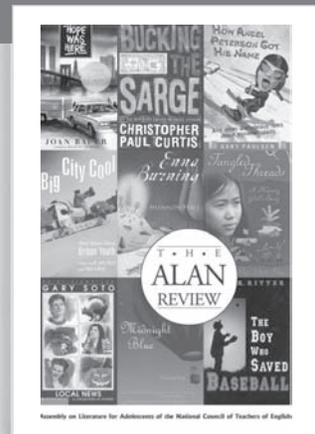


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<i>Jim Blasingame</i>	From the Editors	3
<i>Lori Atkins Goodson</i>		
<i>Betsy Nies</i>	The Borderlands of the Chicano Bildungsroman: A Look at Victor Martinez's <i>Parrot in the Oven</i>	4
<i>Bill Broz with guest co-editor Virginia Broz</i>	Finding Small Press and Self-Published Books about WWII Professional Resources Connection	10
	Call for Manuscripts	20
<i>Lori Atkins Goodson</i>	"Finish that chapter, then lights out:" A Reader Becomes a Writer. A Visit with Vivian Vande Velde	21
<i>Jean Boreen</i>	"Blurring" the Borders between Fantasy and Reality: Considering the Work of Cornelia Funke	26
	Clip and File Book Reviews	33
<i>Susan Carlisle</i>	Challenges Give Meaning to Our Lives: Francisco Jiménez and Social Justice	41
<i>F. Todd Goodson</i>	A Pinch of Tobacco and a Drop of Urine: Using Young Adult Literature to Examine Local Culture, Using Local Culture to Enrich Schools: An ALAN Research Grant	50
<i>Alex Sanchez</i>	Crossing Two Bridges: Coming Out and the Power of Images in YA Lit	56
<i>Shelley McNerny & John H. Bushman</i>	Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life	61
<i>Kay Smith</i>	Don't Take a Ride in Darnell Dixon's Rivy Dog of Love: Christopher Paul Curtis Talks About His New Book, <i>Bucking the Sarge</i> High School Connection	68

T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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From the Editors

We've all seen it happen. Topics in literature can help young people not only see beyond their own groups—their own borders, but possibly take that bold first step to cross the bridge to true understanding of others.

Such an understanding helps make the world not only a smaller place, but also a much more caring and cohesive environment, whether it's the son of a Missouri farmer feeling the intensity of the trial in Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* or the urban teenager understanding the adventure in Gary Paulsen's *Brian's Hunt*.

With that in mind, we've themed our fall issue Borders and Bridges, with the concept that quality young adult literature can serve to bridge so many facets of students' lives—spiraling outward from their families to their communities, cultures, nations, and beyond.

And in this issue, you'll find a variety of articles that demonstrate that theme—including a column by Bill Broz and Virginia Broz on how the use of small-press and self-published books about World War II can help bridge generations by helping students connect to the everyday people who became heroes during that historic time. At a time when some literature of that period may seem somewhat disconnected to the young adult audience, the authors share how these literary finds have enriched class units on World War II.

Jena Boreen's article on Cornelia Funke demonstrates how the author effectively blurs the line between fantasy and reality. In an in-depth interview,

Vivian Vande Velde, another author who powerfully blurs those lines, shares how her own love of reading triggered her passion for writing.

Susan Carlisle visits with Francisco Jiménez, author of popular YA works available in both Spanish and English which cross borders both literally and figuratively.

Other articles, such as Shelley McNerney's and John H. Bushman's discussion of young adult literature and morality, Alex Sanchez's personal narrative of crossing two borders and Betsy Nies's study of *Parrot in the Oven*, provide other examinations of the borders and bridges that exist in this genre of literature.

Whatever our age, we can all benefit from bridges that young adult literature helps us cross. It's up to us as professionals to help young people find the courage to look beyond their own borders. At a time when more and more borders continue to emerge to provide a potential limiting of students' worlds and their understanding of others, creating a connection among people becomes more valuable than ever before.

We hope you'll enjoy exploring along with us the variety of borders and bridges we present in this issue.

STOP THE PRESSES!! We literally held up production when this pleasant surprise was made possible—Kay Smith visits with Christopher Paul Curtis about his new novel, *Bucking the Sarge*. Read what Christopher has to say about his new work and Kay's review on page 70.

The Borderlands of the Chicano Bildungsroman:

Victor Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven*

Victor Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*, winner of the 1996 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, brings the element of formal experimentation, which so widely characterizes Chicano and Chicana literature for adults, to the field of young adult literature. Exploding and challenging genre boundaries has become an inherent element in defining a literary tradition that historically has evolved from the Tex-Mex *corridos*, through the protest poetry of the Chicano Movement, to the experimental texts of today. Marketed as a young adult novel, *Parrot in the Oven* stands alongside, in terms of literary sophistication, other Chicano and Chicana works that have been adopted from the adult field for younger readers. Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*, (1984) having gained wide popularity in the academy, now finds its way onto the desks of middle and high school students, as does Rudolpho Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), now listed in anthologies for readers fourteen and up. In terms of quality and market recognition, Martinez's text makes an important contribution to the field of Chicano young adult literature; it stands as a measuring tool for understanding the shape and texture of the Chicano *Bildungsroman* and its difference from the Chicana *Bildungsroman* for adolescents, itself a rare commodity.

Historically, Chicano literature finds its roots in the form of the *Bildungsroman* as early writers articulated the new immigrant's efforts to survive in a foreign land. José Antonio Villareal's *Pocho* (1959), considered the first Chicano novel in English, documents this struggle. This assimilationist tale finds itself revised in later texts such as Tomás Rivera's . . . *Y no*

se lo tragó la tierra / . . . *And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971) and Arturo Islas's *The Rain God: A Desert Tale* (1984) in which protagonists resist adopting American ideals and principles. The texts instead critique the material conditions and ideological systems that oppress the central narrator, whether that be the class oppression of the migrant farm worker of Rivera's text or the racist and patriarchal domination of women in Islas's tale. Both later narratives assume a decentered subject, inflected through narratives of race, class, and gender.

Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven* falls within this tradition. His narrative, like other recent Chicano and Chicana texts, relies on a certain level of literary experimentation to highlight the discursive nature of identity. His background in poetry makes itself felt in his metaphorically rich prose. His episodic style mirrors that of other Chicano and Chicana writers for young adults such as Sandra Cisneros who likewise brings a certain level of literary experimentation to her work. For example, Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*, a series of poetic vignettes, layers images, as Diane Klein notes, "like an impressionist painting where the subject isn't clear until you step back and view the whole" (22). She describes it as a "story of growing awareness which comes in fits and starts"; likewise, Martinez's short chapters, virtual short stories in themselves, create a narrative view of Manny as a fluid subject. Like a series of photographs of separate scenes, the chapters evoke images that reveal the pain of Manny's life.

The novel, of course, falls also within the Western tradition of the *Bildungsroman* which Klein describes

as follows: “The protagonist comes of age by going through painful rites of passage, by performing heroic feats or passing tests with the help of mentors, by surviving symbolic descents into hell, and finally by reaching a new level of consciousness” (22). Francois Jost, in his comparative analysis of the genre in Germany, England, and France, defined the (European) *Bildungsroman* as a tale in which the young man “recognizes his place in the world; he begins to distinguish, to be able to define this man who is himself” (137). Randolph P. Shaffner, in *The Apprenticeship Novel*, describes it as the story of a young hero who “has usually already become [. . .] a man” (25).

This emphasis on attaining manhood and defining one’s “manliness” presumes a fixed notion of masculinity uninflected by issues of race, ethnicity, or class, so much a part of today’s poststructuralist reading strategies for interpreting the world. For Manny, becoming a man involves passing tests and exploring, in part, the sexual world; yet there is no final definitive “manhood” in terms of Western ideology. Barbara A. White summarizes the traditional events of the *Bildungsroman* as follows: “The hero rejects the constraints of home, sets out on a journey through the world, obtains guides who represent different world views [. . .] and meets with many set backs before choosing the proper philosophy, mate and vocation” (3).

Manny indeed leaves home and suffers a physical initiation; he joins a gang in hopes of gaining sexual favors from its girls. Yet instead of finding a “mate and vocation,” he returns home, a marker itself of the Chicano *Bildungsroman* I will explore later in the paper. His rite of passage, metaphorically experienced earlier in the text when Manny becomes a “trainer” for the Chicano-organized boxing team, La Raza, is threaded through the narratives of race in such a way that reveal the differences between a Chicano *Bildungsroman* and the so-called “universal” narratives of the “classic” *Bildungsroman*. Much like Antonio in Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* who must understand his identity through the indigenous and mythic narratives of his friends and guide Ultima or Esperanza of Cisneros’s *House* who rejects racist narratives of identity outsiders offer to her, the protagonist of this book must come to grips with racial ideology, an unexamined concern in European texts. In a poststructuralist move, Martinez explores how

even narratives of racial pride can contribute to racist oppression.

Manny finds himself lost within a vortex of racial animus when the local Chicano leader, Lencho, forms a boxing team to fight the school-sponsored black team. He tries to whip up local sentiment for La Raza by damning the whites, specifically by celebrating the origins of the Chicanos as grounded in (their) color. He adopts the language of the 1960s Chicano Movement that embraced a return to native origins as a mean of redefining identity. According to Manny’s first-person narrative,

[Lencho] believed that white people were our worst enemy, and if they had one purpose in mind, it was to keep brown people down. We, on the other hand, were descendants of Indians blessed with a color that was as necessary as dirt to the earth, as important as the sun to all the trees. We had treasures buried deep inside our blood, hidden treasures we hardly knew existed. (119)

The protest writers of the sixties such as “Corky” Gonzalez and Oscar Zeta Acosta celebrated their Indian “blood” after years of repressing such identifications. This vehicle for revolt carried with it a dichotomous structure of good/evil, Chicano/white that itself could be limiting in its insistence on essentialist binaries. Manny rejects any easy adoption of such narratives as a means for forming racial identity when he responds to Lencho’s wholesale adoption of the “power” rhetoric of the Chicano Movement. His presentation of Lencho’s speech makes clear his discomfort with what might serve as only a passing salve for healing historic injustices. Manny narrates,

[Lencho] spoke with braids of lightening in his voice, saying stuff he’d learned in the Berets about Mexicans and Chicanos being a special people, how power slept in our fists and we could awaken it with a single nod of our heroic will. He piled it on about being proud, about how marvelous it was going to be after we pulverized those other guys. Lencho could really swell the chest muscles. (122)

Manny’s recognition of the idealized nature of such narratives—“we could awaken [this ethnic power] with a single nod of *heroic* will”—suggests his distance from them. Lencho “pile[s]” the rhetoric on, just like a salesperson, leading to a passing experience of racial pride. The Chicano Movement symbol—the raised fist—stands as an empty gesture, raised high, yet meaningless in the face of systemic oppression.

The fight itself, organized between black and Chicano fighters, stands as a metaphor for the more widespread discrimination. The boxing coach, a white Golden Gloves boxer, makes sure the black fighters destroy the Chicano group, mimicking an age-old practice of pitting minorities against each other. The Berets recognize this after the fight, ostracizing Lencho for causing “a lack of unity between them and their black brothers” (139). Martinez’s narrative questions the “pulveriz[ing]” of others as a means of gaining power. His critique of such a text of racial pride stands alongside his uneasiness with traditional narratives of success, central to American identity and culture.

The author interrogates America’s “bootstrap” legacy through the image of a baseball glove and game, potent signifiers of our national history. The juxtaposition between Manny’s lived reality and American myths of class fluidity, of achievement through hard work, makes clear the entrenched patterns of discrimination that inform not only the marketplace but also border and environmental politics. As the story opens, the narrator longs for a baseball glove:

I wanted a baseball mitt so bad a sweet hurt blossomed in my stomach whenever I thought about it. . . . There was an outfielder’s glove in the window of Duran’s Department Store that kept me dreaming downright dangerous outfield catches. (7)

Like the Chicano migrant worker—“illegal” or “legal”—hoping to earn a place in the American economy, Manny goes to the chili field to pick, a place as inimical to success as the pesticide-laden fields of his real-life counterparts. There the “sun would soon be the center of a boiling pot” (9), the air thick with dust, the leaves of the plants themselves “sparse and shriveled, dying for air [. . .] [with] a coat of white pesticide dust and exhaust fumes so thick you could smear your hands on the leaves and rub fingerprints with them” (10). While the sun “scald[s] the backs of [his] hands, leaving a pocket of heat crawling like a small animal inside [his] shirt,” he and his brother pick. They work alongside Mexican workers who Manny imagines becoming baseball players; he gazes at a picker: “The way he moved [. . .] made me think he’d make a terrific shortstop, what with the way he shifted from plant to plant, his knees like a triangle, tilting first one way then another” (14). Yet immigra-

tion service soon drives off this man, along with the others, leaving the boys to take the already picked bags. While separate from their counterparts, they still cannot steal into the American dream. Manny dreams of

the baseball glove, all clean and stiff and leather-smelling, and of myself in the cool green lawn of center field. I imagined already being on the baseball team at school, and people looking at me. Not these people picking chilies or those sent away in vans, but people I had yet to know, watching me as I stood mightily in centerfield. (20)

The image of “people [he] had yet to know” revering him speaks of a desire to leave behind his past, to rise into a glowing American whiteness, full of baseball fans. Yet even with the picked bags, all he can see is the dust in front of him, the “vans pulling away”: “[W]eariness [. . .] stretched as wide as the horizon” (20). The “clean and stiff” American dream stands alongside the “sparse and shriveled leaves.” The only time he does play, “fastballs kept squirting out [of the broken glove] and popping [him] in the face” (198). At one point, the glove becomes not a way of attaining success and glory, but rather a way of leaving the house. Living with an alcoholic father and perniciously clean mother, Manny uses the glove as a lie, claiming he is running off to play baseball, when in actuality, he is escaping to join his gang.

The lie of opportunity gives way to the reality of street life as Martinez questions the meaning of the American dream sequence for those left in the outfields of chili picking and migrant labor. Like Antonio’s brothers who will lose their relationship with their family while trying to acquire material wealth in vain in Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*, or Esperanza’s friends who remain trapped in a cycle of poverty in Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, the Chicano and Chicana *Bildungsroman* critiques cultural ideologies that perpetuate the myth of opportunity and economic systems that deny such opportunities to their protagonists.

The unavailability of the dream to Manny measures itself throughout the text in ways that make clear the impossibility of any wholesale adoption of it. The inconsistencies of Manny’s life tread across the page, drawing attention to the absurdity of common American maxims about getting ahead through education and hard work. His mother longs to send him to another, better white school district and has

him personally transfer his records because she has “heard rumors that they [the school administration] didn’t like kids leaving [his] school and sometimes would mix things up for months” (37), yet the school rejects him because of “an imbalance in the student population” (110). In his own school, even though he is a strong student, Manny is excluded from the gifted classroom where a white teacher teaches white students and he can only look on. The twenty dollars a teacher slips him for school supplies and shoes becomes lost to his father’s drinking. The American aphorisms that his father repeats—“Start on the bottom and work your way up”—are given lie by the circumstances of those who surround him.

Manny writes the following about his father’s friends: “[M]ost of the people he knew started on the bottom and worked their way sideways” (38). And the girl Manny falls for—very white, with a dreaminess about her, reminiscent of Gatsby’s Daisy—becomes a shattered image when her white male friends harass him and exclude him from an all-white party by deploying a racist stereotype; they accuse him of being sexually aggressive. The onslaught of racism twists the American dream into a jaundiced pretzel, yet the narrative does not spiral towards an existential despair but rather makes meaning out of what often stands foundationally at the center of Chicano narratives—namely the family. The return to the family marks Manny’s escape from narratives of racism. The home, of course, also serves as a microcosm of internalized oppression, yet the narrative suggests that it can offer some means of escape or resistance to external oppression.

Manny’s return home occurs following a revelatory experience, itself a familiar turning point in the European *Bildungsroman*. He momentarily adopts the codes of a gang whose response to class and racial oppression is physical assaults on wealthy whites. One gang member, Eddie, son of a Chicana and a white man, robs a white woman by violently slamming her hand in her car door, then grabbing her purse. Manny tries to follow Eddie but slows down as the police arrive. A black newspaper man stands up for him when the police question Manny, commenting to Manny about the white-looking Eddie, “Let them [the police] deal with their own” (213). This cross minority solidarity forms a backdrop for Manny’s new recognition of self. Manny identifies himself as a caretaker of

victims, a protector of basic human rights. He recognizes Eddie as the man he once saw in the distance with his sister, a temporary boyfriend who got his sister pregnant. He narrates:

In that instant of trying to call out to Eddie, everything changed. It was like I’d finally seen my own face and recognized myself; recognized who I really should be. Then I didn’t feel like catching up to Eddie anymore. Instead, I wanted to grab him, and scold him about how to treat people: like my sister, like that lady. (210)

This self-referential moment of mirroring, of sight, so common to the genre in which the individual learns to separate himself from society, is followed by a trip home where everything takes on a different perspective.

When he walks into the house, the prize possessions of his mother shift in color from gray to light. Throughout the novel, the living room registers as a symbolic metaphor for the family unit, varying in color according to family mood. In an earlier scene, after the father has been carted away by police for chasing his wife with a rifle, Manny perceives the room’s contents with a clouded perspective: “The frame of the Last Supper, with its gold-colored flange and cherub angels, looked as gray as a plastic-model battleship. Even the glass-top table mirrored a reflection of gray” (68). The appropriate battleship—signature of battle and war, a toy ship tossed about in a larger sea of family discord and a disjunction between societal expectations and family needs—changes to a “flock of birds.” After Manny separates himself from his gang,

Shadows lifted from the floor like a flock of birds rising into the horizon, and light guttered throughout the room, slapping away the dark for good. A huge splash of light even bounced off the glass-top coffee table [. . .] a snake of it slithered on the painting of the Last Supper. (214)

The mother’s collection and token religious picture take on new meaning as he gazes affectionately at his two sisters:

The lumpy cherub angels on the frame of the painting, the glass-top coffee table, my mother’s animals, gleaming in the sunlight. This room was what my mother spent so much energy cleaning and keeping together, and what my father spent so much energy tearing apart. And it was wondrous, like a place I was meant to be. A place, I felt, that I had come back to after a long journey of being away. (215)

The shifting imagery suggests that familial bonds outweigh the importance of acceptance in Anglo

society. The devastating effects of poverty and racism can be partly counteracted through relational strength.

Manny's transformation—or return home—does not occur within a vacuum. The father makes changes, gaining employment and offering help and support for the oldest sister who suffers a miscarriage and then racist negligence at the local hospital. In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, according to Hegel, the protagonist's trip towards maturity involves accepting traditional norms (Swales 20); the protagonist may start a family, signature of conventional mores.

In the Chicano *Bildungsroman*, however, a return to the “family” serves as a vehicle of opposition to larger societal forces for the Chicano protagonist. When the traditional routes of success (education and work) fail Manny and the streets envelop him, he finds a model within the home that offers an alternative to the prescribed, normative place of minority adolescents, namely, the streets. And despite the difficulties of home—the ambivalence it presents in the form of a mother who feels less than strong, a father who is not beyond abusing his position of power—the family functions as a site of resistance. The chapter names—the first chapter titled “Baseball Glove” (the glove being the symbol and means of his earlier escape from the family) and the last chapter, titled, explicitly, “Going Home”—reflect this emphasis.

Martinez's novel, of course, falls within a long line of coming-of-age stories that stress the importance of family for survival in a hostile environment. In Ernest Galarza's *Barrio Boy* (1971), the young protagonist, with his mother and brothers, makes it to the United States where only the combined efforts of all family members allow them to succeed economically. In Victor Villedeseñor's *Walking Stars* (1994), the family provides a folkloric heritage that counteracts Western concepts of rationality that deny and ignore the protagonist's understanding of alternative realities. In Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, the book's protagonist must work to combine the opposing forces of his father's line of descent, grounded in the narratives of the Spanish conquistadores, and his mother's heritage, based upon indigenous folklore and Catholicism. This internal suture is preferable to the path of the brothers who leave the family, only to become alienated through participation in the war and later in the capitalist Anglo economy. While there may seem to be a tendency to ameliorate or mythologize what the

“home” has to offer, it remains a better place to survive subjectively intact, in contrast to the vagaries of racism, capitalism, and warfare.

Such a return home, however, must be contextualized within the masculine nature of Martinez's narrative (and those other masculine texts that celebrate the home). Many of the Chicano texts appropriate or written for young adults feature males coming of age. This gender bias is not surprising, perhaps, in light of the rather late arrival of Chicana authors to the literary scene, following the male-authored, male-oriented literature of the 1960s Chicano Movement. Chicana feminists of the eighties railed against the confining nature of the home, pointing to the weight of patriarchal beliefs in Chicano culture and religion, and the attendant virgin/whore dichotomies that pervades Chicano fiction (works like Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* being no exception).

For adolescents, Cisneros offers one of the few narratives featuring female protagonists, although certainly several more have been published in recent years. Even her text alone points to the masculinist nature of Martinez's text (and the others like it). In *The House on Mango Street*, the narrator Esperanza must escape the oppressive conditions of home and the limited options it affords her, including marriage. Her friend Minerva struggles with babies and an ever-returning, abusive husband; another woman, married before the eighth grade, is locked by her husband inside a house. A third female wears the black and blue marks of her father. Esperanza doesn't want to be like others who leave home for babies, “who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain” (82). Her mother left school early and resents the consequences: making cookies and sewing, instead of seeing a ballet or a play. Reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's “room of one's own,” Esperanza plans to find “A House of My Own,” “a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (100). Here she plans to write her own narratives on paper wiped clean of oppression. This Chicana writer offers then not a return to home but a way out—through writing, through revision. Yet, as mentioned earlier, her book does share some characteristics with Chicano coming-of-age stories. Like Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven*, her text draws attention to the economic inequities and racial discrimination suffered by Chicanas and Chicanos. She also suggests

that Chicanas have a certain responsibility to the community. When Esperanza leaves, she plans to return; the narrator writes, referring to the women of her youth, “They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind” (102). Community replaces home, a point that reinforces the underlining emphasis on relationships and connection, part and parcel of both female and male traditions.

The rejection of such narratives of home by Cisneros suggests that young adult Chicano and Chicana narratives, like their adult counterparts, are inflected with issues of gender that influence ethnic identity. Manny’s “home,” with its patriarchal violence, becomes amenable only through a return to what Gloria Anzaldúa marks as traditional concepts of *machismo*: “For men like my father, being ‘macho’ meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love” (83). Anzaldúa suggests that contemporary concepts of *machismo* as aggressive and dominating are a response to the shame and humiliation of racism and poverty and the accompanying feelings of inadequacy.

Martinez’s book documents this in part, allowing the father some measure of esteem only once he enters the work force. Martinez’s *Bildungsroman* suggests that home, to be a site of strength, must offer a certain space of recovery from Western narratives of racism and oppression, attainable in part, however, through insertion into Western narratives of achievement. The text itself remains forever a hybrid, partaking in a tradition that rejects the genre’s emphasis on departure from the family, for men at least, for reaching maturity, yet emphasizing, in part, the need to survive in a capitalist economy. The Chicano family is inseparable from the American contexts that contain it. The hybrid nature of Martinez’s text—based in part of the Western *Bildungsroman*, yet a revision of it—points to the border position of Chicano and Chicana texts. The emphasis on border crossings, so endemic to the adult tradition, finds its voice in the young adult arena that more fully attends to issues of development and the difficult entrance of the subject into an adulthood marked by the experience of marginalization and difference.

Betsy Nies has been teaching adolescent and children’s literature at the University of North Florida since 1998. Formerly an elementary school teacher with a bachelor’s and master’s degree in elementary education, she now teaches English after receiving her master’s degree and doctorate in American literature at the University of Florida. She specializes in adolescent literature, children’s literature, and ethnic American traditions. Her publications include *Eugenic Fantasies: Racial Ideologies in the Literature and Popular Culture of the 1920’s* (Routledge, 2002). Her numerous conference proceedings have addressed, among other topics, multicultural issues in children’s and adolescent literature. She works with secondary teachers on both the state and local levels.

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Small Press & Self-Published Books about WWII

Your moment of truth, your chance, could happen like this. You see a very small press release in your local news paper:

Author to sign book about Iowa guerilla. In honor of Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day on Sunday, a book about an Iowa World War II soldier will be featured at a book signing in Ames. The book, *Lang: The WWII Story of an American Guerilla on Mindanao, Philippine Islands*, was written about Dick Lang, an Iowa farm boy who, after the island where he was serving was invaded, joined the Filipinos as a guerrilla to fight the Japanese. The author, Norman Rudi, also an Iowan, will sign copies of his book from 1-3 p.m. Saturday at Waldenbooks in Ames.

You think—perhaps this book about an Iowan in WWII would be a good inclusion to my collection of WWII titles for my eighth grade WWII unit. Ames is just down the road. I should look into this. Maybe Dick Lang lives there and speaks to classes of students studying WWII. You decide to investigate before making the trip to Ames, and you land at Amazon.com ordering information and customer reviews:

Product Information:

Paperback: 151 pages
 Publisher: McMillen Publishing:
 (November 2003)
 ISBN:1888223529
 Usually ships in 24 hours
 List Price: \$14.95
 Buy new: \$14.95 Used & new from \$8.00

Reviewer 1: a reader from IA United States:

An unbelievable story of one man's journey through the war in his early 20's. I found this book to be very intense and emotional and very realistic. I have had the joy of having known Richard Lang for many years and have had to experience my own sorrow after his recent passing.

So, the book sounds promising but no visit from Mr. Lang. Like too many of his generation, he has died. Then, something troubling in the review:

I did see a few typographical errors and the story was somewhat choppy in areas, but it was so easy to look beyond that considering the adventure you are experiencing on his behalf.

