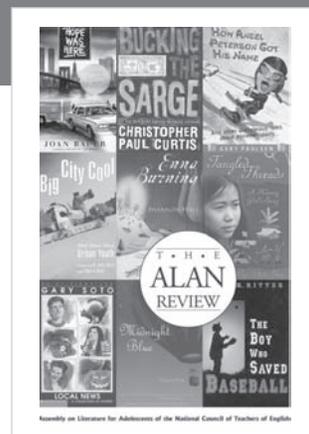


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T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
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THE ALAN REVIEW publishes reviews of and articles on literature for adolescents and the teaching of that literature: research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys 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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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

As we write this column, we find ourselves doing a challenging balancing act.

On one side, we're elated with the success of the fall workshop in Indianapolis, which featured outstanding authors and experts from the field of young adult literature. On the other, we're forced to deal with the fact that, only days after the conclusion of the workshop, we lost one of those experts and friends we've come to depend upon for so long, Ted Hipple.

In this issue, besides the regular columns, we feature some of the finest in our field who took to the microphone at the ALAN workshop.

With his sense of humor and intelligent style, editor Stephen Roxburgh focuses on what truly makes a young adult novel. Clive Barker, who has taken a unique road to young adult literature audience by way of Hollywood and horror, explains his writing and its connection to the subconscious mind and the human experience. And, while Barker's elaborate artwork adds to his young adult novels, another of today's leading authors/artists, Eric Shanower, shares insight into his work. Shanower discusses his immense project, *The Age of Bronze*, a story of the Trojan War told in graphic novel form. Librarians Kristin Fletcher-Spear, Merideth Jenson-Benjamin, and Teresa Copeland then provide a primer on graphic novels. Their annotated list of titles, as well as suggested uses for them in the classroom, will not only help those experienced in using graphic novels, but also the novice who is interested in finding such novels' place in their own professional efforts. Mark Vogel suggests an analogy between animal totems and adolescent psychology, an interesting approach.

We continue with an article by award-winning author Laurie Halse Anderson, who provides details of how educators can use young adult literature to influence and educate teen-agers, while also entertaining and engaging them. Elizabeth Levy shares memories of her close friend, author Paula Danziger. Danziger offered a career filled with novels that held her young readers captive with their lively action and strong characters.

Two experts in YA literature, Holly Blackford and Myrna Dee Marler, examine how popular adult novels deal with becoming a woman and how those effectively speak to the young women who read them.

Regular column editors Jean Brown, Jerry Weiss and Jeffrey Kaplan present some great resources for YA aficionados in the Nonprint, Publishing Connection and the Research Connection columns.

And, finally, Melissa Comer, a former student of Ted Hipple, details what he meant to her and so many other students and colleagues. We also feature a myriad of thoughts and remembrances from those whose lives he touched.

The most uplifting part of our balancing act is that not only can we delve deeper into the heart and soul of those fall workshop presentations by hearing more from the presenters through their articles and interviews, but we also have an opportunity to pay tribute to a gentleman who took a great leading role in his efforts to promote the use of young adult literature.

To those who helped make the fall workshop such a success and to Ted Hipple, who has helped us all succeed in our love of young adult literature, we say thank you.

The Art of the Young Adult Novel

Keynote Address: ALAN Workshop, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 20, 2004

The young adult novel has no Henry James, no E.M. Forster, no Milan Kundera. That is, no young adult novelist has written a treatise on the art of the young adult novel, as James, Forster, and Kundera did on the novel. The young adult novel has no great practitioner spokesperson. However, it does have more than its fair share of commentators. Most recently in September Frances FitzGerald published an article in *Harper's Magazine* entitled, "The Influence of Anxiety: What's the problem with young adult novels?" FitzGerald presents an accurate, albeit cursory overview of the field. Her insights are not ground-breaking. For example, she asserts that for many YA critics and historians, young adult literature is by definition the notorious problem novel. Unfortunately, it's true, and it has been for most of the thirty-plus years since S.E.Hinton, Robert Cormier, Paul Zindel, Judy Blume and others wrote books that revolutionized the business of publishing for young readers. As you all know the "problem novels" of the '80s morphed into the "edgy" books of the late '90s. Based on her sources, FitzGerald characterizes this strand of the young adult novel as therapeutic. She acknowledges the current "trend toward publishing more complex narratives in a more sophisticated style for older teens," but in a quote FitzGerald attributes to our esteemed colleague, Roger Sutton of the *Horn Book*, "the kids won't read them, because they say 'I'm literature and I'm good for you.'"



FitzGerald ends with a summary assessment of kids' observations about books and concludes on the basis of sales that "kids chose adventure tales, chick lit, and fantasy over problem novels and exemplary dystopias." As I said, none of these observations are new, and I'm not inclined to dispute them.

However, it seems to me that after thirty years of reading and discussing young adult novels, we aren't getting very far. Critically speaking, we are spinning our wheels. I've been asked to speak about the art of the young adult novel; I take that to mean the books that say "I'm literature, and I'm good for you." The books kids won't read. Okay. That works for me. I don't want to talk about what kids will or won't read. Or about what is good for them or what they think about them. I'm not going to talk about young adults at all. I'm going to talk to you about the young adult *novel*.

Historically the designation "young adult" is based on audience. Isn't that odd? We define no other art form that I can think of by its primary audience. Paintings? No. Sculpture? No. Music? No. Audience is a *moving* target. We can't even agree on what a young adult is, let alone what the literature is.

It is often observed that young adult novels present the point-of-view of an adolescent. This is obviously true, but it raises more questions than it answers. We all know that *Catcher in the Rye* wasn't published as a young adult novel. Nor was *A Portrait*

of the Artist as a Young Man, or Robinson Crusoe. All three are told, in whole or in part, from the perspective of a young adult. In fact, many, many books being published for adults today—for example, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye*, Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*—are told from a young adult’s perspective.

Most observations about the subject matter and the age of the protagonist and the point of view from which a story is told only describe the young adult novel; they do not define it. I think we need to move past these discussions, not because they are wrong, but because they don’t get us anywhere we haven’t already been. We need to move the discussion from superficial to essential aspects of the art of the young adult novel.

There is no difference between the young adult novel and the adult novel. There are distinctions to be made between them, but they are not different art forms. *Don Quixote* and *Marius the Epicurean* and *To the Lighthouse* represent different stands of the tradition of the novel, as do *Treasure Island* and *Charlotte’s Web* and *The Facts Speak for Themselves*. Are there artistic criteria that apply to the novel that shed light on the young adult novel? Yes, there are.

I am going to discuss the art of the novel in terms of a craft—editing—that I have practiced for three decades. In that time I have edited maybe a hundred and fifty novels. A few of them you all know, some I suspect only the author and I remember. Be that as it may, I have discovered a handful of principles—rules of thumb—that I apply again and again. Through long use I can articulate them simply. The language I use to do so comes from diverse sources, none of which are esoteric or hard to find. All of them have proven useful in the organic process of helping writers shape their work. So, consider this a journeyman’s take on the art of the novel.

The *sine qua non* of fiction is narrative. Most people call this “story” or “plot,” but E.M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, makes a useful distinction between “story” and “plot.” His example of a story is “The king died and then the queen died.” This is a basic sequence of events. His example of a plot is “The king died and then the queen died *of grief*.” This is the same sequence of events, but now we know the cause, at least, of the queen’s death.

I have three guidelines that help me think about

plot. The first is from Aristotle. In the *Poetics* he discusses drama. In fact, prose fiction as we know it didn’t exist when Aristotle lived. His discussion, nonetheless, applies. He writes, and I’m paraphrasing—but only slightly—that a story must have a beginning, middle, and end. This sounds obvious: it is, and it isn’t. How Aristotle defined these terms is the crux of the matter.

The beginning is that which nothing needs to come before but something *must* follow. The middle is that which something *must* come before and something *must* follow. The end is that which something *must* come before but nothing *must* follow. I keep emphasizing *must* because Aristotle is talking, finally, about necessary causality.

In the beginning, something happens and because it happens, something else must happen. King Lear banishes Cordelia for telling the truth. This was a fundamental injustice and a big mistake. Things must happen. In the middle, because things happened, something else happens and because that something else happened, yet another something happens. With Cordelia out of the picture, Lear’s other daughters begin to connive and contrive. Lear’s world begins to disintegrate. He loses control. Finally, because those other things happened, a final thing happens and nothing more needs to happen. With his power broken, his empire gone, and Cordelia dead, Lear is blinded and lost. His blindness to the truth Cordelia stated caused him to

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lose her which, in time, led to *his* blinding, *his* loss of everything, and his death. This is essential justice. Necessary justice. The circle is complete. The chain of causality had a beginning, middle, and end.

Often stories lack one or more of these elements. In many stories they are improperly related; that is, they are accidentally or coincidentally related rather than causally and necessarily. Many stories start but have no beginning. Many stories stop, but have no ending. Many are just great, mushy middles. The chain of causality and necessity is the first thing I look for because without it, there is no coherent plot.

Aristotle posited three kinds of plots: a plot of character, a plot of action, and a plot of thought.

In terms of the mainstream adult novel, virtually any of the novels of Henry James and Virginia Wolfe and their literary progeny are the first kind. *The Portrait of a Lady* is a quintessential plot of character. So is *Madame Bovary*. This is the “great tradition” ranging from Jane Austen through Joseph Conrad defined by the legendary literary critic, F.R. Leavis. Many contemporary young adult novels are plots of character; the quintessential *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novel, Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, is a plot of character.

The plot of action is best represented in the works of such writers as Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling, a lesser tradition, perhaps, but the one my heart marches to the beat of. In plots of action, characters don’t so much change as survive. Think of Jim Hawkins’ adventures in *Treasure Island*, or Kipling’s *Kim*. But plots of action are not restricted to books now relegated to children. Fielding’s *Tom*

Very often when I read a published book or a manuscript I see extraneous action in what is essentially a plot of character. That is, there are incidents, sometimes very well written, that contribute nothing to the delineation or development of the character. They are gratuitous and often distract or confuse the reader. The same is true of characters that don’t serve any necessary function in a plot. And the same is true of exposition that tells us how to think about the character. A writer needs to strip off and discard the layers that obscure the essential plot.

Jones and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* are very much about the change in fortune of the protagonist and not so much about their change in character. Academic critics like to refer to these books as “picaresque” novels. I know a plot of action when I see one. Stevenson describes it best in his essay “A Gossip on Romance”:

Eloquence and thought, character and conversation, [are] but obstacles to brush aside as we [dig] blithely after a certain sort of incident, [i.e. action.]

Stevenson distinguishes between “poetry of conduct” and “poetry of circumstance.” These are simply other words for plot of character and plot of action.

Aristotle’s plot of thought is a rare bird; there aren’t many examples in the genre. William Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (or *The Tailor Retailored*) and Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*, which I mentioned earlier, are examples of plots of thought in the novel. Neither is a book that I suggest you rush out and read. (In fact, the former is long out of print but is available in digital form at Project Gutenberg, as is the Pater.) We think of prose written solely to change our way of thinking as didactic and polemical and don’t usually associate it with narrative fiction except, ironically, in books for children.

Incidentally, Aristotle also

proposed three manners or modes of representation: i.e. ways to present reality or, perhaps better, realities to present. Reality can be presented as it is; we might say “realistically.” It can be presented as better than it is, i.e. a Utopian vision. Finally, it can be presented as worse than it is, i.e., a dystopian vision. I find it useful to think of stories as being cast primarily in one or the

other of these three modes. However, in my editorial work I have found that plots and modes of representation tend not to come in one of three flavors, but rather, like Neapolitan ice cream, with a layer of each.

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What does this have to do with young adult novels? Nothing *per se*, but it has everything to do with the art of the novel. Each principle I have articulated applies to every work of fiction I have ever read and some seem to apply particularly to young adult novels.

For example, the elements that most often dominate in the narratives we include in the young adult category are, as I suggested above:

1) they are plots of character; 2) the characters tend to be adolescent; and (3) the point of view is often first person.

The first thing one wants and needs to ascertain about first-person narrators is their reliability. If the point of view is limited, all you see of the world is filtered through the eyes of the narrator. You need to know if you can believe what the narrator tells you, if you can rely on the narrator's account of what is happening. The narrator's perception of reality transforms reality. If you cannot rely on the narrator, you need to factor that in to your response to events

The first person limited point of view in the young adult novel is worth discussing in other terms. As opposed, let's say, to a character in a theatrical performance or a movie, character in many young adult novels is revealed not so much through action or through appearance or through description, as through direct or indirect discourse. Character is made manifest in and by the protagonist's voice. The constituent elements of voice are diction and syntax, word choice and word order.

and, indeed, to the narrator.

Unreliable narrators are rampant in the novel. In my opinion they are much more interesting than reliable narrators. Think about the self-effacing narrator of *Wuthering Heights* whose perspective transforms Heathcliffe and Katherine into romantic archetypes. And the narrator of Nabokov's *Lolita*, the incomparable Humbert Humbert. More recently Dave Egger's memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*—which is non-fiction—raises all sorts of questions about the reliability of the narrator. Again, what does this have to do with the art of the young adult novel?

The first person narrator in a coming-of-age story—a plot of character—is almost always unreliable. They are innocent and/or ignorant. Life experience is about to change that, but the protagonist is unaware. Initially the reader can almost never rely on the main character's assessment of reality. As the narrator grows and changes, often through trauma, experience leads to self-knowledge and a new perception of reality. In other words, the narrator becomes reliable, or, at least, more reliable. Typically in

the young adult novel, the narrator transforms from unreliable to reliable.

I'll give you a singularly dramatic example: Patricia McCormick's *Cut*. The protagonist, 15-year-old Callie, is a self-abuser: she cuts herself. When the story begins Callie does not speak, even to her therapist. We only hear her thoughts. She is not a reliable narrator. In the course of the novel, she learns things about herself and others that enable her to better understand what has happened and her role in the events of her life, and, subsequently, she begins to heal. This is a common plot in the young adult novel.

What is uncommon is the way McCormick dramatizes her protagonist's change. Callie is a selective mute. When she's locked in her own thoughts, she is an unreliable narrator. As she becomes involved, passively, with other patients in the hospital, she begins to see things differently. When she finally begins to speak, literally finds her voice, she has a truer sense of reality.

In young adult literature you often see this transformation: it is an organic, inherent manifestation of the change the protagonist is undergoing. It is not at all typical of the adult novel where the reliability of the narrator tends to remain consistent. If I am right about this, then might it be a possible criterion for defining the art or strand of the young adult novel?

telling the truth, she is neither a victim nor a fool. Once again, an unreliable narrator becomes reliable, but this time because the narrator alters the reader's perception of reality.

I choose these two books because I know them intimately. If you think about it, you will come up with your own examples. In young adult literature you often see this transformation: it is an organic, inherent manifestation of the change the protagonist is undergoing. It is not at all typical of the adult novel where the reliability of the narrator tends to remain consistent. If I am right about this, then might it be a

She becomes a reliable narrator. This is a remarkable instance of the change I'm referring to; the transformation from unreliable to reliable is seldom rendered so dramatically.

A more complex variation on this is Brock Cole's *The Facts Speak for Themselves*. Thirteen-year-old Linda is in protective custody after being involved in the murder of one man and the suicide of another. The police think they know what happened and her social worker writes up a report, which Linda reads. Linda doesn't agree with what she reads and decides to tell her own story. The reader immediately sees that Linda's version of reality is warped by her experience and yet by the end we see that she is

possible criterion for defining the art or strand of the young adult novel?

The first person limited point of view in the young adult novel is worth discussing in other terms. As opposed, let's say, to a character in a theatrical performance or a movie, character in many young adult novels is revealed not so much through action or through appearance or through description, as through direct or indirect discourse. Character is made manifest in and by the protagonist's voice. The constituent elements of voice are diction and syntax, word choice and word order.

These are elements, along with meter and rhyme, which we associate most often with poetry. I can think of no other category of fiction in which poetic elements contribute more strongly to characterization than in the young adult novel. Think of the "voice" of any protagonist in Adam Rapp's novels: here's Whensday from *The Copper Elephant*.

They're burning tires in the Pits again. I can't see them cause I'm hidid, but I can smell them all thick and hot and fiery like pepper and smoke and wet thunderhorses mixed together. Tick Burrowman says the tires look like little haloes floating in the dark, like some angels is lost in all that blackness. Tick Burrowman says burning tires keeps the fishflies away.

The Digit Kids is down there busting rocks. You can hear their splittingpicks going ballistic like little blasterguns popping off far far away, like in some place you read about in a story. . .

Rapp's character speaks in an invented language. This device is not exclusive to the young adult novel—think of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Burgess's *Clockwork Orange*, and Hoban's *Pilgerman*, among others. Still, the language of adolescence is eccentric and constantly changing, hardly Standard English. Here's a less extreme example, Sura from Rapp's *The Buffalo Tree*.

. . . We are playing floor hockey in the basement of Spalding Cottage. The light cage keeps getting hit and that bulb is about to bust. When it swings you can see those long shadows creeping on the wall.

There are fifteen juvies and most of us ain't sporting shirts. When a bunch of juvies get to playing some floor hockey in the basement of Spalding you get that thick, cooked smell.

Both voices are immediately distinct: I've read you the first 100 words of *The Copper Elephant* and the first 75 words of *The Buffalo Tree*. The only way to understand

how those voices are that distinct in so few words is by a close scrutiny of diction, syntax, and rhythm. Study their poetry.

We see what I will call the “poetry of voice” in its fullest form in novels in verse. Karen Hesse’s *Out of the Dust*, Robert Cormier’s *Frenchtown Summer*, and Virginia Euwer Wolf’s *True Believer*, among others, represent a strand of young adult novels that deserves a great deal of attention. Again, the form is not unique to the young adult novel; Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* is one classic example. However, I believe the novel in verse is uniquely appropriate for the young adult novel precisely because it incorporates the lyric impulse. In the words of Walt Whitman, “I weave the song of myself.” Voice *is* character *is* plot. *This* is the very essence of the young adult novel.

The lines of inquiry I’ve just proposed are theoretical. I haven’t given them the rigorous attention that would validate or invalidate them. I offer them not as guidelines but only as hypotheses. And, more importantly, I offer them as a context for a broader critical scrutiny of the art form.

There is a final, most important principle that I want to discuss. Like all my other rules, it derives from a variety of sources. I think I got it originally from Strunk and White’s, *The Elements of Style*, but it could just as well have been George Orwell’s essay *Politics and the English Language*. Both are seminal. The rule: Never use two words when one word will do. By extension, less is more. By analogy, every element—be it a word, a phrase, a sentence, a character, an action, a setting, a scene, a sequence of scenes—must serve a purpose. It must be appropriate, adequate, and accurate. No more, no less. In the words of T.S. Eliot, taken from “Little Gidding” the last of his *Four Quartets*:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a
beginning.

The closer a novel gets to this, the higher the art of that novel regardless of any other consideration.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not point out that the art of the young adult novel is not limited to the English language. We are myopic when it comes to literature in translation. We do pay attention to other English-language writers—Melvin Burgess and David Almond come to mind—

for the obvious reason. But think of writers such as Per Nilsson from Sweden, Mette Newth from Norway, Anne Provost from the Netherlands, Bart Moeyaert from Belgium, Miriam Pressler from Germany, and Uri Orlev from Israel. These writers aren’t alone. Unfortunately, too few translations are being published these days—but that’s another subject. My point is that the young adult novel is a part of world literature.

I’ve tried to enumerate some of the principles I use to assess the art of the young adult novels I read and edit. I haven’t attempted to be comprehensive. And my approach is not definitive. It’s not even original. Anyone with an academic background will recognize the critical posture I assume as one that dominated English departments back in the early seventies when I was a graduate student. It was a way of looking at literature that was known generally as New Criticism. Basically it dictated that you consider the work of art only in relationship to itself, ignoring biographical, social, historical—in a word, contextual considerations. I am still prone to that approach, not because I’m stuck in a critical time warp but because I work in publishing. It is a world in which many people—authors, agents, and booksellers, as well as publishers—are often concerned about things that have nothing to do with art. Indeed, in publishing today books are often the proverbial elephant surrounded by hordes of blind men.

For my generation the young adult novel was an innovation. For many of you, it has always been there. It is not an aberration, or a fad, a marketing gimmick.

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The art form may still be in its infancy, but it's a very healthy baby. A substantial body of young adult literature exists. There may even be enough to begin to form a canon. To do so, we need to articulate criteria, establish critical standards, by which to assess that literature. We need a *Poetics*. I beseech and challenge all of you—authors, teachers, librarians, and critics—to move past the accidental and incidental issues that are all-too-often rehashed. We *can* do better, and it's time that we did.

Thank you.

Stephen Roxburgh has been involved with children's books and publishing for more than twenty-five years; first as an academic, then as senior vice president and publisher of *Books for Young Readers*, at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and, now, as the president and publisher of *Front Street Books*, a small independent press he incorporated on April 1, 1994. He has worked with such authors and artists as Felicia Bond, Nancy Eckholm Burkert, Brock Cole, Carolyn Coman, Roald Dahl, Madeleine L'Engle, An Na, Marilyn Nelson, Adam Rapp, Alvin Schwartz, George Selden, Uri Shulevitz, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Garth Williams and Margot Zemach.

Our Apologies

Our apologies to the following authors of recent articles in *The ALAN Review* for whom we credited the articles' authorship but failed to give biographical information.

Jeanne McGlinn, "Rags to Riches." 31. 3 (2004): 11-15

Jeanne McGlinn is an associate professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Asheville where she is the Coordinator Language Arts and English programs and teaches courses in adolescent literature, educational research and methods of teaching English. Dr. McGlinn is the editor of the Classroom Materials column for the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* and the author of *Ann Rinaldi* Rowman & Littlefield, 2000)

Elaine J. O'Quinn, "Vampires, Changlings, and Radical Mutant Teens." 31. 3 (2004): 50-56.

Elaine O'Quinn is a past contributor to the ALAN Review and has published numerous articles on the teaching of literature and composition. She is a faculty member in the Department of English at Appalachian State University where she teaches courses in Adolescent Literature, Issues in English Studies, and Secondary Composition Methods.

Susan Carlile, "Challenges Give Meaning to Our Lives: Francisco Jiménez and Social Justice." 32.1 (2004): 41-49

Susan Carlile is co-coordinator of the English Single Subject program and teaches Eighteenth-Century British Literature, British Literature Survey, and numerous courses in the English Single Subject program at California State University at Long Beach. She has published articles and reviews in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, and *The Journal for Adolescent and Adult Literacy*.

John H. Bushman and Shelley McNerney. "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life." 32.1 (2004): 61-67

John H. Bushman is Professor Emeritus at the University of Kansas where he has had an illustrious career, including the 2000 Ned A. Fleming Trust Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the 1998 Edwin M. Hopkins award from the *English Journal*. Dr. Bushman is the author of several books about English education, including *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* (soon in its fourth edition from Prentice Hall). Shelley McNerney is a doctoral student at the University of Kansas and the editor of *Writer's Slate* magazine (The Writing Conference, Inc.)



Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century:

Moving Beyond Traditional Constraints and Conventions

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, young adult literature looks very different than it did fifty years ago. Indeed, fifty years ago, we were just getting started with the likes of Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951), with Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), Zindel's *The Pigman* (1968), and Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) still a gleam in the eye of their literary creators. We have come a long way since then, and I suppose, that is why our humble, yet groundbreaking beginnings have yielded a bountiful harvest of literary works. Today, we face a plethora of young adult books that represent every conceivable genre and literary style. To be sure, we are on the precipice of re-inventing ourselves because our young adult books are constantly in search of the new and revealing so that more and more young people will find their way to the delectable hallways of good and engaging reads.

Thus, it is intriguing to look at the spate of recent articles on the nature of young adult fiction in the twenty-first century. Indeed, as the authors of many articles say, the world of young adult literature is

being transformed by topics and themes that years ago would have never ever been conceived without someone labeling them 'daft' or at least, a little far-fetched and out-of-touch with everyday reality. Furthermore, writers and scholars alike are challenging the whole concept of what young adult literature is. Some think the genre

The authors of many articles say, the world of young adult literature is being transformed by topics and themes that years ago would have never ever been conceived.

is too limiting for even the most experienced readers for it delegates good works to a category few, if any, scholars can easily define. And others regard young adult literature as something that once was, but is

on the cusp of becoming something totally new and unique. Such are the articles presented in this research column: a solemn look at the changing face of young adult literature and where it is going from here. Enjoy the ride.

Young Adult Science Fiction in the Post-human Age

In "Is He Still Human? Are You?": Young Adult Science Fiction in the Posthuman Age," researcher Elaine Ostry analyzes science fiction texts, written for young adults, which deal with the tenets of our new biotechnology age: cloning, genetic engineering, prolongation of life, and neuropharmacology. She discusses how texts—young adult literature concerned with bioethics—use the possibility of biotechnology as metaphors for adolescence. Specifically, these new engaging reads for young adults discuss in vivid and clarifying detail the ethics implied in the study and practice of biotechnology—such as the creation of a super class of human beings and the delicate crossing of the boundaries between human

The once time honored “stuff of science fiction novels”—cloning, genetic engineering, etc.—is now the everyday realities of young people’s lives. Everything from artificially created limbs to designer babies is very real for today’s adolescents, bringing into question the eternal question, “what does it mean to be human?”

and animal, and that age-old fascination, human and machine. Ostry raises a number of startling questions and propositions in regard to the promulgation of young adult literature which examines in full glory the outlines of a new and ever stranger adult world and concludes that most of these contemporary adolescent fictional texts place “nurture above nature” and promote a safe and traditional vision of humanity.

Still, danger lurks. As Ostry writes, the potential of biotechnology to change human form is ever present in young adult literature that recently has seen science fiction come to life. What their parents and grandparents had always thought of as science fiction, says Ostry, are now realities or possible

realities. The once time honored “stuff of science fiction novels”—cloning, genetic engineering, etc.—is now the everyday realities of young people’s lives. Everything from artificially created limbs to designer babies is very real for today’s adolescents, bringing into question the eternal question, “what does it mean to be human?” After all, if biotechnology can change the human form and mind, and machines can become a reasonable part of the human body, then the term post-human body or “techno-body” is a distinct entity. And with the lines crossed between organic and inorganic, Ostry asserts, the word “human” may never be more challenged, manipulated or questioned.

Clearly, scientific advances have changed the map of young adult literature. Young people on a quest to define their identity, Ostry writes, have never become more soul-searching and desperate. After all, if we as a society are altering our definition of what it means to be human, we can only begin to understand the relevance of our desire to truly understand ourselves in light of our newfound technology. Today, thanks to advances in DNA labeling, we can determine much of a person before he or she is even born, or created by other means. And most science fiction for young adults attempts to mediate the post-human age to young audiences. What are the pros and cons of cloning? Of what value is the human versus the new, “improved” human? And how can young people really know what it means to be fully alive if all they know are people who have been genetically engineered? As Ostry

insists, these are all intriguing questions and all indicative of how much young adult literature has changed dramatically in the last twenty years.

The trope that all young adult literature has in common is the search for identity. The dilemma, though, is that in our new post-human age, young people are often questioning not only their emotional identity, but also their biological identity or just “what does it mean to be conventionally human?” As Ostry points out, in the *Replica* series by Marilyn Kaye, the young protagonist Amy is assigned to write her autobiography in her high school English class. Gradually, Amy begins to realize, though,

In the *Replica* series by Marilyn Kaye, the young protagonist Amy is assigned to write her autobiography. . . . she sends off for a birth certificate and, to her surprise, finds that there is no record of her birth. Moreover, her file at school is empty. Only the discovery of a baby bracelet that reads “Amy #7” provides her with a clue about her odd birth: she is a clone.

how little she knows about herself and her family. With little help from absent parents, she sends off for a birth certificate and, to her surprise, finds that there is no record of her birth. Moreover, her file at school is empty. Only the discovery of a baby bracelet that reads “Amy #7” provides her with a clue about her odd birth: she is a clone. Amy is stunned, and the ramifications are many in her desperate search to find her true identity. Likewise, teenagers Mike and Angel team up in Nicole Luiken’s *Violet Eyes* to figure out why they have so much in common. To their horror, they discover that what they think to be true is not. They are living in the year 2098, not 1987 as they suspect. Moreover, they are a new subspecies of human, *Homo sapiens renascentia*, thanks to the injection of “Renaissance” genes that make them exceptional.

Other examples of young adults finding their true identities in a post-human age abound in young adult literature. As Ostry indicates, in Neal Shusterman’s *The Dark Side of Nowhere*, Jason’s father tells him that they are actually aliens who have taken over the genetic structure of previous inhabitants of the town. In the *Regeneration* series by L. J. Singleton, young Allison, a genetically designed baby, blames her distant relationship with her parents on her origins—she wonders was there something genetic in her clone DNA that made her troubled and distant from her family and friends? Or, as her fellow experimentee Varina says, am I a troubled kid because “I wasn’t the product of two loving parents, but the result of experi-

If being human means feeling emotion, continues Ostry, then losing control over one’s emotions or having them controlled for you, puts one’s humanity in direct confrontation with the concept of human freedom.

mental science” (*Regeneration*, p. 140). And in Carol Matas’ *Cloning Miranda*, young Miranda learns not only that she is a clone of a dead sister, but also her parents have had another clone made so that she would always have perfect matches for her transplants. Understandably, Miranda is angry with her parents for their implicit deceptiveness and does not forgive them easily.

To be sure, these stories are wild and fanciful in design, but they all, according to Ostry, have one primary element in common; the young adults in these books feel estranged not just from their parents and from the society that would likely shun them, but from themselves as well. They feel that they are not real because they are clones—or otherwise, genetically engineered. “To find out your that your life is a lie is one thing, but to find out that your own face doesn’t even belong to you,” says Jason angrily in Shusterman’s *The Dark Side of Nowhere*, is to realize that you are living a disguise, “down to

every single cell of my counterfeit body” (Shusterman, pg. 61).

Fears about the new biotechnology generated world permeate new young adult literature. As Ostry writes, the linkage between human being and machine is always called into question. Inevitably, the question arises: Are we developing a race of super humans? There is a striking example of genetics creating a class system of super humans in *The Last Book in the Universe* by Rodman Philbrick. In this provocative read, the world is divided into “normals” and “proovs” The proovs are genetically improved people, who live in Eden, the only place where blue sky and green grass are found. The normals live in the Urbs, concrete jungles of violence and poverty. The narrator, Spaz, is even less than a normal; as an epileptic, he is a “Deef,” or defective. Philbrick’s work is the inevitable conflict that arises when two human beings compete for superior status. In the end, no one wins.

If being human means feeling emotion, continues Ostry, then losing control over one’s emotions or having them controlled for you, puts one’s humanity in direct confrontation with the concept of human freedom. Books using neuropharmacology, as Ostry writes, exploit this idea. Upon reaching puberty, the young adults in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* must take a pill that suppresses sexual desires. Jonas, the story’s protagonist, is uncomfortable with this ruling, and secretly stops taking this pill. Suddenly, Jonas discovers that all emotions become heightened. Similarly, the female leaders in Kathryn Lasky’s *Star Split* stop

taking the substance that calms their emotions. In Peter Dickinson's *Eva*, a mother's concern for her daughter's happiness is answered by a doctor's order for a "microshot of endorphin" (Dickinson, p. 10), as if mere chemicals could alter happiness. And in Philbrick's *The Last Book in the Universe*, the human mind is completely mediated by chemically induced sights and emotions.

This new reality, Ostry insists, is becoming more and more real to young adults as the world outside their classroom door becomes more science fact than science fiction. And this new reality lends a new breadth and depth to young adult literature that heretofore, has only existed in the realm of fantasy. Most of the characters in these post-human science fiction books for young adults, writes Ostry, face choices that determines the level of their humanity. The young protagonists display a considerable energy and wit in their defense of humanity. They label themselves as human, using the standards of morality set by the liberal humanist model. They recognize the humanity of others, tolerating others' weaknesses and rejecting the supremacy of the post-human body.

In these books, Ostry underscores, scientists are seen as fallible. In Marilyn Kaye's *Amy*, young Amy's adoptive mother Nancy says that she thought that by engaging in scientific experimentation with her daughter that she was doing something pure and noble and good. Instead, they learned how dangerous playing with human life forms could really be. In Margaret Peterson Haddix's *Turnabout*, the unaging drug is sup-

posed to be arrested by another drug at the age desired, but, unfortunately, the first person to try this medical wonder pill crumbles into dust. Only the young protagonists Melly and Anny Beth ultimately survive the experiment as all others choose suicide or dwell in severe depression. Similarly, in

As Ostry finishes, although these post modern writers may push the envelope in young adult literature in the subject matter and grotesque imagery, most of these writers play it very safe by showing the post-human body as comfortingly familiar—something which may be as far from the truth as can possibly be imagined.

Frank Bonham's *The Forever Formula* the aged "gummies" or old people without teeth and wit, suffer from malaise and beg to play "suicide bingo." And the positive characters in Nancy Farmer's *The House of Scorpion* are disgusted by the old men who prolong their lives past the age of 150 years by means of continual implants from clones.

The message that these books give to young readers, Ostry concludes, is a reassuring one:

human values and human nature will prevail no matter what changes the human body endures. These values are what literature—and the adult world in general—attempt to inculcate in young people. Still, Ostry insists, for the most part young adult writers are playing it safe because inevitably, the real world is highly more complicated. The future of science and the body is much less certain, Ostry asserts, than most young adult novels would have you believe. No one knows for sure what the personality of a clone would be like. Free will itself may be a combination of genetic factors, yet these possibilities, writes Ostry, are too complicated and radical for the typical writer for young adults today. They stray from the perceived notion in young adult literature of the need to provide a clear moral structure and a hopeful, if not happy, ending. For, as Ostry finishes, although these post modern writers may push the envelope in young adult literature in the subject matter and grotesque imagery, most of these writers play it very safe by showing the post-human body as comfortingly familiar—something which may be as far from the truth as can possibly be imagined. This is the world Ostry dares to paint.

