is also encouraged to accept that, although it may take time, life will go on without that love. Love can change who you are, but it does not have to. For a typical adolescent all events seem life-changing (Stringer, 46). Young adult literature needs to dispel this belief that every mistake they make or every word they utter will affect their lives.

The summary on the back of *Up All Night* by Karen Michaels tempts the reader with images of a girl who, while not looking for love, unexpectedly stumbles upon a summer romance. "Will Lauren give in to the fireworks of Jesse's kiss? Or will she pass up a chance to have the best summer of her life?" Both questions imply that a major life-changing event will occur for Lauren. This luring image of a first love and a life-changing romance is typical of most teen romance novels.

At a first glance, this novel could give a teen reader unrealistic expectations for love which should always include

moonlit walks on the beach and a deep emotional commitment. The novel, which is written from Lauren's perspective, begins with a declaration of her tainted feelings regarding love. "Number one: I will never be stupid enough to fall in love" (1). Much like John in *Hard Love*, her negative attitude stems from her parents' divorce. She remembers watching her parents' happiness on their wedding video. Her mother "looking so beautiful in the white lace wedding dress that she borrowed from her mother," and her father shouting, "I'm crazy with love!" (25). After eight months of divorce proceedings Lauren concluded that "love, marriage and the rest of it was a total sham" (26). The memories of her parents' divorce were coupled with the experience of being abandoned by her Homecoming date when he left the dance with someone else. So how did this girl who swore off love become caught up in a summer fling? And was her relationship realistic?

Against her better judgment, Lauren agreed to go on a double date with her boy-crazy friend Rachel. While Rachel giggled the night away with her "perfect summer boyfriend" (54), Lauren struggled to make conversation with a rude, unwilling boy named Jesse. Lauren was attracted to Jesse's body and noticed his sincere smile. Their date ended disastrously, and left Lauren more convinced than before that love was not going to be part of her summer.

The next day, Jesse apologized for his behavior and explained to Lauren that he too was forced by his cousin to go on the double date. He had also been scarred by a failed love and had no intention of having a summer fling. From his admission, they realize they have something in common, and their friendship begins. As friends, they enjoy the typical teenage activities. They rent rollerblades and rowboats, hang out, and eat dinner. Each day of fun brings them emotionally closer until finally they admit they were wrong about not wanting summer loves.

The development of this relationship is similar to most adolescent relationships.

Throughout their friendship, Lauren revealed how Jesse's appearance affected her physically. While Lauren caught his brown eyes shining in the moonlight, she "could feel a

spark rise in my chest" (66). She noticed the "twinkle in his warm brown eyes" (72), and she felt her heart sink when she remember his disinterest in love. Much like most relationships, the initial attraction is physical, then develops into a friendship.

The progress from friendship to romance was logical. The relationship was providing recreation. While riding the carousel, Lauren realized that she was having more fun than she had had in a long time. Like most teen romances the relationship was largely based on recreation. According to research conducted by Skipper and Nass, teen relationships are also based on status achievement (Paul, White 11). However, their relationship did not seem to be affected by status achievement. Lauren's friend, Rachel, approved of Jesse; however, Lauren was not dating him in an effort to improve Rachel's opinion of her. Therefore, status was not a factor.

Similar to most teen relationships, their relationship can be characterized as stereotypical and superficial by Orlofsky

In order to develop a realistic view of the relationship, both characters' thoughts are needed.

and associates' scale of intimacy (4). No deep commitment between the two is felt; the main purpose of the relationship was having fun. To further the likeness to real teen relationships, conflict is added. When Lauren discovers that Jessie has not been completely honest with her about his cousin's feelings for Rachel, Lauren quickly determines that "trusting Jessie Shaw was a mistake" (143), and she returns to her early summer views that "Relationships don't work out. Love is for suckers" (70). She reaches these conclusions before allowing Jesse time to explain his situation. This hasty judgment is typical of a self-focused adolescent relationship (3). Because Jesse's dishonesty could affect her relationship with Rachel, it was no longer convenient to commit to Jesse. Lauren continued her dislike for Jesse until she was sure Jesse would not negatively affect her friendship with Rachel. When it was convenient to commit again, she returned to him.

This novel did not end with the happy couple making plans for a long, joyful life together nor did it portray them as having a highly strong sense of the other's needs. Their communication skills were poor, and they had difficulty resolving conflicts. Both Lauren and Jesse were involved in the relationship for the memories of a fun summer not a life-long commitment. Therefore, this novel provides another useful message of love what love really is.

A life-long commitment is also not the intention in *Stolen Kisses*, by Liesa Abrams. The reader is invited to enter the mind of both the girl and the boy involved in a good-girl/bad-boy love conflict. From the girl's perspective, Laura knows she shouldn't risk her relationship with Ted Legum, "the most gorgeous senior at Parks Hills High" (3), to take a chance with Mark Adams, a boy with "insanely blue eyes (40)" and a reputation for being a "smooth talker" (40). After an unexpected kiss between Laura and Mark, Mark reminds her that he has no interest in a serious relationship. Scolding herself for her poor decision, Laura brushes off her obvious lapse of judgment and becomes engrossed with Ted and their up-coming date. Eagerly awaiting her date, she comments that if she becomes Ted's girlfriend it would be "the most absolutely and completely perfect experience of her life" (13). Her heart pounds when she thinks of Ted, who she believes is the perfect boy for her. These extreme emotions are typical in adolescent relationships.

During her growing involvement with Ted, she and Mark become partners in planning a surprise party for a mutual friend. As result, Laura realizes that Mark is not a horrible person, and they can have a good time together. Although they bicker over trivial matters, she enjoys his company. With her growing interest in Mark, she begins to doubt her feelings for Ted. Again, her relationship mimics real-life teen black-and-white thinking. Teens are likely to view people as either all good or all bad. If a single characteristic or action offends teens, they will view the person as completely flawed (Stringer 76). Laura automatically labels Mark a bad person based on rumors, but as soon as she can find some element of good in him, she changes her opinion.

Meanwhile, Mark is struggling with his bad-boy image. He lives in a much different world than Laura. He is occasionally bitter toward Laura and reminds her that not everybody lives a perfect life. In addition to their conflicting worlds, Mark is having difficulty accepting that he could be devoted to just one girl. He hopes that a "meaningless hookup with a

girl" (94) would help him forget about "these annoying Laura fantasies" (94). He is typically interested in only the appearance of a girl; however, Mark feels himself falling for both Laura's looks and her intellect. He notices her sexy voice, her short shorts, and also her strong opinions and love of language. Just as Laura is falling for the wrong kind of guy, Mark is falling for the wrong kind of girl.

Their relationship eventually grows from friendship to romance after Laura realizes that, although comfortable with Ted, she could not depend on him in a time of emotional need. Mark, however, was there to listen to her and could understand her frustration with her family. Eventually, Laura leaves the popular boy for the bad boy whom she can have fun with and who can offer her the emotional support she needs.

There are two relationships to consider, and both appear to accurately portray teen relationships. Ted and Laura's relationship is largely self-focused. Laura dates Ted not because of his fabulous personality but because others perceive him as the "most unattainable guy at Park Hills" (4). If Laura could win his affections, she too would become popular. The relationship is stereotypical and lacks intimacy. The main function is to achieve status. This type of relationship is like most high school relationships.

Her relationship with Ted had problems also similar to real teen relationship problems. According to Sullivan, one cause of failure in young adult relationships is few or no social or interpersonal communication skills (Shaughnessy, Shakesby 3). Ted is unable to support Laura during an emotional time. When Laura discloses her overwhelming feelings about her sister's clinical depression, Ted responds with, "God, that really bites" (155). Then he suggests that a fancy dinner might help Laura forget about her sister's problem. This response was obviously not the response Laura had hoped for from a boy who made her feel so safe. This example illustrates the self-focused aspect of the relationship when Ted's wants outweigh Laura's needs. Ted is more interested in the date that he planned than he was interested in Laura's problems. His lack of verbal skills and empathy send Laura running to someone who she can become more emotionally intimate with. Overall, Ted and Laura's relationship falls into the same conflicts as many other teen relationships.

Laura and Mark's relationship wavers between being self-focused and role-focused. Role-focused relationships generally are socially accepted (Paul, White 3). Their relationship is not socially acceptable; however, they do acknowledge and respect each other's feelings more than in a self-focused relationship. For example, they openly discuss the differences in their lifestyles. Mark is not ashamed to admit that his father left him and his mother nor is he hesitant to reveal his feelings toward his father's absence. Self-focused relationships are the foundation of more mature relationships (3). Their relationship slowly evolves from self-focused to the next level, role-focused. At first the main function of the relationship was recreation then it developed into a more emotionally committed relationship. The novel ends with the "softest, most passionate, heart-stopping kiss she had ever imagined" (172). Although this description could possibly contribute to a false perception of love, the reader is not led to believe that Laura and Mark lived happily ever after. The novel is accurate psychologically; however, the writing style was not of the same

quality as *Hard Love*. The syntax was simple with flat conversations, and the plot contained a few underdeveloped characters.

Teens are bombarded everyday with images and standards of true happiness that they could not possibly live up to. Through a comparison of four novels, it is clear that if chosen carefully both teen romance novels and quality teen literature can provide an accurate depiction of love. Teen readers need to know that they are not alone in their emotions. It is essential that authors who write for young adults consider the false notions that they could create when writing fantasy romance novels. Teens read for the same reason they watch television, to see if there are other people in the world like them or to pass the time. If they believe everyone's love experiences will include candlelight and fireworks, they are bound to be disappointed. *Hard Love* provides clever prose and attractive characters that a reader could instantly become attach to along with an accurate account of teen love. There are no falsehoods in this novel; love is hard. *A Walk to Remember* is also a novel written with sharp emotions and images; however, these images are misleading. Realism should not be sacrificed for good writing. Although teen romance novels may not have the same quality writing, they are still capable of providing meaningful and useful life experiences. *Stolen Kisses* and *Up All Night* admit that love is not always easy nor is it going to last a lifetime. These books provide an excellent stepping stone for a young reader. What these novels lack in powerful writing, they make up for in realism.

