



# Teens Meeting the Challenge:

Young Adults Gain a Voice Deciding What's Hot to Read

**M**any teens love to participate, and they love to be asked for their opinions. What better way to focus on these two elements than through books? The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association, with *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* magazine as a co-sponsor, experimented with this idea through a pilot project using teenagers who belonged to library teen book groups throughout the country. The ultimate goal was to develop a permanent program through which teens could vote on their top ten favorites among the most current YA books. Instead of teachers and/or librarians making the award choices, teens themselves would have a voice.

The first phase of the Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley pilot project began in 1999, focusing primarily on the Teens' Top Ten element. Two groups were targeted to participate in the project, our Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) at the City of Mesa Public Library in Arizona and a junior high library advisory board in Pennsylvania that met at four different sites: Marshall

Middle School in Wexford, and North Hills Junior High, Carson Middle School, and Northland Public Library in Pittsburgh. Each group read books chosen for that year's Best Books for Young Adults List from YALSA. In time for Teen Read Week 1999, both groups submitted their final votes, which were combined into one "winners" list. The list of titles chosen was published in the December 1999 issue of *VOYA*.

In 2000, the second phase began. This time, it concentrated on the YA Galley part of the project. Participating publishers sent hot-off-the-press copies of books and galley editions to six teen groups throughout the country. Each teen group read the books and completed evaluation forms. The completed teen evaluation forms were returned to the publishers by the librarian advisors, so the publishers could receive feedback on the books from the teens.

Phase three took place during 2001. The segments of the project from the first two years were combined into one Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley Project. Six teen library advisory groups participated and

completed the project. The groups received galley copies or newly published YA books, and group members completed evaluation forms. The forms were once again sent to the publishers to give them teen feedback.

At this point, teens also used the forms for a second purpose—to nominate titles for the 2001 Teens' Top Ten. If a book received at least two nominations, it was added to the contender list. Nominations from all participating groups were tallied and compiled into one master list. Each group kept reading, and from October 14-20, which was Teen Read Week, each group conducted a final vote for the 2001 Teens' Top Ten pilot. This list of winning titles was published in the December 2001 issue of *VOYA*. The six teen library groups that completed the project also developed criteria for teens to evaluate books in the future.

At the conclusion of the 2001 project year, the YALSA Task Force members assigned to develop Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley as a possible permanent YALSA project wrote a final report. At the American Library Association's Midwinter

Conference in 2002, the report was submitted to YALSA, and Teens' Top Ten was officially approved as an ongoing project. So, 2003 would be the first full year of the project with real votes that count.

Five teen school and public library advisory groups nationwide have been and will be serving as the actual 2003-2004 Teens' Top Ten nominating and voting groups. These groups include the MLHS Booktalkers at Medical Lake High School in Medical Lake, Washington; the Teen Advisory Board at Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana; the Teen Advisory Board: Readers R' Us at Wilson Middle School in Plano, Texas; the Teen Advisory Council at B. B. Comer Memorial Library in Sylacauga, Alabama; and the Teen Review Board at East Lansing Public Library in East Lansing, Michigan.

During 2003, the teen members of these groups read, fast and furiously, the galley and new books that the ever-increasing list of participating publishers offered. In addition, for the first time, nominating teens could also select books from publishers *outside* the YA Galley Project. Readers evaluated each title and nominated or seconded the ones they felt were outstanding. The list of nominated titles was posted on a new web page, developed just for this purpose. To view the results, you can do a keyword search under "Teens Top Ten," or use the following URL: [http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/YALSA/Special\\_Projects/Teens\\_Top\\_Ten.htm](http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/YALSA/Special_Projects/Teens_Top_Ten.htm)

Ten additional teen advisory groups participated as readers and

evaluators without submitting nominations. As our YAAC continued in this capacity, it was interesting to see how members' opinions agreed or conflicted with those of the five nominating groups. Since they read so much, the teens in YAAC and the other participating groups were well prepared to do the

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**School and public librarians can promote the project among students who use their libraries via bulletin boards, a school or library web page link, special PA and written announcements, by mentioning the program during booktalk presentations, distributing bookmarks or flyers listing nominated titles, sponsoring a voting party, or perhaps by having teen library group or book club members promote Teens' Top Ten in creative ways to their fellow students.**

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final national online voting at the same time the nominating groups were conducting their paper ballot votes.

