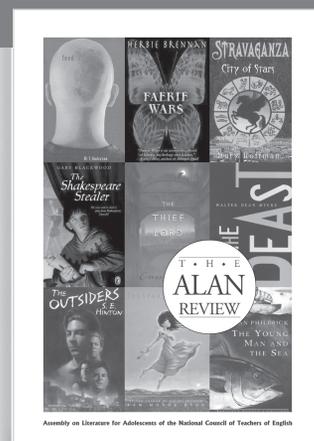


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T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

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Instructions for Authors

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 copyright owner.

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

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

The ALAN Review prefers the use of the Publications Manual of the Modern Language Association (MLA).

A 3 1/2-inch IBM compatible disk in a recent version of Word 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:

Dr. James Blasingame, Co-Editor, *The ALAN Review*, Department of English/English Education, college of Liberal Arts and Sciences, P.O. box 870302, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287-0302.

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.

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

FALL ISSUE Deadline:	MAY 15
WINTER ISSUE Deadline:	OCTOBER 15
SPRING ISSUE Deadline:	FEBRUARY 15

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From the Editors

As the song says, “School’s out for the summer,” and summer has truly been a great time to load up on the latest in young adult literature, grab a frosty glass of iced tea, and settle into that comfortable chair by the pool.

OK, maybe your summer hasn’t been as tranquil as all that, but YA lit can certainly take you miles away from the syllabus begging for revision, lesson plans needing to be written, books waiting to be catalogued and filed, and all the around-the-house chores, as well.

And, while you’re thumbing through the great young adult literature that is hitting the shelves, we hope you will enjoy our issue, which focuses on the past, present, and future of young adult literature. Speaking of the future of young adult literature, we feature an extensive interview with a rising star in the field, Kevin Brooks, as well as reviews of his most recent books, *Kissing the Rain* and *Lucas*. You’re also welcome to dive into our wide array of articles dealing with the past—from Debra Seely, author of books set in 19th century Kansas ranching country, discussing the role of historical fiction, to Eleanor Ramrath Garner sharing her insights into the use of memoirs in adolescent literature, including her notable autobiographical work, *Eleanor’s Story: An American Girl in Hitler’s Germany* recalling her time as a young girl in Hitler’s World War II Germany. We also include features on both award-winning authors.

In this issue’s Library Connection, we welcome guest columnist Karen Peterson, who provides ample information about an outstanding city library’s web page designed to link teens with books. She details the teen web page created by the City of Mesa, Arizona, in an effort to encourage other cities and schools to generate their own web pages. We also welcome the first column from our Middle School Connection columnist, Claudia Katz, and her co-author, Karen Boran.

And then there’s our focus on African American mothers and daughters. KaaVonnia Hinton-Johnson’s article examines mother-daughter relationships in contemporary young adult novels, through black feminist theory.

Pam B. Cole’s article demonstrates the current and future uses of young adult literature, and the genre’s abilities to help teenagers, especially boys, maneuver through their first relationships.

Truly, young adult literature has a rich past, a robust present, and an ever-expanding future. We’re excited about where the genre has been, its current vitality, and the unlimited possibilities that loom in the future.

Yes, summer is ending, but we hope you’ll agree that there are plenty of lessons within the pages of this issue. Grab a chair and enjoy.

The ALAN Preview Fall 2004 Workshop:

The Art of Young Adult Literature

The fall 2004 ALAN Workshop is scheduled for Nov. 22 and 23 in Indianapolis, Ind., and the lineup is filled with well-known authors, publishers, and experts in the field of young adult literature. The activities actually kick off with the annual breakfast featuring author E.L. Konigsburg on Saturday, Nov. 20.

But, before you head to Indianapolis, we've provided this workshop preview to give you a sampling of what to expect. Then get your suitcase out and start packing.—*JB & LG*

The Art of Young Adult Literature: A Welcome from ALAN President, Michael Cart

Welcome to the 2004 ALAN Workshop. The theme I've selected—"The Art of Young Adult Literature"—reflects my long-held belief that YA has come of age and that if the term "Young Adult Literature" might once have been regarded as an oxymoron (like "jumbo shrimp" and "military intelligence"), that surely is no longer the case. For the genre is now arguably the liveliest in publishing, enriched and informed by so many dynamic trends, artistic innovations, and examples of creative risk-taking that I do not hesitate to call this a new "Golden Age" of young adult literature.

I hope you'll find proof of this extravagant claim in the workshop that has been assembled for you. More than fifty authors, editors, and experts in the field will participate in an extraordinarily content-rich

conference, the tone of which will be set by keynote speaker Stephen Roxburgh, the distinguished publisher of Front Street Books and staunch advocate of literary fiction. Other speakers include the likes of Printz Award-winner An Na, Printz Honor Award recipients Jennifer Donnelley, Garret Freymann-Weyr, Helen Frost, Jan Greenberg, Terry Trueman, and Ellen Wittlinger; National Book Award-winner Han Nolan, Newbery Medalist Christopher Paul Curtis, 2004 ALAN Award recipient Jacqueline Woodson, two-time Eisner Award-winner Eric Shanower, and many, many more. They will address an array of topics that range from "The Art of Story" to "Discovering Sexual Identity in Literature," from "The Art of the Graphic Novel" to "The Art of Poetry" and from "The Art of the Short Story" to "The Art of the Novel." Indeed, virtually every aspect of the now artful and newly expansive field of young adult literature will be addressed.

As a result, the conference is, admittedly, an ambitious one and one that is very, very tightly scheduled. It will invite your patience and occasional indulgence with the briskness of its pace and the—well, *ampleness* of its content. To accommodate that, please note that we will be starting at 8:00 both Monday and Tuesday mornings.

If it all seems, from time to time, a bit overwhelming, it will, I promise you, never be dull. And it will also be a continuous exercise in intellectual excitement and personal and professional growth.

I look forward to sharing this excitement and to greeting each of you in Indianapolis!

Michael Cart, ALAN President

2004 ALAN WORKSHOP (TENTATIVE) SCHEDULE

Monday, 11/22/04:

- 8:00-8:10: Welcome and a Few Words about ALAN
Michael Cart, ALAN President
- 8:10-8:20: A Few Words about the ALAN Review
James Blasingame and Lori Goodson,
Co-Editors
- 8:20-8:50: KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Stephen Roxburgh, Publisher, Front Street
- 8:50-9:40: THE ART OF FICTION. I
Carolyn Coman
Garret Freymann-Weyr
An Na
Han Nolan
Ellen Wittlinger
- 9:40-10:20: THE ART OF FANTASY
L.G. Bass
Steven Gould
Edith Pattou
E. Rose Sabin
- 10:20-10:35: COFFEE BREAK
- 10:35-11:00: ADULT AUTHORS FOR YOUNG ADULTS. I
Clive Barker
- 11:00-11:40: ART IN LITERATURE
Jan Greenberg
Kathe Koja
Tracy Mack
- 11:40-12:00: THE ART OF POETRY
Paul B. Janeczko
- 12:00-1:00: LUNCH
- 1:00-1:40: THE ART OF THE NOVEL IN VERSE
Helen Frost
Paul B. Janeczko
Sonya Sones
- 1:40-2:30: THE ART OF FICTION. II. *New Narrative Strategies*
Terry Davis
Jaclyn Moriarty
Lauren Myracle
Terry Trueman
Hilary Frank
- 2:30-2:50: COFFEE BREAK
- 2:50-3:40: BREAKOUT SESSIONS
Steven T. Beckmore: YA Literature and the Pre-
Service Teacher
Jim Blasingame: The Art of Humor in YA Books
Lois Buckman: Beyond Prose
Lisa A. Hazlett: Examining Artistry in YA
Literature
Ted Hipple: How Do We Evaluate Young Adult
Novels
Teri Lesesne: Art and YA Literature
Walter Mayes: The Best New YA Books
John Noell Moore
M. Jerry Weiss: All the World's a Stage—or Is It?
- 3:40-4:20: THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY
Sharon Flake
Marilyn Singer
Ellen Wittlinger

- 4:20-5:00: THE ART OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE
David Lubar
Gerald Morris
Rod Philbrick
Sarah Weeks

Tuesday, 11/23/04:

- 8:00-8:40: ARTFUL NEW YA IMPRINTS
Patty Campbell. Moderator
Eden Edwards (Graphia)
David Levithan (PUSH)
Sharon November (Firebird)
Susan Van Metre (Amulet)
- 8:40-9:05: THE ART OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL
Eric Shanower
- 9:05-9:55: THE ART OF TEACHING YA WRITING
Ann Angel
M.T. Anderson
An Na
Anita Riggio
Jackie Woodson
- 9:55-10:10: COFFEE BREAK
- 10:10-10:50: THE ART OF HISTORICAL FICTION
Julie Chibbaro
Jennifer Donnelly
Kelly Easton
Trudy Krisher
- 10:50-11:15: ADULT AUTHORS FOR YOUNG ADULTS. II
Joyce Maynard
- 11:15-11:55: THE ART OF GENRE FICTION
Carl Deuker
Lynne Ewing
William Sleator
- 11:55-1:05: LUNCH
- 1:05-1:30: THE ART OF HUMOR AND HEART
Christopher Paul Curtis
- 1:30-2:10: FINDING SEXUAL IDENTITY IN YA FICTION
Brent Hartinger
David Levithan
Jackie Woodson
Sharon Dennis Wyeth
- 2:10-2:30: COFFEE BREAK
- 2:30-3:20: BREAKOUT SESSIONS
Pamela Sissi Carroll: The Art and Science of
Young Adult Literature
Kristin Fletcher-Spear: Graphic Reads
Wendy Glenn: Hole in My Life (and Theirs)
Lori & Todd Goodson: The Art of Performance
Patrick Jones: A Core Collection for Young Adults
Jeff Kaplan: Looking on the Inside
Joan Kaywell & Neil Shusterman: What Daddy
Did—What Teachers Do
Lois Stover: The Art of Jacqueline Woodson
Alan B. Teasley: Out of the Closet and Onto the
Shelves!
- 3:20-3:55 Panel: HEARING NEW VOICES
Mark Delaney
Brian James
Patrick Jones
Ned Vizzini
- 3:55-4:00: Patty Campbell, A Preview of ALAN 2005 &
Farewell

Call for Manuscripts

The Art of Adolescent Literature

Winter 2005. The theme for our 2005 winter issue, *The Art of Adolescent Literature*, is intended to accompany and develop the theme of the 2004 ALAN Workshop and to provide a means for examining the artistry inherent in adolescent literature and its teaching, in any form that bears examination or discussion. This theme is meant to be broad enough to cover a wide range of topics and flexible and open enough for many different interpretations. Some ideas for manuscript topics might be found in the titles of author presentations at the 2004 ALAN Workshop in Indianapolis, which include: New Narrative Strategies, The Art of the Novel, Adult Authors for Young Adults, Art in Literature, The Art of Poetry, The Novel in Verse, The Art of Fantasy, The Art of the Short Story, The Art of Middle School Literature, The Art of Teaching YA Writing, The Art of Historical Fiction, The Art of Horror Fiction, Sexual Identity in YA Fiction, and New Voices in YA Literature. Manuscripts dealing with the artistry of the authors (listed below) appearing at the 2004 ALAN Workshop are also welcome. The deadline for manuscripts for the winter 2004 issue is October 15. Please see the **Instructions for Authors** page for specific instructions about submitting manuscripts.

M.T. Anderson	Lynne Ewing	Trudy Krisher	Anita Riggio
Ann Angel	Sharon Flake	David Levithan	E. Rose Sabin
Clive Barker	Hilary Frank	David Lubar	Eric Shanower
L.G. Bass	Garret Freymann-Weyr	Tracy Mack	Marilyn Singer
Julie Chibbaro	Helen Frost	Joyce Maynard	William Sleator
Carolyn Coman	Steven Gould	Jaclyn Moriarty	Sonya Sones
Christopher Paul Curtis	Jan Greenberg	Gerald Morris	Terry Trueman
Terry Davis	Brent Hartinger	Lauren Myracle	Ned Vizzini
Mark Delaney	Brian James	An Na	Sarah Weeks
Carl Deuker	Paul B. Janeczko	Han Nolan	Ellen Wittlinger
Jennifer Donnelley	Patrick Jones	Edith Pattou	Jacqueline Woodson
Kelly Easton	Kathe Koja	Rodman Philbrick	Sharon Dennis Wyeth

2005 Spring/Summer theme: A Road Less Traveled (Deadline February 15)

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature and its use that examine people or paths in young adult literature that differ from the norm or majority. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics, but some possibilities include examination and discussion of innovative authors and their work, pioneers or turning points in the history of the genre and new literary forms. We welcome and encourage other creative interpretations of this theme.

2005 Fall theme: Finding My Way (Deadline May 15)

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature and its use dealing with the search for self. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics, but some possibilities include examination and discussion of the approach an author or group of authors take to leading protagonists down the path to self discovery, comparisons of how this is accomplished across subgenres of young adult literature, or how young adult literature compares to developmental or adolescent psychology. We welcome and encourage other creative interpretations of this theme.

Teens, Literature, and the Web

Who is more “web savvy” than today’s teens? They have grown up using computers and the Internet. A recent study conducted by Yahoo, “Born to be Wired,” shows that 82% of teens have a computer and 78% use the web to help with schoolwork. It also shows teens spend more time on the computer than using any other media (including TV!). What better place to help teens find good things to read than the web? In this article, we will look at how the City of Mesa Library (Mesa, Arizona) is using their “Teens” web page to connect teens and books. From it, perhaps you will get some good ideas to start or expand *your* school or library web page for teens.

Our “Teens” web page is about four years old and is located at < mesalibrary.org > . Staff input, a dedicated Webmaster, and a volunteer teen web page advisory group have made this a site of which our library is proud. You will notice a focus on literature and reading themes throughout the “Teens” page.

The main page is divided up into sections, which consist of “Homework,” “Books and Poetry,”

“College and Career,” “Real Life,” “Get Involved,” “Teen ‘Zines,” “Teen Takes,” and “Kickin’ Back.” There is a wealth of information in each of these sections, but “Teen Takes” and “Books and Poetry” are the sections that most lend themselves to books, reading, and teen reviews.

Teen Takes

Teen Takes is a volunteer teen advisory group sponsored by the City of Mesa Library. The group reorganizes at the beginning of each school year to create a dynamic, fluid membership. Teen Takes helps with the look and content of our web page. They also write reviews for movies, restaurants, hangouts, music, and, of course, books! For example, a member of this year’s group has reviewed *Stargirl*, by Jerry Spinelli, about an unforgettable character who has the courage to “be herself.” There are also a couple of reviews of the popular adult title, *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, which a teen reviewer describes as “one of the best reads of this year. It is so mysterious, so intelligent; each page keeps you yearning for

more.” Web pages offer teen advisory groups a great opportunity to post book reviews to encourage other teens to read.

Reading Lists

Under the main heading, “Books and Poetry,” information can be found in a number of subsections. The first one includes reading lists by grade level and various subjects. Some of the subject areas are “Classics,” “Historical Fiction,” “The Holocaust,” and “Fantasy.” Teens interested in the Holocaust might use this list to find a title that appeals to them. *Good Night Maman*, by Norma Fox Mazer, would be one great choice. In this poignant story, Karin and Marc, a Jewish brother and sister, are in hiding in France during World War II. They are forced to decide whether to escape to America without their ill mother. Many additional quality titles for teens on this subject are included.

If teen readers click on the “8th Grade Reading List,” they might read a description of the book *Belle Prater’s Boy*, by Ruth White, in which a young boy’s mother

disappears and he must live with his grandparents. He and his cousin, Gypsy, who lives next door, become great friends and help each other try to understand the secrets and mysteries which envelope them both. This wonderful, heart-warming book of friendship might otherwise be overlooked.

Another potentially missed topic for pleasure reading might be the classics. Through the web page, teens can peruse the annotated titles on "The Classics" list and find one that appeals to them. Books on this list include such great titles as *The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane, *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, and *Rebecca*, by Daphne DuMaurier. Since high school students must read some of the classics for school anyway, this list can also help narrow down choices for assignments.

Teen Poetry Reading List

This reading list happens to be one of the most popular on our web page. Many teens enjoy poetry, so details are included on a wide variety of poetry books in our library specifically for them, such as *What Have You Lost?*, edited by Naomi Shihab Nye, a collection of poems that explore all kinds of loss, and *I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine: Poems for Young Feminists*, edited by Carol Ann Duffy, which explores the varied facets of the female experience. Poetry for the sports minded is included in the book, *The Basket Counts*, by Arnold Adoff, where artwork and poetic text describe the movement and feel of the game of basketball. Many teens have driving on their minds, and they can even explore

poetry through this subject by reading *Behind the Wheel: Poems about Driving*, by Janet S. Wong.

Open Shelf

The City of Mesa Library has a volunteer opportunity for teens called the Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC). This group meets twice a month and talks about the books that they are reading. They also write book reviews, which are published in *Open Shelf*, a newsletter produced by members. *Open Shelf* is published once a month during the school year, and YAAC members produce a "mega" summer issue. Both current and back issues are available on the web page and are also distributed in Mesa's junior and senior high schools.

If a teen happens to click on *Open Shelf* for March 2004, he or she would be able to read an eloquent review of *The Goose Girl*, by Shannon Hale. This is a retelling of the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, featuring Ani, a strong female character who is a crown princess. On the way to her marriage in another kingdom, she is overthrown by her lady-in-waiting and is forced to become a servant, tending geese, until she can find a way to get back what is rightfully hers. A newsletter like *Open Shelf* is a perfect way for teens to share book reviews like this one online. Teachers can even print them out and use them in their classrooms!

Award Winning Books

Award winning books are an obvious place to look for good reading. The Printz Award, chosen

by a Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) committee to recognize excellence in literature for young adult books, is a popular choice. Teens can read all about both the winners and honor books from our link, which connects them to the winning titles for each year.

The 2004 Printz winner, *The First Part Last*, by Angela Johnson, is an extraordinary novel about a sixteen-year-old boy who is the father of an infant named Feather. His struggle to take care of his daughter and his moments of sheer joy and love for her are depicted here with grace and brevity. Honor titles for this year include *A Northern Light*, by Jennifer Donnelly, an acclaimed historical novel set in 1906 and based on a true story. In this book a young girl, attempting to leave her life of poverty behind, takes a job at a fancy hotel in the mountains and becomes embroiled in a murder mystery. Other 2004 honor titles are *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Round Things*, by Carolyn Mackler in which Virginia, a heavy girl in a family of thin people, tries to deal with her own self image, and *Fat Kid Rules the World*, by K.L. Going, about the friendship between a troubled loner and a legendary punk guitar player. All of these titles explore issues of family and finding your own place in the world, each in a unique and original way. They would appeal to different types of readers but are still all recognized as quality literature for teens, as are past winners. Many teens have discovered these titles through our web page link.

Teens' Top Ten, also sponsored by YALSA, is an exciting new way

for teens to have their voices heard. Teens do the nominating for this list during the year and then get to vote for their favorite books during Teen Read Week. The first official year for this participatory program was 2003, and teens were actually able to vote from our web page link. Some of the teens' favorites from last year were *Second Summer of the Sisterhood*, by Ann Brashares, *The First Part Last*, by Angela Johnson (2004 Printz winner), and *After* by Francine Prose. Another notable favorite, *True Confessions of A Heartless Girl*, by Martha Brooks, is a beautifully written book about the effect a young girl, with many problems of her own, has on a small community to which she has run away.

Among the 2004 nominees is *Goose Girl*, by Shannon Hale, mentioned earlier. Seeing the same title endorsed by teens in two separate sources makes it an intriguing choice. Another exciting nominee for 2004 is a new sensation in the fantasy genre, *Eragon*, by Christopher Paolini, who wrote the book when he was a teen. This first installment in the *Inheritance Trilogy* is about young Eragon, who finds himself on an adventure after discovering a blue stone that turns out to be a dragon's egg. The teen nominator says of the book's setting: "The world is reminiscent of Tolkien, but not as complex and more human, thereby appealing to a larger number of teens."

The Arizona Young Readers' Award for Teens is another option for young adults to have their say, and like Teens' Top Ten, it is featured on our web page. Many other states have similar programs, which could be linked on web

pages. Among the previous winners in the Teen category in Arizona are some very familiar titles: *Stargirl*, by Jerry Spinelli, *Holes*, by Louis Sachar, *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, and *Ella Enchanted*, by Gail Carson Levine, just to name a few. The winning title for 2004 is *The Thief Lord*, by Cornelia Funke, a fantasy story set in the magical underworld of Venice. This was also chosen as a Teens' Top Ten winner.

Books and Reading Links

A potentially rich section of any web page for teens is the links to other pages, and ours is no exception. There are so many great links for subjects relating to books and reading here. For example, there are literary criticism and book analysis sites, graphic novel reviews, college-bound reading suggestions, booklists, book clubs, and much more.

Click on "Booklists for Young Adults," and you will find a site with a plethora of lists. There are lists on every subject imaginable. There is a list of books for boys, which named a couple of my favorites: *Hatchet*, by Gary Paulsen, a survival story about a boy who finds himself alone in the Canadian wilderness with only a small hatchet to help him, and *Someone Was Watching*, by David Patneaude, in which a teenage boy is the only person who does not believe that his small sister drowned and must take action himself to find and save her. These are both exciting books that have definite appeal for young teen boys, especially those not too thrilled with reading, and many other titles like them can be found through booklist links.

The "Outstanding Books for the College Bound" link provides a comprehensive listing of books on a variety of subjects which are selected for inclusion by a committee from YALSA. "Literature and Language Arts" is just one of the subject areas covered, and within this section is a rich variety of high quality titles. Examples are *In the Time of Butterflies*, by Julia Alvarez, which depicts the courageous story of four sisters who work to help liberate the Dominican Republic from the rule of a ruthless dictator, and *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, in which a young girl stops speaking because of an awful secret she is keeping.

"Reading Rants" is a site which offers "out of the ordinary" annotated reading lists for teens. An interesting list on their site is called "Historical Fiction for Hipsters." This is a good list of books including the previously mentioned Printz honor book, *A Northern Light*, by Jennifer Donnelly. Two other very notable choices are *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, about a teenage girl coping with the horrors of the yellow fever epidemic in 1793 Philadelphia, and *Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague* by Geraldine Brooks, which depicts a year in a young woman's life during the plague epidemic of 1666 England.

Poetry Websites

We have linked numerous poetry web sites on our Teens page. "Poetry 180," a poem-a-day website for American high schools, was created by Billy Collins, former poet laureate for the United States. This site was designed to help teens read

and listen to poetry. “*Anthology*” is an Arizona-based poetry magazine link where teens can find out about current contests and events.

“Magnetic Poetry” is so much fun! Check out this virtual version of the popular refrigerator game and all the other links in our Poetry websites section.

“Post-a-Poem” is a new and popular addition to our web page’s poetry section. Teens can submit their original poetry, following our posted guidelines, to be considered for publication on the web page. A poetry showcase like this could be set up on any school or library web page.

“Getting Published” Websites

Talented teens can find out how to get their book reviews, poetry, stories, and other writings published in this section of our web page. There are a number of great places through which to get published, including *Teen Ink*, a monthly print magazine, website, and book series all written by teens for teens. There is also a link here to our listing of “Writing Tools.” Sites like “The Grammar Lady,” “Researchpaper.com,” “Easybib,” “A + Research and Writing,” “Citation Styles Online,” and “Noodletools” can be found here to provide lots of help improving writing skills.

A Final Note

If you want to attract teens to books and reading in new and different ways, a school or library web page that includes plenty of resources may be just the way to go. Talk to your school or library Webmaster, and see if you can develop a site to fit the needs of your teens. Just remember three important guidelines: *Keep it current, keep it interesting, and keep it fun!*

Karen Peterson has over twenty-five years of experience in public, academic, and special libraries. She has worked the last five years as a Youth Services Librarian for the City of Mesa Library in Arizona. Karen works with the library’s Webmaster on the “Kids” and “Teens” web pages. She also works with the Teen Takes young adult web advisory group. For more information about web sites for teens, contact her at karen.peterson@cityofmesa.org.

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Rags to Riches:

The Horatio Alger Theme in Adolescent Novels about the Immigrant Experience

“Only fools laugh at Horatio Alger, and his poor boys who make good. The wiser man who thinks twice about that sterling author will realize that Alger is to America what Homer was to the Greeks.” (Nathanael West and Boris Ingster, 1940)

In 1867 Horatio Alger’s story of *Ragged Dick* began as a twelve-part serial in the magazine *Student and Schoolmate*, but it became so popular that he eventually published it as his first novel. Alger went on to write over one hundred novels in the second half of the nineteenth century using the formula he worked out in *Ragged Dick*. While he never achieved the literary fame he sought, his stories struck a chord in the dreams of the American people. Edward Stratemeyer, who started an influential syndicate of children’s series books in 1883, read Alger’s novels as a young boy and set out to write similar stories which continue to be highly popular even today (Johnson 33). E.D. Hirsch included Horatio Alger in his 1987 list of ideas that form part of our cultural heritage in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, and the “rags to riches” theme shows no sign of losing its attraction. Like an archetypal fairy tale, Alger’s story of how a poor boy can move from the fringes to become a respected member of society lives on in contemporary young adult stories depicting the struggles of immigrants to the United States. This “rags to riches” theme provides the basic plot and character motivation in two recent young adult novels, *Breaking Through*, by Francisco Jiménez (2001) and *Double Luck*, by Lu Chi Fa (2001).

The Horatio Alger Hero: *Ragged Dick*

In *Ragged Dick* Alger made a homeless orphan into a hero who became the prototype for the hundreds of heroes Alger created in the next thirty years. The novel covers the hero’s transformation from a ragged, homeless boy of the streets to a respectable clerk with a salary of ten dollars per week. Dick’s fortunes improve because he follows advice, works hard to acquire an education, and takes advantage of every opportunity. He also has the essential prerequisite to success—good character. The narrator describes Dick:

He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one and had saved him from all mean faults (43-44).

Dick puts the welfare of others ahead of himself. He helps other homeless boys like Johnny Nolan, who doesn’t have enough money for food; Henry Fosdick, who needs lodging and clothing; and Tom Wilkins and his mother, who are being evicted.

In addition to his virtue, Dick has “a frank, straight-forward manner” (40) that leads people to trust him despite his shabby appearance. Such trust helps him get shoe-shine customers as well as other opportunities. For example, a gentleman asks him to guide his nephew around the city for a day because he likes Dick’s honest looks (57). His wit and ability to laugh at himself and his circumstances also put people

at ease. He tells one of his customers, "I have to pay such a big rent for my manshun up on Fifth Avenoo, that I can't afford to take less than ten cents a shine" (41). When asked about his ragged clothes, Dick says, "This coat once belonged to General Washington [. . .] . He wore it all through the Revolution, and it got torn some, 'cause he fit so hard [. . .] if you'd like it, sir, to remember General Washington by, I'll let you have it reasonable" (41).

Dick is enterprising when it comes to business. He has "street smarts" which save him from being duped, although he has no formal education. When asked if he has read the Bible, Dick says, "I aint much on readin'. It makes my head hurt" (72). But Dick has aspirations. He tells Frank Whitney, a patron's nephew who became a friend, that he doesn't always want to be a shoe-shine boy. "I'd like to be a office boy, and learn business, and grow up 'spectable" (73). Frank advises Dick, "A good many distinguished men have once been poor boys. There's hope for you Dick, if you'll try" (75). Dick is willing to work hard, but Frank advises him that he must work in "the right way." Frank says, "You began in the right way when you determined never to steal, or to do anything mean or dishonorable, however strongly tempted to do so. That will make people have confidence in you when they come to know you. But, in order to succeed well, you must manage to get as good an education as you can" (89).

Dick is also modest. He readily admits that he doesn't have the manners required in "genteel" society and never puts on airs. After Dick risks his life to save a child who has fallen in the river, he feels uncomfortable when the father praises him. The narrator writes, "Our hero was ready enough to speak on most occasions, but always felt awkward when he was praised" (210). Because of his self-effacing modesty, Dick benefits from the advice of young Frank Whitney and his uncle and sets out on a course of self-improvement. He strikes a bargain with Henry Fosdick, another orphan, to become his tutor. Dick says, "I can't read much more'n a pig; and my writin' looks like hens' tracks. I don't want to grow up knowin' no more'n a four-year-old boy. If you'll teach me readin' and writin' evenin's, you shall sleep in my room every night" (135). Dick studies with the same diligence and good humor he applies to his daily living. According

to the narrator, Dick "had perseverance, and was not easily discouraged. He had made up his mind he must know more, and was not disposed to complain of the difficulty of the task" (139). All this hard work pays off. When a grateful father wants to reward Dick, he learns about Dick's difficult history and recently acquired ability to write and calculate figures. The father hires Dick as a clerk, and he takes his first step towards financial success.

Alger's moral in this story is clear. Luck doesn't take the place of good character, initiative, and an education. According to Gary Scharnhorst, Alger used the same basic outline in all his stories, drawing heavily on the models of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Dickens's novels. In a typical story, the hero is

forced to struggle for a livelihood [. . .] enters the City, both a fabled land of opportunity and a potentially corrupting environment, where he [. . .] [struggles] to maintain his social respectability, to clear his or another's name of false accusations, to gain a measure of economic independence [. . .] . At length, the hero earns the admiration of an adult patron who rewards him with elevated social station, usually a job or reunion with his patrician family [. . .] . (67-68)

Forced to fend for himself in an unsympathetic world, the hero must have drive and a ready wit. At the same time he should be modest, responding to his circumstances with bravado, but not looking for credit. He may have moments of despondency, but he does not become alienated, nor does he let circumstances defeat him. He transforms his difficulties into opportunities to prove his character—his courage, bravery, and resourcefulness. In Alger's stories heroes succeed in going from "rags to riches" because they are essentially good.