Stretching the Boundaries and Blurring the Lines of Young Adult Genre

In "Stretching the Boundaries and Blurring the Lines of Genre," authors Lester Laminack and Barbara Bell focus on the confusion regarding the term "genre" and attempt to define and stretch its boundaries. According to Laminack

and Bell, genre is typically defined as a way of organizing or categorizing literature, “a way to group books with similar style, form, or content “ (Laminack and Bell, p. 248). Yet, in today’s diversified and multicultural world of varied dimensions and rationalities, the lines, as said, between and among genres often become blurred, calling for a re-examination of what is meant by the young adult genre. In particular, Laminack and Bell point to the continued popularity of memoir as a popular genre in books for children and adults. But, can it really be called memoir?

Memoir books, typically, tell of a specific moment or brief span of time in the writer’s life. Many times, Laminack and Bell stress, these books are written in the first person, and the matter recounts the events by reflecting on what has long passed. Stories written as first-person narratives, Laminack and Bell continue, can share these qualities, allowing them to assume a “memoir-like” feel. And unless, as the authors note, the author of the memoir specifically says that the book is a “memoir of real life events,” the reader may not be able to determine whether or not the events actually occurred in the life of the writer.

This confusing dilemma manifests itself in a few recent works, most notably, Claire Ewart’s *The Giant*, Ann Rinaldi’s *Or Give Me Death: A Novel of Patrick Henry’s Family*, and Maria Testa’s *Almost Forever*. Each book illustrates how blurred the distinction between true-to-life memoir and creative fictional license can become distinctly and unintentionally blurred.

In Claire Ewart’s *The Giant*, a young girl tells in a first-person narrative about the loss of her beloved mother. Though she and her father have the farm chores to keep them busy, the young girl continues to look for the “giants” that her mother told her daughter would always look after her. All through the seasons, from planting to harvest, she searches for evidence of her giant—only to discover him in the face of her father. Illustrated handsomely by the author, the reader is left with a vivid portrait of an endearing loss and love, but still confused if the story is an account of her real life loss or a beautiful fantasy of what might be. Again, is this poetry, narrative, memoir, or just a lush and rich children’s bedtime story?

Ann Rinaldi is known for historical fiction. This, in and of itself, is a mixed bag—because the reader is left wondering—did this really happen, or is the author inventing this for pure dramatic effect? In one of her latest works, *Or Give Me Death: A Novel of Patrick Henry’s Family*, Rinaldi asks the central question, “when do you tell the truth and when do you lie?” Do you lie to protect someone? Is it wrong to keep a secret, when, if you tell, someone gets hurt?

These profound and eternal questions are at the heart of this historical novel about the family members of Revolutionary War hero, Patrick Henry, who must wrestle with a host of family problems—each of whom must face a test in her young life as they struggle to bring a new nation to the birthplace of freedom. With a mother prone to madness and an absentee father, Patrick Henry’s

family must cope with larger-than-life questions as their father faces the impending American revolutionary war and they must decide what actions they should take in his absence and in his defense. Central to the novel is the potential strength of the human spirit to conquer all odds. Yet, although this biography-like novel is actually historical fiction, it is based on true information and reads like the biography of the family of Patrick Henry. Clearly, this can only confuse the uninformed reader.

Finally, Maria Testa’s *Almost Forever* is beautifully written lyrical novel told from the six-year-old daughter’s perspective. It is the moving story of one family’s experience when the father is sent to Vietnam for a year during the Vietnam War. The young girl believes her father shouldn’t have gone to war because he is a doctor and doctors don’t fight, they heal. She fears that her father will simply disappear from her life, especially when the letters stop coming. Told in haunting poetic language, the author evokes a mood that is both real and dreamy. The reader experiences the emotions of the child, yet simultaneously, longs to know how much is the author’s life, how much is written to evoke a mood, and how much is simply a well-constructed poem? Granted, the effect is the same, but again, the work becomes difficult to classify.

These examples, write Laminack and Bell, are but a few of the many works designed for young adults where the genres are blurred, the distinctions many, and the story painfully true—on many levels. And as Laminack and Bell contend, in a day and age where young

people are becoming more and more sophisticated about the ways of the world, they increasingly need to know what is fiction and what is fact. No longer content to accept the world as it is, young people hunger for readily identifiable markers so they can explore and define their ever-changing and cyber-reaching universe. Truly, the lines are blurred as we enter the 21st century.

Exploring Identity Construction in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

Finally, in “Developing Students’ Critical Literacy: Exploring Identity Construction in Young Adult Fiction,” authors Thomas W. Bean and Karen Moni challenge how young adult literature is traditionally read and taught in most secondary classrooms. As Bean and Moni state, most adolescent readers view characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teenagers. At the center of all these themes are questions of character and identity and values. They argue that an alternative way of looking at these novels, and perhaps, a more engaging technique in a postmodern world, is an exploration through a critical literacy framework. Bean and Moni argue that a critical stance in the classroom empowers students to consider “what choices have been made in the creation of the text” (Janks and Ivanic, 1992, p. 316). Their argument is that, through discussion of such choices, young adults may also better understand how they, as teenagers, are being constructed as adolescents in the

The apparent need to shape a different critical look at young adult literature, insist Bean and Moni, is driven by, of all things, dramatic world changes. The world globalization of markets, they underscore, has resulted in the challenging of long-established ideologies and values related to the traditional ideals of work and family.

texts they are reading, and how such constructions compare with their own attempts to form their identities.

The apparent need to shape a different critical look at young adult literature, insist Bean and Moni, is driven by, of all things, dramatic world changes. The world globalization of markets, they underscore, has resulted in the challenging of long-established ideologies and values related to the traditional ideals of work and family. In a world of constant movement and flow, media images of advertising and commerce seep into our lives and strongly influence identity development. Hence, young adult literature and our interpretation of it as a genre of literary study have been profoundly altered as a result

of this dramatic shift in world affairs.

Bean and Moni begin their intriguing look at the changing nature of critical theory and young adult literature by first examining the many theories of identity development prevalent in literary circles. Enlightened views of identity development, as Bean and Moni write, are based on the somewhat fixed social structures and actions of class differences. The “enlightened myth” of the rugged individualist struggling to get ahead in society has been the predominant social and literary theory of the modern age. Bean and Moni, however, conclude that in recent years, this rugged individualist stance has been challenged by a postmodern view, almost Marxist in its orientation, that says that power is the driving force in shaping identity. Furthermore, Bean and Moni argue, even this proposition has been somewhat challenged by cultural theorists who argue that the quest for power has been successfully supplanted by consumerism. “We now live in a world dominated by consumer, multinational or global capitalism, and the older theoretical models that we relied on to critique established systems no longer apply” (Mansfield, p. 163).

Urban teens navigate through shopping malls, train stations, airports, freeways, and the Internet. As Bean and Moni write, these fluid spaces are disorienting, dehumanizing any fixed sense of place, and subsequently, this feeling of emptiness and displacement spills over into adolescents’ interior worlds. Institutions like family, schools, and communities are being replaced by malls, tele-

vision, and cyberspace. Identity in these contemporary worlds, writes Bean and Moni, is constructed through the consumption of goods with selfhood vested in things. And because these worlds are ephemeral and ethereal, feelings of panic and anxiety flow into teens' lives.

The question for Bean and Moni is that, given this postmodern world of convenience and transience, how do young people find themselves? For if traditional avenues of self-expression are no longer valid—home, school, church, etc.—how do young people find who they are if they live in seemingly rootless social world? In essence, write Bean and Moni, youths no longer live life as a journey toward the future but as a condition. Young people today live in two different worlds—the world of home and school and the world of culture and commerce. Although in America this has been always been true, today, Bean and Moni insist, this chasm between conformity and modernity is ever more present due to the conflicting social arena in which most teenagers live.

Bean and Moni focus in on life for the urban Australian teenager in their discussion of the aimlessness of today's youth, but their observation can apply most anywhere. Young people face a world where unskilled laborers rarely can find meaningful work. Instead, in a postmodern world where the stability of life as a factory worker as experienced by their working class parents or life in a town where everybody grows up and nobody leaves, has been replaced by a life of constant change and uncertainty. Much of contemporary teenagers day, write Bean and

Moni, is spent in “non-places,”—like the mall and cyberspace.

Moreover, assert Bean and Moni, the places in which teenagers dwell are sanitized and kept free of the poor. Thus, for many young people, their displacement as marginalized members of society is only aggravated by the increasingly complex and global world of market-driven consumerism. This, as Bean and Moni insist, might seem miles away from the world of young adult literature, but they conclude, its influence cannot be denied. Literacy, they write, especially through multicultural young adult novels, provides a forum upon which teenagers can build cosmopolitan worldviews and identities.

In today's times, teenagers do everything on the run. Hence, this new dynamic—true, always present in the lives of young adults since the end of the second World War, but now ever heightened by modern technology—governs their lives. So, this new life-force of power shaped by social forces beyond traditional boundaries, as Bean and Moni underscore, demands a new language to interpret what students are reading, and more importantly, how they interpret what they read. The language is embedded in a new dialogue for literary interpretation called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA asks the reader to look at the novel as a novel, and not just a work in which to identify with the lead characters. In a new postmodern age, where cyberspace is often more important than “real” space, readers are asked to look at a novel in much the same way that a contemporary teen would look at a computer—not as a living, breath-

ing thing, but as a machine with moving parts capable of transforming their temporary world into an ever-engaging ethereal world. The novel becomes, thus, a vehicle for transformative change, and not just a search for identity.

True, there is nothing dramatically new here. As Bean and Moni assert, critical analysis of novels has long been a staple of literary critics. Yet, what makes Critical Discourse Analysis so vital to today's young adults is that the context in which they live their lives—electronically, globally, and instantly—makes this an even more imperative approach to understanding who they are in their search for personal and spiritual identity. Asking questions about the novel itself—where does the novel come from? What social function does the novel serve? How does the adult author construct the world of adolescence in the novel? Who is the ideal reader of the novel? Who gets to speak and have a voice in this novel—and who doesn't? How else might these characters' stories be told? And these characters inhabit certain places and spaces where they construct their identities. What alternative places and spaces could be sites for constructing identity?

These intriguing questions are different from the standard fare of asking students if they identify with the characters in the story and why. They presuppose that students are sophisticated enough to look at a novel as an object in a given time and place, filled with all settings and vagaries of the particular time frame in which the novel occurs. They also assume that young people can examine a work of art

as both a thing of feeling and a thing of context. To be sure, this is no easy task, but as Bean and Moni assert, in today's contemporary world of ever changing dynamics and global constructs, of technological marvels and instantaneous gratification, and of changing lifestyles and alternative world views, perhaps, it is time that the young adult novel be analyzed in a new light. Perhaps, young people can see art for what it is—a reflection of the times in which we live.

Conclusion

These three articles all have something in common. They underscore that the outside world in which young people spend most of their waking hours is different from the world inhabited by most protagonists in young adult novels. Yes, the dilemmas, as these researchers insist, are the same, but the dynamics of their own lives—the lives of the teenagers who are reading these good works—have dramatically changed. Today's young people are the generation who live truly in a new and alternative universe. Technology has made it possible for them to communicate with people around the world in the blink of an eye, and to gratify their every wish—from musical taste to hidden desire—with the flick of a switch or the move of a mouse.

This new normal, the world of cyberspace and cloning, of blurred genres and conventions, and of critical discourse and contextual analysis, is what drives young adult literature in a new and specialized arena of complex thought and ideas. What this portends is that

the young adult novel is still growing and becoming, and that the teenage angst expressed so well in *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Outsiders*, *The Pigman* and *The Chocolate War* is still present, but just manifested in a world these authors could never imagine. For imagine, if you will, would Holden Caulfield have been a different person with a computer? I wonder.

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Life with Ted:

A Hipplite Speaks Out

When I was seven my older brother and sister took me into my bedroom, told me to sit down, and changed my life forever. All that I had believed in, hoped in, was gone. Apparently, they had searched the house and discovered where our parents hid our Christmas toys, causing them to reach the conclusion that there was no Santa Claus. Why they felt inclined to break this news to me, I have yet to understand. What I do know, however, is that their revelation completely turned my life upside down. I was no longer sure of anything and began to question everything: the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, Rudolph's ability to fly. This one event turned my life in a new direction. The feelings it aroused have been repeated throughout the years, especially during the times I am venturing into unknown waters, attempting things never before tried, or questioning standard, acceptable practice. It was during such a point in my life when I met Ted Hipple. And, once again, my life was changed.

The first class I took with Ted was a young adult literature course. I knew next to nothing about the genre, a deficiency which Ted soon eradicated. He introduced me to the history of YA literature, the story of the conception of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN), and the novels themselves. I instantly fell in love with these books and developed an insatiable appetite for more of them. Fortunately, Ted



was more than willing to share his vast supply of books, as well as his knowledge. He pointed me to the mainstays of the field (*The Outsiders*, *The Pigman*, and *The Chocolate War*) and to titles considered to be controversial (*Annie on My Mind*, *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*, and *Forever*), always sharing his passion and nurturing my new-found love. It was during this encounter and awakening of sorts, I determined that what I was doing in my seventh-grade classroom was no longer acceptable. “No wonder stu-

dents don't enjoy reading,” I mused. “I force them to read books they have no interest in. Something's gotta give.” The something was provided by Ted.

Reader Interest Surveys

Dr. Hipple, as I knew him then, questioned me about the choices I made for classroom novels and how I determined which books would be read. For once, I knew the answer: some choices were based on personal likes and the rest were ones “they” told me must be read. The next question he had for me concerned who “they” were and why I was allowing them to tyrannize me. (See [Hipple's 1989 English Journal article “The Tyranny of the Ts”](#) for more about tyrannization.) I couldn't answer him. From there he introduced me to a reader interest survey. This one instrument proved to be a catalyst of sorts, changing what I did in the classroom in a major way.

No longer did I randomly choose books or give the infamous “they” power to make the choices for me. The novels my students read related directly to their interests. Through a reader interest survey I developed as a class requirement for Ted, I was able to determine that students in my classroom liked humor stories, “stories that could be real,” and mysteries. More than anything, they wanted to read something that didn’t have “words nobody has used in ages.” It was at this point, I introduced them to *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967) and the entire tone of the class changed. Students could not wait to learn what happened to Ponyboy, Johnny, Sodapop, and the rest. I overheard them talking in the hallway and at lunch about what they were reading. They were making predictions and creating story guesses. Their appetites had been teased, and they wanted a full meal. Their excitement grew even more when I told them to store their literature anthologies on a shelf in the back of the room. Their motivation propelled me into action. We would read more novels and then more novels. I was hooked and had become a young adult literature junky. I turned to Ted for my fix.

It’s Not What Kids Are Reading, But That Kids Are Reading

By the end of this first class with Ted, I had been introduced to a new and exciting way of teaching. Throughout that semester, my students and I read young adult novels, discussed their themes, and examined them for literary merit. I discovered that I could teach the same skills I taught through the traditional textbook method, but in a more interesting manner. With the reading of Rawls’ *Where the Red Fern Grows* (1961), students examined figurative language in detail. They found examples of idioms, personification, similes, and metaphors. What made this concept exciting for them was highlighting the examples. Suddenly, they were being told it was OK to mark in their book. For me, the excitement came from their enthusiasm, knowledge, and authentic connection between skills, reading, and writing.

It was during this time I heard what has become one of my favorite quotes: it’s not what kids are reading as much it is that kids are reading (Hipple, 1997). He used this quote in class to prove that the primary goal teachers should have for students is that they are reading. According to Ted, sometimes teachers get so caught up in the literary value of works and

whether or not they are part of the canon that they sometimes forget how crucial it is that kids are actually reading. And, he argued, a large percentage of kids just won’t read canonical literature. Furthermore, he shared, some of the staples of the 1960s (*The Pigman* and *The Outsiders*) have become classics because they “represent excellence in storytelling, character development, language, and exploration of theme” (Hipple, 1993, p. 5). Hearing this argument changed my attitude and opinion about what kids should read.

Ted convinced me that my middle school students did not have to read literature simply because it had always been read in the past. The success I was having with young adult literature supported Ted’s position. For me the choice was a simple one. I would use these novels in my classroom and never look back.

DOWMs

With my new-found love for young adult literature came an increasing desire to incorporate multicultural works into the curriculum. I wasn’t sure how to do this because of the limited knowledge I had of the books out there. Once again, I turned to Ted.

He came into class one day and wrote the word DOWMs on the board. Not sure what this was but knowing instinctively that if it was important enough for the renowned Dr. Hipple to write on the board, then it had to be something significant. And it was. Throughout my undergraduate English major days and middle school teaching experience, almost everything I read and required students to read were written by venerated DOWMs. According to Ted, my allegiance to them resulted in my students missing out on a lot of good stories. Who were they (the DOWMs)? I had no idea, yet somehow I knew that I must break the bond I had with them.

It turns out that DOWMs is no more than literature written by

- Dead
- Old
- White
- Men

I left class with the hold held over me by all DOWMs dramatically loosened. Mind you, the union was not completely severed because, as Ted reminded me, a lot of the work by DOWMs really is terrific, and it would be a shame to categorically discard them. But their grip was not as tight as it had been. In replacement, Ted shared with me stories by Walter Dean Myers,

Katherine Paterson, Gary Paulsen, and many others. Some of them were multicultural titles, some by women, some by men, and none of them were written by DOWMs from hundreds of years past.

From Ted I learned that multicultural literature does not have to be literature written by specific ethnic groups. He showed me that Greene's *Drowning of Stephan Jones* (1992) was multicultural because of its subject matter; that *With a Hammer for My Heart* (1997) by Lyon and Cleavers' *Where the Lilies Bloom* (1969) were multicultural because of the setting, language, and culture presented. Stepping outside of the power of the DOWMs revealed that multicultural literature was plentiful.

It's All in the Attitude

Perhaps more than anything else I learned from Ted was the importance of a positive attitude. He made class enjoyable. True, he had high expectations of me as a student and a doctoral candidate, but the payoff was much higher. Ted challenged me to perform to the best of my ability. Because I knew he did not like mediocre work, I strove to excel. Often, I was like a sponge soaking up information he shared. If Ted suggested I read a book, I read it. If he thought I should attend a conference, I went. This was not because he meant any of these as requirements, but rather because I had faith in Ted's opinion, and I knew he cared about me as a person and wanted me to do well. His attitude conveyed this.

Ted began each and every class I took under him with an opener. I learned that openers were, basically, anything he decided they were. They typically were brief, lasting anywhere from two to five minutes and were, more often than not, hysterical. The openers were short quips he read at the beginning of class. Their purpose was to create a rapport with students so that we could become a community of learners. They worked. The classes I had with Ted were filled with people who wanted to be there, who wanted to learn, and who wanted to become better English educators. Ted inspired us all, and his attitude was such that we all wanted some of it to rub off on us.

Beyond these, Ted was, without fail, approachable. Though I knew as a student that he was a legend in the young adult literature world, I was never apprehensive about approaching him with questions or ideas. He encouraged me to become active in the publishing arena and even went as far as to orches-

trate articles that we could co-author. His support was unwavering, and I continued to run ideas by him and ask for suggestions in my role as professor.

Flash Forward

Armed with Ted's belief that the best reason to use young adult literature in the classroom is because kids will read it, I started a new career of sorts. He convinced me that middle school students love reading this genre, that it can be used to teach literary skills, and that it belongs in the curriculum in a central, not a peripheral, place (Hipple, 1997). But even beyond this, he also convinced me that I could be a teacher educator. Through his relentless support and love for sharing his knowledge and understanding of young adult literature, I earned my doctorate and entered into higher academia.

Today, so much of what I learned from Ted I share with pre-service and experienced teachers. When I read an opener to the class, I hear his voice. I begin each semester administering a reading interest survey and teaching students how to create their own survey and use it to enrich their teaching. I discuss DOWMs and the stranglehold they have on so many of us. I use humor to build a community of learners and attempt to keep a positive attitude and an approachable demeanor. As a Hipplite, I think I owe it to Ted.

Melissa Comer, a former student of Ted Hipple at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is a Literacy Block Assistant Professor at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville.

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Remembering Ted Hipple:

Thoughts and Feelings from Those Whose Lives were Touched by a Great Man

Ted Hipple—scholar, family man, lover of life and a good laugh, a true gentleman—was the founding force of ALAN. I'll always be thankful to Ted for welcoming me, as he did so many others, into the ALAN family.

Bill Mollineaux
Retired
ALAN Past-president

My relationship with Ted went back 30 years, though we got close beginning around 1983. I have been so blessed by having him as a mentor. He was the one who showed me the way life could be in a myriad of ways as he was the model professor, friend, colleague, and father figure. I want to point out that his wife Marge was also a role model in so many ways as she supported him in all of his endeavors and shared him with so many of us.

Joan Kaywell

Ted Hipple was like those great young adult novels he recommended—spirited, thoughtful, and masterfully composed. He was sometimes funny, always honest, never boring. Ted was the book you couldn't put down. He's the book we won't forget.

Gary Salvner
Executive Secretary, ALAN

I first got to know Ted when I edited his book about Sue Ellen Bridgers, a project we both took very seriously. But later he teased me about it, and I

realized that knowing Ted was FUN! And who can forget his generosity, his warmth, and his wonderful ties?

Patty Campbell

In the years when nobody knew my name, Ted Hipple found my stories and promoted them. Better than that, he treated me and wrote about me as if I were a serious writer long before I believed in myself. And I never talked with him that I didn't learn something. He was so smart, and so full of grace.

Chris Crutcher

I admired Ted for all he's done to help English teachers and for his strong moral stand on important issues. I liked him for his sense of humor and his wonderful ability to lighten up the lives of all of us he worked with. He was one of a very special kind.

Ken Donelson
Professor Emeritus
Arizona State University

I knew of Ted Hipple long before I ever saw the man. As a high school teacher and graduate student familiar with *English Journal* and *The ALAN Review*, I knew that Ted was one of the movers and shakers in the field. I attended my first ALAN back in 1989, and that's when I saw the great man himself. He was nothing like I suspected he might be—arrogant, pompous, famous-professor type of guy. No, he was witty, pleasant, friendly, and kind, even to a Podunk

newcomer like me. Over the years, Ted was one of the regular highlights of ALAN for me. I looked forward to talking with him every fall, comparing notes on our schools' respective football teams and coaches, arguing about new YA books, and, later, working on various ALAN projects.

Ted was always such a friendly public guy that I rarely had any time to chat with him privately. I recall two occasions, times that made me like and admire him all the more. The first was at the NCTE in San Diego some years ago. Ted and I were walking to a meeting some distance away, across parking lots, parks, and what seemed like endless blocks. As we walked, we talked about our children, our homes, and our families. It was a wonderful personal glimpse shared with this popular and public man.

The second came at NCTE the year he retired as executive director. Under the direction of president Connie Zitlow, I had been involved in getting the Hipple Service Award made, and along with it, a retirement gift from ALAN to Ted. On Friday afternoon, after our board meeting, Ted invited me up to his room to give me some ALAN paperwork. When we got there, he sat down, invited me to sit, and the two of us once again talked about our careers and our families. Ted let me know how pleased he was to have worked with ALAN and all the good people therein. Now that he's gone, I realize that the good people in ALAN are there because of Ted.

I'll miss him.

Be well, my friend.

Chris Crowe

Ted Hipple changed my life. He came into my life when I was beginning to wonder what to do next—I had taught for about eight years in the public schools, and I was itching to tell others my story about the joys and frustrations of teaching. Suddenly, I found someone conducting a teacher's workshop who "was just like me"—except twenty years later.

Here was someone, a professor no less, who was just as enthused about teaching and education and young people (or "kids" as Ted preferred to call "students in school") as I was—except more so. He knew how to say it in words, how to connect with young people through books, and how to bring the world of authors and publishers and famous people to

their doorstep—all with an ease and grace and dignity that said you mattered. You—as a teacher, a colleague, a lover of kids and learning—mattered above everything—because you value young people like I do, and all in life that really counts, as Ted would profess, is the education of young people in a humane and decent fashion.

I was Ted Hipple's graduate student for two years and his pupil for life. He taught me more about teaching, learning, and above all, being a human being than anyone I know. Or will ever know. He was "it."

And the reason? He was more than a teacher, a reader, a writer, a friend, a mentor, a colleague, an inspiration—he was, as we say in "Yiddish," a mensch—a human being's human being.

What made him a great teacher? After all, anyone can tell you how to teach, how to change schools, how to improve education. Not everyone, though, can tell you how and, at the same time, make you laugh.

For above all, Ted was funny. Funny people—deliberately funny people are always in short supply. Education, as Ted knew so well, takes itself too seriously. We treat children like commodities and berate them when they don't live up to our expectations. Nothing funny in that.

Yet, Ted knew that in order for schools to function and kids to learn, laughter must prevail.

I remember going to lunch with Ted one day and after we got into his beat up Rambler (he told me his Rolls was in the shop), he turned on his tape player and out came some heavy classical music. He turned towards me and asked, "What's that?" I immediately thought, "Oh, no, I have been found. I don't know what this music is. Surely, he will think me a dummy." Sensing my desperation, he looked me straight in the eye and said, "Don't know? It's Liberace!"

That was Ted. Warm, sweet, wise, unpretentious, and always, funny. For he believed, with every fiber of his being, that learning should be joyous because without laughter, there is no learning.

Jeffrey S. Kaplan
University of Central Florida

Both as a teacher and author, I am ever grateful for the amazingly far reaching work Ted did on behalf of YA literature.

Marilyn Reynolds

Ted Hipple brought warmth, wisdom and wit to ALAN. He led us with charm and care. We shall miss him.
M. Jerry Weiss

I knew Ted by working in the convention department at NCTE. He was always a pleasant and funny person on the phone and in person at the conventions he attended. The convention in Indianapolis was not the same without him there. He will be greatly missed by both NCTE and ALAN and anyone else whose lives he touched.
Carol Wagner

I felt a special bond with you on Saturday morning, November 20, at the ALAN Breakfast at the NCTE in Indianapolis, when I was the latest recipient of the Ted Hipple Service Award, for service to ALAN. I felt so honored to be included among the winners of this award in your name, especially knowing that you yourself were the first winner. I have always felt that the ALAN folks were a special group of friends, and you, with your jovial greeting and big-hearted welcome and zest for life, were certainly a big part of that for me. Ted, dear friend, I loved you. You were a special guy, there is no other like you. I will miss you and cherish your memory forever.

John Mason
Scholastic Inc.

One of the things I valued most about Ted was his honest and supportive response to almost everything I published. He'd be the first, and sometimes the only one, to drop me a note to say "congratulations" on my latest book, to say how much he appreciated some point I'd made in an article, to tell me he intended to pass on some of those ideas to his students. I know he sent the same kinds of supportive notes to others he knew, especially his former students—nice work, good job, congratulations! We should all take a lesson from his generosity.

Don Gallo

As we mourn the loss of Ted Hipple, I think of him as a temple pillar that's not there anymore.

Leaving others to hold up the temple, of course. Tinny and tacky as that metaphor is, it's what has come to me. I felt safe with Ted looking into and after kids' reading: He cared so deeply about kids' needs, their tastes, their quirks, the way they roll their eyes about adults and cause adults to do the same about them. Ted set us such a sturdy example, showing over and over again that we can't afford in any way to ignore kids' real book needs.

His teaching, his intelligent caring, his marvelous friendliness and his smile. And, of course, his neckties. As the kids' lit community celebrates these, I join in sending my sympathy to his family. We all acknowledge that his like is not likely to pass our way again.

Virginia Euwer Wolff
(a kids' author)

Ted was a tireless learner and a wise supporter of young professionals. He was a vibrant and enduring presence in ALAN and many other significant assemblies and sections of NCTE. His energy, intelligence, and kindness were a combination that was unique to my experience in my thirty years at NCTE. We will miss him dearly.

Joe Milner
Wake Forest University

Until he retired as Executive Secretary, Ted Hipple was the heart and soul of ALAN. He welcomed new people to the ALAN Workshop and extended unconditional friendship. When I encountered Ted at the ALAN Workshop every year, I knew "all's right with the world." I won't forget this fellow Midwesterner.

Sarah K. Herz
ALAN member

Ted etched a memory of positive vibes in the young adult world of literature and teaching. We will honor him best by continuing to spread his passion with young adults and literature.

Stan Steiner
Boise State University

Like his famously snazzy suspenders and neckties, Ted was *sui generis*, one-of-a-kind, incomparable,

the very model of service and civility. He will be sorely missed by all of his friends and by the larger world of literature he served with such distinction.

Michael Cart

Ted was the type of man who made friends easily. I knew who he was, of course, when he was invited to be a keynote speaker at the Texas state English conference more than 20 years ago. Lois Buckman and I ran into Ted on an elevator in the conference hotel. Lois and I like to tell folks that we “picked him up” in that elevator and squired him around the conference. It cemented a friendship that endures today. How we will both miss Ted, the ties, the bright orange bag, the ever-present smile, the bear hug, and the “be well” at the end of our time together.

Teri S. Lesesne, Professor
Sam Houston State University

What a wonderful man, his exuberance and good humor revealed by his choice of some truly astonishing ties. Ted, I’m glad I knew you.

Alden R. Carter

I loved Ted for his cheerfulness. He always made me smile even when he was talking about unfunny subjects, such as his ALAN plaque falling off the shelf in his office and hitting him on the head or the time his wife was meeting him in Phoenix for the Spring Conference. My teenaged son and daughter drove Ted to the airport to pick up Marge, and it turned out that they had to wait more than an hour for her luggage to get off the plane. Ted kept everybody happy during that long hour, plus he entertained the rest of us with the story when he got back to the dinner—which he had missed except for the dessert.

Alleen Nilsen
Arizona State University

Ted Hipple was a kind and gentle man with his head in the lofty clouds of the human imagination and his feet firmly planted on planet earth. He will be so missed, but he accomplished so much.

Rodman Philbrick

A funny orange book bag, lots of colorful ties, generous warm hugs, a contagious love of YA literature, and always the “Be Well” at the end of his messages. I cherish so many memories and images of Ted, including his incredible support during my term as the 2000 ALAN president; at its conclusion we “roasted” him as he retired from his long years as ALAN Executive Secretary. His delightful personality and sense of humor were always apparent even in the book reviews and scholarly articles he wrote. His legacy lives on in the books he loved and the multitude of lives he touched.

Connie S. Zitlow
Ohio Wesleyan University

How I will miss Ted . . . he was the first, after Terry Ley, to welcome me to the world of YA literature, and he has been a very real presence for me every step of the way. He has been mentor and coach, encourager and honest evaluator. Few people take time to provide the kind of human support that Ted has offered those of us who have followed in the “next generation” of academics behind him, but all of us in that generation know how he has helped us, shaped us, given to us, and we gladly share the Hipple bond.

Ted: With the orange bag over a shoulder, and a wild wide tie tucked into his vest, he’d enter a room and have responsibilities to carry out. But always, he made time to stop. Talk. Ask about friends. Share a book. Laugh. He had a world-class laugh.

Sissi Carroll
Florida State University

As ALAN Executive Secretary, Ted had a knack for directing without micromanaging—a rare and valuable quality. As a colleague, he knew how to make people feel good about themselves and their work, always being one of the first to send a note of congratulations or comment favorably on a job well done. He was a good, kind man, and we shall miss him terribly.

Virginia R. Monseau
Youngstown State University

Ted Hipple was a great man and an even better human being.

David Gill
UNC Wilmington

"Fearful Symmetry:"

Clive Barker Discusses the Art of Fantasy

An artfully dressed man with a youthful countenance (is he thirty-five or maybe forty-five?) seems to be hosting two people for coffee in the Omni Severin Hotel coffee shop at the 2004 NCTE Convention in Indianapolis. He opens doors for his two guests, smiles, stops to pick up the water bottle dropped by a twenty-something elementary teacher in the hotel lobby ("Miss, I think this is yours.") His comfortable, colorful clothing (decorated denim jacket and jeans, pastel cotton shirt with artwork) suggests he might be a studio artist who left fame and fortune behind (the commercial world can go to hell!) and turned high school art teacher, or he might be one of those actors who has reached a point of success where all pretension has been abandoned as unneeded. An accent that says, "London, maybe," places his origin nowhere near Indiana, and the gravel in his voice suggests iron under the art.

"Hello, I'm Clive."

Clive Barker: featured speaker at the 2004 ALAN Workshop, thanks to Michael Cart, ALAN president, and Josette Kurey of HarperCollins, among others.

By sheer volume alone, Clive Barker's accomplishments are mammoth, to say nothing of the genius and passion he has poured into each project, projects even Michelangelo might have found daunting in scope: multi-dimensional marathons—starting in Clive's powerful imagination, moving through sketches to



larger-than-life paintings, moving on to text and often arriving on the movie screen. Since founding a small theater group in London as a young man, Mr. Barker has gone on to write and produce some of the most successful and artful horror movies of modern times, as well as a seemingly inexhaustible stream of fantasy novels and stories for young and old alike which continue to translate to the cinema.

Playwright, painter, horror novelist, graphic novelist, fantasy novelist, movie director, short story

author, dog lover, husband and father, Clive Barker is a remarkable man who can quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake and William Wordsworth, as well as Peter Pan, as he carries on a conversation that plumbs the depths of the human subconscious, quantum physics and how fantasy fiction touches the human psyche.

Photos of Clive on his website, many of which were taken by his partner, David Armstrong, show, among other things, the creator of Pinhead and the other Cenubites himself laughing and covered up in a pile of large, friendly dogs, residents of the Barker household, and a loving and devoted father talking and laughing with his daughter, Nicole.