As a teacher, I was surprised, yet thrilled, to learn that the more widely read teen romance novels are actually quite valuable for a developing reader. It may take some time for me to stop cringing when I see my students reading supermarket novels. But rather than dismissing the books as useless, I must remember that this type of teen literature should be a bridge, not a gap, for the reader between real life and media fantasy.

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Editor's note: For those interested in the psychocological development of adolescents as reflected in young adult literature, please see the Greenwood Press series, edited by Joan Kaywell, Using Literature to Help Troubled Teens Cope . . . Individual books in the recent series focus on Family Issues (J. Kaywell, editor), Social Issues (P.S. Carroll, editor), Identity Issues (J. Kaplan, editor), and Health Issues (C. Bowman, editor).
—psc

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“I Hate Reading If I Don’t Have To”: Results from a Longitudinal Study of High School Students’ Reading Interest

Lisa A. Hale and Chris Crowe

Are high school students reading? If so, what are they reading? What are they required to read? What do they read for pleasure? What general categories of books do students claim to like? Do YA books have a place in the elective or required reading done by high school students? Hoping to find some concrete answers to these questions, Chris conducted a reading interest survey among ninth through twelfth graders at a local high school in 1982 when he was a graduate student at Arizona State University. In 1990 and again in 1997, he administered the identical survey to similar populations at the same school. Now with survey data collected over a 15 year span, we’ve crunched the numbers to answer those initial questions and to see how, if at all, reading habits have changed in the past decade and a half.

The survey was simple (see Appendix A). The first two items asked students to identify themselves by gender and by year in school. The next two items asked students to list titles of required reading and pleasure reading from the last two years. The survey’s final component presented students with a genre checklist and asked them to identify their favorite types of books: science fiction, fantasy, adventure, western, romance/love stories, biography/autobiography, sports, mystery, true life adventure, historical, humor, and other. (Horror fiction was left off the original 1982 list. Most students reported their interest in horror fiction by checking the “other” category.) In each of the three times the survey was administered, it was distributed among approximately equal numbers of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders. Of course this survey was limited to one high school in Arizona, so the results cannot be over-generalized, but what we found may be of interest to English teachers, people interested in the reading habits of teenagers, and to anyone interested in YA literature.

Required Reading

Composite Results

Our reading interest survey was certainly not the first of its kind. Arthur Applebee’s study of the high school canon that appeared in the September 1992 *English Journal* showed that the traditional canon was firmly entrenched in the high school literature curriculum. Four of Shakespeare’s plays dominated Applebee’s lists: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet*. The most frequently required novel was *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* followed closely by *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Of Mice and Men*,

The Great Gatsby, and *Lord of the Flies*. No YA titles were reported as required reading in Applebee’s survey.

The results of all three of our surveys are similar to the larger sample studied by Applebee. Our 1990 survey results featured six of the above titles and most closely parallels Applebee’s findings (Table 1). The 1997 survey also suggests an affinity for traditional canon titles, including works by Shakespeare. However, the composite 1982 survey results diverge from both subsequent surveys and Applebee’s list in their seeming eschewal of Shakespearean plays and in their inclusion of two YA titles—S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* and *That Was Then, This Is Now*. This divergence possibly indicates a shift away from incorporating YA literature into the curriculum at this particular school between 1982 and 1990. Another apparent shift seems to be toward plays. In both 1990 and 1997, a significant number of the top required titles are plays—*Medea*, *Our Town*, *Everyman*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Twelve Angry Men*—whereas in 1982, no plays make the top required list.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is the only title which graces composite required reading lists for all three survey years. Though a mainstay, its popularity does dwindle. For instance, in 1982, it accounts for 28% of all required titles listed by students, but by 1997, this number drops to 5.12%. Despite this drop, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* still remains the most popular required reading title reported in all survey years by all grade levels and is followed by three other classics: *Great Expectations* (5.28%), *The Great Gatsby* (4.87%), and *Romeo and Juliet* (4.74%). Selections from the traditional literary canon certainly dominated the required reading for these high school students in all survey years.

Results by Grade Level

When the results were broken down by grade level, we noticed that ninth graders were required to read more young adult titles than other students (Table 2). Over one third (36.49%) of the required titles reported by ninth graders were YA novels. Freshmen also achieved greater diversity in their titles, perhaps because they were permitted to read more elective books or books from prescribed reading lists than students at other grade levels. The composite freshman favorites included: *The Outsiders*; *I Know What You Did Last Summer*; *The Pigman*; *That Was Then, This Is Now*; *The Contender*; *The Girl Who Owned a City*; *I Am the Cheese*; and *Summer of Fear*. Many of these titles also appear on one or

more of the top required lists for 1982, 1990, and 1997.

Sophomores in the study reported fewer required titles than the freshmen did, and mentioned only two YA titles: *The Outsiders* and Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* (Table 3). They also reported more plays, a pattern that would emerge more strongly in the next two grade levels. By the junior and senior years, students reported no required YA titles as required reading (Tables 4 and 5).

Pleasure Reading Preferences

Popular Authors and Titles

We expected to find titles reported for pleasure reading markedly different from required reading, and assumed we would see many more YA novels in this category. The results showed that many students are reading for pleasure, but we were surprised—and disappointed—by the lack of YA titles mentioned at all levels. Students reported hundreds of titles, from popular to obscure writers, from classic books to series. Because of the very broad range of titles reported by students over the years, we considered any title receiving more than 1% of the mentions significant (though not statistically significant).

It probably comes as no surprise that the King of the pleasure reading was Stephen King. According to the titles reported by students, horror fiction and thrillers dominated elective reading in all three survey years. In 1982, for example, six of the eleven most mentioned pleasure reading titles were by Stephen King or V. C. Andrews (Table 6). In 1990, three-fourths of the composite pleasure reading titles were Stephen King's. In 1997, however, King's books were displaced by Michael Crichton's thrillers, RL Stine's horror series, and Lois Duncan's *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Our survey results suggest that movies may have a strong influence on elective reading. Two of the top King titles mentioned in 1990 were made into movies prior to the survey (one in 1989 and one in 1990), and every popular Crichton novel listed in the 1997 survey as well as Duncan's novel were made into motion pictures prior to the surveys. The book-movie relationship trend wasn't as strong in the 1982 survey; only one of the 1982 horror novels was adapted to the screen before the survey.

When we examined the most popular authors, as evidenced by number of titles students listed rather than the most frequently mentioned titles, we got slightly different results. Stephen King still dominated the 1990 survey, accounting for 9.58% of all elective reading titles listed by all students. And the second most popular author, V. C. Andrews, accounted for 2.88% of all titles. Other popular authors in 1990 included: J. R. R. Tolkien, Danielle Steel, Christopher Pike, Piers Anthony, Douglas Adams, Dean R. Koontz, Lois Duncan, Scott Turow, L. M. Montgomery, Robert A. Heinlein, George Orwell, Lloyd Alexander, and Margaret Weis.

Although none of King's individual titles make the composite top pleasure reading list in 1997, his works account for 5.2% of the all the elective reading titles. Only R.L. Stine's 6.5% outscores King. Michael Crichton, author of three of the top elective books, came in third with 4.55% of the titles reported. Other popular authors in 1997 were Dean R. Koontz, Lois Duncan, John Grisham, Lurlene McDaniel, Maya Angelou, Jean M. Auel, Mary Higgins Clark, S. E. Hinton, Wilson Rawls, and Roald Dahl. The authors listed in our results are similar to other recent reading interest sur-

veys: one by Anne Wilder and Alan Teasley done in North Carolina that appeared in a recent issue of *The ALAN Review* and a national survey of teen reading reported in *Book*.

Two classic authors, John Steinbeck and William Shakespeare, surface among the top authors of elective titles in the 1990 and 1997 surveys. We had expected these authors to be reported in the required category and were surprised to see them appear under elective reading. True, some students may read these authors for pleasure, but we suspected that many of the survey takers simply listed any titles they could recall from their English classes.

Pleasure Reading by Gender

Although overall boys and girls reported a similar number of pleasure reading titles, our data suggests that boys are slightly less likely to read for pleasure than are girls. Seventy percent of boys and approximately 80% of girls in both 1990 and 1997 listed at least one pleasure reading title. In 1990, girls each listed one additional pleasure reading title than did boys (an average of 4.14 titles per girl vs. 3.14 titles per boy), and girls were also more likely to jot down commentary on their reading. One junior in 1990 wrote, "I have read [so] many books, I can't list them." and listed only a single pleasure reading title: Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly*. Another female junior listed seven titles by Willa Cather, Rebecca Baldwin, and J. D. Hardin, and boasted that the books listed were only the ones she had read in the last week. This same student selected the "other" genre and noted that she liked to read "pretty much anything—but mostly sci fi, fantasy, adventure, romance/love stories, true life adventure, and humor." However, though girls may read more in their spare time than boys, in our survey, boys generally reported greater diversity in authors, titles, and genres.

It is difficult to make assumptions about which titles are preferred by boys and which by girls, simply because many popular titles were listed by both, and other titles were listed with such infrequency that analysis is impossible. However, in 1982, boys most popular pleasure reading titles were *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *Deathwatch*, and *Alive*, while girls preferred *Flowers in the Attic*, *Petals in These Wind*, and *Sybil*. In 1990, J. R. R. Tolkien and Terry Brooks were mentioned exclusively by boys; V. C. Andrews and Danielle Steel were cited exclusively by girls. In 1997, boys had only one exclusive author, Michael Crichton; girls' exclusives included Lurlene McDaniel, R. L. Stine, John Grisham, and Dean R. Koontz.

