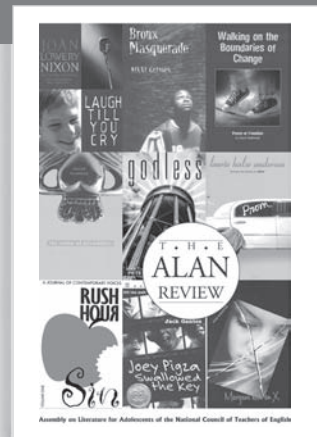


Volume 33

Number 3

Summer 2006



<p>Lori Atkins Goodson Jim Blasingame</p>	<p>From the Editors 3</p>
<p>Diane Tuccillo</p>	<p>Call for Manuscripts 4</p>
<p>Gerrit W. Bleeker Barbara S. Bleeker, Martha M. Bleeker</p>	<p>2006 ALAN Workshop Preview: "Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds" 5</p>
<p>Patrick Jones</p>	<p>Finding Common Ground: Learning the Language of Peace 7</p>
<p>Patricia M. Hauschildt</p>	<p>Stargirls, Stray Dogs, Freaks, and Nails: Person vs. Society Conflicts and Nonconformist Protagonists in Young Adult Fiction 13</p>
<p>C. J. Bott</p>	<p>Worlds of Terrorism: Learning through Young Adult Literature 18</p>
<p>David Clement-Davies</p>	<p>Why We Must Read Young Adult Books that Deal with Sexual Content 26</p>
<p>Marc Aronson, Paul Fleischman, Jim Murphy, Harry Mazer, Walter Dean Myers</p>	<p>Are You Living in the Real World? 30</p>
<p>Lori Atkins Goodson</p>	<p>The Author's Responsibility: Telling the Truth About War 36</p>
<p>Louel C. Gibbons Jennifer S. Dail B. Joyce Stallworth</p>	<p>Clip and File 45</p>
<p>Joan F. Kaywell, Patricia P. Kelly Christi Edge, Larissa McCoy, Narisa Steinberg</p>	<p>Young Adult Literature in the English Curriculum Today: Classroom Teachers Speak Out 53</p>
<p>Wendy Glenn</p>	<p>Growing Up Female around the Globe with Young Adult Literature 62</p>
<p>Robyn Seglem</p>	<p>Boys Finding First Love: Soul-Searching in <i>The Center of the World</i> and <i>Swimming in the Monsoon Sea</i> 70</p>
<p>Leslie Ann Salley Witt Salley</p>	<p>YA Lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom 76</p>
<p></p>	<p>"Making Cities and Then Making Them Crumble:" Francesca Lia Block's Place in the Young Adult Novel 81</p>

T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

Co-editors

James Blasingame,
james.blasingame@asu.edu
Arizona State University
Lori Atkins Goodson,
lagoodson@cox.net
Wamego Middle School,
Wamego, Kansas

Assistant Editor

Sheryl Rinkol,
Arizona State University

YA Book Review Editor

Lori Atkins Goodson

Middle School

Connection Editor

Claudia Katz, *National Louis University*

High School

Connection Editor

Kay Smith, *Utah Valley State College*

Research Connection

Editor

Jeffrey S. Kaplan, *University of Central Florida*

Publishers Connection

Editor

M. Jerry Weiss, *Jersey City State College, Emeritus*

Professional Resource

Connection Editor

William Broz, *University of Northern Iowa*

Library Connection

Editor

Diane P. Tuccillo, *Mesa Public Library, Mesa, Arizona*

Non Print YAL

Connection Editor

Jean Brown, *Rhode Island College*

Editorial Review Board

Lawrence Baines, *University of Toledo*
Katherine Barr, *San Francisco, California*
Kylene Beers, *Yale University*
Jean Borren, *Northern Arizona University*
Cynthia A. Bowman, *Columbus, Ohio*
Linda Broughton, *University of South Alabama*
Jean E. Brown, *Warwick, Rhode Island*
John "Jack" Bushman, *University of Kansas*
Michael Cart, *Chico, California*
Melissa Comer, *Cumberland College*
Chris Crowe, *Brigham Young University*
Pat Daniel, *University of South Florida*
Kevin Dupree, *University of Southern Mississippi*
Joan Elliot, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*
Bonnie Ericson, *California State University at Northridge*
Ted Fabiano, *Blue Valley Northwest High School*
Karen Ford, *Ball State University*
Nena Foster-Pritchard, *North Olmsted High School, Ohio*
Montye Fuse, *Arizona State University*
Marshall George, *Fordham University*
Wendy Glenn, *University of Connecticut*
Gail P. Gregg, *Florida International University*
Robin Denise Groce, *Mississippi State University*
Kay Bushman Haas, *Ottawa, Kansas*
Kathy Headley, *Clemson University*
Sarah Herz, *Westport, Connecticut*
Kaavonia M. Hinton-Johnson, *Old Dominion University*
Ted Hipple, *University of Tennessee*
Jaime Hylton, *University of New England*
Rita Karr, *Oklahoma Road Middle School, Maryland*
Joan Kaywell, *University of South Florida*
Kathryn Kelly, *Radford University*
Patricia P. Kelly, *Virginia Tech*
Daphne Key, *Papillon, Nebraska*
Teri S. Lesesne, *Sam Houston State University*
Terry C. Ley, *Auburn University, Emeritus*
Rob Lockhart, *Morehead State University*
Caroline McKinney, *University of Colorado at Boulder*
Arlene Harris Mitchell, *University of Cincinnati*
William R. Mollineaux, *Sedgwick Middle School, Connecticut*
Elaine O'Quinn, *Appalachian State*
Elizabeth Poe, *University of West Virginia*
Suzanne Reid, *Emory and Henry College*
Gary Salvner, *Youngstown State University*
Barbara G. Samuels, *University of Houston at Clear Lake*
John S. Simmons, *Florida State University, Emeritus*
Robert C. Small, *Radford University*
Elaine C. Stephens, *Michigan*
Barbara Stover, *Chatfield Senior High School*
Lois Stover, *St. Mary's College of Maryland*
Alan Teasley, *Durham, North Carolina*
Mary Ann Tighe, *Troy State University*
Ellis Vance, *Fresno County Office of Education*
Elizabeth Watts, *Broward County, Florida*
Ann Wilder, *Durham, North Carolina*
Carole Williams, *St. Louis, Missouri*
Susan N. Wood, *Florida State University*
Geri Yaccino, *St. Charles Middle School, Illinois*
Connie Zitlow, *Ohio Wesleyan University*

Instructions for Authors

ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW. *The ALAN Review* is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. It is published three times per academic year (fall, winter, and spring) and is sent to all members, individual and institutional, of ALAN (The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE). Members of ALAN need not be members of NCTE.

THE ALAN REVIEW publishes reviews of and articles on literature for adolescents and the teaching of that literature: research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genre and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews of authors.

AUDIENCE. Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of adolescent literature, librarians, authors, publishers, reading teachers and teachers of other related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 states and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than fifteen double-spaced, typed pages. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for adolescents and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a **clearly defined topic** and be scholarly in content, as well as **practical and useful** to people working with and/or studying adolescents and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as **articles rather than formal reports**. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender-specific terms such as "chairman."

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be **double-spaced** throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. A **title page** with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully **documented within the manuscript** and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by **written permission** of the copyright owner.

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

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

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

A 3 1/2-inch IBM compatible disk in a recent version of Word format must accompany all manuscripts. Disks must be clearly labeled with author's name, manuscript title, disk format, and file title.

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

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

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

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editor and at least two members of the editorial review board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks. Manuscripts are judged for the contribution they make to the field of adolescent literature, clarity and cohesiveness, timeliness, and freshness of approach. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of *The ALAN Review*. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style.

Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

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

FALL ISSUE Deadline:

MAY 15

WINTER ISSUE Deadline:

OCTOBER 15

SUMMER ISSUE Deadline:

FEBRUARY 15

Cover credits: *The ALAN Review* cover was designed by Jim Blasingame. Credit lines for individual book jackets as follows:

The Realm of Possibility, by David Levithan, jacket copyright 2004 by Alfred Knopf. *Margaux with an X*, by Ron Koertge, jacket photograph copyright 2004 by Jonathan Cavendish/CORBIS, reprinted with permission from Candlewick Press. *Prom*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, jacket photograph copyright 2005 by Marc Tauss, Viking/Penguin Putnam Young Readers Group. *Bronx Masquerade*, by Nikki Grimes, jacket art copyright 2002 by Christopher Myers, reprinted with permission from Penguin Putnam, Inc. *Laugh till You Cry*, by Joan Lowery Nixon, jacket photographs copyright by Andy Katz/Indexstock (top); copyright Roxann Arwen Mills/Phononica (bottom). *Joey Pizsa Swallowed the Key*, by Jack Gantos, cover art copyright 2000 by Cliff Nielsen; cover design copyright by Hilary Zarchy; cover copyright 2000 by HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. *Walking on the Boundaries of Change*, cover photograph copyright 1998 by The Reuben Group, from "Walking on the Boundaries of Change," by Sara Holbrook. Published by Wordsong, Boyds Mills Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission. *Godless*, by Pete Hautman, jacket photograph copyright 2004 by Burton Pritzker/Phononica; jacket design by Greg Stadnyk, Simon & Schuster. *Rush Hour Sin*, Michael Cart, ed., cover design by Vikki Sheatsley, from Delacorte Press, a division of Random House, Inc.



From the Editors

Teenagers can face a variety of conflicts during their adolescent years: conflicts involving friends, family members, peers, adults, even inner conflicts involving only the individual. Conflicts can also center on sexual and gender identity, on love and hatred, on moral choices, and even the issues presented as our country goes to war. Some conflicts simmer beneath the service of those who experience them while others are as evident as the world news and daily headlines.

So how do we help these young people find a way to learn to live with such conflicts and put them into their proper perspectives? This issue of *The ALAN Review* provides a look at young adult literature and how it can help pave the way for a better understanding of the conflicts that surround them.

The centerpiece of the summer issue comes from the 2005 ALAN Workshop and the Books on War panel presentation given by Marc Aronson, Jim Murphy, Walter Dean Myers, Paul Fleischman, and Harry Mazer. The title of the composite, “The Author’s Responsibility: Telling the Truth About War,” comes from the final line from Walter Dean Myers, an admonition to authors to tell the truth about war. The personal experiences with war which Harry Mazer and Walter Dean Myers have recast in fiction tell the story of young men facing death. The nonfiction and mythological updatings of Marc Aronson, Jim Murphy and Paul Fleischman also tell the truth about the war.

Gerrit W. Bleeker, Barbara S. Bleeker, and Martha M. Bleeker focus on conflict resolution skills in their research on the use of young adult literature for this purpose in, “Finding Common Ground: Learning the Language of Peace.” They focus on giving students

voice in their classrooms, to provide new perspectives and to encourage a resolution of conflict, through reading, writing, and discussion.

One of the most obvious conflicts in a young person’s life is learning to understand and embrace individual differences...especially your own. In “Stargirls, Stray Dogs, Freaks, and Nails: Person vs. Society Conflicts and Nonconformist Protagonists in Young Adult Fiction,” young adult author Patrick Jones examines the perplexity of a specific kind of protagonist in young adult literature—those characters who choose to function outside the mainstream of life.

Patricia M. Hauschildt continues our look at conflict with her focus on “Worlds of Terrorism.” She shares her vision on how educators, and others can address some of the issues of terrorism and war as perceived by teenagers trying to make sense of the world.

In another aspect of adult responsibility to help teens make sense of their world, C.J. Bott explains why educators must become familiar with YA books that deal with sexual content, for the sake of our students. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to some of the more explicit books that flow through our students’ and children’s hands, and we as adults need to be familiar with the issues kids face in the present environment as these issues are reflected in the books they choose to read.

One of the United Kingdom’s favorite fantasy authors, David Clement-Davies stops along his first US book tour to ask the question, “Are You Living in the Real World?” David discusses the role of fantasy in the lives of readers of all ages and asks if it doesn’t have deep connection to the real world. Louel C. Gibbons,

Jennifer S. Dail, and B. Joyce Stallworth provide an opportunity for classroom teachers to speak out regarding the use of YA literature in the English curriculum and their use in reaching state standards.

Veteran contributors Joan F. Kaywell, Patricia P. Kelly, Christi Edge, Larissa McCoy, and Narisa Steinberg share their research on “Growing Up Female around the Globe,” and the role of young adult literature. Meanwhile, Wendy Glenn takes a look at first love among gay teens in “Boys Finding First Love” in *The Center of the World* and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*.

Leslie Ann Salley and Witt Salley take a fresh look at Francesca Lia Block’s work and her role in establishing the parameters and pushing the boundaries of the young adult novel. Taking a further look at popular culture, classroom teacher Robyn Seglem offers “YA Lit, Music and Movies” Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom. Seglem

demonstrates how to incorporate music, movies and YA lit into a successful and meaningful classroom activity.

This issue also features our regular Clip and File collection of 31 reviews of the newest releases in young adult literature.

And, finally, don’t forget to check out our preview of the 2006 ALAN Workshop, with its theme of “Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds.” Scheduled for November in Nashville, Tenn., the workshop features dozens of the top names of authors and researchers and other leaders in the field of young adult literature. And this year’s ALAN Breakfast will feature guest speaker Naomi Shihab Nye.

So get set for some engaging articles regarding conflict, and take a sneak peek at what’s headed your way for the annual ALAN Workshop. We’re glad you’re joining us for this adventure.

Call for Manuscripts

2007 Winter theme: Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds

The theme for our 2007 winter issue will reflect the theme of the 2005 ALAN Workshop: “Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds.” This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics; in addition, articles about any of the authors scheduled to appear at the 2006 ALAN Workshop in Pittsburgh, as well as general articles on any topic dealing with young adult literature and its use, are welcome. October 15 submission deadline.

2007 Summer theme: Seeing Myself in the Story

This theme is intended to solicit articles dealing with the relationships between young adult readers and the characters in their reading. The theme is meant to be open to interpretation, but might, for example, deal with what kinds of protagonists individual readers find appealing and/or identify with, the effects this kind of reading may have on young readers and how teachers use this to help students on the path to making meaning of their reading and their lives. General submissions are also welcome. February 15 submission deadline.

2007 Fall theme: Young Adult Literature: No Genre Unwanted

This theme is intended to solicit articles about the many genres within young adult literature and the approaches teachers take in addressing them, from poetry to plays, from autobiography to horror. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics, but some possibilities include choosing and using the best of young adult drama, helping students make the connections between their own lives in the present day and the lives of characters in historical fiction, creating a thematic unit on mysteries, performance poetry and more. The sky is the limit! We welcome and encourage other creative interpretations of this theme. General submissions are also welcome. May 15 submission deadline.

2006 ALAN Workshop:

“Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds”

Nashville, Tennessee, November 20 & 21, 2006, Monday, 8-5:30; Tuesday, 8-4

The 2006 ALAN Workshop, held as part of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) annual conference, will have the theme “Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds.” You will want to stay for the entire two day program, as the concluding presentations on Tuesday will be as exciting and important as those taking place earlier! As part of your workshop registration, you will receive a year’s membership or renewal to ALAN, plus a large cloth book bag filled with donated books from our generous participating publishers. You will also receive an invitation to the ALAN Reception—a delightful “wine and cheese” gathering—the Sunday evening before the workshop begins, also given by our wonderful publishers.

During the workshop presentations and breakout sessions, we’ll be discovering ways to connect teens and reading through YA books, ways to expand horizons and experience new perspectives via YA literature, and ways to think about the issues of intellectual freedom in using, recommending, and providing YA literature in our work with teens. To get us started, our keynote speaker will be the inspiring and insightful editor of *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA) magazine, Cathi Dunn MacRae.

You will be hearing from a wide array of YA authors who will speak out about their contributions to the literature, how they create it, and how they connect with teens through it. There will be many new and upcoming YA authors represented who are enriching and expanding the literature, as well as

those who have already contributed many fine works that have become YA classics. With that in mind, here is a preview of the authors who will be in Nashville for individual talks, breakout sessions, and/or panel presentations:

Peter Abrahams
Courtesy of HarperCollins

Edward Bloor
Courtesy of Random House

Coe Booth
Courtesy of Scholastic

Michael Cart
Courtesy of Random House and HarperCollins

Cecil Castellucci
Courtesy of Candlewick

Judith Ortiz Cofer
Courtesy of Scholastic

Sneed Collard
Courtesy of Peachtree

Penny Coleman
Courtesy of Holt

Chris Crutcher
Courtesy of HarperCollins

Terry Davis
Author of *Vision Quest*, and more

Melissa de la Cruz Courtesy of Hyperion	Patrick Jones Courtesy of Walker	John H. Ritter Courtesy of Penguin Putnam
Matt de la Pena Courtesy of Random House	J. James Keels Author of "Ape," in <i>Such a Pretty Face</i>	Gary Schmidt Courtesy of Clarion
Sarah Dessen Courtesy of Penguin Putnam	Trudy Krisher Courtesy of Holiday House	Ellen Schreiber Courtesy of HarperCollins
Laura Malone Elliott Courtesy of HarperCollins	Greg Letich Smith Courtesy of Little, Brown	Mark Siegel Courtesy of Roaring Brook
Adrian Fogelin Courtesy of Peachtree	Cynthia Letich Smith Courtesy of HarperCollins	Alan Sitomer Courtesy of Hyperion
Don Gallo Courtesy of Candlewick	David Levithan Courtesy of Random House	William Sleator Courtesy of Abrams
Nancy Garden Courtesy of Harcourt	Robert Lipsyte Courtesy of HarperCollins	Kirsten Smith Courtesy of Little, Brown
James Cross Giblin Courtesy of Clarion	Emily Lockhart Courtesy of Random House	Jordan Sonnenblick Courtesy of Scholastic
Gail Giles Courtesy of Little, Brown	Janet McDonald Courtesy of Farrar, Straus and Giroux	Edward T. Sullivan Courtesy of Holiday House
John Green Courtesy of Penguin Putnam	Stephenie Meyer Courtesy of Little, Brown	Susan Vaught Courtesy of Bloomsbury
Nikki Grimes Courtesy of Hyperion	Lauren Myracle Courtesy of Abrams	Paul Volponi Courtesy of Penguin Putnam
Elizabeth Hayden Courtesy of TOR	Deborah Noyes Wayshak Courtesy of Candlewick	Ellen Wittlinger Courtesy of Abrams
Helen Hemphill Author of <i>Long Gone Daddy</i>	Julie Ann Peters Courtesy of Little, Brown	Gene Yang Courtesy of Roaring Brook
Will Hobbs Courtesy of HarperCollins	Tamora Pierce Courtesy of Random House	Jane Yolen Courtesy of TOR
Pat Hughes Courtesy of Random House	Marilyn Reynolds Author of <i>Love Rules</i> , and more	Timothy Zahn Courtesy of TOR
Paul Janeczko Courtesy of Candlewick		

Of course, you will also want to enjoy the fabulous ALAN Breakfast on Saturday morning, featuring guest speaker Naomi Shihab Nye (courtesy of HarperCollins).

Please join us in Nashville in November 2006!

Information about registration, breakfast tickets, lodging, etc., is available through the NCTE web site at www.ncte.org. You are assured a fun and enlightening experience, as we explore *Young Adult Literature: Key to Open Minds*.

Finding Common Ground:

Learning the Language of Peace

In the Prologue to her seminal book, *The Peaceable Classroom*, Mary Rose O'Reilley poses the question a professor asked in a seminar for teaching assistants: "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" (9). Both haunted and inspired by this question, O'Reilley answers by demonstrating that English can be taught in a way that will reduce violence if the teacher creates a "peaceable classroom"—one which encourages students to find their own voice, listen to each other, respect each other, and to make peace (23). A "peaceable classroom" teacher fosters consensus, cooperation, nurturing, compassion, and "leadings of intuition" (O'Reilley 32-35).

O'Reilley and others who have since joined her cause point out that in a "peaceable classroom" students are encouraged to develop a rich, authentic inner life (voice) so they can share their own stories and enter into the stories of others. Personal writing helps students discover the power of their voices and what it means to be human. G. Lynn Nelson argues: "Deny me my stories, as the modern, dominant culture does, and I will eventually turn to the language of violence" (43). Moreover, reading enables students to discover their inner worlds and identities by engaging

with and connecting with the lives of fictional characters, by discussing the choices characters make for handling and resolving conflict, and by looking at issues from multiple perspectives. Reading, writing, and sharing stories help students understand and appreciate diversity in a positive and enriching way (Jonsberg 29-30; O'Reilley 117-118; Monseau 10-11; Quinn 103). Hence, students in a "peaceable classroom" use the power of language rather than the "force of fists or weapons of self-destruction to intervene symbolically in violence" (Bruce and Davis 121).

Mindful of the best practices suggested by O'Reilley and others, during the fall of 2004 we worked with a middle school language arts teacher to design, pilot, and assess a literature-based "language of peace" program in a highly diverse Chicago middle school setting. Students read, discussed, and responded to a number of young adult novels whose protagonists successfully work through conflict and hence can serve as positive role models for young people learning how to solve conflict in the classroom and beyond. Immediate post-research results show that the students learned how to communicate more effectively with one another, how to explore appropriate ways of agreeing and

Reading enables students to discover their inner worlds and identities by engaging with and connecting with the lives of fictional characters, by discussing the choices characters make for handling and resolving conflict, and by looking at issues from multiple perspectives.

disagreeing, and how to show respect for each other and for those who share our planet.

This paper will describe the “language of peace” program, including a summary of the young adult novels used, the learning activities designed to foster a “peaceable classroom” environment, the instrument used to assess students’ (both in the experimental and control groups) pre- and post-attitudes toward reading vis-à-vis the problem of peace/conflict, and a preliminary statistical analysis of the pilot study.

To help her students start thinking about resolving conflict and making peace, the instructor asked them to respond to three questions: (1) What kinds of conflict have you experienced? (2) How do you respond to different kinds of conflict? (3) What do you do to try to avoid or resolve conflict?

After the pre-reading brainstorming session, she read aloud from Carl Hiaasen’s *Hoot* over a two-week period, modeling for her students the kinds of questions they might ask of other texts they would read and respond to in reading circles. The students were easily engaged in this hilarious ecological mystery and could identify with the central character Roy Eberhardt. They were fascinated with Roy’s choice to help a homeless boy save a colony of burrowing owls from a crooked business operator and admired Roy’s ability to outwit a middle school bully.

As the teacher read aloud, the class collaboratively created a large, three-column chart on which they listed conflicts they saw in the story, ways characters reacted to conflict in the story, and feelings and reactions the students had to the characters’ conflicts. Students especially noted the various kinds of “bullying” going on in the story, perpetrated both by young people and by adults. They observed how some victims were too scared to share their plight with others. They also noted that one character seemed not to be bothered by bullying. Feelings and reactions to the conflict they saw in the story included “feeling bad,” “confused,” “weird,” “curious,” “sad,” “scared,” “amazed,” and “happy” when Roy stuck up for himself.”

The class also began constructing a word wall of conflict/peace words. As they discussed and wrote, they added words to the wall—words such as “bully,” “unsocial,” “disobedient,” “defiant,” “uncooperative,” “rude,” “bossy,” “arrogant,” “annoying,” “bad influence,” and “liar” as well as “adapting,” “responsible,”

“helpful,” “confident,” “less self-centered,” “kind,” “secure,” “cooperative,” “dependable,” “passionate,” “sensitive,” “mature,” “sympathetic,” and “good listener.”

After listening to a section of *Hoot* being read each day, students individually wrote in their journals, responding to one or more of these prompts:

1. Tell how one character in the story is like you.
2. Tell about a time you have had a similar experience.
3. What are some ways the characters in this story respond to conflict?
4. What are some ways the characters resolve conflict? Do you think the characters choose helpful ways to solve their conflict? What would you have done?
5. Which character is the best peacemaker? Why?
6. What does this story make you think about?
7. What does this story show you about resolving conflict?

Sharing selected journal responses became the basis for review/recapitulation each day before the class reconvened to hear more of the story.

After the teacher finished reading *Hoot* aloud, students participated in a “HOOTenanny” in which they acted out conflicts from the novel or a word from the “word wall.” The class guessed what the conflict was or which word they were acting out.

Finally, on owl shapes, each student wrote a letter to one character in the novel, addressing a specific conflict and how the character handled it. For example, Megan wrote a letter to Lonna, the mother of Napoleon, nick-named Mullet Fingers:

“Dear Lonna,

My language arts class just read the book *Hoot* with you in it as one of the stars. I’m writing you this letter because I was completely disgusted on how you reacted to the conflict with your son. He is a very intelligent boy and you never understand that. What did you bicker about to send Napoleon to boot camp? I can’t believe why you don’t care about your very own son. He is very lucky that he has an awesome step-sister to help him with his hard situations he stumbles into. If I were you I’d talk to Napoleon first before sending him away. Napoleon gets very furious at Boot camp. Your son is the best! P.S. Write back and change your attitude!”

By participating in discussions and completing reader response activities related to *Hoot*, students were learning how to recognize conflict; were identifying vocabulary to use when describing and resolving conflict; were seeing how characters in a novel

instigate, respond to, or resolve conflict; and were comparing conflict and its satisfactory resolution in the novel to their own experiences.

Next, the teacher divided the class into small, homogeneous reading circles. She presented book talks on five young adult novels—Esme Raji Codell’s *Sahara Special*, Sharon Creech’s *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, Kate DiCamillo’s *Because of Winn-Dixie*, Tony Johnston’s *Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio*, and Jerry Spinelli’s *Loser*. Each of these works depicts a character who discovers and uses her or his own story (voice) to solve conflict.

In *Sahara Special*, an extraordinary fifth grade teacher gives a special needs child new hope for academic success by validating the child’s ability to tell her own story despite her fears about fitting in and her struggles with a bully. In *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, Granny Torrelli uses good cooking, wise advice, and personal stories to help twelve-year-old Rosie reconcile with her best friend, Bailey. In *Because of Winn-Dixie*, India Opal uses her dog, Winn-Dixie, and the ploy of sharing stories to help people with different points of view get along and respect each other. In *Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio*, small acts of kindness transcend discrimination and potential violence when eleven-year-old Arturo and his loving Hispanic family move to Los Angeles. And in *Loser*, Donald Zinkhoff, who has always been different from his peers, becomes the brunt of jokes and cruel acts until a few recognize his “winning” ways.

After the books were previewed, each reading circle was asked to choose one of them to read in common; each student in the group was given a copy of the novel.

After revisiting the three pre-reading discussion questions used with *Hoot*, students read independently during part of class time. Each student created a conflict chart with three columns like the collaborative class chart created for *Hoot*.

Also, every day each student responded in a

Also every day each student responded in a journal to one of the seven post reading prompts. Responses varied but reflected the students’ attempts to compare and contrast the characters’ experiences with their own. Students began recording “nuggets” of their own stories.

journal to one of the seven post-reading prompts. Responses varied but reflected the students’ attempts to compare and contrast the characters’ experiences with their own. Students began recording “nuggets” of their own stories.

One student related to Arturo from *Any Small Goodness*, noting that “Arturo is like me—he wants to be called by his real name.” When this comment was shared in group discussion, the conversation turned to name-calling and ways to stop it. When another student revealed that her parents, like Sahara’s, were divorced, students discussed how family conflict makes them feel and how they respond to pain and guilt. When asked how characters in their novel resolved conflict and what they

might have done instead, students offered insightful responses. In response to an incident in *Loser*, a student pointed out that Andrew was not helpful. “He could have told Zinkoff it is okay that the cookie broke and helped him clean it up.”

When identifying which character was the best peacemaker, students revealed a growing sense of what making peace might look like. After reading *Loser*, one student wrote: “I think Zinkoff’s Dad is the best peacemaker. When Zinkoff can’t go to take-your-kid-to-work-day, he is sad. But Mr. Zinkoff to the rescue! He asks Zinkoff if he wants to come deliver mail on Sunday. So Zinkoff happily scribbles 100 fake letters and drops them in the mailboxes. Mr. Zinkoff has restored peace yet again!” Another student noted that Mrs. Pointy, the teacher in *Sahara Special*, is a peacemaker in several ways. Her “troubles basket” helps kids find peace, she respects her students, and she tells Aesop fables to help them learn to respect each other.

When responding to what the story made one think about, one student noted that *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* made her think about people with disabilities and the conflicts the two friends experienced partly because of Bailey’s disability. She observed that conflicts in the story “. . . sometimes

made me sad. Sometimes made me mad, and most of the time made me relieved when everyone worked together to resolve their differences.”

Several students made perceptive comments about what they had learned about resolving conflict. After reading *Loser*, one student wrote: “This story shows

After reading *Loser*, one student wrote: “This story shows me that you have to resolve a conflict in order to make a thing better. I think that if you want to resolve a conflict, think before you act.” In responding to *Sahara Special*, another commented that “if you treat someone bad, you get treated bad, too.”

me that you have to resolve a conflict in order to make a thing better. I think that if you want to resolve a conflict, think before you act.” In responding to *Sahara Special*, another commented that “If you treat someone bad, you get treated bad, too.”

The teacher visited each reading circle, sometimes just listening in, other times sharing her own reactions and observations about the novels. She also carried with her a small bag of “conflict cards.” She would randomly invite a student to draw a card from the bag and read the generic question aloud. The student could then answer

the question or invite someone from the group to answer it. Some of the questions printed on the cards were: “Is there a character in your book that you don’t think you would get along with? Why or why not?” or “Have you learned something from reading this selection that might help you the next time you are having conflict? What?” or “Did the author do a good job of describing how the main character reacted to conflict? How?” The conflict cards and group observation helped the teacher assess the progress of individuals in each group.

The students’ journal writing reflected how their ideas about conflict were evolving. Most interesting were their own stories prompted by the experiences of characters in the novels. Even after the project ended, students continued to use “nuggets” from their journals to write stories about themselves.

After each group completed reading and responding to a young adult novel, they chose ways to share their findings with the class. They acted out short skits, depicting how conflict was resolved in the story. They added new words to the word wall. They wrote and shared stories, focusing on personal conflict and on how that conflict was resolved or not.

Best of all, they began applying their new knowledge about conflict resolution to real incidents in class or school. For example, when some students accused one another of breaking rules during a basketball game, the class discussed the incident and wrote stories about times when they were falsely accused. Several students talked about characters who had been unfairly blamed. After the discussion, the students calmly resolved their own incident.

Before the “language of peace” project was launched, the teacher asked students to complete a Likert-type survey in order to assess their attitudes towards reading books, their classroom environment, relationships with peers, and resolving conflict. Two classrooms were used as the control group and a third class became the experimental group. The experimental group consisted of 23 students (12 girls, 11 boys) and the control group classrooms consisted of a total of 39 students (21 girls, 18 boys). All students took a paper and pencil pre-test survey in their classroom, administered on the same day by the same teacher. The experimental group then participated in the six-week “language of peace” project or intervention; the control groups did not receive any intervention during this time. Following the project, all students took a post-test in their classroom, administered by the same teacher.

A preliminary statistical analysis suggests significant differences exist between the post-test attitudes of the experimental and control group. Specifically, even though differences in learning about getting along with others from teachers, friends, and books existed between the experimental and control group children prior to intervention, the difference between the attitudes of experimental group children ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.00$) and control group children ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.30$) was even stronger following the intervention, $t(60) = 3.02$, $p = .001$.

Further analysis uncovered significant differences between the post-test attitudes of the experimental and control group students, even though the two

groups did not differ before the intervention. For instance, students in the experimental group ($M = 4.0$, $SD = .64$) were more likely than control group children ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.00$) to think about how book characters are similar to them, $t(60) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, even though the groups did not differ before the intervention. The experimental group was also more likely to report that reading stories helped them to learn how to get along with others. Finally, following the intervention, students in the experimental group ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.24$) were less likely to think they would walk away when seeing a fight start between two other people, compared to students in the control group, ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.05$), $t(60) = -2.12$, $p = .04$, though no difference existed before the intervention. Means and standard deviations for pre- and post-test measures are reported in Table 1.

Although a statistical analysis demonstrated positive changes in student attitudes, even more telling were the teacher’s anecdotal observations made later in the year. During the spring, she decided to give her students a “peace” inoculation. She read aloud Stephanie S. Tolan’s *Meet the Applewhites*, a story about a troubled youth who is sent to live with the Applewhite family and attend their home school after he is expelled from a number of other schools.

During this time, the class became engaged in a self-initiated, lengthy discussion about the similarities between Mullet Fingers, a character in *Hoot*, and Jake from *Meet the Applewhites*. One student even created a Venn diagram to share with the class. The class concluded that Mullet Fingers and Jake could become friends and constructively help each other avoid conflict.

Also, the class took the initiative to help two non-

English speaking students from Mexico adjust to their new surroundings. Based on Arturo’s experiences in adjusting to his new school in *Any Small Goodness* and Jake’s experiences when joining the Applewhites, the class brainstormed a list of things they could do to help the new students. And one day after a confrontation occurred between two students, the teacher overheard a serious conversation among class members, comparing the students to Jake and E. D. in *Surviving the Applewhites*.

Virginia Monseau contends that “. . . stories make us human. They satisfy our need to connect. . . . and will surely make our students richer in their understanding of one another—and the world” (11). By participating in a pilot project focused on learning the “language of peace,” 23 students with diverse backgrounds learned that English can be taught in a way that promotes self-respect, empathy, and peace.

Students in the experimental group ($M = 4.0$, $SD = .64$) were more likely than control group children ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.00$) to think about how book characters are similar to them, $t(60) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, even though the groups did not differ before the intervention. The experimental group was also more likely to report that reading stories helped them to learn how to get along with others.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and T-tests Comparisons for the Control and Experimental Groups

Variable	Control		Experimental		t	p-value
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Pre-test: Learn from books	2.8	1.17	3.6	1.20	2.48	0.02
Post-test: Learn from books	3.1	1.30	4.0	1.00	3.02	0.00
Pre-test: Similar to book characters	3.5	1.27	3.4	1.23	0.03	0.77
Post-test: Similar to book characters	3.6	1.00	4.0	0.64	2.21	0.03
Pre-test: Walk away	3.5	1.30	3.6	1.30	0.19	0.85
Post-test: Walk away	3.5	1.05	2.9	1.24	-2.21	0.04

Dr. Gerrit W. Bleeker, Professor of English and Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Emporia State University, and specializes in young adult literature, English education, and American literature. He co-authors a column about children's and young adult literature with Barbara Bleeker for the Topeka Capital Journal.

Barbara S. Bleeker teaches in the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Emporia State University, where she is a specialist in children's literature.

Dr. Martha M. Bleeker recently received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies, with a minor in Statistics, from Pennsylvania State University. She now holds a survey research position at Mathematica Policy Research in Princeton, NJ, and conducts national research on education policy issues.

Works Cited

- Bruce, Heather E. and Bryan Dexter Davis. "Slam: Hip-hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention." *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 119-127.
- Codell, Esme Raji. *Sahara Special*. New York: Hyperion, 2003.
- Creech, Sharon. *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
- DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn-Dixie*. New York: Candlewick Press, 2000.
- Hiaasen, Carl. *Hoot*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- Johnston, Tony. *Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio*. New York: Blue Sky Press, 2001.
- Jonsberg, Sara Dalmas. "A Place for Every Student," *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 27-31.
- Monseau, Virginia R. "Mining the Riches of Story." *The Alan Review* 31.2 (2004): 6-11.
- Nelson, G. Lynn. "Warriors with Words: Toward a Post-Columbine Writing Curriculum." *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 42-46.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 1993.
- Quinn, Anna L. "Hopes of a New Harvest: Sowing Seeds of Understanding with Contemporary Literature." *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 100-103.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Loser*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Tolan, Stephanie. *Surviving the Applewhites*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

Additional Readings

- Kreidler, William J. *Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
- Lantieri, Linda and Janet Patti. *Waging Peace in Our Schools*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Monseau, Virginia R. *A Curriculum of Peace: Selected Essays from English Journal*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2004.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 1998.
- Robertson, Judith P. Ed. *Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades K-6: Essays and Resources*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999.
- Yarrow, Peter, Project Director. *Don't Laugh at Me: Teacher's Guide: Grades 2-5 Creating a Ridicule-Free Classroom*. New York: Operation Respect, Inc., 2000.
- . *Don't Laugh at Me: Teachers Guide: Grades 6-8 Creating a Ridicule-Free Classroom*. New York: Operation Respect, Inc., 2000.



Stargirls, Stray Dogs, Freaks, and Nails:

Person vs. Society Conflicts and Nonconformist Protagonists in Young Adult Fiction

Consider, for a moment, the two touchstones in this field we call Young Adult Literature: *The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier, and *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton. The theme of both books is the same: the teen as “the outsider;” Jerry “dares to disturb the universe” and his school’s pecking order, while Pony Boy and pals dare to disturb polite society. Or flash forward to two books from 1980’s who describe kids perceived as different because of how they dress/act/live, like *Weetzie Bat*, by Francesca Lia Block, or because of what they believe/stand up for, like Louis Banks in Chris Crutcher’s *Running Loose*. Or look back only a few years to the two books from the 1990’s instantly recognized as YA classics: *Rats Saw God*, by Rob Thomas and *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, which also feature characters outside of the mainstream.