Clive's young adult projects, such as *Thief of Always* (which *Publishers Weekly* describes as a "tale that manages to be both cute and horrifying") and the four volumes in the *Abarat* series (about which,

Booklist reviewer Sally Estes says, “The multilayered adventure story not only embraces the lands of Oz, Wonderland, and Narnia but also offers a wink and a nod to Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. More than 100 full-color paintings by Barker are appropriately quirky, grotesque, and campy, effectively capturing and expanding on the nuances of the tale”), might better be categorized as fantasy appropriate for readers of all ages, and although he is obviously not a secondary English teacher trained in the Louise Rosenblatt school, he intuitively recognizes that the age and experience of the reader of a book or the viewer of a play provide for diverse experiences with the text. Professional reviews, as well as online reader comments about these books, provide comparisons to a nearly canonical list of authors, including but not limited to Poe, Tolkein, Aldous Huxley, Blake, Coleridge, as well as cinematic geniuses like Ridley Scott and Alfred Hitchcock. In the following interview, Mr. Barker provides his own remarkable insights into the operation of fantasy in the human imagination.

JB: Your work, set in a modern context, of course, quite possibly resembles the work of William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge more than it resembles the work of your contemporaries. Like Blake and Coleridge, you delve deeply into the subconscious, the spiritual and the scientific, but it’s the kind of science that we speculate on, like quantum physics. The kind of science in which all the rules we know are violated . . . and it’s kind of scary.

CB: Yes, true, right.

JB: Does it take a certain kind of mind in the reader or the viewer to understand your work or do you

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think it just hits the psyche like a ton of bricks and you can’t help it.

CB: That’s a big question. My feeling is the kind of fiction we’re both interested in, whether it’s for young people or adults, is the kind of fiction that works on lots of levels. The first piece of Blake I ever read was “Tiger, Tiger.” “Tiger, tiger burning bright/ In the forest of the night/ What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry.” I didn’t have a clue what that meant when I first heard it. But its music was immensely eloquent. I had it by heart, you know, and I’ve had it by heart ever since—I’m 52 years old now, so that’s 44 years. What has happened is that I have decoded those lines different ways as I’ve grown older. I think the great thing about “the fantastic” is that it provides you with a kind of fiction which means one thing when you’re one age and something perhaps completely

different when you grow older.

Another great example for me is “Peter Pan.” For a long time, the Royal Shakespeare Company did a Christmas production of “Peter Pan.” It was a very straight forward, very eloquent version which included portions of J. M. Barrie’s original play, portions of Barrie’s letters and portions of *The Little White Bird*, which was the first reincarnation of “Peter Pan” that appeared in novel form. I saw the show many times; sometimes I took children, and sometimes I was with adults. Something very interesting happened at the end of that show. Wendy dies, and her daughter Margaret takes over, as you’ll recall from the story. And sometimes Peter comes over and sometimes Peter doesn’t. Eventually he forgets. At the end of the show, the last lines of the play were something like, “and thus it will go

on as long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.” Tied with that image was a completely dark and inhospitable stage and high, high up can be seen the figure of Peter looping the loop, a sealed system in other words, one in which he could never break out. He would be a boy forever, looping the loop, looping the loop.

When the lights came up, a very interesting thing was happening: all the adults were crying, and all the children were smiling. The story had delivered two completely different messages. The message that adults perceived matched their experience of life, which is that things get lost and are never found again, that you can’t always have happy endings. That is quite contrary to the child’s experience. The child is saying “Hey, Peter is up there looping the loop” but the adult is saying “Peter is up there looping the loop; that’s all he can do.”

Sorry about the long explanation, but it’s such a powerful example of what I am trying to do in telling stories that work on these many levels. For example, if somebody wants to come to *Abarat* or *Weaveworld* or *Imajica* with a curiosity about the darker aspect, shall we say, the more soul tugging aspects of life, then I hope I have some . . . I’m not saying I have some answers but I have some interesting questions. Let’s say that. But if someone wants to come for the adventure of it or in the case of *Abarat* for the color and the spectacle of the paintings, that’s fine too.

I don’t believe any artist has, and here Blake and I would disagree, the right to sort of demand a painful introspection from the reader. I think there are times in our lives where, frankly, we don’t want painful introspection. It’s important to be able to enter a fantasy world and be free of the things which tug too hard at us. You lose someone you love, for example, or your dog dies (I love dogs and the passing of a dog is a big deal to me)—It could be any number of heart-wrenching things going on with the result that you really don’t want to be having some “profound” questions asked. On the other hand, if you are in the mood for those kinds of questions, if you are feeling resolute and you want to think about, “What is my life for?”, “What is at the end of this journey?”, “What happens if the universe goes on forever?”, then, hey, I’m there

as the author to ask those questions along with you. I’m not guaranteeing any answers, but I will completely fill my fiction with as much eloquence about those questions as I possible can. The questions that we ask at fifteen and fifty-two are very different.

JB: Adults and young people can have very different perceptions of the same work of fantasy, as you have explained. So then, is there a difference in the ease with which a young person can access your work and the ease with which an adult can do it? Does the adult have to turn loose of too many pretenses and agreed-on views of reality and so on?

CB: Well, there’s a subset answer to that. The first is that I write two kinds of fiction. I write adult fiction, and the adult fiction has three things that are not in the fiction for children. It has cuss words, it has sexuality or manifested sexuality of some kind; there will be sex scenes or erotic scenes and probably the violence will be described more brutally.

Those are the only differences. I don’t put any part of my brain on hold when I am writing a piece of fiction for young readers. Why would I? I have a daughter. She is as sharp and as interested in the world as I am. There are some things I don’t want to expose her to. There are some things that come on the television and I say, “Nick [Nicole], it’s time to go,” or I’ll turn the television off. When it comes to these questions, these existential questions, kids ask them very early on, I think. I think children are very troubled by these issues of, “Why am I here?”

One of the reasons they are troubled is because it’s very clear that adults don’t have any answers to these questions. So, for me, I think, the only thing that’s different between the adult’s fiction and the children’s fiction or young people’s fiction, is the way that these questions are framed. There are some differences. I will tend to frame those questions more obliquely in the adult fiction than in the young people’s fiction because I think adults are very much more uncomfortable with asking those questions than children are and so Candy [Candy Quackenbush in *Abarat*] has an existential issue right in the middle of her life, “How is it possible that I am what I am? How do I

know magic? How do I know this place? What is my familiarity? Where does this familiarity come from with this world, this strange world?"

If I carried an adult character over that divide between the real world and some fantastic world, I wouldn't frame those questions [What is my life for? What is at the end of this journey?] so directly. I'd have to be more oblique because adults are a lot more queasy about those questions, so I think in some ways children are more willing to open up to these big issues. Phillip Pullman's success is a great example. Whether you agree or disagree with the strongly anti-Christian message (I have problems with that as a Christian but no problems with that as an artist), kids love it. I've talked to lots of kids about Pullman. They love to be engaged in the God question whereas, if you engage adults in the God question, for example, if you go out to dinner with ten people and start talking about God, four or five of them are going to act really uncomfortable and the other five are going to fight like dogs.

JB: Is your imagination visual or verbal or both or something else?

CB: Both. I think I've always drawn little pictures beside it . . . I handwrite. I don't have a typewriter. Often I've drawn little pictures of the way I think creatures or other elements of a story should look like, often just for consistency. If you're writing *Weaveworld*, an 800-page book, you want to be sure that you've got a really fixed, clear idea in the same way a piece of geography might be. So, I will use a sketch for that purpose. In *Abarat*, however, I reversed the system. I began by painting pictures. I painted 250 paintings before I showed them to Harper Collins, and some of these are very large. One of them is twenty-seven feet long.

Because there had been some anxiety, and I think, legitimate anxiety, on Harper's part, that Clive Barker, the inventor of *Hellraiser* and *Candyman* would easily turn his hand to children's fiction. The way that I actually dealt with that with *Thief of Always* was to give it to Harper Collins for a dollar so that they didn't have any concerns about me being paid a massive amount upfront. I said, "I don't know if this is going to work any more than you do, but I'd really like to see this

published. Let me give you this for a small amount of money." I think we have a million sold now here in the U.S.

Everybody felt great about that, but then when I came back and said, "Ok, now I want to do a lot of books with lots of paintings, lots of color paintings," which is a big project. There were some doubts, and so I just got on with it, and for four years I painted pictures without saying anything to Harper. Cathy Hemming came out to L.A. and, most importantly, Joanna Cotler came out to L.A., and what she saw at that point was about 250 oil paintings. She said, "Oh, I get this. I see what you're doing here. I understand." So, when I wrote, in that particular case, I was writing a text, which illustrated the paintings rather than the reverse where you would turn in a text, and someone would paint pictures to match the text.

The interesting thing about illustration or picture making is this: roughly eighty percent of the brainpower we use on our senses is given over to the eyes. So, in order to take in Jim and the Snapple machine and the colors and the light and the distances takes a huge amount of brainpower, never mind something as massive as the Grand Canyon, you know? So, what I am liberated to do when I write a text that goes with, as in the case with *Abarat* with 125 oil paintings, I'm liberated to tell a whole bunch of other things in 120,000 words in that book. I don't need to bother with the pictures. I don't need to do that thing that young audiences hate most of all: describe. I don't have to have big chunks of

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description, the painting does all of that for me. Now I am free to move the narrative along which, again, young readers like. I think that young readers are very, very smart about pictures now. They go to movies, and they can decode visual images. They seem to have a new means of comprehension. Nicole, our daughter, can go to a computer and pop through it and get everything she wants out of the computer in two minutes. I sit there a little dumbfounded by the whole thing. I have a much simpler idea of technology than she does. Something happened between our generation and the generation of our children. I see it in lots of places. I see it wherever complicated visuals are concerned. They are picture smart, but I don't think they are necessarily what I call fact smart. In fact, Nick says, "Why would I need to learn that when I can find it on the computer?"

In terms of concrete knowledge about the world, which I would call historical knowledge, for instance, I find a deficit among kids today. Ask them who the first president of the United States was, and they will shake their heads. They will not have a clue. Ask them when the Civil War was and even, perhaps, what it was about and they simply won't know. Ask them how to get to the ninth level of a new video game and the two of us, Jim, will be sitting there slack jawed while they tell us how to do it.

JB: What can a graphic novel do that a novel that is all text not do?

CB: I think it's there in that a picture is a thousand words. I think it's there in the idea that a picture provides you with all this information, and it does draw you in. I've referred to my readers as co-creators, and I think that's fair and true. We went to see *Polar Express* last night. The movie would be the same whether we were sitting in a cinema or not, but *Abarat* or a Pullman or any novel even when it has a lot of pictures in it draws out of you all kinds of very intimate, very personal interpretations. You read *Moby Dick* and I read *Moby Dick*, but we both read different books. We all go see *Polar Express*, we all saw the same movie. I suppose that's the essence of the difference.

I really do believe that the written word, even

when it is attached to paintings as it is with me, allows for a massive breadth of interpretation and an intimate interpretation, by which I mean something very, very near to who you are. It's about who you are and the rediscovery of young people of the world. I've seen it in the time that I've been doing book signings over the last six or seven years for the *Thief of Always* and the *Abarat* books. We have J.K. Rowling to thank in no small measure for this. She made a whole generation obsess on something that they never obsessed on before. God bless her, she should be sainted. That has made this generation word friendly again. And articulate again. The young people come to signings who knew everything about the books, often more than I do. They come and they have little contests with each other about how much information . . . Now, nobody has required them to do this. The book is not on anybody's syllabus. This is about them being engaged again with the word and with the pictures again. And putting down the controller for the Super Mario Brothers (that's probably ten years too old but, whatever the current thing is, Doom or whatever), and picking up a book and realizing that the book belongs to them in an intimate way in a way that the game never will.

The game is a cold thing which will never find its way into their souls the way that Ray Bradbury found his way into mine when I was a kid. When I first met Ray Bradbury, I said, "You are one of the reasons I'm writing, and you really got me reading, and I'd like to think that there's a new generation of readers coming along because of Rowling and because of people like Pullman and Neil Gaiman and, hopefully, myself. The kids come along and say, "You did *Hellraiser*, so I read your book. I can't see *Hellraiser*, my mother and father won't let me, but I'll read your book." They really love it when they feel something sort of dark and scary going on in the book. For me these last three or four years have been going out on the road for the book not only here but in Europe has been really, really encouraging. Just at the time when I was beginning to think Ridley Scott might have been right when he predicted reading will be the high opera of the twenty-first century, which I take to mean that it would be an elitist activity, which is

turning out to be simply not true. People are reading books and buying books in unprecedented numbers. I think bookstores are more friendly to be in than they have ever been. Even being on the Internet you have to read. It's not a succession of pretty pictures. I'm really encouraged. Three things that I don't put into fiction for young people, and frankly I don't miss any of them, are the cuss words, the sex and violence. I think this is a brand new day and it is looking very exciting.

JB: Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Kahn," and Blake in "Auguries of Innocence," as well as many of his paintings, seemed to visit some uncharted aspect of the human mind. Do you go there as you work, and what can you tell us about it?

CB: Yes, I'm definitely going there. This will amuse you, I think. I had a breakfast with Margaret Thatcher a long time ago. It was rather fun because my politics are far from Margaret's. She had quoted Blake a great deal, and we would quote Blake back and forth, and I thought here is at least some common ground. She was talking about what a wonderful British education Blake had had. And I said, "Sorry to disagree with you, but he had practically no education, he was entirely self-taught. She then went on to say that he was a great traveler, and I said, "No, he never left a two-mile radius of his home," which is true. In all his life he never left a two-mile radius of the place in which he was born.

The point that's relevant here is that we all have these internal spaces, and we don't have to travel to find these spaces. We dream them. I think that the great gift of Freud and Jung, particularly Jung, is giving us those tools to comprehend what those spaces are. The shaman dreaming with his eyes open is the ideal shape of the artist. That's what Coleridge is doing. Coleridge is, of course, taking drugs in significant amounts. Blake is not. And I'm not. On a Monday morning I'm going to my desk and I'm looking at the page and it's interesting. I'm only beginning to discover how much I just rely on a process, which has no intellectual content whatsoever. That is, I don't think this through. I don't plan this. I sort of

unplug myself from what's around me, and I think that's probably what most imaginative artists do. I don't work from research and go research *Abarat*, you know? You just have to trust from the Jungian part of yourself, the dreaming part of yourself and say, "The thing that I dream will be of interest to other people." That's a very arrogant thing to think, and that's why when you turn your book in, you're always thinking, "I just spent this year dreaming all these wacky things, and I put them into this book. What right do I have to assume that anybody will be interested?" I'm not being falsely humble here; I remain astonished that this act of creation which is so pleasurable for me, so indulgently pleasurable for me, should result in something that people will love. I feel as though I can completely understand why I would do it, but the idea that these wild things that I've conjured, and this brings our conversation full circle, it goes back to your first question that the reason, I believe, is that when we are accessing this material, we are accessing common material. I suppose what I am trying to do is find these common images, pour them into the book in the purest way I can. Not toy with them, not over intellectualize them, never go back and say, "Well, I don't really know what that means." This is why I think we are coming full circle. I will never take something out because I don't know what it means.

I would never censor myself on the basis of meaning. Going back to Coleridge and "Kubla Khan", ". . . the sacred river, caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea." Damn, if that isn't right. I mean it doesn't get any better than that, right? Haven't got a clue what it means at the level I understand. I mean, I know what it means at a literal level. It means that he decreed a pleasure dome and that it was built where a river ran, but why does it move me the way it does. I don't have any answers for that. I do know that if he had revised it until it was something that he could intellectually defend, he probably would have messed up completely. That's why when I write something that I can't necessarily completely explain, I won't muck with it even though when you ask me what it means, I would have to shrug and say, "Jim, I don't know."

The Art of the Graphic Novel

Adapted from an address delivered at the 2004 ALAN Workshop. Mr. Shanower accompanied his talk with a beautiful slide show and refers to the slides in this address.

"Graphic novel" is an awkward term. The "graphic" part is okay, graphic novels always have graphics. It's the "novel" part that's a problem, because graphic novels aren't always novels told with drawings. They can be works of non-fiction or collections of short stories or, really, anything you can think of that consists of drawings that convey narrative between two substantial covers.

The term "graphic novel" isn't much better or more accurate a description than the term "comic book." But "comic book" has pejorative connotations, and many people seem either embarrassed or dismissive when confronted by it. Alternatives to the term graphic novel have been suggested—"drawn book," "sequential art," "graphic album." All these terms are just labels to describe different physical manifestations of one artform. But the term graphic novel is one that has caught on



and, for better or for worse, it seems we're stuck with it.

I'm here to speak to you about the art of the graphic novel. When you hear the phrase, the *art of the graphic novel*, you likely think of the drawings, rather than the story. But I bet most of you will agree that writing is an art just as drawing is. I'm going to talk about both.

Let's forget about graphic novels for a moment and think about what I call cartooning. Or you can call it "comic art" or "sequential art." Cartooning is the art of telling a story in pictures, often using written words as an integral part of the drawing. The history of cartooning starts a bit nebulously. Some comic art historians would include the paintings in ancient Egyptian tombs—which combined sequential drawings and hieroglyphic lettering—as comic art. Surely the Bayeux Tapestry—which shows the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066—is a form of comic art. There are plenty of similar

examples. But, in general, historians agree that the modern form of comic art began in 1895 in the pages of the newspaper. There are precursors, but R. F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* in the *New York World* is generally accepted as the first comic strip. Newspaper comic strips became quite popular. Soon publishers began experimenting with formats, collecting newspaper strips, as well as original material, in stand-alone volumes. After much experimentation with formats, the modern comic book appeared in the mid-1930s and remained little changed for decades. In 1978 the first graphic novel that was specifically called a graphic novel—there were many precursors—appeared, *A Contract with God* by Will Eisner. In the early 1980s U.S. comic book publishers began to experiment with higher quality production values in paper stock, in reproduction, and in format. Graphic novels began to appear on every side—both original material and collections of material that had first appeared in serialized comic books. Today the tide of graphic novels shows no signs of retreating.

Now, don't think that the art of cartooning is solely an American phenomenon. The modern comic strip and comic book are certainly forms native to America, but comics are published around the world. In France they're known as *bande dessinée*, in Spain as *historieta* or *tebeos*, in Italy as *fumetti*, and in Japan as *manga*.

About fifteen or so years ago, *manga* began invading the USA and has become so popular that you've probably heard of it. But there's still confusion about what *manga* is, so I'd like to offer a short explanation. The word "manga" is simply the Japanese word for comics. Any comic art produced in Japan is *manga*. *Manga's* popularity in the USA—primarily among girls, a readership that American comics have for decades failed to reach—has prompted many U.S. publishers to produce comics drawn with the artistic conventions of *manga*. This U.S. material is called American *Manga* or *Amerimanga*.

But back to the art of graphic novels. For approximately the past twenty-five years, the level of artistry in US comics and graphic novels has risen. Where before the appearance of works worth preserving was arguably sporadic, today the number of works which are worth experiencing for their high level of artistry is growing rapidly and seems in no danger of stopping.

So if we have works worth preserving we must

find a way to preserve them, and that's one reason the form called the graphic novel developed. They're not colorful but disposable supplements to the newspaper, not flimsy, ephemeral pamphlets, but substantial books meant to be placed on a bookshelf and preserved—preserved not as collectibles, preserved not as bridges to reading so-called "real" books, but preserved for their own worth—as tangible expressions of creators who have dug down into their hearts and souls and carefully arranged what they found there for the rest of the world to experience.

Now it's time to pull back the curtain on the art of the graphic novel and see how it's done.

There are probably as many methods of cartooning as there are cartoonists, but the only method I'm intimately

familiar with is my own, so I'm mostly going to be using my current project, *Age of Bronze*, as an example. But in general my methods are pretty standard. So I think I'll be giving you a reasonable glimpse into the way graphic novels are created. *Age of Bronze* is my retelling of the story of the Trojan War in seven volumes. Two volumes have been published so far, *A Thousand Ships* and *Sacrifice*. I'm currently working on the third volume, *Betrayal*.

When I first thought of retelling the Trojan War legend in comic art, I assumed it was far too

immense a project to seriously consider. I tried to shut it up in a back room of my mind, but I soon realized that the idea was not so much something I had hold of as much as it was something that had hold of me. So I stopped resisting and began work.

Easier said than done. *Age of Bronze* is not simply a graphic novel adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*. My goal is to retell the entire Trojan War story, which is at least

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2,800 years old and likely much older, so it's had a lot of time to generate material. I've gathered many of the different versions of the Trojan War—poems, plays, stories, paintings, opera—and I'm combining them all into one long story, while reconciling all the contradictions. And I'm not leaving anything out. So over the years I've made a lot of trips to libraries, and whenever I go into a bookstore, I always check the mythology and archaeology sections. No matter how familiar you may be with the Greek myth of the Trojan War or any of its literary or artistic descendants, I think you'll find some surprises in *Age of Bronze*.

Of course, retelling the story of the Trojan War is the most important aspect, but HOW it's retold is pretty important too. I decided to suppress the supernatural elements. I want to show what's happening on a human level—that if the Trojan War ever took place, what you see in *Age of Bronze* is what it might have looked like. In order to do that, I've set the story in the Aegean Late Bronze Age, the thirteenth century BCE, which is when the Trojan War would have occurred—if it really did occur—so I've had to do archaeological research as well as literary research.

So after being seized by the idea, deciding my approach, and gathering my research (which is actually ongoing), I sat down to work. One of the first things I did was to write an outline of the plot. Of course, the main outlines of the story were already there, but there were many details to shoehorn in. I now have three outlines of varying detail for different purposes. One is a list of the basic events of the story in order, one is a more detailed breakdown of scenes with notes on character motivation and questions I have still to find answers for, and the last is a very general outline dividing the story up into seven volumes. I conceived *Age of Bronze* as one complete story, though it's being published as seven volumes. My goal is to manage the material so that reading flows seamlessly. But because of the realities of the marketplace, the material is first serialized in comic book form. Each issue of the *Age of Bronze* comic book has twenty pages of story, so I'm finishing the project in twenty-page chunks.

For each issue I take enough of the story to provide a satisfying and well-paced chunk for the reader. I make notes from my story sources and divide the material into scenes. Then I write the script for twenty pages. Usually there are between five and eight

panels per page. Each panel gets a description as well as dialog, if any. Dialog consists of the words that go in the balloons, plus captions, and sound effects. Descriptions usually indicate the characters present in the scene and their actions. If it's the first panel of a scene, I describe the background. Other pertinent details might include time of day and weather, facial expressions and moods of the characters, and important props. I often indicate the size of the panel and the angle the reader views the scene, whether it's a close-up or long shot, but sometimes I leave these decisions 'till I'm roughing out the page design, since they're subject to change.

Actually, everything is subject to change. My first draft of a script usually bears only passing resemblance to the final draft, and even then I often change things while I'm drawing the pages. Sometimes I'm changing dialog just before I send the pages to the publisher.

After I finish the script, I make three lists: characters, scenes, and props. And I design any of these things that I haven't already designed. For characters, I keep track of their ages, since I'm covering about fourteen years during the story, and their relative heights so that they stay in proportion to one another and the scenery. For each new scene and prop, I need to pull out some of my research and use it to design the new elements.

Then I'm ready to sketch a rough layout for each page. This gives me a chance to work out panel sizes, to stage each scene as effectively as possible, to make sure each page is visually interesting, and to keep the proper flow over each twenty-page section of story. I follow whatever directions I've indicated in the script, but what I draw is little more than stick figures.

When the rough layouts are finished, my framework is firmly in place, but not so rigid that I can't make changes, so it's time to start the final artwork. I cut sheets of Bristol board to size, mark the image area of each page, and draw everything in pencil, following the script and rough layouts.

Next I draw the panel borders in ink and add all the lettering and balloons in ink as well.

Then it's time to finish all the artwork in ink, scan the artwork into the computer, and send it all to the publisher.

Of course, I have to design and draw the covers for each issue, first the black and white artwork, then

I color the final cover on the computer.

Let me say a bit more about color. The interior pages of *Age of Bronze* are in black and white, but many comic books and graphic novels are in color. There are two main ways of coloring comics today. The first is to color the scanned black and white artwork by computer, and the other is to prepare the artwork itself in color before scanning that to print from. For my earlier graphic novel series, based on the Oz books by L. Frank Baum, I painted each page with watercolor.

Of course, with any graphic novel there's more to be done, designing covers and/or dust jackets, designing title pages and other fore-matter. And in *Age of Bronze*, I include maps, pronunciation guides, genealogical charts, bibliography, and so on.

I'd like to share with you how I use some of my research.

This [slide of Warrior Vase] is one of the better-known relics from Late Bronze Age Greece, known as the Warrior Vase. It gives the best artistic representation of armor, helmets, and shields of the time—how they were worn, how they were carried. Some of the details are open to interpretation, but when one has to draw characters wearing this kind of armor, one has to make choices. Here's [slide] Odysseus and Eurybates outfitted in gear similar to what we just saw on the Warrior Vase.

Archaeologists have found many large Mycenaean building foundations which they've labeled palaces. The palace at Pylos on the west coast of Greece, where in legend Nestor was king, is one of the best-preserved. This artistic reconstruction of the throne room by Piet deJong [slide] was done for the archaeological expedition in the 1950s. Notice the painted floor, the frescoes on the walls, and the designs on the ceiling. In *Age of Bronze*, I used a lot of this information in my own reconstruction of Nestor's throne room. Notice the floor, the walls, and the ceiling.

The palace of Mycenae where Agamemnon ruled is still there, too, though now it's just a ruin. But enough was recovered for me to make a plausible reconstruction. It's an important setting in the story, so I built a model to help me draw it. The model is actually a couple of pieces. And this is what it looks like in the comic book [slide].

Travel by water was the major means of getting around a mountainous country like Greece, and

everyone's heard of the face that launched a thousand ships. So I've got plenty of ships to draw. Archaeologists have found a few Bronze Age ships on the bottom of the sea, but they're in pretty rough shape. Luckily we have pictures painted on pots. Here's my version of a ship [slide]. This one isn't a warship or merchant vessel—it's the ship of Achilles's mother, Thetis.

Speaking of Thetis, this is where I got her face from. This sculpture [slide] from the Mycenaean era is probably meant to represent a goddess. She seemed perfect to me as the basis for the priestess Thetis. No one knows if the red dots on the cheeks and chin represent make-up, tattoos, or simply a rosy complexion. I chose to make them tattoos.

A fresco is a painting on a plastered wall. Many brightly painted scenes still survive, but usually as a lot of little fragments at the bases of walls. This charming fresco of a Mycenaean woman [slide] seemed the perfect inspiration for Klytemnestra, wife of the High King of Mycenae.

For costumes and setting I stick to the Bronze Age, but for character design I'm not limited by time period. Artists have made representations of the Trojan War legend for thousands of years. This wall painting [slide] dates to the first century CE, from Herculaneum in Italy. It shows young Achilles on the right and his guardian the centaur Cheiron. The face of Cheiron so intrigued me that I used it for my own version of Cheiron. My version has wilder hair and beard, but the face is the same. I don't do this sort of thing for all the characters—many of their appearances I just make up myself—but once in a while a piece of artwork strikes me, and I incorporate it into my work.

Here's another example. This picture [slide] of Achilles binding Patroklos's wound was painted on a Greek cup in the fourth century BCE. This scene occurs after the first battle, and Achilles and Patroklos pledge always to stand by each other during the war. It's an intimate scene, and when I drew this part of the story, I used this painting as a model for this panel. Please note the helmet that Achilles is wearing. It's called a boar's tusk helmet.

For centuries the only record humanity had of a boar's tusk helmet was a description in Homer's *Iliad*. Through the years scholars assumed that Homer had just made up some fantasy helmet that never existed. But then archaeologists began to find artistic represen-

tations of boar's tusk helmets and even the remains of the helmets themselves. They were real after all.

This is the gold death mask [slide] found by the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann in one of the royal shaft graves at Mycenae. It's one of the most famous objects of the Mycenaean civilization and is popularly called the Mask of Agamemnon, though it probably dates from centuries before the time Agamemnon would have lived if he ever really existed. I didn't care. There was no way I was going to use anything but this as the face of my Agamemnon.

So that's how I put together *Age of Bronze*, from concept to the printer.

Now, I've made a list of some graphic novels that I think are worth your attention. I'm going to skip the works of Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Frank Miller, Chris Ware, Art Spiegelman, and others whose works are absolutely worthy of attention, but which can easily be found on lists of good graphic novels. I'd like to bring to your attention graphic novels that I think are worthy and that are appropriate for young adults, but which you might otherwise overlook.

Finder

by Carla Speed McNeil, published by Light Speed Press
Multi-faceted science fiction featuring a fully imagined society as a backdrop to complicated personal relationships.

Berlin

by Jason Lutes, published by Drawn and Quarterly
Historical fiction set in Germany between the World Wars.

Castle Waiting

by Linda Medley, published by Cartoon Books
Completely engaging characterizations of a group of disparate characters all living and interacting in one castle.

Blueberry

written by Charlier, art by Moebius
A French masterpiece about the American Old West. Unfortunately, the English translation published by Marvel Comics is out of print. You can find volumes of Blueberry on the secondary market from vintage comics dealers or through Internet sources like ebay.

Stuck Rubber Baby

by Howard Cruse, published by DC/Paradox Press
During the Civil Rights movement in the American South, a young man comes to terms with being gay.

Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind

by Hayao Miyazaki, published by Viz
In the future one girl is destined to save the world. This is an example of Manga.

Table for One

by Bosch Fawstin, published by Mainspring Comics
One evening, behind the scenes at an upscale restaurant, tensions go out of control.

Courageous Princess

by Rod Espinosa, published by Antarctic Press
Beautifully drawn fantasy adventures, an example of Amerimanga.

Gotham Central

written by Greg Rucka and Ed Brubaker, art by Michael Lark, published by DC Comics
This is a Batman related series, but Batman rarely appears. Instead, the story focuses on the day-to-day challenges of the policemen and -women of Gotham City.

ERIC SHANOWER lived in a number of places as he was growing up, including Key West, Florida; the islands of Hawaii, Monterey, California; Laurel, Maryland; Norfolk, Virginia; Port Angeles, Washington; and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; before graduating from Novato High School in Novato, California. As a youngster he began his own efforts at continuing the Oz series as originated by Frank Baum with his own illustrated manuscripts. Eric began with First Comics immediately following his graduation from the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art. Eric's first volume (but not his last) in a series of graphic novels continuing the Oz saga was published by First comics in 1986. His current project, Age of Bronze, won the Will Eisner Comics Industry Award for Best Writer/Artist in both 2001 and 2003. The series has been nominated for several other awards, including an Ignatz (Small Press Expo) and a National Cartoonists Society Division Award. Eric founded Hungry Tiger Press with his partner David Maxine, which has been nominated for two Eisner Awards. Eric is also a swimmer, ballet dancer and actor and continues to perform in major roles in such productions as The Nutcracker, A Man for All Seasons, Saint Joan and The Hobbit.

The Truth about Graphic Novels:

A Format, Not a Genre

In the past several years, the buzz about graphic novels has grown deafening. These books, which look like comics on steroids, seem to have near miraculous properties. They attract reluctant readers and bookworms. They lure teen boys, while retaining the qualities beloved by teen girls. They work for ESL students (Krashen 54), teach visual literacy (Gorman 9-10) and sequencing, and, above all else, they are wildly popular with an adolescent audience. If you listen to the praise heaped on the format by its followers, you may think that graphic novels will do everything, including walk your dog and make your teeth whiter.

Even as research piles up on the benefits of these materials, many educators and librarians are reluctant to join in on the graphic novel love fest. Perhaps it is the association with spandex clad heroes saving the world from improbable destruction by impossibly attired villains. Maybe it is the memory of cartoons featuring pretty, big-eyed children and cuddly, but deadly, creatures. Or possibly it is simply the thought, instilled by dozens of teachers and librarians who have come before, that these materials, looking like, feeling like, and acting like a comic book, simply are not “real” books. They have too many pictures, too few words, and lack too much quality to ever be seriously consid-

ered as literature, or even books.

The shortest definition of graphic novels describes them as “book-length comic books.” A definition used by librarians refers to them as book-length narratives told using a combination of words and sequential art, often presented in comic book style. The constant in both definitions is “comic book.” Because the image of comic books seems to fuel resistance to graphic novels by many educators and librarians, correlating the benefits of graphic novels to learning requires a change in the way they are viewed. Instead of thinking of them as a genre, it is necessary to think of them as a format.

To illustrate this, let’s look at another format,

which is already in most public and school libraries: the audiobook. An audiobook can be of any genre, for any audience. The content of audiobooks is variable within the same format. A stroll through the audio section of any large bookstore will reveal titles by authors as varied as Elmore Leonard and Yann Martel, on topics ranging from national security to travel guides, in every genre, for every age group. Graphic novels, as a format, demonstrate a similar diversity among genres and topics. It is important, when thinking about and discussing graphic novels, to not confuse the medium and the message. As an educator, you may

They lure teen boys, while retaining the qualities beloved by teen girls. They work for ESL students (Krashen 54), teach visual literacy (Gorman 9-10) and sequencing, and, above all else, they are wildly popular with an adolescent audience.

feel that *X-Men* is not valuable material, but it is important to remember that not all graphic novels are about superheroes. Excluding graphic novels because you dislike “spandex comics” is the equivalent of excluding all audiobooks because you dislike those by Stephen King.

So, “graphic novels” is an imprecise term used to describe a format that uses a combination of words and sequential art to convey a narrative.

Illustrated by a small army of artists, colorists and letterers, and written entirely by Neil Gaiman, the twelve-volume *Sandman* series is rightfully considered a germinal work in comics’ history.

Graphic novels can be of any genre on any topic. What follows is a selection of recommended graphic novels, which the authors hope will encourage you to pick up one on your own, or to include these titles in book displays, reading lists, booktalks, class discussions, or to pair with more traditional materials. Each genre has recommendations for your students in grades 8-12, as well as

books that are recommended for adults and mature teens. These mature titles will be asterisked in our reference list.