Favorite Genres

Composite Results

The consistent unpopularity of the autobiography/biography, historical, and western genres among most adolescents may not surprise anyone, though the severity of their unpopularity might: all three genres combined account for less than 7% of all student selections in 1982, less than 6% in 1990, and less than 4% in 1997 (Table 7). Only one additional genre remains about as constant in its overall popularity or lack thereof: Sports (7.29% to 6.37% to 9.64%). Though the mystery genre's surprising rise in popularity in 1997 may partially account for this—it claimed an unprecedented 37.45% of all votes—it can't fully explain why more kids don't choose to read about something that is so popular in today's society. However, we should note that the sports

genre was the only genre besides mystery and “other” to grow in overall popularity between 1982 and 1997, even though its growth was slight. Also, sports is consistently one of the more popular genres identified by boys.

Over a fifteen-year span, the remaining genres experienced surges or dips in popularity, some erratic, others constant. Most notable among the genre surges is the mystery, which almost quadruples in its overall popularity between 1982 and 1997 (10.42% to 37.45%), and the “other” category, which grows from 2.08% in 1982 to 14.01% in 1990 and dips slightly to 9.64% in 1997. The rising interest in horror fiction is partially responsible for this growth. In 1997, for example, approximately 60% of the students selecting “other” indicated that their genre of choice was in fact horror. Interest in horror may also account for the mystery genre’s surge in popularity, since some students may have checked this related genre because of the absence of a horror category. Whether or not this is the case, it is interesting to note that mystery readers listed a variety of titles by traditional mystery writers like Agatha Christie and Mary Higgins Clark, by thriller writers such as John Grisham and Dean Koontz, and by horror novelists including L. J. Smith, Lois Duncan, and Stephen King. Mystery readers also reported titles by authors of other genres.

The rise in popularity of the mystery genre in the 1997 survey results paralleled a national trend reported in *Book* in 1999: the most popular authors among high school readers were, in order, Stephen King, Mary Higgins Clark, Michael Crichton, and V. C. Andrews (Kloberdanz 36). Mystery’s increase in popularity among our respondents caused most other genres to slip, including: romance/love stories, science fiction, adventure, true life, humor, and fantasy, with romance/love stories being the most significant casualty. This genre dropped from 18.75% in 1982 to 7.23% in 1997, a difference of 11.52%. However, the staggering overall decline of the romance/love stories must be attributed to more than the rise of the mystery; perhaps teenagers’ tastes are changing, or more specifically, teenage girls’ tastes are changing, since they were responsible for all romance/love stories genre selections in all three survey years. This is consistent with Heather Vogel Frederick’s report in *Publisher’s Weekly* where she discusses the “sluggish” sales and changing face of romance books. “Genre-driven romance doesn’t quite exist the way it used to . . . [it’s] less formulaic” (Ruby qtd. in Frederick 47). New teen romances, Frederick reports, include the inspirational-romance novels of Lurlene McDaniel and “hybrid romance/SF series” (47).

Favorites by Gender

Despite the significant decline in the popularity of romance/love stories, this genre persists on the girls’ top favorite genre lists for all three survey years (Table 8), affirming Elise Howard’s view that “as long as there’s a young teen readership in the world, books about romance can do well” (qtd. in Frederick 47). The mystery genre also thrives, particularly in 1997 where it enjoys an overwhelming preference of 47.17%. And it is likely that many female teenagers prefer both elements of intrigue and romance in their books. One female senior in the 1990 survey, for instance, noted that she reads every single book by V. C. Andrews because she liked the combination of romance and mystery in them. She went onto list four Andrews’ titles she had elected to read—*Gar-*

den of Shadows, *Gates of Paradise*, *Dark Angel*, and *Heaven*—along with Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead* and Pat Graverson’s *Dollies*.

Boys show more diversity in the genres they like, with adventure, and sports topping the lists for 1982, 1990, and 1997 (Figure 9). They also liked science fiction, humor, fantasy, mystery, and “other.” The only genre that tops both the boys’ and the girls’ lists was mystery.

Young Adult Titles

Are students reading YA literature? As noted above, more YA required reading titles surface in 1982, primarily in the freshman list. In general, however, students reported very few YA titles in their pleasure reading (Table 10).

In elective reading when students chose to read young adult books, who did they read? S. E. Hinton, of course. Other YA authors mentioned were Lloyd Alexander, Piers Anthony, Avi, Rebecca Baldwin, Frank L. Baum, Cynthia Blair, Judy Blume, Terry Brooks, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Ellen Conford, Caroline B. Cooney, Susan Cooper, Robert Cormier, Lois Duncan, Louise Fitzhugh, Fred Gipson, Virginia Hamilton, Carolyn Keene, Norma Klein, Madeleine L’Engle, Ursula Le Guin, C. S. Lewis, Anne McCaffrey, L. M. Montgomery, John Neufeld, Robert C. O’Brien, Christopher Pike, Ellen Raskin, Wilson Rawls, Willo Davis Roberts, Ouida Sebestyen, and Cynthia Voigt.

Students who reported YA titles generally listed several works by a single author, possibly indicating a kind of brand loyalty: once they find a young adult author they like, they read more by that author (Table 11). For example, a single freshman in the 1990 survey listed seven Lloyd Alexander titles, while another freshman listed seven titles by Lois Duncan.

Conclusions

The good news is that, in these surveys, at least, student reading has remained essentially constant. Students in this Arizona high school maintained a fairly consistent reading rate for the last 15 years, and over the course of their four years of high school, reading shows little or no decline: seniors reported approximately the same number of titles as the other grade levels, though because of the number of classic works listed in pleasure reading, we doubt that the titles they report reflect their true reading habits. More good news: Book’s 1999 survey of high school students from six states found that 92% read at least one book per month, and, according to a more recent (2001) press release by the NEA, 42% of the teenagers in a national survey reported that they read “primarily for fun and pleasure.” The NEA also found that high school students do read: 49% say they read more than ten books a year, and 85% of the teenagers surveyed described reading as “rewarding and satisfying” (“Teens ‘Get It’”).

The bad news from our results is the absence of YA titles in all categories in all years. This literature that is written for and marketed to teenagers and that is required study for nearly all English teacher preparation programs in the United States has made few inroads on the high school literature curriculum: the traditional canon has remained a dominant presence in the high school literature curriculum over the years. This bad news can be tempered by the fact that high school students are indeed reading. Our survey results show that

they're reading canonical and popular adult fiction, and these results are backed by other, more recent reading interest surveys.

Still, it's disappointing that YA books remain on the margin in both required and pleasure reading. Certainly a number of YA novels are well suited for the lower high school grades, but many fine YA books exist for juniors and seniors as well. As students get older and more involved in life's various activities, they have less time for reading and must devote what little reading time they have to what's required by their English classes. Despite the availability of a wide range of excellent YA novels for students in their junior and senior years of high school, most English programs continue to emphasize traditional adult fare. Students who are readers continue to read, but if given the opportunity to read YA books, they might read even more. In an article reporting the results of a reading survey of high school students, Kristin Kloberdanz noted that most high schoolers who say they read list popular adult authors, like John Grisham, Mary Higgins Clark and Stephen King, as their favorites. Also popular are the writers of classics they've been exposed to in school: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, William Faulkner, Shakespeare. While enjoying the challenges these writers' works offer, teenagers say they would probably read more if they found more books that were tuned into their lives. (36)

Perhaps if we continue to sing the praises of quality YA books, we can begin to help those books find their way to the audience for whom they're intended.

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Appendix A

Reading Interest Survey

1182

Please fill out the information spaces below. Answer all questions that apply to you. If a question does not apply, or if you do not understand a question, leave it blank. *Do not put your name on this survey form.*

- I. Male Female
- II. freshman sophomore junior senior
- III. List, by title, the books you've been required to read in the last two (2) years.
- IV. List, by title, the books you've read because you wanted to, in the last two (2) years.
- V. When given the opportunity to read any kind of book you choose, what kind of books do you read? *Check one only.*
 - ___A. science fiction
 - ___B. fantasy
 - ___C. adventure
 - ___D. western
 - ___E. romance/love stories
 - ___F. biography/autobiography
 - ___G. sports
 - ___H. mystery
 - ___I. true life
 - ___J. historical
 - ___K. humor
 - ___L. other (please explain)

Appendix B

Table 1. Composite Top Required Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|---|---|
| The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (28.07%) | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (9.27%) | Romeo and Juliet (14.16%) |
| The Outsiders (6.13%) | The Great Gatsby (7.42%) | Great Expectations (9.94%) |
| Lord of the Rings (series) (4.01%) | Great Expectations (6.28%) | The Odyssey (8.13%) |
| To Kill a Mockingbird (3.77%) | Medea (4.99%) | The Pearl (7.83%) |
| That Was Then, This Is Now (3.30%) | Our Town (4.71%) | Julius Caesar (6.63%) |
| The Red Badge of Courage (2.36%) | The Scarlet Letter (4.14%) | The Great Gatsby (5.72%) |
| The Good Earth (3.14%) | The Crucible (5.72%) | Romeo and Juliet (3.14%) |
| The Scarlet Letter (5.42%) | Everyman (2.43%) | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (5.12%) |

Titles occurring with a 2% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 2. Top Required Freshman Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|--|--|
| The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (20.47%) | The Good Earth (9.84%) | I Know What You Did Last Summer (7.41%) |
| The Outsiders (14.96%) | Lord of the Files (7.77%) | Invitation to the Game (5.56%) |
| Lord of the Rings (9.45%) | I Know What You Did Last Summer (6.22%) | |
| That Was Then, This Is Now (9.45%) | A Separate Peace (6.22%) | |
| | The Great Gatsby (5.70%) | |
| | The Pigman (5.70%) | |
| | The Girl Who Owned a City (5.18%) | |
| | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (5.18%) | |
| | I Am the Cheese (5.18%) | |

Titles occurring with a 5% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 3. Top Required Sophomore Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (47.37%) | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (31.18%) | Romeo and Juliet (21.95%) |
| The Outsiders (7.37%) | Great Expectations (25.81%) | The Odyssey (20.73%) |
| The Hobbit (5.26%) | Romeo and Juliet (15.05%) | Great Expectations (17.07%) |
| | The Diary of Anne Frank (6.45%) | The Pearl (15.85%) |

