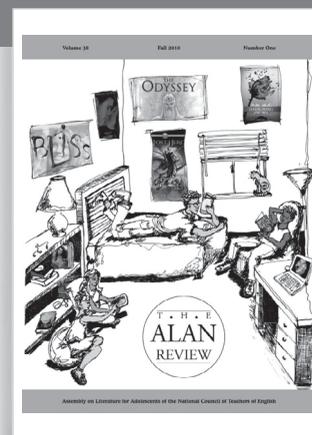


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ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW. *The ALAN Review* is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. 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 American Psychological Association (APA).

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors are to submit manuscripts electronically to alanreview@lsu.edu. In the subject line please write: **ALAN manuscript submission**. All manuscripts should be in a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: (1) A manuscript without references to the author(s). (2) A separate title page with author's name, contact information, affiliation, and a 2-3 sentence biographical sketch. In the case of multiple authors, the author submitting the manuscript will serve as the primary contact unless stipulated otherwise. (3) A brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

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:	MARCH 1
WINTER ISSUE Deadline:	JULY 1
SUMMER ISSUE Deadline:	NOVEMBER 1

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From the Editors

Since I (Melanie) am trapped at home with a broken leg, I have been bemoaning the state of daytime television. Lots of reality shows, lots of CSI repeats, and lots of infomercials. While flipping through the channels last week, I stumbled on the movie *Juno*. I came in at the scene where Juno just told her family that she is pregnant. Her father looks at her and says, “I thought you were the kind of girl who knew when to say when.” She responds by saying, “I don’t know what kind of girl I am.” In that response, I heard the echo of so many of the adolescents I have taught over the years—I don’t know who I am. I don’t know who I want to be. I wanna change and be different but I don’t know how. I don’t like who I am when I hang with them. I just want someone to like me for me, for who I am.

Campbell (2000) argues that one of the distinguishing themes of YAL is “becoming an adult, finding the answer to the question ‘Who am I and what am I going to do about it?’ No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity” (pp. 485–486). The questions “Who am I and what am I going to do about it?” are more complex than they appear at first glance. Juno realizes that she is in the process of becoming who she is as she makes very challenging, very adult decisions. Her actions, her choices shape who she is. Adolescents and the characters that they choose to read about, identify with, or learn from are as complicated as the

question. Good YAL explores the world and, implicitly or explicitly, identity in complex ways.

This issue of *The ALAN Review* focuses on questions of identity. As a teacher, one of the reasons I wanted to use YAL in my classes was so my students could see themselves, or at least people their own age, dealing with issues that they may also be dealing with—getting along with siblings or people at school, finding a date, saying “no” to drugs or sex, dealing with an unwanted experience, etc. While YAL does more than provide an opportunity for students to see themselves, it is a place where issues of identity and self can play out in nuanced and complex ways. The range of YAL—comedy and humor to science fiction to romance to realistic fiction and beyond—provides a space where adolescents can read and explore the issues of their lives and of the world.

In “Humanizing the ‘So-called Enemy,’” Bloem and her university students read the work of Naomi Shihab Nye, which serves as a way for them to discuss the representations of those from the Middle East in popular media. Bloem points out the transformative aspects of Nye’s poetry when paired with thoughtful classroom discussions and activities.

In “Landscapes of City and Self,” Thomas illustrates the variety of ways in which adolescents are represented in urban settings and helps us see that an urban landscape might mean a larger variety of experiences than readers from other setting might initially imagine. Then, in “A Family from a Continent of I Don’t Know What,” Katherine Bell asks us to consider if the grand narrative of the *bildungsroman* or coming-

of-age novel, as it is described in classic terms, still serves as a sufficient trope for adolescents as they question their own formation and identity. Perhaps new narratives make more sense in an increasingly globalized society.

Connie Zitlow and Lois Stover ask us to consider the many ways in which the young adult is represented as an artist. In their essay “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Adult,” they provide examples of how some adolescents define themselves as artists. They illustrate that many adolescent protagonists find themselves as they explore their identities through artistic expression. Angela Insenga explores in “Goth Girl Reading” how graphic novels and comic books provide insight into the exploration of adolescent identity. In this essay, she explores how Kyra Sellers, the protagonist of Lyga’s *Goth Girl Rising* (2009), creates an identity through her reading of graphic novels.

Jennifer Dail and Jordan Leonard ask if LGBTQ teens might find some solace in reading texts that are more representative of their experiences. In *Creating Realms of Possibilities*, they explore the issues surrounding the inclusion of such novels, including the possible discomfort some classroom teachers might feel when attempting to add these titles to a classroom library or reading list.

The three columns in this issue provide useful information for everyone. Jerry Weiss reminds us that when students read different books around a common genre or theme, they can still have a shared experience through discussion. He provides a few sample categories and suggests some recent titles for our con-

sideration. Jeffery Kaplan provides a retrospective of books published about young adult literature through the last decade. His list is a valuable consolidation of resources. Judith Hayn and Lisa Hazlett provide a more specific retrospective in “Hear Us Out!” They explore the changes in how young adult literature representing LGBTQ teens has changed since the late 1990s. Collectively, these columns can help provide timely facts or a relevant reading list when addressing specific issues of young adult literature.

Both of the authors interviewed in this issue write books that deal with important issues young adults experience. In her interview with Allison Whittenberg, KaaVonia Hinton asks her about her identity as a writer who focuses on young African American women’s issues. Rebecca Hill discusses with Ellen Hopkins her decision to write about tough issues that teenagers face and her upcoming novels that continue the stories of some of her familiar characters. Both of these novelists create characters who are seeking the answer to Campbell’s (2000) question.

Finally, our Stories from the Field feature episodes in which families become part of our students’ reading experiences. Family members—represented in young adult literature from the absent and overbearing to the loving and supportive—remain integral to young adults’ identity formation.

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- Campbell, P. (2000, July/August). The sand in the oyster: Middle muddle. *The Horn Book Magazine*, 483-487.
- Lyga, B. (2009). *Goth Girl rising*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

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**.