But why is the person on the outside? By choice, by force, or by circumstance? Many books, such as *Speak*, feature teen characters who have left the mainstream due to events, while others like Andrew Auseon’s *Funny Little Monkey* or Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak the Mighty* show teens pushed outside due to their physical appearance. One could argue that books featuring non-heterosexual characters, like *My Father’s Scar*, by Michael Cart, or James Howe’s *Totally Joe*, a transsexual character like *Luna*, by Julie Anne Peters, or a bisexual character like Battle in *Empress of the*

World, by Sara Ryan, fit under this umbrella of not fitting in to what is “formal and normal” in high school.

Indeed, this is a literature full of misfits, iconoclasts, freaks, geeks, and more than a few non-conformists. The non-conformist teen, like Jerry in *The Chocolate War*, is on the outside due to a deliberate choice. The choice is normally to remain true to an inner code, rather than submit to the rules, regulations, or pressures of a larger group, whether it be, classmates, or society. And almost always there is a heavy price to be paid as teen outcasts stand up when others sit down. Thus, books about teens who don’t fit in are inherently about teens in conflict. This is Literature 101: Man vs. Society. They’re not just in conflict with schoolmates, teachers, and family members; it’s bigger than that. They’re often in conflict with society’s expectations. They’re iconoclasts, rebels, and deviants. Deviants not sexually, but because

they deviate from the formal and normal. And that makes a lot of adults and authorities very, very nervous.

While the non-conformist main character, sometimes the hero, often the anti-hero but almost always the underdog, is as old as YA lit. itself, there was spike of interest in the wake of the awful trends of school shootings in the United States in the 1990s, in particular the tragedy at Columbine High School. YA writers

“But why is the person on the outside? By choice, by force, or by circumstance? [or simply by] not fitting in to what is “formal and normal” in high school.

dug deep trying to figure out why these shootings happened, in part by looking at the shooters, almost all of them cast in their schools on the outside. Don Gallo's short story collection *On the Fringe* pulls together stories by some of the best writers in the field to explore how kids get on the fringe and what happens to them there.

Some of the writers in the anthology, however, continued to look into the dark hearts and minds of these young people simply asking: how did this happen? Gale Giles' *Shattering Glass*, Alex Flinn's *Breaking Point*, and *The Last Domino*, by Adam Meyer, all show outsiders inspired to violence through the need for acceptance from any source. Todd Strasser in *Give A Boy a Gun*, Walter Dean Myers in *Shooter*, and Ron Koetge's *Brimstone Journals* all asked the question, but found the answers were never easy. But in all books teens who were teased and pushed outside, often due to how they looked or dressed, returned seeking revenge. The penultimate school shooting book was Jim Shepard's *Project X* which pulled no punches, nor cutaway from the violence. But one needs to look no further than Stephen King's early masterpiece *Carrie* to find the theme of taunted, teased teen seeking revenge in blood.

But the literature of the outsider, the iconoclast, the outcast, or the underdog isn't about revenge, but about acceptance. And that makes perfect sense as acceptance along with independence and identity are three of the key developmental drivers of adolescence. Given that teen fiction reflects teen life and the development drives of independence, acceptance, and identity are foremost in the hearts and minds of most young people, these themes in the literature come as no surprise. Most teen realistic fiction touches on this topic, and there are a slew of titles which put the outsider teen in conflict with a world, family or school that demands conformity. Let's look in-depth at several recent or breakthrough teen novels which illustrate the theme of the teen outsider. A longer list of titles about teenage outsiders appears as an appendix.

With a title like *The Misfits*, readers know they're in for a dark ride on the outside of school mainstream society, in this case 7th grade. As was once observed by Kevin in *The Wonder Years*, it's not who you are, but who you sit next to at lunch that defines you. In James Howe's *The Misfits*, the outsiders find security

and acceptance in each other because the rest of the school shuns them. The four seventh graders, who of course call themselves The Gang of Five, are misfits for different reasons: Bob, who tells the story, is too overweight, while Addie is too thin, as well as too smart. Skeezie is called "retard," while Joe is called "faggot." But early on, the four realize that "sticks and stones may break our bones, but names will break our spirit."

Despite the taunts all four receive, their friendship makes them stronger, as does their attempts to use the system to fight back. The kids run for student council as the "no name party" pledging to get the school to enact a "no name" day where insults won't be tolerated. But every push gets a push back as the kids run up against the popular crowd clique and butt heads with the school's administration. But more importantly, the Misfits need to convince their fellow students at Paintbrush Falls Middle School that name-calling isn't okay. But it's not just about politics, but the personal as the characters deal with love, life, death, and issues in the family. Howe also chooses not to tell the story in a conventional way, but using play like dialogue and capturing the "meeting minutes" of their club meetings.

Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* similarly explores the group of outsiders who come together; in fact, a club that Howe's Joe would find empowering. In *Geography Club*, Russell Middlebrook tries to maintain the neutral position of not being too popular or unpopular. His biggest challenge confronts him daily in the boys' locker room, where he feels like a soldier on a high school battlefield between straight and gay. He's seen how his classmates treat the school target, Brian Bund, and no way does he want to endure the kind of physical and psychological torture the enemies inflict on Brian. When Russell meets another Goodkind High School Student in a chat room, he suddenly feels a connection. When he comes face-to-face with "Gay Teen", Russell realizes the high stakes of keeping who you are a secret. Russell doesn't have far to fall, but someone like Kevin will plummet. After connecting with Kevin, and coming out to his best girlfriend Min, Russell no longer feels alone. Russell, Kevin, Min and Therse, Min's girlfriend, agree to meet. They are not kids who would or should be hanging out together according to unwritten high school social laws. Though together they are allies,

they are still in enemy territory, and some of them have more status to lose than others.

Though Russell comes out to Min, he cannot find the courage to reveal himself to his best friend Gunnar, whose main goal in life is to get a girlfriend. Russell's fear of Gunnar's reaction to his sexuality leads him to lend himself as a double dater, going out with the friend of a girl Gunnar likes. Russell lives a double agent life, the straight but shy friend of Gunnar, and the secret gay boyfriend to Kevin. He's out to some, but not to others. He lives in constant fear of being revealed.

But connecting with Kevin also gives him newfound confidence. Kevin encourages Russell to join the baseball team. Hitting a game-winning home run is not the best way to go unnoticed, and when rumors spread that someone wants to start a Gay-Straight Alliance, the school jocks take their aim at Brian. Russell is on a side now. Defend Brian Bund and become a target, or berate Brian Bund and become more popular? Suddenly whether or not to be out isn't the toughest choice Russell has to make, as he stands on the brink of deciding what kind of person he is going to be.

Some teen characters decide to be different, and then some just are, like Stargirl Caraway, a ukulele-playing, free spirit in *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli. Spinelli takes a well-worn plot formula—"a stranger comes into town" but plays with it by making the town a normal high school, and the stranger really, really strange. Formerly homeschooled, Stargirl shows up as the new kid at Mica Area High School to wearing pioneer dresses and kimonos to confusion, then outright anger of the school's "go along get along" population. They don't know at first how to take her sweetness of spirit, rejection of all that is popular, and utter obviousness at how other reacts to her. Over time, her eccentric behavior, matched with a kindness toward others, and enthusiasm for even the smallest things starts to win over her new schoolmates, culminating in her place on the school's cheerleading squad.

But fish out of water remain that no matter what the uniform, and Stargirl's comet ride of instant popularity burns out quickly. Not just rejected, Stargirl is humiliated, and then shunned by those who once supported her. The humiliation takes place on a student TV show hosted by average Joe good guy Leo

Borlock, who is telling the tale and fascinated by Stargirl. He also might be falling in love with her, not just Stargirl's snowflake like-uniqueness, but her human strength in the face of adversity. Leo wonders, however, if Stargirl is human— if she's not a mirage—for she is so odd, so enchanting, and so fleeting. But the questions which Stargirl raises for Leo—forced to choose between the free spirit he loves and the conservative and conventional mind set he's always embraced—and for readers. Leo's trying to understand the unknown: the life force that is Stargirl.

A similar life force is Egg aka Victoria from Cecil Castellucci's *Boy Proof*. Egg demonstrates her outsidership in appearance—a shaved head and multi-ring-covered ears—and actions, such as both dominating and demeaning her fellow Sci Fi Club members. With both her parents connected to the movie industry, Victoria doesn't feel the need to connect to the normals at her school. In fact, her self-inflicted nickname emerges from the heroine of her favorite science fiction movie with which she's obsessed with forty plus viewings. What she's not obsessed with is being popular, fitting in, or dating: her weirdness makes her boy proof.

Until Max arrives on the scene and sees something beyond the hard shell Egg's made for herself. Finding they have common if odd interests, as well as similar high IQs, Egg leads down her guard to allow Max into the closed set life she's constructed for herself. The road to romance isn't easy, in part because it's unexplored. Egg is so accustomed to both pursuing her own goals (drawing and dreaming) that even friendship is difficult, let alone a relationship. But as she grows closer to Max, Egg starts to realize she's not an alien on the earth, but a human in as much need of companionship as anyone else.

Another girl who just doesn't fit in at her high school is Rachel in Kathe Koja's *Stray Dog*. She's a smart girl with a mother who would rather she have a social life. "Why should I trade who I am for who they want me to be? So they can pat me on the head and put me in the normal-girl box? I'd rather be alone. I'd rather be a wild dog than jammed in someone's cage." With the exception of her English teacher, dogs are the only living things with which Rachel connects, but with an allergic mother, she cannot own one herself. After she finds an animal shelter that accepts her as a volunteer, Rachel finally finds a place she can be

herself. She pours all the love she wants to give into a feral dog she names Grrll, and from Grrll she receives the unconditional acceptance she so desperately craves from her parents and peers. Grrll has a growl and a bite, but she's nonjudgmental, and Rachel identifies with her plight. "She can't help the way she is.... [a]re we going to kill her for being what she is, what people have made her?" Rachel wants to save Grrll. If she can save the dog's life, she might have hope for her own.

The shelter and English class are Rachel's retreats. Rachel is a gifted writer, but even that gift doesn't relieve her of the pressure and judgment she feels from her classmates and family. When her teacher asks her to partner with Griffin, a new student, Rachel reluctantly agrees, even though she's prejudged him as "Lost Boy," a category she made up for the outsider kids. Her prejudgments of Griffin are proven wrong when she finally reads his work and they become friends. With her first real friend, an animal who needs her, and her writing, Rachel feels important for the first time.

Rachel and Griffin make a plan to save Grrll's life. But the shelter's warnings of the fate of a feral dog fell on deaf ears because when Rachel goes to the shelter to tell Grrll the news, that she and Griffin are going to take her home, Rachel is devastated to find that Grrll is gone. Rachel's rage for the loss of the dog symbolizes years of feeling inferior and invisible. Rachel's violent reaction to the death of Grrll may cause her to lose everything new and good in her life, until a gesture from Griffin, shows her that she's not alone, and never really was, if she'd stopped growling and let people get closer.

Annette Curtis Klause knows a lot about growling, and howling, from her werewolf book *Blood and Chocolate*, but her new novel *Freaks, Alive on the Inside* uses a historical setting (the story unfolds in the 1980's) for a contemporary coming-of-age story about acceptance and identity. As the title announces, this is a book about freaks: human oddities. Like a punch line of a Twilight Zone episode, the main character Abel feels freakish but he's the normal one in his family, a family of carnival sideshow performers. They all live in Faeryland, where visitors can see performances such as "an extravaganza of amazing oddities, mystifying the audience with their uncanny skills, death-defying deeds, and wondrous physiognomy."

His mother has no arms and his father has no legs, but they make it work. As Abel notes in the first line, you know life won't be easy when your first kiss is with the dog-faced girl.

But like any teen, Abel is looking for acceptance from those outside of his family, as well as struggling with who he is: he's not a freak, so how can he possibly fit in? He takes off to find himself, only to find the world of "normal" people is a lot freakier and much crueller than what he left behind. On the road, Abel joins up with a circus then another freak show, and even lives for awhile in a brothel. Along the way, Abel meets those who help him, those he must help, and the villainous Dr. Mink who views freaks as monsters, not humans with differences.

"Freak faggot" is how high school junior Bret Hendricks is greeted by his former friend, now turned bully, Bob Hitchings in my latest novel, *Nailed*. Bret swims upstream against the tide of his high school where jocks rule, and theater-types like Bret get pushed to the side. Bret's rejection at school isn't just from students, but from an ultra-conventional principal and a disrespectful gym teacher/football coach. But the most pressure to be normal comes not from school but from home, from Bret's recovering alcoholic blue-collar father who asks—in the first line of the novel—"Bret, what the hell is wrong with you?"

What's wrong with Bret is he doesn't fit in, but he's not sure why and also unsure why it is so important to him. He believes that when he falls in love with the artsy dancer Kylee that all his problems will be solved, only to learn that the worst hurts in life come from those you love the most. Faced with betrayal in love, hostility at home, and scorn at his school, Bret—like the characters in *The Misfits*—decides to take a stand by running for student council. But his speech with its references to Columbine lead to his suspension and ultimate showdown/smackdown with Bob Hitchings.

In these seven novels and those on the list that follows, the central question of adolescence—Who am I—emerges predominant when the teen characters realize or decide not to be like everyone else. Rather than a thesaurus, the characters in most of these novels define themselves with a dictionary: to be unique, not to be like everyone else. In the mass of conformity that makes up most high schools as the majority rush to Roget's to look/feel/act like others,

characters like Joe, Russell, Stargirl, Egg, Rachel, Abel, and Bret learn the hard way the trust and consequences of the adage “The nail that sticks out farthest gets hammered the hardest.”

Patrick Jones is the author of *Nailed and Things Change*, as well as coauthor of *Connecting with Reluctant Teen Readers: Tips, Titles and Tools. A librarian by degree and profession, he has won lifetime achievement awards from the American Library Association, and the Catholic Library Association. Things Change won the YALSA Best book for Reluctant Readers Award.*

Works Cited

- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.
- Auseon, Andrew. *Funny Little Monkey*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2005.
- Block, Francesca Lia. *Weetzie Bat*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Cart, Michael. *My Father's Scar*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1996.
- Castellucci, Cecil. *Boy Proof*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2005.
- Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Crutcher, Chris. *Running Loose*. New York: Greenwillow, 1983.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breaking Point*. New York: HarperTempest, 2002.
- Gallo, Don, ed. *On the Fringe*. New York: Dial Books, 2001.
- Giles, Gail. *Shattering Glass*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook Press, 2002.
- Hartinger, Brent. *Geography Club*. New York: HarperTempest, 2003.
- Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking, 1967.
- Howe, James. *The Misfits*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001.
- Howe, James. *Totally Joe*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005.
- Jones, Patrick. *Nailed*. New York: Walker/Bloomsbury, 2006.
- King, Stephen. *Carrie*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974.
- Klause, Annette Curtis. *Freaks, Alive on the Inside*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2006.
- Koetge, Ron. *Brimstone Journals*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2001.
- Koja, Kathe. *Stray Dog*. New York: Frances Foster Books/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
- Meyer Adam. *The Last Domino*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2005.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Shooter*. New York: Amistad/HarperTempest, 2004.
- Peters, Julie Anne. *Luna*. New York: Little, Brown, 2004.
- Philbrick, Rodman. *Freak the Mighty*. New York: Blue Sky Press, 1993.
- Ryan, Sara. *Empress of the World*. New York: Viking, 2001.
- Shepard, Jim. *Project X*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- Strasser, Todd. *Give A Boy a Gun*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2000.
- Thomas, Rob. *Rats Saw God*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1996.

APPENDIX: Other outsiders in YA literature:

- Adoff, Jaime. *Names Will Never Hurt Me*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2004.
- Atkins, Catherine. *Alt Ed*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2003.
- Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997.
- Brugman, Alyssa. *Walking Naked*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2004.
- Crutcher, Chris. *Whale talk*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2001.
- Draper, Sharon M. *Battle of Jericho*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003.
- Flinn, Alex. *Fade to Black*. New York: HarperTempest, 2005.
- Foley, Mick. *Tietam Brown*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Gardner, Graham. *Inventing Elliot*. New York: Dial Books, 2004.
- Going, K. L. *Fat Kid Rules The World*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2003.
- Hautman, Pete. *Sweetblood*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003.
- Heneghan, James. *Hit Squad*. Victoria, British Columbia: Orca Book Publishers, 2003.
- Johnson, Kathleen Jeffrie. *Target*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook Press, 2003.
- Juby, Susan. *Alice, I Think*. New York: HarperTempest, 2003.
- Koja, Kathe. *Buddha Boy*. New York: Frances Foster Books, 2003.
- Konigsburg, E. L. *Outcasts of 9 Schuyler Place*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004.
- Lawrence, Iain. *Ghost Boy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2000.
- Lubar, David. *Hidden Talents*. New York: TOR, 1999.
- Luna, Louisa. *Brave New Girl*. New York: Pocket, 2001.
- Mackler, Carolyn. *The Earth, My Butt, And Other Big, Round Things*. Cambridge, MA : Candlewick Press, 2003.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *Big Mouth & Ugly Girl*. New York: HarperTempest, 2003.
- Peters, Julie Anne. *Define Normal*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000.
- Plum-Ucci, Carol. *The Body of Christopher Creed*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2000.
- Plum-Ucci, Carol. *What happened to Lani Garver*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
- Shusterman, Neal. *The Schwa Was Here*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2004.
- Vizzini, Ned. *Be More Chill*. New York : Miramax Books/Hyperion, 2004.
- Weyn, Suzanne. *Bar Code Tattoo*. New York: Scholastic, 2004.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. *Razzle*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2001.

Worlds of Terrorism:

Learning through Young Adult Literature

We are presented daily with news about terrorism—our “war” on it, acts of it around the world, talk about levels of alert with a color code to help us recognize how fearful we should be. Concurrent with the writing of this manuscript, Yahoo News alone reflected this presence in our lives: The 9/11 Panel decided we were unprepared for the attack. Osama bin Laden is still alive and sending messages via videotape asking us to recognize the errors of our President and join in a truce; our Vice President says we can only destroy terrorists. New York continues to live with threats about subway security. Kidnappers hold Christian peace activists and journalists hostage in Iraq. Australia receives a threat of terrorism. Oil workers are kidnapped in Nigeria. The December 12, 2005, issue of *Newsweek* reports that women are becoming increasingly active as terrorists and are able to hide explosives while appearing innocently pregnant. A cartoon depicting the prophet Mohammed with a bomb on his head set off new acts of violence around the world. As this article goes to press, Al Qaeda leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, has just been killed by US forces, and Al Qaeda threatens retaliation and renewed efforts in the insurgency.

While talk of terrorism, kidnapping, hijacking,

bombings and bioterrorism are not pleasant, 9/11 brought these words into a U.S. American consciousness, now as a reality and as a possibility for repetition. Yet even as the news media sustains the focus, people in general continue to live within a more immediate world of work, family, socializing or otherwise surviving. [Doris Lessing](#) writes that “[e]very one of us is part of the great comforting illusions, and part illusions, which every society uses to keep up its confidence in itself. These are hard to examine . . .”

(33). Along with other teachers and authors, I believe we have a responsibility to help students better understand the world in which they live by facilitating an examination of, or inquiry into, topics that confuse, create fear, raise questions and baffle world leaders.

Following the 9/11 event, then editor of *The ALAN Journal*, [Pamela Sissi Carroll](#), shared what many felt as helplessness in reassuring students through young adult literature that their lives remain safe and secure. She called on us to “Look for significance in the ways we live and the lives we touch. For many of us, that means continuing to reach out to adoles-

cents through the medium of young adult books” (3). Author [Jennifer Armstrong](#) noted two years later that while “in the world of children’s literature, we are

I believe we have a responsibility to help students better understand the world in which they live by facilitating an examination of, or inquiry into, topics that confuse, create fear, raise questions and baffle world leaders.

pretty cozy. . . out there in the rest of the world, things are going to hell” (191). She asks what our books are doing to work against such chaos and fear. She writes that books can be the “enemy of violent zealotry” and “give us access to multiple points of view” (192). Kenneth Lindblom, a column editor of the *English Journal*, suggests that we recognize a responsibility to prepare students for a better future and to take the *9/11 Commission Report’s* critique of a lack of imagination in our intelligence agencies as an opportunity to promote imaginative conversation, thinking and action in our classrooms. Ruth Caillouet, assistant professor of English at Southeastern Louisiana University, finds the current war in Iraq a “teachable moment” (68), a way for good teachers to integrate the adolescent search for identity with the complexity of world problems as another kind of identity searching. She frames the time of adolescence as a war—of emotions and hormones, angst and uncertainty, and definitely fear.

I was involved in a research project in an 8th grade English classroom when 9/11 happened. Teachers were understandably unsure how to discuss this horrendous event that continued to unfold and replay on television sets in every classroom. Some decided that students were too young to talk about it. Others attempted to let students talk, write, question and process what they were feeling as we all tried to absorb the shock of this attack. I noted that whenever class was not officially in session, students wanted to talk and were asking questions that merited a response or school time to investigate their concerns. But within a few days, classroom television sets returned to playing Channel One for ten minutes each morning and any mention of the national tragedy rarely surfaced anywhere throughout the day.

Ramifications of Terrorism for Young Adults

As time passed following the 9/11 tragedy, I became increasingly interested in a pervasive silence I was finding in schools about the event and the topic of terrorism. In visits to middle and high school classrooms to supervise pre-service teachers, I sensed the unspoken desire to return to “normalcy,” putting any talk about terrorism, possibility of war, and eventually the U.S. offensive in Afghanistan on a “not

on class time” unofficial policy. Students seemed to comply, returning to comfortable school procedures and topics, appearing to forget that 9/11 ever happened unless something reminded them enough to make a reference in passing. With more time and the extended war in Iraq, the silence became more noticeable as the political climate of our nation turned into an emotionally challenging and polarized arena that usually valued a Blue or Red stance rather than any attempt to dialogue. I found social studies classrooms to be the only school location for occasional but surface discussion or questioning of war and terrorism as connections were made between history and present.

Doris Lessing tells us that people “crave certainty, they seek certainty, and great resounding truths” (21). Living, on the other hand, requires dealing with ambiguity, making decisions without clear resounding truths, and keeping minds open to new information and possibilities. Lessing urges us to work against the unconscious and pragmatic brainwashing all experience as members of any society by moving into

a “greater objectivity . . . to look at our culture with dispassionate eyes” (33). Some questions come to mind to ask of ourselves and our students: Are we as a nation self-silencing as a form of denial to psychologically and emotionally protect ourselves from the potential of war or another terrorist act occurring in the U.S.? Are we as educators participating in this kind of thinking, which tells our students to ignore something as dominating as worldwide terror? Do silence and ignorance about terrorism enable us to act against it? How can we act against it? Do we learn to live with it as many in European countries have done? By ignoring the opportunity to examine terrorism and our responses to it more objectively, are we miseducating for a lifetime of adult responsibility as citizens of a

With more time and the extended war in Iraq, the silence became more noticeable as the political climate of our nation turned into an emotionally challenging and polarized arena that usually valued a Blue or Red stance rather than any attempt to dialogue.

nation and a world threatened by it on a daily basis?

George Fletcher, professor of jurisprudence at Columbia University, writes that terrorism eludes easy definition, as does the concept of war at this time in our history. He claims that we have a romanticized view of freedom and war, much like the ideals of the romantic writers, who value honor, glory and emotional sensibility over objective rationalization, which further complicates efforts to define and deal with terrorism. [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), former Israeli Prime Minister, defines terrorism as “Violence directed against persons who have no connection with the alleged grievance the terrorist purports to remedy” (8). Which leaves us to define *terrorist*. Netanyahu explains that a “terrorist demands that his activity, which would ordinarily be viewed as gangsterism, be treated with the respect to legitimate warfare” (11) and that “far from being fighters for freedom, terrorists are the forerunners of tyranny” (12). [Milton Meltzer](#), an American historian and author, defines terrorism as

“The exploitation of a state of intense fear, caused by the systematic use of violent means by a party or group, to get into power or to maintain power. . . . through acts—bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, assassinations—that terrorize” (28). Meltzer’s more general and less politically-framed definition provides a more approachable way to connect the concept to both political and personal understandings.

Young people live with the national and international talk about terrorism and potential attacks. Those living in large cities who use mass transportation

systems cannot escape the concern about subway bombings or recurring alerts. Many travel with parents or have parents who travel to countries with incidents of kidnapping, particularly of U.S. Americans. Others may dream of traveling or of becoming a foreign

correspondent and think of the dangers as exciting, assuming they would be smarter than those who are kidnapped or killed. But the fear of being terrorized may exist more realistically at the local level with potential violence in schools from bomb threats, school shootings, fights that may involve weapons, and always the terror of being mercilessly teased, taunted, or bullied.

For many teens, terrorism or acts of terrorism may be too distant a phenomenon, yet it can be recognized as relevant if related to a local situation or behavior that has similar characteristics. Many young adult novels can cross this gap and initiate healthy conversation toward understanding one’s fears, finding alternative ways to handle fear and the situations that cause fear, becoming aware of why some need to terrorize others, and becoming more knowledgeable about terrorism on a larger scale.

Beginning with Caroline Cooney: Contemplating the Possible

The concept of terrorism in young adult literature does range from the involvement of international terrorists to individual fear from being “terrorized” by someone or something. Some novels revolve around incidents that can happen as accidents or as purposeful terrorist events, such as an airline crash, a kidnapping, a chemical spill or a biological error. The choice of a specific book would depend upon a teacher’s preference to study terrorism directly as a national and international concern, to approach it in terms of one’s personal emotional and psychological response, or to use a combined analysis regardless of the literature selection.

Three works of Caroline Cooney are especially useful for readers to vicariously experience what it might be like to be in an airplane crash or part of a rescue team responding to such a catastrophe, to have a family member killed by a terrorists’ bomb, or to be threatened with potential biological “warfare” and be kidnapped. (I was not alone in being surprised to find Caroline Cooney categorized as an author of “Chick Lit” at the 2005 ALAN Workshop in Pittsburgh. According to Pamela Sissi Carroll in *Caroline Cooney: Faith and Fiction*, this speaks to her broad range and talent as a writer.)

In *Flight #116 is Down!* [Caroline Cooney](#) uses

The choice of a specific book would depend upon a teacher’s preference to study terrorism directly as a national and international concern, to approach it in terms of one’s personal emotional and psychological response, or to use a combined analysis regardless of the literature selection.

multiple 3rd person narrators to allow readers to be an airline crash victim with life-threatening injuries as well as passengers who suffer and try to hold on but do not survive; to feel the thrill of being part of a rescue team; to feel helpless when wanting desperately to help but not knowing exactly how; and to worry as a family member of a passenger, waiting at an airport to hear a dead-or-alive report from an airline official. Patrick, 17, is an EMT and a junior member of an ambulance team. He “yearned for something unpredictable; something that would test him; something he could swagger about” (7). Heidi, a ninth-grader at a boarding school, is home at the family mansion. She dislikes school, gets Cs and is not sure how to follow her parents’ advice to get involved and be active in something. Daniel, 15, and Tucker, 13, are flying to their divorced father’s second wedding. Flying home after visiting her grandparents, kindergartner Teddy hugs her cuddly white bear and worries that her parents may not be at the airport to meet her. Darienne is an impatient woman who does not want to sit by a little girl named Teddy, is upset that the plane left late, becomes irritated by a whining baby a few rows away, brought a book on board that she has already read, and felt “baked in her own hostility” (22). Laura, also a junior EMT, feels she is in love with Patrick, who was in her EMT training class. She too is anxious for action.

Because each character is introduced through a chapter section headed by a specific time, such as 5:05 P.M. and 5:10 P.M., readers simultaneously know where each person is located on the ground, who is in the airplane and who is waiting at the airport as the printed times raise the tension toward an imminent crash that will occur at 5:41 P.M. (given away on the back cover). As the plane suddenly changes angles and begins its descent to crash, the time given begins to include seconds (5:41:01 P.M.) as people on the ground become alerted by the sound. Survivors on the plane express confusion and fear.

An eerie silence follows the roar of the crash of the 747, then screams are heard. The plane has crashed in the woods behind Heidi’s mansion in an area that is not easily accessible. Emergency crews coming to the sight are soon trapped in a traffic jam on a long, narrow country road with no outlet, leaving no exit access. From Saturday at 5:42 P.M. to Saturday at 10:48 P.M., readers experience the rescue operation.

Heidi’s home becomes emergency central. Her knowledge of her land and available equipment allows her to become the involved and capable person her parents wanted her to be. Patrick’s initial excitement about accidents meets the horror of reality at the scene. Gradually overcoming his paralysis, Patrick is able to invent a way to untangle the traffic and permit ambulance exits. Laura helps the ambulance crew put survivors onto gurneys, noticing personal details that bring emotions, thoughts of waiting relatives and empathy for another’s pain to the forefront. Sightseers and the media become a complication as the rescue extends into hours. Family members at the airport begin to get final verdicts about their loved one.

Readers can feel optimistic at the novel’s conclusion when many passengers have survived. Heidi and her parents are proud of her extensive involvement. The EMT trainer tells Heidi that even with training, one doesn’t feel prepared for such a massive rescue effort. One prepares, uses that knowledge to go forward, “hoping to be right” (199). The novel begs the question of *What would I do if this were me in any of these lives?*

Code Orange, another Caroline Cooney novel, begins when Mitty Blake, a high-schooler in Mr. Lynch’s advance biology class, struggles to find a topic for his term paper on a disease. Mitty wants to research bioterrorism in the Ottilie Lundgren 2001 anthrax case but cannot as Mr. Lynch requires four books as resources. Mitty’s mother, an interior decorator, specializes in creating libraries for people and thus buys and gathers old books. She has recently bought the library of a very old, now deceased doctor. At the Blake country home that weekend, Mitty investigates several of these recent acquisitions. In *Principles of Contagious Diseases* he finds an envelope marked “Scabs—VM epidemic, 1902, Boston” handwritten with a fountain pen. Opening the envelope, he handles the scabs and they crumble, causing him to sneeze. Because this happens on page 11, readers feel anxious during the remainder of the book as Mitty researches to find out what “VM” means, whether or not he will contact a contagious disease, and finally whether or not he could infect and kill everyone in New York City.

The first part of the novel is interwoven with textual excerpts from Mitty’s research to let us learn about the disease as he does. Meanwhile, anxiety

builds as readers note everyone he touches and speaks with, rides with on mass transportation, and sits with at ballgames. Cooney increases the tension by telling how many days before visible signs appear. When Mitty exhibits some early symptoms and thinks he could be contagious with smallpox, he decides to ask questions online at a variety of sites pretending that he is only concerned with accuracy for his term paper. His online inquiry gives him 27 messages the next day. Someone wants him to meet personally. But Mitty

Cooney allows readers to be reflective about the effects on individuals, families and communities through each of these three novels. Extended discussions and writings could then examine these same effects on a societal level.

chooses to write a long letter to his parents explaining that he must die, and the virus with him. Two chapters later, we find Mitty in a basement immobilized with duct tape trying to remember how he got into this predicament. One of his abductors claims to be with the Center for Disease Control, but the enthusiasm for his potential illness tells Mitty he is a prisoner. His absence involves the NYPD, FBI and the CDC in an effort to interrupt anyone involved in the potential act of

bioterrorism. Mitty's knowledge and careful thinking allow him to escape as the terrorists attempt to move him to a new location. We finally learn that Mitty does not have smallpox.

The first chapter of *The Terrorist*, the third Cooney novel, acquaints readers with Billy Williams, newspaper boy, a Kraft macaroni and cheese aficionado, and a boy who imagines abandoning a suitcase at an airport to see what would happen. He imagines helping Scotland Yard seize a terrorist who might pick up the bag by mistake. However, on his way to school one day coming up from the Underground, someone catches his arm, smiles and says, "Your friend dropped this" (10). Quickly processing the stranger, the fact that no friend is with him today, the crowded setting, his knowledge about how such incidents happen, and the way "this" package is wrapped, Billy realizes it is a bomb. He wraps himself around the package as he

sees a baby in front of him and thinks of his mom.

The Terrorist differs from *Flight #116 is Down!* and *Code Orange* with an emphasis on the inner thoughts of the protagonist. Laura, a U.S. American who lives in London and attends the London International Academy, processes the death of her brother through denial, anger, proactive, but unwise, action and finally beginning to come to terms with the loss. Before Billy's death, Laura is only interested in finding a date for the Junior-Senior Thanksgiving dance. While her friends at school either discuss world events or worry about being kidnapped for political reasons, Laura is proud of her ignorance about world geography, of which friend comes from which country (if they can give this information), and of world politics. Unlike her European and Middle Eastern classmates, Laura made friends by listening to everyone's opinions and had none of her own.

After Billy's death, she gradually takes an active interest in her current events class. But she also becomes suspicious and judgmental in thinking how each of her classmates might have been involved in planting the bomb on Billy. She does develop a closer friendship with Jehran, one of her wealthiest classmates who is driven to school in a bullet-proof limo. At Jehran's first slumber party, she tells Laura that both of her parents are dead. She lives with her oldest brother. Jehran, who looks a somewhat like Billy, asks Laura for Billy's passport so that she can fly to the United States to escape an arranged marriage. The two girls work to devise the way to let Jehran escape, only to discover that Jehran is part of the terrorist group who had Billy killed just to gain a U.S. passport. Disillusionment with her friend causes Laura to question why God cannot stop a terrorist. Her father tells her, "Only other people can stop evil people" (154). Laura asks how and her father can only say he doesn't know, but that our responsibility is to stop evil wherever we see it. She learns the value of true friends "who cared enough to pay attention, to risk looking silly, to get involved" (198) in order to save her in spite of her naiveté and recent anger with them.

Opportunities for Reflection with Young Adult Literature

All three novels by Caroline Cooney offer rich material for student discussions about how innumerable fears can be transformed into acts of significance.

All three contribute to changing student illusions of a cozy and safe world into a recognition that life has pleasure and sorrow, safety and danger. Each story has a balance, which presents a more realistic world for young adults to reflect upon, one of uncertainty yet with hope in learning how to respond in ways that help others and themselves. Cooney allows readers to be reflective about the effects on individuals, families and communities through each of these three novels. Extended discussions and writings could then examine these same effects on a societal level.

Students could also follow the novel reading with research projects to discover more about terrorism as a world construct and compare research findings with text accuracies. Why were there no survivors on 9/11 on the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania? How is smallpox transmitted? Could Jehran actually gain entrance into the U.S. with Billy's passport? Throughout the novel *The Terrorist* (published in 1997), Laura's reactions and comments parallel many of the responses of the U.S. population after the 9/11 terrorist attack. By page 71, she thinks, "I was proud of being ignorant. I felt superior because I *didn't* know anything. When you're an American, and you're the best and the strongest, you don't have to worry what all those little guys are up to" (71-72). Why do we feel this way as Americans? And the question many find disturbing: Why do so many people in the world hate us?

Exploring Other Worlds of Terrorism: Other Selections

Stephanie S. Tolan's *Flight of the Raven* (a sequel to *Welcome to the Ark* but stands alone) combines the reality of acts of terrorism within the United States with two characters who have extrasensory ability to mentally connect with other human beings and animals. Amber Landis, about 14, believes that her father's leadership in the Free Mountain Militia in upstate New York will help create a better world through his organization's efforts to disrupt the system by bombing transmission towers and disturbing the infrastructure. While the Militia men are running from their last attack, they find a black, ten-year-old boy who is the one reported missing from a mental hospital. Debating pros and cons that include racist accusations, they decide to take Elijah as a hostage.

Elijah had been in a home for unusually gifted children where their schooling included enhancing their "connections" (54). For months, Elijah does not talk, remaining in his dreamlike world for safety. He first begins talking with Amber. Eventually, his gift lets him "hear" and feel the infiltration of an FBI agent in a White Nation organization who could endanger the entire Landis family with whom he now lives. But when Militia leader Landis decides to believe in Elijah's strangely-acquired information, he has two people members killed. Changing the method of violence from bombing places to killing people gives Amber and Elijah cause to question the goals of the Militia when Landis presents the final plan to practice "biowar" in conjunction with another country.

Flight of the Raven lets us face terrorism in our own country. A reminder for students that all terrorists are not of Middle Eastern descent opens the concept of terrorism for broader investigation and understanding. Meltzer includes a chapter in *The Day the Sky Fell* called "Terrorism, American-Style" which presents the Ku Klux Klan as a post-Civil War terrorist group and the late 1800's union activities as anarchism turned violent with terrorist methods.

One way to enter the young adult literature that speaks to topics like violence and terrorism would be through offering a list of possibilities and utilizing a literature circle format to initiate a broader dialogue. Cormier's *After the First Death* gives a chilling and realistic view of a school bus hijacking, giving 3rd person narratives from the perspective of two terrorists, the bus driver, a general's son, and a young child. Two additional novels involving kidnappings let readers feel kidnapped and follow the efforts to escape. Discussions that analyze realistic and novelistic could be productive since kidnappings happen locally as well as in the high visibility areas of Iraq. Ellen White's *Long Live the Queen* is situated in the White House. Madame President's daughter, Meg, is

Each story has a balance, which presents a more realistic world for young adults to reflect upon, one of uncertainty yet with hope in learning how to respond in ways that help others and themselves.

kidnapped by masked men amid machine gun fire and realizes that one of her Secret Service men was involved. The eponymous protagonist in *The Kidnaping of Christina Hattimore*, by Joan Lowery Nixon, is taken for ransom, but once she escapes, her family assumes she instigated her own kidnapping to get family money needed to pursue her own goals, goals which were not in alignment with family plans for her.