Titles occurring with a 5% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 4. Top Required Junior Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|---|---|--|
| The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (32.56%) | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (22.08%) | Julius Caesar (15.83%) |
| To Kill a Mockingbird (7.75%) | Great Expectations (12.99%) | Romeo and Juliet (15.00%) |
| | Julius Caesar (7.14%) | The Pearl (10.83%) |
| | | Great Expectations (10.00%) |
| | | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (9.17%) |
| | | The Odyssey (7.50%) |
| | | The Crucible (6.67%) |
| | | Twelve Angry Men (6.67%) |

Titles occurring with a 5% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 5. Top Required Senior Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| The Red Badge of Courage (13.70%) | The Great Gatsby (14.6%) | The Great Gatsby (19.78%) |
| The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (8.22%) | Medea (11.68%) | The Scarlet Letter (18.68%) |
| The Great Gatsby (6.85%) | Our Town (11.68%) | Romeo and Juliet (10.99%) |
| Of Mice and Men (5.48%) | The Scarlet Letter (8.03%) | The Crucible (10.99%) |
| The Scarlet Letter (5.48%) | Everyman (5.84%) | Great Expectations (7.69%) |
| Jude, the Obscure (5.48%) | Death of a Salesman (5.11%) | The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (6.59%) |
| The Crucible (5.11%) | | |

Titles occurring with a 5% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 6. Composite of Top Pleasure Reading Titles

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|---|---|
| The Outsiders S. E. Hinton (3.07%) | Pet Sematary Stephen King (1.76%) | R.L. Stine Series (1.30%) |
| Flowers in the Attic V. C. Andrews (1.54%) | Misery Stephen King (1.28%) | A Time to Kill John Grisham (1.03%) |
| Firestarter Stephen King (1.37%) | Grapes of Wrath John Steinbeck (1.12%) | Congo Michael Crichton (1.30%) |
| 1984 George Orwell (1.37%) | It Stephen King (1.12%) | The Crucible Arthur Miller (1.30%) |
| That Was Then, This Is Now S. E. Hinton (1.37%) | | I Know What You Did Last Summer Lois Duncan (1.30%) |
| The Shining Stephen King (1.37%) | | I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings Maya Angelou (1.30%) |
| Cujo Stephen King (1.19%) | | Jurassic Park Michael Crichton (1.30%) |
| Go Ask Alice anonymous (1.19%) | | The Lost World Michael Crichton (1.30%) |
| Lord of the Rings J. R. R. Tolkien (1.19%) | | The Outsiders S. E. Hinton (1.30%) |
| The Dead Zone Stephen King (1.02%) | | Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare (1.30%) |
| Petals in the Wind V. C. Andrews (1.02%) | | Where the Red Fern Grows Wilson Rawls (1.30%) |

Titles occurring with a 1% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 7. Composite List of Favorite Genres

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Romance/Love Stories (18.75%) | Fantasy (14.01%) | Mystery (37.45%) |
| Science Fiction (12.50%) | Other (14.01%) | Other (9.64%) |
| | <i>Approx. 33% of these specified horror.</i> | <i>Approx. 60% of these specified horror.</i> |
| Adventure (11.46%) | Adventure (13.38%) | Sports (9.64%) |
| True Life (10.94%) | Romance/Love Stories (13.38%) | Adventure (7.23%) |
| Humor (10.42%) | Mystery (12.10%) | Fantasy (7.23%) |
| Mystery (10.42%) | Humor (10.83%) | Romance/Love Stories (7.23%) |
| Fantasy (9.38%) | Science Fiction (6.37%) | Science Fiction (7.23%) |
| Sports (7.29%) | Sports (6.37%) | True Life (6.02%) |
| Biography/Autobiography (4.69%) | True Life (4.46%) | Humor (4.82%) |
| Other (2.08%) | Biography/Autobiography (3.18%) | Historical (2.41%) |
| Historical (1.56%) | Historical (1.27%) | Biography/Autobiography (1.21%). |
| Western (.52%) | Western (.64%) | Western (0%) |

Table 8. Girls' Favorite Genres

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Romance/Love Stories (35.29%) | Romance/Love Stories (22.81%) | Mystery (47.17%) |
| True Life (12.75%) | Mystery (11.96%) | Romance/Love Stories (11.32%) |
| Mystery (11.76%) | Humor (10.87%) | |

Genres with a 10% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 9. Boys' Favorite Genres

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Science Fiction (22.92%) | Fantasy (17.95%) | Sports (18.6%) |
| Adventure (17.71%) | Adventure (15.38%) | Mystery (13.95%) |
| Humor (12.50%) | Sports (11.54%) | Adventure (11.63%) |
| Sports (10.42%) | Mystery (10.26%) | Other (11.63%) |
| | | Science Fiction (11.63%) |

Genres with a 10% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 10. Top Pleasure YA Titles Listed Alphabetically

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|--|--|--|
| Go Ask Alice anonymous | The Outsiders S. E. Hinton | Anne of Green Gables L. M. Montgomery |
| The Chocolate War Robert Cormier | I Know What You Did Last Summer Lois Duncan | The Outsiders S. E. Hinton |
| That Was Then, This Is Now S. E. Hinton | Incarnations of Immortality Piers Anthony | R. L. Stine Series (entire or part) R. L. Stine |
| | Locked in Time Lois Duncan | Where the Red Fern Grows Wilson Rawls |
| | Magic Kingdom for Sale—Sold! Terry Brooks | |
| | Remember Me Christopher Pike | |
| | A Separate Peace John Knowles | |
| | A Spell for Chameleon Piers Anthony | |
| | Sword of Shannara Terry Brooks | |
| | The Westing Game Ellen Raskin | |
| | A Wrinkle in Time Madeleine L'Engle | |
| | Xanth (series) Piers Anthony | |

Titles with a 1% or greater frequency are listed.

Table 11. Top Pleasure Reading YA Authors Listed Alphabetically

| 1982 | 1990 | 1997 |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Anonymous | Piers Anthony | |
| Terry Brooks | Judy Blume | S. E. Hinton |
| Paula Danzinger | Terry Brooks | Joseph Locke |
| S. E. Hinton | Frances Hodgson Burnett | Wilson Rawls |
| John Neufeld | Robert Cormier | R. L. Stine |
| Wilson Rawls | Lois Duncan | |
| | John Knowles | |
| | Madeleine L'Engle | |
| | Ursula Le Guin | |
| | C. S. Lewis | |
| | L. M. Montgomery | |
| | Christopher Pike | |
| | Ellen Raskin | |
| | Cynthia Voigt | |

To be listed above, titles by each author must have been mentioned by two or more students in a given survey year.

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No Need to “Duck, Run and Hide”: Young Adult Poetry that Taps into You

Laura R. Lipsett

What Wrought Such Pain and Rare Pleasure?

He looked shocked. “That’s poetry? I thought it had to rhyme.” ... Many of these teachers had read Shakespeare and Keats, and had learned that writing was something for other people, certainly not for them.

Georgia Heard, poet, *Writing Toward Home*

Recently, in my English methods class, I took an informal survey, asking my students how they felt about poetry. This was conducted in light of various methods texts that state that most English teachers do not like poetry themselves and as a result teach very little of it, and then when doing so do a poor job of it, or if possible, do not teach it at all (Andrews, 1991; Beach and Marshall, 1991; Burke, 1999; Flynn and McPhillips, 2000; Heard, 1999). The overwhelming majority of my methods students said that they did not like poetry, having had negative experiences with it in their pre-college and during-college lives and were not at all familiar with the breadth and sophistication available in young adult literature, let alone realized that there was such a genre as poetry written and compiled explicitly for the young adult audience.

Since I am an avid poetry reader and writer, interests cultivated only in my adult years, I’ve asked this question since I started teaching English methods courses in 1995. I continue to be surprised by my students’ responses. My current students are traditional, in that their ages range from 22 to 24 years. One might assume that these young adults have been exposed by now to contemporary poetry and readings that have culled an interest and realization of its broad forms, rather than have conceded a profound distaste. Many of my students confessed to not studying contemporary poetry as part of their English majors, but as with their high school experiences, took required courses that included a portion of poetry, such as the history of American Literature I and II, British Literature I and II, Chaucer, Middle English Poets, and so forth. Their elective studies in Chicano/a, African American and Native American Literature, for them, consisted typically of novels and short stories. In reflecting particularly on young adult poetry read, one student remembered reading “Jabberwocky” in her middle school textbook anthology. She said she could remember nothing memorable about this piece other than its title.

I’ve long been a believer in a “pedagogy of persistence” and viewed my students’ pained expressions and utterances as a gauntlet thrown down, and decided to forge ahead with

various *how’s* and *why’s* and *perhaps not’s* of teaching poetry in middle and high school classrooms. I juggle book talks on a diverse range of poetry collections that might appeal to them as well as to middle and high school students. I continue to hold firm faith that such poetry collections might make poetry so appealing that the term no longer remains a word that otherwise might inspire students and sometimes their teachers “to duck and run for cover into the woods.” I present reasons for teaching poetry to adolescents and descriptions of recommended poetry collections in the paragraphs that follow.

Traditions

There are multiple reasons why the word *poetry* may conjure such feelings of anxiety and revulsion. Various scholars of poetry (some of whom are poets themselves) have attributed these to certain critical literary theories and methodologies, to mandated school curriculum and tests, and to teachers themselves who may not be readers or writers of poetry (Andrews, 1991; Dias, 1987;

*If poems are the music of life, then
music play on.*

Flynn and McPhillips, 2000; Fox, 1995). Perhaps poetry reading and study in middle and high schools, like much of our literary legacy, has been determined by New Critical and Structuralist approaches that place the teacher (or the textbook) as the conveyer of the poem’s “singular meaning” and the bearer of the “tools” that a reader must use to understand as well as to appreciate the poem’s “mysteries” that may seem locked — or not locked. (There are always students who believe they “get it,” but then discover what they got just wasn’t “it.” I confess to being one of those students in high school and in my undergraduate career. Poetry engagement before that had meant out-of-school childhood readings of nursery rhymes and my bestowed legacy of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses*; and I *knew for sure* that I caught those.)