Call for Manuscripts

Winter 2012 Theme: Reading YAL's Past, Writing YAL's Future

Jean Rhys, West Indian novelist, argued that reading “makes immigrants of us all. It takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere.” Young adult literature helps readers both see themselves and see themselves differently. The theme of this issue asks us to consider the influences of young adult literature since Hinton’s pivotal novel *The Outsiders*. What was young adult literature? What is it now? What could it be like in the future? What are the books in the canon of YAL that stand the test of time? What are the possible forms and formats for future YAL novels? Who are the dominant authors in YAL’s past? Its present? Its future? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation, and we welcome manuscripts addressing pedagogy as well as theoretical concerns. General submissions are also welcome. **Submission deadline: July 1, 2011.**

Summer 2012 Theme: Exploring Identity and Identities in Young Adult Literature

James Baldwin argues that all “roles are dangerous” and that the “world tends to trap you in the role you play.” Too often, teens feel trapped by the role they think they must play. The theme of this issue asks us to consider the influences and intersections of race, class, gender, culture, and sexual identity in young adult literature. What roles do adolescents feel trapped in or empowered by? How are issues of race, class, gender, culture, and sexual identity explored or challenged in YAL? Who is silenced or marginalized by an aspect of their identity? Which novels help students explore or try on different identities? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation, and we welcome manuscripts addressing pedagogy as well as theoretical concerns. General submissions are also welcome. **Submission deadline: November 1, 2011.**

New Section

Got a story about young adult literature you’d like to share? We are starting a new section featuring brief vignettes (no more than 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around YA literature.

Humanizing the “So-Called Enemy”: Teaching the Poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye

Do not be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks you are a savage. Or perhaps he is afraid of you because he feels that you are afraid of him. And perhaps if he believed you are capable of loving him he would no longer be your enemy.

—Thomas Merton (2007/1961, p. 177)

When I first started teaching Naomi Shihab Nye’s *19 Varieties of Gazelle* (2002) five years ago, the television and news images of Muslims and Middle Easterners were violent, scary, or so very, very foreign. Angry men, waving their fists, jostling for the camera. Angry men, shouting epithets about Americans. Or perhaps men kneeling in prayer—which shouldn’t be an alarming image but was because of the sheer numbers, the huge lines of prostrate men, only men. In the last five years, we have added names to some of these men’s faces: Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden. During the weeks I wrote this article, a Nigerian Jihadist tried to blow up a plane before it landed in Detroit. His face is another frightening image that my students and I now recognize.

Note that we do not have images in our heads of those protesters at the Detroit courthouse, both Nigerians and Arabs from the Middle East, who wanted to make clear to the world that Islam is a peaceful religion. Our local newspapers and media sources did not carry photos of those who want to give Islam another face. True, we know more now about the Middle East than we did five years ago: we have a greater sense of the diversity of the Middle East, recognizing that it includes Afghans and Iranians, Palestinians and Iraqis;

we know more about the Islamic religion, and the sweep of its geography. But in some ways it’s harder now for my students to make sense of the Middle Eastern news because it isn’t just the news media that reinforces negative stereotypes; popular culture does it, too.

Take the video games, the ones that invite players to simulate war. Some of my students play video war games like *Kuma\War*, *Army of Two*, and *Conflict:Desert Storm*—games that are often set in a vague location that sometimes looks urban, sometimes desert-like, often Middle Eastern, usually with terrorists and snipers, fast action and violence. Publicly objecting to the violence that includes the killing of civilians, a British MP complained that the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* “contains such scenes of brutality that even the manufacturers have put in warnings within the game” (Emery, 2009). Clearly the games are produced with consumers in mind and reflect their expectations and tastes, but beyond accommodating people’s desire for action and amusement, these video games promote stereotypes of the bad guys—bad guys who seem to be increasingly portrayed as Middle Eastern.

Vit Sisler, a researcher in the field of game studies, states, “When you play a game, you tend to

identify yourself not only with its main character, but with the whole system—with its rules and underlying logic” (Haenni, 2009). It is important, he points out, that we study how Arab and Muslim characters are represented. In some games where the point of view of the game player is that of an American or coalition shooter, “the enemy is represented by visual signifiers referring to Arabs or Muslims, like head cover, loose clothes and dark skin color. Most of these games exhibit strong cultural bias when schematizing Arabs and Muslims as enemies in the narrative framework of fundamentalism and international terrorism.” Sisler argues that the players’ “only interaction possible with the Arab/Muslim characters is to fight them,” these stereotyped, flat characters who “fight in an undisciplined way, [and] laugh mockingly after they kill someone or wave AK-47s above their heads.”

In a parallel way, a Syrian company has remade American videogames by substituting men of Hezbollah or Arab Muslim soldiers as the protagonists and the Americans and Israelis as the bad guys (“Middle East Online”). Governmental agencies are not above using games for their political purposes. Reporting on this phenomenon, Sisler notes, “We have the Army Games Project, within which a first-person shooter game, *America’s Army*, was developed and distributed freely to help the US Army’s recruitment campaign; the Iranian National Institute of Computer Games, which supports games designed in accordance with Islamic and Iranian values; and the Central Internet Bureau of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, which produces a series of games about the struggle with Israel” (Haenni, 2009). Thus the propagation of stereotypes and demonization in the various games are manipulated to serve the creator’s perspective. Anyone who studies the effect of video gaming on youth—American youth as well as Middle Eastern youth—needs to consider the pernicious effect of these clichés. If Sisler is right in saying that “games are the new semiotic language of today’s youth” (cited in Haenni, 2009), my game-playing students are exposed to a world of influence that is at least as polarizing, if not more so, than Fox news.

Consider as well the influence of popular movies on our students’ understanding of the Middle East. Anti-Arab film *Delta Force* (Golan, 1986) may be an old movie to them, but it has had a long shelf life. They all grew up with *Aladdin* (Clements & Musker,

1992), and most of them remember the infamous line about the Middle East as a place “where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face.” Shaheen, author of *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001), makes the case that Hollywood’s images of Middle Easterners, and especially Arabs, have always been reductive and insulting. Women are portrayed as belly dancers. Men are repulsive oil sheikhs or perhaps religious fanatics. He references several films in the past seventy years in which characters refer to Arabs as dressed in sheets or all looking the same, and concludes, “In Hollywood films, they certainly do” (p. 2).

My college students, unlike those from more urban or sophisticated areas around the country, are likely to know the news from and the videogames and movies about the Middle East, but are not likely to have firsthand experiences with Middle Easterners. Many walk in the door with little understanding of Arab Americans or Muslims or Palestinians. They are ready to move on from their unconsidered stereotyping, but they need new images to replace the old. I teach a course in international literature for children and young adults to these future elementary and secondary teachers, future librarians, and eager literature students, a course that invites them to read outside of the body of literature with which they are familiar. I ask them to learn about the literature that others grew up reading or that describes others’ realities. My students read *19 Varieties of Gazelle* (2002), a collection of poems that will be familiar to many readers of *ALAN Review*; Nye’s work has been written about in these pages before. Her neglected essay, “Lights in the Window,” published in this journal in 1995, is a perfect complement to *Gazelle*. These two texts are timely this year, this month, when fear is rampant and prejudice is increasing. Teaching them provides students with a powerful, emotional counterweight against today’s media images.