Alger hoped that the stories of poor and homeless boys would move people to support charitable institutions for such boys and would also inspire the boys themselves to persevere and to develop habits of good character and ambition (Kanfer). He created a mythic rite of passage that connects the pursuit of success with good character. This idea of success continues to inspire writers of adolescent fiction including in recent multicultural fiction when the heroes comes from other cultures. In the end, just as in *Ragged Dick*, the struggles of these heroes become an emblem of the gospel of success.

Character and Hard Work Pay Off

In his autobiographical novel, *Breaking Through*, Francisco Jiménez shows how the hero's character and hard work pay off with the opportunity to pursue an education. Francisco, although not an orphan like Dick, is homeless in a symbolic sense because he is an illegal immigrant in the United States. He faces deportation, and lives "in constant fear" (1). But what Francisco fears most of all is not being able to attend school. He says, "As I got older, my fear of being deported grew. I did not want to return to Mexico because I liked going to school [. . .] I knew there was no school in El Rancho Blanco" (2). So even when the family teeters on the brink of economic disaster, Francisco works harder, takes on another part-time job, and dedicates himself to his studies.

Like Alger's heroes, Francisco has strong moral character. When he and his family are forced to live across the border for a short time, Francisco steals a chunk of fool's gold. He was fascinated by "The shape and color of the stones [. . .] . They looked like gold nuggets" (10). Immediately, he is sorry. He thinks about throwing the rock away, but decides to return it as quickly as possible and is glad he did the right thing.

In school Francisco wants to be accepted but most of all he wants the respect that comes from being at the head of the class, so he applies himself diligently. Even when he is at work after school, he studies spelling words or memorizes poems taped to his broom handle. He finds a copy of *Dr. Doolittle* at the dump and reads five pages every night. Francisco is a young Ben Franklin, intent on a program of self-improvement. Entering high school, he tells his guidance counselor that he doesn't want to follow the typical vocational program; he wants to be a teacher. This is the first time he learns about scholarships. "So, if I get good grades, I can get free money to attend college?" I wanted to make sure I'd heard him right" (75). Like *Ragged Dick*, Francisco has a clear goal and follows his teachers as guides. Seeing his algebra teacher, Mr. Coe, multiplying double-digit numbers in his head, Francisco says, "I decided to write down double-digit multiplication tables on postcards and memorize them while I worked. I wanted to be as good as Mr. Coe" (79). When he is a sophomore in high school, his English teacher encour-

ages him to work on his writing. She tells him, "[If] you continue working as hard as you have, you're going to succeed" (99). She also introduces him to a love of reading when she assigns him to read *The Grapes of Wrath* and, identifying with the characters, he finds he cannot get the novel out of his mind (102).

In his senior year Francisco is elected student body president. He dreams of continuing his education even though it seems that Francisco's dreams are no match for economic realities. How can a Mexican, an illegal alien, achieve success? How can he afford to go to college when he needs to help his family? Just as in *Ragged Dick*, a patron steps in—his high school counselor shows him scholarship and loan applications and secures his father's permission to proceed. Francisco's determination and work have not gone unnoticed. When he is accepted to college and gets scholarship money, his father affirms the gospel of hard work (179). Francisco's life is a moral emblem. His character, determination, and resourcefulness have led to success.

Strong Character and a Dream of Coming to America

Double Luck: Memoirs of a Chinese Orphan, also autobiographical like *Breaking Through*, tells a similar "rags to riches" story. Chi Fa faces unbelievable obstacles, but in the end he is rewarded with success, the opportunity to immigrate to America. Chi Fa is an orphan. His first memories are the deaths of his father and broken-hearted mother which left him homeless and alone: "[T]he bad fortune of two untimely deaths left me an orphan, a small boy in a world where no one wanted me" (5). He is passed from one family to the next, until he is sold by the wife of his eldest brother to "a Communist chief, for five hundred pounds of rice" (13). When cruel treatment makes him miserable, he dreams of escape: "I dreamed I was flying on the back of a dragon. It was a big, strong dragon. I rode on the winged beast's back all night. I felt safe and powerful in my dream" (19). Chi Fa has only this fantasy to sustain him through a long series of trials. Chi Fa says, "To keep my dying hopes flickering, each day I searched the skies for dragon clouds" (155). When he learns about America, he decides that his dragon will carry him away to this better place. Many years later when Chi Fa is finally

flying to America, he sees dragon clouds in the sky—a good omen that his luck is about to change (198).

Throughout his difficulties, Chi Fa shows good character. When he was three years old, his sister made him promise, “[N]ever forget that you are a good boy” and believe that “you are lucky. Good fortune will find you” (7-8). This is his mantra. When his Communist father accuses him of wrong-doing, he recites these promises to himself. He knows what he needs and accordingly he knows that poor people should be helped. While the Communists in China rally to take over political power, Chi Fa thinks, “*If thousands of people are starving [. . .] we have to help them [. . .]*. I was just a boy, but I knew how it felt to have an empty belly. I [. . .] couldn’t understand how people could cheer because others were starving and suffering” (26-27). Later he gives freely of anything he has to help others. He cares for an epileptic man shunned by other villagers and gives the man his mother’s quilt, his only treasure, to help the man endure his troubles. When he is in a refugee camp, he gives rice to a hungry, old man but doesn’t want to be repaid. He says, “We are all hungry. We must help each other” (148). Even though his eldest brother treats him cruelly, Chi Fa tries to be sympathetic and forgiving. He says, “I swallowed his harsh words and accepted each bitter beating in silence. And after every attack, I tried my best to forgive Brother. My thinking was this: *Brother is not angry with Chi Fa. Brother is angry with his position in life*” (109).

From childhood on Chi Fa learns resourcefulness and the ability to do all kinds of work. At nine, he says, “Long ago I had learned how to work hard. Many times each day I walked to the canal with a big jar and filled it with water and carried the heavy load back to the house [. . .] I kept the room scrubbed and everyone’s clothes washed and folded. Each morning and night, I cooked the rice and washed the dishes” (106-107). At eleven, when Chi Fa and his brother’s family are refugees in Hong Kong and totally destitute, he learns different Chinese dialects, Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, so he can beg for the family’s rice. He calls out, “Double luck [. . .]. If you give this hungry boy a coin, it will be double luck. Lucky once because you will feed a starving child, and lucky twice because it will bring you good fortune” (153).

All the time, Chi Fa dreams of a better life. When the family is admitted to Taiwan, Chi Fa hopes to get

an education and make a new beginning. He says, “If wanting something very badly could make it happen, I knew I could learn to read” (163). He dreams of going to America, which he has heard is a land of plenty. He says, “I often heard stories about America, and although the dream seemed to get further and further away, with each passing day I longed more and more to go” (188). Finally, his persistence and patience are rewarded. Through a chance meeting, Chi Fa finds a patron, Mr. Ching. He pours out his dreams and misfortunes, and Mr. Ching, “listening with his heart,” agrees to help him get a visa to the United States. There all his suffering, hard work, and good character are finally rewarded. We learn in the Epilogue to the novel that Chi Fa becomes the successful owner of a restaurant in California, and he says, “Over the years, I have found America to be everything that I had heard as a child and much more. I eat three times a day, and, indeed, I am too full to swallow sorrow” (206).

In the Footsteps of Horatio Alger Heroes

Francisco and Chi Fa follow in the footsteps of Ragged Dick. Their stories like his, which on the surface read like biographies, are actually moral allegories. Dick, in his “down and out” condition looked for success in New York, a city fabled for opportunity. In these two novels about immigrant experience, the United States is the land of opportunity, the place where potential success awaits these boys. The main characters are outsiders, actual or figurative orphans, who are searching to carve out a new identity. Just as Ragged Dick worked to recreate himself as a clerk, so these boys seek to make themselves into Americans. They hope to change their current economic or social condition, either through education or a job. But the moral of all these stories is the ethic of hard work and perseverance. Luck helps—being at the right place at the right time, or having a helpful patron—but in the end, it is strong character and hard work that lead to success. Horatio Alger’s notion that these stories would inspire ambition and achievement in the very boys whose difficult condition he was describing continues to inspire modern day writers, especially those writing from a point of view that values assimilation into American culture. The rags to riches theme, a manifestation of the American Dream and its promises of rewards and possibilities,

continues to be a staple of young adult novels in modern times. On a deeper level, perhaps it teaches the values of good character and the possibilities for success open to all who are willing to work hard to achieve their dreams. Such didactic messages about character and possibility have always been a staple of children's literature. It is no wonder that the Horatio Alger theme continues to be a vehicle for these ideas in contemporary adolescent novels.

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Teens, Teachers and Controversial Text

Note: This paper is adapted from a speech I presented at the 2003 NCTE convention in San Francisco as part of an author panel that also included E.R. Frank and Alex Sanchez.

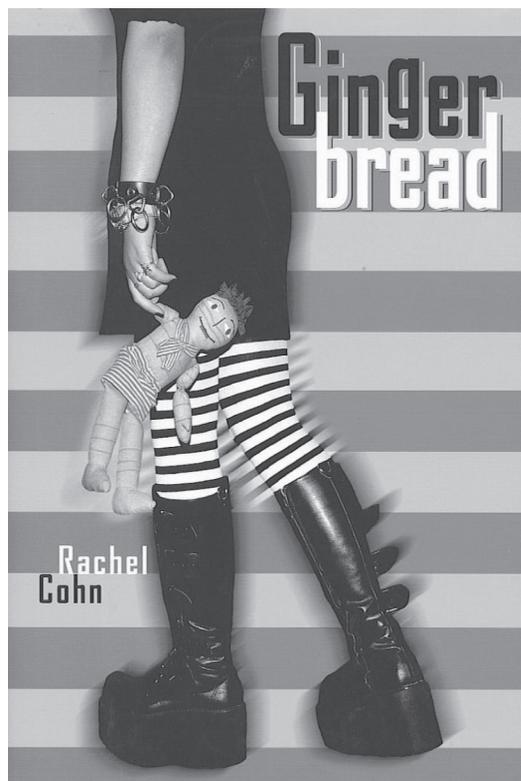
Alex Sanchez, E.R. Frank, and I write YA books that, particularly because of their frank depictions of sexuality and family life, can be challenging for educators in terms of getting the books onto approved reading lists. Nonetheless, I believe there are methods that interested educators could use to bring controversial YA literature into classrooms to stimulate some of the core tenets of education: reading, writing, and thinking.

Although we have each published more than one book, as examples, I am focusing here on my book, *Gingerbread*, *Rainbow Boys*, by Alex Sanchez, and *Life is Funny*, by E.R. Frank, each of which have in common teen protagonists, dark content, and controversial subjects like abortion, adultery, teen sexuality, alcoholism, drug addiction, and incest. Despite these books' sometimes dark subject matter and controversial content—and by controversy I mean frank discussions of sex that make adults

uncomfortable but which teen readers invariably recognize as situations that confront their own lives and those of their peers—these books actually offer uplifting and positive messages about the coming of age experience. I don't think of our books as the "issue" or "problem" books common in YA literature, but rather as honest depictions of the complicated lives that contemporary teens live—sometimes sad, sometimes harsh, sometimes joyful—but always interesting.

Bridging the gap between teenager appreciation of

YA literature versus adult perspectives on controversial YA subject matter is a tricky task. I am inspired to find educational value in these books by teens themselves. Teens don't just have opinions; they are PASSIONATE in their opinions. As an author I have learned that they just don't like your book, they LOVE it, they create fanlisting circles for it, they put up websites and send you artwork they've created based on your book. Before any author should get too big-headed with a teen reader's passionate devotion to a book, however, I need to point out that the haters are equally vocal. To quote two different *Gingerbread* teen



readers, the book “wasn’t worth the paper it was printed on,” or “I hated it so much I threw it across my room.” Focusing on the bright side, however, I’ve culled from my website, and comments posted on Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, some honest and funny reactions to our books from teens that show me that these readers relate not only to the books’ controversial content, but they embrace it – and could, if given the right nudging, use these books as springboards to learning. Here are just a few:

***Life Is Funny*: by E. R. Frank**

“Although some of the issues the characters have to deal with are very traumatic, such as domestic violence, drug abuse, incest, suicide, and teenage pregnancy and miscarriage, it is not a depressing book.”

“Each character struggles with personal demons, family troubles and young love, and though they often fall flat on their faces, each one picks him or herself up by the time their tale is through.”

“This book tells it like it is in Brooklyn, there is no buttering things up. There’s cursing and some mature scenes, but if u ever can, and u can handle the reality made by E.R. Frank, then definitely read it!!!”

***Rainbow Boys*: by Alex Sanchez**

“I’ve heard a lot said about this novel before I even read it. I’ve heard kudos from the gay community, and much protests against it for its ‘immorality’. Once I read the book, I was forced to laugh. It was so wonderful, so rich, and so captivating. I laughed because all the people who gave it such compliments were right, and all the detractors and homophobes had reason to be pissed!”

“This book was one that really made me think of what it would be like to be homosexual in this society. It gave me a better understanding of the feelings and actions that these boys went through and how they grew to accept the way they are. It taught me a valuable lesson, not to judge people.”

***Gingerbread*: by Rachel Cohn**

“I am a social outcast and I like it. I dress weird and have never done what people wanted me to, like shop at preppy stores or have a million friends I don’t like. I was going through a hard time with my family. They did not like how I was so independent, but your book always reminded me that I’m not the only one and that I should never change myself for any one.”

“This story actually helped me cope with my problems, and my divorced parents, my boyfriend, my police situation.”

“This book made more sense to me than my own thoughts do practically.”

“When I read the book I was like “FINALLY! Someone who understands ‘different’ people and doesn’t make them sound like freaks.”

Thinking on the passionate and diverse reactions teens have to controversial realistic fiction, here are some ideas I came up with for translating these reactions within a classroom environment. Keep in mind that I have no training in teaching or social work, so my methods are unscientific to say the least, but definitely from the heart.

Lesson 1: Reading—The Book Challenge. A common thread I find among kids’ responses to controversial YA literature is the sense of recognition and affinity they feel with the protagonists. I never cease to be amazed by the volume of letters I get from girls who tell me that Cyd Charisse, the main character in *Gingerbread*, reminds them of themselves, or that she feels like she could be their best friend. The fictional Cyd Charisse considers herself a social outcast, even though she comes from an exceptionally privileged background. She has two nutty families on two different sides of the country, she’s been kicked out of a posh boarding school, her best friend is an old lady who lives in a nursing home—and yet so many teen girls relate to her? Here’s why: the emotions – her vulnerability and quirkiness, her boy craziness, her desire to be independent of her family and yet not alienated from it.

Life Is Funny and *Rainbow Boys* strike the same chord. One not-so-kind librarian posted the following about *Gingerbread* on the Internet, “The protagonist is a whiny, spoiled teenaged girl who doesn’t understand why everyone else’s world doesn’t revolve around her.” Teen readers, however, see teen characters (and themselves) differently; one reader wrote to thank me for a book that wasn’t about “fake perfect families,” while another told me, “it gave me kinda of a relief to know that I wasn’t totally screwed up,” or from another reader, “*Gingerbread* made me feel like it’s ok to be different, and proud.”

Books to which young people can relate, however dark their content, get challenging students to read, period. One reader posted this appraisal of *Gingerbread*, “There are no words for this book! I can’t believe how this book changed my life, it showed me how reading wasn’t just for school, I was so into the

book that I read it in one day in 5 hours non stop, it really changed my life, I read all the time now.” Another passionate reading convert wrote, “*Gingerbread* has inspired me to read all the time. I love reading now. I used to hate hate HATE it. Now it’s like a must.”

I believe that if YA books can ensnare the reluctant reader and turn that reluctant reader into a passionate reader, then we’re one step closer to bringing that reader happily—and not reluctantly—to the classics on the school curriculum. A Book Challenge can bridge the reading choices of a teen versus the imposed choices of adults. I know that books like *Gingerbread*, *Life Is Funny* and *Rainbow Boys* are slipping into the curriculum by student choice, via the infamous book report. I think you could take a student book report choice and pair it with the Board of Education choice, as a challenge to the student. Dare students to find the same alienation or outcast feelings experienced by the protagonists in *Gingerbread*, *Life Is Funny* and *Rainbow Boys* in assigned reading like *Othello*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and of course, *Catcher in the Rye*. Our YA books have hormonal teenagers grappling with issues of sexual identity—aren’t the characters in *Romeo & Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, and again *Catcher in the Rye*, doing the same? I’ll confess that I loathed high school English classes and particularly the lofty English literature classics that I felt were shoved down my throat—but when I look back on my high school self, I think I would have found genuine excitement in a teacher challenging me to take those perceived stuffy classics and compare them to a book I could relate to, and even better yet, to one my mother wouldn’t have approved of me reading.

Lesson 2: Writing. Controversial YA lit can be effective not just in bringing in the reluctant reader, but in bringing out the reluctant writer. Teens respond to controversial YA literature because the emotions reflect their own, but so do the voices: YA literature—the kind that strives to please teens and not necessarily adults—sounds like a real teen talking, whether it’s Cyd Charisse’s California slang, the urban hip-hop beat of the characters in *Life Is Funny*, or the rainbow boys whose supposed stereotyped roles—jock Jason, nice guy Kyle, flamboyant Nelson—give way to layered and complex personalities. A teacher can use the voices in these books as examples to encourage

students to write in their own voices, naturally, without affectation and without worry of proper English stymieing their attempts at prose. Letting their written words flow without grammatical or literary censorship will encourage students to write—just write, simple as that. As their confidence and experience with writing in their own voices grows, so will their writing skills. And using realistic contemporary YA fiction as examples allows students to see that if they want to start writing, they don’t have to have a *Lord of the Rings*-worthy universe already thought up—they can start with the world and the voices they already know. I know students are encouraged to write by YA literature because I, like several other YA writers I know, had to put up a section on my website about How To Be A Writer in response to the almost daily queries I get from kids who want to be writers after finding books like *Gingerbread*, *Rainbow Boys*, and *Life Is Funny*. These books reflect the way teens talk and feel, and thus encourage teen readers to take the next step forward, to express themselves in writing.

Lastly, **Lesson 3: Thinking.** We all know the value of Shakespeare, the Greek plays, and the classics of English literature that teach students about history, morality, politics, and philosophy, etc. Reading controversial YA literature as supplements to these classics will get students thinking not just on a selfish level—how does this apply to me?—but just as the classics can introduce students to the great ideas that have been debated throughout history, study of YA literature allows teens access to an important developmental tool in their emotional maturity.

In YA books with so-called taboo content and risky behavior, students have to explore the notion that they themselves will, through their actions and those actions’ consequences, have to examine and make decisions that will form who they become as adults. Students won’t just relate but can learn from controversial YA characters by analyzing: 1) what is their opinion of the character and the character’s actions?; 2) what advice would they give to the character?; and 3) what would they do in the character’s position? *Gingerbread*, *Rainbow Boys*, and *Life Is Funny* all give models for, as Emily Plicka, a graduate student in Education at Cal State-Sacramento wrote to me, “dealing with teen issues in positive, or maybe even negative ways—but the end result is that

the reader knows what could truly bring happiness to that character. And the hope is that the application will be for students to think about their actions in their lives—and what options they have for dealing with teen issues, and what they can do to increase happiness for themselves.”

One of the best teen affirmations of YA literature I’ve received comes from my unbiased, very favorite teen reader—my sixteen-year-old sister Martha, who confirmed for me Emily Plicka’s evaluation of controversial YA books’ appeal to teens’ emotional development. Martha wrote to me with her reaction to *Pop Princess*, a YA book I wrote that is coming out in 2004. *Pop Princess* is about a 16-year-old girl who seemingly rises from nowhere to a life of extreme glamour as a pop singer—only the lifestyle might not exactly match who the girl really is or wants to be. Martha wrote to me,

It was just really cool and different to read about a totally different world for most kids, then at the same time, a part of her that kids can relate to as well. Obviously, it deals with issues like sex, bullying and death, but one issue that was interesting to me is the part at the end when she does it all on her own terms: writing her own songs and playing the guitar, too. In a lot of the book she just seems to do

what other people tell her to and expect of her, so when she’s just doing her own thing at her own pace, it’s a lot cooler. And the fact that she had all that experience and she had to go through all the trashy stuff is really important—learning from experiences.

Learning from experiences: Here is the optimal outcome we can hope to absorb from reading literature, be it YA or classic, no matter the age of the reader. Martha’s evaluation offers, to me, the essence of what controversial YA literature can provide teen readers, on a scale different but complementary to the literary classics on a school curriculum: YA books, if given the chance, can teach, guide, and mold, through voices and situations to which kids can relate, and hopefully, that adults, too, can appreciate.

Gingerbread jacket photographs © 2002 by Jane Wattenberg. Jacket design by Anahid Hamparian.

Rachel Cohn is the author of the young adult novels *Gingerbread and Pop Princess* and the middle-grade novel *The Steps*. Her next young adult novel, *Shrimp*, a sequel to *Gingerbread*, will be published in early 2005. She lives in Manhattan.



Two Views of the Past:

Historical Fiction and Autobiography

Authors Debra Seely and Eleanor Ramrath Garner may take two different approaches in their writings, but both assist today's adolescent readers in stepping into the past. Debra Seely's works of historical fiction, set in nineteenth century Kansas, highlight the 1800s ranching country. Meanwhile, Eleanor Ramrath Garner takes a more personal approach with her memoirs of

World War II in *Eleanors Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany*. At a time when teens may have a tendency to focus on their own current interests, Seely and Garner help them discover new insight into the past and, hopefully, give them a broader perspective for the future. Lori Atkins Goodson

You Can't Change History, Can You?

By Debra Seely

When I first started researching my juvenile historical fiction novels set in nineteenth century Kansas, I kept bumping into facts that didn't fit my 1950s movie-western image of the American West. They included Black communities of homesteaders and Jewish communities of homesteaders. African-American and Hispanic cowboys constituted one-third of the drovers riding the Texas cattle trails (Porter 343). Female cowhands numbered far fewer but were still among the populace. These aren't unfamiliar facts anymore, thanks to historians devoted to telling the stories that haven't always been told in history, stories about people and events that changed and shaped the West as profoundly as those in the more well-known stories. I began to think seriously about the responsibility the historical fiction writer has to tell these stories, particularly to young people.

It's not likely to surprise anyone that historical fiction can be a wonderful addition to teaching history. Historical fiction can take the reader into the world of the past through imagination. Well-written historical fiction can be authoritative, too, because it must be accurate to be believable. Thomas Fleming, historian and author of over forty works of both nonfiction and fiction, writes,

a historical novel is not 'made up.' Its vitality can and should come from history itself, and the deeper its roots in reality, the better (8).

Yet readers should expect the historical novel to serve only as a springboard into the study of history. Historical fiction may provide a broad context, but more often than not, what intrigues a writer of historical fiction is the anomaly, the part of history that is different from the rest. Fleming writes that

often, what sparks the imagination “may be the discovery of a set of little-known facts or a situation that has relevance to our own time. I believe a prime function of the historical novel is to surprise as well as intrigue the reader” (8). The historical fiction writer, in other words, looks for what serves the story.

Here’s a story I found: In 1914, two sisters, Elsie and Amy Cooksley, in Wyoming’s Hole-in-the-Wall country of Butch Cassidy fame, hired out as cowhands, rounding up cattle, branding, and doing all the other rugged work right alongside cowboys. The sisters did this work for years. They loved the job, and it was a way to contribute to the family income. They didn’t see themselves as rebels. Most of their female friends, however, did not work cattle, and some thought Elsie and Amy’s work was strange or even scandalous. When we think of the typical cowboy of the American West, Elsie and Amy are not who come to mind. Yet there they were (Jordan 2-12).

The atypical character has its place in historical fiction for young people; however, Professor Anne Scott MacLeod (1998) cautions against letting current sensibilities intrude upon the accuracy of their portrayal. In critiquing young adult novels such as *Catherine Called Birdy* and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, she argues that such books inappropriately foist a contemporary feminist viewpoint on their historical setting, including heroines acting with an independence more consistent with today’s values. MacLeod writes that it is wrong to show these heroines behaving contrary to the accepted mores of the day. She claims the reality of history is that

most people in most societies are not rebels; in part, because the cost of nonconformity is more than they want to pay, but also because, as members of the society, they share its convictions. Most people are, by definition, not exceptional (34).

Her objection to writers grafting contemporary mores onto historical periods is a valid consideration, of course, but it is a mistake to think that women of earlier times did not have the desires for their lives that feminism has allowed contemporary women to express. History has not always told these women’s stories, but just because something wasn’t recorded in history doesn’t mean it didn’t exist.

Newbery Medal winner Avi, author of *Crispin Cross of Lead* and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, has said that “most of history was written by

Debra Seely’s second book, The Last of the Roundup Boys, was published earlier this year. It follows a companion work, Grasslands, which received numerous accolades and awards. In her two novels, Seely showcases, through the eyes of her teenage characters Tom and Evie, the life of pioneers trying to tame the harsh prairies of Kansas. We asked her to share some details about her writing career and how she lassoed such an interesting topic for two young adult novels.

Lori Goodson spoke with Debra Seely by email.

LG: How did life bring you to writing? Was *Grasslands* your first attempt at a novel?

DS: I’m a former English teacher (junior high, high school, college) and have just recently become a full-time writer. I started writing in 1987 and earned an MFA in Creative Writing in 1997. *Grasslands* was my thesis, and yes, it was my first attempt at a novel.

LG: For a debut novel, *Grasslands* certainly won a lot of awards. Were you surprised with the success of this story?

DS: I didn’t think about winning awards when I was writing the novel. I just wanted to tell a good story, but I am pleased that other people liked it.

LG: Both of your books, *Grasslands* and *The Last of the Roundup Boys*, are young adult fiction set in the past. How did you develop an interest in historical fiction?

DS: I liked to read historical fiction when I was young. I also liked to listen to family histories. It’s been very helpful in my life to know the stories of people who’ve gone before me. It gives me a sense of connection to time and place. Historical fiction is satisfying in that it’s instructive to read about people struggling with the issues of their day and learn how they coped.

men, so it isn't accurate" (SCBWI). Revisionist history is often criticized for seeking to change the facts of history, but it seeks less to change the facts than to tell the rest of the facts—to tell the stories that haven't been told. Much of history has been the record of the workings of the great and powerful—armies, kings, and explorers. Many stories have been left out—the poor, the slaves, and women's stories, for example, and if these stories were told, it was often by others. Women on the frontier of the American West, for example, were portrayed in the popular imagination as long-suffering Madonnas—there is even a sculpture entitled *Madonna of the Prairie*—or as prostitutes, or outlaws. The latter two are certainly exceptional women, great for stories, but not the voice of most women of the West. If we read their stories as told in their voices through their letters and diaries, we find neither saints nor sinners, but complex women facing uncertainty and doing the best they can. A writer of historical fiction might find exciting stories in the West's Madonnas and prostitutes, but to be responsible to the mindset of the times, to portray the historical reality, the writer must look beyond these romantic images into the truths of stories that have been less often told.

Evie, the protagonist in my novel *Last of the Roundup Boys* (Holiday House 2004), has grown up on the prairies of Kansas with a great deal of freedom, common to girls of that time (1886) and place. Evie wants to remain a cowgirl, a role she's assumed since childhood and wants to continue, even though her parents pressure her toward a more conventional role. But when girls of that time and place became young women, they were expected to assume the fairly rigidly defined roles of their mothers, roles that didn't fit their experience growing up. The story asks what happens when someone rebels against the role she's been assigned. There is conflict, and conflict often begets change. Certainly change came for western women. They were the first to get the vote, including Wyoming women in territorial elections in 1869, and Kansas women in municipal elections in 1887, although the Nineteenth Amendment (women's suffrage amendment) to the Constitution would not be passed in the U.S. Senate until 1919.

Non-conformists are the agents of change in a culture—the makers of history. What drives change is dissatisfaction with the status quo. American women today would not be able to vote without the women of

LG: And why, specifically, did you choose to write for a young adult audience?

DS: The characters and concerns I like to explore seem to appeal to this age group.

LG: *The Last of the Roundup Boys* is not the typical look at pioneering and cowboy life. How did you arrive at such an idea for the novel?

DS: I used family stories as a starting point. I wanted to explore stories about the West that were perhaps atypical but true. Although no women in my family wanted to be cowgirls, there were cowgirls in the West and there were women in my family (very determined women!) who wanted choices in life that weren't offered to them. In that sense, they typified western women. I think the American West has historically offered a sense of freedom and possibility to everybody, but for some people the options were pretty narrow.

LG: Will adolescents identify with your characters even though it takes place more than 100 years ago? What is the appeal of YA historical fiction?

DS: Problems with parents and decisions about life's work and a mate are issues that transcend time and place. I hope young people will respond to the emotional struggles Tom and Evie have, but I hope adolescents learn something about the past, too. I hope they see it as a time that impacts and instructs the present – for me, that is the appeal.

LG: As a native Kansan, do you have any family background in ranching?