For the 2003 Teens' Top Ten list, teens could select any young adult or adult book published in the United States in 2002 or 2003 not previously nominated. Each title had to be nominated and seconded by members of the official Teens' Top Ten nominating groups. Readers made their selections according to criteria that the teens themselves developed; you can find a link to the criteria on the previously mentioned web page.

During Teen Read Week, October 19-25, 2003, any interested teens nationwide, ages 12-18, who had read the books and had access to the Internet could vote online for their favorites from the posted nomination list. More than 1,700 teens did so, a good turnout for the first "official" year of the project. After the five nominating groups voted and a tally was reached, and after the national teen online votes were completed, the results were posted in November on the Teens' Top Ten web site.

School and public libraries had been encouraged to publicize the Teens' Top Ten voting as part of Teen Read Week activities. At our library, we made flyers and put up a bulletin board to promote the voting, and we included Teens' Top Ten in all our Teen Read Week publicity. We also posted information and a link on the "Teens" section of our library's web page, [www.mesalibrary.org](http://www.mesalibrary.org).

Next year, YALSA hopes more schools and libraries will help promote the Teens' Top Ten project by encouraging teens to read the nominated books and to vote. How can you get your teens involved?

If you are a YALSA member and have a teen library group or a

book club at your school or public library, you can apply by June 2004 to have them considered for one of the 2005-2006 Teens' Top Ten five nominating/voting groups. You can also apply for them to become one of the ten participating YA Galley reading and evaluating groups. If you qualify and are interested, contact the Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley committee chair Diane Monnier at [dmonnier@erols.com](mailto:dmonnier@erols.com) for an application.

Another way your teens can participate is for you to keep tabs on and share information about the books the nominating groups are selecting as they are posted on the web page. Nominations began in January and close by May 31, so in June 2004, the final title list will be ready for reading and gearing up for the 2004 Teen Read Week voting in October. Teachers might choose participation (reading the books from the nomination list and doing the final voting) as an extra credit or regular class assignment, depending on the class. Another idea might be to use the nominated books for some other kind of class, summer or independent reading assignment or activity.

School and public librarians can promote the project among students who use their libraries via bulletin boards, a school or library web page link, special PA and written announcements, by mentioning the program during booktalk presentations, distributing bookmarks or flyers listing nominated titles, sponsoring a voting party, or perhaps by having teen library group or book club members promote Teens' Top Ten in creative ways to their fellow students. You

might also include promotion of Teens' Top Ten as part of your library's teen summer reading program or your school's reading list. Be sure to order the nominated titles and add them to your library collection, so teens have access to them.

For the last four years, teenagers have met the challenge of producing a book award list that is theirs, from nominations to final votes. Now it is up to teachers, school and public librarians who work with teens to make sure that all the rest know about the project and get involved as well.

#### **Teens' Top Ten Books 1999 (in rank order):**

1. Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic, 1998.
2. Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Farrar, 1998.
3. Ferris, Jean. *Love Among the Walnuts*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1998.
4. Werlin, Nancy. *The Killer's Cousin*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
5. Quarles, Heather. *A Door Near Here*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
6. Yolen, Jane and Bruce Coville. *Armageddon Summer*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1998.
7. Wilson, Diana Lee. *I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade*. New York: Orchard, 1998.
8. Mikaelson, Ben. *Petey*. New York: Hyperion, 1998.
9. Paulsen, Gary. *Soldier's Heart*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
10. Peck, Richard. *A Long Way from Chicago*. New York: Dial, 1998.

