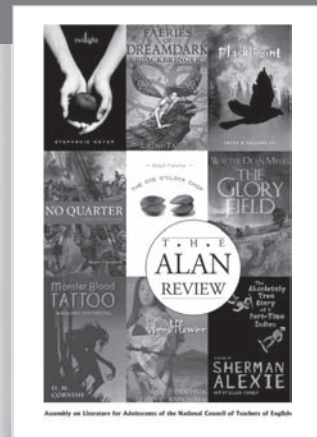


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ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW. *The ALAN Review* is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. It is published three times per academic year (fall, winter, and summer) 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:	JANUARY 15

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From the Editors

As fall has shifted to winter and the 2007 ALAN Workshop has come and gone, it doesn't mean that the valuable presentations and discussions must fade. With this issue of *The ALAN Review*, we return to some of the key issues generated by the workshop's theme of "Helping Teens Develop a Sense of 'Place' and 'Self' through Young Adult Literature." In this issue, we revisit some favorites from the New York City workshop, while also offering some new insights.

We begin this issue with Honor Moorman's discussion of "Finding a 'Place' in the World of Books, developing a Sense of 'Self' as a Reader: A Case Study of a Ninth-Grade Student in an Upward Bound Summer Program." Next, Wayne Brinda takes a look at nonfiction literature and the answers that genre provides to adolescents' questions regarding war.

Educator and author Alan Lawrence Sitomer, one of the featured presenters at the fall workshop in NYC, provides his lively approach to hip-hop. In his article, he demonstrates how hip hop and classic poetry can combine for success in the language arts classroom.

The scene shifts to Hawaii as Thomas W. Bean discusses "The Localization of Young Adult Fiction in Contemporary Hawai'i." Kenan Metzger and Wendy Kelleher continue that call for more voices to be heard, focusing on Indigenous Peoples.

LeAnna Madill focuses on gender, with her article, "Gender Identities Explored: *The Lord of the Rings* as a Text of Alternative Ways of Beings," while Catherine S. Quick examines obesity and body image as addressed in young adult novels.

Focusing on exploration of another sort, Carolyn Lott and Stephanie Wasta have authored "Lessons Learned from Hobbs, London, and the Yukon Gold Rush." And *The ALAN Review* co-editor James Blasingame tells of "From Wellpinit to Reardan:

Sherman Alexie's *Journey to the National Book Award*." Alexie was another of the crowd favorites as a featured speaker at last fall's workshop.

Steven T. Bickmore makes a case for finding a place for *Inexcusable* in the classroom, while husband-and-wife team Gerrit W. Bleeker and Barbara S. Bleeker offer "Literary Landscapes: Using Young Adult Literature to Foster a Sense of Place and Self." They wrap up this issue with an examination of six young adult novels that show how the literary landscapes, in the physical, social, and cultural sense—shape the lives of the works' protagonists.

And, finally, be sure to explore 31 new young adult books featured in the Clip and File. Reviews are written by supporters of young adult literature from across the country. And don't forget to check out this issue for the upcoming deadlines for our themed issues, as well as the various grants and awards available. You'll want to mark your calendar so you don't miss out on these opportunities.

With a journal crammed with research, interviews, and reviews, we're sure the conversation started in November in the Big Apple will continue, and you'll continue to understand that your "place" is with young adult literature and the ALAN family.

We hope you enjoy the articles—and a chance to help teens find greater understanding of themselves through their connection with YA literature.

Ps. From Jim Blasingame (Lori doesn't know I'm sneaking this in here!): Congratulations to my coeditor, Lori Atkins Goodson, for winning the 2007 NCTE Edwin Hoey Award for Outstanding Educator in the English Language Arts. You can read all about her wonderful work at Wamego Middle School at <http://www.ncte.org/middle/awards/hoey/126930.htm>.

Call for Manuscripts

2008 Fall theme: How Will Life Be in 2053? Visions of the Future in Young Adult Literature

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature, authors, and instructional approaches that speculate on the nature of life in the future. This need not be limited to science fiction or fantasy by any means, but could center on any books that deal with trends that may impact life in the future. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are welcome, as well. **May 15 submission deadline.**

2009 Winter Theme: Negotiations and Love Songs: The Literature of Young Adults

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature, authors, and instructional approaches that deal with the relationships that develop among young people, the things they love and how they navigate and negotiate the way to their heart's desires in the world. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are welcome, as well. **October 15 submission deadline.**

2009 Summer Theme: A Different Way: Innovative Approaches to the Writing and/or Teaching of Young Adult Literature

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature, authors, and instructional approaches that attempt to take the genre in new directions. This might include, but not be limited to, connections to new literacies, subject matter that has previously been absent or scarce in YAL, or formats/subgenres that are expanding the YAL genre. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are welcome, as well. **January 15 submission deadline.**

2009 Fall Theme: Growing Up: Young Adult Literature Gaining Stature at the High School Level

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature, authors, and instructional approaches that illustrate the value of using young adult literature in the high school setting. This might include, but not be limited to, the exploration of specific titles and themes linked to areas of the high school curriculum, the examination of successful implementation of YA into current classes, the value of YA literature in Advanced Placement coursework and as a bridge to college literature studies.

This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are welcome, as well. **May 15 submission deadline.**

Finding a “Place” in the World of Books, Developing a Sense of “Self” as a Reader:

A Case Study of a Ninth-Grade Student in an Upward Bound Summer Program

This summer, while teaching a literacy class in the Upward Bound Program at Trinity University (a federally funded program that provides academic support to low-income students who are seeking to be the first in their families to graduate from college), I met a ninth-grader (soon-to-be-tenth-grader) named Aurora. Somehow in just five short weeks, she went from saying “I just don’t read, miss,” to checking out six books on our final trip to the library together—barely enough to last her until school started again. Although I’m not sure I can explain Aurora’s transformation any more than I can take credit for it, I think her story is so powerful, it needs to be shared. I’ve woven together Aurora’s comments (transcribed from an interview—here in italics) with my own reflections on what happened. Perhaps somewhere between our two perspectives, you will discover a third story—the story of how you, too, can encourage a student to find his or her place in the world of books and develop a sense of self as a reader.

When I came to campus for the first meeting before the summer session started, I was looking at my class schedule wondering why I got stuck in “Contemporary Literacy and Literature.” I was thinking I’d be lost in that class. Then I found out that my friend Patricia was in the class, too, and I thought maybe it was going to be okay.

When the director of the Upward Bound program at Trinity University showed me a list of the students—ninth, tenth, and eleventh-graders—who had

been placed in my class, I looked at the reading levels listed beside each of their names and caught myself wondering if I could really work the miracles required to bring them up to grade level. But as we discussed the goals and methods I would be using to teach the course, I managed to convince both the director and myself that I was up to the challenge.

My idea for the course was to draw on all the best practices of reading instruction I knew and to give these students the strategies they needed to become more confident, active, skillful, and successful readers. I envisioned teaching students comprehension strategies that would help them navigate the nonfiction texts they encountered in their content area classes, as well as the literary texts they were assigned to read in their English courses. In addition, I wanted to support their growth as independent readers, helping them find texts that would interest and engage them in reading for pleasure and finding personal fulfillment in reading. I hoped to capture this vision by naming the course “Contemporary Literacy and Literature.”

Since I had never tried “Contemporary Literacy and Literature” before—I had only had English classes before—I thought it would be kind of complicated and hard. I was thinking “literature” sounded more advanced than English in high school. And I was thinking my teacher would probably be mean because my English teacher was mean. But she was pretty nice the way she introduced herself, and I guess I felt pretty comfortable in her class right away.

After introducing ourselves and getting to know each other with a name game and other ice breakers, I asked the students to tell me little more about what kinds of things they liked to do by completing the “Activity Ranking Sheet” (Smith and Wilhelm 29). In addition, I asked them to tell me about themselves as readers by filling out a “Reading Survey: What, Why, How, and When Do You Read?” (Burke A47-A50). One of the underlying questions I had stated on the course syllabus was for us to explore the role reading plays in people’s personal and public lives. So I explained to the students that this survey was one way for them to begin thinking about the question, “What role does reading play in *my* life?”

Aurora ranked “hanging out with friends” as the activity she enjoyed most, while “reading a good book” was her second-to-least favorite activity on the list. When asked to rate herself as a reader on a scale of 1-10, Aurora wrote “5 because I don’t read much but I can read long books.” In response to the prompt, “The best reader I know is . . .” Aurora wrote, “I don’t know,” and when asked to describe her biggest achievement as a reader, she responded, “I don’t really read much.” Given a choice of ten different reasons for reading, Aurora chose only two: “I read when I want to learn something” and “I do not ever choose to read.” She cited “lack of time” and “lack of interest” as factors that consistently interfered with her ability to read well and described three goals for herself as a reader: “have more interest in other kinds of books, have an interest to read, and read about anything.”

That survey took me a while to do. I couldn’t really think of things I liked to read. Before this summer, the last time read a novel just because I wanted to was . . . never. In ninth grade I didn’t read a book at all, not one that I wanted to. I didn’t go to the library. If you asked my friends, they would say it would be kind of weird to see me in a library. But now if I did that survey again, I would change some of my answers.

Our course met Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. On the second day of class, I engaged students in activities and discussions about the importance of establishing or identifying a purpose for reading and the benefits of previewing the text. I had students think about how they choose to watch different television shows based on the mood they are in or their purpose for watching. This served as an analogy to the idea of choosing a book that would match their interests and purposes for reading.

Acknowledging that students often don’t have a choice about what they read in school, we also talked about the importance of matching your purpose to the type of text you are about to read—approaching informational text differently from the way you would approach a work of fiction, for example.

We used the analogy of the movie preview to explore the reasons for and benefits of previewing the text (Moorman 28-29). I asked students if they would be willing to pay to see a movie they knew nothing about, and they said “no.” So I had the students collaboratively brainstorm a list of things they learned about a movie from the preview. Then I passed out *Building Academic Literacy: An Anthology for Reading Apprenticeship*, our course text, and had students identify the text features that corresponded to each of the items on their list. This gave us the opportunity to talk about previewing techniques such as reading the front and back covers, title page, table of contents, chapter titles, index, and so on, as well as asking friends for recommendations and reading critics’ comments to see if you would be interested in reading a particular book.

On Friday, I took students to the university library so they could research and locate self-selected texts for independent reading. In the computer lab, I showed them a webpage where I had posted links to a variety of websites on young adult literature including award-winning books, library booklists, and books recommended by individuals, such as Jon Scieszka, Teri Lesesne, and Oprah Winfrey, and groups, such as YALSA and ALAN (see Fig. 1). I asked students to choose at least three books they thought they might be interested in reading, including one they could check out from the university library. Their homework assignment was to start reading that book, give it a “ten-page chance” (Schoenbach et al. 64-65), and focus on previewing to see if the book matched their predictions of what it will be like. Since many of the titles my students were interested in weren’t available at the university library, I had them look those books up in the public library’s online catalog and write down the branch location and call number, so I could check them out over the weekend.

Aurora hadn’t written any books on her list, so I decided to check in with her:

“What kinds of books do you think you’d like to read?”

“I don’t like to read.”

Award-Winning Books

The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward/Printz.htm>

The Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal
http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/sibertmedal/Sibert_Medal.htm

The Coretta Scott King Book Award (for African American authors and illustrators)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/emiert/corettascottingbookaward/corettascott.htm>

The Pura Belpré Award (for Latino/Latina writers and illustrators)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/belpremedal/belprmedal.htm>

The Alex Award (for books written for adults that have special appeal to young adult readers)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/alexawards/alexawards.htm>

Best Books for Young Adults from YALSA (The Young Adult Library Services Association)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/bestbooksya/bestbooksyoung.htm>

The Best of the Best from YALSA

<http://www.teenreads.com/features/yalsa-best-of-best.asp>

The Texas Bluebonnet Awards

<http://www.txla.org/groups/tba/index.html>

Library Booklists

The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Teen Booklist
<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/teens/read/booklists/>

The Internet Public Library: TeenSpace (Click on "Reading and Writing" then "Reading Lists and Clubs")

<http://www.ipl.org/div/teen/>

Multnomah County Library: Adult and Teen Booklists
<http://www.multcolib.org/books/lists/adultlists.html>

New York Public Library: TeenLink (Click on "Books for the Teen Age")

<http://teenlink.nypl.org/index.html>

Teens at the San Antonio Public Library Webpage
<http://www.youthwired.sat.lib.tx.us/>

Click on "Booklinks"

Find Books Similar to Another Book You Have Read

Amazon.com (Search for your book on Amazon.com, and read the "Customers who bought this book also bought . . ." list of suggestions)

<http://www.amazon.com/>

What Should I Read Next?

<http://www.whatshouldireadnext.com/>

Books Recommended by Individuals or Groups Interested in YA Literature

Authors & Books: Booktalks from Scholastic
<http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/ab/booktalks.htm>

Bill's Best Books from ALAN: The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (Click on "Bill's Best Books")

<http://www.alan-ya.org/>

Booklists from YALSA: Young Adult Library Services Association

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklistsbook.htm>

Guys Read

<http://www.guysread.com/>

Lazy Readers' Book Club (so-named because all the books listed are fairly short)

<http://lazyreaders.com/>

Mona Kerby's The Reading Corner: Young Adult Books

<http://www.carr.org/read/YA.htm>

Oprah's Book Club recommendations

http://www2.oprah.com/books/books_landing.jhtml

Outstanding Books for the College Bound

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/outstandingbooks/outstandingbooks.htm>

Pierce Wonderings: Young Adult Literature Recommendations

<http://www.piercedwonderings.nstemp.com/Teaching%20Tips/YA%20Lit.htm>

Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/quickpicks/quickpicksreluctant.htm>

Reading Matters: Reviews of books for children and teenagers

<http://www.readingmatters.co.uk/>

Reading Rants: Out of the Ordinary Teen Booklists

<http://www.readingrants.com>

TeenReads: Ultimate Teen Reading List

<http://www.teenreads.com/features/2006-reading-list.asp>

Teri Lesesne, self-proclaimed "Goddess of Young Adult Literature"

<http://www.professornana.com/>

Top Books for Teens

<http://www.welchenglish.com/top-books-for-teens.htm>

YALSA: Teens' Top Ten Books

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/teenreading/teenstopten/teenstopten.htm>

Figure 1. Finding information about young adult books on the Web

Well, okay, but if you were going to read a book, what kind would you choose?"

"I don't know."

"That's okay. Let's see if we can figure it out together. What kinds of things are you looking for in a book? Mystery? Romance? Horror?"

"I don't read, miss."

I decided to give her some space and let her continue browsing the online book lists.

Later, I noticed Aurora was still having trouble finding any books she was interested in checking out. She was diligently reading the critics comments and

Aurora tried to make me understand, "I just don't read, miss." She was the only one of my students to leave empty-handed that day, and I worried all weekend about how I was going to motivate her to find and read a self-selected book.

using Amazon.com to preview the front and back covers and first page as I had shown her, but she wasn't writing any titles down on her list. Finally, after most of the other students had gone out into the library to find their books, I said to her, "I'm glad you're really taking time to read the covers. Are you not interested in any of the one's you've looked at?" Frustrated, Aurora replied, "No. I don't really want a book. I don't read. Can I just do something else?" I suggested that if she would

make a list of movies and TV shows she liked, I would try to help her find a book she would like.

I thought it was really hard looking through the Internet and looking at all those books. I thought some of the books would be interesting because of the covers, but then when I read the back, they weren't. It took me a long time to find one. I didn't really want to do it. At first I wasn't really thinking of what I was looking for. I was just looking at some books. And when you told me to make a list of TV shows, I thought, "What does this have to do with finding a book?" So I just started putting anything down to get a 100. But then when I thought about the shows I was interested in—reality shows—I thought there might be something related to what I watch, so kept looking on the Internet.

All of the other students had checked out their

books and gone on to their next class when I saw Aurora approaching me from across the library. She had written down three titles and needed help locating the one that she had found in the university catalog—*Someone Like You* by Sarah Dessen. Unfortunately, when we found the call number in the stacks, it turned out to be another book with the same title by a different author. As I searched the online catalog in vain, Aurora tried to make me understand, "I just don't read, miss." She was the only one of my students to leave empty-handed that day, and I worried all weekend about how I was going to motivate her to find and read a self-selected book.

In addition to checking out the titles students had listed on their book choice sheets, I also got the books they had indicated as their favorites on the Reading Survey, plus others I recognized as recipients of teen praise and critical acclaim. I started the second week of class by giving students advice about how to choose a book that would be the "right fit"—one that would not only interest them, but also be at the appropriate level of challenge. I used a visual showing the zones of comfort, risk, and danger (see Fig. 2) and explained that we need to be in our "risk zone" in order to improve our skills, whether we are learning to play a musical instrument, do tricks on a skateboard,

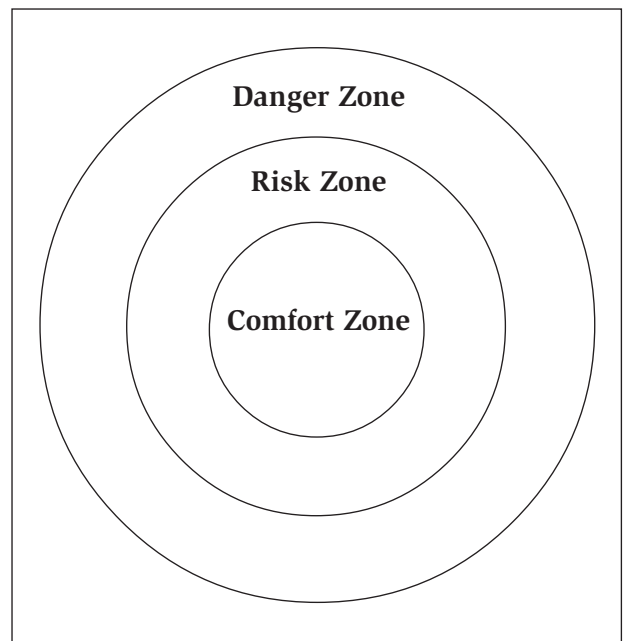


Figure 2. Zones of comfort, risk, and danger from the National School Reform Faculty, www.nsrforum.org

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Pass Record Sheet

Title: _____ Author: _____

Genre: _____ Challenge: Too easy Just right Too hard

Would you be interested in reading this book? Yes No

If yes, why is this book appealing to you? If no, who do think would be interested in this book? _____

Title: _____ Author: _____

Genre: _____ Challenge: Too easy Just right Too hard

Would you be interested in reading this book? Yes No

If yes, why is this book appealing to you? If no, who do think would be interested in this book? _____

Title: _____ Author: _____

Genre: _____ Challenge: Too easy Just right Too hard

Would you be interested in reading this book? Yes No

If yes, why is this book appealing to you? If no, who do think would be interested in this book? _____

Figure 3. Handout for book pass activity

or develop as readers. Then I taught them the “five-finger method” (Robb 198) or “rule of thumb” (Atwell 40) for determining a book’s difficulty level and had them engage in a book pass activity (Allen; see Fig. 3) to browse and preview all the books I had brought back from the public library. I had identified the books students requested with their names on heart-shaped sticky notes, and labeled those students had said were their favorites with “Juan recommends” and so forth.

Aurora took home four books that day: *Someone Like You* and *Dreamland* by Sarah Dessen, *So B. It* by Sarah Weeks, and *The Simple Gift* by Steven Herrick.

I did find one on the Internet—Someone Like You—that the back cover was interesting, and it was a good book. And when I saw Dreamland, I thought it was going to be a dumb book. But I guess you can’t really judge a book by its cover because that was a really good book.

I guess I like books that involve real-life problems like relationships and stuff and problems that happen to other people. Sometimes books give you solutions that you can use for your own life purposes. I think most of the people I hang out with probably would like those books, too, but they don't read either. I guess if it was a really good book that I liked, I would tell them about it, and they would probably read it.

I explained to the students that I expected them each to finish at least one book by the end of our summer session, four weeks away. I asked them to keep track of their daily reading on a Reading Log (Gallagher 175), which I checked regularly. As part of their final exam, I told students we would be having a “book talk” in which they would tell me about their book. During the book talk, I would also open to a page, read from the text, and ask them to explain that selection to me in the context of the rest of the story. I had a student volunteer model the book talk with me, so the other students would know what to expect. And I encouraged them to do their book talks as soon as they finished their books, rather than waiting until the last week of the summer.

To my surprise, at the end of that second week, Aurora arrived early to class and announced that she had finished *Someone Like You*.

“Hey, I finished that book.”

“Great! When do you want to do your book talk?”

“Today, because I’m already reading the next one, and I don’t want to get it confused with the other one.”

So while we were on a field trip to a nearby university, Aurora sat with me on the bus for a few minutes and told me about her book. When we came to a stop light, she moved back to sit with her friends, and I heard one of them ask, “Why were you sitting up there?” Aurora replied, “just talking to my teacher.” In our end-of-the-summer interview, I asked Aurora why she thought she had finished *Someone Like You* so fast.

When I was reading it, I stopped at the part when the boy got in a motorcycle accident. But I wanted to find out what happened, so I kept going. And it just

I guess I like books that involve real-life problems like relationships and stuff and problems that happen to other people. Sometimes books give you solutions that you can use for your own life purposes.

got more interesting, so I wanted to finish it.

The following Wednesday morning, I saw Aurora sitting in the lobby reading *Dreamland* before class. Since most of my other students weren’t even halfway finished with their first book, I excitedly told the Upward Bound director about Aurora’s progress. While I was getting things organized in the classroom, Aurora came in before any of the other students had arrived.

“I’m reading that other book.”

“Yeah, I noticed you’re more than halfway through already.”

“But I’m not really a reader. It’s

not like I’m a big library person or anything.”

I was struck by Aurora’s response, and I wondered if the director had said something to her about my excitement that morning (she hadn’t). Since Aurora seemed to be rejecting the idea of identifying herself as a reader, I worried that praising her too much might backfire and stop her from reading more. When I asked in the interview about why she had said “I’m not really a reader,” Aurora explained:

“Even though I’ve been reading, I’m still not really a book person. It’s not like when I’m bored, I would just pick up a book or something. I would probably do something else because I’m not a reading person. I don’t read because I’m bored; I only read if I’m interested to find out what happens next.”

“So even though you read three books in three weeks, you still don’t think of yourself as a reader?”

“To me a reader is a person who reads books more often than I do. Reading to me is kind of rare. Like to everybody else, they don’t think I’m a reader. One day my friend Amber came to my house and said, ‘What are you doing?’ I said, ‘Just reading a book.’”

“Did you worry that she might think you were uncool?”

“No, I don’t care because the book was good enough, so I wanted to read it. If I really want to read, I’m going to read. It just depends on the book.”

“So if I, as your teacher, made a big deal about you reading and told you how proud I was of you, how would that make you feel? How would you react?”

“I would probably just read more because I like to impress teachers and show them I’m smart.”

By the following Monday, Aurora had started reading *So B. It*. And after finishing a book each week for three weeks in a row, she finally started *A Simple Gift* by Steven Herrick. But unlike the first three—realistic fiction narrated by teenage girls—*A Simple Gift* is a novel in verse written in three different voices.

I stopped reading that one. I didn’t want to finish it. There were two sides of the book, one was Billy and one was the girl, but I didn’t really know that, so it was confusing. Then there was a point where I looked at the top and saw “Billy” and I noticed that it was changing between a boy and a girl. But I didn’t really want to reread anything, so I just stopped.

Aurora’s favorite books of the summer were the two by Sarah Dessen. I asked her why she liked them so much.

“I guess it’s because some of the characters kind of relate to me. I like to imagine being in their position and think about what would I do and what they did. I just like those kinds of books with characters who are real people to you.”

“What did you think about *So B. It*?”

“It was okay, but not as good as the other ones.”

“Why not?”

[pauses to think, struggling to find the words] “You know how you told us to make predictions when we read? Well, I was making predictions, and they were always coming true.”

“Oh, it was too predictable! That’s a really good reason not to like a book because if you already know what’s going to happen, it’s not that interesting, is it?”

“Yeah, it was like one of those books that you already know the ending.”

“So would you say you like to read books with surprises?”

“Yeah.”

“What else would you look for in a good book?”

“I just think books are better

when there are people in them that relate to me and to the friends I have at school and at my apartments.”

“That’s a really important insight about what kinds of books you like best. What else did you discover about yourself as a reader this summer?”

“That I can actually read pretty fast.”

“Did that surprise you?”

*“Yeah, because I don’t really like to read books. And there was that one I didn’t really want to finish, so I was pretty slow at that one. These books [pointing to *Someone Like You*, *Dreamland* and *So B. It*] I finished pretty fast because I was really interested in them.”*

“Did you discover anything else about yourself as a reader?”

“Well, I wasn’t that good of a reader before this class. There was one point when I used to read some books during my free time, like when I was in middle school. Then I bought all these books, but I didn’t read them, so I gave them away. I guess that’s when I stopped reading books—about sixth or seventh grade. But now I think I’m a good reader. This time I understand more, and I kind of have more interest in books. I feel like I can explain what I’m reading. I can tell people about it, what the whole story is about. Like,

one day in class I was giving a “book talk” about my book to Joe (another student in the class,) and he was interested in my book, so he was looking for it.”

“What else did you learn this summer?”

“I just got more interested in books, so I was reading more. Sometimes at home, I would just have the TV on mute and I would sit there and read for a while. This summer was the most books I’ve read in that amount of time, in a row. So I guess it just made me think that there are more good books like that out there.”

“So was there anything about our class this summer—anything I did or maybe something I didn’t do—that helped you get interested in reading again?”

“Yeah, you looked for books for

Aurora’s favorite books of the summer were the two by Sarah Dessen. I asked her why she liked them so much.

“I guess it’s because some of the characters kind of relate to me. I like to imagine being in their position and think about what would I do and what they did.”

me. Because when I look for books, I can't really find them. I mean I still got to choose which ones I liked, but you helped me. You picked certain books for me, so I kept reading them. Also the reading log made me want to finish the whole thing. And I knew I was going to do the book talk, so I knew what to expect."

"So what advice would you give teachers who want their students to like reading?"

"They should have everyone talk about their books. But people don't like to stand up in front of the class. So maybe the students could sit in a circle and go around and tell about what they're reading. Also, teachers should pick really good books when they make us read, so we'll actually want to read them. Teachers should find out more of what their students are about—what they like and things they do. So then maybe if they want to help the student find a book, it would kind of relate to the student. If there was a kid who liked sports, he would like a sports book, and a girl who is a "drama queen" would like books with lots of drama. Kids would read more books if they knew that it was about them, that it related to their lives."

"What do you think would be the best way for teachers to find out what their students are interested in?"

"They could let them have a journal, and write about things like what you did this weekend, or just let them write a page about themselves."

"So do you think the kind of books you like are part of your personality, part of who you are? What do you think these books say about you?"

"Yeah, because I can relate myself to the characters. Like I think of myself as having determination, and in *So B*. It she has the confidence to go somewhere just to find out about her mom's lifestyle. And I do want to go far with things, like if I wanted to find something out, I would. Also I want to help people, and in *Someone Like You*, her best friend helps her with the baby, which is pretty much what I would do.

"So what advice would you give teachers who want their students to like reading?"

"They should have everyone talk about their books. But people don't like to stand up in front of the class. So maybe the students could sit in a circle and go around and tell about what they're reading."

I'm helpful like that character. And her younger sister wants to go a different way, you know, do her own thing. And that's how I want to be, to be the one person in my family who goes to college, and make a difference—something that no one's done before."

"Besides relating to the characters, what else do you think teens look for in a good book?"

"Just like adults would rather read their kinds of books, teens would be better off with books that sound like the way other teens talk. We like stories where it's like the kids wrote the book themselves, where kids are telling their own story. When an adult is telling the book, it feels like parents telling you what to do. But teens are more sociable with teens, and adults are more sociable with adults. There's a lot of social things going on with teens, and it's good if they have

somebody that's around their age telling them their story. When it's from an adult point of view, it sounds like an adult wrote that book. But a teen book should make you think they're like a teenager who just wrote their life story out to you."

"So teens feel more at home when they're reading a book written in the voice of a teen?"

"More comfortable, because we can say, 'Yeah, okay. I know what you're talking about. I went through that too. I'm in the same position, but what did you do?' We want something realistic to the teen's experience."

As I was driving Aurora home after this interview, I offered to take her to the library. I knew she was leaving the next day for an Upward Bound trip to New Orleans, and I thought she might want a new book to read on the bus. She said she would like that, so we went to the small branch library near her apartment complex and spent about forty-five minutes exploring their young adult collection. At first we looked for more titles by Sarah Dessen, but they didn't have any. So Aurora began browsing, and I scanned the shelves for books I thought might appeal to her. Periodically, I

would bring a book over and place it on her pile. Aurora carefully considered each one, examining the front and back covers and thoughtfully reading the first page or two before making her decisions. She rejected some of the books I offered and accepted others. In those silently shared moments, it seemed to me that Aurora had found her place in the world of books and developed a sense of herself as (dare I say it?) a “reader.”

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ALAN Foundation Research Grants

Members of ALAN may apply to the ALAN Foundation for funding (up to \$1,500) for research in young adult literature. Proposals are reviewed by the five most recent presidents of ALAN. Awards are made annually in the fall and are announced at the ALAN breakfast during the NCTE convention in November. The application deadline each year is **September 15th**.

“Can you name one good thing that comes out of war?”

Adolescents’ Questions about War and Conflict Are Answered in Nonfiction Literature

“The lessons of the past offer hope as we invite a new generation to guide their lives with a deep regard for humanity, a commitment to the values of caring and respect for others, and the development of a strong moral and ethical fiber that will enable them to stand up for what they believe in and speak out against injustice.”

—Kassenoff & Meinbach xvii

Every day young people see disturbing images of violent current events on television, on the Internet, and in popular culture, such as movies, music videos, and even video games. In addition to hearing a myriad of inflammatory rhetoric, often in the form of threats, born of ethnic or cultural hatred from political and cultural leaders around the world, teens also read or hear comments from journalists, teachers, parents, and peers. Not surprisingly, many young people are questioning what is right or wrong, what is true or false, and what is really behind current events and their historical antecedents. Adolescents want personal answers from those who have lived in the midst of conflict, not talking points or historical rhetoric. Instead of obeying the rule to “pay no attention to that man behind the curtain” of situations, young people would much rather tear the curtain down and see war from the point of view of those who can tell the truth about it.

Keeping in mind that the adolescents of today will be the parents, power-brokers, and politicians of tomorrow, we, as teachers, need to respect, acknowledge, guide, and inspire them with resources that accurately, aesthetically, and authentically address their ques-

tions, curiosities, and concerns. Inspired by scholars of adolescent literacy (Baker 2002; Moje 2002; Beers 1996; Ivey 2002) who contend that adolescents must be heard and acknowledged before designing curricula to address their needs, I found it essential to record the articulate, passionate thoughts of young people about war and conflict. Ultimately, key questions of theirs emerged, questions which informed my selection of literature that would present them with what they were asking for.

What Are Adolescents Asking?

In *Helping Our Children Deal with War*, the National Mental Health Association alerts adults: “In this time of heightened anxiety over the war with Iraq, our children are experiencing fear and anxiety, too [...] But unlike adults, children have little experience to help them put all this information into perspective” (1). Adolescents also need guidance and direction to make sense of what it means to be at war.

To determine specific questions that adolescents are asking about war, I selected a sample of young people between the ages of thirteen and eighteen who serve on the Prime Stage Theatre Teen Advisory Board in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These students, with a

diverse range of academic skills, backgrounds, and interests are quite candid about their thoughts, questions, and comments when suggesting topics for the theatre to present. After I conducted an introductory interview session with twelve students, seven adolescents agreed to participate in this project.

An open-ended questionnaire was distributed through email. This survey invited them to share three to four questions they have about the topic of war, people involved in war, and what they would ask a survivor of war. To ensure that the questions were thoughtful, meaningful, and representative of young people, the participants were given up to two weeks to select and compose their thoughts.

Once all the responses were collected through email, each participant was re-interviewed to confirm, expand, or adjust his or her questions. The students and I then chose five provocative questions written by the participants that most effectively represented their concerns:

1. "Why do people have to insist that a certain religion is wrong, that a certain group of people are the root of the world's problems—how can your beliefs in God's teachings want you to kill innocent children?"
2. "I would ask a war survivor whether or not the stories we hear about the event 'live up,' in a sense, to the actual experience. Does the media portray, say, the War in Iraq as something worse than it is or something better than it is?"
3. "I would want to talk to youths that are constantly living under the threat of terrorism—what keeps them going? What do they think the future holds for them?"
4. "Their personal stories—how they survived, what they did to survive, what did they think about, what kept them going? Why?—so that I can better prepare myself for any future wars that I may have to live through. Maybe I can do something that may prevent that next war. . . . What would someone like me do or not do?"
5. "Can you name one good thing that came out of the war, whether it be a person you met or a lesson you learned?"

The answers to these questions are readily found in nonfiction, first-person diaries, stories, and other young adult literature written by and about survivors of wars. These works are literary windows into

turbulent worlds. "Adolescent literature provides an environment for young adults to see the results of decisions made by characters and to evaluate their ideas and behaviors" (Hayn & Sherrill 7). History and current news become more than facts or figures when authors relate their experiences or those of other teens living through the Holocaust, running from bombs in Sarajevo, hiding in Baghdad basements, or trying to keep safe from the crossfire in Lebanon, El Salvador, and Washington, DC.

Age-appropriate, nonfiction literature about teenagers, or books with comments from teenagers facing these horrible sorts of conflicts, enable students to read, hear, and feel the impassioned pleas, rages, and cries of young people like themselves in situations of anger, fear, loss, and hope. "There is no other genre that is so welcoming and accessible to teenage readers" (White 10). Creating opportunities for young people to identify with characters living harsh events helps students understand themselves better as they begin to understand the actions and choices of others (Davis & Watkins 16). Identification leads to empathy, and empathy leads to understanding. The provocative, personal questions of teens are answered in accessible, honest, and relevant ways by people they will listen to because, as one student said to me: "Those people matter."

Literature to Address the Questions of Adolescents

While there is a vast array of nonfiction books on war, the ones I selected to address the students' questions were written by authors who are sensitive to the thoughts, images, and experiences of adolescents.

Age-appropriate, non-fiction literature about teenagers, or books with comments from teenagers facing these horrible sorts of conflicts, enable students to read, hear, and feel the impassioned pleas, rages, and cries of young people like themselves in situations of anger, fear, loss, and hope.

According to Totten and Feinberg, individual human stories within situations of persecution and genocide have the ability to engage students in ways that are beyond the ability of other genres of literature and resources of information. This is due to “deeply human aspects—including the passions and emotions—that are communicated” (111). Memoirs, diaries, and first-person narratives link adolescents to historical events so they can discover and vicariously experience, as David Russell wrote, the worst and best of humankind. “In these stories of suffering humanity, we may at times hear above the cries of despair, the faint, persistent murmuring of the compassionate heart that will lead us out of the darkness and toward the light” (280). These are some issues for which young people seek answers.

The literature I have chosen to answer the five questions that sprang from my conversations with young people ranges from memoirs of Holocaust survivors, comments of Hitler Youth, diaries of a thirteen-year-old girl in Sarajevo and an eighteen-year-old girl in Baghdad, to images and accounts of an author who traveled with children into the more contemporary war zones of Lebanon, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Washington, DC. Books that are well-written, true accounts about real people who made real choices as children and teenagers in extraordinary times “provide important and powerful messages for the youth of today” (Biro 2005).

The selections include Holocaust memoirs *Eleanor’s Story: An American Girl in Hitler’s Germany*, by Eleanor Ramrath Garner; *Eva’s Story: A Survivor’s Tale by the Step-sister of Anne Frank*, by Eva Schloss; *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*, by Livia Bitton-Jackson; *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor*, by Judith Magyar Isaacson; and *Strange and Unexpected Love: A Teenage Girl’s Holocaust Memoirs*, by Fanya Gottesfeld Heller. I have also chosen books specifically intended to answer the questions of adolescent boys, *Children of the Swastika: The Hitler Youth*, by Eileen Heyes, which includes comments by young people who joined that organization, while *An Uncommon Friendship*, by Bernat

Now, instead of being a place of friendships and learning, her school is a place where inflammatory anti-Semitic insults fill the halls and hopes of graduation dissolve.

Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, gives compelling perspectives of the Holocaust through the reflections of a Hitler Youth and a Jewish boy. War experiences in Sarajevo and Baghdad are detailed respectively through *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo* by Zlata Filipović, and *Thura’s Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq* by Thura Al-Windawi. Finally, a global perspective of war is presented by Maria Ousseimi in her collection of compelling images and comments of young people in

Caught in the Crossfire.

Introductions of Selected Books

Although many of the selections have female protagonists, all the books are equally appropriate for boys. Each book has specific strengths in providing young readers with answers to the five questions. Short introductions of each book will demonstrate how the books also fulfill criteria established by Totten and Feinberg for literature that addresses war and conflict. Quality resources must assist “students to ponder how some are ill-treated or made to feel ‘other,’ to be maligned not because of what they have done or said, but because of their religion, beliefs, or background” (Totten & Feinberg 158). Quality resources must also realize a specific rationale and provide insights to the life and choices of others during the conflicts.

In *Eleanor’s Story: An American Girl in Hitler’s Germany*, Eleanor Ramrath Garner begins with a first-hand account of the Hindenburg explosion and then explores questions she asked as a young American girl surrounded by the Holocaust and World War II:

So much puzzled me about this war and how people behaved who were involved in it. Edit was always cheerful and friendly. She didn’t seem to appear to bear a grudge against anyone. I knew I would have been furious at the Germans if they had taken away my property and family and forced me to work for my enemy” (52).

Eva Schloss in *Eva’s Story: A Survivor’s Tale by the Step-sister of Anne Frank* portrays life in pre-war Amsterdam through friendship with her best friend, Anne Frank. Readers see girls shopping, going to

school, and flirting with boys. Then, Ms. Schloss takes the reader to the barracks of Auschwitz where she was imprisoned simply because of being Jewish, to forests in Russia, and back to Amsterdam, all before her sixteenth birthday:

Franzi shrugged and bent down to kiss me goodbye. I hugged her hard. She had been a constant companion and a dear friend. I watched helplessly as she joined the consignment to an unknown destination. We had been thrown together by fate and there was no knowing if we would ever see each other again. [. . .] She had given me comfort and courage when I had been at my lowest and now she had to go instead of me. [. . .] At that moment as I sat at the bench alone with the empty chair beside me, I knew Pappy's prayers had been answered again and I felt the hand of God truly protecting me. (135)

Elli, the thirteen year old protagonist of *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, dreams of going to a prep school in a large city where she will become "a celebrated poet, beautiful, elegant, and very talented" (13). Yet at 2:30 in the morning, her beloved world is turned upside down with the Nazi occupation of Hungary. Now, instead of being a place of friendships and learning, her school is a place where inflammatory anti-Semitic insults fill the halls and hopes of graduation dissolve. Livia is confronted with the possibility of being the only survivor of her family. When her father shows her where their family treasures are stored, she bursts out:

Why should I know about the jewels? Why? Tell me, why? I don't want to be the one to survive! I don't want to survive alone! Oh, God. Why? Why? Why? (28).

In *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor*, Judith Magyar Isaacson, educator, author, and human-rights advocate, shares her experiences as a young, spirited teenage girl in a small town in Hungary prior to the Nazi invasion of Hungary, to her captivity in Auschwitz, the liberation, moving to America, and return to eastern Europe with her daughter thirty-three years after being transported to a death camp:

Our cattle car was packed with sev-

enty-five people. I was crouching on my pack, squeezed between mother and Nana Klein. An SS officer came in and closed the door. I heard him bolt it—from the outside. It was dark. The engine gave a sudden tug. "We're leaving," Nana choked. "I can't believe this. We're really leaving." Where to? I tensed. The train was moving east. [. . .] "No one came to see us off, I murmured. "No one." (58)

Strange and Unexpected Love: A Teenage Girl's Holocaust Memoirs expands the adolescents' perspectives of the setting of the Holocaust from Eastern Europe to German occupied Ukraine. Heller vividly recounts how she, her brother and parents survived against the war in barn attics, cellars, forests. Heller also found love, loyalty, and life with a Ukrainian boy who saved their lives:

I longed for word from my parents. Jan could tell me nothing more than he'd heard they were safe and that they had a hard life in the Borszczow ghetto. One day he brought news that our house had been taken over by the Germans for offices, since it had the reputation of being the cleanest on in Skala. [. . .] Chronological time had become meaningless, since I had no clock or watch. On gray days, time played tricks: I'd think it must be eight o'clock in the morning and it would turn out to be five. [. . .] I trained myself to become more and more adept at using "false time" to advantage. Sometimes I managed to get Arthur to join me in braiding straw figures. I made a whole settlement of houses and people. Other times I made up new stanzas for old songs, and Arthur joined in the refrain. (99)

In stark contrast to each other, the authors of *An Uncommon Friendship* share their parallel memoirs of

life under Hitler and the Nazis. Frederic Tubach, a German youth who attended Pre-Hitler Youth rallies, and Bernat Rosner, a twelve year old Jewish boy who was the sole survivor of his family, detail these opposite experiences of the same war:

When you are twelve years old you feel immortal. Bernie and I both felt that way then. I remember looking through an open vent on the tiled roof of my grandparent's house, feeling invulnerable as I watched low flying American Mustangs strafing the countryside. I asked myself whether Bernie felt fearless, even invulnerable, while he was being transported to Auschwitz. (14-15)

In *Children of the Swastika: The Hitler Youth*, Eileen Heyes relates the comments of boys and girls who were seduced by the charisma and promises of Hitler to fulfill the "dreams" of their country devastated by the aftermath of World War I.

Thura shares her inner-most responses to the physical sights and sounds of living during the regime of Saddam Hussein, to experiencing the “Shock and Awe” on March 20, 2003, and walking along deserted, debris-filled Baghdad streets.

In *Children of the Swastika: The Hitler Youth*, Eileen Heyes relates the comments of boys and girls who were seduced by the charisma and promises of Hitler to fulfill the “dreams” of their country devastated by the aftermath of World War I. A former Hitler Youth, “Johann,” son of a German businessman, reflected on his service to the Fuehrer that sounds ominously familiar to the words of young people today:

Like all kids at that age, you had to join because all your friends did. During the war, it became very important [to belong], when food became scarce and food rationing set in, it was a wonderful way to punish people by simply not giving them rations: “If you’re not willing to do your share by joining the Hitler Youth, you don’t deserve to eat.” [. . .] What really was the motivation for a lot of people was that it was a lot of fun. There was always a two or three-week summer camp. When you’re young, you hardly know what’s going on. It’s only later on that you realize that there were subtle pressures and subtle indoctrinations taking place. (38-39)

While accounts of the Holocaust address aspects of students’ questions, the words of teens experiencing conflicts in Sarajevo and in Bagdad, bring situations closer to the present day. *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo*, written during the 1990’s war in Sarajevo, and *Thura’s Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq*, written during the 2003 bombing of Iraq, connect American readers with worlds studied in school and seen on the news.

In *Zlata’s Diary*, readers encounter more than historical accounts of the war in Bosnia. Her words, as a pre-teen girl, convey intense emotional confusion. An example is her entry on Monday, June 29, 1992:

BOREDOM!!! SHOOTING!!! SHELLING!!! PEOPLE BEING KILLED!!! DESPAIR!!! HUNGER!!! MISERY!!! FEAR!!! That’s my life! The life of an innocent eleven-year-old school-girl! A schoolgirl without a school, without the fun and excitement of school. A child without games, without

friends, without the sun, without birds, without nature, without fruit, without chocolate or sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short, a child without a childhood. A wartime child [. . .] God, will this ever stop, will I ever be a schoolgirl again, will I ever enjoy my childhood again? (61)

Thura’s Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq brings young readers forward in time, as an eighteen year-old girl writes about her experiences in Iraq. Thura shares her inner-most responses to the physical sights and sounds of living during the regime of Saddam Hussein, to experiencing the “Shock and Awe” on March 20, 2003, and walking along deserted, debris-filled Baghdad streets. On March 20, she wrote: “I hear and feel the first missiles exploding—when the earth shakes, your whole body shakes as well. What’s going to happen to us? There is only fear in my house” (13). Her April 3 diary entry is particularly significant for adolescents:

I don’t know where to start. Everything’s changing so quickly. Normal life is coming to an end [...] At the moment I’m sitting up in bed writing. I’m so worried—not just for me, but for all my friends from college. They’re scattered all over Baghdad, and now the fighting has started in the city. (46, 51)

Conflicts in other war zones that are more recent and close to home are reported by Maria Ousseimi in her collection of interviews and photographs titled *Caught in the Crossfire*. Ms. Ousseimi is a witness to war, having been born in Lebanon and left with her family as the seventeen-year-long war began. She writes in her author’s note:

I needed to find answers to [my] questions, to connect with the often forgotten victims of that war and other wars being broadcast into my comfortable living-room night after night. [. . .] I felt compelled to travel to as many different continents as I could to show people that war is not confined to a particular region or a particular culture. (vii).

Each of these selected books portrays the events of war in accessible, private, intimate, and personal ways, just as they happened to their adolescent protagonists. With this literature, adolescents have words and people to which they can return when they feel the need to do so.

Questions Answered in the Literature

Before I share how the chosen literature answers the adolescents’ questions, it is important to keep in mind three caveats:

- a) These literary works are only suggestions of literature than can be used.
- b) Within literary works, there are hundreds of images, thoughts, and reflections that address the concerns.
- c) Answers to provocative topics are not usually found in just one resource.

Individually, each book provides a personal answer to be reflected upon and explored. Collectively, the books show an historical perspective of the intensity and profundity of the questions posed. Holocaust survivor Livia Bitton-Jackson wrote in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*: “This is the story of triumphs in the face of overwhelming odds, of extraordinary events in extraordinary times. And yet, I believe it is essentially the story of a teenager [. . .] That teenager could have been you” (2). Like dear friends sharing secrets, the authors of young adult nonfiction, along with the authors of the other books disclose why teens did certain things, and how they survived ridicule, fear, confusion, starvation, or worse.

The First Question

The first question, which seeks answers to issues of ideology and prejudice, establishes the level of concern posed by the young people:

Why do people have to insist that a certain religion is wrong, that a certain group of people are the root of the world’s problems—how can your beliefs in God’s teachings want you to kill innocent children?

That complex question is a common theme in the books. Each author in our selected works shares how political conflicts in his or her decade and country were the results of people who lived by ideologies of hate, prejudice, destruction of others. Ousseimi offers disturbing answers through comments of young “soldiers” in the chapter “Children Killing Children—Mozambique” of her book:

Having witnessed or been forced to commit acts of extreme violence on their own parents at a very early age [. . .] grew up with no emotional bonds. Like Ricardo, they often justified their acts on the grounds that they were only obeying orders. I was a soldier. I lost my finger in combat. I killed many people. I was told to do it, so I did. Those were the rules. I was ordered and I obeyed. (53)

The political ideology of hate was also witnessed by

Judith Isaacson whose words reflect the transformation of an educational system and a school professor in 1938 Hungary:

After the occupation of Austria on March 13, 1938, the condition of Hungarian Jews deteriorated daily [. . .] Jewish students lost their scholarships, and new Nazi textbooks changed history overnight: from Roman times to the present, the Jews emerged as villains. Most of our professors ignored the new politics; Aladár Kövary, my history teacher, was the only exception. He suddenly emerged as an avowed anti-Semite, and he seemed to get a perverse enjoyment out of spouting obscenities at the Jewish girls. (12)

Another look at the fervor of anti-Semitism resounds in the words of Melita Maschmann, a former Hitler Youth member interviewed by Eileen Heyes who explored why young people joined that organization:

We dreamed then of a strong Germany, respected amongst the nations not from fear but from admiration—and Hitler promised to fulfill this dream for us. Dreams are something dangerous in politics. They stop the dreamer from seeing what is really happening. Hitler whipped up our yearning political dream into a fanatical passion. When he succeeded in doing this we followed him blindly. . . . In this state of bondage we had forfeited our freedom of conscience. (52)

Zlata recalls the moment of discovering that her friend from kindergarten was killed by a bomb that fell in a park near her house in Sarajevo:

NINA IS DEAD. (sic) A piece of shrapnel lodged in her brain and she died [. . .] Nina, an innocent, eleven-year-old little girl—the victim of a stupid war. I feel sad. I cry and wonder why? She didn’t do anything. A disgusting war has destroyed a young child’s life. (43)

The diary entry on April 9, 2003, by Thura Al-Windawi expresses thoughts that are particularly significant for young people as Saddam Hussein’s statue was pulled down:

But now it was time for him to pay the price for everything he’d done in the past. How can I explain all this to Sama, who used to have to say “Long live our leader Saddam Hussein!” several times a day at school, and all the children would clap at the mention of his name? [. . .] Sama won’t understand, she’ll still say, “We love Saddam, we will sacrifice ourselves for him”—it’s the result of a kind of brainwashing. But where is the sacrifice? Where’s the loyalty to Saddam? It’s all lies. It’s as if we have been teaching our children make-believe things that don’t really exist at all. (71-72)

The Second, Third, and Fourth Questions

Those answers to the first question bridge the second, third, and fourth questions, which focus on victims of war. Adolescents want to know not necessarily about specifics of wars, but how survivors found inspiration and support to live, hope, and envisioned a future in the confusion of their present circumstances:

2. "I would ask a war survivor whether or not the stories we hear about the event 'live up,' in a sense, to the actual experience. Does the media portray, say, the War in Iraq as something worse than it is or something better than it is?"
3. "I would want to talk to youths that are constantly living under the threat of terrorism—what keeps them going? What do they think the future holds for them?"
4. "Their personal stories—how they survived, what they did to survive, what did they think about, what kept them going? Why?—so that I can better prepare myself for any future wars that I may have to live through. Maybe I can do something that may prevent that next war. . . . What would someone like me do or not do."

Being that each book shows war through the lens of young people who lived through or are living through war instead of a lens of journalism, young readers hear, see, feel, and vicariously experience the actual events. Granted, the memoirs are written by people recalling their situations, in contrast to the diaries and the book by Maria Ousseimi that goes directly into the crossfire. However, each book presents unedited truths about war. Garner's sentiments in the chapter titled, "Childhood Lost" of *Eleanor's Story* capture the essence of a child in a war torn world:

The war was now part of my life. No longer somewhere else, but right here in my own neighborhood. I realized that all of us were as vulnerable to death as any soldier on the front line. The battleground was no longer out there, but right here on our doorsteps. *Today we survive, but what about tomorrow?* The next morning I wrote these words in my Poesie Album: *Oh, if only I could have the Courage of a hero. I would conquer the fear of death, Instead I cry.* (108-109).

Although her recollections are as a young American girl in Germany, the intensity of threats,

murders, and insults against people evicted from society by the Nazis were daily occurrences. Isaacson and Tubach share smaller moments of hope poignantly contrasted against the graphic details of Auschwitz and Mauthausen. Isaacson recalls a particular roll call:

Predawn *Zähl Appell* was never an easy task for the kapos—too many prisoners fainted out of the ranks—but a predawn head count during our second week was the worst I recall. An icy rain lashed viciously in the dark, and it chased mother, Magda, and me from the edge of the [rectangular military formation]; the more the kapos lashed, the more everyone shoved toward center. I could see how panic mounted at each sweep of the searchlights. Shivering uncontrollably, I wedged myself deep into the midst of the crowd. This is it! [. . .] By noon, the truck had carted away more than the day's portion of the dead, then the sick were made to undress, and to crawl nude into the emptied vehicle. Magda and I held mother up by the armpits, so she would be allowed to stay [. . .] Was it hours or was it minutes? All I know is that I woke to singing liquid echo to rain: "Above me weeps the sky," I hummed with my comrades, and for the first time since our arrival the tears came. Afterwards, I sang full-throated if slightly off-key. The kapos stood by without trying to stop us—The Rain Song was stronger than they. (76-77).

Frederic Tubach shares the experiences of his friend Bernat Rosner who, as a young teen, was at a sub-camp of Mauthausen known as Gusen:

Shortly after his arrival at Gusen, Bernie teamed up with another Hungarian teenager, Simcha Katz, a member of the original shipment of prisoners from Auschwitz to Mauthausen, to form a survival unit. The ultimate test of this relationship came in mid January 1945 when Simcha's shoes—the officially issued wooden-soled clogs—were stolen. For two days Simcha trudged to work through the winter ice and snow in his bare feet. If he was going to survive, he would have to repurchase his shoes from an inmate who used thievery as his survival strategy and who offered to "sell" Simcha his own shoes, which the thief claimed he had "found." The ransom for the shoes was two day's bread rations, but such a great sacrifice would have spelled Simcha's death. The only way to save his life was for both boys to go without their bread rations for one day. This they did, and Simcha got his shoes back. (127-128)

Adolescents want to know not necessarily about specifics of wars, but how survivors found inspiration and support to live, hope, and envisioned a future in the confusion of their present circumstances.

Similar dangers resonate in the diaries of Zlata and Thura. Adolescents see how wars are not limited to certain people. While set in Sarajevo, the interests, confusions, and hopes of Zlata as expressed to Mimmy in her diary are vividly similar to young people in 21st century America. Zlata loved pop music, MTV, boys, birthday parties, piano lessons, television, birthday parties, skis, and school. But because of war, she “had lost her [childhood] innocence” (x):

We waited for September 27 and 28. The 27th was the Assembly of Bosnian Intellectuals, and the 28th was the session of the B-H Parliament. And the result is “conditional acceptance of the Geneva agreement.” CONDITIONAL. What does that mean? To me, it means the non-acceptance of the agreement, because there’s no peace. To me it means the continuation of the war and everything that goes with it. Once more the circle closes. The circle is closing, Mimmy, and it’s strangling us. Sometimes I wish I had wings so I could fly away from this hell. Like Icarus. There’s no other way. But to do that I’d need wings for Mommy, wings for Daddy, for Grandma and Granddad and . . . for you, Mimmy. And that’s impossible because humans are not birds. That’s why I have to try and get through all this, with your support, Mimmy, and to hope that it will pass and that I will not suffer the fate of Anne Frank. That I will be a child again, living my childhood in peace. (181)

In addition to Zlata, Thura’s words, as an older, eighteen-year-old girl in Baghdad, reflect present perspectives of war and views of hope. In both diaries, one hears the voices of today’s young people and the question: “What would someone like me do or not do?”

I’m always being asked how I feel about what is going on in Iraq. It is difficult to know from the news, but I’m worried about my family. They’re facing the danger of being kidnapped or robbed—or just living life. I hope there aren’t more confrontations with the Americans and that the two sides can come to understand each other. That is the reason I wrote this diary. I wanted to try to bring about a greater understanding of my country and to show what Iraqi’s are really like. I wanted people to know what it’s like for children to have no hope. I wanted them to know what it means for a father to work for hours just to feed his family. I wanted them to know what it is like to have to flee from home. I wanted to make the Americans and the British understand that we are not their enemies. We just need some security and the chance to lead normal lives. Let’s give the children the opportunity to be happy; let’s give people the chance to live and hope, to help others, and bring an end to all their suffering [. . .] There will still be fighting between the Iraqi’s and Americans and the problems in Iraq will continue. I know they will be fixed one day, but I am not sure exactly

when that day will be. [(125-126, 130)

Looking at other conflicts around the world, including war zones in our nation’s capital, Ousseimi found teens whose fears were disturbingly similar to those from World War II, Sarajevo, and Baghdad. The following four comments are from teenagers living in our nation’s capital. The first harshly realistic point of view is from a male teen gang member:

When someone steps on your shoes, you kill him. Don’t matter it’s an accident. Don’t matter he says, “scuse me.” All that matters is that he stepped on your shoes and nothin’ can ‘scuse that. He gotta die. (102)

An idealistic sentiment comes from Donnell, a teenager wounded in drive-by shooting:

After I was shot at I was tempted to get a gun to protect myself, but I came to the conclusion that another gun would just take another life. I think that anyone that is in a gang or has a gun needs attention and is basically insecure. It has a lot to do with family background. If you pray, you don’t need a gun for security. (105)

A realistic view is presented by Tanya who sees violence being a part of life and something that she feels every teen should be prepared to handle:

I wouldn’t want to live in a safe place because it is boring, nothing happens. And plus if one day I am forced to move away from that safe place, I would like to know how to handle myself in dangerous situations. If you live in a safe place you never learn about the real world. (110)

The fourth perspective is from Tameka who sees her schools that were once considered neutral territory, like the experiences of Isaacson in 1938 Hungary, become part of battlefields horrifically similar to those in war-torn countries of Hungary, Ukraine, Sarajevo and Baghdad. She echoes the sentiments of other witnesses of war:

I get mad about the violence. At my school there are always shootings, so we sometimes have to lay on the ground. So we don’t go to the playground that much. The worst thing about this place is that you could just be looking at someone and he can say “what are looking at!” and shoot you just like that. It’s crazy. Disneyland is the safest place I have ever been to. I would like to live there. (98)

The Fifth and Final Question

The last question posed by the adolescents I interviewed and surveyed is not as skeptical as it first seems.

5. “Can you name one good thing that came out of the war? Whether it be a person you met or a lesson you learned.”

Teens, who feel mired in what seems to be conflict without end, seek answers that will help them see life beyond war. All books, except *Caught in the Crossfire*, include revelations that lasted a moment, a day, or a lifetime. Ousseimi wrote that while many of the scenarios she chose to present where young people tried to survive in nightmarish worlds, the fight still continues in our country:

Despite the fact that Reggie has been involved with gangs, he still dreams of a hopeful future [. . .] his strongest wish “is to live to be real old.” However [. . .] in its own way, Washington, a city that symbolizes the best of America in so many ways, is as much a battlefield as Mozambique, Beirut, and El Salvador once were. For them, the fighting has stopped. Even in Sarajevo, cease fires give hope that an end to the fighting is in sight. In Washington, though, the war goes on day after day (117-118)

Positive and hopeful revelations are presented by other authors who share miracles of friendship, food, and compassion from unlikely sources that helped them survive. Isaacson wrote:

I never believed in fate or wonders. But I often think now, that I had to come to Auschwitz and Lichtenau, and I had to remain in Leipzig with the ill women and I had to go all those things through, only to meet Ike [her husband]. We met ourselves quite by accident. But as I was too occupied with my own troubles to pay any attention to him, so by another accident we met ourselves after a week again [. . .] If I wasn't so accustomed to unusual things to happen, I couldn't believe, it's sure. (179)

As adults, when Frederic Tubach and Bernat Rosner found each other and the uncanny parallels in their lives during World War II, instead of harboring hatred and resentment, they chose to write about the Holocaust with a profound intent:

They began to talk to each other about their pasts and made the decision to record their stories. In order to keep his past life as a victim at a distance, Bernie preferred that his story as an Auschwitz survivor be told in the third person, as a narrative by his German friend. The daunting task of writing the story of his Jewish friend helped [Frederic] confront his own past in Nazi Germany along with that of his family and childhood village. Both Bernie and Fritz believed that their lives [. . .] needed to be revisited for the sake of the dead, the living, the innocent, and because of the guilty. Ultimately, both men refused to allow Hitler's agenda to define their lives and prevent their friendship. Their stories are about bridge building [. . .] there is a search for re-

demption through narrating the story of one of Nazi Germany's victims together with his own. (x)

The final diary entry of Thura Al-Windawi from the streets of Baghdad is a fitting conclusion to the last question of the adolescents:

I leave my story in your safekeeping—the story of an Iraqi girl who hasn't discovered much about life yet; a girl who already had missiles exploding all around her when she was in her mother's womb; a girl who has lived through war and fear and cruel sanctions on her country; a girl whose parents are always worried; a girl whose little sisters are terrified by the bombs and the looters, and come to her for comfort; a girl with American soldiers all around her neighborhood, every bit as scared as she is; a girl born in the wrong place at the wrong time—but a girl who still has hope. I'll get to America one day- not to take revenge, but to study and live and love like anyone else [. . .] And once I'm there, I'll go and see the families of American soldiers killed in Iraq and those who are still fighting too, to offer them my condolences [. . .] I'll tell them the same things I said to Iraqi families who have lost sons and yet still cling on to life: *The future is shining in front of us like a bright light, and eventually we'll find that we can all live together as long as there's not darkness and no injustice between us. While there's still light, no one will be able to destroy our lives completely.* (120-121)

The author and adolescents seem to be asking the same question: “Can you name one good thing that came out of the war? Whether it be a person you met or a lesson you learned.” The answer to this fifth and final question about war might be best summarized as the only good things that come from it are the relationships it often galvanizes that might have never happened otherwise, the understanding of others it can force upon those experiencing its horror, and the hope that it will one day end.

Concluding Thoughts: War Goes On, and So Do the Questions of Adolescents

As history shows, wars do end but new ones always seem to be on the horizon. Wars and the world have become increasingly more complex on what seems to be a daily basis. Adults must be cognizant of what adolescents are feeling, asking, questioning, and discussing. What are their questions? What happens when we, as educators, cannot provide their answers? Where do they and can they get the truths?

The questions posed were only a glimpse of how adolescents perceive conflict whether in the world or

in their community. The nonfiction books presented were gateways to help young people hear, see, and vicariously experience truths not from the media, websites, or history texts, but from the souls of those who have lived through war. Adolescents want and deserve answers to their provocative questions that transcend mere facts, figures, maps, and political rhetoric. They need meaningful words and inspiration from those who have experiences to which they can relate. Thank God for authors who share their most intimate reflections of conflict. Young people need not only answers from yesterday, but answers for tomorrow that can be used forever.

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The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes seeks nominations for its 2008 awards. The Barron Prize honors young people ages 8 to 18 who have shown leadership and courage in public service to people and our planet. Each year, ten national winners each receive \$2,000 to support their service work or higher education. Nomination deadline is April 30. More information is available at <http://www.barronprize.org/index.html>.

Yo, Hip-Hop's Got Roots

See if you have ever heard of this celebrity. He's been considered a danger to society. Wherever he went, scandal followed. Authorities denounced him. Critics blasted him. Mothers made their children cross to the other side of the street when he walked down their way. And the teenage girls . . . well, they loved him. (You know how teenage girls can be.)

Can you guess his name?

That's right, I am speaking about Lord Byron, the English poet from hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

You're familiar with the great poet Lord Byron, aren't you?

Okay, okay, you might have missed that one. Let's try another.

He's a celebrity. His work has been studied at Harvard. He uses literary tools such as symbolism, personification and onomatopoeia. Rumor has it that he has gone on mad writing sprees that lasted upwards of three days with no sleep, food or water (but I am pretty sure he must have taken a pee) and he swears he couldn't care less if he ever earned a penny from his poetry because the fulfillment he received from writing it is more compensation than money could ever be to him.

Yep, you got it . . . Eminem.

That's right, Eminem. You know who he is, don't you? Then obviously you're familiar with the extensive connection between these two incredible poets, right?

Well if not, you probably don't know as much about Hip-Hop as you thought you did. You see, true



fans of Hip-Hop know that it has deep roots in the world of classic poetry.

That's right, classic poetry.

"YUCK!" I can already hear you say. "I HAAAAATE poetry."

Well, let me ask you then, what is rapping if not a form of poetry? After all, rap uses all the same literary techniques the greatest poets of all time used when they were putting their own pen to paper.

LL Cool J uses hyperbole. So does Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Nas uses figurative language. So does William Wordsworth.

Kanye West uses irony, imagery and an awesome amount of awe-inspiring, astounding and astonishing alliteration.

(By the way, in case you weren't paying attention in English class, alliteration is the repetition of the same or similar sounds in words that are close together.)

And guess who else uses alliteration? Yep, you got it . . . William "The Wondrous Word-Weaving Wonderboy" Shakespeare.

That's right, Kanye West and William Shakespeare use the exact same poetic tools as one another to practice their mutual literary craft. So much so, in fact, that if Ole Shakesey was alive today, he'd probably have a pumpin' video on MTV.

(But to be fair, if Kanye West was living during Shakespeare's time, he'd probably be wearing those whacked-out pants that made all men look like sissy ballerinas.)

Wouldn't that be something to see?

Okay, okay, I'll be the first to admit, some classic poetry stinks. I don't like it all. Instead of being forced to read it, I'd rather go to the dentist . . . *without Novacaine!*

But some Hip-Hop stinks, too. You know what I'm talking about. The kind that is so bad you need to get it out of your eardrums more than Donald Trump needs to change his hairstyle.

(Now that's bad!)

However, I am also smart enough to know that some things just need a chance. Have you ever heard a song and been a bit unsure about whether you like it or not but then, after hearing it a few times and figuring out the lyrics and the meaning discovered that, "Hey, this tune is pretty fresh."

That's how you need to look at classic poetry. Some of it just needs a bit of time, a chance, but trust me, once you start to "get it" and see its connections to Hip-Hop and modern life and love, sex, war, loneliness, ecstasy and desperation (I'm telling ya, classic poetry is Deep with a capital D) you'll start to discover that some of this classic poetry I am yapping to you about is off-the-hook!

Some examples

Hyperbole: Classic

Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Concord Hymn"

Hyperbole: Hip-Hop

I drive up to the ave, with the windows closed
My bass is so loud, it could rip your clothes
—LL Cool J

Figurative Language: Classic

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats high over the hills
—William Wordsworth

Figurative Language: Hip-Hop

I'm like the farmer planting words, people are seeds
My truth is the soil; Help you grow like trees
—Nas

It won't be long after this gets rolling that you'll then begin to see how some of the hottest Hip-Hop artists on the scene share many, many things in common with some of the classic poets from years gone by. And once this happens, an intelligent appreciation for the true depth and roots of the entire Hip-Hop art form will develop in you.

Intelligence is good. It makes you feel good. It also prevents ignorance. After all, what's worse than someone who is ignorant about the things they say they love yet really know nothing about?

I can't stand folks like that.

Essentially, this means that if you *really* want to know about Hip-Hop, you *really* need to know some classic poetry. It's why I wrote a book about the subject called *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics* (www.HipHopInTheClass.com). Intelligence needed to be promoted.

For example, Mos Def, one of the hottest Hip-Hop artists in the world, knows exactly what I am talking about. It's part of the reason why he starts off his TV show *Def Poetry Jam* by frequently reciting classic poems written by old-school dudes like Bryon, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth. You see, when Mos Def keenly utilizes metaphors in his own poetry to draw comparisons between two unlike things (without using like or as) in order to create solid, vivid imagery in the mind of his audience, he knows he's not the first skilled literary technician to do so. Matter of fact, he partly learned this skill from studying the tremendous work of some of the excellent poets that put their pen to paper many years before him.

In other words, he's paying tribute, giving props,

That's how you need to look at classic poetry. Some of it just needs a bit of time, a chance, but trust me, once you start to "get it" and see its connections to Hip-Hop and modern life and love, sex, war, loneliness, ecstasy and desperation (I'm telling ya, classic poetry is Deep with a capital D) you'll start to discover that some of this classic poetry I am yapping to you about is off-the-hook!



throwing a shout-out, and giving respect to his teachers. By learning from the past he is able to create something unique and significant in the present.

Think about KRS-ONE, one of the best-selling Hip-Hop artists of all time. Do you know what his name stands for? That's right, KRS stands for Knowledge Reigns Supreme. Do you know what Knowledge Reigns Supreme over?

Knowledge Reigns Supreme over oppression.

Knowledge Reigns Supreme over tyranny.

Knowledge Reigns Supreme over injustice, inequality and ignorance. (And you know how I feel about ignorance.)

Therefore, if you like to consider yourself educated about Hip-Hop, the next time a classic poem

comes your way asking you things like, "What happens to a raisin in the sun?" don't just dismiss it. Think about it. Does it dry up or explode? Why? What historical factors, in terms of race relations in Harlem during the time the author lived might have contributed to these "exploding raisins"? Are there any cities in modern America that also have people who feel exactly like the narrator of this poem? Do you see a thematic connection between this very famous classic poem written by Langston Hughes and some of the Hip-Hop lyrics of any of your own favorite artists? How are they similar? How are they different? How might people best prevent themselves from becoming oppressed so that they don't turn into these type of "raisins" themselves?

And if your friends ask you why you're bothering with any of this "classic poetry stuff" just tell them, "Yo, Hip-Hop's got roots. Deep roots."

Trust me, it's too true.

Mr. Alan, as he's known to his students, was named California's 2007 Teacher of the Year and is the author of The Hoopster, Hip-Hop High School, Homeboyz, a trilogy of young adult novels published by Hyperion, as well as Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics, a text being used in English classrooms all around the country.

The Localization of Young Adult Fiction in Contemporary Hawai'i

In this article, I draw on the work of selected contemporary young adult and Hawai'i-based authors to explore the ways in which local Hawaiian adolescent identities are contextualized in young adult fiction. The literature reflects the diversity of Hawai'i's youth, spanning multiple ethnicities, languages and dialects. These are important spaces often glossed over or simply ignored in depictions of Hawai'i as an idyllic paradise. In contrast, Wilson's (2000) cultural analysis of local Hawaiian literature as a site of resistance to utopian discourse underpins the need to explore the social construction of adolescence in a Hawai'i context with an eye toward local funds of knowledge, pride, and struggle.

Two young adult novels were selected that represent continuing work by acclaimed local authors, Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Graham Salisbury. Both authors have achieved recognition for their unblemished portrayal of youth in Hawai'i. Yamanaka's (1999) novel, *Name Me Nobody*, and Salisbury's (2005) *Eyes of the Emperor* both feature characters coming-of-age in turbulent times.

Thirteen-year old Emi-Lou in Yamanaka's novel lives in rainy Hilo town on the Big Island. She is overweight and struggling to cling to her childhood friend, Von, a star baseball player. As the novel progresses, Von embraces a lesbian relationship with Babes, one of her teammates on the Hilo Astros baseball team. Emi-Lou is jealous of the time Von spends with Babes, doing everything she can to delay the inevitable loss that goes with growing up.

Sixteen-year old Eddy Okubo in Salisbury's account of Japanese-American families at the onset of

World War II and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor deals with racism and resistance, as well as coming-of-age issues framed within the masculine world of the soldier. Both novels feature characters representative of Hawai'i's isolated, multiethnic setting.

Before moving into the theoretical lens guiding my reading and analysis of how adolescence is constructed in both novels, I want to examine some of the distinctive features that make Hawai'i both unique and similar to other communities distant from mainstream cities (e.g., Inuit people in the high arctic, aboriginal groups in northern Ontario, Canada). In addition, I will allude to recent postcolonial critiques of how Hawai'i is depicted in the popular mythology of capitalist consumption and escape (e.g., Wilson, 2000).

Hawai'i and a Sense of Place

Demographically, Hawai'i is predominantly Asian (53%), European-American (33%), Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders (10%), and Other (4%) (Davis, Bazzi, & Cho, 2005). Given its diversity and distance from the mainland United States, "Hawai'i represents the range of possible heritage language and cultural configurations present in the United States and other multilingual societies and, as such, is a microcosm of educational conditions for linguistic minorities" (Davis et al., 2005, p. 191). Languages in Hawai'i now include: Illokano, Samoan, Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Tongan, Laotian, Spanish, Thai, Marshallese, Yapese, Chuukese, Ponapean, and Kosrean (from Micronesia), among others (Davis, et

al.). In addition, Hawaiian language immersion now extends through high school and into university study, revitalizing Hawaiian identity and pride.