He references several films in the past seventy years in which characters refer to Arabs as dressed in sheets or all looking the same, and concludes, “In Hollywood films, they certainly do” (p. 2).

Naomi Shihab Nye's father left Jerusalem as college student, going to study in Kansas. Her mother was a Midwesterner from Ohio. Nye has embraced both parts of her heritage and has labored to present a new point of view to Americans who are locked into images of violence. Because she believes in the power of words, she wrote a daily letter to the President (N. S. Nye, personal communication, February 1, 2010) over several stretches during the George W. Bush administration. *Gazelle* is another record of her thoughts. Her poems tell stories of family in the States—Arab American immigrants longing for home—as well as her family and friends living in the Middle East, unwillingly caught up in violence and political realities not of their doing.

A prose introduction speaks of her politics immediately: "Perhaps Arab-Americans must say, twice as clearly as anyone else, that we deplore the unbelievable, senseless sorrow caused by people from the Middle East" (Nye, 2002, p. xvi). The impetus for the collection was her grandmother's voice, haunting her at night, nudging her after 9/11 to "Speak for me too. Say how much I hate it. Say this is not who we are" (p. xviii).

Nye's broad take on the Middle East includes poems on the devastating earthquake in Iran, a message from Saudi women, an account of a visit to Abu Dhabi and to the island of Bahrain. However, her book is grounded in her depiction of Palestinian anguish, her willingness to see Israelis as individuals, her recognition that both sides are perpetuating violence, and her call for change.

No one was right.
Everyone was wrong.
What if they'd get together
And say that? . . .
Jewish and Arab women
Standing silently together.

Generations of black.

Are people the only holy land? (pp. 135–136)

Nye's method of creating empathy is to celebrate the small quirky details that help us see that Arabs do not all look alike. She helps us notice men "who had been shepherds so long they walked like sheep" and women who carry buckets of water on their heads and tease Nye, because they know she can't balance a bucket herself. We glimpse her elderly grandmother,

baking bread, waiting by the oven. We read about "young ones" who seemingly roll their eyes at the constant praying of their elders and tell the "old ones" not to waste their time. My students tip their heads up in sudden recognition.

Most of the 60 poems show us pictures of Arabs, bits of their lives spent in villages with one cow, or in refugee camps, or in self-imposed exile elsewhere, but still longing for home. As we look at the details, we see individuals suffering. We see an Iranian man holding his limp child after an earthquake. We see Palestinian girls, "with huge dark moons under their eyes," stand in line for bread for seven hours. We see students gathering for their last day of the school year, but then the school door is blown off, and we see

Empty chairs where laughter used to sit.
Laughter lived here
Jingling its pocket of thin coins
And now it is in hiding. (p. 60)

The penultimate poem, "Blood," considers how, in our post-9/11 world, a *true* Arab behaves. Nye slides into the topic obliquely, proposing various answers. Is it through the small habits or customs that mark a person as "Arab"? Is it through a mindset, a perspective that reveals an Arab philosophy? Is there a flag that unites Arabs? Nye's father identified her childlike wonder at the world, her open-heartedness, as being truly Arab. Or, does it mean that to be Arab means living with grief and violence, with a "tragedy with a terrible root [that] is too big for us" (p. 136)? And so, after another horrific headline, Nye and her father talk "around the news," because his pain is so deep and raw that "neither of his two languages can reach it" (p. 136).

Like the shepherds of the first poem, Nye herself goes to the countryside in this last poem. She "plead[s], with the air," and, like those shepherds, looks for a place to store her pain. But now there is no settling down to good food, to those simple pleasures of being alive in order to balance the despair. We've come too far and have seen too much. Now there are only anguished cries: "What does a true Arab do now?" (p. 137).

How far this is from the images I see when I turn on CBS news. How far it is from the quick, menacing figures on video games or in the movies. My students need help with, as Judith Langer (1998) says, moving through this literature and examining what they know

because of it, and they need to make connections with other texts and to make readjustments because of previously held stereotypes. But mostly they need to settle in and look at Nye's images, listen to her words, and ponder.

Lens for Nye

I teach Nye's *Gazelle* and her essay through reader response and sociocultural lenses, urging my students to make lots of connections to other texts. Before they begin reading, I ask them what they know about the Middle East and find that the depth of their answers varies widely. (Thankfully, their answers have deepened since the first time I asked this question, when I received several papers that used the term Israelites for Israelis.) I assign an interactive geography website (*Map Quiz*) to help them learn the names and locations of Middle Eastern countries. "I don't mean to treat you like fourth-graders," I say, "but American students are not known for their geographical knowledge." They often thank me. "I surprised my dad," one says, "when I proved to him I could identify more Middle Eastern countries than he could."

For two poems, one of my choosing and one of theirs, I assign them a Reader Response exercise (*Bleich's Heuristic*, 2009). They pick important words and concepts and analyze how the poem triggered their thoughts and emotions. I ask them to analyze how the book is structured and why. Then we do the same for the title poem. They begin to see how the book works, how Nye has put it together. They are surprised because they didn't know a book of poetry was more than private whimsy, that it has structure as plumbable as a person's DNA. They like that I don't want them to explicate every line, that, like them, I'm not sure of why she writes:

Soldiers stalk a pharmacy:
Big guns, little pills. (p. 93)

I tell them my story of surprise at seeing armed soldiers parked outside a pharmacy in Guatemala City, proposing a guess at why they might be stationed there; they tell me their theories, and we puzzle together.

I bring in a picturebook of the comic figure Goha (Johnson-Davies, 2005), which helps them understand a few of her references. Some of them see the Palestinian film "The Lemon Tree" (Riklis, 2009). They

also individually choose other texts that deepen their understanding of *Gazelle*: Nye's picturebook paean to her grandmother, *Sitti's Secrets* (1997), or her young adult novel *Habibi* (1999). Some choose to study Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine* (2001); some read Valerie Zenatti's *When I Was a Soldier* (2005), the memoir of a young Israeli woman, while others read Carter's *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* (2008). A great favorite is Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* (2004), which is not Arab but Iranian, and helps expand their understanding of Islam.