DS: My mother's family has been ranching and farming in Kansas for four generations.

LG: Since you live in a ranching area, what kinds of responses did you get from other

native Kansans as you shared your story of a girl dreaming of ranching and of the racism that existed?

DS: Some women have shared with me their mothers' stories of being ranch and farmwomen. Generally, these have been positive tales about coming to terms with farming and making it a creative life.

LG: In your article, you discuss conformists and nonconformists. It would seem that, as an author, you are a nonconformist by approaching a subject from an unusual perspective. Do you see yourself as somewhat of a rebel when sharing stories of America's history?

DS: Less of a rebel than just a storyteller who is intrigued by stories that haven't been told. But I do believe it is important to include a wide variety of stories from America's past, not just those that fit a certain way of thinking. Including untold stories from the past is a way of including people in the present.

LG: You've written two companion books—what are your plans for future novels? Are Tom and Evie coming back to us?

DS: I plan to stick with historical fiction, but I'm going to let Tom and Evie ride off into the sunset—for now, anyway. The novel I'm working on now does have cowboys, though.

Note: Be sure to read the review of The Last of the Roundup Boys in this issue's Clip and File section. For more information about Debra Seely, go to <http://www.debraseely.com>.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who refused to accept the non-voting status of women. Change may not have occurred in their lifetime, but they continued to prod. The famous ones are known, but the contemporary historical fiction writer asks, what about the ones whose stories aren't known?

Historical fiction is not history. It is story, driven

by character and conflict. Avi says that historical fiction needs to be thoroughly grounded in historical fact and in the mindset of people of its period to be believable, but it aims to tell the story not told, to ask the "What if?" questions about history (SCBWI). A fiction writer will be more interested in what happens to a character who is different from the societal norm because a character who generates conflict is interesting and thus creates a story. Avi's Charlotte Doyle is, in fact, grounded in historical fact. She's based on a nineteenth century poem in which a woman dressed as a man to accompany her sailor-lover on his voyages. But Charlotte becomes her own character, and whether or not you agree that she's believable as a sea captain, she serves to illustrate the exception to the rule for women of the era, to explore the "What if?"; in this case, what if a person back then and there whom everyone accepted, thinking she was male, turned out to be female?

One value of looking at the anomaly in history, the little-known or unconventional act, is that history is made by the people who confront traditional mores and instigate change. History is a record of change. The story of the rebel is also the stuff of literature, the individual in conflict with the society. Historical fiction has the opportunity to examine a historical past imaginatively, at the level of an individual life, the actions that lead to change, that make history.

Every culture has its non-conformists, recorded and non-recorded. One of my writer friends asks, "Would anyone believe a fiction writer who created a young girl who dressed like a soldier and commanded armies in rebellion, saying God told her to?" Yet this is the story of Joan of Arc. Less recorded but more common is the girl who doesn't want to marry the man her parents arranged for her to marry in medieval England. We know she's there from the fifteenth century Paston letters which MacLeod mentions. They describe the girl who was beaten once or twice a week because she opposed her mother's choice of a match (MacLeod 28). We know that human nature, regardless of the time period, does not like to be coerced. Here is the opportunity for the writer to ask "What if?" What if a girl tried to rebel, to act out her feelings? What options were open to her? Thus we get Karen Cushman's Newbery Honor book, *Catherine Called Birdy*. MacLeod has criticized the novel for imposing contemporary ideology on medieval times. But to

portray a protagonist who is an exception to the culture is not imposing contemporary ideology on the past. Catherine's struggle against her culture, in fact, highlights the values of the culture and teaches us more about it. Contrast Catherine to her friend Aelis. Aelis is also disinclined to marry her parents' choice because they've chosen a seven-year-old boy. But Aelis, although she loves someone else, doesn't rebel against her parents' choice of spouse for her. We see, instead, the difference between the medieval and our own modern mindset.

It is irresponsible to put a modern mindset into a historical character. But it goes against our knowledge of human nature and history to assume that no one ever questioned his or her lot in life or longed for change. While historical fiction must portray the mores of the day, its great stories arise from the conflict created by the rebels, often the unknown

rebels, who question and challenge social conventions and ultimately change history.

Debra Seely lives in Wichita, Kansas, with her husband and three children. She writes and lectures full time.

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Memoirs In Adolescent Literature

By Eleanor Ramrath Garner

Not enough has been written about the importance of memoirs in adolescent literature. With this article I hope to illustrate the unique learning experience memoirs can bring to classroom teaching and to demonstrate from my own experience the enormous appeal that personal stories have on adolescents. I refer mostly to my own story, since I know it best, but the insights are applicable to all young adult memoirs.

Eleanor's Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany is a World War II remembrance that spans the years 1939 to 1946, ages nine to sixteen, when I found myself as an American girl in Berlin, Germany, where I survived a repressive regime and the terrors and tragedies of war. After the book was published in 1999, I received many letters from readers and from classroom teachers.

Memoirs are in essence historical documents. They are timeless perennials that not only describe a period of history, but also address the universality of collective human experiences. History, after all,

happens to real people. It isn't just cold facts, but a living, organic changing thing. It is about life, human life, with all its triumphs and failures, its increases and decreases, its courage and weakness, its lights and darks. In his 1995 acceptance speech for the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, David McCullough, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, says,

"We live in an era of momentous change, creating great pressures and tensions. But history (through our stories) shows that times of tumult are the times when we are most likely to learn.... History really is an extension of life. It enlarges and intensifies the experience of being alive."

Our personal stories make history texts jump alive. They provide the texture, the details, the sights, the sounds, the smells, and, above all, the emotions of important events in the past. Faceless statistics suddenly become real people. With the death of an eyewitness, whose story has not been shared, a piece of the past is lost, and the world is poorer for it. It is this fact, and the enduring truths, that make memoirs

so precious. Over and over again teachers and students who had read my book told me, “your story is so compelling because we know it happened to a real person, not a fictional one.”

Historians tell us that approximately 55 million people lost their lives in WWII. Besides the Holocaust with its loss of 6 million lives, 500,000 civilians, mostly women, children, and the old, died in Allied bombings over Germany. Twenty-two thousand civilians were killed within an hour and a half in the middle of a sunny day in Berlin. These are staggering figures, but they have no human value in attempting to understand the brutality and inhumanity of war. Questions arise: How did it feel to be bombed day after day, night after night, sometimes seventeen times in twenty-four hours, fully aware the next minute might be the last? What was it like when home and neighborhood became the battlefield? How did people live in a totally decimated city with none of the basic necessities, like electricity, gas, food, and drinking water, amidst plunder and rape by occupation forces? How did war impact children physically and psychologically? How did they cope with constant fear and insecurity?

War literature answers questions like these in a way that young people, who never personally felt the effects of armed conflict, can understand. Memoirs are written honestly without political or historical bias and without the usual Hollywood spin.

Statistics have no face or soul. We can't feel compassion for numbers. They make an abstract of the fact that history happens to real people. For instance, the tragedy of the Twin Towers bombing on 9/11 in New York City, where almost 3,000 people lost their lives, didn't really hit us until we read their stories. It brought home the horror in a personal way we could not forget. Hundreds of American soldiers have died and continue to die in the war in Iraq, and thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians have lost their lives, but not until we read stories of individuals did we mourn and lament the senselessness and cruelty of war.

When survivor stories are told, history moves from mythic quality to reality. The enormity of the Holocaust didn't become real to us until we read *Anne Frank's Diary* and the many other survivor stories. Eyewitness accounts can do what history books alone cannot do. Pamela Thomason, a teacher at Valley High

Eleanor Ramrath Garner continues to receive praise for her World War II memoir, Eleanor's Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany. While her journal article discusses the significance of memoirs, she generously agreed to be interviewed. She shares critical insight into how she became a temporary resident of Hitler's Germany and just what that time in her life entailed. Additionally, she tells how sharing her story has helped her reflect on such a solemn and crucial time in her life.

LG: Why did you decide to write about your years in Hitler's Germany? Were you planning to turn it into a book, or was it simply for you and your family? Have you always been a writer?

ERG: We who were eyewitnesses of World War II are fast dying out. It is important to the understanding of history that our stories be told. An editor friend I met during my years at Harcourt Brace, who later became an acquisitions editor with Peachtree Publishers in Atlanta, encouraged me to write down my stories with young adults in mind. I had often thought about doing this, if for no other reason than to preserve family history, but I lacked the courage to tackle such a daunting task, particularly considering the painful material I would have to work with. But with Sarah Smith's strong emotional and editorial support, I was able to write a successful book and release the young girl from her prison of dark memories. I have always been a writer at heart. I have written articles, short stories, and children's stories, but *Eleanor's Story* is my first book.

LG: Had you been encouraged by family members to share your story?

ERG: No, it was solely my decision and the desire to share my story with others. My siblings were most supportive.

School in West Des Moines, Iowa, wrote to me:

As a high school teacher, I've had the opportunity to share your story with U.S. history students as part of their social studies curriculum. We quickly became engrossed in all you experienced. I've seen once again that story can affect individuals as no other medium; truth draws us into its grip. In the context of story, we make connections about human nature, its potential, and its complete depravity.

Someone once said, "A story of real importance is at once a presentation and an invitation." I think what it means is an invitation to readers to make an imaginative response to reality. It invites them to find their own connection to the story. Much like dreams, good stories allow the expression and the experience of both personal and collective material. They coax readers into the imaginal realm where they can fully participate in the life of another. A middle school student wrote: "Even though your experience wasn't mine, the story made me feel as though it were mine." Indeed, a strange kind of intimacy spins between the author of a memoir and the reader. It's like sharing secrets with a stranger. Students often tell me, "I feel I know you after having read your book." They know me because so much of what I reveal of substance is universal and belongs to all human beings. Feelings we find in ourselves, we also find in others. It is what binds us together as human beings. As a writer, I was able to articulate what is still relatively unformed and without words in a young person's psyche, and yet wants to be expressed. A student wrote: "It must take a lot of courage to write about your feelings for everybody to read. I could never do that. I would write it as if it happened to a friend."

Eleanor's Story became a watershed for an eleven-year-old who wrote: "Your story had such a huge impact on me because I have never before seen death or been afraid to go to sleep at night. I have never had the screaming of bombs in my ears or felt terror. Your book made me feel as though I was there right with you. It made war come alive."

Another student made a connection to the present situation in Iraq and to his own experience as a refugee from Vietnam. He wrote: "I see some similarities with the war in Iraq and your story. They had a dictator, too, like Hitler, and there are many innocent people who had to suffer. We are immigrants from Vietnam. After the end of the Vietnam war and as the communists were taking over the territories in the

LG: Could you give us an idea of what led up to your being in Germany during World War II?

ERG: During the Depression years, my father lost his position as engineer for General Electric Company in Philadelphia. He was eventually able to get a low paying job as draftsman with RCA in Camden. We moved from Philadelphia to a less expensive area in Stratford, New Jersey. In 1939 my father was offered a challenging engineering position with AEG—the general electric company of Berlin. He took the position with the understanding that we would return to the States in two years. En route on a German ship, the war broke out and we were unable to return, and two years turned into seven years of trying to survive WWII in Nazi Germany.

LG: Without taking too much away from the book for those who haven't read it yet, what were some of the key events and experiences you observed? What was the most traumatic for you?

ERG: Leaving the secure world of a happy childhood in Stratford for the frightening unknown in a foreign country; having to learn how to read and write in a foreign language at age 9—always afraid of not measuring up to others. Adjusting to an unfamiliar culture and the repressive Nazi regime. The constant fear of losing family members, friends, home, and neighborhood to bombings. The heartache of many family separations. The emotional impact of historical and political events on my life. The early loss of childhood due to increased responsibilities and the daily presence of death. The most traumatic for me was the ever-present fear of being buried alive by a blockbuster. The desperate knocking of people still alive under bombed out buildings haunted me for years.

South, our family fled the country for new hope, as did thousands of others. Like your family, my family was separated many times.”

A twelve-year-old related to the evil of war, again finding parallels to the current situation in Iraq: “Your book taught me a lot. I learned about the evils of war. Reading your personal story made me think about everybody in the Middle East. I realized that civilians living in Iraq are just as innocent as you were. It inspired me to want to help them in any way I can through methods such as prayer. Your story also inspired me to want to help prevent war in the world.”

A fourteen-year-old related to the injustice of prejudice:

When I was first taught of WWII and the Holocaust, I thought, ‘Oh, those horrible Germans! They must all be bad,’ and I have been prejudiced ever since. But your book has shown me that many innocent German people were also victims of this cruel man, Hitler.

These are just a few of the many, many letters I have received from young people expressing the strong impact my story had on them. They related my experience to a need to understand themselves, and to find their own place in the insecure world of today.

What touched me so was that these students showed a remarkable capacity for reflective thinking, drawing comparisons, and asking good questions when encouraged to do so. They corrected my misconception that young people today were only interested in lightweight, fun books. I could see that, once introduced to more serious literature, the students took off, bringing their own imagination to the contents of my book. For instance, they developed in-class skits and readings, kept thematic journals, arranged for author interviews, emailed questions to me, wrote essays on how the experiences in the book related to their own lives, created art projects by designing their own book cover, crafted mobiles out of coat hangers with key elements in the story, painted posters, prepared time lines, all ways of expressing in concrete form what they had read and understood. On their own, they sought out similar memoirs on World War II and the Holocaust, exploring commonalities and differences in the various experiences.

For instance, Anne Frank and Eleanor were the same age. Each lived under totally different circumstances, one child Jewish, the other Roman Catholic,

LG: Was there any joy that you experienced during that time? Or was it all terrifying and dreadful?

ERG: No, it was not all terrifying and dreadful. Even in the worst of times the heart can still dance. There were two more babies born into our family who brought me joy and needed my protection. There were family and holiday celebrations despite the war, visits to relatives, a best friend to share things with, the joy in nature and its promise of renewal, easy access to memories of happy, carefree times in America, a fervent belief in 14 protective angels that surrounded me, and the ability to lose myself in the magic of books that could transport me into a better world. Above all, it was the love for my family, the close relationship to my brother, and the intimacy of a best friend that brought me the most joy and made the day-to-day drudgery of war bearable.

LG: One can’t help but make the comparison to Anne Frank; why do you think adults and young people are so moved by seeing World War II through the eyes of a child?

ERG: My book is often compared to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, perhaps because we were about the same age, both living under a totalitarian regime and both having our childhood cut short. I think the eyes of a child see things the way they really are. There are no political, historical, or psychological biases. The child perceives the events in total honesty without the distortion of adult perceptions. The child is not interested in pleasing anyone and so says it like it is, without guile. I think it’s this honesty and innocence that a child brings to war literature that intensifies the experiences and so deeply moves both adults and children.

LG: After you left Germany in 1946, where did you go and what did you do?

yet both were caught up in the terrifying drama unfolding around them, one in Holland, the other in Germany. What were the commonalities, and how were they different? How did each child cope with fear and insecurity and still find hope in a world gone awry? One survived; the other did not. How about Jean Wakatsuki Houston's experience in growing up as a Japanese American behind barbed wire in the United States during that period (in *Farewell to Manzanar*)? In what way did prejudice play a role in the lives of these three girls?

These are great springboards for discussion and reflective thinking. Students can be encouraged to find parallels to what is happening in the world today. Have the images of war changed since WWII? Students can also explore acts of courage and compassion in these personal stories and how they might relate to everyday school and home life.

Young adult memoir is storytelling at its most powerful. This type of literature reveals so much of human behavior and is embedded with "instructions" that guide young people through the complexities of life. These stories offer a different kind of hero from the usual football player, rock star, or movie idol. The young heroes or heroines in these memoirs are forced to grow up way before their time and are often called on to make mature decisions that can affect the lives of others. They deal with the challenges of everyday life courageously and are not swayed by collective thinking. In spite of Hitler Youth, Nazi indoctrination, propaganda, cultural pressure, and Allied bombings, loyalty to my own country never wavered. Children of war become streetwise and learn the art of survival by tapping into deeply buried instincts, finding reserves of strength they never knew they had. They find hope and reassurance in the ever-repeating cycles of nature and belief in a higher order of things. They learn to appreciate the love of family, the gift of friendship, and, above all, the preciousness of life itself. The major theme that binds all these personal stories together is the triumph of the human spirit over adversity.

I want to mention some guidelines in selecting a good memoir as literature for classroom use: what to look for. As a teaching tool, it must not only be a personal story authentically told, but it should also reflect the social issues of a larger group. What conditions and experiences shape a country and its

ERG: In the final chapter of my book, titled "Home is the Stranger," I return to the States. Here I was once again confronted with enormous acculturation problems as I did in 1939 Germany. I had just come from day-to-day brushes with death, from constant hunger, and a totally decimated city, into a country untouched by war. I entered high school in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, and tried to fit in. It took enormous courage to overcome the many problems I encountered on the way back to some kind of normal life. My education had suffered because of sporadic school attendance in Germany, and nightmares haunted me. I felt like an outsider, not belonging anywhere. The readjustment to America was another big task of overcoming as so many before.

LG: After you wrote your memoir and it received such strong reviews, what was your response? Joy? Sorrow at the memory of it all?

ERG: I was totally awed at the wonderful warm reception my book received from reviewers and readers and the many awards it won and continues to win. I remember saying to my editor, "I don't think anyone will be interested in my story." I wasn't heroic to my adult way of thinking, but after the book was completed, I realized with amazement that the young girl in me had indeed been heroic and spunky in the pure act of day-to-day survival and the overcoming of incredible odds. She deserved to have her story told.

LG: What do you feel is the role of your book for young people?

ERG: I see my book as a learning experience for young people. It makes World War II come alive by taking the reader into the heart of war, what it was like living under Hitler, what it was like trying to survive under Allied bombings, house-to-house combat in the battle for Berlin, and the terrors of Soviet

people like Germany under the Nazis? A memoir must show the universal themes and drama that expose the underlying patterns of life, not only as a witness to history, but also as a mirror to the vulnerabilities that we share with all humanity. The story cannot be all sad, depressing, and full of pathos. It must also contain a counterbalance of light moments and humor to show that even in the most difficult times, the heart can still dance, that hope never goes away completely. The experiences of growing up must be told compellingly and honestly so that young people can find themselves in the feelings and emotions of the storyteller. No one is all good or all bad. Authors who write memoirs for adolescents must be willing to share their own vulnerabilities and include not only the triumphs, but also the failures.

The emotions of growing up are common to everybody. What child doesn't struggle with low self-esteem, with fear of being different and of not fitting in, with parental tensions, with wanting independence from parents, but at the same time needing their support and approval? The reader wants to know that the main character in the book struggled with these same themes.

Authenticity, not only historically, but also psychologically, is of great importance. Does the character ring true?

I think the mistake authors often make in writing memoirs is to view their experience as a child through the developed critical ego of the adult, not allowing the child to express its own truth, thus unwittingly creating a distortion in perception: a child then emerges that isn't quite real. In other words, the adult ego—manipulated, bent, and shaped over a lifetime by parental and societal expectations—no longer truly represents the perceptions of the child, and a distortion happens that a sensitive reader can detect as inauthentic.

When I was writing my memoir, I soon became aware that the older me, like any parent, criticized the young girl as she tried to express herself with brutal honesty. I wanted to soft-pedal some of her actions and thoughts, mitigate them through my adult perception and, at times, make excuses for her behavior. However, I would promptly hear from my editor saying, "That's not the child speaking, that's the older woman. Don't editorialize! I want her voice, her feelings." The big question was how do I do this?

occupation. It puts a human face on the horrors of war and helps them to understand that each casualty of war is a person, not a statistic. In war many innocent civilians have to suffer and die. The book also teaches self-awareness and independence. It juxtaposes wartime ordeals to the universal experiences of growing up.

LG: As a middle-school educator who teaches about World War II in her language arts classroom, I'm still concerned that students don't understand the true terror of that time. How can we help them better understand it?

ERG: History lessons alone cannot make students understand the terror of war, but when they read personal accounts by peers, the understanding of fear and human suffering shifts to comprehension—that could have been me! What would I have done under the same circumstances? Personal stories are powerful tools in teaching history, social studies (propaganda, Nazism, dictators, fascism, outcome of war) and language arts. They encourage students to reflect and to find connections to their own lives. They awaken interest in history and the desire to explore other books on the same subject. It's important that what the student has read and understood be put into some kind of tangible form like writing or poetry or the arts. (Please note, Peachtree Publishers provides free of charge, *Peachtree Pointers*, suggestions to teachers and librarians how to teach *Eleanor's Story*.)

LG: What did your experiences in World War II teach you?

ERG: My experiences in World War II taught me about the terrible legacy of hate and prejudice and intolerance that have led, and continue to lead, human beings to unspeakable evils in the world. They taught me to appreciate and value the freedom of speech and the press,

How can I keep the older woman from interfering? Then I had an idea. Why not allow the older woman her point of view in a journal? I began to keep a daily journal that ran simultaneously with the manuscript. It turned out to be the most creative decision I ever made. Here I recorded my adult reflections, insights, and thoughts, dialogued with the young girl, listened to her complaints and her feelings as she struggled hard to emerge into my conscious life. Best of all, I began to find my adult emotional connection to her. I realized with shock just how deeply I had buried my child-self under the ashes of painful memory.

After completion of the first draft, my editor pointed out a curious thing: The manuscript showed a natural progression of language and thoughts from a nine-year-old to a sixteen-year-old. This was not done intentionally. It had happened naturally because I was so immersed in telling her story that I actually became that young girl again.

After publication, a reviewer wrote: "Eleanor recounts her story with the chilling innocence of the child, thereby intensifying the scenes of prejudices, bombings, and evacuations. She captures the mistrust, fear, and passions of wartime Germany with details we can physically sense. The story promises to forge an intense bond with readers." A reader wrote: "...your ability to convey events through the eyes and mind of a young girl is absolutely extraordinary. The young Eleanor was wonderfully appealing, in part because of the honesty with which you drew her character." Behind reviews like these are two long years of incredible emotional drain, dogged perseverance, hard work, and an awesome process of self-discovery.

Finally, in a personal story, students look for touchstones that validate their own feelings. A middle school student from Plain City, Ohio, wrote, "When I first read your book I was so caught up in it that I didn't pay attention to anything else going on around me. I felt like I was standing right there with you in all the scenes, watching and feeling what you were feeling. Your feelings were my feelings. I have since read it four times."

Encounters with readers show me again and again how amazingly interconnected we all are as human beings and how the written word has tremendous power.

and what a privilege it is to live under a democratic form of government, flawed as it may be. They taught me about the sustaining power of love of family and friends, and the joy of hope that never really dies. They taught me that all experiences in life, both the good and the bad, have meaning, and are there for growth and maturity.

LG: What does your life involve now? Are you writing other books or involved in any other projects?

ERG: Today I continue writing books, painting in oils, writing my daily reflections in journals, reading at least one or two books a week, working along with Mother Nature in my beautiful garden, nurturing and loving everything that grows there, making presentations to schools, community, and teacher organizations. I'm enjoying the visits from children and grandchildren, and the loving company of my husband of 54 years. I am in a profoundly different place today after writing my book. I feel an authenticity and self-confidence I never had before that grew out of the painful task of picking up the disparate pieces of my traumatic childhood and putting them into a story. The young girl and I are one!

Shared Reading Theatre:

An Invitation to the World of Story

We are in a school library. The teachers are engaged in staff development. They have just watched a videotape of a class involved in Shared Reading Theater. They take turns voicing their objections and asking questions:

“I thought I needed plays to make this work. Do I have to rewrite books to look like plays?”

“How is it different than Round-robin Reading?”

“What about students who read badly? When they read aloud, I die a little bit with every tortured word.”

“I read the text to my students. I believe they all understand it that way.”

“You know, I have to teach writing, too. Can I use this for teaching writing?”

The vignette above is not a creation. It really occurred during an after-school staff development session. Students of differing abilities need to become engaged in text by actually reading it. When the teacher reads the text to students, middle school students have a strong tendency to “zone-out.” It is easy to blame the students for a lack of understanding. Teachers might say, correctly, “They just aren’t listening.”

Still, teachers need to provide for the variety of reading abilities in their classroom. In addition, to fully engage their students, they must offer ample time and opportunity for students to make personal connections to the text, to the world, and to their lives outside of the classroom. We believe that Shared Reading Theater provides an ideal solution to these problems.

However, in our role as staff-developers, we have found that the middle school teachers we work with have a great deal of trouble understanding the concept of Shared Reading Theater. These teachers believe Shared Reading Theater is “just reading plays,” or worse, Round-robin Reading. To clarify the difference, it would be useful to look at Reader’s Theater and Shared Reading and see how Shared Reading Theater is an amalgam of the two older, tried-and-true strategies and the farthest thing possible from Round-robin Reading.

Readers’ Theatre:

Young & Vardell define Readers’ Theater as “a presentation of text read aloud expressively and dramatically by two or more readers.” (396–406) Johns and Berglund suggest that, “Meaning is conveyed to the audience, primarily through readers’ expressive and interpretive readings rather than through actions, costumes, or props” and that students can “read from commercially-prepared scripts or develop scripts from materials they are reading [. . .].” (2002)

Shared Reading:

According to Routman, Shared Reading involves learners viewing a text usually on chart paper or in a big book, observing the teacher fluently reading the text, and then reading along with the teacher. In this conception, the teacher makes reading visible and,

because this is done with an entire class, provides differentiation for all the readers in the class. Students and teachers become “partners in an enjoyable process and see themselves as ultimately capable” (139).

Round-robin Reading:

In contrast, Round-robin Reading (Eldredge, Reutzel, & Hollingsworth, 1996) involves “turn-taking” oral reading. During a session of Round-robin Reading, students are sitting around the teacher waiting to take their turn to read aloud. Every student, no matter what his or her ability might be, reads audibly. Students must wait their turn to read; they cannot actively read until their turn has arrived. This practice can lead less-skilled readers to feel that they have been singled-out by their inability to read the text smoothly. Less-skilled readers get little support beyond immediate correction. Unfortunately, this can undermine their self-confidence, which has a negative effect on their ability to comprehend.

When Eldredge, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth compared Shared Reading and Round-robin Reading in their 1996 study, they found that Shared Reading was the superior method. The use of Shared Reading was, “effective in improving [. . .] reading development” (220). They found that students in the “Shared Reading group outperformed children in the Round-robin Reading grouping in word-analysis knowledge, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension” (218). Further, the Shared Reading strategy caused a significant change in the ability of less skilled students to comprehend text (221).

Shared Reading Theatre:

What is Shared Reading Theater and how is it different from Readers’ Theater or Shared Reading? Unlike the Readers’ Theater strategy described by Johns and Berglund, Shared Reading Theater does not require a script of any kind. Students involved in Shared Reading Theater can use a variety of available texts: novels, short stories, newspaper articles, science texts, even math texts. It is not a “play-reading” strategy. There is no audience in the sense that students are passive—all students have active roles to play. Everyone is involved in reading. It is like Shared Reading because the reading process is observed, done with an entire class, and provides differentiation because all the students in the class read. It differs from Shared Reading because the teacher does not model fluent reading while the students observe her although the teacher might play a part as everyone reads the text. In Shared Reading Theater, everyone has a copy of the text and plays a role, with less-skilled readers taking shorter or more predictable or repetitious parts. In addition, in Shared Reading, as Routman describes it, the students read chorally after the teacher has modeled fluent reading. Students engaged in Shared Reading Theater, however, read only their assigned parts. This demands a higher level of engagement while providing a genuine purpose for reading. The following chart attempts to clarify these differences:

Shared Reading Theatre and Less-skilled Readers:

Often when nonfluent readers read aloud, their reading is interrupted not only by their own pauses but by other stu-

	Shared Reading Theater	Readers’ Theater	Shared Reading	Round-robin Reading
Text	Can be used with any text	Requires a script	Uses a single text that all readers can see	Uses a common text
Teacher’s Role	Director or sometimes the teacher takes a role	Director or possibly one of the roles	Models reading	Observes reading and offers immediate correction
Student’s Role	Every reader takes an active part with less-skilled readers taking shorter roles	Some of the class takes a role while the rest of the class becomes the audience	Every reader reads no matter their ability	Students take turns reading in a predictable pattern

dents (or teachers) who tell them the word that is causing the pause. Whether done out of kindness, offered out of frustration, or offered because we don't know other strategies, telling the dependent reader the word encourages more dependence [. . .]" (Beers, 2003).

We found that, in order to prevent our students from "rescuing" their friends who were struggling with a particular word, we would assign one student to help the other students. This strategy gives the reader time to try the word on his or her own—or guess the word's meaning—before the class or the teacher jumps in. When the reader feels the word is beyond reach, he or she asks the delegated student to supply the word. This *student teacher* or *assistant director* can just supply the word or give hints for getting the word using an established class protocol for determining an unknown word—such as dividing the word, looking for parts of familiar words, trying to say the first few letters, even trying to sound the word out slowly. In this way the less-skilled reader is provided with a model of the embedded habits of good readers (Beers 217).

Sharing responsibility for the making of knowledge in the classroom with the students invites everyone to participate in the story world. It offers an easy method for teachers to assess how fluent the students have become and measure their prosody. Are they pausing for dramatic effect? How are they using punctuation to help us understand the author's intent? What signals do quotation marks give us? (An additional benefit is that once our students become accustomed to reading this way, their appropriate use of punctuation marks in their writing improves dramatically—particularly quotation marks!)