In addition, there is a growing literary movement in Hawaiian Creole English or pidgin. According to Davis et al., the growing number of novels, poems, short stories and essays featuring pidgin “has transformed this language from one disdained to one with a place of acceptance within many classrooms and communities” (193). Indeed, both Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Graham Salisbury infuse their writing with the day-to-day language of pidgin, an integral part of their adolescent characters’ make-up and inner speech. Much of this movement toward embracing the expressive richness of pidgin was fostered by Eric Chock and Darrell Lum, founders of *Bamboo Ridge: Journal of Hawai’i Literature and Arts* in 1978. Indeed, Lois-Ann Yamanaka credits *Bamboo Ridge* with offering her writing an outlet in its early stages, including her hard-edged poetry collection, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theater* (Yamanaka, 1993) about small town sugar plantation life in Pahala on the Big Island. In addition, Bamboo Ridge Press books and collections like *Growing Up Local: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose from Hawai’i* (Chock, Harstad, Lum, & Teter, 1998) have captured the interest of high school teachers and their students in the islands. More recently, grass-roots Hawaiian literary journals, including *Oiwi* ([www.Hawai’i.edu/vice-versa](http://www.Hawai'i.edu/vice-versa)) and a quarterly e-zine sponsored by the University of Hawai’i at Manoa’s Department of English, add to the early and ongoing efforts of *Bamboo Ridge* by expanding the outlets for local authors.

Throughout contemporary works by Hawai’i authors, pidgin figures prominently and serves to demarcate insiders from outsiders. Indeed, Wilson (2000) notes that the King’s English is seen as “ka olelo haole” (the outsider’s tongue). The mainland is both a far-away place, 2,397 miles across the ocean to Los Angeles, and a regular presence in the form of the Internet and a constant flow of visitors. As a kind of cultural backlash to Hawai’i as a commodity, postcolonial Hawai’i features literary works and

responses to literature that serve as a counter discourse to colonial positioning of Hawaiians and Hawai’i people as “primitive, exotic, lazy, ignorant, and sexually promiscuous heathens in need of protection and enlightenment from the Christians (Grace & Lum, 2001, 446).” McCallum (1999) argues that:

Realistic young adult literature, until recently, has been rooted in the liberal humanist tradition of the individual as actor, overcoming obstacles in the world (McCallum, 1999). The influence of poststructuralist thinking dismantles this tradition, begging the question: “What images of selfhood do these fictions offer their readers?” (4)

In this view, the individual as actor is located firmly in a social, intersubjective world where social forces and power differentials render action dialogic and relational (McCallum, 1999). That is, the construction of the self is always undertaken in relation to others and within normative pressures surrounding gender, status, and power.

The increasing array of young adult literature featuring indigenous people and the Other serves as a counterpoint to essentialist views and offers an alternative for adolescents to read beyond the traditional literary canon (Bean, 2004). This renaissance of silenced local voices rings loudly in the poetry, short stories, and novels of contemporary Hawai’i authors, often writing in pidgin and disrupting the notion of who really is an outsider (Kaomea, 2003). Indeed, from a Bakhtinian standpoint: “Thought is virtually impossible outside language and the formation of consciousness and subjectivity is thus inextricable from the acquisition of language” (McCallum, 1999, 11).

Contemporary Hawai’i is a mix of contradictions, isolated geographically yet intimately linked to Las Vegas and other mainland cities where significant numbers of former Hawai’i residents live. Wilson (2000) notes that insider Hawai’i authors like Yamanaka and others struggle with Hawai’i’s contradictions, seeing their homeland as “A riddle and a maze, a rim and a charm, a struggle and a curse, both dream and slime, an ocean with ancient contents and cyborgian

Contemporary Hawai’i is a mix of contradictions, isolated geographically yet intimately linked to Las Vegas and other mainland cities where significant numbers of former Hawai’i residents live.

futures all cast into one strange regional poetic” (48). This is in marked contrast to early efforts, prior to World War II, to market the islands to wealthy tourists, portraying Hawai'i as a colonial fair maiden to be rescued from the primitives or as a vast resource to be plundered (Wilson, 2000). Some researchers would argue that this trend simply continues in the tourist-marketing arena. For example, University of Hawai'i scholar, Julie Kaomea (2000, 335) notes that: “Today, this familiar trope of the superior Caucasian and the subservient native functions as an essential selling point for Hawaii's tourist industry.” I would argue that young adult literature situated in Hawai'i and other aboriginal settings offers a rich site for critical literacy and the examination of the balance of power.

Today, contemporary Hawai'i authors are carving out alternative spaces that embrace distance from the mainland and localization of the arts. Core values in this postcolonial movement include hybrid indigenous cultures, multicultural and polyethnic community, and a local literary scene that affirms ethnic heritage and culture (Wilson, 2000). Indeed, Wilson sees this movement as a counterpoint to utopian discourse aimed at marketing a new Asia-Pacific defined by fusion elements in cuisine and culture, or what Wilson terms “Rimspeak” (47). Instead of this sanitized, pseudo-cultural experience, Hawai'i authors foreground the Other and openly resist a pastoral care form of governance. In this fashion, the haunted, blues-like quality of the postcolonial Hawai'i literary scene forms a counter discourse to ongoing efforts to co-opt and market an idealized version of the islands (Wilson, 2000). They challenge grand narratives designed to market the islands and offer what Wilson aptly calls: “scrappy outlets for Hawaiian writing . . . a literary heteroglossia of mixed voices and local tongues that might otherwise be starved or go unrecognized (151).”

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Hawai'i's isolation and relatively small size with semi-rural Hilo, the second largest city after Honolulu, renders local happenings hugely important. This feature of particularity figures heavily in Yamanaka and Salisbury's writing and in the construction of adolescence depicted in their novels. Jamaica Kincaid (1998) writing about her childhood home in Antigua said:

In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into the everyday, so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small places' tongues. (52)

Similarly, literary theorist McCallum (1999) notes that: “The image of the landscape as text, which both writes and is written upon by the people who occupy it, implies a sense of the past of places and cultures as radically textualized and intertextual (190).” As an island community, isolated from the

mainland, surrounded by rough Pacific ocean channels, and regionalized through pidgin and other languages, Hawai'i's contemporary young adult literature treats linguistic difference and marginalization as valuable traits, turning normative categories of standard English and status on their heads.

As we examine the lives of Emi-Lou Kaya in *Name Me Nobody* (Yamanaka, 1999), and Eddy Okubo in *Eyes of the Emperor*, (Salisbury, 2005), the dual elements of pidgin language and isolation play out in how these two youths construct the self, and, in how we as readers experience this construction of adolescence. In addition, the power elements of neocolonial Hawai'i are ever-present in both novels where a sense of self is always measured against some external ideal of body and being.

The central questions guiding my reading of both novels comes from an enduring interest in young adult literature and adolescence as a social construct

(Bean, 2004; Bean, in press; Lesko, 2001; McDonald, 1999). I also find myself revisiting some of the places, flavors, and textures of my youth in the novels. I was raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i, graduated from the University of Hawai'i in English, spent many years on the Big Island in Hilo, speak and appreciate pidgin as a rule-governed, yet resistant language, and resonate with the characters' strong sense of Hawai'i as the place of my youth. Surfing has always been a driving force in my life and a long-standing connection with the islands and other surfers.

The Construction of Adolescence in Two Hawai'i Young Adult Novels

Both novels were written for adolescents by adults, relying on research, memory, and their own island experiences, as well as composites of adolescents known and invented. Thus, we can explore the characters as constructions of adolescence by considering the following questions based on a critical literacy framework (Stevens & Bean, 2007):

- How do they see themselves in the world?
- How do they balance this inner sense of self with that offered by the larger society of peers, teachers, parents, and others in positions of power?
- How do these fictional adolescents compare to real world adolescents?

This sociocultural lens departs from various stereotypes commonly associated with discussions of adolescents. Often viewed as clueless, dangerous bundles of raging hormones, and homogenized in their likes and dislikes, current thinking about adolescents debunks many of these essentialist labels (Lesko, 2001). For example, older views of adolescence portrayed youth as waiting in limbo to be adults. In contrast, Lesko (2001) argues for a sociocultural theory of adolescence that sees time as

complex and shifting rather than simply biologically determined. She notes: "Theorizing adolescence as a simultaneity of contradictions may be necessary to allow it to escape the temporal trap of linear, cumulative development (197)." In addition, contemporary notions of identity challenge essentialist categories (e.g., skater, geek). Multiple identities in varying contexts including fluid, global Internet communities are more representative of adolescents' experiences.

Name Me Nobody

Lois Yamanaka's works include her early poetry collection, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (Yamanaka, 1993), embracing pidgin throughout and exposing the at once raw and rich textures of life in the small sugar cane plantation town of Pahala on the Big Island. Her young adult novels include the one considered in this paper, *Name Me Nobody* (Yamanaka, 1999) set in Hilo and *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* (Yamanaka, 1996), as well as contemporary novels like *Father of the Four Passages* (Yamanaka,

2001) and others. There is no question that Yamanaka's life in the islands informs her work and her strong sense of localization. She was born on Molokai and raised in Hilo, Ka'u, and Kona on the Big Island. In one of her interviews, Yamanaka notes: "Linguistic identity and cultural identity are skin and flesh. When you sever one from the other, you make it not OK to be who you are" (Takahama, 1996, 1). Because she was put down by her teachers for speaking pidgin, she experienced first-hand being positioned as the Other. Yamanaka's realistic young adult novels move pidgin to the forefront in a way that anyone raised in Hawai'i will recognize as authentic. This is no small achievement given the negative stigma often attached to creoles in various cultures.

The two novels considered in this paper were selected because they fit the category of young adult literature intended to be read by 12

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to 20 year old students (Nilsen & Donelson, 2005), as well as representing well-established Hawai'i young adult authors. Both Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Graham Salisbury have written young adult novels intended for this age group.

In *Name Me Nobody*, Emi-Lou Kaya, a ninth-grader, goes to Hilo Intermediate School across from Hilo High and survives constant racist ridicule as an overweight, Japanese teen by hanging out with her childhood friend, Yvonne Vierra. Von is confident, athletic, and outgoing. She's everything Emi-Lou is not and Von carves a path for her friend through the cruelty of adolescent life where an idealized Hollywood version of beauty prevails. Von gets Emi-Lou onto the Hilo Astros baseball team. In small town rainy Hilo, the social action revolves around island-wide baseball competition. But Von is in love with Babes Hinano, another player on the girls' team, and the novel chronicles themes of change and loss as Emi-Lou struggles to find her own pathway as she comes to understand her best friend in a new light. Emi-Lou, or Louie as Von calls her, sees herself as fat, unattractive, not athletic, not cool, and certainly not sought after by the Hawaiian boys who socialize with the team. When they go to Hapuna beach while staying at Coach Kaaina's beach house in Puako, the boys ridicule her. "I feel so humiliated. My thighs feel like two tons of flabby butter melting into the sand" (32). Von convinces Louie to go on a crash, diet-pill driven plan to lose weight. The pills disrupt her sleep, but more importantly Louie feels like she no longer has an excuse to stay disengaged from the social whirlwind of adolescent life. "So-and-so hates me because I'm fat. I suck at softball because I'm fat. I have no boyfriend because I'm fat. Now what? I'm not fat. So it must be me (49)." She goes on a crash course to change her appearance, even adopting blondish hair. "Eh, Viva, how you got your hair all ehu like that? And she tell, I put Sun-In and lemon juice before I go down Four Miles. Come all orange like this" (54). Louie has a crush on Kyle Kiyabu, a hot baseball player at Hilo High who largely ignores her until he realizes she has something he needs. Louie is smart, excelling in English while Kyle is in danger of losing his spot on the baseball team if his grade point average falls too low. Femininity and masculinity play out in fairly typical ways as Louie acquiesces, helping Kyle by writing his articles in

news writing class. In essence, Louie trades her intellectual prowess for a few, fleeting moments next to Kyle, adopting a familiar, feminine positioning as caregiver:

I'm not stupid. I know what was going on the couple of weeks before our first deadline. Kyle Kiyabu's body so close to mine in newswriting class, I could feel the hairs on my arm stand up and make static with his every time he gave me the information I needed to write his articles. (79)

Unfortunately, they are found out and Kyle gets an F in the class and drops below the 2.00 GPA he needs to stay eligible for boy's volleyball. On the sly, Louie continues to write Kyle's articles in a style that is simple and undistinguishable as hers. Later, Kyle asks her to write a paper for social studies on the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy so he won't flunk the course. She is nearly raped in Kyle's car but rescued by Von with a baseball bat to the window. The next day Louie and Von go to Four Mile beach together, close friends again:

We sit on the craggy lava rocks at Leleiwi, sea grass moving stiff arms, the pull and swirl of water in a small tidal pool beside us. Nobody speaks for a long time. It's like what happened to me happened to all of us. I feel dirty and used. (135)

Von tells Emi-Lou:

"Me and you, we blood. You my number one girl, always. But you gotta take Babes in as part of me. You can? (137)."

By the end of the novel, Louie comes out of all the turmoil and self-doubt okay, content with herself, her friends, and reconciling Von and Babes relationship. Yamanaka closes one of the last chapters in the novel with a kind of concrete poem containing Louie's thoughts:

Good is summer and night ball games, green neon field at
Carvalho Park.
Good is swimming at Four Miles.
Good is Von and I talking story.
Good is a name. My name.
Not Jerry Rapoza's name.
Not Roxanne Kaya's altered name.
My name.
Name me: Emi-Lou Kaya. (217)

This small place, familiar, wet, and rainy, just down the hill from Boiling Pots and the rushing waters of the Wailuku river, is where Emi-Lou Kaya feels at home, surrounded by close friends, a familiar language, and the palpable feeling that things will get better.

Eyes of the Emperor

The second novel, *Eyes of the Emperor* (Salisbury, 2005) is a more recent work by award-winning Hawai'i author Graham Salisbury based on his historical research into the experiences of a small group of Hawai'i Japanese-American soldiers during World War II (Blasingame, 2006a). Salisbury is a local haole writer and a descendant of missionaries. His historical fiction often features male characters and coming of age themes under difficult circumstances. His own relation to the ocean was forged as a surfer growing up in Kona on the Big Island and the vast and omnipresent Pacific features prominently in his early books, including *Blue Skin of the Sea* (Salisbury, 1992) and his more recent writing.

In researching the lives of Hawai'i Japanese-American soldiers assigned to the 100th Battalion at

Schofield Barracks on Oahu, Salisbury unearthed the stories of these adolescent soldiers through detailed descriptions gleaned from interviews with surviving soldiers over 60 years after World War II (Blasingame, 2006b). He interviewed 8 of the 26 soldiers who were sent to remote Cat Island off coastal Gulfport, Mississippi to become enemy bait for K-9 Corps dogs trained to hunt down enemy Japanese soldiers. In Graham Salisbury's words: "That mission was to honor the men who participated in it by telling their story, the story of men from my home state, men from my neighborhood" (Blasingame, 352). Like Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Graham Salisbury's Hawai'i adolescent characters speak pidgin, retaining their local identities even in the face

of a wrenching journey to the mainland and their bizarre orders to serve as enemy dog bait. Salisbury noted that: "Pidgin English is Hawai'i's language. It was then, and is now, how we communicate on the most enjoyable level" (Blasingame, 2006b, 354).

Eyes of the Emperor (Salisbury, 2005) revolves around issues of honor and what he calls a male "silent code of conduct" (Benton, 1997). This code of conduct goes to the heart of what it means to be courageous in the face of danger, stoic and calm rather than rattled under pressure. In many ways, this is a fairly traditional view of masculinity now challenged by newer work in masculine theory designed to broaden narrow, essentialist conceptions of masculinity (Bean, in press). But in the *Eyes of the Emperor*, this silent code of conduct is intertwined with the long-standing Japanese belief in honor.

Eddy Okubo and his brother help their Dad, a Sampan boat builder in the Honolulu Harbor area. As the story unfolds, Eddy is 16 years old and yearning to join his slightly older buddies in the Army. Although Eddy's Dad is a Japanese citizen, adhering to traditional values of deep respect for Emperor Hirohito, Eddy's hybrid identity as a Hawaii Japanese-American renders his view of self quite different from his Dad. "I wasn't a *Japan* Japanese. I was an American" (Salisbury, 2005, 4). Eddy lives in Kaka'ako not far from his Dad's boatyard and he hangs out with his buddies there. "We all stuck together by our races. We had Hawaiian camp, Japanese camp, Portuguese camp down by Waikiki, and some Chinese and Filipino" (7).

Eddy and his fellow soldiers must report to Schofield Barracks following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. An ongoing series of racist comments and hazing begins when Eddy and his pals report for duty. Lieutenant Sweet, their platoon leader, orders them to dig trenches near the barracks at Schofield. "You Japs look cross-eyed at anything but those trenches and you'll be taking up where they left off" (Salisbury, 54). Eddy can't believe what he's heard, telling Chik, his friend: "You call me a Jap, I muttered to Chik, I going laugh and shove you, because you a Jap too, ah? But when somebody like him says it. . . ." (55). Their disequilibrium as both Hawaiian born Japanese and American soldiers treated as the enemy begins early in the novel and persists throughout their assignment on the mainland, far from their island home. But Eddy and his buddies never stop thinking of themselves as

Their disequilibrium as both Hawaiian born Japanese and American soldiers treated as the enemy begins early in the novel and persists throughout their assignment on the mainland, far from their island home. But Eddy and his buddies never stop thinking of themselves as American soldiers from Hawai'i, remaining proud and, at times, defiant in the face of racist comments and undue harassment.

American soldiers from Hawai'i, remaining proud and, at times, defiant in the face of racist comments and undue harassment. Early in the novel they are assigned to guard the beaches of Waimanolo from enemy submarines. Their fox holes are set up in front of haole soldiers and Lieutenant Sweet issues orders for Eddy and his pals to be shot if they do anything to aid the enemy. In the course of this guard duty, one of Eddy's compatriots rescues a Japanese soldier from the outside reef when his small one-man submarine runs aground. The Japanese soldier's loss-of-face is profound and he asks them to shoot him. Eddy's friend Cobra tells him not to expect any battle assignment: "You not even a grunt no more. You a prisoner now. The army ain't going say it, but when they look at us they don't see soldiers. What they see is Japs. What they see is enemies" (64).

Pidgin permeates the novel and Salisbury includes a brief glossary of Hawaiian, Pidgin and Japanese terms used in telling Eddy's story (227). Salisbury's use of pidgin serves to further distance Eddy and his pals from the haole Sweet who berates them at every turn. In that sense, the familiar local lilt of pidgin offers a refuge from their haole abusers. But Salisbury also offers a counterpoint character in the form of Captain Parrish, their mechanical drawing teacher from McKinley High School who was in the National Guard and called to active duty following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Major Parrish is a local haole with an affinity for his former students and a deep sense of their worth. He intervenes and countermands Sweet's racist orders.

But even without the help of Captain Parrish, Eddy remains a strong, self-contained and honorable character, resisting Sweet's racist attitude whenever he can. "You wrong to call us Japs. Japs are the ones who bombed Pearl Harbor—the enemy, not us. We're Americans" (97). But whenever Eddy fights back, he is given more pushups and more harassment. By the time Eddy is 17, the 100th Infantry Battalion is flown on a DC-3 to boot camp. They have never been off the island of Oahu and Eddy thinks: "All around me guys had menpachi eyes, big and bugged-out like that fish" (p. 110). Following boot camp, 26 of the soldiers including Eddy are sent to the coast of Mississippi to tiny Cat Island where they are ordered to serve as K-9 Corps enemy bait for the dogs in training.

Eddy and his friends survive the humiliation of

serving as dog bait under the mistaken belief that they smell distinctly different from other American soldiers. "The army is not going to crush me. I'll never give up" (173). And, he manages to maintain his pride and self-respect even while running and hiding from a large German shepherd and its handler who orders the dog to find and subdue Eddy. In the course of this training, the dog wounds Eddy but he never loses sight of who he is as a Hawaii born Japanese-American soldier proudly serving his country. Eddy also respects Kooch the German shepherd assigned to work with him.

He going find me okay, I said. Because he's prob'ly the best dog you got on this island. But it ain't going be Jap blood he smells, no. What he going smell is just me, just my scent. Human scent. Because we don't smell no diff'rent from you or anybody else. (192)

In the end, the Army's experiment is a dismal failure, as the dogs simply cannot distinguish Eddy and his buddies from any other man hiding out in the dense underbrush of Cat Island. Washington calls off their assignment and they are shipped out to Europe to fight with other United States soldiers. By then, Captain Parrish is a Major and he praises Eddy and the others hard work and loyalty. Eddy thinks, "All I ever wanted from this army, or even from this country—everything was in that look. Respect. All the rot I had to go through before that moment was worth it, just for that one thing. Now we were equals" (221).

In terms of how Eddy and his peers are constructed as adolescents in the world, *Eyes of the Emperor* traces their struggle to survive with dignity and honor amidst a time in our nation's history when Japanese-Americans were marginalized and placed in internment camps. In many ways, this young adult historical novel runs against the grain of liberal humanist boy novels featuring heroic characters (McCallum, 1999). Rather, Eddy's subject position as a lowly grunt soldier assigned to the potentially humiliating task of serving as dog bait, offers a context for resistance. Indeed, Eddy does resist racist comments but he elects to excel at his assignment, no matter how absurd, in essence defusing the power of his commanding officers and Smith, the haole dog handler. A kind of counter hegemonic discourse (Wilson, 2000) operates throughout the novel where Eddy confronts racist comments head-on.

Historically, adolescent boys have been viewed as needing to be controlled and protected (Lesko, 2001).

For example, the Boy Scouts were created to provide discipline and instruction for each stage of boyhood and adolescence with structured regimens designed to lessen the potential for moral anarchy (Lesko, 2001). In many ways, the Army attempts to serve a similar function for Eddy and his friends with hierarchical race and class divisions. But with the onset of World War II and their assignment to function as bait for K-9 Corps dogs in training, Eddy and the other young soldiers see themselves outside biologically determined notions of adolescence. Lesko's (2001) contemporary theories of adolescence suggest that we need to think of the possibilities of being simultaneously mature and immature or old and young. Eddy and his buddies choose to see themselves as competent soldiers, even in the face of racist verbal abuse by their commanding officer, Sweet. Indeed, they see Sweet as the Other and privately view him as the outsider haole while they fondly think of Major Parrish as an insider, a local haole who appreciates their skill and competence as soldiers. In many ways, their stories parallel those of adolescent boys who, in detailed interviews reveal diverse interests and skills often largely ignored by their teachers in traditional school settings (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Concluding Thoughts

Both novels can be seen as counterpoints to simplistic conceptions of adolescents and equally vacuous notions of Hawai'i as a commodity to be marketed through Asia-Pacific advertising discourse that erases localization (Wilson, 2000). Wilson calls this discourse, "social fantasy" and "semiotic fiction" (p. 33), arguing that:

Asia Pacific is, in truth, culturally and politically naïve, ignoring, bypassing, or suppressing the cultural complexity, historical issues, and symbolic profusion of the region in order to form this regional identity. (47)

Wilson calls this marketing ploy, "Rimspeak" (47) and argues that cultural criticism is crucial to locate these misconceptions within the historical and political terrain in order to bring the Other to the foreground. Thus, novels like *Name Me Nobody* (Yamanaka, 1999) and *Eyes of the Emperor* (Salisbury, 2005) are infused with pidgin and rich local contexts, disrupting the simplistic grand narratives and more recent fusion notions that serve to domesticate the local. Wilson (2000) notes that:

Cultural literatures can help provide different mappings of the Asia-Pacific region and, as such, can help to circulate alternative mappings and subjugated knowledge of modernity and the space/times and future directions (capitalist telos) of postmodern history inside the Pacific. (211)

Contemporary young adult literature by local authors, as well as the rich collection of poetry, essays, and short stories by Hawai'i authors, stay close to the grain of local experience and language. Most importantly, these authentic constructions of adolescence offer glimpses of the multiple ways in which Hawai'i youth contradict older stereotypical notions of the adolescent. Throughout the two novels profiled here, adolescent identity was portrayed as a socially constructed practice that is multilayered and dynamic, constructed in the varying social contexts of contemporary Hawai'i and Hawai'i at the onset of World War II. As Kaomea (2003) notes: "Art and literature . . . force us to slow down our perception, to linger, and to notice" (15).

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Gallo Grants

The Gallo Grants were established in 2003 by former ALAN Award and Hipple Award recipient Don Gallo to encourage educators in their early years of teaching to attend the ALAN Workshop for the first time. The grants provide funding—up to \$500 each—for two classroom teachers in middle school or high school each year to attend the ALAN Workshop. (The amount of a grant may be less than \$500 if the applicant lives within commuting distance of the convention location where airfare and housing would not be necessary.)

The Workshop is held at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English on the Monday and Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving Day. Applicants must be teaching full-time; must have been classroom teachers for less than five years prior to the year in which they are applying; and must not have attended an ALAN Workshop previously. Membership in ALAN is not required for consideration, though applicants are expected to become ALAN members if they receive this grant.

Each applicant must fill out the grant application form and submit an essay of no more than 750 words explaining their interest in Young Adult Literature, what they hope to gain by attending this year's ALAN Workshop, and how they hope to use the experience in their classrooms in the future. A letter of support must also come from the applicant's school system. The deadline for submission is September 1. Applicants will be judged on their ability to articulate their understanding of the value of Young Adult Literature as well as their explanation of how they intend to use YA books and the information they gather at the Workshop in their own classrooms.

For further information about this grant, contact ALAN Executive Secretary Gary Salvner at gsalvner@ysu.edu or 330-941-3414. Information about the ALAN Workshop may be obtained from the ALAN Website—www.alan-ya.org. Information about the NCTE Convention may be obtained on the NCTE Website—www.ncte.org—or by writing to NCTE Headquarters at 1111 West Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

The Dearth of Native Voices in Young Adult Literature:

A Call for More Young Adult Literature by and for Indigenous Peoples

A stereotype is not a simplification of truth, and in the case of American Indian/Alaska Native/Hawaiian Native people, many stereotypical images have been constructed in literature and visual media. No single stereotype adequately illustrates “the variety of images which the Euroamerican mind has been projecting for centuries onto the tan-skinned screen of the North American Indian” (Haladay 114). Lomawaima describes the variety of images projected: “Whether lazy or noble, drunken or stoic, poverty-stricken or living in harmony with nature, we are all lumped together in an artificial category that is anything but natural” (5). Inaccurate representations of Sitting Bull, Pocahontas, and Geronimo all parade before a young adult’s eyes as representations of what an “Indian” looks like and acts like from a mainstream, non-Indian perspective. However, none comes close to representing the reality for Indigenous People today. Over-generalized, arrested forms of representation created by sports mascots, Thanksgiving and Columbus myths, non-Indian literature, and Hollywood movies perpetuate the perception that American Indian/Alaska Native/Hawaiian Native people still look and act the same as they may have hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Imagine an Indian child, watching *Dances with Wolves* or reading James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* looking in a mirror. His mother tells him he is an Indian, but he sees neither feathers, nor war paint, nor other accoutrements associated with the Indians he sees in these visual and literary media. In his confusion, he

may ask himself “Are you a real Indian?” As University of Kansas professor of Indigenous Education Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche/Kiowa) would tell this young man, “There are no real Indians in America, only indigenous peoples increasingly forming into a hybrid culture trying to hold onto what little culture, language and sacred knowledge are left” (71). This response would also silence those hasty generalizers who say, “You don’t look Indian.”

Stereotypes exacerbate the identity crisis children and teens already face, particularly those stereotypes found in the curriculum schools often provide for students. Books like Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* and Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative were mainstays in the high school canon for over a century, disseminating the colonialist assumption that Indigenous Peoples are savages in a civilized Anglo world. Within those pages, readers—Indian and non-Indian—saw the stereotypes that persist to the present day.

Luther Standing Bear in his autobiography *My People the Sioux* asserted that non-Indians who have tried to write stories about Indigenous Peoples have either “foisted on the public some blood-curdling, impossible ‘thriller’; or, if they have been in sympathy with the Indian, have written from knowledge which was not accurate or reliable” (Haladay 114). Furthermore, the incomplete knowledge Anglo writers have written from has homogenized hundreds of indigenous cultures, robbing them of their distinctive identities, creating a one-size-fits-all image of what it

means to be indigenous. The fact of the matter is that “Native America is incredibly diverse, encompassing hundreds of communities with distinct languages, cultures, philosophies, and educational systems that defy easy generalizations” (Lomawaima 5). Only in the last hundred years have American Indian/Alaska Native/ Hawaiian Native authors had opportunities to represent themselves, in all their diversity, honestly in mainstream literature, generating an authentic picture of the issues and characteristics of Indigenous Peoples

(Haladay). “No one is able to understand the Indian race like an Indian,” wrote Luther Standing Bear. In response, dozens of Native American authors, such as Sherman Alexie (Spokane/ Coeur D’Alene), James Welch (Blackfeet), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), and N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) have contributed to the growing body of American Indian literature now available to young adults of all races, providing an authentic narrative from the viewpoints of Indigenous Peoples.

One book in particular that came out in 2007 was Alexie’s “Flight,” not necessarily meant for young adults; however, it addresses many of the issues young indigenous students face as they navigate their world. Michael (or Zits as he is called) struggles to find his identity and a stable home. In the end Michael comes to some revelations about himself and his people.

Sherman Alexie, in his essay “Superman and Me,” also provides a context for native students’ experiences at school:

A smart Indian is a dangerous person . . . we were Indian children who were supposed to be stupid. Most lived up to those expectations in the classroom, but subverted them on the outside. They struggled with basic reading in school, but could remember how to sing a few dozen pow-wow songs. They were monosyllabic in front of the non-Indian teachers, but could tell complicated stories and jokes at the dinner table. They submissively ducked their heads when confronted by a non-Indian adult, but would slug it out with the Indian bully who was ten years older. (5)

Alexie adeptly portrays this experience in his first young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part*

“Native America is incredibly diverse, encompassing hundreds of communities with distinct languages, cultures, philosophies, and educational systems that defy easy generalizations” (Lomawaima 5).

Time Indian, winner of the 2007 National Book Award. Young readers will enjoy this humorous look at a teenager who experiences many of the trials and tribulations that all teenagers face, but from the viewpoint of Junior (AKA Arnold), a boy from the Spokane Reservation. Junior tells his story and the story of many native youth.

James Welch also tells his stories candidly and honestly. “I have not once pulled my punches. And I have so many Indian people come up to me and say that *Winter in the Blood* was just . . . like it is on their reservation. Not only

northern plains reservations but in the southwest or Midwest or whatever. So I think as long as you can write truthfully, people will recognize the truth of what you are writing” (Shanley 26).

Welch goes on to say:

I’ve had whole high school classes write to me how they just became interested so quickly and the whole book just kept them right there. So I feel that the book strikes a chord. So many books of that nature are written from the outside looking in on the Indian culture. This book is from the inside as the Indians look out at the rest of the world. And I think that kind of viewpoint was kind of missing in virtually all of the historical fiction written about Indians. (Shanley 26)

As with all young people, school experiences that promote a positive self-concept for the reader are of developmental benefit to Native American youth. Pewewardy explains that developing a student’s self-concept is critical to his or her development as a mature, well-adjusted adult: “To do well in school or life, each person must know who they are and be proud of their background. They must have a positive self-image” (74). A positive self-image is inseparable from a positive concept of family and culture, as well. P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, writes that students “must never forget our homes and families, where we are from and who we are. We may seek refuge in pan-Indian associations and urban communities, but we must always remember our own Peoples” (280). Consequently, the challenge to Indigenous People today is to create and

add to a literary canon and a literary community, a cadre of Native American scholars who will develop their own networks and organizations that will protect and respect tribal nations, histories, cultures, and literatures (Hafen 280). Carol Miller, University of Minnesota, says, “Our objective should be to model for our students not an adversarial and minimal survival in an alien environment but an expectation of achievement and influence in a setting that may be adapted to our own self determined ends” (284).

Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) speaks of this self-determination to publish his own writing, as well as the writing of others. A graduate of Cornell University and Syracuse University, he and his wife Carol founded a literary magazine called *The Greenfield Review* and a publishing company, The Greenfield Review Press, both of which have multicultural literature as a focus. They publish many American Indian writers, including Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Duane Niatum (S’Klallam), Lance Henson (Cheyenne/Oglalla Sioux), Nia Francisco (Navajo), and Kim Blaeser (Chippewa). On the subject

“Accurate, sensitive and fully-rounded representations of the cultures a child lives in can help validate that child and his or her culture” (Bruchac).

of literature for young adults Bruchac states, “Literature in the classroom introduces students on the one hand to worlds beyond their own, and on the other hand may help them understand their own lives more fully.” In particular, he touts the benefits of historical fiction, which can make history come alive, much

more effectively than “any dry summary of events and dates.”

Conversely, literature may help students to see who they are now not just in the context of history. “Accurate, sensitive and fully-rounded representations of the cultures a child lives in can help validate that child and his or her culture” (Bruchac). The danger, according to Bruchac, in not portraying students’ culture accurately is that they may feel that their world and, by extension, their own lives are of no real importance. However, the problem becomes how can teachers, especially non-Natives, find such literature? The literature is out there if one takes the time to look in appropriate places.

Oyate is a Native organization working to see that Indigenous People’s lives and histories are portrayed honestly (<http://www.oyate.org/aboutus.html>). This website contains very helpful information on how to find such books as *Through Indian Eyes*. It is also helpful in pointing out books to avoid such as *My Heart is on the Ground*, *Sign of the Beaver*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, which unfortunately “sell millions of copies and are in virtually every school library” (Bruchac). Therefore, one major issue is the availability of YAL for Indigenous People. If the teacher cannot find good books in the school library, where can such quality books be found?

Bruchac says, “The problem lies principally not in a lack of material, but in convincing the publishers to open their doors to more Indian authors.” There are numerous Indian authors who have publishable manuscripts but cannot get their foot in the door because publishers are looking for what they are familiar with—which is the stereotyped, romantic non-Indian view of Indians. Therefore, the answer to the question of availability is that teachers must be diligent in seeking out books that are culturally relevant. As well as *Oyate*, Bruchac’s own website is a valuable resource (<http://josephbruchac.com/>).

The question then becomes, why should teachers spend the time seeking out such books? Teachers need to take the time because, “The lack of culturally relevant literature can be devastating to children” (Bruchac). The unspoken, or sometimes spoken, implication is Native students’ culture is not worthy of respect. Native students need to be able to see themselves in their reading. Bruchac, himself, has published over 75 books with Native American themes and characters, the majority of which would serve the purpose of providing Native American youth with a positive vision of themselves. Singling out individual works of his is hard, but two examples of very good books that could be used with young adults are *Hidden Roots* (2004) and *Wabi: A Hero’s Tale* (2006), both of which portray important images of native student’s experiences. The former is the story of a young man whose family tries to hide their Indian roots, similar to Bruchac’s experience. The latter is the story of Wabi’s journey of self discovery. Although it employs elements of fantasy it has a realistic depiction of identity and love.

Bruchac stresses that certain aspects of Native American cultures (there is no monolithic “Indian

Culture” but, rather, there are many cultures) can be addressed through the medium of storytelling, but it is more a question of content and approach than it is of genre and form. Once teachers select this culturally relevant literature they must strive to re-emphasize the importance of enjoyment in reading. “The current trend of emphasizing testing above all other things is killing American education as a whole, discouraging and penalizing minority students in particular” (Bruchac). Beyond the classroom, in order for books to be available, Bruchac says more open-mindedness in the world of publishing is needed, along with the involvement of more American Indian writers and artists.

Jackie Boyd (San Juan Pueblo/San Felipe Pueblo/Navajo), an education instructor at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, offers important insights into how writers and teachers can be attentive to the needs of Native students. Boyd believes that students first need to understand and comprehend what they read. Then they can develop an appreciation of the world around them and learn about other cultures. Like Bruchac, Boyd states that books must contain contemporary contexts as well as historical facts. Native students can then make connections with young characters that may live in cities or on reservations but are also Native American, sharing similar thoughts, and struggles. Sometimes students may not be able to go back to their tribe or community, because it is difficult to participate in all ceremonies and celebrations. However, students can read about it and it can have a positive affect on their lives.

Unfortunately, Boyd laments, culturally appropriate literature for Native American children is currently very limited. Many of the writers who write about Native Americans are non-Native. “They do their best to write about Native people, but it is different.” Boyd explains that Indian writers writing about Native culture will have a much stronger insight because they know what it is like to grow up with a particular tribal affiliation.