The second review echoes similar themes:

Reviewer 2: a reader from Ames IA United States:

This is a great story of courageous men. I've met Mr. Lang and am inspired by what he has done. He is truly one of the great Americans of the greatest generation. The book is rather choppy and I was surprised to find so many typographical errors. Personally, I was willing to overlook that because of my interest in the story.

What do you do? Even though you have lost your chance to invite Mr. Lang to speak in your class, the story about his service sounds phenomenal, at least to two people from Ames who knew the man. Along with reading about what happened to Anne Frank and Eli Wiesel in WWII, your students could read the story of someone from their state, their county even. They could read about WWII in the Pacific theatre (not too many books in your collection about that). So, do you think like an American, an Iowan, a person interested in the history of WWII and interested in making that history come alive for your students—and buy the book? Or do you think like an English teacher and say, "I am not buying any book from some vanity press

full of spelling errors!” (It’s McMillen, not Macmillan).

We say buy the book while you have the chance. We say buy the next one you hear about too, and follow up on that one to see if the veteran who wrote it can come to your school to talk to your students. Such a move could become one of the most rewarding actions you take in your teaching career. Our thesis in the column is that books about WWII, especially first-person accounts by veterans from your local area, are likely to come from small press or self-published sources rather than the Scholastic catalog. Bringing these diamonds in the rough into your classroom often requires quick action and a leap of faith. In this column Virginia Broz and I will discuss some of those leaps of faith we have taken and the rewards those leaps have brought. We will also review the publications we talk about, some of which you can buy. But our primary purpose here is to alert you to the treasure hunt in your own back yard. We estimate that no less than six times a year, the newspaper this small state of Iowa depends on, *The Des Moines Register*, carries a press release like the one above. Many more such press releases are carried only in city and regional papers. But we all know that there will be fewer and fewer of those press releases. The common figure in published accounts is that sixteen million American men and women served in WWII. About four million are alive today. They are dying at a rate of 1,000 per day.

Virginia Broz is a national board certified teacher of early adolescent English Language Arts and a twenty year veteran of the

middle school classroom. Her story about one of those leaps began about ten years ago with a letter to the editor in *The Fairfield Ledger*, our local county newspaper in rural southeast Iowa.

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Our Eighth grade literature of WWII and the Holocaust unit, which had focused on just the Goodrich and Hackett play based on *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1977 when I began teaching, had expanded to include hundreds of memoirs and novels by 1995. My theory is that the veterans and others who experienced WWII were deciding to tell their stories before it was too late. Many of the stories were told from the point of view of young people near the ages of the students in my classes, and students found the books accessible and interesting and often mesmerizing and moving.

Occasionally students invited grandparents or great grandparents to visit the classroom to share their experiences, and I was always on the lookout for community members who might be willing to come to school. That’s why I cut out a letter to the editor one September day and stuck it in the December pages of my desk calendar. The letter-writer mentioned in passing that he was a WWII veteran. He sounded like an articulate person, and I thought I might give him a call when we were reading *Night* and *Maus* and *The Cage* and *Farewell to Manzanar* and the dozens of other titles students would chose from.

That phone call went something like this: “Mr. Yellin? You don’t know me, but I teach eighth grade English and reading here in

Fairfield. I saw a letter to the editor you wrote a few months ago that indicated you are a WWII vet. My students and I are reading books about the war, and I wondered if you’d be interested in visiting one or more classes. . . .”

Jerry Yellin, whose WWII experiences included flying off Iwo Jima to escort bombers to Tokyo, did come to class that year. It turned out that he had just written about his story in a book called *Of War and Weddings*. Over the years, he continued to visit, and he has brought dozens of copies of his book for our classroom collections. He has brought videotape and photographs. He has even brought two vintage P-51 airplanes to our little local airport to demonstrate strafing maneuvers as 150 eighth graders watched, shading eyes from the sun, holding ears to muffle the roar of the low flying Mustangs. This veteran has spoken with hundreds if not thousands of Fairfield students by now, as well as with students in other schools in Iowa and in other states. Every time he does, he brings history to life. His memory of his war years is crystal clear. His analysis of his feelings and beliefs, both then and now, is insightful and wise. His hope for the future is bright, and it is reflected back to him in the thoughtful and hopeful eyes of thirteen-year-olds who are at an age where they are both realistic and idealistic about the future.

For Jerry Yellin, now 80 years old, the invitation to speak to school children led to very significant experiences:

I had never given much thought to my status as a veteran in the eyes of youth until I was asked to speak to eighth

grade classes in a middle school. That experience opened my eyes to my own youth and the general lack of interest I had in hearing about WW I from my uncles who had served. I wondered if the generation I would be speaking to would feel the same about me as I felt about vets from the First World War. I learned that being a war veteran was important to the students and sharing my experiences with them was meaningful. Many of them had grandparents who served who had never spoken about their experiences. Because I came to their classes they had something to say to or ask of their grandparents. This opened up dialogue that gave understanding to the students of what war and the effects of war had on all of us who served.

Jerry also learned a few things about his book and about the insights of eighth graders:

I realized that my book was viewed differently by a younger audience after listening to those students who had read it question me. The girls were much more interested in the romance between Robert and Takako, the wedding and the family. The boys clearly had more interest in the “warrior” aspect, the flying and the shooting, the life on Iwo Jima. I learned more from the young people I spoke to than they could ever learn from me. They, in their innocence and absolute fascination with my wartime experiences as well as my reconciliation with my enemy through my son’s marriage, asked deep and thoughtful questions. The answers came from my heart because the questions came from theirs. I found them interesting, thoughtful and more profound than I expected. They had the ability to respond to an adult talking to them as an equal, in a very mature way. I have a great deal of respect for these youngsters and the teachers who have raised their level of understanding.

Not only was Jerry moved by what the students said to him in class, but also by the hundreds of letters they have sent him. Here are

excerpts from two of those letters, first a tough observation from a young man and then the expansive manifesto of a young woman:

(Student 1): . . . Something I am also thinking about is that when you came back and you went to give your friend’s belongings to his parents. His mother was mad at you because she thought that you should have gone down instead of him. I thought that was weird and rude, because you usually see in the old educational films the soldiers come back from the war and they are being hugged and welcomed back, but you do not see the soldiers getting yelled at for not dying in someone else’s son’s place. . . .

(Student 2): Right now I am reading your book *Of War and Weddings*. . . I’ll begin by telling you that I became obsessed with finding out what happened in Europe during the war because nobody told me.

Here is a quick history about my elders: my grandma from my mom’s side. . . grew up in occupied Netherlands and still lives there today . . . My grandpa from my mom’s side is part Indonesian and Chinese. He spent most of his childhood in a Japanese POW camp. That is when he started hating the Japanese. . . . The things I really want to know about are what your feelings were for the Japanese during the war. Did your feelings affect your fighting? Did you ever wonder about the wives and children of the men whose planes you may have shot down? As you can see, I want to find out about emotions. I know enough dates and places!

Readers of this column might not find a veteran as cool as ours, but then again you might. (We hope many of you have made such a connection already.) While Jerry Yellin is not local to the students in Fairfield in the sense that he did not grow up in the area or even live there until he was well into his sixties, he is local in the sense that

he lives there now, students see him on the street and in the grocery store, and have heard him speak in the town square on Memorial Day. But sometimes local history and local geography figure heavily in the content and potential impact of these books.

Suppose you are a student who has spent all of your school days at the rural campus of the Pekin Iowa School District in south central Keokuk County about twenty miles northwest of Fairfield and twenty miles northeast of Ottumwa. Since you have been old enough to wonder about such things you have puzzled over the fact that the buildings of your small rural school district with a total enrollment of less than 600 students K-12, sit on three or four acres of concrete. The expanse of cement between the school buildings and the football field looks like the parking lot outside a major college stadium. The vehicles of every person living in the school district could be parked there at once. Yes, you heard something about WWII planes landing there, but it did not quite compute. WWII planes in the middle of Iowa?

Then during your ninth grade literature unit on WWII your teacher book-talks a book called *Carrier on the Prairie* by Elsie Mae Cofer, a retired elementary school teacher from Ottumwa. Your teacher says that during WWII planes from the Ottumwa Naval Air Station practiced landings and take-offs right where you are sitting now. You teacher has six copies of the book and says that the author is coming to your classroom in two weeks. You begin reading the book and see names of places you know

on nearly every page. You learn that 6,656 Navy pilots trained in Ottumwa (1,200 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and 2,000 miles from the Pacific). On one day in 1945 “students and instructors on training hops logged 2,205 hours” in the air. The concrete on which your school now sits was one of the 19 outlying fields where pilots practiced and one of two permanent air fields. From what you read, the 162 acre grass field #4 must have been on or near your grandfather’s farm near Libertyville. You call him up one evening and discover that he knows all about it and even helped build the field, and can show you where it was on a neighbor’s farm next time you visit. When the author comes, you are ready to ask questions and do, but are disappointed to find out that the woman is too young to have been in the military during WWII and never personally saw the Ottumwa Naval Air Station in action. Then she says, “No, I wasn’t in Ottumwa during WWII. I was just about your age growing up on a potato farm in North Dakota. But I do have my own WWII story for you. On my farm we had German prisoners of war!”

Even college students are not immune to the excitement of WWII stories created by local authors with local stories. In his college liberal arts core, required literature class, Bill has for several semesters used a geopolitical criteria for selecting the readings—works by Iowans about Iowa. He even tries to use works written by faculty members (if they are Iowans). One of these is set primarily on the University of Northern Iowa campus: *Sleeping with the Enemy*

by Nancy Price. Every couple of semesters, Nancy Price, who has lived in Cedar Falls since she was fifteen years old, finds time to come to class just after students have finished *Enemy*. The last time she came she also talked about her latest novel about WWII, called *No One Knows*, which she has self-published under her own mark, Malmarie Press. When she began to talk, everyone in the room was captivated. “Imagine this building, Lang Hall in 1942, with almost no men in any of the classes, at least no able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and fifty. You young women, imagine that many of your female friends are writing to family members and boyfriends overseas and hoping that those loved ones will come back.” In her novel *No One Knows*, Price recreates Cedar Falls and the UNI campus, then Iowa State Teacher’s College, as the historical setting for a love story about the struggles of young people on the home front during WWII. Price knows this territory like someone who lived it—because she did. Her father, Malcolm Price, became UNI’s fourth president in 1940, a post he held until 1950, guiding the university through the war years. College and high school students have heard parents and grandparents talk of WWII, and have lived through turbulent times themselves. The lives of Price’s characters will fascinate them. Fine local, self-published and small press books about WWII, told by those who remember, are everywhere.

We now want to shift gears a bit to praise our NCTE conference programs and to urge readers to keep their eyes out for special

WWII sessions there. When we see a session in the NCTE conference program that mentions WWII at least one of us always tries to go to it. In 2003 in San Francisco it was the session on the book, *The Children of Willesden Lane: Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love, and Survival* by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen. A young woman, Lisa Jura, was sent out of Vienna alone, on the famous Kindertransport that sent 10,000 Jewish children to England at the beginning of WWII. There Lisa survived the blitz to become a concert pianist. Author Golabek is Jura’s daughter and a noted concert pianist in her own right. In the conference session Golabek was stunning. She narrated portions of her mother’s story and punctuated them with dramatic keyboard performances on a grand piano from the stage of the conference room. This is not a small press book, and you can find it easily on Amazon. But if you did not go to the conference session which was sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, you might not know that the foundation makes available, through its project Facing History and Ourselves, a “Teacher’s Resource to *The Children of Wellesden Lane*” which includes a curriculum guide and recordings of classical piano pieces performed by Mona Golabek. As further noted on the foundation’s website www.mff.org, “The foundation is making both the curriculum guide and the recordings available free-of-charge on [its] website.” You can use the book as a read aloud and download the music to play in class.

Amazing as the above book and the music are, they are not the

coolest thing about WWII we have ever found at an NCTE conference. It may be that you will never be able to get one of these books; maybe someone reading this column can change that prospect. It was at a spring conference in Cincinnati. Virginia was not there and I wanted to get some kind of special present to take back to her. She was the one who was way into WWII. I was just getting interested. The program catalog said the session was about the WWII Japanese Internment Camp, Manzanar. It was at the time that people were just starting to talk about *Snow Falling on Cedars*. In the session room a very gentle and soft spoken California high school teacher, Diane Honda, was talking about resources available for teaching about the Japanese American experience of WWII. She was talking about Manzanar and showing great slides. In particular she said that Manzanar had a high school and that high school had a yearbook. Somehow, surely through every fault of my own, I was not getting the point of the presentation until the end when I realized that

she was saying that this yearbook, the 1943/1944 yearbook from Manzanar High School, called *Our World*, had been reprinted. She had a stack of them there. I could buy one! This is what we meant when we said that your quest for these resources might require quick action. The book made a great present for a WWII searcher. It cost only \$25. As it lies on my desk now, it looks like any yearbook-USA. The kind of thing we all bought in high school.

Faint in the background of the cream-colored cover is a map of eastern California showing the detail between the towns of Independence and Lone Pine on Route 395, in the remote Owens Valley, in the shadow of Mt. Whitney. The title, simply *Our World—Manzanar, California*, begins a reading/learning experience like no other I have ever had. I feel the same way every time I open the cover.

From the "Dedication:"

From a dusty wasteland to a lively community, Manzanar had progressed

to become an exciting chapter, developing from World War II. This part of the story depicts the temporary war-time life of 10,000 tireless, self-sacrificing residents living in one square mile of barracks. . . .

From the "Forward"

Since that first day when Manzanar High School was called in session, the students and faculty have been trying to approximate in all activities the life we knew "back home." With the publication of this yearbook, we feel that we have really come closer to our goal In years to come, when people will ask with real curiosity "What was Manzanar?" we can show them this volume. . . .

The first few pages of montage photos seem pretty ordinary for an old yearbook, teachers posing in front of blackboards, students behind lab tables sporting chemistry apparatus, girls at student events in sweaters and bobby sox. The first things that really rock readers are the senior pictures. Of course, we know the seniors are all Japanese. What we do not think about until we read the captions under the graduates names is that they all should be graduating from some other, normal California high school. Each name is accompanied by the name of the high school that student would have graduated from if he or she had not been imprisoned—"North Hollywood, San Pedro, Van Nuys, Santa Monica, Herbert Hoover, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, Venice, San Fernando." These are all young Americans who just happen to be of Japanese ancestry. It's a yearbook, an American school yearbook, just like the ones your students want their parents to buy for them this year. There are sections and pictures for



Photo taken by Archie Miyatake. Reprinted in the "Our World", Manzanar HS yearbook, 1944 with permission from Toyo Miyatake, Inc.

*baton
club*



Top right corner is Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, author of “Farewell to Manzanar”. From the 1998 reproduction of the 1943 Manzanar HS yearbook, “Our World”. Reprinted with permission from Diane Honda.

each grade down through the seventh, student activities—music, drama, science club, and of course a big section for the journalism and yearbook students. It seems the sports, like sports in any prison, were all intramural. One thing you begin to notice is that almost all of the group shots are taken outside, with the snow-capped Sierras in the background. It would not do to show the temporary, knocked together buildings—and no shots of guards, guns, or barbed wire were allowed—but guards, guns, and barbed wire were part of the Manzanar experience.

Some other incredible special features will grab you. On page 00 we see the Baton Club, the first squad decked out in skirted uniforms and majorette hats, the second squad in back in white tops and dark skirts. On the end of the line is a much younger girl, not a secondary student, a kind of mascot. This, according to Diane Honda, is Jeanne Wakatsuki, Jeanne Wakatsuki who was inspired by this yearbook to write, *Farewell to Manzanar*. And what about first semester senior class

officer Ralph Lazo. Not a Japanese name, not a Japanese face. To quote some of the new supplementary material in the back of *Our World*, after stowing away on the internment train, “Ralph [. . .] went with his buddies from Belmont HS in Los Angeles to Manzanar. [. . .] the only Mexican-Irish American to voluntarily place himself in camp out of loyalties to his buddies.” Fellow Manzanar senior William Hohri eulogized Lazo at the 50th class reunion saying: “When 140 million Americans turned their backs on us and excluded us into remote, desolate prison camps, the separation was absolute—almost. Ralph Lazo’s presence among us said, No, not everyone.” The unique features of this teaching artifact go on and on. Some of the wide-angle shots of the Sierras seem really well done—many were taken by a very talented Japanese professional photographer (also interned) Toyo Miyatake. And then of course there was Ansel Adams who was invited by camp director Ralph Merritt to take photographs for historical purposes. Not every high school yearbook has photo-

graphs like that.

The last page of the original yearbook just makes me want to jump up and cheer. As I remember it, Ms. Honda said that as the yearbook was being prepared to send to the publisher, the political climate was changing; it was suspected that this imprisonment was about over. After the



Senior class photos from the 1998 reproduction of the 1943 Manzanar HS yearbook, “Our World”. Reprinted with permission from Diane Honda.

yearbook's paste up was approved and before it was sent away, as high school students do some times, they slipped in another page—a photograph of a guard tower, barbed wire, and a hand using a wire cutter!

I really think this is one of the most powerful teaching artifacts I have ever seen or ever used. Virginia gives it to middle schoolers reading *Farewell to Manzanar*. Demonstrating a thematic literature unit, I taught *Snow Falling on Cedars* to a college literature methods class at Western Illinois University in 2000. Before reading that book, more than half of Illinois' finest in that class were very uncertain about the Japanese-American WWII experience. After following Hatsue to Manzanar in *Cedars*, I handed them *Our World*. It blew them away.

The original first seventy-one pages of *Our World* are supplemented by ten additional pages that tell about the lives of the yearbook editors, Ralph Lazo, and the Presidential apology signed by George H. W. Bush in 1990, all great teaching tools. The final page tells about Diane Honda's efforts to get this document republished, including support she received from the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund and the Journalism Education Association. It also says that for \$25 dollars plus \$5 for shipping and handling, *you too* can own one of these. But you can't any more, at least not now. Ms. Honda says that the original run was for 1000 books, of which 400 went to former internees. The rest were bought by people like me. Herf Jones Yearbook Company of Logan, Utah., which graciously cooperated with

the first republication, still has the plates to print more books. Ms. Honda thinks that \$5000 could generate a new run of 200 books. If you want one, and we promise you we have not exaggerated how cool these books are, write to Bill Broz at the address below, express your commitment to buy so many copies at \$25 each plus \$5 for shipping and handling (send no money now), and included complete contact information including phone and email. If this invitation produces 200 orders, Ms. Honda will try for a new printing. If any reader knows the right philanthropist or book publisher, contact Bill. NCTE or Herf Jones with whom we English teachers do a great deal of business, or somebody has to make this national treasure readily available. Remember, the students in Manzanar stated clearly in the "Forward" to *Our World*, "In years to come, when people will ask with real curiosity 'What was Manzanar?' we can show them this volume. . . ." When they wrote this, they were thinking about your students.

As you can tell, we could go on and on about these books that teachers need to find and make available to students. If their authors are alive and willing and local, make them available too. The following reviews cover the books mentioned above, plus a very neat and unusual book called *Pacific Skies*. But most of the books we mention here have their most powerful significance locally. Find your own self-published and small press WWII books significant to your own locality. Find your own veterans, before it is too late.

As a P.S. to this column, we

invite readers to send Bill 200-300 word reviews and purchase information on self-published and small press WWII books you have found and used that other teachers should consider. That information will be published here when several titles have come in.

Virginia Broz reviews the following books:

***Of War and Weddings: A Legacy of Two Fathers* by Jerry Yellin**

Most war veterans return home carrying haunting memories. Many find small compartments of their minds in which to store the memories and lock them away. Jerry Yellin returned from the war in the Pacific in 1945, and for forty years he did not speak of his experiences as a fighter pilot. For forty years he held fast to his hatred of the Japanese. Yellin was forced to confront his prejudice when his son went to Japan to teach English and fell in love with a Japanese woman, a woman whose father had fought the United States. Fifty years after World War II, Jerry Yellin sat down to write about his experiences. The result is his memoir *Of War and Weddings: A Legacy of Two Fathers*.

Readers will go back in time with the author as he sees Japan from the cockpit of a P-51 Mustang in the first "Very Long Range Fighter Escort" of B-29's over Japan. His memory is crystal clear:

There would be over four hundred B-29's and one hundred fighter pilots flying P-51's. Take-off was at 7:00 A.M. We were to be over the target from 10:45 A.M. until 11:30 A.M. and expected to return to Iwo again at 2:15

in the afternoon. We rendezvoused with the B-29's at 18,000 feet over Koju Shima, an island off the coast of the Izu Peninsula. Each fighter was carrying a heavy load, with two 110 gallon drop-tanks. As we crossed the coast of the mainland, we dropped the wing tanks and prepared to face enemy aircraft.

His honesty is disarming. When Jerry is grounded to have his wisdom teeth pulled by the group dentist, his good friend Danny Mathis is assigned to fly a mission in Jerry's place. The one hundred seventy Mustangs that left Iwo Jima on that escort mission encountered a huge storm. Twenty-seven P-51's went down and all but three of their pilots were lost. Among them were Danny Mathis and Jerry's plane, the "Dorrie R." Yellin writes, "The terrible nature of war is that losing Danny was hard, but losing my plane was shattering [. . .] I was more affected by the loss of my weapon than by the loss of my friend."

Of War and Weddings is also a love story. Readers will follow the author's transformation as he returns to Japan, encounters Japanese people and culture, and allows the love between his son and the daughter of his enemy to gradually melt away the hard shell of his hatred. Yellin leaves us with an understanding that by forging personal relationships which cross cultural bridges, prejudice can be overcome . . . or prevented.

Hardcover: 275 pages
Publisher: Sunstar Publishing:
Fairfield Iowa (1995)
ISBN: 0963850253
List Price: \$17.95
Order directly from author:
jaywhy@lisco.com

Lang: The WWII Story of an American Guerilla on Mindanao, Philippine Islands by Norman Rudi

On December 7, 1941, sixty-seven Japanese Mitsubishi 21 Iie bombers released their loads on Clark Field, Luzon, in the Philippines. On the ground below, Private First Class Dick Lang and members of the 19th Bombardment Group maintenance crew were servicing B-17 bombers which had arrived from Hawaii a few days earlier. *Lang* tells the story of the three and a half harrowing years that follow.

On Christmas Eve, 1941, the group abandoned Clark Field and under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur retreated to the Bataan Peninsula. Days later they boarded an ancient, rusty steamer bound for Mindanao Island to service the aircraft located there. On March 15, Lang and seven other airmen were ordered to report for special duty at the airfield to load four B-17 bombers which would take MacArthur and his staff to Australia. On May 6, 1942, all American troops in the Philippines were ordered to surrender to the Japanese. "A campaign to support the military in the Philippine Islands was redirected to Europe, and the men and women who served in the Philippine Islands were sacrificed," writes author Norman Rudi.

Rumors were rampant of Japanese brutality on Bataan. Dick Lang and hundreds of other Americans on the islands decided they would rather take their chances in the hills than in a prison camp. With six compatriots, Lang purchased three water buffalo to pack weapons, ammunition, and all

the food they could find. They traveled on the jungle trails until they had to abandon the pack animals and continue on foot, carrying their supplies on their backs. It would be nearly two years before MacArthur made good on his promise, "I shall return!" During that time Dick Lang fought not only the Japanese, but the treacherous plants, leeches, and malaria-carrying mosquitoes of a jungle which receives up to 200 inches of annual rainfall. Rudi writes, "Walking through the wet plant materials, Lang's army high-top shoes finally rotted out and were no longer wearable. This meant he would have to walk barefoot until a replacement could be found." It would be over a year before Lang received shoes for his by then toughened size 13EEE feet. Lang made his way to the east coast of the island where he organized guerrilla activities, salvaging sunken boats, repairing motors, and scouting for guns and ammunition. He led hit and run attacks on the Japanese invaders, including a daring mission to slip through enemy lines, sneaking back into their enemy-held maintenance building to retrieve a hidden radio.

Lang makes clear to the reader the tenacity of the Japanese war effort in the islands of the Pacific, the courage and ingenuity of the abandoned American guerilla fighters on the Philippines, and the generosity and bravery of the Filipino people. The book, which includes timelines, maps, photographs, and a glossary of Tagalog words, is a wonderfully readable history lesson and an amazing true adventure story which pays tribute to a heroic Marshalltown, Iowa, farm boy who lives to tell his tale.

Paperback: 151 pages
Publisher: McMillen Publishing:
(November 2003)
ISBN:1888223529
List price: \$14.95

The Children of Willesden Lane: Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love, and Survival by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen

Early in the book, Lisa Jura, a 14-year-old musical prodigy living in Vienna in 1939, is at her piano lesson with her teacher whom she greatly admires when the Nazi occupation of Austria begins to affect her personally.

He looked at her for a long moment, then finally spoke, looking uncomfortable and ashamed: "I am sorry, Miss Jura. But I am required to tell you that I cannot continue to teach you."

Lisa was stunned and unable to move. The professor walked to his window and opened the curtain. He stared at the people in the street. "There is a new ordinance," he said slowly. "It is now a crime to teach a Jewish child." He continued mumbling under his breath, then added in despair, "Can you imagine!"

Lisa felt tears rising.

"I am not a brave man," he said softly. "I'm so sorry."

He came over to the piano, lifted her slender young hands, and held them in his grip. "You have a remarkable gift, Lisa, never forget that."