Mrs. Carey, a middle school teacher in Chicago, uses Shared Reading Theater with her students as they read a story from their anthology about two friends entering a boxing match.

Mrs. Carey asks the students to take out their literature books. "Brian, you'll be assistant director again today."

"But I want a part this time," Brian objects.

"Assistant director is a part. You keep track of who plays which part. It's an important role, and you did a really good job last time." Her affection for her students is apparent by the slight smile that crosses her lips. She is pleased with them and especially

delighted in Brian's interest in reading.

"But I want a character part or a reading part," insists Brian.

"OK. You can be one of the six people to read-around. You will be one of the narrators, and you'll read every sixth paragraph. Brian, you are number one reader. I need five more Read-around readers." She surveys the room. Mrs. Carey assigns five other people to read-around. These people read assigned paragraphs on the first two or three rounds. They locate words they cannot read before it is their turn to read, and Mrs. Carey tells them how to say a word if they ask her about the word before they read their paragraph. Later they will read automatically when it is their turn.

Mrs. Carey instructs students to put their finger at the start of the story. For the first two pages, there is little dialogue and students read their assigned sections. Mrs. Carey stops the reading to discuss the difference between "heavyweight" and "lightweight." A very knowledgeable student fills her in with the exact difference between the different weights in boxing including welterweight, which she hadn't asked for. Mrs. Carey wonders what will happen to the friendship between these two boys.

Mrs. Carey has assigned six volunteers to read the next six sequenced paragraphs of the text. Another student was assigned to be the "he said—she said" reader, to read those parts of the text that lead into dialog before and after quotation marks.

Having students read their texts twice silently—once for content and once for character—improved their confidence over time. Having students read for a specific purpose through the perspective of a specific character adds so much to what students get out of oral reading because they are genuinely engaged in a meaningful task for a purpose that makes sense to them. This improves student confidence over time. They read more smoothly and with more expression.

What Texts to Use:

We have used Shared Reading Theater with young adult literature (both fiction and non-fiction) across the curriculum. Any well-written descriptive text, with well-drawn characters or events, is fertile ground. With fiction, we did not limit ourselves to plays (the

traditional arena of Readers' Theatre). For example, Karen has used Shared Reading Theatre when she was modeling Louis Sachar's *Holes* in a sixth-grade classroom. She felt it was crucial to help the sixth-grade students understand the dynamics of Stanley's visit to the Warden's office by having students take on the part of the Warden, Mr. Sir, Stanley, and the narrator. Other students listen and then ask questions of the readers. Karen found that small snippets of texts read in this fashion were sufficient—it was not necessary to treat entire texts this way. After Shared Reading Theater, she sends students off to read the next section of text on their own.

Claudia has found that a text like Avi's *Nothing But the Truth* is just right for Shared Reading Theatre because it is written in dialog, notes, memos, phone conversations, and newspaper reports. This post-modern style provides plenty of parts for everyone in the class. She experimented with this method when she was modeling a reading lesson in an eighth-grade class:

The Malloy family is sitting down to dinner discussing the time-honored family topic, "school." Phillip Molloy turns to his father, "What would you say if a teacher said I wasn't allowed to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner'?"

"What?" Mr. Malloy replies. He cannot believe his ears. Maybe he is hard of hearing.

Phil, impatiently, "Singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

Mr. Molloy is shocked, "Anywhere?"

Phil is terse now. Apparently, his father can't understand anything. "In class."

Mrs. Molloy chimes in, "I don't understand. What's this have to do with what your father asked—your running? Singing in the middle of class?" (Avi, 51). [The dialog is Avi's; the italicized text is Claudia's.]

Claudia interrupts the reading, and everyone in the class writes furiously. Then there is a minute of talk. She turns to the student playing Phillip Malloy and asks, "Phil, why did you say that to your father?"

Greg, Phil for the last 53 pages, says, "I just felt like it. I felt I couldn't tell him the truth."

"Why couldn't you tell him the truth? The truth is important, isn't it? Why did you bring up the part about the singing?"

"I wanted to get him off the topic of the track team. I felt bad about not being on the team. I don't want him to guess that I couldn't join because of my

grades, so I thought the singing bit would distract him."

"And you, Mr. Molloy," Claudia asks Bill, a bit uncomfortable in his fatherly role, "What are you thinking when Phil tells you about the singing?"

"Lawsuit!" Bill quickly replies. The class cheers. "She can't do that, that teacher. It's Phil's first amendment right to sing 'The Star Spangled Banner.' Who does she think she is? I'll have her job!"

"Mrs. Molloy," Claudia turn to Olivia, "What do you make of this?"

"I'm just confused. I don't get it. Why is he singing in class? Anyway," Olivia adds, "I just want to be sure everyone has enough to eat. That's what my mom would care about."

Ariel, a class member without a major role, chimes in. "That's so true. My mother is only concerned about our eating. We have to finish all our food."

Students become so involved in their roles, they take their personalities outside the class. After finishing *Nothing But the Truth*, Greg, who had played Phil Molloy for the run of the book, followed Claudia all the way to the lunch room arguing in favor of Phil Molloy's point of view, "Look, I had to lie. It meant so much to my dad. I couldn't just tell him I'd blown it by messing up on a stupid English exam. He'd never understand."

Greg had truly entered the world of story.

Writing as an Extension:

We often ask our students to stop and write an answer to a reflective question through the eyes of their character. Karen has modeled this using Karen Hesse's *Witness* with ninth grade students. In the book, thirteen characters tell the story of the same event from thirteen different perspectives, and Karen's students love to argue from their character's perspective about what really happened. Because the author does not tell the reader everything, Karen's students write powerful passages that fill in some of these gaps. These passages are revised and rehearsed and become the center of the students' culminating project.

In another instance, Karen had ninth-graders write letters to other characters in *Witness* explaining their behavior. Students read these letters aloud, creating additional refinements to their understanding of the story.

In the book, a black woman dies from exposure. Percelle, the town's sixty-year-old constable, refuses to

accept responsibility. This hands-off attitude allows the Klan to gain a foothold in this small Vermont town. Demetra, writing in the role of Leonora, the twelve-year-old protagonist in *Witness*, to Percelle, the constable, writes,

“Why did you let my mother die?
Why didn’t you help us?
What did we ever do to you?”

This passionate response helps Demetra and her classmates understand in tangible ways the reality of the Klan’s presence and the fear and terror it engendered.

The Procedure:

- Determine a text you might want to read with the entire class. This text can be more difficult than the average student is reading because you will be there to scaffold the text with the students.
- Determine what reading roles might be available. Assign roles. You might uncover additional roles as you read. We have mentioned several roles in this article.
 - Character Readers
 - He said/she said Reader
 - Bold Reader
 - Regular Reader
 - Number Reader
 - Italics Reader
 - Parenthesis Reader
 - Date Reader
 - Box Reader (The person who reads everything printed in boxes.)
 - Underlined Reader
 - Student teacher Reader
 - Assistant Director
- Do some pre-reading activity before entering the text. Look at the cover or the graphs and pictures. Introduce essential vocabulary words.
- When introducing the strategy to the class, allow the students who are reading together to practice before reading to the audience. This provides for smoother reading, a better understanding of the content, and better modeling for the class.
- Jump into the text and begin to read, or invite students to read the text themselves, locating and focusing on their roles.

- Stop reading occasionally to point out meaning-making strategies, salient vocabulary, or the focus of a recent mini-lesson such as figures of speech.
- After reading, invite students to reflect on events in their journals, answer questions in the role of the character they played, or write letters to other characters.

Conclusion:

We have combined two classic classroom strategies, Readers’ Theater and Shared Reading, into one large meta-strategy, Shared Reading Theater. Shared Reading Theater goes one step beyond traditional Readers’ Theater by combining the reading of any text with the best features of the Shared Reading approach.

Two weeks later, we return to our staff-development school and ask how Shared Reading Theater has worked. Previously, the teachers had read the text aloud to their students because they felt that it was the only way to include less-skilled readers. After trying Shared Reading Theater and observing their students’ engagement with this strategy, they offer these observations in their written evaluations:

“I was amazed. I didn’t know my students could do that.”

“They were so engaged in the text. They really knew what was going on.”

“The post-reading discussions were so much better. I didn’t have to pull so hard.”

“When students took on the role of a character, they became the character with real conviction.”

“This approach brought the story world into my classroom.”

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Appendix

Good books for Shared Reading Theatre for Middle Level Students:

Fiction:

- Ablelove, Joan. *Go, and Come Back*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Puffin, 1999.
- Avi. *Nothing But the Truth*. New York: Orchard Books, 1991.
- Bunting, Eve. *Smoky Nights*. Illustrated by David Diaz. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994.
- Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1999.
- Dumas, Alexander. *The Three Musketeers*. Retold by Michael Leitch. Illustrated by Victor Ambus. New York: Dorling Kindersley, Ltd., 2000.
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. *The Number Devil: A Mathematical Adventure*. Illustrated by Susanne Berner Rotraut. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1997.
- Hesse, Karen. *Witness*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2001.
- Mikaelsen, Ben. *Touching Spirit Bear*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *A Handbook for Boys*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Na, An. *A Step From Heaven*. Asheville, NC: Front Street, 2001.
- Park, Linda Sue. *A Single Shard*. New York: Dell Yearling, 2001.
- Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*. New York: Scholastic, 1990.
- Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.
- Wolff, Virginia Ewer. *Make Lemonade*. New York: Scholastic, 1993.

Non-Fiction:

- Armstrong, Jennifer. *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance*. New York: Crown Books for Young Children, 2000.
- Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999.
- Cooper, Michael L. *Bound for the Promised Land: The Great Black Migration*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1995.
- Duggleby, John. *Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1998.
- Fradin, Dennis Brindell. *Bound for the North Star: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves*. New York: Clarion Books, 2000.
- Gorrell, Gina K. *North Star to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1996.
- Freedman, Russell. *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
- Levine, Ellen. *Darkness Over Denmark: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews*. New York: Holiday House, 2000.
- Murphy, Jim. *Blizzard: The Storm That Changed America*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.
- Murphy, Jim. *The Great Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
- Rumford, James. *Seeker of Knowledge: The Man Who Deciphered Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.
- Sis, Peter. *Starry Messenger*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1998.
- Sis, Peter. *Tibet Through the Red Box*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1996.
- Warren, Andrea. *Orphan Train Riders: One Boy's True Story*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.
- Watkins, R. *Slavery: Bondage Through History*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.
- Wormser, Richard. *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999.

<p><u>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</u> by Jim Murphy Clarion, 2003, 165 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>In late summer of 1793, while George Washington lived and held office in a borrowed house in Philadelphia and worried about the United States' relationship with France, a mysterious disease began to cripple the city. First afflicted were the people who lived along the docks, but as temperatures rose and humidity clogged the air, sickness spread rapidly among the bustling population of 50,000 people. Within weeks, those who could afford it, including President Washington, his cabinet, and other public servants, had fled to the countryside. This left only the poor to cope with the ravages of a disease whose source and cure were much debated but ultimately unknown until the 20th century. As the dead piled up and city services broke down, a heroic few, including members of the black community, two or three doctors, and a handful of civic leaders, emerged to handle the crisis. In prose as gripping and suspenseful as a novel, Jim Murphy recounts the story of a city in chaos saved by the superhuman efforts of a minority concerned more about others than themselves. In today's atmosphere heavy with the threat of bioterrorism, <i>An American Plague</i> will have particular resonance for young readers.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Provo, UT</p>	<p><u>The Boy Who Couldn't Die</u> by William Sleator Amulet Books, 2004, 162 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Horror ISBN: 0-8109-4824-9</p> <p>Ken doesn't want to die. Ever. Ken is a teenager who gets everything he wants from his rich parents. But after his friend, Roger, dies in a plane crash, Ken realizes what he wants most of all is to never die. Cheri Buttercup advertises "Freedom from death," and she delivers. When Ken touches a hot pan, he is not burned. When he steals the girlfriend of a bully at school, the bully cannot beat him up. He is invincible. But he is not prepared for the dreams—of being buried alive, of digging up Roger's grave.</p> <p>Ken decides he's ready for the ultimate challenge: to face death. He goes scuba diving on a little island where sharks are known to attack, but Ken comes out unscathed. A new friend, Sabine, discovers his invincible nature. Sabine educates Ken about voodoo, zombies, and the evil magic that has surrounded him. They then fight against Buttercup's evil magic.</p> <p>This book is full of zombies, danger, murder, and creepy twists Sleator is famous for. Just when you think you've solved everything, there's a twist you didn't see coming.</p> <p>Holli Keel Tucson, AZ</p>
<p><u>The Empty Mirror</u> by James Lincoln Collier Bloomsbury Press, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 1-58234-949-5</p> <p>Imagine waking up one morning feeling not quite like yourself. You take a walk by a pond and when you look in it, you have no reflection. This is the dilemma that faces 13-year-old Nick Hodges. Nick, an orphan being raised by his Uncle Jack, is also being accused of crimes around town that he knows he didn't commit. Confused and upset, Nick can only confide in his friend, Gypsy, an outcast because of her nationality. Determined to find his reflection and the person responsible for ruining his name, Nick learns more about his past and the influenza epidemic that swept his town when he was a baby.</p> <p>With innumerable suspenseful scenes, this book will leave a chill running down anyone's spine. Not only does the book deal with problems teenagers face, such as feeling like you don't fit in, but it also offers a history lesson about a serious time when illness destroyed entire towns. This book has a great story and good ending and will keep you on your toes the whole time.</p> <p>Lyra Heiser-Washington Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><u>The Fattening Hut</u> by Pat Lowery Collins Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003, 186 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Self-image ISBN: 0618309551</p> <p>In the author's notes at the end of <i>The Fattening Hut</i>, Pat Lowery Collins states that she hoped the book will "resonate throughout the human community" (p.186). I would say that she succeeded with her quest.</p> <p>Helen is a 14-year-old native girl of a mythical island now ready to spend time in the fattening hut. Girls are isolated in the hut for fattening before marriage, or in the case of Helen's sister Miduna, while nursing a baby. It is in this hut that the older women will come one night to perform the ritual ceremony of the cutting, female circumcision.</p> <p>This is a powerful tale of adolescent longings, insecurities, and desire for a better life. Hard to imagine, in our culture of thinness, a book about a culture that reveres obesity would speak so strongly. However, this is a book about self-image, self-fulfillment, and self-accomplishment, all concepts with which adolescents struggle.</p> <p>Freida Golden Manhattan, KS</p>

<p>Going for the Record by Julie A. Swanson Dealing with Terminal Illness/ Soccer Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2004, 217 pp., \$8.00 ISBN: 0-8028-5273-4</p> <p>The summer before her senior year in high school, everything is coming together for Leah Weczynkowski's soccer aspirations. She makes the Olympic Developmental Program's regional team, is invited to a national camp, and is recruited by coaches at major universities. But her self-absorbed dedication to soccer is challenged when she learns her chief supporter, her father, has terminal pancreatic cancer with only three months to live. Leah and her family find themselves on a devastating path as they learn to cope with the illness. They go through fear and anger, denial, hope, bargaining, and resignation. They also have to watch as their father tries to cope with extreme pain and still maintain his sense of control and dignity.</p> <p>Swanson asks hard questions anyone facing suffering must ask. Why is this happening? How can someone deal with pain with dignity? How can people continue their lives faced by the loss of a loved one? How do we deal with the void in our hearts? This may seem to be a predictable novel, but Swanson's story leads us to empathize and to hope we might have their courage to deal with death and loss.</p> <p>Jeanne M. McGlimm Asheville, NC</p>	<p>The Golden Hour by Maiya Williams Amulet Books, 2004, 272 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8109-4823-0</p> <p>Fantasy/Time Travel</p> <p>Rowan and Nina Poplewell's father sends them to spend the summer with their recently deceased mother's eccentric aunts in Maine. They meet twins Xanthe and Xavier and unlock the secrets to abandoned Owatunnauk resort; it becomes a time-travel portal only in the "golden hour," the short period of time between day and night." When Nina flees her grief-filled life, the other three follow her to Paris during the French Revolution. This novel is contemporary fiction, combined with fantasy and historical adventure. The observations Rowan makes add intelligent fun in his "Top Ten Reasons My Life Stinks," which form a loose frame for the plot. Getting lost in the machinations of French intrigue in 1789 makes for rollicking, energetic action and suspense, and the adolescent characters are believable and likeable—a good choice for readers who like a challenge. A sequel is planned by the author, a writer and producer for <i>Rugrats</i> and <i>Mad TV</i>.</p> <p>Judith Hayn Chicago, IL</p>
<p>Hard Times for Jake Smith by Aileen Kilgore Henderson Milkweed Editions, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-57131-648-5</p> <p>Historical Fiction</p> <p>In rural Alabama during the Depression, a 12-year-old girl named Mary/Jake soon discovers the cruelty of the financial woes of that time period, when she is left on the side of the road by her family because of their poverty. Hurt and disillusioned by their instructions for her to follow a specific path in the woods, she chooses a different path. She gives herself a new identity as a boy called Jake Smith, because she thinks boys may be treated better. She discovers a widow in need of her help with chores and begins a new life fulfilling her passion for gardening and her love for animals. She gains friendship with a neighbor girl and with a boy who has the same love for gardening. Mary/Jake also finds out secrets she never dreamed possible, resulting from her parents' initial instructions, along with a precious heirloom.</p> <p>Young readers who appreciate historical stories of the 1930s, and who may have a relative or friend who lived during that time, will appreciate the courage and love Mary/Jake possessed for family.</p> <p>Vicki Boatfield Tempe, AZ</p>	<p>The Haunting of AlaiZabel Cray by Chris Wooding Orchard Books, 2004, 304 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 04399546567</p> <p>Adventure/Horror</p> <p>The shadows and dark alleyways of London are seething with mysterious, frightening horrors that could haunt children in their dreams. The Old Quarter of London creeps with beastly creatures called wych-kin. Townspeople are aware of the unspeakable horrors that stalk London's streets at night, and most hide in their homes and close shop early to avoid inevitable death if one crosses a wych-kin's path. The only ones who can protect the public from these nightmarish creatures are wych hunters. Thaniel is a 17-year-old boy following in his father's footsteps as a legendary wych-hunter. His mentor, Cathaline, helps in his hunts for anything evil that lurks in the shadows. Their lives are changed as they meet a young girl, AlaiZabel, who seems to carry a mysterious and frightful past. Soon, the team of three band together to uncover a sinister plot by London's elite that could destroy London, turning power over to the wych-kin.</p> <p>Readers who like a bit of horror and gore along with a good mystery will enjoy this book. While the wording is sometimes overly descriptive and some terms are confusing, high school-level readers should enjoy it.</p> <p>Cassandra Haggard Tempe, AZ</p>

<p><i>How I Found the Strong</i> by Margaret McMullen Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, 136 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-618-35008-X</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Shanks Russell watches in frustration as his father, Jack, and older brother, Henry, depart their tiny Mississippi farm for the battlefields of the Civil War, leaving him behind with his mother, grandparents, and their slave, Buck. Although certain that they march off to victory, Shanks isn't as certain about the cause for which they are fighting. As scant news of the war's progress trickles in, Shanks questions the justice of slavery and the South's justification for it. Circumstances become desperate for the Russells; Grandpa abandons them, and Grandma passes away. His mother gives birth to a baby girl, while their food supply dwindles away. Fortunately, Buck foregoes an opportunity to escape northward, which would have doomed the remaining Russells to starvation.</p> <p>Jack Russell returns from the war as hostility toward Negroes (now freed by the Emancipation Proclamation) escalates, and lynch mobs roam the countryside. Shanks risks his life to defend Buck from a lynch mob, inspiring his father to help Buck, too.</p> <p><i>How I Found the Strong</i> is a stomach-churning look at life during the Civil War through the eyes of a boy journeying toward manhood. It is a compelling story about a trying time in American history.</p> <p>Ann Opseth Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Jingle Boy</i> by Kieran Scott Delacorte Press, 2003, 230 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Fiction/Christmas ISBN: 0-385-73223-2</p> <p>Paul and his family adore Christmas, with their various decorations and traditions redefining "ostentatious." This year, 17-year-old Paul's cheer sours after purchasing an expensive necklace for his girlfriend, then seeing her kissing the mall Santa in the parking lot and being summarily dumped.</p> <p>Worse, his father is injured while decorating, setting their house ablaze, and his mother loses her job. In anger, Paul joins the "Anti-Christmas Underground," all students with past negative holidays.</p> <p>The group initially engages in minor vandalism, but after escalating to planning serious criminal activities, Paul realizes his anger is from personal, not seasonal, problems. He exits the group with renewed spirits and decorates their refurbished house before his father's hospital homecoming.</p> <p>Narrated by Paul, this story begins sharply but numerous plot contrivances (Santa advises Paul, he discovers his mother's boss and mall Santa stealing, causing his rival's comeuppance and mother's promotion, etc.) turn this into a frothy read. The absence of season commercialism issues and religious diversity (possible discussion topics) further lighten the story, but those seeking an amusing Christmas novel with only happy endings will enjoy this fast, easy read.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>
<p><i>A Killing in Plymouth Colony</i> by Carol Otis Hurst and Rebecca Otis Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 148 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Mystery/Puritanism ISBN: 0-618-27597-5</p> <p>Based on an actual murder case in Plymouth Colony in 1630, this novel explores the mystery surrounding the crime through the eyes of 11-year-old John Bradford, the son of Governor William Bradford.</p> <p>As historical fiction, the book provides an interesting view of Puritan culture. The novel explores the community's expectations of its children, gender roles, approaches to punishment, and systems of governance. And despite the historical environment, our protagonist struggles with issues contemporary adolescents should find familiar. He wants to prove himself in the eyes of the community, and he especially craves the attention and approval of his distant father. As a murder mystery, <i>A Killing in Plymouth Colony</i> contrasts the way the children and the adults identify suspects and work toward a predictable resolution.</p> <p>The novel is best suited to middle school students. It would be a good text to pair with historical studies of the Puritans and the early colonial period, perhaps even a good read-aloud choice for students exploring that time period.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Kings are Already Here</i> by Garret Freymann-Weyr Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003, 149 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Friendship/Determination ISBN: 0618263632</p> <p>Phebe, a ballet dancer, and Nikolai, a chess player, are searching for their futures. Each is talented and at the defining moment of their lives. Phebe must make a decision about dancing when she seems to have lost the passion. Nikolai is looking for Stass, a master chess player, to help him move beyond his current skill level. Both meet through Phebe's father, a diplomat in Switzerland. Phebe spends the summer to reflect on her dancing, and Nikolai has been taken in because his father has disappeared.</p> <p>Nikolai is not interested in becoming world champion, but he wants to play chess beautifully. Phebe has only been taught to crave the spotlight, not to dance for the sake of dancing well, and thus the differences make it difficult for them to become friends.</p> <p>The book moves back and forth between the two characters' stories, but it is easy to follow. As each character is drawn into the other's problem, they find friendship and a way to move on with their lives, neither finding what they originally thought they required.</p> <p>Freida Golden Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> by Debra Seely</p> <p>Holiday House, 2004, 228 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-8234-1814-6</p> <p>A sequel to <i>Grasslands</i>, <i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> explores gender issues against the backdrop of the Kansas prairie in the years following the Civil War. The novel is told from two points of view: Tom, a young man transplanted to the harsh Kansas environment from a more privileged Virginia upbringing; and Evie, the daughter of the prosperous rancher for whom Tom is employed. Through the eyes of these young people we trace the development of their emerging relationship, but we also explore their resistance to the accepted gender roles of the day. While her family expects her to conform to traditional norms, Evie wants to work the ranch. And his relationship with Evie helps Tom learn to adapt his own expectations regarding gender.</p> <p><i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> is a nice historical novel, exploring the need for personal growth in response to the societal change.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Legacy of Gloria Russell</i> by Sheri L. Gilbert</p> <p>Random House, 2004, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Adventure ISBN: 0375828230</p> <p>Set in the sleepy town of Kelseyville, Missouri, and the majestic Ozark Mountains, <i>The Legacy of Gloria Russell</i> tells of Billy James, 12, as he struggles with the sudden death of his best friend, Gloria. Questions surrounding Gloria's death plague Billy, who begins to uncover mysteries surrounding his own family. So, Billy sets off on a quest where his friendships are challenged, his family begins to break apart, and he faces the socially discarded and puzzling Josef Satan. In the end, Billy's daring voyage takes him on a journey of self discovery through the vast green wilderness of the Ozarks as he unearths, not only the answers to Gloria's death, but also the secrets Kelseyville has been keeping for decades.</p> <p>Readers will enjoy this fast-paced, heartwarming novel. By weaving the beauty and awe of nature with the meaning of friendship and family, Gilbert shows how powerful one voice can be when others are in need. Billy's search for truth brings him closer to understanding the death of someone he loved, while teaching him the importance of thinking for himself and carving his own path in life.</p> <p>Jason Corbett Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Letting Go of Bobby James, Or How I Found My Self of Steam</i></p> <p>Self-discovery</p> <p>by Valerie Hobbs</p> <p>Frances Foster Books, 2004, 144 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>ISBN: 0374343845</p> <p>This is a great read! If you are not from Texas, the accent might hold you back from getting into the book. However, it doesn't take you very long before you settle in to the accent.</p> <p>The opening pages are a letter written by Jody, the main character in the book. Her full name is Sally Jo Walker, a 16-year-old newlywed who has been slapped one too many times by her husband, Bobby James Walker. The last name Walker is great symbolism for the couple. He impatiently leaves her while she is in a gas station/convenience store bathroom, but she doesn't wait around for him and takes the next bus wherever it is going.</p> <p>The last stop is Jackson Beach, Florida, where Jody finds her self of steam. She sleeps in the movie house at night and works at Theina's Cafe by day. Eventually she makes friends with the mentally challenged character Dooley and Effaline, a 15-year-old pregnant runaway. This is a coming of age sort of book that captivated me.</p> <p>Sherri Stradling Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>North of Everything</i> by Craig Crist-Evans</p> <p>Dealing with Terminal Illness/ Cycle of Rebirth</p> <p>Candlewick Press, 2004, 80 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>ISBN: 0-7636-2098-X</p> <p>Poet Crist-Evans uses sparse, but evocative, language to create an emotional response in this verse-novel about rebirth and hope. The prologue introduces this theme by describing the cycle of the seasons "north of everything" where fall turns to winter and then spring. This seasonal change is a symbol of the cycle of death, birth, and rebirth which the young narrator encounters during several years in his life when his family moves from Miami, Florida, to a farm along the banks of the Winooski in Vermont. They start over and are happy working the land and then expecting a new baby, until the father is diagnosed with cancer.</p> <p>Each person in the family deals with the reality of death in different ways, but in the end they find the courage to go on, realizing that "Dad's spirit lives/in every blade of grass,/in every tree, in all the ways/we learn to keep on breathing."</p> <p>This touching verse-novel will remind readers of several other recently published books which use poetry to tell a story, such as <i>Almost Forever</i> by Maria Testa and <i>Out of the Dust</i> and <i>Aleutian Sparrow</i> by Karen Hesse.</p> <p>Jeanne M. McClinn Asheville, NC</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><i>Nightmare</i> by Joan Lowery Nixon Delacourte Press, 2003, 166 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 0-385-73026-8</p> <p>With <i>Nightmare</i>, Joan Lowery Nixon delivers another fast-paced mystery. Troubled by a recurring nightmare that hints at murder, Emily Wood is a classic underachiever in a family that emphasizes success. To address her lack of motivation, her parents send Emily to Camp Excel, a summer camp developed by a famous educator to motivate adolescents to achieve to their potential.</p> <p>At Camp Excel, Emily learns that her nightmares are the result of an all-too-real event she witnessed as a child, and someone at Camp Excel was involved. Emily realizes she is in danger, but she is not sure who she can trust. Suspense mounts when another student at Camp Excel is attacked, and Emily is convinced she was the intended victim.</p> <p><i>Nightmare</i> is an enjoyable mystery, best suited to middle school students and struggling readers.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Ostrich Eye</i> by Beth Cooley Delacorte Press, 2004, 180 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Trust ISBN: 0-385-90132-1 (GLB)</p> <p>In the ninth grade, Ginger is almost six feet tall. She inherited her height from her father, whom she doesn't remember at all because he left for good when she was three.</p> <p>Ginger lives with her mother, Renee, her stepfather, Tony, and her 7-year-old half-sister Vivian who is the apple of Renee and Tony's eyes. <i>Ostrich Eye</i> tells the story of this blended family through the perspective of a responsible teen-ager searching for her own identity in her family and in her young adulthood when the tall blonde stranger begins to show up around town. Ginger begins to wonder if the man is following her and if he might possibly be the father she has not seen for so many years. Poor communication between Ginger and her mother results in disaster; the novel shows danger does not always come with a clear warning.</p> <p>This poignant novel tells a gripping story of adolescence and misplaced trust. Intended for readers aged 12 and up, it is realistic and unsettling and will keep its readers thinking well after they have put down the book.</p> <p>Susan Malarkey Mesa, AZ</p>
<p><i>Our Time on the River</i> by Don Brown Houghton Mifflin, 2003, 135 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Coming of Age/Adventure ISBN: 0-618-31116-5</p> <p>College freshman David returns home during December 1968 with shocking news: he's quit school, enlisted in the army, and wants to fight in Vietnam. This information is poorly received by his parents, and heightens David's estrangement with Steve, his 14-year-old brother. At their father's suggestion, the brothers reluctantly embark on a summer canoe trip before David ships out in September. As hoped, their shared trip experiences create a brotherly bond.</p> <p>Steve's subsequent fear for David translates into poor school performance, and after David's unit is hit, David returns with a possible hearing loss and uncertain future. Reminiscing about their trip and planning another provides hope for both boys.</p> <p>Steve narrates this slice-of-life story through short, fast-paced chapters. Still, one voice lessens character development, notably David's, as reasons for his initial disdain of Steve and enlistment are vague and contradictory. Moreover, as the canoe trip is the story's focus, Vietnam era details are sketchy, creating a setting largely devoid of this period's historical and emotional contexts.</p> <p>Middle-level boys should easily identify with these brothers who mirror themselves and their peers. Vietnam era explanations will enhance understanding of the story's setting and events.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>	<p><i>Peak Survival</i> by Pam Withers Walrus Books, 2004, 155 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Adventure ISBN: 1-55285-530-9</p> <p>Visiting British Columbia during spring break, 15-year-old Peter Montpetit, a type-A personality, is stoked to be with friends Jake Evans and Moses Wilson as they embark on a ski/snowboard adventure. Eagle Heli-Ski Tours will helicopter them to a remote peak, where they will test their skills hoping to become Junior Guides. Before they begin skiing, the boys spot a rival company's helicopter and watch in horror as its rotors clip a cliff, and the aircraft makes a spiral slide down the mountain. Zooming to help rescue the passengers, they uncover two bodies and one survivor, Fiona, a teen girl from Britain, who happens to be a champion snowboarder. From this initial disaster, the four teens survive an avalanche, sit out a blizzard for two nights in a snow cave, and must escape from a plunge into an ice crevasse. Although this short book accentuates a number of death-defying scenes, the story is balanced when the teens are forced to cooperate and use their talents to survive the freezing wilderness. Teens, especially reluctant readers, will enjoy this fast-paced action novel marked by cliffhanging chapters and realistic snowboarding and skiing action.</p> <p>Rollie Welch Cleveland, OH</p>