Boyd offers a specific example from her past at a day school at San Juan Pueblo where the students read about Dick, Jane, and Muffin. Students could not connect with these people because they had nothing in common. If these children had books like Cynthia Leitich Smith’s (Muscogee) *Jingle Dancer*, the story of a small-town native girl and her relationships with

women of her intertribal community, it would make a big difference. Boyd’s own childhood experience is a good example of this. Her grandmother shared *Chee and His Pony* with her, which became her favorite children’s book to read. Boyd’s maiden name is Chee, and one of the characters was a Navajo boy, two powerful connections to personal experience. Boyd contends that if children at any age or from any culture do not have culturally relevant literature then it will have profound effects.

There are certain aspects of culture that are appropriate for authors to write about and some that are not, according to Boyd, because they are topics that are not supposed to be spoken of outside the culture. A book written about a Native student going to a basketball tournament would be culturally appropriate, since basketball is very popular among Native men and youth. If a character were to narrate the sacred events of traditional rituals and dances, however, that would not be appropriate (Boyd). Therefore, not only do authors need to be sensitive to content that is appropriate to include in young adult books, but they also need to pay attention to aspects of specific cultures which are out of bounds.

Boyd says, “The most pressing need in reading and writing education is for children to be exposed to a variety of reading material, not just novels, but poetry written by Native people and short stories, because many of us grew up listening to stories.” Oral histories are crucial to Native students. Subsequently, with more exposure to authentic content, states and districts need to write standardized tests to include this content (Boyd). This means not just changing the name from an English name to a Native American name, but the stories need to be authentic. There need to be more stories about Indian people who are fulfilled and successful in life, so students can imagine more opportunities than just stagnating on the reservation, living off commodities (Boyd).

Reading is important but it requires that schools have the appropriate literature. Boyd has worked with adults who teach in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and was struck by the lack of professional development and instructional resources they have available to them. The teachers in these BIA schools were excited to gain the instructional strategies and curricular knowledge from Boyd’s classes to take back to their students, but available materials are still not at the level they need to be. Boyd says, “What needs to

happen in the world of publishing and writing is for books to touch on all cultures, not just one culture, bringing their stories to life for kids to read.” More sensitivity is needed to get an accurate portrayal through stories of culture, and more research should be done.

On source of high quality literature with Native American characters is Cynthia Leitich Smith, author of the above-mentioned *Jingle Dancer*, as well as *Indian Shoes* and *Rain is Not my Indian Name*. Cynthia’s novels and picture books offer accurate portrayals of culture. Her work also includes a short story in *Moccasin Thunder: American Indian Stories for Today* and a companion story to a work by Joseph Bruchac in *Girl Meets Boy, Boy Meets Girl* (2008). Smith says:

It is crucial for young people to have a choice of books—some with characters that reflect them—in the greater body of literature. This is not only the case with regard to race, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation, but also of religion, sexual orientation, region, and so forth. It is true of Native youth because they are bombarded with false, stereotypical, and minimizing images.

It is important for all students to read about people like themselves and different from themselves. It

facilitates character identification and encourages understanding (Smith).

As a young person, Smith longed for Native American heroes, so in her imagination she overlaid Indian identities on characters where none was specified. Young adults will survive using their own coping mechanisms, but at the same time, characters that are similar to teen readers send the messages that they belong in the world of books and that

the experiences and perspectives of people like them are valued (Smith). However, if something as profound as heritage, culture, or lineage are not recognized, young adults will begin to notice that absence, which may result in their pulling away from literature.

At this point in the early 21st century, there are few books Smith can recommend. One challenge is that there are so few authors working in this area; so, there is little diversity of tribal affiliation or setting (urban, rural, suburban, reservation) reflected in the body of literature. Smith, as an author, visits public and school libraries. They may have a Native American section, but the books are often dated. “Budgets are an issue and books by Native authors rare”; however, Smith says that the market is steadily building. Outreach—by Native authors and their supporters—helps to bring readers in this area to the fore.

Smith continues:

Small and regional publishers, for example, have been increasingly open to historically underrepresented groups such as women and minorities. Also, I’m starting to see more Native voices on the big-house lists. But, we are lagging behind other ethnic-related literary communities. Our numbers are statistically insignificant. There are a handful of well-researched and well-written books about Indians by non-Indian authors, and that’s great. But these, too, are in the minority. We all still have a long way to go.

Smith suggests one remedy for the dearth of Native American YAL is to extend beyond that one week in November when all schools do the Native American unit. “We can celebrate Native authors and integrate them throughout the curriculum.” For example, *Rain is not my Indian Name* can be used to talk about technology and students’ self-expression. Once we do this in an integrated fashion, literature becomes a priority, and it is not as much of a struggle to include Native voices. If this culturally relevant literature is not included, students may feel that their own stories are not worth telling. “For those who are non-Indian, they can see that we are human beings; we have a range of emotions. That we live in the 21st century, sometimes in houses with television sets,” Smith explains.

Cynthia also laments the current obsession with testing in education and how this fails to take into account the cultural variations across our society. “I understand that there is a need for evaluation, but there should be an awareness of differing regional and cultural perspectives and a variety of modes of learning,” she contends. Again, reflecting the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and their communities is essential to the development of both literature and educational materials. Cynthia describes a test driven

On source of high quality literature with Native American characters is Cynthia Leitich Smith, author of the above-mentioned *Jingle Dancer*, as well as *Indian Shoes* and *Rain is Not my Indian Name*.

approach to teaching literature, saying, "Reading is not just a subject to pass on a test but a life skill that is absolutely essential to the individual and society."

The need for more literature in our schools written by, for and about Native Americans is undeniable. There are some issues to consider as we move forward, however. In a survey of first year writing students at Haskell Indian Nations University, we found some additional issues that merit future scrutiny. First, some Native students did not necessarily want to have their culture emphasized in school for fear they would be singled out. This fear may point to an issue of institutional inequities that need to be addressed. Perhaps the very infrastructure of our educational institutions is not conducive to the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Second, students pointed out that just because literature was from an Indigenous perspective did not mean it was culturally relevant to them. Perhaps there is a need to draw on the resources of diverse Native communities to create literature using the language, customs, and culture that is appropriate to share with Indians and non-Indians alike. Educators and anyone who has a stake in the education of young adults need to begin to develop curriculum that includes culturally relevant literature by for and about Indigenous People in order to build a society that is not only tolerant but inclusive as well. Authors and publishers must also play a role in this process, since there is still a need for them to write and publish works by for and about Native young adults. Many excellent authors have been mentioned such as Cynthia Leitich Smith, Sherman Alexie, and Joseph Bruchac, but more American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native authors need to step up and be recognized for the work they are producing and the work they will produce in the future. These works are needed as an alternative to the misinformed and stereotypical young adult books that are being written and published every year.

In summary, books for Indigenous youth must not only portray Indigenous People with historical accuracy, but also portray members of various cultures as contemporary role models. It is also essential that a diversity of cultures be represented in the literature, paying attention to the many tribes and communities that abound. For these reasons, it is vital that more Native authors write books for and about Native

youth, as well as for non-Native youth. We as educators must show publishers that there is a market for such books in the schools. We must also share such culturally relevant literature with non-Indian youth, so that they may appreciate the diversity of culture. In turn, the culture of all students must be recognized as essential to a broader understanding among students and teachers alike. Finally, this has far-reaching implications that reach even into the area of high-stakes testing. Educators need to advocate for equity on reading tests, where all cultures may be represented. This may mean shaping testing materials for particular communities, but if we express the need for these materials then they will be developed.

Kenan Metzger has worked at Haskell Indian Nations University as a curriculum developer focusing on culturally relevant literature. Currently, he works at Ball State University where he continues to focus on culturally relevant curriculum. In particular he is working on a project to teach young adult literature with Native American themes to secondary students.

Wendy Kelleher completed her Ph.D. in English education at Arizona State University following a career in high school English language arts and theater in North Dakota. Her primary research areas are culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, and teacher training. She currently lives in Fountain Hills, Arizona.

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"I understand that there is a need for evaluation, but there should be an awareness of differing regional and cultural perspectives and a variety of modes of learning," she contends.

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James Moffett Award

NCTE's Conference on English Education, in conjunction with the National Writing Project, offers this grant to support teacher research projects inspired by the scholarship of James Moffett. All K-12 classroom educators who teach at least three hours or three classes per day are eligible to apply for the grant. Moffett Award winners receive a certificate, a monetary award (up to \$1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project, and a copy of James Moffett's last book, *The Universal Schoolhouse*. Proposals will be judged on such criteria as the strength of the connection to James Moffett's scholarship and the perceived value and feasibility of the research. **The deadline for nominations for the 2008 Moffett Award is May 1, 2008.** Winners will be notified in July 2008 and announced at the 2008 NCTE Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas. Submit nominations to James Moffett Award, Kristen Suchor, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. For more information, go to <http://www.ncte.org/groups/cee/awards/moffett/108836.htm>.

Gendered Identities Explored:

The Lord of the Rings as a Text of Alternative Ways of Being

The *Lord of the Rings* is a fantastic and magically woven narrative of adventure, courage, and friendship. Romance and mystique abound in the physical and spiritual journey that a small hobbit makes with a Fellowship of eight other members of Middle Earth. Of course, this world, not unlike our own, suffers from greed, misused power, and war. In other words, it is a world dominated by men.

Identity is shaped by the multiple experiences a person has in the world. Davies (1989) suggests that “our subjectivities are experienced as if they were entirely our own because we take on the discursive practices and story-lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences” (230). In other words, our individual perceptions and feelings (subjectivities) of the world come from shared discourses and interpretations of texts. Of course, we must also respect that the “reader” of discourses brings past experiences, values, and beliefs that influence her understanding of the new discourses and interpretations (Rosenblatt, 1986, 1990, 1991). DeBlase (2003) suggests that “Transactions with literacy engage individuals not as passive recipients of text and culture but as coproducers of culture” (625) so that gender, class, and racial identities are being created and maintained in complex ways.

Constructing and Deconstructing Gender: Problematizing *The Lord of the Rings*

I am concerned with the shaping of a reader’s gendered identity during his/her transaction with

texts, such as *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien creates a fantastically detailed and lovingly developed world so that a reader is drawn in without much room for reflection. Even after pausing between reads, the reader is left to mull over the descriptions and plot in order to comprehend and manage the multiple narratives. Or perhaps, Middle Earth corresponds with the reader’s world values and beliefs so that gender roles do not appear problematic.

In one study, Davies (1989) found that when elementary students were presented with a feminist story (*Paper Bag Princess*, Munsch, 1980) many of them heard and understood the story as “a variation of a known story line in which males are heroes and females are other to those heroes” (231). These students did not have background experience with which to understand the disruption of the male and female roles; therefore, the consideration of inequality in gender roles did not occur to them, and their understanding of male and female roles was not disrupted with simply reading a text. Similarly, in a study of adolescent female literacy practices, DeBlase (2003) found that the female students did “not merely absorb the values of progressive or multi-cultural texts—particularly when the cultural representations of women in these texts are not supported by a society’s notions of femininity” (633). Thus, students need explicit instruction in deconstructing male and female roles in texts.

Deconstructing Masculinity

A long-term goal of feminist post-structuralists is to disrupt the inequality of gender roles and expecta-

tions through critical reflection with texts. By deconstructing how language constructs gender, students may be able to question and challenge the inequalities that exist. Researchers such as Connell (1995, 1996), Davies (1997), Kimmel (1993), and Martino (1995a, 1995b) suggest that the construction of masculinity be given specific examination because the depiction of one 'correct' version of masculinity is problematic and works to maintain a patriarchal hierarchy in societies that value a hegemonic masculinity over other masculinities and femininities. Martino (1995b) explains that the purpose in exposing students to deconstructing masculinity in texts is not to change their attitudes, "but to make available a space for students to consider other possibilities for making meaning and to consider other gendered positions" (210).

The Lord of the Rings is not a text that invites criticism of hegemonic masculine values, but it is a text that can provoke multiple discussions about its various messages about masculinity. According to Connell (1996) and Martino (1995b), the social practice and ideology of masculinity differs between cultures and throughout history; therefore, multiple definitions of masculinity exist or have existed and are transformative (Connell, 1996). However, some masculinities are valued more than others; the culturally accepted masculinity is referred to as hegemonic masculinity. "The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity" but it is "highly visible" (3). Often only a few males in a society practice hegemonic masculinity closely, but other males feel pressure to conform to this visible performance of what a society considers normal for men. Hegemonic masculinity and femininity establishes narrow expectations that leave many males and females to be considered and treated as outside the norm. Masculinity and femininity, therefore, need to be deconstructed so that males can understand how masculinity has been constructed, through texts, institutions, and media, but also to create a space for discovering alternative gendered identities to admire and adhere. Through the deconstruction of texts, the power structure of patriarchy can be disrupted and gender equality can be possible.

Feminist Post-Structuralist Perspective

Feminist post-structuralist stance understands that power imbalances are created and maintained through language, so that in deconstructing and reconstructing words, images, and other language constructs, power imbalances can be disrupted and changed. Riemer (1987), who teaches men's studies, explains that just as feminist literary criticism and theory have changed how we perceive women, so can the examination of men in literature affect and broaden the way we perceive men.

Therefore, in considering the popularity of the *The Lord of the Rings*, an important consideration is to explore the ways that masculinity in the *The Lord of the Rings* can be read and understood. Students can deconstruct the portrayal of gender by examining the role of hero, friendships, leadership, conflict resolution, and relationship to the environment. The complex depiction of friendships and the role of femininity in relation to masculinity are examined here as an example of how examination of language can provide multiple interpretations.

The Lord of the Rings

The Lord of the Rings has been argued to be a myth, epic, romance, or fairy tale, which hints at the complex nature of this trilogy. Set in the fantasy world of Middle Earth, four hobbits from a peaceful, isolated village join a Fellowship of five other members from different parts of Middle Earth on a journey to battle a terrible evil power that wants to conquer and destroy Middle Earth. Frodo and Sam are two of the hobbits who journey right into the heart of the danger to ultimately destroy a ring of power that only they have the courage and ability to do. The Fellowship is created to protect and aid Frodo in getting the ring to its final destination. Besides Gandalf, the wizard, much of the responsibility of the Fellowship falls on Aragorn, an enigmatic warrior, who will eventually become king of the men. Gimli is a representative of the Dwarves of Middle Earth, while Legolas is the Elven representative. The rest of the Fellowship includes Boromir, another man, and Pippin and Merry, hobbits from Hobbiton. Themes of heroism, friendship, good and evil, love, and freedom are all evident in this trilogy and are entry points into deconstructing gender roles.

The Layered Depiction of Friendship

Friendship binds much of this trilogy. Old friendships and new friendships are described and developed, and while many of the friendships seem typically masculine, beneath the veneer of loyalty or competition, questions about affection and the value of masculine and feminine characteristics are raised. According to Sherrod (1987), who has studied friendships between men,

Our culture has traditionally viewed male friendship as embodying the ideals of comradeship and brotherhood. Men have buddies, pals, lifelong ties—bonds of unspoken, unshakeable commitment—the kinds of friends for whom one would ‘lay down one’s life’. Yet surveys find most men today name their wife as their closest friend. (p. 215)

Reading *The Lord of the Rings* without examination can make the multiple friendships seem congruent with this traditional view. However, the portrayal of the friendship between Sam and Frodo represents alternative views of male friendships.

Some modern day readers who are influenced by the narrow definition of hegemonic masculinity have reflected on Sam and Frodo’s friendship as homosexual (<http://www.ubersite.com/m/3626> retrieved Sept. 10, 2005) but as Martino (1995a) argues, homophobia is a strategy to police and regulate masculinity for males. Sam is the loyal servant of Frodo who proves that he would lay down his life for him in that he accompanies Frodo on his perilous journey to destroy the Ring. Two male hobbits traversing treacherous landscapes and evading dangerous enemies suggests a hegemonic masculine adventure, but on closer examination, Sam displays deep affection for Frodo through his words, actions, and expressed emotions.

At the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1993) Frodo attempts to leave the Fellowship unnoticed, but Sam guesses his plan and follows him to his boat. He argues with Frodo that he should not have left without him, “Safely!” said Sam. “All alone and without me to help you? I couldn’t have borne it, it’d have been the death of me” (527-528). Sam’s words reveal his deep concern and love for his friend. His words echo the love of a parent for a child which suggests a love beyond that of a traditional male friendship. Sam also often refers to Frodo as dear: “Mr. Frodo dear” (III, 1993, 262).

When Frodo volunteers to bear the Ring himself, Sam also steps forward: “Sam came in. He ran to Frodo and took his left hand, awkwardly and shyly. He stroked it gently and then he blushed and turned hastily away” (I, 1993, 295). Again, after Sam finds Frodo in the Orc tower he comforts Frodo: “Frodo . . . lay back in Sam’s gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand. Sam felt that he could sit like that in endless happiness: but it was not allowed . . . He kissed Frodo’s forehead” (III, 1993, 222). Near the end of their journey to Mount Doom, Sam tries to speak of positive memories with Frodo, but Frodo is consumed with negative feelings. “Sam went to him and kissed his hand” (258). He also takes Frodo’s hand after the Ring has been destroyed: “laying Frodo’s wounded hand gently to his breast” (274-275). The affectionate actions of Sam and the symbolism of connecting hands as a bond, relationship, and nurturing gesture suggest that male friendship can be more complex than simply protecting a friend

from harm; caring and showing affection is another means of nourishing a friendship. Back in the Shire, Sam’s dilemma of wanting to live with Frodo, but also to marry Rose, echoes Sherrod’s (1987) research of the importance and value of male friendships that existed and exists in different cultures at various times.

The friendship of Frodo and Sam is complex in that it raises questions about the role of male friendships. Similarly, the friendships of Gimli and Legolas, Merry and Pippin, and Aragorn and Boromir, raise questions about the value of different versions of masculinity. These friendships provide entry into further discussions about masculinities, and question the practice of valuing only hegemonic masculinity. Sherrod (1987) suggests that perhaps in the near future, “many men, I believe, will look to other men. Here, in a shared sense of ‘maleness,’ men may find the kind of emotional support and intimacy from a male friend that men have traditionally enjoyed in other times and other cultures” (235).

Sam’s words reveal his deep concern and love for his friend. His words echo the love of a parent for a child which suggests a love beyond that of a traditional male friendship.

Femininity in Relation to Masculinity

The typically feminine traits that appear in the portrayal of Sam and Frodo's friendship are juxtaposed by the typically masculine traits that the female characters exhibit. Often female characters are portrayed as inferior to male characters and are not represented proportionately. *The Lord of the Rings* is no exception to this unequal representation. The trilogy has only three significant female characters: Arwen, Galadriel, and Eowyn and not one of these women is part of the Fellowship. They also have very

The juxtaposition of Galadriel's characteristics suggests that masculinity and femininity are not clearly defined ways of being; there can be movement between masculine and feminine characteristics which can be admired, no matter whether a male or female portrays them.

small roles. The trilogy is dominated by male characters who are deemed more significant in most ways. However, the purpose of examining the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* is to question what these female characters reveal about masculinity. Riemer (1987) suggests that studying male—female relationships in literature can “disclose the central role that women play in developing the male's sense of masculinity” (296) through her passive role, her definition of, and reinforcement of manly behavior.

Examining the female characters from this perspective sheds light on the potential of masculinity and femininity as fluid ways of being.

Galadriel portrays both traditional masculine and traditional feminine qualities. She is first introduced as sitting “side by side” (I, 1993, 460) with Celeborn, the male Elven leader. “Very tall they were, and the lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful” (460). Describing both the male and female leader as ‘grave’, a traditionally masculine trait, and ‘beautiful’, an adjective traditionally used for a female, suggests that both the male and female character are equal in status and that they both admirably share masculine and feminine qualities.

Galadriel's voice, wisdom, and spirit are all portrayed with hints of masculinity. “Her voice was clear and musical, but deeper than a woman's wont” (I, 1993, 461). Her wisdom, comparable to Gandalf's and Elrond's, is revealed when she admits to having initiated the meeting of the Council that created the Fellowship. Moreover, Aragorn defends her to others who are unsure of her power and intentions: “There is in her and in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself” (465). In this statement, she represents a higher power and purity than the males, who are mostly portrayed in this trilogy as the leaders who sacrifice and deserve honour. She is also described later in the chapter as serving drink to Celeborn. The juxtaposition of Galadriel's characteristics suggests that masculinity and femininity are not clearly defined ways of being; there can be movement between masculine and feminine characteristics which can be admired, no matter whether a male or female portrays them.

The third main female is Eowyn who is not Elven, but part of the human race in Middle Earth. Eowyn represents the oppression of women that hegemonic masculinity endorses in restricting women to limited roles and expectations. Similar to Arwen and Galadriel, Eowyn is described beyond simply having typical feminine features. Her “long hair was like a river of gold” (II, 1993, 146), but in the next sentence it says, “strong she seemed and stern as steel” (146). This juxtaposition of warmth and cold is repeated in descriptions of Eowyn and represents her struggle between the typical feminine practice of nurturing and loving, and the typical masculine practice of being emotionless and stoic.

Her strength and respect from the people are revealed when she is named as the one to rule the people in the King's absence at war. The irony of this honour is that there are no men left to rule except the elderly and very young. Eowyn confronts the reality that, although she may have traditional masculine qualities of strength, fearlessness, and fighting ability, because she is a woman, she will not be allowed the prestige and honour as given to the men:

And she answered: ‘All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death.’ (63)

Since masculine qualities are more valued, she has attempted to embody all of them so that she can escape the “cage” (163) that she is trapped in: being a female who is not perceived or treated as equal. Consequently, Eowyn changes her appearance (and her name), as other women in history (Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I) have done to be involved in arenas typically expected of men.

Another irony of the value of masculinity and femininity occurs during the event in which Eowyn proves her strength, courage, and swordsmanship against a Nazgul and its rider. However, Eowyn’s healing seems to occur when she gains the love and respect of another (Faramir). She stops feeling the need to practice the *hegemonic* masculine traits and instead embraces the strengths that she can be proud of: “I will be a shield maiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren” (III, 1993, 294). Although others may read her resolve not to be a Rider nor practice typical masculine characteristics as a backward step for Eowyn, I would argue that it is only a step back if we, as readers, do not value healing, loving, and nurturing, traditionally feminine qualities.

Hegemonic masculinity *is* opposite to hegemonic femininity. “Hegemonic masculinity is an *idea* of masculinity (as well as something practiced by men) that we generally refer to when we go along with those generalizations that make all men not only superior in terms of strength and power to women, but also *opposite* to women” (Davies, 2001, 283). Masculinity is not the opposite of femininity. Masculinity is only a word used to describe characteristics that are traditionally associated with male actions; the ideologies of what masculinity and femininity mean restrict our identity construction. The portrayal of Galadriel and Eowyn serve to create disruptions in the way a reader considers femininity in relation to masculinity and reveals the complex nature of being human instead of solely defining people into gendered ways of being.

The Lord of the Rings may seem to present a simple approach to masculinity, but upon closer examination of the language used, hegemonic masculinity becomes expanded and even disrupted when considering the portrayal of heroes, friendships, and femininity. Without a close examination of the words

that are used to describe these characters, readers of *The Lord of the Rings* may not notice the descriptions that contradict their own values and assumptions about masculinity and femininity.

Parents, peers, schools, and media teach children the gender roles they are supposed to assume and identify with; however, children are capable of “constructing and maintaining the social world through the very act of recognizing it [the organization of the social world] and through learning its discursive practices” (Davies, 2001, 282). In other words, children learn to position themselves as male or female within the expectations of society, but they can also choose to challenge and transform these positions. According to Riemer (1987) the purpose of examining the role men play in literature is to:

revise the way men live their lives so that they are free to guide their lives by human ideals rather than restrict them with purely manly ones. But to change men’s lives in such a fashion needs more than just recognition of the limitations and negative effects of our present ideals of manhood. There must also be a recognition and reinforcement of positive alternatives to traditional masculine ideals and behaviors. (p. 298)

Many texts create the “preferred reading position . . . that supports traditional ways of thinking about gender” (Martino & Mellor, 2000, 5). These repeated messages about gender roles encourage readers to believe that gender guidelines are accepted and unchangeable since they are in print; however, gender beliefs are flexible and changeable (Martino & Mellor, 2000). When reading novels like *The Lord of the Rings*, students may miss the ways that language suggests alternative ways of viewing gender roles. Students should have opportunities to examine how gender, class, and race are portrayed in literature, movies, magazines, or videogames, so that important social issues can be raised.

Masculinity is not the opposite of femininity. Masculinity is only a word used to describe characteristics that are traditionally associated with male actions; the ideologies of what masculinity and femininity mean restrict our identity construction.

Implications

Teachers need to be provided with space to reflect on their own assumptions and values about gender roles because they can recognize the resistance students might face when exploring alternative ways of being gendered. There are many activities that teachers can do to encourage an examination of the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in *The Lord of the Rings* and other novels. Students could create charts in which they describe the male and female characters as they imagined them from their reading and then compare these descriptions to the language used in the text. They could examine the characters' physical appearances, actions, emotions, and how the characters are treated by others in the story. In addition, students could choose a character and, through a debate, argue whether that character was more masculine or feminine. Ultimately, though, it will be important for the students to question what is masculinity? Why is one masculinity valued more than other versions of masculinity? Can someone ever portray only one version of masculinity or are there multiple masculinities that are practiced depending on the context?

Another useful reference is Martino and Mellor's (2000) book *Gendered Fictions*. Included in the book are short stories of males and females who do not fit into hegemonic gendered roles and discussion questions to provoke further thoughts about our own values and expectations of gender roles. Movies are also another avenue that teachers can use to provoke critique of gender roles and expectations. The movie remake of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Alliance Atlantis, 2001, 2002, 2003) could also be watched and critiqued regarding Peter Jackson's decisions to change or omit particular aspects than the novels. Critiquing the movie in comparison to the novels allows for a discussion about how definitions of masculinity and femininity depend on society's expectations. For example the movie portrays Frodo and Sam's friendship less intimately; Sam never calls Frodo "dear" as he does in the novels, and they hold hands less in the movie; the women's roles are also not as complex as the novels suggest. Unlike the novel *The Lord of the Rings*, the movie of *Whale Rider* (South Pacific Pictures, 2002) conspicuously questions male and female roles in a New Zealand Maori

community. Students could research how masculinity or femininity are represented in past societies (their parents or grandparents) or other cultures and share their findings. Inquiries and discussions about gendered identities using adolescent literature can encourage students to question the role of masculinity and femininity in their own lives and ideally, the students will begin to challenge the language that constructs and maintains the gender inequality that exists in the world around them.

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Application for ALAN Webmaster

ALAN Online

The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) is seeking a webmaster for its popular, growing website. ALAN Online is the official website of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents. It publishes information about the assembly and its activities, awards, grants, workshop, etc.

Summary

Under the direction of the ALAN Executive Committee, the ALAN Online Webmaster maintains the website, manages the site data, posts information, answers inquiries, corresponds with the server host, and performs other duties as required.

Responsibilities

1. Creates and posts content from ALAN officers and others on the website using the Joomla CMS and other tools.
2. Creates timely backups of data.
3. Reviews all web content prior to and after release to maintain a professional quality of the pages.
4. Responds to e-mails about the site.
5. Attends the annual ALAN Board meeting and submits a report on the status of the site.

Requirements

Self-motivated person with skills in web site design, writing, data and site management, graphic design, and basic HTML knowledge. Experience with mysql, cpanel, CMS, and graphics software or willingness to learn is helpful.

Compensation

The ALAN Webmaster is a member of the ALAN Board of Directors and is an annual consultant for the ALAN Workshop. Compensation for consultants is free admission to the ALAN Workshop and \$100.

Information

To apply for the position, send a letter of the interest stating your qualifications for the position as an attachment using the header "ALAN Webmaster" to gilld@uncw.edu. Application letters will be accepted until May 1, 2008. The webmaster will be chosen by the ALAN Executive Committee and will take office after a transitional period at the annual ALAN Board meeting in November 2008.

For more information regarding the position, please contact ALAN President David Gill at gilld@uncw.edu.

<p><i>The Black Diamond Detective Agency</i> by Eddie Campbell Betrayal/Dealing with the Past First Second Books, 2007, 144 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-59643-142-3</p> <p><i>The Black Diamond Detective Agency</i> is a visually stunning graphic novel that tells the story of a Missouri farmer named John Hardin, who is framed for a train bombing and betrayed by those closest to him. The novel follows John in his quest to prove his innocence and save his kidnapped wife. Posing as a detective, Hardin is able to uncover the truth about the bombing, while at the same time, revealing disturbing truths concerning his own past.</p> <p>Adapted from a screenplay, the book is extremely entertaining, with a plot that unfolds like scenes from a movie. The story is relatively easy to follow and is filled with action. The artwork is detailed and realistic. Older teenage readers will find this to be a very enjoyable read. Due to some graphic violence and strong language, teachers and parents should preview this to judge the appropriateness for each reader.</p> <p>Jordin Brown Rogers, AR</p>	<p><i>Bounce</i> by Natasha Friend Scholastic Press, 2007, 192 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-439-85350-7</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Evyn's world is turned upside down by her dad's announcement that he is marrying a woman he barely knows and moving the family to Boston. She struggles to accept this transition, but it turns out that fitting in with her new family and making friends in a new school is not easy. Evyn experiences scorn from the popular clique at school, unrequited crushes, and growing distance from the friends she left behind. However, as Evyn's resistance to change gradually breaks down, she finds that her newfound surroundings may not be as terrible as she once imagined.</p> <p><i>Bounce</i> effectively addresses the universally relevant issues of remarriage, adjustment, and a desire for acceptance. Friend's writing is simultaneously honest and refreshingly lighthearted, and by providing access to Evyn's internal dialogue, her readers will find themselves empathizing with this young girl's struggle to find her own identity and accept who she truly is.</p> <p>Sarah Applegate Fayetteville, AR</p>
<p><i>Chase</i> by Jessie Haas Greenwillow Books, 2007, 250 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-06-112850-9</p> <p>Phin Chase witnesses the murder of his friend Engelbreit by Ned Plume, a member of a notorious group, the Sleepers. Phin narrowly escapes with his life, and the knowledge that Plume intends to blame Engelbreit's murder on Phin.</p> <p>Phin finds himself tracked by a secretive man with a horse for a bloodhound. Phin doesn't know if the man is part of the Sleepers, a Pinkerton agent, or a friend. The only thing Phin can trust is a collection of Emerson's poems that he has memorized and that may just save his life.</p> <p><i>Chase</i> is set against the backdrop of the labor disputes between mine owners and the workers after the Civil War. Haas introduces the reader to the ethnic conflict that existed at the time, especially in the case of the Irish. Phin's story is one not only of survival, but also of finding his place within the world. While readers will definitely sympathize with Phin, the best part of the book is definitely the horse.</p> <p>Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Curse of the Romanovs</i> by Staton Rabin Margaret K. McElderry, 2007, 288 pp., \$17.99 ISBN: 978-1-4169-0208-9</p> <p>Are you obsessed with the rich and famous? Ever wondered what life would be like if you became one of the most powerful people in the world? Rabin's innovative creation takes the reader inside the secret lives of the Romanov family.</p> <p>The heart-wrenching story of the royal family is creatively retold through the eyes of the 12-year-old future tsar of Russia, Alexei Romanov. From his point of view, the reader gets an unexpected and surprising look at the events that led up to the murders of the Tsar and his family. Alexei tells of his struggles with hemophilia and describes his fears and excitement at becoming the future leader of Russia.</p> <p>While at times the bizarre plot and abundance of difficult language was distracting, Rabin succeeds in entertaining the reader by modernizing history. This book is a challenging historical read which younger adolescents would enjoy.</p> <p>Lauren Marston Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>Elijah of Buxton</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis Scholastic Press, 2007, 342 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Occasionally a book comes along that has us laughing one second and swallowing the lump in our throats the next; that brands haunting images into our brains, through the fresh voice of an irrepressible character. That would be 11-year-old Elijah, the first child born free in Buxton, Canada, across the border from Detroit. Mischievous Elijah, famous for once throwing up on Frederick Douglass, is the heart of Buxton. Now he yearns to be “growned up,” which – thanks to a skillful author — happens both gradually and suddenly, when Elijah embarks on a dangerous odyssey into America.</p> <p>This is Curtis’s most fully realized novel, about family, human connections, and the passion for freedom. Though written in modified dialect, the language flows and rolls off the page like poetry. Incidentally, Buxton truly was a safe-haven colony, yet Americans know little about where runaways settled when they reached Canada. Recommended for ages 9 and up, this is a humdinger of a tale that twists and turns and breaks our hearts, before catapulting us to the sad, yet triumphant ending.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lois Ruby Albuquerque, NM</p>	<p><i>A Friendship for Today</i> by Patricia McKissack Scholastic, 2007, 240 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>A brood of neighborhood enemies and parents on the brink of divorce should be the bulk of 12-year-old Rosemary Patterson’s worries. But there is one more thing looming: sixth grade at one of the nation’s first racially integrated schools. Loosely based on author Patricia McKissack’s own childhood experience growing up during the monumental moments of the Civil Rights era, <i>A Friendship for Today</i> is about the tenacity of a young trailblazer and the ability of friendship to overcome obstacles.</p> <p>Compounding Rosemary’s troubles, her best friend J.J. is stricken with polio just before school begins, leaving Rosemary as the only black student in her class at a resistant elementary school. Then, walking into room 123 on the first day, Rosemary is face-to-face with Grace the Tasteless, her sworn enemy and a known racist. However, though it takes a series of incidents to bond the girls, eventually they form a friendship stronger than the forces that threaten to pull it apart.</p> <p><i>Friendship</i> is an artfully told story that brings the brimming tension of the 1950s to life.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jennifer Funk Raleigh, NC</p>
<p><i>Gregor and the Code of the Claw</i> by Suzanne Collins Scholastic, 2007, 412 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>After backstabbing, infighting, and lying, the Underland is finally at war with each species, sizing up what side to take—side with the humans and Gregor, their warrior, or side with the rats and their leader, the Bane. If Gregor had spared the Bane’s life as a pup, would the war still come? Would another leader make a difference? So much hate and distrust between the species was bound to erupt in war. Collins is a master of writing an authentic battle, not everyone survives. Nor should they. But it isn’t necessarily the warrior that saves the day. His sister has an important role to play in putting the Underworld back together again.</p> <p>This is the last book in a sophisticated series that should be required reading. Collins deals with prophecies like poetry, logic, echolocation, and politics. It would fit in all subjects in middle grades content area classrooms.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>Gym Candy</i> by Carl Deuker Houghton Mifflin, 2007, 313 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>With <i>Gym Candy</i>, Carl Deuker presents a young athlete’s journey through abuse of performance enhancing drugs. Mick Johnson’s father was a failure as a professional football player, and he puts enormous pressure on his son to succeed in the sport. Held back a year from starting kindergarten so he would be bigger than the other boys, Mick struggles to find his own identity as something other than a football player. Eventually he connects with a personal trainer who gets him started taking steroids. While the effects are positive at first, eventually the drugs cause his behavior to become increasingly erratic as he sinks into despair. The book ends on a positive note, but the ending recognizes the on-going struggle confronting those recovering from substance abuse.</p> <p>Given the on-going interest in the use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional athletes, <i>Gym Candy</i> should hold strong appeal to sports fans (particularly middle school and high school boys), and the book’s simple, uncluttered prose should be accessible to non-readers and struggling readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>