Comedy

In Makoto Kobayashi’s *Club 9* series, Harou is a lovable, klutzy country bumpkin who has left everything and everybody she knows to attend college in Tokyo. She works at a bar called Club 9 as a hostess to pay for apartment expenses. Japanese hostesses sit with the customers and provide conversation while continually filling the glasses. Her hostess job leads to some very amusing situations. The black and white art is almost typical manga (Japanese) style, but the eyes are even bigger, giving the art the look of Betty Boop. This series, which will total five volumes when completed, has a great storyline with many cultural aspects to study and many more scenes at which to laugh out loud.

In another world, inhabited by creatures such as vampires, werewolves, and honest-to-god witches, it’s only to be expected that these beasties would occa-

sionally find themselves in need of legal representation. Enter Wolff and Byrd, Councilors of the Macabre, in the *Supernatural Law* series by Bratton Lash. Running the only legal practice that caters to the supernatural, Alanna Wolff and Jeff Byrd find themselves in a variety of genuinely strange and genuinely funny situations with an assortment of paranormally derived problems. To wit: The adopted “son of a witch” who finds himself sued for “hexual” harassment; the demon who finds himself possessed by a human; the hunchback preschool teacher accused of child abuse. This clever series, written and drawn by Lash, is one of the underappreciated gems of the comics’ world. For more supernatural comedy, see *Boneyard, Volume 1* by Richard Moore.

Another representative series is *Kodocha Sana’s Stage, Volumes 1-10* by Miho Obana. In it, Sana, a child actress, is a problem solver—and right now the problem that needs to be solved is Hayama, the devil child who is terrorizing her classroom. The story revolves around Sana’s life and her relationship with Hayama. Once the initial conflict of Hayama terrorizing the classroom is over, they find themselves depending upon one another. Their relationship causes most of the comedy as well as the drama in the story, since Sana is completely clueless about Hayama’s feelings. The black and white art greatly contrasts with the open and expressive looks of Sana and the inexpressive looks of Hayama. Due to the crazy antics of Sana and the inexpressiveness of Hayama, boys and girls alike will love it.

Fantasy

Illustrated by a small army of artists, colorists and letterers, and written entirely by Neil Gaiman, the twelve-volume *Sandman* series is rightfully considered a germinal work in comics’ history. *Sandman* is the story of the Endless—Dream, Death, Destiny, Desire, Despair, Delirium and Destruction—immortal beings that are neither gods nor men, but forces that shape the destinies of both. When the story opens, we meet Morpheus, King of Dreams, as corrupt men seeking relief from death imprison him. Trapped in crystal for a mortal lifetime, Dream eventually makes his escape, extracts revenge on those who imprisoned him, and reunites with his family. As the story progresses, we watch Dream squabble with his siblings, fall in and

out of love, make and lose friends, and oversee his realm of the Dreaming, and his subjects. Incorporating the myths and literature of many cultures, and inhabiting a precarious space between fantasy, horror and truth, *Sandman* stands as an epic accomplishment of storytelling and an unmatched feat in sequential art. Of special note are the stories, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” which is the only comic ever to win a World Fantasy Award, collected in *Volume 4: Dream Country*, and “Norton I, the Emperor of America,” collected in *Volume 8: The Dream Hunters*. The eleventh volume in the series, which stands as a companion piece to the rest of the tale, *Sandman: The Dream Hunters*, is a beautifully illustrated re-telling of a Japanese folktale beloved by *Sandman* and manga fans alike.

A thousand years have passed since the destruction of civilization in Hayao Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind: Perfect Collection 1-4*. Now mankind struggles to survive in a wasteland surrounded by poisonous fungi and giant insects called Ohmu. Nausicaä is the princess of the Valley of the Wind, a land of farmers. When returning to the valley from a survey in the forest, Nausicaä discovers a refugee plane from one of her country’s allies. With her dying breath, the princess from that country begs Nausicaä to give a special stone to her brother and to keep it out of the emperor’s hands at all costs. Nausicaä now faces her first trial as the next ruler of The Valley of the Wind. In a serious fashion, this series deals with environmental issues and war and is an excellent choice for discussion groups.

In the *Bone* series by Jeff Smith, Fone Bone and his cousins, Phoney and Smiley Bone, get run out of town by a mob, ending up in a strange valley. The cousins are soon separated, and the story follows Fone Bone as he survives the winter and meets some of the inhabitants of the valley, including Thorn and her grandmother. Reunited, the Bones just want to find their way home, but their arrival sets off a chain of events that may end in the destruction of the entire valley. Thorn and her grandmother are more than they appear, and by joining them, the Bone cousins find themselves in constant danger. Throughout the ten-volume series the cousins encounter rat creatures, monsters, dragons, scheming politicians, and an ancient power trying to take over the world, all while Fone tries to keep his cousins out of trouble. Phoney

and Smiley, however, have plans of their own—most of them involving getting rich quickly before making a safe escape. This is an engrossing series that any age can enjoy.

Now, imagine if all of the characters from your favorite nursery rhymes and fairy tales were forced to live together in an apartment building in New York City. This is the premise behind the gruesomely funny and highly addictive *Fables* by Bill Willingham. In the first trade paperback of the series, *Legends in Exile*, the “Fables” are consumed with the question of who killed party-girl Rose Red. The suspects include her boyfriend Jack of the Tales, her fiancé Bluebeard, and her sister’s ex-husband Prince Charming. It’s up to the Fabletown house detective, Bigby Wolf, to find the murderer. The second volume of the series, *Animal Farm*, takes us to the Farm, a facility in upstate New York that is home to all Fables who are unable, or unwilling, to take human form. Sedition is brewing at the Farm, as Vice-Mayor Snow White learns when the head of one of the Three Little Pigs is found on a stake. This series, which lampoons fairy tale conventions even as it makes use of them, gets grisly, but you would be hard pressed to find a comic that is better written and more fun than this. For gentler fractured fairy tale graphic novels, see Linda Medley’s *Castle Waiting: The Lucky Road* and *The Curse of Brambly Hedge*.

Historical Fiction

Jack the Ripper and the Whitechapel Murders have been examined and reenacted in art both high and low. In a monumental graphic novel, *From Hell: Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Parts*, Alan Moore, the “mad prophet” of comics, brings his unique perspective to the subject. While readers may not agree with Moore’s theory of a Royal/Masonic conspiracy, the rich characterizations, intricate plotting and meticulous research will draw you into the story. This dark and moody tale is perfectly illustrated by Eddie Campbell’s highly atmospheric black and white artwork, which manages to evoke both the squalor and splendor of Victorian London. For another period piece in Victorian England, try *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Lorenzo Mattotti and Jerry Kramsky.

From a different historical perspective, Gen and his family struggle to survive in the aftermath of the

atomic bombing of Hiroshima in Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*. They face starvation, illness, and the lingering effects of radiation—effects, which at the time, no one truly understood. Author and artist Nakazawa himself survived Hiroshima, and his firsthand experiences are woven throughout the story. Despite the horrors experienced by the survivors, Nakazawa's tale remains hopeful and optimistic; focusing on the way the survivors do everything they can to help each other in the midst of the devastation. The images are sometimes graphic and horrific, especially the effect of radiation poisoning and the images of piled bodies, and they may be too much for sensitive readers. This work is an excellent choice, however, to introduce a Japanese viewpoint of Hiroshima to students, and to make it clear just how much devastation resulted from the bombing.

In *Buddha*, a projected eight-volume series, Osamu Tezuka creates fictionalized characters and stories and intertwines them with the biography of Siddhartha, the prince who becomes Buddha. One of Tezuka's more mature masterpieces, the series brings the world of long ago India to life with action and humor. In the first volumes, key moments of Siddhartha's birth and childhood are highlighted and intermingled with the stories of Chapra and Tatta's adventures. Tezuka's humor and style permeate the pages. There is non-titillating imagery of slaves and pariahs without clothing, but it is realistic to the times portrayed. Although this series was published for adults, teens interested in Buddhism will want to pick it up.

During the turbulent times of Bakumatsu, the Japanese civil war that ended in 1868, both sides of the conflict used assassins against their enemies. The *Rurouni Kenshin* series by Nobuhiro Watsuki begins ten years after the end of the war with Kenshin, a heavily fictionalized version of one of the more notorious assassins trying to escape his past. He meets Kaoru, a woman trying to run a martial arts school alone; Yahiko, a war orphan; and a street brawler named Sanosuke. All of them try to adjust to the rapid change in Japanese society that came with the entrance of the West. Together they battle against the groups attempting to return Japan to the way it was. While the story is fictional, many of the historical facts presented in the tale are accurate, and many historical figures are reoccurring characters. For more samurai graphic novels, see the *Usagi Yojimbo* series by Stan

Sakai and the mature series, *Vagabond*, by Takehiko Inoue.

Horror

Out There: The Evil Within by Brian Augustyn follows four teens who find out that the adults of El Dorado are helping aliens take over the world in exchange for their own piece of it. These teens are not willing to stand aside and allow the invasion, but fighting against the others means not only placing themselves in danger, but also turning against people they knew and trusted. Following in the style of classic horror and suspense set by shows like the *Twilight Zone*, this series manages to be scary and suspenseful without resorting to outright gore and violence. The teens are stereotypes at first, but they have to grow out of their standard roles—jock, Goth, geek, and cheerleader—to survive. Augustyn and Ramos weave horror with science fiction, mystery, and social commentary, and the result is an interesting and fascinating series.

Kurozu-cho is a small town on the coast of Japan in which Kirie and her boyfriend, Shuichi, have lived all their lives, in Junji Ito's *Uzumaki: Spiral into Horror Volumes 1-3* series. The town has become a weird Mecca for spiral-obsessed and possessed individuals. Shuichi's father becomes so obsessed that he kills himself trying to become one large spiral. Since his cremation, the town crematorium smoke spins into hypnotic spirals before the ashes fall into the town's lake. The stories are inter-connected, each depicting yet another incident of spiral-induced madness, which ends giving readers chills down their spine. With the characters drawn like realistic Japanese teens, the setting in everyday places, and the usage of black, white and grays, this trilogy brings *Twilight Zone* creepiness to life.

In *Fray* by Joss Whedon, Melaka Fray, a "grab," is perfectly suited for the dystopic future in which she lives. Blessed with unnatural strength, speed and agility, she can steal anything, and doesn't blink at the mutants, 'roid pumps and other freaks who populate her world. All Melaka fears are the lurks, pale and bloodthirsty creatures who haunt the lower levels of her city. So when the demonic Urkon comes to her and tells her she is the Slayer, the Chosen One who will fight the lurks, she is initially skeptical, until a

voice from her past makes her believe. Fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* will find much that is familiar in this futuristic horror tale, but even those not versed in Slayer lore will find a sharp story and expressive artwork in this trade collection.

Mystery

If you could kill with no repercussions, would you? This is the question asked by the amazing noir-crime series *100 Bullets* series by Brian Azzarello. Each of the damaged people featured in the interconnected short stories has suffered an injustice, and each is visited by the mysterious Agent Graves. To these people, Graves brings evidence of those responsible for their pain, a gun, and 100 completely untraceable bullets. He leaves the rest up to them. Watching each recipient of the bullets wrestle with their dilemma is fascinating, as is the shadowy Graves. Who he is, and why he practices this peculiar form of justice is slowly revealed through the five trade collections currently in the series. A perfect blend of moody art and sharp writing, this series is both a fan and critical favorite.

For more mystery, try *The Kindaichi Case Files* series by Yozaburo Kanari. Though Hajime Kindaichi attends an exclusive private high school and has an I.Q. of a genius, he can still be found either cutting class or sleeping on the roof of the school. When Hajime is awake, he is a cocky amateur sleuth with amazing deductive skills. Each of the nine volumes is a conclusive murder mystery and can be read in any order. The mysteries are well designed, and readers will have to use both visual clues in the black and white art and textual clues in the writing to solve the murder mystery. Readers who like traditional “whodunits” will fall hard for this mystery series.

Greg Rucka presents more mystery in *Whiteout: Melt*. Connie Stetko, once a shining star in the U.S. Marshal Service, has now been put on ice, literally. Exiled to Antarctica, where men outnumber women 100 to 1, Connie learns to live on the ice, but does not love it. The prequel, *Whiteout*, tells how Connie wound up in Antarctica, as she solves the murder of an American geologist. In its sequel, she is offered a shot at redemption, and a chance to leave the ice forever. These books feature some of the best characterization in comics today, and Lieber’s stark black and white artwork makes Antarctica not only the setting, but also an actor unto itself.

Realistic Fiction

Mitsuru Adachi proves his mastery of short stories in *Short Program Volumes 1-2*. While the black and white art is an older, simplistic style, the stories told are international and undated. The art helps relay the emotions of his characters. Whether it is a repairman fixing a stereo for the girl he likes or the super-tall student who celebrates his track star friend’s success, Adachi captures the characters’ emotions at major moments in their lives. The stories will warm the readers’ hearts with their dramatic touches of human life and relationships. The quietness of these tales and the older art style may not be for everyone, but given the chance, readers will find stories they connect with in these volumes.

In *Sanctuary Volumes 1-9* by Sho Fumimura, childhood friends Hojo and Asami vow to turn Japan upside down and to create a “Sanctuary” for themselves. After a game of rock, paper, scissors, Hojo takes to the shadow and joins the *yakuza* (Japanese underworld crime syndicate), and Asami takes to the light and strives to be the top Japanese politician, the Prime Minister, by the age of forty. Hojo financially backs Asami, but both intend to topple the leaders of their own worlds. In their path are the powerful politicians and crime syndicate leaders, as well as a pretty female deputy police chief who is out to expose them for the crimes she is sure they have committed. Ikegami’s art is realistic, so the portrayal of sex and violence make this series a mature title. Adults and mature high school teens who like crime dramas or political intrigue will eat this series up.

An autobiographical tale of the author’s childhood in Wisconsin, *Blankets: An Illustrated Novel* follows Craig Thompson and his brother as they grow into teenagers. Born to strict religious parents, Thompson has to face the many challenges to faith that growing up can bring, especially when the religious community considers his art a waste at best, and at worst a

Ikegami’s art is realistic, so the portrayal of sex and violence make this series a mature title. Adults and mature high school teens who like crime dramas or political intrigue will eat this series up.

sin. As the tale turns to the teenage years, Thompson meets his adolescent sweetheart at a church camp. The two fall in love, and Thompson must examine both his faith and his love for Raina as he approaches adulthood. This is a long and complex story, and at nearly 600 pages, it is a lengthy read even in this format. Thompson presents the readers with an inside look at religious fundamentalism and small town ethics, and what it means to grow up in that society. For another coming-of-age graphic novel, try Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World*.

Romance

In Chynna Clugston-Major's *Blue Monday: the Kids are Alright*, Bleu is a modern (well, early 1990s)

kind of girl who longs for an old fashioned guy—Adam Ant. When she finds out that Adam is coming to her small California Town, nothing will stop her from going: not jerky disc jockeys, not a sold-out show, and especially not the hormonally charged pervert boys who hang around her and her friends. In her quest for tickets, many things go wrong, but one thing goes absolutely right. In *Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners*, the “pervy” boys tape Bleu in the bathtub, and then show the tape at school. The only way Bleu can get the tape back is to go out with them—but why? This couldn't be their idea of flirting, could

it? The raunchy comedy in this book covers a very sweet, very true core, which evokes the tragedy and triumphs of being a teenager in love. Clugston-Major's clean manga-inspired artwork gives each character life, and beautifully illustrates her coming-of-age stories.

Skank Zero Hopeless-Savage, youngest daughter

of punk legends Dirk Hopeless and Nikki Savage, is in love for the first time in her young life, in Jen Van Meter's *Hopeless Savages: Ground Zero*. There have been guys who see her as a celebrity conquest or guys who hope she lives up to her name, but this is the real thing. Unfortunately, the object of her affection, a science-geek named Ginger, loves her back, but is afraid of being hurt. This newly blossomed romance also coincides with a bout of overprotectiveness from Mom, and the arrival of a film crew. Can Zero and Ginger and/or Zero and her Mom find a way to work it out? This title, second in the excellent *Hopeless Savages* series, is a sweet and touching story that looks at love of all kinds—between parent and child, between siblings, between boys and girls, and boys and boys. The use of multiple artists for flashbacks and point-of-view changes gives the book a depth and richness that enhances the excellent storytelling.

Miki just wants to be normal, but that's not going to happen with her parents divorcing, swapping partners with another couple, and all four living under the same roof! She is totally against this absurdity, but then she meets Yuu, her new stepbrother. *Marmalade Boy Volumes 1-8* by Waturu Yoshizumi is a romance series if anyone has ever seen one—there are the sweet first meetings, the first misunderstandings, the first realizations that the two may really be biological brother and sister . . . oh wait, that's not normal for a romance! Teens will gobble up all of Miki and Yuu's relationship woes from high school to their first year in college. Readers will cheer for them as they get together and cry for them when they have their hearts broken. The black and white art is fun with the big eyes that detail all of the emotion. Even though it is a romance, the characters are all so goofy and fun that even guys get a kick out of it. Manga is full of romantic graphic novels, and in addition to *Marmalade Boy*, girls will particularly enjoy the *Peach Girl* series by Miwa Ueda and the *MARS* series by Fuyumi Soryo.

Science Fiction

Mai is an ordinary teenage girl with extraordinary psychokinetic abilities in the *Mai the Psychic Girl Perfect Collection 1-3* series by Kazuya Kudo. Her powers come from her mother's family and have been passed down through the generations. The Wisdom Alliance, a secret worldwide organization, has discov-

ered her powers and is willing to do anything to have her and her powers under their control. Lucky for Mai, she has some good friends to help her find her path and to fight the Wisdom Alliance. Ikegami's black and white art has a very realistic tone. His usage of screentones (pre-printed films used for shading) particularly when Mai uses her powers, adds to the science fiction aspect of the story. This trilogy is for the reader who likes stories where ordinary people are put into extraordinary situations.

In Otomo Katsushiro's *Akira Volumes 1-6*, Tetsuo is taken for military testing of his psychic abilities after a bizarre motorcycle accident. His bike gang leader, Kaneda, is concerned for Tetsuo, but once Tetsuo's powers become out of control, Kaneda is one his many enemies. These enemies have two reasons to stop Tetsuo—one, to keep him from connecting with Akira, a paranormal boy who caused World War III, and two, to stop Tetsuo from becoming as powerful as Akira. The black and white art relies heavily on screentones for shading. There is drug usage and violence—both paranormal and realistic—and the graffiti art in background shots are of a sexual nature, making this title probably not for younger students than high school aged. *Akira* is pivotal science fiction manga, having won major awards in Japan and worldwide. This series' influence over the science fiction manga genre is very powerful. While the series is more than 2,000 pages, this manga uses action and the art to further the storyline at a quicker pace, so don't be fooled by the thickness of these books.

The Complete Geisha by Andi Watson features Jomi, an android who has been raised as part of a human family and aspires to become an artist. An admirer of the Dutch painters, anti-android prejudice keeps Jomi from making a living with her art; thus, she is forced to take a job in the family bodyguard business. Her father, disapproving, gives her the most boring, lackluster assignment he can come up with: babysitting a spoiled super-model. Things get complicated fast, however, when the model becomes the target of a stalker, and Jomi is offered big money to forge a Vermeer painting. This series, a basic science fiction action adventure on its surface, is really a look at family dynamics and what makes us human. Written and illustrated by Watson, the smooth line art and subtle use of grey tones create a completely believable, not quite alien future world. For another

tale of androids searching for their place in the world, try the series *Battle Angel Alita* by Yukito Kishiro.

In Conclusion

The titles described represent our picks for some of the best in illustrated storytelling. Be aware, however, that these books barely scratch the surface of the diverse world of graphic novels. Not included are the many excellent biographical and non-fiction titles, martial arts-inspired titles and superhero graphic novels. We hope that you will use these selections as a springboard to further exploration of the format.

Now that we've recommended what graphic novels to read, we'd like to conclude with some tips on how to read them. It is tempting, when first exploring graphic novels, to read them as you would any other prose material. This is a mistake—one that overlooks an important aspect of the format. Graphic novels, with their reliance on a synergy of words and pictures, have more in common, as a format, with film than with prose novels. To illustrate this point, imagine watching a film with nothing but the sound. You would probably be able to follow the plot, but would miss out on a great deal of characterization, setting, and other elements that give the story its richness and depth. Conversely, imagine watching the same film with only the visuals. Again, you would miss out on some of the elements that contribute to the whole of the film, such as dialogue. To get the full experience of the film, the visual and text elements must be considered together. Graphic novels must be read in the same way, with the images being examined in concert with the text. This is a skill that can feel foreign to readers unaccustomed to sequential art. Excellent graphic novels to use as training tools to help you consider illustrations and text together are the various manga novelizations of the *Star Wars* films, illustrated by Hisao Tamaki and published by Dark Horse comics.

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Internet Resources:

- www.noflyingnotights.com—Developed by librarians and librarians in training; includes book reviews and definitions of commonly used terms in the graphic novel world.
- www.artbomb.net—Maintained by the staff of comics creator, Warren Ellis, this site highlights the best of the graphic novel world. Of particular note is a wonderfully informative and beautifully drawn explanation of the graphic novel format by artist Jessica Abel (click on the Introduction image).

<p>Behind You by Jacqueline Woodson G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004, 118 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Death/Interracial Dating/Homosexuality ISBN: 0-399-23988-X</p> <p>Jeremiah Roselind is dead at fifteen years old. Miah, as he is affectionately called by most, was shot and killed by two white cops—a case of mistaken identity. The spirit of Miah whistles through loved ones trying to make sense of his death and their lives as they see them now. Ellie was Miah's white girlfriend. She hurts the most and is trying to overcome the pain of losing her soul mate. Miah is trying to make sense of his death, too, and how to embrace his new role in the afterlife.</p> <p>Woodson reveals the thoughts and personalities of her characters in miniature time capsules. She allows the reader to uncover who Miah was through the characters' actions and their feelings about him. Woodson captures the present world, along with the afterlife, and creatively allows the reader to experience bereavement in both. She touches on social taboos such as homosexuality and interracial dating, while also showing the many facets of grief. A well-written novel, <i>Behind You</i> is both thought-provoking and heartwarming.</p> <p>Jeron Shelton Elgin, IL</p>	<p>Bermudez Triangle by Maureen Johnson Relationships//Homosexuality Razor Bill, 2004, 370 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>ISBN: 1-59514-019-0</p> <p>Nina, Avery, and Mel have been inseparable for years. However, when Nina leaves for summer camp, a secret emerges that shakes the foundation of that friendship: Avery and Mel are in love with one another. When Nina returns, nothing is the same. She feels alienated and struggles to accept the life her friends have chosen; meanwhile, her friends now avoid her to be alone with one another.</p> <p>Avery and Mel are unable to keep their relationship a secret; rumors circulate throughout school. Embarrassed, Avery begins to doubt her newly discovered homosexuality. To figure out what she feels and who she is, she breaks off her relationship with Mel, seeking comfort in the arms of a man. Left alone, Mel turns to Nina for comfort.</p> <p><i>Bermudez Triangle</i> is an excellent portrayal of the realistic struggles associated with homosexuality. Since it does contain scenes with the two lovers, I would not recommend it for middle school or younger high school students.</p> <p>Esther Myers Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>The Big Nothing by Adrian Fogelin Peachtree Press, 2004, 235 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Relationships/Music/Family Problems ISBN: 1561453269</p> <p>To escape family problems, Justin Riggs sometimes escapes into "The Big Nothing" — a place he can be who he is and not worry about his mom and dad splitting up, his older brother shipping out to Iraq, or whether Jamie Lewis knows he's alive or not.</p> <p>Justin is musically inclined and, when visiting one day after school at Jamie's house, discovers the piano and Jamie's grandmother, Nana Grace. When Nana offers to help him learn to play, he begins spending every spare minute at Jamie's practicing. The angst he seems to feel while his Dad and brother are away is diminished by his connection to the music, and he doesn't mind being around Jamie so much, either!</p> <p>Written more for middle school, Fogelin writes a sensitive, yet humorous, account of a boy coming to grips with adulthood too soon. Highly recommended.</p> <p>Nancy McFarlin Wamego, KS</p>	<p>The Boy with the Lampshade on His Head by Bruce Wetter Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004, 304 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-689-85032-8</p> <p>Stanley Krakow doesn't consider himself to be anything special. He is a young boy whose problems consist of a callous fifth-grade teacher and a bully, who just happens to be Stanley's older brother, Jerold. Concerned with saving his glow-in-the-dark fish and holding his breath long enough to make it into the <i>Guinness Book of World Records</i>, Stanley creates a world in which he is the hero and everything else is out to destroy him. In his role as super hero, Stanley meets Theresa. Theresa's everyday battle brings to life the reality of abuse in the home and the need for friends. Through Theresa, Stanley discovers how special he really is. Stanley goes from being a blood-sucking beetle killer to a brave friend who literally saves Theresa's life.</p> <p>Bruce Wetter does a fantastic job of capturing the imagination of a unique fifth-grader. Humorously introduced throughout the story, Stanley's trials and tribulations are sure to captivate young readers as they reveal an unlikely hero: <i>The Boy with the Lampshade on His Head</i>.</p> <p>Jessica Mattes Elgin, IL</p>

<p><i>Call Me Maria</i> by Judith Ortiz Cofer Coming of Age/Survival/Acceptance Orchard Books, 2004, 127 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-38577-6</p> <p>With <i>Call Me Maria</i>, Judith Ortiz Cofer delivers a poignant story of a sixteen-year-old Puerto Rican girl trying to find her place in the barrio of New York.</p> <p>Maria has gone with her father as he returns to the place of his childhood leaving her mother behind for a temporary time. Maria's father is a superintendent and a jack-of-all-trades as he takes care of the needs of the tenants in the building. Maria accepts the responsibility of making their basement apartment into a home—a home where she sits from her desk doing schoolwork and looking up at the feet that walk down the sidewalk. Maria befriends Whoopee, who teaches her the way of the barrio and how to master Spanglish. When her mother does come to New York a year later, Maria realizes it is only for a visit and not to live. Though both parents want her, Maria decides to stay with her father because she has come to accept the life of the barrio.</p> <p>Maria's voice is a strength in this uniquely written novel as Cofer comfortably transitions between prose, letters, and poetry.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Roger Caswell Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Children of the Lamp: The Akhenaten Adventure</i> by P.B. Kerr Fantasy/Adventure Orchard Books, 2004, 355 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-67019-5</p> <p>What do wisdom teeth, <i>The Arabian Nights</i>, an earthquake in Egypt, and a missing couple on a flight to London have in common? Quite a bit, it turns out, for two twelve-year-old twins. John and Philippa Gaunt enjoy an exciting and, at times, dangerous, adventure, thanks to what happens to them after a trip to the dentist—and a little luck. Luck is precisely what these twins need after they go to stay with their uncle Nimrod. Only John and Philippa discover they have much more control over luck than they ever thought possible. The twins must quickly learn to harness their emerging powers to help their uncle solve an ancient mystery. If they succeed, the balance of Good and Evil in the world will remain in homeostasis; if they fail, Evil will have the advantage, and the whole world will suffer.</p> <p>It is no surprise P.B. Kerr is also a writer of adult thrillers, as Phillip Kerr. Although the wit and vocabulary may be beyond some young readers, enthusiasts of the <i>Harry Potter</i> series and similar works will enjoy Kerr's suspenseful, yet fun, tale.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Emily Pauly St. George, KS</p>
<p><i>A Couple of April Fools</i> by Gregory Maguire Fantasy Clarion Books, 2004, 182 pp., \$16.00 ISBN: 0-618-27474-X</p> <p>The children in Miss Earth's class are not having a good spring. What with mutant chickens, an escalating rivalry between the Tattletales and the Copycats (their girls' and boys' clubs), a traitor, and a couple of April Fools pranks gone wrong, they hardly notice the fine spring air or the first forsythia blooms. Their problems reach a crisis point when their beloved teacher disappears. Though Thekla Mustard, former Empress of the Tattletales, suspects a romance gone wrong between Miss Earth and her fiancé, Mayor Grass, her classmates are not so sure. However, they all agree, they must use their excellent education to locate their teacher.</p> <p>In this, book six of the chronicles of Hamlet, Vermont, Maguire uses humor and a fast-paced plot to create a delightfully entertaining story. Despite the quirky names and bizarre events, Maguire's tale captures the essence of pre-adolescent experience: the difficulties of peer relationships and the growing understanding that parents are flawed human beings.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>	<p><i>Double Helix</i> by Nancy Werlin Ethics of Genetic Engineering/Family Trust/Loyalty Dial Books, 2004, 248 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-8037-2606-6</p> <p>Eighteen-year-old Eli has always been smarter, faster, and stronger than the average kid. He has never really questioned why until the mysterious and brilliant Dr. Wyatt begins to take a curious interest in him and offers him a job at his renowned lab, Wyatt Transgenics. When Eli's father pleads with him to decline the offer but refuses to explain why, Eli becomes more intrigued. His life gets turned upside down as he begins his search for answers and uncovers some disturbing secrets about his past.</p> <p>This suspenseful book is both mysterious and exciting. Nancy Werlin takes her readers on a wild ride with Eli as he struggles to gain an understanding of the secrets in his own past that may be his only hope in the future. This gripping novel explores some serious themes such as morality and the ethics of genetic engineering. It is also a story of the ties of love and loyalty that bond a father and son.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sarah Briggs Elgin, IL</p>

<p>The Flame Tree by Richard Lewis Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2004, 272 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Isaac is struggling to remain loyal to the Christian faith and values with which he was raised. In the wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, while living a mission life with his doctor and nurse parents in Wonobo, Indonesia, Isaac is taken hostage by anti-Christian Muslims after an attempted evacuation of all Americans goes terribly wrong. He undergoes a transformation throughout this horrible ordeal and discovers more about the driving forces of the Islamic people and, in the end, finds the faith in Jesus that he had lost.</p> <p>Richard Lewis dynamically explains the faith journey of Isaac Williams in a creative and unique way. He takes his young readers on a journey of their own through the Christian and Muslim faiths, with gruesome yet truthful detail. This book is rich with description, and despite violence and heartache throughout, readers who stick with Isaac will be rewarded.</p> <p>Katie Nedli Elgin, IL</p>	<p>Fortune's Bones: The Manumission Requiem by Marilyn Nelson Front Street, 2004, 32 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>A skeleton has been lurking in Mattatuck, Connecticut, for more than 200 years. Historians have recently discovered that the bones belonged to a slave named Fortune who was owned by a local doctor. Following his death in 1798, Fortune's bones were preserved by his former owner to help further his medical studies.</p> <p>In <i>Fortune's Bones</i>, Marilyn Nelson tells Fortune's story in verse, adapting various elements of a traditional funeral mass. Her poetry has a simple voice, yet a strong tone; it both mourns Fortune's death, while celebrating the freedom from slavery that his death has provided.</p> <p><i>Fortune's Bones</i> is beautiful and haunting; it is an excellent introduction to poetry for young readers, particularly those with an interest in history and/or slavery issues.</p> <p>Amy Anderson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>Foxmask by Juliet Marillier TOR, 2004, 464 pp., \$27.95</p> <p>Thorvald talks his friend, Sam, into setting sail to find his father. Creidhe hides in the boat, because she knows that her friends will need her on their journey. After several weeks in the North Sea, they land on a Foroes Island between Norway and Iceland. The island is ruled by the evil Asgrim. Criedle stays with the women, while Sam and Thorvald go off with the menfolk to prepare for the Hunt on the Isle of Clouds. Then Criedle is kidnapped.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Asgrim's son had hidden the seer of the Unspoken tribe on the Isle of Clouds. They, too, are preparing for the Hunt. Near the Isle of the Clouds, Criedle escapes by jumping over the side of the kidnapper's boat and drowns.</p> <p>Marillier weaves a delightful adventure of lies, deceit, secrets, misunderstandings, and romance in this sequel to <i>Wolfskin</i>. Middle school and high school students will be standing in line for <i>Foxmask</i>.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>Hawkes Harbor by S.E. Hinton TOR, 2004, 251 pp., \$21.95</p> <p>While S.E. Hinton's first new novel in more than 15 years is marketed as an adult novel, her name recognition will no doubt cause young people to seek out <i>Hawkes Harbor</i>. (Sections of the book, in fact, read very much like a young adult novel. Readers will notice an echo of Ponyboy in the protagonist.)</p> <p>On the surface, the book is a mere re-working of a stock horror story. And even if, as some have suggested, the plot of the book is drawn directly from the televised series <i>Dark Shadows</i>, the book is much more than a simple horror story. The characters are well developed and believably unbelievable. We get to know the young protagonist, and we watch the roles of hero and villain shift as the plot develops. Ultimately, the book is a dark allegorical exploration of the descent into madness and the journey toward atonement. The elements of horror are best read as metaphor for the inner workings of the mind. Hinton graphically portrays the depths to which the human mind can sink, yet she also demonstrates our capacity to heal.</p> <p>Mature, sophisticated older adolescents will find the novel worthwhile. The book should not, however, be recommended to young people simply because they enjoyed <i>The Outsiders</i>. Hinton's first novel was a gritty young adult novel. Her most recent is a gritty adult novel.</p> <p>Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>Here Today</i> by Ann M. Martin Coming of Age/Historical Fiction/Realistic Fiction Scholastic Press, 2004, 308 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-57944-9</p> <p>In <i>Here Today</i>, Ann M. Martin addresses the problems of social ostracism, broken families, and one girl's struggle to define who she is. Eleanor Roosevelt Dingman is a sixth-grade girl living in the small town of Spectacle, New York. She practices the art of camouflage to escape the cruel taunts of the Sparrows, the popular clique of girls at school. Her mother, Doris Day Dingman, is the prettiest woman in all of Spectacle, the star of local plays, and the Bosetti Beauty.</p> <p>Everything begins to change when John F. Kennedy is assassinated. Doris decides that life is too short and leaves for New York City to pursue her dream of acting on Broadway. Elle is left to care for her brother and sister, all the while struggling to discover who she is and why her mother could leave her behind.</p> <p><i>Here Today</i> is an engrossing story about the strength inside of us all. This book would be appropriate for sixth- to eighth-graders and for anyone student who is struggling with divorce.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>How My Private, Personal Journal Became a Bestseller</i> Self-image by Julia DeVillers Dutton Children's Books, 2004, 212 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-525-47283-5</p> <p>Jamie Bartlett is a fourteen-year-old freshman at Whitaker High School who wishes she was popular. Jamie always has problems with the "I think I am so much better than you" girls. Lacking courage to stand up for herself, Jamie journals about a girl named IS, who is everything Jamie is not. IS has self-confidence, high self-esteem, courage, and strength that can overpower the "Evil Clique of Populars" with the flick of her wrist. Accidentally, one of Jamie's journal entries is turned in as an assignment, and suddenly she becomes a best-selling author. She is now getting TV, radio, and newspaper interviews. Through all this fame, Jamie becomes popular at school; however, she gets so caught up in her fame that she neglects her true friends.</p> <p>Julia DeVillers reaches the hearts of young girls in this "chick" book that encourages them to be themselves. Her story sheds light on the realities teen girls face and offers hope. This one will keep the girls reading!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Samantha Sojka Elgin, IL</p>
<p><i>I Walk in Dread: The Diary of Deliverance Trembley, Witness to the Salem Witch Trials</i> by Lisa Rowe Fraustino Scholastic, 2004, 203 pp., \$10.95 ISBN: 0-439-24973-2</p> <p>Fans of the <i>Dear America</i> series are sure to enjoy this novel of the afflictions, accusations, and fear that gripped the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1690s.</p> <p>The novel reads as the diary of a twelve-year-old Puritan girl who lives with her uncle and her sister on a farm outside Salem, Mass. Their guardian leaves to find work at sea, and the sisters must keep up the farm. When a blizzard forces a businessman and his son to seek refuge on their farm, the men eventually weave their way into the girls' lives, adding a slightly romantic subplot. Meanwhile, the girls find themselves in the midst of a hysteria overtaking the town. When other girls began accusing citizens of practicing witchcraft, the community must confront the idea that some citizens allegedly signed a pact with the Devil and are inflicting harm throughout the village.</p> <p>The author demonstrates how it is easy to let fear dictate action and emotion rule logic and leads the reader to realize that taking a stand for truth is not always an easy task, but most certainly a necessary one to promote justice.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Emily Pauly St. George, KS</p>	<p><i>ID!OT!</i> by Colin Neenan Brown Barn Books, 2004, 152 pp., \$12.95 ISBN: 0-9746481-1-6</p> <p>Jim is sixteen and can talk to his best friend, Zanny, about anything until he realizes (during tryouts for <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>) he's madly in love with her. He emails her as "John Kurtz," sharing his feelings, only she's convinced "John" is Jim's twin brother Jake (reknown for his hippie hair and clothes, drinking and drug-induced state). At the cast party, Jim gets drunk for the first time, planning to unburden himself to Zanny, but when he's told she is with Jake, he hooks up with Jake's girlfriend.</p> <p>Full of passion, regret, and humor, <i>ID!OT!</i> conveys the uncertainties of romance in the lives of youth and their parents. The framework of the story (that this is Jim's unsanitized account of what caused him to end up drunk in a tree, eating his own words—literally, his emails to Zanny—and have his picture plastered on the front of newspapers across the country) adds to its cleverness and the ambiguity of Jim and Zanny's relationship. The cover art is a cartoon and too juvenile for the content, but librarians who can sell the story inside will find a receptive audience with guys and girls alike.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Melissa Moore Jackson, TN</p>