<p><i>The Presence: A Ghost Story</i> by Eye Bunning Clarion Books, 2003, 195 pp., \$15.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mystery ISBN: 0-618-26919-3</p> <p>Catherine flies to California to spend Christmas with her grandmother, while her parents are in Europe. Her grandmother takes her to church, where the grandmother volunteers. The ancient church, with stained glass windows, feels cold, although the day is warm. As Catherine explores the gallery, someone calls her name.</p> <p>After they leave the church, a former church member, Lottie Lovelace, tells Catherine to run away from the church. When Catherine visits Miss Lovelace's home, there is a picture that looks like Catherine in the entryway. Later, another member mistakes Catherine for her missing daughter. Intrigued by the coincidences, Catherine is determined to find out the mystery of the church.</p> <p>Before you book talk <i>The Presence</i>, purchase several copies. Middle school students will love this ghost story.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Purple Emperor</i> by Herbie Brennan Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2004, 429 pp., \$17.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy/Adventure ISBN: 1582348804</p> <p>After jumping into Brennan's series without his first installment entitled <i>Faerie Wars</i>, I was pleasantly surprised at this piece of young adult fiction. The story is fast paced yet still offers a mature and scientific view of Brennan's created fairy world. I would recommend reading the first book before diving into this one, because Brennan does not spend a lot of time filling his readers in on what happened in the last novel.</p> <p>Brennan's readers are brought back to the Realm of the Faerie right before Prince Pygrus is to take the place as Emperor. (Pygrus' father had been murdered at the end of the previous novel.) The evil faerie of the night, Lord Hairstreak, returns to cause trouble by resurrecting the old emperor's body from the dead. The Emperor returns to the palace with a document demanding his other son, Comma, to be crowned the new king and for Pygrus and his sister, Blue, to be banished from the palace and surrounding kingdom. The novel has a nice rhythm of switching between the many characters, from Henry, the young earth boy who has fallen in love with Blue, to Brimstone, an old associate of Hairstreak and faerie of the night. The many diverse characters take the reader on a fabulous journey where greed seems to be the downfall of the evil characters. Readers should be mature enough to handle issues such as death and gruesome violence.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nicole Schrecke Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Summer Boys</i> by Hailey Abbott Scholastic, 2004, 214 pp., \$8.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romance ISBN: 0-439-54020-8</p> <p>Just outside of Maine Pebble Beach became a ritual summer getaway for the Tuttle family. Extended family would come and go, but the summer truly belonged to the girls: Jamie, Ella, Keisi, and Beth were all cousins around the same age and spent most of their year looking forward to those magical seven weeks at Pebble Beach. The four cousins endure a roller coaster of emotions during their stay. Jamie suffers a broken heart</p> <p><i>Summer Boys</i> chronicles the classic coming of age tale of teenage romance that involves love, jealousy, betrayal, envy, and heartache. It demonstrates how relationships during the summer can be so fleeting and how at times even the most sensitive teen can emerge resiliently from disappointment.</p> <p>By summer's end each girl goes home a little wiser, confident, and more self aware than before. The girls each in their own way experience their first boy, first love, and first time. True romantics at heart will absolutely love this novel. It does however contain adult content and is recommended for an older reading audience.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jessica Segura Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story</i> by Pegi Deitz Shea Clarion Books, 2003, 236 pp., \$15.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Immigration ISBN: 0-618-24748-3</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Mai and her grandma were able to escape Laos following the massacre of her parents, but the Thai refugee camp where they have lived for the past 10 years has hardly been a refuge. They have endured the pangs of hunger brought on by too little food for the tens of thousands of people living there, the brutality of the soldiers who watch their every move, as well as separation from their only remaining relatives.</p> <p>But now, they are finally able to join Mai's uncle and his family in America. The adjustment to life in a foreign country, its new language, strange culture, food, and religious practices, however, threaten to break the spirit of Grandma Yang, while causing hope, excitement, and confusion for young Mai.</p> <p>Their story is preserved on the fabric of pà'ndau, the ancient Hmong art of embroidery skillfully stitched by Grandma and lovingly passed on to Mai. It serves as the common thread that sustains their memories of the past and Mai's hopes for the future.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ingrid Seitz, Manhattan, KS</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><u>Truck Dogs: A Novel in Four Bites</u> by Graeme Base Adventure/Dogs//Science Fiction Amulet Books, 2004, 145 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8109-5031-6</p> <p>A lot of ingenuity went into this book for middle readers of a world peopled by amalgams between machinery and animals. It is the hero's story about mongrel town dogs helping save the town from another town's "bad dogs." The writer is Australian; any older reader may notice almost exact duplications from the film, "The Road Warrior." In the film, a "feral child" throws a boomerang; here, our dog hero throws a "spanner" (wrench).</p> <p>Middle readers, especially those interested in art, might really enjoy this tale, with its old man with wisdom, its young hero, and color plates that show how the dogs and the vehicles are put together. The idea itself is quite original. Instead of chapters, the book has "bites," and some of the dogs are a Jack Russell, Great Dane, Irish Setter, and a Mastiff, all joined in some way to bulldozers, ore trucks, a Ford 50 pickup, a Land Rover, and a tractor, among many.</p> <p>The story takes place in the future; otherwise, this is a Mad Max/Kung Fu meets Lassie. It is worth a glance or two, and the cover is great.</p> <p>John Jacob Oak Park, IL</p>	<p><u>TTYL</u> by Lauren Myracle Amulet Books, 2004, 209 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>TTYL (Instant Messaging for "talk to you later") follows the relationships of three 10th-graders—Angela (<i>SnowAngel</i>), Maddie (<i>mad maddie</i>), and Zoe (zoegirl). They've been best friends since seventh grade and are determined to weather the storms of their sophomore year together, including potential boyfriends, driver's license tests, a too-friendly English teacher, and social cliques.</p> <p>Their story is told through Instant Messages between the three girls (including emoticons, Net lingo, and even stage directions like *shoots daggers with eyes*), so dialogue essentially carries the action of the story. Fortunately, Myracle pulls off three distinct characters and voices (Angela, who always has a crush; Maddie, who wants so badly to be accepted by the in-crowd; and Zoe, the sheltered good girl who's tired of being good). Conflicts happen within and without the circle, but mutual respect and loyalty win out.</p> <p>TTYL will appeal to teenage girls who can relate to both the format and the struggles experienced by Myracle's friends. Several expletives and references to sex and anatomy, though appropriate in the context, may be a point of consideration for some libraries.</p> <p>Melissa Moore Jackson, TN</p>
<p><u>The Unseen</u> by Zilpha Keatley Snyder Delacorte Press, 2004, 199 pps. \$15.95</p> <p>One day while wondering through the forest—which she is forbidden from—Alexandra "Xandra" Hobson hears gunfire, soon noticing a beautiful white bird has been shot. Before the hunters can grab it, Xandra takes the bird and runs through the forest. Though she has no idea what kind of bird it may be, Xandra takes it to her home to nurse it to health, as she has secretly done so before in the basement with other animals. The next day, however, she finds the bird is missing leaving a feather, which later becomes a "key" to the "unseen" world.</p> <p>To learn more about this "key," Xandra must talk to the "weird" girl, Belinda, whose grandfather has knowledge of such supernatural things. Xandra becomes hesitant in talking to Belinda, but the two become friends and learn much about each other, and Xandra experiences the "unseen" world, as well. Though Snyder writes few scenes in which Xandra experiences the "unseen," the story follows Xandra's experience in becoming humbler, closer to her siblings, and experiencing a life she isn't used to—Belinda's life and the "unseen."</p> <p>Felipe Baez Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><u>Wake Up Our Souls</u> by Tonya Bolden Historical Nonfiction/Black American Artists Harry N. Abrams/Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2004, 128 pp., \$24.95</p> <p>More than 30 black American artists whose works span from the late 18th century to the present are profiled in this colorful and informative compilation, published in association with the Smithsonian Art Museum.</p> <p>The approximately 45 reproduced works reflect a wide range of mediums (e.g. photography, painting), styles (realism to abstraction), and subjects (people, nature, etc.), and are accompanied by extended, descriptive captions.</p> <p>The artists' artworks are distributed among three chapters, with each containing information about the profiled artists' lives and works along with the notable historical events of their eras, effectively highlighting black Americans' priceless contributions to the visual arts.</p> <p>Although the text is clearly geared toward middle-level students, older readers would also find it appealing, albeit with a longer, more comprehensive narrative. Also featured are a glossary, notes, bibliography, and reading list, each extensive and current. This interesting, focused compilation is a significant tribute to black artists and would be valuable to art, English, and social studies classes, perhaps inviting shared units of study.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>

<p><i>What a Song Can Do: 12 Riffs on the Power of Music</i> by Jennifer Armstrong Knopf, 2004, 208 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-375-84299-5</p> <p>Music</p> <p>“Theme” is a term used in literature and music; but in Jennifer Armstrong’s compilation of short stories, she conflates the two and successfully shows the universalities of music. It was most refreshing to find these stories did not all portray music as the great healer of all the world’s pains. In Ann Manheimer’s “Riffs,” she tells the story of a boy named Lee who is torn by the dilemma of playing with his band, or caring for his hospitalized mother. The “riff” is not entirely internal, however; Lee’s father is adamant about him staying home.</p> <p>Naturally, there are stories about the very real, binding quality of music. In Dian Curtis Regan’s “Tangled Notes in a Watermelon,” Cora is afflicted with <i>synesthesia</i>, a condition that causes Cora and her late grandmother to see colors and objects while they hear music. This story, about mourning and also a crush, is served on a table made of surrealism.</p> <p>As with any collection, some entries are simply less palpable than others. Some are a bit flattened by instances of bland narrative voices, trite dialogue, and underhanded preachiness. With that being said, the biggest success in this book is the deliberate circumspection that Armstrong took in the compilation.</p> <p>Edward A. Wade Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Words West: Voices of Young Pioneers</i> by Ginger Wadsworth Clarion Books, 2003, 191 pp., \$18.00</p> <p>ISBN: 0-618-23475-6</p> <p>Non-fiction/Pioneer Life</p> <p><i>Words West</i> is a significant achievement in non-fiction for young adults. Wadsworth organizes her treatment of 19th century westward migration according to the concerns and hardships faced by overland pioneers, devoting chapters to issues like “chores and chow” and “life, death, and accidents.”</p> <p>Woven through her discussion of each topic is a colorful set of excerpts from the diaries, letters, and memoirs of young people making the journey. These quotations breathe life into the narrative and make it much more appealing to adolescent readers. Also, the book benefits from the generous inclusion of historical photographs.</p> <p>Wadsworth covers the full range of experience associated with this aspect of American history. Readers come away with a clear sense of the beauty, tragedy, fear, and work endured by those traveling the major westward trails.</p> <p>Ideally suited for interdisciplinary studies, <i>Words West</i> should appeal to students interested in history or the American West.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Young Man and the Sea</i> by Rodman Philbrick Blue Sky Press (imprint of Scholastic), 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-439-36829-4</p> <p>Fishing/Survival</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Samuel “Skiff” Beaman Jr. is a determined young man trying to survive after his mother’s recent death. Skiff is forced to become an adult as he desperately tries to get his father to get back into the family fishing business.</p> <p>Skiff raises the Mary Rose after it sunk with the help of a kindly old man, Mr. Woodwell. Amos Woodwell instructs Skiff as how to raise the boat and once done, proceeds to do the necessary repairs but does not have the money to repair the diesel motor. Skiff decides to earn money trapping lobsters for the repairs on Mary Rose.</p> <p>One day he sees an amateur fisherman who caught a large tuna. Samuel makes the decision to solve his financial problems by going after tuna. Twenty-five miles out to sea, he runs into thick fog and realizes he has forgotten a fog horn. He makes the best of his situation by putting out baits for the tuna. He is ready to head home after his realizes his foolish mistakes of not taking enough bait and not being as prepared as he should have been.</p> <p>Jo Ann Yazzie Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p>Lori Goodson 409 Chery Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>

African American Mothers & Daughters:

Socialization, Distance, & Conflict

The black women's literary tradition began in a conscious effort to create a space for black women's writing and to illustrate a distinction between black women's reality and the realities of others (Christian 348–359). The literature within the tradition is influenced by how black women perceive themselves and the world around them. As a result, identity is an important part of African-American women's literature (Hooper 74–81). Race, class, gender, and sexuality are all components of one's identity and are critical in the formation of one's lived experiences (Crenshaw 357–383). Family, from its structure to the function of specific members within the unit, also has a significant influence on one's identity development. Relationships with family members help young people develop a sense of self-awareness, pride, and individuality. One of the most significant familial relationships in black women's literature is the one that exists between mothers and daughters.

Collins argues for the importance of including the lived experiences of black women when thinking critically about motherhood (45–65). Black feminist theory offers a useful framework for thinking deeply about the black mother-daughter relationship. The theory calls for a careful look at how race, class, and gender, as interlocking oppressions, inextricably impact the mother-daughter relationship. Here, I use black feminist theory as a tool to look at the mother-daughter relationships in Angela Johnson's *Toning the Sweep* and *Heaven*, Rita Williams-Garcia's *Blue Tights* and *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, and Jacqueline Woodson's *The Dear One* and *I Hadn't Meant to Tell*

Synopses of Novels

Johnson, Angela. *Toning the Sweep*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.

Emily, the protagonist, and her mother visit Emily's grandmother, Ola, in the California desert. They are preparing to take Ola home to Ohio with them because she is dying of cancer. Emily learns a great deal about her grandmother, her grandfather, her mother, and herself while videotaping her grandmother's friends.

Johnson, Angela. *Heaven*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1998.

Marley discovers her biological father's twin brother and his wife adopted her when she was much younger. She struggles with notions of family and identity, as she attempts to learn about a mother she does not remember.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Blue Tights*. New York: Puffin, 1988.

Joyce Collins, an aspiring dancer, wants to feel love and a sense of belonging. At school she doesn't fit in with her middle-class schoolmates, and she believes her ballet teacher is discriminating against her. At home she struggles to cope with her fragile relationship with her mother.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Like Sisters on the Homefront*. New York: Lodestar, 1995.

When Gayle becomes pregnant with her second child, her mother forces her to do two

things that change the direction of her life: 1) Gayle has an abortion and 2) she goes to Georgia to live with relatives. In Georgia, she learns the rich history of her family and improves her self-value.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *The Dear One*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1991.

Afeni becomes unhappy when Catherine, her mother, decides to take in Rebecca, a college friend's pregnant daughter. In time, however, the two girls put aside their differences in an effort to forge a promising friendship.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1994.

Thirteen-year-old Marie recalls her friendship with Lena, and how they bonded as a result of being motherless.

You This (See Sidebar for Summary). Each of these novels offers rich, poignant depictions of black mother-daughter bonds. Three themes that merit discussion shape the mother-daughter connections in these six award-winning novels: socialization¹, distance, and conflict.

Socialization

Societal messages that devalue and debase people of color and the poor influence the identity formation of black girls. As a result, Wade-Gayles asserts that black mothers “socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident” (12). This can be difficult because, while black mothers want to teach their daughters these concepts, they must also prepare their daughters to live in a society that devalues them. This is seen clearly in an exchange in between Catherine and Afeni (*The Dear One*). Afeni says, “There’s always going to be someone deciding what I can and can’t do. If it’s not because I’m a kid, it’ll be because I’m a woman. If it’s not because I’m a woman, it’ll be because I’m black” (Woodson, 31). Catherine replies, with “something like fear” in her

1. I realize socialization is an overlapping theme, as distance and conflict impact socialization.

facial expression, “Don’t ever feel like you don’t have power [. . .]” (Woodson, 31). Catherine’s response expresses the contradictory teachings of black mothers. Though Catherine wants to prepare Afeni to live in a world that does not value her, she also wants to empower her.

Afeni’s mother also strives to teach her about African American pride amongst middle-class black professionals. Her mother is the vice president of a public relations firm, and her mother’s friends, Marion and Bernadette, are an attorney and teacher, respectively. Catherine wants Afeni to see that black professionals are important and valuable to the black community. She also suggests Afeni learn the significance of middle-class black people working together to help blacks who are less fortunate. Catherine makes this evident to Afeni when she joins with Marion to help a college friend’s pregnant daughter.

In a similar vein, Diane (*I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*) teaches Marie to respect all people regardless of socioeconomic levels. Though her father repeatedly refers to poor whites as trash, her mother insists that they be referred to as people. For Diane, it is important that Marie learns that “[w]e [are] all just people here” (Woodson, 59) and that she should acknowledge that poor people, regardless of race, are disenfranchised, which is one of the hallmarks of black feminism (King, 294–317).

In Joseph’s 1991 study, she expresses a particular interest in how adolescent mothers socialize their daughters:

As the children of the adolescent mothers grow older, what messages can the mothers give their daughters about marriage; about men; about getting ahead in the world and getting an education? These are the major lessons that traditional Black mothers give to their daughters, and they are important ones (101).

Because of bitter and hostile experiences with men, Aunt Em and Minnie (*Blue Tights*) attempt to advise, and, in some cases, warn, Joyce about men (Bethel 176–188). At sixteen, Aunt Em had become pregnant and had given herself a coat hanger abortion when she realized that the baby’s father had deserted her. Also a deserted teen mother, Minnie had Joyce just turning sixteen; as a result, Minnie becomes frightened that “history will repeat itself” when she learns J’had is interested in Joyce. Socialization becomes an important part of the mother-daughter

relationship, as mothers hope to isolate their daughters “. . . from the dangers of the larger world until they are old enough and strong enough to function as autonomous women” (Troester, 163). Yet, for some mothers, adequate time for socializing daughters is often hard-won, if won at all.

Distance

In spite of attempts at mother-daughter closeness in some of these novels, some mothers are still distant. The distance between mothers and daughters can be labeled as physical and/or emotional distance. Physical distance refers to the actual physical separation of mothers from their daughters for various reasons, most of which include some type of work. Emotional distance involves the mothers' inability or unwillingness to express affection toward their daughters. Both types of distance are detrimental to the mother-daughter relationship and make it difficult for mothers to help their daughters negotiate identity formation.

Wade-Gayles suggests that black women have an approach to mothering that is influenced by their socioeconomic standing in society (8–12). For this reason, a number of the mothers in the novels discussed here work full-time jobs, creating distance, whether physical or emotional, between themselves and their daughters. The girls repeatedly refer to the amount of work their mothers do or to their mothers' physical distance because of work. Several times throughout *Blue Tights*, Joyce and Minnie's relationship is described as being similar to a relationship between sisters, partly because of their closeness in ages, but there are also times when Minnie distances herself from Joyce because she chooses to focus on her career. As a teenager, Minnie leaves Joyce with Aunt Em while she dances professionally. By the time Minnie decides to stop dancing, Minnie tells Joyce she is “too big for all of that ‘come-to-Mommy’ nonsense” (Williams-Garcia, 102). Later, Minnie's decision to pursue a degree in nursing and marry a man with several children takes her further away from Joyce. Working a part-time job and attending school, the mother-daughter gap widens and physical distance continues to be a problem even after Minnie becomes a nurse.

Similarly, Afeni's mother works “sixty to seventy hours a week” (86). Initially, Afeni does not realize how problematic this is because she considers herself to be a “true-blue loner” (86). Afeni thinks, “I liked being by myself and thinking thoughts no one else knew about, not even Mama” (86). This assessment changes later, however, when Afeni sees her relationship with her mother through Rebecca's eyes and accuses Catherine of putting her own daughter second: “You want a career and stuff. You don't have time for a daughter,” (83). It is important to note, however, that Afeni feels comfortable having such a difficult conversation with her mother, which suggests that the two share a certain amount of closeness despite some physical and emotional distance.

Conversely, Gayle (*Like Sisters on the Homefront*) does not enjoy the comfort of communicating with her mother. In fact, it is clear that Gayle does not know her mother well long before Auntie says, “I get the feeling you don't know your mother” (117). Gayle's mother, Ruth Bell, is the sole provider for her family; as a result, she spends a significant amount of her time working outside the home. This is problematic for Gayle as it makes it easier for her to participate in adult practices such as sexual intercourse. Because Ruth Bell cannot be home to supervise her daughter, she is unaware that Gayle's affair with a married man is initiated in her home and ends with Gayle's first pregnancy.

When Gayle goes into labor, she is refused anesthesia because she has no advocate to protest on her behalf since, as Gayle explains to Cookie, “Mama couldn't take off from work early and I didn't have no doctor [. . .]” (45). When Ruth Bell does request a day off, not only is she penalized via lost wages, but her dignity is compromised, also. Gayle listens as Ruth Bell uses her “best ‘work voice’” while talking to her employer and surmises, “now Mama was angry because she had to sound like a child begging permission to take care of business” (2).

Ruth Bell's inability to be physically close to Gayle weighs heavily on how Gayle feels emotionally about her mother. When Aunt Virginia tells Gayle about her mother's past, particularly her relationship with her father, Williams-Garcia writes, “[Gayle] didn't want to understand Mama, because understanding would loosen the grip on her heart” (120). Ruth Bell seems to

be partly responsible for Gayle's tough exterior. After Ruth Bell forces Gayle to get an abortion, "[She] wouldn't give Gayle room to vent her feelings about her ordeal [. . .]" (9) Refusing to allow anything to make her cry, not even the pain from the abortion, Gayle tells Cookie, "Me cry so Mama could start hollering 'What you crying for?' Please" (45).

Collins asserts, "For far too many Black mothers, the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection often must wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied" (55). Similarly, King maintains, "[W]hen black women become the primary or sole earners for households, researchers and public analysts interpret this self-sufficiency as pathology, as deviance, as a threat to black family life" (298). Black women view their labor quite differently, however. For them, work outside the home is an expression of love for their families, particularly their children, not negligence.

When Joyce feels rejected by J'had, Minnie cannot understand why Joyce would jeopardize her future in exchange for physical intimacy with a man. Nevertheless, Joyce explains her motive as a desire to be loved. Upon hearing this, Minnie becomes even more perplexed, as she insists that she gives Joyce love: "Don't I feed you? Put a roof over your head? Scrimp and put up with trash on the job so you can go to any college you want? That's all for you" (Williams-Garcia, 113).

Afeni is also unaware that she and her mother interpret love and affection differently. Several times throughout *The Dear One*, Afeni feels her mother does not care about her, yet she never considers that her mother expresses her love via opportunities she makes available to Afeni. Catherine tells her, "Don't you ever let me hear you say I don't love you, because if I'm not showing it with words, I'm showing it with actions! 'I love you' is in every meal you eat, every piece of clothing you wear, and every clean sheet you sleep on!" (84). This distance, emotional and physical, often confuses the girls and presents a challenge to mothers who attempt to socialize them and help shape their identities.

Conflict

Emotional and physical distance between mothers and daughters often lead to conflict. Mothers and

daughters in the novels analyzed here express differences in opinion via verbal disagreements, and in at least one mother-daughter duo, physical altercations. For example, tension exists between Gayle and Ruth Bell for several reasons (*Like Sisters on the Homefront*). Early in the novel, Gayle admits that Ruth Bell "be pissing her off" partly because of Ruth Bell's treatment of her and also because she believes her brother is her mother's "favorite" because he looks like his father.

However, a large part of the antagonism between Gayle and her mother is the result of Ruth Bell's discovery of Gayle's second pregnancy. Immediately, Ruth Bell exerts control over Gayle, insisting that she get an abortion and move "down Souf" with extended family. On the way to the clinic, Ruth Bell argues, "As long as you fourteen and in *my* house, you mines [. . .] . Only one woman in my house. I say what goes on in my four walls [. . .]" [italics in original] (4). Mother and daughter seem to be in a tug-of-war even when it appears that Ruth Bell is in control. In her final effort to prove Ruth Bell wrong, Gayle verbally attempts to exercise her right to keep the baby, maintaining, "That 'doption sounds good" even as she realizes "it was hype. Ain't nobody breaking they necks to adopt black babies" (6). Gayle, fully aware that she must submit to Ruth Bell's wishes, gets the abortion, though she is forced to request local anesthesia because "[t]hey didn't have extra money for sleep" (7). Powerless, Gayle also goes on the life-changing trip to Georgia to live with her uncle and his family.

Fear fuels the conflict between Joyce and Minnie. One of the first causes of Minnie's fear occurs when Joyce tells Minnie that her stepfather is looking at her inappropriately. Minnie's first reaction is to slap Joyce. However, when Minnie observes that her husband's "eyes are follow[ing] the twelve-year-old girl in and out of the living room," she leaves him (Williams-Garcia, *Blue Tights*, 21). The tension and fear further increases when Joyce, feeling neglected by her aunt and her mother, begins to reach out to J'had. Angry and confused because she does not know how to prevent Joyce from repeating her mistakes, Minnie tells Joyce she does not love her. Joyce believes this, and continues to look for love elsewhere until she realizes it is actually inside her.

Conclusion

Contemporary novels such as the ones discussed here continue to shine light on the complex role of motherhood. Analyzing the mothering role, in general, and the mother-daughter relationship in particular, provides insight into how race and class largely impact mothering. Black feminist theory is especially useful for considering some of the nuances of mother-daughter relationships influenced by race, class and gender. As these novels indicate, black mothers, even in the midst of conflict, and in spite of physical and emotional distance, are determined to socialize their daughters, impacting their overall development into womanhood.

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Vampires, Changelings, and Radical Mutant Teens:

What the Demons, Freaks, and Other Abominations of Young Adult Literature Can Teach Us About Youth

“Conversations between members of different species are difficult at best.”
—from *Owl in Love* (191)

Finally understand that before introducing young adult students to new realizations of who they might be, it is important to help them understand the roles in which they have been cast by culture and society—in other words, who others expect them to be. Through a blend of modern psychological science, the Enlightenment ideal of rationality that threads throughout the history of modern education, and the traditional Protestant notion of humans as fundamentally flawed and fallen, the haunting specter of adolescents as problematic, emotionally unstable, and innately sinful has permeated societal judgments of who they are. Pathologized as deviant, ascribed with endless maladies that capitalize on societal anxieties and intolerances, and diagnosed as irrational, dependent, and non-conforming, young adults are viewed as dangerous and unpredictable aberrations that must be cured of their reckless natures. In a word, they are transgressors, who blatantly resist their assignment to “normal” cultural boxes. Such judgments of the young are often imported onto their reading habits as well as their personal characters.

Young people, just like adults, read for many different reasons. They seek to know themselves better, know their world better, and know what it

means to be a “better” person. They do not, however, look for these understandings in didactic or necessarily “reasoned” ways. In fact, it might even be argued that, because they are in the midst of an evolving intellectual and emotional impression of the world, adolescents choose not to draw absolute lines between the conflicts that plague them and the conflicts that torment the characters they read about even if those conflicts are not necessarily their own and the characters exist in another realm.

It is no accident that a novel like *Weetzie Bat* continues to be immensely popular. The world teens are experiencing is a curious place where strange and unexpected events happen; no reality is privileged because, clearly, no reality can be claimed as fixed and stable. Struggles with what is “good” exact the same price as battles with the “devil.” Because youth are not afraid to ask the same hard questions about goodness as they do evil, “good” is feared as much as it is loved. For them, the complacent answers that often come with age rarely exist; moral certainty appears just as evil as outright wickedness. Frailties of the heart and spirit are no more and no less limiting than those of the mind and body. It is only in theory, not practice, that young people are incapable of

adequately reflecting on the atrocities as well as the marvels of their lives. Books with elements of the “unreal” which draw only fine lines between reality and fiction help in their reflection of these understandings as much as any other text they encounter.