Some teachers may perceive poetry study as a cultural literacy chore to be completed with clenched teeth and forced admiration for its high art literary promises. English language arts teachers may want to teach poetry but are not confident that they have the language to explore it successfully, or the means to assess reading or writing it effectively. Poetry study at the secondary level often is characterized by memorization of rhyming patterns, definitions of meter, and objective test items, such as the differences between metaphor and simile (Beach and Marshall, 1991). While an understanding of the formal elements and structure of poetry may be necessary

for its full appreciation, these can also make poetry reading deadening to the adolescent reader who already approaches the genre with trepidation (Beach and Marshall, 1991). The “Era of Standardization” in which we currently are living may also discourage teachers from being literary explorers with their students. Standardized tests often focus on genre, setting, plot, etc. Few steps taken forward, and perhaps even more steps taken backward.

Students often are asked to read poems in which they’ve little or no interest. This especially is problematic when adolescents are reading from the traditional canon in which the subject matter may tap into emotions and experiences beyond their range of years (Beach and Marshall, 1991). Poems that are not inviting or accessible may discourage adolescents from reading them even once (Beach and Marshall, 1991; Tsujimoto, 1988). In general, research shows that middle school students do not read much for pleasure, read less than they did in their earlier years, and continue to develop negative feelings about reading as they move through the middle grades (Ivey and Broaddus, 2000). A decline continues in high school, aggravated further by increasing extracurricular involvements, including employment outside of school. Some studies suggest that contemporary adult society is largely a nonreading society and suggest that people continue to read less as they grow older (Bushman and Bushman, 1997). The likelihood of *not* picking up poetry collections in or outside the school classroom seems inevitable when faced with these realities.

Contexts need to be created that will allow students to function as successful readers and writers in recognition of the different ways each student goes about reading and writing a poem. Some teachers who are unfamiliar with poetry or are not readers and writers of poetry themselves may also believe the most reluctant and struggling readers especially will not like *any* poetry. However, there is a richness in YA poetry that even the most reluctant and struggling readers might find engaging. A former graduate student of mine, “Max”, as a first-year teacher, decided to introduce Mel Glenn’s *Jump Ball: A Basketball Season in Poems* (1997) to a student in his seventh and eighth-grade remedial reading class. This particular eighth-grade student was placed in Max’s classroom as this student’s previous English teacher believed him to be a poor reader, one without the skills to master the required textbook anthology. Max decided to make his reading classroom a non-textbook rich environment and conducted several book talks and engaged his students in the readings of various young adult texts (novels, short stories and poetry) that were required readings or were mentioned in my college young adult literature course. Max’s students, while he was gaining familiarity with various poetry collections, provided him with feedback regarding whether or not these texts were “good reads” for them. Many students asked for more of these same authors’ titles. In particular, this eighth-grade student read Glenn’s basketball poems in less than two days: He was surprised that they weren’t like “real” poetry he read in his English classroom.

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A Case for Poetry

There are many reasons for the case for poetry, including these: (1) poetry increases one’s sense of knowledge about language and visual literacy; (2) poetry contributes to the affective education of students; (3) poetry acts as a preserver of felt experiences; (4) poetry suggests flow and momentum while at the same time provides a pattern and shaping of experience, setting expectations that are sometimes fulfilled and sometimes subverted; (5) poetry teaches its readers that ambiguity is a part of life — that life is tentative, exploratory and even vague and that this is okay though it can be uncomfortable; and (6) poetry gives pleasure and is capable of generating laughter as well as feelings of well-being. Joseph I. Tsujimoto (1988) says that he teaches poetry because poetry:

gives students a way of crystallizing and publicly expressing private emotions that otherwise might be impossible to communicate.... it persuades students to hear and recognize the private feelings of others...Poetry extends our experience and broadens our consciousness, making us aware of other people’s points of view, other people’s visions of history, the cosmos, and God.... its most practical function: to humanize and elevate our race as a civilized species, cultivating sensitive, open-minded human beings—which is the true vocation for which we are preparing our students. (xiv)

Heard (1999) states, “The kids I have taught have helped me to see that the real lessons poetry teaches are much larger than counting five-seven-five on our fingers, or thinking of the best rhyming word for *moon*. The real lessons poetry can teach are what I call life lessons” (xvii). The very nature of poetry can teach teachers and students about emotional literacy, the kind that both Howard Gardner, in *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (1991), and Daniel Goleman, in *Emotional Intelligence: Why It can Matter More than IQ* (1995) contend to be *as* important as the math and verbal intelligences that are valued most in schools and are proclaimed by many prophets of standardized curriculum and testing: The literacy of knowing and managing one’s feelings and understanding and getting along with others.

Young adult poetry includes poems written explicitly for adolescents and includes adult poetry compiled for young adults. It is poetry with harmony as well as cacophony, but still it is music that can be heard and can inspire movement. It is poetry that puts fire in hands and hearts. Poet Galway Kinnell states, “When I found the world of poets, I realized I was not so odd after all” (Kinnell cited in Rosenberg, 1996, 87). Virginia Monseau (1996) says adolescence is a period that “many of us would just as soon forget . . . the time in which we first asked ourselves important questions, the answers for which we continue to search even today . . . that forgetting is a mistake; turn your back on the source of your question and lose much of what you have to gain finding an answer” (ix). Young adult poetry is about many periods in our lives and in the lives of others. This poetry can help young adult readers to realize that they are not alone in their thoughts

and experiences and that play and multiple perspectives are integral to understanding what makes us human and what inspires us to think and act in the ways that we do.

Music for Ears and Feet

“. . . the art which uses words as both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feelings salute, the mind perceives, and the imagination orders.”

Babette Deutsch, poet

“Poetry has historically been defined as particular ways of organizing thought through sound, and its music remains the point where any good poem begins.”

Jane Hirshfield, poet

Poems do what they do through the music of words. “Poetry has historically been defined as particular ways of organizing thought through sound, and its music remains the point where any good poem begins” (Hirshfield 7). The music of language can provide its readers with a sense of connectiveness as well as dissonance in terms of feelings and experiences. Every poem begins in language awake to its own connections—language that hears itself and what is around it, sees itself and what is around it, looks back at those who look into its gaze and knows more perhaps even than we do about who and what we are (Hirshfield, 1997). She explains, “The repetition and changes of a poem’s prosody . . . Unfolding their tensions and resolutions, a poem’s sounds make of experience a shapeliness, with beginning, middle, and end. And under every poem’s music, whether in form or free verse, lies the foundational heartbeat, its drum and assurance accompanying us through our lives (8-9). Hirshfield believes a poem’s music affects us whether or not we make it conscious and that to study its sounds is music for both ears and feet:

Poetry’s work is the clarification and magnification of being. Each time we enter its word-woven and musical invocation, we give ourselves over to a different mode of knowing: to poetry’s knowing, and to the increase of existence it brings, unlike any other. (Hirshfield 1997, vii).

If poems are the music of life, then music play on. Several recent young adult poetry collections reverberate in the existence of every day things: in conflicting cultural identities and the languages of literacy, to courtships that develop over time in harmony and cacophony, to searching for one’s place in the world, to nursery rhymes in contemporary times, to the music of streets and neighborhoods, to puzzles and mysteries that hint for answers, to multiple voices umbrellaed under the same expansive sky. The following poetry collections present experiences that rock and revolutionize, sometimes working together and sometimes falling apart.

Lori M. Carlson’s edited collection, *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States* (1994), has been ascribed “hot has jalapenos and as cool as jazz.” This particular collection includes thirty-six voices that resonate the sights, sounds and smells of Latino/a culture in the United States, celebrating the tones, rhythms and sounds of what it means “to live a (cultural and linguistic) double life.” These poems are about families and parties, insults and sad memories, and glory and pain. Poets included hail from Cuba, California, Mexico, Michigan, Nicaragua, and New York, all capturing the various accents and experiences of teenagers, given in their original language and in English transla-

tion. “. . . to understand me/you have to know Spanish/feel it in the blood of your soul . . .” (“Learning English,” 17).

Well-known poet and poetry anthologist Arnold Adoff has compiled a soulful, heart-pounding and feet-tapping collection *Slow Dance Heart Break Blues* (1995). These poems are sung from inside the hearts and heads of adolescents in love and out of love. These poems are visually interesting and reflect the speakers’ sentiments. They quake and quiver with teenage angst and read more like the blues with both patent sorrows and joys.

Another well-known poet and poetry anthologist, Liz Rosenberg, has put together a collection of poetry to help adolescents cross the world’s narrow bridges without being afraid to fall down. “Emily Dickinson believed poems to be earthshattering when one felt physically as if the top of one’s head were taken off” (Rosenberg, 1998). These poems are a selection of passion and yearning and of birth and death. They both hurt and heal. The various poets speak of love and feelings that bind us to others and may lead us to new feelings and experiences. Rosenberg (1998) states that:

I believe that all great poetry has its own kind of music, its own rhythm . . . People often turn to poetry in peak moments — moments of extreme joy, or sorrow, or confusion. Here again, it seems to me that poetry and adolescence make a perfect pair. Many teenagers write poetry, sometimes for the first and only time in their lives. It is a form dedicated to intensity. (xi-xii).

This collection is organized chronologically by the poets’ birthdates; their voices resound from all over the globe — from ancient China and Persia to Russia during the Stalinist terrors to Japan, El Salvador, and America today. Some poems are dark and others break open with joy, but all seem to speak to each other over vast spaces of time and place. Rosenberg also includes biographical notes on each poet and their poetic forms.

Invisible Ladder (1996) is another collection edited by Rosenberg. Rosenberg’s motive in this collection is to make contemporary poems written for adults accessible to a broader readership. For this anthology she asked poets to write about the links between poetry and their childhoods. Included are photos that show how they looked when they were young and how they look today. This collection offers its own ladder for readers to climb:

Young people deserve great poetry; great poetry deserves young readers. Because I did not find in any anthology of poems the book I was hoping for, I made my own. There are many fine books of children’s poems for children—Shel Silverstein’s and Dr. Seuss’s are among our best—but this thing, “children’s poetry,” is its own kind of creature. It is not the only kind of poetry there is . . . The poetry I liked best as a child . . . was poetry that grew along with me. I loved Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg, Edna St. Vincent Millay and, a little later on, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell—and I still do. I think I needed, even then, to know that real poets were alive and well, and writing in the world. (Rosenberg 3).