Conditions in Vienna worsen and Lisa's parents become concerned about the fate of their three children. After the German pogrom of November 1938 known as Kristallnacht, the British government eased immigration restric-

tions, allowing a committee of British Jews to organize the evacuation of what eventually became 10,000 children to England between December 1938 and September 1939. Lisa's family manages to acquire one and only one ticket for the Kindertransport. They are forced to choose Lisa, to send to "safety" in Britain. Lisa, one of the 10,000, ends up in the Willesden Lane hostel in the East End of London. There she struggles to develop her musical talent and keep alive her dream to study music at the Royal Academy. Of course, Lisa is no safer from the blitz than other residents of London.

But Lisa does survive and succeed and give birth to her own daughter, Mona Golabek, who herself becomes a concert pianist and writes this story of her mother's journey and struggles. As noted above, the Milken Family Foundation, at www.mff.org provides extensive teaching resources for using this book, including free downloads of classical music related to the text performed by Mona Golabek.

Paperback: 288 pages
Publisher: Warner Books (November 2003)
ISBN: 0446690279
List price: \$13.95

Bill Broz reviews the following books:

No One Knows by Nancy Price

In *No One Knows*, three young lovers in their teens and twenties live in a Midwestern college town as America enters World War II.

The fear of those waiting at home begins to surround them. Veterans return, changed by the "shell shock" we now call "post-traumatic stress disorder." The story contains romance and a tightly constructed mystery plot. The writing embodies the literary skill of an author who has been publishing for over half a century.

I found many aspects of the book compelling and instructive. Most striking is life in a town and a college emptied of able-bodied men, and the cruelty toward the able-bodied who are not in the war for good reason. Both of the young men who love the heroine, Miranda, face such suspicion. Robert endures the cruelty because he is young for his high school graduating class and attends college as he waits to turn eighteen. Conrad suffers because he must remain at home to manage a family business making war materials. Miranda, orphaned in the Depression, is bright, funny and clever: she learns about fashion, manners and the limited life open to women in the forties.

Conrad and Robert love Miranda as much as they hate each other, and all three main characters must choose, as their lives progress, whether to avenge themselves when they are given the chance. Two of them choose to forgive; one does not, and loses Miranda. And when one of the two men disappears, she keeps his secret. No one knows.

Hardcover: 333 pages
Publisher: Malmari Press Books,
St. Cloud FL
ISBN: 0974481807
List price: \$27.95

Order from:
Baker and Taylor
1120 US Highway 22
P.O. Box 6885
Bridgewater NJ 08807
www.btol.com

***Carrier on the Prairie* by Elsie May Cofer**

This book is primarily a local story, offering great detail about how and when the Ottumwa Naval Air Station came to be, who built it and how it was built, the lives of the officers, pilots in training, and other military personnel while they were in Ottumwa, and how all of this became a most influential part of the life of Ottumwa, Iowa, between 1942 and 1947. In the “Preface” Cofer writes:

No one is more surprised than I that this book took shape. I first began to listen to NAS Ottumwa tales in order to record and transcribe interviews for Wapello County Historical Museum records. As I shared incidents I heard, the museum staff and volunteers began to say, ‘You really ought to write about this.’ Next an interviewee told me, “If you don’t, who will?” But it was not until the day I drove to the Airport Café to have lunch with a friend that I knew I must draw the facts together.

As I rounded the curve of what was once Yorktown Avenue, a feeling of nostalgia touched me. I could sense 3,500 uniformed men and women bustling about, 300 Stearman biplanes noisily soaring overhead, and 60 sparkling buildings passing white-glove inspection. I began to write.

Certainly Iowans and other Midwesterners, along with WWII buffs and flight enthusiasts, would enjoy this book. Taking a primarily chronological approach, Cofer constructs her story with from more

than sixty interviews, eighty photographs, maps, and other data from the period. Readers of this work get the added bonus of being able to answer the trivia question, “Where did Richard Nixon spend WWII?” Answer, Ottumwa Iowa.

Paperback: 318 pages
Also available in hardcover
Publisher: Hawley Court Press,
Ottumwa Iowa
ISBN: 0964992515
List price: \$16.95 paperback
\$25.95 hardcover
Order from:
Hawley Court Press
P.O. Box 1191
Ottumwa IA 52501

***Pacific Skies: American Flyers in World War II* by Jerome Klinkowitz**

From the Preface ix:

But what of the individuals who fought this war—particularly from the air, where photography was often limited to gun-camera footage and pinpoint air reconnaissance, where maps were a business of navigational specifics and target coordinates, and where war correspondents (with their own master narratives) could only on the rarest occasions fly along? For flyers who fought World War II in the skies over the Pacific, a medium other than picture taking or map making would have to convey the special nature of their experience. [. . .] Many [. . .] Army Air Force, Navy, and Marine aviation personnel serving their country [. . .] turned to the one descriptive asset [they] had: words.

In this unique and highly accessible, academic work, Jerome Klinkowitz applies the eye of a literary critic to the content of over 100 Pacific theatre, flyer narratives to weave a composite narrative and

analysis of the air war against the Japanese. Beginning with the military aviation background leading up to December 7th, 1941, and following the air campaign through August 6th and 9th, 1945, Klinkowitz serves up meaty chunks of pilot memoirs on nearly every page. The narrative style of the book works like this. The author addresses a component of the air war experience such as the Japanese “kamikaze” flights. Then he tells readers, here are some important passages written by officers and strategists on both sides, here is how six different American combat veterans, who wrote six different books after the war, describe what it was like to be under kamikaze attack. And even, this is what a Japanese kamikaze pilot wrote about preparing for a mission and how he felt when he was unable to complete it. Readers do not have to read the 100+ books themselves, because the author of *Pacific Skies* does it for you and offers readers an interpretation of the meaning of these events for the people who lived them, an interpretation supported by many layers of first-hand accounts. Though Klinkowitz is a distinguished professor of literature (he is one of the editors of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*), this work is devoid of academic jargon and very readable. Good readers, eighth grade and above, could enjoy this book and be very satisfied with its comprehensive scope, could even use this book as a guidepost to a personal reading of some of the works referenced within. Klinkowitz’s conclusion addresses the spiritual response many fliers made to their

experiences, several becoming religious ministers and others becoming peace activists, a response that resonates with the book's title, *Pacific Skies*.

Klinkowitz has several other books based on World War II flier narratives including *Their Finest Hours*, *Yanks over Europe*, and *With the Tigers over China*. Secondary literature teachers might also like to know that commentary on the life and works of Kurt Vonnegut Jr., on whom he is the leading international authority, represent Jerome Klinkowitz's earliest and deepest scholarship. Also see, "Jerry

Klinkowitz" for an eclectic collection of works on such subjects as jazz and baseball.

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Order from:
University Press of Mississippi
3825 Ridgewood Road
Jackson MS 39211
Phone Orders: 800-737-7788
www.upress.state.ms.us

Bill Broz is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Northern Iowa. His recent publications include Teaching Writing Teachers of High School and First-Year Composition, edited with Robert Tremmel, Heinemann, 2002, and articles on grammar and censorship in Voices from the Middle and the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy. He was the 2002 recipient of the NCTE's Edwin M. Hopkins Award for his 2001 English Journal article, "Hope and Irony: Annie on My Mind." He can be reached most at bill.broz@uni.edu or 102 Baker Hall, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0502

Call for Manuscripts

2005 Spring/Summer theme: A Road Less Traveled

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. February 15 submission deadline.

2005 Fall theme: Finding My Way

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. May 15 submission deadline.

2006 Winter

The theme for our 2006 winter issue will reflect the theme of the 2005 ALAN Workshop soon to be announced. October 15 submission deadline.

“Finish that chapter, then lights out:”

A Reader Becomes a Writer. A Visit with Vivian Vande Velde

Vivian Vande Velde writes some hauntingly memorable novels for the young adult market—from *Heir Apparent* to *Being Dead*, a collection of short stories. Ms. Vande Velde was kind enough to be interviewed about her memorable characters, unexpected plot twists, and what led her down the road to becoming an award-winning author. Through our discussion, we find that Ms. Vande Velde grew up reading—books and plays (with a strong love for *To Kill a Mockingbird*). And, though early in her schooling, teachers rarely called on her to read her own writing aloud, Ms. Vande Velde has certainly made up lost time as teachers and students alike are now extremely eager to read her works. For more information about the author, you can check out her website at <http://www.vivianvandelde.com>.

LG: Something I’m always curious about with successful authors—what types of books inspired you to be a writer? Did you have a favorite mystery writer?

VVV: I always knew I wanted to be an author, but it was when I was in 8th grade and read T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* that I absolutely knew what kind of story I wanted to write. It’s the story of King Arthur—not a scholarly search for the Dark-Ages, historic Arthur, but a story full of anachronisms and peopled by interesting, flawed characters. I couldn’t tell who to root for because they were often on opposing sides—yet I cared deeply for all of them.

When I was a young adult, there were not so many books specifically for teenagers. I went pretty much from children’s books to adult books.

My parents used to get those Readers Digest Condensed Books. (Now I’m horrified at the idea of abridged versions, but in my own defense, I think I started reading them when I was too young to know what the word “condensed” meant. I think it also goes a long way toward explaining my short attention span.) I first read Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, when I was ten, in the Readers Digest version. I have since, of course, read the whole thing, and when I am absolutely pinned down to name one book as being the best in American literature—that’s it.

I also read a lot of plays—not being in a situation to actually *go* to plays. (Which—now that I think about *that*—might explain why I so favor action and dialogue and have little patience with description.) My favorite play was Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which kind of fills in the cracks of the story of *Hamlet*, which—as long as I’m talking about favorites—is my favorite play by Shakespeare.

As a young adult I liked Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, J.D. Salinger, J.R.R. Tolkien, Mary Renault’s stories of ancient Greece, some John Steinbeck (I have to put in a plug for his never-completed work *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, which was published posthumously and would have been a masterpiece), and I always knew Graham Greene was brilliant—just didn’t always understand him.

LG: Please tell us a little about your childhood and school years.

VVV: In a classroom situation, there are always some kids who are considered to be the really good writers—they are the ones who pretty generally get their work read out loud as good examples, year after year, by teacher after teacher. I was never one of those. I was one of the ones who *might* get her paper read after those—if there was time.

But I did love reading. I even liked most of the required reading in school. I know a lot of people don't have patience with, for example, Charles Dickens—but I did enjoy the richness of his stories and of his language. (Despite my short attention span.) Still, my favorite Dickens story is the shortest: *A Christmas Carol*. If I could take credit for one book written by someone else—that would be the one I would choose.

LG: When did you take on writing as a career?

VVV: I enjoyed stories so much—books, TV, movies—that I wanted to be involved in creating stories of my own. For example, I loved fairy tales, but wondered why the princess always had to be beautiful. (Why couldn't she have a bad hair day once in a while?) Why was the prince always fearlessly brave? (I find a little bit of self-doubt very appealing in a character.)

I love reading. At night my parents would tell me, "Finish that chapter, then lights out." But I'd get so caught up in the story, that (sometimes intentionally, sometimes without even noticing), I often just kept on reading. Then I'd get in trouble with my parents.

For some reason (probably having to do with a dark, twisted psyche), that's what I wanted to do: write stories that were so engrossing I would get other kids in trouble with their parents.

LG: You have picture books and adult fantasy novels, as well as young adult novels. Why did you choose to write for the YA market?

VVV: Writing for young people is the most important writing there is. An adult—the kind of adult who reads—is going to read hundreds of books over the 50 or 60 years of his or her (average) adulthood. Naturally, childhood is much shorter, meaning that there are only a relatively small number of books a

child can read, and that is limited further by reading ability and interest in subject matter. So, it is a very short window of opportunity. And yet that is precisely the time of life when tastes and opinions are being formed—including, even, whether reading is worthwhile and if that child is going to grow up to be one of those adults who reads.

LG: And, more specifically, why fantasy and science fiction for that age group?

VVV: The most basic answer is that I write the kinds of stories I like to read.

I enjoy fantasy and science fiction because I find those stories can deal with universal questions, and yet—because the specifics of the stories are fantastical—the stories are non-judgmental and non-confrontational and might open a reader up to new ways of looking at things. So, for example, *Companions of the Night* is a vampire story. Yet one of the issues it deals with is good girls attracted to bad boys. The blood-sucking undead is about as bad as a boy can get, and therefore readers can understand the situation, can clearly see what Ethan is, and can make up their own minds about how Kerry reacts and what choices she makes—without being distracted or burdened down the way they might have if the story had been more realistic, with details that hit too close to home.

LG: You've written novels and short stories. Which do you feel is the best approach for your writing style and for getting a story across?

VVV: There isn't one "best" approach. Some stories can be told in fewer words, with fewer complications, subplots, and characters; others need more scope.

So, for example, a story that asks the question, "When you're driving along the highway and you come to a spot where there's a bunch of those orange traffic cones forcing three lanes of traffic down to one, and when—finally—you drive by where the construction workers are, and they don't seem to be actually working but look as though they're just hanging around watching the traffic crawl by—are they *really* construction workers, or might they be trolls disguised as construction

workers?”—that’s a short story. A story that asks, “What do you do when you’re falsely accused of something and can’t prove that you didn’t do it?”—that’s a novel.

LG: What about reaching your young adult audience? Do you find that young adults prefer short stories or novels?

VVV: There are some occasions when you want something shorter, that you can read in one sitting, that can quickly expose you to one idea then leave you alone to think about it. There are other times when you want to immerse yourself in another world, in a company of characters with all their needs and emotions.

LG: How do you divide your writing time—novels vs. short stories, science fiction vs. fantasy vs. mystery vs. supernatural?

VVV: Some authors are full of ideas, with not enough time to write them all. I’m a one-idea-at-a-time sort of writer. So I don’t plan ahead. Each time I finish a book, I worry that I’ll never write another, because I don’t have a reserve. So I’m certainly not saying, “Well, next I’ll do this sort, and then I’m scheduled for one of those, and oops! I haven’t done one of that kind in a bit . . .” So when I get an idea—I run with it.

LG: In your book *Being Dead* (2001), you present a collection of seven short stories, all dealing with death and the supernatural. What is the appeal of these types of stories?

VVV: The one thing that all people have in common is that we will all, eventually, die. So it’s only natural to wonder what happens after that. Though I believe in an afterlife, I don’t believe in ghosts. Still, I find the idea of ghosts fascinating.

LG: After reading *Being Dead*, I find there’s one short story I can’t get away from: “Drop By Drop.” I can’t escape Brenda Keehm’s story. Why is it so captivating?

VVV: What’s really gratifying about *Being Dead* is that, for every story in that collection, I have heard

at least one person say, “That’s my favorite.” I wanted to try all sorts of different ghost stories. Some of the ghosts are friendly, some malevolent. In “Shadow Brother,” the reader has to decide for himself or herself whether there even is a ghost—or just a father’s feelings of sorrow and guilt. I have to admit “Drop by Drop” is my favorite, too. Thanks for your kind words.

LG: I really wasn’t prepared for the ending. You hooked us in with the haunted house story, and we expect it to follow the traditional line—the ghost of a murdered child still haunts her house. Then you make an unexpected turn in the story. How did you decide on such a plot line?

VVV: OK—spoiler alert. Don’t read this if you’re planning on reading the story soon, because here’s the whole plot: “Drop by Drop” starts out as though it’s going to be a teenage-girl-coping-when-she’s-forced-to-move-because-her-parents-buy-a-new-house story, except that the house seems to be haunted. Brenda investigates, thinking she’ll find that a child of a former owner died. But there are no dead children tied to the history of the house. Then she hears about a missing child who fits the description of the ghost that only she can see, and she assumes the child was murdered and dumped on their property. But that doesn’t turn out to be right either. Maybe, Brenda figures, the ghost is coming to her for help. “What’s the worst thing Leah-Ann can want?” Brenda asks herself, and thinks it’s to track down Leah-Ann’s parents and break the news to them that Leah-Ann is dead. In the end, Brenda comes to realize that the reason Leah-Ann is haunting her is because—even though Brenda didn’t know it—Brenda herself is the one who caused Leah-Ann’s death, when Brenda was out doing some unauthorized drinking and driving the night she said good-bye to her friends in the old neighborhood.

Again, this is one of those issues that I thought I could handle better in a fantasy format than as strictly realistic fiction. Brenda is basically a good girl. I’m hoping that in the first 59 pages (admittedly, it’s a very *long* short story), readers are sympathetic with her plight of being forced to leave her home and her friends; that they will find her

observations sharp and funny, and her reactions to her family typical in an amusing way; that they will think she is both brave and generous in her attempts to resolve the ghost's problem. Then, once readers have totally identified with Brenda, the truth comes out on the last pages: That Brenda has accidentally run over and killed a child, and—because she was drinking—wasn't even aware of it. One child dead, another who will have to live with the consequences of that for the rest of her life.

Yes, I could have written a realistic don't-drink-and-drive story. But this story is for those kids who wouldn't have read that one.

LG: Then there's your Halloween short story in Deborah Noyes' collection of short stories, *Gothic!: Ten Original Dark Tales*. Again, I thought I could see where the story was leading, but you veered off the traditional plot line trail again. How did you determine this twist?

VVV: As with "Drop by Drop," what you call "the twist" was my reason for writing the story. In "Morgan Roehmar's Boys," I was again thinking about ghosts and wondering if a ghost would necessarily look the way the person had looked at the moment of death—or if the ghost could choose to look the way he had at some previous time in his life. And if a malevolent ghost could use that to his advantage.

LG: In another of your novels, *Heir Apparent*, you interspersed touches of humor with a scary tale of a girl trying to battle her way to survival in a virtual reality game. This seems to add a different dimension of fear for readers, who find themselves drawn in to the struggle of determining what is real and what isn't. Is it the mix of humor and fear that make this book so popular among teens?

VVV: Many of my books have characters who are sarcastic—which generally makes the reading lighter and more fun. Sometimes that sarcastic character is the protagonist, sometimes it's someone the protagonist has to deal with. If a character was to whine and mope, that wouldn't be any fun to read—and we'd be less interested in seeing that character solve his problems and attain his goal. Generally speaking, we like people who make us

laugh. If we like someone, then we worry about him when he's in danger.

LG: Why do you think young adults are so intrigued by your tales of murder and mystery, such as those in *Being Dead* and the Gothic tales?

VVV: People ask: Which is more important, characters or plot? And the thing is that they are both very closely intertwined. It's hard to say, "That's an interesting character" if the person is in a boring situation. At the same time, you can be reading a story where the existence of the universe is in jeopardy, and if you don't care about the characters, the story leaves you feeling "So what?"

So, I try to write about likeable, interesting characters. (Beginning writers ask: "Does the main character *need* to be likeable?" Well, no, not always and absolutely. But who do you prefer to spend time with?) Then I put them in a bad situation. (We all hope for health, happiness, and good times for ourselves and our loved ones. But that *does* make for dull reading.)

LG: Can you give us a preview of what other projects you have in store for us?

VVV: Coming up in 2005 are three YA novels.

In January, from Harcourt: *Now You See It . . .* which is about a modern-day girl who finds a pair of glasses that allows her to see stuff nobody else can see. As a result, she travels to a world of elves, witches, and dragons, as well as to the 1950s, where she meets her own grandmother as a young woman. (By the way, I have seen the cover by Cliff Nielsen—and it's fantastic!)

In the spring, from Houghton Mifflin: *The Book of Mordred*, a look at the King Arthur story from the viewpoint of three young women who have been helped, one way or another, by Mordred, Arthur's son—who is usually the villain of any stories about Camelot.

And in the fall, from Marshall Cavendish: *Witch Dreams*, about a young witch living in medieval times who can see into other people's dreams—and who uses this power to try to solve the murder of her family.

LG: Thank you, Vivian.

“Blurring” the Borders between Fantasy and Reality:

Considering the Work of Cornelia Funke

Kara, one of my students, recently noted that fantasy allows us to “discuss the concerns we have today through worlds that provide an alternative view of societal concerns or personal identity issues.” Cornelia Funke, the author of *The Thief Lord*, *Inkheart*, and *Dragon Rider*, has become one of the best in providing children and young adults with books that allow us to “blur” the borders between the concerns of characters in fantasy worlds and the apprehensions of young adults in the 21st century. In considering Funke’s *The Thief Lord*, Kara noted, “It’s this great book about growing up, defining one’s place in the world, living the adventure and learning from it . . . I would have loved this as a kid, mixed-up little person that I was.” Of course, one doesn’t have to be a kid to love—or learn from—*The Thief Lord*, a wonderful tale of loyalty and courage, *Inkheart*, the story of a man who can read characters out of books, or Funke’s newest arrival in the United States, *Dragon Rider*, a magical tale focused on finding one’s identity amid the adventure of a lifetime. In the following piece, I pair reviews of all three books with a recent interview conducted with Cornelia Funke. That pairing illustrates those places/themes where blurred borders provide opportunities for critical thinking on the part of students.



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The Thief Lord: Story review

In *The Thief Lord*, Prosper and Bo grew up hearing their mother’s stories of the beauty and magic of Venice, Italy. When she dies and their aunt decides to adopt 5-year-old Bo (leaving 12-year-old Prosper to his own devices), the boys run away to Venice. Upon their arrival, they are befriended by a group of orphans—Hornet, Mosca, and Riccio—and eventually, Scipio, the Thief Lord. Casting himself as a mysterious figure in black who wears a bird mask to obscure his true features, the Thief Lord steals from the rich to give to his poor, orphaned friends. They, in turn, barter Scipio’s ill-gotten gains with Barbarossa, a corrupt shopkeeper. When Barbarossa offers The Thief Lord a mysterious job from “the Conte,” Scipio jumps at the opportunity. However, the mystery behind the blurred picture of a wing and an address as to where the wing can be found make the children question the job.

Further complications arise when Aunt Esther hires private investigator Victor Getz to find the boys. Victor proves to be a worthy and honorable adversary; he eventually figures out where the children are hiding, as well as the truth about the origins of the Thief Lord: Scipio is actually the son of the one of the richest men in Venice. When Victor shares this

information with Prosper and company, they reject Scipio and decide to support themselves by stealing the mysterious wing for the Conte. A short time later at the home of Signorina Ida Spavento, they are “found out,” befriended by the sensible Ida, and hear the true story of the wing.

The wing is actually part of a magical merry-go-round that allows the rider to become older or younger, depending upon how many rotations one takes on the ride. Scipio and Prosper are both fascinated by the idea that they could become instant adults, Scipio to escape the control of his father and Prosper to keep both himself and Bo safe from Aunt Esther. Once the opportunity presents itself, however, the decisions made by each young man have amazing consequences for their friends . . . and their enemies.

***Inkheart*: Story review**

Funke’s second offering to the field of children’s and young adult fantasy, *Inkheart*, is the story of Meggie, her father, Mo, and the repercussions of Mo’s ability to read characters out of their novels. That ability has become a curse for Mo, for it has brought him to the attention of the villainous Capricorn (read out of a book called *Inkheart*) who plans to use Mo to bring more evil-doers as well as great riches from books like *Treasure Island* and *The Arabian Nights*. When the mysterious Dustfinger shows up at Mo and Meggie’s home to warn them that Capricorn knows where they are, Mo, who has never told Meggie about his strange ability, takes Meggie to the home of Aunt Elinor, an eccentric woman who loves books as much as Mo and Meggie. However, this is not the strangest of Mo’s decisions: he also brings a book along that Meggie has never before seen. This book, *Inkheart*, is a source of fascination for all for very different reasons, and when Elinor borrows the book from Mo without his knowledge and he is subsequently kidnapped by Capricorn’s men, she sets forth a chain of events that will impact them all.

Meggie enlists Elinor and, grudgingly, Dustfinger, to help free her father. When she is eventually reunited with him, Meggie makes Mo tell her the real secret of *Inkheart*. Mo admits he has the ability to bring “things” out of books, but that he and Teresa, Meggie’s mother, had never worried about consequences, mainly because Teresa so loved to hear Mo read stories aloud and the small objects that appeared

always made them happy. But one evening, as Mo was reading *Inkheart*, Teresa and two family cats disappeared at the exact moment Capricorn, Dustfinger, and Capricorn’s henchman, Basta, appeared. Mo desperately attempted to bring Teresa back out of the book, but to no avail. In his despair, Mo decided there would be no more attempts to bring Teresa back because he was simply too frightened of what else might come out of the book. So he locked away his copy of *Inkheart*.

However, Capricorn was not so easily put off; he sent his henchmen to collect all of the copies of the book in existence so he could control both his former and his current worlds. Capricorn also found another reader with Mo’s general abilities, but Darius did not have the same level of gift and brought characters forth who were not quite “correct”: a maid appeared without the ability to speak, henchmen materialized with misshapen faces. So Capricorn sends his men, once again, to find Mo.

As the battle to control *Inkheart* continues, Mo and Meggie enlist the help of Fenoglio, author of the book. At first skeptical, he changes his demeanor as he hears about Mo’s ability and the destruction Capricorn has caused in the world. Eager to help them, mainly because he is excited at the prospect of meeting his creations, Fenoglio joins the small troupe and, spurred by an idea Mo shares with him, uses his creativity and his “authorly” instincts to try to outwit Capricorn and his minions.

***Dragon Rider*: Story review**

The third book reviewed here is *Dragon Rider*; this book is available in September 2004 to the American public, but is actually one German audiences have been enjoying since 1997. In this novel, the last of the dragons on Earth find out Man is set to overrun the land of the dragons. Firedrake, one of the younger dragons who has grown up on stories of the mystical Rim of Heaven, the ancestral home of the dragons, decides he will attempt to find it. With the help of his brownie friend, Sorrel, a young human named Ben, and a special map of the world created by cartographer Gilbert Graytail, an extremely talented rat, Firedrake begins his quest.