To consider terrorism in school settings, choices range from individual bullying of peers to school shootings. In *The Creek* by Jennifer Holm, one boy, Caleb Devlin, returns to this safe suburban community after being sent away to a juvenile home. When a dog skull with a bullet hole is found, rumors begin. During a game of hiding with flashlights, protagonist Penny

and friend Zachary find a little girl's body in a drainpipe. Parents assume Caleb is guilty, but Penny knows that someone else has killed Caleb and is framing him for the recent attacks. Penny finally learns it was Zachary.

Francine Prose's *After* pushes the real toward an almost-too-sinister plot by an "evil" adult who takes over a school after a school shooting occurs in a community 50 miles away. The principal relinquishes too much authority to an outside counselor who proceeds to send students away to survival school programs in other states for non-compliance with his increasingly bizarre rules. While the plot may be somewhat fantastical, the story illustrates the danger of remaining uninformed and accepting the illusion that the person in charge is making decisions based on self-created truths. It also

shows how reactionary institutions can be when violent situations disrupt certainty and no one is clear about what can or should be done to prevent further violence. *Give a Boy a Gun* by Todd Strasser presents a strong, multi-genre approach to combine a story about two students, Brendan Lawlor and Gary Searle, who decide that they can get even with those who have teased and tormented them for years by holding the student body hostage and killing their enemies as they see fit. The rich textual presentation offers the story through multiple voices as collected by a university journalism student from this community. Poignant facts and non-fiction excerpts from a variety of sources appear at the bottom of appropriate pages as the author's activist stance for gun control.

Another approach would be a whole class focus on a novel such as *Inventing Elliot* by Graham Gardner. Elliot was bullied at his last school and begins in a different school with the strong intention of laying low and not attracting attention. However, the leader of the Guardians, an organized high school group that terrorizes selected students, sees a potential Guardian member in Elliot. His experience of being "invented" by the Guardians becomes inseparable with his own quest for identity. A look at oneself raises questions about how a person may be against violence yet be caught up in it when lacking the self-awareness and skills to interrupt the power of a group.

Final Thoughts

Fear can be challenged when knowledge interrupts patterned thoughts or responses. By giving young adult readers the classroom permission to read about, vicariously experience, discuss, investigate, and then analyze terrorism as a topic, they can utilize that knowledge to rethink all of its ramifications, from acts of teasing and bullying to national and international realms of terrorism as the warfare of the twenty-first century. When I see students in classrooms discussing whatever a teacher or state has deemed worthy of study, I ask myself, 'How will this experience help them in their lives? How will it contribute to shaping each individual into a contributing member of the human family? Could we be doing more for them? for all of humanity? Which one of these students might be a Senator? a President? a foreign correspondent?

As [Angela Johnson](#) reminds us, "We are not

Fear can be challenged when knowledge interrupts patterned thoughts or responses. By giving young adult readers the classroom permission to read about, vicariously experience, discuss, investigate, and then analyze terrorism as a topic, they can utilize that knowledge to rethink all of its ramifications, from acts of teasing and bullying to national and international realms of terrorism as the warfare of the twenty-first century.

bibliotherapists” (19), but we can help students—and ourselves—“make sense of the loss of innocence and the costs and benefits of free societies [and to] find scraps of hope in the midst of national—indeed, international—despair” (19). The ultimate hope for engaging young adults with literature that intersects with the world around us is the replacement of fear, ignorance and inaction with knowledge, a developing understanding and proactive steps toward making our world more habitable, whether on an individual or an international scale.

Patricia M. Hauschildt is Associate Professor of English Education at Youngstown State University. She teaches courses in reading and writing for teachers, English methods, and young adult literature.

Works Cited

- Armstrong, Jennifer. "Narrative and Violence." *Horn Book Magazine* 79.2 (2003):191-194.
- Caillouet, Ruth. "The Adolescent War: Finding Our Way on the Battlefield." *The ALAN Review* 33.1 (2005): 68-73.
- Carroll, Pamela Sissi. *Caroline Cooney: Faith and Fiction*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2001.
- . "A Note from the Editor." *The ALAN Review* 29.1 (2001):3.
- Cooney, Caroline B. *Code Orange*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2005.
- . *Flight #116 is down!* New York: Scholastic Inc., 1992.
- . *The Terrorist*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.
- Cormier, Robert. *After the First Death*. New York: Dell, 1979.
- Fletcher, George P. *Romantics at War: Glory and Guilt in the Age of Terrorism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Gardner, Graham. *Inventing Elliot*. New York: Penguin Speak, 2003.
- Holm, Jennifer L. *The Creek*. New York: HarperTrophy, 2003.
- Johnson, Angela B., Jeffery W. Kleismit, and Antje J. Williams. "Grief, Thought, & Appreciation: Re-examining Our Values Amid Terrorism Through *The Giver*." *The ALAN Review* 29.3 (2002):15-19.
- Lessing, Doris. *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*. New York: Harper& Row, 1987.
- Lindblom, Kenneth. "Teaching English in the World: The Post-9/11 English Teacher." *English Journal* 94.4 (2005):106-109.
- Meltzer, Milton. *The Day the Sky Fell: A History of Terrorism*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Netanyahu, Benjamin, ed. *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*. New York: Avon, 1986.
- Nixon, Joan Lowery. *The Kidnapping of Christina Hattimore*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2004.
- Prose, Francine. *After*. New York: HarperTempest, Joanna Cotler Books, 2003.
- Strasser, Todd. *Give a Boy a Gun*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2002.
- Tolan, Stephanie S. *Flight of the Raven*. New York: Harper Tempest, 2001.
- White, Ellen Emerson. *Long Live the Queen*. New York: Scholastic, 1989.

Additional Non-Fiction Resources

- Benjamin, Daniel, and Steven Simon. *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and A Strategy for Getting It Right*. New York: Henry Holt, Times Books, 2005.
- Crenshaw, Martha. "The Causes of Terrorism." *Violence: A Reader*. Ed. Catherine Besteman. New York: New York University Press, 2002, 99-117.
- Nguyen, Tram. *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant Communities after 9/11*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.
- Ronszkowski, Michael R. *Terrorism and Organized hate Crime: Intelligence Gathering, Analysis, and Investigations*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2004.
- Seierstad, Åsne. *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Translated by Ingrid Christophersen. New York: Little, Brown and Company, Back Bay Books, 2004.
- . *A Hundred & One Days: A Baghdad Journal*. Translated by Ingrid Christophersen. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

Why We Must Read Young Adult Books that Deal with Sexual Content

At its very best, I find reading to be a totally engrossing experience; the characters and events live inside me even when the book is closed and sitting on a shelf. Because of this relationship, I sometimes have to read the ending first to find out if the dog dies. I understand self-censorship because there are some books just too violent, too intense for me. There are many reasons people self-censor—the topic makes us feel uncomfortable; it goes against our personal beliefs; we don't believe such things could happen; or maybe the book touches on a personal experience that is still too tender, too emotional to revisit just yet. Other people will only read happy endings, sighting there is enough sadness in the world already. I can admit to saying that.

Teenagers have different comfort levels and different interests than we, their teachers and librarians. I do not understand why some students like to exclusively read the extremely sad stories of people with abusive lives or fatal diseases, or stories with seemingly no hope. Others want to read about blood and gore; others still, monsters or psychopaths.

Some students want to read books that validate their experiences and that give them hope and comfort in their loneliness and school invisibility—because many

of our teens do not find themselves in the pages of the curriculum we are contracted to use. Books helped me define myself; it is the same for many of our students.

When I choose not to read an adult title, I am mainly making that decision for myself. But if I do not read these young adult (YA) books, then I cannot recommend them to students, blocking one more path to these books' rightful readers. Recommendations from teachers and librarians are often the only way teens hear about such books. I am not saying I would recommend any title to any young person, but rather that, as an adult who works with young people, I need to be aware of these often-controversial books, because such books may be exactly what one of my students needs.

As young adult literature grows and stretches its boundaries, more topics are being written about. Sex is always a controversial topic in young adult literature, with rape being one of the edgiest topics. Trying to pretend rape does not exist is dangerously ignorant. Though a few YA books do discuss rape, there are many YA books that focus only on the aftermath of rape, showing how the victim

struggles to reclaim her or his life. Four of the best YA books that deal with this topic are *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Target* by Kathleen Jeffrie Johnson,

Some students want to read books that validate their experiences and that give them hope and comfort in their loneliness and school invisibility—because many of our teens do not find themselves in the pages of the curriculum we are contracted to use.

Inexcusable by Chris Lynch, and *Jailbait* by Leslea Newman.

Most people have read or at least heard about *Speak*, Laurie Halse Anderson's story of Melinda Sordino's freshman year after she has been raped by an upper classman during an end-of-the-summer party. While Melinda is calling the police for help, others at the party think she is turning them in for drinking. Melinda races home, showers away all physical evidence, and never reports the rape. Then she shuts down. During the next year Melinda slowly recovers from the trauma of rape while being ostracized by the entire school population. This book chronicles Melinda's odyssey. She connects with a few very special people, the art teacher and a few students in her art class, before she gets to the point when she realizes, "The time has come to arm-wrestle some demons." The beauty of this book comes from her return to health. She not only survives, she regains her self and her voice. How many of our female students need to arm-wrestle some demons and think it is too impossible to try? Imagine how Melinda's courage might inspire them.

Target is about male rape, a topic rarely mentioned in the teenage world because so few males believe it can happen. But sixteen-year-old Grady West is walking home from a concert when a van stops beside him and the man driving asks directions, while a second man comes up behind him. Grady is beaten, immobilized, and dragged into the back of the van where he is raped anally and orally before being dumped partially clothed on the street (This is the opening chapter in the book, then time switches to a year later). Like Melinda, Grady spends the next year trying to recover. Sure that the account published in the newspaper gave just enough details that everyone at school knew he was the tall, strong, young male who was raped, and that everyone will assume it was a homosexual encounter that turned violent, Grady transfers to another school. He cannot eat, because he still has trouble swallowing. He doubts his sexuality and himself in ways he never did before the rape. As does Melinda in *Speak*, he finds a safe space in art class and connects with a few students who also have secrets. Teenage boys are reckless and careless in their behaviors and beliefs. They are completely confident that rape can not happen to men, and if it does, it says more about the victim than the rapist. That attitude

parallels the attitudes women have fought nearly forever. Discussions generated from books like *Target* may save the males in our classes from their own macho bravado.

Inexcusable is about date rape told from the male's point of view. Keir Sarafian believes he is a good guy, a fairly decent student, starter on the football team, and popular with the "right" kids at school. He doesn't plan to rape Gigi Boudakian, whom he has loved from afar. He respects her and her relationship with her Air Force boyfriend stationed just too far away to make it home for prom. Keir has grown up in a loving though dysfunctional family. His best friend and drinking partner is his father. His two older sisters, who have protected Keir from family secrets, have gone on to college. A popular football jock, Keir is privileged at school and at home and has a sense of self that is not grounded in reality, particularly when he is drinking. He and Gigi have been friends for years, and he loves her. As the realities of his life start to become obvious, Keir turns to Gigi for support and believes her kindness is born of her need for him. The story is told in flashbacks, after the rape has happened. The author slowly reveals the story and the events that created Keir's misinformation about his own life and his relationship with Gigi. He keeps saying, "I couldn't have done what she says, I am a good guy. Just ask anybody." Keir has grown up the way some of our male students have, with a belief that they can do anything, that they deserve anything, can say anything, and have earned the privileges they take for granted. That, mixed with a misunderstood definition of date rape, can be very dangerous. *Inexcusable* provides the opportunity for much needed discussions on this topic for both our male and female students.

Jailbait deals with statutory rape, a topic teens need to be more conscious of. Andrea Kaplan is 15 years old and very lonely. The best relationship in her life is with her older brother who is away at college. Her parents barely communicate with each other or her. Andrea's mother seems caught in a valium-controlled depression, constantly worrying about her own weight and trying to monitor Andrea's. Her father is a dentist who works too many hours to be available. At school, Andrea is harassed because of her large breasts. To avoid the school bus and the taunts, she walks home, which is how she meets Frank, seem-

ingly just an older guy driving by who takes the time to wave to her each day. There is nothing special about him except he notices Andrea. They slowly develop a relationship that starts from that simple

It is Andrea's inability to let go of what she knows is an unhealthy relationship that makes me believe this book must be read.

wave and progresses to groping in an abandoned model home. Frank is a master manipulator, and Andrea is extremely needy. The fact that she tells Frank her name is Vanessa proves she knows the situation was wrong from the beginning. Frank tells her how beautiful she is, how voluptuous her breasts are, as he un-

dresses her and caresses her. No one has ever said such things to her. Then Frank says they cannot have sex because it would be statutory rape. She begs him, saying she wants it and that should make it okay. After several months of meeting and touching, Andrea finally convinces Frank, and on her sixteenth birthday, they plan to have sex. As the reader realizes, Frank is a dangerous personality and the waited for event turns into a three-second rape with none of the tenderness and caring Frank has lavished on her for the past several months. The next time is worse. But Andrea keeps going back, fantasizing about the tender moments and making excuses for the violent ones, until Frank stops showing up. It is Andrea's inability to let go of what she knows is an unhealthy relationship that makes me believe this book must be read. This is rape of a willing but insecure and unknowing victim who never tells anyone until a year later when she shares it with her brother. How many of our female students easily fall into such a relationship? How many stay tied to that type of relationship and lose all sense of self? And how many carry this pattern into adulthood?

English teachers, of course, but also sociology/psychology teachers, social workers, counselors, facilitators in support groups, and librarians helping students find the right book need to know such books exist. These books can be used in several different ways. They can be used alone or in pairs, or in literary circles. *Speak* and *Target* make a logical pairing. Melinda and Grady each spend a silent year trying to

reenter the world, trying to recover from the violence done to them. Again, *Target* should be available to our male students because rape can happen to anyone, regardless of gender.

Some educators have suggested *Inexcusable* could be paired with *Speak*, but a very clear distinction must be made between the rape in *Speak* and the date rape in *Inexcusable*. Melinda, in *Speak*, did not have a relationship with her attacker. He was a perpetrator who violated several girls. Keir does not fit that role. He and Gigi have a longstanding relationship; there is a mutual attraction that played a part in the event. It was date rape, but Gigi has some responsibility in the event while Melinda does not. However, *Inexcusable* clearly shows the progression of circumstances that may lead to date rape. Every dating person, teen or adult, would benefit from reading this book.

Jailbait educates us on the dangers of inappropriate and secret partners. Caught in the idealized, romantic world of fifteen years olds, Andrea is lured by the excitement of an older man's attention and the intoxication of such a secret. She is very lucky Frank left before he caused her more pain. How many of our female students are easy prey for men like Frank? What could they learn from reading and discussing such a book? How would they define statutory rape?

Oral sex is another topic not avoided in recent YA books. Many adults are uncomfortable with this topic and won't talk to each other about it; even fewer will talk with teens. But teenage oral sex has been talked about on Oprah and the Dr. Phil show with middle school girls sitting in the hot seat and saying, "It isn't sex, it is just something I do for my friend!" Casually or as the main theme, oral sex in being discussed in YA books. The two most recent books with this subject are *Rainbow Party* by Paul Ruditis and *Sandpiper* by Ellen Wittlinger.

Rainbow Party has caused the most buzz, because the term defines an oral sex party where each girl wears a different shade of lipstick and at the end of the party each boy's penis sports a rainbow of colors. Gin has invited six males and six females to her afternoon rainbow party, just enough time before her parents get home from work. There are many doubts in the two hours before the party, and the reader learns of each student's doubts as their voices alternate between the chapters. The value of this book comes from the realistic and honest discussion of

these doubts. Those who are invited are like the kids in our classes: they want to be popular and they want to do what is right. Unfortunately it is sometimes impossible to do both. In *Rainbow Party* only one male shows up. The rainbow party never happens—at least in this book—though it probably is happening in a school near you. At the end of the book, thirty-nine members of the sophomore class have gonorrhea, which is another reason we should read this book. The students in the book and in our classes are ignorant of the dangers of orally transmitted sexual diseases, as are many adults.

Sandpiper handles the topic of oral sex in a much different way and is a more teachable book. The main character, Piper, hears in the eighth grade that the best way to get a boyfriend is to offer oral sex, and so she did. She had boyfriend after boyfriend until she realized there wasn't anything else in the relationship. Now in ninth grade, she not only has a group of angry former boyfriends, she also has a terrible reputation that labels her as a slut. Not only does the whole school know, but Piper realizes so does her younger sister who has to live under that shadow. The book opens after Piper has made the decision to change. There isn't any oral sex in the book, just the consequences. Our students rarely think they will be judged by their actions; they do not believe in reputations unless they are talking about someone else. Piper earned a terrible reputation and at least one angry former boyfriend who decides to get even for being dumped. With the help of her other former boyfriends, he harasses her secretly and publicly. Nearly every one thinks she deserves it, and where can she go for help?

Would I teach *Rainbow Party* in my classroom? Probably not. It is not particularly well written, is pretty one-dimensional, none of the characters are very likeable, and though the party doesn't happen, there are descriptions of two other sexual events. But there is an immense value in the discussion it would raise around the issue of oral sex. Just discussing the characters' reasons for not attending the party validates the belief that our young people have morals and standards. *Sandpiper* could easily lead to such a discussion, but it offers much more. Piper sounds just like the girls on Dr. Phil's show, stubbornly insisting there aren't any consequences to oral sex. It really is just something one does for a friend. Or in her case, to get a boyfriend—and it worked, until Piper wanted a

relationship that wasn't just about giving him oral sex. Her actions have labeled her. Her reputation precedes her, isolates her, embarrasses her, and eventually haunts her. Many of our students are stunned by the reputations they earn as the result of their actions, actions they will defend but refuse to take responsibility for. That is one of the great values of this book. It is very well written and the characters are fully developed and likable. The plot does not just focus on how Piper earned her reputation, but on how she is now dealing with the aftermath. If Piper had been able to read *Rainbow Party*, I wonder if she would have made different choices? Perhaps reading *Sandpiper* will help our teen girls to make better choices?

These books and many like them can provide lifelines for some students. Offering them on a list of books for outside reading or extra credit reading provides awareness of these books but also offers choices for all students and parents. Sometimes it is as simple as carrying the book with your lesson plans and grade book while traveling from class to class to show you are reading it. Students see it, and ask about it, and an opportunity to share happens. Talking up the book with the local and school librarian often starts a cross communication about books they have read. Be sure to attend the YA literature sessions at the November NCTE conference, and of course, the two day ALAN workshop where each attendee gets a sack load of books and the chance to meet and listen to more than two dozen YA authors so that you can educate yourself about the newest books. There are books being written by insightful authors and published by courageous publishers that will never make it into the hands of the students who need them, unless we read them first.

C.J. Bott, a retired high school English teacher of 30 years, presently works as an educational consultant on *Young Adult Literature and Issues of Bullying and Harassment*. She is also the author of *The Bully in the Book* and in the *Classroom*, Scarecrow Press, 2004.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Puffin, 1999.
Johnson, Kathleen Jeffrie. *Target*. Brookfield, Connecticut: Roaring Brook, 2003.
Lynch, Chris. *Inexcusable*. New York: Atheneum, 2005.
Newman, Leslea. *Jailbait*. New York: Delacorte, 2005.
Ruditis, Paul. *Rainbow Party*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.
Wittlinger, Ellen. *Sandpiper*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Are You Living in the Real World?

Adapted from a university lecture given on a book tour of the United States.

I snatched the theme for this talk from a flier I saw in London at a children's Book circle called "Are we living in the real world? An exploration of fantasy in children's books today." It was hosted by Faber and Faber, and it seems to me, at least, an interesting subject for discussion, with the proviso that books are, of course, a kingdom to themselves and what we say here among literate, chattering adults is never quite as important as what children are actually reading and enjoying and learning from. That is to say the wellsprings of great writing are not really academic, not the stuff of Ph.D. theses, and few writers, except perhaps the archly Victorian ones, actually begin their books knowing precisely why they are doing what they are doing, or where their books will take them.

So—fantasy and reality? The REAL world? It seems a paradox, doesn't it? It's quite obvious that a 'fantasist' isn't living in the real world and wouldn't want to, especially when they're traveling between Texas and San Francisco, Seattle and New York. How dull for Lucy or Peter or Edmund to scabble to the back of that wardrobe and bump their heads against a hunk of plywood. How depressing for Lyra to talk to her daemon only to find that it is a well marketed cuddly toy.

The point of the journey is the fantasy. What

seems impossible suddenly becomes actual. What seems incredible is realized. What is completely fantastical becomes the realm of everyday experience, for the protagonists taking the journey anyway, and their loyal and wondering readers.

But wait just a moment? Is that really the key to great fantasy? Simply what the writer can imagine to be possible and then lets happen? Should we all be

imagining the moon to be a giant banana and sending vitamin-starved children into space to mine a new source of fruit drinks? Lunar Smoothies. Imagination, we say to children in schools so often, like an unthinking mantra, imagination is what it's all about. And children, responsive and impressionable as they are, pick it up and nod and secretly chuck away the book being peddled at them in favor of a far more exciting and immediate computer game.

But what exactly is this thing that we and Hollywood and the world insist we and kids buy into so readily, this mysterious thing

called imagination? Is it something that can be popped into a Dream-Works to produce, Willy Wonka-like, an instantly satisfying result? I don't think so, and that is why the question, "Are we living in the real world," is important. It was the English romantic poets, as individualistic as any serious children's writer should be, and especially Coleridge, who made the distinction



Researching for his fantasy/thriller about supernatural wolves set in Transylvania, David poses with a friend at the Wolf Trust in Berkshire in the UK.

between fancy, (for the moment let's not call that fantasy), and imagination.

Fancy to Coleridge was, on the one hand, a light, almost airy thing, the stuff of sugar plum fairies, of daydreams, of what you will. But imagination, now that was entirely different, something far deeper, more poetic, more insightful, more powerful and visionary. And what differentiated this powerhouse called imagination from those light fancies that we all have everyday? The things we make up on a whim. The ability of the person imagining to fully engage their mind and their emotions, their thoughts and their feelings, for as Coleridge believed "there can be no great thoughts without great feelings," with everything around them, with life itself. In short with truth as they understand it.

Bang. And we bump our heads on the back of that wardrobe. Truth? Crikey! Harry Potter isn't true. Far from it, some Christian fundamentalists cry, and isn't it evil to talk to kids about things like magic and make it seem so wonderful? We agree, say the scientists, if not about the "evil," because there is no evil as such, then at least about the nonsense of magic. And Philip Pullman, he isn't trying to tell the truth either, no more than it could be true that a deer could be born in thirteenth century Scotland with the mark of an oak leaf on its forehead, a he is in my first novel, *Fire Bringer*, and talk to the animals. These are fantasies and should be accepted and enjoyed as such, and nothing more.

It is at least reassuring to writers worried about their own work that, as a friend said to me once when I was fretting about what message I was giving to children; kids are far cleverer than we think and know that "they're only stories." And if we worry about why children should be wasting their valuable time over "stories," rather than studying the Dow Jones Industrial Average or learning to steal hub caps, we should remember that one of the greatest of all storytellers, Robert Louis Stevenson, labeled many of his own deep felt works "an entertainment." And there's nothing wrong with entertainment, and "no business like show business."

Except that there is something wrong with entertainment when it's bad entertainment. When it numbs us with the cheap, the obvious, the formulaic and the dull. And in the world of fantasy it will be bad entertainment if mere fancy rather than true imagina-

tion is engaged, without passion and vision and courage. If the writer or playwright or film maker doesn't really care about what they are doing, doesn't seek truth in their characters and their journeys and in themselves, doesn't address themes, and feelings and thoughts that are vitally important to us all in the everyday. Because that's what the heart and the mind, the soul if you like, desperately needs to feed and breathe and grow on. It is in fact that seemingly paradoxical tension between addressing "real life issues" in the form of fantasy, that responsibility in their art, that makes the greatest storytellers, and that sometimes agonizing tension between fantasy and the supposed real world that is the very stuff of children's fiction.

"Grow up," the adults and the realists cry, "it's not like that," as parents attempt to control and direct their children. There is no Santa Claus. There are no daemons. There is no goblet of fire. But that is exactly the point. In fact, in a child's awakening mind, everyone is a potential Santa Claus, or wicked uncle, daemons literally exist and there are goblets of fire. But great children's stories are helping us all to grow up and most especially when they pit the child's imagination, forming, creative, wondering, with the adult's, realistic,

responsible, authoritative, scientific nowadays. Think of muggles versus wizards. Think of Lord Azreal's bridge into other worlds. Think of fur coats and wardrobes and the sudden appearance of a lamp, a fawn and a freshly falling silent shower of snow.

It's not a game, nor, with a bow to modest Mr. Stevenson, a mere entertainment, it is something absolutely intrinsic to the human journey and always will be. And not only important for children, but adults too. Just look at how many supposed adults suddenly started reading Harry Potter on the way to

It is in fact that seemingly paradoxical tension between addressing 'real life issues' in the form of fantasy, that responsibility in their art, that makes the greatest storytellers, and that sometimes agonizing tension between fantasy and the supposed real world that is the very stuff of children's fiction.

work. Doesn't adulthood so often seem to rob us of our hopes, our passions, our ideals, our beliefs, our love? Well, in the wardrobe, in Will and Lyra's promise to communicate with each other in that scientific botanical garden, in Harry's. . . well, that we'll see about, the great, often terrible transition between the extraordinary possibilities of a child's mind and future, and the often harsh truths of life are being directly confronted.

Not always in the fact of plots, or reversals or denouements, but most powerfully in the very matrix of the committed writer's imagination. You can feel Pullman's visceral struggle with childhood and adulthood, with what fantasy, imagination, and belief are and what experience, reality, loss and death make us, bursting between the lines. His heroic and passionate, Miltonic and Blakean, defiance of Church and God, the authority, into whose heart he tries to plunge far more than a subtle knife, versus his profound, almost sacred wonder at life itself. It is his knowledge and mind, his skill with language and his deep commitment to his characters and his art, his moral maturity, that make that tension so miraculous and rightly won him the Whitbread in Britain.

The same tension is at work in Harry Potter, though to a lesser extent, and in the Narnia Chronicles, in Tolkien. They are so powerful precisely because their writers directly confront what confronts us all, namely the real world itself and the potential failure of our own imaginations and beliefs, with how so often life is not what we dreamt it to be, with how so often it is not the hopefully nurturing, protective place of home, with how it is not the stuff of fairy tales. No, that's not right. It is the stuff of fairy tales, but sometimes a very Grimm fairy tale, indeed. Indeed, the best approach the very real danger of myths themselves, how they can inspire us, but how we need to step beyond them in order to be really human.

And the greats address one thing in particular that I think truly ambitious children's books all share, namely the potential loss of God. For Phillip Pullman that is in essence a good thing, heralding, when he's

You can feel Pullman's visceral struggle with childhood and adulthood, with what fantasy, imagination, and belief are and what experience, reality, loss and death make us, bursting between the lines.

worked through the entire canon of literature, a republic of heaven. But it leaves him with a paradox. How can he overturn religious myths, using the very myths and language he seeks to undermine? If the Authority to Pullman is a dangerous fantasy, he is still writing fantasy literature, still giving license to that searching, questing imagination, which even when you accept all science's powerful lessons, still leaves room and need for a wondering question, and for the language of God. For J.K. Rowling it is, we imagine, disastrous when a muggle world predominates, when there is no

magic. Except, of course, that all her characters and most of her settings are very realistic, even mundane. Home and school. Here again she roots her imagination and fantasy in the real world and, beyond the opposites of good and evil, of Harry and Vold . . . oops, "He who must not be named," of wizard and Muggle, she is writing about that most important thing of all to real life, relationships. For Tolkien the battle is with a different kind of God, the gods of Middle Earth, perhaps the end of Childhood itself, and the passing of an age, when the elves go into the West and the time of Men predominates.

In my books the tension is there too and the problem of God and the gods is directly addressed in *The Alchemists of Barbal*. In *Fire Bringer* the whole pattern of the book is informed by religious myth, and the tension between that and the truths of nature, while in *The Sight* the tension becomes even more palpable. In *The Telling Pool* the myth of King Arthur and Excalibur and what it might make us aspire to, and the earth magic of visionary waters that conjure images like a TV set, is set opposite the very real and horrible facts of warfare and a very domestic drama. If it becomes a didactic exercise, lecturing and badgering, then it will fail as fantasy, but clever writers, in the challenges they set their characters and in their fantastical plotting, will find a way to key into their own dilemmas and obsessions. The challenges their own beliefs face in the supposedly real world. That will allow them an almost psychic doorway back into

a child's imagination.

We know that we do have to grow up, that all children want to grow up. Indeed it is in trying to pretend that life and bad things don't happen, that the battles of good and evil are not so often more complex than black and white, that children will always be protected without having to learn resilience and independence for themselves, that we do the most damage. It's like saying all children's books should be cozy things, or that we should glorify childhood for its own sake. Leaving the child a perpetual child as he or she stands bereft under that Christmas tree, wondering in the face of fairy lights where all the magic went. That's what worries me a little when I see a nation of adults reading Harry Potter, or at least seeming to want crawl back into the womb, when they might be helped far more by reading Tolstoy, or naturally my own books! But then both children and adults need safe places to go and explore themselves in, and the arc of most popular fantasies is intrinsically safe. Though characters may die, and those moments can be brilliant preparations for real life, though really nasty things may happen, there is an implicit pact that the writer, like a loving adult, will guide their characters back to safety and psychic health—and will certainly help them to grow into themselves.

In fact children's fantasies today, certainly in the realms of teen fiction, are rightly willing to confront, with a chance at those safe explorations, issues that might have been banned or caused apoplexy 50 years ago. Sex and sexuality, drugs and alcohol, science and belief, life and death. All those things that exist and which children one day will have to confront in the real world. When critics talk nonsense about "the evil" of Harry Potter they fail to touch a fundamental human truth, that the potential for dark and light, for lies and truth, for good and evil is in all of us. It is within the human mind. Children will grow into far more balanced adults if they are allowed to see that, that they are not alone in their own problems and anxieties. Yet, perhaps we have to be careful with it. The culture does, to an extent, make the society. But books, which give more space for imagination, association and moral examination than the moving image, are the best place to do it. In Wales in the late 1920's my grandfather threatened to horsewhip my uncle for reading Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*, since Wilde, hounded for homosexuality, had

fallen from grace. He was in that respect a man of his time, but how wrong can you get, not least because Dorian Grey, like Wilde's fairy tales, is a deeply moral book. Just as that gay angel in *His Dark Materials* is a deeply moral figure.

And in terms of "living in the real world" there is of course that other powerhouse of fantasy, Science fiction. There the real revolutions of science can be explored through the necessary human construct of a narrative. Which brings me to a little act of revenge. I can't remember which critic for *The Washington Post*, while saying that she couldn't put it down, compared my book *The Sight*, to a bad episode of *Star Trek*.

Now I'm not sure who that's ruder about, me or *Star Trek*, but I'd like to put it on record that I like *Star Trek*, damn it. Or used to. Besides the trouble with critics is that they have to be treated like tribbles, but what they say doesn't really matter. What matters is the letter I got from a kid called Sam in Wisconsin, who is adopted and who said that *The Sight* has really helped him through. *The Sight* isn't science fiction, it is most definitely fantasy, but some of the most imaginative, subversive and individualistic novels have and are appearing in the world of science fiction. In space all those human issues, and the challenges that science

throw up, can be synthesized beyond country and culture, in that no man's land, or perhaps every man's land, The Future. If the lesson of Arthur C. Clarke's invention of the telecommunications satellite is anything to go by, not only are those fantasists living in the real world, they are helping to create it too. There fantasy, imagination and science go on an intimate journey together.

Children will grow into far more balanced adults if they are allowed to see that, that they are not alone in their own problems and anxieties. Yet, perhaps we have to be careful with it. The culture does, to an extent, make the society. But books, which give more space for imagination, association and moral examination than the moving image, are the best place to do it.

And that journey that readers take is not a real journey when it is forced toward an unnaturally happy conclusion. Like an LA producer demanding that the movie has a happy ending, because he knows it's close to Christmas and wants maximum comfort factor and profits. It's understandable to want happy endings; we all do, but what's the point when, like a darling girlfriend of mine, you pick up a novel and read the end first to see if you'll like it. Then you're not taking a journey at all. Dang, that used to make

But when science tells us that it has proved that magic doesn't exist, as surely as faith in something is wrong, and that their methodologies encompass the whole of being, or the human heart and imagination, then we need the magical and miraculous to be restored to us in stories, and to be reminded that even scientists need extraordinary leaps of imagination for their revelations.

me cross. So then to fantasy in Hollywood. Like America the dream machine is blamed for a lot of things, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. Hollywood and American TV is at its absolute worst when it takes up fantasy and myths that it fails to respect and understand, on the level at which they were created. Take HERCULES the series, though that may have been Australian. Snatch a demigod, tone him into The Governor of California, and then surround him with characters and language straight out of a geeky day at the shopping mall. The cultural gap is too great, and the result is just cheesy. I'll forgive Sheena, but for entirely different reasons. But the failure to look to the roots of why myths have become myths, at what they might be

telling us about the human mind and psyche on a universal level, to give them authenticity, depth and cultural context is as wrong as the tendency to want to rewrite history and convince the world that it was actually the USA that played a decisive role in the conclusion of the Boar war. The obverse of that is the new tendency to throw out the baby with the bath water and approach mythic stories in a pseudo

realistic way. Troy, 'The Truth'; Alexander the really not very Great; or the truly atrocious Arthur of the Britains. Thank god that a mature children's writer, William Nicholson, was brought in to the "warzone" of the set of *Gladiator* to save the day. The point once again is tension. That tension present in good children's books, between the storyteller's desire to touch the limits of their imagination and create universally satisfying stories, in myth and allegory, and the desire to realistically confront experience, history, character, fact and the truth.

When Hollywood does that well, nowhere is it done better. Practically anything touched by Spielberg. The teams working at Dreamworks and sometimes Disney, too. Updated myths like the wonderful *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or in America's case myths grounded in their own reality, like the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Directors and writers who understand their own culture and its needs, but respect the roots of legend and go back to the source. And that is why, and here's my pitch to become a national institution, or at least get a fantastical job in Beverly Hills, writers and their books are so important and must be valued, especially when they hate selling themselves. It's why Hollywood, for all its have-a-go genius, still looks to literature for its inspirations.

And now children's literature. The *Harry Potter* films, *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, the coming of Pullman. And at no time in the union of art and technology can fantasy be so amazingly fulfilled in the "real situation" of a cinema auditorium. But although I don't think a film has to be a book, I do think the danger of the bandwagon is always present, and that scriptwriters and directors have to stay true to the spirit of the novelist's imagination. The director did it fantastically with *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy, because he so obviously loves those stories, although I think he falls down in his treatment of the Ents and not acknowledging how deeply Tolkien's imagination and message is rooted in trees. That is, in an almost pantheist sensitivity to nature, and the deep transformation stories that come out of nature based Anglo-Saxon legends.

"Oh, grow up," worried execs might be saying now at my publisher's, it's really about selling things. Well, that it is, but all of us, if we are lucky enough to, want to sell things that are worth buying. And for the committed children's writer, that imperative to "grow

up” is not the angry or contemptuous shout of an adult toward an unruly or naive child. It is the hope that the wonder and potential is carried fully into adulthood. And there we suddenly are as adults, often feeling about eight years old. But when we hurt each other, or tear each other apart, or scream that YOU have to live in MY real world, when what we call reality invades our souls and someone tries to tell us that they know the absolute truth, then above all we need that opening imagination. As a child knows that they have so much to learn from a parent, but that if we lived 10,000 years ago or 10,000 years into the future, would the rules or the truth be quite the same?

That kind of imagination hopefully reminds us too that though the rent has to be paid or this domestic situation may be more painful than we can cope with, we are all, here and now, on a planet, floating in space at 60,000 miles an hour, and that is always and forever quite miraculous. Terrifying often, but miraculous. When the Fundamentalists too, or those who claim the absolute good or the perfect moral high ground, tell us that we must believe in what they believe in, in their Authority, then we need the Pullmans to wield, scientifically and brilliantly, their subtle knives. But when science tells us that it has proved that magic doesn't exist, as surely as faith in something is wrong, and that their methodologies encompass the whole of being, or the human heart and imagination, then we need the magical and miraculous to be restored to us in stories, and to be reminded that even scientists need extraordinary leaps of imagination for their revelations. To be told, too, that on one very real level these things are about language and that while there may be objective scientific truths out there, there are also human truths, what is healthy for the human animal, and sometimes they are in direct conflict.

That's why the greatest children's stories are not just for children but for adults too, and carry forms down to the future. Down to our children. Was *The Lord of The Rings* voted the greatest book of all time in the UK because we all as illiterate as the rest of the world? Or because in Frodo's journey to destroy the Ring of Power and cast it into the cracks of doom, in

the face of all odds and ultimate evil, Tolkien had hammered out a psychic archetype of resistance, belief, hope and freedom, that is at the very core of the human journey. As deeply embedded as *The Odyssey* or Bible stories. One that beyond all political flag waving, beyond what we are told we should accept as truth and reality, readers have and can carry with them in their private hearts and minds to the darkest of places. And humanity is what Rowling, Tolkien, Pullman, and Lewis are ultimately dealing with. The making of men and women. Everything JK Rowling writes is really about how to protect, encourage and nurture Harry into an adult world, but one that still contains magic, and one that is more tolerant, imaginative and inclusive than many adults would have us create. Do I live in the real world? Am I a fantasist? I prefer to think, because that is the key to creativity, change and growth, that somewhere there is always a doorway between the two.