The Inner-City Mother Goose (1996) are Mother Goose rhymes that Eve Merriam re-wrote in 1969. Following the old tradition of rhymes that portray social ills, Merriam’s rhymes depict grim realities of inner-city life, including crime, drug abuse, unemployment, inadequate housing, insufficient

public transportation and pollution. Razor-sharp verses read with a beat to be rapped with a voice of force and knowledge. Nikki Giovanni writes, in the introduction, “Eve Merriam took the spirit of Mother Goose . . . to give voice to those who were being silenced . . . She had the moral indignation of a just cause . . . Agony should not be ignored . . . to allow words to carry some healing . . . We are all a part of this civilization” (2-3).

Gary Soto’s *Neighborhood Odes* (1992) is a celebration of life in a Mexican-American neighborhood that is like all neighborhoods, filled with a variety of people, some you know better than others and some not at all. He writes of the pleasures of sprinklers, snow cones, trips to the park, new tennis shoes, tortillas and the library. There’s joy in wedding music, in neighborhood pets, and in fireworks in the street after dark. Soto has written several young adult novels that read with a poetic beat that include *Jesse* (1994), *Baseball in April and other Stories* (1990), *Living Up the Street* (1985). He is an acclaimed poet for adult and young adult audiences whose words resonate of Spanish language and song and often are autobiographical, poignant and humorous.

Angela Johnson’s *The Other Side: Shorter Poems* (1998) won the Coretta Scott King Award. Johnson has written numerous acclaimed young adult novels and picture books. This collection of poems takes readers on a journey back in time told from the perspective of a young woman who recounts growing up in Shorter, Alabama — the people and the landscape of her childhood and adolescence. Her narrator looks back on the social customs and politics of the south and the reasons her family relocated north. Her book begins with “Preface,” which includes these lines: “My poetry doesn’t sing the song of the sonnets, but then/ I sing a different kind of music — / which is what it’s all about anyway” (xii-xiii). “Red Dirt” begins the journey: “Got me some red Alabama dirt I keep/ on the bathroom shelf in a heart-shaped/ bottle” (1).

The Complete Poems to Solve (1993) is a collection by well-known children’s poet May Swenson. This compilation invites readers to solve riddles that describe an unnamed subject, while others focus on a particular subject or topic. These poems encourage engagement in the poetic process and encourage adolescents to view the world in a new way. This collection is an exercise for perceptions and imaginations. Many of these poems were published in a previous volume, *Poems to Solve*, and have been included in this newer 72-poem work that represents a sizable portion of Swenson’s body of poetry. Another collection by May Swenson is co-edited with R. R. Knudson, *American Sports Poems* (1988). The subjects in these poems include some of this country’s greatest athletes: Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, Mickey Mantle, Pete Rose, Babe Didrikson, Patrick Ewing, and Muhammad Ali. Other subjects include various professional and college teams. Musical, doggerel and sometimes eloquent sonnets, these poems float like a butterfly and other times sting like a bee. Some of the poets included are Carl Sandburg, Elizabeth Bishop, Maxine Kumin, Anne Sexton, John Updike, and Shel Silverstein. The poems celebrate ecstasy, pain, dreams and memories that have made sports an American obsession. A poem by R. Ernest Holmes, “Black Lady in an Afro Hairdo Cheers for Cassius,” resonates the rhythm of the man who became known as Muhammad Ali, and begins with “Honey-

hued beauty, you are:/in your gleaming white shorts,/gladiator shoes . . .” (144-145).

This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World (1992) is a collection by poet and another well-known poetry anthologist Naomi Shihab Nye, who wrote the Newbery Honor novel, *Habibi* (1997). This is a collection of 129 voices telling of their lives, loves and losses. They write from apart, but their words—under the same sky—join them. Nye divides the poems into sections: Words and Silences, Dreams and Dreamers, Families, This Earth and Sky in Which We Live, Losses, and Human Mysteries. The poets represent 68 countries from around the world, including Latvia, Israel, Denmark, Mexico, Indonesia, Italy, Palestine, Taiwan, Kuwait, South Korea, and Kenya. Nye includes contributors’ notes as well as a map that depicts the poets’ countries of origin and that illuminates “this same sky”.

Fire in Hands and Heart

“Poetry is language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.”

Edward Arlington Robinson, poet

“ . . . poems can be seen as parts of conversations and as elements in argument; they can become the most political of actions, a moving outward of the individual consciousness..to explore, discover and change the world . . .”

Michael Rosen, poet

Poetry is a way of knowing. Poetry can be wittier and funnier than any kind of writing; it can tell us about the world we live in through words we can’t forget. It can be tough, and it can be tender. It can be fat, and it can be lean. It can preach a short sermon, or give a long thought. Sometimes the shorter the poem, the longer the thought. Poems ask for a different reading than just reading to oneself. They must be heard, and they must be felt. Several young adult poetry collections are like fire in hands and heart — a fire that gives off the heat and glow of finding one’s place in this world, of considering different perspectives and the politics of gender, of what it means to be female in all her glory and strength, of the beauty of seemingly ordinary things, of what it means to be alone but not alone, of the need to be yourself despite pressures that would you otherwise.

Poet and well-known anthologist Paul B. Janeczko’s *The Music of What Happens: Poems that Tell Stories* (1988) is a varied collection. Contemporary poets tell about ghosts, angels, lovers, dreamers, young Civil War soldiers, classroom clowns, stepchildren, senior citizens, grandchildren, kids at summer camp, and much more. These are the events that make up lives. This collection begins with a line by Jared Carter that hits the central purpose of this collection, “The purpose of poetry is to tell us about life” (1). Another Janeczko collection, *Looking for Your Name* (1993), is an exploration of the conflicts that make a statement about life in America and life in the heart. Janeczko has divided this collection of multiple voices and experiences into two parts: “In the Lonely Games No One Sees the Wonderful Things You Do,” and “America, It’s Hard to Get Your Attention”. The first section contains such poems as “I Have Some Questions about Life on Earth,” “The Nuclear Accident,” “White Trash,” “Why I Quit Dancing Lessons,” and “Ice Hockey”. The second includes tales of patriotics, blue collar skills and no jobs,

and beauty defined: "The Market Economy," "What Holds Us Back," and "Eye of the Beholder."

Naomi Shihab Nye and Paul B. Janeczko co-selected the collection *I Feel a Little Jumpy Around You* (1996), that pairs a wide range of his and her voices that offer lively exchanges and contrasting images: views on a first kiss, what boys and girls can do, on brothers and sisters, parents and children, how men view women (and vice versa), on creativity, and on romance. This collection is told in unison and in opposing voices. It is meant to inspire readers to think about perspectives from opposite sexes and about language use and life. An accompaniment to that is Carol Ann Duffy's *I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine: Poems for Young Feminists* (1992) which includes a variety of women's voices from around the world. The voices are angry, funny, tender, dramatic, conflictual, self-mocking, speak of failure and betrayal and are voices that play with language, roles and stereotypes.

Ralph Fletcher's poetry collections, *Room Enough for Love* (1998) and *Ordinary Things: Poems from a Walk in Early Spring* (1997), are plain speaking, accessible and fresh without clichés. *Room Enough for Love* is a compilation of two poetry collections, *I Am Wings: Poems About Love* (1994) and *Buried Alive: The Elements of Love* (1996). Fletcher states, "My best poems seem to draw on the deepest, most profound experiences of my life. Falling in

and out of love was like that for me. Those shy glances, secret notes, breakups, crushes and kisses left indelible marks on my soul" (back cover). *Room Enough for Love* is about exploring the experience of love and includes such poems entitled with the heat in hands and heart aptly felt: "First Look," "Crush Blush," and "Falling Out". This collection reads like a relationship between two people and the effects of outsiders' perceptions, beginning with feelings of fresh awareness and moving to comfortable familiarity and reasons not to continue. Fletcher's *Ordinary Things* (1997) is a collection of poems about physical and spiritual discoveries from taking a walk in early spring. Poems recall sights and feelings experienced on a walk leaving home, entering the woods, and then returning home. It's about really seeing for the first time what we've been looking at all along, and about walking and its cleansing properties: "I walk to wash the dead air/ from the branches of my lungs . . ." ("Walking," 48).

Pierced by a Ray of Sun (1995) is a collection of poems about when we feel different and alone and about what it means to be human and sensitive to ourselves. Ruth Gordon has selected poetry by various authors that reveals both the universality of feelings of loneliness and alienation and the universality of stresses and means of survival. Poems included are "Envy," "Beating Up Billy Murphy in Fifth Grade," "My Parents," "Lies," and "Fear".

English teacher and multiple award-winning poet Mel Glenn has penned several free-verse poetry collections. Glenn has stated that his poetry inspirations are derived from the struggles and aspirations of those he teaches and observes as a teacher in Brooklyn, New York. Previously mentioned was *Jump Ball* (1997) which portrays the Tigers, Tower High School's basketball team in their champion season. This book

may appeal to adolescents who like poetry and sports and to those who don't like either. The reader gets to know starting player with NBA aspirations Garrett Jones and the rest of the team and their families, their coach and team manager, their friends and girlfriends, their teachers, and the fans and reporters who cover their games. A wide range of emotions, commitments, relationships, and home situations are presented from a multitude of perspectives. Poems are humorous, insightful, and filled with pathos. One example is "Dennis Carleton," which is told from the perspective of a star-player who failed to show to practice the day before a game: ". . . It was Coach with no words to say/ Who had spoken loudest of all" (100).