However, the threat of humans is not the only challenge to Firedrake’s mission; he must also ensure that he and the dragons of the Rim of Heaven are not

destroyed by Nettlebrand, a horrific monster with golden scales who was created by the alchemist Petrosius Henbane in 1424 to hunt dragons. Nettlebrand sends a flock of menacing ravens as well as his homunculus servant—tiny human/machine—Twigleg to spy on Firedrake and his allies; combined with Sorrel's unwillingness to trust Ben and the general difficulties all of them face being "outside" their normal worlds, creates a number of dangerous situations.

However, Firedrake and company also find important allies along the way. Professor Greenbloom provides them with several clues as to the various extraordinary magical creatures with which they are sure to come into contact. Later, he and his wife, Vita, and daughter, Guinevere, provide additional support and a warning about Nettlebrand's whereabouts. Dr. Zubeida Ghalib, prominent dracologist (one who studies dragons), provides them with the ancient story of the dragon rider and the prophecy surrounding his role in saving the dragons. Adventurer Lily Graytail, niece of Gilbert, arrives in her airplane to provide counter-intelligence to the information the ravens have been collecting. Finally, "dubidai" Burr-Burr-Chan, liaison to the dragons of the Rim of Heaven, provides the final ingredient necessary to stop Nettlebrand's nefarious plans.

All of Funke's books share a delightful mix of fantasy and reality, and this ability of Funke to "blend" is certainly one forte in her writing repertoire. Indeed, in the following interview with Cornelia Funke, it is obvious the author knows well her strengths as a writer as well as how to use her own brand of creativity in crafting fabulous experiences for her loyal readers.

Interview with Cornelia Funke¹

JB: My copies of *The Thief Lord* and *Inkheart* have been making the rounds with the students in my YA Lit class, so I really appreciate the chance to ask you some of the questions my students and I have concerning your books. First of all, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a writer of children and young adult books?

¹ This interview occurred in February 2004 before advance copies of *Dragon Rider* were available.

CF: I became a writer because I was an illustrator. For some years I drew pictures for other writers' stories, and I always had the feeling that I didn't get to do the kind of illustrations I wanted to do. I wanted to draw dragons and sea serpents instead of just children in a school yard, and I was often disappointed by the way the stories were told. Before I became an illustrator, I worked for some years as a social worker with children who did not walk on the sunny side of life, and I learned a great deal from them. The most important was which kind of story grasps the imagination of children who don't read. When I started writing myself, I tried to write for both kinds of children: "bookophiles" like myself and those who think books to be boring.

JB: It seems like you've been pretty successful with that approach.

CF: So far it has worked. I get lots of letters from children, parents, and teachers who tell me that my books opened the door for another reluctant reader. Or, to put it in another way: They create another addict of the printed word. For that's what readers also are, don't you agree?

JB: Absolutely.

CF: Over the years I found out that my passion for writing is far more unlimited than my passion as an illustrator; therefore, I now only do the illustrations for my own books. However, when I write picture books, I ask an illustrator to do the artwork, because it would steal too much of my writing time to do the illustrations myself.

JB: Both *The Thief Lord* and *Inkheart* feel like magical realism to me, although one of my students argued that they're closer to fantasy for her. How do you define your books, and what inspires you to write in this genre?

CF: I admit, as a reader I have always loved good fantasy (though there is not much of it to be found). I think that fantasy is the oldest way of storytelling. Fairy tales, myths . . . I strongly believe that we sometimes understand reality far better if

we disguise it, if we find pictures and images which describe sorrow, joy, fear, and other feelings we all share. The human mind often grasps a visual image better than an abstract or realistic description, and as a writer, I love to work in a genre that doesn't forbid my imagination to work unlimited. You could say that I enjoy being able to clad reality in different clothes. I often have the feeling that writing fantasy frees the unconscious and allows things to flood onto the paper, ideas I didn't even know I could write about. Apart from all these quite philosophical thoughts, I love to imagine riding on dragons or meeting creatures I have never met before and make them feel real for my readers. By the way, you might ask your student if Shakespeare is fantasy because he lets ghosts appear?

JB: That should promote some interesting discussion . . . The characters in both *The Thief Lord* and *Inkheart* are so "individual" yet believable to readers because we know people like them in our own lives. How do you manage this?

CF: This is hard to explain. Mostly my characters step into my writing room and are so much alive, that I ask myself, where did they come from? Of course, some of them are the result of hard thinking, adding characteristics, manners etc., but others are alive from the first moment they appear. When I wrote *Inkheart*, this happened with Dustfinger. He told me his name, and he was so real that after a while I had the feeling that he was standing behind me whispering his story into my ear. As for Mo (also from *Inkheart*), from the first page I wrote of *Inkheart*, he looked and talked like an actor I knew. (By now, probably everybody knows that Mo is Brendan Fraser.) So, sometimes an actor makes a character come to life, sometimes the character does it himself. I do not like to copy real people from my neighborhood or family (you have to describe their weaknesses, too!), but Bo in *The Thief Lord* is my son Ben, for he loves to be in a book. And *The Thief Lord* is not the only one in which you can meet Ben (he also appears in *Dragon Rider*).

JB: One of the aspects of *The Thief Lord* that I really appreciated was the way you presented adults who

longed to be children and children who longed to be adults, not always for the best reasons. So I was surprised at what happened with Scipio. Is there a message you're trying to send to children or young adults through Scipio's transformation?

CF: I don't like to send messages. I do not think that most of us read a book to find a message there. Maybe questions to ask, yes, maybe something to think about, but a message doesn't [allow] the reader to think, and this is disrespectful. I hope that *The Thief Lord* expresses my love for children, my deep respect for them, and my anger about the way adults so often treat the smaller, younger ones. And I always wanted to fulfill Scipio's wish to become an adult: That was our deal from the beginning.

JB: Your use of details in both *The Thief Lord* and *Inkheart* is masterful, which leads me to a question about the craft of writing. How much of this detail comes through revision, a process that, from what I've read, you take very seriously?

CF: Much of it! Revision makes writing sparkle, makes it dense and beautiful. I usually do three or four drafts before I give a manuscript to my publisher. With each draft, I read the whole text aloud to myself, work my way through it. For I strongly believe that a book should be sound pressed between pages.

JB: I love the idea of that. And that actually leads to my next question. I loved the concept that reading aloud (in *Inkheart*) can be such a profound experience and, in the case of Mo and Meggie, a considerable talent. I also appreciated how you were able to show that people can use the written and spoken word for enormous good as well as real evil; would you agree that one of the insights readers might gain from a consideration of this gift of using language is that words must be used carefully?

CF: Oh, yes, I agree. Language can be a great temptress, sometimes a dangerous one. It is surely not by chance that magic is always connected with magical words.

JB: When I got to the end of *Inkheart*, I felt like there

had to be a sequel to explain why certain characters from the original text didn't "disappear" as expected. So I was pleased to read that you're working on a sequel to *Inkheart*; anything you can share with us on that book?

CF: I just finished my third draft of *Inkblood*, the second part of the story. It will be slightly longer than the first novel, and it will see Dustfinger's return to his own world. Most of the story will take place in Inkworld, the medieval world Fenoglio created and now has to live in. Most of the characters readers met in *Inkheart* will go there, some because they long to, some because they are forced to. It will be a world where the spoken word is much more important than the written one, as books are just for the few nobles who inhabit that world. Of course, the written word will play its part as the writer himself will try to rule his world.

JB: Thanks for the peek into *Inkblood*. I guess another question that I have is that even though you're a well-known author in Germany, Americans are really just getting to know you and your books. Is there a website you recommend for fans who want to know more about you and your books?

CF: At the moment, an international website is in development, I think, it will be available in a few months (hopefully!)

JB: You also have a new book coming out very soon in the United States: *Princess Knight*. It looks like this book will once again "play" with readers' expectations of how certain types of people are supposed to act. This seems like a theme you really value in your books. Is it, and if yes, can you share with us why?

CF: Yes, I like to play with certain expectations. And I think that there are many classical motives of storytelling just waiting to be revisited. For me it is lots of fun to work with motives I liked as a child, stories about knights and dragons, fairies, ghosts. I really want to keep telling stories that feel familiar but in a new, surprising way.

Extending the Discussion

As Cornelia Funke notes in her interview, "I strongly believe that we sometimes understand reality far better if we disguise it, if we find pictures and images which describe sorrow, joy, fear and other feelings we all share." When we consider this in light of Kara's earlier comments on working out contemporary issues through alternate worlds like those found in fantasy, we easily find themes in all three of Funke's works that provide readers with much to consider as far as relevant life themes.

The Thief Lord, for example, allows younger readers to consider what it means to be an adult; children and teens constantly refer to those freedoms they'll have when they're "older," rarely considering that adults actually have different perspectives as to why adults behave as they do. Dottor Massimo uses pain and humiliation to keep his son in check. Aunt Esther's self-centeredness illustrates itself in her desire to raise Bo because it seems to be the "thing to do in her own polite society." The Conte is dissatisfied with his life and wants another chance at wealth and happiness. None of these people feel any responsibility toward the children with whom they interact, nor do they wish to be role models in any manner. On the other hand, Victor and Ida are positive adult models in that each has life success and is responsive to the needs of others. Victor proves himself by not turning Bo and Prosper over to their aunt; Ida makes a deal with the children to keep an eye on them when they turn the wing over to the mysterious Conte and later provides a refuge for all the orphans during the final conflict of the novel. Ida shows herself to be caring and willing to help them, but also capable of being the adult who has sensible expectations for how children should act/ behave. This balance between "good" and "bad" adults is especially important in this story with its focus on young people creating identities for themselves in the midst of so many grown-ups who seem unable to decide how to position themselves. This is a situation to which many young people will respond and should provide myriad opportunities for discussion.

On a related note, *Inkheart* allows us to consider the universal dilemma of good versus evil. As Fenoglio, the author of the "book within a book," states:

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he cried. “Yes, I let him get away with it. He’s one of my best villains. How could I kill him off? It’s the same in real life: Notorious murderers get off scot-free and live happily all their lives, while good people die—sometimes the very best people. That’s the way of the world. Why should it be different in books?” (258)

Meggie and Mo—representing good—face consummate evil in the character of Capricorn. Yet a large number of characters, aligned either with Meggie and Mo or with Capricorn, provide opportunities for readers to consider human nature and the inability in most of us to be totally good or totally bad. Funke further illuminates the difficulties faced by various characters as they have to choose between their own safety and that of a loved one, or debate the choices they might have to make to prove their loyalty to a friend. Throughout *Inkheart*, the uncertainty as to what may happen to Meggie and Mo parallels well the uncertainties of our world today (terrorism, war) and again provides an opportune vehicle for student discussions.

In *Dragon Rider*, Funke offers her readers the opportunity to consider how we define ourselves and our roles in others’ lives. While few would argue that some aspects of identity derive from gender or cultural background, to name a few, teachers often lead students through discussions of identity in terms of the choices characters make or the actions they take that help to define and delineate character traits inherently bound up in definitions of identity. Within the pages of *Dragon Rider* we are introduced to myriad characters for whom many readers may already have fixed images. For example, many fantasy writers have given us dragons who are fierce, nocturnal hunters who only care about the riches they are able to amass. However, Funke provides us with the more dimensional Firedrake, whose courage is based in his desire to save his fellow dragons from suffering at the hands of the human interlopers. Firedrake is also fiercely loyal to Sorrel, the brownie girl who takes care of him, and who, in turn, he protects; nevertheless, he is not unaware of her shortcomings, especially when it comes to her feelings about the human boy, Ben. Because of Ben’s willingness to help Firedrake and Sorrel in the City without regard for his own safety, a characteristic also found in Firedrake, he earns the

dragon’s esteem and friendship. Finally, as the journey progresses, we see Firedrake moving from an immature dragon who often acts on instinct to a more mature figure who takes care to think through the situations in which he finds himself; this is evidenced clearly in a discussion with the Professor when he realizes Nettlebrand may be staying “underground” to allow Firedrake to lead him to the dragons at the Rim of Heaven.

Twigleg, the homunculus who begins the story in an uncomfortable alliance with Nettlebrand, provides the strongest example of the shifting dynamic of identity. Threatened incessantly by Nettlebrand, Twigleg uses his superior brainpower to simply survive (his 11 brothers, all servants to Nettlebrand, have been previously eaten by the monster). Forced to spy on Firedrake, Twigleg is confused by the camaraderie evidenced among the brownie, the dragon, and the human boy. Eventually saved by Ben from a group of archaeologists who have captured him, Twigleg further questions his status, understanding, after hundreds of years of abuse at the hands of Nettlebrand, that life lived cautiously is no life at all. He eventually summons the courage to lie to his old master; the liberating effect of this act allows Twigleg to confess his previous actions to Ben and his new friends and then actively plot against Nettlebrand. By the end of the novel, Twigleg has moved from an identity fashioned by a scientist who saw his “created being” as little more than a brainless servant to one that he himself has determined: an independent, loyal friend who serves his friends because he wants to even as he serves his own wants and needs.

Throughout each of Cornelia Funke’s novels, each player must find his or her own personal strength, and it is as the individual characters define their place in the adventure that Funke provides stories that transcend the boundaries of the average children’s story.

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<p>The Black Brothers by Lisa Tetzner Front Street Publishing, 2004, 144 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Survival/Friendship ISBN: 1-932425-04-7</p> <p>Giorgio, a young boy, struggles valiantly to free himself from his master in <i>The Black Brothers</i>. A desperate situation results in Giorgio's father selling him to a strange man for labor in a far off city. A struggle for freedom, acceptance, and bountiful meals awaits young Giorgio in his new home of Milan. A friendship develops that will be the only force to sustain Giorgio's hope for a chance at a life other than chimney sweeping.</p> <p><i>The Black Brothers</i> is a phenomenally illustrated novel that entices the reader to turn the page again and again to follow the troubled life of Giorgio. The illustrations allow the reader to jump right into Giorgio's terrifying experiences in the chimneys of Milan.</p> <p>A book that will touch your heart, this novel reveals the importance of determination, acceptance, and friendship, as seen through the eyes of one young boy fighting for his freedom.</p> <p>Jolie Darby Topeka, KS</p>	<p>Blue Fingers by Cheryl Aylward Whitesel Clarion Books, 2004, 252 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Acceptance/Ninja Life ISBN: 0-618-38139-2</p> <p>Taking a step into the past and a nation far across the seas, Cheryl Whitesel captivates her audience with a tale of ninja clans and samurai warriors. Koji, a Japanese twin, is desperately searching for belonging and acceptance in a place where twins are thought of as a sign of misfortune and disgrace. Through a strange twist of fate, a secret ninja clan captures Koji. Forced to endure ninja training, Koji must learn to accept this new ninja lifestyle and forget his family at home or die.</p> <p>I was intrigued by the ninja history intertwined throughout the text. Whitesel combines fact with fiction, giving her readers a glimpse of what ninja life may have been like. My favorite element of the novel was the relationship of Koji's family. The readers are able to examine sibling rivalry, as well as discover the importance of family and belonging.</p> <p>Christina Hosler Waverly, KS</p>
<p>Blue Moon by Marilyn Halvorson Orca Book Publishers, 2004, 109 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Relationships/Responsibility/Romance ISBN: 1-55143-320-6</p> <p>Bobbie Jean has saved up enough money to buy a barrel racing horse. At the auction, she decides to buy a blue roan horse that has seen better days. Feeling foolish, she, nevertheless, takes the horse home.</p> <p>Through good food, wise training, and the help of a friend, Bobbie Jean eventually gets Blue Moon into shape to compete in barrel racing. Attending a small rodeo, Bobbie Jean wins first prize, only to find that the horse has been stolen.</p> <p>This fast-paced novel will certainly appeal to all—horse lovers, as well as those who root for the underdog.</p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p>Cold Tom by Sally Prue Scholastic, 2004, 187 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0-439-48269-0</p> <p>Tom lives in the common with the rest of his tribe, elf-like creatures with heightened senses and the ability to "call to the stars" and becoming invisible. He has no concept of family or friends, as he has been caring for himself since he was able to crawl. He fears humans as demons and believes they are an inferior race.</p> <p>Tom's only job was to warn others of approaching demons, but he has failed. In consequence, he faces death by Larn's silver sword, so he flees to the city of demons, where he might be safe. Within the city, he finds shelter in Anna's backyard shed. Tom's original intention was simply to avoid death, but instead he learns lessons that do much more than save his life.</p> <p>An intriguing interpretation of humanity, Prue's fantasy grips the reader from the start. I found myself not only wondering about the plot line, but also about the portrayal of human behavior. The book, broken into 48 short chapters, is easily read, and I will definitely recommend it to many of my students.</p> <p>Elaine Gruenbacher Clearwater, KS</p>

<p><i>Cruise Control</i> by Terry Trueman HarperTempest, 2004, 148 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>New Realism ISBN: 0-06-623960-5</p> <p>Paul McDaniell, a high school senior, is a grenade with his hand on the pin.</p> <p>Living in Seattle with his mother, his sister, and his retarded brother nearly pushes him over the edge. He despises his father for leaving the family, and he feels responsible for helping his mother with his brother. Paul loves and defends Shawn, although he guiltily resents him at times wondering what his life would be like without him. Sports, especially basketball, provide Paul with an outlet to release his anxiety; still, he struggles with how his family situation will affect his future and his dreams of an athletic scholarship to Georgetown University.</p> <p>His friends worry about Paul's angry demeanor, and at times step in to keep him from inflicting pain on his provokers. However, when Paul's mom confronts him with the reason his father "abandoned" the family, he is able to release the pent up anger and view his situation from a more realistic and accurate perspective.</p> <p>Rhea Spears Chandler, AZ</p>	<p><i>The Dating Diaries</i> by Kristen Kemp PUSH (Scholastic), 2004, 266 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Dating/Self-discovery ISBN: 0-439-62298-0</p> <p>Katie James's life, like many high school girls, revolves around her boyfriend, Paul. They've been dating for almost five years, but he just turned her world upside down. After spending a week in bed feeling sorry for herself, she picks herself up off the ground, resolving to make up for lost time. Katie will have 12 dates in six weeks, with an ultimate goal of falling in love again before prom. Along the way, she undergoes a makeover, not just in a physical sense, but emotionally as well, realizing that there is more to life than having a boyfriend.</p> <p>I highly enjoyed following Katie through her journey of self-discovery, recalling many of my own high school dating memories. Kemp captures the essence of today's teen world, incorporating experiences with alcohol, music, same-sex relationships, and many more. I would recommend this novel to all my female (and some male) students looking for a realistic, easy-to-read, story about modern teen issues.</p> <p>Elaine Gruenbacher Clearwater, KS</p>
<p><i>Eager</i> by Helen Fox Wendy Lamb Books, 2004, 280 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Science Fiction ISBN: 0-385-74672-5</p> <p>In the twenty-first century, scientific study and technology have transformed human life. Humans co-exist in a world where robots are more than personal assistants. The new BDC4 robots, created by rich Technocrats, are programmed with the same interests as their owners. They are built to satisfy humans' physical and emotional needs. Protagonists Gavin and Fleur Bell are immersed in this world. The house they live in watches their every move, and there are few moments when they are alone.</p> <p>Helen Fox takes science fiction fans into a fantastical tale about Eager, a robot questioning the meaning of his feelings and whether he is alive. Eager comes to live with the Bells to replace Grumps, their older model. Considered new, improved, and much like the Technocrats' BDC4, Eager is physically and emotionally different. The BDC4s are considered the robot to own, but, as Gavin and Fleur discover, they are not as wonderful as everyone thinks.</p> <p>Eager teams up with the protagonists to pursue the truth behind the BDC4s' behavior. Along the way, Eager becomes a part of the family and finds the reasons for his existence.</p> <p>Gina Desai Glendale, AZ</p>	<p><i>Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became An American Boy</i> by Andrea Warren Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004, 106 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Historical Biography ISBN: 0-374-32224-4</p> <p>This touching work chronicles the closing days of American involvement in the Vietnam War and "Operation Babylift," a last-ditch attempt by the American government to save orphaned children in Vietnam before the Communist Army marched into the city. If the children stayed, there would be little hope for survival. Most of the children were of mixed blood, half Vietnamese and half American. Northern Vietnam looked upon these children as having "the blood of the enemy" and would kill them outright. Matt Steiner became one of these orphans when his mother committed suicide, and his G.I. father was unknown. His grandmother gave him up to an American agency when she could no longer provide for Matt.</p> <p>Warren pieces a narrative of Matt's early years using what little Matt remembers, and the results are heartbreaking. Matt wrestles with abandonment and the rapidly approaching horrors of war. Warren also chronicles Mr. Steiner's harrowing trip to America and his adjustment to his American family. <i>Escape from Saigon</i> is compelling enough to read in one sitting and stays with you long after you put it down.</p> <p>Eldridge Tsosie Tempe, AZ</p>

<p>Exiled: Memoirs of a Camel by Kathleen Karr Cultural Awareness/Point of View/Adventure Marshall Cavendish, 2004, 240 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-7614-5164-1</p> <p>Allah in his wisdom created the camel, Ali. Ali was born in the land of the Ancient Ones. Raised Muslim amid the pyramids and sand dunes of Egypt, Ali was captured and tamed by men-beasts; but in his heart, Ali never submitted. Sold to an American soldier in 1856, Ali and other camels journeyed by ship to Texas.</p> <p>Becoming acclimated to his new environment, one sees life through Ali's eyes as he finds purpose, selects a mate, starts a family, and secures his freedom in the Mohave Desert.</p> <p>Based on actual events in the history of the United States, this fictional story from the point of view of a camel is a delightful tale that takes the reader into two very different worlds that also have many similarities.</p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p>First Crossing: Stories About Teen Immigrants Edited by Donald R. Gallo Candlewick Press, 2004, 224 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 0-7636-2249-4</p> <p>Gallo's latest collection of short fiction examines the immigration experience from the perspectives of teen-agers from ten cultural groups. <i>First Crossing</i> offers a variety of immigration stories.</p> <p>We have Ameen, a Palestinian working to gain the respect of his teammates necessary to play varsity quarterback. We have Marco, a Mexican boy making his first trip to America to work with his father. And we have Maya, a girl from Kazakhstan whose family's immigration was sponsored by an aunt who married an American through an international dating magazine. Other stories feature protagonists from Venezuela, China, Romania, Sweden, Korea, Haiti, and Cambodia. Authors in this collection include Pam Munoz Ryan, Alden Carter, and Lensey Namioka.</p> <p><i>First Crossing</i> is an invaluable resource for the contemporary middle school and high school classroom. The stories explore the challenges and possibilities faced by young people as their first cultures collide with the dominant American culture, and it offers a clear sense of empathy and shared humanity. This collection offers realistic situations and characters and should help contemporary adolescents better understand complex cultural dynamics.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>Flux by Beth Goobie Orca Book Publishers, 2004, 258 pp., \$16.95 Speculative Fiction ISBN: 1551433141</p> <p>When her mother disappears, 12-year-old Nellie is left to manage on her own. She has a tough, lonely life on the streets, stealing money and food and evading a rough gang of boys called the Skulls. Nellie becomes aware of "flux," the ability to alter her vibratory rate in the molecular field, and she learns to travel back and forth to different "levels" of reality. During her travels to parallel worlds, Nellie glimpses horrifying experiments on children and wonders about her own unremembered past. She eventually finds a friend in 14-year-old Deller, the leader of the Skulls. Together they search for Deller's missing younger brother, who is trapped in another reality.</p> <p>I loved this book! The plot is imaginative; the characters are interesting and believable; the strange-yet-familiar setting is intriguing. Many of the mysteries of this story are left unanswered, leaving this reader happily anticipating a sequel. It's highly recommended.</p> <p>Wendy Street Pella, IA</p>	<p>A Heart Divided by Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld Romance/Historical Fiction Delacorte Press, 2004, 306 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-385-32749-8</p> <p>Kate Pride, at age ten, decides with passion her purpose in life, when her parents take her to see her first Broadway play in New York City. She wants to be a writer! Five years later, her parents enroll her in the appropriate classes for such a career, and Kate is chosen for an elite playwright club. So, when her father tells the family they are moving to Tennessee because of a job transfer, Kate feels her life is over.</p> <p>Although she finds their new home charming, and the townspeople extraordinarily friendly, the high school is a different story. She finds it filled with young adults of traditional views, a school divided between some white people who still want to raise the Confederate flag and some black people who view the flag as racism.</p> <p>Kate meets a boy named Jackson Redford. He and Kate fall in love and realize their hearts are not divided. When a family member is caught in the crossfire of a riot at a football game, Kate is able to write the play reminding the students of what they were fighting for.</p> <p>Vicki Boartfield Tempe, AZ</p>