David Clement-Davies is the author of fantasy fiction works, including Fire Bringer, The Sight, The Alchemists of Barbal, and The Telling Pool. His newest book, Fell, a sequel to The Sight, will be out in 2007. Born in London, David grew up in Wales and attended Westminster School and Edinburgh University, where he studied history, English literature, Italian Renaissance literature, and Russian Literature and Society. His books are marked by rich intricacies of plot detail enabled by his formal education and interest in English literature, Arthurian Legend and its depictions in popular culture, Romanticism, and nature. His works are recently available in the United States.

**Do I live in the real world?
Am I a fantasist? I prefer
to think, because that is
the key to creativity,
change and growth, that
somewhere there is al-
ways a doorway between
the two.**

The Author's Responsibility:

Telling the Truth About War

Each of the authors of this five-part article was kind enough to allow us to use his presentation from the Books on War panel at the ALAN Workshop held in Pittsburgh in November of 2005. We are indebted to them, not only for their generosity in giving permission, but also for the important message within each talk. We would also like to thank Patty Campbell, Kathleen Broskin, Vicki Tisch, John Mason, Jerry Weiss, Becky Hemperly, and Anne Irza-Leggat for their help.

Marc Aronson

An expanded version of this article is available on Marc's website at http://www.marcaronson.com/young_adult_books.html

All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys,
The champions and enthusiasts of the state

Herman Melville wrote those lines in July of 1861 just as the Civil War began and his words get to the heart of what we are here to discuss today. We are fighting a war now. All of us here in this room write, edit, review, teach, evaluate books for teenagers who will soon have the chance to be the “champions and enthusiasts” on the battlefield. Can those books play any role in helping those young men? What role might that be? American soldiers are in harm's way. Can any book help protect them? American soldiers, too, have been in the position to notice, participate in, or expose torture and abuse. Could any book be of use to a person who in that terrible position of moral choice and social pressure?

Melville's words, though, are just as important when read in reverse: in his time it was assumed that young men would be fascinated with war, would be preoccupied with imagining themselves as heroes in combat. Yet outside of the authors on this panel—all males as you can see—it is very rare to find realistic YA books in which armed combat is central to the story. There are wars in fantasy novels and in science fiction; video and computer games are filled with weaponry and clashes of arms. But in the novels and nonfiction produced for teenagers you are far, far, far more likely to find emotional combat, the storm and stress of dating, parents, girl friendships, than tales of bands of brothers on battlefields.

Some part of this is the result of the YA lag—most people get around to writing about coming of age a decade or so after the fact. Perhaps ten years from now if ALAN holds this same panel all of the chairs will be filled by guys in their 20s, who made their mark writing about coming of age in Iraq. But mostly I think that we, as an industry, responded to the first set of questions—how can YA books help young people face war—by deciding that war was bad, and best ignored. We treated war the way Victorians did sex—something that we knew people liked, but that we did not want to promote, so had best keep secret. The phrase used over and over was, “we don't want to glorify war.”

We, as an industry, determined to be the antidote to John Wayne, to the Green Berets, to the boosterism of war. Fine, except that, as I see with my own five year old, boys have not changed. They crave fighting, crave combat, crave heroism in battle. And, as I

discovered in writing nonfiction books about American and British history—war is fascinating to research, exciting to write about, and is, often enough, the essential turning point of both personal and national histories. We simply cannot be true to the past, to the present, or to our readers, and silence war.

I have never, ever, seen a reviewer say we should not write books about two girlfriends having a fight because we don't want to glorify animosity between girls. Just the opposite, the reviewers praise authors of such books for their insightful realism. Similarly, there is a whole industry of books about the most intimate moments in a girl's physical maturation: getting her first period, anxiously tracking the development of her breasts, experiencing a range of sexual sensations. And yet I am certain that a book that was as detailed in describing the gore of combat would be criticized for being too graphic.

There is another interesting thread in this panel—the play of fiction and nonfiction. Harry Mazer served in World War II, and has written a trilogy whose titles—*A Boy at War*; *A Boy No More*; and *Heroes Don't Run: A Novel of the Pacific War*, exactly match our theme today. Personal brushes with war appear in Walter Dean Myers work in two ways—through the clashes on the streets of Harlem, and in the story of his brother in Vietnam. As far as I know, neither of the authors of our nonfiction books related to war—Jim Murphy and Paul Fleischman—has made use of direct personal experience of combat. And yet Jim has told me that his *Boy's War*—again directly our theme—is one of his most requested school publications. And Paul's *Dateline: Troy*, which is just now being revised and updated—most directly deals with the war boys are fighting today.

I hope that this panel with these four accomplished writers will mark a new moment for our industry. We are at war. As the world's only superpower, I suspect that war of one sort or another is in our national future. Here together we can end the policy of Victorian delicacy and silence and revisit the questions Melville suggested so long ago: where do boys, war, and writing meet?

Marc Aronson is a scholar and author of numerous works of nonfiction, often challenging widely held misconceptions about history. He has won numerous awards, including the Sibert Medal, School Library Journal Best Book, and New York Times Best Book.

Paul Fleischman

The Iliad is often described as a glorification of war. The vividness and detail of the descriptions—which ribs the spear entered between, what sound it made, a long simile comparing the spurting blood to a freshet in spring—would seem to support this. In a way, *The Iliad* is the ancestor of those Hollywood movies that switch to slow motion to show shells exploding and bodies flying through the air. It lets us not simply hear or read about battle, but smell and feel and taste it.

But Homer doesn't describe only battle this way; everything is evoked in rich detail: The waves striking the shore, the donning of armor, the flames from the Greeks' cooking fires in the evening. It's for this reason that Homer is such a valuable reporter on Greek life of the period, filling in the sorts of details not found in tombs and middens.

Though Homer praises the martial virtues of strength and courage, *The Iliad* doesn't resemble an Army recruiting film.

Though he flits from earth to Olympus and back to tell his tale, the war is seen largely through an infantryman's clear-sighted eyes. Leaders are foolish, selfish, spiteful. Achilles, the book's and the Greeks' star, is a vain, hot-tempered churl, willing to let his fellow Greeks be slain by the score just to spite Agamemnon, with whom he's feuding. The gods are a curse upon the soldiers, keeping the war simmering for their own ends, breaking truces, feuding above like the generals below.

When a soldier dies in *The Iliad*, he doesn't ascend to Valhalla in glory. Far from it. His soul journeys down to the underworld, a land of shadows whose inhabitants spend eternity pining for the feel of sunlight, the taste of wine, the sight of their wives and homelands. Homer's standardized description of death makes no mention of honor, courage, justice, self-sacrifice. The phrase is rather, "And darkness covered his eyes," a chilling catch-

When a soldier dies in *The Iliad*, he doesn't ascend to Valhalla in glory. Far from it. His soul journeys down to the underworld, a land of shadows whose inhabitants spend eternity pining for the feel of sunlight, the taste of wine, the sight of their wives and homelands.

phrase that never loses its power for me. I would argue that for Homer war is a tragedy—a bloody, unnecessary, disaster foisted upon us, cruelly taking the lives of men of valor before their time.

War for Homer is also a moral mixed bag. Though the Greeks start out as the righteous plaintiffs, soon

neither side has a monopoly on virtue. After ten years of fighting, the men can barely remember why they're fighting. The war has assumed a momentum of its own, drawn out by spells of tedium. It was said that only Palamedes's invention of dice from the knucklebones of sheep kept the Greek soldiers from going mad. No glorification there. Rather, *The Iliad* is the spiritual grandfather of *Catch-22*, *MASH*, of *Jarhead*.

It's this honesty, I think, that has kept *The Iliad* alive all these years. Propaganda is predictable,

one-dimensional. Literature is just the opposite. It's the humanity of the Trojan War story that originally appealed to me. How can you resist a story that starts with a seer advising a pregnant queen to kill her baby when it's born lest it bring ruin upon their city? How can you not keep reading when the king and queen can't bear to kill the child, entrust the deed to a herdsman who leaves the baby on a mountain, then finds it still living five days later, and decides with his wife to raise it in secret, taking a dog's tongue to the king and queen as evidence that the baby is dead? Driving past the Argonaut Motel near my house, I realized that the ancient world still lives. And that accompanying the story with actual newspaper articles paralleling the events described was the perfect way to bring one of our oldest stories into the present.

I quickly decided to start the story before *The Iliad* and to continue past it, since there's so much drama aside from the Achilles-Agamemnon-Hector story. The war, after all, lasted ten years. *The Iliad* covers only a few weeks. I broke down the story into

scenes and tried to find modern parallels. The first one was easy. The king and queen of Troy relied on a seer; Ronald Reagan consulted an astrologist. The second clipping dropped into my lap as well, and epitomized what I was searching for. The herdsman left the infant on a mountain to die—standard practice in ancient Greece for unwanted children. There, one day, at the bottom of page one of my local paper, was the headline "Newborn Found in Dumpster," the story of an infant left to die, but rescued. What the mountain was for the ancients, the dumpster is for us.

The Trojan War story is ageless, but newspapers keep rolling off the presses. And in teenagers' eyes, the first Gulf War marches quickly in reverse, receding to join Vietnam, the French and Indian War, and Hannibal's invasion of Rome. Meanwhile technology marches on. In the ten years after the first edition was published, the Internet sprang into being. Suddenly I could search hundreds of papers all over the country, instead of just the local and national papers. And then came a new war in the Persian Gulf. I decided it was time to improve on some of the first edition's clippings, and time as well as to bring the Trojan War into the new millennium, with warnings about 9/11 replacing those about Lockerbie, with President Bush's "Bring 'em on" added to the collage of boasts from overconfident leaders clamoring for war.

In college, I had little thought of writing for a living. I thought I might go into history, perhaps teaching at the high school level. *Dateline: Troy* was written for the teacher I didn't become, or rather for the one I would have become, and for the teachers that you in the audience are. The kind of teachers who show students why history and literature never go out of date. I wish you good luck with it. Let me know how it goes.

Paul Fleischman is the author of more than 30 best-selling works, from plays, to poems, to picture books, to young adult novels. He has won numerous awards, including the Golden Kite Award, Scott O'Dell Award and Newbery Medal.

Jim Murphy

I've written four books that deal with the subject of war, three on the Civil War, one of which is fiction, and one on the American Revolutionary War. It's

It's this honesty, I think, that has kept *The Iliad* alive all these years. Propaganda is predictable, one-dimensional. Literature is just the opposite. It's the humanity of the Trojan War story that originally appealed to me.

important to know that I have never personally been in a combat situation or even trained as a soldier. But when I was young, I did have this odd, weird experience that helped me decide how to approach this subject in my books.

I was eighteen in 1965, and as you all know, the Vietnam War was going on. On the day I turned eighteen, I left my house, marched across our little town to the high school where the draft board had its office and I signed up. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't enlisting in the army. I was only registering my name for the draft. So I signed my name and marched home, and I never told anyone what I'd done.

A couple of weeks later, I came home from school, and my mother was furious. A letter had arrived from the draft office and my mother had opened it (she did that with any mail addressed to my brother or me that looked official and could contain bad news). She looked inside, saw that the card inside said I was "I-A," and she started screaming. My mother was at best five feet tall, about so big [gesture]. She was a short, little Italian woman, but when she got angry, the entire neighborhood knew what was going on. "How could you do this without telling your father and me?" she wanted to know. "Who gave you permission?" I told her (in my calm, supercilious eighteen-year-old voice) that I did it because that's what the law required. When you turned eighteen, you were required to register, period, and I didn't want to be any different than all of my friends who were turning eighteen. That did not make my mother happy. Or quiet her down.

Several weeks later, I came home from school again, and another draft card had arrived for me in the mail. This one said "IV-F." When you see "IV-F" and your name on the draft card, the "IV-F" looks huge, like it's about a foot tall. I had gone to register, originally, because I wanted to be a normal, law-abiding kid. Suddenly, now, this "IV-F" made me completely different from all my friends. It was a clear indication that I was inept, that I was not physically qualified to be in the army or to defend my family, relatives and neighbors from attack. From whom didn't matter.

A general rule for all parents to remember: you do not suggest to any eighteen-year-old that he is physically unfit. It's a clear challenge that will be met with blind, incoherent stubbornness.

The way this terrible "IV-F" thing came about was that my mother worked as a bookkeeper for a doctor, and I had fainted a couple of times while at track practice. I think this happened because I never ate my school's really awful lunches, and by the time afternoon practice rolled around I was completely done in, weak and light-headed. Which didn't mean I begged off practice. Why not? Because I didn't want to be treated any differently than anyone else, of course. I'd go out, run as far and as fast as I could—and then pass out. Ever sharp, my mother took these incidents and convinced the doctor that I must be epileptic and therefore eligible for a medical deferment. So, now it was my turn to inform the entire neighborhood about the situation.

We had two or three weeks of conflict, which eventually turned into negotiation on the doctor's report. And then a third draft card appeared. This one said I was "II-A." It was a compromise. My mother was not completely happy. I was not completely happy.

It took a few years—and watching those grim TV pictures of wounded and dead soldiers in Vietnam night after night—before I realized how utterly dopey I'd been and how amazingly smart my mother was. I had put myself in line to go to Vietnam without really knowing what was going on there. I didn't know anything about the Vietnam people or why we were fighting them; I didn't know how the war was being handled militarily. I didn't even know what it was like to be in the army, how it felt to shoot at and kill

I had put myself in line to go to Vietnam without really knowing what was going on there. I didn't know anything about the Vietnam people or why we were fighting them; I didn't know how the war was being handled militarily. I didn't even know what it was like to be in the army, how it felt to shoot at and kill another human being, or even the consequences of being wounded. I was completely uninformed and stupid.

another human being, or even the consequences of being wounded. I was completely uninformed and stupid.

And when I thought about it, I realized this complete lack of information made me the perfect soldier [laughter from the audience]. It does. Because the more you know, the more questions you tend to ask, and the more questions you ask the more likely you are to say “no” to an order. Trust me, no army wants that. They want to train a blank slate into

someone who will fit the army’s very special needs. And that means saying, “Yes sir,” no matter what they’re told to do.

I didn’t realize it then, but this experience had a powerful influence on my writing. Fast forward twenty years or so, and suddenly I am working on the first book I did about the Civil War called *The Boys’ War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk About the Civil War*. It’s about boys sixteen years old and younger who enlisted to fight in the Civil War. Not to be drummer boys, but to actually fight in the infantry. I did a lot of research on the Civil War and the soldiers who

fought in it and read many diaries, journals, memoirs and letters from these soldiers.

I discovered that, essentially, they really didn’t know what they were getting themselves into when they went off to war. They just wanted to be with their friends, who had all rushed off to volunteer. They saw fighting in the war as a grand adventure that they would all come out of as heroes. And I thought, “Wouldn’t it have been nice if someone had told me what Vietnam was going to be like that day as I marched across town to sign up for the draft.”

I decided my book was going to be an attempt to let kids, my readers, see and feel what it’s actually like to join an army in war time. I would follow these

young soldiers start to finish, from the time they hurried off to enlist, through their brief period of training, and into their first chaotic battles, death and suffering included. I’d let readers experience camp life, camp food, and all the other discomforts away from home. And I’d let readers see the lucky ones come marching home, changed forever.

When I signed the contract for this, my editor was Ann Troy. She was extraordinarily supportive when I said I wanted to do a book that was very realistic and presented war in as powerful a way as I could. She was an extremely good editor, although when I showed her a photograph of body parts strewn across a field, she did hesitate slightly. I remember she looked at the photo and then back at me. “Now don’t make the battle scenes overly graphic,” she suggested. “We don’t want to scare kids.”

I blurted out, “Yes, I do!” That’s the kind of from-the-hip response some authors believe shows how brave they are. You know, willing to risk censure for the good cause. But when I really thought about the question, it made me analyze what I hoped the book’s impact would be. Did I want to scare readers? Well, to a degree, yes. But I didn’t want readers to think I was putting anything in simply for shock value or to create controversy. I wanted them to experience war in an immediate and dramatic way that left them with lasting images and impressions.

I went back over what I’d written and found myself wondering if maybe I had gone over the line in my enthusiasm to produce realistic scenes. Were my descriptions detailed to the point of being distracting? I tried deleting a word or phrase, but then the scenes seemed paler and less alive. What to do? I don’t know how other writers handle such situations, but my response is to escape into research (and hope something vaguely intelligent enters my head as a result).

I went back over my notes and began rereading all those first hand accounts I’d hunted out. And it was while doing this that I realized something I probably should have earlier. These kids—some just fourteen years old with a modest amount of formal education—were masterful writers. Clear, direct, innocent and eager to see and tell about the world around them. What surprised, shocked or just gave them a chuckle, they wrote down on paper.

I decided I was going to bring in as many of their personal accounts as I possibly could, letting their

Did I want to scare readers? Well, to a degree, yes. But I didn’t want readers to think I was putting anything in simply for shock value or to create controversy. I wanted them to experience war in an immediate and dramatic way that left them with lasting images and impressions.

combined voices present as complete a picture of war as possible. My hope was that by the end of the book, by letting modern day kids take this imaginary trip into a very real past, by letting them experience war through the words of people who really had been there, that when the time came for *them* to march across town to sign a registration paper, they might stop, step back and really think about what the consequences might be.

That's what my four books essentially try to do. Draw readers into the text who (usually) have a highly romanticized view of war and let them muck through the mud and blood and waste that is the inevitable consequence of battle.

I'll add that, as he opened our panel's discussion, Marc Aronson mentioned the idea of how books often glorify war. That made me remember a day I had received a bunch of fan letters, and in the first one I opened someone figuratively wagged a finger at me, saying, "You're glorifying war. You're sending young men off to be killed, and you should be ashamed of yourself!" Two or three letters later, I opened another which said, "I want to thank you for writing such a great antiwar book." [laughter from the audience] So, I decided I'd done (with the help of some incredible eye witnesses) a fairly decent job of presenting both sides of the issue [more laughter].

Jim Murphy is the author of over 20 best-selling nonfiction books for young adults, including An American Plague, The Great Fire and The Boys of War. He is the winner of numerous awards, including a Newbery Honor, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and National Book Award Finalist.

Harry Mazer

When WWII started, I was sixteen years old, and when I was seventeen, I was so worried that the war would end before I could get into it, that I volunteered for the air cadets. I was going to be an officer, hopefully, but I washed out of that whole program. I did end up volunteering for the Army Air Corps and ultimately wound up as a B-17 gunner, a waist gunner, on a B-17 heavy bomber. Our first mission was over Berlin, early February, 1945, and it was an experience like none I had ever had. The city lay beneath us like a huge rusted grid. And although I have no memory of where we dropped our bombs, what I do remember

vividly is seeing one of our bombers, one of our B-17 bombers, split in half and the back end of it, the tail end of it, spin away from the plane. After that I was a shareholder in this war.

On April 25, 1945, 13 days before the war in Europe ended, we flew out on our 26th mission, over Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Six hundred bombers went out that day. The target was the Skoda armament works, a big munitions factory. The Germans were waiting for us; they knew we were coming. Of the 600 planes, two were shot down, one of which was mine. When we were hit, we were at 26,000 feet, I was in waist gun position, and the explosion threw me off my feet. It tore off my oxygen mask and my intercom, and when I looked, I saw the wing on the port side of the plane was gone; it had been blown off and the plane was falling.

I was wearing an emergency parachute and harness, and I crawled to the emergency door, but the door was stuck. I had no oxygen. I turned away from the door, and saw the turret gunner, on his knees right behind me. Behind him I saw my best friend, Mike Brennan, the radio operator. We were both nineteen years old, both from the Bronx, and I would like to believe that I yelled to Mike, "Come on!" or something of that sort. I threw myself against the door and fell out of the plane. I had never parachute jumped before in my life or since.

I remember everything that happened after I fell out of that door. I fell and fell, and it felt like I was floating. I fell and fell and didn't pull the 'chute. I fell and I fell and I fell, and I didn't pull the 'chute until I fell into a bank of clouds. And then I did, and for a moment, I blacked out. When I woke I was under the chute; the chute was billowed out, and looking down, I saw a beautiful day, a blue and white sky, and a beautiful spring day. There were two other 'chutes near by, but I couldn't tell who the men were. Where bombs had been dropped there were great columns of black smoke rising in the sky.

I seemed to fall into a giant bowl, and I could see men waiting for me before I hit the ground: German soldiers in blue uniforms, Luftwaffe-German Air Force, and I was taken prisoner. Another gunner from my plane was also taken prisoner, but at a different place, by the German Air Force. I was raised on the movies, I was raised on John Wayne, and this wasn't the way it was supposed to be. I never saw Mike again,

After the war, I visited Mike Brennan's parents. His brother was there, and Mike's father sat there and listened as I told them what I knew. Of the eight men

I wrote *The Last Mission* for many reasons, not the least of which is that boys love war books. And clearly, I'm not speaking for all boys or all girls, but that was just one of the reasons for writing the book. Unlike life, we expect stories to make sense, and so maybe by writing the book, I hoped to finally make sense of what had happened to us. I wanted to remember, I wanted never to forget. I wanted the world to know about and to honor their sacrifice. I wanted an answer to why I had lived and Mike had died.

on the plane, only two had survived, and Mike wasn't one of them. I felt ashamed to be sitting there; I was here-Mike wasn't here, and as soon as I could, I left.

In those days, I told my story almost impulsively to anybody who would listen. I intended to write the story, and years later when I became a writer, after Norma and I had gotten together, and I had begun to write stories, as many of you know, I wrote a novel from my experiences called *The Last Mission*. *The Last Mission* is about fifteen-year-old Jack Raab, who is from the Bronx, fakes his age to join the Army Air Corps, and becomes a waist gunner on a B-17. The book has been in print for 26 years.

I wrote *The Last Mission* for many reasons, not the least of which is that boys love war books. And clearly, I'm not speaking for all boys or all girls, but that was just one of the reasons for writing the book. Unlike life, we expect stories to make sense, and so maybe by writing the book, I hoped

to finally make sense of what had happened to us. I wanted to remember, I wanted never to forget. I wanted the world to know about and to honor their sacrifice. I wanted an answer to why I had lived and Mike had died.

I wrote three other books about WWII, a trilogy

about a young man named Adam Pelko. My editor at the time had asked me to write a book about Pearl Harbor. I said, "Sure," and what came to my mind almost immediately was a phrase that wouldn't leave my head: "A Boy at War, A Boy No More." And that was the emotional and dramatic framework of the story. The first book was *A Boy at War*, and that was about Pearl Harbor. The next book I wrote was about the Japanese internment camps, and it was called *A Boy No More*.

When I wrote the third book, which is about Okinawa, and the same main character, which goes to the end of the war, I thought back to my rhyme, and I thought, *War No More* would make sense. So, I put that on the manuscript and sent it in to the publisher. Nobody liked. So I went back and I thought about a scene in the book where Adam and his sergeant, Rosie, are out on the front line, crouching together. Adam confesses that he is scared all the time, and Rosie tells him to stop babbling, "any man who is here on this island, in this hell-hole, is a hero in my book." So, I emailed that title, *Heroes Don't Run*, to David, my editor, and that's the title of the book.

Now, you don't have to serve in a war to write about war. It's not a requirement that you do what I did. Imagination makes all things possible. But writing about things I had not been part of, I felt the need to learn more. I spoke to veterans, I read first person accounts, wartime memoirs, and all of them talked of things: the wounded the dead, the living wandering around half mad,

How do you translate things like that into a book for young readers? How realistic should I be? What was my responsibility to young readers and to those who had been in that war? I had to remind myself that I was a novelist and not a historian. I wasn't an authority. I wasn't writing polemics against war. My job was to write a story, and I have learned that in telling a story, a little goes a long way.

If there was a message in my book, it had to be contained within the story. After a writer friend of mine had just finished reading *The Last Mission*, he let me know that he liked the scene at the end of the book, after the war, when Jack Raab is at a school assembly, and he is asked to say something and he finally blurts out: "War is one stupid thing after another." This particular writer was especially moved by those words, and he wanted me to know that, and

he added, "I think so, too."

At the end of WWII, I would never have uttered those words. I would not have written those words; WWII was a necessary war. People speak of it as a good war, but that doesn't really make sense because there are no good wars. It was a necessary war, but then there was Viet Nam and everything that has followed since then.

Let me tell one last story. Fifty years after the end of WWII, I was invited to come back to where our plane had gone down in Czechoslovakia for a ceremony honoring my crew.

I went to Prague first where one of the engines of my plane sits in the Czech Air Museum, and then to where we crashed. I was taken to a farmer's field where bits of our plane still could be found. And it was her that I found out something I had not known for fifty years; Mike Brennan had not died on the plane. He had been the third man out, and he had landed near a Czech cemetery not too far from where we landed. As he landed a German Wehrmacht officer was closing on him in a car, and as he approached Mike, pistol drawn, he shot and killed him. This had been witnessed at a distance by some Czech girls.

Why didn't *we* come down next to that cemetery. What would it have taken? A little rearranging of the way we went out of the plane. Or parachutes opened a little later or earlier, just a wisp of wind.

It was Mike's bad luck; it was war.

Harry Mazer is the author of more than 30 best-selling books for young readers, including The Last Mission, a largely autobiographical book based on his experience as a gunner on a B-17 shot down and taken prisoner during WWI, and the Adam Pelko trilogy: A Boy at War, A Boy No More, and Heroes Don't Run. Harry has won many awards, including the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, the Horn Book Honor List and The ALAN Award, which he won with his wife, young adult author, Norma Fox Mazer.

Walter Dean Myers

Teenagers grow up to be decision makers. They grow up to be people who send other people off to war. They grow up to be people who make decisions about war, often without ever really knowing about it, without understanding what it truly is.

One of my sons, I've got two sons: a good son and a bad son [laughter from the audience]. My bad son is an artist, and he and I work together [more laughter from the audience]. My good son is career Air Force. He called the other day, and we asked about something inadequately explained, "What's going on in Columbia? What are we doing in Columbia?" And he replied, "You don't want to know." There are wars going on all over the world that nobody knows about. That's pretty scary.

When I joined the US Army, it was on my seventeenth birthday. I left school and enlisted. Later, my younger brothers saw me in my uniform and thought I was pretty cool; in fact, one of my younger brothers joined the army after me. I think it used to be one out of every nine soldiers in the US Army went into combat, and now it's one out of every eight, but the War in Vietnam was picking up, and my brother was sent into combat. He was killed there.

He was not just a number for me; he was my brother.

I had two pictures of him in my mind: a picture of him doing things around the house; he wanted to be an artist. And then I had another picture of him, dead. I had to somehow unite those two pictures because if they could be united for *me*, so could the idea of this reality that he was gone.

At that time, there was still some hope that the South Vietnamese would take over and fight that war. So they were shipping South Vietnamese officers over to Fort Dix and Fort Monmouth and trying to train them. And they were bringing some prisoners over at the same time, and one prisoner was scared out of his mind. He was asked why are you so scared? You're in America, now; no one is going to shoot you. What had happened was that the people who had captured him in Vietnam had been told to "bring back a prisoner," and they had

Teenagers grow up to be decision makers. They grow up to be people who send other people off to war. They grow up to be people who make decisions about war, often without ever really knowing about it, without understanding what it truly is.

captured two of them, and then decided to kill the other guy, which was routine. If they were told to bring back *one* prisoner, and they're out in the field, you don't risk the mission with an extra one. And they killed the other one, usually with a knife. They would cut his throat.

I think that's an important concept of war that people need to learn and understand. I have been reading about the atrocities at the prison at Abu Ghraib, and people don't seem to understand that the torture of prisoners is routine during war. What they're saying is that "Oh, no! This is something different," but this is what happens. In war, they capture prisoners and they routinely kill them and routinely torture them. It's what happens, but who wants to say that?

Who should tell young people that this is what war is about? Who?

I was seventeen and prior to when I joined the army, I had just read Siegfried Sassoon, and all these World War One poets. "Yes! Wherever I fall, there shall be a piece of Harlem." [laughter from Mr. Myers and from the audience].

This is the sort of thing we want to teach. You ought to teach the idea of passing a person you had lunch with lying on the ground, dead. You have to walk by that person and leave them behind because they're dead. We ought to teach that.

Young boys are interested in war. Young men are interested in war. I remember Forest Lee Moffatt, a friend of mine (a really good guy, a football player), calling Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of Egypt, a "faggot," during the Suez Canal Crisis. We had our rifles—we were in a boat outfit, what's called a "riverine outfit," at that time—and we were going to go fight and take the Canal. Later, a settlement was reached among all the sides, and he called David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, a "faggot," and Nasser, President of Egypt, a "faggot."

My whole point is that war—if you don't know what it's about, if you haven't experienced your first dead body, yet—you think it's just a game, that it's wonderful. I watch war on television now, and I hear the talk about "smart bombs"—what a bunch of

Who is going to tell the children the truth about war if not authors? Who?

bullshit! They're feeding you this sanitized version of the whole thing.

I wrote *Fallen Angels* based on my brother's death in Vietnam, and I wrote *Patrol* based on another friend who served in Vietnam. I

also wrote a book about D-Day, the Invasion of Normandy, [*The Journal of Scott Pendleton Collins: A World War II Soldier, Normandy, France, 1944*] and one of the things that struck me about that invasion was that it was one of the biggest screw-ups. One group of soldiers, young boys from Bedford, Virginia [home of Company A, 116th Infantry Regiment, Virginia National Guard. The little town of Bedford lost more men per capita than any other place in the U.S.], and they were just young boys, when they hit the beach, they were told that none of the landmarks on their maps would be there because "we're going to bomb them all down." But when they landed, they didn't know that they had completely missed the beach they thought they were landing on, and thousands of soldiers were killed.

They want to tell you that the plans for conducting a war will work. They tell you, "We'll do this, we'll do the other thing, and this is going to be the result, and this is accurate," and it's not true—none of it's true. War is chaotic. People are killed at a tremendous rate. And it's all sanitized. It's sanitized by the media, it's sanitized by the military. If you read the "After Action Reports," however, and any time there is combat, there is an After Action Report, you will find a completely different story. There was an After Action Report on the massacre at My Lai, in Vietnam, for example, and it gave a completely different version of it.

Who is going to tell the children the truth about war if not authors? Who?

Walter Dean Myers is the author of more than 70 best-selling works of fiction and nonfiction. He is the winner of over 50 of the highest awards in literature, including multiple Coretta Scott King Awards, National Book Award Finalist, the Michael L. Prinz Award, and the very first Virginia Hamilton Award. A military veteran himself, Mr. Myers is the author of several works on war, all connected to true events in one way or another.

<p>Bowery Girl by Kim Taylor Viking, 2006, 192 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Friendship ISBN: 0-670-05966-8</p> <p>Inspired by Jacob Riis's study of tenement life in late 19th century New York, <i>How the Other Half Lives</i>, Taylor creates a fascinating story of friendship between two young women. The naive, youthful pickpocket Mollie Flynn and her protector, the flamboyant, indomitable prostitute Annabelle Lee, survive through their wits, courage, and cunning on the streets of 1883 Manhattan.</p> <p>The grimness, poverty, and hardship of life without a permanent home are graphically vivid, while descriptions of their lives are realistically harsh as Mollie and Annabelle struggle with gang violence, rat pit fights, robbery, and harassment from many sources. Their chance encounter with Emmeline DuPre, who has just opened the Cherry Street Settlement House, offers opportunity and hope. The lure of the street, however, always tempts as both seek their dream of a new life waiting just over the newly constructed Brooklyn Bridge. Mollie and Annabelle could be two homeless young women anywhere in the world today, but their story from more than a century ago informs and inspires. Judith A. Hayn Skokie, IL</p>	<p>Chill Wind by Janet McDonald Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, 134 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>Family/Identity ISBN: 0-374-441183-2</p> <p>Nineteen-year-old Aisha Ingram tries to recall "chillin'" with her boyfriend at Coney Island and skipping school, but these are just distant memories. Now, with two young children, sixty days until the termination of welfare, and no job because she dropped out of school, Aisha is in trouble. Also, Aisha is forced to live with her alcoholic mother because she receives no help from the children's father. The only thing this single mother from the projects knows is that workfare is not for her. While trying to avoid working one of the jobs welfare suggests, Aisha answers an ad for BIGMODELS. She thinks she is pretty enough and has the "big" part down. Aisha has high hopes that she deserves the chance to find a real job and turn her life around.</p> <p>This Coretta Scott King winner is an enjoyable read. There isn't a detail missed, including the language used and the daily situations that occur in the projects of Brooklyn. Hanna Morrill Kansas City, MO</p>
<p>Copper Sun by Sharon Draper Atheneum, 2006, 302 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Survival/Slavery ISBN: 0130502437572</p> <p>Some stories need to be told. Fifteen-year-old Amari's story of slavery is told through Sharon Draper's powerful new novel, <i>Copper Sun</i>.</p> <p>Amari's tale begins in an African village, where she lives with her family. Foreign visitors are given a warm welcome before a blood bath ensues as the visitors kill many villagers or put them in shackles. The slaves' journey to America is brutal, but Amari survives. She is later sold to a plantation owner, who buys her as a gift to his son for his 16th birthday. Life on the plantation is harsh, but Polly (an indentured white servant) helps Amari and later befriends her. After witnessing a brutal murder by the plantation owner, Amari, Polly, and Tidbit (a slave's son) escape captivity and become runaways.</p> <p>Draper masterfully portrays the inhumane realities of slaves' lives in America in this compelling read. Unimaginable horrors are graphically portrayed; there are scenes of rape and bloodshed, including a scene where slave owners use Tidbit as gator bait. These visions allow audiences to not only hear the story, but they enable us to feel the rage and injustices as well.</p> <p>Jill Adams Denver, CO</p>	<p>Dear Miss Breed: Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration During World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference by Joanne Oppenheim Scholastic, 2006, 287 pp., \$22.99</p> <p>World War II/Relocation Camps ISBN: 0-439-56992-3</p> <p>Americans with Japanese ancestry were rounded up and sent to Relocation Camps from March through October of 1942. The United States government said it was for their protection. Later, they were sent from the relocation camps to internment camps; in reality, these camps were "concentration camps." The book contains letters San Diego teens incarcerated during the war wrote to Miss Breed, a librarian in San Diego. Miss Breed, who kept in touch with her "children" by writing letters, sending books and packages to those interned, kept all of the letters she received. Those letters were reprinted in the book with the original spelling and grammar as the teens wrote to her.</p> <p>Use <i>Dear Miss Breed</i> with World War II units about life in the United States during World War II or as part of a racial discrimination unit. While middle school students will understand what happened during World War II, this title will be of more interest to high school students.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>Endgame</i> by Nancy Garden Harcourt Children's Books, 2006, 304 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Relationships/Bullying/Death ISBN: 0-15-205416-2</p> <p>When fifteen-year-old Gray Wilton enters the halls of Greenford High School with his father's gun, his world is forever changed. He is convicted of murder and given a life sentence without parole. Sitting in the detention center, Gray reflects on the months that went wrong. Trouble began with the occasional bully, bringing a knife to school, and then moving to a new city. Gray turns to his music, one love that he feels may save him from the turmoil. Things at the new school don't improve but take a devastating turn for the worse. Gray ends up making a decision that changes his life forever. <i>Endgame</i> takes a serious look at the issues of bullying and school violence. This book is appropriate for ages 14 and up and is strongly recommended to all educators.</p> <p>Michelle Sherer Independence, MO</p>	<p><i>Gossamer</i> by Lois Lowry Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006, 140 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Dreams/Dreaming/Healing ISBN: 0-618-68550-2</p> <p>Lois Lowry's newest novel explores a fantasy world where angelic beings visit sleeping humans to bestow dreams. The short novel weaves together the stories of a novice dream giver, a lonely woman, and a troubled foster child.</p> <p>Our dream giver, Littlest One, learns to take bits and fragments of happy memories from the objects in people's homes and turn those morsels into dreams capable of helping the woman and the boy through the challenges they face in their waking lives.</p> <p><i>Gossamer</i> is rich in archetypal characters and imagery, reading something like one of the pleasant dreams bestowed by its central character. Although the book will be of interest to young people who are fans of fantasy and rich narratives, its message of gathering strength for the future from the past is applicable to readers of all ages.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>Grooves: A Kind of Mystery</i> by Kevin Brockmeier Katherine Tegen Books, Imprint of HarperCollins, 2006, 199 pp., \$16.89</p> <p>Mystery/Detective ISBN: 978-0-06-073692-7</p> <p>Kevin Brockmeier has brilliantly incorporated the adventure all adolescents desire with his critique of "The Man." Dwayne Ruggles is a seventh grader who, after taking a science experiment to a new level, discovers a secret plea for help in some blue jeans and potato chips. This leads Dwayne and his friends on a mission to discover the truth about a headstrong businessman named Howard Thigpen.</p> <p><i>Grooves</i> allows the young reader to identify with the main characters and become apart of the fantastic adventure that lies within its pages. The protagonists are not extraordinary kids, and that is what makes this novel so attractive. The adolescent reader can relate to the characters in a semi-realistic world.</p> <p>This well-written novel can reawaken the reader's interest in science, economy, and ethics, promote humanitarianism and at the same time be a lot of fun. The teacher can use it as a tool in his or her class or the student can use it as an exemplary pleasure read.</p> <p>Christopher Sullivan Marquette, MI</p>	<p><i>Hazing Meri Sugarman</i> by M. Apostolina Simon Pulse, 2006, 266 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Peer Acceptance/Teen Girls/Humor ISBN-13: 978-1-4169-0610-0 ISBN-10: 1-4169-0610-X</p> <p>Cindy Bixby dreams of escaping her high school loser image when she begins college. Following in her mother's footsteps, Cindy pledges Alpha Beta Delta, hoping to find acceptance and popularity. Cindy's captivation with Meri Sugarman, sorority president, causes her to make moral compromises to gain Meri's approval. When Cindy lands a boyfriend, an ex of Meri's, she becomes victim of Meri's powerful wrath. Cindy and her friends have no choice but to destroy this evil villain before she destroys them.</p> <p>This story is cleverly revealed through daily diary entries. Middle school girls will find the exaggerated dramatic events appealing as it unfolds much like a modern day high school chick flick where the unpopular misfit finds the courage to confront the bully. Somewhat cliché, but the interspersing of family dynamics and the uncertainty of how to stop Meri will keep the reader intrigued until the end.</p> <p>Susan Gapp Vermillion, SD</p>