Foreign Exchange (1999) and *Split Image* (2000) are Glenn's most recent collections. In the tradition of *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale?* (1996) and *The Taking of Room 114: A Hostage Drama in Poems*, *Foreign Exchange* is a mystery told in poems. As with *Jump Ball* (1997), urban Tower High School is at its core. Teens from this city school spend a weekend in a rural town and face small-town prejudices and sus-

picious that "city kids mean crime and drugs." Each urban teenager is paired with a rural teen, resulting in interesting and comic situations. When a local girl is found murdered, the townspeople point fingers at an African-American boy who danced

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with her at the foreign exchange dance. Glenn explores stereotypes and prejudice and delves into the inner lives of teens and townspeople. *Split Image* (2000) is about the hottest girl in school, newcomer and Chinese-American Laura Li. These poems are about what happens when one teenage girl is denied the freedom to determine her own identity and feels possessed by the perceptions of others. As with his other collections, Glenn weaves multiple voices and perspectives into one fabric. This collection is about what might happen when we allow others to define our lives and how outward impressions are just that and rarely tell the true story of the real you. In "Laura Li," the reader is brought inside her longing to be herself and her realistic acceptance of others' views: "People see who or what they want anyway" (107).

Finding What You've Always Had

"Poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right."

Wallace Stevens, poet

"These poems have come a great distance to find you."

Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall In Love with Poetry*

In *Finding What You Didn't Lose: Expressing Your Truth and Creativity Through Poem-Making* (1995), certified poetry therapist John Fox contends that everyone has a natural inclination to express themselves through the language of poetry: "It's there waiting for you to find what you never really lost" (xv). Heard (1999) believes that poetry, like bread, is for everyone. She is convinced that we all have poetry inside of us and that we just don't recognize it when we hear it in our students or in ourselves:

Sometimes it disguises itself, it doesn't rhyme, it doesn't sound like a limerick, so we have to look for it in unlikely places . . . When we speak in a voice that's exclusively ours, that's natural, when we're not trying to be anything other than ourselves, that's the stuff of poetry. (xv)

Poetry seems to be appearing in more public places. Even in Wyoming, our local coffeehouses (of which we have four in a town of around 29,000) have featured poetry readings, many of which are open mike to original poets. Some of my colleagues from across the university have shared their interest in David Whyte, poet and poetry consultant who provides professional development to major corporations speaking of the importance of employees' needing to nurture their inner lives and creative abilities. The September 4, 2000, *Upfront* (a news magazine for teens published by *The New York Times* and distributed to schools) featured "Poetry that Rocks," a recount of the third annual National Youth Poetry Slam held the Spring of 2000 in San Francisco. Representing a wide range of ethnic and racial voices, slam poetry (poets) has been boosted in part by the popularity of rap music and the boom in stand-up comics on both stage and TV sitcom. Slamming is a lively amalgam of original poetry recited in solo, duet or multiple-voice formats that can be considered performance art, hip-hop concert, and Olympic figure skating, replete with judges holding numerical score cards ("Poetry that Rocks," 2000). One observer said watching others perform "showed me that poetry could be something that lifts an audience to another place, like jazz or salsa or dance" (28).

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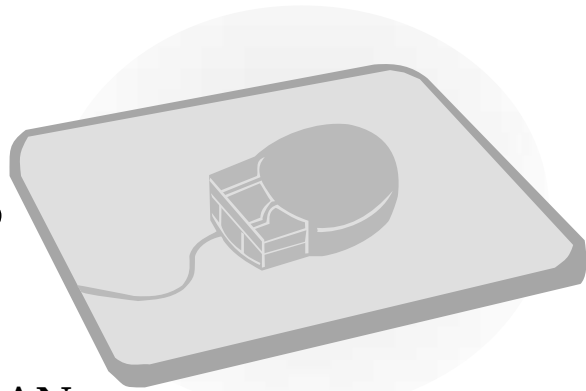
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**Have you
tried these
Web sites yet?**



ALAN:

<http://english.byu.edu/ALAN>

The ALAN Review:

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournal/ALAN/alan-review.htm>

National Council of Teachers of English:

<http://www.ncte.org>

The ALAN Review Web site has recently been recognized by researchers at Lightspan's StudyWeb as "one of the best educational resources on the Web." It will be featured on studyweb.com in the near future.

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTION COLUMN

Kathleen Carico, Editor

Critical Essays about Two Books in the Greenwood Press “Critical Companion” Series

Susan Elkins and John Nicklas

In this column, two colleagues share reviews of two books in a series called Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers. The series features books about best-selling writers who have written several successful novels, many of which are on the crossover list of adult/young adult books. For example, works from Amy Tan, Dean Koontz, Michael Crichton, V.C. Andrews, Barbara Kingsolver, and Anne McCaffrey are often cited as favorites among young adults, and these authors are among the over thirty authors featured in the series.

Books about Jamaica Kincaid and Rudolph A. Anaya are featured in this column. Susan Elkins’ review of Jamaica Kincaid gives us a valuable summary of and reflection on the content of this volume about Kincaid’s life and works. Susan’s review also clearly shows the frame for all of the books in the Critical Companion series: a biography of the author, a chapter on the literary context of the author’s works, a series of chapters each analyzing several of the author’s best known works, and a helpful bibliography of related works and secondary sources.

John’s review takes a different approach. Currently teaching 8th grade, John uses Anaya’s Bless me, Ultima, in his classroom, and, in his review, he shares the context of his classroom and the background of the unit in which he uses the novel. He then goes on to explain how the critical information in this volume informs his own teaching.

Both Susan and John share what they found helpful in each of these two volumes. In so doing, they also reveal to us what is available in the entire “Critical Companion” series. —kc

Jamaica Kincaid: A Critical Companion

review by Susan Elkins

Paravisini-Gebert, L. (1999). *Jamaica Kincaid: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, Professor of Hispanic and African Studies at Vassar College, contributes a useful volume to the “Critical Companion” series as she spotlights Jamaica Kincaid and her most recent writings: *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1997). With this volume, Paravisini-Gebert not only provides teachers with a wealth of helpful background information about Kincaid—a gutsy writer not always easily accessible to readers—but she also provides a glimpse into the Caribbean/West Indian culture, history, and landscape which foregrounds much of Kincaid’s work.

As all volumes in this series do, Paravisini-Gebert’s volume—rich with information drawn from interviews with Kincaid and other published writings—begins in chapter one with biographical information that highlights the adolescent experiences which shape-shift as subject, theme, symbol, and character in many of Kincaid’s writings. Born Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson, Kincaid grew up in St. John’s, the capital city of the Caribbean island of Antigua. A British territory that did not achieve political independence until 1981, Antigua underwent intense, foreign-controlled development of the tourist industry during Kincaid’s childhood. As a result, Kincaid observed the disappearance of a native Antiguan

culture as many Antiguan, including her own mother, adopted “Englishness.” Kincaid’s first published stories in 1978, “Girl” and “Antigua Crossings: A Deep and Blue Passage on the Caribbean Sea”—both included in the short story collection, *At the Bottom of the River*—evidence her resentment toward and rejection of what she perceived as “fostered racism.” Ultimately, this meant the rejection of her mother, Annie Drew, as well, for Kincaid felt that her mother embraced English and European ideals of womanhood, ideals she deemed as “prudery.”

Paravisini-Gebert further traces the dissolution of Kincaid’s relationship with Annie Drew as she highlights Kincaid’s reaction to losing her mother’s sole affection after three younger brothers are born; Kincaid’s isolated withdrawal into a life-long love of reading; her rudeness toward those who imposed the colonial life on her, especially her teachers; and, finally, her eventual departure from the island in 1965. Paravisini-Gebert explains that the weak relations between Kincaid and her mother, Kincaid’s “adolescent impatience” and her stepfather’s illness (which prevented him from working and forced Kincaid to leave school so she could help take care of her younger brothers) provided the impetus to send Kincaid to the United States to work as an au pair for a well-to-do family in New York. It is in New York, then, where Kincaid meets *New Yorker* writer Michael Arlen and begins to publish short stories about the Antiguan life she left behind.

In chapter two, Paravisini-Gebert continues by explaining Kincaid’s unconventional path to writing fame, as she high-

lights Kincaid's body of work. She begins with Kincaid's fictional autobiography, an oxymoronic, but apt, description as Paravisini-Gebert explains the most intriguing aspect of Kincaid's work as the "close connection existing between autobiography and fiction, particularly as [she] often offers both fictional and nonfictional versions of the same autobiographical episodes, allowing the reader to determine the closeness of the relationship between the two" (25). Thus begins Paravisini-Gebert's descriptions of Kincaid's many and varied works, e.g., *At the Bottom of the River*, Kincaid's first book of short stories, including "Girl"; *Annie John*, considered one of the best examples of the Caribbean *bildungsroman* tracing Annie's adolescence in Antigua; *A Small Place*, a biting non-fictional critique of the corrupt and poorly-managed Antiguan government; *Lucy*, another narrative work which picks up with Annie once she is in the United States; *The Autobiography of My Mother*, a "pseudomemoir" portraying a "larger than life" father figure; *My Brother*, Kincaid's second book of non-fiction, which tells the story of her brother Devon Drew and his struggle with AIDS, and most recently, *In the Garden*, a series of essays on gardening. Finally, in this chapter, Paravisini-Gebert points out some of the major themes of Kincaid's work, including the question of how to define and rewrite post-colonial West Indian history and culture, the relationship between the powerful and the powerless, and the necessary severance of mother/daughter ties as symbolic of Antigua's movement toward independence.