Their final task is to place *Gazelle* alongside her essay "Lights in the Window" (1995). My students are intrigued by images of Middle Easterners as rapt fans of poetry readings and as a people proud of their culture and their history. They see what Nye was hoping her readers would see as we visualized our way through her 60 poems. We read about her decision during the first Gulf War to go into classrooms with the poems of Iraqis, so that readers had a sense of just who the "so-called enemy" was, so that she could help people move beyond media images. Nye believes that the *job* of poetry is "to give us a sense of others' lives close up" (p. 5), and that poetry allows us to listen to the intimate poetic voices of citizens of other countries. She asks, "Isn't this where empathy begins?" (p. 5).

I ask my students to keep a dual entry notebook as they read this essay, so that they slow down and ponder what she proposes and why. Their task is to jot down a few words from Nye on the left side of the paper—perhaps a statement, perhaps a beautiful phrase—and an explanation for that choice, a question, or a connection to other ideas and texts on the right side of the paper. Invariably, they mention her similes and metaphors and beautiful language. And invariably, they make connections between their experiences while reading *Gazelle* and reading her beliefs about what poetry is and can make possible in "Lights in the Window."

Responding to Nye

After they've digested *Gazelle* and "Lights in the Window" and the other texts or movies of their choosing, I ask them to tell me what they have learned from Nye. Many of them mention that they have moved beyond the stereotyping. Here are a few of their thoughts:

- In *19 Varieties*, the American audience can get a sense of Palestinians as people, not just “Palestinians.” It is easy to mistake the governmental leaders of a country for the average citizen of a country, but it is important not to do so. One way of getting out of this habit is to read international literature and critically examine yourself and the stereotypes and assumptions you hold about others, a challenge Nye’s work seems to offer.
- When we actually listen to each other, we learn things about each other that we can’t learn from the news—and listening to someone is essentially what we do when we read poetry. Nye is suggesting that by listening to people from perspectives that are different from or even opposing our own, we are able to empathize with them rather than make judgments. . . . Many people might consider people of her background an “enemy” but she seeks in her work to portray all people as people, setting aside already formed ideas that people have about each other in favor of encouraging people to listen to each other.

From Nye, my students learn to see individuals. They grasp that the Middle East is filled with many, many people who desperately want peace. At least to a limited extent, they identify with Nye’s family and friends, and in some of their responses, use the term *we*.

- Nye wants the world to know that not all Middle Easterners are what is portrayed in the media. We are all human beings and we all search for peace.
- Nye’s book acknowledges the senselessness of war, especially in her poem “Jerusalem.” The war or killing goes on and on. We blame the other guy when in fact the wings of the bird lie across both Israeli and Palestinian roofs.

In “Lights in the Window,” when Nye describes carrying Iraqi poems into American classrooms, she wanted students to remember that real people live in Iraq, with real hopes and fears, who wear shoes and eat bread just like we do (p. 6). She, more than any poet I know, wants readers to develop their abilities to empathize with the people of the Middle East. And that is what happens to my students: they develop their powers of empathy. Many, if not most, replace the ugly stereotype with new images for the term *Arab*.

But there are limits. Not every student reads slowly enough to engage well. Even if students do replace a disturbing, shadowy menace with an image of Nye’s grieving father, gaining new insight does not ensure that students will be moved to political action, will boycott the latest Arab movie, or will complain to the creators of video games. In fact, some of my students’ responses to Nye distress me. Several of them tell me these lines are ones they are grateful for, that speak to and for them.

I’m not interested in
who suffered the most.
I’m interested in
People getting over it. (p. 92)

The students who claim these lines as their favorites are willing to open their minds to her ideas, but at the same time do not want to disrupt their perspectives too much. They are afraid of having an emotional response, afraid that they’ll be called upon to do something they don’t want to or can’t do. I can see that they would prefer to move on now to happier books.

But Nye is bigger than that, I tell them. Why not put her lines (above) in balance with the old taxi driver’s words from “The Palestinians Have Given Up Parties.”

They will not see, he says slowly
The story behind the story,
They are always looking for the story after the story
Which means they will never understand the story.

Which means it will go on and on. (p. 61)

Why not take one more step in your thinking, I ask them. Why not take stock of what you’ve learned and wipe out those old prejudices? Why not think about what you know of our own country’s policies and actions and reconfigure your political stance? Why not replace those shadowy, ominous figures of the videogames with those of Nye’s family, and while we do so, take a hard look at our own culpability in their suffering? I know that my students will resist anything that smacks of guilt. I know that they do not want to feel guilty about what they or their parents do, did, or didn’t do, and that their resistance will put up a wall between them and Nye. But the culpability of privilege—that we have been given a lot and therefore a lot can be expected from us—is an argument that they can digest.

In critiquing the teaching of social justice literature, Nance (2006) argues that it is not enough to urge students only to connect and identify with less fortunate “others” (p. 10). Her comments are helpful in seeing that teaching for empathy does not always yield the kinds of responses that a teacher would prefer, and she implies that many teachers teach social justice literature badly. I agree with her that it is possible for students to read about injustice but not feel or hear any call to action as a result of that encounter, but I believe that there is a web of responsibility. If, as Nye says, “it is the *job* [stet] of poems to give us a sense of others’ lives close up” (p. 5), then it is my job to pick great literature and to guide my students in reading well. I need to help my students read in such a way that they banish stereotypes and recognize another’s existence and suffering. What follows next is the students’ job, their task of taking those images and “sense of others’ lives” to their hearts and minds. I believe that an emotional recognition that someone is suffering is the first step to action. I ask the students what we can and should do, after being moved by Nye, and with them, I suggest some pathways to action. But we all do our parts—Nye, me, and the students.

I tell my students that our privilege makes action possible. We can’t all be Gandhi, but we can all speak out against demonization of other people. We can point out to our friends how a movie tries to manipulate us, and we can stop enjoying certain kinds of video games. When our news only shows us scary terrorists, we can remember Ibtisam Bozieh, the 13-year-old girl who wanted to be a doctor, but instead, way back in 1989, was the 500th Palestinian to die (Nye, 2002, p. 53). We can tell people that Nye’s haunting poem about this child was banned by Israeli censors. We can vote differently. We can ask critical questions. We may not all become global political activists, but we can all act locally.

Some of my students write about their new attitudes towards the media, demonstrating how they’ve changed because of their reading of Nye.

- I don’t like to be judged by things Americans do, so I should think more before I stereotype an entire culture.
- I’m Jewish, and I hope that all people see that this fighting is stupid. There are humans on both sides.

Nye helps me understand that people I should “hate” are human just like me.