<p>Harmless by Dana Reinhardt Wendy Lamb Books (Random House), 2007, 229 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Honesty/Dishonesty ISBN: 978-0-385-74699-1</p> <p>Sometimes trying to fit into others' expectations leads to unexpected consequences. Ask Mariah, whose "coolness" portrayed her as something she was not. Ask Anna, who desperately wanted to fit into the high school social life. And ask Emma, who made one mistake that snowballed into an event that affected their entire community.</p> <p>Told in the alternating voices of the three girls, <i>Harmless</i> explores how one lie can transform the lives of not only the liars, but also of those they've never even met. Who will have the strength to step forward and try to fix the damage that has been done?</p> <p>Why did each girl commit to the story that was told? The answer is different for each girl, creating a novel that serves as a springboard for exploring individual motivation and the importance of honesty. Mariah, Emma, and Anna will have a lasting effect on all, regardless of age, who read their story.</p> <p>Robyn Seglem Olathe, KS</p>	<p>Hold Up by Terri Fields Roaring Book Press, 2007, 163 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Realistic Adventure ISBN: 978-1-59643-219-2</p> <p>Told through alternating perspectives of victims and criminals, the voices of 10 characters tell the tale of a frightful night at Burger Heaven, where a group of teenagers, of various character flaws and conflicts, work. On this particular night, a long-time criminal and his first-time lackey rob Burger Heaven. But, this is the first night when the only adult supervisor is suddenly called away — only the teens are closing the store. The robber is botched. The police arrive. A shot is fired. Do the robbers escape? Does anyone die?</p> <p>While the chapters alter in perspective, the characters are so descriptive, you instantly know who is narrating without having to check the chapter name. Interspersed throughout the narrative are late-breaking news updates. The end of the book finds the victims a year later, and they talk about their experiences and how they have and have not changed.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>
<p>Kissing the Bee by Kathie Kojia Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 128 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Love/ Friendship ISBN: 978-0-374-39938-2</p> <p>As the end of their senior year approaches, Dana, her best friend Avra, and Avra's boyfriend Emil are faced with what will happen in May. But, before school ends there is a lot to think about, like prom and Dana's big biology project on bees. As Dana works on her project, she becomes mesmerized by the intricate behaviors of these insects, and she realizes her life is more closely related to theirs than she would have ever thought. She also realizes she may no longer be able to ignore her feelings for Emil and what they will do to her friendship.</p> <p>This novel about love, friendship, and truth is told through intricately woven metaphors and honest language. The heroine Kojia has given us is truly special, and her journey into her adult life is beautifully and gracefully taken. Readers will float through the story, never wanting it to end.</p> <p>Sarah de Verges Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p>The Missing Girl by Norma Fox Mazer HarperCollins, 2008, 291 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Psychological Thriller/Realistic Fiction ISBN: 978-0-06-6237763</p> <p>Five sisters—Beauty, Mim, Stevie, Fancy, and Autumn—live seemingly ordinarily lives. They argue and laugh together, worry about their family finances, and dream about boys. Unbeknownst to them, a man watches them walk to school daily and obsesses over which girl he likes most. When one sister, upset that her sister is being “shipped off” to live with an aunt for financial reasons, ventures onto the man’s property by mistake, the man makes his choice, and the stage is set for a nightmare.</p> <p>The story alternates among the voices of the five sisters and the stalker. Mazer does an outstanding job building tension. From the onset the reader knows one girl will be taken, but the reader must follow Mazer’s clues to determine which girl. In a unique twist, Mazer delivers one girl’s perspective from second person point of view—a brilliant move, for the reader steps into the shoes of the predator’s prey. This is a horrifying, yet realistic story that ends on a note of tenderness.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>

<p><i>November Blues</i> by Sharon M. Draper Atheneum, 2007, 316 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Teen Pregnancy/Death ISBN-13: 978-1-4169-0698-8</p> <p><i>November Blues</i> is the sequel to Draper's <i>The Battle of Jericho</i>. Josh's death has affected so many of his friends and family. Jericho, his cousin, has given up his first love—playing trumpet. November, his girlfriend, grapples with his disappearance and the new addition he has left behind—his unborn daughter. Jericho tries to deal with his grief by trying out for the football team. November tries to hide her pregnancy for as long as she can. Josh's parents segregate themselves from everyone until they find out about the pregnancy. They see the baby as a way to have a piece of Josh in their lives and hire a lawyer to create documents to allow them to adopt November's baby. November is at a crossroads. Is giving the baby up the right thing to do?</p> <p>This book is recommended for middle and high school students. There are no instances of profanity or sexual scenes. Draper has written another fine book that addresses the choices adolescents must make and their consequences.</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FLA</p>	<p><i>Off-Color</i> by Janet McDonald Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 163 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Race/Identity ISBN: 978-0-374-37196-8</p> <p>Safe and comfortable in her middle-class neighborhood, feisty 15-year-old Cameron faces typical challenges—dealing with her single mother, avoiding schoolwork, and finding time to text message friends. Her life takes an unexpected turn when her mother loses her job and they are forced to move to a public housing project.</p> <p>McDonald's novel takes a turn when Cameron uncovers a photo of her father and discovers she is bi-racial. Cameron works through the process, then, of straddling two worlds and figuring out how her new sense of ethnicity might allow her to fit into both her old life and her new neighborhood. The issue of race permeates this book, infusing every element of Cameron's family life, friendships, and even school assignments. The novel's title not only alludes to the focus on the complicated issue of race, but it also occasionally serves as an apt description of the book's frank dialogue.</p> <p>McDonald's novel sheds light on one girl's journey toward understanding her own racial identity while prompting readers to consider the meaning of ethnicity.</p> <p>Kevin Kienholz Emporia, KS</p>
<p><i>Outside Rules: Short Stories about Nonconformist Youth</i> edited by Claire Robson Persea Books, 2007, 178 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>ISBN-13: 978-0-89255-316-7</p> <p>This collection of 14 short stories explores the world of young protagonists who might be considered nonconformists, though it could be read more broadly as a literary exploration of the concept of <i>difference</i>. Since almost everyone feels like an outsider at some point, young readers will not only be able to empathize when the protagonists in these stories struggle, but they will also share in the joy of occasional triumphs.</p> <p>Robson's collection of stories grants the readers a unique glimpse into characters trying to find their courage, voices, and – ultimately – their places in the world, no matter how far from the margins they may find themselves. On just a few occasions, some of the language may be considered a bit indelicate for younger readers, and not all of these stories end on a hopeful note.</p> <p>As with any collection, the quality of the stories varies, but as a whole, the book deals seriously with the idea of valuing individuality more than conformity.</p> <p>Kevin Kienholz Emporia, KS</p>	<p><i>Pushing Pause</i> by Celeste O. Norfleet Kimani TRU, 2007, 248 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>True to Life/Family Secrets ISBN-13: 978-0-373-83085-5</p> <p>Kenisha Lewis is a 15-year-old girl who is spoiled by her parents. She holds her head high above others. Why shouldn't she? Kenisha and her girls, Jalisa, Chilli, and Diamond, have the hottest moves in dance class. She also has the finest, NBA-bound boyfriend in the palm of her hand, or so she thinks. But behind the glamorous lifestyle, events threaten to rip apart Kenisha's life. Her father decides to move her and her mother out of the house so his pregnant girlfriend will have a place to stay. She and her mother move in with her grandmother and cousin, Jade, who resents Kenisha's presence. Chilli breaks the bond of friendship by going out with Kenisha's boyfriend. While this drama ensues, it only gets worse for her.</p> <p>Her mother dies and, as a result of her death, Kenisha's grandmother tells her the truth. Jade is her half-sister, not her cousin. Kenisha contemplates suicide as she mentally wrestles with her problems. This novel will make a great read for any high school classroom.</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FLA</p>

<p>Rat Life by Ted Arnold Sleuth Dial, 2007, 200 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Todd is a secret writer. Mostly he writes gross stories to impress his friends. The worse thing happens when his English teacher confiscates his writing notebook. His latest story ends with her being zapped into a tornado of dust by an alien death-ray. The same day, Todd finds a stray puppy and meets Rat, a boy not much older than himself, and learns a body was found floating in the river.</p> <p>Todd starts to learn more about the mysterious and secretive Rat. Perhaps most surprisingly, Rat has recently returned from serving in Vietnam. As Todd struggles to learn about himself as a writer, and Rat as a person, his entire world will be turned upside down. And, as Todd points out repeatedly, it's all because of that stupid puppy.</p> <p>Arnold's most powerful writing comes through his descriptions of Vietnam veterans Todd meets. Arnold manages to deal with the pain the veterans feel without being preachy or political. And you have to love a book that opens with the narrator groping for the best opening line.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>The Real Benedict Arnold by Jim Murphy Clarion Books, 2007, 264 pp., \$20.00</p> <p><i>The Real Benedict Arnold</i> is a serious attempt to dispassionately tell the story of one of the most controversial figures in American history. Murphy goes to considerable lengths to convince us he is not an apologist, trying to revise history or make Arnold something less than a traitor. Murphy does, however, debunk as folklore a number of anecdotes about Arnold that serve to show him as a simplistic villain. Rather, it presents Arnold's life story in an attempt to understand and explain the man and his choices. For the most part, value judgments are left to the reader.</p> <p>This book is a serious biography. It is carefully crafted and rich in cultural and even genealogical detail regarding Arnold's life. As such, it is most appropriate for high school students with the interest and patience to dig beneath simple portrayals of good and evil in historical figures. The book is suitable for inclusion on a supplementary reading list for an American history course, and Advanced Placement teachers might want to consider it as a required reading.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>The Restless Dead: Ten Original Stories of the Supernatural by Deborah Noyes Candlewick Press, 2007, 253 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Deborah Noyes has expertly collected a broad range of stories sure to interest and terrify a teenage audience.</p> <p>While <i>dealing with the dead</i> remains the connecting theme throughout the 10 stories, plot lines, characters, themes, and settings vary from a teenage heroin who seduces vampires in order to kill them and avenge her sister's death in Annette Curtis Klause's "Kissing Dead Boys," to Marcus Sedgwick's "The Heart of Another," a story of a Poe fan and heart transplant patient who unwillingly kills her donor's murderer. Each suspenseful tale is expertly told creating a collection of short stories much greater than the sum of its parts.</p> <p>Readers from ninth grade and up will enjoy these haunting tales. <i>The Restless Dead</i> works best for individual readers with an interest in similar themes. A must for any Poe fan, this collection is not recommended for the faint or weak hearted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Chris Goering Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p>Resurrection Men by T.K. Welsh Dutton, 2007, 214 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Young Victor seems destined to be in a coffin long before his time.</p> <p>After watching his parents murdered by Austrian troops, he is sold to a harsh life as a cabin boy aboard ship. Trying to escape a man molesting him, he falls from the rigging and shatters a leg. He is thrown overboard to drown. Amazingly, he makes it to the coast of Britain, and his life is spared one more time. However, his benefactor nurses him to health only to sell him once more.</p> <p>Victor is transported to London, sharing a coffin with a corpse. He is sold again to work as a beggar child. He joins the ranks of homeless children in 1830s London for a life of filth, hunger, sickness, and danger. He discovers the grisly secret to his disappearing friends conducted under the guise of scientific research. Can he save them and himself?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Diana Costello Marion, KS</p>

<p><i>The Rules for Hearts</i> by Sara Ryan Viking, 2007, 224 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Theater/Gay-lesbian Issues ISBN: 978-0-670-05906-5</p> <p>Battle Davies is headed to college. She has talked her parents into letting her go for the summer to get familiar with the area before classes start. What she doesn't tell them is that she will be living with the brother who ran away from home years earlier.</p> <p>Like most teenagers, Battle has a lot to learn. Her brother has changed from the guy always willing to let her tag along to a man who rarely puts the needs of others above his own. Battle is exploring her creative side and sexual tendencies.</p> <p>Between her part in <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and the daily drama of her room-mates, Battle has to determine her role in her own life. <i>The Rules for Hearts</i> is an interesting look at coming of age.</p> <p>Diana Costello Marion, KS</p>	<p><i>Saturday Night Dirt</i> by Will Weaver Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008, 163 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Sports/Racing/Series novels ISBN: 978-0-374-35060-4</p> <p>A group of car racing-fanatic teens and adults live for Saturday night racing in this new series. Mel and her father, a disabled race car driver, own a financially strapped, small-town dirt track. Mel doesn't know the history behind her father's tragic accident. Trace, his father, Don, and their mechanic, Larry, can't get their act together. Is Trace a bad driver, or does Larry not want him to win? Then there's Patrick, the teen who parks cars and has a crush on Mel; Maurice, the 59-year-old Navy vet, Headwaters Speedway's flagman, and Beau, Amber, and Sonny who are out to beat one another on the track.</p> <p>This book builds slowly. The first third of the book introduces 10 key characters and other minor ones in short chapters. For that reason, it may not be a favorite for teens who enjoy making deep connections with characters; however, racing fans and teens who prefer action over character development may consider this book a sure winner.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p>
<p><i>Snitch</i> by Allison van Diepen Simon Pulse, 2007, 304 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Gangs ISBN-10: 978-1-4169-5030-1</p> <p>"Snitches get stitches" is a popular phrase on the streets and one that Julia is familiar with in her gang-infested Brooklyn high school. Julia is a top student, has a close circle of friends, and has avoided all of the gang drama that's been going on around her for years, so why would she be interested in joining the Crips?</p> <p>In this fast-paced book, van Diepen explores the gang culture that plagues many of our inner-city schools and the reasons so many teens find themselves attracted to the gang lifestyle. If you liked <i>Street Phizm</i>, you won't want to miss this one.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>	<p><i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You</i> by Peter Cameron</p> <p>Growing Up/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-374-30989-3</p> <p>Frances Foster Books/Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007, 229 pp., \$16.00</p> <p><i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You</i> is the story of James Sveck, a young man who is caught in the transitional summer between high school and college. The problem is that he finds himself drawn away from college, because, as he says, "I don't like people in general and people my age in particular, and people my age are the ones who go to college" (p. 39). Comparisons between James and Holden Caulfield are not unreasonable: James is charming, witty, and able to point out what is wrong with everything under the stars. James is an engaging narrator and, even when he does some pretty bad stuff, you still find yourself hoping everything turns out okay for him. <i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You</i> is equal parts comical and heartrending, but entirely entertaining.</p> <p>Luke Davis Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>Suckerpunch</i> by David Hernandez Harper Teen, 2008, 224 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Family Problems/Friendship ISBN: 978-0-06-117330-1</p> <p>Marcus, the main character of the book, and his younger brother Enrique are glad when their abusive father suddenly moves out. While the boys try to return to a “normal life,” Marcus is plagued by questions: Why did his father only beat Enrique? And why didn’t Marcus ever step in to help Enrique? After their mother says that Dad will be moving back home soon, the boys decide to confront their father, who is living in California.</p> <p>Told using realistic language and scenarios, this book may be suited for older readers, due to language and content, which includes recreational drug use. Readers will be able to connect with Marcus and Enrique, as they learn to stand on their own two feet as men, instead of boys.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>	<p><i>Sweethearts</i> by Sara Zarr Little Brown & Co., 2008, 217 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Family/Relationships/Self-Discovery ISBN: 978-0-316-01455-7</p> <p>Alternating between present-day life and flashbacks to a tragic and momentous day in her childhood, <i>Sweethearts</i> tells the story of Jenna Vaughn, a 17-year-old who reinvents herself from Jennifer Harris, the chubby, picked-on little girl, into a popular high school girl with friends and “the” boyfriend. But when her best and only friend from childhood, Cameron Quick, reappears, her life is thrown out of balance.</p> <p>Sara Zarr captures the feelings of Jenna who, inside, is still the chubby little girl who secretly ate food to fill her emptiness, whose mother wasn’t there for her, and whose only friend was a boy with an abusive home life. When Cameron returns, her insecurities return in full force. If he was alive, why didn’t he contact her? And what does he want from her now?</p> <p><i>Sweethearts</i> is a book that is impossible to put down and that compels one to read until the bittersweet end.</p> <p>Melanie Koss Chicago, IL</p>
<p><i>They Came from Below</i> by Blake Nelson Tom Doherty, 2007, 299 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Girls/Environmental Issues/Science Fiction ISBN: 978-0-7653-1423-9</p> <p>Summer on Cape Cod is the highlight of the year for Reese and Emily. The long-distance friends look forward to endless days of sun, surf, and finding the perfect summer boyfriend, but the disappearance of a nuclear missile off the East Coast starts a strange chain of events. From the mysterious blob that washes up on the beach to the two odd but gorgeous boys who have an urgent message for Emily’s marine biologist father, the girls find out that this summer may be more than they could have imagined.</p> <p>Some far-fetched science fiction and a character’s supernatural senses make for a few laughable moments. However, the environmental twist and cliffhanger ending set this novel apart from other teens-at-the-beach plots.</p> <p>Nicole Avery Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Thirteen Reasons Why</i> by Jay Asher Razorbill, 2007, 304 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Suicide ISBN: 978-1-59514-171-2</p> <p>Clay receives a mysterious brown-wrapped package in the mail. When he opens it, he finds a handful of cassette tapes. After finding a cassette player (because, heck, it is 2007, who uses cassette players anymore?) he pops in cassette No. 1 and is shocked to find that his classmate, Hannah, is speaking on the tapes. . . . Hannah had killed herself just weeks before the package’s arrival.</p> <p>As Clay listens, he finds that anyone who receives the package is one of the 13 reasons Hannah committed suicide. This page-turner will keep you up all night, as Clay pops in cassette after cassette, to find out what his role is exactly in Hannah’s death. Could he really be somewhat responsible? You won’t regret reading this book, and it won’t take you very long. It is a fast read and will keep you on the edge of your seat, as you read on to find out more about the circumstances surrounding Hannah’s death.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>

<p><i>This Is Push</i> edited by David Levithan Scholastic, 2007, 232 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Contemporary Controversial Issues ISBN: 978-0-439-89028-1</p> <p>This is a collection of short stories, poetry, and plays by young writers. Every selection seems to push the limits of what we, as a society, feel is appropriate for young adults to read.</p> <p>Topics include drugs, parents in prison, sex, moving away from home, cultural division, drug dealing, violence, suicide, eating disorders, and homosexuality. It is told in a straightforward, authentic voice, to which young adults ages 17 and beyond can relate.</p> <p>Reading this book was an enjoyable, page-turning experience. Each story tackles one of the more prevalent and oftentimes saddening issues of today. It would make a perfect springboard for creative writers, especially upperclassmen, to write their own true-life tales.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Angela McCutcheon Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>The Unmaking of Duncan Veerick</i> by Betty Levin Front Street, 2007, 212 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 978-1-932425-96-3</p> <p>Duncan Veerick's life is complicated enough. Between school, his sister, and his irritating neighbor, he has more than enough trouble. When his eccentric neighbor has a stroke, Duncan tries everything in his power to get out of taking care of her hyper dog. After Astrid Valentine returns from the hospital, Duncan finds himself at her beckon call.</p> <p>Astrid asks Duncan to hide some junk that engulfs her house from her prying nephew, starting a chain of events that could literally ruin Duncan's life. Duncan finds himself accused of murder and arson. It's a race against time as Duncan tries to find the real criminal and clear his name.</p> <p><i>The Unmaking of Duncan Veerick</i> is a classic case of "no good deed will go unpunished." The characters are rich and surprising. Levin does an excellent job of tricking the reader into caring about them, especially Astrid Valentine. Middle school readers will surely sympathize with Duncan's plight, as well as with his annoyance at his sister.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>Who Was First? Discovering the Americas</i> by Russell Freedman Clarion Books, 2007, 88 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>History ISBN-13: 978-0-618-66391-0</p> <p>Freedman's brief history of exploration and immigration of the Americas provides an accessible overview of what is and is not known about the subject. Taking care to distinguish established facts from speculative theory, <i>Who Was First</i> begins with Columbus and subsequent Spanish explorers of Central and South America. The text then moves to a more speculative chapter devoted to the evidence of Chinese contact with the "New World." Following a chapter devoted to Leif Eriksson and Viking explorers and possible settlers, the text turns to a discussion of the likely immigration patterns of those who would become Native Americans.</p> <p>While most everything covered in the book is available in history textbooks, <i>Who Was First</i> does provide an interesting summary of issues surrounding the "discovery" of the Americas. The book is especially appropriate for middle school students, although it is a source that could possibly interest reluctant high school readers. The book refuses to take sides on the implications of this discussion, so it would be an ideal jumping-off point for class discussions and/or debates.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">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>

How Todd Strasser Became Morton Rhue

Four years ago I was at the International Youth Library in Munich researching the status of the young adult novel outside the United States. Since this segment of the American publishing industry was experiencing a fair amount of experimentation in form, I was interested in discovering the extent to which that might be happening elsewhere. As part of that research, I interviewed Robert Elstner, a public youth librarian in Leipzig. One of the questions I asked was along these lines: “Can you pinpoint anything that marked the rise of the young adult novel in Germany? A particular book, maybe?”

The answer I got was *Die Welle* by Morton Rhue. That book title continued to come up in conversations during the subsequent five months I spent in Germany, always as a significant turning point in German youth literature. The author’s name didn’t ring a bell, but neither did many of the other names I was encountering. Then someone mentioned that the author was American. Here was an American book that had exerted such influence on German young adult literature, and I had heard of neither the book nor its author. When I returned home, I discovered that *Die Welle* was a translation of an American book called *The Wave* by someone whose work I thought I knew well: Todd Strasser. I set out to find the story behind this quirky little piece of publishing trivia: how and why did Todd Strasser become Morton Rhue?

Morton Rhue is practically a household name in Germany. To understand why, it is necessary to return to the origins of *The Wave*, which began long before Morton Rhue was a gleam in his alter ego’s eye. It all started with an essay by Ron Jones, who was a classroom teacher in Palo Alto, California. At some

point in the 1970s, he wrote an essay describing an experiment he conducted in his social studies class in 1967, his first year of teaching.¹ According to Jones, he and his class had been studying the Third Reich, and as always, students were questioning how the German people could have gone along with Hitler. Jones had no answer, of course, and decided the next day to introduce an exercise in class that might help lead to an answer. This is how he described it in his essay:

On Monday, I introduced my sophomore history students to one of the experiences that characterized Nazi Germany. Discipline. I lectured about the beauty of discipline. How an athlete feels having worked hard and regularly to be successful at a sport. How a ballet dancer or painter works hard to perfect a movement. The dedicated patience of a scientist in pursuit of an Idea. it’s discipline [sic]. That self training. Control. The power of the will. The exchange of physical hardships for superior mental and physical facilities. The ultimate triumph.

To experience the power of discipline, I invited, no I commanded the class to exercise and use a new seating posture; I described how proper sitting posture assists mandatory concentration and strengthens the will. In fact I instructed the class in a sitting posture. This posture started with feet flat on the floor, hands placed flat across the small of the back to force a straight alignment of the spine. “There can’t you breath more easily? You’re more alert. Don’t you feel better.”

We practiced this new attention position over and over. I walked up and down the aisles of seated students pointing out small flaws, making improvements. Proper seating became the most important aspect of learning. I would dismiss the class allowing them to leave their desks and then call them abruptly back to an attention sitting position. In speed drills the class learned to move from standing position to attention sitting in fifteen seconds. In focus drills I concentrated attention on the feet being parallel and flat,

ankles locked, knees bent at ninety-degree angles, hands flat and crossed against the back, spine straight, chin down, head forward. . . .

It was strange how quickly the students took to this uniform code of behavior. I began to wonder just how far they could be pushed. Was this display of obedience a momentary game we were all playing, or was it something else. Was the desire for discipline and uniformity a natural need? (Jones)

Building on their acceptance of this regimentation, he instituted several rules, such as requiring students to stand when called upon and preface their response with “Mr. Jones.” Punctuality and readiness were emphasized.

The intensity of the response became more important than the content. To accentuate this, I requested answers to be given in three words or less. Students were rewarded for making an effort at answering or asking questions. They were also acknowledged for doing this in a crisp and attentive manner. Soon everyone in the class began popping up with answers and questions. The involvement level in the class moved from the few who always dominated discussions to the entire class. Even stranger was the gradual improvement in the quality of answers. Everyone seemed to be listening more intently. New people were speaking. Answers started to stretch out as students usually hesitant to speak found support for their effort. (Jones)

The following day, Jones walked into the classroom and saw the students in their seats, postures erect. Having gone into this without a game plan, he decided to continue it, and wrote on the board, “Strength through community.” The previous day had been about a discipline; now it was about community. Again, from his essay:

I made up stories from my experiences as an athlete, coach and historian. It was easy. Community is that bond between individuals who work and struggle together. It’s raising a barn with your neighbors, it’s feeling that you are a part of something beyond yourself, a movement, a team, La Raza, a cause. (Jones)

At the end of the class period, he made up a salute for class members, with fingers curled like a wave. He called it the third wave, taken from the surfer’s idea that the third wave is the largest. Although he claims he was not deliberately alluding to the Third Reich, the coincidence strains belief. As his students saluted each other in the halls, the cafeteria, or the gym, others wanted to be part of the Third Wave and on Wednesday thirteen students had

skipped their own classes to attend Jones’s class. Wednesday’s focus was “Strength through Action,” and among the actions encouraged were to bring more students into the movement and to report any students who were not adhering to the rules. In all, nearly 200 were involved by the time Jones found a way to end the experiment, which he did by setting the students up to believe they were part of a nationwide movement and then exposing them to the truth: they had been manipulated.

The above account comes directly from

Jones’s article. Whether it is entirely factual or has been shaped and embellished for effect is an important consideration but not one that is relevant here. What is important is that Jones’s article was picked by T.A.T. Communications, an independent production company, as the basis for an ABC Afternoon Special, a series that ran from 1972 to 1988 and usually consisted of scripts written from young adult problem novels. As someone who watched this series commented, “most of the specials dealt with the same subjects every two years. . . . teen pregnancy, drug addiction, divorcing parents, or some other societal problem that affects kids and teens” (ABC). One of the actors who co-starred in the film version of *The Wave* said, “We knew when we made *The Wave* that it was way out there as far as this programming format was concerned” (ABC). In fact, the finished program packed such a punch that the network delayed showing it as an ABC Afternoon Special and instead ran it during prime-time on its ABC Theater for Young Americans on October 4, 1981. It garnered both an Emmy and a Peabody Award for that year and was rebroadcast as an ABC Afternoon Special in 1983.

Enter Todd Strasser, who was hired to write a novel of the story based on the filmscript. Strasser was working as a journalist with one teen novel to his

At the end of the class period, he made up a salute for class members, with fingers curled like a wave. He called it the third wave, taken from the surfer’s idea that the third wave is the largest. Although he claims he was not deliberately alluding to the Third Reich, the coincidence strains belief.

credit, *Angel Dust Blues*. Published in hardcover in 1979, *Angel Dust Blues* was scheduled to come out in paperback from Dell Publishing in 1981. Meanwhile, Dell had made an agreement with the film production company to publish the novelization of *The Wave* as a paperback original and assigned the writing job to Strasser. It was work for hire, with the copyright belonging to Dell and T.A.T. Communications. The first Dell printing came out in October 1981, presumably to coincide with the airing of the television show.

Rights to *The Wave* were bought by the German publisher Ravensburger and the German edition was published in paperback in 1985 with translation by Hans-Georg Noack, who also translated *The Outsiders* into German. The book exists in several editions in Germany—trade paperback, and school editions in English and German that include supplementary material, including a biography of the author, historical background, text analysis and interpretation, assignments, themes, reviews, and other material for use in a classroom setting.

It is safe to say that almost everyone raised in German schools from the late 1980s on has heard of this book. I asked a 17-year-old German girl who was visiting me if she had read *Die Welle* and she said yes, as did a much older acquaintance, who added, “by Morton Rhue.”

Todd Strasser’s webpage contains a button “Für Deutsche Leser,” which addresses the German reader and explains the connection between Todd Strasser and Morton Rhue. When giving background about *The Wave*, he writes, “To me, one of the most rewarding aspects of *The Wave* is knowing that it is required reading not only in your class, but in most of Germany as well.” In addition to discussing *The Wave*, Strasser’s site for German readers describes the two other books of his that have been translated into German. *Can’t Get There from Here*, about street kids living in New York, was published in Germany as *Asphalt Tribe*, and *Give a Boy a Gun*, about a school shooting spree, was published under a German title roughly translated as “I pick you off.” Both list the author as Morton Rhue.

The name Todd Strasser means nothing in

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Germany—the name Morton Rhue carries a lot of weight and has marketing cachet. Morton Rhue has a very different image than Todd Strasser. Rhue’s books are raw and gritty. He writes about street kids in New York, about adolescent misfits who go on a shooting rampage in their school, and about teens like Robert who are losers until something like *The Third Wave* comes

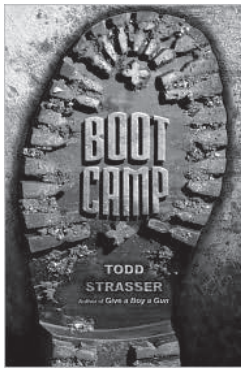
along to give them a sense of worth. *Asphalt Tribe* was one of five books nominated by the Youth Jury for the prestigious German Youth Literature Prize.

Todd Strasser, on the other hand, has written over 80 books, including novelizations and light-hearted series books for younger teens. *Help, I’m Trapped in My Teacher’s Body* has launched 16 other *Help, I’m Trapped* books. His series have names like *Impact Zone*, *Don’t Get Caught*, *Camp Run-Amok*, and *Against the Odds*. His serious books are well received, but he is perhaps best known in North America for his more popular books.

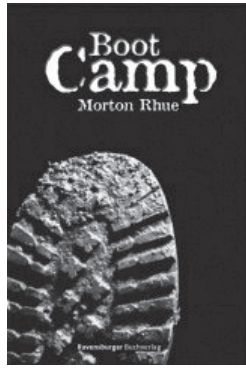
To return to the question I began with, How *did* Todd Strasser become Morton Rhue? In 1981, Strasser’s second novel, *Friends till the End*, was due out from Delacorte Press, Dell’s hardcover imprint, and his first novel, *Angel Dust Blues*, was being released by Dell in paperback on the same list as *The Wave*. The publisher decided that it was better not to have two books by the same author coming out in the same season, and so Strasser was asked to come up with a pseudonym for *The Wave*. That explains why. Finally, here is how, taken from the page of his website directed at German readers:

Perhaps he was influenced by his sojourn in Europe as a young man: Strasser sounds similar to the German word “Strasse” [which means street]. In French “Strasse” is “rue.” To capture the r sound, the h was added to yield “Rhue.” “Todd” sounds very much like the German word “Tot” [which means dead]. “Tot” equals “mort” in French. And since “Mort Rhue” sounds choppy, Todd Strasser became Morton Rhue. (Todd Strasser.com. May 15, 2006. www.toddstrasser.com/html/fur.html)

In America, Morton Rhue had a very short life. Not long after the first printing, Dell dropped the pseudonym from the cover of *The Wave*, replacing it with Strasser’s name, which had started to gain recognition among young adult readers. *The Wave* is



American cover, published by Simon & Schuster, 2007



German cover, published by Ravensburger, 2007



German cover *Die Welle*, 1985



Original cover *The Wave*, 1981



Current cover *The Wave*, 2005

still in print under the Dell Laurel-leaf imprint and occasionally gets a facelift in the form of new cover art; the most recent edition was issued in March 2005. Judging from reader comments in online forums, the book is read both for school assignments and as recreational reading, and it continues to make the same strong impression it first made over twenty-five years ago.

In Germany and in the United Kingdom, however, Morton Rhue is alive and well. In the U.K., he is known only as the author of *The Wave*, which has remained in print with periodically updated covers, the most recent being in 2007. In Germany, however, not only does Morton Rhue live on in the minds of two decades of German readers as author of *Die Welle*, but his list of books grows longer by the year. His latest book in translation there is *Boot Camp*, not coincidentally the name of Todd Strasser's latest book in the U.S. With each book, Morton Rhue gains new readers, yet *Die Welle* is the one book that spans the generations. Of all the German readers who know that book, few, if any, realize its provenance. For older readers especially, the story will always belong to the noted American writer Morton Rhue.

End Note

1. The original publication of Jones's essay, "The Third Wave," is somewhat in dispute. One source (Strasser) cites it as having "appeared in a Whole Earth Catalogue sometime in the early 1970s." The essay reproduced on two websites (Jones) carries the date 1972. Finally, a search of the database AltPressIndexArchive, which spans the years from 1960 to 1990, shows the article as having been published in the *North Country Anvil* in 1974. It is possible that the essay appeared in more than one publication in the 1970s.

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"Meant to Be Huge":

Obesity and Body Image in Young Adult Novels

In her 1998 *ALAN Review* article, "The Portrayal of Obese Adolescents," Rachel Beineke presents a moving account of her own struggles with obesity as an adolescent and decries the lack of young adult literature that mirrored her experience in a realistic way. In fact, she cited only six novels that addressed the issue, noting that most books about body image focused on eating disorders. Beineke sums up her primary criticism of the situation: "by the end of each book, each child either loses the weight or starts to lose the weight. The child then gains popularity and friends and has loving families that are pleased that their child is finally becoming 'normal' and fitting into their standards as a result of the weight loss" (44).

While this ending is not universal in her cited six books—*Blubber*, for instance, ends with the child still overweight and still friendless—the point remains. Realistic adolescent novels with truly positive messages about obesity and body image were relatively scarce.

In less than a decade, the situation appears rather different. Obesity is now a hot topic for young adult problem novels. Some of these novels take a more beneficial approach to the issue than those mentioned in Beineke's article, providing positive role models of overweight teenagers and adults who are happy, self-accept-

ing, and have many friends. The weight-loss ending criticized by Beineke is no longer the dominant scenario. In some of the books, the fat character does indeed lose weight, which may lead to self-acceptance and the acceptance of others. But weight loss does not always have positive results and is not always the catalyst for a change in perspective on the part of the overweight protagonist. Whether the character loses weight or not, the fat character moves from a position of self-loathing or doubt to self-acceptance. Such a message, on the surface, seems positive, and does offer improvement over an exclusive lose-weight-be-happy ending. However, this positive message as the focal point of young adult obesity novels covers a

When the novels are taken together, the picture of the fat person is of one who is abnormal and crazy—a freak. It is rare for a young adult novel to portray fat, or even a little extra weight, as beautiful—or even as an alternative standard of beauty.

potentially more insidious problem than the weight-loss message of earlier novels: being fat is portrayed as outside of the norm and often the result of deeper psychological problems. When the novels are taken together, the picture of the fat person is of one who is abnormal and crazy—a freak. It is rare for a young adult novel to portray fat, or even a little extra weight, as beautiful—or even as an alternative standard of beauty. The protagonist may accept herself/himself in the fat state and go on to live a happy life. But the protagonists love themselves *in spite of* their fat. Thin is still represented as

the absolute ideal for body image, and the fat person, although willing to accept fat as integral to identity, undoubtedly prefers thin. Fat is still viewed a decidedly negative body type.

One might question why representing thin as the ideal is problematic, given that obesity is blamed for a myriad of health problems, and obesity rates among adolescents are rapidly growing. Young adult fat novels portray very few (if any) adolescents attempting to lose weight for health reasons. Their purposes are almost always related to body image. The young adult loses weight not to be healthy and live a long life, but to fit in better with peers, to be considered attractive and desirable. The pain of obesity, for an adolescent, is not because he or she is unhealthy. The pain is the rejection and humiliation by their peers. Health, for better or worse, is *not* the point. The real issue is belonging and self-worth. As Younger notes in her article on female sexuality and body images, “young adult fiction reflects girls’ lives back to them” (46). Young adult novels that explore the theme of obesity, and by extension that of self-esteem, belonging, and identity, must find ways to make that reflection a more positive image for obese adolescents, without asking them to wait for a future that may or may not include weight loss.

A concept from the field of disability studies may help us understand better why simple self-acceptance is not enough. As a field of research, disability studies views disability not as a medical issue or physical limitation, but as a cultural construct. Specifically, disability studies defines disability as a representation of the “other” against a society’s concept of the “normal” body. The definition of disability, in other words, rests not in the physical characteristic of the disabled person’s body, “but in an oppressive social environment” (Marks 7). Disability exists because the world is constructed, both physically and in attitudes toward disabled bodies, to render a disabled body as abnormal. In much the same way that a society views a disabled body as abnormal, so too is the obese person viewed as abnormal.