<p><i>Hip-Hop High School</i> by Alan Lawrence Sitomer Hyperion Books for Children, 2006, 384 pp., \$16.99 Urban Youth/Self-Reliance ISBN: 0-7868-5515-0</p> <p>Alan Sitomer first introduced the Anderson family in <i>The Hoopster</i>, a novel that traced Andre Anderson's battle with racist teens. Now, we learn more about Andre's younger sister, Theresa (Tee-Ay), as she struggles in the shadow of her respected older brother. The novel begins the first day of her sophomore year, detailing her struggles with the hard reality of her urban high school and her secret desires to make it to USC upon high school graduation. With hip-hop and its messages ever present, Tee-Ay uses her love of music to help understand her friends' struggles with violence, poverty and teen pregnancy, all the while secretly practicing her SAT vocabulary in hopes of escaping these realities.</p> <p>Told in the language of urban youth, this novel provides an honest look into what it is like to try to survive in an inner-city school. Rather than settling for despair, however, Tee-Ay learns how to make something of herself through her budding friendship with Devon, the class valedictorian, and her ambivalent relationship with her teacher Mr. Wardin.</p> <p>Robyn Seglem Olathe, KS</p>	<p><i>The Hollow: Mischief</i> by Christopher Golden and Ford Lytle Gilmore Razor Bill, 2006, 214 pp., \$6.99 Friendship/Love ISBN: 1-59154-02603</p> <p>This novel should appeal to many adolescents looking for a good read. The book is part of series, so readers should read the series from the beginning to fully understand the complexity and history of all the characters.</p> <p>The story takes place in a town called Sleepy Hollow; where weird things are a daily occurrence. But, only the young adults are able to really see what the problems are. After previously being haunted by the Headless Horseman, the teens are faced to deal with another type of ghost that comes to disturb the residents. While they are faced with these problems they solve another mystery in <i>The Hollow</i>. The book is a quick read at 214 pages, perfect for young teens of 13-16.</p> <p>Stephanie Linhart Antioch, IL</p>
<p><i>Ithaka</i> by Adele Geras Harcourt Children's Books, 2006, 368 pp., \$17.00 Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-15-205603-3</p> <p>Author Adele Geras continues her version of Odysseus's epic journey by shifting sites from the battlefields of Troy, wonderfully described in this book's predecessor <i>Troy</i>, to Odysseus's home island of Ithaka. The intricate story of lust and betrayal is seen through the eyes of Klymere, a handmaiden to the island's queen. All is not well as the island inhabitants longingly await their king's return from war. Pressured to select a new husband from the cast of unsavory suitors lolling on the palace's grounds, Penelope wavers about remaining pure for her husband. But this is also a story about loyalty. Atgós, Odysseus's dog, is the story's noblest character as the hound patiently waits for his master's return. Cameo appearances by the Gods, wielding control over the wretched humans, make this historical tale unique. It's recommended, but not necessary, to have read <i>Troy</i> to fully appreciate <i>Ithaka</i>.</p> <p>Rollie Welch Cleveland, OH</p>	<p><i>Julia's Kitchen</i> by Brenda A. Ferber Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2006, 160 pp., \$16.00 Family/Survival/Faith ISBN: 0-374-39932-8</p> <p>While Cara Segal is on a sleepover at her best friend Marlee's, her mother, younger sister, and family cat are killed in a house fire due to an electrical short in a toaster oven. Cara has a relationship with God where He seems to spare her from potential tragedies, so the disaster raises that issue along with others. Why is her father a walking ghost unable to discuss the fire? Why does she feel like such an outcast? Why do the Jewish customs of Shiva and Shabbat bring comfort to others but not to her?</p> <p>Close to her mother, Cara eventually finds healing by continuing her mother's catering business, Julia's Kitchen. This is a perfect read for girls ten and over who will appreciate the scrapbooking connections. Cara's story is an exuberant story of the survival of the youthful human spirit. The author provides a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms for those unfamiliar with Judaism.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Skokie, IL</p>

<p><i>Measle and the Mallockee</i> by Ian Ogilvy Harper Collins, 2006, 376 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Family ISBN: 0-06-058692-3</p> <p>Measle's nine-month-old sister, Matilda, is a typical baby who loves to jabber and throw food at her brother. However, there is one big difference – she is a mallockee, an extremely powerful wizard who can do many spells at once, while most are limited to one.</p> <p>In this third adventure for the Stubbs family, Measle and Matilda work together to escape the mysterious Caltrop Castle and rescue their imprisoned parents. Aided by a surprisingly helpful Wrathmonk, a wizard who has been stripped of his magical powers, and Toby Jugg, who recently lost the election for Prime Magus of the Wizard's Guild, it seems like an easy task. But the Stubbs children soon discover that not everything, or everyone, is as it seems.</p> <p>Ogilvy spins a web of twists and turns with his vivid descriptions and unique characters. Middle school students will get swept away in this Potter-esque fantasy adventure.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Independence, MO</p>	<p><i>The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane</i> by Kate DiCamillo Candlewick Press, 2006, 228 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>Friendship/Adventure ISBN: 0763625892</p> <p>Edward Tulane is not your ordinary, garden-variety rabbit. He is a china rabbit, made of the finest porcelain. He wears custom-made silk clothes and carries a small, golden pocket watch. Edward is the much-loved birthday gift of Abilene Tulane, 10, who includes him in all of the family's dinners and outings. However, Edward has a heart made of that same, cold china; he is conceited and selfish and doesn't seem to understand what love is.</p> <p>That is, until he is lost, having been thrown overboard by some rambunctious boys during the Tulane family's ocean journey. From there, Edward bounces from home to home, from one life to the next, as the book progresses. From lying on the ocean floor to traveling with a hobo to lying in the arms of a sick child, Edward learns about love and loss and why hope is always important to have.</p> <p>This is a brilliant story about the importance and challenges of true love and friendship. Newbery-Award winning author Kate DiCamillo presents a riveting plot that is wonderfully complemented by illustrator Bagram Ibatoulline's exquisite illustrations.</p> <p>Jennifer Stevens Louisville, KY</p>
<p><i>Playing the Field</i> by Phil Bildner Simon and Schuster, 2006, 181 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Homosexuality ISBN: 978-4169-0284-3</p> <p>Darcy Miller wants to play baseball, but her high school principal says she can't because she's a girl. But when Principal Bassett thinks that Darcy's a lesbian, he changes his mind. His reasoning? Not allowing her to play would bring controversy to the school.</p> <p>So Darcy pretends to be gay to play.</p> <p>The book has some problems: the characters are all wealthy, which could alienate readers, and the only openly gay character is stereotypically so, propagating stereotypes instead of breaking them.</p> <p>Despite this, the novel describes what it means to be gay in an American high school, while also educating on the issue. This novel is solidly written and approaches a sensitive topic well. It is full of high school drama and humorous descriptions, which really pull the plot along.</p> <p>Shawn O'Neil Marquette, MI</p>	<p><i>Plenty Porter</i> by Brandon Noonan Amulet Books, 2006, 221 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fiction/Family ISBN: 0-8109-5996-8</p> <p>As the youngest of eleven children, Plenty Porter feels that she is the one-too-many child in her family. Her family survives as share-croppers in Illinois during the Korean War.</p> <p>Problems abound for the Porter family. Plenty experiences prejudice at school and ridicule in the community. Her sister, Marcie, must be hospitalized; her father takes a second job to help pay bills. Landowner Mr. Prindergast complains constantly about crop production.</p> <p>Plenty decides to run away from home, and Mr. Prindergast takes her home. In a scene similar to Bo Radley saving Scout in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, Plenty learns her family really does love her. Use <i>Plenty Porter</i> with high school units about the 1950s.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>

<p>Rash by Pete Hautman Simon and Schuster, 2006, 245 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Science Fiction/Humor ISBN: 0-689-86801-4</p> <p>Bo Marsten lives in a future society where anything that has the remotest potential to harm humans has been outlawed. In order to run track for his high school, Bo has to wear multiple layers of protective gear and runs on a track that behaves like a giant pillow. Football and other contact sports have been banned for years.</p> <p>It is also a lot easier to become a criminal in this future society, as the slightest infraction sends individuals off to prison work farms necessary to support the government and the economic system. When Bo is sentenced to McDonalds Plant #387 for saying hurtful things to one of his classmates, he discovers a very different world, one in which the head of the prison and the head of a nearby prison (Coca-Cola C-82) field highly illegal football teams that play one another in a particularly brutal version of the sport.</p> <p>The characters are well-developed, and the future society provides insights into our contemporary culture. Hautman's novel should appeal to young adults who appreciate social satire and speculative fiction.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>Rewind by Laura Dower Scholastic, 2006, 246 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Relationships/Romance ISBN: 0-439-70340-9</p> <p>The stories of three characters intertwine as the plot unfolds from the night of prom backward to a New Year's Eve party six months prior. Cady Sanchez, the talented guitarist/composer/singer, has a crush on the handsome, musical, athletic, and mysterious new comer Lucas Wheeler. Lucas is secretly involved with gorgeous, popular, promiscuous, and manipulative Hope White. Former best friends, Cady and Hope reunite as leads in the school play, <i>The Children's Hour</i>, after years of Hope's ignoring Cady since a nasty junior high incident over a boy. The reader follows the building tension among all three as the violence at prom reverses through time, and all becomes horribly clear on the night when the seniors first connect at the party. The snappy dialogue, music analysis, and teen behavior will ring true for high school seniors ready to leave the past while still experiencing the present.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Skokie, IL</p>
<p>The Road of the Dead by Kevin Brooks Chicken House (Scholastic), 2006, 339 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Suspense/Death/Violence ISBN: 0-439-78623-1</p> <p>Two determined brothers travel from London to an eerie village in the moors on a mission to find their sister's rapist and murderer after the family becomes impatient with the police investigation. As the unwelcome boys begin to unravel the secrets and dynamics of the community, they experience savage attempts to put a stop to their searching, which is nudging them closer to the truth. The boys compromise their own lives to complete their mission and bring peace to their family.</p> <p>This suspenseful story encompasses both a violent edge and emotional softness. The brothers' personalities complement each other, as one is hardened and fearless, while the other is compassionate and sensitive. Feelings of loss, love, and anger run deep throughout the story, allowing for personal connections that keep the reader anxiously awaiting the boys' safe return home.</p> <p>Susan Gapp Vermillion, SD</p>	<p>Rx by Tracy Lynn Simon & Schuster, 2006, 262 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Teen/Drug Abuse ISBN: 1416911533</p> <p>After years of hard work, Thyme Gilcrest has finally worked her way to the academic top of her junior class. Though she has barely broken into The Twenty—her nickname for the hardest working students in school headed to the best colleges—her junior year is set on the path of extra-currics and college applications. With the arduous course load of AP courses, National Honor Society obligations, and SAT prep courses, Thyme begins to run out of time and energy for the study hours necessary for success. The answer to the latter problem comes in the tossed bottle of a friend diagnosed with ADHD—Ritalin.</p> <p>A frighteningly realistic portrayal of upper class teenagers dealing with extreme pressure and stress, this novel reveals the demands of a seemingly average student who gets in over her head in the dangerous world of a drug dealer. Tracy Lynn gives an entertaining and convincing account of the hidden, yet vast world of illegal prescription drugs in the high school setting. The use of pop culture, sarcasm, and narrative voice make <i>Rx</i> a hauntingly amusing read.</p> <p>Janae Brady Wichita, KS</p>

<p><i>Slide or Die</i> by Todd Strasser Simon Pulse (Simon & Schuster) 2006, 198 pp., \$6.99 ISBN: 978-1-4169-0581-3</p> <p>Fiction/Adventure</p> <p>Seventeen-year-old Kennin is new to Las Vegas; a friend he had made at work invited him to go for a ride in a hot GTO. As they drove out of the city toward the mountains, Kennin discovered that the driver with a bottle of tequila was an ex-con who had stolen the GTO.</p> <p>Kennin's group meets up with a group of drivers who compete at a very high rate of speed, sliding the back wheels around turns. The stolen GTO has a tracking device, so the police can locate the car. When the police arrive, Kennin is forced to take the GTO down the mountain road against a very experienced driver.</p> <p>The manga-style drawings will attract reluctant readers and students interested in cars. <i>Slide or Die</i> is appropriate for middle schoolers, although the target audience is probably high school.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Small Steps</i> by Louis Sachar Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2006, 272 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0385733143</p> <p>Coming of Age/Friendship</p> <p>With this book, author Louis Sachar brings back the character Theodore Johnson, a.k.a. Armpit, from his Newbery Award-winning book, <i>Holes</i>. Armpit, an African-American teen, is working hard to rebuild his life after returning home from Camp Green Lake. That is hard to do when everyone knows about your criminal record, so Armpit takes small steps to stay in line and make good choices. While trying to finish high school, Armpit is hired by a landscaping company and works doing what he does best: digging holes. He also befriends Gimmy, a young neighbor with cerebral palsy.</p> <p>Everything seems to be going well for Armpit until his old Camp Green Lake pal, X-Ray, visits him. X-Ray gets Armpit involved in a get-rich-quick scheme, scalping concert tickets to see the latest teen pop sensation, Kara DeLeon. But is Armpit ready to throw away everything he's worked so hard for?</p> <p>Sachar combines a suspenseful plot with likeable characters to tell this story of friendship and of taking "small steps" to accomplish one's goals.</p> <p>Jennifer Stevens Louisville, KY</p>
<p><i>The Sound of Munich</i> by Suzanne Nelson Speak Publishing, 2006, 211 pp., \$6.99 ISBN: 0-14-240576-0</p> <p>Adventure/Family</p> <p>Author Suzanne Nelson has created a light-hearted but surprisingly moving tale that proves to be a quick and light read. We first meet Sena Bernstein, self-proclaimed free-spirited Californian, on her way to Munich, Germany. She is about to begin a semester abroad in the city of her ancestors. While our protagonist may be a bit flighty and carefree, this is not your typical spring break trip; Sena has a secret plan. She is determined to complete her deceased father's "Carpe Diem" list. Her only link to her father is this list, and the last item has yet to be fulfilled. Only in Germany can she complete this list and possibly find a link to her past, her future, and the father she has never known.</p> <p>This young adult novel is an easy read and, just like Sena, is sunny and fun. She is an interesting character, and readers will appreciate her kindness, her friendships, and her adventure. A no-frills read for young adults (girls) with a Meg Cabot-like feel.</p> <p>Stacy Distel Nishioka Chicago, IL</p>	<p><i>Startled by His Furry Shorts: Confessions of Georgia Nicholson</i> Love/Friendship by Louise Rennison ISBN: 0060853840</p> <p>HarperTempest, 2006, 288 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>In this, the seventh book of the Georgia Nicholson series, Georgia finds herself in "the oven of luuvre" once again. At the end of the last book, <i>Them He Ate My Boy Entrancers</i>, Georgia had given the Italian Stallion, a.k.a. Masimo, an ultimatum: to be an exclusive couple.</p> <p>Throughout this book, Georgia awaits her answer and has to deal with the devastating idea of only being "mates" with Masimo. Will she be able to live if he picks Wet Lindsay over her? And what exactly did Dave the Laugh mean when he said that they were meant for each other?</p> <p>Along the way, Georgia has to put up with her little sister, Libby, who is constantly hiding things in her bed, and her psycho cats, Angus and Gordy, who attack at random. That doesn't even begin to explain the horrors of dealing with school at Stalag 14.</p> <p>A must-read for fans of the series, this book is laugh-out-loud funny and, as Georgia would say, "full of hilariosity."</p> <p>Jennifer Stevens Louisville, KY</p>

<p>The Tenth Power by Kate Constable Arthur A. Levine (Scholastic Press), 2006, 320 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 0-439-55482-9</p> <p>This novel completes the Chanters of Tremaris trilogy which includes <i>The Singers of All Songs</i> and <i>The Waterless Sea</i>. Eighteen-year-old Calwyn, suffering the loss of her magical powers of chanting, returns to her home in Antaris. She had fought the dangerous sorcerer Samis, lost her powers trying to heal a “dry and troubled land,” and in her misery pushed away Darrow, the man she loves. She hopes to find refuge among the priestesses. Instead, she finds her home in the grip of endless winter, the chanters suffering from a plague of snow-sickness. There the dying High Priestness teaches her the secrets of the Goddess and sends her on a quest to find the Wheel, an object of Power, which can heal the world.</p> <p>Calwyn regains her magical powers when she is willing to sacrifice herself for another, even an enemy. Calwyn shows the people how they can break down barriers and live in harmony. Constable creates a vision of a Utopia where differences are overcome and warfare is broken. This magic can only be created when all the people join in a great dance of healing.</p> <p>Jeanne M. McGlinn Asheville, NC</p>	<p>That Fernhill Summer by Colby Rodowsky Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006, 176 pp., \$16.00 ISBN: 0-374-37442-2</p> <p>Travel with Kiara as she meets the family that she never knew existed. After an unexpected phone call from her Aunt Claire, informing her family that her mother’s mother was ill, Kiara is thrown into a life of new cousins, aunts, uncles, and a grandmother who is anything but kind. While staying at Fernhill, her grandmother’s house, for the summer, Kiara and her cousins Jill and Maddie learn how to make the most out of difficult situations while dealing with their very moody grandmother. The trio becomes very close as they battle the hot weather and boredom at Fernhill. <i>That Fernhill Summer</i> by Colby Rodowsky is a quick read with only 176 pages, yet it is still entertaining and satisfying. While traveling with Kiara, you will feel everything from sadness to happiness and will be left feeling content.</p> <p>Brenda Carobine Marquette, MI</p>
<p>Thicker than Water by Carla Jablonski Razorbill (Penguin), 2006, 256 pp., \$16.99</p> <p><i>Thicker than Water</i>, a novel by Carla Jablonski, is the story of seventeen-year-old Kia, who is dealing simultaneously with many of life’s difficulties: a cancer-stricken mother, an absent father, a compulsion for cutting, and a search for identity. Kia investigates witchcraft and magic, first at a Wiccan ceremony, then in the world of hip vampires in the bars of New York City. Along with encouragement from her new co-worker Hecate, Kia becomes captivated with the vampire underground bar scene, especially with one of the deejays, Damon. Kia spends much of the book pursuing a romance with him, despite the concerns of her friends Carol, Aaron, and Virgil. However, in the background are always Kia’s relationships with her ever-changing family. Bar-hopping adventures, underage drinking, and some erotic scenes make <i>Thicker than Water</i> more appropriate for older teens, especially those with an interest in the supernatural.</p> <p>Kia Jane Richmond Marquette, MI</p>	<p>A True and Faithful Narrative by Katherine Sturtevant Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, 256 pp., \$17.00 ISBN: 03743780996</p> <p>In this sequel to <i>At the Sign of the Star</i>, 16-year-old Meg is chafing at the restraints on 1600s women.</p> <p>As a bookseller’s daughter, Meg has had the unique opportunity of reading widely. As a Londoner, her view of life is broader than many, but her desire to be a writer is not a popular one. She realizes that her future depends on her making good decisions. She will have to marry, but she seeks a man who will not be averse to her vocation.</p> <p>Caught between two young men, she decides to choose the one who offers possibilities. This book is a wonderful story about women’s struggle for equality, and it is relevant today.</p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p>

<p><i>The Valley of the Wolves</i> by Laura Gallego Garcia Arthur A. Levine Books, 2006, 256 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Supernatural ISBN: 0-439-58553-8</p> <p>Ever since Dana was six, her best friend has been a boy named Kai. The only problem is that Dana is the only one who can see him. Everyone in the town knows of Dana's "imaginary friend" and believes she must be crazy and a witch. When a mystical man named Maestro adopts Dana as an apprentice and takes her to Maestro's magic Tower in the Valley of the Wolves, Dana begins to wonder if she really is a witch. With the help of Kai, Dana must survive the Tower and the Valley of the Wolves, while trying to discover what the power of magic is really all about.</p> <p>Written when Garcia was only 20, <i>The Valley of the Wolves</i> is the story of a young girl coming of age and realizing her full potential. Garcia borrows different elements of fantasy and the supernatural to create a truly believable world.</p> <p>Brandon Schwarz Lawrence, KS</p>	<p><i>What Are You Afraid Of?</i> Edited by Donald R. Gallo Candlewick Press, 2006, 189 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Short Stories/Phobias ISBN: 0763626546</p> <p>Excessive fears, debilitating fears that cannot be rationalized away, grip teenagers' lives, causing them to be the brunt of bullying, the focus of jokes, and the cause of nightmares for parents and friends who only want to help.</p> <p>These short stories demonstrate how the fear of string, crossing a road, cats, sharp knives, or clowns can make "normal" life impossible for teens. Most of them get help from a professional or a friend or a parent by learning that they first have to face their fears and then take one day at a time to overcome them. The last story will leave you with a taste of fear in your own mouth as the usual source of fears is reversed.</p> <p>Readers will laugh, shiver, and empathize with phobics who can't control their own thoughts and who can't make their bodies react to seemingly natural events. Anthologist Gallo has collected 11 phobia-ridden stories that hold readers' attention long after they finish reading.</p> <p>Carolyn Lott Missoula, MT</p>
<p><i>The Wright 3</i> by Blue Bakkuett Scholastic Press, 2006, 297 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0439693675</p> <p><i>The Wright 3</i> by Blue Bakkuett is an absorbing mystery involving American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's Chicago design, the Robie House.</p> <p>Because of a teacher's concern about destroying works of art, three classmates endeavor to save the house. Sleuths will enjoy unraveling the historical, mathematical, and criminal clues needed to solve the mystery. The author has definitely plotted this novel well, while providing characters that are delineated well. One does not want to stop reading the book!</p> <p>Besides providing an interesting historical fiction story, the reader will gain a great deal of information about Wright and his buildings.</p> <p>Joy Frenichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>

Young Adult Literature in the English Curriculum Today:

Classroom Teachers Speak Out

Many teachers have come to acknowledge that the reality of teaching the classics is similar to the reality of trying to teach a pig to sing: It does not work and annoys the pig. These teachers have paid attention to students' complaints about assigned works as well as questions about "Why are we reading this?" and have either replaced some of their traditional canonical selections with timeless works of young adult literature (YAL) or have expanded their literature curriculum by pairing YAL with the classics. Clearly, student engagement with a work of literature insures introspective writing, lively discussions, and perhaps most importantly—the students will keep reading, long after the required selection has been finished. Hipple sums this idea up in his statement, "The THAT of teenagers reading is more important than the WHAT" (15). The problem, however, resides in concerns about the "WHAT" of students' reading. Can young adult literature provide a means for meeting state standards in an English classroom, or is it destined to a peripheral role on classroom library shelves to reward students who have already completed more difficult, required readings?

Reviewing the session offerings at literacy and language-focused

national conferences and perusing the tables of contents of language arts journals reveals an ever-growing inclination among secondary English language arts teachers toward using YAL in the classroom. Many English teachers believe that YAL offers a sophisticated reading option for addressing standards, designing relevant curricula, and engaging twenty-first century young adults in rich discussions of literature and life. For years, proponents have concluded that YAL should be integrated into the middle and high school English classroom because such literature can (a) help improve students' reading skills; (b) encourage young adults to read more books, thereby improving their abilities to read; (c) facilitate teachers' abilities to incorporate more books of interest to adolescents into the curriculum, thereby avoiding the non-reading curriculum or workbooks and lectures; and (d) support the development of an inclusive curriculum (Reed).

However, others, including a number of English teachers, believe that YAL should not occupy a prominent position in the curriculum: they believe that YAL may be useful as an option for struggling upper elementary and middle school students or as out-of-school leisure reading. Teachers

Many English teachers believe that YAL offers a sophisticated reading option for addressing standards, designing relevant curricula, and engaging twenty-first century young adults in rich discussions of literature and life.

assuming this stance believe that such literature is not “deep enough” to include in the regular curriculum.

These conflicting views prompted us, as teacher educators, to seek methods for better understanding secondary English language arts teachers’ perspectives on YAL. Our first goal was to determine which YAL titles teachers use in their curricula, and we accomplished this by surveying 142 English language arts teachers in our state. Our second goal was to illuminate the methods that secondary English teachers use to purposefully and thoughtfully integrate YAL into their curricula. To accomplish this, we interviewed secondary English teachers who participated in the study and who regularly use YAL in their classrooms.

What We Found in Classrooms

During the 2003-2004 school year, we surveyed 142 English language arts teachers employed in 72 different public secondary schools in four distinct regions of our state to identify the book-length works they include in their curriculum, as well as their reasons for including or excluding young adult literature. Since this was a statewide survey, the names of all secondary public schools in the state were retrieved from the State Department of Education. This comprehensive list was first divided into four distinct regions—North, South, East, and West—to ensure a geographically representative sample. Second, the schools within these regions were categorized by school size, which was determined by student population as shown in Table 1.

Within these six class groupings for each of the four geographical regions, three schools were randomly selected, yielding a total of 72 secondary public schools.

After the selection process was complete, the principals of each school were contacted to secure their permission to contact their respective English teachers and to get the names of department chairs and/or senior English teachers. Survey packets, which included a self-addressed and stamped envelope, were then mailed to the department chairs and/or senior English teachers. To get a more varied response from schools surveyed, each department chair/senior teacher was asked to distribute a copy of the survey to a teacher for each grade level, which included grades 6-12. Completed surveys were gathered by the depart-

Table 1: Teacher Demographics

Teacher Demographics	
Gender	Male: 12 Female: 130
Ethnicity	African American: 8 Asian American: 1 European American: 124 Hispanic American: 2 Native American: 2 Other: 5
Years of Teaching Experience	1-5 Years: 33 6-10 Years: 30 11-15 Years: 27 12: 16-20 Years: 12 21 + Years: 40
School Community	Urban: 30 Suburban: 32 Rural: 78 Inner City: 2

ment chair/senior teacher and mailed to the researchers. Two-hundred and sixteen surveys were mailed, an average of three per school, and 142 completed surveys were returned, equaling a return rate of 66%. Table two details the demographics of the teachers who participated in the study.

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative components, with the quantitative portion asking teachers to list the book-length works for each grade level they taught during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. In the qualitative section, teachers responded to these open-ended questions related to their reasons for including or not including young-adult literature: (1) Do you include contemporary young adult literature in your curriculum? Why or

Table 2: School Demographics

School Classification	Student Population
1A	24-144
2A	145-205
3A	206-295
4A	296-424
5A	425-736
6A	737-1670

why not? (2) Which young adult authors do you include in your curriculum? (3) How would you describe your students' attitudes toward reading? (4) What other information about the current status of the middle and high school literature curriculum can you share with us?

Based on teachers' responses to the survey and themes that emerged during the analysis of data, we selected four teachers with whose classroom practices we were familiar and sent them additional questions to obtain detailed profiles of classroom teachers using YAL in their curriculum. We selected two middle school teachers and two high school teachers in order to represent the span of secondary English language arts teachers included in the study. In our discussion of our findings, we include two of these profiled teachers, one middle and one high school, based on the depth and extent of their responses to our follow-up questions.

The quantitative data were analyzed using the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to determine which book-length works were taught most frequently in order to develop the lists of top ten works.

The qualitative data were studied to determine emerging patterns and trends using the constant comparative analysis (Miles & Huberman), which included careful reading and rereading of all the teachers' relevant responses by the members of the research team. After examining the data that were collected, recurring themes were noted. During subsequent readings, a matrix was developed using the themes. A table was created to code the frequency of the references made about uses (or lack thereof) of YAL. Quotations that were representative of the themes that emerged from the data were selected. To produce an accurate representation of the research findings, as well as to control for researcher bias, data were triangulated across the members of the research team.

Theme #1: YAL Lacks Sophistication and Literary Merit

An initial theme that emerged from the data analysis was the belief that young adult literature lacks sophistication and literary merit. Teachers in our study indicated that they feel that YAL does not have the qualities of canonical texts and, therefore, will not

help students to meet the same curricular objectives. Like some critics (Jago, Knickerbocker & Rycik), teachers in our study feel that YAL's role in the curriculum is, at best, peripheral, serving as independent reading outside of class and for motivating struggling readers. However, there is nothing simplistic about quality YAL. Stover points out that good YAL "deals with themes and issues that mirror the concerns of the society out of which it is produced. It does so in ways that help readers understand the complexities and shades of gray involved in dealing with these issues" (119-120).

In an educational system driven by testing and standards, teachers often view their curriculum as overcrowded as they try to teach their adolescent students the merits of quality literature: its devices, how to be critical readers, difficult vocabulary, etc. Often teachers view the canonical texts as a means of accomplishing these objectives and see young adult literature, while relevant to their students' lives, as easier—as literature to implement if time allows at the conclusion of the school year. However, Bonnie Ericson points out, "To limit our selections of novels, especially to the 'classic' novels, is to tell our students that all these other texts, perhaps the students' preferred types of reading have less value" (10).

Additionally, Ericson asserts that class reading needs to extend beyond classic novels and novels in general to encompass a variety of genres in order not to "limit students' bridges to the joy of reading" (10).

Young adult literature includes multiple genres and subjects and it does not solely focus on novels of teenage angst. Over the years, YAL has grown expansively to include genres such as poetry, biographies, memoirs, informational texts, and science fiction and fantasy, to name a few

While teachers complain that students in their classes struggle with difficult texts and, hence, with the presented literary concepts, YAL provides an excellent vehicle for introducing students to literary concepts through engaging texts that are written at an appropriate reading level.

Conversely, some of the traditional canonical selections pose several obstacles for a student of the “microwave generation”; namely, these selections are difficult to read, irrelevant to the students’ lives and interests, and require a teacher’s assistance to decipher meaning.

(Donelson & Nilsen). While teachers complain that students in their classes struggle with difficult texts and, hence, with the presented literary concepts, YAL provides an excellent vehicle for introducing students to literary concepts through engaging texts that are written at an appropriate reading level. As Joan Kaywell points out in her series *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, “Part of the problem, as most teachers are fully aware, is that the classics are often too distant from our students’

experiences or the reading level is too difficult” (ix). Weaving young adult literature throughout the English language arts curricula proves a strategy for making the curricula more engaging for students (Stover).

Theme #2: YAL Relates to Students’ Interests and Addresses Time Constraints of a Crowded Curriculum

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was that young adult literature relates to students’ interests as well as provides teachers with options for addressing the time constraints of a crowded curriculum. Repeatedly, teachers who participated in the survey told us that their students don’t like to read, but most of the teachers qualified this statement by adding that the majority of their students will read if they are given literature that relates to their interests and to their lives. One teacher synthesized the challenge of appealing to today’s students by remarking that the fast, action-packed plots in YAL “cater to this microwave generation.” Of course, YAL fits that description perfectly. Among others, teachers listed Lowery, Hinton, Myers, Voight, Marjorie, Weinman, Sharmat, Namioka, Cooney, and Duncan as authors whose works they have incorporated into their curriculum and that their students

enjoy reading. In this way YAL equips teachers to face the challenge of engaging students as readers in the classroom, with the long-term goal of fostering a lifelong love of reading.

Young adult literature appeals to adolescent readers for multiple reasons. It is written about characters with whom they can identify based on issues such as age, conflicts, and world perceptions. It is fast-paced and will hold students’ attention in a rapidly increasing technological society where their world literally flashes before their eyes through television, video games, and computer images. YAL also includes a growing body of work that represents different ethnic and cultural groups, reflective of our ever-growing diverse society (Donelson & Nilsen).

Conversely, some of the traditional canonical selections pose several obstacles for a student of the “microwave generation”; namely, these selections are difficult to read, irrelevant to the students’ lives and interests, and require a teacher’s assistance to decipher meaning. YAL overcomes these obstacles, however. One teacher noted that she “include[s] contemporary YA literature because reluctant readers enjoy these books more than they do the ‘classic’ literature.” Her rationale for including the young adult works is that “reading these books makes them more comfortable with reading so that, hopefully, they will learn to enjoy classic literature.” In this way, the teacher indicated that a curriculum that incorporates YAL provides ways of engaging middle and high school readers.

Additionally, the teachers described several ways that they used YAL to combat the time constraints a crowded curriculum poses. One teacher concisely summed up the problem in her statement, “Too much to cover; too little time.” For this reason, time constraints prompt teachers to seek creative ways to incorporate YAL into their already crowded curriculum. Reading aloud, book study groups, and the Accelerated Reader program were methods the teachers reported that provided a means of incorporating YAL while requiring a relatively small time commitment.

Reading aloud promotes interest in reading (Vacca & Vacca). One teacher stated that all of her students—from the advanced ones to the reluctant and struggling readers—“enjoy reading aloud because I read with them and make voices and characters come alive.”

This teacher went on to explain that she usually reads aloud to her students at the beginning or at the end of the class period.

Several teachers noted that book study groups provide an efficient way to include more young adult literature in their curriculum while allowing their students more choice in what they read. Further, the teachers reported that students who “do not enjoy reading alone seem to enjoy reading in groups,” so in this way the students’ desire to socialize and interact with their peers can be channeled in a positive way that stimulates engagement and learning (Daniels 13).

Theme #3: YAL Helps Struggling and Reluctant Readers Build Literacy Skills

A third theme that emerged from the data analysis was that young adult literature helps struggling and reluctant readers build literacy skills. Research shows that the number-one method of improving reading skills is by practicing reading (Alverman & Phelps, Vacca & Vacca) and that the motivation to read affects reading proficiency (National Center for Educational Statistics). Because they feel unconnected to the books they are assigned to read in English classes, both struggling and successful readers feel antipathy toward reading (Stover). YAL is intentionally written to be accessible to struggling readers as they develop their skills in interacting with a variety of texts (Stover). It presents students with opportunities to read for enjoyment, thereby strengthening the reading and literacy skills we are trying to teach in our English language arts classrooms. Also, because YAL meets the needs of adolescent readers, it is more likely than canonical literature to motivate students to read (Stover). Additionally, as Louise Rosenblatt asserts, “Few teachers of English today would deny that the individuals’ ability to read and enjoy literature is the primary aim of literary study” (64).

As secondary English language arts teachers, we not only want but need to instill a love for reading in our students. Teaching students to truly love literature, which will inevitably lead to increased reading and increased aptitude for literacy skills associated with reading, requires that teachers challenge and re-think some of their traditional approaches to literature instruction. Performance on tests does not necessarily illustrate what students have gained from reading

literature. Competency exams measure the content students could draw from the text; they do not measure what students actually learned from reading literature, what they thought, and what questions it raised (Bushman & Haas).

One teacher notes the use of YAL in her ninth-grade classroom because it enables her “to teach multiple literacy concepts.” She specifically cites Louis Sacher and Lois Lowry as YA authors she uses in such contexts. This teacher also notes that the way to motivate students to read and improve literacy skills is to “make it relevant” to their lives.

Other teachers participating in the study note the fusion of contemporary novels (albeit not always YA novels) with classical novels. As Kaywell notes, classics are not always relevant to our students’ lives.

Such a pairing of contemporary literature and YAL with canonical texts at least bridges the distance between students’ lives and the textual world. Teachers in our study also note choosing age-appropriate literature for their students, which directly speaks not only to readability but also to relevance. One teacher who cites providing students’ with choices based on age-appropriateness says, “I guess that’s why I have a variety of favorite authors so I can recommend them to reluctant readers.” In

conjunction with her use of YAL in her classroom, this teacher clearly recognizes that YA authors are the ones more likely to hold relevance for her adolescent students.

The Voice of Classroom Teachers

Elizabeth, an 8th Grade Language Arts Teacher

Elizabeth, an eighth grade teacher, discusses her use of YA novels that have proven successful in her classroom. She “developed interest in young adult

Teaching students to truly love literature, which will inevitably lead to increased reading and increased aptitude for literacy skills associated with reading, requires that teachers challenge and re-think some of their traditional approaches to literature instruction.

literature through a graduate school course (Young Adult Literature). The course offered many strategies of incorporating young adult literature into the classroom.” Of this course, Elizabeth declares:

By reading over thirty books in a short period of time, I realized the plethora of young adult literature that existed and how easily students could relate to the texts. Also, we created projects and book talks with various novels; therefore, my students now create projects and book talks as well. Students give an oral book talk each six weeks and have various choices of presenting their talk. This also helps students gain confidence in public speaking and introduces their peers to other reads they might be interested in reading. Hooray for Young Adult Literature!