One student emailed me a semester after our class to say this:

- I just saw the film version of *Reel Bad Arabs*, showing how America’s political decision to side with Israel has influenced our access to anti-Palestinian media in movies and books. It was really a great movie and I learned a lot about how Palestinian people (including the children!) have been demonized by media. Promise me that you’ll never stop teaching *19 Varieties of Gazelle!*

And so Nye leads us to a new place and makes it possible for us to begin a conversation that starts like this: why do some Middle Easterners hate America and what should we do about it? How can we stop perpetuating hate—theirs of us and ours of them?

In “Lights in the Window,” Nye (1995) writes, “we need to know one another. It is an imperative, not a luxury” (p. 6). William Greider (2001), a national correspondent for *The Nation*, asks if we are capable of rising above the ugly stereotypes perpetuated by the film industry (p. viii). My answer is that we *must* be capable of moving beyond stereotype. We must learn to see each other. Voices like Nye’s will help us find our way.

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Note

1. Here are representative and important writers who support the potential of creating emotional connections with literature and teaching to build empathy: Jeffrey Berman, 2004; Jerome Bruner, 1987; Robert Coles, 1989; Azar Nafisi, 2008; Nel Noddings, 2002.

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Landscapes of City and Self:

Place and Identity in Urban Young Adult Literature

“Every ghetto, every city,
Every suburban place I been
Makes me recall my days in the New Jerusalem”
—Lauryn Hill

Urban landscapes feature iconic symbols from the past and contemporary times. These symbols become representative artifacts of their cities, from the Empire State Building in New York City to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Physical spaces such as these are emblazoned in the consciousness of city dwellers and visitors all over the United States and around the world. These spaces serve not only as settings and backdrops for memory, but often become metaphors for cities themselves. Just as we notice the beauty of a person’s eyes, and remember them clearly many years later, we also notice and remember (and in the case of natives, often take for granted) the distinctive smell of a wharf in Washington, D.C. or Baltimore in the summertime, the colorful jubilation of Jackson Square in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, or the quiet desolation of Michigan Central Station in postindustrial Detroit. We also remember virtual urban landscapes in young adult literature long after we have read the final page, from the delightful renderings of a Chicago Chicano neighborhood in *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1991) to a glorious summer at the Philadelphia art school in *Same Difference* (Vivian, 2009). These noticing and remembrances from life and literature contribute to the formation of readers’ identities, as

well as their sense of being anchored in worlds both real and fictional.

As the geographic, cultural, and economic distinctions of cities are taken for granted, there are even broader implications for readers, teachers, and critics of adolescent literature. The first is that of relevance. There are relevant connections between literature for young adults and trends in the culture of urban centers. We are living during a time of profound cultural shifts. World populations are more urban than in any other time in human history. Global economies, new technologies, rapid information flow, and transnational workforces are rapidly changing the cities that we live in (Gere, Aull, Dickinson, McBee-Orzulak, & Thomas, 2007).

To thrive, city dwellers of all ages must constantly shift from one context to the next, often many times within the same day and during moment-to-moment interactions with others. We may now choose from among a myriad of information modes (snail mail, email, text messaging, IM, Facebook, or Twitter), orienting ourselves in texts according to the interpersonal relationships involved (using netspeak with close friends and loved ones, using a more formal register with teachers and supervisors, and adopting an anonymous online persona on MySpace), and

shattering age-old barriers of space and time (instant access to anyone with an Internet connection, in any time zone, anywhere in the world). In young adult literature, we have seen this trend in recent titles that make extensive use of netspeak, such as *ttyl* and its sequels (Myracle, 2005), as well as in the proliferation of spaces online where authors of adolescent literature and their fans can connect.

Yet even in the midst of technological innovation, globalization, and urbanization, many still find value

The *virtual* nature of many of today's communication modes has inspired a return to that which is tangible, local, and immediate—that is, a sense of place.

in affirming premodern and modern identities and social subjectivities—of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and religion—connected to places, specifically the urban landscapes that a variety of youth inhabit. The information age has helped individuals of all ages and from all walks of life to affirm their special interests. Instead of hap-

penstance in-person meetings between people with similar interests, affinity groups are only a single click away (Gee, 2003). Taking this into consideration, I submit that the *virtual* nature of many of today's communication modes has inspired a return to that which is tangible, local, and immediate—that is, a sense of place. The urban geographies imagined and described in 21st-century fiction for young adults provide orientations and grounding in specific places. These story places are as diverse and interconnected as that of any natural biome.

A focus on urban settings has implications for adolescent literacy development. Educators often ask students to focus on the descriptive language in a novel as part of the meaning-making transaction between author and reader (Rosenblatt, 1983; Wilhelm, 2008). Often, to demonstrate comprehension and to practice describing their own experiences of being in the world, students are asked to compose original texts in response to their reading. Depending upon a teenager's previous urban experiences, the imagined city in *Lyra's Oxford* (Pullman, 2003) or the dystopian

San Francisco in Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) may be as new and strange as the Philadelphia of Flake's novels (i.e., *The Skin I'm In* [2000], *Who Am I Without Him?* [2004], and *Bang!* [2005]) are familiar to others. Reading about different kinds of places may change students' previously held views about cities, or in the case of city dwellers, affirm their sense of identity and belonging. As they are transported into these urban spaces through literature, young adults expand their view of the world and what it means to be a citizen in it.

If urban geographies provide unique experiences for students' entertainment and their literacy learning, it is also important to note that not all city landscapes are created equally. Just as cities themselves are stratified by socioeconomic status, culture, race, religion, orientation, and immigrant status, today's adolescent literature features urban geographies of both privilege and challenge, as well as contact zones where the two landscapes meet. From *Gossip Girl* (von Ziegesar, 2002) to *Hip-Hop High School* (Sitomer, 2006), these novels are some of the most popular in the field. Yet reading such texts for the role of place and environment is often subordinated by other concerns, such as a focus on identity, ideology, or culture (Glenn, 2008).

In this article, I read across recent urban YAL offerings for landscapes of privilege and challenge, as well as spaces where different zones intersect. As my analysis is focused on place, I use theories of cosmopolitanism to examine socioeconomically privileged spaces in the *Gossip Girl* and *Princess Diaries* (Cabot, 2000) series, as well as the ways in which this privilege is contested in *Little Brother* (Doctorow, 2008) and *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003). Moving on to urban landscapes of challenge, I examine descriptions of the specific physical constraints of ghettos and barrios in the work of de la Peña, Mowry, and Booth, among others, as well as some of the distinctive, treasured landmarks of these communities, realized in Flake's *You Don't Even Know Me* (2010) and Myers's *What They Found: Love on 145th Street* (1999b). Finally, I examine a few of the books where privilege and challenge intersect in varying ways. I conclude by proposing some practical applications of the study of urban geographies in young adult literature for teaching, learning, and activism.