<p><i>Kira-Kira</i> by Cynthia Kadohata Atheneum Fiction, 2004, 244 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>To Katie, Lynn is . . . older sister . . . best friend . . . and greatest teacher. Lynn begins Katie's life lessons, teaching her her first word: kira-kira (Japanese for glittering; shining). Katie plasters the world with it. She gives the name to everything from kittens to colored Kleenex. Katie views life as kira-kira. She carries this outlook with her as her parents close their small oriental food store in Georgia and move the family from their supportive Japanese community to an unfamiliar Iowan town. There, her parents work almost 24 hours a day at a chicken hatchery, where they are being treated as animals themselves and making scarcely enough money to support their family.</p> <p>Katie and Lynn, and a new baby brother, Sammy, view an adult's world through children's eyes. They learn the importance of family interdependence—one person hurting meant they all were hurting.</p> <p>Cynthia Kadohata creates a masterpiece of specific moments entwined in emotions. This novel has the ability to inspire the reader to remember what it is to live with the heart of a child.</p> <p>Natalie Whetzel Elgin, IL</p>	<p><i>KLEPTO</i> by Lori Weber Lotimer & Co, 2004, 160 pp., \$4.99</p> <p>Kat's authentic voice shares the disturbing tale of the abuse she has experienced at the hands of her older sister Hannah. When Hannah is sent to a group home for dealing drugs, Kat is the only one relieved at her departure. Yet, for reasons she doesn't comprehend, Kat begins to shoplift and relishes the feelings of control. When it's clear Hannah is soon to return home, Kat's stealing escalates, rushing to consequences inevitable yet surprising.</p> <p>Weber's first novel honestly conveys the anguish over parental neglect, the oftentimes ugliness of life, and brutality of an abortion (Hannah's). The heaviness of Kat's story is alleviated in part by best friend Anita's search for her birth mother and next-door-neighbor-turned-hunk Andy's gentle, supportive presence. Kat's tale addresses important issues in a tone which respects teens and their issues. Because of the nature of some of these issues, this title is recommended for readers age 14 and older.</p> <p>Melissa Moore Jackson, TN</p>
<p><i>L'Chaim! To Jewish Life in America! Celebrating from 1654 until Today</i> by Susan Goldman Rubin Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004, 173 pp., \$24.95</p> <p>The first recorded settlement of Jews in the United States was in 1654; they came looking for religious freedom. For 350 years, they have played a role in building America and retained their heritage.</p> <p>This attractive book features many photographs and images from the The Jewish Museum. Chapters are in chronological order, and topics include Colonial, American Revolution, Immigration, American West, Alaska, World War I and II, and the Great Depression.</p> <p>So many influential people are included in <i>L'Chaim!</i> This would be an excellent resource for research ideas. Fifth- and sixth-graders may find this book useful for information on immigration.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Meanwhile Adventures, The</i> by Roddy Doyle Arthur A. Levine Books, 2004, 174 pp., \$16.95</p> <p><i>The Meanwhile Adventures</i> is a fun, fast-paced, and entertaining story that follows the Mack family through their exciting escapades. After Mister Mack is arrested, his three children and dog set out to find their record-breaking mother and help their father escape. What follows is the intermingling of each character's crazy adventure that leads to the exciting conclusion where the family finally comes together.</p> <p>The best thing about this book is Doyle's use of language and his bizarre and hilarious scenarios. It would be hard not to laugh out loud at some of the kooky scenes. Doyle also includes little side notes to the readers that explain certain situations, as well as sections where he banters back and forth with the anonymous reader.</p> <p>Although it contains somewhat crude language at times, <i>The Meanwhile Adventures</i> is an entertaining book for older elementary and middle school students. It would also be a great piece to read aloud.</p> <p>Jennifer Sloan Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>Names Will Never Hurt Me</i> by Jaime Adoff</p> <p>Dutton Children's Books, 2004, 186 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Bullying/Suspense ISBN: 0-525-47175-8</p> <p>Almost a year ago, a student was violently murdered on Rockville High grounds. With suspense hanging in the air, four students battle their way through high school.</p> <p>Kurt tries his best to get through a day of school without turning into a human punching bag, or worse, having to swallow someone else's spit at the bottom of the drinking fountain.</p> <p>Tisha, who deals with bullies herself, wants people to accept her for who she really is, but who is that really?</p> <p>Floater is transformed (by the principal) from being picked on into something even worse: a power-hungry kid who looks to rule the school.</p> <p>Ryan, the star quarterback, is the king of the school. When the four of them collide, Ryan's dark secret comes out of hiding.</p> <p>Jaime Adoff brings to life a brutal story of the realities of high school via four intriguing main characters who cement the reader to the story. Adoff does an excellent job of describing events in a way that ensures the reader will enjoy it.</p> <p>Barbara Wilson Elgin, IL</p>	<p><i>One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies</i></p> <p>Death/Change by Sonya Sones</p> <p>Simon and Schuster Books, 2004, 268 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-689-85820-5</p> <p>Ruby Milliken shines as a saga unfolds from the mind of a teenager in this fast-paced novel of vibrant emotions and high drama. Ruby is a fifteen-year-old who has just lost her mother, home, and reason for living. She moves across the country to live with her movie star father leaving behind her boyfriend, Ray, and best friend, Lizzie.</p> <p>A look into the mind of Ruby is like boarding a jolting roller coaster as she thrives on impulsive decisions and peaks of emotion. At one moment, she will be fired up about how she thinks this "loose" girl named Amber is trying to steal Ray; another moment she'll be writing an e-mail to her dead mother.</p> <p>Sones writes with a poetic, plot-driven style magically connecting each new character to the next event. Having experienced the culture shock of Hollywood herself, Sones equates some of her experience through Ruby, causing the first-person narrative to come alive in a natural way. Young readers will be drawn to the journalistic feel, poetic set-up, and page-long chapters.</p> <p>Mary McCoy Elgin, IL</p>
<p><i>The Orange Trees of Versailles</i> by Annie Pietri,</p> <p>translated from the French by Catherine Temerson</p> <p>Delacorte Press, 2004, 137 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0385731035</p> <p>Fourteen-year-old Marion is uniquely suited to her work as the servant of Louis XIV's favorite mistress, the Marquise de Montespan. The loss of her mother affected Marion's ability to sleep for more than one or two hours at a time, making her an ideal "busy girl" for the marquise, who demands a servant's presence to guard her through the night.</p> <p>During her vigils, Marion crafts exquisite fragrance blends for the marquise. But after the marquise gives credit for the perfumes to another, Marion begins to understand her true character. When the king and queen come to Versailles to celebrate a victory, Marion must use her gift with scents to help prevent the marquise's plot to secure a higher place at court and in the king's heart.</p> <p>Readers might be confused as to how a girl of Marion's station learned to read and write and why she sleeps so little, but Pietri eventually ties up these questions. This story is a satisfying read for those interested in life during the time of the Sun King.</p> <p>SarahEllen Morrow Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Pepperland</i> by Mark Delaney</p> <p>Interpersonal Relationships/Mothers and Daughters/Death and Dying Peachtree Press, 2004, 184 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>ISBN: 156145317X</p> <p>Star is a not-so-typical 16-year-old in the 1980s—she is dealing with the grief that comes with losing her mother, her best friend Doooley's mood swings/search for identity, her own search for her place in the world, and attending therapy sessions.</p> <p>When musician Star comes across her mother's old guitar in the attic, as well as a letter her mother wrote to John Lennon stuck in an old yearbook, she senses that something is about to happen in her life—she <i>wants</i> something to happen. Delaney takes us on a tender and touching journey of a young girl coming to grips with life—and finds the courage to step up and take it by the (guitar) neck.</p> <p>I recommend this highly for older middle school and high school students. The tip back was great for me, too!</p> <p>Nancy McFarlin Wamego, KS</p>

<p>Raising the Griffin by Melissa Wyatt Wendy Lamb Books, 2004, 279 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>When Communism is overthrown in Rovenia, the people establish a constitutional monarchy, in hopes a royal family will attract the attention of tourists and act as a focal point in rebuilding the poor country. Their decision will change the life of Alex Varenhoff, great-grandson of the last ruling Varenhoff.</p> <p>Alex never dreamed his family might be asked back to the country they were cast out of; he would rather be at school in England. Being a royal is even harder than Alex imagined. He is surrounded by bodyguards, monitored by publicists and the press, followed by screaming girls, in danger from people opposed to the monarchy, and angry with his parents for changing his life. His rebellion has the potential to endanger Rovenia's democracy. It takes a tragedy for him to be allowed to choose his own fate.</p> <p>Wyatt provides a realistic portrayal of the trials and choices of a young man forced to face a destiny he thought was buried in the past. Alex's emotions and responses should resonate with young adults living in situations not of their own making.</p> <p>SarahEllen Morrow Tempe, AZ</p>	<p>Sam I Am by Ilene Cooper Scholastic, 2004, 252 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Sam finds the month of December a bit confusing: His mother, who is Christian, and his father, who is Jewish, are divided on the issues of religion and holidays. This year, the Hanukkah Bush is knocked over by the family dog, and the family sees it as a sign for change and compromise. Both grandmothers get an invitation to a religion-neutral holiday, but the fondue does not make anyone happy.</p> <p>Sam has many questions: Does he have to choose a specific religion? Will his parents and grandmothers hate him if he chooses the wrong one? Does Heather like him? No twelve-year-old can have all the answers, except Sam does find out his crush is not as wonderful as he first thought when she makes a racist comment about the Jewish religion and the Holocaust unit they are studying in school.</p> <p>Cooper accurately portrays an interfaith family. This family has arguments, confusion, questions, and no easy answers. Neither does the book, which is refreshingly honest. She is also quite accurate in her portrayal of twelve-year-olds and their emotions, questions, and, almost certainly, first crushes.</p> <p>Jennifer Judy Oxford, OH</p>
<p>So Super Starry by Rose Wilkins Dial Books, 2004, 230 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>In <i>So Super Starry</i>, Rose Wilkins delivers a unique look into the lives of London's rich and famous. Octavia Clairbrook-Cleeve is the daughter of a director of low budget films and an American TV actress. She attends a very posh high school, Darlinham House, which only the elite attend. Her schoolmates include sons and daughters of movie and rock stars. Even though her mother and father are famous, Octavia is an outsider at her school because of her awkward height and average appearance.</p> <p>Octavia finally gets her chance to receive star treatment and become popular when a high-profile boy asks her out on a date. Octavia must decide between staying true to herself and giving into the shallow superstar way to stay popular. She realizes she would rather know herself than give into the superficial ways of her peers. Now she just has to tell her parents.</p> <p><i>So Super Starry</i> is an intriguing and amusing coming-of-age story, best suited toward high school readers due to the content of the book and allusions to other works.</p> <p>Kristine E. Tardiff Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>Spilled Water by Sally Grindley Bloomsbury, 2004, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Sold at the age of eleven by her uncle, who considers a girl child about as valuable as spilled water, Lu Si-Yan finds herself the slave/housemaid of the Chen family, who consider her to be an utter failure at her duties, but a potential future wife for their brain-damaged son. Mrs. Hong, the mother of Mr. Chen, gives Lu Si-Yan some money to escape, yet Lu Si-Yan has her money stolen and must work for a toy factory to repay the ferry fare. When she collapses at the factory after coughing up blood due to the horrible factory conditions and is sent to the hospital, she is reunited with the uncle who sold her, now regretful of his decision.</p> <p>Though the writing occasionally lapses in to dragging exposition, Grindley's work deftly demonstrates the harsh factory life, low wages, and grim reality many around the world face each day. Truly an interesting find, this novel will find a place in the hearts of those teens who care for the underdog and for those interested in modern day child labor abuses.</p> <p>Jennifer Judy Oxford, OH</p>

<p>Starfall: Phaeton and the Chariot of the Sun by Michael Cadnum Mythology Orchard Books, 2004, 120 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-54533-1</p> <p>After chaffing under the jibes of a young man in his village, Phaeton confronts his mother, Clymene, about his parentage. Clymene confirms her tryst with the sun god Phoebus Apollo, and she urges Phaeton to seek his father. Leaving home, Phaeton travels to the far reaches of the world before finding his father, Apollo.</p> <p>To prove his devotion to Phaeton, Apollo promises his son anything he desires. Unfortunately, Phaeton asks to drive the chariot of the Sun. Regretting his rash promise, Apollo allows his son to drive the chariot. Unable to control the horses, disaster soon follows. Havoc is wrecked upon the earth, and Phaeton is killed. This classic tale is a most readable story. This is the first in a trilogy of retellings from Ovid.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joy Fenichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p>USS Constellation: Pride of the American Navy by Walter Dean Myers Non-Fiction/American History/Naval Holiday House, 2004, 85 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-83243-1816-2</p> <p>Beginning with the privateers which harassed British ships and allowed colonists to sell products at a fair price on the world market, Myers tells the story of the first <i>Constellation</i>, a wooden frigate in the fledgling American Navy. This ship fought in the War of 1812. Later, after 1857, the second <i>Constellation</i>, built with materials from the original, intercepted the slave trade and took part in the Civil War.</p> <p>The U.S. Navy, perhaps because of miserable living conditions and long absences from home, allowed black seamen to take a proud place in American naval tradition. With the advent of steam power and iron hulls, wooden ships became obsolete; nevertheless, this ship lives on as a museum.</p> <p>The book, full of details of life at sea, details of sea battle, authentic photographs, and the origins of such idioms as “showing the flag,” “knowing the ropes,” and “loose cannon,” will catch the imagination of young people about a little-known part of American history.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Myrna Dee Marler Late, HI</p>
<p>Vegan Virgin Valentine by Carolyn Mackler Coming of Age/Identity Candlewick Press, 2004, 228 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 0-7636-2155-2</p> <p>Mara Valentine has it together; she is a straight-A senior, a vegan, and a perfectionist. She is in a duel-to-the-final-GPA race with her ex-boyfriend for the coveted valedictorian spot, has been accepted at Yale, and is ready to leave home and high school in glory.</p> <p>“The first thing V did upon arriving in Brockport was fool around with my ex-boyfriend,” a reference to Vivienne Vail Valentine, Mara’s niece through an estranged older sister, who comes to spend a semester of her junior year with the family.</p> <p>That first tantalizing line in the novel spells the end of Mara’s rigid control of her life as she narrates her own tale of learning more than school offers and growing up in ways she never imagined. V has spent her life without supervision; her flirting, flaunting, and flippant attitude drive Mara batty. A potential new romance with her hunky boss and doubts about her vegetarianism add to the chaos in a breezy, humorous, and revealing novel, as Mara finally gets a clue and comes to grips with the real world.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Judith Hayn Chicago, IL</p>	<p>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</p>

Loving the Young Adult Reader Even When You Want to Strangle Him (or Her)!

Adapted from the keynote speech delivered at the Arizona English Teachers' Association State Convention, October 16, 2004

The title of my message, "Loving the Young Adult Reader Even When You Want to Strangle Him, (or Her)," is based on my belief that we need to quit whining about teenagers and begin to celebrate them instead. I'm officially on my soap box now, so as I stand at the podium up here on the stage, I want to warn those of you who are sitting in the first three rows that you are in the *splash zone*. If you have ever been to Sea World, then you know what happens when Shamu hits the water after a big jump, and you know what the term *splash zone* means. Well, when I really get into it, I start to spit and foam at the mouth. So, I'm sorry I didn't bring any of those clear plastic ponchos for you to put on over your clothes but you might want to put a mask on; I don't know, but we'll see. You might also want to get out a pen and a piece of paper. There are two writing prompts or exercises a little bit later that I want you to do. Not here, but when you get home.

I'm going to give you my background, briefly, to help explain why I wrote a couple of the books I wrote and the impact I have had on teenagers. This was all unanticipated by the way; I did not set out to write books for teenagers. I have been put in a unique position, as have many YA authors, of becoming a sort of mother/father confessors for this generation. When young people read a lot of books and actually connect with them, they often seek out the writer, through e-mail, letters or in person, to talk to us in a uniquely

intimate way. I want to share some of the feedback that I've received from my readers because I believe that you, as teachers, librarians and others who work with young adult readers, need to hear this.

Frankly, I hated school. I was the student that teachers often don't like to have because of the dilemma I presented; I was tall, so they wanted to put me in the back row, but in the back row I either got in lots of trouble or I ignored the teacher. No offense intended, nothing personal against my teachers, but it's just very hard for me to sit still for any long periods of time. I do some of my finest writing, by the way, at conferences. Those of you sitting in the back row, I suspect that you are all secret novelists and you've chose the back row so that once my voice begins to lull into a rhythm, like a white noise, then you can start working on my novels, your novels. Go ahead, you have my blessings. That's how I get some of my finest work done.

I left high school early to be a foreign exchange student in Denmark and missed my senior year in the states, but if you want to know what I really think about high school, just read *Speak*. That's what it pretty much felt like for me, particularly ninth grade. I made friends eventually so it wasn't all bad, and I'll give you the details of that in a moment. but leaving was a good thing, and when I came back to the states, I went to community college, which I loved. Community college was a godsend for me. And from commu-

nity college, I transferred and went to Georgetown University, which was fun but it gave me a totally useless degree and a lot of debt (which I finally paid off). I studied historical linguistics, which, as I mentioned in an earlier session, qualifies me to work at the mall. But it was fun at the time.

I wound up working as a journalist for a couple of newspapers that had wonderful editors who taught me how to write (once they finished throwing dictionaries at my head). From that newspaper writing, I started to write for fun. At that point I had little kids around my house, so I began to write for children. I was not going

to write about or for teenagers; in fact, I didn't even enjoy being a teenager. You know how you try to not think about those weird, awkward breakthrough years. I should tell you now that through a combination of my kids and my stepkids, we have girls, 19, 18 and 17 and a 12-year-old boy, so we're just up to our ears in adolescence.

Bad things are everywhere I look: in my school, in my city, in my family, nothing is happy, everything is broken. How did your character find the strength to go on?"

A letter I received this year kind of summarizes what I've learned about teenagers in the last four or five years. I got this letter about six months ago from Slovenia (who knew my books were being read by teens in Slovenia?). It was written in English, very well written in English, from a young girl. I think she was sixteen, and she has relatives in northern California. While visiting in northern California, she had picked up a copy of *Speak* and taken it back to Slovenia. I have forgotten which city she lives in, but it is devastated, bombed out from all the wars those folks have had. Its economy is depressed, and so it is very similar to Eastern Europe in the 1950s and the 1960s. She wrote me a very sweet letter, continuing for several paragraphs before saying,

"I should probably get to my point. I read your book and I have a question for you. The main character in your book, *Speak*, was very sad because bad things had happened to her. That's how I feel all the time. Bad things are everywhere I look: in my school, in my city, in my family, nothing is happy, everything is broken. How did your character find the strength to go on?"

I can't get that letter out of my head. I think a lot of teenagers are asking this of us. They want us to show them how to find the strength to go on. They desperately want us to give them the tools they need to go on. These are very, very, difficult circumstances. I understand the sadness that girl was talking about because I spent a lot of time living in the middle of that.

I was blessed with an idyllic childhood prior to adolescence. My dad was a preacher, and after a couple of country churches, when I was in first grade, we moved to Syracuse University where my father became a chaplain at Syracuse University. It was awesome! College students were always in our house, and they were all like big brothers and big sisters to me. My dad was the big man on campus, my mom had a job she loved, and I could walk to school.

It was a childhood you would hope all of your kids have, but one which, of course, had to come crashing around me as soon as I reached adolescence. I changed schools in sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade for a variety of reasons, and my family really hit a difficult patch. My father had a falling out, a bloody falling out over a very significant issue with his church, and he left, which for my father was a recipe for spiritual suicide.

My parents spent probably the next five years going in and out of mental illness and very severe alcoholism. My sister and I were confused, to say the very least. We moved to a very expensive, preppy region of Syracuse. We lived in a crappy little apartment, and I was the poor kid at school when I walked into ninth grade, which also explains *Speak*. Of course, you know, all teenagers have to rebel against their parents, but when your dad is a minister sometimes, if you have my kind of personality, you feel compelled to rebel against God, too.

This is a really big thing, to rebel against God. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of energy. It was not fun. Lots of people have these types of issues in their lives, and I have to say we worked out any kind of pain we went through in my family. Both of my parents are still with us, and they're doing OK. We're all at peace, and I love them very, very much. There was one shining moment in eighth grade when I was supposed to be getting confirmed as a United Methodist kid. Of course, my dad couldn't do my confirmation; I had to go to another church for that. The night before my confirmation I went to my pastor and said,

“OK, you want me to come tomorrow, you want me to say all this stuff, and join the church,” and I said, “But how can I do that when you guys are treating my father this way?” For the first time I spoke up, and he didn’t answer me. So, I chose not to be confirmed. When I eventually did join a church, I was a real little devil, so I became a Quaker. Chris Crutcher’s autobiography is called *King of the Mild Frontier*, and I think mine might be called *Born to Be Mild* because that’s kind of what I’ve become. I’m a bad Quaker. I’m a Quaker with evil tendencies. But I try really hard.

When I finally escaped, and I understand the need to escape, to get out of the house, I went to Denmark and worked on a pig farm rather than suffer through senior year in my high school back in the states. During all of those college years following that, I can honestly tell you I worked very hard actively trying not to think about my previous life as a teenager. I just couldn’t do it. As I got married and had children and raised them up, I still wouldn’t even consider reflecting back on those years. I guess maybe the reason the book is called *Speak* and I talk about *Speak* all the time is that the pain was actually UN-speakable until later in my life, and the title *Speak* is a meant to express irony. Young adults do experience a lot of pain, and often, perhaps, their behavior is an acting out caused by a hurt too deep for words.

Understanding this, what we need to do as teachers, librarians and others who work with young people is to love and honor them despite and BECAUSE of their weaknesses, as well as their strengths. As an adolescent you just have all that energy, and the wonder of having to deal with all that passion and a powerful sense of the possible.

It’s a hazard of being an author that you tend to see metaphors everywhere. I see children as blank sheets of paper. I see teenagers as rough drafts. They’re always adding details to fit these new personalities. They’re putting in new information; they’re expanding to fit their larger bodies and their larger sense of self. Then they cut, they contract, they pull back in when they run up against unexpected pain or harshness, they’re always polishing these new versions of themselves, trying to see who will stay in control. Our culture is not equipped to love and cherish teenagers. We’ll take their money, we’re very happy to take their money, but we don’t give them much back in return.

The letters that I get are heart-wrenching. There are the ones you might expect which come from survivors of sexual assault. I’m here to tell you right now, folks, there is a whole lot more of sexual assault going on in the middle schools and the high schools of America that even the experts aren’t willing to admit. It’s appalling. But they also write to me about harassment, about bullying, about feeling powerless and about feeling voiceless. I think the reason that *Speak* has been as powerful as it has been is not because of the whole rape thing. *Speak* is not really about rape. I have come to believe that *Speak* is a book about depression.

Pretty much every kid in America has gotten to that ugly, gloomy, dark hole that they can’t find a way out of. I’ve gotten letters that say, “Ok, like, I’m the biggest jock of the school and if you ever tell anybody this I’ll kill you, but I know exactly what that girl feels like.” That’s something we need to pay attention to.

There was a poll recently published that asked teenagers if they found any meaning in their high school experience, if they were learning things that were relevant and useful to their lives. The number of kids who said they found absolutely no meaning in their high school experience has doubled since the late 1980s. Think about it. There are an awful lot of kids who feel forced to attend class. And they are forced to sit in their chairs for eight hours a day, 180 days a year with people they don’t like, having to do things they don’t like. Am I describing anyone’s job? But the kids don’t get paid for it, and they get yelled at when they don’t do it well. We are failing our children. The outcomes are predictable. Kids have lost respect for the institution, and so respect for teachers diminishes. That makes your job so much harder because the students don’t see why they should be doing this and those of you who really care—you burn out. Sometimes you have to leave the profession because it is exquisitely hard. You guys already know about this.

Why do I appear so passionately frustrated by all of this? Because I, all of us, know how to fix it very

I’ve gotten letters that say, “Ok, like, I’m the biggest jock of the school and if you ever tell anybody this I’ll kill you, but I know exactly what that girl feels like.”

easily. Literature is an easy, affordable, multidimensional, cross-curricular way to both educate teens about the world and allow them to learn about themselves and their pretensions in a safe and productive way. Just give me five minutes with the president, that's all I need, five minutes.

Don Gallo, who is a known educator and one of my big heroes, has a great quote. He says "We are a

nation that teaches its children how to read in the early grades then forces them during their teenage years to read literary works that most of them dislike so much that they have no desire whatsoever to continue those experiences into adulthood." As a nation, I believe that we have lost sight of the goal. The goal is not to produce eighteen-year-olds who can deconstruct text. The goal is to produce, at graduation, every single child in America who can read and read well, and who will read broadly, who will read for fun, who will read for enlightenment, for work, who will read for safety, who will read to get information in emergency situations, who will read for information, who will read to make intelligent political decisions, and who will read for cultural understanding.

Stop for a moment and imagine that every single adult you came across in the course of your day: from the fellow at the gas station, the lady in the lunch line, the bank president, the administrator of your building. What if that person were honest to goodness reading for fun? What if they all had exactly equal literacy skills? Everyone must be able to read and read well to be responsible, useful citizens. Everyone must be able

to read and to read well to be fully aware as a human. That's just my personal opinion.

Well, what about the canon, you ask?

Throw it overboard, and let it sink to the bottom of the sea. Not all of you are clapping. Give me a minute, all right? There are a lot of reasons why you should keep it, of course. First of all, money—your schools have invested all that money in all those darn books, and they're not going to take very kindly to the notion that they all need to be tossed to the bottom of the sea. They could also line cages at the animal shelter.

Then there is tradition. We have a tradition of eighty years of teaching these books at our high schools. And a lot of these books we teach in the canon are the foundation of our culture. I'm all about that. I personally believe a lot of the text that we use in the English literature should be taught as social studies and they can be excerpted. "The Scarlet Letter," which everybody knows I loathe, does have some important points to it, but that text is too dense. Most of the books in the canon were not written for teenagers. Very few adults pick up those books and read them for fun. They were written in different time periods for different audiences with different needs and desires.

Think about how much the curriculum in American high schools in math, science and history has changed since the 1940s. Pretty substantially, right? There used to be books that said someday we'll go to the moon. The English curriculum by comparison has not changed at all since 1940. A Steven King book will be thrown in for an alternative education class, but for the most part, the books are very much the same.

What I'm talking about here is not necessarily the AP and honor kids; they're going to do well no matter what challenges they're presented. I do think, however, that they want to read for fun sometimes, too, and we should allow them to do that. Let me give you two quick examples to help you really understand what this feels like to the average high school student. I want you to do this next week. Go to your local community college library and take out a book on chemical engineering. The librarian will be able to tell you where it is. I want you to take that book everywhere you go for a week. I want you to read it in the faculty room. I want you to go home, turn on MTV

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and read it. I want you to be e-mailing your friends while reading your chemical engineering text. I want you to get a group of your friends together, go to Starbucks, stand up in the middle of Starbucks and read out loud that chemical engineering text. That experience for you is going to help you know what it feels like for the average teen reader, or the struggling reader, who reads below grade level, to try to plow through the books in the canon. They'll have as much meaning, and it will feel about as good.

I think that any book you assign in an English curriculum should be the kind of book that you, as an adult, would be comfortable reading on a beach because our attention span as adults on a beach, you know chilling out and enjoying life, is what a teenager's attention span is in the classroom. So, let's think about where young readers are and address them where they are. We don't expect fourth-graders to act like eighth-graders. Why do we expect ninth-graders to act like they are thirty? It doesn't work that way. Their brains aren't finished developing.

I would like you to think about taking the expression *reluctant reader* out of use. Don't call them reluctant readers; they are not. They are readers faced with high barriers (presented by the canon) and very high standards. They have high barriers to successful reading; it's hard for them, and you know what? A lot of these kids are too smart to willingly endure boring books. They want to read something that has meaning, that's interesting, that speaks to their condition. My daughter, Merideth, didn't like to read; she had very low reading scores, about three grades below grade level. But, she got to the seventh grade, and they taught her about the Holocaust in social studies.

She came home and she said, "Mommy, did that happen?"

And I said, "Oh yeah; in fact, your grandfather was a soldier in that war."

And she said, "Do they have any books about it?"

Now, I've been waiting this kid's entire life to hear those words, and I said, "I think so." We now have in our house the largest collection of juvenile literature about the Holocaust of any household in America. The interest in that subject propelled my daughter beyond her own low reading skills, and she was very interested in reading about it. She became a great reader. She goes to college next year and intends to major in education.

Young adult literature is multicultural literature. We have accepted, pretty much every place in America, although I'm not sure about a few counties, the need for multicultural reading in the curriculum. And if you think about adolescence as its own unique culture: the language, music, artistic expression, you will realize that they deserve books that reflect their cultural experience and what is going on inside of them.

Now, I know I am preaching to the choir. If you guys took the time, the trouble and the money to show up at a state English teachers' convention on a Saturday, you already understand an awful lot of this. There is one piece about which I want to sort of pump you up so when you go home you'll say, "We need to put this in the curriculum." We have Walter Dean Meyers and Gary Soto and all these authors that speak to the conditions of our readers so we can finally, in America, produce a literate generation. We haven't done that yet.

The last thing I want to tell you about is something that I hear from kids over and over and over again when they talk to me and when they write to me. They include kids marching their way toward the penitentiary, as well as kids on their way to MIT. The one common thread that unites them is that they love good teachers. They always tell me, "I hate school. It sucked, but there was this one teacher. . ." It could be a biology teacher, a gym teacher, anybody, but there's always this *one teacher*. I'm here to tell you, this is the honest to goodness truth, I would be dead today, I would have been dead at age sixteen if it hadn't been for a couple of teachers in my high school. I was teetering on the edge of disaster. I was ready to go from soft drugs into very hard and nasty drugs. I was hanging out with people who are all dead now. The reason that I'm not dead is that I had teachers, not that they would help me with my homework, not that they would give me good grades, but I had teachers that would look me in the eye and say, "Hi, how are you doing? I haven't seen you in a while. Welcome

A lot of these kids are too smart to willingly endure boring books. They want to read something that has meaning, that's interesting, that speaks to their condition.

back. Now you have to serve detention, but I'll be there."

I knew that those teachers loved me and they were so strong and they were so wonderful and they were willing to risk their hearts on someone like me—the biggest loser on the planet, but they loved me even so. I hope you as teachers know that if you have the courage and the strength and the gift and the blessings to go forth and love those teenagers in your life, you will change the world. They need it, they want it, and they are so grateful! But they'll probably never,

I hope you as teachers know that if you have the courage and the strength and the gift and the blessings to go forth and love those teenagers in your life, you will change the world. They need it, they want it, and they are so grateful! But they'll probably never, ever tell you, so I'm here to tell you

The Animal Within:

Recognizing the Fullness of Adolescent Selves

“Trouble with us humans is we keep forgetting we’re animals.”