I am not necessarily trying to argue here that

Specifically, disability studies define disability as a representation of the “other” against a society’s concept of the “normal” body.

obesity is a disability. That is a matter of debate in disability studies and best left to the experts (see Gilman for a discussion of the issue). However, the concept of disability as socially constructed, defining the abnormal against the normal, can be usefully applied when studying obesity within a carefully constructed world, such as that of a young adult novel. Like obvious physical disabilities, obesity is a bodily condition that

society has defined as abnormal and undesirable. Obesity also shares other salient characteristics with disability when defined in terms of abnormality. For example, the stare—both the disabled and the obese are looked at by “normals” with an unwelcome and judgmental gaze. The disabled and the obese are both societal freaks, so different from the perceived norm that they get special response. However, the response to obese persons is of a different character. When a blind or a wheelchair-bound person is stared at, the mix of emotions on the part of the gazer is complex, but usually includes pity (“poor blind person!”) and a sense of relief (“there but for the grace of God”).

The irony of disability, of course, is that any normal person may easily become disabled through accident, sickness, or simple aging. Even if the disability might have been caused by a perceived recklessness (riding motorcycle without a helmet, for instance), the disabled person is not usually blamed for the disability. The stare at obesity, however, rarely includes pity or relief. It is primarily revulsion, not tempered by guilt but exacerbated by self-righteousness (“how could anyone let themselves get so fat?”). Obesity is universally considered the fault of the obese, even when it can legitimately be attributed to glands, genetics, or medications. Whether pitied or blamed, both the disabled and the obese live in a world built for the society-defined normals, and it is the abnormal’s job to adjust, to fit in, to make themselves as normal as possible so that they don’t upset perceptions of normality. Society is rarely willing, without being forced, to make accommodations—note the necessity of a sweeping law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, to force such accommodations.

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This normal/abnormal binary so prevalent in representations of disability, and by the above extension, of obesity, helps explain why young adult novels that promote the message of self-acceptance may not take the issue far enough.

representations of disability, and by the above extension, of obesity, helps explain why young adult novels that promote the message of self-acceptance may not take the issue far enough. On the surface, this self-esteem message seems so important and positive body images are sorely needed for the young people who constitute the audience of such novels. But needed even more desperately is to break down the societal structures that support the idea of obesity as “other”

and create negative body images in the first place. If an overweight character simply accepts himself or herself as they are, or other characters come to appreciate them despite the obesity, then one also implicitly accepts society’s judgment that obesity is something that needs to be “accepted” into the realm of the normal, despite statistics telling us that being overweight may, by strict numbers, be more normal than thin. Thinness still represents normalcy; the obese person simply decides that he/she will not be able to obtain normalcy and agrees to go about life as abnormal, to remain a freak.

While this is not necessarily the worst way to perceive of one’s own body image, a more positive approach might call for appreciation of the fat body as something special, perhaps even worthwhile, like the plump—by modern standards—bodies in a Rubens painting. The question we will attempt to answer in our analysis of the following recent young adult novels about obesity is whether or not any of them move beyond the simple self-acceptance message to an active deconstruction of the normal/abnormal, ugly/beautiful binary in relation to obesity. All of these books are entertaining, have engaging narrators, and promote a more positive self-image for an overweight teenager. But do any truly attempt to break down negative attitudes toward fat bodies?

***The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Carolyn Mackler)**

Virginia Shreves is the only overweight member of a beautiful, brilliant, seemingly perfect family. Her mother is a successful and obsessively thin adolescent psychologist who constantly nags Virginia to lose weight. Virginia’s brother Byron is “big man on campus” at Columbia University; her sister Anais, slim and beautiful, is in Africa with the Peace Corps. Her father is a successful software executive who often expresses appreciation for the beauty of thin bodies.

A crisis, however, engulfs the “perfect” family when Byron is accused of date rape and suspended from Columbia. Virginia has always looked up to Byron and his fall precipitates a crisis in her attempts to lose weight and become what her family expects. When Virginia is invited to Seattle to visit Shannon, her recently moved best friend, her parents refuse, citing Byron’s need for family. Here, Virginia carries out her first act of rebellion—she drains her savings and buys the plane ticket (nonrefundable) herself.

While in Seattle, Virginia begins a process of self-discovery, symbolized by getting her eyebrow pierced. As she stares at her newly pierced reflection, she notes “it was like I was seeing myself for the very first time” (178). This is her first time changing her appearance according to her own desires, rather than to fit her mother’s very strict image about how one should look, dress, and behave if you are overweight. Rather than losing weight to fit in with her family, she makes a visible declaration of independence from the family norms, which definitely do not include an eyebrow ring. Students in school start to notice her. When her mother takes her shopping for a Christmas party dress, Virginia refuses the drab, old-ladyish dresses available in the plus-size section at Saks. Instead, she finds a purple dress at a funky secondhand shop and dyes her hair purple to match.

Her final act of familial defiance is to visit Annie, the girl Byron raped, expecting to find a shattered shell. Instead, she finds that Annie is doing just fine. Annie tells Virginia that she refuses to let herself be defined by what Byron did to her. She will be more than just a rape victim; she will control her own destiny, not Byron. Virginia is stunned and inspired by Annie, realizing that she has been letting others—her mother, kids at school, her own lack of self worth—determine her identity.

Because she didn't measure up to that impossible standard of perfection she thought was expected, she could only consider herself a failure—a fat failure. However, as she witnesses her perfect family fall off the pedestal, she comes to understand that she must appreciate people, herself included, for who they are—complex and fascinating, but with flaws as well as strengths. By choosing to create her own sense of identity, she declares her independence from her overbearing family, but also feels more accepted as a vital part of it. She forcefully informs her father, when he compliments her on a little weight loss (from kickboxing), that “my body is not yours to discuss” (227). However, she derives great satisfaction when her mother tells her, “you really are a Shreve” because she is doing what she wants, asserting her independence (244), a comment that had nothing to do with her weight.

The novel is focused on self-acceptance. Virginia learns to define herself by something other than her body size, deciding she does not have to adhere to the body image norms of her family or the people around her. She accepts her freakishness and magnifies it by consciously choosing to defy the norms. But she still recognizes thinness as the ideal. Fat is still considered a failure to live up to norms. Virginia's action is simply to downplay the importance of those norms to her life and identity. But she never really takes the next step, of seeing worth in her large body, other than a brief appreciation of her cleavage. Instead, she begins to lose weight from kickboxing. While Virginia's relation to her body image is much more positive and accepting than it started out with, the dissatisfaction, the desire to be thin, while pushed to the background, is still there.

***Life in the Fat Lane* (Cherie Bennett)**

Life in the Fat Lane takes an unusual approach to the obesity novel. Lara Ardeche begins the novel as a 17-year-old beauty queen and the epitome of bodily perfection. But she develops a metabolic disorder called Axell-Crowne syndrome which causes her weight to balloon from 118 to 218 pounds in just a few months. Despite the fact that the protagonist is not “naturally” fat, the story is very realistic in its portrayals of the struggles of an overweight teen. Lara experiences every difficulty, indignity, and emotion in

her responses and the responses of others to the weight gain. She can't find clothes that fit. She has to wedge herself into movie theater seats. She feels isolated and ugly. She almost gives up piano, out of fear of showing her fat body in front of a crowd. She overhears thin people say mean things about her weight. She is constantly given diet advice, especially by her mother, even though her mother is well aware that the weight gain is not from eating. Her father grows distant; instead of calling her his “princess,” he ignores her and eventually leaves the family—although Lara eventually learns that his distancing from the family began long before she gained weight. In fact, gaining weight and becoming less than perfect in her own body opens Lara's eyes to the imperfections in other parts of her life. Her family is not perfect: her father has been having an affair for several years, and her mother is suffering from depression. Her perfect boyfriend, Jett, likes her new curves early in the weight-gaining process, but eventually becomes distant, too, not knowing how to handle the weight gain, her mood swings, and his discomfort at his own reactions. The only person remaining steadfast is Lara's decidedly imperfect best friend Molly, who at a size 14 was the chunky one before Lara's weight gain. Molly is smart, funny, and very much disliked by Lara's more bodily perfect and popular friends. But part of Lara's growth is learning about real friendship.

Like an individual who suddenly becomes disabled due to disease or accident, Lara goes from normal to abnormal practically overnight. She becomes the “other,” an object of disgust and ridicule, even within her own family, especially her thin-obsessed mother and self-centered, egotistical father. The novel explicitly employs the language of freakishness to describe Lara's response to herself as she processes the changes in her body and the changes in reaction by others to her body:

However, as she witnesses her perfect family fall off the pedestal, she comes to understand that she must appreciate people, herself included, for who they are—complex and fascinating, but with flaws as well as strengths.

So clearly I really had turned into someone else, morphed into some hideous, fat monster-creature, full of sizzling rage. (88)

‘Well, look at me!’ I blurted out. ‘I’m some kind of fat freak now!’ (90)

I had become a sexless, ageless, faceless blob. I wasn’t a pretty girl anymore. (96)

It was no use. I looked fat. Enormous. Grotesque. (154)

When her family moves to a new city, Lara begins a new school where no one knew her as a thin person. She finds herself experiencing something new: not being popular. By default, she becomes a member of the “geekoid” crowd rather than the usual jocks and cheerleaders. Ironically, among the geekoids and fat freaks at her new school, Lara finds the kind of unconditional acceptance that she did not have with her popular friends at her old school. At the end of the novel, Lara has reluctantly accepted her place among

the abnormals of her society. At this point, however, Lara begins to lose a little weight. But just a little—we do not learn if this is the disease going into remission or not. Neither do we learn if Lara retains her newfound wisdom about friendship, perfection, and human nature. The message about obesity and body image in Bennett’s novel resembles that in Mackler’s; the fat

person decides to accept herself as she is and try to be happy as a fat person. Lara realizes that she likes the new friends she has made among the freaks of society. As she dresses for a party, wearing a new pale pink outfit, Lara looks in the mirror and decides she “looked pretty. . . . Round to be sure. Too round. But still” (237). The final statement in Bennett’s novel aptly sums up the basic self-acceptance conclusion: “I wasn’t perfect. But I was okay” (260). This realization and acceptance of self does not change anything—two sentences earlier, Lara expressed her longing to be thin. As Younger notes in her analysis of this novel: “[the readers] worry—will Lara’s newfound self-acceptance be lost? Is it really better to be thin after

all? The book’s answer is yes; thin is desirable” (53). Thin is still the norm, and Lara, despite maybe being “pretty” as a fat girl, will never be able to see her weight as part of her identity or anything remotely positive.

***Name Me Nobody* (Lois-Ann Yamanaka)**

Emi-Lou Kaya, self-described chunk and the fourteen-year-old narrator of Yamakana’s novel, joins a softball team at the request of her best friend Von (Yvonne)—“where Yvonne go, Emi-Lou go,” as Uncle Charlie explains (11). Von has a chance for a scholarship, but Emi-Lou is not very good. She is picked on for her weight by some of the other players on the Hilo Astros team, called “Emi-Fat,” “Emi-Lump,” and referred to as Von’s “hefty shadow” (7, 19). Over the summer, Von helps Emi-Lou lose weight, mostly by enforcing drastic eating patterns and shoplifting diuretics and laxatives for her. Emi-Lou doesn’t improve much in softball, but she does slim down to a size seven by the time school starts.

But the real problem by that time is not so much Emi-Lou’s weight, although she never really feels thin or fits in with the group as anything but Von’s shadow. The problem for Emi-Lou is the budding relationship between Von and Babes, a softball teammate. Emi-Lou, fearing both the idea of lesbianism and of losing Von, tries to keep them apart and insists to anyone who asks that Von is “normal.” Emi-Lou futilely attacks Babes in the designated lesbian bathroom at school, futile because Babes is much tougher and stronger than Emi-Lou and it is Emi-Lou who gets hurt. More importantly, it alienates Von. In her despair over losing Von, Emi-Lou begins to gain weight again. In addition, her relationship to Sterling, handsome sophomore athlete, is unclear—she doesn’t know if he really likes her or if he is simply “baby-sitting” to keep her out of Von and Babes’ way. The end of the novel is a positive resolution—Emi-Lou accepts Von’s lesbianism and her relationship with Babe; she learns that Sterling really does like her. She also decides to rejoin the softball team, despite protests that she is no good. Not for Von this time—she decides to join for herself, to prove that she can learn to play the game decently.

The title of the book, *Name Me Nobody*, comes from two places: First, Emi-Lou does not know who her father is, and her mother left her to be raised by

Thin is still the norm, and Lara, despite maybe being “pretty” as a fat girl, will never be able to see her weight as part of her identity or anything remotely positive.

her grandmother. Emi-Lou refers to herself as “a nobody bastard girl” (2). Second, Emi-Lou does not seem to have much of an identity apart from Von or her image of herself as fat. Even after losing weight, Emi-Lou is only marginally accepted on the fringes of Von’s group. In fact, the weight loss increases her sense of isolation, because now her weight can’t be blamed for her problems: “I’m not fat. So it must be me. But who am I, if not Emi-oink?” (49). Weight loss does not change her sense of herself as a nobody. This is why her determination to succeed in softball for her own sake is so important. It’s a first attempt to define herself, for herself. Even though Von will be a big part of that effort, she is not the cause of the effort. The night before rejoining the softball team, Emi-Lou finally asserts her own name and proclaims it good: “Good is a name. My name. Not Jerry Rapoza’s name. Not Roxanne Kaye’s altered name. My name. Name me: Emi-Lou Kaya” (211).

Yamanaka’s novel demonstrates that weight loss alone does not bring happiness and popularity, a definite change from Beineke’s claims about earlier novels focused on fat teenagers. Emi-Lou remains an outsider and miserable, even at a size seven. Despite her constant insistence that she and Von are “normal” (that is, not lesbians), this turns out not to be true for either of them. She must learn to accept Von’s abnormality (abnormal in the sense of the typical societal binary). But she must also accept her own abnormality—not so much the weight, but her lack of any self-identity. The weight is a symptom, not the disease. She gets the freak/loser/outsider label because she never attempts to define herself as anything else. Rejoining the softball team will probably not change the label—she realizes she is never going to be a great player. But she decides to accept the label and all the teasing and torment that may go with it in order to develop her own identity. Ironically, it is through this act of acceptance of her freak status that the rest of the team may be willing finally to accept her, as many agree to coach her, to help her out. The end of the novel, however, still indicates Emi-Lou’s desire to lose

In fact, the weight loss increases her sense of isolation, because now her weight can’t be blamed for her problems: “I’m not fat. So it must be me. But who am I, if not Emi-oink?” (49).

weight again, even on Von’s rather dangerous diet. She may be willing to play the role of outsider, but definitely not a fat one.

Myrtle of Willendorf (Rebecca O’Connell)

In the present, Myrtle Parcittadino is a college sophomore art major and in the past, a relatively friendless high school junior who is invited by Margie to join a coven. At both times, Myrtle is obese. As for the coven, Margie is a true believer in Wicca; Myrtle enjoys the friendship and the

meetings, but is not quite sure what to think about the spiritual aspect, the celebration of a divine feminine. To one meeting, Margie brings a small statue, an ancient image of an obese woman with ponderous breasts. It is Venus of Willendorf, a figure found in Austria, and possibly worshipped as an ideal of femininity and fertility by prehistoric peoples. Myrtle observes that the figure looks exactly like her own body. Yet the significance of this observation, and of Margie’s friendship, doesn’t immediately register with Myrtle. She and Margie have a falling out when classmates accuse them of being lesbians. Neither are, but Margie does not try to deny it. She instead speaks a litany of praise for great lesbians from the past. Mortified, Myrtle pulls away from her friend—not because she fears lesbianism per se, but she fears the unwanted attention to her overweight body, attention that implies that it is sexual. Now in college, Margie constantly sends Myrtle postcards. Myrtle never answers them.

Myrtle rooms with Jade, who has a stereotypically perfect body and is obsessed with physical perfection. Jade spends two hours in the bathroom each morning getting ready, and constantly pesters Myrtle to use make-up and lose weight. Jade’s equally perfect boyfriend Keith, nicknamed Goat, frequents their house, and Myrtle, much to her embarrassment, often witnesses sexual encounters between Goat and Jade. Myrtle submits a detailed and secretly made drawing of Goat to a local art show. Goat’s upper half is drawn as a life portrait, but the bottom half as goat legs; Myrtle titles the drawing “Satyrsfaction.” At the

exhibit, Jade's friends are surprised at the drawing, and call Myrtle "nympho-psycho-lesbo" (66). Once again pained at the attention to her body and its sexuality, Myrtle flees the opening and embarks on an all-night food binge—not the first time she has done so. When she awakes the next morning, she finds Margie's most recent postcard, which reminds Myrtle of the obese Venus figure. Myrtle strips naked in front of a mirror and begins to paint her own body with blue flowers, swirls, and patterns, recalling that blue is the color of the goddess. She then paints her own self-portrait—a naked, obese woman in blue, titled "Myrtle of Willendorf." She substitutes this portrait for "Satyrsfaction" in the show. This new painting is purchased and displayed by the Women's Studies department as an artful representation, albeit not without controversy, of timeless feminine beauty. Myrtle sends a newspaper clipping about the portrait to Margie, letting her know that she now understands what it means to connect with the divine feminine and to celebrate her own beauty.

While all the novels discussed so far question the normal/abnormal, thin/fat binary, *Myrtle of Willendorf* perhaps goes the furthest in breaking it down and attempting to define fat as beautiful, not just something to accept and live with in the thin-obsessed society. Myrtle never really attempts to lose weight or to fit in. She is embarrassed by her fat, but seeks to be invisible more than to be thin, thus her dismissal of the outspoken, radical Margie as a friend. Margie never asks Myrtle to lose weight, instead encouraging her to celebrate her fat as an honor to the goddess—to celebrate and love, not just accept. Celebrating and loving her body is what Myrtle finally accomplishes with her self-portrait. The novel also forces the thin/fat, beauty/ugly question into the public sphere when the portrait is displayed. Through her two artworks, Myrtle not only celebrates fat as potentially beautiful and feminine, she exposes the conventional ideals of beauty as a hidden ugliness. The portrait of Goat shows his upper half as an ideal—handsome face, thin body, sculpted biceps, ripped abs. The bottom half, however, is ugly—hairy, crooked, and sexually predatory. The stereotypically beautiful, in other words, is cast into the role of deformed freak, the object to be stared at with revulsion and fear. The satyr is predatory and rapacious, destroying in order to

get "Satyrsfaction." For beauty to be "beautiful" it must continually reinforce its superiority by degrading and dominating its opposite; if thin is beautiful and sexually desirable, fat has to be ugly and undesirable. By representing her own fat body as beautiful, Myrtle refuses to be forced into that side of the opposition, instead, turning it on its head. The display of her painting in the women's center is questioned by some, but the painting remains and a conversation begins.

***Fat Kid Rules the World* (K.L. Going)**

In contrast to the above novels, Going's protagonist is male. Troy Billings is unusual in another way—he's 17 and weighs 300 pounds: "I'm a fucking three-hundred pound teenager living in the most unforgiving city on earth. I'm ugly and dumb and I make stupid noises when I breathe. I annoy and bewilder my only living parent, mortify my little brother, and have no friends" (9). As he stands on the subway platform contemplating what would happen to a fat body if a train hits it, a dirty, emaciated homeless boy confronts him. This boy is Curt MacCrae, a dropout from Troy's school, but a talented punk guitar player and a musical legend among the students. Claiming he saved Troy's life, Curt talks Troy into buying him a meal. Before Troy realizes what is happening, he finds himself the drummer for Curt's new band. The problem? Troy doesn't really play the drums and is terrified of placing his 300 pound body in front of people. Reluctantly he accepts lessons, but in his first performance, Troy vomits all over the drum set. He flees offstage, refusing to return, although the audience thinks it's a fabulous opening to a punk rock show. Despite Troy's questionable music skills and obese body, the strange homeless musician still wants Troy as his drummer. Curt sees something special in Troy, believing that he can be a punk rock star *because* of his size, not in spite of it: "you are punk rock, T. You just don't know it yet, and I don't know how to convince you" (143). In an attempt to explain what he means, Curt has Troy watch a physically attractive couple eating in a diner. At first, all Troy sees is their perfection and hates them for it. But as he watches, he notices a piece of pasta fall off the man's fork onto his chin. He sees the tentative way the woman carefully puts food on her fork and how hard the man works to maintain that perfect, confident demeanor. This, according to Curt, is the essence of punk rock:

“That moment when you see through the bullshit?” he says a moment later. “That’s what punk music is all about. That’s what *anything* great is all about. We’re all just stuffing our faces, no matter what we look like, and people need to figure that out. When you can *play* that moment, you’ve got it.”

. . . . “And me?” I choke. Curt smiles. . . . “You live that moment,” he says. (148)

At the end of the novel, Troy finally embodies, largely and happily, his punk rock destiny on stage.

Like Myrtle, Troy does not, in the end, simply accept his body and his life as a fat person in a thin world. Instead, he embraces his size as the essence of punk rock and as a legitimate, 300-pound representation of an ideal:

I imagine myself on stage, a huge shape that’s *meant* to be huge. The crowd spreads out below me, pounding their fists into the air and waiting for me to bring my sticks crashing down. All those hands reaching for me. All those eyes looking at me. I wonder if they’d laugh. Maybe they would. Or maybe they’d scream louder than they’d ever screamed before. Without even trying I’d be king of the freaks. (103)

In this punk rock context, being a freak is the ideal. While skinny people pierce themselves and shape their hair into Mohawks to become freaks, Troy is the natural freak, the embodiment of the punk rock ideal, what they all want to be—a living defiance of the societal norm. His size, rather than being a disability, is his greatest asset and, even more so than his role as drummer, the basis of his identity as punk rocker. He is indeed the king of the freaks.

Conclusion

Of the five novels discussed here, we find that two, *Myrtle of Willendorf* and *Fat Kid Rules the World*, move beyond the simple acceptance message and attempt to break down societal attitudes that say only thin can be truly beautiful. The other novels fortunately do advance well beyond Beineke’s justifiably criticized happy weight loss ending. But for overweight teenagers facing the same humiliations, degradations, and other daily injuries that the characters in these more recent novels deal with, simple acceptance is one step short of a truly positive self-image. Acceptance means liking yourself *in spite of* obesity—you recognize that it’s a thin person’s world and you’d lose weight if you could, but for now,

you’re okay. A truly positive self-image, however, means embracing the so-called negative qualities wholeheartedly, seeing them not as a negative to be accepted and dealt with, but as a positive asset, the essence of an identity. While the other protagonists simply accept their abnormality and move on, Myrtle and Troy embrace it. They come to see their bodies as a legitimate form of beauty, perhaps an “alternative body style” that should be recognized more readily in the thin-obsessed world. The alternative is forcing obese teens to do what may be impossible, that is, lose weight, in order to believe that they are worthy. As Emi-Lou Kaya demonstrates, losing weight does not necessarily lead to self-esteem, anyway. Instead, perhaps young adult novels can play a role in helping to encourage all teenagers—not just the fat ones—to accept a broader notion of beauty by giving them alternative representations of what beauty can be. Such an attitude has the potential to foster self-esteem and a truly positive body image, no matter what the size.

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Lessons Learned from Hobbs, London, and the Yukon Gold Rush

As teachers who regularly use literature to make connections across the curriculum, our finding two trade books that addressed language arts and social studies themes with a focus on the Yukon Gold Rush offered exciting opportunities for meaningful learning, both by our students and by us as teachers. Fortunately, a local eighth grade language arts teacher shared our enthusiasm for this project because it addressed parts of a unit that she was already teaching. The connections between Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* and Will Hobbs' *Jason's Gold* seemed natural: they shared settings and characters in a general way, but they also shared themes that students saw reflected in their own environment.

Evident in both books were the gold rush mentality, dog and master relationships, demanding physical and social environments, and author connections even though 100 years apart. The authors shared stylistic characteristics that let readers make connections between the two books. Both authors used realism and naturalism to keep readers involved.

All of these aspects excited us; we could pair a hard-to-read "classic" with an eighth grade reader-friendly young adult literature selection as recommended by Joan Kaywell in *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (1995 ix) while integrating language

arts, social studies and other curriculum areas (Daniels and Bizar 269-280). This integration afforded opportunities for all of us to learn lessons about teaching, lessons that gave us pedagogical reasons for addressing nonfiction and primary sources while examining literary elements and creative writing prompts. Just how all these lessons melded for eighth graders, for a language arts teacher, and for two university faculty members follows. As you read, look for lessons that can be adapted for your students, your teaching, and your curriculum.

We designed a four-week unit for the eighth graders that included following the development of characters, keeping a wilderness journal, searching for

primary documents that would augment historical understandings, and finding examples of naturalism in both novels. Students began by reading *Jason's Gold* and completed activities to enrich their literary understandings and awareness of the historical time period. The objectives were for students to gain a deeper understanding of London's writing and his literary craft by reading *Jason's Gold* first and identifying with Jason and the entire time period before they met London's dog, Buck. *Jason's Gold* gave students a solid historical context of the Yukon Gold Rush to aid their understanding of more complex issues in their second

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book, *The Call of the Wild*. In students' reading of London's work, they then expanded their awareness of setting, characterization, theme and style. These planned activities focused the students on reading for understanding as well as pleasure.

Hobbs "blessed" our efforts as he originated the idea of connecting both works. The inspiration for *Jason's Gold* was Hobbs' visit to the Yukon Territory and London's home as well as a museum in Dawson City where he examined photographs of gold seekers climbing Chilkoot Pass. He imagined a story that gave "the big picture" of the Yukon Gold Rush and had Jason meeting London himself (Hobbs, paragraph 4). These several meetings of Jason and London throughout *Jason's Gold* provided a natural connection to the two works.

Setting

We began both novels by examining the setting. Many of the activities we created for this unit enabled students to paint a picture in their minds of the hustle and bustle of late nineteenth century Seattle, the treacherous conditions of the Chilkoot Pass, and the rudimentary living conditions gold rushers experienced in destination cities such as Dawson. By using an 1895 map of the Yukon region (Sterner) to locate major stopping points on the journey to the gold fields from Skagway or Dyea, the eighth graders embraced the challenge of finding towns, lakes, rivers and mountain passes that characters in both books mentioned during their travels. Using the period maps made the experience authentic and meaningful to our students (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>). They had to use the type of information available to people during that era. To help them visualize the terrain, the wintry conditions of the mountains, as well as the clothing and supplies the gold seekers carried, the students also examined photographs of the Yukon Gold Rush. They viewed pictures of a crowded steamship leaving a Seattle port (Jones, 51), numerous dead horses covering White Pass (Jones, 57), a seemingly endless line of stampedeers climbing the Golden Stairs to Chilkoot Pass (Jones, 62), and several gold rushers braving White Horse Rapids in their make shift boat (Murphy and Haigh, 43, Jones, 62). Primary docu-

All of these findings gave context to the stories; they provided students with a sense of what was real, accurate, and true.

ments also helped students visualize and understand the setting and the mind set during the gold rush (Crooks). After describing the images and conditions they saw, students hypothesized the locations of these photographs on the 1895 map and supported their remarks with information they had gathered from the readings. These two activities provided a solid base for understanding setting—location and time period.

Coupled with these lessons, students were asked to verify facts in both books, which often led to more in-depth explorations of place and history. Students researched specific key locations such as Five Fingers, Lake Lebarge, and Porcupine Hill. The eighth graders also investigated notable figures from this time period found in Hobbs' *Jason's Gold*: Soapy Smith (31, 210) George Washington Carmack (158), Skookum Jim (159), and Kate Carmack (159). Some students also explored the steps for building log cabins and analyzed the purpose of mosquito nets in the Yukon. All of these findings gave context to the stories; they provided students with a sense of what was real, accurate, and true. Because students recorded notes and reflections in their wilderness journals, they also drew pictures to illuminate their understandings of place and history. We called their notebooks "wilderness journals" to mimic remembering the places and times and ideas of the novels.

Another activity, the creation of newspaper stories, reflected students' best understanding of setting. By creating news articles, editorials, and human interest stories to reflect the 1898 time period, students learned to describe events and locations as "eyewitness reporters." In her letter to the editor, one student spoke with a sense of realism:

The streets of Dawson need to be worked on. The mud is more than a foot deep. My dogs can no longer pull the sleds through it. People are starting to use the sides of the street to prevent walking through the mess.

Another student described the setting for his news story with facts as well:

From Skagway, a 600-mile trek led over the coastal range and down to the Yukon River headwaters. Along these trails were the greatest hardships of all. Cold, ice and snow; agony and misery; murders and suicides; hypothermia, avalanches.

Disappointment and heartbreak [sic]. Few who started out ever reached the gold fields.

Both students provided clear images for their readers. They described specific conditions of the Yukon region in the late 1800s. The creative products demonstrated students' depth of understanding as well as their enthusiasm for the topics.

Lessons Learned: Setting

Using the 1895 map, old Yukon Gold Rush photographs, and the text of *Jason's Gold* provided students with a sufficient understanding of the setting for both books. Students carefully scrutinized the maps, and they were enthralled with the pictures. They were able to pick out details of when and where the photographs were taken and replicated some of the images they had seen in their own wilderness journal drawings. In students' newspaper writings they also proved they had an understanding of setting; the ads, stories, and letters were put into an accurate context.

Next time, to give students a stronger sense of place, we would have them attach the photographs on the map to note the location of each. We would also have students revisit the photographs during the reading of *The Call of the Wild* to make sure that they were following Buck's trip and grasping the harshness of the environment he experienced. Finally, we would emphasize the wilderness journals even more as the drawings and reflections gave us additional proof of student understandings of setting.

Characterization

We purposefully selected *Jason's Gold* and *The Call of the Wild* because of their historical connections to the Yukon Gold Rush and also because of their two strong protagonists, Jason and Buck. Both braved the harsh elements of the Alaskan and Canadian wilderness. They both needed survival skills and a solid intellect to withstand the physical and mental anguish they experienced. They both needed to learn to work within a "system" and maintain their individual identities. Buck needed to discern the intricacies of the rule of the pack. Jason needed to understand the "gold rush mindset" in which greed, corruption, and selfishness often ruled. Both characters matured in the harsh setting and were not jaded by the mistreatment

they experienced. They did not lose complete faith in everyone, but instead retained a healthy skepticism of a few. Buck finally obtained a good master in John Thornton, and Jason developed friendships with several individuals during his journey. At the end of both stories, the main characters returned to their "families." While Buck did not return to his human family in California, he became part of a new family in the wild. He became a leader of a pack of wolves, a master of the wilderness. Jason, however, reunited with his brothers and started a new life with them in Alaska.

Because of these and other parallels between Buck and Jason, a key objective we had for the eighth graders was to examine the characterization of each protagonist. We asked students to analyze the role of survival evident in the characters' actions and their responses to nature and humans. Students participated in class discussions and composed essays explaining Buck and Jason's ability to survive the Canadian environment when others could not.

When analyzing the character of Buck, many students chose words such as intelligent, determined, and loyal. They noted strengths he possessed such as his large physical size and his aptitude for making quick, sound decisions. They recognized that Buck's ability to adapt to new surroundings and to learn necessary survival skills contributed greatly to his success in the pack and in the wild. One student wrote,

He was a fast learner and he adapted well to his new environment. Buck learned the law of the club and fang quickly and also how to stay warm when the dogs slept at night. He learned to burrow a hole in the snow and sleep there.

Students also recognized that Buck was smart in a variety of ways. He made wise decisions, especially during difficult times. One student commented in his final essay about Buck, "When he found a trail of blood leading to John Thornton, he decided to move on instead of grieving over it. It took a lot of will power to do that after his ideal master was dead."

Over and over again the students acknowledged that Buck was courageous and able to persevere because he learned from his mistakes. One student summarized, "His power of being able to understand what is going on, to remembering what he learned, and applying that knowledge was a great asset."

Students noted similar qualities when describing

Jason. They portrayed him as determined, intelligent, and hard working. One student wrote,

He had the will to get there and the courage to do so. Jason was also determined and when everything looked bad, he never gave up. His skills he acquired during his time away from home helped him. He learned to live on his own hook and therefore had the need to be on his own and not take the easy way out.

Students also depicted Jason as caring, good-natured, and adventurous. One student commented, “Being kind-hearted earned him the reward of King and together they made a fine team to survive during their travels . . .” Jason acquired King, his dog, as he struggled to climb White Pass and witnessed King being beaten by his master, a man who had reached his breaking point. His compassion for the dog resulted in gaining a needed companion.

While most students found parallel characteristics between Buck and Jason, a few students believed there were significant differences between them. For example, one student opined that “Buck was much smarter than Jason; Jason was just lucky.” Having some dissention enabled students to grapple with characterization on a deeper level. What did students really admire about the characters? What evidence did they have to support their ideas? What could they learn about the character of each protagonist based on his actions?

Lessons Learned: Characterization

Having students analyze these two protagonists proved to be a meaningful component of this unit. The eighth graders were able to identify numerous connections between both characters and perhaps more carefully scrutinized each due to the comparison. For instance, examining a quality in one character required that students consider that quality for the other, necessitating more critical thinking.

Yet, we believe students could probe even deeper with their analysis of both protagonists. If we were to do this again, we would have students take more thoughtful notes about each character as they read the books. We would have them create dialogues with each other and take on the persona of either Buck or Jason. In this way, students would need to “know” their character well to engage in an honest conversation with each other. The assigned essays comparing

the two main characters were useful assessments, but more reflection about each protagonist prior to that activity could strengthen the outcome.

Themes

After teacher-led discussions about what literary theme entails, how theme is more than a one word topic, and how theme is developed in movies and television shows by music, extended metaphors, or repeating scenes, students were able to tackle our objective to follow the progress of literary themes developed by London and Hobbs in each book. They immediately picked up on

one of the most obvious Darwinian themes: survival of the fittest! Students referred in conversations and in journals to survival of the fittest as “the law of the club, the law of the fang, and the law of the Yukon.” The law of the club meant a respect for the weapon, any weapon that could beat or maim. The law of the fang represented no fair play, once down, no getting up. The law of the Yukon was that only the strong, the fittest, survived the weather conditions and physical demands of the environment. Students found numerous examples of these “laws” in both books.

The extremes of nature, the greediness of people in their search for gold, and the ruthlessness as the strong sensed weaknesses in others proved easy themes for students to follow in discussions. Some talked about naturalism found in the need to amputate Charlie’s leg in *Jason’s Gold* (Hobbs, 139) and the cruelty of the dogs to Curly and any other dog who displayed weakness (London, 26) in *The Call of the Wild*.

Students connected both stories also in the theme of civilization versus primitivism. In an essay assignment, students were asked to discuss how Buck could be part of civilization while at the same time being pulled toward the wild. One student responded,

Having some dissention enabled students to grapple with characterization on a deeper level. What did students really admire about the characters? What evidence did they have to support their ideas?

Buck was able to develop and regress at the same time. He was developing his natural instincts while losing his domestic instincts. Instead of being polite and good natured, Buck was learning how to adapt to the Yukon wilderness. This is related to the theme of the story because the book was based on someone changing which is exactly what Buck was going through.

Another student noted that same draw to life in the wild in *Jason's Gold*. "I'd say that the people involved in this gold rush were very daring. They were willing to erase their previous lives and start out basically from scratch."

The loyalty exhibited by Jason and Buck became an obvious theme to students so that they easily recognized the authors' references to it. In a final essay, one student wrote, "Jason had a goal to accomplish, a stronger goal than others looking for gold. He was trying to find his brothers. This goal made him strive to survive." Students also recognized Buck's loyalty to Judge Miller in California's Santa Clara

Valley (London, 9) and to John Thornton as he pulled a 1000 pound sled frozen fast in the snow (London, 94).

In the newspaper articles mentioned earlier, students thoughtfully incorporated themes from the era. Their research gave them clear details to persuade readers to accept their theses. One female student's editorial on the harsh conditions in Alaska said, "In the Gold Rush, there is no need to be worried about freezing to death. A far worse killer comes in silence and with no warning. The most dangerous problem is gangrene." She continued

by describing the physical characteristics of gangrene and warned her readers to be careful, because once it starts, "there is no way of stopping it without amputation."