Urban Geographies of Privilege

Twenty-first century urban geographies of privilege have been exacerbated by globalization and cosmopolitanism. The notion of cosmopolitanism can be traced back to the Cynics and the Stoics of Hellenistic Greece, who coined this paradoxical term to refer to a “citizen of the cosmos” (Appiah, 2006) that belongs to all communities and none at the same time. Yet the ability to become a cosmopolite is necessarily circumscribed by socioeconomic factors. “Transnational elites exist in positions of power and privilege enabling them to act as cosmopolites” (Binnie, Holloway, Millington, & Young, 2006), although the experiences of the global urban elite cannot be easily reduced or homogenized. Some urban landscapes of privilege encourage the “voyeuristic desires of readers” (Glenn, 2008), while others actively challenge and even negatively evaluate the lifestyles and values of the wealthy and powerful.

Stories about privileged urban adolescents are often (yet not exclusively) set in New York City. Two of the most popular series that recount teens living in these landscapes of wealth have been serialized, imitated, and found homes in movie theaters, on television sets, and on DVD. Perhaps the most quintessential (and stereotypical) depiction of the New York upper class can be found in the *Gossip Girl* novels, where Blair Waldorf, Serena Von Der Woodsen, and friends indulge in sex, lies, and character assassination on the Upper East Side (von Ziegesar, 2002a). Material wealth and desirable real estate, schools, retail choices, and vacation spots are central to the series. As the *Gossip Girl* blog recounts in the second novel, *You Know You Love Me* (von Ziegesar, 2002a), “Winter is coming. It’s the city’s favorite season and mine, too . . . it’s time to break out those credit cards and hit Bendel’s and Barney’s for some cool new boots, sexy fishnet tights, little wool skirts, and delicious cashmere sweaters. The city feels a little sparklier this time of year, and we want to sparkle with it!” (p. 1). Throughout the series, the descriptions of Park Avenue, exclusive Upper East Side real estate, and exclusive shopping venues are described as enthusiastically as the infidelity and rumor mongering in which Blair and friends frequently indulge. The *Gossip Girl* novels describe a cosmopolitan world, but not a very nice one.

In contrast, *The Princess Diaries* (Cabot, 2000)

features an upper middle class teen, Mia Thermopolis, who is far less reptilian than the *Gossip Girl* characters. Yet even before she learns that she is royalty, Mia’s landscapes of privilege are just as apparent as those in the aforementioned series. While Mia’s hometown in the Disney movies is San Francisco, in the novels she attends a Manhattan private school and lives in “a bohemian artist’s loft in Greenwich Village.” As endearing as Mia’s penchant for awkward situations and clumsiness might be, even before she learns that she is a princess, she is a transnational cosmopolite, spending summers with her wealthy father and *grandmere* in the fictional nation of Genovia.

Once Mia learns that she is heir to the throne, she processes the information inside of a women’s powder room in the Plaza Hotel. Mia breaks the fourth wall and shares in a breathless aside, “I don’t know if you’ve ever been to the ladies’ room at the Plaza, but it’s like totally the nicest one in Manhattan. It’s all pink, and there are mirrors and little couches everywhere, in case you look at yourself and feel the urge to faint from your beauty or something . . . I went into one of the stalls, each of which, besides a toilet, has its own private sink with a huge dressing table with a little stool with tassels hanging off it” (pp. 38–39). Clearly, Mia is familiar with a number of settings that are fit for a crown princess even before she learns of her royal status. Her launch into the cosmopolitan status of a monarch is rocky, but does not require an unbelievable stretch of the imagination. One may speculate on the reasons why Mia’s privilege prior to becoming a princess is downplayed in the Disney movie—other than attending private school, she is portrayed as a middle class teenaged girl. Perhaps those responsible for translating her character from page to screen believed that adolescent girls from all socioeconomic classes might be more sympathetic toward a character that could relate to their experiences.

Not all teen characters inhabit privileged urban space uncritically. In *Little Brother*, (Doctorow, 2008) Marcus is the leader of a group of teen hackers who chafe against the restrictions of their surveilled environment in a San Francisco of the near future, and then are caught up in the nation’s most devastating terrorist attack since 9/11. Marcus lives with his parents in a gentrified older neighborhood in the city, Potrero Hill: “It’s all residential streets, and the old Victorian houses they call ‘painted ladies’ for their

gaudy, elaborate paint jobs, and front gardens with scented flowers and tall grasses. Housecats stare at you from hedges, and there are hardly any homeless” (2008, p. 75). At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the average listing price for real estate in Potrero Hill was \$766,434 (trulia.com), while the median national price for a single family home is only \$183,100. Unlike the characters in other geographies

As gentrification and the new urbanism become reality in many of our cities, it is important to rethink mid-20th-century conceptions of city spaces.

of privilege, Marcus sees the living conditions of challenge. He contrasts his neighborhood with a poorer one, the Mission: “Lots of rowdy drunks and angry crackheads and unconscious junkies, and also lots of families with strollers, old ladies gossiping on stoops, lowriders with boom-cares going thumpa-thumpa-thumpa down

the streets . . . also drag queens, angry gang kids, graffiti artists and bewildered gentrifiers trying not to get killed while their real estate investments matured” (pp. 70–71). Marcus is self-aware of the class differences in his city, but his notoriety on the Internet imbues him with a cosmopolitan status that would not be possible without access to the latest technology, accessories, and equipment.

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things (Mackler, 2003) offers another critique of urban upper class landscapes. Virginia is the plus-sized daughter of a psychologist specializing in adolescents. She is obsessed with being thin, especially in light of her two naturally svelte older siblings. Her brother, Byron, is a sophomore at Columbia University. To Virginia, his surroundings seem to serve as a metaphor for his good looks and apparent charm: “As I step through Columbia’s entryway, all the buildings look identical—stately, stone, draped in ivy . . . it’s a balmy fall afternoon, so the grassy expanses in front of the majestic library are overflowing with students” (p. 48). Later in the story, when she rebels against her parents’ ostracism because of her weight and visits her best friend in the Pacific Northwest, Virginia finds an urban landscape where she feels at home: “As I gaped at Mount Rainier, I was both speechless and elated. That’s how I’ve been since I arrived in Seattle.

Not speechless as much as elated. For the first time in months, I’ve been laughing at even the silliest things . . .” (p. 172). Her relationship with food even changes as she reflects on the geographies of social privilege in both cities: “The strangest thing is that I’m not thinking about food all the time. Rather than constantly munching, like I do at home, I’m just eating when I’m hungry” (p. 172). For Virginia, upper crust New York is a place where she must eat to cope with her sadness; in Seattle, however, she can fill the void with social interaction. She takes what she has learned about herself through the Seattle trip back to the Big Apple, and is empowered.