<p><i>Heck Superhero</i> by Martine Leavitt Abandonment/Comics/Emotional Problems Front Street, 2004, 144 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-886910-94-4</p> <p>Heck's mother, who suffers from depression, telephones Heck while he is at his best friend Spence's house. She tells him they have been evicted from their apartment, to stay with Spence, and she will call soon.</p> <p>Not wanting to acknowledge his mother's illness to others, Heck begins a search through the city to find his mother. While Heck lives on the street for five days, he does one good deed after another believing that his assistance will provide the way to find his mother before Social Services finds him. Within his mind, Heck is a superhero who needs to rescue his mother from hypertime—the time not connected to reality. Heck encounters many obstacles, but through his ability to draw, he finds comfort from his own reality.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Roger Caswell Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Hippie House</i> by Katherine Holubitsky Impact of Violence/Coming of Age Orca Book Publishers, 2004, 233 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-55143-316-8</p> <p>In 1970 Emma is 14, living in a close-knit rural Canadian community and looking forward to a new high school. She is surrounded by loving family and friends, and everything seems safe and right with the world. But this all comes suddenly to an end when a local girl turns up missing and is discovered by Emma's brother, raped and murdered, in a small outbuilding, the Hippie House, on their farm.</p> <p>The community suffers as residents try to deal with this violence. Life is no longer as good or safe. Girls are warned not to roam freely. Neighbors begin to distrust each other; false accusations become commonplace. Nerves, nightmares, depression, and anxieties are rampant. A shadow covers the daily lives of Emma's family and her neighbors; no one can relax.</p> <p>Written in a somewhat honey, even flat, style, Holubitsky's story keeps us reading to piece together the clues. Readers won't be able to quit as they reach the climax and learn the identity of the murderer. Although dealing with a horrific event, Holubitsky celebrates the strength that comes from people bonding together to help each other in trying times.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jeanne M. McClim Asheville, NC</p>
<p><i>Honeysuckle House</i> by Andrea Cheng Friendship/Family Relationships/Multicultural Front Street, 2004, 136 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-886910-99-5</p> <p>People are more alike than different. The reader is engaged through the use of two 10-year-old narrators, Sarah and Tiang, who relate the story in alternating chapters.</p> <p>Sarah, a Chinese American who does not speak any Chinese, is coping with the loss of her best friend, as well as her father's job which requires him to be absent from home for extended periods of time.</p> <p>Tiang, a Chinese girl, enters Sarah's school and is upset with her new surroundings, her father's endeavors to get a green card, and adapting to a new school.</p> <p>Paired together by their teacher, the two girls strive to find mutual ground for understanding. They not only have to work through their problems, but they also must deal with the stereotyping by others. When they eventually open up to each other, they find that there is a basis for friendship.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joy Ferichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p><i>Hunger Moon</i> by Sarah Lamstein Family Problems/Coming of Age Front Street Publishing, 2004, 112 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 1-932425-05-5</p> <p>Set in the 1950s, <i>Hunger Moon</i> follows the life of young Ruthie Tepper. Ruthie possesses the characteristics of the typical middle school student: she is interested in boys, popularity, stardom, and her best friend, Jeanie. However, Ruthie's world suddenly changes when she enters the walls of her home. Her family only seems to communicate through yelling. Ruthie's dysfunctional family leaves her the burden of taking care of her three younger brothers, one of whom is mentally disabled. Standing up for what she believes to be right leads Ruthie on a courageous journey.</p> <p>Ruthie's vivacious character and exciting dreams capture the audience in <i>Hunger Moon</i>. Her passion for what she believes in will leave the reader inspired by her persistence but aching for her in the end. Ruthie Tepper will steal your heart and make it impossible to forget her.</p> <p><i>Hunger Moon</i> is a story of compassion, survival, and hope for one little girl.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jolie Darby Topeka, KS</p>

<p><i>The Insiders</i> by J. Minter Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2004, 249 pp., \$8.95</p> <p>Written by J. Minter, the author of "Ben's Life" (a guy's point-of-view column) in <i>Seventeen</i> magazine, <i>The Insiders</i> chronicles the misadventures of a group of middle- and upper-class friends who waste the days away popping prescription drugs, having casual sex, and emotionally abusing each other, while only occasionally showing up for school.</p> <p>Mickey, Arno, David, Patch, and Jonathan are lifelong friends. Mickey is a pill-popping alcoholic, while Arno is only interested in the opposite sex. David is an emotional wreck, contributing occasional emotional outbursts. Patch appears in the last couple of pages to reassure the reader that his friends aren't completely self-centered. Jonathan fancies himself the group's glue.</p> <p>Minter paints 'guy' archetypes with a roller rather than a paintbrush, thereby missing any real detail and attempts to make up for this deficiency using glitzy backdrops. Minter moves the characters around New York. Rather than fully developing their characters, Minter painstakingly catalogs their music, restaurants, clothing, vehicles and accessories. All of these characters know what's cool in New York.</p> <p>Eldridge Tsosie Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Kat's Fall</i> by Shelley Hrdlitschka Orca Book Publishers, 2004, 168 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Darcy has it all under control. His mom is in prison, his dad doesn't care, and he has to take responsibility for raising his deaf, epileptic younger sister. But the 15-year-old is handling it all, except for that small problem he has with cutting himself. Then his mom is released from prison, and Darcy is accused of a terrible crime. His carefully ordered world spins wildly out of control.</p> <p>This short novel addresses a number of social issues: self-injury, dysfunctional families, substance abuse, sexual abuse, and alternative high schools. But the tone is very matter-of-fact and never preachy or melodramatic. Bad language is minimal.</p> <p>Despite the grim subjects, it is not a painful book to read. There are strong themes about the transcendent power of hope, love, and forgiveness. There is also a terrific teacher who demonstrates the pivotal role a caring adult can play when she doesn't give up on a surly, troubled teen.</p> <p>The plot doesn't contain any surprises and the ending is just a little too neat, but overall it's a very enjoyable book.</p> <p>Wendy Street Pella, IA</p>
<p><i>Kissing The Rain</i> by Kevin Brooks New York: Chicken House, 2004, 336 pp., \$16.95</p> <p><i>Kissing the Rain</i> thrills the reader by retelling a story told through the eyes of its protagonist, Michael "Moo" Nelson. From its opening lines, Moo's narration leaps from the pages, grabs you by the collar, and dares you to finish the novel. Riddled with angst and inner turmoil, Moo shows the reader just how it feels to live in his world.</p> <p>Michael earns the nickname "Moo" because he is overweight, and his peers ridicule him at every turn. The rain in this novel is not the meteorological kind, but rather the metaphorical variety. Moo calls the constant harassment and bullying that he receives from his classmates "the Rain." Moo's only refuge is his bridge—the footbridge overlooking the A12 bridge to be exact.</p> <p>Moo's sanctuary, however, quickly becomes his largest source of stress, as Moo witnesses an incident of road rage, which results in a man's death. Moo gives his eyewitness account of the events and realizes he has stumbled into the middle of a conspiracy to frame a local gangster. Moo is forced to grapple with questions of truth while searching deep within himself for answers.</p> <p>Jason Corbett Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Letters from Wolfie</i> by Patti Sherlock Viking Press, 2004, 240 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Mark Cantrell's decision to enlist his dog, Wolfie, as a scout for the Army is encouraged by a letter from his brother, Danny, serving in Vietnam, and his father, a former trumpet player with the First Calvary obsessed with duty and responsibility. Mark hopes Wolfie's service to his country will quicken Danny's return and get his family's life back to normal, so he can deal with his girlfriend Claire, his best friend Rick's turbulent home life, and the strained relationship of his parents. Further complications arise when Mark learns of the Army's policy of treating dogs as their equipment. Realizing the horrible fate awaiting Wolfie, Mark campaigns to bring Wolfie home along with the other service animals. Mark comes to understand that his father's views on war and duty differ from his own and finds his brother comes home a complete stranger.</p> <p>The Vietnam War serves as the catalyst and the crux of the changes in the Cantrell family's life. Adolescent pet owners and non-owners will enjoy the bond between Mark and Wolfie, although some adult readers might be turned off by the anti-war sentiment that permeates work.</p> <p>Eldridge Tsosie Tempe, AZ</p>

<p><i>A Mid-Semester Night's Dream</i> by Margaret Meacham Holiday House, 2004, 154 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Humor/Fantasy ISBN: 0-8234-1815-4</p> <p>Morgan Yates thought her problems would be solved when she gets a surprise visit from a fairy godmother. After all, what girl couldn't use a little help winning the affections of the best looking boy in junior high, getting her dad to stop dating the wrong woman, and fixing her best friend up with the perfect date?</p> <p>Naturally, Morgan is delighted to discover her doll's house inhabited by Gretta Fleetwing, a fairy-godmother-in-training. Unfortunately, this fairy godmother hasn't quite mastered her trade. One miscast spell follows another and soon Morgan finds herself with more problems than ever. Morgan is ready to send Gretta home, but she needs her help to set things straight.</p> <p>While the plot is a clever take off on <i>Cinderella</i> and <i>Mid Summer Night's Dream</i>, the dialogue and relationships are realistically rendered. This funny, fast-paced book's humor, endearing characters, and clever plot twists are sure to delight a young audience.</p> <p>Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>	<p><i>Norman Tuttle on the Last Frontier: A Novel in Stories</i> by Tom Bodett Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2004, 192 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-679-89031-9</p> <p>The title of this collection of closely related stories refers to both Norman Tuttle's Alaskan home and his angst-filled and often hilarious journey toward adulthood.</p> <p>Norman's first fishing trip with his father falls dangerously short of high expectations when Norman, unnoticed, falls off the boat into the frigid water of Alaska. Norman struggles to clear his head, take stock of the situation, and do the right thing. He struggles atop an icy piling and contemplates his fate as his father and uncle float away into the deepening night. Surprisingly for a 13-year-old boy, Norman loudly proclaims to the night that he has survived.</p> <p>So begins the journey of Norman, who tackles very real issues facing adolescents today, from discovering girls and all the complications that come with dating, to becoming responsible for one's self and finding your place in the world. Frank and Norman's stormy relationship is the underlying theme in all of the stories. Both characters' viewpoints are expressed quite succinctly, allowing readers a peek into what their parents might be going through with them.</p> <p>Eldridge Tsoisie Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Overdrive</i> by Eric Walters Orca, 2004, 102 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Peer Pressure/Integrity ISBN: 1-55143-318-4</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old Jake is lucky: he's got his driver's license. However, this freedom comes with a price—due to poor academic performance, he is repeating the ninth grade.</p> <p>Left behind by his former classmates, Jake spends his free time with Mickey, a fellow freshman. When his older brother loans Jake his car for a night on the town, Mickey sees this as a chance to pick up girls and drag race. Giving in to the pressure, Jake makes a poor decision that could have lifelong implications. Now he must do the right thing, as hard as it is.</p> <p>With its short chapters, easily defined conflict, and a main character who faces a tough and realistic decision, <i>Overdrive</i>, although written with teenage boys in mind, will be appealing to most reluctant readers.</p> <p>Lisa Scherff Kissimmee, FL</p>	<p><i>The President is Shot! The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln</i> by Harold Holzer Boyd's Mills Press, 2004, 144 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Presidency/Civil War ISBN: 1-56397-985-3</p> <p>Harold Holzer explains the presidency and ultimate demise of one of the starkest icons in American history. He describes Lincoln as a man who, after a short career in the House of Representatives, was thrust back into politics when he learned of a piece of legislation that threatened to expand the role of slavery.</p> <p>Though unsuccessful at first, he finally won the nomination, and eventual presidency. Holzer reveals, in mature yet undaunting prose, that, as much as Lincoln was revered in the North, he was equally despised in the South. The author ushers in the names of the conspirators and their plot to kidnap Lincoln. The first family is also profiled. The personal grief of the Lincoln family, coupled with the war that plagued the nation on so many different fronts, deepened the eyes and the moods of the president. The book is peppered with pictures and illustrations. We know the unfortunate outcome of the shot speared through Booth's pistol, but Holzer does, what I assume any good historian does, ends with a couple of <i>what ifs</i>.</p> <p>Edward A. Wade Tempe, AZ</p>

<p>Pulling Princes by Tyne O'Connell Bloomsbury, 2004, 221 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Relationships ISBN: 1-58234-957-6</p> <p>O'Connell has created a tale that appeals to many adolescent girls. Calypso, the main character, attends an elite boarding school in England while her parents live in Hollywood. As an American attending the school, Calypso has a difficult time fitting in. When Calypso returns for another year of schooling, she finds out she is rooming with Star, her best friend, and Georgina, one of the popular girls who berates Calypso on a regular basis.</p> <p>In a fencing match against Eades, the male counterpart to the girls' school, Calypso is up against Prince Freddie, next in line to the throne of England. After the match Freddie and Calypso talk, and Freddie becomes romantically interested in Calypso. As Freddie and Calypso's relationship progresses, Calypso's life at school becomes increasingly more difficult.</p> <p>Girls of all ages can relate to Calypso as she ventures out of the sheltered world she has created for herself and begins her first real relationship, deals with the difficulties involved in remaining true to herself, and recognizes the complexity of relationships and the strains relationships can create.</p> <p>Elle Wolterbeek Tempe, AZ</p>	<p>Remember: The Journey to School Integration by Toni Morrison Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004, 78 pp., \$18.00</p> <p>ISBN: 0-618-39740-X</p> <p>Judging this book by its cover—and its use of a simple classroom photograph, it's obvious well-known author Toni Morrison will provide a gripping look at the road toward integration. She keeps her words to a powerful minimum, accompanying the stark, black and white archival photographs. The words and photos combine to provide an emotional simplicity to the history-shaping events of the Civil Rights movement.</p> <p><i>Remember: The Journey to School Integration</i> provides meaningful elements, such as a timeline of important events involving civil rights and integration in the United States and an extensive "Photo Notes" section that serves as an index of the photographs, including a brief note about each of the photos.</p> <p>Morrison's writing offers a fictional account of individuals' questions, thoughts, and dialogue to accompany the photographs, which provide an intense connection for the reader.</p> <p>While the written text may be limited, Morrison's book clearly illustrates the country's emotional upheaval of the time, and yet it demonstrates to young people the impact that period has on contemporary times. Morrison provides a lesson in history that all of us should know.</p> <p>Lori Atkins Goodson Wamego, KS</p>
<p>The Silent Boy by Lois Lowry Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003, 178 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Mental Retardation ISBN: 0-618-28231-9</p> <p>Deeply reminiscent of Harper Lee's classic <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, Lois Lowry's <i>The Silent Boy</i> is a touching story of a series of tragic events in a small town in the years immediately preceding World War I. In the book's prologue we meet our narrator, Katy Thatcher, now an elderly woman and a retired physician. The rest of the book is her recollection of her friendship with and growing understanding of Jacob Stoltz, a mentally retarded boy who rarely speaks, loves animals, and possesses the capacity for tragedy and heroism.</p> <p>As in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, <i>The Silent Boy</i> describes the beauty and the ugliness of rural life through the eyes of a young girl, the only character in the story who understands Jacob's actions and his heroism.</p> <p>The text is enriched with antique photographs interspersed throughout, and Lowry inserts historical events (e.g. the San Francisco earthquake, the first automobiles) into the narrative to provide a rich historical context. <i>The Silent Boy</i> is a gentle, bittersweet, and well-crafted novel.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>Taylor Five by Ann Halam Wendy Lamb Books, 2004, 197 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-385-73094-2</p> <p>LifeForce is a revolutionary company that has unlocked the secrets of preventing disease and aging. They have also created five clones who have grown up to be teenagers. Taylor is clone number five.</p> <p>Taylor hasn't always known her origins; that her DNA perfectly matches with someone else. Her parents loved her and only told her as much as she was ready to hear. Then, when she is 14, the cloning news goes public, and Taylor becomes international news.</p> <p>Taylor grew up with her family on the island of Borneo. Her parents ran an orangutan reserve owned by LifeForce (the company that created Taylor). Taylor and her younger brother Donny are as comfortable with the jungle and the orangutans as they are with people. But their lives are changed forever when a rebel group attacks the reserve. The only adult they can turn to for help is Uncle, an orangutan whose intelligence makes him seem almost human.</p> <p>As Taylor struggles to survive, she also searches to know what it means to be a copy of someone else and what it means to be human. She finds her answers in unexpected places.</p> <p>Holli Keel Mesa, AZ</p>

<p><i>Under the Sun</i> by Arthur Dorros Amulet Books, 2004, 216 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>War ISBN: 0-8109-4933-4</p> <p>Based loosely on the story of the “children’s village,” a community in Croatia rebuilt by a mixed group of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, many of whom were orphans of the war, <i>Under the Sun</i> traces the story of Ehmet, a thirteen-year-old who, with his mother, is displaced from Sarajevo and forced to wander across the countryside searching for sanctuary and missing family members.</p> <p>Dorros’ novel provides younger adolescents with a vivid description of the Bosnian conflict through a sympathetic and compelling character. Ehmet’s story demonstrates the futility and destruction caused by greed and ancient conflicts, but the novel also offers a vision of hope based on tolerance and compassion. Of particular interest is a diverse collection of compelling characters Ehmet meets on his journey in search of sanctuary.</p> <p><i>Under the Sun</i> is a memorable story set against an important and tragic series of events. It is not a particularly enjoyable book, but it is an important book.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Yankee Girl</i> by Mary Ann Rodman Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004, 216 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Civil Rights ISBN: 0-374-38661-7</p> <p>Jackson, Mississippi, in the summer of 1964, seems like another country to new resident and former Chicago denizen Alice Ann Moxley. Alice learns that, among other things, she is a “Yankee girl.” Alice finds out that making friends is more difficult than in any other place she’s ever lived, especially since her father is an FBI agent assigned to Mississippi to protect the rights of blacks. Alice experiences alienation and fear for herself and her family, all the while keeping a personal journal including the daily headlines.</p> <p>Mary Ann Rodman draws on her own life experiences for this book. She was the 10-year-old daughter of an FBI agent in 1964 who moved to Jackson. <i>Yankee Girl</i> is rich with emotional detail interwoven through actual events and occurrences from the summer of 1964 to the summer of 1965. Rodman opens each chapter with a newspaper headline that might have been seen on the front page of the Jackson paper during that era. This book would be a terrific read for junior high school students when taking them through the complex issues of the 1950s and 1960s, especially for helping explain the complex issue of segregation.</p> <p>Cortney Milanovich Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Zee’s Way</i> by Kristin Butcher Orca Book, 2004, 104 pp., \$7.95</p> <p>Delinquency/Intergenerational Conflict ISBN: 1-55143-279-X</p> <p>Loiterers, punks—these are the names hurled at the 15-year-old boys in Zee’s gang by the merchants of Fairhaven Shopping Center. Unfair, discriminatory—retaliate the boys. A “war” is on, and Zee thinks he has the way to get the upper hand—paint graffiti on the wall of Feniuk’s Hardware. Graffiti is Zee’s statement of protest, to make the merchants aware they can’t push the boys around. They want to enjoy the shopping center too. This was their place to roller blade and hang out before the strip mall was built.</p> <p>Zee’s plan backfires. When Feniuk paints over the graffiti but keeps the picture Zee drew, he loses control of his art. Then when Feniuk catches him and makes him work to pay off his debt for the vandalism, Zee finds himself wanting to prove he is a real artist. In the process both sides begin to understand and respect each other.</p> <p>This novel, an easy-read for middle-grade students, explores the intergenerational conflict that often plagues relations between younger and older adults. In the end, both sides get beyond stereotypes and gain a bit of understanding—an important lesson in our conflict-ridden world.</p> <p>Jeanne M. McGlim Asheville, NC</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 Cherry 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>

Challenges Give Meaning to Our Lives:

Francisco Jiménez and Social Justice

In conversation, as in his books, Francisco Jiménez inspires a deep sense of respect for the universality of the human experience. Jiménez, winner of the American Library Association Pura Belpré Honor Book Award (2001) and the Carnegie Foundation Outstanding U.S. Professor of the Year (2002), has dedicated his life to encouraging communication between people with a wide range of backgrounds. Jiménez is one of those rare individuals who is completely at home in many environments and recently commented in an extensive interview in July about his life and his works. His confident tranquility reveals a sharp-minded, gracious individual who has a deep compassion for people of every generation. Throughout his career as a teacher and administrator at Santa Clara University, as well as in his work as a literary scholar and fiction writer, his “hope and whole focus” has been to “promote the acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences.”

Jiménez’s journey has been full of obstacles, and he has found consolation in writing down his life story. His love for young people and his respect for the challenges of growing up inspired him to compile his stories into four award-winning books—*The Circuit: The Life of a Migrant Child* (University of New Mexico, 1997), *La Mariposa* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998), *The Christmas Gift/El Regalo de Navidad* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000) and *Breaking Through* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)—which recount his experiences leaving



his birthplace of San Pedro, Tlaquepaque, Mexico, at the age of four and becoming a California migrant worker with an insatiable appetite for learning. The first line of *Breaking Through* strikingly illustrates the challenges of his early life, “I lived in constant fear for ten long years, from the time I was four until I was fourteen years old” (1). With the haunting possibility of deportation constantly on his mind, Jiménez could not have guessed that one day he would receive numerous prestigious teaching and writing awards in the

United States. Today he is a successful writer with many more stories to tell.

The Writing Life

Jiménez did not begin writing creatively with the intention of exclusively appealing to children or young adults. He simply felt he had a story to tell. He had jotted down thoughts about his life while in college and at Columbia University as a graduate student. However, it was not until his graduate advisor encouraged him to put these thoughts into stories that he considered them for publication. Jiménez explains, “When I tried to capture the child’s voice, the emotions would come out in Spanish.” In 1972 he published two short stories in Spanish, “Muerte Fria”/ “Cold Death,” and “Un Aguinaldo”/ “The Christmas Gift” in *El Grito: Journal of Contemporary Mexican-*

American Thought. His widely successful “The Circuit” first appeared in 1973 in Spanish as “La Mudanza”/ “The Move” (later “Cajas de Carton”) for a New York literary journal. And in 1974 “Arado sin Buey”/ “Plough without an Ox” appeared in *The Bilingual Review*.

Jiménez’s first fictional success was his short story “The Circuit,” published in 1973 in the *Arizona Quarterly*, where it received the Best Short Fiction Award. In this story Jiménez recounts a life lived out of cardboard boxes, the title he gave the Spanish version, “Cajas de Carton.” Moving from one tent labor camp to the next, Francisco, the main character, describes the loneliness of never settling down. “‘Ya esora’ (Quitting time) [Ito] yelled in his broken Spanish. Those were the words I waited for twelve hours a day, every day, seven days a week, week after week. And the thought of not hearing them again saddened me” (*The Circuit* 73). After moving to a labor camp in Fresno, California, Francisco finally feels a sense of place again. His sixth-grade teacher, “my best friend at school,” offered to teach him to play the trumpet and he raced home to tell his family the good news, “when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes” (83). The pain of never settling down is poignant, yet Francisco learns to find something good about every situation. To Jiménez’s surprise this short story became a favorite in textbooks and anthologies and has been reprinted 121 times.

As much as Jiménez would have liked to return to fiction writing, he found himself beginning his life as a professor and, soon after, university administrator and did not have the time to pursue his love of telling stories for over twenty years. As “The Circuit” continued to receive such overwhelming attention, Jiménez realized that there was a significant popular interest in his experiences. Rudolfo Anaya, author of the award-winning novel *Bless Me Ultima*, was also supportive of his desire to flesh out more of his childhood story. With a sabbatical from Santa Clara University in 1995, Jiménez went back to his successful short story and added eleven more to create the expertly woven collection *The Circuit*, which documents Jiménez’s experience traveling with his family from Mexico into California. He explains in detail what happened when they reached *la frontera*: “We walked along the wire wall until Papá spotted a small hole underneath the

fence. Papá got on his knees and, with his hands, made the opening larger. We all crawled through like snakes” and into the sometimes brutal realities of migrant labor camps.

The story continues in the San Joaquin Valley, where he found life a constant challenge as he and his family “did the circuit” from farm to farm, trying to eke out a meager living picking strawberries, grapes, carrots, lettuce and cotton under the hot California sun. Like the original short story, this collection won high praise. It received many prestigious awards, including the Boston Globe-Horn Award for Fiction, the California Library Association’s 10th annual John and Patricia Beatty Award, and The Américas Award for Children and Young Adult Literature. It has also been published in Chinese (1999) and Japanese (2004). However, even more impressive has been the sale of *The Circuit*, which reach 100,000 in both soft and hardcover in 2003.

Writing *The Circuit* was challenging. “As I was writing, I would read parts to my children and my wife, but I didn’t show it to anyone else until it was completely done. I had to rely on creativity to fill in the gaps where I couldn’t remember details, since it’s further back in time. I did do a lot of research, and I went to the San Joaquin Valley and visited some of the places where I knew we lived. Some of the labor camps were still there, but others no longer existed. All of those visual things brought back memories and emotions that I incorporated into the book. I also talked to my mother and Roberto. They were both extremely helpful, especially for the first story, ‘Under the Wire.’ I had some of the pictures that are reproduced in the back of *Breaking Through*, like the one that was taken in Tent City, Santa Maria. Most of the pictures were taken more or less at the same time, but I don’t know who took them or how we ended up getting them. However, I am glad my family collected them and I wish I had more. I had to rely more on emotional memory to write this first book.”

The biggest challenge for Jiménez was telling the story from the point of view of a child. “This may sound a little bit strange; but the Spanish dramatist, Federico Garcia Lorca, explains how every adult has a child in him and that we have to maintain the child in us—his innocence and his creativity—to look at the world and appreciate it. I think I have been able to maintain the child inside of me. Sometime my kids

will even say, ‘Dad, you are just a big kid!’ I love children. I am able to empathize with them, especially those who suffer poverty or discrimination. I visit migrant families who are in literacy programs—through the P.E.N Foundation—and I think my experiences help me feel more compassion for children. And hopefully that connection—the child inside of me—helped me capture the voice of the child in *The Circuit*.”

Jiménez decided to publish *The Circuit* in English because he thought he would get a wider readership. He explains, “That was important to me because the stories that I write are the experiences of many families in the past and in the present. I wanted readers to have some insight into the migrant experience.” However, Jiménez does keep some Spanish words and phrases and uses the context to give the meaning to non-Spanish speakers. The stories were clearly in his head in Spanish as well, “When Houghton Mifflin asked me to translate it into Spanish, it was very easy.”

Two of the tales in *The Circuit* became children’s stories. *La Mariposa* (The Butterfly) (1998) recounts Jiménez’s first-grade year, during which he was not allowed to speak Spanish. Jiménez inserts Spanish dialogue into his story to give an English-speaking reader the sense of the tension Francisco feels between his Spanish and American worlds.