—Eva 114

My twelve-year-old son, Jack, has recently had yet another surge of growth. He is taller (5’4), and heavier (124 pounds). But the place he has grown the most has been in his feet. He now wears size 9 men’s shoes. Jack is mutating right before my eyes. Given the rapid degree of change in his physical appearance, it isn’t surprising that he is undergoing similar shifts internally. He, like other young adults, has learned to deal with radical change as a way of life. This transforming spirit of adolescence is at the heart of my focus, along with the books explored here, and will show the natural bewilderment (and delight) that accompanies new powers and abilities.

Young adult literature includes many outer transforming novels in which young adults routinely take on animal forms. These books document how the lure of the natural, animal world intermingles (and often conflicts) with the acculturation all adolescents go through. These animal/human books serve as a metaphor for the funny, absurd difficulties of straddling worlds. Radical young adult transformations are at the heart of Annette Curtis Klause’s

Blood and Chocolate, Donna Jo Napoli’s *Sirena*, Patrice Kindl’s *Owl in Love*, Melvin Burgess’ *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*, Linda Hogan’s *Power*, Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*, and Peter Dickinson’s *Eva*. The transformations these protagonists undergo are not merely intellectual. All aspects of their physical, spiritual, and intellectual world are affected. These books suggest that life is less certain than we might allow, and profoundly mysterious in ways that are often shuttered out. They explore the complex (and sometimes opposed viewpoints) often co-existing in an adolescent, demonstrating that knowledge comes in many forms, and for many purposes.

Adolescents have long been stereotyped as split figures without stability, their warring selves struggling in vain to secure an identity. Whether these conflicting sides are child vs. adult, or instinctual vs. intellectual, the difficulties are real. The young protagonists in these seven novels—whether werewolf, mermaid, owl, dog, panther or chimpanzee—struggle mightily to keep their humanity alive as they walk in and out of worlds that do not smoothly mesh.

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These protagonists, like all adolescents, must try out roles and take on personas until the labels they apply to themselves fit. Like all young adults, they must also become adept at code-switching—learning how to communicate in radically different roles and contexts. In these books the stark differences between the animal world and the human world—and child consciousness and adult perspective—make decision-making for these protagonists especially difficult.

It is no accident that the protagonist in each of these novels is a young woman. Readers of children's

Seeing the animal side so closely aligned with the human side highlights the extraordinary demands placed on these earthy young women. Free from "normal" social conventions and "typical" peer groups, these young women must learn to utilize their powers in a world that doesn't understand.

and young adult literature are accustomed to seeing feisty, independent and intelligent young women. But these animal/human books add a new twist. Placing these young women in animal and human forms forces new contexts for evaluating ways young women can flourish. The animal/human link helps readers to see the rich abilities of these young women. We can't just say *she's a cheerleader; she's a shy girl; she's boy crazy*. We have to say she's a whiz at biology—and an owl. Or a beautiful young woman—and a

werewolf. Or an accomplished musician—and a mermaid. Combining animal and human forms also helps readers see sexuality and other dangerous topics with new eyes. Seeing the animal side so closely aligned with the human side highlights the extraordinary demands placed on these earthy young women. Free from "normal" social conventions and "typical" peer groups, these young women must learn to utilize their powers in a world that doesn't understand. But first, they must learn the rules of both the animal and the human worlds.

In *Lady: My Life as a Bitch* and *Eva*, two normal

teenage girls are transformed without warning into animals. Lady and Eva find themselves literally transformed from their human form and placed in an alien animal body. Like many other adolescents, these two young women are rudely thrown into a new culture, without rules or guidebooks, with no convenient adjustment period. They have little choice but to cope. They ultimately must also choose between their animal and human societies.

When Sandra Farmer, the seventeen-year-old protagonist in *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*, accidentally turns into a dog, her own family cannot recognize her essence. They see only a stray mongrel seeking their affection. Without a family or home or stable identity, she is turned loose in her community. Her plight resembles what many adolescents face: "I set off again, no idea in my head about who I was or what I was and where I belonged or where to go, except to run and run until my pads bled and my dry tongue beat the ground" (22). Sandra, as a young female, knows the social and moral constraints of her human world. As a dog, her new freedom is exhilarating. In her dog form, Sandra, like many young adults, doesn't know the rules of how to behave, how to master a new culture, meet new friends, and survive on her own wits.

Peter Dickinson's *Eva* portrays a world where no living creature (including humans) can confidently look to a stable future. Human dominance is killing the animals, the trees, the earth itself, as well as hope for a sustainable future. It is a world where "most people stayed in their rooms all day, just to get away from another" (14). Into this future world, Eva wakes after a horrible accident to find herself, a teenage girl, in a chimp's body. Eva realizes quickly she will need the strengths of both her human and her chimp sides. She can't be just human, or just chimp. She must blend both viewpoints—to create a new stronger species. Bringing together the human and animal worlds is not so easy. Eva is immediately conflicted—not over "what the human part of her felt about being chimp but what the chimp felt about being human" (978). Seeing the world from animal eyes forces her to see humankind with new perspective.

Eva recognizes signs in human society that others have learned to ignore—like the fact that young children have begun to routinely commit suicide. As an animal she recognizes immediately the bleakness

of a future cut off from the natural world. Eva sees for the first time that most people “were strange, listless, empty [as] if they didn’t have anything to live for”(78). Viewing humans from the “outside,” she is horrified by the cruelty and violence inflicted by humans. “This is what humans did to animals, one way or another. This was what they’d always done” (134). In her new form none of the old human rules for behavior quite apply.

Ultimately, Eva tears off her “human” clothes and joins the chimp world in the wild. She does so, knowing she is more than a chimp. She is human *and* chimp working to preserve the “wild”—for both chimps *and* humans. For the next three decades Eva will be the communicator—the connection between the animal and human worlds. She will be the mother of a new breed of chimps who will evolve into the new humans when the old human species annihilates itself.

In these seven animal/human books, it is difficult not to think of the adult (human) side of these characters as thoughtful, logical and calculating, and the child (animal) side as closely linked with the instinctual, natural world. These female protagonists, like all young adults, straddle the border between childhood and adulthood. As they rapidly approach adulthood, their new intellectual awareness often conflicts with their more primal (“animal”) and instinctual child side.

Sirena, by Donna Joe Napoli, is a mermaid who has trouble reconciling her half fish, half human nature. Her human lover describes her difficulties well: “We are all made of little pieces. We are all part this and part that. We are air and water and fire and dirt. But you, Sirena, you are more” (102). Sirena *has* to be more. Sirena and the other half-animal, half-human females in these books must master multiple worlds at once. They are both children trapped in nearly adult bodies, *and* human and animal at the same time.

As a child, Sirena must use her newfound abilities and discover how her actions affect those around her. She learns quickly that her good intentions do not necessarily produce good results. When she and her fellow gregarious siren sing in delight at seeing sailors, they inadvertently lure them to their death. Like most adolescents, Sirena has little experience and many fears. But she faces her fears head on. She says: “If I yield to fear, my life will become small and dry, until

no pleasures touch me at all. I must allow myself adventure” (45).

The young women in these novels typically *do* allow themselves adventure, and they are not paralyzed by their difficulties. Though much is imposed on them, their choices are what mark them as human (in animal form). Sirena ultimately chooses unselfishly to give up her lover, though she knows she has the power to make him stay. Once she realizes the cause/effect relationship between singing and sailors dying, she denies her greatest gift—her song—with the sailor she loves. Her ability to balance perspectives, see choices, and make unselfish decisions is one mark of her approaching adulthood.

As these seven young women explore new abilities and push themselves into new worlds, they expose more of themselves to others. For many adolescents new awareness of their inner and outer selves can be frightening. As they venture into worlds far removed from the safety of home and neighborhood, they learn that being noticed by others may be dangerous, especially when their differences are undeniable. In *Blood and Chocolate* and *Owl in Love*, the werewolf and owl sides can be hidden but not removed. In *Owl in Love* and *Blood and Chocolate*, characters have spent a lifetime possessing knowledge they must hide and learning how to balance conflicting roles. It’s not easy being a female werewolf teenager in New Jersey. Or an owl/human teenager attending a suburban high school. Vivian and Owl are radically different in ways that cannot easily be masked. They are different to the core of their being, and their only choice is to accept who and what they are. They are a new form of being facing a new future.

They are different to the core of their being, and their only choice is to accept who and what they are. They are a new form of being facing a new future. Because they push themselves into worlds their parents largely shun, they are especially vulnerable and on their own. It would be understandable if they simply retreated from their challenges. But they don’t.

Because they push themselves into worlds their parents largely shun, they are especially vulnerable and on their own. It would be understandable if they simply retreated from their challenges. But they don't. Like Serena, they push on—though they often don't have a guidebook for how to proceed.

Vivian, in *Blood and Chocolate*, is both human and werewolf. In both her human and werewolf forms, she wonders if she will always have to hide the essential truths of her nature. As a typical post-modern young adult, she belongs to a multitude of packs and sub-packs. Many of the groups she belongs to possess conflicting values. As she weaves amongst

these groups, Vivian craves relationships where she can be accepted and reveal all of herself. Yet, when she ventures into human culture in high school classes, she realizes (much like each of our other young women) that “she [doesn't] know their rules” (51).

These rules are often unstated. Vivian quickly discovers that with humans when attraction is

involved, the most essential truths are rarely discussed. In her relationship with a human teenage boy, she realizes she is involved in a “game of pretend we don't want sex so badly” (52). This open discussion of sexual desire might be shocking if human teenagers were the sole focus. But here, the wolf side, with its earthy, uncontrollable passion, is presented as natural. Her lust isn't tainted by human rules of morality. Still, Vivian isn't so unusual despite her wolf appearance. What young adult understands what happens when attraction takes over? How can they, when much of what they experience can't be openly discussed—even with their own kind?

Though Vivian pines for a complex, adult relationship (involving sexuality), her mother and the other pack members still treat her as a child. Vivian complains when they dismiss her feelings as merely a “stage” (69). She is trapped in between, frozen by the viewpoint of others. She is equally trapped between animal and human worlds. If the humans knew of her wolf-like nature, they would kill her immediately.

When her wolf peers learn of her desire to mingle with humans, they harass her unmercifully.

Vivian feels locked into roles by both peers and parents. Though she feels ready to explore new experiences, to do so she must fight both peers and parents. Thomas Hine in *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* notes that many teenagers “serve a sentence of presumed immaturity, regardless of their achievements and abilities” (16). Hine states that:

The mismatch between young peoples' imposing physical development and their presumed emotional, social, and intellectual immaturity is dramatic. Will these powerful young people, who are judged not yet ready to join the adult world, assert themselves and immediately careen out of control, endangering themselves and others? (16-17)

Vivian is not interested in careening out of control. What she wants is someone who is “open enough to accept the truth about her” (77). She wants all of herself to be acknowledged. Yet, the fear that she will be rejected paralyzes her: “[What] if they saw her in her wolf-shape? They'd be fleeing down the streets like those teenagers on the television” (133). Vivian is right to be afraid of allowing all her abilities to surface. When she finally reveals her wolf nature to her human boyfriend, he is repulsed and horrified. At a tender age, Vivian recognizes the narrow conformity often practiced by humans and werewolves. To her credit, she continues to listen to her instincts, refusing to deny her full nature.

Balancing instincts and intuitions with human demands for conformity is tough for each of these protagonists. It would be easier if their animal side disappeared when they chose to reveal their human attributes. But the animal within isn't just a momentary costume change. The animal side is part of who they are, as natural as their human side. In Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love*, Owl deals with high school trivia, and cliques—while also learning to balance her bird-of-prey “instincts.” Owl attends classes during the day and eats mice and hangs out in trees at night. In school she does her best not to stand out as an oddity. She says adamantly: “I am no vampire in a fairy tale” (4). Characters as strange as Owl know that simply changing her wardrobe will not make her fit in:

My fellow students at Wildewood Senior High have always thought me strange, odd . . . I am very different from them. My blood, for instance, is black, while theirs is red. It is a pretty color, human blood, when it is fresh. (5).

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Owl is not surprised by the shifting transformations of adolescents she meets at school. This tolerance for change is bred into her genetic code. Weirdness is inherent in her family. “Others of my family shift to dog- or cat-kind, a few to hooved or finned beasts” 4). Because Owl has a crush on her science teacher, she often is found flying in his neighborhood, or perched in trees overlooking his house. There she meets a kindred soul, a strange dark boy who has suffered because of his “extra” abilities. The humans he has come in contact with “thought him demented when he tried to do what his instinct told him he must do” (188-189).

Both Owl and her new friend search for cues on how to be human while also following their ‘instinct.’ There is much to learn. Nature rules the owl world with its dirt, killing and eating, and physicality. Like the other young women we’ve met, Owl finds the balance between fitting in and following her inner voice doesn’t come without mistakes and pain. Anytime her owl life intersects with her human life, trouble ensues. She survives by being adaptable and borrowing from both of her complex worlds.

By following her instincts she learns of her own special talents. Almost accidentally she learns that she has the ability to create a special owl call. “There is no call so insistent, so impossible to ignore. It is a cry from the heart to the heart bypassing the mind.” (187)

Owl was born with her traits; she didn’t choose her abilities. So genetics can be blamed for her feathers and love for mouse delicacies. But in Linda Hogan’s *Power*, there is no easy explanation for her links to the animal world. Omishto, the sixteen-year-old Native American protagonist, lives in two worlds. One side of her life connects her to high school and her mother’s Middle American aspirations. Another world Omishto inhabits is the native tribe of her ancestors—who have long believed in kinship with the Florida panther. The panther, they believe, lives both inside and outside themselves. If the panther is threatened, the tribe is also. Omishto is torn between her mother’s materialism and her “aunt’s” life in the wilds of Florida swampland at one with the native panthers. When a huge storm washes all worlds together, Omishto joins her lost tribe, choosing their understanding over her mother’s consumer-driven culture. She comes to see how both her future and her tribe’s are intertwined with the panther’s destiny.

Omishto is linked to our other young women because she chooses her primal, natural, animal heritage over her modern “human” heritage. When she and our other young women are pushed to choose a side of themselves, they surprisingly align themselves with their animal nature. Vivian listens to her wild nature and becomes more wolf-like than human. Owl coaxes her new friend to embrace his owl nature as the site of his authenticity. Lady, after a time in the dog world, states flatly: “I don’t want to be a human being . . . I want to be a quick and fast and happy and then dead . . . I don’t want to go to work. I don’t want to be responsible. I want to be a dog” (235). Similarly, Eva, forced to choose between a chimp world or a human world, ultimately sees the chimp world as more humane, more natural, more freeing.

Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*, provides special insight into the animal/human connection explored so far. In *The Golden Compass* all humans possess a daemon, an animal alter ego. In this story the worst fate, except for death, is for children to be separated from their daemons. The animal alter ego so cherished by children is inseparably connected with the core of a human personality. Messing with another’s daemon is an unpardonable crime. “It was the grossest breach of etiquette imaginable to touch another person’s daemon” (126). The daemons of children possess a life of their own; they transform often, sometimes many times within a single scene. Later, as children age, the daemons settle on one fixed form. Lyra, the protagonist, learns from an old sailor why this settling takes place. He tells her: “when your daemon settles, you’ll know the sort of person you are” (147).

Lyra and other children naturally test the connections with their daemons: “Everyone tested it when they were growing up: seeing how far they could pull apart, coming back with intense relief” (170-171). In *The Golden Compass* the link between the animal and human worlds reminds humans of a time when “they

The young adults portrayed in these books have an urgency to learn. And we, as teachers and parents, have a duty to welcome them through doors.

were at one with all of the creatures of the earth and the air, and there was no difference between them” (326). *The Golden Compass* reaffirms what the other books have illustrated: As humans have distanced themselves from the natural world, the balance shifts and the future is threatened. When the natural world is far from everyday human activity, essential truths are hidden.

There’s a message in these seven novels for those of us who work with adolescents. We, as teachers and parents and adults, must keep the sense of humanity alive within our adolescents. We must be gentle with our manipulations, our attempts to lead adolescents into adulthood. We must delight in exploratory transformation and recognize both the “animal” and “human” sides in the fullest sense possible.

These books show an animal side full of instinctual knowledge tied to the richness of the natural world. This animal world, which humans often fear, is more humane, more loving and sensitive than “civilized” culture (at least in these books). In contrast these books show the human side as too often fraught with cruelty, intolerance and horror. In these books the human side is “thin,” missing essential information about the larger world.

Thomas Hine states in *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*: “A person standing at [the threshold of adulthood] must be invited to come through the door. But those with power to extend the invitation are often ambivalent about surrendering their authority” (46). The young adults portrayed in these books have an urgency to learn. And we, as teachers and parents, have a duty to welcome them through doors, offering experience and opportunities. They have much to experience, and in many situations they don’t know the rules. At the same time, they have knowledge that adults have forgotten, or have never experienced. The best of us as teachers learn from young adults as we teach them.

When young adults grow and take on new roles, they don’t necessarily forget old roles. In fact, like the characters in these novels, they often fully retain old roles and attitudes. Thus, adolescents are never EITHER children or adults. In almost all situations adolescents are both children and adults at the same time. At twelve my son is a shifting mix of both. When he plays his trumpet or teaches me how to make a power point presentation, he seems pretty adult to me.

When he is tired and begs me to read to him before going to bed, he is the beautiful child I’ve known forever. These novels remind us that the movement toward adulthood doesn’t come in neat, well-labeled adjustments. Being in the middle (as Nancie Atwell has suggested) is the normal state of affairs for adolescents.

We as adults must see the mysterious and sometimes brutal truths which adolescents face daily. I don’t think we should be frightened when we look at the truth of adolescent lives. These seven novels help to remind us that there’s more hope and freshness than horror. Anyone who has spent any time working with adolescents would agree with Patricia Hersch’s summary in *A Tribe Apart: A Journey to the Heart of American Adolescence*. Hersch states passionately: “The kids, if we get to know them, will decimate every long held stereotype any adult has ever had about teens . . . They are not all doing bad things . . . they are simply more complex than we could ever imagine” (232).

They should be. They are the evolving model, the future in progress. We shouldn’t look for anything less than the total emerging animal. There’s something wonderful about powerful, independent, and intelligent young adults exploring their full nature.

Mark Vogel has been a professor of English Education at Appalachian State University since 1989. Before that, he taught in Missouri and Iowa at the middle school, high school, community college, and university levels. He has published scholarly essays, short stories, poetry, and photographs.

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Photo by Barbara Bordnick

Remembering Paula Danziger

I was one of the scores of Paula's best friends. No one had a gift for making best friends and writing about deep friendship than Paula Danziger. We both started publishing in the 1970s. I, like so many in our children's book world, loved it when Paula would show up at conventions, laughing, connecting, and making sure that everyone felt included. Then we'd go our separate ways. About ten years ago, she called, and said, "We've got to put up or shut up. We're either good friends or not." That's Paula at her core. A deep honesty that grounded the love she gave to all of us and that she poured into her fiction. Just as happened with her readers, I don't remember any transition. We were intimates, friends who could share our deepest fears, loves and hopes.

Paula was one of the great teachers. She pushed me to dig deeper in my writing, the same challenge that she gave herself. She kept urging me to use the humor in my writing the way we did in our friendship, to get to the underlying truth of our feelings.

She knew the difference between humor that hurts and humor that heals.

Paula and I once did an interview for *Booktalk* on writing humor. . . . Paula wrote, "Humor is touching . . . Because it gets close to feelings . . . Because it can make us feel better—almost like a caress of under-



Photo by Sigrid Estrada, courtesy of Penguin Young Readers Group

standing or it can really hurt—like a stiletto in your heart." She continued, "This is really important to me as a writer, and in my personal life. I'm so psychologically adept and so funny, I can cut somebody off at the knee-caps. I learned to do it in self-defense because of a father who was very cruel and always said he was being very funny. But it was not a good defense, and it's not a good device to use in writing. There was a time that I do that in personal situations, but it didn't make me feel good, and certainly, it didn't make for lasting friendships. It was anger

. . . In my writing that kind of humor creates a distance."

So often she quoted John Ciardi, the poet, who taught her that if you took a poem and put a red line through the funny lines and a blue line through the sad lines—you would have a page full of purple. Paula left us all draped in purple, the color she so often draped herself in.

John Ciardi hired Paula as a babysitter for his children and took her up to the Breadloaf

Paula would show up at conventions, laughing, connecting, and making sure that everyone felt included.

Writers Conference—and from that moment gave her the courage to be a writer. Paula believed in giving back, in trying to give to others the unexpected chances that had been given to her. If there was an artist in any one of us that needed nourishing, Paula would do it or get everyone else to do it. No one took such delight in a young author getting good reviews—or calling her editors and telling them, “You must publish so and so.”

Having started out as a teacher, Paula had her teacher’s voice—mostly used on adults, hardly ever on children. Just dare a teacher to rustle papers and correct them while Paula was speaking, or to be cruel to child, Paula would be on them like a tiger.

She was so funny, smart and quick that it’s hard to pick out the moments to remember. There was the moment at a large conference (it might have been NCTE) when she had to go the bathroom before she spoke. There was a huge line, so she promised all the librarians and teachers that if they let her go first, she’d give them a piece of toilet paper that would mean that they could cut the line for the autographing. She kept her word. Penguin Putnam let anyone through waving a piece of toilet paper.

Even in the bleakest times, Paula could find the humor. After she was physically attacked in Reno, in the emergency room when they went to wrap her wounds in gauze, she held out her hand and said “Is this gauze for alarm?” When I was told to help her put ice on her bruises, I chased her around the hotel room

She was so funny, smart and quick that it’s hard to pick out the moments to remember. There was the moment at a large conference (it might have been NCTE) when she had to go the bathroom before she spoke. There was a huge line, so she promised all the librarians and teachers that if they let her go first, she’d give them a piece of toilet paper that would mean that they could cut the line for the autographing. She kept her word. Penguin Putnam let anyone through waving a piece of toilet paper.

with packages of frozen peas. She turned to me and said, “You want me to give peas a chance. . . .”

Paula wrote, “I never thought of myself as a clown—although I was upset when someone got voted class clown instead of me. Instead of a clown, I was a commentator. The only time I was class clown was then the teacher told me to put my gum in the garbage can and I begged to be able to stand in the garbage can so I could still chew it.”

Well, Paula left us lots to chew on.

And in fact to gum on, to use one of Paula’s puns. One of her favorite characters was Great Uncle Mort, or GUM for short. In writing *The United TATES of America* she had planned on starting with Gum’s death, but she realized for the reader to feel what it was like to love GUM, she had to write about him when he was alive, and so it is not until page 80 that GUM dies.

Then Paula wrote
“Gum is dead.
I am so sad.
I am so angry.
I am so upset.
I love him so much.”

We all in the children’s book world loved her so much.

Elizabeth Levy is an award winning author of many books for young people, including Paula Danziger’s own favorite My Life as A Fifth Grade Comedian. More about Elizabeth is available at <http://elizabethlevy.com/index.html>

Film in the Classroom:

The Non-Print Connection

The timing could not be better for teachers to take a serious look at books that have been adapted for film. Today's adolescents continue the American love affair with movies while filmmakers respond with a plethora of teen films designed to tap into this lucrative and eager audience. This column focuses on a film evaluation form developed by a group of middle and secondary teachers enrolled in a graduate course, Teaching Adolescent Literature, summer 2002, at Rhode Island College.

The form was designed to help teachers examine movie adaptations of books that are used in the classroom. Several local teachers and graduate students at Rhode Island College have used the form and their evaluations of films adapted from adolescent novels are included later in this column.

Teachers need to make the distinction between novels that are then made into movies rather than movie scripts that are turned into novelizations and sold as books. Movies makers often authorize novelizations to capitalize on the film's popularity. These books usually follow the plot while adding detail, but as can be expected usually are of limited literary quality.

The role of technology also provides ever-increasing opportunities for teachers to incorporate film, especially adaptations of books in the classroom. Videotapes and DVDs provide teachers with both accessibility and flexibility to use an entire film in the classroom or for teachers to identify and use excerpts from films, to pause and discuss, or to replay important sections. I recently observed a very effective lesson where the teacher used excerpts from the film

Oh, Brother, Where Are Thou? as a bridge to reading *The Odyssey* in a ninth grade classroom. In another class, a teacher used different film excerpts of the gravedigger's scene from *Hamlet* and led her students in a spirited interpretation of the different versions.

A number of years ago, I surveyed high school students about influences on their reading preferences and what influenced their choices. A number of students listed movies as an influence on their reading choices. Their "reading" lists would then include the latest Shakespeare play that had been filmed or a novel made into a television mini-series. The results of the survey revealed that a film or television adaptation of a book heightened students' awareness of books and even encouraged students to read a book once they had seen the film adaptation. It also revealed that some students assumed that seeing the movie "was just as good as reading the book." Of course, some of these students never read the books if there were a movie version, but others were eager to see and compare the two treatments of a story that they liked. One eleventh grader reported: "When I hear about a movie of some book, I get the book and read it and then I go see the movie. When I see the movie first, I have all the images from that in my mind and I don't make my own and that takes the fun out of reading."

More recently, a part of an on-going Literacy Partnership between the Alliance for the Study and Teaching of Adolescent Literature at Rhode Island College and H. B. Bain Middle School in Cranston (RI) involved a whole school read of Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty*. (See the evaluations below.) After reading and discussing the novel, the students all had

the opportunity to watch the movie adaptation, *The Mighty*. The following comments were representative of responses that student volunteered: "I liked the movie, but the book was better." "What did they do to our book?!" "I liked the way I thought they looked like better than the movie." "I liked the King Arthur stuff in the movie." Not surprisingly, some students indicated that they would liked to have just seen the film rather than reading the book, but there were only a few who took that position.

The Evaluation Form

The form, developed in 2002, has been modified and revised based on field test by teachers. Parts 1 and 2 of the form are geared specifically to the needs and concerns of teachers; however, teachers *and* their students can use Part 3 to compare the book with its film adaptation.

Evaluation for Film Adaptations of YA Books

Film: _____
 Stars: _____
 Director: _____
 Date: _____
 Book: _____
 Author: _____
 Publisher: _____
 Date: _____

Part 1 Rationale/ Purpose for class use of the film

Your discussion should include the following: a justification of *why* and *how* the film will be used. (e.g. How do you think the film will contribute to the understanding of the book? Or the appreciation of it? Are you using the film in conjunction with the book? In place of it? Or just excerpts to clarify or emphasize? Will students view it before, during, or after reading the book? How will you assess their experience?

Part 2 Special Considerations

Your discussion should include the following: Regardless of the rating system, are there any elements of the film that would cause obvious concern in the community? Do you need to use permission slips? Do you need to do any type of pre-viewing activity to enhance the students' experience?

Part 3 Comparison and Contrast

Rate the film in each of the following areas in comparison with the book. Comment on why you selected the rating. In the rating scale replace numbers with stars 5 is the highest.

Characters	5 4 3 2 1
Plot	5 4 3 2 1
Theme	5 4 3 2 1
Setting	5 4 3 2 1
Conflict	5 4 3 2 1
Tone	5 4 3 2 1
Mood	5 4 3 2 1
Overall effectiveness	5 4 3 2 1
True to the text	5 4 3 2 1

Application of the Film Evaluation Form:

Four applications of the complete form follow. Two of them evaluate *The Mighty*, from differing perspectives. *Freak the Might* is one of the most frequently taught YA novels in the area and increasingly the film is also being used in conjunction with it. The remaining two are evaluations of *Shiloh* and *Tuck Everlasting*.

Evaluation of the Film Adaptation of *The Mighty*

Film: *The Mighty*

Stars: Sharon Stone, Gena Rowlands, Harry Dean Stanton, Gillian Anderson, James Gandolfini, Kieran Culkin, Elden Henson

Director: Peter Chelsom

Date: 1998

Book: *Freak the Mighty*

Author: Rodman Philbric

Publisher: Scholastic

Date: 1993

Part 1 Rationale/Purpose for class use of the film

While the plot of the movie pretty much mirrored the book, there were some interesting differences. *Freak the Mighty* is written as a first person narrative. In the book Max is the focus; the reader is inside Max's head. The perspective in the movie shifts. At first Max narrates. The film follows all of the characters for a bit and then returns to Max's voice-over narration. The story is no longer Max's story. Kevin catches the attention of the camera while Max supports him, both literally and figuratively.

While excessive voice-over can kill a movie, changing perspectives also presents a problem: the director needs to explain what's going on with the other characters. Towards the end of *The Mighty*, Max is being held prisoner by his father, murderer Killer Kane. In the book crippled friend Kevin shows up to save the day. Since we're inside Max's head this is all we need to know. In the film the director felt compelled to show Kevin's journey on crutches propelling his weakened body through snow, riding a runaway bumper down an icy mountain. I might use this particular chunk of the film to study how point of view impacts the decisions the story teller makes.

Another interesting difference was the film's many visual references to King Arthur and the Knights. The Arthurian legend thematically holds the movie together. While the legend is important in the book, it is the power of words from beginning to end that draws the story together. The story ends with the writing of the story, even followed by a dictionary of favorite words. I might show the entire movie with a focus on the Arthur references, asking students to compare thematic emphasis.

The movie is divided into chapters, some named exactly as the chapters in the book, others not. It would be very easy to use segments of the movie to compare to specific chapters. The first segment of the movie would be a very good one to show since we hear Max's voice and thinking as the main characters are introduced. Using just this first chunk would provide background knowledge and might also engage less motivated readers.

The endings would also be interesting to compare. Scenes in the movie are quite drawn out compared to the relatively brief wrap-up in the book.

Part 2 Special Considerations

Since the movie and book both deal with special needs students, I would want to discuss that nature of their disabilities. I have had students in the past with disabilities similar to Kevin's. I'm not sure how I would feel about using this movie with a physically handicapped student in the class. Using the word "freak" might be upsetting to students (and parents) so I would want to discuss this word and its use in the context of the film before seeing the movie. It's interesting that the movie version dropped "freak" from the title.

Although I don't think the movie is particularly violent or graphic, I would notify parents that students were going to be watching a PG movie. I would also briefly explain the connection of the movie to the curriculum. When videos are used, parents should understand that there is an educational purpose.

Part 3 Comparison and Contrast

Characters 3 While Kevin was feistier in the movie, Max was more of an unknown. The father (played by James Gandolfini) was downright creepy, especially with southern accent. The grim grandfather was just as I imagined.

Plot 3 Two misfits join forces and become a force to be reckoned with and learn life lessons along the way.

Theme 3 The movie emphasized the code of chivalry. A knight's duty is to do the right thing-and a man is known by his deeds rather than his parentage.

Setting 4 The movie is set in Cincinnati. There are excellent shots of the city, the power generators and plumes of smoke.

Conflict 3 The points of conflict are the same as the book. The boys are in conflict with the local gang, Max's father, and at times, each other. Iggy plays a smaller role. The grandmother and grandfather seem fearful of Max in the book. This tension is minimized in the movie.

Tone 3 During the narration/voice-overs, the tone matches the book: informal, reflective, "kidspeak".

Mood 3 The mood is a bit lighter than the book. Some sequences are downright manic and overblown. The scenes where Max is threatened by his father flip between scary and silly. This is also true of the book, but the translation to film is almost cartoon-like.

Overall effectiveness 3 While the movie was entertaining enough, it didn't hold together. Parts of the film felt silly or overdone, taking away from the relationship that developed between the two boys.

True to the text 3 Most of the plot points remained true to the text. By shifting the point of view away from Max, the story became less about his growth as a character.

Helene Scola
6th grade teacher
Flat River Middle School
Coventry, Rhode Island

Evaluation of the Film Adaptation of *The Mighty*

Film: *The Mighty*

Stars: Kieran Culkin (Kevin "Freak" Dillon), Eldon Henson (Max Kane), Sharon Stone (Gwen Dillon), Harry Dean Stanton (Grim), Gena Rowlands (Gram), Gillian Anderson (Loretta Lee), Meat Loaf (Iggy), James Gandophini (Kenny "Killer" Kane)

Director: Peter Chelsom

Date: 1998

Book: *Freak the Mighty*

Author: Rodman Philbrick

Publisher: Blue Sky Press

Date: 1993

Part 1: Rationale/Purpose for class use of the film

The film version of Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty* is a faithful and powerful adaptation of the original text. Using this in the classroom in tandem with the novel would go a long way towards having students understand and appreciate Philbrick's themes and lessons. Being a cinematic person by nature, I strongly believe that the use of properly adapted cinematic versions of novels helps bring readers closer to the text. Bear in mind that film versions should never be used as an alternative to reading the book, and certainly should not be shown before students have read the text. That having been said, it's important to understand and accept that students today are more drawn to film and television—it's a sign of the times—and we, as educators, need to show kids that these things can be educational as well as entertaining.

When my students have finished reading *Freak the Mighty* and have discussed the novel in literature circles and reported on it through various writing prompts, I plan to show the film and ask students what they thought of how well the characters, scenes, and overall themes were portrayed. Students will be given assignments which give them the opportunity to act as film critics, directors, casting agents, and screenwriters and make modifications to the film as they see fit. The experience of seeing this film will be assessed on the basis of these final projects.

Part 2: Special Considerations

There is some violence in this film (in accordance with Philbrick's original text), although it is handled with discretion. Still, I understand that, while many

parents don't mind their children reading about violence, to see it portrayed in a movie shown in the classroom could upset them. I would arrange for a screening of the film for all concerned parents and administrators to ensure that there are no surprises when it is used in class. I am confident that there would be no objections from anyone who has seen the film. In cases where parents outright forbid their child to see it, the student will be excused from the exercise and given an alternative assignment based upon the novel itself.