Traditionally, novels set in upper middle class and elite settings in the city have not been classified or categorized as urban. Yet as gentrification and the new urbanism become reality in many of our cities, it is important to rethink mid-20th-century conceptions of city spaces, which were more appropriate for a time when suburban car culture was in its infancy and cities were in decline (Sandercock, 2003). Today, “contemporary cities are sites of struggles over space, which are really two kinds of struggle: one a struggle of life space against economic space, the other a struggle over belonging” (p. 4). Sandercock also suggests that in cities, often the role of planning “has been to regulate the production and the use of space . . . planners have acted as spatial police . . . regulating *bodies* in space, administering who can do what and be where, and even when” (p. 21). This regulation of the body has some implications for upper middle class and wealthy teen characters, but it also defines the urban landscape for their less-privileged counterparts. In contrast to the privilege found in some communities of 21st-century cities is a geographic landscape of challenge that can be found in others. In the next section, we travel from mansions and penthouses to the ghettos and barrios that are often located within the same city, and examine urban geographies of challenge.

Urban Geographies of Challenge

The modern young adult novel has prominent roots in urban settings, from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967) to *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968). While the landscape of urban privilege in most contemporary adolescent literature is taken for granted or, as in the preceding novels, depicted as desirable, the geographic chal-

lenges of urban life are foregrounded through descriptions of unsafe streets and schools and perilous home environments. The language used to describe these environments is that of decay and the criminal justice system—crumbling streets, sirens, gunshots, and suffocating restrictions on physical movement. When characters do venture outside of the ghetto, the barrio, or the trailer park, they are faced with the realities of racism and class privilege. This type of landscape is what *urban* has come to mean in our popular consciousness.

Some of these stories serve as a general commentary about inequities in our society. Coe Booth's work with youth in the New York City Children's Emergency Service inspired the character of Tyrell (in *Tyrell*, Booth, 2006), a 15-year-old under duress (Blasingame, 2007). Others serve as treatises about the young people whose lives are most imperiled. The protagonist in *Monster* (Myers, 1999a) dreams of being a filmmaker, yet is on trial as an accomplice to murder. Through his film script, the reader is able to visualize the Manhattan Detention Center: "The best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out and someone else is being beaten up and screaming for help. . . . There is a mirror over the steel sink in my cell. It's six inches high, and scratched with the names of some guys who were here before me" (p. 1). In *Bang!* (Flake, 2005), 13-year-old Mann begins his Philadelphia story with "They kill people where I live. They shoot 'em dead for no reason. You don't duck, you die" (p. 1). The realistic urban geography of challenge faced by the characters in *Tyrell*, *Monster*, and *Bang!* stands in stark contrast to the more privileged locales and lives in the city. The cosmopolitan teens of the upper class urban elite travel to locales all over the world, whether real or virtual. In contrast, the worlds of the lower middle class, working class, and impoverished teens navigating challenging landscapes are much more localized and immediate.

Dreaming of better circumstances against all odds is a feature of the urban geography of challenge. In *After Tupac and D Foster* (Woodson, 2008), D serves as a female doppelganger for the soon-to-be-fallen rap star Tupac Shakur: "D started singing real soft 'Dear Mama,' the Tupac song where he talked about having a beef with his mom but loving her anyway . . . we got quiet. An ambulance raced by, and way down the avenue, somebody started honking their car horn like

they didn't have any sense" (p. 19). *The First Part Last* (Johnson, 2004) offers hope through the story of a young teenaged father's love for his baby daughter and the neighborhood that cradles them both: "I used to laugh when this old dude, 'Just Frank' from the corner, used to ask me if I was being a 'man' . . . two days after I brought Feather home, Frank got killed trying to save a girl in the neighborhood from being dragged into an alley by some nut job. Didn't have any family. Didn't have any money. So the block got together to pay for his funeral . . ." (p.

7). In the midst of extremely difficult circumstances, city dwellers constrained by landscapes of challenge display audacious hope, tenacity, and love.

Other characters struggle with whether or not to escape the geography of challenge altogether for more privileged zones. *Way Past Cool* (Mowry, 1992/2007), set in Oakland, California, is the story of the Friends, a skateboarding clique that struggles to hold down their block against the onslaught of rival drug-dealing gangs. Their neighborhood is realized in richly descriptive passages: "Back at the other end of the alley, the boys picked up their school things, shouldered packs, and decked their boards, and the faint jingle of a burglar alarm bell carried from blocks away. The Friends skated casually, weaving around people, dodging the legs of wineheads and zoners sticking from doorways . . ." (p. 56). In this milieu, success is defined and narrated as escaping the ghetto altogether, creating dilemmatic tension for the Friends. Similarly, *Mexican WhiteBoy* (de la Peña, 2008) deals with the challenges of biracial identity in the barrio. As Uno considers whether to move to Oxnard with his African American father or remain with his Mexican mother, National City is described: "Uno's stuck in the middle . . . like it's some tug-of-war between black and Mexican, and he's the rope . . . he cuts into the mouth of Las Palmas Park, slides down the ice-plant-covered hill, races along the weed-infested baseball field, and leaps the crumbling fence along the first-base line. He ducks under the rusted bleachers, chest heaving in and out, heart pounding in his throat"

Dreaming of better circumstances against all odds is a feature of the urban geography of challenge.

(p. 38). Struggling with his dilemma, it is interesting to note that Uno enters the virtual prison of the rusty bleachers, restricting his own physical movement for hours as he considers his choices.

Although in our popular culture, “urban” is often synonymous with “poor,” “African American,” and/

or “Latino,” there are a growing number of stories that expand these formulations. *Chasing Tail Lights* (Jones, 2008) is set in working class Flint, Michigan, featuring white characters that are underprivileged and longing to escape. The main character in Johnson’s *Suite Scarlett* (2008) has to clean hotel rooms for a living. *Almost*

Home (Blank, 2007) and *Absolutely Maybe* (Yee, 2009) feature white teens who run away to Hollywood in search of fame and fortune. *The Hoopster* (Sitomer, 2005) and *Black or White* (Volponi, 2005) feature urban interracial clashes that ultimately end in disaster.