Other class activities addressing theme spanned across the entire unit. One that proved extremely popular with students asked them to follow a participant in the Iditarod, the Alaskan sled dog team race that goes from Anchorage to Nome over extreme winter conditions. In fact, our eighth grade teacher-partner chose to teach the unit in March because of the Iditarod events. Each student was assigned a musher to follow on the computer as that team made their way over the ice and snow. Students enjoyed the connections of the sled dogs to the dogs in both London's and Hobbs' books. They invited experts to the classroom who could talk about sled dogs as well as huskies, St. Bernard's, and sheep dogs. And they drew pictures of their impressions of King, Buck, Spitz, and other dogs they knew personally from their readings.

Lessons Learned: Themes

Students could have used more time for reflections on their understanding of theme in their journals as well as in the discussions. They needed to include more concrete examples from both novels as they read. As teachers, we were reminded of the strong need to model what we meant by theme—consistently showing examples of how an idea was repeated through different scenes in the books. Theme can be a hard concept for eighth graders to grasp. This time we did not delve into the concept of mastery or control so pervasive in London's book, mostly because the students did not have time to study Nietzsche's view of the world as background. But we learned that students need that sense of primeval mastery to understand why Buck strives so hard in the wild to become master of the wolf pack.

Style

In studying the concept of style we targeted the comparison of language of the historical times with today's words and phrases. Students were asked to enter in their journals words and phrases they did not know as they read both books. They noted connotations as they read and tried to figure out what the words and phrases meant in the nineteenth century context. Students discussed the phrases and terms and their importance to the "flavor" of the book, phrases like "that man reads water like a book," and

Other class activities addressing theme spanned across the entire unit. One that proved extremely popular with students asked them to follow a participant in the Iditarod, the Alaskan sled dog team race that goes from Anchorage to Nome over extreme winter conditions.

“Klondike or bust,” learning how each author used these words to add personality to the historical fiction and adventure novels, and then they used terms like “klondicitis” in their own writings. Students quickly picked up on Hobbs’ style of writing: conversational, yet reflective of the historical time. They recognized the travelogue nature of the plot and the many references to Greek mythology, including Jason’s name and his search for his kind of gold: friendship and family. Students investigated the quest motif that Hobbs adopted by following Jason’s geographical travels and noting the trials that he had to overcome to reach his goals. From being thrown off the steamer to being robbed on the train to losing five days of efforts to cross over White Pass only to be so thwarted that he had to go over the Chilkoot Trail, Jason persevered and continued to search for his family and golden riches, becoming a stronger character as a result.

London’s writing style also offered many opportunities for students to add words and phrases to their wilderness journals: veranda, demesne, progeny, primordial, “no fair play. Once down, that was the end of you.” Passages like these that described Buck’s initiation into the savage world of the primitive “law of the club” provided glimpses into the naturalism so prominent in London’s work. They quickly learned that London pulled no punches when describing the brutality of the man in the red shirt or the savage death of Curly by a pack of dogs. The world of 1898 in the Yukon Territory was merciless, full of raw brutality, wild nature untamed by man.

Students examined Hobbs’ use of dialogue to develop a character, to demonstrate historical accuracy, and to make the historical aspects of his writing easier for readers. Students imitated the language in the newspaper articles they created about fictional and historical people who suffered from nature’s harshness, about gold seekers who dreamed of sudden wealth, and about practical information on successfully climbing Chilkoot Pass. Sample news stories featured Soapy Smith and his criminal activities, detailed illnesses that plagued the gold seekers, and resulted in spirited commentary about the economic consequences of railway decisions.

The creation of their newspapers to represent Alaskan news about the end of the nineteenth century meant students had to research significant people involved in making the history of the Gold Rush era,

had to find specific details about illnesses that plagued the adventurers, and had to incorporate details about life in the Territory, gore and all. They wrote editorials and letters to the editor about economic effects of the gold rush and addressed practical information about what supplies to take and which route was best to get there. One student even speculated that the gold rush was all a ruse by the government, a way to scam the public into believing that gold existed in the mountains. They wrote poetry and songs reflecting the styles of the authors that they included in their publication. And they drew cartoons with appropriate captions to

represent the historical era. Students captured the flavor that Hobbs and London exuded in their historical representations of the Gold Rush. They were able to incorporate that understanding of the language in their newspaper issues. With these hypothetical events, students captured the mindset of the gold seekers in their newspaper. This extended activity and its analysis helped them understand the styles and techniques used by London and Hobbs.

Lessons Learned: Style

Discerning the style of any author is not easy. London and Hobbs are distinctly different, yet they offer good comparisons and insights into writing. The students felt Hobbs was “friendlier,” but they liked London’s realism. Being told from a dog’s perspective, *The Call of the Wild* anthropomorphizes Buck’s life so that he becomes as human as Jason.

To more fully grasp style, eighth graders need a rich understanding of the “wild” London infuses into his book, social Darwinism. So next time, we plan to

Students discussed the phrases and terms and their importance to the “flavor” of the book, phrases like “that man reads water like a book,” and “Klondike or bust,” learning how each author used these words to add personality to the historical fiction and adventure novels, and then they used terms like “klondicitis” in their own writings.

delve more deeply into the philosophical understanding epitomized in the four-line poem which introduces the novel. We will pull specific passages from London and Hobbs to compare—Buck learning to fend for his food despite his genteel training (London, 35) and the gold seekers leaving Charlie in Jason’s care after amputating his leg (Hobbs, 94).

Conclusions

In the end, students saw clear connections between the two books and between their authors. As teachers, we also reflected on the worth of the unit:

1. What did *Jason’s Gold* contribute to the reading and understanding of *The Call of the Wild*?

We found that students’ sense of history, the era of the Yukon Gold Rush, helped them learn setting, theme, characterization, and style in *The Call of the Wild* because they understood the historical, geographic, and social conditions present in *Jason’s Gold*. By reading *Jason’s Gold* first, students brought a wealth of knowledge to the reading of *The Call of the Wild*. They had successfully read a novel without stumbling over vocabulary and phrasing. They had cheered on Jason through his many challenges and setbacks, and carefully followed his journey north, learning the names of key locations and recognizing the conditions of the terrain in those places. Students were familiar with real people, real events, and real facts from this era. Upon reading *The Call of the Wild*, they didn’t have to grapple with these basic understandings. With London’s work they could focus their attention on the more challenging aspects of the book—vocabulary, style, theme, and interaction among characters.

2. Do students understand literary elements better by studying their use in two connected novels?

Characters, setting, theme and style are challenging aspects of reading for eighth graders, but we were very pleased with the way these two novels lent themselves to a clearer understanding of literary elements in novels. *Jason’s Gold*, a young adult novel by definition, lets students identify with a 14-year-old in New York and Seattle before the drastic change to the Yukon. Students could understand nature, man, and circumstances that precipitated events in the novel. Because they had read *Jason’s Gold* first, students’ expectations were set for *The Call of the Wild*. They recognized common characters, same

settings, similar themes, and comparable stylistic characteristics.

Our reflections fully justified using the two novels together! Our eighth grade language arts teacher plans to use these works as paired readings again. We suggest that the next time this unit is taught, the following aspects be added: more philosophical explanations, a stronger emphasis on the impact of the gold rush on the Native culture, the roles of women and children in creating history with the period’s events, and certainly integrating the social studies teacher and curriculum directly into the unit. Next time we want to make more connections to twenty-first century events and prevailing attitudes, e.g., mining and land use, re-introduction of the wolf (or other endangered animals) into an ecosystem, the de-civilization of man and animal in the wild. Both novels offer multiple teaching and learning opportunities. The lessons we all learned were richer for the paired reading of the two authors and their works.

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From Wellpinit to Reardan:

Sherman Alexie's Journey to the National Book Award

Sherman Alexie really can palm a basketball, just like Junior, the protagonist in his 2007 National Book Award winner, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. Sherman proved this fact in front of a standing room only crowd at Arizona State University's Neeb Hall during a book tour appearance in October of 2007. Gifts of appreciation were given from audience members at the end, and when ASU student Natalie Tsinnjinnie presented Sherman with a maroon and gold ASU basketball, he took it in one hand and effortlessly held it out to roaring applause. Sherman had just acted out one of the most engaging chapters in the book, one in which Junior's skills on the basketball court make both friends and enemies for him, not necessarily the friends and enemies he would have expected.

Holding the collegiate-size ball at arm's length with only one hand was pretty impressive, but the most impressive thing Mr. Alexie did that night may have happened in a small classroom on the ASU campus before his advertised appearance began. Twelve students from Ira Hayes High School (IHHS) in the Gila River Indian Community had come to see the author whose books they knew almost by heart, accompanied by their English teachers, Matt Lentz and Leigh Myers. Sherman arranged to meet with them privately before the big college lecture, and in that time together they shared stories about life on the rez, and talked about his books, especially this most recent book. Sherman's stories of life on the Spokane Reservation resonated with these young members of the Akimel O'odham and Pee-Posh nations, and their stories of life in the Gila River Indian Community also

had Sherman nodding and laughing in recognition.

Sherman's approachability and infectious sense of humor were a surprise to these young readers, who weren't sure what a world famous author might be like in person. IHHS student Rene Peters, 16, said she "was really nervous to meet him but then he kept us laughing the whole time. This book is now my favorite book that I've ever read and I can't wait for more." Christine Lewis, 16, who had seen pictures of Sherman with longer hair than he had that day, said, "I was expecting him to have really long hair. I was surprised that he was such a cool guy." Victor Pablo, 18, was also uncertain of what this famous author's reaction might be to questions from high school students, but he was pleasantly surprised: "I was nervous to ask him why he used the name Victor in his stories. He told me that he was almost named Victor and that's why he chose it. He's been a real inspiration to me to read more and to start writing myself."

Laughter surrounds Sherman Alexie wherever he goes, and humor is a powerful tool for him as he makes sense of life experiences which were anything but funny. Wherever he speaks, whether he is reading book chapters or giving his take on life, audiences spend most of the time laughing. In the Alexie family, however, Sherman was not considered the funny one: "If you asked my siblings or my mother who the funny one in the family is, it's not me. They would describe me as the depressed one. I think in its origins, my humor is a defense mechanism. By using humor publicly, I may be showing people how to use it as defense mechanism, or maybe as a weapon, too."

“Humor can be used both defensively and offensively. Sometimes life can be so bad that humor is the only way you can talk about it. The only option to humor is silence. Unfunny people scare me. Unfunny people are up to no good.”

main character, Junior, two lives which are nearly inseparable due to the mostly autobiographical nature of the book. Sherman tells these stories of his life, no matter how difficult or hurtful they seem, with his characteristic touch of humor. His early years (and Junior’s) were fraught with adversity, nearly fatal adversity. He was born a hydrocephalic, which doctors believed would either kill him or leave him hopelessly impaired. He was the recipient of surgery after surgery, including the insertion of a shunt into his skull to divert fluid that was applying tremendous pressure on his brain. Early on, doctors explained to his mother that, even if he lived, Sherman would most likely be a vegetable, to which, he tells us, she replied, “What kind of vegetable?” This is especially funny now, considering that Sherman grew up to be so successful, but it surely was a heart rending time for his mother and for their family.

How can the heart rending story of a little boy’s battle for his life be so funny? It’s all in how he tells the tale. As Junior narrates his life story, it is always Sherman telling his own story, sometimes adding a few fictional details, but mostly sticking to what really happened: Junior (Sherman) describes the physical maladies of his early years and the resulting harassment:

. . . my hands and feet were huge. My feet were a size eleven in the third grade! With my big feet and pencil body, I looked like a capital *L* walking down the road.

Humor can be used both defensively and offensively. Sometimes life can be so bad that humor is the only way you can talk about it. The only option to humor is silence.

Unfunny people scare me. Unfunny people are up to no good.”

As the keynote speaker for the 2007 ALAN Workshop, Sherman talked a little about winning the National Book Award and about moving into the young adult book world, but mostly he talked about his life and the life of his

And my skull was enormous.

Epic.

My head was so big that little Indian skulls orbited around it. Some of the kids called me Orbit. And other kids called me Globe. The bullies would pick me up, spin me in circles, put their finger down on my skull, and say, “I want to go there.” (3)

Being picked on for his physical differences made Junior/Sherman tough, an official member of the “Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club,” (5) and accustomed to having to fight every day. Among the “UNOFFICIAL AND UNWRITTEN (but you had better know them or you’re going to get beaten twice as hard) SPOKANE INDIAN RULES OF FISTICUFFS” (61) were number 1: “If somebody insults you, then you have to fight him” and number 10: “If you get in a fight with somebody who is sure to beat you up, then you must throw the first punch because it’s the only punch you’ll ever throw” (62). When Junior/Sherman first arrives at Reardan High School, the only Native American student in the whole student body, he applies these rules the first time a big farm boy, named Roger, makes a racial joke about Native Americans:

So I punched Roger in the face.

He wasn’t laughing when he landed on his ass. And he wasn’t laughing when his nose bled like red fireworks.

I struck some fake karate pose because I figured Roger’s gang was going to attack me for bloodying their leader.

But they just stared at me.

They were *shocked*. (65)

And Junior/Sherman was in. He didn’t understand why, but he had just won a place of respect among the boys in the school. He is completely mystified by the course of events, but his grandmother explains:

“I think it means he respects you,” she said.

“Respect? No way!”

“Yes way! You see, you men and boys are like packs of wild dogs. This giant boy is the alpha male of the school, and you’re the new dog, so he pushed you around a bit to see how tough you are.” (71)

Junior/Sherman would go on to be a hero in the school, not so much for fighting, but for two other things: basketball and academics. He would, in fact, become a major contributor to Reardan’s regional prominence in athletics and academics.

It was Reardan's prominence in sports and academics that motivated the real Sherman Alexie to enroll in high school there and leave his community school at Wellpinit. The pinnacle moment in this decision comes, in the book, when Junior finds his mother's name in his geometry textbook, and he realizes that a whole generation had gone by, thirty years or so, and no new books had been purchased for the Wellpinit School. Junior hurls the book across the room, smashing his math teacher, Mr. P, in the nose. Mr. P surprises Junior by understanding his disillusionment with the school. Mr. P expresses his own disappointment with how reservation schools have failed to make the dreams of young people available to them, including Junior's own sister, who could have become a successful writer. It is in this conversation that Junior comes to the realization that his hope in life lies off the reservation. After a conversation with his parents about hope, Junior announces that he is going to Reardan to school next year.

Oddly enough, writing about himself in the guise of Junior may have helped Sherman make his real life story more plausible to the reader. As he explains:

Part of the reason I wrote about leaving Wellpinit to go to school in Reardan as a novel and not as a memoir is because the real story doesn't seem very believable. In the novel I have the incident with the teacher to sort of push him, but that didn't really happen. The truth, that a self-possessed thirteen-year-old came home from school and said, 'I gotta get out of here' just didn't seem realistic, especially to leave the rez that way. In real life, the brain damage did something to me. I had learned to fight to live, and somehow I knew that I had to leave to live and if I stayed, I'd die. Since then, thousands of my peers have died, so it must have been true. My brother has lost five best friends. He's three years older than I am; he's forty-three and already has lost five good friends. He makes jokes about being like Dirty Harry, Harry Callahan, whenever he gets a partner, they die. That's my brother, Harry Callahan of the rez.

Life on the rez also means basketball. The essence of Sherman Alexie's life is in this book, and basketball runs deep here, just as it has in other stories he has written. In fact, Sherman finds a way to talk about basketball in most presentations or conversations or even on his book tour blog (<http://www.fallsapart.com/FlightBlog.htm>). This isn't just a personal thing, it's a cultural thing. Sherman explains,

Basketball is huge on the rez. Basketball is actually one of

the strongest aspects of our culture, especially intertribal culture. It's more intense and certainly more common than powwows. It has that warrior appeal that modern society doesn't provide to native men anymore. Basketball ended up being a sort of substitute warrior culture. I played my whole life, even as an adult, until I had kids and couldn't go out of town to tournaments anymore.

My father never missed a basketball game if I was playing in it. He was a man who loved deeply and loved us deeply, but also one who could disappear for days, which meant he missed lots of important days in our lives, like birthdays and sometimes Christmas, but

he never, ever missed an organized basketball game. This was perhaps the strongest bond between us. He might be gone without explanation for three weeks, but when a basketball game began and the music started and the team ran out onto the floor, I would look up into the stands where he always sat and there he'd be, sometimes pretty damned haggard, but he'd be up there.

My dad was a heck of player himself. We would sometimes go to parks in Spokane or Coeur D'Alene and play basketball two-on-two against people who would mistakenly see us as just a young kid and an old guy. We'd kill 'em because Dad was so good. We didn't play for money, but we would get into pickup games so easily because people just assumed "Indians can't jump" and we would beat everybody.

In some sense, *The Absolutely True Diary* is my father's story. His dad died on Okinawa in WWII, and his mom died six months later. My dad and his sister were raised on the war death benefit, which enabled them to get a good house in Coeur D'Alene off the rez and for them to go to a Catholic school. They were the only Indians at the school. He would move to the rez after high school and was totally rez from then on, but his high school experience was a lot like mine and like Junior's. When I went on my first book tour in 1993 all sorts of his classmates from the Catholic school would show up thinking that I was him because I'm Sherman Alexie, Jr., and they were in no way surprised that my father would turn out to be an author. It seemed completely natural to them that he would be doing that, but then I would explain who I was and they would ask what he was doing. He was a hero to them, these people who

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were now university professors and doctors and successful at different things, and knowing him in high school, they figured he was very successful. I would have to tell them that he was a randomly employed, blue collar, reservation alcoholic. I think in a lot of ways I ended up having the life he was supposed to have. I look exactly like him.

Just as basketball is a cultural element of reservation, so are many other everyday sorts of things. One of the cultural phenomena that Sherman brings up in his public appearances, one that generates waves of laughter, especially from Native American audiences, is the “rez accent,” a pattern of soft speech that has definitely recognizable inflections. Anyone who has seen *Smoke Signals*, the film that Shadow Catcher Entertainment and Sherman made from his book,

I think it’s really liberating for young people to hear a successful Indian adult speak using their syntax and vocabulary. It validates them and their life experiences.

Tonto and the Lone Ranger Fistfight in Heaven, would recognize the accent in Thomas Builds-the-Fire’s mantra of “Hey, Victor,” as he initiates conversation with the story’s other protagonist, Victor Joseph. Sherman wrote those lines and now he hears those two words almost everywhere he goes: “When Indian kids recognize me out in the world, they often come up and start a

conversation by saying, ‘Hey, Victor,’ and I can’t help but smile.”

Honoring Indian English is important to Sherman:

Part of the issue in the Indian world is that when you’re talking about adults, mentors, or public figures, we often distance ourselves from our people in a way. Because our success comes in the non-Indian world, we end up, culturally, speaking a non-Indian English and leaving that other English for kids. I think it’s really liberating for young people to hear a successful Indian adult speak using their syntax and vocabulary. It validates them and their life experiences, especially when I start talking about being a rez kid—growing up in a HUD house across the street from the tribal school, I’m as Indian as it gets—and for me to be doing what I’m doing and still retain that Indian-ness, which is not just about dancing or singing or that kind of culture but about the day-to-day way of communicating, daily communication skills of our indigenous culture. That’s important. Not just to look like them, but to sound like them.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian is

largely about striding two cultures. The opening dedication to the book reads, “To Wellpinit and Reardan, my hometowns.” Like most of the specifics of the book, the towns of Wellpinit (on the Spokane Reservation) and Reardan (just off the reservation at the junction of Washington State Highway 231 and US Highway 2) are absolutely true (pun intended). When the real Sherman Alexie left the Spokane Reservation, just as his alter ego, Junior, does in the book, he was faced with a completely different culture from the one he had known his whole life. And they were faced with him, too. Junior makes it work, just as Sherman did in real life, and it is hard to imagine a more challenging human endeavor, but Sherman has a strongly held philosophy about the meeting of cultures: “When you speak of culture, if you make an analogy with the heart, it’s dangerous to think that you have to be monogamous. Instead, you need to be able to fall in love quickly and easily with other cultures.” Both Sherman and Junior were accepted into the hearts of their new tribes, as Sherman puts it, in the world outside the rez.

Sherman Alexie has found his way into the hearts of people all over the world. He appeals to everyone, all sorts of people, all sorts of readers and movie goers. He laughs and explains,

People look at me and make a connection; they intuitively believe that I am half of whatever they are. Humor plays a big part, but also I appeal to universal aspects of life, like the feeling of being trapped by this or that. In my keynote speech for the ALAN Workshop I talked about feeling trapped by expectations as a teenager, and I think everybody feels trapped by expectations in life, not just teenagers, but everybody. But another reason that I appeal to people is that everybody loves Indians. They really do. My wife’s father told her again and again while she was growing up, ‘You’ll be OK in life; you’re smart, and everybody loves Indians.’

That’s one of the things I try to teach Indian kids today. Our own elders have taught us that we’re hated, and the truth is that we’re not. People love Indians. Everywhere I go in the world, Indian people are admired. It worries me when people tell Indian kids to leave their hearts behind when they leave the rez because that implies that the world is a dangerous place for our hearts and it’s not. There are so many allies out there, and if you don’t bring your heart, you won’t find them.

Sherman has always loved books, and his earliest memories of books are still strong many years later.

I have a vivid memory of when I was six years old and pulled *The Snowy Day*, by Ezra Jack Keats, off the shelf in the elementary school library. On the cover was a dark boy in a red coat out in the snow. I instantly figured he was Indian, he wasn't, but I thought he was. I connected to that main character almost instantly in lots of ways. He wandered through the snow alone, and I spent a lot of time alone when I was little. I was very solitary, so the introverted nature of that kid wandering around, making snow angels by himself helped me to empathize or identify with him, not just the fact that he was brown but he spent all that time alone. Even after all that time alone, though, he ended up back at home with his mom. I connected with that feeling of wanting the adventure but always knowing there was a place to return to, somebody waiting to give you cocoa and a hot bath. That book is a poem, and I think that was my first experience with poetry.

I have always loved books. My advice to anybody is to read at least a book a week. No matter where you are, no matter where you're at, books can save your life. That's the key. Look at anybody, anybody in any field who's doing well, and you're looking at somebody who reads like crazy.

Books made a huge difference in Sherman's life, and now his books are making a huge difference in the lives of others. The best young adult literature helps kids to make sense of their lives, including *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, which has so far won:

- 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Award
- 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature
- Publishers Weekly 2007 Best Books of the Year—Children's Fiction
- The New York Times Notable Children's Books of 2007
- National Parenting Publication Gold Winner 2007
- Amazon.com Best Books of 2007
- School Library Journal Best Books of 2007
- Kirkus Reviews Best Young Adult Books of 2007
- Horn Book Fanfare Best Books of 2007
- The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon Winner
- Kansas City Star's Top 100 Books of the Year

When asked what he thinks it is about this book that helps kids make sense of their own lives, Sherman laughs and says,

Well, my initial response is to say that if they read the book, they should think that if this poor-ass reservation kid can make it, it should be easy for them, living in the suburbs.

They won't have to go as far. Seriously though, I think it's Junior's resiliency. I also think it's the fact that the book takes young people seriously. The opposite of this is censorship, which arises out of not taking kids seriously, which I hate. Chris Crutcher gave a great talk about censorship [for the ALAN Workshop], and I believe censorship is really about condescension. It's the notion that kids don't have complicated emotional lives, don't have complicated responses to a complicated life. Censorship is an attempt to make kids and their lives simple. Being accustomed to that sort of treatment, kids just respond well to anything that takes them seriously.

When asked about his reaction to the announcement that he had won the National Book Award,

Sherman laughed and said,

I vomited a little bit of lamb when they announced my name. In the final minute, when they started doing the announcing, I got hot-faced and felt like I was going to faint. They said my name and I vomited a little bit. The moment was intense. It was like the Oscars, but everybody had progressive lens—it was the near-sighted Oscars. My oldest friends in the business were there, the people I worked with on my adult novels before trying my hand at a young adult book, so that was great. My

new friends and my old friends were there. I didn't realize how many people I had come to know in publishing, but I knew 200 or so people who were there. I realized at that moment that I was getting an award for a book about finding new tribes and I realized I was a member of a tribe I hadn't even thought about consciously, the publishing tribe.

It is this realization that we are all members of many tribes, not just one, that Sherman ends his talks with lately, and he ends the book that way, too. Actually, the very end of the book is a basketball game, but just before that, Junior/Sherman says:

I realized that I might be a lonely Indian boy, but I was not alone in my loneliness. There were millions of other Americans who had left their birthplaces in search of a dream.

I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms. (217)

“When you speak of culture, if you make an analogy with the heart, it’s dangerous to think that you have to be monogamous. Instead, you need to be able to fall in love quickly and easily with other cultures.”

He goes on to name many other tribes to which he belongs: “the tribe of poverty,” “the tribe of small-town kids,” and “the tribe of boys who really miss their friends” (217).

Surely adolescence is mostly about figuring out which tribes you belong to and how to follow your dreams. We thank Sherman Alexie for sharing the story of how he did just that.

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Call for 2008 Halle Award Nominations

The NCTE Richard W. Halle Award for Outstanding Middle Level Educator honors a middle level educator who has consistently worked to improve the quality of middle school education and middle school educators, especially in the English language arts. Originally established in 1996 by the Junior High/Middle School Assembly, this award pays special tribute to the person who has worked to improve schools and schooling for the middle level—teacher, principal, college faculty, curriculum specialist, or supervisor.

Nomination packet information can be found on the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/middle/awards/halle> and must be postmarked no later than **June 1, 2008**. Results will be announced in September 2008, and the award will be presented at the 2008 Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas, during the Middle Level Get-Together.

It Is Inexcusable to Deny *Inexcusable* a Place in the Classroom

"This book is messed up!" Janet exclaimed as she walked into my classroom.

I followed her as she proceeded to take her place in the back of the class.

"Wait a minute," I said, "what does messed up mean?"

"You know that kid, Keir, is in a bad situation and doesn't get it."

"Have you finished it yet?"

"I just have a couple of chapters left."

Janet's (all names are pseudonyms) first response while reading *Inexcusable* by Chris Lynch was blunt, but was the kind of direct response I hoped for when I gave her the book. I was immediately taken with *Inexcusable* when I first encountered it at the 2005 ALAN Workshop in Indianapolis. I hoped to include this dynamic book, along with other titles, as a possible choice for literature circles and self-selected readings. In my experience, students are more likely to finish and enjoy books of their own selection over books that are chosen for them. "Books that make a lasting impression on readers are those that connect with their lives and personal experiences in significant ways" (Brown and Stephens 66). *Inexcusable* is such a book; it has modern issues and problems related to our students' concerns. Educators should place *Inexcusable*, and books like it, into our students' hands.

I asked my two student aides, Janet and Zac, to read *Inexcusable* to gauge student reaction to the book. Both Janet and Zac had been in my regular junior English classes the previous year. They were

typical of my students; they were bright but not overly engaged in the study of English or, for that matter, any other classes. In my class, they managed to earn a variety of grades at various times depending on their interest or their inclination. I may have seen more promise in these students' academic ability than they did themselves. I readily recruited them as aides when they were seniors. While Janet and Zac worked as my aides, I quickly learned to value their insight into books they read the year before, books I was now teaching again to a new crop of juniors. As they helped me, it became apparent that they had a good handle on my current students' reactions to class activities. They turned out to be perfect aides; they were valuable living commentaries on activities I had attempted the year before and were sounding boards for current projects.

When Janet and Zac finished reading *Inexcusable*, we held an informal discussion about what they liked and didn't like about the book. We also discussed how best to fit the book into class activities according to Daniels' contention that:

teachers who really want to meet this need for genuine choice and self-direction must provide two kinds of independent reading: time for individuals . . . and time for independent reading in *groups*, when kids select, read, and discuss books together, as in literature circles. (19)

In the past I had too often relied on books and methods that I liked or had selected without consulting students. By recruiting the advice of Janet and Zac, I hoped to gain insight into the kinds of books my students would self-select. I wanted to get closer to

“genuine choice” in the selection process. In hindsight, I should have used students, like Janet and Zac, as book scouts to provide lists of books for my classroom. They provided many reasons to include *Inexcusable* in a classroom. It was a novel they both enjoyed and found thought provoking.

Did *Inexcusable* have a place in my classroom? Why should I bother with a novel that might be problematic? As a teacher, I found reasons to include *Inexcusable* as I strived to include novels in my classroom with interesting ideology and fine literary craftsmanship. Many English teachers feel that young adult (YA) literature simply isn't rich enough to compete with the entrenched works of the canon as quality literature. But I (and I believe many other teachers) keep finding students who resist the classics or disdain how literature is seemingly forced on them. Probst suggests that students:

may despise literature, the literature classroom, and the literature teacher. They may even express great pride in their inability to make sense out of the written word. But, unless they are very unusual, they have the one characteristic that is essential for the reader of literature: an interest in themselves. (30)

In this battle to teach literature and the skills to interpret and enjoy it, teachers too often encounter students who resist and shut down. If Probst and others are right and young adults are motivated in their reading by their interest in themselves, then YA literature should give us an edge, a hook, to draw students to reading.

Students are selecting and reading YA literature outside of class or for independent reading, but those choices are not often explored or validated by teachers. Soter explains, “[M]any students who had become disenfranchised members of English classrooms loved those [YA] books, read them voraciously, and *became* readers. But we never used them to teach students *about* literature” (1). I agree with Soter's further suggestion: “Although many young adult novels do not have the qualities that bear the kind of scrutiny that literary study involves, some do lend themselves well to interpretive study as literary works” (2). From my first exposure, I felt that *Inexcusable* could withstand close literary evaluation. It is a well-written work that addresses a deeply rooted social ill, one that lurks on the fringes of daily life for many young people.

As I have argued elsewhere, English teachers carry the responsibility to introduce young readers to books that are finely crafted. Books with strong ideological themes allow our students to vicariously place themselves in perplexing situations. Vicarious experiences “transport readers to unknown places and help them understand what others experience. Literature provides a powerful means by which we can ‘walk in another's shoes’ and begin to understand what another experiences” (Brown and Stephens 5). Students can then think productively about the serious problems they face in their lives through the power of literature. Based on the advice of Janet and Zac, I suggest that our students can be trusted to internalize the lessons we teach. Despite the facades they present from day to day, students are listening to their teachers and are retaining more of the tools to read and understand literature than we think they are during the daily grind of a school year.

A Place of Discovery: Finding *Inexcusable*

Like all participants in an ALAN Workshop, in 2005 I received an English teacher's (and a reader's) dream gift of two overstuffed bags of books. I found a place to sit and began exploring the collection. I found *Inexcusable* and noticed in the program that the author, Chris Lynch, was speaking the following day. I started reading the book and finished it later that evening. The force of the narrative and the “touchy” subject of date rape were powerful. Like young people around the world, many of my students had difficult life experiences, life experiences that went unaddressed at school; as a result, I believed I had students, both boys and girls, who would be drawn to this story even though they were not attracted to more traditional texts.

Quality YA literature should engage the students that pick up and explore these books. Equally important, teachers in the classroom, media specialists, English educators, and the critics of YA literature should promote books that are both ideological engaging and appropriate as well as a finely crafted literary work. Blasingame suggests, “Good young adult literature is powerful. It grabs kid's interest and speaks to them in language they can understand about the very issues they worry about on a daily basis” (7). We should offer these emerging books next to the books traditionally used in the English classroom.

Please don't misunderstand me. I love the classics and have recently read with my students *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain), *Great Expectations* (Dickens), *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad), and *The Old Man and The Sea* (Hemingway). These classics are all books with ideological themes that are complex and relevant in the lives of our students. They are novels that are expertly crafted and can demonstrate how literary devices: setting, character development and narrative structure can open our understanding of a text. In *Young Adult Literature & The New Literary Theories* Soter underscores the canon's importance but points out that one of the purposes of her text is to show that YA literature can be critically examined.

I am not recommending the elimination of adult classics from secondary school curricula. However, I do want to show that among young adult novels are selections that teachers can use to develop students' critical appreciation of literature. Additionally, these novels contain content that is more directly relevant to teenagers and their experiences. A balance of young adult fiction and the classics is what I propose. (2)

Choosing YA literature does not have to mean providing a text of inferior quality, but it does mean that more of us should explain the craftsmanship in these novels. *Inexcusable* is an example of a novel that poses complex ideological questions and is a finely crafted work. The conversation with Janet and Zac is revealing and supports the assumption that *Inexcusable* is a work of literary quality. The approaches they suggested as ways to teach *Inexcusable* provide a groundwork for a discussion of the book's quality and craftsmanship.

Relying on the Readers

Students need to discover these YA novels. It isn't enough that I like them. I need to find out if the students who walk through my doors each year will read them. Nilsen and Donalson emphasize the role of student participation and choice in finding and defining YA literature; "we define young adult literature as any book freely chosen for reading by someone in this age group" (xvi). The goal of English teachers should be to have our students read and write more. Can we incorporate the books they read rather than insisting on "literature?" Probst reminds us:

The pleasures that first drew us to literature were not those of the literary scholar. When our parents read us nursery

rhymes, we listened for the rhythms of the language and the stories they told without analyzing the rhyme scheme or the metrical pattern, without exploring their political or social significance, without learning about their history or their authorship (29).

Introducing students to the power of literary devices that open up the "political or social significance" of books is important; we should be able to use the books they read in this endeavor. By including their books we empower their choices; we build readers. In addition, we need to find ways to expand their range of choices. We may not create a host of English teachers but we have a chance to create many life-long readers.

In previous years, I returned from the ALAN workshop and displayed my new collection of books around my room. I did book talks and shared new novels by authors that I knew my students had read. Of course, the readers always perked up, but far too many just tolerated my excitement and waited for the opportunity to get back to their iPods. Inviting Janet and Zac to serve as student reviewers employed a new tactic. I was even a little surprised at how quickly they agreed to the idea. I can't say that Janet and Zac were typically eager readers; however, when given the chance to operate as confederates evaluating a book for other students, they both readily agreed. I listened carefully to their experience with the novel and noted their suggestions on how to find a place for this book in my classroom. They quickly highlighted the complex narrator and the narrative structure of the novel. These characteristics of the novel demanded that readers pay close attention. When asked how to incorporate classroom activities around *Inexcusable*, they were quite clear on how the book could be used to illustrate literary devices commonly taught in classroom settings. In addition, Janet said, "You

Choosing YA literature does not have to mean providing a text of inferior quality, but it does mean that more of us should explain the craftsmanship in these novels. *Inexcusable* is an example of a novel that poses complex ideological questions and is a finely crafted work.

should ignore some of the other books and teach this one to everybody.” Zac added that, “Teachers should let us choose all of the books we read.” While I understand the sentiment and realize that we can’t abandon all instruction to the control of students, we should honor their choices. It is important to recognize the excitement that the project generated in both students.

Troubling the Narrator

I was anxious to follow up on Janet’s first commentary, “*This book is messed up!*” and have her place it in the context of a larger discussion. When I asked her what she meant by “messed up” she said, “It was about a rape, you know. So, this is really what it is about? I kept reading to find out if Keir was crazy or not.” Zac also focused on the narrator during his

initial comments on the book. “Can I trust this guy? Generally, I have an inclination to believe first person narrators and rely on what they say.” Both Janet and Zac focused on a central issue of literary criticism, the role of the narrator. Analyzing the role of the narrator is a task that English teachers hope their students will grapple with at a sophisticated level. In practice, however, the majority of the short stories and novels used in middle school and high school do not feature complicated narrators, especially in regular level classrooms. Unfortunately,

complex novels with narrators that trouble the story line or prove unreliable are often reserved for students in advanced classes. Yet, in this situation both Janet and Zac, students who had participated only in regular English classes, found *Inexcusable* interesting and compelling because of the nature of the narrator.

Chris Lynch’s skill in developing a complex narrator that gets under the reader’s skin is a sign of his craftsmanship, his ability to create a character that moves and controls a narrative. One of the goals when selecting classroom novels is to find texts that illustrate specific elements of literary craftsmanship. Janet and Zac had engaged with a text that expanded their

expectations of fiction. *Inexcusable* had a narrator who pushed beyond the limits of their previous literary experiences. They acknowledged that they were reading something that expanded the boundaries of what they had usually read in school. Janet stated, “It was just unique, it has more to it than most of the things I have read in school.” Even though many English teachers discount the quality and value of YA literature, Janet and Zac readily admit that *Inexcusable* enhanced their understanding of what fiction could do. Isn’t that more closely aligned with the goals that we want for our students when they read?