In chapters three through six, Paravisini-Gebert delves deeper into Kincaid's writings by focusing, story-by-story or chapter-by-chapter, on such elements as narrative point of view (*At the Bottom of the River*), genre, plot development, setting, character development (*Annie John*, *Lucy*), and theme. Too, Paravisini-Gebert provides what I think is one of the most helpful aspects of this series, alternative readings of each of Kincaid's works. In his recent book, *Interpreting Young Adult Literature: Literary Theory in the Secondary Classroom*, John Moore explains:

We can help our students understand what it means to know literature differently if we value multiple readings (or interpretations) over a single authoritative reading. Literary theory helps us understand that there are many ways to know texts, to read and interpret them . . . We need to expand our students' understanding of how they read; we need to teach students how to 'develop and defend their own interpretations.' (4)

In providing these alternative readings, Paravisini-Gebert complements pedagogical strategies for teaching literature, as well as student understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing/reading. For *At the Bottom of the River* and *Lucy*, Paravisini-Gebert provides a feminist reading, focusing on the works of Nancy Chodorow and Elizabeth Spelman as she explores the mother/daughter relationship and the postcolonial critique of feminist thought. For *Annie John*, Paravisini-Gebert offers a genre-theory reading which discusses and attempts to clarify the work's classification as a work of nonfiction. Finally, for *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Paravisini-Gebert offers a postcolonial reading as she looks at the decolonization theorist Frantz Fanon's presence in this work's character of Xuela and her ultimate rejection of Fanon's belief that political action brings liberation.

The volume ends with an extensive bibliography that includes titles of works by and about Jamaica Kincaid, interviews, recordings, and related works.

In her article, "Experience and Acceptance of Postcolonial Literature in the High School English Class," Patricia F. Goldblatt explains that as a speaker at Toronto's International Festival of Authors, Kincaid presented herself as "displaced . . . always travelling and seeking a place called home, but returning to [my] birthplace, only to leave again." Goldblatt ponders whether Kincaid and other postcolonial African writers she teaches (Mukherjee, Slovo, Achebe) are intriguing to her students because of their "restlessness, this constant seeking but never securing their roots" (76). Although I have never taught/read Kincaid's works to/with my ninth graders, I see great value in doing so in the future, especially with the aid of Paravisini-Gebert's extensive literary analysis. Paravisini-Gebert captures the restlessness of Kincaid, as pondered by Goldblatt, and helps the reader understand some of the underpinnings for that restlessness. Adolescents, especially, are restless and are constantly searching for, questioning, and rejecting their roots. Too, because Kincaid's work is largely autobiographical in nature, her works as explained and highlighted by Paravisini-Gebert, could serve as catalyst and mentor for students' own autobiographical writings. Carolyn Barros calls on Roland Barthes, a linguistic theorist and semiotician, when she says:

. . . narrative is simply there like life itself . . . international, transhistorical, transcultural . . . and might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. (5)

Through discovery and exploration of Kincaid's writings, as well as through writing their own personal history narratives, students could write about what makes them different from and similar to the girl whose voice they hear in Kincaid's writings—a voice they will come to understand more deeply and more appreciatively through Paravisini-Gebert's beneficial addition to the "Critical Companion" series.

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A Resource for Teachers: *Rudolpho A. Anaya: A Critical Companion* review by John Nicklas

Olmos, M. F. (1999). *Rudolpho A. Anaya: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Many of us who teach middle school students can see evidence every day that young adolescents are in a unique phase

of change in their lives. After leaving elementary school many begin forming cliques, seeking out other students with similar interests, or vying desperately to become part of a perceived “cool” or “popular” group. Too often, undue attention is placed on appearances, and middle school children begin to develop an adult awareness of the differences between people without the adult understanding of the more important similarities that bind us together. *Different* begins to be a negative characteristic that often leads to segregation or ostracism in high school. Yet most of the middle school students with whom I work have not yet lost their faith in the more positive aspects of the world, and seem to be at a stage in their lives in which they can learn better ways to see their world and interact with others.

The typical class I teach in my school breaks down demographically to 83% white, 8% black, and 9% various other cultures including Asian, Iranian, and Indian. Our school is further diversified through the inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom. Resource teachers are available to aid in the creation of differentiated curricula to meet the needs of these academically diverse classrooms that can range in one room from gifted to severe LD and even autistic. By the time they reach 8th grade, most students who have spent their lives in this county become accustomed to the diversity our system provides, creating an openness to new ideas and paving the way for a more serious look at socially constructed values that can impede communication between people of different cultures.

To take advantage of the students’ backgrounds and this particular time of openness in their lives, I teach a multiethnic literature unit that focuses on teens with different ethnic backgrounds growing up in America, dealing with typical teenage problems, and as overcoming the obstacles of discrimination. This is a cross-curricular diversity unit that emphasizes the American citizenry of the characters, rather than the inherited ethnicity. The ethnic background is not neglected, however. I include a focus on the ethnic background of the characters with two purposes in mind: 1) To foster understanding of the impact of culture on our lives, illustrating particularly how that culture has the power to separate us from each other if we do not understand and value it; and 2) To highlight the similarities that connect us to each other despite our various cultural backgrounds.

I have collected a diverse selection of literature for young adults available to meet this goal, such as *Shadow Brothers* by AE Cannon, *April and the Dragon Lady* by Lensey Namioka, *Candle in the Wind* by Maureen Wartski, *Children of the River* by Linda Crew, and *Dangerous Skies* by Suzanne Fisher Staples. These and other novels I use give students an opportunity to learn more about the ethnic customs that are not familiar to them, and, more importantly, to recognize and relate to these characters as American teens dealing with many of the same problems they do. To be able to see that a character thinks and feels the way they do helps de-mystify the strangeness of “different” and emphasizes the security of “similar.”

Problems I have faced in the past with this unit have had to do with the serious paucity of stories about teens with *particular* ethnic backgrounds in young adult literature. The challenge in my room is always to have diversity among the diverse. I constantly seek good novels about various ethnic

backgrounds that would fit a variety of reading skills and interests, from high ability to low. Recently, I have noticed a glut of books about Asian teens, so many in fact that I have slowed my purchase of these titles so as not to risk that my multiethnic unit will take on a singular focus. The smallest section of my classroom library is the Hispanic/Chicano collection. *Bless Me Ultima* is one such book that fits well into my unit, but I tend to reserve it for my higher ability students, and even then, it can be a struggle. Therefore, I was very excited to discover *Rudolpho A. Anaya: A Critical Companion*, by Margarite Fernandez Olmos, which I saw as promising to at least partially fill the hole in Hispanic literature in my classroom by helping make *Bless me, Ultima* more accessible to my students.

Bless Me, Ultima is about a young Chicano boy growing up in the plains of New Mexico. The cultural landscape is rich with the heritage of two sides of the boy’s family, the structure of the Catholic church, and the mysticism of an old woman named Ultima.

The difficulties students typically face when reading *Bless Me, Ultima* have to do with the strangeness of the Chicano heritage in our southwest, the lifestyle on the *llanos*, the Spanish words peppered throughout the story, the extraordinary symbolism meshed in the landscape, the boy’s struggle for identity, and the differences in the childhood experiences of the story’s characters. Yet, the goal of the unit is to get them to be more inquisitive about different cultures, to look past the facade of difference that can obscure the individual identity, and somehow find the similar. Therefore, I have found *Bless me, Ultima* to be an excellent book for this purpose. However, I have also found myself stumped as to how to deal with the few pesky problems that might turn a student off from an otherwise wonderful story.

The book gives invaluable information about the author and his story that helped me, as a teacher, piece through the more difficult aspects of the book and use my new understandings to shape my lessons. For example, Olmos has included a wonderful quote from the author on the first page: “Writing for me is a way of knowledge, and what I find illuminates my life” (1). I present this to students, then change “writing” to “reading,” and I have *their* purpose for the reading *Ultima*: to let the knowledge they glean from the book illuminate their life. Sure, I could have said it, but they seem to pay better attention when the author says it for me. It is a connection between the book and them that they seem to value, and it begins the reading on a positive note.

Olmos goes on to give biographical information on Anaya’s life, which mimics closely the boy Antonio’s life in *Ultima*, offering yet another connection that can tie the student into the story. We learn that Anaya’s struggles as a teen of ethnic background in high school are exactly what our unit is all about. And information about the Chicano culture, the least represented of the diverse backgrounds in our area, helps clear up students’ misconceptions about the culture.

A Critical Companion then goes into a more in-depth study of each novel produced by Anaya. The section for *Ultima* is rich with material a classroom teacher can use. Topics include Narrative Strategy, Setting, Cultural Context, Language, Dream Symbolism (thank you!) Plot Development, Characterization, and Themes. Although each topic was informative to me, I will briefly discuss symbolism, a concept I have

not found easy to teach to my middle school students. Unlike the high school classic *Moby Dick*, where symbolism is obvious (you can't turn your head on the Pequod without bumping into a symbol), symbolism in *Ultima* is one of the more confusing aspects of the book for my students. Because symbolism is so important to understanding the conflict within Antonio as he struggles for his identity, I have struggled to make it clear. *A Critical Companion* addresses my problem: Olmos identifies the major symbolism present in the novel and ties it straight to the involvement of Antonio's character.

Feedback from students regarding their reading of *Ultima* has been positive. When students complete their evaluation at the end of the unit, they appeared to have generally enjoyed the story. One student said he chose the book because "it was about a Chicano family and it told about how Hispanics live in New Mexico. When I looked through the book and saw that some of the dialogue was in Spanish, it pulled me into reading the book." When asked what he had learned about people with different ethnic backgrounds, he responded, "I learned that no matter where you come from you will have family problems. People are usually made fun of because of their skin color, hair style, and accent. People are judged today more on their ethnic background than on their personal self."

Another student who read *Ultima* wrote, "This book was hard to follow because of the fighting between the two families and the debate about Catholicism." Despite that, he went on to write, "... To tell you the truth I loved this novel. I was sort of in a zone. I couldn't stop reading." When asked what he had learned, he replied, "I learned that even though people have the *same* ethnic background they can still have great conflicts. Also that most ethnic backgrounds have a lot in common with everybody else. People from different cultures can be very similar to me. I learned that I enjoy reading

and learning about other cultures. I think I've re-found my love of reading."

A high level of interest from the students is important in a unit such as this, and the selection of novels used must be just as important. As the middle school curriculum changes to meet the needs of our millennium teenagers, sources for the classroom will need to keep pace. The benefit of resources like Olmos' *A Critical Companion* enable the classroom teacher to keep the expectations high, use literature that may fall outside the structure of the typical national curriculum, and build strong literary concepts in our students. If only someone had time to produce one of these for all the novels we use!

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