He tried to pay attention because he wanted to understand. But by the end of the day he got very tired of hearing Miss Scalapino talk because the sounds still made no sense to him. He got a bad headache, and that night, when he went to bed, he heard her voice in his head. (9)

Francisco’s struggle is symbolized by a caterpillar, which sits in a jar next to his desk and which he regularly feeds. Over the course of the semester its transformation into a butterfly is a source of hope for him. *La Mariposa* won the Parents’ Choice Recommended Award, was named a Smithsonian Notable Book for Children and was chosen for the Americas Commended List.

Jiménez also won numerous awards for his bilingual children’s book, *The Christmas Gift/El Regalo de Navidad*, including the Cuffie Award from *Publisher’s Weekly* for “Best treatment of a Social Issue.” In this story Jiménez documents through the main character, Panchito, his family’s difficult life in a labor camp in Corcoran, where they have to look for

fruits and vegetables in the trash and cut off the rotten parts. However, their life is not nearly as bad as that of the young couple who are expecting a baby and come to their door asking for help. The weight of poverty is tangible in this story, yet the family overcomes this with their strong sense of community.

In *Breaking Through*, the sequel to *The Circuit*, Jiménez continues the story of his traumatic experience with immigration, which concludes with an immigrant visa and his return to the United States. Jiménez then recounts salient experiences throughout the next four years as he struggles to help support his family and also complete high school. As they face prejudice—both Francisco and his brother are rejected by girls because they are Mexican—the Jiménez family finds a way to approach their difficult life with determination, benevolence, and hope. During these years, Francisco is happy to stay in Santa Maria, because he is able to attend the same school. His older brother, Roberto, finds a steady janitorial job, which alleviates the financial strain now that his father’s back injury keeps him out of the fields. At Santa Maria High, Francisco becomes a school leader and eventually student body president. He continues his ritual of memorizing material for school while he cleans offices early in the morning and late into the night. This book is most powerful in its representation of how others were essential in helping Francisco pursue an academic life. His counselors and teachers made him aware of college and helped him find scholarships; and with their help and the support of his family he was able to attend Santa Clara University.

Breaking Through has won twelve distinguished awards, including the Tomás Rivera Award. *Breaking Through* was slightly easier to write in English,

because the setting was mostly during the time I was in high school where I functioned mostly in English, except at home. When I translated it to Spanish the dialogue was especially easy, since I could hear my father, who never learned English. I also talked to Roberto, who shared a lot of information about his relationship with his girlfriends. I had much more material available to me than I had for *The Circuit*. In the first chapter, when we got deported, I was able, through the Freedom of Information Act, to get all the documentation from that experience. I also went through yearbooks and school newspapers, and I had saved my report cards. But again, the biggest challenge was trying to keep the voice of the teenager. Oddly enough, I didn’t show it to anyone, not even my children or my wife until it was completely done. Then I gave the manuscript to my wife,

because I trust her and she is widely read. In fact, she's my harshest critic. When she read it, she said, 'It's really good.' So I decided to send it to my editor at Houghton Mifflin, Anne Rider, and she wrote back and said, 'It's a wonderful piece.' So I only had to make a few editorial changes.

Jiménez admits that he has used many strategies as he tried to thoughtfully recount aspects of his life. He explains, "One of my writing strategies is to begin with a significant amount of reflective writing. I consider a specific event in my life and then ask myself, 'What is it that I learned from this memorable experience?' So in writing *The Circuit*, I put together the stories, keeping what I learned in mind. Then I related the experience not in terms of the type of reflection I might do as an adult, but rather as a child might think about the experience. My hope is that the way I write about the experience that I had as a child will lead an adult reader to the same reflection. I don't say, 'Here's what I learned from this experience,' but rather I lead the reader—whether adult or child—to my reflection simply by telling the story."

Jiménez's writing reflects this resourcefulness in a sort of hopeful realism. In fact, none of his books end

on a patently happy note. In *The Circuit* Francisco is practicing his memorized portion of the Declaration of Independence in his eighth-grade social studies class . . . "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these

are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," when an immigration officer appears at the classroom door and his teacher has to identify him.

In *Breaking Through* Jiménez feels a mixture of sadness, anger, and excitement as he leaves the labor camp outside Santa Maria for Santa Clara University, where he will attend college as a result of several scholarships. To get there he passes "several men and women picking strawberries on their knees and children playing near old, dusty cars parked at the edge of the field. I glanced at Papá, who winced [from back pain] as he napped" (191). Still he speeds ahead.

"As we approached the Santa Maria Bridge, I remembered the pain I felt in my chest every time we crossed this bridge, at the end of every summer. But this time I felt excitement, not pain . . . After so many years, I was still moving" (193). It is this optimism, void of sentimentality, that makes his works so appealing.

Jiménez's children's books also acknowledge a complex world. *La Mariposa* ends in a truce, with Francisco offering the bully, Curtis, his prize-winning drawing. *The Christmas Gift/El Regalo de Navidad* closes with little Panchito's "deep breath" (27). He has not received the ball he so desperately hoped for, but he has learned about generosity and his parents' profound love. Instead of a happy ending, Jiménez offers a reality laced with an abiding sense that something better is on the horizon.

Although in some ways he laments that he didn't have time earlier in his life to tell these stories, he acknowledges, "I don't think I would have had some of these reflections twenty or thirty years ago. I suppose as we get older, we get wiser; therefore, the reflections that I have now give a different meaning to the experience." His career has been rewarding, and he has come to understand that his work is particularly timely.

Now since *Breaking Through* has come out I am much more in tune with younger people and their reaction to the book. I get many, many letters and emails from young people, and their teachers—not only Mexican-Americans, but also Vietnamese-Americans and people from other ethnic groups. Their reaction to the book is really rewarding to me. They will say, 'This is my story,' or 'My parents went through this,' or 'I don't feel alone now knowing that somebody else has gone through the same experience.' Many people relate to the story "Inside Out"—going to school, not knowing a word of English, and then struggling to learn English. From *Breaking Through* many readers relate to the struggle of trying to reconcile two cultures, a native culture and a new American one. I tried to blend the two as I was growing up, taking the best from each.

College clearly fed Jiménez's love for learning, and his academic success won him a fellowship to Columbia University, where he earned a Ph.D. in Latin American literature. He returned to his alma mater, Santa Clara University, where he became a full professor and later Associate Academic Vice President. Rather than drive him away from his roots, this trajectory fostered in him a deep gratitude. In fact, he believes that the person he is today is a direct result of

Jiménez's writing reflects this resourcefulness in a sort of hopeful realism. In fact, none of his books end on a patently happy note.

the wisdom and sacrifices of his parents. “It’s a matter of respect,” he explains. “They gave me life and they taught me very important lessons. My father used to say that every person must be respected.” Jiménez has certainly lived a life that demonstrates the depth to which he has learned this important lesson. He wisely surmises, “A well-educated person can relate to all different kinds of people.”

Jiménez has not only applied a lucid understanding of the value of an attitude of respect to the people in his life, but also to his experiences. The popular Nietzsche quote, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger,” could easily be applied to his outlook on life. He sees the obstacles that have faced him as the very foundation for his present success. “I compare my situation to a man who is drowning. A man who is drowning uses the water, the very substance that threatens his life, to save himself. So I used poverty and those experiences that initially pulled me down to boost myself up. Whenever I felt discouraged, I would write about my childhood” (1998 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award acceptance speech).

Working on the sequel to *Breaking Through* is Jiménez’s next goal. This novel will begin with Francisco heading to college and will document his experiences at the university. “The incentive to write this is not just because people have urged me to do it, but because I realized that the experience of first-generation college students, especially those of color, is very different from others. Students of color have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Still I think the experiences of first generation college students cut across different ethnic groups, and that’s really my motivation for writing the new book.”

Although he is just beginning to write, he realizes that the language of this book is going to be different,

because it’s written from the point of view of a college student. It’s going to be a little more sophisticated. I suppose that it would be more appealing to seniors in high school, although you never know. *The Circuit* is used in grammar school, high school, colleges, universities, and teacher education programs. My hope is that it does have a wide appeal. I have had some students and people in the audience when I make public presentations offer to give me insights into my third book, because they are first generation college students. So, I think I am going to take them up on that offer because I think their insights will be very, very helpful.

The Teaching Life

Being an education advocate has clearly been the focus of Jiménez’s life:

I strongly believe that education is the best means for people to progress in life. It gives people many, many choices for the kind of life they want to live, and the kind of lifestyle they want to have. But more importantly I think—and it’s a cliché, but it’s true—a well-educated society maintains a rich democracy. When our society is not well educated, democracy suffers. The other reason that I strongly support public education is that it is the best means for people who come from poor economic backgrounds to escape poverty. The obstacles are greater, but at least the opportunities are there. Education helps to level the playing field. My biggest concern currently is that cutbacks to outreach programs and other cuts to programs that serve the poor are really hurting the educational opportunities of those who need the most help. They are short sighted.

Jiménez’s interest in public education came to the attention of California Governor Jerry Brown, who appointed him to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing in 1976, where he volunteered for the next ten years, serving at Chair from 1977-1979. Jiménez explains, “I am not in Teacher Education, but [Brown] believed that you really needed someone from outside to look critically at the whole issue of Teacher Credentialing. Of course, it took me a long time to understand what was really going on. And eventually I understood. I hope I made some contribution.”

Like his books, Jiménez’s outlook concerning an equal education for all children remains realistically hopeful. He explains:

During the time I was appointed to the Commission, the Chacon Bill in bilingual education was passed. So I was involved in the discussion about what the standards should be for certifying bilingual teachers. That was exciting. I was frustrated when California eliminated bilingual education—the criticisms against immigrants is discouraging—but I strongly feel we can’t lose hope. I think overall cultural and human understanding between the United States and Mexico has improved. In the recent years, I have felt discouraged; but overall I think it has improved, especially in education. I think teachers are better prepared than they were many, many years ago to appreciate and be sensitive to cultural differences. I think our society as a whole is much more receptive to cultural and linguistic differences than they were many years ago. As I mentioned in *The Circuit*, many years ago we were not allowed to speak in a language other than English in school, and often we were punished if we did. Hopefully that doesn’t happen now. I am fairly confident

that it doesn't happen in California. Perhaps in some parts of the country students may still be punished for speaking Spanish. However, because of the diversity that exists in California, we are ahead of other parts of the country in terms of accepting and appreciating cultural differences. My hope, and my whole focus, is to try to promote that acceptance and appreciation. If we succeed in California, we might serve as a model for the rest of the country. It's always been a struggle, but the struggle is worth it. Rather than being discouraged completely and give up, we should meet those challenges with hope and courage. Those are the challenges that give meaning to our lives.

This belief that struggling for what we believe in is what makes life worth living permeates all the projects to which Jiménez dedicates himself. In 1985 he proposed and became the director of the Institute for Poverty and Conscience at Santa Clara. He explains, "This was when the economy was really bad in the '80s. We lived in San Jose, and there were many people who were homeless, which is still the case today. I hoped to draw attention to the plight of the poor and to identify the causes of poverty and offer possible solutions. We had panel discussions and keynote speakers. We invited Cesar Chavez, Julian Bond, Frances Moore Lappe, Michael Harrington and others. Some courses that came out of that Institute are still being offered at Santa Clara on a regular basis. The Institute was very rewarding and got a lot of attention, especially in the Bay Area. *The San Jose Mercury News* had articles about it and I hope it made a difference in the conscience of our communities and in the minds of those who are empowered to make changes." Jiménez published the proceedings of this institute, *Poverty and Social Justice: Critical Perspectives* (1987), with the Bilingual Press.

As Director of Ethnic Studies, Jiménez has tried over his career at Santa Clara to incorporate Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies scholarship throughout the curriculum. "Once you do that, then every student who goes through four years of college learns about it . . . it's like breathing air. It's natural. If we are successful, and I hope we will be in the future, we won't need those separations anymore. But until that happens, I think those emphases are necessary. Our goal is to incorporate ourselves into the rest of the university curriculum, so that the Ethnic Studies Department won't be necessary. That's the ideal."

Jiménez's passion for education is even more apparent when he talks about his own teaching:

Being in the classroom gives me energy. It's wonderful to be helping young people developing their talents and to see them getting engaged and wrestling with the subject matter. That's very exciting to me. I didn't get that being up in the Administration Building. To be an effective teacher, I need to put myself in my students' shoes to reflect on my own teaching through their eyes. So I tell them that the success of my classes depends as much on me as it does on you—and perhaps more on you. I remind them that I too am a student. I strongly believe that I learn from them. They have different experiences that they bring to discussions that profoundly enrich me as a teacher. I try to create a comfortable, respectful environment where I don't necessarily become the center or the focus of my class, rather I become part of the class. So far it has worked well. Students have responded positively to our journey together. I tell them how blessed I feel to be a teacher and to have the privilege of learning from them and helping them to learn. And I get paid for it!

Encouraging students to talk to their parents and learn about their own family history, is also one of Jiménez's goals as a teacher, "because it roots them and gives them a sense of being, a sense of who they are. They become more appreciative of where they are as a result of the sacrifices that their ancestors made when they first came here. After all, we are a country made up mostly of immigrants."

Teaching as Writing/Writing as Teaching

Productive classroom exchange is important to Jiménez and he describes his purpose for writing as being an extension of this dialogue. "Through my writing I hope to give readers insight into the lives of migrant farm worker families and their children, whose backbreaking labor picking fruits and vegetables puts food on our tables. Their courage, their hopes and dreams for a better life for their children and their children's children, give meaning to the American dream. Their story is the American story" (1998 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award acceptance speech).

Jiménez believes that his experiences as a migrant laborer with big dreams for the future served a very important purpose in his life. The frustrations of poverty and the loneliness of trying to access a different world gave him the impetus to write. "Sometimes when I make public presentations students will ask me if there is anything in my life that I would change. And I tell them, as strange as it may sound, I

would not. The experiences I had as a child, my teaching, my writing, my vision, they all inform everything I do as an adult. So for me to wish that I had had a different life would be like saying, 'I am not comfortable with who I am because of those experiences.' I really believe that we go through experiences for a purpose. My experiences enable me to voice the experiences of many children and young adults who went through, or are going through, similar experiences."

Reminding his students of the value of learning about the perspectives of others is a primary focus in Jiménez's teaching. "I tell students that even though they may not have gone through similar difficulties—and hopefully they haven't—the fact is a large sector of our society, many who had been responsible for the development of our agriculture and the economy of our nation, have. Their stories are part of American history. So if we are going to understand who we are as a society, then we need to understand and appreciate each other's contributions. Irish-Americans, Polish-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans and so many others have experienced discrimination, have struggled to develop themselves and have also contributed to society. Their stories are important to document because they are part of the American experience."

These stories make up the fabric of our society, and for Jiménez there is nothing more important than facilitating the communication that will create understanding and appreciation among all people in American society, "Some writers will say that they don't have any political agenda. They say that they write simply because they need to write. I admire that. But that's not why I write. I write purposefully and I have in mind why writing is important to me. It's the same reason that I enjoy teaching. My hope is that through my teaching, writing, and my public speaking, I can serve as a bridge for cultural understanding. I am not motivated to do "esoteric" scholarship even though I value it. I'd rather do scholarship or writing that might make a difference in our society."

Jiménez often teaches his literature courses from an historical perspective and was attracted to more "esoteric" scholarship, which is likely to involve a significant amount of time studying archival material. When he was writing his dissertation on the Mexican historical novel, he was given access to the personal

archives of Victoriano Salado Alvarez, a prolific historical novelist, short story writer and journalist who is from the same state of Jalisco as Jiménez. In 1974 he published *Los Episodios Nacionales de Victoriano Salado Alvarez*. Since then Jiménez has helped to organize Alvarez's papers and the Alvarez family has given him some of the journalist's letters, one of which was signed by Porfilio Diaz, President of Mexico for 35 years. "All of this material is very valuable, and I think it should be accessible to the general public." However, Jiménez is more inclined to keep his focus on more pressing social issues. "It is very important for me to promote multi-cultural education, to help students be sensitive to and appreciative of different cultures that make up our ethnically diverse society. This is crucial if they are going to function well and live harmoniously. For me creative writing, the work that I do as a teacher, and even the work that I do as an administrator all have the same focus. They are not disconnected. All of this work excites me."

Using Obstacles as Building Blocks

As a writer, Jiménez sees himself in the tradition of other Latin American writers. "That's why I majored in Latin American Literature. One of the characteristics of Latin American literature is that it has a strong theme of social justice. And I think that carries over into a lot of literature written by Latinos and other ethnic groups. They come from a culture

I tell students that even though they may not have gone through similar difficulties—and hopefully they haven't—the fact is a large sector of our society, many who had been responsible for the development of our agriculture and the economy of our nation, have. Their stories are part of American history. So if we are going to understand who we are as a society, then we need to understand and appreciate each other's contributions.

that has not been totally accepted or appreciated or has not been treated justly. That backdrop fuels one's vision for what one wants for the future . . . for what one wants for our children and our children's children. I realize that I am generalizing, but I see that that is the case with many U.S. Latino writers, like Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros. Anaya was the one who suggested that I send the manuscript to the University of New Mexico. I admire Sandra Cisneros too. In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza says that she writes for her community. She voices the community from which she comes. Sabine R. Ulibarri, who has now passed away, is another writer who has documented the life of what he calls 'Hispanic societies' in New Mexico. His goal was to preserve the traditions that existed for centuries, from settlers from Spain. He is not as well known, but he wrote a collection of stories titled *Tierra Amarilla: Stories of New Mexico*, the region in New Mexico that he was from."

Jiménez's career has been dedicated to incorporating different ethnic literatures into the canon of literature associated with the United States, which is often referred to as "American literature."

"In 1974 I proposed an ongoing discussion group at the MLA on Chicano literature, with the idea of helping integrate Mexican-American literature in American literature. But when I proposed it, they placed it as part of Latin American literature. That was an uphill battle. I purposely invited Luis Leal, a Mexican literary critic who also has done a lot of work on Chicano literature, to deliver a paper in the first session. I also invited Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, and José Antonio Villareal, who wrote *Pocho* (1959), which is considered one of the first Mexican-American novels published by a mainstream publisher; and Joseph Summers, a Latin American literary critic who had done a lot of work on Mexican literature. I titled the panel 'The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature,' and Joseph Summers said, 'Francisco, I don't know if you want me on this panel because I am not Chicano.' I said, 'I am asking you to serve because you are a well-known literary critic. It would be silly for anyone to say that I cannot read Argentinean literature and write critical articles because I am not Argentinean.' He said, 'Well, not everyone thinks that way.' I said, 'Well, we have to be the models and break this narrow view.' Our goal was to try to get Mexican-American literature into the American canon so it would be recognized and valued. We also believed that professors who are not Mexican-American did a wonderful job of teaching these works. Eventually our ideas took hold and now Mexican-American literature, African-American literature, and so

many others, are taught in English Departments.

The challenge was not only in trying to get Mexican-American literature to be widely accepted in universities, but it was also very difficult for Mexican-American writers to get published. As co-founder and co-editor of the *Bilingual Review*, later the Bilingual Press, Jiménez played a major role in publishing high quality Mexican-American literature. "My effort was to make Mexican and Latino literature accessible as widely as possible, to give some kind of direction to writers. A lot of material that was being published then was excellent, but some was not really of high quality. Mexican American/Chicano critics were sometimes reluctant to be critical of material that was not of high quality because it had been written by Mexican Americans. I felt that as literary critics we had to be honest, so that we were helpful to writers and to people who read the material. Our goal was to promote and give access to talented Latino writers who had trouble being accepted by mainstream publishers. These writers feared that there was no one interested in reading Mexican-American literature or that the number of people who would be interested was fairly small. So from a commercial point of view their writing would not be accepted. I thought that if we encouraged writers to continue writing and disseminated high quality works by Latinos, eventually we would break this barrier that Latino writers were encountering. Rudolfo Anaya and others ended up publishing their work with Quinto Sol Press, which came out of Berkeley, because the mainstream publishers were not interested. Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, if I am not mistaken, was turned down by mainstream publishers. However, once it did very well, then they picked it up and now it's being published by a mainstream publisher."

Jiménez continues to be dedicated to the distribution of the works of high-quality Latino writers. He presently serves on the editorial board of the Bilingual Press and is the west coast editor. In the past ten years many more Latin American writers have become popular in the mainstream. Jiménez lists many popular Latino writers who have published works that appeal to children and young adults. "Gary Soto's work on Fresno, California, captures fairly well the community of Fresno, not just the rural but the urban. Francisco Alarcon, at UC Davis. Juan Filipe Herrera, at

Fresno State. You know we are all academics. There are very few of us, who have the means and the time to devote entirely to writing. Pamela Muñoz Ryan, who wrote *Esperanza Rising*, has been able to write full time. I kind of envy that. It 's wonderful that Latino writing is being recognized as being part of the American canon. I can say with confidence that many writers from different ethnic groups are producing wonderful books for young adults.”

Jiménez finds himself at an exciting moment in literary history. Rather than feeling alienated as a result of his personal confrontations with racism and poverty, Jiménez has embraced his experiences and used them for the benefit of his students, readers, and community. He has created a rich, meaningful life— one steeped in service and in art . . . a life he considers “full of great rewards.”

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A Pinch of Tobacco and a Drop of Urine:

Using Young Adult Literature to Examine Local Culture, Using Local Culture to Enrich Schools: An ALAN Grant Research Project

For students who don't excel in school it often comes as welcome information that there are areas in their lives where they are proficient learners [. . .] . Outside of school they are successful learners. In a class in folklore their success in other settings can become part of the curriculum. They can take pride in it. This change in self-image can rub off favorably in their schoolwork.

—Elizabeth Radin Simons

A successful search for identity—aided by folklore—takes us far beyond mere survival and results in a state of health.

—Fred Metting

Folklore is fascinating to study because people are fascinating creatures.

—Jan Harold Brunvand

The richness of place

Several years ago, I was invited to visit a seventh-grade classroom to talk with the students about writing for publication. The tiny school was tucked away in the farming country of northwest Missouri, and the students were mostly the children of local farmers.

At first I tried to talk with them about things they could write about, but they assured me there was absolutely nothing unique about their lives, nothing at all that anyone might care to read about or know.

“Really?” I asked. “How many of you have ever driven a tractor?”

All of the boys and at least two-thirds of the girls raised their hands.

“Imagine all of the kids your age in America. How many of them do you think have ever driven a tractor?”

One young man offered a tentative answer,

“About three-fourths, I suppose.”

“I don't think it would be quite that many,” I said. “In fact, I'll bet that it would be well under five percent.”

As a group, they looked stunned and a little angry, and most of their heads turned to the teacher who was kind enough to rescue me.

“Yes, I think he's right,” she said. “Not very many people live on farms anymore.”

I pushed on. “I think your lives are interesting because not very many people these days have the opportunity to experience the kinds of things you have. How many of you have ever helped a cow deliver a calf?”

Almost everyone there had.

“What other things have you done that most people haven't?”

“Castrated hogs.”

“Good. What else?”

“Went coon hunting.”

And so it went for several minutes until I tried to bring the discussion back around to the reason for my visit.

I ended my visit by telling them they need to write about their experiences because those experiences are unique. “The rest of the world needs to learn about you,” I said, “and if the rest of the world isn’t interested, they should be.” In truth, of course, I had already learned a great deal from them. In particular, I learned that the seventh graders I visited have a wealth of experiences that reflect more honest work and responsibility than many adults accumulate in a lifetime, and many of those things that were part of their experience would be unfamiliar to the vast majority of adolescents their age—experiences like butchering hogs and building fences and herding cattle and attending special church services called for the purpose of praying for rain while crops withered in the July heat.

Interestingly, however, they were almost completely unaware of how unique their experiences are in comparison to contemporary adolescents. If anything, they tended to view the uniqueness of their culture as a liability. At the very least, the idea of taking school time to write about those things we talked about seemed to take them by surprise. Perhaps it even seemed a bit fraudulent to them.

Taking the show on the road

Shortly after this experience, with the help of a grant from the ALAN Research Foundation, I was able to explore some of these ideas in a classroom context. I envisioned the study as an opportunity to examine how students’ local culture could be tapped in order to promote meaningful responses with quality young adult literature. With the help of a cooperative classroom teacher, I spent two weeks in a middle school in rural eastern North Carolina where I taught a novel to a group of sixth-graders, making a set of deliberate attempts to engage students’ folk knowledge in service of the study of literature.

The novel I selected was *When the Nightengale Sings*, by Joyce Carol Thomas. I believed this novel was particularly appropriate for several reasons. First, it is a re-telling of the Cinderella story and, as such, it

is easily connected to oral lore. Second, the novel is set in an African-American church (in this case, the Cinderella being sought is a new lead singer for the choir), and I thought it would likely be of interest to the class I was working with, as many of the students in that rural school were African-American. And finally, *When the Nightengale Sings* is an excellent novel for middle grades students.

The process we used was fairly simple. We began our study of the novel by asking students to share bits of their folk culture with us. We asked for ghost stories and folk remedies and weather predictions and so on. And we introduced the concept of folklore to the students. We talked about nursery rhymes, and we shared popular urban legends. We talked about how folklore is passed from person to person and generation to generation.

Through this process, I learned many things from the students. I learned how to use a pinch of tobacco to relieve a bee sting. I learned that a drop of urine was an established treatment for pink eye, and I learned about a mysterious gray apparition that appeared along the North Carolina coast in advance of hurricanes. I learned how to predict the weather and how to predict the sex of an unborn child, and I learned techniques for inducing labor.