Elizabeth’s experience with her university course in YAL speaks strongly to the need for such courses. It was through this course that she gained exposure to quality YAL and learned the benefits of integrating it into her language arts curriculum. It is entirely probable that in addition to the aforementioned reasons for not integrating YAL into their English

language arts curricula, many teachers do not have enough exposure to quality YAL to make selections that achieve this end.

YA novels that Elizabeth utilizes in her curriculum include *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, and *Somewhere in the Darkness* by Walter Dean Myers. She chose both *Night* and *The Giver* because they complement

other texts in her classroom curriculum. She integrates *Night* as “part of a text set that students read for our Holocaust unit. Students read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and then read several young adult novels, including *Night*.” On the other hand, Elizabeth notes that *The Giver* complements “a short story we read in my advanced classes, ‘There Will Come Soft Rains’ by Ray Bradbury.” She chooses this pairing because it provides a means in her crowded curriculum through

which she can “allow students to examine texts that focus on science fiction.” Within the context of this pairing, Elizabeth has students “contrast present-day society with the other two settings” in order to help them “view the advantages and disadvantages of our world.” Not only does YAL paired with shorter texts address the time constraints that are a reality in classrooms, but it provides a vehicle through which teachers can explicitly teach targeted reading strategies.

In considering her implementation of YAL, Elizabeth also reflects on her students’ attitudes toward reading. She notes that their “attitudes about reading are influenced by a number of issues.” The first issue impacting her students’ attitudes toward reading is that of daily habit. She notes that her students who read daily “are usually very open to any type of reading.” On the other hand, and not surprisingly, Elizabeth observes that “students who have been reluctant to read or have struggled in reading have a negative attitude about reading in general,” making comments such as “Man, reading is stupid” or “Reading is for nerds.” How does Elizabeth hook these reluctant readers who are reflective of many in our own classrooms? She incorporates YAL. She recognizes that “some of the ‘traditional’ reads are sometimes too complex in plot or vocabulary for struggling readers”; YAL enables these readers to successfully read fast-paced texts while benefiting from practicing with varied reading skills. The experiences of Elizabeth’s students with reading and the integration of YAL directly reflect the power of YAL to transform students’ attitudes toward reading and speaks to the lack of appeal that the classics hold for many struggling and reluctant readers. In fact, Elizabeth advises other teachers:

Young adult literature offers numerous advantages in your classroom. First, young adult literature covers a plethora of themes and topics. For example, students reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* can also read young adult novels that provide an array of perspectives from the Holocaust. Therefore, students gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic because of additional texts. Second, students develop a love for reading through adult literature. Personally, I have seen students start reading novels on their own because of a young adult literature book that really “spoke” to them. Some students have faced unspeakable struggles in their life. Therefore, they can appreciate a character like Melinda Sorino in *Speak* who has been raped and can’t seem to talk

Not only does YAL paired with shorter texts address the time constraints that are a reality in classrooms, but it provides a vehicle through which teachers can explicitly teach targeted reading strategies.

about it. In addition, young adult literature gives students characters they can identify with. Characters struggle with peer pressure, self-identity, and changes; as a result, teenagers can readily identify with these same issues. They can also see how characters deal with these struggles and how they, in turn, can. Some teachers argue that “classic” novels should only be taught. I disagree. I feel both “classic” novels and young adult literature are valuable and have their place in the classroom.

Elizabeth’s experiences and resulting advice to other English teachers directly reflects research on the uses of YAL in the curriculum.

Katherine, a 9th and 11th Grade English Teacher

Just as Elizabeth’s interest in teaching young adult literature evolved through her participation in a university course focusing on this genre, so did Katherine’s interest. Katherine asserts, “Through these classes I became aware of that genre of material and fell in love with the content of the books.” Once she had a familiarity with texts in the YA canon and a knowledge of possibilities for implementing them in her curriculum, Katherine was able to utilize YAL in her classroom. At this point, she “saw students’ interests spark with excerpts and then full works integrated into the classroom.” Katherine, however, does not complacently integrate YAL in her curriculum. As noted above, she developed a love for it. Katherine reflects, “I enjoy reading and teaching the books; my students enjoy reading and learning from the books. That is a perfect combination.” Teachers who are genuinely passionate about books and reading stand a better chance of instilling a similar love in their own students because they truly model the readers they hope their students will become.

Katherine implements YA novels such as *Dacey’s Song* by Cynthia Voigt, *Tangerine* by Edward Bloor, and *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse as part of her curriculum. She also uses additional YA novels as part of literature circles (Daniels) in order to provide students with additional reading opportunities in which they have ownership regarding their selections. Of great interest is Katherine’s rationale for incorporating *Tangerine* as a novel read by her entire class. She notes that she first read it in her university course on YAL. In previous years she had taught *Dacey’s Song* and had “found many students had read the book already in elementary or middle school.” *Tangerine* offered an alternative title that she could implement.

Katherine notes the specific draw of implementing *Tangerine*: “It is hard to find a book that will appeal to boys that does not have strong censorship issues, and this book has strong appeal to boys and lacks profanity or sexual situations.” This speaks strongly to research supporting that male readers prove a more difficult audience to find books with appeal than do female readers (Smith & Wilhelm). However, as Katherine also notes, *Tangerine* does have “a few girl characters with whom [her] female students can identify,” thereby maintaining appeal for her female students as well.

Katherine’s teaching experience has shown her that “Overall, most students, regardless of academic ability, do not like to read.” Even the few students she has annually who do enjoy reading for pleasure, become “bored when reading the textbook in class.” For years research has supported the notion that textbooks lack appeal (Vacca & Vacca). In reflecting on this, Katherine says, “I think they *expect* textbooks to be boring and see a ray of hope that this material outside of the book could be more appealing.” Katherine also notes that because novels are shorter in length than textbooks, that they seem more manageable to students and that students “stay more interested in YA literature than in traditional works.” This level of interest takes the form of attentiveness during class, completion of assignments, and discussion about the content of the novels.

All of the issues that Katherine has observed pertaining to students’ attitudes toward reading support the implementation of YAL within the English language arts curriculum. For example, YA novels are of a length that is manageable for student readers and for time constraints of classroom curriculum, as was also reflected by Elizabeth’s implementation of YAL.

Katherine advises novice classroom teachers to “not let traditionalists squelch [their] desire to use these books.” She continues, “There is research-based evidence of successful teaching through their use, and if you can meet required learning objectives with a YA

“I think they *expect* textbooks to be boring and see a ray of hope that this material outside of the book could be more appealing.”

book's use, then use it." Katherine and Elizabeth both have classrooms that live this advice in their curriculum; it can be done. Katherine warns veteran classroom teachers not currently integrating YAL in their curriculum that they "are missing out on a fantastic teaching tool." The reality is that it can be difficult for teachers, especially high school teachers, to make YAL fit with their curriculum due to constraints of literature classes such as time periods. Aware of this, Katherine advises, "if you don't use YA authors because you teach 10th grade early American literature and no authors writing in that time period, of course, write YAL, then find a contemporary YAL title SET during the time period you are locked into and pair it with a traditional work."

While Katherine's advice is grounded in her own classroom experiences, it directly aligns with the arguments current research make for using YAL.

Recommendations

The findings of our study firmly support what research on reading and the use of young adult literature in the English language arts curriculum already asserts. They show that young adult literature:

- offers teachers reasonable options for implementing full-length works of literature in their curriculum that do contain sophisticated literary devices,
- matches students' interests,
- addresses the time constraints of a crowded curriculum,
- provides a bridge for reluctant and struggling readers in successfully reading classic works of literature, and
- builds literacy skills in readers.

One teacher surveyed in our study states that many of her students "like to read as long as it relates to them." Another participant states, "Most are reluctant readers. However, many of them will read a book if they can figure out what interests them." These are the most basic, yet salient, arguments for integrating YAL. As teachers, let's give students material to read that is relevant to them and then use that to meet all of the standards and assessment objectives in today's classroom. With creativity, passion, and planning, it can be done, as this small sample of teachers demonstrates.

Louel Gibbons teaches eleventh grade English at Brookwood High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Her research interests include rhetorical grammar and improving literacy across the content areas.

Jennifer Dail has served as an assistant professor in the Secondary English Education program at The University of Alabama and will join Kennesaw State University's English Education faculty this fall. Her current research interests include the use of digital technologies for pre-service teachers' self-reflectivity and the use of young adult texts to critically engage students.

Joyce Stallworth is the Associate Dean in the College of Education at The University of Alabama. Her research interests are focused on the successful integration of young adult and multicultural literature into the secondary curriculum and pre-service and beginning English language arts teachers' perceptions of and beliefs about effective pedagogy.

Works Cited

- Allington, Richard L. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*. New York: Longman, 2001.
- Alverman, Donna E., & Stephen F. Phelps. *Content Reading and Literacy*. 3rd Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002.
- Bushman, John H., & Kay Parks Haas. *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 1997.
- Daniels, Harvey. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1994.
- Donelson, Kenneth L., & Alleen Pace Nilsen. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. 7th Ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2004.
- Ericson, Bonnie O. "Reading in High School English Classes: An Overview." *Teaching Reading in High School English Classes*. Bonnie O. Ericson, Ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English (2001): 1-22.
- Gallo, Don. "How Classics Create an Aliterate Society." *English Journal* 90.3 (2001): 33-39.
- Goodman, Ken. *On Reading: A Common-sense Look at the Nature of Language and the Science of Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.
- Hipple, Ted. "It's the THAT, Teacher." *English Journal* 86.3 (1997): 15-17.
- Jago, Carol. *With Rigor for All: Teaching Classics to Contemporary Students*. Portland, ME: Calendar Islands, 2000.
- Kaywell, Joan F. (Ed.). *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 1993.

- Knickerbocker, J.L., & Rycik, J. "Growing into Literature: Adolescents' Literary Interpretation and Appreciation." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 46.3 (2002): 196-208.
- Miles, Matthew B., & Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994.
- National Center for Education Statistics. *National Assessment of Adult Literacy: Defining and Measuring Literacy*. (2003). Retrieved May 12, 2003, from <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/defining/defining.asp>.
- Reed, Arthea J.S. *Reaching Adolescents: The Young Adult Book and the School*. New York: Merrill, 1994.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature as Exploration*. 4th Ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1991.
- Smith, Michael W., & Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. "Reading Don't Fix No Chevys": *Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
- Stover, Lois T. "The Place of Young Adult Literature in Secondary Reading Programs." *Teaching Reading in High School English Classes*. Bonnie O. Ericson, Ed. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English (2001): 115-138.
- Vacca, Richard T., & JoAnne L. Vacca. *Content Area Reading: Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum*. 7th Ed. Boston: Pearson, 2005.

Growing Up Female around the Globe with Young Adult Literature

Growing up female can be difficult and confusing, but for many young women in other parts of the world, being female can be painful and dangerous. As important as it is for young adult (YA) literature to offer hope and guidance, it is equally important for literature to help us understand the human condition, in this case the conditions that affect young women worldwide. Through literature, authors show the realities of their times and spaces. Their stories are gripping, but the realities are based in facts and research.

Many of the books chosen here deal with common problems female teens encounter in their developing years. The books focus on drugs, sex, relationships, abuse, disorders, peer pressure, and self-inflicted pain. The characters in the annotated novels are female teenagers who suffer from a range of cultural crises, yet exemplify sources of hope and remediation. Readers might relate to the characters, definitely learn from them, and some will realize they are not alone. But there are other books that deal with problems relating to places, cultures, traditions, and practices new to many teen females. As a way to organize the literature, books set in the United States are presented first and then books set in other countries are organized by authors' last names. To provide readers with contexts for reading or thinking about the books annotated here, we have provided some striking facts, statistics, and sources for further exploration.

Female Genital Mutilation Facts/Statistics

- Amnesty International estimates that 135 million of

the world's girls and women have undergone genital mutilation, and two million girls a year are at risk of mutilation—approximately 6,000 per day. "Female Genital Mutilation." *Amnesty International*. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/femgen/fgm1.htm>

- According to the World Health Organization, most of the women and girls who have been genitally mutilated live in 28 African countries. Some live in the Middle East and Asia, but these women and girls are increasingly found living in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. "Female Genital Mutilation." Retrieved July 16, 2005, from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/index/htm>

No Condition Is Permanent by Cristina Kessler (U.S.A. to Africa)

When 14-year-old Jodie finds out that her anthropologist mother is forcing her to move halfway around the world from California to Sierra Leone, West Africa, in order to study tribal customs, Jodie pitches a fit. Jodie worries if she'll be able to make any friends in this tiny village where she doesn't even know the language. Jodie's fears are soon allayed when she meets Khadi, a friendly village girl. Soon the girls become inseparable. Jodie teaches Khadi how to read and write—skills reserved only for boys in this culture—and Khadi teaches Jodie how to speak the language and dress like the other girls. Jodie becomes curious and feels alienated when Khadi and the other teenage girls disappear for several days at a time, but

she is warned not to ask any questions. When Jodie discovers that the village girls are preparing for a coming-of-age ceremony, which includes female circumcision, Jodie decides she must save her friend from this horrible ritual. Jodie's actions only complicate things, resulting in a dramatic climax.

The Red Moon by Kuwana Haulsey (Africa)

The novel begins in Harlem and moves quickly to a flashback to Africa. Nasarian, is an outcast within her Kenyan tribe for two reasons: she is getting educated and she has refused to be circumcised for marriage. When her Samburu father dies, the women in her family must submit to the will of the males in the family. Her mother, a Somalian, soon dies, leaving Nasarian defenseless. Because she continues to refuse circumcision, a practice in the Samburu tribe, she cannot be married. As a result, Nasarian is given to a cousin as a house servant to care for his youngest daughter. Nasarian watches helplessly as her young cousin endures the brutality of circumcision and ultimately dies. Nasarian runs away and endures many hardships before eventually going to college in Nairobi. Nasarian studies hard and struggles not only to fit into the college environment, but also to shed the demons that haunt her from her past. She falls in love with Augustin, an uneducated Samburu porter, and becomes pregnant. Augustin wants her to be circumcised for marriage as a second wife. Having already received a scholarship to study creative writing in the United States, Nasarian flees from Augustin. When he catches her and beats her, she betrays him in order to escape.

Oppression of Women Facts/Statistics

- Domestic violence is not a crime in Pakistan, and men have the right to beat their wives, sisters, and daughters. A woman who is raped must prove the rape with evidence of four males or else she will be prosecuted for adultery.
Manzoor, R. (November 3, 2004). "Musharraf's Hypocrisy Won't End Violence to Women." Retrieved July 15, 2005. <http://www.socialistworld.net.eng/2004/11/03oakistan.htm>.
- According to an IRIN News Report (February 2, 2005), the incidence of domestic physical, sexual,

and verbal violence against women in Pakistan is among the highest in the world. It is estimated that 80% of Pakistani women suffer from such abuse. Pakistan: Violence Against Women Still a Huge Problem. Retrieved July 15, 2005. http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=45340&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=PAKISTAN

Breathing Underwater by Alex Flinn (U.S.A.)

Nick Andreas's peers think that he is rich, popular, and perfect, but his girlfriend knows otherwise; Caitlin and her family have placed a restraining order on him. At 16, Nick is sentenced to six months of counseling that includes his writing 500 words per week in a journal in order to explain how he's ended up in Mario Ortega's Family Violence class with six other angry guys who hit their girlfriends. During his writing process, readers can see the perpetuation of domestic violence as Nick's home life is exposed.

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis (Afghanistan)

Set in the early years of the Taliban regime, this topical novel for middle readers explores the harsh realities of life for girls and women in modern-day Afghanistan. Eleven-year-old Parvana has rarely been outdoors. Barred from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, she is trapped inside her family's one-room home. Taliban laws require women to fully cover themselves and ban girls from attending school or going out unescorted. When the Taliban imprisons her father, Parvana disguises herself as a boy to support her mother, two sisters, and baby brother. Parvana's disguise gives her a measure of freedom and the means to support her family while providing a reading service for illiterates.

Second Class Citizen by Buchi Emecheta (Africa)

This inspiring autobiographical novel shows the resourcefulness of a Nigerian woman determined to overcome strict tribal domination of females. Adah's dream is to go to school and eventually study in the United Kingdom even though her culture discourages females from attaining much more than a basic

education. When her father dies, Adah becomes—as necessity and tradition dictate—a servant in relatives’ homes. She struggles to attend school and graduates only to confront another obstacle. According to tradition, she must marry if she is to have a home. Her husband turns out to be lazy, self-centered, and chauvinistic, and Adah stays in Nigeria while supporting his studies in England. Adah eventually follows him to England with their two children, only to find both old and new oppression. Fortunately, Adah is indomitable in her determination to take charge of her life and make it better for herself and for her children.

Journey for the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran by Roya Hakakian (Iran)

Told from the perspective of a young Jewish girl growing up in Iran during the fundamentalist Muslim revolution, Roya Hakakian tells of the people’s frustration of Mohammed Reza Shah’s unwillingness to extend more freedom to the Iranian people. Although Roya leads a peaceful life as an Iranian Jew, she recounts stories of Iranian students who rebel against the Shah’s oppression. Once the Shah is exiled and the Ayatollah Khomeini rises to power, Roya realizes the true impact that this daughter of the revolution never dreamed she would experience: Roya and her family are faced with the decision to remain in their homeland in the face of persecution or to flee in order to maintain their dignity and freedom.

My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban by Latifa (Afghanistan)

In 1989, civil war broke out in Afghanistan among the rivaling forces of different ethnic backgrounds. During these years, Latifa and her family grew accustomed to the murderous fighting. Latifa, like other Afghan teenagers, finds refuge in the universal passions and interests of adolescents: Her bedroom walls are adorned with Brooke Shield posters, and she spends hours listening to rock music and watching popular western videos. On the morning of September 27, 1996, all comes to an end when Afghanistan falls to the Taliban. Shortly thereafter, the repressive edicts of the new regime are ruthlessly imposed and females are no longer allowed to attend school. Mired in despair, Latifa takes stock of her new situation and

looks for ways to improve the conditions of those around her. At great risk to her personal safety, Latifa opens a secret school for children.

Haveli by Suzanne Fisher Staples (Pakistan)

In this sequel to *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, Shabanu is like a beautiful but caged desert bird held captive by the bounds of custom. Although her husband Rahim, an older wealthy Pakistani land owner, adores Shabanu and her five-year-old daughter, Mumtaz, he demands their obedience. While Rahim is preoccupied with politics, his other two wives maliciously scheme against Shabanu. To protect her daughter, Shabanu desperately makes plans for their future by running away to the home of Rahim’s widowed sister in the ancient city of Lahore. There her situation becomes more perilous when Shabanu helps her friend Zabo hide from her arranged marriage to a horrible man and meets Omar, who is her husband’s nephew.

Poverty Facts/Statistics

- According to the 1994 Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, approximately one out of four children in America lives in poverty. “Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children. New York: Carnegie Corporation. Retrieved September 28, 2005. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_148_37/ai_97723213/pg_4
- Over a billion children are severely deprived of one or more of the necessities essential to childhood. In millions: 90 lack food, 400 lack safe water, 640 lack shelter, 500 lack sanitation, 300 lack access to information, 270 lack health care, and 140 lack schooling. *The State of the World’s Children 2005*. “Childhood Under Threat.” Retrieved September 28, 2005. <http://www.unicefusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=duLR1800H&b=262152>

Kira Kira by Cynthia Kadohata (U.S.A.)

Set in 1951 during the post World War II Era, a Japanese-American family move from Iowa to rural

Georgia in an attempt to improve their living conditions. Five-year-old Katie, her older sister Lynn, and brother Sammy are spurned by their peers, but these siblings find solace in their devotion to one another. Their parents toil untold hours under horrendous conditions at the local poultry hatchery in order to fulfill their lifelong dream—to buy a home. All of this is shattered when Lynn suffers from a devastating illness that tests the family’s fortitude. This Newbery award-winning novel is the story of a clash of cultures as well as the story of the overwhelming hardships endured by the Takeshima family as they struggle to attain the American dream.

***Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan (U.S.A.)**

Esperanza and her mother are forced to flee their prosperous home in Mexico, El Rancho de las Rosas. They flee to a company-owned Mexican work camp outside of Los Angeles where they live in dirty, cramped quarters. At thirteen, Esperanza has to care for her ailing mother, work the fields, and care for the young ones living with them—all tasks unbecoming a rich Mexican rancher’s daughter who should be attending a private school in Mexico.

***The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl* by Ma Yan (China)**

While growing up in a drought-stricken rural area of northwest China, Ma Yan sees education as the only hope for escaping a life of devastating poverty. *The Diary of Ma Yan* is the true story of how a 14-year-old girl’s struggle, courage, and persistence helped her to stay in school. This book inspired the establishment of *The Association for the Children of Ningxia*, an international charitable organization dedicated to helping children like Ma Yan stay in school.

AIDS Facts/Statistics

- AIDS is the number one cause of death in Africa and the fourth leading cause of death globally. “The Facts: The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic.” Know HIV/AIDS. Retrieved July 16, 2005. http://www.knowhivaid.org/ep_facts.html
- By the end of 2002, an estimated 42 million people

worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS. Over 30 million of them were in sub-Saharan Africa. Fifty-five percent of the HIV-positive people in sub-Saharan Africa are women, with six of seven HIV-positive children being girls.

“Africa Health.” Globe Africa. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.globeafrica.com/Health/hivstats.html>

- At the end of 2003, 12 million children orphaned by AIDS are living in Sub-Saharan Africa. “World HIV/AIDS Statistics.” Avert. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm>.
- Sub-Saharan Africa had 30 million people living with HIV/AIDS in early 2003 after 3.5 million new infections in 2002. 2.4 million Africans died in 2002. Ten million young people (aged 15–24) and almost 3 million children under 15 are living with HIV. Dixon, Patrick. “AIDS in Africa.” Global Change. Retrieved 16 July 2005. <http://www.globalchange.com/aidsafrica.htm>.

***It Happened to Nancy* by Beatrice Sparks (U.S.A.)**

Beatrice Sparks edits an anonymous teenager’s diary after her tragic death from AIDS, resulting from a one-time date rape. “Nancy” shares her story from beginning to end with her counselor providing answers to questions Nancy raises throughout.

***Nine Hills to Nambonkaha* by Sarah Erdman (Africa)**

Sarah Erdman lived in several different countries as a youth, so it is little surprise she volunteered for two years in Nambonkaha, a northern Ivory Coast village, after she graduated from college. From 1998–2000, she worked as a health care volunteer, dealing with pregnancy, malnutrition, and child-care issues. A significant challenge for Sarah was trying to meld medical knowledge with villagers’ traditional beliefs. Villagers, for example, believed that illness and misfortune were caused by witchcraft rather than infection. Such beliefs were particularly dangerous when AIDS first comes to the village by way of a widow and her son. Though an important issue for Erdman’s work, her book is far more than health care, AIDS prevention, or birth control. Sarah tells how she

learns local ways, how she gains the confidence of the villagers, and how there were some traditional practices she could do nothing about—such as female genital mutilation. She tells the village’s story with love and sensitivity; the people and the village and their customs come alive in her prose. As a female, her story has a decidedly female slant, but health care issues are nearly always grounded in female issues.

***Chanda’s Secrets* by Allan Stratton (Africa)**

Sixteen-year-old Chanda’s life is tough. Her mother has been married several times, she has been sexually abused by one of her stepfathers, and she has just discovered that her beautiful little sister is dead—kidnapped from the world by an epidemic that plagues many of the people who live in her fictional, yet seemingly real, African town. Due to the horrific conditions, Chanda learns what it means to grow up before her time. When her mother disappears and she is forced to abandon her studies and care for her siblings, Chanda confronts her community head on. She finds a voice she never knew she had and comes to term with the fact that her mother might die and she too might be infected by the less than beautiful beast—AIDS.

Depression Facts/Statistics

- In Australia, the number of children and adolescents who suffer from depression is estimated at about 100,000, and the number of prescriptions for anti-depressants issued per month to people under the age of 19 is estimated at about 20,000. “Mental Illness.” Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.youthfacts.com.au/index.php?option = displaypage&Itemid = 265&op = page#depression>.
- At any point in time, up to 5% of adolescents experience depression that is severe enough to warrant treatment, and around 20% of young people will have experienced significant depressive symptoms by the time they reach adulthood. “What are the different stages of depression and anxiety?” Beyond Blue: The National Depression Initiative. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link id = 1.7&print = true#Youth>.

- The rates of depressive disorders are three times higher for young women than for young men and depression among 18-24 year old women (10%) is higher than the overall female rate of 7%. “Young Women’s Health: Depression and Risk-taking Behaviour.” Department for Women. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/PDF/Archived/Young%20Womens%20/Health.pdf>.

***Upstream* by Melissa Lion (U.S.A.)**

Living with her unconventional mother and sisters in rural Alaska, Martha copes with the death of her boyfriend, Steven, the summer before her senior year of high school. Consumed by depression, Martha attempts to restore normalcy, but every day she is tormented by her memories of Steven and her role in his death. When investigators probe the details of the accident, Martha is forced to confront her feelings of guilt and inadequacy. With the support of her family and friends, Martha confronts this tragedy head on.

***Saving Francesca* by Melina Marchetta (Australia)**

Australian born Francesca “Frankie” Spinelli is about to enter her 11th year of high school. Although she would typically be excited about moving on and almost moving out, this year is going to be quite different. So that she might gain more exposure to “opportunity,” as her pushy mother puts it, Frankie is forced to attend St. Sebastian’s, a historically all-male school. Angry with her mother’s decision to make her attend a school where less than 4% percent of the students are female and teachers still refer to students as *gentlemen*, Frankie is reluctant to make friends, partly due to the fact that the only people available for friendship are the people she shunned at school last year while her so-called buddies molded her into whomever they wanted her to be. And, if the uncomfortable situation at school isn’t enough to stress Frankie out, the sudden sickness of her mother is sure to do her in. With no warning at all, Frankie’s crazy, out-spoken, and intelligent mom refuses to get out of bed. A stranger at school and at home, Frankie must figure out who she is and how to save both her mother and herself from the dark cloud of depression and teen angst.

Homosexuality Facts/Statistics

- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, homosexuality has existed in most societies for as long as recorded descriptions of sexual beliefs and practices have been available, but it wasn't until 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association reclassified homosexuality as a sexual orientation/expression rather than as a mental disorder. "Policy Statement on Homosexuality and Adolescence (RE9332)" published by The American Academy of Pediatrics, 1993, Vol. 92. <http://www.aap.org/policy/05072.html>
- Societal attitudes toward homosexuality have had a decisive impact on the extent to which individuals have hidden or made known their sexual orientation. In fact, the psychosocial problems of gay and lesbian adolescents are primarily the result of societal stigma, hostility, hatred, and isolation. The gravity of these stresses is underscored by current data that document that gay youths account for up to 30% of all completed adolescent suicides. Approximately 30% of a surveyed group of gay and bisexual males have attempted suicide at least once. "Policy Statement on Homosexuality and Adolescence (RE9332)" published by The American Academy of Pediatrics, 1993, Vol. 92. <http://www.aap.org/policy/05072.html>
- To date, at least 10 peer-reviewed studies have found a clinically and statistically significant association between suicide attempts and homosexuality, strongest among males. "Suicide and Sexual Orientation: Nearing the End of Controversy?" by Gary Remafedi, MD, MPH published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, October 1999, Vol. 56, No. 10. <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/issues/v56n10/rfull/ycm9279.html>

***Far from Xanadu* by Julie Anne Peters (U.S.A.)**

In rural Kansas, a girl softball star, Mike Szabo, comes to terms with her alcoholic father's suicide. In the two years following his death, Mike's dysfunctional family has offered her little support and love. In fact, her morbidly obese mother has not uttered a word to her since his suicide. When Xanadu moves to

Coalton, Mike instantly falls in love with her; however, Xanadu is not gay.

NOTE: We discuss this topic in the United States, but none of us could find any book that addresses this issue in another country. We all believe that is a fact worth noting.

Suicide Facts/Statistics

- An estimated 1.7 million adolescents die each year, the victims of accidents, suicide, violence, pregnancy-related complications, and other illnesses that are either preventable or treatable. World Health Organization, "Overview of Child and Adolescent Health and Development." Retrieved July 15, 2005. http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/overview/ahd/adh_over.htm

***Things Left Unsaid: A Novel in Poems* by Stephanie Hemphill (U.S.A.)**

Eleventh-grader Sarah Lewis plays the part of the average teenager who's focused on boys, girlfriends, shopping, and appeasing her parents. As her act wears thin, Sarah yearns for something else—something different. This restlessness leads Sarah into an intense friendship with Robin, a dressed-in-black rebel with a defiant, tough-talking façade. When Robin attempts suicide, Sarah is forced to reassess her self-identity.

***Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori (Japan)**

Yuki Okuda is only ten years old when her mother, Shizuko, commits suicide. Her father hastily remarries, which places an additional burden on Yuki's development. Yuki must come to terms with her mother's death, adjust to stoic parents, and accept her own development.

War Facts/Statistics

- Between 1986-1996, armed conflicts took the lives of over two million children. During that same time period, over six million children were seriously injured or disabled, over one million lost their families, and more than ten million were traumatized. "War Affected Children." FTC Worldwide. Retrieved

July 16, 2005. http://www.freethechildren.org/youthinaction/war_affected_children.htm.

- For 36 years, Guatemala was terrorized and torn apart by a guerrilla war that left over 100,000 dead and one million people displaced. Brutal in both depth and duration, the war formally ended in 1996.
“Guatemala.” FTC Worldwide. Retrieved July 16, 2005. http://www.freethechildren.com/ftcworldwide/ftc_project_guatemala.htm.

***Tangled Threads* by Pegi Deitz Shea (U.S.A. from Thailand)**

Mai Yang has spent 10 of her 13 years in a refugee camp in Ban Vinai, Thailand. Originally from Laos, Mai and her grandmother fled after their village was poisoned by “yellow rain” dropped from airplanes. Finally, after long last, Mai and her grandmother are getting approved to relocate to the United States where Mai’s uncle and cousins had gone five years earlier. Mai’s certain all of their problems will end once they move in with her uncle and cousins in Providence, Rhode Island, but things do not go smoothly. Mai’s cousins have changed, and she doesn’t understand many things about this new country. As if things can’t get any worse, Mai learns a terrible secret her grandmother kept from her and the family.

***A Stone in My Hand* by Cathryn Clinton (Palestine)**

This story of a Palestinian girl and her family living under Israeli military occupation captures 11-year-old Malaak’s experiences of the occupation, and the never-ending cycle of anger and retaliation. Malaak’s father has been killed in a bus bombing, and her brother has joined a youth activist group that engages in terrorist activities. Malaak finds courage and risks her life, but there are no happy endings or simplistic solutions. Clinton shows the diversity of Palestinians in class, religion, and politics.

***A Sky So Close* by Betool Khedairi (Iraq)**

A first-person narrative, this novel in translation is a powerful depiction of the clash between East and West and of a young girl shaped by two cultures yet fully accepted by neither. This story of a girl growing

up in wartime Iraq sparked controversy when it was published in the Middle East. Her father is Iraqi; her mother is British. The novel begins in a peaceful village outside Baghdad, but when the narrator is a teenager, Iraq and Iran are at war and her family moves to Baghdad, where her mother and father continue their personal conflict. Her father dies, and the narrator falls in love with an Iraqi soldier, who is a Christian. When the Gulf War begins, she accompanies her mother, who has terminal cancer, to England, where her cultural estrangement continues. Readers never learn the name of the narrator in this tale.

***Tree Girl* by Ben Mikaelson (Mexico)**

Loosely based on fact, *Tree Girl* is the tale of Gabriela Flores, a 14-year-old girl who loves to climb trees so she can appreciate and contemplate the natural splendor of the forest that surrounds her. Despite her infatuation with nature, Gabriela’s view from the trees becomes less than beautiful when, from the highest limbs, she witnesses the murder of her teachers, fellow classmates, and nearly all of the people in her Mayan village. Realizing she must find a way to escape the American-trained guerillas, Gabriela begins her quest to reach the Mexican border where she hopes to be reunited with her younger sister. Unfortunately, on her way to the refugee camp, she is exposed to more violence and brutality. Camouflaging herself at the top of a tree once more, Gabriela watches as another village is ransacked and destroyed; women and children are beaten, raped, and finally executed. When there is no one left to murder and the soldiers leave, Gabriela climbs down from her perch and promises never to climb again. Gabriella continues her journey north and while hoping to find her sister, she somehow manages to find herself.

***Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye (Jerusalem from U.S.A.)**

Liyana, a 14-year-old Arab-American girl, is unhappy when her father, a native Palestinian doctor, decides to move the family from St. Louis to Jerusalem. Immediately, she is immersed into a culture where only tourists are permitted to wear shorts, and relationships between boys and girls are restricted. When Liyana falls in love with Omer, a Jewish boy, she goes against family, culture, and tradition. Under-

lying their daily lives is the violence between Palestinian and Jew. Israeli soldiers destroy her grandmother's bathroom, but in turn, Palestinians bomb a Jewish marketplace. Liyana's friend is shot and her father is jailed. Readers experience the varying landscapes, from villages to Bedouin camps, and the story resonates with hope for peace and understanding.

***Under the Persimmon Tree* by Suzanne Fisher Staples (Afghanistan)**

In war-torn Afghanistan, young Najmah must find a way to survive after the Taliban takes her father and brother away to fight in the war. Because her mother is eight months pregnant and cannot travel, they are unable to flee to Peshawar, Pakistan. As bombs fall around her, Najmah hides among the boulders and witnesses something so tragic she can no longer speak. Concurrently, an American Muslim named Nusrat has organized a school in Peshawar for the refugee children. Nusrat has not heard from her husband, a medical doctor working in a clinic based in Afghanistan north of Kandahar and fears for his safety. Staples masterfully weaves these two stories together into a gripping and suspenseful drama.

Conclusion

It was our intention to show that there are, of course, many similarities across cultures, but there are also many striking differences. It is not always enough to see only ourselves in literature; we need to see others. Young adult literature can provide a variety of lenses through which to view the adolescent female condition and can help broaden the awareness of its readers.

Joan F. Kaywell is a Full Professor of English Education at the University of South Florida where she teaches pre-service and practicing teachers ways to improve literacy. She was President of ALAN in 1999 and currently serves as its Membership Secretary. She is best known for Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics (Christopher Gordon) and has edited a new book, Dear Author: Letters of Hope, which will be available from Philomel in spring 2007.

Patricia Proudfoot Kelly is Professor Emerita of English Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, VA, where she teaches critical literary theory applications to young adult literature. She was President of ALAN in 1990, served as a Co-editor of

The ALAN Review for five years, and has contributed several chapters to Kaywell's Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics.

Christi Underwood Edge earned her M.A. degree in English Education from the University of South Florida and currently teaches at Sickles High School in Tampa, Florida.

Larissa McCoy earned her M.Ed. degree in English Education from the University of South Florida and currently teaches at Alonso High School in Tampa, Florida.

Narisa Steinberg is pursuing her M.A.T. degree from the University of South Florida and teaches English at Alonso High School in Tampa, Florida.

Works Cited

- Clinton, Cathryn. *A Stone in My Hand*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 2002.
- Ellis, Deborah. *The Breadwinner*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 2001.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Second Class Citizen*. New York: George Braziller, 1983.
- Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2003.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breathing Underwater*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Hakakian, Roya. *Journey for the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*. New York: Crown, 2004.
- Haulsey, Kuwana. *The Red Moon*. New York: Villard, 2001.
- Hemphill, Stephanie. *Things Left Unsaid: A Novel in Poems*. New York: Hyperion, 2005.
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Kira Kira*. New York: Atheneum, 2004.
- Kessler, Cristina. *No Condition Is Permanent*. New York: Philomel, 2000.
- Khedairi, Betool. *A Sky So Close*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
- Latifa. *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban*. New York: Hyperion, 2001.
- Lion, Melissa. *Upstream*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books, 2005.
- Marchetta, Melina. *Saving Francesca*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Mikaelsen, Ben. *Tree Girl*. New York: Rayo, 2004.
- Mori, Kyoko. *Shizuko's Daughter*. New York: Fawcett, 1994.
- Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Habibi*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997.
- Peters, Julie Anne. *Far from Xanadu*. New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2005.
- Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2000.
- Shea, Pegi Deitz. *Tangled Threads*. New York: Clarion, 2003.
- Sparks, Beatrice. (Ed.). *It Happened to Nancy*. New York: Avon, 1994.
- Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Haveli*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1995.
- Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Under the Persimmon Tree*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2005.
- Stratton, Allan. *Chanda's Secrets*. New York: Annick Press, 2004.
- Yan, Ma. *The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Boys Finding First Love:

Soul-searching in *The Center of the World* and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*

While attending the 2005 ALAN Workshop in Pittsburgh, I had the pleasure of hearing Laurie Halse Anderson share wise words regarding stories, light, and, interestingly enough, boys. As she spoke about the coming of age experiences of her son and his friends, she noted that the

souls of young men may be likened to their feet. They are big and grow quickly but are crammed into shoe space that is increasingly too small. The interior lives of boys, the thoughts that occupy their minds and reflect their heart's true longings, are reflected in two recently published novels for young adult readers, *The Center of the World* ([Andreas Steinhöfel](#)) and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* ([Shyam Selvadurai](#)). Both novels examine the experience of first love and the accompanying emotions and effects on the male protagonist and those closest to him, encouraging readers to wiggle their toes as they seek more space in the nurturing of their souls.