Adults who believe that adolescence is a time when the lens focused on the world must be adjusted to view life through the eyes of grown-up “truths” rather than childhood “fictions” find it difficult to take seriously teenage books that concern themselves with fantastical protagonists who are half woman, half animal; part man, part angel; or a pinch of human, and a dose of demon. Once readers move beyond age-appropriate fairy tales, they are expected to give up their child-like fears and fascinations with the strange, eerie, and unknown while disciplining themselves to “rationally recognizing the dangers of these disrupting forces that intrude on their humanity. The inclination is to dismiss stories of the supernatural, surreal, or fancy as either immature daydreams of immortality, poorly contrived romances of horror, fluff of the imagination or, even worse, as solipsistic, self-referential texts. Unfortunately, in the haste to dismiss “unrealistic” genres of books, we miss important understandings of adolescent thinking and identity construction while remaining blind to the flawed, linear nature of the developmental theories surrounding them. Instead of allowing readers to use such texts as touchstones for the sometimes tragic nature of their lives, or even as sites of inevitable loss that may never be reconciled, we condescendingly refer to them as “dumbed down” versions of “real” literature, worthless pieces of deviant trash, or sentimental fiction that is “utterly banal” (Ravitch 130).

In a need to reinforce rather than shatter myths of youth, adults frequently fail to see books such as M.T. Anderson’s *Thirsty* or Patricia Kindl’s *Owl in Love* as symbolic resistances of the socio-cultural harnesses systematically thrown across the neck of adolescence. To be sure, the fictitious vampires and changelings of these books, standing far outside the acceptable norm, can be safely reasoned away as bizarre and unusual “characters,” mere entertainment at best or identification badge of the outcast at least; however, what cannot be denied is the flesh and blood radical mutant teen counterpart seen in the reader’s mirror. It is this corporeal monster, the teen who purposefully pushes against notions of standardization, normativity, and

status quo who is most feared, not the pen and ink ghosts of some writer’s imagination. It is this recognizable, mortal being who flies in the face of custom, counsel, and the commonplace, who spits in the eye of adult claims of a predetermined sequence for adolescent development that must be stifled. The alienation is palpable; the construction complex. If adult notions of adolescence cannot be mapped onto young adults, then we must deal with teens on their own terms, a perspective that seems impossible and forbidding to some and downright immoral and unacceptable to others.

The history of literary monsters, vampires, and changelings is a long and lively one. Such characters make an appearance in both ancient and modern cultures. From *Beowulf* to *Frankenstein* to *Dracula* to *The Metamorphosis* right up to the most recent comeback of the comic book legend *Spiderman*, society has maintained a steady, if strange, attraction to the grotesque, unusual, and sometimes macabre manipulation of humanhood. Traditional fairy tales abound with stories of non-human entities being substituted for mortal babies at birth by malevolent forces. Our fascination with creatures who are so different from who we perceive ourselves to be is debated in depth by everyone from literary scholars to philosophers, and the longing to understand everything from sexual prowess to immortality to bourgeois politics is attributed to the creation of such freaks.

But perhaps the most important issue that a character like the werewolf, or, as is the case with Klaus’s *Blood and Chocolate*, a *shewolf*, forces us to confront is the one which nudges acknowledgement of the blurred lines of identity that haunt us our entire lives. It is not the Jekyll and Hyde ability to disguise our true nature that piques human interest nearly so much as it is an ability to learn to live in multiple worlds and multiple identities with an on-going consciousness of what that might mean. For young people, especially, such concerns are at the forefront of their daily experience. They do not seek to give up who they are, but rather to integrate their known sense of a developing self with the unknown self that pushes from the darkness. They are not looking for the certainty that the prudence of adulthood points them toward; they are searching for a way of negotiating the inconsistencies that living in an infinitely complex universe imposes. Half-vampires and change-

lings, shewolves and snake-boys provide an opportunity to move through these incongruities in a way that realistic fiction cannot.

The radical mutant teen as seen in contemporary young adult literature is about transfiguration not mere transformation; liberation not redemption. These are the teens who are unpredictable and multifaceted, who are a tangle of contradictions and paradoxes. They refuse the defining theories of youth that would wed them to lock-step states and conditions dependent on categories and bracketing, theories that are certain of particular phases and cycles. They deny the “Truths” that Foucault observes are “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain” (133); like Foucault, they intend to expose those truths as biased claims set in motion by those who stand to gain the most from them. These are the outlaws who refuse to look for the answers in the socially habituated places—teens for whom piety is found in leaving the questions open rather than in accepting the culturally prescribed explanations. They are not about becoming someone else’s notion of who they should be; they are about accepting the uniqueness of their own promise and limits.

In stories, these evolving, uncommon identities answer to names like Chris, Owl, Simon, Linnet, Darren, and Althea. In stories, these identities on the margin lead to the obscure dwelling places of vampires, werewolves, cutwings, and shapeshifters. Stepping out of the cradle of childhood and into the wide berth of adulthood where questions of life and death loom large, these are the characters who in our own world are known simply as teens, enthusiastic anomalies whose only desires are to know and be known. Much like the characters they choose to read about, teens are intent on creating themselves not as predetermined immutable essences over which they have no say, but as active interpreters of their own lives whose ambiguous natures can sometimes overcome situations meant to fix them in place.

Caught up in the pursuit of self, community, and humanity; trying to balance a newfound physicalness with emotional awareness, intellectual consciousness, and moral perception; and attempting to negotiate a world strung somewhere between farce and tragedy, the teen characters in books like *Thirsty*, *Owl in Love*, *The Silver Kiss*, *The Cheerleader*, *Cirque du Freak*, and *Growing Wings* all have one thing in common: They

recognize the enigmatic necessity of their chameleon-like realities. Adapting constantly to an evolving environment, prone to change without a moment’s notice, and sensitive to whatever predicaments they happen to stumble into, the young people of these texts all realize the fragility of identity and the difficulty involved in trying to hold on to it, even as they seek to question it.

Dizzied by the obscure world whizzing round them, the radical mutant teens of these texts wrestle with the startling disparities of light and dark forces, good and bad inclinations, and autonomous and dependent feelings. These binaries confuse them because the implied hierarchies of such limiting choices do not ring true. They note the contradictions of living that consistently bring together all of the strengths and weaknesses of existence at once. For these characters, reality includes moral struggles, limitless being, and the experience of painful circumstances. They come to know that sometimes the only way to understand the ecstasy of humanity is to experience the anguish of it, anguish that frequently happens at their own hand. “I realize,” says Chris in *Thirsty*, “that the decision to be human is not one single instant, but is a thousand choices made every day. It is choices we make every second and requires constant vigilance. We have to fight to remain human” (Anderson 248).

The radical mutant teen is a category buster. It is the dreaded octopus appendage of young people that adults anxiously scramble to restrain, only to discover it popping out from yet another site. Radical mutant teens do not always march to the drumbeat of rationality that the linear theories of adolescence would have them heed. Where they will travel and to what they will attend cannot always be foretold. In an effort to release their unique potentiality, these teens often defy convention, even at the risk of being misunderstood and seen as developmentally inappropriate, off track, or just plain weird.

Yet, I contend it is not the teens themselves who are wayward, but rather the system that attempts to contain them. Because of a growing desire to pigeon-hole personality development as character education and dictate preferred behavior according to defined standards, the fixed and parochial stages of “normal” development continually erode the space teens need to discover who they might become. In an effort to make

the world small, adult theories about adolescents have disregarded youth's right to self-determination and have failed to validate the indeterminable awakenings of self-definition. "One thing [is] for sure," Linnet of *Growing Wings* thinks to herself, "she [is] not going to let anyone bind her wings or cut them off" (Winter 3). In *The Silver Kiss*, Simon echoes a similar feeling: "Call me nobody? he whisper[s], and his fangs slid[e] from their sheaths. Call me nobody? he scream[s] as if in pain. . . . I AM" (Krause 40).

Teen readers are drawn to figures such as the winged changelings Linnet and Owl and the understandable vampires Chris and Simon, not only because they are resolute in their desire to be themselves, but because they stand as representative of the "lust for life" and the yearning for freedom that youth also feel. "How brave was his mind and spirit; what a longing for life, for life, for his own true nature, he had" is how Owl of *Owl in Love* describes the desires of the fellow wereowl she works to save (Kindl 189). Likewise, Chris, the vampire teen in *Thirsty*, cannot ignore his own "unnamed feelings that percolate until they feel like a dam about to burst" (Anderson 26). "I am thirsty," he says, "[t]hirsty for life," and in the course of events that follow, Chris comes to define more clearly what that actually means (249). But this lust can also be a curse; uninvited but ever present, it is a hunger that cannot be ignored, it torments the characters of these novels as much as it compels them. They learn that controlling it can sometimes be a difficult, if not impossible burden.

"Beneath the itch [of the wing] is an ache," reveals Linnet (Winter 2); an ache, we can assume, that is both titillating and frightening at once. Forcing her into physical and emotional discomfort, the "[w]ings. Forming beneath the surface of her skin. Unfolding. Emerging" morph Linnet beyond her will and cause her much distress (11). There appears no room for the wings to stretch and grow. She has no choice but to accept the changes taking place, yet insists on doing so under her own conditions. Dealing with a body that seems to have betrayed her, Linnet knows she will be altered by the changes, knows her new appearance makes her a freak, but refuses to conform to the implied imposition of those changes. Though she realizes that to "try flying with wings in the real world" is an almost impossible feat, she understands, too, that she is determined to soar in the

undertaking (40). "Why walk?" she asks, "with the whole world watching, she was going to fly" (195). Linnet resolves to be courageous about her transfiguring self, but she will never be compliant. She is prepared to mobilize her autonomous nature and will not give way to the fears and prejudices that the world assumes will subdue her.

The breast and crown of the Linnet, a well-known songbird, become a brilliant crimson in the summer, but only if it is left in the wild and not tamed. And, indeed, Laurel Winter's story of Linnet is that of a fledgling young girl, determined to fly. She will not allow her wings to be bound and, therefore, will not be symbolically caged. For her, wings represent a divine freedom. She is determined she will never be a "cutwing," a sign that she accepts her own mortality as a part of her existence that cannot be controlled. Though Linnet must, in the end, escape, at least temporarily, to the safety of a group of other creatures like herself, she does not do so because she seeks isolation but because there are those who would persecute her and her kind for that which they cannot help being. Linnet does this willingly and becomes stronger for it, but recognizes, too, that someday she and others like her will be a visible force in the world.

Owl, the protagonist of Patricia Kindl's story, would seem to have little in common with Winter's Linnet. Physically and metaphorically these two changelings are very different. Owl's unusual appearance does not torture her in the same way that Linnet's does. In fact, she often "long[s] to transform" to her physical owl self (181). Though she attempts to "fit in" by doing things like trying to eat her mice between two slices of bread, she is more concerned with how awful the bread is than with the fact she prefers to eat mice. She continually "long[s] for [her] own humanity" (170). Still, even Owl has moments when she realizes that "[s]ometimes [she] would like not to be what [she] is" (6). But while "[l]ife is a strange and sometimes terrible thing" for Owl, it is also a thing of possibility (4). It is an experience to be welcomed, not avoided or ignored.

Owl stands in her story very much as a symbol of the unclouded vision that sometimes only youth can have. Traditionally associated with Athene, goddess of wisdom, an owl, with its sharp eyes, is able to penetrate the darkness in ways that others cannot. Kindl's Owl wisely observes many things that the

adults around her are unable to detect. She is a bridge between the mortal, grown-up world of day, whose harsh and brilliant light can blind people to each other, and the nocturnal, transitional world of night, where the softness of light allows for more hallowed understandings of the nature of things. Owl, who can transform only at night, is a kindred spirit of the moon, which stands for change and growth. She is associated with rebirth, helping another werewolf come into his own: "He began to transform slowly, painfully. He clearly still found it difficult," notes Owl (199). It is a discernment familiar to her, because, despite a growing acceptance of her condition, she, too, is mostly alone, often estranged, and restless in her need to live fully. "Why should I be ashamed of a need that ought to be [. . .] simple," she asks, though she knows the answer is a complex and difficult one (14).

The "lust for life" that imposes itself on the vampire characters of young adult fiction is a more difficult one to concede, but no more difficult to understand. Theirs is a yearning, it seems, that will never be satisfied. In its passion and desire, this appetite has the capacity to be all consuming, and, if not equalized, lead to a moral self-destruction, as well as to the corruption of those who come in contact with it. Who among us has not struggled with such passion and desire? Obsessive love, compulsive habits, dogmatic beliefs, manic moods, and uncontained energies are disturbing behaviors that turn on us, destroying the very things we mean to create, including ourselves. For the vampire character, the wonder of living can turn quickly into a hideous nightmare, a nightmare that represents many of the "monster"-like issues of becoming human, first and foremost being how to deal with the knowledge of the finite self. But there are other adolescent issues that stem from this frightening passion and desire, as well: what it means to have and use power over others; how to deal with profound feelings of alienation and loneliness; how to keep life energies from becoming excesses that ravage life itself; and, finally, how to work through the other enduring existential questions that confront all humans, but are arriving for teens for the first time.

Vampire stories generally represent two ways of thinking: they either bring out the best or the worst of what it means to be human, though this is not to say they do so in stark black and white terms. In Klaus's

The Silver Kiss, the vampire Simon is able to help Zoe cope with the impending loss of her mother by helping her recognize she is paralyzed from living her own life in the denial of her mother's death. "It's death," he tells her, "[d]eath that frightens you so" (56). As Zoe searches for "some magic [to] perform to stop her mother dying" (74), Simon helps them both realize that death is only horrible if we make it so. In freeing Zoe, Simon also frees himself. In the end of the novel, as he sits facing the rising sun, he understands, finally, that he has had the ability to be released from his three hundred years of insatiable lust by simply letting go of the desire that has bound him. "I think I'm free," he whispers incredulously, "All I had to do was go willingly" (198). For the young, the lesson inherent in Simon's choice is ultimately an enabling and important one.

"Personal meaningfulness should be recognized as at least one of the possible criteria to be applied by a reader assessing the reading event," according to Louise Rosenblatt (157). In the case of Zoe and Simon, there is much for the teenage reader to find personally meaningful. Both of the characters feel the terrible pain of aloneness and separateness felt also by both Linnet and Owl of the changeling stories. "I'm so alone," thinks Simon, "I'll be alone forever. There is no one to share my burden and make it lighter" (88). But he is wrong; he meets Zoe and is able to see a way out of the darkness that has engulfed him. "Because you talked to me," he tells Zoe, "I felt like a person again" (95). Likewise, Zoe, in trying to deal with her mother's terminal illness, feels she can no longer function in the world her friends inhabit, and that if she loses Simon, she will be utterly alone. But in an act that comes full-cycle, Simon, at the moment that he sets himself free, also releases Zoe: "[. . .] you have yourself," he tells her, "A good, kind, strong, brave self, it was you who gave me courage" (196). In the loving faith of each other, both characters find the courage to face their individual destinies.

The realization of their own mortality is important for all of the characters of these stories. Contrary to adult theory which would see teens as in denial of life's finitude, these YAL protagonists, vampires included, are able to recognize it with an emotional honesty that many adults fear: "And a voice says to me again and again this one chilling fact I know is true: that I came into this world from a warm place

within someone else; but that I will leave it completely alone" (*Thirsty* 176). While *Thirsty* is a story full to some degree of all the typical fearless vampire camp—sex, beautiful girls, violence, and humor—it is also a story of questioning and struggling. It is a story that recognizes its own limits and the sometimes inadvertently insidious nature of evil. "I can't wait to have burned out of me this stupid thirst, this hunger that lies coiled and miserable in my throat and stomach like a tapeworm," anguishes Chris (59). His cry is not lost on those who know the pain of being captured by their own passions and desires.

Rosenblatt also understands this transference of understanding and meaning as it pertains to readers: "[. . .] in a literary work there is no one else for whom we are substituting. We are not vicarious or substitute Juliets or Leopold Blooms. We are living in the world of the work which we have created under guidance of the text and are entering into new potentialities of our own natures" (68). Teens who read books like *Thirsty* know exactly what it means to prove themselves against the forces of evil and destruction; they understand the moral tests they will be required to engage in time and time again. And in their struggle to articulate the true nature of the darknesses that shadow the world, they question the dark that parades itself as light and recognize that in times of deepest conflict and uncertainty, those most willing to identify themselves as skeptics may often be the ones most persecuted.

Anderson's character Chris is a teen who lives in the vague borderlands between adulthood and childhood. In the midst of all the wonder and mystery of life, he is thrown into the most frightening, unknown aspects of it which he approaches with humility and reverence. In the end, he knows he has no choice but to journey forward. Chris becomes a dangerous shapeshifter, not because he fears death, but because he embraces life. Through his ordeal, though, he comes to understand that life can be incredibly deceptive and self-serving. In his attempt to save what he believes is a spark of greatness and light in the world, he unknowingly releases a darkness that will not be contained; in his attempt to save the world, he himself will be destroyed, and those who set him up for that destruction consider him nothing more than a pawn. Chris learns that the forces of evil are never really controlled, not always apparent, and more

easily imagined than we might think: "[. . .] what dark god must struggle somewhere, writhing back and forth to escape" (73). Though he fears that at some point he will be brought to the level of the very beast he seeks to kill, Chris also knows that when the time arrives, he may be helpless against it. So it happens that sometimes the dark forces of our lives cannot be escaped, that they wait in secret and in silence to take us down with them.

Vampires like writer Caroline B. Cooney's are different. In the case of her stories and those that are more traditionally like hers, the aim is always to see the collective evil that befalls those who give into a malevolent longing. While there is no denying that Cooney's vampires are themselves detestable, it is how their evil attributes are imposed on the other characters Cooney develops that is most important. For example, in Cooney's novel *The Cheerleader*, the main character, Althea, becomes a victim of her own desire to be popular. While the vampire in the story preys on Althea's weakness of character, it is Althea whom the reader ultimately holds responsible for the despicable act of turning friends over to the vampire.

Much like the fabled Althea, the Queen of Calydon who seeks vengeance on her son for acts committed against her brothers, Cooney's Althea cannot control her conflicted feelings, commits ugly acts of betrayal, and, in the end, turns on herself in self-loathing. When this Althea realizes that she has emotionally and spiritually resigned herself to the evil the vampire represents, she physically commits herself to him, becoming in the end the very thing she despises. Unlike Simon of *The Silver Kiss* and Chris of *Thirsty*, two unwilling vampires who resist the curse inflicted on them and struggle against a forced identity toward their own independence, Althea becomes a vampire because she allows socially imposed structures to shape her; in doing so, she forgoes all indicators of moral responsibility and perception and succumbs to an eternity of hunger that will never be satiated, no matter the power she has achieved.

The list of fictitious vampires and changelings seems endless. In addition to the vampires, half-vampires, and weremen found in countless other stories, books like the popular *Cirque du Freak* series by Darren Shan introduce readers to characters who only somewhat resemble bizarre humans: Mr. Tall, Gertha Teeth, Alexander Ribs, Cormac Limbs, Rhamus

Twobellies, Hans Hands, Bradley Stretch, a bearded lady, the blue-hooded Little People led by Mr. Destiny, and Evra Von, the snake-boy. "There are always openings at the Cirque du Freak" for those who are different, alien, and misfit (Shan 59). Perhaps what texts like *Cirque du Freak* do best is let these insurgent Others tell their own stories instead of having the same old stories told about them. Though it may not be a particularly pleasant experience to be a freak of nature, an ability to claim and own one's difference is vastly preferable to having another simply pass judgment on it. Teens know this as well as anyone. Beyond the relics of capes, crucifixes, graveyards, bats, and coffins, beyond the bloody fangs, unreflected images, full moons, spider webs, and howling wolves of the "undead" lie issues of identity, morality, and power that young people are not blind to as they confront the world. There is a "hunger inside us," says Darren of *Cirque du Freak*, "that must be fed to be controlled" (20). It is a hunger that is both a power and a curse, an appetite that these texts make plain is never as easily satisfied as it appears on the surface.

Adults who see texts such as the ones discussed here only as catalysts for defiant behavior are missing the point of why teens read them. The young do not need characters like Owl, Linnet, Simon, Chris, Althea, and Darren to give them permission to resist socialized roles; they live in a world that abounds in those messages. They need these characters and the stories they tell as safe houses where the paradoxical questions of emotional and moral struggle as well as the contradictory issues of humanity may be asked and thought about without cynicism or deprecation. "There are those," says Louise Rosenblatt, "who, far from thinking of the reader's activity as free, speak of the domination of the text, the submergence of the

reader in what sounds in their phrasing almost like a brainwashing dictated by the text" (71). Teens should be given more credit than this. They are not mindless believers to be molded into our own or even some writer's image, but are fresh, and, yes, slightly irreverent beings to be called upon and heard. It behooves us to allow them their voice and their vision, their pleasure and their appetite "[b]ecause there can be no doubt that they are on the move, and that they are stalking through forests and slipping across lawns" (*Thirsty* 12). Let us meet them at the bend and welcome them to a world we know is unpredictable, but nonetheless as magical and wondrous as they hope it is. Understanding and affirmation will serve everyone much better than an arsenal of pointed stakes, a show of braided garlic, and a draconian insistence on who they not only are, but who we expect them to become.

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Back to the Future—One Good Lesson at a Time

I love movies, and it doesn't matter what kind of movies. When you love them as I do, there is nothing except a good book that is as entertaining as two hours of convoluted plots, rich characterizations, and critical dialogues. As indiscriminate as I appear to be about my selections, I am, however, pragmatic about my movie habit: a movie must give me something to chew on. Undoubtedly, this is a universal and humorous idiosyncrasy of English teachers. We enjoy the unrelenting search for "deep meanings" and effective outcomes. One movie and its wacky theme, a theme somewhat related to outcomes, has continued to intrigue me. It's been a few years since the movie's debut, but when I visit classrooms, review old unit plans, research new pedagogy, and watch students learn, I continue to struggle with what practices will lead us nowhere, backward, to the future, and paradoxically, "Back to the Future." Let me see if I can explain a connection.

It seems like only last year that America watched the movie about Marty McFly, a typical teenager of

the Eighties. An aspiring musician in an uninspiring band, McFly spends time with his friend, Professor Emmett Brown. Although he appears to be nothing but a scattered and disheveled scientist, Emmett has created a time machine. It can not only launch people into the past and future, but it does so with style. The time machine resides within a plutonium-powered DeLorean car, and while driving the car at a speed that activates the machine, Marty McFly is hurled through an amazing trip back to three previous decades. After a series of outrageous events, Marty completes his important work; acts as Cupid for his parents so they can meet, marry, and eventually become his parents. With that done, Marty can move forward in time and get "back to the future."

In our work as secondary English educators, we know we should routinely consider the literacy practices that best meet the needs of our students. Times and standards change; we should also change. The lesson plans that fill our filing cabinets, and quite possibly even last year's lessons,

may be irrelevant to our students' current schema and need. For example, consider a possible similarity found between our Huckleberry Finn lessons and the incongruity found in "Back to the Future." When Marty McFly asks Emmett Brown a simple question about the type of fuel needed for the special DeLorean, he learns that some things have not stayed the same.

Marty McFly: Does it run on, on regular unleaded gasoline?

Dr. Emmett L. Brown: Unfortunately, no. It requires something with a little more kick. . . . Plutonium!

Marty McFly: Plutonium! . . . wait, are you telling me that this sucker is nuclear?

Although knowledge of fuel production and lessons from Mark Twain compare like apples and oranges, it is the relativity of our instruction that we are attempting to explore. In preparation for state and national assessments, students

would find more significance in “Huckleberry Finn” instruction that helps students “. . . read . . . literary texts from different periods, cultures, and genres” (USOE), rather than lessons which require learning an outdated Southern vocabulary or the life and times of Samuel Clemens.

Because we English teachers have always loved our content area, even when our own high school teachers transmitted information from yellowed and boring lecture notes, we may understandably underestimate the need to evaluate our practice. We like a diet of words, parts of speech, persuasive essays, metaphysical poetry, and classical literature. We like it, and students should, too. Could it be, however, that our practices make literacy instruction less attractive than it could be?

I cringe when I think of the weekly spelling and vocabulary lists I once doled out every Monday morning of the year. Doggone it! Learning to spell and vocabulary development was good for students, and new-fangled research that exposed the worthlessness of my lists was just nonsense.

The research was nonsense; nonsense until I realized students memorized my lists for Monday and couldn’t remember a simple definition a week later. With that sad realization, I began to understand the necessity of context. Even the brilliant scientist Emmett Brown needed context to understand the words of teenager, Marty McFlye.

Marty McFly: Wait a minute, Doc. Are you trying to tell me that my mother has the hots for me?

Dr. Emmett L. Brown: Precisely!

Marty McFly: Whoa! This is heavy!

Dr. Emmett L. Brown: There’s that *word* again: “heavy.” Why are things so heavy in the future? Is there a problem with the earth’s gravitational pull?

Just a month ago, I enthusiastically began a class discussion, but I soon learned my students knew little about the content. Stating and then outlining the learning objective seemed easy enough, but the students had no schema or background information to draw upon. After ten minutes of shallow answers and confused expressions, I knew my teaching, no matter how pedantic, would not bring about comprehension. I could hear the words of Madeline Hunter in my mind: it was time to “monitor and adjust.” Although changing my plans spoiled my unit-plan-magic, backtracking was a necessary adjustment. Out went the prescribed lesson, and in came something new. While punting is never recommended, we managed to salvage the class period.

When my lesson wasn’t working, why didn’t I just continue my instruction and expect the students to fill in the gaps? The answer is simple. If we expect imperfect comprehension to effectively scaffold to future learning, it won’t happen. The unfortunate consequences will fall on our students, and in our unwillingness to change the way we teach, we will ultimately botch multiple lessons. Like our students,

poor Marty McFly experienced the frustration that can occur when proper schema has not been achieved. Imagine the confusion he experienced while innocently trying to order a soft drink . . . albeit a drink that had not yet been invented.

Lou: You gonna order something, Kid?

Marty: Ah, yeah . . . Give me a Tab.

Lou: Tab? How can I give you a tab if you don’t order something?

Marty: Alright. Give me a Pepsi Free.

Lou: You want a Pepsi, Pal, you’re gonna pay for it!

Effective teachers are those who constantly monitor what is working in a classroom. When learning is compromised, effective teachers determine what isn’t working and why.

The changing role of English teachers is shaped by new needs, new standards, and a new type of student. Yes, we must continue to be knowledge specialists, but remaining specialists will be the easy part. Our natural love of English obliges us to read more, write more, and analyze more. The challenge for the changing educator goes beyond our knowledge. The challenge calls for a reformation. It requires us to carry student-relevant knowledge by fresh strategies. It requires us to show new support for assessment-driven and quantifiable curriculum. Lastly, it requires

us to re-shape our practice and meet the needs of America's most differentiated consumer: our teenagers (Davies). The challenge to write our new future is exciting, especially when the alternative is to languish in the past. As English educators, we can help make the words of Marty McFly a promising reality: "Yeah, well, history is gonna change!"

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high school English. In 1993 and 2000 respectively, she earned an M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Brigham Young University. After working ten action-packed years as a secondary principal, she left what she really loved and decided to do what she really loved: teach English education on the college level. She currently teaches Young Adult Literature and Methods of Literacy at Utah Valley State College. She is married to Michael D. Smith, and they are the proud parents of seven children and proud grandparents of six. She can be reached at smithky@uvsc.edu.

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For Boys Only:

Young Adult Literature about Girls and Dating

Dating is a complex coming-of-age experience. It is an uncertain and often humiliating and painful time for teens. While boys and girls alike have uncertainties and questions about relationships, boys may struggle more with expressing themselves and sharing their feelings. Socialized to be “manly” and fearing ridicule, many learn to bottle or avoid emotions. Young adult literature about girls and dating with which boys can relate can be a safe portal through which boys can explore emotions without fear of ridicule; such literature can provide answers to questions boys may never ask.

Unfortunately, little literature about girls and dating appeals to males. How many high school boys, for instance, want to read a Judy Blume or Louise Rennison novel? Boys need stories about relationships that are not feminine in nature: books about girls and dating must be realistic and gritty, not romantic or dreamy; they should contain action, suspense, or themes such as sports. Covers need to attract young men specifically; they cannot be cartoonish; nor can they resemble Harlequin romances. Titles, too, must capture males.

Novels featuring these characteristics are rare; however, as the young adult literature genre matures, authors are beginning to write about relationships that appeal to boys. Publishers are also becoming increasingly aware of the power of visual images and titles—if a young adult novel looks too much like something a boy read in middle school or looks too feminine, high school boys will likely be turned off. An analysis of recently published books that have covers and titles appealing to high school boys and that feature male

protagonists realistically wrestling with their feelings about girls follows.

The cover (a girl’s torso) and title of Markus Zusak’s *Getting the Girl* (2003) is a sure winner with boys. Within the pages is a rugged, yet tender story, about first love and brotherly solidarity. Cameron Wolfe lives in the shadow of his older, athletic brother, Ruben. While Cameron yearns for a girlfriend, he watches Ruben run through girls and listens as Ruben talks trash about ex-girlfriends. Ruben wants each girl only because she is his next conquest; he has no feelings for girls and has never loved. Feeling disdain for Ruben’s behavior, Cameron vows he will treat girls better; however, he must first find a girlfriend.