Part 3: Comparison and Contrast

Characters 5 I have to admit, I was skeptical about the casting of Kieran Culkin as Kevin, considering that in Philbrick's text, Kevin was slightly deformed from his disease. This, in my mind, brought more out in the concept of "Freak the Mighty." Kieran is a normal, fairly good-looking young boy who I was uncertain could capture the essence of the character. I was wrong. Through a combination of special effects and his outstanding performance, I was gladly proven wrong. Other cast favorites include Harry Dean Stanton as Grim. Sharon Stone as Gwen, and Eldon Henson as Max. The performances are powerful, but not over the top, which could have easily happened with a story as heart wrenching as this one.

Plot 5 The film follows the original novel's plot almost exactly. While there are some scenes that have been modified (Kane's attack on Loretta for example) and there are some creative liberties taken here and there (the appearance of knights in many scenes) it all goes to help with the flow of the film and does not compromise the integrity of Philbrick's original intentions.

Theme 4 Philbrick's original themes are evident in the film. The first, and most obvious, being that our differences make us what we are and that everyone has a place in the world. The symbiotic relationship of Max and Kevin reflects this as both have had trouble fitting together individually, but when together as "Freak the Mighty," they become more than either one could be alone. Other themes include the search for the self, the desire for individuality, the struggle for acceptance, the absence of the father (and the presence of an abusive parent), trauma from a past life experience resurfacing, and coping with the loss of a loved one. If there is any fault in this category, it's that the film tries to capture too many of

these themes. As a result, the narrative often comes across as a little heavy handed in it's handling of some of these lessons—almost preachy at times.

Setting 5 I referred back to the book several times during the course of the film and found that the sets and locations match up nicely with Philbrick's original descriptions. The city streets are gritty, Kevin and Max's homes are old but not really run down, and Loretta's building looks exactly like I'd pictured it when reading the book. Choosing to do the entire second unit shooting in Cleveland speaks volumes about director Chelsom's desire for authenticity and his care in translating the book to celluloid.

Conflict 4 There's a lot of this in the film and the novel. Although Chelsom had to modify a lot of it to fit it all into a 90-minute film, his handling of a lot of the violence and heartbreak shows that he is catering to young adults and children in his work. For example, the scene where Kenny Kane attacks Loretta takes place behind a wall. While we don't actually see his hands around her throat, what we do see: her legs shaking, Kane's form over hers, and what we hear: the sounds of strangulation, combine with Max's flashback to the death of his mother to make for an eerily disturbing and powerful sequence (far more effective than if we'd actually seen the act explicitly). Likewise, Max's final scream when he realizes that the "cybernetic research lab" is nothing but an industrial laundromat is silent, but the pain is there in his face and his body language.

Tone 4 The use of Max as the de facto narrator of the film gives it a unique voice. Unfortunately, this narration occurs almost exclusively at the beginning and end of the film. The director also pushes us through the action through chapters, named from chapters in the original novel (see "True to the Text" below for more on this). Overall, the film speaks to both kids and adults, although it would have been interesting to hear more of what Max is thinking now and then.

Mood 3 Here is where the film, in my estimation, flounders a bit. Perhaps this is because the narrative has to move quickly for time restraints. It just seems that more time could have been taken to build more emotion at key points in the story. For example, the friendship between Kevin and Max happens very quickly. Too quickly, I think. The book offered a lot more tension as Max overcame his fear of Kevin (and his fear of himself) in order to be able to trust the

young disabled boy. It just seems that the film moves from one frame of mind to the next too rapidly. One moment, Max is curious, and then scared, and then shy, and then angry . . . as his emotions change, so does the mood of the film. This can be jarring and sometimes confusing as, in some cases, the shift of emotion is not properly explained.

Overall Effectiveness 4 The film is very ambitious, considering the source material. Chelsom handles it with grace and artistic integrity. The themes, though many, are strongly and effectively portrayed and the relationship between Kevin and Max, once they have gotten past the awkward initial stages, is persuasive and touching. The intensity of the third act is frightening but heartening and the final moment between Kevin and Max could have easily been melodramatic but comes across more as inspiring, especially in light of Kevin's final gesture, essentially giving Max a chance to have something of a normal life. We are saddened by Kevin's death, but are hopeful for Max and his future.

True to the Text 4 Philbrick's book had been acclaimed for five years before the film's release and Chelsom obviously had his work cut out for him in taking on this project. Too often, films take the low road and churn out a story that has little or nothing to do with the original text. This is absolutely not the case in *The Mighty*. The film relies heavily on the original text, even going as far as using chapter names from the novel to name segments of the film. Even some of the original dialogue has been lifted (though in some places "pop-culture-ized" a bit). Of course, time restraints made it impossible to recreate every scene and every conversation, but that is to be expected. The only area that the film might have improved is in Max's internal dialogue. There is some narration from the character at the onset of the film and the end, but that's about it. I think that Chelsom could have included more of this throughout the film, as he does briefly at some key points. Overall, the film is faithful to the original novel and, while I am not certain of his actual reaction, I have to believe that Philbrick was pleased with what Chelsom has produced here.

Michael Gianfrancesco
Graduate Student
Rhode Island College

Evaluation of the Film Adaptation of *Shiloh*

Film: *Shiloh*

Stars: Blake Heron, Michael Moriarty, Rod Steiger

Director: Dale Rosenbloom.

Date: 2001

Book: *Shiloh*

Author: Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Publisher: Atheneum.

Date: 1991

Part 1 Rationale for class use of the film

My Inclusion class is comprised of eight special education students and five regular education students. There is a wide range of ability within each of the two groups of students. It is very difficult to get all of the students to read the assigned pages of a book as homework. It is for this reason that I decided to have the students read the entire book during class. I chose the book *Shiloh* because I felt it would appeal to all of the students and it was well within their reading abilities. The class read the book before viewing the film. Students were asked to identify the differences between the book and movie. They were then asked to tell why they thought the changes had been made and to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes.

The students had no difficulty identifying the changes, but had difficulty explaining reasons why the changes might have been made. To overcome this difficulty I helped them to brainstorm possible reasons for one of the changes. In the film version Marty was friends with the daughter of the local store owners, something which had not happened in the book. After considering some possibilities, the students concluded that the director wanted to appeal to teens by having a romantic connection.

Part 2 Special Considerations

The film was rated PG for mild violence. I did not need parental permission as the film was in no way controversial. I did warn the students that it would be upsetting to watch *Shiloh* being mistreated, but that more than likely trick photography was used.

Part 3 Comparison and Contrast

Although there were several changes, the film adaptation stayed quite true to the original story. For example, the family was portrayed as less needy than the book would have led us to believe. However, an explanation of a re-mortgaged home was given for the family's inability to afford a dog. The characters were developed through their actions and conversations rather than in the method of narration in the book. One major difference was in the climax of the film. The film version was far more dramatic than in the book. In the book Jud not only released *Shiloh* to Marty, but gave him a dog collar as well. In the film Marty and his dad got into a shoving and shouting match with Jud. This change added much suspense as the viewers were taken through desperation then jubilation as Jud drove away with *Shiloh*, then at the last minute released him.

Shiloh was adorable, and in depicting just how precious he was the book could not compete. Another aspect in which the film excelled was the in depicting the theme. Not only was the theme directly stated in the film, it was ably shown by the actions and words of the actors. To stand behind your words and fight for justice were messages that could not be missed.

Susan Yessian

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Jean E. Brown is chair of the Alliance for the Study and Teaching of Adolescent Literature (ASTAL) at Rhode Island College where she is a member of the English and Educational Studies Departments. She is a member of the ALAN Board and the board of the New England Association of Teachers of English. Her most recent book, written with Elaine C. Stephens, is *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies 125 Practical Reading and Writing Ideas*, 2nd edition.

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The Wandering Womb at Home in *The Red Tent*:

An Adolescent Bildungsroman in a Different Voice

Here is the scenario: I am sitting on the floor with a group of ethnically diverse 16- to 18-year-old girls, preparing to interview them about their responses to Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, because I am currently studying responses of sixty teen readers to first-person narration and have chosen these two novels for comparison. As I gather preliminary information about when, during the day, the girls might read, the following conversation erupts. I am quickly overwhelmed by the energy with which these girls gush about *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant. I am struck by the way in which they mirror my own childhood; they find what they call "school literature" meaningless and seek "good books" on their mothers' bookshelves, which they then orally recommend to one another. So emotional about the story of *The Red Tent* that they can barely speak, and indeed continually interrupt one another, they cite the way in which the contemporary novel revises the patriarchal story of Jacob; represents the concerns of girls in terms of emotion and relationship; and details the entire lifecycle of girl-to-woman through engaging first-person narration:

Carol: There are certain books I just can't put down.

Laticia: Seriously, I'll read until like three in the morning . . .

Interviewer: Like what?

Carol: Like *The Red Tent*!

Laticia: Oh yeah! *The Red Tent*!

Interviewer: *The Red Tent*? I just read *The Red Tent*. That's a really bizarre coincidence.

Carol: I picked it up, and it was like.. I started reading it when we were having standardized testing in school, and I was like rushing through the PSSAs [Pennsylvania System of State Assessment] so I could read the book . . .

Evelyn: Yeah, same with me!

Carol: . . . and after school, that was like all I did! It was like me trying to find time that I could just finish it.

Laticia: When I read that book, I started reading . . . I thought the cover looked interesting, my Mom had it, and I picked it up and just started reading in the middle. And I ended up reading like half the book, starting from the middle, and then I was like "I need to start from the beginning!" And I read the whole thing in like . . . like a day. I just sat and read it.

Carol: Yea, same with me. Took me about two days to read it just because I was so into it.

Interviewer: What was good about it?

Carol: All the stories. I mean I loved it. It was so passionate[ly] written, like you . . .

Laticia: . . . the way it was written was . . .

Carol: . . . worded . . .

Laticia: . . . and just like how you knew every emotion she was feeling, like from the time she was little until her death . . .

Evelyn: It was like they gave you such an insight on her life, and the people around her that..

Laticia: . . . and relationships and that . . .

Carol: Yeah! And it just made you feel like you were part of the story and you knew her and you were just . . . felt her emotions when like the bad things happened!

Laticia: Yeah.

Evelyn: . . . and . . .

Laticia: . . . and the Bible story is really about Joseph . . .

Carol: Yeah . . . (all “yes” agreements)

Laticia: And the fact that it’s about a sister that . . . if you . . . that . . . just skimming through, knowing you know, your normal Bible stories you don’t even hear about.

(all agree)

Laticia: Yeah, there’s like two passages about . . . you don’t even know the guy, the king, is Joseph . . .

Evelyn: . . . right . . . until she figures it out.

Interviewer: Her brother, you mean?

EXCLAMATIONS: OH IT WAS SO GOOD!

Carol: I was just so upset! I was like no . . .!

Evelyn: I seriously cried . . .

Laticia: I cried more in that book than any other book

I’ve ever read. I cried more . . .

Carol: Oh, I cried too . . .

Evelyn: Oh my God . . .

Laticia: So did I.

Carol: I bawled my eyes out!

Evelyn: I got all teary . . . it was just so . . . when her first husband died, was murdered . . .

Carol: That part was like . . . they made it seem so perfect, like her . . .

Laticia: And like I cried when her son, Moses, when Moses, he grew apart from her.

Carol: Yeah.

Evelyn: I cried then, too

Carol: You just kind of felt her alone . . .

Laticia: And then I cried at the end when it was really happy.

Carol: Yea. And just like her . . . she just seems so isolated from everyone during the second part of the book.

The girls complete this discussion by launching into a critique of the patriarchal canon taught in school and the “standardized testing” manner required by their “boring” language arts teacher. They decide to build the perfect (fantasy) English class on *The Red Tent*, full of discussions of “psychology” and in-depth study of “myth, legend, and ancient cultures.”

At the very moment in which fantasy works such as J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* are enjoying intense revitalization, girls are hungering for an exploration of female-centered myths, deities, worlds, and power-structures. I found a similar enthusiasm for *The Red Tent* in an individual interview conducted in another state (the group was from Bucknell, the individual from upper New York). In the latter case, I had again sat down to

interview a sixteen-year-old about *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and she promptly told me that her friend, who was “a feminist” and interested in women’s history because she wished to be an Obstetrician/Gynecologist, recommended *The Red Tent*, which then turned out to be the best book the interviewee had ever read. Girls are recommending it to one another and devouring its storytelling powers; these interviewees led me to a reconsideration of the novel as an adolescent novel. What follows is a discussion of the literary elements that allow the novel to appeal to adolescent women and grow their appreciation for contemporary women’s literature that speaks “in a different voice” (Gilligan) from the more masculine canon they expect in their school curriculum.

The Female Self-in-Relation

Published in 1997, *The Red Tent* is the story of Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, growing up with her mother Leah and Leah’s various sisters, the wives of Jacob. The red tent is the communal menstruation tent for

the women of Jacob’s tribe, the place where the women retreat during the New Moon and undergo both ritual and rest, conversation and conflict. The novel recaptures or theorizes, depending on your point of view, a pre-patriarchal religion centered upon women and women’s bodies, narrated by a female character who is merely a passing reference in Genesis. Some of the book represents a girl’s point of view, as Dinah is growing up and discovering what womanhood means in her culture, but unlike in teen novels, the narration continues as Dinah grows older and wiser. She continues to develop in perspective and insight

until her death as a post-menopausal wisewoman and midwife.

One of the girls in the above group astutely reported that she likes “all the stories,” intuitively understanding that the novel’s story of Dinah is actually comprised of the many stories of her mothers, as articulated by the protagonist: “I am not certain whether my earliest memories are truly mine, because when I bring them to mind, I feel my mother’s breath on every word” (75). The breath of life experienced through the word bears the traces of maternal voices. Diamant divides the novel into four sections: the prologue, “My Mothers’ Stories,” “My Story,” and “Egypt.” The individual female protagonist’s story is thus insufficient without the context of her mother’s stories, which is a common theme in the female bildungsroman. Teachers of literature often contrast the individuality of the male self articulated at the beginning of Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, Chapter One, “I am Born,” with female narratives such as Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which begins with and repeatedly features the stories of older family members. Family stories are intrinsic to girls’ understandings of themselves as selves in relation to others, as defined by [Carol Gilligan \(1982\)](#).

In telling the stories of her mothers, Dinah builds a nostalgic view of a tribe whose everyday life is run by many wives. Although there are tensions, the women function as a kind of matriarchal village and have an internal community, quite apart from the lives of men, with whom they do not even take meals. Although she is too young for the red tent, Dinah is the only daughter of Jacob’s tribe and is thus privileged to share in the restful, storytelling culture of the tent; it is where she is most at home, as a child romanced by many mothers. She has a liminal position whereby she can fetch things in and out of the tent, even waiting upon her menstruating and/or childbearing mothers. Her very life is structured by rhythms of women’s bodies and voices—by not only monthly rites but by various miscarriages (especially Rachel’s), births, and deaths. The women are preoccupied with fertility, a preoccupation mirrored by her mother’s worship of not Jacob’s one God but many gods, including the great mother and the idols that Rachel takes with her when Jacob decides that his tribe should separate from Laban and return to the land of his birth. Dinah’s liminality in being both

The book represents a girl’s point of view, as Dinah is growing up and discovering what womanhood means in her culture, but unlike in teen novels, the narration continues as Dinah grows older and wiser. She continues to develop in perspective and insight until her death as a post-menopausal wisewoman and midwife.

speaker and receptacle of women's stories, both outside and inside the circle of Jacob's wives, mirrors the theme of transitional identity that adolescents are experiencing.

The novel is a means by which Diamant restores the concept of the female deity and the idea of the idol, linking women's everyday reality with the sacred and suggesting that spiritual stories of forgotten mothers and female communities need to be linked with developing girls. Judy Mann, in *The Difference: Discovering the Hidden Ways We Silence Girls*, evinces very strong feelings in her argument that the masculinity of God hinders girls' understanding of their powers, joining many feminist cultural critics who argue the various ways that girls experience themselves as less powerful than boys (White; American Association of University Women; Gilligan; Pipher; Orenstein; Chernin; Brumberg; Chodorow; Bordo; K. Martin; E. Martin). In literature, this picture is complicated because research has continually shown that girls read more fiction than boys (Smith & Wilhelm), and in my empirical research with readers (Blackford, *Out of this World*), I have found that girls reading all kinds of fiction, most of which they define as fantasy and do not understand as self-reflection, experience reading itself as an empowering adventure, regardless of textual content. In *The Red Tent*, we find the theme of female storytelling and listening as a means for connecting past and present, sacred and mundane, spirit and body, often divided in Western consciousness (Bordo). These story connections allow self-development, regardless of whether the stories have to do with the listener. The lives of today's readers look little like the lives depicted in the novel, as Diamant points out in the prologue:

And now you come to me—women with hands and feet as soft as a queen's, with more cooking pots than you need, so safe in childbed and so free with your tongues. You come hungry for the story that was lost. You crave words to fill the great silence that swallowed me, and my mothers, and my grandmothers before them. (3)

The novel makes the argument that to develop a sense of context for the self, we need spaces and time for mothers and daughters to share stories beyond the stories of "great women." Is it not intriguing that one girl could only find space for reading by rushing through the PSSA, and that she sought substantial adult books on her mother's nightstand?

Idolizing Female Experience and Body

In the novel, female deities and prophets abound. There are so many female goddesses, and they are known by so many names that they all seem to originate in the great mother, as suspected by those who study cross-cultural manifestations of goddess myths. In *The Red Tent*, maternal deities are neither gentle nor domestic. Maternal deities are terrible as well as life-celebratory. For example, the character of Rebecca is a kind of oracle, whom the tribe visits when they return to Jacob's land. Rebecca stands as a guardian of female ritual, demanding absolute vigilance in marking first blood in the old way, ways she knows are disappearing due to the ascendancy of the one God. In a pivotal scene, Rebecca rages against and banishes Jacob's brother's wife for failing to mark her own daughter's menarche in the old way, leaving the child scared and alone (without a community of women to initiate her into a womanly body) and

wasting the first blood rather than honoring the great mother by burying it in the earth with sacred rites. Rebecca strongly objects to the practice of hanging out blood-stained sheets of newly married women, a desacralization of female blood. With the particulars of a dramatic story, the novel captures the sense that the female body and the women who represent female ritual are at once both awe-inspiring and terrifying, similar to the paradox commented upon by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*: "The woman's body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnation of evil; a hoard of ambivalences, most of which have worked to disqualify women from the collective act of defining culture" (102).

While many critics have studied the vast reorganization of body image that takes place at menarche

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Whore dichotomy in the literary representation of women has stemmed from a sexist point of view. However, myths associated with goddess love and wrath, including fairy tales primarily passed down by female tellers (Warner), suggest that the female body itself has engendered paradoxical feelings in women themselves. In *The Woman in the Body*, Emily Martin conducts interviews with women and finds a lack of agency when women speak of the body; they speak of menstruation and pregnancy happening “to” them. And yet the female body does assert a life of its own throughout a woman’s life, times when it simply refuses to be “the body project” (Brumberg) people might wish it to be, and which marketers hope it to be. The experience of female rites of passage is not inevitably a passive Ophelia drowning (Pipher). Feminist movements that have revolutionized birthing have demonstrated that (Wertz).

But current discourses used to educate girls about their bodies do little to capture the wonder of the body. Michelle Fine shows that education materials lack “the discourse of desire,” and Joan Brumberg demonstrates the harmful effects of commercialized discourses of feminine hygiene products. The body demands symbolic understanding and interpretation. In my last project researching readers (Blackford, *Out of this World*), I was struck by how little adequate language girls have for the body (non-clinical or non-insulting); in a chapter tracing how girls identify with powerful animal characters and emphasize the tremendous movement, fluidity, and activity that one can experience with an animal body, I argue that identification with animals is a displacement of the

(e.g., Koff; Koff et. al.), anyone who remembers the raw experience of menstruation as a teen (before birth control pills, before having experienced one’s personal cycle and menstruation as routine) or the awe-inspiring and terrifying experience of giving birth understands this simultaneous terror and wonder at the female body. Critics have often claimed that the Madonna/

insecurity and awe they feel by having a female body that contemporary discourses cannot appropriately characterize. Literature welcomes the paradoxes inherent in experiencing a female body, and the passionately narrated story of *The Red Tent* conjoins the changing female body with discourses of desire and subjectivity.

Diamant uses the transitional period between old gods, including goddesses, and the new God to explore what is lost when women are alienated from ritual and from the powers of the female body, symbolized most fully by the shift from ritualizing female fertility to the circumcised penis (of the infant boy, no less, who could not be more dependent on grown women). There are many allusions to this new God as one who celebrates not life but death, who demands sacrifice of animals rather than food (seen as enormous waste) and who is rather hostile to the idea of family:

Zilpah told me that El was the god of thunder, high places, and awful sacrifice. El could demand that a father cut off his son—cast him out into the desert, or slaughter him outright. This was a hard, strange god, alien and cold, but, she conceded, a consort powerful enough for the Queen of Heaven, whom she loved in every shape and name. (13)

The female perspective criticizing Jacob’s worship comes in every shape and size; how could you take a new infant, at risk of death, and put him under the knife? How could you take a lamb, the product of so much careful husbandry, and kill him without eating him? And yet, the power of El is equal to the great female (maternal) deity because El is similarly woven from words, containing the power of larger-than-life story, particularly in the tale of Isaac:

Jacob was a weaver of words, and he would catch his eager audience in the threads of his tale, telling of the glinting knife, Isaac’s eyes wide with fright. The rescue came at the last possible moment, when the knife was at Isaac’s throat, and a drop of blood trickled down his neck, just like the tears falling from Abram’s brimming eyes. But then a fiery spirit stayed the old man’s hand and brought a pure white ram to be sacrificed in Isaac’s stead [. . .]. Years later, when his grandsons finally met the boy of the story, by then an old man, they were appalled to hear how Isaac stuttered, still frightened by his father’s knife. (61-2)

The novel, commonly understood as a fantasy of female community, is also a romance, a romance of story, the body, and both women and men. The tale of

Isaac's near-death is as equally compelling and dramatic as the "in the moment" awakening of Dinah to the murder of her husband at the hand of her brothers. Thus scenes of violence and sexual energy are linked, as they often are in adolescent and women's literature.

Growing Up: The Nomad Voice of the Wandering Womb

In a very dramatic scene that all the girls mention, Dinah, a new bride after long negotiations, awakens to find that she is covered with the blood of her lover, whose throat has been cut. Her awakening into heterosexuality, which is her choice in the novel and not a rape, has consequences that are symbolic of menarche, when her mothers actually break her hymen with an idol and ensure she "marries" (bleeds into) the earth. The reader will notice that Dinah can only enjoy the red tent before she is a menstruating teenager; after menarche, she is quickly swept off her feet by the Prince of Shechem and soon thereafter wakes to his murder. Not only does the scene symbolize the dramatic self-change that occurs upon sexual awakening and marriage (to earth or a man), but it renders complete the separation between daughter and family-of-origin that is felt (if not always occurring) upon the transfer of affection to a sexual partner.

The act of murder drives Dinah to curse the land of her fathers and travel to Egypt, where she bears a son and is forgotten in the house of Jacob. The third section is simply titled "Egypt." Dinah's sojourn in Egypt, however, thematically develops the growing separation of Dinah from her mothers, the lessening of the authority of the red tent in the tribe, and the nomad rhythm of Dinah's voice, *actually* begun when the tribe first leaves Laban's land, when the narrator finds that she likes the style of living on the open road. The novel's vision of adolescence is an adventure into nomad homelessness that is *never* fully at home again because that is the nature of becoming an adult. The novel perfectly captures a psychoanalytic vision of human development, complicit with the language of desire that Peter Brooks argues motivates and drives forward all plots. While the theme of celebrating mothers is thus important, the structure and the homelessness of the female protagonist are also important to adolescent readers.

The remove of Jacob's tribe to the land of his birth characterizes the nomad rhythm of the novel begun after the point that Dinah's childhood is over. Long passages describing their exodus to Jacob's land initiate the narrator's pleasure in a wandering existence; although Rebecca takes an interest in Dinah, she finds that Dinah will not replace Rebecca in her position. In the new settlement of the tribe, where Dinah is also initiated into womanhood according to the old ways, Dinah begins to serve as midwife assistant to Rachel and thus takes on a continual existence of the traveler assisting other women. She and Rachel are invited into the city of Shechem to assist with a birth; in that royal palace, which follows the customs of Egypt, she and the Prince fall in love and become consorts, a match facilitated by the Prince's mother (Re-nefer). Though the family attempts to negotiate her brideprice with Jacob and sons, Jacob refuses and demands circumcision of the men, after which the men are slain by the sons of Jacob. Dinah wakes to find her lover's blood upon her. Dinah curses her father and his tribe, and is taken by Re-nefer back to her land of Egypt, where the past is erased (the story cannot be told), and Re-nefer demands that Dinah bear the son she is carrying in Re-nefer's name. Alone and never able to return to the red tent, ironically a place she has only enjoyed as a pre-menstruating girl, Dinah spends her time isolated in Egypt until she becomes a midwife companion and, late in life, moves to a river village to practice midwifery and finally attain a marriage with a carpenter, an image of equality.

Although a hunger for childhood remains throughout life, a teen can never really return to pre-teen existence. Dinah only returns to the land of her father when he is dying because Joseph, whose house she has attended for a birth, demands that she come (Joseph has obviously undergone his own story while she has been in Egypt), but Dinah is unknown and unimportant.

After Joseph attains his father's blessing, he tells Dinah, "He said nothing of you. Dinah is forgotten in the house of Jacob" (312). There is a glimmer of hope, though, as she is visited by a young girl of Jacob's tribe who likes to chat; in her stories of her relatives, she mentions that she has been told the terrible story of Dinah. The author thus concludes her theme of female storytelling with this idea that perhaps, among

women, stories of women's lives are kept alive and perhaps they are the sites for capturing forgotten tales of women in history. But they are, paradoxically, the product of homelessness rather than "domestic" tales.

Even in the prologue, the author presents the idea that female storytellers are, by nature, homeless or "detours" of history:

We have been lost to each other for so long.

My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust.

This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well-known history of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother. On those rare occasions when I was remembered, it was as a victim. (1)

The author and narrator position themselves as speaking from the footnotes of male history. As the scholars we are, we know that footnotes are incredibly

As the scholars we are, we know that footnotes are incredibly important and point the reader to look between the lines. This process of daughters sorting through footnotes to recapture their mothers' stories is precisely what I found when I discovered that teen girls are so taken with *The Red Tent*.

important and point the reader to look between the lines. This process of daughters sorting through footnotes to recapture their mothers' stories is precisely what I found when I discovered that teen girls are so taken with *The Red Tent*. In that process, they have learned something about scholarship—that a tale lies between versions of histories, as written by uncommon men. They learn that a tale is a result of a point of view, and that different points of view change and enrich old stories. They also learn that women, in the "detours" off the main roads, are essentially lost and alone, the result of

broken chains of oral and female knowledges. This site of homelessness becomes a site of unique perspective.

Dinah's story is not developed in Genesis, al-

though she (ostensibly raped) is the named reason that the sons of Jacob commit the atrocious deed of demanding the men of the city be circumcised to recognize Jacob's one God, then slaying the men while they lie healing. In *The Red Tent*, Dinah has become the consort of the Prince of her own free will and overwhelming sexual desire. The slaying of her lover and husband becomes yet another symbol of the death to women's lives that occurs with the transfer from the old gods to the New, mirroring the fact that she is the last woman initiated into first blood in the old mother-worshipping way, and that she (and the world) cannot go back to the red tent home of life-celebrating childhood. The red tent of mothers' voices has become an Eden murdered by experience and in my view, she becomes the wandering womb, homeless because there is no home for women in a patriarchal world. When she is young, one of her mothers prophesies that Dinah is actually a river goddess, a symbol for a flow of life that rushes onward and cannot rest. As Dinah says of Egypt, "I had no place among all of these wonderful things, and yet, this was my only home" (220). Even with a home, adult women are homeless, because the more modern world does not have a red tent for gathering women's experiences and stories.

The last comment that I quoted from the group's response is "she just seems so isolated from everyone during the second part of the book." The alone quality of the protagonist emerges from contrast with the many chatting mothers and stories she registers before she leaves Jacob's tribe. Essentially, then, *The Red Tent* is not only about celebrating female community; it is also about growing up and leaving the world of mothers, the home, and childhood. Growing up is associated with violence, the novel suggests, and an increasing understanding of what it means to be isolated. This vision of growth fits with both the psychoanalytic understanding of child and adolescent development and the understanding of girls that I have interviewed before. Few of the girls that I have interviewed equate womanhood with marriage and motherhood; most, instead, feel that those things possibly await them far in the future after a well-established career. To compensate for the utter aloneness of womanhood, in their view, the girls often fantasize about living with roommates in an extended college setting like that imagined on the television

series *Friends*. Marriage, then, no longer has a meaning of what allows a girl to grow up and leave her family-of-origin; instead, it is a much-later possibility after the individuality of adulthood is well established.

The most painful sections of *The Red Tent* are when Dinah cannot tell her story in Egypt, the symbol for adulthood. She is only able to tell her story three times. First, she tells her painful past to a storyteller who once served Rebecca and has been raped and mutilated, now blind and wandering around with entertainers. The story of Werenro is a very serious image of the consequences of female independence—a hyperbole of the narrator’s homelessness—and it is crucial that she is introduced to us as a captivating storyteller, inherently a mobile, nomad, independent figure. Second, Dinah tells her tale to the midwife with whom she sojourns to the river valley. This midwife-companion functions as a minor “sisterhood,” but this midwife-companion facilitates Dinah’s marriage late in life and is thus more like a matchmaker. Third, Dinah finally tells her tale to her second husband, the book’s conclusion a suggestion of equality in a seasoned rather than young, passionate marriage.

Thus the structure of the novel moves from polygamous marriage to complete independence to monogamous marriage, as it simultaneously traces the structure of human development (Dinah’s movement from mothers to the world of men) and cultural development (matriarchal deities to the one God). The development is quite literal in that the novel moves from a world that worships the female body to one that worships the phallus, as speculated in Lacanian theory, and simultaneously demonstrates that the young protagonist’s subjectivity moves from one comprised of her mother’s stories to her own independent story to the end of her story in a mature, post-reproductive marriage. I guess you could say the second marriage is a “happy ever after,” or at least one girl thought so, and thus compensation for the loss of a woman’s world that accompanies growth. Yet the novel seems to actually recommend a marriage freed from reproductive role, mirroring today’s increasingly childless couples and late marriages.

The novel offers the thesis that a match made late in life, once having achieved wisewoman status, can be based on male-female equality. Dinah’s second husband respects her midwifery: “He took an exquisite little box from a niche in the wall. It was un-

adorned but perfect, made of ebony—wood that was used almost exclusively for the tombs of kings—and it had been burnished until it shone like a black moon. ‘For your midwife’s kit,’ he said, and held it out to me” (271). The book fits solidly in contemporary American visions of growing up, which is to leave the gendered separatism of childhood, connected with mothers, behind, make it on your own, and only then forge a partnership with “an other” that will be based on self-fulfillment, rather than reproductive role (Dinah can no longer reproduce). Perhaps this aspect of the girls’ appreciation interests me most. For, in *The Red Tent*, they have caught a glimpse of a bildungsroman across the entire life span; there is no end to development at 21, no “home-away-home” pattern common to myth, but a continual flow of development until death. The wandering womb thus explains a model of womanhood as *continual* development of self and community, a model that links the stages of these teen girl readers with what all women are going through all the time. In today’s world, the basic biological rhythms of the body may be the only ways that the lives of mothers and daughters resemble one another; the fantasy of the red tent and communities of women organized around childrearing is yesteryear. Dinah’s growth into a vocation thus mirrors what today’s girls imagine growing up to be; this model has its costs and benefits just like any other model. While there are limitations to girls imagining adulthood as marriage and motherhood, there are also limitations to viewing adulthood as being alone and believing marriage and childbearing only appropriate for mid-career women, as rather controversially argued by Sylvia Hewlett.

Animism in Style

But the girls always point out “something about this novel” that captivates: “the way it was written . . . so passionate.” That something is style, which they are not as good at describing. Diamant’s strategy is to embed the symbolic level of literature in the concrete description of events. The metaphor is couched within the image in the sentence. She thus does not rely upon her reader to leap to the symbolic level, but concludes the meaning by positing a symbol in the everyday object, so the reader is always aware of two levels of meaning—the concrete story or plot itself and the

The sparse imagistic style of modernists such as Hemingway (which all the girls typically use as an example of an author they detest) has been left behind by many contemporary women writers, who prefer to unify the concrete and symbolic by unpacking the metaphor for the reader, which provides a fluid movement between story and symbol, an ease of bridging between literary levels. This is starkly opposed to a very common assertion among my interviewees that *The Old Man and the Sea* is simply bewildering (“what does the marlin mean?”).

walked in harmony (particularly centered on body experience), and when the world of the flesh and spirit were not at odds, but the flesh world fully symbolized and incarnated the symbolic. In an effort to enhance her fertility, for example, Rachel “dined upon snake—the animal that gives birth to itself, year after year” (47). The world of objects then represents

transcendent symbolic meaning. We see an example in the prologue: “Maybe you guessed that there was more to me than the voiceless cipher in the text. Maybe you heard it in the music of my name: the first vowel high and clear, as when a mother calls to her child at dusk; the second sound soft, for whispering secrets on pillows. Dee-nah” (1).

The sparse imagistic style of modernists such as Hemingway (which all the girls typically use as an example of an author they detest) has been left behind by many contemporary women writers, who prefer to unify the concrete and symbolic by unpacking the metaphor for the reader, which provides a fluid movement between story and symbol, an ease of bridging between literary levels. This is starkly opposed to a very common assertion among my interviewees that *The Old Man and the Sea* is simply bewildering (“what does the marlin mean?”). The style of *The Red Tent* furthers the thesis of the book: that there was a time when everyday life and the spirit world

human desire and spirit. This is a philosophy of an animated universe of myth, embodied then by the narrator’s zest for making symbols out of description.