The Stories

Andreas Steinhöfel's *The Center of the World* tells the story of seventeen-year-old Phil, who lives with his twin sister, Dianne, and mother, Glass, in an old castle in a small German town. The father he has never met and knows little to nothing about remains in America. Glass' promiscuous sexual behavior makes the children targets of the neighborhood bullies' taunts and jeers and relegates them to the role of outsiders in the community. Phil is befriended by Kat, the daughter of the school headmaster, who is willful, proud, and possessive. When Phil falls in love with the new boy, Nicholas, Kat supports the relationship but soon finds herself falling for Nicholas' charms, too. In order to nurse and ultimately heal the wounds that result from the love triangle, Phil must decide what is most important to him, accept his own self-worth, and become a more active participant in his life. This novel is rich and multi-layered with several interwoven stories that take the reader backward and forward in time, weaving a complex story of love, betrayal, and family connection. As Phil reveals and reflects upon his relationships with those around him—his sister, his mother, his seafaring uncle, his adult friends, his lover, his enemies, even his absent father—we are pushed and pulled through time and given the opportunity to bear witness to his coming of age. Originally published in Hamburg, Germany in 1998, the novel rightfully earned the Buxtehuder Bulle Prize for Best Young Adult Novel in Germany and was short-listed for the German Children's Literature Award.

When Phil falls in love with the new boy, Nicholas, Kat supports the relationship but soon finds herself falling for Nicholas' charms, too. In order to nurse and ultimately heal the wounds that result from the love triangle, Phil must decide what is most important to him, accept his own self-worth, and become a more active participant in his life.

Shyam Selvadurai's *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* is set in Sri Lanka in 1980. Selvadurai describes the experiences of fourteen-year-old Amrith, an orphan living with his mother's childhood friend and her husband and two daughters, Mala and Selvi. It is between school terms, and Amrith dreads the long, lonely days that lie ahead. He plans to dedicate some of his time to learning lines and rehearsing for his school's production of *Othello*, in which he pines to play the role of Desdemona and earn the coveted prize awarded to the best actor in a female role, an award he managed to score the year before. Amrith is shocked to learn that he has a cousin close in age, the son of his mother's brother, a man who tormented his young sister and drove away his own wife. When this cousin, Nires, arrives from Canada, he and Amrith become fast friends. Amrith is enthralled by his cousin's mischievous ways and finds himself sexually attracted to the boy, although the feeling is not mutual. When Amrith witnesses a growing romantic relationship between Mala and Nires, he is enraged. Driven by his jealousy, he attempts to drown young Mala in the monsoon sea. Shocked by his own behavior, Amrith is forced to face his emotions and come to accept his identity, even if it means admitting the truth about his mother and living a life he never expected to lead. The novel reflects a story-within-a-story form, as the primary plot events parallel Amrith's dealings with the play performance, as well as the play itself. The love, rage, jealousy, and sexuality that run through *Othello* eventually emerge in Amrith's daily life.

Unique Settings, Common Experiences

Despite the unique geographical locales represented in these two novels, the protagonists undergo common experiences in their first encounters with romantic love. In both novels, the young men experience similar steps as they negotiate the trials and triumphs of first love, from the initial sense of longing to the fear of becoming vulnerable to the act of ultimate betrayal (as first love is often not the last).

First Love and Longing

Both Phil (*Center*) and Amrith (*Swimming*) are lonely. Phil longs for the father he has never met and, with the exception of his connection to Kat, feels

isolated both physically and emotionally from his peers, who scoff at his mother's outwardly sexual behavior. He has never been in love and considers this truth "one of the blank areas on the map of [his] soul" (86). Amrith longs for the mother he has lost and, although he lives with his aunt, uncle, and cousins, feels orphaned and without family. He suffers increasingly dark moods, feeling "that familiar inner blackness come in and sweep him out, like a current. He was helpless against its power—like being held underwater in the salty murkiness of a churned-up sea" (32).

With the possibility of romantic love, however, comes a sense of longing, a desire for connectedness that helps to dispel the sadness of unwanted solitude. For Phil, hope arrives in the guise of Nicholas, a young man with a wild reputation and black hair, white skin, and incredibly red lips. After being expelled from several other schools, Nicholas arrives as the new transfer student, possessing a mystique that results in admiration on behalf of his peers immediately upon admittance. Phil remembers seeing Nicholas four years earlier; he has held Nicholas' memory close in hopes of one day meeting the boy who made his heart skip a beat when they made eye contact near the church steps (96). And now, the dream has come to fruition. Phil is fascinated by Nicholas, watching him run during track practice (114), noticing his peculiar habit of collecting odd items from the ground and surreptitiously placing them in his pocket (126), and fantasizing about his long legs and slender hands (128).

For Amrith, an escape from his isolation results from new knowledge of the existence of his cousin, Nires, the son of his mother's bullying brother. Nires, an often irresponsible, regularly deceptive, and always charming young man, arrives with his father from Canada on business, and a meeting is arranged. When Amrith first enters the company of Nires, he is mesmerized by his cousin's audacity in dealing with his tyrannical father (99, 105), his exaggerated stories

With the possibility of romantic love, however, comes a sense of longing, a desire for connectedness that helps to dispel the sadness of unwanted solitude.

of life in Canada (116), and the glamorous way he “leaned on the balustrade, drawing on his cigarette and exhaling between slightly parted lips, with the panache of those men in the cigarette ads that play before a film” (111). Niresh finds it difficult to concentrate upon much else, including learning his lines for the play.

First Love and the Vulnerable Condition

With the onset of romantic love comes a sense of belonging, an awareness that one’s existence is somehow connected to that of another. As his relationship with Nicholas develops both physically and

emotionally, Phil (*Center*) feels truly alive, elated. When the two young men converse for the first time after a happenstance meeting at the library, Phil describes his heart as “spraying sparks in all directions” (150). Amrith, too, gains a sense of connectedness as a result of his romantic love. Usually an outsider, Amrith feels included, a part of something important, when he is with Niresh. He is intensely protective of his cousin, refusing to share him with his female cousins and their friends, and becoming angry when they make plans that involve Niresh without Amrith’s approval (145, 155).

This sense of belonging and connection,

however, makes one vulnerable, as the potential for losing what we have come to value arouses fear. A romantic relationship demands revelation and exposure on behalf of those involved; sharing those intimate details of self evokes potential self-doubt, apprehension, and insecurity. Phil gives his body and soul over to Nicholas, allowing himself to be taken in by the “dark, magnetic smile” that can calm him, “lull

him into silence” (216). It is this silence, however, that perpetually troubles Phil and makes him vulnerable. He realizes, “The more I reveal myself to [Nicholas], the more I put myself at his mercy. The less he divulges about himself, the more closely he binds me to him” (329). Phil wants Nicholas to let down his guard and answer his many questions about his life, his family, his passions honestly and without fear. Yet, Nicholas refuses to participate in the exchange, using that magnetic smile to end the likelihood of achieving emotional intimacy. Although Nicholas gives him glimpses into his world, sharing his museum of collected items and the accompanying stories, for example, he refuses to let him in completely. When they meet, they sleep together, rarely kissing and never asking the one if he loves the other. Nicholas shuts Phil out—and Phil lets him (333).

Amrith (*Swimming*) holds tightly to the ghosts of his past and is, for a time, unwilling to become vulnerable in his interactions with Niresh. Although Amrith wants to learn all that he can about his cousin, even if it means negotiating the web of lies that so easily spring from Niresh’s mouth, he, himself, holds back in his sharing. He would rather live vicariously through Niresh’s experiences, true or false, than face the reality of his own circumstances. When Niresh queries Amrith about his mother, Amrith refuses to speak, and an uncomfortable rift develops between the boys (119, 132-33). Amrith has spent so much of his life suppressing memories of his mother in hopes of protecting himself from the pain they evoke that he refuses to lower the veil of secrecy, even for Niresh; he withholds an essential part of himself. When he ultimately decides to share what he knows of his mother, he is liberated from the “heavy burden of silence” he has carried for eight years (254). Revelation allows for vulnerability that, in turn, yields freedom.

First Love, Betrayal, and Loss

First love is rarely final love. Perhaps the separation results from age or an unwillingness to commit or family influence or any of a multitude of other factors. Despite Phil’s (*Center*) commitment to Nicholas, he is, under the surface, aware that their relationship is not all that he had hoped it might be. He is completely enamored by Nicholas’ charm and often describes him as magical and perfect (217). Yet, he knows, too, that

love can be delusional; we can fool ourselves into believing that something is there when it is not—or that, with time and care, it might be within our power to make it exist. After he and Nicholas make love, Phil admits that the act is more physical than emotional. He wants more, thinking, “Nothing seems more fleeting to me, nothing could fill me with more fear here and now than the body next to me withdrawn into sleep. I want to be the air that Nicholas breathes, to be his blood, his heartbeat, everything without which he can’t exist” (245). When he awakes and reaches out to Nicholas, however, his hand touches cold sheets.

When Kat and Nicholas begin to spend more time together, Phil can’t help but feel pangs of jealousy. He notices that Nicholas’ occasional kisses and touching have become even rarer but rationalizes away his concern, citing his own envy toward Kat and the “uninhibited direct way she has with people” (365), a trait he admires in her and fails to see in himself. He assures himself that Nicholas loves him deeply, as evidenced by the fact that he has revealed his secret museum to him but not to Kat. His sense of betrayal, then, is even more striking when he comes upon Kat and Nicholas having sex in that very place. He is betrayed by the two people he trusts most; he has lost his love—and his faith in love.

Amrith (*Swimming*), too, experiences a betrayal that ends his first love experience. Although Amrith feels sexually attracted to his cousin, the feeling is not mutual, and is, in fact, never discussed between the two boys. When Niresh begins to display his attraction for Amrith’s female cousin, Mala, Amrith first feels ignored (195). Not yet recognizing the scope of his feelings for Niresh (and what that means about his sexuality), he simply feels jealous of the attention Niresh is paying to Mala instead of him. He likens Mala’s laughter to “a gate clanging shut, leaving Amrith on the outside” (204). Amrith tires of being an outsider and plans to reassert his will in the drama by confronting Mala, calling her a slut (215), disowning her and her family (216), and, ultimately, attempting to drown her upon a visit to the beach (226ff), only to be stopped by Niresh. It is at this point that he realizes that he loves Niresh “in the way a boy loves a girl, or a girl loves a boy” (234). Amrith feels betrayed not only by Mala, but by himself. He has lost his love—and his innocence.

The Aftermath: Feeling the Effects of First Love

First love might not last, but perhaps that is not necessarily a tragedy. In dealing with matters of the heart, both protagonists gain a more complex view of the self, life, and love.

Valuing the Self

As a result of their first love experiences, the young men portrayed in these two tales realize that they are worth fighting for; they matter. Phil (*Center*) learns that, in relationships, one must preserve a sense of self, an identity beyond that which is created in the formation of a couple. In his relationship with Nicholas, Phil denies himself the right to ask hard questions, those that would force Nicholas to reveal a deeper part of himself, out of fear of losing him. When Phil realizes that Nicholas fears their relationship might be discovered by those in town, for example, he lacks the courage to speak his mind. To do so, he would “have to be able to suppress the quiver in [his] voice and calm [his] racing heart” and be “consumed with fear [Nicholas] might go off and leave [him]” (380).

Once Phil learns of the sexual interlude between Kat and Nicholas, he realizes that, in the attempt to maintain his connection to Nicholas, he should not have to sacrifice who he is to the point of losing the ability to recognize himself. He might have to let Nicholas go. Rather than continue to serve as one of Nicholas’ sexual exploits, a pawn in a game that brings him no emotional intimacy as reward for his willingness to play, Phil chooses to walk away. He is worth more. He sheds his earlier self, the one that chose to hold his tongue, and demands instead that Nicholas’ express his inner self. When Nicholas attempts to use his sexual power over him to avoid dealing with the truth, Phil resists, imagining “mutilated corpses, the mangled blood-red debris in some war zone” in lieu of his lips (407). He is beginning to formulate his answer to his mother’s question, “Whom do you love more, yourself or him?” (412).

Amrith (*Swimming*), too, learns of his self worth as an outcome of his first love. For him, this means admitting, and ultimately accepting, his sexual identity despite the personal and cultural complications. When Amrith first understands his feelings toward Niresh and his resulting sexual identity, he

feels “deep horror” (234) and refuses to share his new knowledge with anyone. As a result, he finds himself distanced from everyone, “as if he were in a pit of darkness and there, above, the world carried on with itself in the sunlight” (240). He is embarrassed. Even when Niresh seeks to make amends, he does not know “how to get past his own shame and reach out to his cousin” (244). He remembers the disparaging descriptors assigned to Lucien Lindamulagé, an architect and family friend known for his relationships with his young, male secretaries, and wonders whether these now apply to him. He feels alone and afraid to share his fears with anyone; “he felt the burden of his silence choking him” (266). It is only when he gives voice to his new identity that he is able to begin to reconcile himself to it. In the graveyard next to his mother’s tomb, he whispers, “I am . . . different” (267). Through this act, he names his reality. In this first step,

he felt the burden of his secret ease a little. It was all he could do for now. He would have to learn to live with this knowledge of himself. He would have to teach himself to be his best friend, his own confidant and guide. The hope he held out to himself was that, one day, there would be somebody else he could share this secret with. (267)

Amrith has lost his innocence but, with experience, acquired greater awareness and emotional maturity.

Choosing Life

As an outcome of first love, both protagonists reap a richer understanding of life, recognizing that, although our existence may be inspired by chance, we have choices. We might be born to an absent father or of a mother unable to meet our needs. We might be attracted to unacceptable or uninterested mates. We might live in worlds that don’t feel like home. Regardless, we have choices as to how we deal with our circumstances. Phil (*Center*) chooses not only to honor himself by walking away from Nicholas; he chooses to also honor his past by seeking that part of his soul that remains unknown. He pursues the wider view of the world for which he has been longing and chooses to accompany Gable, his seafaring uncle, to America in pursuit of his father. Rather than close the door on the memories that have haunted him for years, he chooses to embrace them. He enters a room that frightens him the most as a means to get to “a bigger, more beautiful” part of the house (389) and accepts

the truth that all people, at some point, reach “a crossroad in their life, with paths going off in different directions, and they have to decide which one they will follow” (399). Phil chooses “the feeling of life in motion” (462).

Amrith, too, learns to accept that “the great difficulty is to say Yes to life” (James Baldwin in frontispiece). For years, he refuses to accept his mother’s death, visiting her grave only when forced by his aunt and refusing to mark the anniversary of her death. He suffers repeated nightmares that feature his mother’s chair, empty of her presence. Upon learning the truth of his sexuality, however, Amrith’s dream takes another form; “he found his mother seated in her chair. She smiled at him and shook her head, as if to say, ‘Now what were you so worried about, son?’” (266). She has not abandoned him, so he chooses not to abandon her. He visits his mother’s grave, tearing out the overgrowth, scrubbing away the accumulated bird droppings, and vowing never to let her memory be forgotten again (266-67). With the acceptance of her death comes a more fulfilled life.

Defining Love

Phil and Amrith emerge from their first loves a bit battered and bruised but with a more complex understanding of love in hand. Phil (*Center*) bears witness to several romantic relationships and, as a result, gains knowledge and insight into romantic love. When his mother, Glass, allows herself to remain with Michael, an attorney who treats Glass tenderly and wisely, Phil learns that he should not give up on love. Although Glass chose earlier in life to sleep with her husband’s brother, leave her husband, and take up with a long list of men to punish herself for her first indiscretion, even she can feel an emotion so strong that it changes her long-standing behavior. Through Tereza and Pascal, lesbian lovers and family friends, Phil learns the value and hardship of honesty. Pascal refuses to lie to Tereza. She tells her what she needs but doesn’t want to hear but always provides the support that the truth sometimes requires. Phil’s twin sister, Dianne, teaches him that love can be selfish. Phil learns that, twice each week for over three years, she has been visiting a boy in the hospital. He is in a coma due to a bicycling accident that occurred while he was on his way to meet her. She finds it “easy to love him,” as he is unable to “defend himself” (448);

she uses his presence to appease her own conscience.

From his sea-faring uncle, Gable, Phil learns the most important lesson of all—“love is a word only to be written in bloodred ink” (465). Gable is unable to bear life on land and loses his wife as a result. Before they part ways, however, she accidentally gives him a token to remember her by, a small scar on his arm, the result of a vegetable knife swiped during a passionate argument. To remind himself of the love he has lost, Gable annually takes a knife to the scar to ensure it lasts. Phil realizes,

love causes deep wounds, but in its own particular way it also heals scars, provided you have faith in love and give it time to do so. I won't touch my scars. I'm bound to get fresh wounds, even before the old ones have healed, and I will inflict wounds on other people. Every one of us carries a knife. (465)

When Amrith opens himself to love for the first time, he learns that love demands forgiveness—of other and self. His refusal to accept his mother's death results, in part, from his anger at her decision to let him go. Amrith remembers the day when Auntie Bundle came to take him away, leaving his mother behind to attempt to help his alcoholic father. Although his mother hesitates for a moment, holding tightly to her son, she ultimately listens to Auntie Bundle's plea, “Don't weaken now. What you are doing is only out of love for Amrith” (252), and lets him go. Amrith feels abandoned, unable to see, as a child, the sacrifice his mother is making for him. He denies her memory and refuses to allow others to know just how much he does indeed remember. He feels “a curious bitter pleasure” in denying Auntie Bundle, in particular, his memories (13). He claims to hate Bundle and her decision to wear mourning clothes eight years after the death of his mother, her sympathetic looks, her questions about his memories. He is angered by Bundle's interference, saying, “maybe if she had let things be, at least his mother would be alive” (248). Amrith's anger is compounded by his own feelings of self-loathing. He remembers the last day he and his mother shared, waiting in anticipation of leaving the home together to start a new life with Auntie Bundle and learning the truth that his mother would remain behind. Once he is put in the

car, his mother places her hand on the car window, hoping her son will reciprocate. He chooses to defy her gesture, instead mouthing repeatedly the words, “I hate you.” Ultimately, he forgives his mother, his aunt, and himself when he revives the memories of his mother by visiting her grave and telling Auntie Bundle of his desire to plant her favorite flower, the rose, in remembrance (272).

Love Lost and Lost Lovers

The most intriguing commonality inherent in these two tales is that, while the protagonists themselves feel confused and confounded by love, those they love are lost, too. Nicholas (*Center*) is just as frightened as Phil. He doesn't fully understand the dysfunctional relationship of his parents, his own sexuality, or how to allow people to get close to him. As Phil comes to understand, Nicholas is “the collector of lost things now lost himself, a teller of stories without a story of his own” (464). Niresh (*Swimming*), too, is afraid. He feels, for example, as though he doesn't belong in any land; he is a foreigner in Canada and Sri Lanka. The lies he crafts to give himself the illusion of a better life suggest his desire for escape (242-43). Unlike Phil and Amrith, Nicholas and Niresh have, as Laurie Halse Anderson might say, shoes that run a size bigger. They are better able to disguise their insecurities. In doing so, however, they run the risk of never filling those shoes. While it might be difficult for Phil and Amrith to face their fears and take a mirror to their inner selves, they are more likely to find a more perfect fit, a space just suited to hold their burgeoning souls.

Wendy Glenn is an assistant professor in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Glenn serves as section editor for the Journal of Literacy Research and as president of the Connecticut Council of Teachers of English. She is widely published in the fields of adolescent literacy and teacher education.

Works Cited

Selvadurai, Shyam. *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*. Toronto: Tundra Books, 2005.
Steinhöfel, Andreas. *The Center of the World*. Trans. by Alisa Jaffa. New York: Delacorte, 2005.

YA Lit, Music and Movies:

Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom

Dark hair swinging, black hoodie zipped half way, John entered my room with a nod and a “Hey” before taking his place in the back of the room. Intelligent and articulate outside of class, he had little patience for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, no matter how relevant I tried to make it to my students’ lives. John’s world consisted of the religious rock band he played in on the weekends, the various roles his older brother had for him in film-making endeavors and the

looming shadow of his parents’ recent divorce. He simply had no interest in school of any shape or size, particularly if it involved classical literature.

With John’s grade hovering just above 50 percent, I approached him after class, asking him to bear with me another week: I was positive he would relate more to our next unit. Quickly, I explained that he would have a choice of several young adult novels, revolving around our “Coming of Age” theme. A spark flickered in his dark eyes; previous English classes had never offered the prospect of choice in

reading, and few novels had featured teen protagonists. His attention captured, I continued to describe the assignment that would accompany the unit, a project that involved two of John’s passions: music and film. A smile slipped across his face.

Although unique in many ways himself, John’s feelings about English were not unique at all. Every day, students shuffle in and out of classrooms modeled after realities that are now just faded memories of their parents and grandparents. In a world that spins faster and faster every day, a world created by an impatient society crammed with conflicting ideas presented in songs, on film, and through advertisements, studying the traditional literary canon no longer prepares our students to be the critical thinkers we desire them to be. Students suffer, frustrated with class content and ill-prepared for the workplace, and teachers grow exhausted after hours of attempting to “teach” to unwilling students.

Fortunately, for both teachers and students, a new canon of young adult literature already exists, combining the teacher’s desire for finely crafted works with the student’s need of relevant characters and topics. After a review of research conducted on the use of young adult literature in the classroom, [Santoli and Wagner \(2004\)](#) consistently found that its use “promotes and encourages lifelong reading habits,” a goal that all language arts teachers should list at the top of their priorities. Beyond this benefit, however, remains the fact that young adult literature revolves around the themes found within the pages of the classics and offer the same literary elements ([Santoli and Wagner, 2004](#)).

But this only answers one aspect of the problem.

In a world that spins faster and faster every day, a world created by an impatient society crammed with conflicting ideas presented in songs, on film, through advertisements, studying the traditional literary canon no longer prepares our students to be the critical thinkers we desire them to be.

Although students must be able to analyze traditional texts, the reality of today's world revolves around texts that our students' grandparents could never have imagined. The novel no longer remains a sacred part of the home. Instead, televisions and computers litter every room. Literacy can no longer be defined by a single definition of text. Rather, today's literacy possesses a fluidness that encompasses a mixture of music, images and HTMLs. And this literacy is constantly changing as technology continues to race forward. If teachers want to mold literate students, it has become critical that educators broaden the definition of literacy. One way to do this is by embracing the very media that so successfully garners our students' attention. Embedding media within the language arts curriculum will not only teach students the critical thinking skills needed to interpret the onslaught of media messages, but will also allow teachers to use the media to teach and motivate students in the areas of reading and writing.

This reality is not a new one. Educational researchers have been studying the impact of media since it became prevalent in students' lives. In their 2000 article, [Donna Alvermann and Margaret Hagood](#) argue that if educators want students to perform well in both the world and on new assessments, "they will need to develop a critical understanding of how all texts (both print and nonprint) position them as readers and viewers within different social, cultural, and historical contexts" (para. 2).

One element to adequately preparing students rests upon ensuring that students fully understand the subject's concepts. Many students fail to understand why they are sitting within their classrooms, and, therefore, lack the motivation required to fully explore the ideas presented to them. For some, however, it is their low self-efficacy that leads to low motivation. [O'Brien \(2003\)](#) asserts that the instructional programs designed to identify and label students who are lacking in the reading areas of decoding, fluency and comprehension have led to intensely negative perceptions about students' abilities even as the programs strive to correct their reading deficiencies. Because students develop these feelings early in the education process, O'Brien further argues that these students begin to see failure as something beyond their control and to develop a learned helplessness. Others argue that the school curriculum can lead to low motivation

by stifling children's choice in reading and continually setting limits on reading, which can permanently affect how students see themselves as readers ([Alvermann, Moon and Hagood, 1999](#)). Whatever the origin, low motivation can seriously hinder a student's progress within the language arts classroom.

[Alvermann \(1999\)](#) and [O'Brien \(2003\)](#) assert that understanding the more popular media texts that engage student interest can help educators not only understand their students, but also motivate them. As technology continues to expand, today's students differ greatly from students of the past, requiring a broadened definition of text and learning if educators want to keep their students motivated about learning.

For me, the idea of incorporating media into my classroom was intuitive rather than research-based. After witnessing the success of young adult literature in my classroom, I developed a project that built upon this interest by tapping into teenagers' natural interests: movies and music. Students would create a project that enveloped all the aspects of movie production: movie scripts, a trailer, soundtrack, movie poster and character sketches. That first year's success prompted me to explore the use of media in the language arts classroom, leading me to research that not only validated what I had discovered in my own classroom but also provided a wealth of other strategies that would enable me to motivate students and accomplish my curricular goals. Since that first year, I have continually refined the project, creating an assignment that motivates students to read and teaches them how to work with plot, characters, and theme in a much more meaningful way than ever before.

The novel no longer remains a sacred part of the home. Instead, televisions and computers litter every room. Literacy can no longer be defined by a single definition of text. Rather, today's literacy possesses a fluidness that encompasses a mixture of music, images and HTMLs. And this literacy is constantly changing as technology continues to race forward.

To help equip students with the tools needed to adequately tackle the project, we begin by becoming film scholars. Together, we actively view a movie that corresponds with the theme we are discussing in their novels. Rather than sitting back and simply watching the movie, students are taking notes over the events of

Rather than sitting back and simply watching the movie, students are taking notes over the events of the plot, making observations about characters and their motivations, noting the effect music has on each scene, and writing down various other observations.

the plot, making observations about characters and their motivations, noting the effect music has on each scene, and writing down various other observations. At the conclusion of the movie, students map the story and characters and then reflect on how the theme was developed in the movie. We listen to the soundtrack, examining whether the songs are used to reinforce the ideas in the plot or whether they are used to help set the mood. When students finally have a good understanding of how all of the elements of the

movie work together to create the final product, they then turn to their own novels.

Students are generally so excited about the project they want to jump in without any planning. To slow this down, it helps to remind them of the writing process. There needs to be brainstorming; preliminary ideas must be revised; and all of these steps need to be taken before publishing the movie. To begin the brainstorming process, I begin by asking students to individually reflect on their novels' themes and events. When you think of your book, what first comes to your mind? If you were going to recommend your book to a friend, what specific parts would you describe to convince your friend to read it? What is the underlying theme or message of your book? Questions such as these help students differentiate the important scenes from the less important scenes and help them examine the important ideas within the pages of their books. It is at this point that students really begin to understand plot and character develop-

ment and how they work together in the novel:

“The art room scene shows the beginning of Melinda’s journey in finding herself. Throughout the book she keeps her emotions inside. This scene shows the beginning of the simple project that taught her to express herself.”

So writes Kelsey, a junior in my fifth-period class, as she reflects over Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*. Melinda, a teenage girl, has committed a major social faux pas by calling the police from a high school beer party the summer before her freshman year (although no one knows she has just been raped by a fellow partygoer). As the events unfold, the reader finds that there is more to this than anyone realizes, but Melinda refuses to speak up. Through her art class, she begins to understand more about the event that led to the phone call and about herself. Through her reflections, Kelsey began to focus on the importance of the art class, which helped her shape the final movie project.

Another part of the brainstorming stage involves determining the eight to ten most important scenes of the novel and then creating a list of songs that would enhance these scenes. Students are encouraged to think of lyrics that are similar to the events of the plot, music that sets the mood and various genres that could be included. This activity requires students to become critical thinkers as they examine not only the ideas in their books, but also the lyrics of the music they hear on a daily basis. This synthesis of ideas helps create a deeper understanding of what is happening in the book and the impact the events have on the characters. One of the songs Kelsey chose to use for *Speak* was *My Immortal* by Evanescence. Kelsey writes:

The song is very powerful for this scene in the book . . . Melinda goes back to the night of her rape. They are awful memories and she wants to get the thoughts out of her head. The incident cannot be turned around. The song says this girl went through many pains and her wounds won’t heal. She will have to live her whole life repeating the moments that haunt her . . . Just like Melinda.

Once students have individually identified the important ideas and themes of their novels, they break out into groups with students who read the same novels. At this point, they begin sharing ideas, assigning responsibilities and creating the products that make up the final project. This is the time they can build upon their individual learning styles, using their own talents and intelligences to convey their

interpretations as readers. Some students take charge of writing a script for a trailer and then capturing their scripts on film. Other students look at the characters, writing detailed character sketches about each of the important characters and suggesting potential actors for the roles. The more musically inclined tackle the soundtrack, compiling a song list and creating a cover that reflects the theme of the movie. And the artistic develop a slogan and movie poster designed to entice viewers to watch their movie.

Although it is amazing to watch their creative ideas emerge into final products, what is even more amazing is the learning that takes place simultaneously. One of the most important aspects of this project is not the actual trailer or poster (and some have been phenomenal), but the reflections they write upon the completion of each product. For the learning process to be complete, students must take time to understand the reasons they made their decisions regarding scene selection, song choices and visual images.

After completing the project, students share their trailers and ideas with the class. This has always been the highlight of the assignment for them because it gives them a platform to showcase their talents, and most of them are proud of the work they accomplished. Students pour themselves into the project, creating portraits of themselves as active readers and thinkers. An added benefit is that the audience grows interested in the books they did not read and can be frequently seen toting library books around weeks after the unit has concluded. Their literary world has been greatly expanded as students become aware of the quality literature available to them, literature that features teens facing similar problems they encounter daily.

As for John, that smile stayed on his face. Rather than slumping in his desk, he could be seen reading his novel, *Rats Saw God* by Rob Thomas, which featured a young male reflecting upon how he had slid down the slippery slope from a straight A student his sophomore year to a student in danger of failing the last semester of his senior year. John could relate to Steve, the protagonist, because he, too, was facing life changes that stemmed from his parents' divorce. No longer focused solely on his brothers' most recent projects, John concentrated on ideas for his own movie. Students from his own class and from different

hours consulted with him on ideas for their trailers. His CD collection became an important part of my classroom. John was engaged, and the insights I had previously overheard by accident in the halls were evident in all aspect of his project. His transformation as a language arts student showed me that there was significantly more to John as a student than he had ever realized. As a reader, John's film showed he could identify and classify the character traits and motivation featured in his novel; he deftly illustrated his understanding of themes; and he expertly translated the mood of the book into song. As a writer, John finally understood the importance of getting his ideas down on paper before attempting production and how to analyze his own thought processes. As a listener, John stepped outside of his own miseries and began communicating with others, suggesting techniques that might help them portray their own novels' ideas on film.

Now, two years later, John is the student who leaps to mind when I examine the philosophies behind this project. There is no question that John emerged from the experience a better student, not just a better reader and writer. But he is not alone. Kelsey, who was already an A student, was propelled out of her traditional comfort zone as a student, and was able to tap into her musical and artistic interests, creating a project with deeper critical thought than I had witnessed in her previous papers. Tom, a very capable student who took very few assignments seriously, spent hours outside of school, intent on creating the perfect movie. This list could continue, but the reality that would materialize in its telling is that uniting young adult literature with music, movies

John concentrated on ideas for his own movie. Students from his own class and from different hours consulted with him on ideas for their trailers. His CD collection became an important part of my classroom. John was engaged, and the insights I had previously overheard by accident in the halls were evident in all aspect of his project.

and other popular media engages students, giving them the opportunity to expand their ability to analyze texts and succeed in the classroom.

Robyn Seglem is a language arts teacher at Trailridge Middle School, Shawnee Mission, Kansas. She is a teacher consultant with the Flint Hills Writing Project, an affiliate of the National Writing Project at Kansas State University, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction. She has been teaching for seven years.

Works Cited

Alvermann, D.E., J.S. Moon, and M.C. Hagood. *Popular Culture in the Classroom: Teaching and Researching Critical Media Literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1999.

Alvermann, D.E., and M.C. Hagood. "Critical Media Literacy: Research, Theory, and the Practice in "New Times." *The Journal of Educational Research*. 93.3 (2000): 193-205.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Puffin, 2001.

Evanescence. "My Immortal." *Fallen*. CD. Wind-up, 2003.

O'Brien, D. (2003). "Juxtaposing Traditional and Intermedial Literacies to Redefine the Competence of Struggling Adolescents." *Reading Online*, 6.7. Retrieved June 8, 2004, from http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/lit_index.asp?HREF=obrien2/.

Santoli, Susan P., and Mary Elaine Wagner. "Promoting Young Adult Literature: The Other "Real" Literature." *American Secondary Education* 33.1 (Fall 2004): 65-75.

Thomas, Rob. *Rats Saw God*. New York: Simon Pulse, 1996.

“Making Cities and Then Making Them Crumble:”

Francesca Lia Block’s Place in the Young Adult Novel

Although Francesca Lia Block has won over [twenty awards](#) for her young adult (YA) novels, not enough scholarship has been devoted to Block’s work, possibly because of its self-claim to postmodernism and flares of the fantastical or magical. As [J. Sydney Jones](#) reports, Block began writing to make sense of her surroundings and continues writing for the same end (18). Block’s novels are her vision of “postmodern fairy tales,” and she uses magical realism to blend in the often-dark reality of her stories and culture.

Examining two of Block’s novels—*Weetzie Bat* (WB) and *I Was a Teenage Fairy* (IWTF)—reveals that place is resonant in her work. Block’s place, however, is not traditional.

In modern literature, setting (or place) furthers the author’s description of the novel’s socio-historical elements. Even if an author does not explain, for example, the Depression thoroughly, readers can conjure up images of America during the 1930s, relying solely on their knowledge of the period. “The only fitting conclusion to a study of city in *modern* novels,” Dianna Fest-McCormick offers, “is, possibly, that there is none available” (193;

emphasis added). Yet, in a very basic sense, there is a conclusion. Eventually, talk of place falls away in the analysis of the modern novel because place, like other aspects of the novel, remains stable and oftentimes becomes the grounding force of a novel. In Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, for instance, the single thread through the novel is the city in which the story takes place.

Postmodern literature, however, remains stable only limitedly, if at all, and as Block herself says, her novels are postmodern fairy tales.

In Block’s postmodern stories, fairy tales begin where most traditional fairy tales end (happily ever after), the worst monsters and witches are given human traits, magic is not omnipotent, and questions at the end are not representative of true good or true evil. Perhaps more importantly, Block’s mixture of right and wrong does not send a moral message but rather shows multiple perspectives of the same situation—alcohol, sex, conflict, neglect, and abuse—often leaving the reader to make his/her own conclusions about the outcomes. Within this context of post-modernity, one can begin to analyze the multiple ways in which place becomes central to studying

In Block’s postmodern stories, fairy tales begin where most traditional fairy tales end (happily ever after), the worst monsters and witches are given human traits, magic is not omnipotent, and questions at the end are not representative of true good or true evil.

Block's novels.

Using essays from the field of human geography and writers dealing with place, we will argue that Block molds Los Angeles and its culture in the same way she would mold a character. This molding becomes increasingly important when examining the magical realism with which she imbues her novels, making a city to which everyone theoretically has access, a unique place people can visit only through her novels.

To say that Block has merely created a place is too simple, when, in fact, she is rewriting her home through these novels, that home being Los Angeles. This essay explores this rewriting through the lens of the feminist criticism of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, both of whom purport that woman's place is a fluid and ever-changing environment, just as Block suggests with/in her writing. Additionally, this essay places Block's readers in a context of tourism because everyone who delves into Block's world is a tourist. Thus, we hope to provide a map and itinerary into Block's world. By examining these layers separately, one can ultimately see how the layers fit together to explain the themes to which Block points her readers.

Juxtaposing two of Block's books enables readers to experience fully the place that she has created for her readers. The place Block constructs is not only physical but also a series of situations involving the same (or same types of) scenarios. Both novels take place in L.A., and while *WB* does not take place during a specified era, *IWTF* is clearly set in the early to mid-1990s, as it makes frequent reference to current events, such as Kurt Cobain's suicide and Jon-Bennet Ramsey's murder. In both books, Block adopts a new language readers must translate. In *WB*, for instance, boyfriends are called "Ducks," cool is "slinkster," and surprise is expressed by saying "lanky lizards." Likewise, in *IWTF*, boyfriends are "biscuits," and monsters and other evil forces are "vile, vile crocodiles."

Within the basic plot lines are situations involving young adults' actions and reactions toward alcohol and drug abuse, sex, infidelity, and grief. None of these situations provides clear-cut answers or suggestions about what is "right" or "wrong." Rather, Block allows for interpretation(s), which ultimately makes her books a sort of "Choose Your Own Adventure." Such an approach appeals to young adults because

they are attempting to make decisions about these same issues. Her target audience also represents individuals who are deciding what to do with their lives (e.g., attending college, getting a job, moving away from home, trying to find a place or home, etc.). These themes permeate all of Block's minimalist imagery, which [Patricia Campbell](#) suggests took seed in poetry workshops (56). Both *WB* and *IWTF* can serve as initiation into Block's world of multiplicities, giving readers a clear sense of her language, images, and—most importantly—her place(s).

Human geographer [Derwent Whittlesey](#) defines absolute space as "the basic organizing concept of geographers" (qtd. in Johnston, Gregory, and Smith 574). Any area, then, is a space. Place, however, holds a different, more complex meaning: space to which someone has given value. Many novelists make cities or locations places to readers by carefully detailing them. *Huckleberry Finn* would not be the same had Mark Twain placed the story in New Jersey, even in the same era. Reading the novel, people who have never seen a river feel as though they can see Huck and Jim on the Mississippi. Had Twain placed the novel in New Jersey, every aspect of the book would have changed—not only the setting but the language, the characters' motivations, and the themes as well. Likewise, if Block's novels were stripped of L.A., every element of the novel would change. Even if her characters discussed movie productions or modeling, the scenery that makes Block's novels come to life would be lacking. Her attention to L.A. and its charm are threaded through her novels completely, making Block's L.A. a place for her readers and an element that deserves careful scholarly attention. The city that Block develops conjures up real and utopian images, not a city of which everyone can be a part.