When Ruben and Octavia break up, Cameron’s desire becomes a reality as he and Octavia develop a tender relationship. Though Ruben has moved on to something better, he becomes jealous of Cameron’s sensitivity toward Octavia and beats Cameron up. Octavia ends her relationship with Cameron because she refuses to come between two brothers. Cameron feels lost and hopeless; Ruben feels guilty for destroying the relationship.

While a central theme of Zusak’s latest novel is brotherly love, the novel has much to offer boys about relationships. Ruben disrespects girls, while Cameron is affectionate and respectful. Newly comparing himself to Cameron, Ruben becomes angry and no longer feels his former pride in treating girls like trophies. Healthy relationships, he realizes, are not about conquering girls, treating them like prizes, or even having sex. Getting all the “hot” girls does not make him a man; in fact, it is treating women with

respect that shows strength and character. Cameron becomes his role model.

Zusak's novel raises an important issue for boys: respect. While some boys value girls, many emulate Ruben. Sometimes disrespect comes from family experiences; other times it may come from peer relations and other cultural forces. Because attitudes and behaviors are difficult to alter, it is unlikely that disrespectful boys will suddenly treat girls better after reading *Getting the Girl*; however, Zusak's novel can offer boys some insight into the nature of healthy relationships. Well-developed and realistic, Ruben Wolfe is a character with whom boys can easily relate.

While boys often exploit girls, boys can also be victimized. The male protagonist in Ellen Wittlinger's *Razzle* (2001) allows himself to be used, despite numerous warnings. When fifteen-year-old Kenyon Baker moves with his retired parents to Cape Cod to restore and operate a dilapidated resort, Kenyon believes he will experience the worst summer ever; instead, he meets Razzle Penney, a tall, skinny, eccentric girl, and the two become close friends. Their friendship is tested, however, when Kenyon falls for Harley, a gorgeous but trappy girl, despite warnings from Razzle and Harley's castoffs.

With the aid of Frank, a gay plumber, Kenyon learns that beauty is truly skin deep, a hard but important lesson. When Harley tricks him into shooting photos of her and displaying them in an art show, hoping she will be discovered and get off Cape Cod, Kenyon realizes Harley played him like all new boys to Cape Cod. Though Razzle lacks Harley's sexual appeal and physical beauty, Kenyon realizes he cares for Razzle because she is real and true. Despite his revelation, Kenyon must leave Razzle when his aging parents admit repairing the rundown resort is too labor intensive.

Any boy who has ever felt used by a girl can relate to Kenyon's pain. Though teens place tremendous importance on physical attributes, Wittlinger's story illustrates that physical beauty means little unless accompanied by an attractive personality. Though some boys, like Zusak's Ruben Wolfe, are callous and exploit girls, boys can be exploited, too. Kenyon is a wonderful role model for boys who find themselves in exploited situations. Unlike many boys who become resentful and angry, who lash out and develop negative attitudes toward girls, Kenyon works

through his pain in grace. He walks away from Harley having learned an important lesson about attraction.

Sharon Draper's *The Battle of Jericho* (2003), a story with a strong hazing theme, shows how far some boys will go for the girl of their dreams. When Jericho and his cousin and close friend, Josh, pledge for the Warriors of Distinction, an exclusive club in their school, Jericho believes his life could not be better, especially when Arielle, a good-looking classmate, shows interest because he is a soon-to-be warrior. Believing Arielle is worth the price, Jericho endures brutal and dangerous initiation rituals. Only when a fatal accident occurs does Jericho realize the price of his newly acquired status.

Most boys will easily relate to Jericho's desire to impress Arielle. While girls may attract boys by wearing the right clothes and looking desirable, boys tend to impress girls through actions. Athletic boys often attract girls through sports; other boys, such as Jericho, use organizations or activities that bestow manliness or social status.

First relationships are tough, and many teens will go to extremes to maintain a relationship. Draper's work raises important questions: What are you willing to sacrifice for the person of your dreams? What are the consequences? Draper has written an important addition to the young adult genre.

While some boys sacrifice everything for a relationship, others are caught between two desires. Fifteen-year-old Gary Keeling in Kevin Waltman's *Nowhere Fast* (2002) feels torn: his friend Wilson wants his time; so does Lauryn, his girlfriend. Gary spends his summer dating Lauryn, drinking and getting into trouble with his friend, Wilson—a wild teen whom Lauryn dislikes. Wanting to be the best boyfriend ever but also wanting to please his friend, Gary keeps secrets from Lauryn. Lauryn is not easily fooled and confronts Gary for not resisting Wilson's pressure.

As the summer progresses, Wilson talks Gary into stealing a car, and Gary helps arrange a meeting between the car's owner, Mr. Roverson, a former teacher, and a student with whom he had an affair. The plot ends in disaster, when Lauryn, like most people living in the small town of Dearborn Springs, Indiana, treats Mr. Roverson as an outcast and turns irate when Gary is forced to reveal his secret.

Though Gary wants to be the ideal boyfriend, he

cannot resist Wilson's challenges; he has no self-confidence and needs Wilson's and Mr. Roverson's approval. He cannot, no matter how angry Lauryn gets, refuse Wilson or Mr. Roverson.

Dating is a transitional time for teens. Having established childhood friends, teens often feel torn between hanging out with old friends and dating. Making decisions can be difficult—boys, for example, are often teased when they break away from friends to spend more time with girlfriends. Long-term friends can feel neglected and are sometimes jealous and resentful. High school boys can relate to Gary's trapped feelings: On one hand, Gary wants to please Lauryn; on the other, he wants to hang out with Wilson, despite knowing Wilson causes trouble. Though he wants badly to be good enough for Lauryn, he cannot control his life and knows he risks losing Lauryn.

Many teens find themselves in abusive relationships. While child abuse is an ample theme in young adult literature, dating violence has been explored minimally. Young adult literature dealing with dating violence has focused primarily on the girl's perspective; *Past Forgiving* by Gloria D. Miklowitz is a case in point. Alex Flinn's *Breathing Underwater* (2001), however, features a male protagonist coming to terms with abusing his girlfriend.

Flinn's novel opens with sixteen-year-old Nick Andreas in court for hitting his girlfriend, Caitlin. The judge orders him into counseling and forces him to keep a journal. Nick and Caitlin's story unfolds through Nick's writing. Good looking, athletic, and popular, Nick seems to have everything; no one suspects he is a victim of his father's abuse. When Nick falls for Caitlin, his world is complete; however, Caitlin becomes increasingly popular, and Nick becomes obsessed with thoughts of losing her. He becomes controlling, insisting that Caitlin cannot have friends, go anywhere without him, or participate in social events. Knowing Caitlin is afraid of getting fat, Nick attempts to control her with nasty comments about her weight. He criticizes her weight in front of friends and convinces her to swim in a t-shirt so guys cannot see her body. The story's climax occurs when Caitlin goes against Nick's wishes and sings in a school event. Filled with rage and fear, Nick beats Caitlin mercilessly.

Breathing Underwater is a poignant and gritty

portrayal of a teenage boy perpetuating the cycle of domestic violence. Threatened by Caitlin's beauty and her independence, Nick uses cruel tactics to isolate and control her. Knowing he is emulating his father's behavior, Nick cannot stop—he is driven by fear. He feels small and cannot tolerate being dumped or humiliated.

Domestic violence is a serious societal issue. While seeds for domestic violence are sown during childhood, relationship experiences during adolescence play important roles in molding young men and women. Though painful to read, Flinn's book paints an accurate portrait of a young man headed toward a life of domestic violence. Boys who are possessive and controlling and who lack insight into their own behavior may do some self-examination as a result of reading Flinn's novel.

One topic given little attention in young adult literature about boy/girl relationships is teen pregnancy. While many young adult novels have been written from the female point of view, few have been written from a male perspective. (*Too Soon for Jeff* by Maryiln Reynolds is an older example.) Margaret Bechard's *Hanging on to Max* (2002) is a recent work that features a male protagonist struggling with becoming a parent.

Sam Pettigrew should be enjoying his senior year in high school; however, when his girlfriend becomes pregnant and decides to give the baby up for adoption, Sam gives up his college dreams and chooses to raise it alone. Sam and his eleven-month-old son, Max, live with Sam's widowed father, who agrees to support them until Sam graduates and begins a construction job. Sam's father helps little with Max, and Sam struggles to juggle parental responsibilities and school. Despite trying his hardest to care for Max, Sam never feels good enough. His life brightens when Claire, a former classmate who has her own baby, enrolls in Sam's alternative school. They begin dating and spending time together with their babies. When Max cuts his hand on broken glass at a party, Sam panics. After realizing Max will be okay, Sam knows he cannot care for Max and makes the agonizing decision to give him up for adoption. In doing so, he also ends his relationship with Claire—if he cannot have his own son, he cannot take on the responsibility of someone else's child.

While this book addresses the fears and struggles

of a teen dad, it also portrays the complexities of dating as a single parent and/or dating someone who has a child. When Sam gives up Max, he also sacrifices his relationship with Claire, for he cannot spend time with Claire and her daughter without feeling guilty for giving up his son. In a time when most young adult literature about teen pregnancy is written for girls, this work is an important contribution.

A second riveting novel featuring a teen dad as a protagonist is *The First Part Last* (2003) by Angela Johnson. Bobby is an ordinary urban teenager—reckless, impatient, carefree. He hangs out with his best friends, cuts school to celebrate his birthday, eats pizza, and watches movies. His life changes abruptly when his girlfriend, Nia, becomes pregnant. In chapters alternating between “then” and “now,” the reader learns of Bobby’s bittersweet relationship with Nia and his current role as a struggling, but devoted, single dad. Though his parents are supportive, they insist Bobby assume all parenting roles. Bobby is determined to be the best dad to Feather, his daughter; however, sometimes he yearns to be a child again.

Johnson’s characters are memorable and well-developed. Flashbacks reveal that Nia is in an irreversible coma, which explains why Bobby has custody of his daughter. Johnson’s language is sparse, her story fast, suspenseful, yet tender; it is a terrific read for boys.

Relationships are complex, particularly for teens who are dating for the first time. Young adult literature provides teens an opportunity to read about peers working through similar problems. Unlike girls, boys

have had little opportunity to explore dating issues in young adult literature. Respect, exploitation, physical attraction, dating abuse, and teen pregnancy are dating issues facing today’s teens. Other issues such as interracial dating and dating older women need exploration, as well. Hopefully, young adult literature will offer boys more as it continues to mature.

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From Ragsales to Mumblety-peg:

The Search for Self in Appalachian Young Adult Literature

“I’ve heered tell a little ‘sang is quickening to the blood.”
“Woods full of ‘sang there used to be, but I hain’t seen a prong in ten year.”
“So scarce it might’ nigh swaps for gold.”
“Don’t reckon there’s a sprig left on Carr Creek.”
“Well, now, it ain’t all gone. I seed a three-prong coming up from Blackjack, blooming yellow. I see that ‘sang standing so feisty, and I says to myself: ‘Ain’t that a sight? Nobody’s grubbed him yet,’ and I broke a bresh to hide it.” (James Still, *River of Earth*, 1978, p. 54-55)

You’ve just read a sampling of the rich language from Still’s *River of Earth* in which two mountain characters are discussing the scarcity of ‘sang or ginseng. Appalachia is not just about languages; it is a place and a culture. As a place, Appalachia is a chain of mountain ranges that begins in Canada and stretches all the way south to Alabama. The ranges include the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Allegheny Mountains in the states of Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland. As a culture, Appalachians are a people who value their freedom, independence, and solitude. They live in the high misty mountains along the east coast of the United States where they are surrounded by natural beauty, wild game, roots and herbs for food and medicine. For mountain people, the strongest most unifying value is the sense of place (Jones, 1994). Mountain people love the land. Although the natural resources of this land have been exploited and squandered for profit, the Appalachian culture remains strong and functional.

In the search for self, young adults from this region need to read novels about the culture, people, language, and setting of Appalachia. They need to be able to identify with the subject matter and recognize themselves in the fictional characters. The characters should face situations that students know, or at least have heard of, and react in ways the students can understand. Novels with Appalachian settings and stories not only represent and validate adolescents who are from this region, but they also provide young adults from other cultures a new understanding and appreciation of life outside their societal norm. Since Appalachian adolescents often have difficulty finding themselves in literature whether due to scarce availability, the “hillbilly” stereotype, or traditional curriculum requirements, a survey of current young adult novels that are both well-written and sensitive to the cultural and social realities of Appalachian children should prove valuable.

Culturally conscious literature should reflect Appalachian life experiences. As Simms (1982) defines other regional literature, this means that the major characters are Appalachian, the story is told from their perspective, the setting is in an Appalachian community or home, and the text includes some means of identifying the characters as Appalachian – physical descriptions, language, cultural traditions and so forth. If we use the same criteria to judge the value of Appalachian literature as for other regional genres, it should (1) deal with the land as it impinges on humans, (2) deal in-depth with individuals involved in universal conflicts or learning some universal truth, (3) reject stereotyping, and (4) provide a heightened

sense of place. These criteria will inform our examination of young adult literature.

The Land As It Impinges on Humans

Cherokee Removal

The first Appalachians were the Cherokee, who lived in the mountains hundreds of years before Columbus arrived in North America. A woodland tribe, they farmed, hunted, and gathered wild berries. Their society was based on a system of clans, with women heading households. Then, in the 1700s the first people of European descent made their way to the region. For a while, Native Americans and the new settlers coexisted peacefully. But as competition for land intensified, a series of fierce battles took place, culminating in the forcible removal of the Cherokee to an Oklahoma reservation in 1838.

Cornelissen's *Soft Rain: A Story of the Cherokee Trail of Tears* (1998) tells a fictional story based on the Cherokee march westward, an incredible 700 miles without adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Soft Rain is nine years old when the soldiers arrive without warning and command her mother to go with them, taking only the possessions they can pack and carry. They are forced to leave behind Soft Rain's blind grandmother, her father and brother, and even her puppy. The long and dangerous journey that takes them across rivers and over mountains, through rain and snow, is a dreadful adventure for Soft Rain and her people. Historical records affirm that fully 16,000 Cherokee died of starvation, disease, exposure to the weather, or mistreatment by soldiers. Soft Rain's inspiring story of strength and hope is a testament to all those who lived through the Trail of Tears.

Cherokee Sister (2000), by Debbie Dadey, is another story about two girls from different backgrounds that form a lasting friendship in spite of the Cherokee removal. Allie McAllister is white and comes from a farming family, struggling to make it during hard times. Leaf Sweetwater is a Cherokee Indian who lives with her grandmother, owner of the Cherokee trading post. Despite their economic and scholastic differences, Allie and Leaf become best friends. One Sunday, Allie slips out of church to visit Leaf at the trading post. While at Leaf's house Allie tries on a beautiful white animal-skin dress Leaf has in her closet, and Leaf braids her hair. They are so happy to

look like sisters, but here is where the adventure begins. While Allie is wearing the dress, an army captain comes to the door to take the Cherokee Indians away to the new Indian Territory. Allie is mistaken for a "half-breed" and is taken along with Leaf's family down the Trail of Tears. As conditions on the trail grow more desperate every day, hope of rescue fades, while prejudice and terror mount. Allie and Leaf's friendship strengthens as they make this journey and endure many hardships together.

Industrialization forces change

Settlers in Appalachia from the 1700s all the way to the late 1800s were almost all subsistence farmers. Well into the twentieth century many people in Appalachia continued to get by on small homesteads, eking out a living with horses or mules – and some still do. However, in the late 1800s, the railroad began to penetrate the mountains, and with travel facilitated, industry followed. This abrupt change dramatically altered both landscape and people. First came the lumber industry, which provided jobs, but also ravaged the mountainsides and polluted the streams. In time, entire hillsides were eroded by runoffs. Then, with the industrialization of America, coal became a necessity. Since the mountains of Appalachia were rich in anthracite, a superior grade of coal, the industry grew rapidly. Not only were Appalachian farmers lured into the mines, but African-Americans were imported as cheap labor, and European immigrants migrated to the "company towns" built by the coal industry in hope of fulfilling their American dream. According to Bial (1997), forty percent of the country's production came from Appalachian coalfields during World War II. However, after the war, the demand fell, mining became mechanized, and fewer workers were needed. In the 1950s, workers were let go and forced into government assistance if they wanted to remain in the mountains. While the natural resources of this land had been exploited and squandered for profit, the Appalachian culture remained. Young adult literature, then, should reflect the struggle to preserve the land and the culture in spite of those who would destroy it.

Bartoletti's *Growing Up in Coal Country* (1996) captures the legacy of life in coal country. Bartoletti uses oral history, archival documents, and an abundance of black-and-white photographs to capture

mining life at the turn of the twentieth century. As she reports her careful research, she tells the story of what life was like for the children of the coal country in northeastern Pennsylvania. She writes of the desperate working conditions, the deplorable squalor found in the “patch villages,” and the ever-present dangers of the occupation. All the stories point out the enormous hardships suffered before there were effective unions and child-labor laws. The words and work of children are weighted equally with the efforts of the Molly McGuires, Mother Jones, and other adult players. Captioned, black-and-white photographs appear on almost every page, allowing the images to play a powerful role in retelling the children’s stories.

In another nonfiction work, *In Coal Country* (1987) by Judith Hendershot and illustrated by Thomas Allen, the life of a miner’s family is vividly seen through the eyes of his young daughter in the nostalgic glimpse of growing up in an Ohio coal-mining town during the 1930’s. This family lived in a place called Company Row built by the owners of the Black Diamond Mine. The young narrator describes playing on the gob piles which remained after the good coal was sorted out and dumped into railroad cars, collecting coal that rolled off the cars and cooling off by standing under Bernice Falls. Kids played hopscotch and mumblety-peg in the dirt and built campfires in the summer, but Christmas was her favorite holiday when they cut down the tree and roasted goose for dinner. While the reminiscence of childhood is innocent, the power of the book lies in the dark counterpoint that underlies text. The illustrations portray the darkness of the environment from black creek water, to black engine smoke, to grit on the table.

In Baldacci’s *Wish You Well* (2000), eighty-year-old Louisa Mae has to fight hard to keep her land from the Southern Valley Coal and Gas Company. They want to buy her land, not just the mineral rights to it, but there is no way Louisa will sell it to them. “You ain’t scalping this land like you done everywhere else” (260). She said, “I got me a deed to this land says I own it, but nobody really owns the mountains. I just watching over ’em while I’m here. And they give me all I need” (260). No argument coal company officials make for a good living and a better life convince her. Louisa stands her ground. She means for her land to stay in the family, and intends to pass it on to her

great-grand children, Lou and Oz, just as she had inherited it from those who went before her. Louisa’s lawyer puts it this way in the courtroom:

“You know she’d never sell her land, because that ground is as much a part of her family as her great-grandchildren waiting to see what’s going to happen to them. You can’t let Southern Valley steal the woman’s family. All folks have up on that mountain is each other and their land. That’s all. It may not seem like much to those who don’t live there, or for people who seek nothing but to destroy the rock and trees. But rest assured, it means everything to the people who call the mountains home” (359).

Moving as his speech was the verdict goes in favor of Southern Valley. There was no justice for Louisa Mae Cardinal, but in the end the children are able to remain in the mountains they had come to love.

Another book that reflects the struggle to preserve the land and the culture in spite of strip-mining destruction is Hamilton’s Newbery Medal Book, *M.C. Higgins, The Great* (1974). Mayo Cornelius Higgins is an African-American hero who must come to terms with his own cultural heritage in order to survive. As he sits on his gleaming, forty-foot steel pole on a bicycle seat towering over his home, he surveys his world and wonders how to save Sarah’s Mountain from the strip mining spoil heap that threatens to come crashing down on his ancestral home and family. Sarah’s Mountain was named after M.C.’s slave ancestor who, like Hamilton’s Grandfather Perry, escaped to Ohio. All Sarah’s descendants are living on or buried in the mountain. In his desperation, M.C. hopes that a man collecting folk songs will hear his mother, Banina Higgins, sing, and will take them all away and make her a star. His world, which includes a friendship with a family his father thinks is “witchy,” is also entered by a wandering teenage girl who stays just long enough to help M.C. learn something about his own responsibility for making choices and decisions. In the end, M.C. realizes that he himself must take some action to save himself and his family.

Universal Conflicts and Lessons: Growing Up and Finding Oneself

Culturally conscious fiction deals with in-depth individuals involved in universal conflicts or learning some universal truth. This aspect focuses on youngsters making some step(s) toward maturity as individual. While the protagonists often are also involved

in relationships with family and peers, according to Simms, “the stories involve (1) achieving some personal goal, (2) acquiring some insight into themselves as individuals, and (3) recognizing their growth over a given period of time, or, in the case of the books for older readers, (4) some combination of all the above” (1982, 61).

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s Newbery Medal book, *Shiloh* (2000), is the story of a young boy whose personal goal is to save an abused, runaway dog from its angry owner. As the story begins Marty Preston discovers a young beagle in the hills of Tyler County behind his home. Marty, sensitive to the dog’s cowering from some kind of abuse, befriends him and names him Shiloh. In his pursuit of justice for the dog, Marty exposes his family to the dog’s abusive owner, Judd Travers. Judd is the town’s tobacco spitting iconoclast. He is cruel and mean to his hunting dogs – beating them and starving them so they’ll find the prey. Marty is caught in the ethical dilemma of returning the beagle to its legal owner versus hiding the dog to save him from further abuse. His decision to hide him only complicates the matter since the dog has been attacked and severely injured. After Doc Murphy sews up the wounds, Marty is still faced with not only finding a way to repay the doctor, but also still having to return the animal to Judd. In the end, Marty agrees to do back-breaking work for this mean man in the hopes of accomplishing his goal of obtaining Shiloh for his own.

In Katherine Paterson’s *Come Sing, Jimmy Jo* (1985), all James Johnson wants to do is sing the songs he loves with his Grandmother. James has been raised in West Virginia by his Grandma, while his Mother, Father, Grandpa, and Uncle Earl have been out on the road singing country music at tent meetings, picnics, and family reunions. After returning from their most recent trip, the family argues over whether or not to hire a manager. When a potential manager, Eddie Switten visits the house and hears James singing, he recognizes that James has “the gift.” It doesn’t take Switten long to see that James should play a part in the family’s band. They get a six-month contract with a TV show, “Country Time,” in Virginia and move there, leaving Grandma at home. Although James becomes the star of the band and has many adoring fans, he hates his stage name, “Jimmy Jo.” He is also behind in his new school, doesn’t have any

friends, and doesn’t want anyone to know about his singing. It’s hard to keep that a secret, since some of the students have seen him on TV and there is a story in the newspaper about him. James needs insight into his gift of music to find his place in the family.

When Zinny Taylor, in Creech’s *Chasing Redbird* (1997), discovers a mysterious, overgrown trail that begins on her family’s farm in Bybanks, Kentucky, she is determined to clear it from start to finish. For her, it represents a place of her own, a place she could go to get away from her family, to grow up and find herself. “The trail was curving in the direction of the woods, and part of me was eager to enter them to see where the trail would lead, and part of me was pigeon-hearted, uneasy about what might await me there” (31). She may have felt uneasy, but she was not afraid to discover the truth. Along this journey of uncovering an old Indian trail, she also uncovered her own feelings about her beloved late aunt and cousin, the parents she had never been close to, and a boy who pursued her in spite of her obsession on the trail. This passion to uncover the trail that was eventually opened to the public as Redbird Trail, led Zinny home with a strong identity and knowledge of her unique contribution and place on the earth.

Woodrow, in White’s Newbery Honor Book, *Belle Prater’s Boy* (1996), must deal with his mother’s disappearance in order to grow up and find himself. After Belle Prater vanishes early one morning, Woodrow is sent to live with his grandparents in Coal Station, Virginia. His cousin, Gypsy, lives next door and is just as curious as the rest of the town about his secret concerning his mother’s disappearance. Woodrow is cross-eyed and wears hand-me-downs, but Gypsy is impressed by his charm and witty stories. As they spend time together, the cousins find they have a lot more in common. Gypsy wonders how Woodrow can accept his mother’s disappearance when she’s never gotten over her father’s suicide seven years earlier. As time passes and the two come to trust each other with their loss and sorrow, they find a way to share their pain and face the reality that a parent had left them, not because they didn’t love them, but because “their pain was bigger than their love. You had to forgive them for that” (195). Eventually, Woodrow finds he can release his secret concerning the whereabouts of his mother and share his pain with his cousin.

Overcoming the loss of a loved one is also a theme in Cynthia Rylant's Newbery Medal Book, *Missing May* (1992). After her parents die and when none of her relatives in Ohio want her, Summer is sent to live with her Aunt May and Uncle Ob in West Virginia. Her Uncle Ob, a disabled World War II veteran, enjoys creating art sculptures in the form of whirligigs and her Aunt May enjoys gardening. They live in a broken-down trailer with peeling aluminum, missing windows, and sinking front steps located in Deep Water in Fayette County. Summer has never seen two people more in love than her elderly aunt and uncle. She found all the love and family she had been missing all her life right there with Ob and May. Life was good for six years, and then May dies from her untreated diabetes. Not only does Summer have her own grief to deal with, but she fears losing Ob, as well. Summer's identity crisis depends on moving through the grieving process herself and at the same time helping Uncle Ob cope with his great loss.

Another universal experience for young people is the search for religion. In Cynthia Rylant's Newbery Honor book, *A Fine White Dust* (1986), Pete, a thirteen-year-old North Carolina boy, has been attending the Baptist church and is searching for something that would save him from going to hell. When the Preacher Man, James W. Carson, comes to town to lead a revival, Pete is sure he has found what he was looking for. He has a religious experience that changes his life, and then he strikes up a friendship with the Preacher Man, making every attempt to follow in his footsteps. Of course, this obsession causes conflicts with his loving, but non-religious parents and his best friend, Rufus, an avowed atheist. They fail to share the joy of his salvation or warm up to the Preacher. Then in the final days of the revival, the Preacher Man invites Pete to leave town with him. Pete agrees to go, but, when betrayed, learns some painful lessons about trust and friendship.

Characters Free of Stereotyping in Strong Family Relationships

When characters are free of stereotyping, they reflect the culture in producing memorable, family relationships with characters true to the culture of the region. As Cynthia Rylant reflects on her childhood memories of living with her grandparents in Cool

Ridge, West Virginia, she says, "We children had to make do with each other and what we found in the mountains, and do you know, I was never bored!" In her books, especially in, *When I Was Young in the Mountains* (1982), Rylant depicts the culture of her grandparents through the simple home-cooked meals, visits to the outhouse in the middle of the night, swimming in a mud hole, baptism in the mountain river, visits to the country store, water pump by hand, and church in the one-room school house. Her stories take us back in time to a culture that was isolated from mainstream America but which thrives on strong relationships among the people.

Gloria Houston also takes us to the Blue Ridge Mountains and a most unforgettable character in *My Great-Aunt Arizona* (1992). Arizona was born in a log cabin her papa built in the meadow on Henson Creek. Arizona is a typical mountain girl who likes to grow flowers, sing, and square dance to the music of the fiddler on Saturday night. But what she likes most of all is to read—and dream—about all the faraway places she would like to visit one day. Well, Arizona only goes to those faraway places in her imagination. Instead she stays in the Blue Ridge Mountains where she was born and teaches generations of children in her one-room schoolhouse "about the words and numbers and the faraway places they would visit someday" during her fifty-seven-year teaching career.

Another memorable character is found in George Ella Lyon's *With a Hammer for My Heart* (1997), Ada Smith. Protagonist Lawanda Ingle comes to know her spiritual values and the power of prayer through the influence of her eccentric Grandmother, Mamaw Smith, who is struck by a bright light in the spirit Sunday at Splinter Creek Church and has a vision. In the vision she sees Mother Jesus who gives her a gift of healing in her hands with a command, "Don't let nobody go to bed before their time" (16). But when she testifies in front of the congregation, they drag her out and excommunicate her. Even though they consider Mother Jesus to be sacrilegious, in hard times and desperate situations, many are healed by her laying on of hands and waving of a feather to chase the sickness away. When Lawanda is critically ill, the family carries her over the mountains in pouring rain so that Mamaw can pray for her and she can be healed. Because she has experienced this healing herself, Lawanda is quite incensed when a new

classmate, Jimmy says in Civics class, “You should see her. Big crazy woman, goes around singing and healing people with a feather” (21). Lawanda does her best to defend Mamaw at the time, but then begins to doubt. Lawanda seeks out Mamaw to verify the story for herself and find out the truth of her healing power.

In *The Star Fisher* (1991), Laurence Yep draws on his own family history to depict a Chinese family’s experiences when they arrive from Ohio to open a laundry in 1927. When they get off the train in Clarksburg, West Virginia, they are the first Asians any of the town’s people have seen. As a result, the language barrier, as well as outward appearances, make them the brunt of cruel taunts. Fortunately, their landlady, a retired schoolmistress, warmly welcomes and befriends them. The protagonist, Joan Lee is fifteen, and unlike her parents, she and her siblings were born in the United States and speak English fluently. She serves as translator for her parents and shelters them from cruel comments. At school, Joan has a difficult adjustment, until she meets another outcast friend who helps her realize that she is not the only one struggling to find a niche. Still, “The Star Fisher,” a Chinese folk tale Joan shares with her little sister, symbolizes Joan’s position even after she gains acceptance: like the child of the magical kingfisher who is held captive in human form by her mortal husband, Joan feels caught between two cultures: the Chinese and the Appalachian.

