



From the Editors

“Scattering Light” in the Lives of Young Adult Readers

The theme for this issue of *The ALAN Review* and for the ALAN workshop last November in Philadelphia asks us to imagine what it means to “scatter light” using young adult literature. We are asked to consider which writers and what texts in our field have encouraged us to “scatter light” or have given “voice [to those who have] been pushed down hard” by school or society. I (Melanie) would like to offer some perspective as we introduce this issue.

Naomi Shihab Nye is a favorite poet of mine, and while the journal and conference theme was taken from her poem “Voices,” it is her poem “The List” that strikes me today as I look across the articles and columns for this issue. In the poem, the speaker listens as a man calculates how many books he should be able to read before he dies. The man has used a mathematical formula to calculate the number—expected life span multiplied by average books per month. As I read this poem, I see parallels to the way texts are calculated for the students in our schools. We have students for roughly twelve years, so we divide the number of texts (key, canonical, etc.) that we need them to read before they graduate into the number of years, or semesters, or courses. Our goal, we say, is to create lifelong readers, but we try to do this by formula—so many great books a year, divided by number of English/language arts classes, multiplied by

summer reading. We make lists of “necessary books,” just as the man did in Nye’s poem:

nonfiction mostly, history, philosophy,
fiction, and poetry from different time periods
so there wouldn’t be large gaps in his mind.
He had given up frivolous reading entirely.
There are only so many days.

The speaker in the poem questions the man’s plan. She wonders, “What about the books that aren’t written yet,/the books his friends might recommend/that aren’t on the list,/the yummy magazine that might fall/into his hand at a silly moment after all?” These are the questions that those of us who are passionate about young adult literature ask: What about the book that hasn’t been written yet? What about the texts that friends recommend to each other? What about those viral books that spread throughout the grade level or school? What about those books that grab the adolescent reader? The ones that speak to them? The ones that “scatter light” in their worlds?

We, as editors of *The ALAN Review*, echo the idea that “there are only so many days,” but we believe we should dedicate those to the *best* books. And that’s where this journal comes in. This issue’s contents offer at least a few answers to the questions posed above; they help us with the see-

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ing, thinking, and imagining that young adult authors, teachers, and readers do in a variety of contexts as they scatter light on their lives.

To begin the issue, sj Miller and Josh Slifkin scatter light on the use of young adult novels for the open question of the Advanced Placement examination. If, as many of us argue, the body of young adult literature has many fine novels of significant literary quality, then why couldn't a high school student select a young adult novel of similar literary quality to answer the question? We think their article opens a long-awaited discussion. Nai-Hua Kuo and Janet Alsup remind us that while the rhetoric about including multicultural literature remains constant, many teachers find it difficult to incorporate into their curriculum. First, they address the concerns of teachers as they teach multicultural literature. Second, they describe a classroom observation of a teacher using *Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear* with high school ESL students. To conclude, they offer pedagogical strategies for teaching *American Born Chinese*.

Scattering light also means revisiting the pioneers in our field who continue to influence authors of YA lit and our students. Referring to a recent national controversy about a book loosely based on J. D. Salinger's life, John S. Simmons recaps the reasons for teaching Salinger's novel and teaches us ways in which we might connect our readers to the themes found in Holden's life. As one of our students mentioned after reading *Catcher in the Rye* in a young adult literature course, "I was nervous and scared for Holden."

Turning to an emerging scholar in young adult literature, Rob Bittner closely examines the characteristics of the growing list of trans young adult novels and what readers might come to understand through these narratives. Jennifer Buehler discusses the work of Matt de la Peña and its roots in urban youth who often go unnoticed in our schools and neighborhoods. As light shines on the lives of the youth in both instances, we can see the beauty that emerges.

The four columns in this issue provide differing views on what it means to scatter light in the broad contexts of young adult literature. Teri and Haviland Holbrook provide a look into a teen reader's list of books that "scattered light" in her reading life. Alan Sitomer challenges teachers to consider a wide variety

of texts in order to reach the students in their classrooms. Both Jeffrey Kaplan and Cindy Welch offer interesting perspectives on research and young adult literature. Kaplan's column provides an overview of the dissertations that focus on young adult literature, while Welch provides readers with a history of the organizations and their journals that developed out of a group of committed teachers and scholars determined to let young adult literature scatter light in teens' lives.

Our two interviews in this issue feature two relatively new authors. In her interview with Isamu Fukui, Sara Schwebel traces the work of this young author and how his futuristic novels comment on how institutional schooling in the United States discourages children from thinking. Fukui began his trilogy—*Truancy*, *Truancy Origins*, and the forthcoming *Truancy City*—with his own scribbled notes about school written while in high school. April Brannon's interview with Emily Wang Smith provides insights into one author's path to the publication of her first novel, *The Way He Lived*. In this allegorical novel, six teens face the same tragedy and deal with it in the only way they can.

Finally, the three Stories from the Field feature teachers who took a chance and brought global concerns, parents' voices, and the Internet into their teaching practices, thereby creating unexpected connections with voices beyond the classroom. We hope you enjoy this issue and apply its ideas and perspectives to the thinking that began at the ALAN workshop in Philadelphia last fall. We also hope that the authors and novels highlighted here will continue to scatter light among young readers, teachers, librarians, and scholars.

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