Examples of this stylistic choice are numerous. The word “mantle” is both an object and a symbol in the sentence, “Leah wore the mantle of the great mother, seemingly always pregnant or nursing” (45). Bilhah’s “bracelet,” an object, becomes a link to Jacob in the following sentence: “Thinking of her bracelet, Bilhah smiled and with her forefinger traced the place where a bit of string had tied her to Jacob” (53). The moon is a symbol for the goddess because it has a literal role as an object in women’s lives: “Leah said the moon was the only face of the goddess that seemed open to her because of the way the moon called forth the filling and emptying of her body” (57). Above, I quoted “I am not certain whether my earliest memories are truly mine, because when I bring them to mind, I feel my mothers’ breath on every word” (75). Obviously, “breath” is both real and symbolic of their spirits, evocative of the breath of life. Expressions take on concrete and metaphoric meaning: “We ate a morning meal salted by the tears of those who would not accompany us” (102). The word “bowl” in the following sentence is both an image and a link to a childhood organized around food: “The hills in the distance held my life in a bowl filled with everything I could possibly want” (83). In “I recognized the scent of this water the way I knew the perfume of my mother’s body” (111), the perfume has a layer of resonance beyond just the scent of the maternal body. We see a double meaning in “rooted in one place” in the following: “After a few days of [travel], I could barely remember my old life, rooted in one place” (110). Diamant often states the action and then provides the metaphor in a clause: “My thoughts flew back and forth, like the shuttle on a great loom, so that when I finally heard my name in my mother’s mouth, there was some anger in it” (135). She uses the syntax to suggest double meanings; in the last sentence quoted, “it” could be the mother’s mouth or the name of Dinah, thus Diamant has created the anger as a symbol as well as an emotion of the moment, blurring the line between mother and daughter, speech and character.

In relative clauses, Diamant will draw out the significance of action: “We took advantage of our freedom, putting our feet into the water and pouring

out the handful of stories that compose the memory of childhood” (132), or “Silence greeted the declaration of this visitor [Werenro], who spoke in strange accents that bent every word in three places” (143). Occasionally Diamant will replace the real object with symbolic language: “I watched the preparations from the bottom of a dark well” (232), the well entirely psychological. Rather than simply reporting the fact that she tells her story to Werenro and leaving it to the reader to determine significance, the narrator states that, “Without hesitation, I told her everything. I leaned my head back, closed my eyes, and gave voice to my life” (255). The author uses various personifications to link levels of meaning:

Death was in the room. I caught sight of him in the shadows beneath a statue of Bes, the friendly-grotesque guardian of children, who seemed to grimace at his own powerlessness here. (240)

A snake slithered from the spot where her spittle fell, and I shivered in the cold blast of Werenro’s anger (254).

The strategy is to continually link the action with the plane of the sacred and to link the mortal and immortal world with one another, furthering the thesis of the book that women connect life and death: “In the red tent we knew that death was the shadow of birth, the price women pay for the honor of giving life” (48). Importantly, these various devices of the narrator’s storytelling are shared by Dinah’s second husband, who speaks in the same way. For example, he explains his preference for woodcarving over stone cutting: “I had no talent for stone. [. . .] Only wood understood my hands. Supple and warm and alive, wood speaks to me and tells me where to cut, how to shape it. I love my work, lady” (245). We know he is special because he deploys the narrator’s style.

This means of leading the reader to symbolic meaning from action is a very common strategy of ethnic women writers who want both academic and popular audiences. I recently completed an analysis of the way earthly and spiritual planes are linked by concrete and symbolic language in the works of writers Ntozake Shange, Ana Castillo, and Julia Alvarez (Blackford, “The Spirit of A People”); perhaps the best example of this strategy is Toni Morrison, an author whom many teen girls also like. In fact, they do not need me to link the language of Anita Diamant with Toni Morrison. One enthusiastic reader of *The*

Red Tent also proclaimed her enthusiasm for *Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye*, while disparaging in the same breath Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* for its sparse style and refusal of larger-than-life myth.

Conclusion: Teaching Novels of Female Development

The author most often embraced in the same vein as *The Red Tent* is Marion Zimmer Bradley, a very natural counterpart to feminist rewritings of legend and this particular style that unites plot and symbol, women’s history and body with spirituality and deity. Because the same kind of enthusiasm for female story is evident, I am quoting this discussion as well. One girl said she’s “into legends—especially Celtic and Druid.” The subject of Marion Zimmer Bradley quickly surfaced:

Carol: *The Mists of Avalon!* I love that book! I adore that book! My middle name is Morgana, and my Mom got it from Morgane in Authurian legend.

Laticia: I just love Authurian legend, because there’s so many different takes on it . . .

Carol: . . . my mother was obsessed with King Arthur, and so she named me after her. And all the books I’ve ever read have portrayed her as an evil person who wants to like kill Arthur or whatever. She’s always the evil sorceress, so I’m like “Mom! Way to name me after this evil chick!” It’s Morgan le Fey actually.

Laticia: It’s so many different names . . . Morgana, Morgane . . .

Carol: so then my mother goes “No, you have to read this book; this is the greatest book ever.”

. . . The style of *The Red Tent* furthers the thesis of the book: that there was a time when everyday life and the spirit world walked in harmony (particularly centered on body experience), and when the world of the flesh and spirit were not at odds, but the flesh world fully symbolized and incarnated the symbolic.

This is the mother-lode of all books, so I read it. I read it. And it's great. I adored it. It's so cool because it's kind of like "so that's where my name comes from."

Laticia: I've read every single version of like Arthurian legend, really that I can just find. And like I love mythology and legend, and I love when . . . I love how a lot of fantasy books that I read really get a lot of their roots and like themes, and even like names and just ideas from Celtic, Norse, or like English Arthurian legends and even Greek. Like I just . . . I really like that. I like the romance.

The girls filed *The Red Tent* in their heads with *The Mists of Avalon*, just like I had, seeing the significance of female points of view on old stories, which are critical points of view. I do not think it an accident that Bradley, also accessible and symbolic in her descriptions, is called "the mother-lode" of books and like Diamant's preface, contextualizes the female name ("Dee-nah," "Morgana"). In another interview with a much younger girl in a different region, I also found an enthusiastic reader of *The Mists of Avalon*; in this rare case, the book was actually read for class, with, in my view, a cutting-edge teacher.

The Mists of Avalon and *The Red Tent* are similar in the way they blend child development with cultural development, building nostalgia for a fantasy of being a daughter in a culture ruled by mothers, then marking the end of childhood by the need to leave the mothers behind and enter the world of the fathers. *The Red Tent* now takes its place with *The Mists of Avalon* and *The Bluest Eye* in my syllabus for literature of childhood, the class that I teach to prepare pre-service teachers in both children's and adolescent literature. The female novels are beloved among the female students and quite unfortunately alienate the male students (they never interrogate why everyone can equally love Robin Hood, King Arthur, *Harry Potter* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*). My students always observe (some happily and some not) how the female novels engage both the body and sexuality (and often rape/abuse) in very concrete ways. They often cannot imagine teaching these in high school; they fear the parents and prefer to ponder the meaning of the marlin. But at least by teaching a novel such as *The Red Tent*, I've encouraged them to expand the

scope of the adolescent novel in, I think, imaginative and mythic ways. And maybe some of them will be brave enough to bring this material into the classroom and give these wandering wombs another home for storytelling. It behooves us to pay attention to what teens are reading on their mothers' bookshelves, which is where I myself, after all, encountered my favorite teenage books such as the novels of Danielle Steele, William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which were much more important to me than what I read in school.

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Memoirs of Survival:

Reading the Past and Writing it Down

Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club* and Barbara Robinette Moss' *Change Me Into Zeus' Daughter*

The literary memoir has become popular in the last several years. Almost everybody who makes it to adulthood has a story to tell about negotiating the perils of growing up in a dangerous culture. Some, especially those written for a pre-teen audience, recount happy memories, playing stickball in the vacant lot and bubblegum-blowing contests. Most, though, are stories of survival recounting how the teller overcame obstacles to snatch at a more satisfying adulthood. The overt message of these memoirs is the same as many young adult novels, i.e., “You can do it.” “You are not alone.” “Determination and persistence can take you as far as you want to go in America.” The implicit message, though, is that through writing, you can reclaim a childhood, where you were once an impotent victim, and through the power of authorship, make it your own, reconcile yourself with your past, and—ultimately—heal. Both the explicit and implicit themes make such memoirs valuable tools in the junior high or high school English classroom although they differ from young adult fiction in that the voice is usually that of a grownup recalling the perils of childhood with the message that the path to manhood or womanhood is negotiable and adolescents need to be aware that life continues beyond high school.

Two memoirs of growing up female in the South, Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club*, and Barbara Robinette Moss' *Change Me Into Zeus' Daughter*, demonstrate how writing both frames and heals the scars from growing up. Both authors were impoverished, their childhoods marked by parental substance abuse, male

violence, distant mothers, chaos, and social marginalization. Because they were children, both girls were helpless in the face of parental whimsicality, no matter how much each may have raged against circumstance. Yet, during the course of their brutal childhoods, each girl was given the gift of literacy by their mothers and a vision of somewhere away from the homes they were planted in as a place to grab for the American Dream.

Male violence perpetrated by a hair-trigger temper is a feature of southern culture. The two fathers in these memoirs are both violent and proud of it. Significantly, both books begin with the death of the father and the family gathered around the casket, each girl now a grown woman trying to reconcile the past over the body of the dead father with their living mothers and siblings. Beginning each memoir with the fathers' deaths suggests the end of the dominating father figure and signals the freedom for the authors to finally write their own stories and reveal the subversive, almost hidden influence of the mothers.

The maternal influence was subversive and hidden because both mothers were unable to give their daughters the love and emotional support they needed because of the dysfunctional relationships with their husbands. Each mother was emotionally distant. Karr's mother was deemed by the neighbors as “nervous” and was at times sent away to an institution to recover. This “nervousness” is not only a euphemism for insanity but was hereditary. Karr says, “when Mother could be brought to talk about her own childhood, she told stories about how peculiar her

mother's habits had been" (44). Although her mother wasn't physically abusive, Karr was always wary of her emotional outbursts because it seemed as if "some kind of serious fury must have been roiling around inside her. Sometimes . . . she would stand in the kitchen with her fists all white-knuckled and scream up at the light fixture that she wasn't whipping us, because she knew if she got started, she'd kill us" (71). Karr's mother spent months at a time in an alcoholic or pill-induced haze. At those times, Karr would count her drinks, pour bottles of liquor down the sink, listen to her parents' violent fights, and worry. She says, "Mother had always been a binge drinker, not touching a thimbleful for weeks or months when she'd gotten her gullet full. But once she took that first drink, she was off" (126-127). At other times, her mother lay in bed for days, not bothering to get dressed, reading from a stack of books piled on her bedside table (142). Karr remarks that she called these episodes "Her Empress Days [. . .] for she spent them doing nothing more than ministering to herself in small ways" (230). This, of course, led to many incidents of parental neglect and even allowed the opportunity for sexual abuse from unsavory babysitters. But, even worse were the times her mother became addicted to uppers. "[S]he never slept. I don't mean that she didn't sleep much, or slept less. I mean all those months, we never saw her asleep. Ever" (230). On many occasions, especially when drunk and mournful, Karr's mother talked "in a misty-eyed way about suicide. She would gaze up [. . .] and say that for some folks killing yourself was the sanest thing to do" (230). As Karr notes, such threats "will flat dampen down your spirits" (71). And, in fact, on at least three occasions, with the family in the same car, Karr's mother seemed intent on committing suicide and taking the rest of the family with her. As a result, Karr learned early that "things in my house were Not Right [. . .]." (9). This perception then quickly "metastasized into the notion that I myself was somehow Not Right, or that my survival in the world depended on my constant vigilance against various forms of 'Not-Rightness'" (10).

Robinette Moss's mother was a teetotaler and the family provider in the face of her husband's alcoholism and the needs of her seven children. Nevertheless, she would not leave her husband, even when her daughters begged her to do so. Her mother's addic-

tion, it seemed, centered on her father as if in the face of his presence, she had no will of her own. The images Robinette Moss creates suggest a sexual bond between them that defied logic. Once, for example, her father reappears after an unexplained absence of several months, which left his family destitute. Her mother's reaction was to lean "against the doorframe, her eyes round and lips slightly parted, her fingers caressing the buttons on the front of her cotton dress. She straightened as Dad approached, like a puppet whose strings were drawn tight [. . .]. Her hand moved to her mouth as she sucked in a jagged breath, but her liquid blue eyes did not spill a single tear" (73). Another example of her mother's sexual fixation comes with a lengthy description of how her mother shaved her father's face every morning he was home. In the final step of the process, her mother "stood back and, with the discerning look of an artist at work, admired the handsome lean face, the wide shoulders and muscular chest. He opened his eyes and she looked away and handed him a starched, long-sleeve blue shirt" (162). Robinette Moss suggests that her mother "craved" her father "as much as he craved alcohol," and she excluded friends from her life because "she didn't want her time to be taken up by anything other than Dad" (110). All this, in spite of his frequent physical and emotional abuse. Robinette Moss remembers, "There was never any real reason for Dad to get mad at Mother; he was mad at her because there was nothing to get mad at—mad because she was so good and he was so terrible" (82). Her mother's coping mechanism was to simply pretend "it didn't happen: [she] cleaned up the broken dishes and furniture, hid bruises, took him aspirin and breakfast in bed and kept us quiet and out of the way" (82). In consequence, Robinette Moss describes her as being much of the time "benumbed" (142). Robinette Moss says, "Mother often stared into space, but she never cried. Tears had become an emotion she denied herself and, consequently, her children" (115).

Because of her mother's emotional absence, Robinette Moss craved her mother's undivided attention, a rare occurrence, and an opportunity often taken without her mother's awareness. For example, Robinette Moss got an extra treat every morning because she helped prepare the school lunches for the entire family. She says, her mother "thought I didn't mind because of the extra Little Debbie cake. But I

really liked it because I had my mother all to myself for forty-five minutes every day [. . .]. Sometimes we talked” (197). More often, though, Robinette Moss’s special needs were ignored. She suffered through scarlet fever without seeing a doctor. For a time her mother nurtured her, but when it became apparent her daughter was going to survive, “as if in conspiracy with Dad [she] went blindly through the days, pretending I wasn’t sick. She became irritated if I vomited or collapsed dizzily into a chair. Both of them looked through me as if I weren’t there at all” (172). Robinette Moss suffered the results of abuse and neglect. She became a head rocker, afflicted with nervous tics. She also says, “I grew thin and pale. Protruding, crooked teeth parted cracked, bitten lips. Mouth breather. Tongue-thruster. The epitome of a guttersnipe. My hazel eyes made only the briefest contact with other eyes before darting back to the floor” (103).

Both authors of these memoirs then seemed destined for lives similar to their mothers or even worse. Yet, in spite of their massive failures as parents, both mothers gave their daughters a way out of the sordid circumstances of their homes, namely, the gift of literacy and a vision that horizons stretched far beyond their immediate surroundings. Both mothers were educated. Karr’s mother had lived and worked in New York City and was an artist. Her husband and his friends had built her a studio in the garage. When Karr first entered the studio and saw her mother’s painting, she says she felt “like a thief in church [. . .]. The whole idea of erecting a person—from tinted oil and from whatever swirled inside my mother’s skull—filled me with a slack-jawed wonder” (59). Her mother’s bedtime stories were about artists her mother loved: “Van Gogh’s lopped-off ear; Gauguin’s native girls; the humpbacked Degas mad for love of his dancers; how Pollock once paid a fortune for a Picasso drawing, then erased it in order to see how it was made” (59). Karr’s mother also carried battered art books with her wherever they went in their travels. Karr makes constant references to how images in her daily life reminded her of images she’d seen in “mother’s art books” (117). When drunk, or lonely, or suicidal, her mother played opera, or Bessie Smith songs, and told stories of her life in New York, which made it sound, in contrast to Leechfield, Texas, where Karr grew up, like a haven for the finer senses. Her

mother remembered New York as “the holy land of her youth and from which she felt exiled” (128) and told stories of seeing Maria Callas at the Metropolitan opera or watching Marlene Dietrich climb out of a cab, covered in a scarf that only revealed her lonely eyes (129-130). She watched Einstein lecture at Bell Labs. “She always told us about famous people . . . she described the Ink Spots swaying over a silver microphone in some Harlem nightclub, and how Bing Crosby once smoked marijuana on somebody’s penthouse terrace under a big, buttoned-up moon” (131-132). Further, her mother was an avid reader. “She toted *Das Kapital* around in her purse for years” (12). On days she was depressed, “She wouldn’t get out of bed, seemingly hypnotized with whatever book she had propped on her middle reading” (125). Karr remarks, “The bedtime stories she told were [about] Athens in the age of Socrates, [. . .] the Paris of the twenties; Vienna when a sick and sweaty Mozart was scribbling out the notes to his own requiem” (212). Karr’s grandmother had bought them a set of encyclopedias, and Karr learned about “how the Rockies were formed by glaciers sliding across the continent to rake up zillions of tons of rock” (189).

Thus, in spite of the domestic chaos that surrounded her, Karr grew up enamored of storytelling and the world of art, and she focused on reading and writing to take her away. She learned to read by the age of three, showing off her prowess by reading the front page of the daily newspaper and comic books aloud for acquaintances (62, 141). She read books she liked hundreds of times (240). She did well in school, even getting a 100 on her spelling test on the day her mother in a fit of “nervousness” burned up all the furniture and clothes in the house (145-147). A year later, as their family disintegrated and her mother married a new man, Karr still excelled in school, “I moved eighteen reading levels and twelve math levels the first week, a new school record, achieved as much from boredom as ambition” (219). She spent her spare time reading and writing poetry “in the cool comfort of the Christian Science Reading Room” (196). She kept a journal, poetry drafts, and rules for behavior in Big Chief tablets. At times, reading and writing filled her “with such light that I want to tell somebody about it” (241). In this way, through the flawed example of her mother, she was given, by the very association with her, the gift of story, a knowledge of

the power of words to take her away and shape her own experience, and a vision to dream which she eventually fulfilled.

Robinette Moss' mother gave her daughter the same gift through association and example. Her mother triggered her interest in art because she had taken art courses and had held on to the textbooks throughout every change in fortune. Robinette Moss recalls, "I loved every page." She traced the drawings of famous paintings and carried them in "a cardboard portfolio that held Mother's old pencil drawings [. . .]. (64-65). Her mother was also a singer. She had sung in the Marine Corps choir (97) and even made recordings. Her children were used to hearing her "sweet soprano as she did the dishes" and other household chores (29). But even more important, she gave her children the gift of language and story. Robinette Moss' mother had been famous in her circle as a young girl "because she could recite almost any poem on request" (110). And she taught all those poems to her children. Robinette Moss recounts, "Along with all the other books Mother owned and carried with her from place to place was an old tattered poetry book. It was our source of entertainment [. . .] before TV, radio and RC Cola." Their mother read to them while they ate meals, while they rested on the porch after dinner, when they sat through thunderstorms and feared tornadoes. "She had repeated the same poems so often that we had chimed in to help her through the lines" (111). The children even put on Christmas plays and recitals as gifts. They grew up knowing as many poems by heart as their mother, poems such as, "The Village Blacksmith," "The Rum Tum Tugger," "Hiawatha's Childhood," "Dream Fairy Dear," "Oh Captain! My Captain!," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Donkey," "Little Willie," and "The Tale of the Custard Dragon" (112-113). The many books that her mother packed from place to place as the family traced a downward spiral into deeper poverty also included a store of much loved novels. Repeatedly, throughout the memoir, Robinette Moss refers to her mother reading while cooking, while rocking a baby, when resting from a long day, or any time she had a spare moment and a free hand to hold the book.

Robinette Moss does not write much about her success in school, except to speak of the humiliations caused being poor and misshapen from malnutrition.

However, the fact that she graduated from high school under such conditions speaks for itself. She saw her way out because the gift of language and the concept of horizons beyond the immediate had shown her the importance of education. She does recount her huge sacrifices in attending college and graduate school, where she obtained degrees in art, while raising a child as a single mother. She accepted charity from her church, borrowed heavily on student loans, collected Coke cans and painted surfboards but received no help from her father and only a little from her mother.

Robinette Moss recalls that she would not have gotten through school without her son Jason. She says, "Through the years he and I had clung together, determined to create a different destiny for ourselves" (302). The determination to create that destiny could only have been born from the visions she received from her mother of horizons that stretched to include music, art, and literature.

A vision of broader horizons led to advanced education and artistic endeavor for both authors. Karr is a poet. Robinette Moss is an artist. Yet neither could leave their childhood behind until they had written about it, framed it in their own words, and thus, put it in a perspective they could deal with. Karr frequently admits that her memories are not the same as her older sister's, most particularly on the occasion when her grandmother died. Karr says, "She died, and I wasn't sorry" (99), mainly because of her memories of the grandmother's cruelty and insanity. She admits her sister Lecia, on the other hand, "would correct [her] memory. To this day, [Lecia] claims that she genuinely mourned for the old lady, who was a kindly soul, and that I was too little and mean-spirited then to remember things right" (47). Karr also admits that her memory fades in and out and that some of what she remembers is what she has been told (48-49). Likewise, Robinette Moss admits to holes in her memories and to differing memories from her sister Janet, who gets angry when Robinette Moss recalls the violence and misery, which she claimed not to have experienced. If Lecia Karr and Janet Robinette had written these memoirs, they would be very different accounts of the authors' childhoods, which casts doubt on the ultimate "truth" of the accounts that exist. Robinette Moss states in her "Acknowledgements" that she wrote "to go back in time—to heal old wounds and reclaim my family" (ii). The epigraph that begins

Karr's text is a quote from R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self* and reads in part, "We have our secrets and our needs to confess [. . .] and what an accomplishment it was when we, in fear and trembling, could tell our first lie, and make, for ourselves, the discovery that we are irredeemably alone in certain respects, and know that within the territory of ourselves, there can only be footprints" (n.p.). Thus, both suggest that their purpose in writing is not to proclaim some undeniable truth but to frame their stories and give them perspective. Patricia Hampl has spoken of this process, in "Memory and Imagination." She notes that the details the memoirist remembers, whether accurate or not, are symbols for the way the writers felt things were. She concludes:

We seek a means of exchange, a language which will renew these ancient concerns and make them wholly and pulsingly ours. Instinctively, we go to our store of private images and associations for our authority to speak of these weighty issues. We find in our details and broken and obscured images, the language of symbol. Here memory impulsively reaches out its arms and embraces imagination. That is the resort to invention. It isn't a lie, but an act of necessity, as the innate urge to locate personal truth always is. (265)

That is why writing heals and why memoirs are called "creative" non-fiction. Annie Dillard has remarked, "Don't hope in a memoir to preserve your memories. If you prize your memories as they are, by all means avoid—eschew—writing a memoir. Because it is a certain way to lose them [. . .]. The work

battens on your memories and replaces them" (242). Stated another way, the gift of literacy and an introduction to the magic of storytelling has given each author the power to own her own past and to reconcile themselves with it, indicated by the fact that both authors dedicate their work to their mothers. Recollection, reconciliation, and the resolution of past wounds was achieved through the power of storytelling.

Memoirs by men would recount different but essentially similar stories of finding language and personal truth in framing a narrative with words. Certainly such a theme would be welcome in any adolescent English classroom.

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ads

For Your Consideration

On the Passing of Paula Danziger

In 1972, Dr. Maria Schantz, chair of the Reading Department at Montclair State College, invited me to teach a course in adolescent literature. I accepted, and on the first night of class, I was greeted by a young woman who told me she had already taken the course for credit with Dr. Schantz, but she wanted permission to sit in to see what I was going to do. That young woman was Paula Danziger.

During that semester I learned to adjust to some of the “antics” of Paula until . . . I had assigned the students to read Mildred Lee’s *Sticks and Stones*, a controversial novel for its time, about a group of teens who call a loner classmate a homosexual. In the story this leads to rumors and repercussions in the small town where the boy lives.

During a class discussion of the book, a male student stated, “I would never let any students of mine read such a book. It might give them ideas.” At that point, Paula picked up her heavy, plastic pocketbook and threw it at him, and the class began to spiral out of control. I told Paula she was suspended for three weeks. “Go home. Read. Write.”

For me, those were the three loneliest weeks of that class. When Paula returned, she handed me a package with her writings. I took the package home, read what she has written, and laughed a great deal. The following class meeting I had her read her work to the entire

A male student stated, “I would never let any students of mine read such a book. It might give them ideas.” At that point, Paula picked up her heavy, plastic pocketbook and threw it at him.

class, and they applauded loudly. I told Paula if she finished writing the book, which she already had done, I’d try to find a publisher.

She brought me her finished manuscript a couple of weeks later, and I liked it very much. I took it to one editor friend who was not amused. So I showed it to another

editor who loved it. The book, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, was published in 1974, and thirty years later is still in print and doing very well. Paula and my family became very good friends. She was wise, witty, and wonderfully wacky at times. She was most caring and compassionate. We shall miss her.

So Many Good Books; So Little Time!

As *ALAN Review* readers, we recognize the advantage of bringing newer books into classrooms to meet the diverse and changing interests, needs, and abilities of students. Through reading this publication and by attending conferences, many of us are introduced to new books and methods and become familiar with many authors who can touch the minds of young and old.

A common problem in many English classrooms is the teaching load consisting of too much material to be covered with too many students. There are teachers who resist change. Reports from consultants and authors making school visits tell us that teachers

often say they are satisfied with what they have been using for many years, and they don't have the time to add anything new. Some admit they are not willing to make changes. As one teacher said recently, "I just don't have the time to read more books." So while we are embarked on a campaign to LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND; however, are we also on a campaign to LEAVE NO TEACHER BEHIND?

Good books make meaningful reading happen. One parent told me that she was thrilled when her son, who seemingly had reading problems, discovered *Ironman* by Chris Crutcher and was turned on to sports books. He really hadn't known that there were sports books like this around. A good librarian then gave him a copy of *Slam* by Walter Dean Myers. He zoomed through that book. It's interesting that few teachers have a unit of sports or use sports books to hook their students.

A book such as David A. Adler's splendid biography, *George Washington: An Illustrated Biography* (Holiday House), shows us a true leader for his time and puts politics and patriotism in a perspective worthy of study. Betsy Harvey Kraft's *Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit* (Clarion) offers more insight into the American Presidency as the reader witnesses Roosevelt's strong feelings about women's rights and a futile attempt to "reform the court system" so that if the public didn't like the ruling by a judge, they would have the right to challenge the verdict. An interesting idea?

Wade Hudson has done a remarkable job in *Powerful Words*

(Scholastic). More than thirty African Americans from colonial days to contemporary times speak out against racism and slavery to show how African Americans have contributed so much to their community and to American history. Commentators include Benjamin Banneker, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, among

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others.

As English teachers we are concerned with language and lives, fiction and nonfiction. Jordan Sonnenblick, in his novel, *Dreams, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* (Daybue Insights), reveals the strong feelings a young teenage boy has for his younger brother who has leukemia, and at the same time, his frustrations at watching his parents focus most of their attention on the ailing

child and seemingly overlooking him as "the other son." He has interests, questions, needs too. A very powerful story.

Three books of poetry caught my eye.

Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices by Walter Dean Myers (Holiday House) recaptures the voices of many who grew up or who live in Harlem. Students, a numbers runner, veterans, a furniture mover, a hairdresser, an artist, a boy evangelist, and a nurse are just a few who have their thoughts and experiences depicted by this talented poet. Myers claimed to write this after being inspired by Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*. So he created his own "street corner in Harlem," and the many characters in his book passed there or near there and spoke and thought, very much alive in their community, complete with hopes, dreams, and frustrations. Heavily illustrated.

Paul B. Janeczko in *World Afire* (Candlewick Press) tells readers about the many people who went to the circus for all kinds of interesting reasons—to see the freaks, to see the animals, to see the Greatest Show on Earth. Using a true event that happened in Hartford, CT, on July 6, 1944, he reminds us of a fire that broke out at the circus where many were killed and injured. Watching the characters face the catastrophe, and many who were caught up in it, becomes the basis of each poem told by a specific character—a parent, a firefighter, a state trooper, a nurse, among others. Exciting in its horror.

Naomi Shihab Nye, in *Is This Forever or What? Poems and*

Paintings from Texas, has brought together poets and artists who depict the variety of cultures and talents as one drives across this very large state. The book is filled with beautiful words and pictures which show, for the most part, common people reflecting on their settings and circumstances.

Space limitations prevent me from annotating every book I would like to list here. So I have chosen just a few topics and some of the books published in 2004 that I think would be suggestions for any classroom.

HISTORICAL FICTION

- Chotjewicz, David, translated by Doris Orgill. *Daniel Half Human: And the Good Nazi*. (Atheneum)
- Disher, Garry. *The Divine Wind*. (Scholastic)
- Hassinger, Peter W. *Shakespeare's Daughter*. (Harper Collins)
- Hobbs, Will. *Leaving Protection*. (Harper Collins)
- Hooper, Mary. *Petals in the Ashes*. (Bloomsbury)
- Hughes, Pat. *The Breaker Boys*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)
- Morgan, Nicole. *Fleshmarket*. (Delacorte)
- Rinaldi, Ann. *Finishing Becca*. (Gulliver/Harcourt)
- Wilson, John. *The Flags of War*. (Kids Can Press)
- Wolf, Allan. *New Found Land*. (Candlewick Press)
- Yolen, Jane, and Robert J. Harris. *Prince Across the Water*. (Philomel)

SHORT STORIES

- Gallo, Donald R., ed. *First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants*. (Candlewick Press)
- Howe, James. *13: Thirteen Stories about the Agony of Being Thirteen*. (Atheneum)
- Kurtz, Jane. *Memories of Sun: Stories of Africa and America*. (Amistad)
- Peck, Richard. *Past Perfect, Present Tense:*

New and Collected Stories. (Dial)

Singer, Marilyn, ed. *Face Relations: 11 Stories about Seeing Beyond Color*. (Simon & Schuster)

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

- Augarde, Steve. *The Various*. (David Fickling)
- Barren, T. A. *The Great Tree of Avalon*. (Philomel)
- Barry, Dave, and Riddley Pearson. *Peter and the Starcatchers*. (Hyperion)
- Card, Orson Scott. *Maps in a Mirror*. (Orb)
- DeLint, Charles. *The Blue Girl*. (Viking)
- Finke, Cornelia. *Dragon Rider*. (The Chicken House/Scholastic)
- Hayden, Patrick Nielsen. *New Magics*. (Tor)
- Jacques, Brian. *The Long Patrol*. (Firebird)
- Kindl, Patricia. *Owl in Love*. (Graphia/Houghton Mifflin)
- Pierce, Tamora. *Trickster Queen*. (Random House)
- Shusterman, Neal. *The Eyes of King Midas*. (Simon Pulse)
- Tunnell, Michael. *Wishing Moon*. (Dutton)
- Werlin, Nancy. *Double Helix*. (Dial)

GENERAL NONFICTION

- Hill, Laban Carrick. *Harlem Stomp: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance*. (Little, Brown)
- McClatchy, J. D., with photographs by Erica Leonard. *American Writers at Home*. The Library of America, 2004.
- McWhorter, Diane. *A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954-1968*. (Scholastic)
- Meltzer, Milton. *Hear that Whistle Blow! How the Railroads Changed the World*. (Random House)
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Revenge of the Whale; The True Story of the Whaleship Essex*. (Puffin)
- Prince, Bryan. *I Came as a Stranger: The Underground Railroad*. (Tundra)
- Warren, Andrea. *Escape from Saigon. How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)

SCHOOL DAYS

- Bloor, Edward. *Story Time*. (Harcourt)
- Clement, Andrew. *The Report Card*. (Simon & Schuster)

- Moore, Peter. *Blind Sighted*. (Speak)
- Moriarty, Jaclyn. *The Year of Special Assignments*. (Scholastic)
- Nelson, Blake. *The New Rules of High School*. (Viking)
- Peck, Richard. *The Teacher's Funeral*. (Dial)

FAMILY

- Carey, Janet Lee. *The Double Life of Zoe*. (Atheneum)
- Dessen, Sarah. *This Lullaby*. (Penguin)
- Fogelin, Adrian. *The Big Nothing*. (Peachtree)
- Gilbert, Sheri. *The Legacy of Gloria Russell*. (Knopf)
- Konigsburg, E. L. *The Outcasts of Schuyler Place*. (Atheneum)
- Krishnaswami, Uma. *Naming Maya*. (Farrar Straus Giroux)
- McCord, Patricia. *Pictures in the Dark*. (Bloomsbury)
- Mosher, Richard. *Zazoo*. (Graphia/Houghton Mifflin)
- Supplee, Audra. *I Almost Love You, Eddie Clagg*. (Peachtree)

MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

- Balliett, Blue. *Chasing Vermeer*. (Scholastic)
- Shan, Darren. *Cirque Du Freak: Hunters of the Dusk*. (Little, Brown)
- Stine, R. L. *Dangerous Girls*. (Avon)
- Taylor, G. R. *Shadowmancer*. (Putnam)
- Wooding, Chris. *The Haunting of Alazabel Gray*. (Orchard)

SPECIAL YOUTH, SPECIAL PROBLEMS

- Galloway, Greg. *As Simple as Snow*. (Putnam, 2005)
- Grimes, Sally. *Spilled Water*. (Bloomsbury)
- Hinton, S. E. *Hawkes Harbor*. (Tor)
- Korman, Gordon. *Son of the Mob: Hollywood Hustle*. (Hyperion)
- Leavett, Martine. *Heck, Superhero*. (Front Street)
- Morgenroth, Kate. *Jude*. (Simon & Schuster)
- Sanchez, Alex. *So Hard to Say*. (Simon & Schuster)
- Twomey, Cathleen. *Beachmont Letters*. (Boyd's Mills Press)

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.