My own first experience with a complex narrator happened in a relaxed high school environment. I took an elective English course focusing on the novel during my senior year. The teacher alternated class readings between simple texts and time-tested classics in a calculated attempt to draw this roomful of self-professed readers into literary worlds that we hadn’t yet imagined or experienced. In this manner, I discovered Raskolnikov. I began to realize that I was sympathizing with and, in a bizarre way, rooting for a double murderer to escape his fate. My reading of *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky), unencumbered with a teacher’s lecture or fancy assignments, led me to start contemplating how fiction explored the complex nature of the human condition. Instead of mandating a rigid curriculum, the teacher simply ushered me into a reading experience that I have revisited for thirty years. Like *Crime and Punishment*, *Inexcusable* provides a tormented narrator, confused about his actions and the ramifications of those actions in the face of society’s sense of right and wrong. As narrators, Raskolnikov and Keir eventually reach an understanding that they must and will suffer the consequences of their actions. Not all students are prepared to read and struggle with the complexities of Dostoyevsky’s classic novel. In reality, many more students are prepared to read *Inexcusable*. They can more readily identify with the language and themes of the novel. Dealing with the issues of popularity, an alcoholic father, and even date rape are more central to the world in which many of our students live.

Narrative Structure

Janet and Zac found literary components, other than the narrator, that attracted their attention. According to my two senior readers, the book was

Janet and Zac had engaged with a text that expanded their expectations of fiction. *Inexcusable* had a narrator who pushed beyond the limits of their previous literary experiences.

“messed up” beyond Keir, the disturbed narrator. Zac noticed that the plot was more complicated than most of the books he was assigned in school. “The book is full of little flashbacks that happen before the rape. I started looking for stories before and after the rape.” Zac focused on the narrative to see if he could put together a clearer picture of events than the one supplied by the narrator. Janet explained that as she continued to read she was captured by the flow of the book. “It seemed to get faster and faster.” She also commented that the book jumped around a lot, not like “most of the books that are assigned, which move from point A to point B, even the classics we are supposed to read.”

Janet and Zac had again pointed to another characteristic of fiction that English teachers wish their students would analyze more completely, the narrative structure. The flashback is a standard feature of fiction that most students at every level encounter in their English classroom. *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (Lee), *A Separate Peace* (Knowles), and *Their Eyes are Watching God* (Hurston) are novels that employ a flashback to frame or situate the narrative. Of course, many novels included in the traditional canon of secondary English classrooms have complex narrative lines, but these novels are most frequently reserved for honors or Advanced Placement classes. Novels like *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad) and *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner) use complicated narrators that disturb the traditional narrative flow. Conrad’s famous narrator, Marlowe, weaves a narrative in *Heart of Darkness* that begins with a flashback that frames the entire story. Conrad also interrupts the narrative flow with philosophical meanderings as the action proceeds up the river and towards Kurtz. Many students have puzzled over Marlowe’s reliability and his various interruptions that often comment on his own understanding of the events he experienced. Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* also provides the reader with a set of problematic narrators. All three of the Compson boys, Benji, Quentin, and Jason complicate the narrative and the narrative order through their points of view. Clearly, Faulkner’s masterpiece is one of the most complex narratives that an English teacher can offer a high school student. *Inexcusable*, on the other hand, is a YA novel with themes that interests students but also introduces them to a problematic narrator and a complex narrative pattern.

Janet and Zac, self-proclaimed “average” students, engaged in a complex discussion about narrative structure after reading *Inexcusable*. *Inexcusable* joins other recent YA novels that play with creative and experimental narrative structures. Most notably, perhaps, is the recent success of *Holes* by Louis Sachar. *Holes* is an example of an adolescent novel that is easy to read from middle school on, but is finely crafted using multiple narratives, suggestions of magical realism, parallel plot lines, interconnecting story arcs, mythical symbolism and compelling character studies. Other YA novels including *Looking for Alaska* (Green), *Monster* (Myers and Myers), and *Whirligig* (Fleischman) provide complex narrators couched inside dynamic narratives that allow secondary students the opportunity to explore the possibilities of narrative structures. Teachers do not need to push to the side or even forgo the teaching of demanding critical and structural analysis just because their students are not reading traditional texts. It should be increasingly inexcusable for teachers to ignore YA fiction such as *Inexcusable* and other books I have mentioned to teacher literary skills.

Literary Devices Janet and Zac Suggest as Teaching Tools

In addition to the complex narrative structure and unreliable narrator, *Inexcusable* can easily be used to discuss other literary concepts commonly covered in an English classroom. I asked Janet and Zac about the variety of tasks they had been asked to complete in an English class that were associated with reading fiction.

Like *Crime and Punishment*, *Inexcusable* provides a tormented narrator, confused about his actions and the ramifications of those actions in the face of society’s sense of right and wrong . . . Not all students are prepared to read and struggle with the complexities of Dostoyevsky’s classic novel. In reality, many more students are prepared to read *Inexcusable*.

They mentioned character descriptions through dialogue, foreshadowing, and the importance of setting. It was remarkable how quickly they sounded like English teachers. They knew the tasks even though they might have been reluctant participants in the past. Their rationale for lackluster participation tended to revolve around their lack of interest in the text. We might cite a variety of reasons for their hesitant response to other assignments. Perhaps a

Both Janet and Zac realized that they began to understand Keir, not only through the intense short scenes with Gigi after the rape, but through the flashbacks that show the various missteps that Keir makes throughout the school year.

text's reading level was simply too hard. Maybe the style was too old or rigid for their tastes. Then again, the subject matter or the characters might have been too removed from their concerns or every day experience. Nevertheless, they had the ability to mimic their teachers and list possible assignments.

Among the possible literary techniques that they saw as teachable in combination with *Inexcusable* were dialogue, flashbacks, foreshadowing, characterization, and

setting. At a more immediate level they saw rich possibilities in discussing a variety of themes that appear in the novel including rationalization, peer pressure, the importance of appropriate adult guidance, the difference between nature and nurture, and the idea of double standards commonly held in society. The list of literary techniques and the possible thematic discussion posed by Janet and Zac demonstrate that our students are often more insightful than we might imagine when asked to play the role of teacher. I was more than a bit taken back that these two previously semi-reluctant scholars supplied such a rich list of possibilities.

Dialogue

As Janet and Zac point out, *Inexcusable* provides ample opportunity for students to work with dialogue. At one level, students can analyze the dialogue

between Gigi and Keir. A close look at these encounters between the two main characters allows students the opportunity to closely examine selected passages. Careful dialogue examination helps students see the ways in which Keir misreads situations and just how angry and violated Gigi feels as a result of Keir's transgression. Dialogue between Keir and his sisters alludes to a discomfort that his two sisters feel concerning their father. Dialogue between Keir and his father illustrates the father's weaknesses as a parent. For example, his father's willingness to let Keir bend the boundaries of behavior between adolescence and adulthood allows Keir to flounder. All of these situations promote student discussion of how dialogue reveals theme, character development, foreshadowing, and a variety of other literary elements.

In another arena of skill development, students could be given the opportunity to expand their writing skills by writing dialogue that connects to the book. They could create a scene at the dinner table with Keir's family. This writing exercise allows students the opportunity to attempt creative writing that deepens their understanding of the characters. The writing assignment could demonstrate a student's understanding of the how family dynamics are developed in *Inexcusable's* dialogue. In a similar manner, dialogue writing involving characters as they are paired in the novel would reveal further understanding of character development. For example, writing a new or expanded dialogue between Gigi and Keir would demonstrate how well a student understands their relationship.

Flashbacks and Foreshadowing

Inexcusable's narrative depends on the complex intertwining of the scenes that flashback to various moments in Keir's senior year. Both Janet and Zac realized that they began to understand Keir, not only through the intense short scenes with Gigi after the rape, but through the flashbacks that show the various missteps that Keir makes throughout the school year. As students, Janet and Zac understood that the flashbacks contained important information about Keir's character, as well as hints to the future. Perhaps the strength of *Inexcusable* is that the rape is immediately introduced but only hesitantly discussed. This technique creates a narrative gap that demonstrates sophisticated craftsmanship that draws the reader into the story.

Janet and Zac understood that they were reading a book that pushed the boundaries of what subjects might be openly talked about in a public school classroom. They suggested that date rape might be alluded to by a teacher in a discussion but would hardly be the focus of discussion. As they read they understood the importance of how the author foreshadowed Keir's horrible decision by illustrating and illuminating his mistakes during his senior year. Foreshadowing may be the most frequently discussed literary device in the literary classroom. Zac and Janet indicated that foreshadowing was an important aspect of how they understood Keir's character development. This raises the question once again; how important is it to teach the classics or something that we traditionally teach, when many new adolescent novels are so expertly written?

Setting

It might appear unimportant that two average English students in high school would mention that *Inexcusable* could be used to teach something so seemingly pedestrian as the setting. On the contrary, setting can sometimes be the most direct way to have students enter the symbolic and thematic workings of a novel. Several texts, traditionally used in the high school classroom, illustrate how important setting can be to the interpretation of literature. How important is the river to the understanding of both *Heart of Darkness* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? At the very least, the events on the river are symbolic of the journey that both Marlowe and Huck are trying to internalize. Untold numbers of students have mapped both journeys, marking important points along the rivers that connect to events that shape the narrators and correspondingly the readers understanding of the journey. While Keir's journey is obviously not on a river, he is flowing toward an unalterable course of destruction. A reader's understanding of the physical points that mark the course of Keir's journey will help them interpret his mental condition and eventual breakdown.

The settings in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Separate Peace* are certainly important, as well. The small southern town in *To Kill a Mockingbird* helps the reader understand the small mindedness of many of the characters and helps Atticus stand out as a moral

giant in his community. The isolated boarding school in *A Separate Peace* provides Gene and Finny with an idealistic setting that seems far removed from the horror of WWII. Small episodes in specific settings within each novel's world help the reader understand the characters. For example, Atticus's stand at the jail and Finny's record setting swim in the pool teach the reader something about the quiet confidence and resolve of each character.

Settings are equally important in *Inexcusable*. In this case, the primary setting is a small room that has been the scene of rape. Keir and Gigi are confined in this small room while the flashbacks take the reader to several places that reveal more about Keir's character and limitations. These settings include a football game, a school party, his home, and a limousine. Together, these locations supply the reader with snapshots of Keir that demonstrate his confusion and a series of tragic choices. Clearly, guiding students through how a setting helps a reader understand a novel's

character or theme is as important as Janet and Zac suggested. While the novel first appealed to them because of its controversial theme and "messed up" narrative structure, they readily understood that traditional literary devices, like the setting, would supply them, and other students, with tools for understanding. In sum, *Inexcusable* provides teachers with a text that can easily be used to meet their instructional objectives. In fact, its compelling themes and storyline might attract more students than many traditional texts.

Conclusion: Make No Excuse

Inexcusable is an intellectually invigorating YA novel with a complex narrator and a narrative structure that invokes careful reading and contemplation. From my initial reading, I began to compose an explication of the narrative structure. At first, I was interested in teaching the novel because it was an

***Inexcusable* is an intellectually invigorating YA novel with a complex narrator and a narrative structure that invokes careful reading and contemplation.**

accessible and interesting text for my students, and would allow me to show how well I can “read” a text. In short, I could show off, I could easily be the sage on the stage. In fact, one of my major difficulties in writing this paper was deciding when I could display my explication of the narrative structure. I could easily explicate the novel and demonstrate its potential. I felt myself succumbing to what I call the English teacher’s disease—the urge to teach literature to my high school classes as if they were all going to run off to college and become English majors. Some will, and good for them, we still need people to read and write thoughtfully about beauty and truth (Keats). Our call as English teachers is to help all of our students to better master the tools of reading and writing. If we do so they can then apply those skills in the variety of fields they choose to pursue.

I avoided providing my own reading of the text as much as possible. It is more important to illustrate what Janet and Zac, as representative students, do with this YA text. They can and do find meaning in the text for themselves. Furthermore, they point to the ways in which traditional literary devices can be employed by other students to explore *Inexcusable*. They point directly to discussing and evaluating the reliability of a narrator. While I was anxious to discuss the complexity of the narrative structure, they discovered this issue on their own. They indicate how the flashbacks serve as a controlling device for the narrative and trouble what a shifting story line means for the reader’s understanding. They suggest that working with dialogue, either through discussion or creative writing, builds a more thorough understanding of the characters. They discuss how flashbacks not only work with the narrative, but serve as means for foreshadowing the action and thematic impulses of the story. Finally, they discuss the settings of the novel and how each setting suggests a new way to understand Keir’s development. All of these literary devices are tools that we, as English teachers, hope our students learn to apply to the texts they are assigned in the classroom. I agree with Smith who suggests, “Ultimately, however, we want students to exert their own textual power. Consequently, the instruction continues by asking students to develop and debate their interpretations of stories without the benefit of a teacher’s questions” (Rabinowitz and Smith 78). Both Janet and Zac used the questions and methods they

received in their English classes. Finally, they were able to give me their interpretation of *Inexcusable* and provided suggestions on how other students might explore the novel.

In today’s English classroom there is room for quality YA novels. The craftsmanship and ideology of YA novels in many instances is exceptional. I have tried to point to several in the course of this paper. These novels are engaging because they speak to our students in language that is familiar and with themes that clearly match the concerns of their lives. As English teachers, media specialist, English educators, and critics we can promote and discuss quality options for our students. We can achieve all of the traditional goals of teaching literature with YA fiction. In fact, as this small qualitative study with Janet and Zac suggests, if we trust what we have already taught our students they might meet these books with more enthusiasm than some of the more traditional texts in our classrooms. Students can apply the same strategies we hope they use with the classics with YA texts. Teachers should begin to include YA literature in their curricula without apology. It is, I believe, inexcusable to ignore *Inexcusable* and many other quality YA novels.

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Author’s note: Janet and Zac are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of two students who were so helpful to the writing of this article.

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Literary Landscapes:

Using Young Adult Literature to Foster a Sense of Place and Self

When Billy Jo in Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* returns to her drought-stricken farm in Oklahoma after an aborted attempt to escape, she confesses that she knows ". . . now that all the time I was trying to get/out of the dust,/the fact is,/what I am,/ I am because of the dust./And what I am is good enough./ Even for me" (222). She realizes that, even though the monstrous "dust" threatens to devour her, it has also influenced how she views herself and the world. "Place" has shaped who she is—how she sees, acts, believes, thinks, and speaks.

Not all recently published young adult novels are set in such a well-defined, specific geographical region as Hesse's historical novel. Yet, an examination of six representative recent young adult novels will show how the lives of the protagonists, like Billy Jo, are shaped by their literary landscapes—physical, social, and cultural—even though it is becoming increasingly difficult to define these "landscapes." Sociologists have pointed out that in the postmodern world teenagers sometimes feel "disconnected" from their gelatinous places which seem to be increasingly becoming more ". . . chaotic, unpredictable, and unstructured" (McDonald, 2). Furthermore, two young adult literature specialists have observed that urban teens often navigate through fluid spaces which are ". . . disorienting, disrupting a fixed sense of place" (Bean and Moni, 640), and this spills over into their interior worlds as well. Instead of clear anchors in family, community, and institutions like schools to forge a coherent identity, these fluid spaces engender feelings of disconnection and alienation. Many contemporary teens spend time in "non-places" . . .

supermarkets, railway stations, and malls" (Bean and Moni, 641).

Postmodern teens often construct an identity based on the ". . . consumption of goods that form or alter identity, e.g., cars, clothes, CDs, cell phones, gang affiliations, graffiti writing, eating disorders, ethnic and cultural affiliation, sports, and street life" (Bean and Moni, 641). Sometimes they struggle to escape or reject their locale. At other times, they use ". . . action and experience to forge identities in this shifting, unstable landscape" (Bean and Moni, 641). Hence, many young adult protagonists find it difficult to connect with their "region/place."

Even though it is more difficult to pinpoint "place" in contemporary young adult novels, it is still important for teen readers to examine how "place" helps shape a protagonist's identity, albeit sometimes the connection is subtle and multifaceted. We recommend using the following reading prompts as a framework for analyzing the relationship between "place" and identity.

- a. Distinctive physical/geographical features of space/place.
- b. Distinctive characteristics of the cultural/ideological (traditions, habits, values, beliefs) landscape.
- c. Ways in which social and interpersonal relationships help shape the protagonist's identity.
- d. Ways in which cultural and/or sub-cultural linguistic patterns (dialects, slang, neologisms) help shape the protagonist's identity.
- e. Ways in which the protagonist's identity is shaped by place and/or by her/his struggle to reject or escape place.

f. Means the protagonist uses to search for and discover her/his own place and identity.

Using these prompts as a guide, we will explore how six young adult authors construct literary worlds in which “place/literary landscape” informs a character’s identity.

In Paul Fleischman’s *Breakout*, seventeen-year-old Del is desperately searching for a “place” and an “identity.” To underscore this on-going quest, the story alternates between two different narratives—one in which Del records what happens and runs through her mind as she waits in an all-day traffic jam on the Santa Monica Freeway and the second (taking place eight years later) in which Del (now named Elena Franco, a playwright and performer) performs her own one-woman show based upon being caught in a traffic jam on a Los Angeles freeway. By juxtaposing these two narratives, Fleischman artistically delineates how Del’s life-long search for “place” is integrally linked to her sense of who she is.

Through Del’s interior monologue, we learn that she has lived in foster homes in the Los Angeles area through high school, but she has never felt connected to any of their worlds. She has survived through various forms of what she calls “shape shifting” (33), e.g., striving for invisibility, immersing herself in Italian films, impersonating others, and losing herself in classic novels. As the novel opens, she is still attempting to escape. She discloses that she is on the freeway in her ’83 Datsun, trying to run away from LA to a “. . . life without a file, just like other people!” (12). She fakes her own death; leaves her old self behind—boombox, CDs, new Doc Martens, and lava lamp; disguises herself as a college student, camping in the Southwest, so police won’t recognize her as a minor; and leaves town, hoping to exchange her “interim” identity for a permanent one (17).

Being caught in a traffic jam provides Del the opportunity to reflect on who she is, where she came from, and where she wants to go.

She perceives LA as a place of contrasts and mixed messages:

Los Angeles! City of tanned shoulders! Smog-spewing, pay-per-viewing, sitcom maker of the world! Mall builder! Pierced-tongue purveyor of tacos! Surfboard toter, deal closer, looter, shooter, barbecuer, black-jacketed valet parker of a million BMW’s! City of thronged roads! Drive-through city! City whose dwellers see the sun through sunroofs, its

rays pouring through like a revelation and tanning the youthful, muscled, tattooed, sunscreened shoulders of Los Angeles. (15)

It is inhabited by people who simultaneously fascinate and repel:

. . . dreadlocks, pierced eyebrows, pierced lips, pancake makeup, a wristwatch in the shape of Dali’s melted clock, berets, birthmarks, bald heads, bloodshot eyes, a combined eighteen yards of tattoos of barbed wire, scabs, scars of worrisome origin, toupees apparently bought at garage sales, age spots, pornographic earrings, fingernails chewed to the quick, lazy eyes incorrectly addressed for the past five minutes, capillaries in the nose, constellations of moles, Milky Ways of dandruff . . . (93)

As she observes people on the freeway, she gives us glimpses into their lives: a mother and her self-absorbed fifteen-year-old son, playing a game on his cell phone while listening to a CD through headphones; an illegal alien driving a ‘51 Volvo; a college student working on a piece on “road rage”; and two drain cleaners trying to hook up with a woman who turns out to be gay.

She also notes how drivers use their cars to insulate themselves from the world around them. They customize their cars to satisfy individual tastes and then guard them with security systems. Their identities seem to be wrapped up in the kind of car they drive. In this culture of shifting mores and individualistic values, “place” and “identity” have become self-constructed and solipsistic.

The longer Del interacts with the stranded drivers, however, the more she realizes how opportune this traffic jam is. It is a leveler—they are all equal. Eventually, the motorists put aside their distinctions of class, race, appearance, politics, and model of car, start talking to each other, and share their own stories and talents. And the more Del loses her self in the lives of others, the more she understands her own life and place in the world.

Del experiences her own “breakout.” It dawns on her that “. . . L.A. is a vast, ludicrous, lethal, infuriating collection of Other People” and that is . . . “all

The longer Del interacts with the stranded drivers, however, the more she realizes how opportune this traffic jam is. It is a leveler—they are all equal.

we've got" (135). She understands that without connection we cannot survive, and that Other People help define who we are. Furthermore, we have to accept "Otherness. Things we have no control over, didn't ask for, don't deserve . . . 'It is what is'" (135).

Through Elena, readers learn that Del has broken away, not only from the traffic jam, but also from her past. Through the arts of playwrighting and performing, she has created her own "place" and found her "identity."

Fifteen-year-old Tyrell, the African-American narrator in Coe Booth's *Tyrell*, is a victim of his place—the New York Bronx. When his father is sent to jail for a third time, his mother scams the welfare system and is placed on probation for fraud; Tyrell, his seven-year-old brother, and his mother become homeless victims of the over-subscribed Shelter System. As the story begins, Tyrell, a high school dropout, rides a rickety bus with his mom

and little brother to a cheap hotel in Hunts Point. From the bus window he sees ". . . two drunk Mexicans. . . screaming at each other," a man with a shovel ". . . swinging it 'round, trying to get them to move from his store. People is walking up an down the street like nothing is going on. Like it's just another night in the Bronx" (17). This bus trip is Tyrell's nadir, but in the Bronx, life goes on; no one takes note of anyone else's pain. Tyrell later admits that "I don't need nobody to tell me how fucked up this city is" (215). Living in this city has messed up his life, too. Tyrell and his friends feel trapped like pin balls in a shabby, broken pinball machine.

Tyrell's cell phone connects him with family and friends. His girlfriend provides him with a prepaid card, saying "I wanna make sure I can always talk to my man . . ." (16). He values that phone connection so deeply that he accepts her charity, though he speaks often of guys needing to be tough. He says, "guys gotta act stronger and tougher when females is watching them" (93).

Because he has nothing, he is willing to break rules. His only means of making money is ". . . at the

train station swiping people in with [his] MetroCards, charging them half what the city want" (60). Everyone tries to beat the system—his friends sell drugs, a girl his age in the hotel sells her body for sex, his father's friends sell beer and prostitutes to minors.

And yet, in spite of his indifferent, unruly landscape, Tyrell tries to be responsible and caring. Because his mother is immature and dysfunctional, he assumes full responsibility for his younger brother, Troy. It is the only way the two brothers can stay together and out of foster care. Tyrell's constant attempts to make money are always motivated by making sure Troy has food. His mother demands that he sell drugs to make money for her, but he refuses, unwilling to end up in jail like his dad.

Tyrell looks up to his dad as a role model until his dad is thrown in jail. ". . . he ain't done nothin' to make sure we was gonna be 'ight while he was gone. And, now, 'cause of him, I gotta be the man" (224). Tyrell loses his childhood in a set of conditions beyond his control. He wonders what will happen when his father is released. "I'm s'posed to go back to being a kid again? 'Cause I don't think I could go back, you know what I mean?" (224).

Unlike other protagonists in young adult novels set in a specific region, Tyrell is not searching for his roots. There is very little family history beyond a cranky grandmother who appears briefly early in his life. Instead, Tyrell's environment forces him to make adult decisions in order to survive. He weighs freedom against responsibility, indifference against caring, giving up against forging ahead.

When the New York City Administration for Children's Services takes custody of Troy, abandoned all night in the seedy hotel while his mother goes out partying, Tyrell finally realizes he cannot be the sole provider for a seven-year-old. He sees this as his chance to make his own way. He writes, "I need [freedom] too. I need time where I don't gotta worry 'bout nobody but myself. I mean, it ain't my job to be no father at fifteen" (308-9). The young, homeless girl he meets at the dreaded Bennett Hotel escapes with him, each trudging off with a plastic bag of belongings. Together, they plan to enroll Tyrell in her alternative high school. He has not escaped the Bronx or even homelessness, but, unlike his dad, he is "gonna be 'ight" no matter what happens.

In Patrick Jones' *Nailed*, sixteen-year-old Brett

Fifteen-year-old Tyrell, the African-American narrator in Coe Booth's *Tyrell*, is a victim of his place—the New York Bronx.

Hendricks spurns the conventions of Flint, Michigan—a politically conservative, blue-collar city. Brett’s dad manages the local car wash, while his mom works as the cashier at the local Wal-Mart. Brett’s dad is into NASCAR, cars, and poker—he spends more time worshipping his vintage, red, “holy” Camaro Beretta than he spends with his son.

Brett, on the other hand, is an artist who cares about books, music, and the theater. Because Brett does not fit the image of the typical Flint male, Brett and his dad clash. Brett’s dad wants him to learn a trade; he calls him a “freak boy” because he wears his hair in a tinted pony tail, dresses unconventionally, and loves to sing and act.

Neither does Brett fit in at Southwestern High School, run by a “Jockarchy” who think the “world revolves around them and [who] harass those who are different” (181). In this environment hostile to non-athletic males who love the world of theater and music, Brett is frequently the victim of bullying.

Flint is not an accepting place for Brett. Even though his Mom is sympathetic and tries to understand him, he feels lonely and disconnected. He isn’t sure who he is, but he does know who he doesn’t want to be—a “pathetic poser” (58), caught in a dead-end, back-breaking job. He does not want his ideas and opinions “stamped out like another GM assembly line part” (58). He longs to break away from high school, Flint, and his Dad; like the Joads in *Grapes of Wrath*, he is looking for a “promised land, far away from Flint” (101).

But, meanwhile, Brett is trapped in Flint, fighting to survive and to establish his identity. Performing as the lead singer in a local band, the Radio-Free Flint, helps bolster his self-efficacy. Dressing in Goth-like theater costume castoffs and Goodwill thrift store apparel helps him stand out as a non-conformist. Romancing Kylee, a sexy, talented dancer, who admires his acting ability, helps build his self-esteem. Later, however, when she twice cheats on him, he feels betrayed, devastated and empty. Running for student body president gives him a platform to speak out against hypocrisy, harassment, and apathy.

After Brett capitulates to his dad’s demand to change the oil in his Mom’s car, Brett and his dad start talking again and begin to understand each other. Brett’s dad begins to respect him and offers advice which helps build his confidence; he tells Brett that

Life is not “. . . about getting what you want, it’s about getting what you need and doing what you should” (167). Brett finally feels validated as a son and human being when his dad sells his cherished Camaro to help pay Brett’s legal fees.

Brett’s new girlfriend, Becca, teaches him that he can be “different without feeling odd” (203). And after he allows himself to be beaten to a pulp by the school bully just to prove to his fellow classmates that he is “not gutless” (198), he returns to look at the graffiti, “Brett Lives,” he had earlier painted on the Grand Trunk Railroad concrete. Standing there, he thinks “. . . about Becca, senior year, Rodeo-Free Flint’s new lineup, and my father and I know those words are the fuel I’ll use to make my own way on this human highway” (216). Brett’s experiences in Flint have given him the resiliency to fight back, to chart his own path, to be the “real thing.”

In e. E. Charlton-Trujillo’s novel, *Feels Like Home*, young adult readers meet narrator Mickey Owens, a high school senior living in the small South Texas town of Three Rivers. The multi-layered regional setting in this story permeates her every action; her complex view of herself and her past, present, and future; and her relationships with family and friends.

As the story begins, the reader learns that Mickey’s father has been killed in a pickup truck accident while inebriated. Mickey’s mother had deserted the family when Mickey and her big brother Danny were youngsters, and Danny became Mickey’s hero and best friend. But after Danny graduates from high school as a football star, he takes off in shame because the townspeople blame him for setting the fire which burns down the football stadium and kills his best friend. Mickey spends her adolescent years hating Danny for leaving. Upon Danny’s return, he hopes to make things better for Mickey, but she cannot forgive him for abandoning her.

She also recognizes a split in the town’s citizens—white wealthy rednecks, Mexicans, and white trash. She knows that despite her intelligence and Danny’s football prowess, they are considered white trash. She

Flint is not an accepting place for Brett. Even though his Mom is sympathetic and tries to understand him, he feels lonely and disconnected.

plans to escape the Three Rivers community after graduation to attend college.

The distinctive physical and geographical features of the literary landscape in this novel serve as a framework for extended metaphor and foreshadowing of change in characters. One particularly strong image of place involves “. . . a little scraggle of road” called “the Stick” by locals. When Mickey and Danny were growing up, the Stick was a place of refuge: “Mom’s moods and Dad’s drinking, it all faded the second our

shoes stepped out on that narrow dirt road snaking between two cornfields. . . out there we belonged. . . There was no limit to the transformations of the vast openness” (44). After Danny returns, they revisit the Stick, but, this time, they aren’t sharing dreams. Rather, the place denotes a remoteness between Mickey and Danny—as wide as Texas.

Later, the Stick again becomes a place to talk. Mickey and her friend Ricky

ditch school, go to the Stick to share thoughts, and watch a storm bubble angry clouds. Ricky drives Mickey back to town as the “wind roar[s] and the neighbor’s wind chimes smashing together [is] the only sound aside from cracking leaves that pierce the smothering air” (138). When they get to Mickey’s house, Danny bursts out the door, grabs Mickey, and sends Ricky packing. The prairie storm mirrors Mickey and Danny’s unraveled relationship.

The siblings have also been shaped by a shared reading experience. They have always been captivated by *The Outsiders*, identifying with the characters’ struggles and their search to belong. After Danny leaves near the end of the novel, Mickey sashes out to the Stick, crawls onto the hood of her truck, and once again opens *The Outsiders*. She writes: “I started reading aloud, hoping my voice carried up over the fields, past the stadium, along the highway, and soared right across the Texas state line. I hoped that maybe Danny could hear” (213). In the wide expanse of fields and sky and in the narrow confines of a small Texas town, Mickey learns about loyalty, growing up,

forgiveness, honesty, and letting go while hanging on. Powerful lessons learned from a powerful landscape.

In Alan L. Sitomer’s *Hip-Hop High School*, smart and ambitious Theresa Anderson (Tee-Ay) lives in an inner city filled with race riots, drugs, and random shootings—a community in which blacks are set to fail before they even get started. Most of the “peeps” in her ’hood dream of becoming rappers, hi-hoppers, or ballers but end up with low paying jobs, in jail, or as drug-addicts. She feels her neighborhood is undergoing “poorification”—the middle class is being replaced by a “. . . straight-out low class” (214-215). All that is left in her community are a “. . . bunch of liquor stores and doughnut shops that sell Chinese food” (57).

The one positive force in Tee-Ay’s environment is hip-hop music. Tee-Ay idolizes the beat-boxers and hip-hoppers who “flow rhymes by the fence” (1) of her school—“music, rhythm, and rhymes make it all good no matter what ’hood you came from” (40). The “wild, electric sizzle” (21) of hip-hop lingo races through her veins and gives her a sense of self-identity and serenity—“. . . if you talk too proper, you might get jumped by a crew of four or five . . . because people will think you’re trying to act white” (5). Her favorite expression—“Wuzzup wit’ dat?”—makes her sound cool (5). Hip-hop “understands” her and keeps her company “. . . like a slo-mo flow of dope, dope show” (134).

Not only does hip-hop help Tee-Ay fit in, it also teaches her about the benefits of “elevating your mind” (120). Since sixth grade she has dreamed of graduating high school with a respectable GPA so she can attend a good university—USC—in spite of all the “haters” who constantly try to bring her down. Thus she works hard to overcome all of the obstacles in her way—low self-esteem; a drug culture; a school with “. . . helicopters, race riots, and wannabe gangstas” (230); an overly-protective mother who does not trust her; and daily black-on-black violence. Tee-Ay realizes that to survive at her high school she has to stand up for herself and find her “. . . own groove in life” (208).

Tee-Ay enrolls in Honors classes; stops smoking pot; resists the temptation of sex; works at the movie theater to make her own money; befriends Devon, the brightest boy in her class; works hard in the library accessing SAT websites and prepping for the SAT test; reads the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* which con-

The distinctive physical and geographical features of the literary landscape in this novel serve as a framework for extended metaphor and foreshadowing of change in characters.

vinces her she can do something with her life too; and, when her soul mate, Devon, is shot in a drive-by shooting, she finishes writing his application essay for college and submits it for him. While writing the essay about how “. . . an event, an encounter, or a specific life experience has helped shape your character and influence your perspective on life” (279), she realizes that Devon has been able to transform his bad experiences in the ‘hood into positive ones—he used his misfortunes as a “. . . motivational tool to work even harder so that he could become a success in life” (322).

Like Devon, Tee-Ay also chooses to turn the negative influences in her environment into positive ones. The consequences of these choices are not easy; she often feels betrayed, confused, and guilty. She admits: “Maybe I’m broken on the inside” (49). Yet, her persistence pays off. Her guidance counselor helps her get into USC in spite of her mediocre SAT scores, and her mother gives her a new car for graduating from Hip-Hop High.

In John H. Ritter’s *Under the Baseball Moon*, the setting of “over-the-moon and star-tossed” Ocean Beach in San Diego, CA, is woven into every part of the story, narrated by fifteen-year-old trumpet playing, skateboarder Andy Ramos. In Part I, Andy introduces Ocean Beach as a “. . . magical, organical beachtown filled with soul, filled with the spirit of long-lost freedoms, and known simply as ‘OB’” (1). Part II opens with a lyrical description of place: “Peaches, oranges, nectarines. Llama rides, cake and pies, and everything in between. . . Listen to the ocean pound and the foghorn bay. You can sell your soul at these crossroads, *mijo*, or you can walk away” (127).

Andy grows up surrounded by music making—jazz, rock, bebop, and hip-hop or “old school music,” as he calls it. His musical roots. And now he is beginning to create sounds beyond his roots, street sounds he imitates on his trumpet as he skateboards under Sunset Cliffs Boulevard Bridge near Robb Field and the softball diamonds. He calls his music “Cultural Fusion” because it is just like his neighborhood.

Like Devon, Tee-Ay also chooses to turn the negative influences in her environment into positive ones. The consequences of these choices are not easy; she often feels betrayed, confused, and guilty.

He is a spray-paint artist, or tagger, with music, spraying people and trash-can cats, Newport coffee shops and tattoo parlors, and the broomstrokes of Freeman sweeping the sidewalk. Andy hopes this will be his “break out summer,” when he will become a respected and recognized musician beyond the boundaries of San Diego.

When he reunites with a childhood friend, Glory Martinez, who has just returned to town with her mother, Andy begins imitating her softball pitching moves. Before long, the two discover that Andy’s music carries Glory’s pitching to new heights, and Glory’s presence

inspires Andy’s music in a magical way as well. Their dreams of becoming a famous softball pitcher and a renown musician fuse. But, in a scene filled with allegorical implications, Andy meets a stranger on the pier in the dark of night and later fears he might have sold his soul to the devil for the promise of musical success. He believes he could lose both Glory and future musical glory because of one weak moment.

Ocean Beach tradition is rich with magic—a fortune teller, a Holy Jokester, and a root doctor wander in and out of the story. In the introduction to Part III, readers are told that “this rivermouth town has been a crossroads town since the river was a stream . . . a vortex of things hoped for, a conjunction of things unseen. . . . Never underestimate, *mijo*, the powers of this place” (209). As Andy grows into his dream, he looks for “*verdad* that” or the truth. Though he starts out hoping to escape the small-town musician’s life his parents are happily living, by the end of his breakout summer, he is still in Ocean Beach, while Glory has received a softball scholarship to attend Cal Berkeley. He is still there three years later, thinking he has “dropped off the music industry’s radar screen” (280). But, then the phone rings, and his band “FuChar Skool” is about to take off, fueled by the power of OB.

By using the six prompts detailed earlier as a frame of reference, we have tried to demonstrate the role “place/literary landscape” plays in shaping a young protagonist’s character and identity. We hope

these brief analyses will serve as models for readers who wish to examine place and identity in young adult novels. Also, as teens engage with young adult novels, we hope they will see and/or reexamine connections or disconnections between their own “place” and their own emerging identity.

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