From here we turned to fairy tales, and we asked the students to select a familiar tale (any tale except Cinderella) and re-write it as a contemporary story. Then we turned to *When the Nightengale Sings*, reading it as a class and pausing to discuss and savor each plot twist. About halfway through the book, we took a break to read the Grimm brothers’ version of the tale and talk a bit about how the basic story had been transformed by various storytellers (e.g., Disney, Joyce Carol Thomas).

Anne Haas Dyson describes “a chain of communication in which privileged adult authors have rewritten characters, plots, and/or dominant motifs” (282). In other words, each generation retells a story like Cinderella, but each telling reveals the values and concerns the “authors from the more privileged class” wish to pass along to children (280). According to Dyson, “it is possible for a classroom chain of communication to develop in which individual children, as members of a collective, use the school sanctioned agency of writing to question given stories and, thus, their given social and political worlds” (284).

With this in mind, we concluded the brief unit on *When the Nightengale Sings* by having students re-tell the Cinderella story in any way of their choosing. I am not at all sure our students reached the lofty social goals Dyson describes, but I do think the unit was successful. The students were clearly engaged throughout the unit. They took considerable pride in describing their folk traditions, they exhibited a high degree of involvement with the novel, and they created some very interesting versions of Cinderella. Their writing incorporated elements of folklore and traditional storytelling, and I think it is safe to say these activities helped the students connect and respond more deeply to the novel.

Attempts at understanding

I began this project with an intent to explore and document ways folk knowledge and local culture could be tapped in order to build connections to young adult literature. I saw this as a teacher-research project that would explore an extension of traditional reader-response activities, beginning with a recognition of the need to meet readers where they are and building progressively more sophisticated aesthetic responses to literature. Folklore was simply another part of the reader's prior knowledge to be tapped to foster response. I did not question the assumption that the purpose for all of this was the study of the novel (and whatever increased reading skill students might gain through the reading of the novel). Literature was primary; folklore was a tool to be used in its service.

By the time I finished the project, I was beginning to understand that the folklore was at least as important as the literature, not simply a tool to be used in service of the teaching of literature. That is to say, we can use students' folk knowledge in support of literature instruction, but we can also use literature as a connection to students' folk knowledge and culture, and helping students understand and validate their unique cultural heritage is arguably as important as the study of literature.

Tension at the cultural boundaries

In an illustrative example of the re-telling of fairy tales in cultural context, one of our students recast "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" as Clide and Jimbo, Jeffro, and Elestin. This version opens with Jimbo, Jeffro, and Elestin sitting at the table eating deer meat

that was too hot, too cold, and so on. After they have left the house, Clide enters and helps himself to the trio's most valued possessions: the afore-mentioned deer meet, chewing tobacco and a rifle.

This student text is a rich illustration of the local culture—a social environment in which most farmers raise tobacco, gun ownership is common, and hunting (and eating) deer is an accepted seasonal ritual. This student text also clearly expresses values that fly in the face of the accepted norms of school culture. The text tests the rhetorical boundaries of the school's culture (it would not be at all uncommon for the text to be censored or otherwise suppressed in a school setting) because the aspects of local culture expressed stand in stark contrast to the values we typically find in school culture.

School culture (e.g., Deal and Peterson) is a recognized force. Generally speaking, the values of school culture are those of upper-middle class America. Schools value respect, hard work, timeliness, and a faith in knowledge validated by experts. Typically, the dominant culture of the school approaches the culture of the local folk as deficient, particularly when the folk of the community and the faculty of the school are from different races or social classes. At the school, we don't rely on ghostly figures to predict hurricanes. We consult the weather service. We don't use urine or tobacco to heal physical problems. We go to a doctor who sends us to a pharmacist. The school is an authoritative "distanced zone" (Bakhtin) within which we validate and celebrate stories and knowledge that we assume to be fundamentally superior to the folk knowledge of the surrounding community and the omnipresent popular culture.

But our students come to school thoroughly immersed in the values of their folk and popular cultures. From the folk culture, adolescents receive a world view and an identification with a unique cultural system. If the students are suburban, upper-middle class children of college graduates, there is probably much agreement between the values of the folk community and the values of the school community. If, however, the students are from working-class or impoverished backgrounds, it is likely the values of their folk cultures will conflict in important ways with the values of the school.

Many young adult novels are situated within unique folk cultures, and those novels are uniquely

positioned to help teachers and students discuss and reconcile competing cultural forces. We can use novels with strong expressions of folk culture to engage in a two-way dialogue with our students. The benefits to the students include a deepening appreciation of their own cultural heritage, the improved sense of belonging in the school environment that results when they feel the school has validated their cultural backgrounds, and increasing interest in and engagement with the literature based on the connections made between the literature and the local culture.

The knowledge gathered about the local culture benefits the school, as well.

We gather all sorts of information about our students. The ever-swelling folder the school keeps on each student is filled with all manner of testing data, as we measure and probe all the accessible portions of that student's mind. What we don't gather systematically is information about our students' cultures, and that information is potentially very useful to us as we select content and build curricula, as we plan instruction and interventions, as we attempt to gain the support of the community for our efforts, and as we evaluate all aspects of our programs. When we focus entirely on the cognitive aspects of the observable performances of students and groups of students, we ignore some of the most powerful available "data" that could help us improve student performance on the very measures about which we have become so obsessed. Most school districts have available the services of one or more educational psychologists to help collect and interpret data on student achievement. I do not mean to suggest this is not important and potentially valuable, but I would like to suggest the school could benefit just as much from the help of a cultural ethnographer. I would also like to suggest that the better the school understands and accounts for the local cultures within which the students exist, the better the school will be able to create and adapt learning experiences that will result in increased student performance (including the kinds of performance that are measured on all manner of tests).

So what would this look like in the real world?

Just how would we go about doing this? As an example, let's consider how we might use a young adult novel to explore youth culture. M.T. Anderson's

Feed is a science fiction novel in the tradition of the dystopian future society such as *1984* or *Brave New World*. In *Feed*, we follow a group of teenage characters at a time when transmitters are implanted in the brains of most citizens. Primarily a parody of the faddish consumerism and corporate greed spawned by our ever-present media interest, *Feed* is an interesting accomplishment in that it manages to paint a vivid portrait of a youth culture, including a set of language idioms and constructions, without dating that culture at a point in the historical past. Most novels that relied on a realistic representation of the youth culture of a particular time (e.g., the 1960s, the 1980s) become hopelessly dated in rather short order. By placing the novel in a future society, Anderson manages to capture the mechanisms and functions of youth culture in a book that should be not lose its impact for a good long while.

Of particular interest for our purposes here is Anderson's creation of a teen vocabulary. Consider, for example, how a unique youth culture is created through the following examples from chapter one of *Feed*. To express his sense of feeling a little spacey, the protagonist tells his friend, ". . . I'm so null . . . I'm null too, unit . . ." Here the term "null" refers to state of mind and "unit" expresses a friendship relationship. In describing contemporary fashion, the protagonist reports that on the walls of a club ". . . there were lots of pictures of dancing and people with romper-gills and metal wings . . ." In noting that he appreciates the company of his friends, the protagonist says, "And it would be good to have someone to download with." Upon feeling embarrassment, the protagonist notes, ". . . I felt like a complete bonesprocket . . ." and the expression "I'm flat-lining. Meg." reflects the character's lack of engagement. Note that "meg" is a modifier, not a name.

In a high school setting, we might approach study of *Feed* by having students create a lexicon of the teen terminology present in the novel. Aside from being a nice activity for language study, it could lead naturally to the creation of a lexicon of the teen vocabulary the students themselves use, and then we could have the students do some oral history work in the community to discover the unique vocabularies of previous generations. Here we started with the high-interest teen vocabulary present in the novel and moved to

first validate the students' existing culture and then to connect the students to the larger culture outside the walls of the school.

But the school gets something at least as valuable from the series of activities. The data collected from the contemporary lexicons and the interview data from the oral histories should be shared among the faculty and fed into school improvement efforts in the same way we make use of standardized test data. For example, if we have data suggesting students struggle with reading comprehension, we might schedule in-service workshops on comprehension strategies, and we might make the incorporation of those activities across the curriculum a priority. What should we do if the students' youth vocabulary reflects a glorification of drug use or promiscuity? How should we respond to disturbing trends we find in this kind of data we collect from students? Obviously responding to this kind of data is not as straightforward as responding to standardized test scores reflecting a particular deficiency, but the point is that discussion of the data by faculty members help teachers better understand their students and their communities, and this deepened understanding can enrich our instructional efforts.

My argument, then, is we need to validate, and respect the local culture. We need to discover as much as possible about the local culture, and we need to use our growing knowledge of the local culture to help select content (e.g., novels) to be taught. We need to connect the local culture to works studied, helping to develop interest in the content, but at the same time we need to connect the works studied to the local culture. When we use the content we are teaching to help students and teachers discover as much as possible about the local culture, we deepen our understanding of the local culture, and that under-

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standing can, in turn, help us do a better job of meeting our students' needs.

The readability and high interest of young adult literature make it well suited to use as a connection into local culture. How might we use a novel like *Dogwolf*, or *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*, or *Permanent Connections* to engage students in similar rural working-class communities with their own cultures? How could we use the novels like *Monster*, or *Forged by Fire* or *Miracle's Boys* to engage urban adolescents with their folk cultures? How could a novel like *Tangerine* be used to explore suburban culture? What young adult novels are uniquely appropriate for the students in your school? What could your students gain from a deeper appreciate of their folk heritage? How could you use that knowledge to better meet your students' needs?

In today's climate of standards from on high and pre-packaged instructional materials, it is easy to lose sight of the less perfect worlds in which our students live.

Whether the standards and accountability frenzy is a good idea

or not is a topic for another place. My point here is that, given our pressing need to produce demonstrable student improvement on standardized measures, it is more important than ever for us to better understand and account for our students' rich cultural background. Instructional interventions based purely on cognitive data can have only so much effect. To push achievement higher, we need to account for and incorporate a much more sophisticated socio-culture awareness.

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Crossing Two Bridges:

Coming Out, the Power of Images in YA Lit
Remarks adapted from panel discussion at the 2003 NCTE Convention

When I was growing up I had no images of people like me. You see, I am an immigrant, born in Mexico. When I was five, my family immigrated to Texas.

As I now speak to groups, I've found that many Americans don't know that up until the 1950s, in Texas and much of the Southwest, all people of color, including Mexican-American people, suffered the same segregation we typically identify with African-American people. People like me were required to have separate schools, use separate eating places, water fountains, and restrooms.

When I arrived in Texas at five years old in the early 1960's, desegregation of Mexicans had only recently taken place. For the first time in my life I experienced prejudice and playground cruelty.

When I started school I did not know a word of English. Other children picked on me for being different, for not speaking English. I experienced being an outsider.

I was fortunate, however, in that my teachers never made me feel inadequate or inferior because of my inability to speak English. Although my teachers didn't know Spanish, we somehow managed to communicate.

Although I lacked self-confidence, it was thanks to teachers like you, who recognized my efforts at learning, that I made progress. By fourth grade I was in the advanced level reading group.

Ms. Holden, my third-grade teacher was also highly influential. From her I learned to appreciate literature and the art of storytelling. She regularly asked us to write—and even though I had difficulty

expressing myself, I enjoyed writing.

She also read to us once a week from *The Secret Garden*. I learned from the eager anticipation with which I awaited each reading the power and value of writing to captivate and engage the imagination.

I worked hard to learn English as fast as I could. And yet I soon discovered this wasn't enough. I was still looked down upon because I was Mexican.

I wanted to fit in. I wanted to belong. I wanted to be liked and accepted.

In order to do so, I stopped speaking Spanish. When my parents took me shopping or to a restaurant, I would tell them to speak only English. I didn't want other people to know we were from Mexico.

Because of my light-skinned father and his German last name (not Sanchez), I learned I could pass as white. I could hide who I was, so that others would like and accept me.

By the time I reached middle school, I had buried a core part of myself—my Mexican heritage—deep inside me. I was no longer different.

Or so I thought.

Then came the biggest challenge of my life.

I was 13 (in eighth grade) when I first heard the word "gay." Immediately, I knew that's what I was.

Sometimes, people who aren't gay will ask me, "But how could you know you were gay at such a young age?"

Well, the development process for gay kids really isn't much different than for other kids. As we hit puberty, around the age of 13, we start becoming aware of our sexual attractions.

I suspect most boys that age, when they see a kissing scene in a movie, they identify with the guy kissing the girl. In my case, I clearly remember wishing the guy were kissing me.

While the other boys claimed crushes on girls—I carried my own secret crushes on some of those very same boys.

Believe me, I knew I was gay—as surely as many of you first knew you were straight. And I hated myself for it. Why?

Because growing up gay or lesbian also means growing up surrounded by homophobia. At 13 years old, I believed that being gay was the worst thing in the world a boy could be.

After school, alone in my room, I would tell myself, *I'm not going to feel this way. I refuse to let this happen.*

I wished desperately there was some one I could talk to. I'd been able to talk to my parents and brother about kids laughing at me for not speaking English, or being Mexican. After all, they were in the same position I was—in a different culture, learning a different language. But how could I talk to my parents and brother about the confused feelings I was having about being gay? I knew they weren't gay.

Nor could I talk to my schoolmates about it. They all made jokes about gay people—or worse.

I remember one boy at school, who was labeled “queer” and who consequently got beat up every day. I watched and stood silent, wishing I had the courage to say something—but too afraid that if I said anything, people might suspect I was gay too.

Instead, I looked on, feeling ashamed and guilty for standing by and not doing anything. I felt totally alone.

So, just as I had learned to hide that I was Mexican, I tried to hide that I was gay. I became depressed, quiet, invisible, trying to escape calling attention to myself.

At lunch I sat alone. But then I felt such self-hatred sitting by myself, that I skipped lunch altogether. Instead, I hid out in the library.

Now, I estimate our school library had several thousand books. How many of those books told me it was okay to have the feelings I experienced? That I wasn't sick for wanting to love and be loved by another boy like me?

None.

How many of those books described how homophobia hurt kids like me?

Not a single one.

I came to hate school. What teen wouldn't hate an atmosphere that leads a boy or girl to hate himself or herself?

The way I coped was by burying myself in my schoolwork. I studied hard, became a classic over-achiever, raced through school, and graduated a year and a half ahead of schedule.

I went on to college, and eventually became a youth and family counselor, working to help discriminated populations—of Latino, black, and Asian youth—street kids, delinquents, troubled families. And at night, alone, I would try to write.

Writing was a way of healing. I began writing about high school, about being different, and about the struggle to live by values in a world of injustice and hate. I wrote to be heard. I wrote to be accepted. I wrote to find my voice.

Finally, my novel, *Rainbow Boys*, about teens fighting homophobia—was published—eight years after I'd started it.

In the months prior to publication, I was a total nervous wreck. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I was terrified what people would say.

Then my editor phoned with the first review.

It came from the *School Library Journal*—which recommends to librarians whether they should buy certain books for their schools—the books that my school library did not carry.

A librarian in Springfield, Missouri, wrote: “There will no doubt be challenges to *Rainbow Boys*, much like the challenges of Judy Blume's *Forever* when it was published in the 1970s. But please, have the courage to make it available to those who will need it—it can open eyes and change lives.”

Wow! My book? Change lives?

As I read the reviews, I realized that I had written the book I desperately wanted and needed to read when I was a teen.

A book that would've told me: It's okay to be who you are.

And apparently, that's the impact it's having on young people.

I'd like to read to you a few of the many email letters I've received from teens about the book.

The first is from a girl:

Dear Mr. Sanchez,

I live in a really homophobic town and it was refreshing to read about characters dealing with that in high school, especially when things like that are happening to me in jr. high. Sex hardly ever gets addressed, especially homosexual issues, and yet we deal with homophobia every day. It was nice to know we're not alone.

I've been slowly coming out as being bisexual but lately it's been really hard and the only people who know are my closest friends, and even then some of my friends I find myself lying to for fear they would ditch me.

Your book inspired me a lot, and maybe someday I'll feel confident enough to completely come out. Anyway, I gotta go. Just wanted to tell you your book rocked.

This one's from a boy:

Dear Mr. Sanchez,

I am 16, and gay, and I had the almost exact same situation in my life as Kyle did, except it didn't end quite as well.

In the chapter when Kyle told his Mom, it was like I was reliving telling my Mom again. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do . . . as I imagine it is for many.

I have also experienced homophobia a lot in my life, most from my father and brother, like Jason has. Almost every day I have to deal with persecution and harassment. It makes me feel a lot better about who I am knowing that there are people like you out there trying to spread understanding and acceptance.

Another email, from a 17-year-old boy:

Hey Alex,

I hate to read but I went through your book in about 3 days. I wanted to cry after every sentence and every identification that I saw between the book and myself.

It makes me wonder why I and so many other gay teens have to worry about this. I feel that I do especially have to worry about what people are going to say, simply because of the status I have, being the wrestling captain, and good at other sports in school. I often ask myself, Is being gay worth the rep it has? What would coming out do to the rep I have now in school?

I guess I'm just very confused, I'm just not sure I guess. But when I read your book, I was sure. I am gay. But I don't know how to handle it.

Well, that's all I really have to say. Your book has changed the way I look upon things. And I thank you for that.

This email is from a girl:

I'm not homosexual, but I always had interest in how people who were felt. I, being [from a fundamentalist family],

couldn't ask for answers in certain places, and so I just wondered. . . . thank you for writing your book, because although I got a lot out of it, I'm sure others will find many more answers than I have, and feel like they're not so alone anymore.

And this one:

Mr. Sanchez

I just recently found out about your book through my ex-boyfriend. You see, we recently broke up after a long relationship. After our break-up he started reading your book. He told a mutual friend that "Rainbow Boys" really spoke to him. He says he now knows for sure about his sexuality.

I never realized that the guy I had fallen in love with was gay. This came to me as a shock. But I know that I must be bigger than the initial shock. I love him and want him to be happy, no matter who he is with. . . .

[But] I'm afraid this journey will get the best of him.

Thank you for helping me to understand what he's going through so that way I can help him.

And this one:

Hi, I'm Meghan. I'm sixteen, and I'm bisexual. I came out last year. I told my close friends and my family. It was hard. My friends told their friends and it kept going. Within a week I was getting strange looks.

This year is hard. No one wants to be in my gym class, some girls transferred out, one told the principal I was looking at her when she changed and I might be charged for harassment. I've had one girlfriend. She broke up with me, told me I do more harm than help. My family (outside my parents) won't talk to me.

Even my sister throws Bible quotes at me about being 'unnatural.' I lost all of my friends, now I'm just floating around between groups of 'Goths.'

Oh, look. I was going on about my problems and I didn't get to tell you how much we loved your book. After I read it, I had my principal read it. He wants the library to get some copies. He wants to make the book available to all teenagers.

So far those who have read RAINBOW BOYS are touched by what really goes on in my life and the lives of those around me. With more people aware, maybe it will get better. He thinks that if we get enough people to read it then a GSA will start on its own and we won't have to fight so hard.

This one from a teacher:

Alex,

Thanks so much for writing Rainbow Boys. I'm a high school teacher . . . Somehow your book, which I hadn't heard of, was on my bookshelf when I got to school in September. I

didn't pay it any attention until a new student joined our school.

Quan is out and proud. He also could barely read . . . He has lots of learning disabilities and had dropped out (our school is for drop outs). Thank God he found my classroom and thank God I had your book. I gave it to him and he read it carefully, page by page—calling me over often to read aloud to him and help him make sense of the book. He immediately identified with Nelson and said he liked him the best of the three boys. He couldn't believe someone had written down his experience. Quan turned in the book Friday, after keeping it about 2 months.

Thanks again.

This one from a boy:

I remembered having read [Rainbow Boys] in like, the 9th grade. Then I went to Boys Town, a facility for behavioral problems.

While there I was very confused about who I was. Being at that place, they forbade anything related to homosexuality. I remembered what a well-written book you had and managed to sneak it in after a trip to the library (believe me, it was not easy, that book is big in shape).

After rereading that book, I found the courage to be able to accept myself as gay. Reading about Kyle, I found the courage to tell a couple of my friends that I was gay. They were completely supportive of me.

Well, I originally was going to write this message to you just to tell you how great the book was. Keep up the great work.

And this one:

Hey I read your book and . . . I didn't want it to end! Jason and Kyle became so true to me!

I'm a struggling 14 yr old gay teenager who has parents that are trying to make me straight.

They took me out of school and won't let me talk to my old friends.

So far my life seems like it would make a good depressing book!

I don't know how long I will be alone but I will have to buy Rainbow High when it comes out! Will it have Jason and Kyle in it?

I feel so much like Kyle and now I'm in love with Jason, too bad he's fiction!

I'll write you again soon!

Write back!

And this one:

Dear Mr. Sanchez:

Hi my name is Tommy . . . I am in 8th grade and I was at the library looking for books on coming out when I found Rainbow Boys. I read it hoping it would help me and it did, not only did it help me come out to my friends it helped me to come out to my family . . . will you make a sequel? . . . Please e-mail me back ASAP. Thank you.

To which I responded, yes there will be a sequel—but tell me what happened when you came out to your family?

To which he replied:

Dear Mr. Sanchez:

Thank you for e-mailing me back. When I came out to my parents it was hard but a relief. I told my mom I was reading your book and she said she knew what it was about and she had guessed I was gay. Then she told me I should tell my dad.

I really did not want to tell him because he'd never really approved of me in the first place. He'd always said that I should not try to be different, which I wasn't trying to—I just am.

So I finally told him. He did not really talk to me—but after a week he told me that he was having a lot of trouble at work and to come home and find out I was gay. He told me he was just in shock.

I was wondering if you had a title for the new book? If so could you please tell me so I know what to look for when it comes out. Thank you.

Reading these letters, I think back to the boy I watched get beaten when I was in high school—and how I didn't have the courage to stand up for him then.

Sometimes we get second chances in life. I'm speaking up for him now—and for thousands of other boys and girls like him.

I have found my voice.

My success in writing came only when I was finally able to accept myself, when I stopped believing that who I am was shameful, less than, not good enough. Only when I ceased being silent did my writing acquire a voice.

And I have discovered a function for my writing I never imagined. In school I'd been taught to read and write in terms of commas and metaphors. I was never taught to think of writing and books as agents of social change, able to inspire, empower, and change lives.

For years I worked as a counselor, trying to help teens and families, while in private, I kept a personal journal of my thoughts and experiences.

But the public and private sides of my life never merged. The half that wanted to roll up my sleeves and do something to help the kids on the street and the half that wanted to retreat behind the door of my apartment to write were at odds.

I never imagined those two halves could meet—that my writing could help anyone other than me.

Since *Rainbow Boys* was published, those two parts of my life have finally joined. I know this because of the emails I read to you and hundreds of others like them.

I have come to accept myself as a writer who not only tells stories, but who does so in a way that helps create change in the world by promoting social justice.

That my books do this ceaselessly amazes me.

Through my writing I hope to give readers an insight into the lives of gay and lesbian teenagers, their families, their friends, and communities—the daily name-calling and bullying they experience, their courage, struggles, hopes and dreams for a better life for both themselves and for those you come after them.

My mom taught me that each of us should help make the world better.

As I have spoken to teachers and librarians around the country, what I have come to understand is this: As each of you incorporate texts about growing up gay in your own schools and libraries, you will be confronted with your own coming out process. As you are perhaps challenged by the prejudices of a parent or administrator and put in a position to defend such books, you will experience a little bit of what it is like to grow up gay or lesbian, constantly being challenged about who we are.

But if we don't accept that social responsibility, then who will?

I love the line from the movie *Spiderman*: "With great power comes great responsibility."

Each of us as writers and as teachers has that power and that responsibility. You too can change lives.

Thank you.

Alex Sanchez is the author of Rainbow Boys and Rainbow High.

Moral Choices:

Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life

“There’s one more thing- a thing that *nobody* don’t know but me. And that is, there’s a n[-----] here that I’m a-trying to steal out of slavery [. . .] .I know what you’ll say. You’ll say it’s a dirty, low-down business; but what if it is? *I’m* low down; and I’m a-going to steal him”

—*Twain, 218*

“I ask him, ‘Why’d you guys do this robbery? Why’d you need money so bad?’

Alan looks at me a second before he answers. ‘Our mom has cancer. We don’t have any medical insurance because mom had to quit her job. She’s really sick from the chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and her medicine costs a fortune. We’re down to nothing. We had to get some money, so I came up with this idiotic idea’”

—*Trueman, 71*

“With great power also comes great responsibility.”

—*Spiderman, David Koepp*

In 2004, in light of world events, the fact that modern societies greatly prize freedom of choice is starkly evident. But, as Peter Parker’s (Spiderman) dying uncle Ben told him, “with great power also comes great responsibility,” a fact any thirteen-year-old can tell you created Peter’s alter-ego, a super-powered adolescent whose life’s work was to fight for good. In the world outside of comic books, too, freedom to choose one’s actions truly does come with “great responsibility.” The good of society rests on the individual’s ability to make choices that benefit not only him/herself, but also society as a whole.

Morally correct decisions prevent individuals or groups from violating the rights of others, sometimes others who can not stand up for their own rights. It would be nice if our society rewarded morally correct decisions, especially among adolescents whose moral values are being formed and tested, but often the

moral position is difficult to identify, let alone follow through on. It’s just not that simple.

From Mark Twain’s 1885 classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to Terry Trueman’s 2003 novel *Inside Out*, young adult novels reveal the truth about the complexities that people face when they are confronted with moral dilemmas. While certain decisions may seem to have a clearly moral, or clearly immoral bent, these novels demonstrate that society cannot always be counted on to properly define morality. Huck Finn acts immorally, his intellect tells him, when he breaks the law to help a slave escape. According to society this is an immoral act; it is, in fact, theft of property, but Huck looks within himself and intuits that society’s acceptance of slavery is grossly at odds with a higher morality.