Undeniably, visiting a new location can present both scary and exciting outcomes without a guide. With no one to recommend places to visit or paths to take, visitors may decide to return home early, decide never to visit again, or—worse yet—begin to hate the trip and memories of it altogether. Reading, writing, and traveling are often combined; travelogues, travel diaries, and scrapbooks are markers of these combinations. Yet people, whether reading or traveling, are sometimes too afraid to ask for directions or help. No one wants to look like a tourist while visiting a new place, but tourists can be spotted from afar: camera

around their necks, grinning from ear to ear as a moment is snapped into forever.

Tourists to new books and new authors have a similar distaste for asking for help. No one wants to admit that a particular novel, especially a YA novel, is difficult to read. In “The Matter of Culture: Aesthetic Experience and Corporeal Being,” Renee C. Hoogland asserts that she “approach[es] the practice of reading as, in Rosi Braidott’s words, an ‘embodied’ and ‘embedded’ practice of becoming, that is to say, an ongoing process of making and doing that is indispensable to the continual co-production of both human beings and their variously interconnected material and socio-symbolic ‘outsides’” (2). A novel, then, is not a static work but rather a dynamic act between reader and author. This act does not end merely with comprehension of the material, but it becomes a more marked change in the readers and their experience as they visit a world the author has created. Perhaps this dynamic act holds true for Block’s work more than for others’, as her work comprises self-proclaimed fairy tales.

As Vladimir Propp points out, there are critical differences between folklore (wherein fairy tales lie) and literature. Literature is static; when one finishes Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and loans it to a friend, the friend reads the same story the first person just read. As reader-response theory holds, the second reader may have a different take on the book; nonetheless, the fictional elements remain the same. Folklore—and, therefore, fairy tales—is oral and is changed from telling to telling; hence, many versions and revisions of these tales exist. Block calls her novels postmodern fairy tales, perhaps clarifying that there is not a single story, theme, or point of view, but rather multiple stories, themes, and characters,

Because YA novels are becoming more and more complex, as Michael Cart explains in “A Place of Energy, Activity, and Art,” readers must enter them just as prepared to give up comprehension at first to acclimate him/herself to the elements of the story before grappling with what an author is trying to illustrate. Block’s novels exemplify this type of complex work. Block’s language is simple, yet rich, and sometimes difficult to wade through; her characters encounter scenarios typical and atypical in their individual situations or life places. But even though she writes about young adults, Block often does not

flesh out the typical coming-of-age stories young adults are so accustomed to finding. Instead, Block works against growing up and toward other avenues—such as happiness, magic, survival, love, and friendship, all seemingly more important than being an adult. In fact, the adults presented are often the most “lost” characters, and they exhibit poor judgment and virtually no accountability, again shifting readers’ expectations.

Cart states that 1996 “marked a true turning point, a breathtaking moment when young adult literature seemed all of a sudden, to come of age” (114). This time also marked the debut of Block as a YA novelist—who, according to Cart, is “arguably the first cross-over author [. . .] whose [. . .] novels appealed to a new demographic: fifteen to twenty-five year olds, coincidentally the same demographic that MTV targets” (115). As Cart affirms, Block’s novels blur the lines between YA and adult literature, an important point to make when discussing Block on any level but especially crucial when trying to discern her place among other YA novelists. Perhaps because of her blurred readership, Block has been on the outskirts of YA literature scholarship and has been without a stable place in YA novels.

Block’s characters are oftentimes in high school but decide to stop going. They have sex but often without the typical consequences. Adults are often irresponsible and narcissistic, not the moral upstanding citizens more often found in children’s literature.

Block often does not flesh out the typical coming-of-age stories young adults are so accustomed to finding. Instead, Block works against growing up and toward other avenues—such as happiness, magic, survival, love, and friendship, all seemingly more important than being an adult. In fact, the adults presented are often the most “lost” characters, and they exhibit poor judgment and virtually no accountability, again shifting readers’ expectations.

Even when an author does not aim to be fable-like, the larger message can be gleaned from character's reactions to themselves from an objective or outside viewpoint. In *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, for example, Ann Brashares shows one young woman's reaction to her father's engagement after he and her mother have divorced. By the end of the book, the reluctant young girl decides to accept her father's decision. If Block presented a divorce scenario (as Brashares does in *Sisterhood*), she would likely present three adolescents' perspectives, and each young adult would have a different reaction to the situation. Block would not portray any of the perspectives as being best or worst, but she would indicate that the characters are in different places in their lives.

Oftentimes, if Block's books are suggested for teen reading, they are recommended only for the independent and mature reader, and this caution may be wisely founded. These books are not laced with the societal norms or messages that abound in many other books. When Block's best-known character, Weetzie Bat, decides she wants to have a baby at 18, she is upset when her boyfriend is not sure he wants to be a father; she then has sex with her gay friend and his lover. When Weetzie becomes pregnant, she is thrilled, even though she is not sure which of the two gay men is the father.

Typically, the plot described above would not reflect the kind of book teachers or parents encourage students or adolescents to read. However, Block remains in the YA canon. Why? As Cart describes, the coming-of-age for YA literature means that "writers are freer than ever to experiment, to flex their creative muscles, to employ themes, tools, and techniques that were previously considered taboo" (113). Block fits into Cart's reformed genre as a crossover, but she remains nearly untouched in literary criticism, where she is the "first crossover" (115), most likely for several reasons. Block writes about topics that are traditionally taboo not only for young adults but also for adults. These topics include drug overdoses, child abuse, gay adolescents, and parents who abandon their children to join cults. These subjects fill the pages of Block's work partly because she, too, struggles with these types of issues in her own life.

In *Writing as a Way of Healing*, Louise DeSalvo discusses the ways in which writers use writing to explore, work through, and come to terms with their

experiences. Often, when in therapy, people are encouraged to write by journaling, letter writing, and creative writing. This move toward personal accounts has led to the growing popularity of memoirs, and personal essays. Although Block's work is not what one thinks of as an example of creative nonfiction, she is writing in the genre. Block admits that she "wrote *Weetzie Bat* as a sort of valentine to Los Angeles at a time when [she] was in school in Berkeley and homesick for where [she] grew up. [. . .] It was a very personal story. A very personal love letter. [she] never expected people to respond to it the way they have. [She] never imagined [she] could reach other people from such a personal place in [herself]" (Jones 17). Block admittedly writes her novels much as a personal essayist may write to reach closure of a situation, but Block rarely, if ever, offers closure. By looking at two novels she wrote in two years, one can speculate about which life events Block struggled with while she wrote the novels. Authors often continue to write about similar struggles in several of their works. For example, Todd Strasser's *The Wave* and *Give a Boy a Gun* both address school-related problems and delve into nonfiction and current events. Yet with repeating settings and struggles come the fine line authors must walk to avoid becoming formulaic or archaic.

David King Dunaway, in "Huxley and Human Cloning: *Brave New World* in the Twenty First Century," asserts that, because Huxley maintains his detailed story in an unspecific place and time, the novel remains at the forefront of discussion (167). Dunaway then explains that novels including specific place and time have less a chance of survival (168). This trait is perhaps more influential in YA novels than any other writing because the audience YA authors try to reach is very concerned with its culture. Several YA novels that were once popular (e.g., *The Outsiders*, *The Chocolate War*, and *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret*) have become less read, even though they are highly recommended, because they are so dated. Yes, adolescents still deal with these same issues, but there are more current and immediate novels that address them. Given the precedent for vague and timeless settings, one should explore the reasons Block chooses to create a definite time and cultural context for her novels. In *Image of the American City in Popular Literature*, Adrienne Siegel declares, "even if a writer did state a high-minded motivation in the

preface or text of [her] book, can one be certain that this was [her] true purpose? (9). Of course, scholars can never be sure of the motivations of authors, but perhaps there is not one reason to write about a city, just as there is not one reason to write about any topic or character.

Weetzie Bat and *Teenage Fairy* are set in recent years and in or around L.A. Block makes reference to current events and landmarks, thereby carefully drawing her setting as an important reference point so that readers can visit the same restaurants, movie theaters, towns, and cities that her characters do. In “The Poetics of Place,” Lawrence Kimmel states that time in literature “becomes more than process, it becomes culture, it becomes world, it becomes human” (147). Block’s time and space in her novels have become arguably a culture in and of themselves. This conscious, intricate drawing of L.A. allows Block’s readers to adopt ties to these same spaces, making them places and, as Kimmel suggests, cultures for her readers.

Block’s view of the city contains not only those true places—such as roads, landmarks, and restaurants—but also magic—such as genies, Mabs, voodoo, and mind-controlling powers, all of which drive her stories into the magical-realism genre. Her mixture of the real and imaginary combines into a place that cannot be reached except through Block’s novels. In their introduction to Henry Lefebvre’s *Writings on Cities*, Elenore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas discuss Lefebvre’s notion of utopia: “a place that does not yet exist” (21). Lefebvre summarizes what happens to the maker or writer of the city: “[S]he who conceives the city and urban reality as system of signs implicitly hands them over to consumption as integrally consumable: as exchange value in pure state” (113). Block’s city is a system of signs to interpret, creating a problem for new readers or visitors of/to her work. Scholars have not written about the bulk of Block’s work, so it remains unfamiliar terrain, especially with spots of magic and fantastic events. “In science fiction novels,” Lefebvre adds, “every possible and impossible variation of future urban society has been foreseen” (60). And though Block does not write science fiction, she writes about a utopia—a very real utopia for her readers wherein characters, some more realistic than others, have adventures in real and

unreal L.A., a city writers have described since its early beginnings.

David Fine, a Los Angeles writings scholar, writes that the long history between writers and L.A. started over a century ago (2). L.A. continued to grow in terms of its literary body throughout the 1930s and 1940s as writers who came to write screenplays eventually set their novels in the city springing up around them. Fine also notes that with the writing of L.A. comes the juxtaposition between the East and the West, New York and Los Angeles. This juxtaposition comes into play throughout all of literature. “Even before the thirties,” Fine writes, “this playing of East against West appears in fiction” (6). Charles L. Crow declares that “the case against Los Angeles is a litany told by hostile, bewildered tourists as a spell against seduction: the city is an alienating, mindless place, which drives its inhabitants to ‘werewolf’ freeway speeding, despair, drugs, divorce and violence” (191). Fine agrees that “the characters in the Los Angeles novel have been for the most part seekers, men and women drawn hopefully or desperately to Southern California as the place of the new beginning or of the last chance” (7). The adult characters in Block’s stories depict these types of seekers: those characters trying to reinvent themselves through the city. Mostly, they do so through their daughters. What sets Block apart from most other L.A. novelists is that she is not an outsider. She grew up in and around the places that she uses as a setting, making her perspective fresh. Coupling Fine’s “seeker” with Lefebvre’s “utopia,” one can begin to see that Block’s city is truly a city no one has ever been or can venture to without gaining access through Block’s novels.

Adults in Block’s novels tend to be passive when

Block’s time and space in her novels have become arguably a culture in and of themselves. This conscious, intricate drawing of L.A. allows Block’s readers to adopt ties to these same spaces, making them places and, as Kimmel suggests, cultures for her readers.

it comes to taking responsibility and care of their children. Take, for instance, Charlie and Brandy-Lynn Bat: their little girl, Weetzie, grows up in a house with her gay best friend, his lover, and her own boyfriend. Barbie Markowitz's mother basically sells Barbie to a molester, while her father ignores her in an attempt to forget his past life. Later, Block develops Weetzie Bat into a secondary mother character who lies in the background of her daughters' stories. Knowing that Block can take a primary YA character, write her story, and then place her into the background of another YA novel reveals that all parents and adults have their own stories. Examining these individuals' stories ultimately aids in the larger understanding of the young adults in Block's novels.

But just recognizing that these stories exist does not grant complexity to them; one must begin to analyze the differences in the ways that Block describes cities and, essentially, sexes. Part of exploring the adults in Block's novels means understanding their idols. According to Douglas Porpora, examining whom adults idolize can explain where adults place meaning in life, and the trends in his study show cultural disenchantment among adults. Porpora discusses that adults do not typically have heroes with whom they identify because "personal hero identification has largely developed into empty 'celebrity worship'" (210). This notion of worship is perhaps most clear in the case of Mrs. Markowitz, Barbie's mother in *IWTF*. Her idol is Barbie, the Mattel doll, who is perhaps the most empty of celebrities, a plastic doll. Obviously, the first clue to this worship is Barbie's name, which her mother chose (12). But even the first time Block describes Mrs. Markowitz, "wearing her over-sized white plastic designer sunglasses and a gold and white outfit" (5), readers imagine the woman as one imagines a Barbie: in fancy clothes and with covered eyes so that she does not have to see reality. Later, Mrs. Markowitz changes Barbie's and her last name to "Marks," much to the dismay of her husband (12), in order to give Barbie an advantage in the modeling world. Mrs. Marks lives vicariously through Barbie's accomplishments, as she "won Miss San Fernando Valley in 19 . . . well let's just say [she] was a winner" (7). Block alludes here that Mrs. Marks wishes Barbie would be empty of something. But what? Thoughts? Dreams? Motivation? Perhaps all of those are true, but I'd say something simpler: Mrs. Marks treats Barbie as

though she is a doll, a toy to be bent and controlled.

Brandy-Lynn, Weetzie Bat's mother, does not worship any celebrity but is also the type of adult that Porpora discusses: an adult detached from and disenchanting with culture. She tells Weetzie:

when I was a kid my mother brought me to Hollywood. [. . .]he left me alone all day and I went around the pool with my cute little autograph book. It said, "Autographs" on the cover in gold. [. . .]Everyone was so gorgeous. [. . .] I used to walk to Schwab's have a hamburger and a milkshake for dinner, and I'd swivel around and around on the barstool reading Wonder Woman comics and planning how it would be when I became a star. (60)

At first, "planning how it would be when I became a star" seems as though she idolizes someone specific, as does her reference to Lana Turner (discovered spinning on a barstool in Schwab's) suggests, but Brandy-Lynn really does not have a hero, which shows in her actions or, more aptly, her non-actions. Brandy-Lynn is truly disenchanting as an adult, which one can discern from her description of her childhood—"everyone was so gorgeous" (60)—implying that there was not one person she idolized or emulated. Instead, she admired everyone she saw and came into contact with. Throughout the rest of the *Weetzie Bat* series, Brandy-Lynn continues to be passive but always present in the shadows of Weetzie's story.

In a basic sense, these two mothers represent both the over-active and the over-passive parents, but neither role works in terms of helping the young adults in these novels find what they are searching for. Or do they? Had Mrs. Marks not been intent on Barbie's being a model, then Barbie never would have met Todd or Mab, both characters in her life for whom she longed. Brandy-Lynn serves as the same sort of catalyst. Weetzie had to be looking for love with Dirk; if not, their lives may not have merged, and she never would have gotten the "beautiful golden thing" (19). Instead of feeling anger at their mothers, both Weetzie and Barbie help put their mothers back together. This shifting of roles shows the different ways that they can turn into parents, making their placement on the range of YA or adult literature indefinable.

Looking at these mothers, however, does not provide the range of adult roles in Block's works. The fathers in Block's books, perhaps more than any other characters, take on real qualities from Block's own life

and her own father. Block began writing *Weetzie* while she was homesick for her sick father. In interviews, Block admits that she has not felt ready to write about him or his life. Yet, even with the limited material about Block's personal life, one can surmise that Charlie Bat's life mirrors much of Irving Block's (Block's father) life. Both were special-effects men in Hollywood—"making cities and then making them crumble, creating monsters and wounds and rains and planets in space" (Block 13)—before turning to different arts: Block to painting and Bat to penning screenplays (15). Even the occupations they choose were, in a striking sense, false: building a city instead of perhaps experiencing the city they were in. Charlie Bat is written about with more wispiness than Brandy-Lynn. Weetzie even says, "Being with Charlie was like being on a romantic date" (54), demonstrating how much Weetzie idolized her father. And when Charlie dies from a drug overdose, it seems as though it is a dream, especially for Weetzie. Block says, in an interview with Cathy from *The Grouch Café*, "I still can't write about my father's illness" (Young). Perhaps she cannot write directly about the death of her father, but she powerfully describes the loss of a father through a young woman's eyes:

Grief is not something you know if you grow up wearing feathers with a Charlie Chaplin boyfriend, a love-child papoose, a witch baby, a Dirk and a Duck, a Slinkster Dog and a movie to dance in. [. . .] grief is different. Weetzie's heart cringed in her like a dying animal. It was as if someone had stuck a needle full of poison into her heart. She moved like a sleepwalker. She was the girl in the fairy tale sleeping in a prison of thorns and roses. (59)

This passage shows again how Block uses place to illustrate Weetzie's feelings. Block goes as far as to place Weetzie in a familiar fairy tale—"Sleeping Beauty"—but before the "happily ever after" actually sticks in a lifeless limbo. When My Secret Agent Lover Man (MSALM) wakes Weetzie and tells her, "Your dad's dead. But you aren't, baby" (59), he replaces Weetzie in her own postmodern fairy tale. Loss and grief are not discussed in traditional fairy tales; even when Cinderella's or Snow White's mothers and fathers die, they do not grieve; the girls are simply pushed through the story. Explaining grief as a place where people "move [. . .] like [. . .] sleepwalker[s]" gives a tangible feeling that is possible to experience.

Charlie Bat and Mr. Marks share perhaps the most

important quality and the defining characteristic between the mothers and the fathers in the story—the fathers come from and return to New York. This juxtaposition serves not only as a comparison between the cities of L.A. and New York but also as what the fathers and mothers ultimately represent. The mothers in these two books represent tangible women, who, in spite of their faults, are available to their daughters. The fathers, on the other hand, have left—whether by choice or fate—and have moved on. Block, as she herself says, works through her own experiences in her writing, and these polar placements of available L.A. mother and unavailable or dead New York father are no exception. As Fine and others report, L.A. and New York represent polar opposites, as do mothers and fathers, especially through Block's eyes. L.A. is the present, ever-changing, lively, lighter, colorful place where all the characters—including mothers—are. New York is the darker, more stable place where the characters visit. Here, Block weaves several layers of imagery.

When Weetzie and Barbie visit their fathers for the last time, both girls are completing a job. Weetzie has to find an end for the movie she and MSALM are making, and Barbie is on her way to a modeling shoot. Each girl also visits her father for the last time. Weetzie spends time with Charlie Bat, and Block incorporates images around them of sadness and death. Weetzie even tells Charlie Bat to come back to L.A. with her, even though she knows New York is "his city" (55). He refuses but does give her an ending to the movie: "Maybe this girl tries to get back by taking drugs," he said. "And she dies" (57). Weetzie looks around her father's apartment and notices "the paint on Charlie's apartment walls had cracked and chipped and his eyes were as dark and hollow as the corners of the room" (57). Charlie, like the character in his imagination, takes too many drugs and does not wake up.

Barbie's run-in with her father is unplanned and happens on the streets of L.A. Their conversation is very stiff. Barbie remarks, "It sounded as if he were talking to a client," and he did not reach out to touch her. He walks away from Barbie after saying, "Well. It was nice seeing you. Take care" (81). As he leaves Barbie on the curb, Dr. Markowitz thinks of his new life with a new wife and new daughter (82). Placing their conversation in the street helps the reader see

that their paths will not cross again and that Barbie is left without a father.

These girls both lose their fathers, but their mothers are fluid throughout their stories. Barbie's mother forces her to do modeling shoots, to go to New York, and to come home to L.A. Her mother shifts from the foreground to the background of the novel. Brandy-Lynn stays toward the shadows of *WB*, but she

Accepting that, as Cixous argues, woman must write woman (1234) to share herself and her body and that, as Kristeva maintains, daughters are a part of their mothers in the most basic and bodily of senses, Block truly writes woman through these young women's stories.

continues to be present. As in traditional tales, the fathers leave or die but remain the desired parent. Barbie wishes so often Dr. Markowitz would speak that she creates conflict between her parents just to hear him talk, and Weetzie has rituals with her father that she and her mother do not have. Block paints two young women who love their fathers but who cannot reach them, perhaps because their mothers are their gender, that is, their selves.

Accepting that, as Cixous argues, woman must write woman (1234) to share herself and her body and that, as Kristeva maintains, daughters are a part of their mothers in the most basic and bodily of senses, Block truly writes woman through these young women's stories. It is no accident, then, that L.A. represents fluid, bodily mother and that New York represents static, phallic father. The young women are attached to their mothers because of their gender, but in order for them to become adults, they must sever themselves from their mothers—the last step of becoming women themselves. Block reveals this severance in Weetzie before her story really starts. Weetzie and Brandy-Lynn do not live together, nor is Weetzie dependent on Brandy-Lynn for anything. Barbie actually must sever herself from Mrs. Marks, and, in turn, she becomes (literally and metaphorically) a new woman. She confronts her demons and actually changes her name and identity. This transcendence becomes the true

ending of Barbie's story and the beginning of Selena Moon and happily ever after.

Though the driving force behind Block's novels may be the magic of genies and Mabs, the reality within them ties the reader to a familiar culture. "Adolescents are society's risk takers" (24), Jonathon Klein et al. point out when beginning their discussion of the risks adolescents take. In this discussion, their "objectives were (1) to understand and describe the relationship between adolescents' media use and risky behaviors, and (2) to identify the media channels most often used and thus most likely to reach adolescents who engage in multiple risky behaviors" (24). The "risky" behaviors Klein et al. studied are sexual intercourse, drinking, smoking cigarettes, smoking marijuana, cheating, stealing, cutting class, and driving a car without permission (24). Block's characters participate in several of these activities, which illustrate that, even though Block admits she is not writing directly for a YA audience (Jones 18), she draws a realistic picture of and for young adults. This realism is partly why her books have been banned: "Patrick Jones summed up [the criticism by saying] 'It is not just that sex [. . .] is explicit; it is not. It is just that Block's characters have sex lives . . . In the age of AIDS—whose ugly shadow appears—anything less than a 'safe sex or no sex' stance is bound to be controversial" (19).

And Jones is correct. The language Block employs when characters in her novels have sex is not graphic in any way, and usually sex remains a passive act. For instance, when Duck moves in with Dirk, Weetzie hears "love noise through the walls" (23). The sex Weetzie has before she meets MSALM is markedly different from the sex she has with him. When she meets Buzz and goes home with him, "she kept her eyes on the bare bulb until it blinded her," but when she and MSALM have sex, Weetzie recalls it as making love (36). Through physical place, Block's images separate the feelings between love and mediocrity, an important separation when the main theme of Block's works is the power of love.

In all of her interviews, Block maintains that the biggest difference between growing up today and when she did in the 1970s is HIV/AIDS: "they grow up knowing that if you make love with someone, you could die—not just get pregnant or a venereal disease" (Young). Perhaps, then, one reading of Block's

statement is that she writes about sex while knowing that most young adults know the risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS or with becoming pregnant. It could be that this attitude is part of why Block is so popular with young adults: She does not preach to them. Her novels are subtle, yet it is clear when sex is positive and when it is negative. Barbie Markowitz never has positive sex, but when she changes to Selena Moon, her body image and feelings about sex change. After Barbie has revealed Hamilton Waverly as a “crocodile pedophile” (180), she and Todd have sex. The language Selena uses to describe sex is much different from Barbie’s description: “Todd’s body inside hers was startling and tender at once, completely different and an exact extension of who she was” (165).

Although discussion of safe sex is absent from these novels, the descriptions of positive and negative sex are handled in a way that is subtle enough not to impede the flow of the story but is startling when analyzing the changes between the young women after they meet their true love. As Cart points out, Block’s novels are marketed for an audience older than the traditional YA audience, approximately ages fifteen to twenty-five. This older readership may not be looking at as many decisions about having sex, as Klein et al. indicate that over half of the fourteen- to sixteen-year-old women they surveyed had engaged in sexual intercourse. Because Block’s target audience grows over ten years over the fourteen-year-old mark, it is possible that the adolescents reading her works have already made their decisions about having sex.

Klein et al. also discuss alcohol as a risky behavior. Block’s characters’ relationship with alcohol is much more fluid and comes without consequences. Weetzie and Barbie both enjoy going to bars, going to parties, and staying home with beer, Kahlua, and champagne. Their mothers enjoy liquor, as well. Mrs. Marks has martinis, and Brandy-Lynn has vodka. This shows that women use alcohol (fluid) to cope, while the men use drugs (which are more solid) or just abandon the situation altogether. While the young adults often have drinks or are around drinks, they are less strong than those of their parents. Brandy-Lynn and Charlie Bat also pop valium and other drugs when they get the chance. This indicates that the adults in the book use drugs and alcohol to escape their lives. Mrs. Marks drinks on a plane on the way to New York,

and Brandy-Lynn drinks her vodka-valium cocktail after Charlie dies. The young adults, on the other hand, do not drink to forget but rather to enhance their moods or to become free—typical responses and reactions to alcohol, according to Klein et al., who reported that 64.7 percent of the adolescents in their study drank alcohol. Block’s representation of alcohol is not discussed in scholarship about her books, but she uses alcohol in a different way for adults than young adults because it draws yet another line between the adults and the young adults in the novels.

At the moments when Block’s characters need a push in the right direction, it seems that she fixes the problem with magic. Upon closer examination, however, the magical elements of these stories are not just catalysts for characters’ actions; instead, they become characters with their own motives and stories. Typically in fairy tales, genies and godmothers represent emptiness, damage, and wish-granting plot-pushers. In “Cinderella,” for example, the only purpose of the fairy godmother is to provide Cinderella with the elements she needs to win the prince, all of which are physical characteristics of Cinderella. Block’s magical elements do not serve the same ends. Instead, each instance wherein she utilizes magical characters to “fix” an issue, the issue actually becomes more complex, complete with new and unknown consequences. Block is not merely changing the outward appearance of the characters; she is altering the ways in which they think.

In *WB*, Grandma Fifi can truly be called Weetzie’s fairy godmother, as she gives Weetzie the chance to get what she truly wants. After giving Weetzie “the most beautiful thing [. . .] a golden thing,” Grandma

At the moments when Block’s characters need a push in the right direction, it seems that she fixes the problem with magic. Upon closer examination, however, the magical elements of these stories are not just catalysts for characters’ actions; instead, they become characters with their own motives and stories.

Fifi kisses Weetzie's cheek (17). But perhaps the most significant part occurs just before Weetzie gets the "beautiful, golden thing," when Fifi explains that the canaries are "in love. But even before they were in love, they knew they were going to be happy and in love someday. They trusted. They have always loved themselves" (18). Fifi's explanation explains Weetzie and Dirk's place in their lives better than any other scene—both Dirk and Weetzie are sure they will find love and be happy, eventually. Grandma Fifi's explanation also elucidates that she believes Dirk and Weetzie are ready for what she knows Weetzie will inevitably ask for: love and all the struggles that come with love.

This scene is followed directly by the genie scene, wherein Weetzie tries to outsmart her fairytale counterparts and says for her first wish, "I wish for an infinite number of wishes!" As a kid she had vowed to wish for wishes if she ever encountered a genie or fairy or one of those things. Those people in fairy tales never thought of that" (19). Block has many features at work here in this simple scene between Weetzie and her genie. Obviously, Weetzie is preparing to make her three wishes. Everything she wants is possible and impossible simultaneously. As [Kenneth Burke](#) points out in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, the act of persuasion or desire includes three parts: "speaker, speech, and spoken to" (274). But as soon as the object of desire has been obtained, another appears. As Burke contends "biologically, it is the essence of man to desire" (275). And so Weetzie makes her three wishes: "I wish for a Duck for Dirk, and My Secret Agent Lover Man for me, and a beautiful little house for us to live in happily ever after" (19). In true fairytale fashion, she receives every item on her wish list but not without a cost. Grandma Fifi's cottage is where Weetzie, Dirk, Duck, and MSALM are happily ever after, but after Grandma Fifi dies, Weetzie feels guilty for wishing her third wish, as it killed Dirk's grandmother. More importantly, however, is where this leaves Weetzie and her makeshift family: At the end of most fairy tales, in the midst of happily ever after, where nothing is certain and where the only constant feeling is more desire. While Grandma Fifi and the genie are not dynamic characters in this novel, they do more than push the plot along. Fifi is introduced as a woman whom Weetzie admires, again shifting the traditional ideas of hero worship. Weetzie's hero is a real person, while her mother's

hero cannot be determined. Fifi is the only adult in the book who attempts to teach a moral lesson of any sort, and Fifi understands Dirk and Weetzie at their core. She knows what they want. Although the genie does not play a large role in the novel, he does serve a larger purpose beyond explaining that everyone really does wish for more wishes. The genie escapes his place; he completed his duty and disappeared in a "smelly puff of smoke" after he says, "I'm not going back into that dark, smelly, cramped lamp" (19). Even the genie suffered in his "golden thing" until he could leave.

Hamilton Waverly represents the most disturbing of characters. Like the troll or monster in traditional tales, Waverly is described as a "crocodile" and has a smile that is "long and toothy, sliding open under his nose" (35), and he is referred to as a Cyclops. Perhaps this reference to Cyclops indicates that Waverly has only one eye or one idea of Barbie, and emphasizing his mouth helps Block create a silence in Barbie. This silence is seen literally when Barbie says, "She felt like the doll she had been named for, without even a hole where her mouth was supposed to be as Hamilton Waverly came toward her" (36). Maybe the most significant issue relating to Waverly is that he also abuses Griffin, a boy Barbie first sees as he is being dragged into the modeling agency by his mother. Waverly is obviously a monster to children, making him more despicable and more like a traditional monster. The similarities end there, though, as Waverly becomes a persona with an explanation for his actions. Burke's notion of changing desire comes into play in this instance as well. Waverly begins to "long" for the children and "to comfort them" because the camera captured only the outside. Waverly wanted to "know the inside" of the children. "But then he found he could not get inside in the way he needed to. And the longing began to tear at him like a wild creature in the cage of his body. And things happened before he could stop himself" (172). Afterward, he threatened the children to convince them to keep the secret.

As Burke claims, once a desire is fulfilled, another is immediately felt, making Waverly continually search. As [Block](#) shows Waverly's unmasking as the monster in the story, he gets a glimpse of Mab and remembers when he had a Mab, when his own stepfather abused him (172). His remembering makes

him at once a victim and an assaulter. More striking, however, are the layers Block reveals about abuse. Obviously, abused young adults can take at least four routes: like Barbie, they can confront the abuser; like Griffin, they can let it destroy them; like Mrs. Marks, they can pretend the abuse never happened and refuse to recognize abuse when it happens to others; or like Waverly himself, they can become an abuser and continue the cycle. None of the characters has easy choices, and all paths are valid. More importantly, all choices lead the abused to a different place. Young adults who have been abused can see themselves in one of these roles, no matter what kind of abuse it is. Block does not make value statements about who is right or wrong; each character and choice travels side by side.

In *IWTF*, Block switches between sharing the story of Barbie, a young adult struggling with the pressures of being a model, and Mab, a spunky fairy. Mab is used as a coping tool for Barbie, Griffin, Hamilton Waverly, and Mrs. Marks. But Mab has her own agenda—to find a “biscuit” and be free. Mab, like the genie, is small and constantly searching for a place. She moves about from flowers to a birdcage to Barbie’s purse. Whenever she is flying in the open, she is scared of being smashed or hurt. Mab leaves Barbie so that Barbie can stop using Mab as a crutch and begin to confront her problems, all of which ultimately lead her to stop Hamilton Waverly from abusing other children and to fix the problems with Mrs. Marks. But unlike traditional tales, Barbie and Mab do meet again. Both of them have found love, and when they part, Mab tells the newly named Selena Moon, “Going to Ireland. Thanks for everything. And remember, do everything I would do” (185). Mab, finished with her work, goes to Ireland with her own biscuit. Though Selena and Mab will probably never meet again, Block makes it clear that Selena will always remember Mab, the only victim who can clearly recall her.

Block’s attention to place is clearly woven through her postmodern novels. But why? Why place, and why postmodern? Of course, as with all that comes with Block, the reasons are multiple and for multiple audiences: young adults, publishers, teachers, and even Block herself. As Cart points out, Block’s place on the shelves of bookstores and classrooms is not set. At Barnes and Noble, she may be found in YA fiction,

general fiction, or both. Likewise, educators, librarians, and parents do not recommend Block’s novels to all readers because they tackle controversial issues and do not give generally accepted social answers. Instead of showing Block as a model, perhaps it would be better to approach her as a window to open discussion. As Diane Davis suggests, there needs to be less deciding and more listening. Listening to the multiple perspectives Block presents can lead educators and students or parents and children into a discussion of possibilities rather than answers.

The listening also engages young adults to make their own choices about issues. Without a “right” answer, they are able to “listen” to several options and decide which route they may take for themselves, allowing the reader to more aptly experience the novel, rather than merely read it. We would argue that young adults search for opportunities to experience situations (places) in their lives without having to physically endure them. Block’s novels allow that sort of experience for readers.

Perhaps most important is where Block herself fits in this equation. The limited scholarship devoted to Block’s work has been about her rewritings of traditional fairy tales. We contend that *WB* and *IWTF* have been discussed so little because they are so unlike any other books that no one is sure how to approach them on a level that is not merely conjecture. As a writer, Block adopts her mother’s trade of poetry (Jones 18), which she meshes with her father’s first career of building places and manipulating scenes. These novels develop place so thoroughly as a

None of the characters has easy choices, and all paths are valid. More importantly, all choices lead the abused to a different place. Young adults who have been abused can see themselves in one of these roles, no matter what kind of abuse it is. Block does not make value statements about who is right or wrong; each character and choice travels side by side.

theme that one may miss the irony Block shares with her characters. Her novels do not have a definite place in stores, and while she is an avid writer, there exists little scholarship about her work. Block is searching for a place within a literary context, and instead of fitting into a mold, she is etching out her own place.

A native of Springfield, Missouri, Leslie Ann Salley received an associate's degree in liberal arts from Cottey College as well as a bachelor's and master's degrees in English education from Missouri State University. She currently teaches high school English in rural Green Forest, Arkansas, as well as developmental writing, freshman composition, and children's literature for North Arkansas College in Harrison and Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri. She is happily married to her co-author, Witt, and the two reside in Springfield, with their Labrador retrievers, Mama Dog and Scholar Lee.

A native of Dermott, Arkansas, Witt Salley received his bachelor's degree in professional writing from Missouri State University and his master's degree in online teaching and learning from California State University, East Bay. He currently serves as Director of Online Teaching and Learning for Ozarks Technical Community College, where he teaches courses in composition and educational technology.

Works Cited

- Block, Francesca Lia. *Weetzie Bat. Dangerous Angel*. New York: Harper Collins, 1998.
- . *I Was A Teenage Fairy*. New York: Joanna Cotler, 1998.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969.
- Campbell, Patricia J. "People are talking about . . . Francesca Lia Block." *The Horn Book Magazine* (January 1993): 54–61.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clement. "A Woman Mistress." Trans. Betsy Wing. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2000. 1245–50.
- . "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2000. 1232–45.
- Davis, D. Diane. *Breaking Up (at) Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter*. Carbondale: U of Southern Illinois P, 2002.
- Dunaway, David King. "Huxley and Human Cloning: Brave New World in the Twenty-First Century." *Aldous Huxley Annual* 2 (2002): 165–179.
- Festa-McCormick, Diana. *The City as Catalyst: A Study of Ten Novels*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1979.
- Fine, David M. *Imagining Los Angeles: A City in Fiction*. 1st ed.

- Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2000.
- Hoogland, Renee C. "The Matter of Culture: Aesthetic Experience and Corporeal Being." *Mosaic* 36.3 (Mar. 2000): 1–17.
- Johnston, R.J., Derek Gregory, and David M. Smith, eds. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995.
- Jones, J. Sydney. "Block, Francesca Lia, 1962–." *Something about the Author*. Ed. Kevin S. Hile. New York: Gale Research, 1995. 16–21.
- Kimmel, Lawrence. "The Poetics of Place." *Passion for Place Book II: Between the Vital Spacing and the Creative Horizons of Fulfillment*. Ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. 141–7.
- Kofman, Elenore, and Elizabeth Lebas. "Introduction." *Writings on Cities*. Trans. and ed. Elenore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Trans. and ed. Elenore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.
- Propp, Vladimir. "Folklore and Literature." *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Ed. Maria Tatar. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1999. 978–81.
- Siegel, Adrienne. *The Image of the American City in Popular Literature, 1820-1870*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1981.
- Young, Cathy. "A Cool Bit with Francesca Lia Block." *Favorite Teenage Angst Books*. 13 Feb. 2004. <<http://www.grouchy.com/angst/fib.html>>.

Works Consulted

- Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: UP of Texas, 1981.
- Bremer, Sidney H. *Urban Intersections: Meetings of Life and Literature in United States Cities*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992.
- DeSalvo, Louise A. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Boston: Beacon, 2000.
- Lehan, Richard Daniel. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.
- Pike, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Propp, Vladimir. "Folklore and Literature." *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Ed. Maria Tatar. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1999. 978–81.
- Strasser, Todd. *Give a Boy a Gun*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's, 2002.
- . *The Wave*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 1981.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.

¹ These awards include the Shroul Fiction Award, the Emily Chamberlain Cook Poetry Award, a Best Books of the Year citation from the American Library Association YASD Best Book Award, and the Best Book for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (Jones 18).