#### **Teens' Top Ten Books 2001 (in rank order):**

1. Nicholson, William. *The Wind Singer* (Wind on Fire #1). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
2. Ewing, Lynn. *Goddess of the Night* (Daughters of the Moon #1). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
3. Ewing, Lynn. *Into the Cold Fire* (Daughters of the Moon #2). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
4. Colfer, Eoin. *Artemis Fowl*. New York: Talk Miramax/Hyperion, 2001.
5. Korman, Gordon. *No More Dead Dogs*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
6. Goobie, Beth. *Before Wings*. Victoria, BC: Orca, 2000.
7. Weaver, Will. *Memory Boy*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
8. Lester, Julius. *When Dad Killed Mom*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 2001.
9. Klass, David. *You Don't Know Me*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001.
10. Nicholson, William. *Slaves of the Mastery* (Wind on Fire #2). Hyperion, 2001.

#### **Teens' Top Ten Books 2003 (Teens' Top Ten Voting Groups) (in rank order):**

1. Brennan, Herbie. *Faerie Wars*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2003.
2. Plum-Ucci, Carol. *What Happened to Lani Garver?* San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
3. \* Nix, Garth. *Abhorsen*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
4. Johnson, Angela. *The First Part Last*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
5. \* Black, Holly. *Tithe: A Modern Fairy Tale*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

6. \* Brashares, Ann. *Second Summer of the Sisterhood*. New York: Delacorte/Random House, 2003.
7. Prose, Francine. *After*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
8. Bowler, Tim. *Storm Catchers*. New York: McElderry/Simon & Schuster, 2003.
9. Ferris, Jean. *Once Upon a Mari-gold*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
10. \* Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. New York: Chicken House/Scholastic, 2002.
5. Fredericks, Mariah. *The True Meaning of Cleavage*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
6. \* Nix, Garth. *Abhorsen*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
7. Rumstuckle, Cornelius. *The Book of Wizardry: Apprentice's Guide to the Secrets of the Wizard's Guild*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2003.
8. Giles, Gail. *Dead Girls Don't Write Letters*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook, 2003.
9. Brooks, Martha. *True Confessions of a Heartless Girl*. New York: Melanie Kroupa Books/Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003.
10. Frank, E.R. *America*. New York: Atheneum/Simon & Schuster, 2002.

**Teens' Top Ten Books 2003  
(National Online Teen Vote), 2003**

1. Duane, Diane. *A Wizard Alone* (Young Wizards #6). San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
2. \* Brashares, Ann. *Second Summer of the Sisterhood*. New York: Delacorte/Random House, 2003.
3. \* Black, Holly. *Tithe: A Modern Fairy Tale*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
4. \* Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. New York: Chicken House/Scholastic, 2002.

\* Title appears on both 2003 Teens' Top Ten lists.

**Further reading:**

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "How Can Librarians and Teachers Involve Teens in Teens' Top Ten Online Voting?" *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Oct. 2003: 269+.

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "Testing . . . The Teens' Top Ten Best Books 1999." *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Dec. 1999: 303.

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "YA Galley and Teens' Top Ten Books: Teen-Selected 'Best' Booklist to Debut for Teen Read Week 2003." *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Dec. 2002: 334.

**Diane Tuccillo**, a former English teacher, has been Young Adult Coordinator at the City of Mesa Library in Arizona since 1980. Diane served on the ALAN Executive Board from 1999-2002, has been a frequent presenter at ALAN Workshops and other professional conferences, and is active in the Arizona Library Association and YALSA. She has written articles for *The ALAN Review*, *VOYA*, *Kliatt* and other publications, serves as a book reviewer for *School Library Journal* and *VOYA*, and is a member of *VOYA's* editorial board. Diane has been elected to the 2005 Printz Award Committee. Her forthcoming book for *Scarecrow Press* is *Library Teen Advisory Groups: A VOYA Guide*.