Similarly, Trueman’s teenage characters are committing armed robbery, which society correctly

deems immoral. However, they are motivated to do so by a higher moral call, the desire to save their dying mother. In this case Trueman forces his readers to consider the role society plays when it denies medical care to the poor, leading the boys to a desperate decision to commit a crime.

Apparently, society cannot always be counted on to establish a reliable moral map and may actually send adolescents down the wrong path as a result. While rather frightening at first, ultimately this demonstrates the important role that individuals must play in monitoring and shaping society's ideals. In an apathetic nation, encouraging adults to make their voices heard on the issues is difficult; even the freedom and privilege (should we call it a responsibility?) to vote is not accepted by the majority, as demonstrated by the decreasing number of eligible voters who visit the polls each election. If the goal is to hear multiple perspectives and discussion of pro's and cons, right and wrong, the local football rivalry will probably initiate a more spirited debate than election issues that will affect moral choices for decades.

The strength of young adult novels, however, both classic and contemporary, to challenge students to discuss, contemplate, and develop their own moral standards cannot be overlooked by today's language arts and reading teachers. As these young adults develop their own moral standards, through engaged, critical examinations of moral dilemmas, they can also begin to explore how their own engagement can be incorporated into participation in the improvement of their society.

Young adult novels provide a positive avenue for the introduction of thought-provoking explorations of mature issues that encourage students to examine critical societal and individual situations from a variety of perspectives. The novels allow students to vicariously experience challenging, sometimes dangerous situations, in a non-threatening fictional arena. Through these explorations of moral dilemmas in young adult novels students will develop critical thinking abilities that will allow them to examine moral dilemmas in their own communities and make their own moral decisions from a more balanced and solidified moral stance. Their explorations can also help them to identify societal weaknesses, and provide them with opportunities to develop ideas to help

combat some of the pressures that contribute to morally unacceptable choices.

Adolescence is a period of continual change and exploration. Young adults begin to examine their identities, their relationships with family and peers, and their career interests. The decisions that they make regarding these different areas of their lives are ultimately shaped by their personal value systems. Like Huck and his dilemma over abolition, today's students often experience confusion and/or meet obstacles as they develop these personal value systems and have difficulty making moral decisions which support their future well-being and the well-being of society in general. With today's increases in violence, alienation, emotional dependence, and lack of social responsibility it seems crucial that the educational community assist adolescents with the formation of personal value systems in order to foster their abilities to make positive decisions. Thus, it is the challenge of instructors to lead young adults to young adult literature that helps them through the gauntlet of moral development.

The modern language arts classroom is one arena that can foster this value system development. Rita Manning, in her 1992 work *Speaking from the Heart: A Feminist on Ethics*, says that fiction "can help the young reader determine and understand his or her own ideas about morality and can help the young reader work through moral confusions" (28). Additionally, Sharon Stringer, in her study of adolescent psychological problems, suggests "Exploring adolescent psychology through young adult literature provides another constructive avenue for individuals to develop 'problem-focused' coping techniques" (xiii).

Reading young adult novels that feature realistic moral dilemmas and their consequences provides adolescents with a safe venue in which they can explore a variety of solutions to modern problems. Examining these characters and their choices can often present readers with alternative methods to understand their own moral dilemmas and positively resolve conflicts in their own lives.

We are offering here specific examples of young adult novels that examine four main areas of adolescent moral reasoning: identity exploration, relationships with adults, relationships with peers, and the idea of social responsibility. Reading, discussing, and

reflecting upon these ideas can stimulate adolescent moral development.

Identity

Young adults, in life and in literature alike, struggle to develop identities that will allow them to become independent of their family and friends. Often as children mature, they must discover that a person's identity is comprised of a variety of personal qualities and abilities. In her 2003 Coretta Scott King and Printz winning novel, *The First Part Last*, (prequel to *Heaven*) Angela Johnson chronicles a very fast set of choices that lead her protagonist, Bobby, to choose the identity of responsible father at age 16. When Bobby and his girlfriend Nia discover they are about to become parents, a moral dilemma certainly follows about what to do with the baby, keep it or adopt it out (or other?). When Nia goes into a permanent coma during childbirth, however, Bobby is faced with choices he had not at all anticipated. He chooses to become a single parent and eventually forsakes his native Brooklyn for Heaven, Ohio, which he thinks will make family life better for him and his infant daughter, Feather. In between the birth and his departure, however, he is confronted by other identities that demand his attention or denial. Is he a tag artist who spray-paints buildings? Is he a carefree teenage boy who "hangs" with his buddies all night, buddies who are not particularly responsible even for teenage boys? Or is he a young parent who has made a commitment to Nia's parents, to his own, to himself and, most importantly to the baby, Feather? Ultimately, Bobby's moral fiber is much stronger than the reader might first estimate. Obviously, many teenagers face the moral choices that surround teen pregnancy every day, and experiencing these choices vicariously through Bobby can only help.

In the 1987 novel *Crazy Horse Electric Game*, by Chris Crutcher, a teen named Willie defines his identity by his physical capabilities. After a water skiing accident leaves him paralyzed, he struggles to gain a new sense of identity based on the strengths he still possesses. Jeff, in *When Jeff Comes Home*, (Atkins, 1999) also struggles to prevent one aspect of his life from controlling his identity completely. After being kidnapped and sexually abused, Jeff must learn how to regain a sense of normalcy. He finally does so

after realizing that his identity may always be affected by his experiences, but that there are ways for him to begin to make choices that have a more positive impact on his sense of identity.

Like Jeff, Cole in *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelson, 2001) is an angry young adult who must work toward acceptance of his past, its affect on his identity, and ways in which he can develop a more positive sense of self. After enduring emotional neglect from his parents, and fighting and stealing for years Cole is banned to a remote Alaskan island as part of a juvenile rehabilitation program known as Circle Justice. On the island he learns that in order to survive he must stop blaming others for his mistakes and take responsibility for his actions and their effects on his life and the lives of others. He realizes that by making amends for past actions, and resolving to make positive decisions in the future, he can begin to re-shape his identity from being violent and uncontrolled to working hard and accepting compromises.

Destiny, a troubled 12-year-old (*Destiny*, Grove, 2000) also struggles to accept responsibility for her actions in spite of a less than desirable home life. She eventually begins to come to terms with her family and herself as she enters the world of Mrs. Peck, an elderly woman to whom she reads. Over the course of their relationship, Destiny must make moral decisions which conflict with her unscrupulous family members' beliefs. She learns that her priority must focus on remaining true to her own values, and that her identity need not be shaped by her family members' identities.

Destiny's realization that identity can be shaped by an individual, and need not be defined by birth, is echoed in Ann Rinaldi's 1991 historical fiction novel *Wolf by the Ears*, in which the main character questions whether her identity is defined by her biracial heritage. This theme also reappears in Meg Cabot's *The Princess Diaries* in which 14-year-old Mia must decide if her identity is the result of her noble birth, or her middle-class New York City upbringing.

Jerry Spinelli looks at identity development from a different perspective in his novel *Stargirl* (2000). In this novel he focuses on how society can affect a person's identity development. Stargirl, from her first days at Mica High School, struggles with who she is and who she wants to be. Unfortunately, the way she dresses begins to turn the student body—and even her

own boyfriend—against her. Stargirl questions whether her identity is controlled by her image, or if her image controls her identity. She must decide whether her need for an independent identity requires her to conform to gain acceptance from her peers.

Reading about these teenage characters' struggles with identity can act as a catalyst for young adult readers to consider how one defines one's own identity, the role which peers and society play in that defining process, and how the repercussions of moral decisions can affect identity development.

Relationships with adults

During adolescence parent-child conflicts become fairly normal. However, Nancy Cobb, in her 1995 book *Adolescence*, suggests that these conflicts must be resolved, and reconnections formed based on respect and cooperation. This resolution becomes more problematic when young adults are missing the positive parental role models with which this reconnection can occur. Several of Chris Crutcher's novels, including *Stotan* (1986), *Running Loose* (1983), *Ironman* (1995) and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993) feature parents who are either absent, or physically or emotionally abusive. In order to find support, and make connections with positive adult role models these adolescents must seek out other adult role models in their lives. In *Stotan*, *Chinese Handcuffs*, (1989) and *Whale Talk* (2001) the abused characters are able to find physical and emotional help from their sports coaches. *Ironman* features Mr. Nak, a community adult who leads an anger management group for troubled teenagers. The positive adult role model is presented in the form of a high school English teacher in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. All of these books suggest to readers that they can find the caring role models in their communities that they lack in their own homes.

Norma Fox Mazer reminds readers in her 2001 novel, *Girlhearts*, that sometimes a teenager's separation from his or her parents is not a matter of neglect, or of choice. When 13-year-old Sarabeth loses her mother to a heart attack she loses the only home she has ever known, and the adult she would usually turn to for support during traumatic times. In her initial grief Sarabeth considers running away from two close friends of her mother who are caring for her. As she moves through the grieving process, she begins to

develop new support networks with her new caretakers, and realizes why she must stay with them. Additionally, she reaches out to distant family members to heal deep family wounds. Although Sarabeth has lost her mother, she moves through anger and grief and forms lasting connections with new adults who help to support her.

The topic of parental loss due to divorce, and the complex relationships children have with their step-families is explored by Ann Brashares in the novel *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2001), and its sequel, *The Second Summer of the Sisterhood* (2003). These two novels feature four teenage friends who are learning to adapt to changing family situations. In the first novel Carmen must discover where her place is in her father's home which now includes a new wife and stepchildren. In the sequel Carmen struggles to accept the realities of her mother's return to dating, and the personality changes it causes her to undergo. Although Carmen takes her mother's approval of Carmen's boyfriend for granted, the reverse is not true. When her mother goes so far as to wear the traveling pants out on a date as if she were one of the teenage Septembers (all four girls were born in September), Carmen throws a tantrum. In both of these novels the characters are able to rediscover the bonds that have always existed between themselves and their parents. The teenage and adult characters demonstrate that honesty and understanding on both sides can help even the most strained relationships become more harmonious.

These novels demonstrate that adolescents need positive adult role models for support during the many challenges that they face. These novels demonstrate that honesty, caring, compromise, and understanding from both sides will allow these relationships to flourish, whether the teen is forming the relationship with a parent, a blood relative, or another support adult. The novels illustrate to readers that the world is full of caring individuals who are available to help encourage adolescents to make positive decisions.

Peer Groups

Adolescents often feel a tremendous amount of pressure from their peer groups to modify their behavior in a way that is consistent with the expectations of the group. These group expectations can either demonstrate caring for each other and other

members of society, or they can be more negative, requiring members to act in ways that they know are not morally correct providing the individual with an opportunity to choose.

Walter Dean Myers's 2003 novel, *The Beast*, for example, provides the reader with a portrait of a young man who never turns his back on his peers but doesn't let them influence him into a losing lifestyle, either. Anthony "Spoon" Witherspoon returns periodically to his old neighborhood in Harlem from the prestigious and exclusive prep boarding school he attends, where he is a star basketball player and a good student. Tragically, he finds that "the Beast," as Myers has named it, claims more and more of his old friends and acquaintances every time he returns. Drugs, poverty, and a life without much promise for improvement destroy or harm the people he has known and loved during his seventeen years. Friends and especially his former, and still sort-of, girlfriend, Gabi, would draw him back into the quagmire of their existence. Meanwhile, his new friends unintentionally pressure him to leave that world behind and join their world of privilege and promise. Spoon navigates the two worlds without abandoning his friends in either; in fact, he makes choices that permit him to create win-win situations for everyone involved, despite "the Beast."

Many additional young adult novels contain negative peer influences but have main characters who resist, or overcome, the negative pressure and ultimately make morally correct decisions. In Chris Crutcher's *Running Loose* Louis Banks has the bravery to resist going along with the rest of the football team's plan to use cheating tactics during a game. Dan, in Lois Ruby's *Skindeep* (1994) realizes that the neo-Nazi group he has become involved with might provide him with the sense of acceptance he craves, but that the acceptance would come at the price of the violation of his own moral beliefs. He is strong enough to choose to remain an outsider rather than sacrifice his true convictions. *Night Hoops* (Deuker, 2000) and *Death at Devil's Bridge* (DeFelice, 2000) also show main characters that struggle with negative peer pressure but ultimately make decisions that reflect their own beliefs about the importance of ensuring other people's happiness and well-being.

On the other hand, examples of how negative peer pressure can coerce adolescents into performing

immoral acts are numerous. In Lois Duncan's classic novel *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978) Susan's desire for peer acceptance is so great that she agrees to become involved in the plot to kidnap and persecute an English teacher. Carla in *The Drowning of Stephan Jones* (Green, 1991) also struggles with her boyfriend's expectation that she support him in his persecution of a homosexual couple in their town. Again, negative peer influence is evident in Robert Cormier's novel *We All Fall Down* (1991) as several young men pressure Buddy into a self-destructive cycle of alcoholism and vandalism. All three of these novels demonstrate the horrendous results that can accompany adolescents' decisions to allow themselves to be controlled by the negative influences of their peers.

Young adult novels can also demonstrate the positive effects that supportive peer groups can have on adolescents. *Speak* (Anderson, 1999) is a vivid demonstration of the power of both negative and positive peer pressure. When Melinda breaks up an end-of-summer party by calling the police, her friends abandon her and she becomes the high school social outcast. Eventually, she becomes so traumatized that she retreats into silence. Near the end of the school year she finally begins to receive support from some students at her school. It is their support, which defies the unspoken rule to ignore Melinda, that finally allows her to validate her experiences of the previous summer. Through their support Melinda is able to begin to learn to express herself and become empowered again. With her empowerment she is able to finally explain the truth about the events of the previous summer and begin the process of obtaining justice by holding others responsible for their decisions.

These novels demonstrate that peer influence can either stunt or encourage positive moral development. Through reading and comparing the consequences of both negative and positive peer influence, young adults can begin to identify the type of peer influence that is present in their own lives. They can also begin to understand the importance of eliminating the damaging peer influences before they suffer unintended negative consequences themselves.

Developing social responsibility

As teenagers continue to mature they begin to seek out their places in society. They must grapple

with society's expectations for them, and the responsibilities that these expectations carry. These social responsibilities generally include protection of society members and the overall improvement of life for all society members. Adolescents must discover how their personal sense of self relates to society, and how their personal identity is shaped by the identity of society. Occasionally, a society may have expectations which teenagers deem unreasonable, such as when American society expected African Americans to accept segregation. In these cases teenagers must decide the degree to which they will conform and how they can work to peacefully achieve necessary societal changes. Several young adult novels explore how societal standards, expectations, and responsibilities affect members' decisions and actions.

Negative, controlling, societal expectations are clear in *Sisters* (Paulsen, 1993). Two young women are trapped and destroyed by society's expectations, which include adherence to distorted views of beauty and success. As each woman attempts to fulfill societal expectations, her pursuits of true happiness are thwarted. This book is a moving example of how negative societal expectation can destroy promising lives. It also provides a warning to readers that societal expectations must constantly be evaluated and revised to ensure that the needs of all members are being met.

This process of developing, evaluating, and revising societal expectations is demonstrated by *Downriver* (Hobbs, 1991) and its sequel *River Thunder* (Hobbs, 1997). In these novels a group of teenagers form a small society of their own as they face challenges on a swift and raging whitewater river. Initially each person dismisses the need for unity, authority, and group responsibility. However, after several mishaps they evaluate their situation and realize that survival necessitates the need for societal roles that stress organization and teamwork. By basing the rest of their task assignments on the needs of the entire group, and stressing that members have a responsibility to each other, the adolescents survive their ordeal. Their revised expectations allow each member personal freedom, but stress that those freedoms cannot endanger others.

Each of these novels asks readers to re-evaluate the role of societal expectations in their own lives. Through careful examination of these expectations

adolescents gain a deeper understanding of their own role in society, and the important impact that their individual decisions play in the formation and maintenance of a coherent, cooperative, successful society.

Most of the young adult novels in this article feature young protagonists who meet with some degree of success and feel good about what they have done. The characters often learn to become independent, think for themselves, and become more considerate of others' rights. Not all characters meet with immediate success, and some are still struggling with their moral development at the end of the novel. However, these struggles are realistic, and help to reinforce the idea to teenagers that growing up is never easy, that the struggles they are facing in their own lives are natural, and that progress toward becoming a successful adult can be achieved if one is willing to work hard and make tough decisions. Readers may not always agree with each of the characters' decisions, but at least they are exposed to possibilities of resolving ethical issues they may not have previously considered. They are provided with choices, and these choices prompt reflections about their personal beliefs, thereby stimulating their moral development.

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Don't Take a Ride in Darnell Dixon's Rivy Dog of Love:

Christopher Paul Curtis Talks About His New Book, *Bucking the Sarge*

Only one thing can be more exciting than reading an adolescent novel that is so new, it isn't even on the shelves; that one thing is interviewing the author of that book! After years of reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* with my YA lit students at Utah Valley State University, imagine my delight when I was given the opportunity to interview Christopher Paul Curtis about his new novel, *Bucking the Sarge*. The book, an attention-grabbing story about the life and challenges of Luther T. Farrell, had my interest firm in its grip from the early pages.

I tuned Sparky out and started worrying about what my mother, a.k.a. the Sarge, was gonna say when she found out all my stuff had been ripped off. No, let me break that down; it wasn't what she was gonna say that had me worried, it was what she was gonna do. (2)

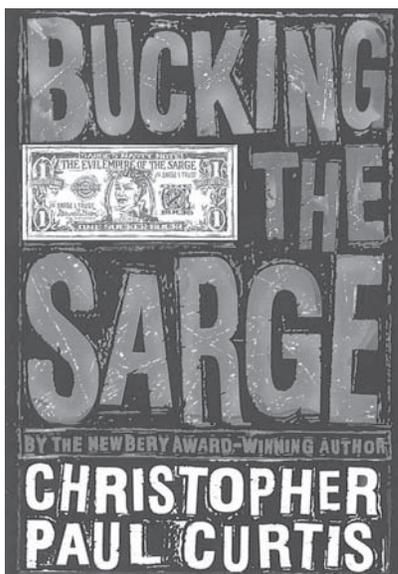
At first blush, this read like beautiful and vintage Christopher Paul Curtis, but it didn't take long to feel a distinct difference. With the introduction of Sparky, rest homes, science fairs, scandal, and a parent who would never win the "Mother



of the Year" award, I knew this was also a new Christopher Paul Curtis: an older adolescent-writing, new-angle-on-life-writing, and visceral-to-the-bone-writing Christopher Paul Curtis. After such a great read, interviewing the author about his new book was just frosting on the cake. In between his many public appearances (Christopher is among the most loved of YA authors), Mr. Curtis kindly took the time to visit with me about *Bucking the Sarge*:

KS: This book is even better than your previous two, both of which were unbelievably successful, both in popularity and in awards. As you move through your career as a writer, do you feel like the experience of writing a book is evolving in any way for you? How was the experience of writing this one different from the previous two? How is your writing changing over time?

CPC: I can't say this was the most difficult book for me to write, there was too much enjoyment in doing it. *Bucking the Sarge* did



take much, much longer than the other two, and I can't for the life of me figure out why. I'd like to blame it all on Jerry Spinelli. Right after *Bud, not Buddy* won the Newbery Medal, he told me that I was going to be so busy that I could forget about doing any writing for a year. I just carried it on for another three years beyond the "Spinelli Year."

KS: Nursing homes are certainly not common experience for the majority of teens and can seem a bit macabre or creepy, and so probably does the idea of working in one to a teenager. What did you want to capture about that experience and where did you get a working knowledge of the physical care provided to adults in that type of setting?

CPC: I lived next door to a nursing home in Flint, Michigan, and the man I hung car doors with at the G.M. auto factory worked in one after hours. I saw both extremes of treatment of the "clients." Some people who cared for the clients were kind to them but others were brutal. I think it was the perfect world to put Luther into to show the horrible amount of responsibility that had been dumped on him and the dignified way he handled it.

KS: Luther doesn't think about running away, nor even seem to harbor visible hatred for his mother despite how she exploits him. Why not?

CPC: I think the Sarge has Luther so cowed that striking back is

way on the bottom of any list he would develop. He has seen her power and knows there is no way he can fight it. Also everyone keeps telling him how lucky he is.

KS: When Luther and his friend, Sparky, go with Little Chicago and Darnell Dixon, Sarge's flunkies, to evict a family from their apartment, it all becomes very personal for Luther when he discovers that one of the two kids in the family is Bo Travis, a classmate of his. Despite a fairly unstable living situation, Bo is a good student who was last year's third place winner in the science fair. In the act of discarding all the family's possessions to prepare the apartment for the new tenants, Luther learns that KeeKee, Bo's little sister, has won Citizen of the Month, all A's and B's on her report card, and the Book Worm Award for the month of April, and was her school's spelling champion. Could a kid from an evicted household really be such a good student?

CPC: Oh yeah, I think there is an age when the child finally gives up and doesn't want to win anything or do anything. But, KeeKee was still young enough that the weight of her situation hadn't crushed the joy of learning and discovering new things out of her. I know several children who are from absolutely horrible homes who do very well in school. I don't think their future prospects are very good, but at this time the spark of youth is carrying them forward.

KS: You make great use of conversation in your books. Do you rehearse dialog in your writing before you proceed to "write" conversations? (rehearse the slang and idioms?)

CPC: I don't so much rehearse it as I write it and re-write it and then do it all again. As a writer I have the luxury of going back over things a million times until they are right, it may appear (I hope) spontaneous but it's really the end product of a long process.

KS: Each of your books seems to be built around chapters. Do they help you organize your thoughts, almost like an outline? Do you have all the chapter titles determined before the end of the book, and then flesh out the chapters as you continue writing?

CPC: I do the opposite, actually. I name the chapters after they are written. That's one of the really fun parts of writing and I use it as a reward for finishing.

KS: Any new accomplishments at your house?

CPC: I'm working on a novel that I'm absolutely in love with called *Elijah of Buxton*. It takes place in Ontario, Canada, in the 1860s, and I have never had a writing experience like this; the book is flying out of me!

KS: We can't wait to read it! Thank you so much for your fabulous books, your willingness to speak person to person with young adult audiences all over, and for

sharing your thoughts on
Bucking the Sarge.

CPC: You're welcome.

* * *

The only way we readers can make the wait for *Elijah of Buxton* more enduring is to pick up a copy of *Bucking the Sarge* during the wait.

Our interview with Mr. Curtis only begins to capture the mood and essence of his new novel. Only in the reading can we travel with Luther T. from old homes into new and better places, only in the reading can we laugh at the hilarious capers of boys growing up in Flint, Michigan, and only in the reading that we recognize Luther's

ability to make sense of the world:

As I pulled onto the expressway I couldn't help thinking of that great philosopher, whose name escapes me at the moment, who once said, "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day (259).

And it is in the reading that we now have more characters to root for. Thank you, Mr. Curtis!

Review of *Bucking the Sarge*

Once again, Christopher Paul Curtis's beloved hometown of Flint, Michigan, provides the setting and (not so beloved) home for his teenage protagonist. In *Bucking the Sarge*, Curtis's latest offering from Wendy Lamb Books (Random House), fifteen-year-old Luther T. Farrell is a young man intent on living life the way he sees fit and bucking the control of his tyrannical mother, the Sarge. The Sarge, so nicknamed for her drill instructor interpersonal style, is just as intent on keeping Luther within the grip of her iron fist where she can exploit him as cheap labor in her string of rental units. Luther and his friend Sparky do odd maintenance jobs for the Sarge, including painting, and cleaning out the possessions of evicted tenants—a task that Luther finds both immoral and distasteful.

Sarge is a greedy and conniving Flint slumlord with considerable influence and property holdings and a talent

for bending others to her will. She has conned a local government official into faking Luther's age on a driver's license so he can work for her government-scamming group home for elderly men. In addition to assorted work on Sarge's other properties, Luther drives the group home van, taking the residents to the doctor and other necessities. Sarge further exploits Luther by requiring he live in the home and provide for the residents' personal needs. He does all this, surely more than a full-time job, while juggling school, the rigors of his beloved science fair, a wanna-be romance with smart Shayla, and his friendship with his hilarious sidekick, Sparky.

Although his mother's scams have provided Luther with wheels, "fifty bucks in [his] wallet at all times . . . and six million dollars . . . in that education fund," credit cards, and some prestige in the neighborhood, Luther wants out.

Winning the science fair for the third year in a row will put him on track for a good college and for a life as one of America's eminent philosophers. While Luther admires the integrity and morality manifested in the words of Socrates and Aristotle, support for his plans are not to be found at home. His cruel and manipulative mother, the Sarge, has other ideas for Luther:

. . . And I know you're the one that's got all these high-and-mighty plans to be a fool-osopher one day, but the truth is that you're gonna be running these houses for me for the rest of your life (pg. 79).

Putting a contemporary and urban twist on this coming-of-age story, Christopher Paul Curtis uses dark humor and parodies of the American economic system to build a story that provides a departure from his former works. This is a new Christopher Paul Curtis, and fifth- and sixth-graders who loved *Bud, Not Buddy* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*,

1963, are probably not old enough to catch or appreciate all the nuances of the life experience with which Curtis has endowed Luther, nor are all the elements of a story about slum

lords and loan sharks appropriate for that age —this is truly a book for adolescents. An easy yet exceptional story, readers will find *Bucking the Sarge* filled with hilarious antics by resource-

ful kids in the hood, a smart young man who courageously carves out a new future, and a never-ever-expected ending from Luther T. Farrell, a well-mannered and likeable protagonist.

After earning an English and music education degree from Utah State University in Logan, Utah, (Dr.) Kay Smith enjoyed seven years of teaching 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 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.