Another story rejecting stereotypes is *Borrowed Children* (1999) by George Ella Lyon. It is set in Kentucky during the Great Depression. When Mama is forced to stay in bed for six weeks after the birth of William, it is twelve-year-old Amanda Perritt (Mandy) who reluctantly drops out of school to care of her younger siblings and keep house for her older brothers and father. She is responsible for taking care of the new baby until her Mama is able to take over. Then, Mandy is sent to visit her well-to-do grandparents in Memphis during the Christmas holiday to give her a break from all her responsibilities. Here, Mandy learns about her family history. She hears stories of her mother’s childhood and learns about the dark secrets of her Aunt Laura. Mandy bonds with her grandparents and, with a new understanding of her family, returns home with a sense of her own individuality as well as what it means to be part of a family.

A Heightened Sense of Place

Novels that provide a heightened sense of place are ones that take the reader to a situation so unique to the culture that the experience would have little likelihood of occurring elsewhere. For instance, in Bates’ picture book, *Ragsale* (1995), illustrated by Chapman-Crane, *ragsalin’* makes Saturday a special family day in Appalachia. In the book, Jessann, her mom, sister Eunice, Mamaw, Aunt Mary Jane and cousin Billie Jo set off for ragsales. Driving to various sales they look for the things they need, but also hope to find some unique treasures. The Stuart Robinson ragsale is at Mommy’s old high school, so she always sees people she knows. While her mom looks for clothes for the family, Jessann tries to find some mittens for riding the sled and Billie Jo combs through the piles of used paperbacks. Bates says that “Ragsales are a special kind of used clothing store, and when I was a little girl we went to the ragsale about every weekend. Wearing used clothes is a way of not wasting things that are still good.” She says that even though ragsales aren’t as prevalent now, “going to them is as much fun as ever.”

While rural poverty is a universal experience, *Just Juice* (1998) by Karen Hesse tells the inspiring story of the eight members of the Faulstich family who learned to endure impoverished conditions ever since Pa got laid off from the mine. The opening image of Ma “spreading grape jelly so thin on the sliced white bread you can hardly find the purple” suggests the level of poverty of the Faulstich family. The story is narrated by nine-year-old Justus (“Juice”) Faulstich who has to repeat third, grade because no matter how hard she tries, she simply can’t learn to read. She often plays truant and stays home, where she is happiest working with Pa in his machine shop in the yard. Illiteracy is an underlying issue: Pa keeps it secret that he can’t read, and because he can’t deal with the official papers, the family could lose their house. Juice sympathizes with her Pa’s secret and his depression: “We all look out for him. But I look out for him best, even Ma says so.” At the same time she realizes that as she learns to read, she may have to leave him behind: “Pa and me, we’ve been careful tiptoeing around this particular secret. But I can’t let Pa’s half of the secret keep me from doing something about mine.” In a climactic scene when Ma gives

birth, Juice is the only one at home, and she makes herself read the sugar monitor and saves Ma's life. Even through the darkest moments of truant officers, court summons, and the fear of losing their home, the Faulstich family remains hopeful and creative in finding inner resources to cope with their bleak situation.

The Search for Self in Appalachian Young Adult Literature

What matters in Appalachian literature is that young adults examine their beliefs and validate their culture and family heritage. While Appalachian values may be marginalized in mainstream American culture, the literature discussed here gives adolescents a means to search for their identities within a safe context where their values are validated. Whether they go to Ragsales on Saturdays or play Mumbletypeg with their friends, adolescents should find role models in the literature they read. When readers discover their own feelings in the character of a book, they experience the events of the story as though they were happening to themselves, thus validating their life experiences. They can also learn about the history and politics of Appalachia. For readers not living in Appalachia, this literature not only acquaints them with the values of mountain people, but readers can also identify with the characters who struggle with universal themes such as poverty, family relationships, cultural heritage, and spiritual matters. In Appalachian Young Adult Literature, readers searching for their identity and looking for a yardstick against which to measure themselves can find help in defining the person they want to become. Whether they come to the mountains to learn to understand them like Louisa in *Wish You Well*, or want to come to terms with the family history like Zinny in *Chasing Redbird*, or want to leave their mountain home for a college education like Lawanda in *With A Hammer for My Heart*, readers can identify with the subject matter and recognize themselves in the fictional characters.

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Writing to the Teenager Inside:

A Talk with Kevin Brooks

Kevin Brooks burst upon the young adult literature scene with *Martyn Pig* (Chicken House/Scholastic 2003) and was an instant favorite with young people. His rapid-fire delivery of myriad details and lovable/hate-able anti-hero protagonists speak to teenagers and “the teenager inside us all,” as Kevin describes the place he goes to find that special voice, the voice of “Moo” Nelson, for example, the overweight hero of *Kissing the Rain*. Kevin shared his own story and his views on the writing craft face to face at the 2003 ALAN Workshop in San Francisco.



that Moo faces with the police and the gangster, you haven’t got too many options, really. One of the options is that you stand up and face it, but that means you become kind of like the people who are making your life hell. Another way is to just sort of put up with it and run away.

The “kissing the rain” part is almost like embracing the attitude which is thrust at you, which is hurting you rather than fighting or running away from it. That’s what I was attempting to capture.

TAR: In *Kissing the Rain* you introduce the reader to your protagonist and narrator, Mike Nelson, nicknamed Moo by his classmates, in reference to his weight problem.

“Kissing the Rain” is Moo’s expression for embracing the insulting remarks about his obesity that rain down on him from his classmates. How did you come up with that expression? Is it from your own life?

Kevin: I think it’s one of those things that just pops into my head, actually. I wanted to somehow draw together the taunting and the rain; the point of it being that if you’re in that situation where you’re being bullied, which ties into the larger dilemma

TAR: Are most kids rainmakers or rain-takers?

Kevin: Given a chance, most of them would be rain makers, I think. There’s that sort of pecking order thing, so at least they’ll be the top bully in their group. I think Moo does it to an extent with his only friend, Brady.

As I created Moo’s personality, I didn’t want the reader to just feel sorry for him, but rather I wanted the reader to bounce on the edge of feeling sorry for him—acknowledging the problems in his life, but also from the negative side, seeing why he was in the situation he was in. He’s not the most attractive, the nicest person in the world. I wanted the reader to see him from different sides, and I attempted to keep the balance between two perspectives on Moo.

Lucas and Kissing the Rain

Reviews and comments by Wendy Kelleher, Arizona State University Department of English

Kevin Brooks writes with the easy grace of a poet, using language that leaves the reader breathless at times as he speaks the truth in ways that adolescents need to hear it. Brooks pulls no punches, softens no blows. His protagonists tell stories without neat, happy endings, stories that are real and reach into the heart of truth, and then stand back and allow the reader to react without prompts or orchestration. There is no formulaic tidiness in Kevin Brooks's novels. There is only reality, a camera turning on and a camera turning off. No narration, no pedantic moralizing, no lesson to be learned. Just life as it happens.

Lucas

Kevin Brooks's third novel *Lucas* is the story of Caitlin McCann, a teenage girl living on the island of Hale among an ethnocentric and cruel citizenry far too concerned about their own inane existence. She learns the dimensions of this awful truth when Lucas ambles into her life.

Lucas is a gypsy, a rover, a man without a country who doesn't conform to any societal standard but thinks and lives for himself; he *is* an island and needs no one. Caitlin cannot fathom her love and fascination for Lucas, but the reader will; we always want what we cannot have.

The story opens with Caitlin and her dad driving her brother back from college. On the trip

home they see Lucas and Caitlin's life begins to change; unlike every other boy she's known, he doesn't feel "the need to act at all. He was just himself, take it or leave it" (97). This simple humility draws Caitlin but repels nearly everyone else on the island, and within a few days, he's the target of a campaign of terror conducted by some of the most popular (and powerful) island kids.

The story reaches its climax during a stormy evening when an old man stumbles upon a teenage girl's viciously raped and torn body, and Lucas is accused. In the ensuing witch hunt, he seeks sanctuary with Caitlin and her father as swarming villagers scream for "justice" outside their house. When he realizes they'll not be satisfied till they have him, he leaps over the crowd and runs for his shelter across the quicksand mudflats.

Just as the reader breathes a sigh of relief at his brilliant escape, Lucas makes a choice that leaves Caitlin grasping for solace in a place where none exists.

Lucas is appropriate for middle and high school, but teachers might be wise to offer a disclaimer about violence and sexual content. At 400 plus pages, the book is involved and sometimes the storyline gets lost in Caitlin's introspection about events and people. One of Brooks's particular strengths as a

story teller, however, is his sense of pacing. He intuitively juxtaposes his description of sea and weather rhythms and the unfolding events, much like the orchestration of music underlying scenes portrayed on the movie screen. To Kevin Brooks, crying yourself a story *does* work. "All you have to do is tell the truth, tell it like it was," says Caitlin's dad (inside page). He's absolutely right. *Lucas* is proof of that.

Brooks, Kevin. *Lucas*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

Kissing the Rain

I'd place Kevin Brooks' second novel, *Kissing the Rain*, firmly in the same category as other male coming of age stories such as *Stotan* or *The Outsiders*, but with a much more sinister, knifelike edge. The story's protagonist, Mike Nelson, a.k.a. Moo (so nicknamed by his peers for his weight problem) has a cynical self image; "I ain't COOL, I ain't LEAN, I ain't HARD, I ain't MEAN ... I ain't even got a NICE PERSONALITY," he tells us; in fact, he's just fat, the victim of his male and female classmates' jeers, taunts, and daily beatings, which he has come to refer to as "the rain."

The story opens just a few hours before its ending as Moo flashes back a year earlier to a rainy November night when all his troubles began on a bridge overlooking the A12 Highway.

This is Moo's thinking place, his refuge, until one particular night when he sees an obviously staged murder. From his vantage point on the bridge, he observes what happens with the clarity and detail of a young man who pays attention to everything around him. When police talk to him later the next day, he calmly reports everything he saw, repeating the particulars without so much as a pause.

That night as Moo watches TV news coverage of the event, it dawns on him that what he actually witnessed was a police frame up of a local mobster and murderer named Keith Vine.

Moo's only friend and fellow outcast, Brady, begs for details, telling him that Vine is a "badass". His curiosity piqued, Moo does a Google search and finds out more than he wants to know. His conclusion? "I can SEE myself getting dragged into a whole heap of BADASSery."

Back at school Moo is surprised to find the "rain" of insults has stopped. The kids ask him about what he saw and beg him for details. He's in the glory seat, and while a part of him enjoys the notoriety, another part remembers the capriciousness of the crowd.

Moo soon finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he tells the truth in court, that Vine is innocent, the police threaten to send his dad to jail on trumped up charges. If he lies and says that Vine is guilty, the mobster has promised to make good on threats of his own. The line between good guys and bad is badly blurred, but as the novel approaches its ending Moo prepares to put an unlikely plan into action that he hopes will stop all the "rain" for good.

Brooks, Kevin. *Kissing the Rain*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2004.

TAR: Moo's narration is almost stream of consciousness—a rapid-fire delivery—mixing long sentences with sentences of only two words, followed by words or phrases in capitals to emphasize a point. It's easy to follow but it's kind of like watching an MTV music video or a television advertisement in that lots of images and ideas come very quickly. In this writing style of yours, you accurately convey a grand number of ideas in a very small space. Do you notice the myriad of details in real life?

Kevin: I've always felt that the details are of great importance to a writer, and I have always tended to notice everything around me. I think it's the small things that actually characterize life. You put them all together, and that's what comprises the whole. I have always noticed, for example, the way that someone moves their eyes, the way they stand. The small things are everywhere, and they make up the world. In good writing the author can more accurately convey the essence of something through a multitude of details rather than long, direct descriptions.

TAR: You demonstrate a skill for portraying the cruelty, madness, strangeness, and humor of school

and how teenage kids, especially outcasts, experience it. For example, in the typical school cafeteria, like Mike Nelson's school cafeteria, the unpopular kid faces the daily problem that no peers will let him eat lunch at their table. How do you know kids this age so well? Were you ever a teacher?

Kevin: I was never a teacher, but what I do remember very well from when I was a teenager are the emotions. I know exactly how I felt in certain situations, and I still feel some of the same emotions in similar situations now. I am much better at dealing with them now, but if I go into a room full of strange people now, I'll feel virtually the same as I did when I was a kid. Now, of course, I've done it so many times that I've learned how to deal with it, but beneath that, the same instinctive, emotional reaction takes place.

Those kinds of things that seem small now didn't seem small at all back then. Every single day, every single minute, there is stuff for a teenager to deal with it. As we get older, it's probably still there, but we have learned to deal with it.

Until I was eleven, I went to a small village school, but then I won a scholarship to a big, wealthy, private school. Suddenly, I found myself

away from the kids I grew up with and with kids who were much wealthier. I often took sanctuary in books. Twenty years later, I was commuting to work in London, sitting on the train among lots of people, reading a book, and I realized that not much had changed. Adults drive cars instead of bikes, and carry briefcases instead of satchels and talk about markets, but it's all pretty much the same, just the outer layer changes. The real stuff is still the same.

TAR: Speaking of sanctuary, real or figurative, Mike Nelson finds sanctuary at a bridge where he passes time watching the traffic go by and escaping from the world. When you were his age, did you have a bridge or place of sanctuary where you went, and do you think that's a common thing for adolescents?

Kevin: Yes. Although I had two brothers, I quite enjoyed being on my own. The house I grew up in had a sort of an attached garage with a flat roof and a little parapet. You could get down on the roof from the landing window, and I used to spend a lot of time on the garage roof. I would spend a lot of time just sitting up there, really, on my own, and I never got tired of looking down.

Maybe not everyone is this way—some people find sanctuary in the company of other people rather than being alone, but I think everybody has a place where they go to feel sanctuary. Even now, I have a place; my sanctuary now is sitting in my little room in front of my computer, writing.

TAR: The bridge works well for Mike Nelson because it works as a plot device in the conflict because he sees the murder take place there, and it works in characterization of Moo, as well.

Kevin: I think about stories a lot before I write them. Before the writing of this book, I actually saw a boy on a bridge. He seemed to be wrapped in a sort of loneliness but peacefulness, as well. That fit with the ideas about which I was getting ready to write.

TAR: One of the things that makes Mike Nelson appealing is that he has this intelligent, dry, but dark sense of humor. As the narrator, the opportu-

nity is often there for him to make fun of himself, and he takes it. It seems to be a tool that he uses to defend himself. Is this dryness common to the British sense of humor? Is Moo's sense of humor actually your sense of humor?

Kevin: It's mine. I'm not a bleak person, but I am sort of dry in my sense of humor. Sometimes when I'm writing some of the humor comes through, but some may need to be explained to Americans because it can be in the British style. I suppose there are different national senses of humor; it's risky to generalize, but I think there can be differences. I think humor works very well in dark situations. A story is hard to read if it is all dark, but the humor makes it readable.

It can't all be dry, either, and different styles of humor work in different ways. Some of the best comedy I have seen, like the American television show, *The Simpsons*, isn't just funny but has some point to make. I even like sort of middle-of-the-road things like *Cheers* and *Friends*. They're funny in a different way, and actually English humor isn't always dry; we have Benny Hill type of humor, as well.

TAR: Early in *Kissing the Rain*, Moo's dad has on a Homer Simpson shirt, so I couldn't help but from that point on think of him as Homer Simpson. Was that intentional on your part?

Kevin: Just a little inside out joke. The image goes into the back of your mind, and a character is built without having to say, "He looks like so and so," in an overt description.

TAR: Moo's dark and quirky sense of humor, the twists and turns of the plot, and your distinctive writing style combine to give the book a sort of Chris Crutcher, Ken Kesey, Hunter Thompson flavor with perhaps some overtones of Robert Cormier. Your writing is more sophisticated than just telling a story. Have you had to work to attain this style, or does it come naturally? Does it take a lot of revision to get that kind of complexity?

Kevin: That's a nice list of names. I especially like Ken Kesey. The writing does come kind of naturally

now, but it didn't when I first started writing. When I was writing stuff for adults, I was unpretentiously trying to write the great masterpiece, the great novel to show how good I was. But you can lose track of the story that way. When I started writing for and about teenagers, the story became the main thing. You've got to write a good story first. I found that all the nice little bits of prose and poetry that I like in a piece could still go in, but they are almost like the garnish to the main course, which is the story.

I've always loved really good writing, especially good writing that includes a good story; that's the ideal—when great writing doesn't get too much in the way of the story. That's what I have aimed to do in my writing. I sometimes have to be a bit hard on myself and edit out stuff [I have written] I like, passages that are really good writing but maybe get in the way of the story. I've had to learn how to do editing like that with the help of my publisher. I still enjoy the art of words and style.

TAR: Your word choice is masterful, and sometimes you even invent words like “hipponotic” and “a nonfat smile.” The language of your writing is enjoyable even just for its own sake.

Kevin: I enjoy writing in that fashion, and I never really change the nuts and bolts of how I write. I may change the direction slightly depending on the audience, but my basic structure and style remain the same. I don't change much. It should be writing that could be enjoyed by people of different ages. I do spend a lot of time picking the right words. It's like painting, in which you make sure you get the right shades; in writing, you make sure you get

the right words. In isolation, it might not make a huge difference but throughout the whole book, the writer can pick words that create rhythms that emphasize moods or feelings. That gives a work a nice edge, and I try to take the time to get the words right.

TAR: You mentioned Raymond Chandler as one of your influences. Are you an aficionado of the detective story?

Kevin: Yes, I've always liked that genre. I read a lot of that sort of thing when I was young. Now I read Lawrence Sanders, James Lee Burke, and people like that. There are some really great crime writers, but the crime itself isn't the point, it's just a good device to create a story.

I'm always looking for new authors to read. Once I find an author I like, I actually wait for them to write the next book. I didn't read Stephen King for a long time, then one day I gave him a try and found that I loved his work. I don't read horror as a genre, necessarily, and I don't really like the stuff solely based on monsters, but Stephen King writes really well. I think he writes a good story. I also thought his book, *On Writing*, was one of the best books about writing that I have ever read.

TAR: In *On Writing* Stephen King says that when he writes, he has an imaginary ideal reader in mind and includes just as much detail as he imagines that ideal reader would like to know. Do you have a sort of ideal reader, an audience in mind when you write?

Kevin: I suppose I do, but it's the teenage version of me. The teenage me has never really left;

When we're all young we all paint and we all write and we all sing, but then we reach a certain age when we're told we have to do it properly. If we don't do it properly, that is according to the formal practices, then we're told to give it up. It's a shame because, although it can be good to learn to do things properly, there are other ways to do them. As long as you do something passionately, how it comes out is just about as good as any other way.

I think it stays with everyone over time. For *Martyn Pig*, *Kissing the Rain* and *Lucas*, I was kind of writing for the teenage person in me. When I'm writing adult stuff, I suppose I am writing to the adult part of me.

TAR: You and Stephen King share a talent for going inside the minds of your characters and revealing their inner thoughts. It seems to facilitate the reader's identification with that character. How does that work?

Kevin: It can work at many levels. When you've got something that's really bothering you and you can't really express it or talk about it with other people, you may think you're the only bloke in the world who has this issue, but suddenly you come across somebody else who voices it, and you think, "I'm not the only one in the world." That helps you as a sort of friendship, and a friendship is formed with that character.

Young boys, for example, might talk about sex, but they'll never talk about love with each other. They never discuss love with their friends; it just isn't done. You fall in love with someone and can't tell anyone, and it's like a volcano inside you. You can't talk about it, so what do you do with it?

TAR: Speaking of the communication practices of today's youth, what effect do you think the Internet has had on the writing practices and skills of young people, especially emailing and web logging?

Kevin: In some quarters, there's a fear that although many young people are using immediate messaging and using it quite frequently, they aren't necessarily writing with grammatical correctness. But you have to say that they are writing far more than they used to, and that's a very good thing, I think.

Chat rooms have some good and bad issues, as well. I don't know about the United States, but in the UK, there's been a big clamp down on chat rooms because of the danger of not knowing the

true identity of the chatters, which is fair enough. There's also an advantage to chat rooms, however, in that people who are lonely, people who don't have any friends or anyone to talk to, can talk to people online, which is probably a good thing.

One good thing about all the writing that has come as a result of the Internet is the passion and honesty in the writing. When we're all young we all paint and we all write and we all sing, but then we reach a certain age when we're told we have to do it properly. If we don't do it properly, that is according to the formal practices, then we're told to give it up. It's a shame because, although it can be good to learn to do things properly, there are other ways to do them. As long as you do something passionately, how it comes out is just about as good as any other way. When young people are talking on their weblogs, they are expressing themselves passionately; they're just communicating naturally without trying to be like everybody else. They just want to be themselves. I think it's really good. I think it's a good outlet.

TAR: Your mother is still living in England. How does she feel about your success?

Kevin: She's quite happy for me but not entirely surprised because I was a pretty good student in school, including university.

Kevin Brooks lives in the small town of Maningtree in Essex. He and his wife, Susan, have been together for over 20 years. They have a retriever/collie cross named Jess, and a new puppy named Shaky, whom Kevin describes as "a lurcher, six-months old, a bit mad but very nice." Kevin's fourth book, Candy, is finished and due out next year. He is working on a fifth one at the moment. He also has a small novel, Bloodline, coming out in August through Barrington Stoke, an Edinburgh publisher with a specialty in books for reluctant readers. He has a short story, "Dumb Chocolate Eyes," in an anthology called Thirteen coming soon from Orchard. If that is not enough, Kevin has also been working on a screenplay version of his first YA novel, Martyn Pig.



Connecting the Past and the Present

Unusual and Great

Michael Osnato, former superintendent of schools of Montclair, New Jersey, was instrumental in organizing a committee of local citizens, teachers, administrators, parents, and members of The Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence, to become a part of The Children's Literature Initiative. This group was to come up with ideas to raise funds for buying books for all of the libraries in the Montclair public schools. Most of the members were on the fund-raising part of the committee. Five members were on the book selection committee that instead of who worked with the teachers and librarians to find out the schools' needs and interests. Over the course of four years, more than \$200,000 was raised from grants, gifts, and an adult spelling bee.

Competition in the adult spelling bee consisted of teams of three opposing other similar teams. There were realtor teams, doctor teams, teacher teams, teams of local citizens, women teams, men teams, etc. Each year over 60 teams entered, paying three hundred dollars per team in order to participate. Word callers were celebrities

who lived in the town. When all was done, the committee of five was given the funds raised to buy books, and lots of books were added to the elementary and middle schools and the high school. Every cent raised by this initiative was given to the committee to spend. And did they buy good and new books! All of these were trade and reference books. Teachers and students used these books as an integral part of their daily activities and even as part of the curriculum.

By the way, I attended all of the spelling bees, and I did well on the first three words. After that, I could hardly pronounce the words. Books to study the potential word list were provided to each team. What fun. What a good cause in these times when libraries are suffering from severe cut backs.

The new superintendent, Dr. Frank Alvarez, has decided to keep the movement going, and he has organized a good committee to meet the challenge. There may not be a spelling bee every year, but some activity will be set forth to raise a lot of money to keep the libraries well staffed with new titles and to keep the publishers, teachers, students, and librarians happy.

Attention, ALAN Members!

It doesn't matter what your political persuasion is, I think all should read Richard A. Clarke's *Against All Enemies*, Simon & Schuster, 2004. If anything, this book will provoke thought and discussion about world events, especially terrorism. Very few are attacking Clarke's concerns with protecting the homeland. Little evidence has shown up anywhere that discounts most of the serious events that led up to 9/11. Whether or not you agree with President Bush's decision to go to war with Iraq, you will have to look at some of the events that led to this decision. Students need to know we live in a political world and that the United States is a part of that world. (This is not a simple statement.) We are a society of many creeds and religious beliefs. We have many values. War stories have filled our shelves and we know from books such as Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, (Signet Classic), and John Wilson's *And in the Morning*, (Kids Can Press), the price, horrors, fears, unexpected events of wars. If English teachers are involved in teaching historical fiction, they will

find plenty of good writers, such as Ann Rinaldi, *Cast Two Shadows*, (Harcourt); Avi, *The Fighting Ground*, (Harper Trophy); Harry Turtledove, *Gunpowder Empire*, (Tor); Maureen Garvie and Mary Beaty, *George Johnson's War*, (Groundwood); L. M. Elliott, *Under a War-torn Sky*, (Hyperion); Pete Nelson, *Left for Dead*, (Delacorte); Nelly S. Toll, *Behind the Secret Window*, (Puffin); Kevin Coyne, *Marching Home*, (Viking); Tamar Bergman, *Along the Tracks*, (Houghton Mifflin); Uri Orlev, *Run, Boy, Run*, (Houghton Mifflin); H. Bruce Franklin's collection, *The Viet Nam War in American Stories, Songs and Poems*, (Bedford Books/St. Martin's Press); Esther Forbes, *Johnny Tremain*, (Houghton Mifflin); Jerry Spinelli, *Milkweed*, (Knopf); James Bradley, *Flags of Our Fathers: Heroes of Iwo Jima*, (Delacorte); Walter Dean Myers, *Fallen Angels*, (Scholastic); Milton Meltzer's collection, *Hour of Freedom: American History in Poetry*, (Boyd's Mills Press); June A. English and Thomas D. Jones, *Scholastic Encyclopedia of the United States at War*, (Scholastic); and Liz Sonneborn *The American West: An Illustrated History*, (Scholastic). These are just a few of the many books that can be used to stimulate thinking and discussion.

Another book that deserves reading is *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, by Diane Ravitch, (Knopf). Both right and left political wings exert pressure on book companies regarding what should be included in texts. Some examples include: (1) The use of "peanuts to be included" is because one group stated that peanuts are

nutritious. Another group challenged the use of the word "nutritious" and indicated some people have allergic reactions to them (2). Another issue dealt with quilting in the mid-nineteenth century, some members on the screening committee objected because this view, although historically accurate, it "contained stereotypes of females as 'soft' and 'submissive.'"

The list goes on and on, including challenges to a story about Mount Rushmore, the environment, a selfish rich baker, and an arrogant king— just a few among other issues.

Of course, in the last issue of *The ALAN Review* I mentioned lots of categories and books that probably would warrant a challenge, but there is a large group out there that wants students to get an education void of anything that is controversial. Notice how many biographies really avoid sensitive issues about the personal doings of our nation's leaders. We now know that Jefferson and Washington had slaves, and Jefferson even slept with at least one. Read *Jefferson's Children: The Story of One American Family* by Shannon Lanier and Jane Feldman, (Random House).

Sing a Song

Of course, we all know that the lyrics of all songs are poems. What a great way to get students hooked on the wonders of poems. Among some interesting books that have been published in recent years are: *Go In and Out the Window: An Illustrated Songbook for Young People*, music arranged and edited by Dan Fox, and commentary by Claude Marks, (The Metropolitan

Museum of Art and Henry Holt); *Getting to Know You: Rogers and Hammerstein Favorites*, illustrated by Rosemary Wells (Harper Collins); *All Night, All Day: A Child's First Book of African-American Spirituals*, selected and illustrated by Ashley Bryan (Aladdin); *Cats: The Book of the Musical*, music by Andrew Lloyd Weber, based on *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, by T. S. Eliot (Faber/The Really Useful Company); *Rogers and Hammerstein's In My Own Little Corner of the World*, illustrated by Katherine Potter (Simon & Schuster); *Rogers and Hammerstein's My Favorite Things*, illustrated by Renee Grant (Harper Collins); *God Bless America*, words and music by Irving Berlin, illustrations by Lynn Munsinger, *Summertime*, from *Porgy and Bess*, by George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin, paintings by Mike Wimmer (Aladdin); *Easter Parade* by Irving Berlin, illustrated by Lisa McCue (Harper Collins); *I Hear America Singing: Folk Songs for American Families*, collected and arranged by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Alien Garns (Knopf); *Over the Rainbow*, by E. Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen, illustrated by Julia Noonan (Harper Collins). Having each student select a favorite song and illustrate it with drawings or photographs is a worthwhile project. What a way to start a poetry unit. Then continue with such books as: *Is This Forever, or What? Poems and Paintings from Texas*, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye (Greenwillow); *Paint Me Like I Am: Teen Poems from the Writerscorps* (Harper Tempest); *Eve's Red Dress*, by Diane Lockward (Wind Publishers); *The Poetry*

Invisible Ladder, edited by Liz Rosenberg (Henry Holt); *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*, by Sara Holbrook (Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press); *The Body Electric*, edited by Patrice Vecchione (Henry Holt); *Truth and Lies*, edited by Patrice Vecchione (Henry Holt); *Whisper and Shout: Poems to Memorize*, edited by Patrice Vecchione (Cricket

Books); *Poems for Homeroom: A Place to Start*, by Kathi Appelt (Henry Holt); *Wherever Home Begins: 100 Contemporary Poems*, selected by Paul Janeczko (Orchard Books); *Words Afire*, by Paul Janeczko (Candlewick Press); *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth Century American Art*, edited by Jan Greenberg (Abrams); *Jinx* by Margaret Wild (Walker);

Blushing, Expressions of Love in Poems and Letters, collected by Paul Janeczko (Orchard); *Singing America: Poems that Define a Nation*, edited by Neil Philip, illustrated by Michael McCurdy (Viking); and *Dream Makers: Young People Share Their Hopes and Aspirations*, selected and illustrated by Neil Waldman (Boyd's Mills Press).