In order to tell 21st-century urban tales, stories of privilege and challenge are necessary. The geography of privilege features symbolic places that bring to mind princesses, nobility, incredible wealth, even (in the case of the *Gossip Girl* series) greed, excess, and overindulgence. The geography of challenge, on the other hand, highlights people and places that bring to mind social justice, altruism, social change, and knowledge about not only what we might do for the least of these, but also the power of the least of these. For many readers of urban fiction, and their teachers, the challenging landscapes of the ’hood are beloved. In *What They Found: Love on 145th Street* (Myers, 1999b), everyone is interconnected, from the crossing guards to store owners: “The bodega on 138th Street is always the first store open that takes our card. Mr. Alvarez always says he shouldn’t let me use it, but he always does . . .” (Myers, 1999b, p. 31). Along with the possibility of thriving in these spaces through strategies of mutual interdependence, there are moments of tranquility and harmony that the barrio and the ghetto provide to poor and working class city dwellers. The sentiment of the opening quote is echoed by one of the Philadelphia boys in *You Don’t*

Even Know Me (Flake, 2010). “I watch my neighbors kicking back, talking on cells and to each other. I hear Miss Bert yelling to someone to bring her a bowl of butter pecan ice cream, and some grease so she can oil her scalp” (p. 166). He goes on to reflect on how much he appreciates where he lives: “Philly heat. It makes people stay outdoors all night long . . . that’s why I like it though . . . knowing that it ain’t all bad; ain’t all good, neither. It’s just where I live. My hood” (p. 167).

Intersecting Trajectories in the City: Where Privilege Meets Challenge

As we consider urban settings, Pratt suggests that a contact zone is “the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt, 1992). Intersecting trajectories that blend urban landscapes of privilege and challenge are prevalent in recent young adult literature. Even though urban spaces are often carefully planned and/or policed to keep the privileged and the challenged separate, coevalness or “the sharing of the present time” is a fundamental condition for social change and social justice (Duncan, 2006). It is inevitable that the trajectories of those who live in various urban spaces will intersect, for better or for worse. Additionally, the notion of *who* is urban, *what* locations in urban space are like, and *how* place is represented is central in many young adult texts.

Twenty-first century Romeo and Juliets abound, from *Romiette and Julio* (Draper, 1999), to *Othello* (Lester, 1998), to *Son of the Mob* (Korman, 2004). Woodson’s *If You Come Softly* (1998) is the story of Ellie, who is white, and Jeremiah, who is black. Their story captures the wonders of first love and the agony of the tragedy caused by their intersecting trajectories in Washington Heights. On a lighter note, Cohn and Levithan’s *Nick and Norah’s Infinite Playlist* (2006) features the star-crossed pairing of Nick, who is from Hoboken and the straight bassist in a queer-core band, and Norah, a Jewish girl who attends a Catholic school. Norah’s noticings in the beginning are less than flattering toward Nick: “NoMo dresses so bad—he has to be from Jersey . . . the van’s probably a piece of scrap metal with a leaking carburetor that as likely as not will pop a tire or run out of gas in the middle of the Lincoln Tunnel . . .” (p. 10). Although

The notion of *who* is urban, *what* locations in urban space are like, and *how* place is represented is central in many young adult texts.

the course of true love never did run smoothly, Nick and Norah manage a happy ending at the end of their hilariously profane romp through New York City.

A growing number of young adult authors situate characters of color in middle class and elite settings. In *A La Carte* (Davis, 2008), Lainey is a San Francisco vegan who dreams of being the African American answer to Julia Child. She creates magnificent recipes in a tattered notebook and works part-time at her single mom's fusion restaurant: "The noise this afternoon isn't as urgent yet as it is during dinner service. So far it's laughter, conversation, the rhythmic *thunk, thunk, thunk* of heavy knives slicing through vegetables and bone to make stock for the gravies and sauces . . . the back door opens" (p. 26). The sights and sounds of this black urban teen's lifeworld are very different from those found in city landscapes of challenge. *Marcelo in the Real World* (Stork, 2009) is the lyrical story of a mildly autistic Latino teen who is the son of a Boston attorney. Through working in his father's law firm over the summer, Marcelo experiences life beyond the protective environments of his home and school. "We are walking on the sidewalks next to streets clogged with cars. The sidewalks themselves are difficult to walk because of the number of people rushing to catch trains and buses, I suppose, or just to get away from their jobs as fast as they can. But as we move from the center of town, there is more room and I can walk next to Jasmine without having to dodge rushing people" (p. 110). Jasmine is the key that unlocks Boston for Marcelo, inspiring him as he gains the confidence to enroll in a comprehensive high school.

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, formed another convergence where geographies of privilege and challenge intersected. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Foer, 2005) is the story of *wunderkind* Oskar, whose father perished in the Twin Towers. His detective work takes him all over the five boroughs of New York City, where he meets people from all walks of life who were profoundly affected by the incident. Throughout Foer's novel, visual depictions of the tragedy and even the ways that words are spaced on each page form an internal urban geography designed to evoke a tragic time. *Love Is the Higher Law* (Levithan, 2009) includes the first-person stories of three teens on the morning of 9/11, positioned and impacted differently. Set two years after the events of 9/11,

Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You (Cameron, 2007) is a *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) for the new millennium, where cynical protagonist James questions everything—materialism, sexuality, and urban life. As James observes, "The majority of the world's conflicts are caused by religious intolerance. I could go on and on with this, especially with things like 9/11, but I won't" (p. 41).

Intersecting trajectories create cities of our dreams and nightmares. *The Dead and the Gone* (Pfeffer, 2008) is the sequel to a novel that speculated on what might happen if our moon's trajectory was knocked closer to Earth. While the first tale was set in exurbia, in *The Dead and the Gone*, Alex Morales must navigate the landscape of postapocalyptic New York through his resourcefulness, connections to the city's elite, and faith in God. Alex's city landscape becomes perilous during a winter storm:

"It took an hour just to get to Seventieth Street, and by then Bri was having difficulty breathing. Julie fell on Sixty-eighth Street, and [he] had to pull her up, which took more energy than he cared to spare at that point. Some of the snow got into Julie's boots, and she began shivering uncontrollably" (p. 263). The urban landscape in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) is even more bleak; in this dystopian successor to the United States, the Capitol is the rich metropole where children from the impoverished peripheral districts go to die in a gladiatorial contest. District 12 tribute Katniss Everdeen notes, "My quarters are larger than our entire house back home. They are plush, like the train car, but also have so many automatic gadgets that I'm sure I won't have time to press all the buttons. The shower alone has a panel with more than a hundred options you can choose . . ." (p. 75). The descriptions of the luxury and indolence of the Capital are starkly contrasted to the near-starvation that District residents must endure. Yet not all imagined cities are nightmarish. *Lyra's Oxford* (Pullman, 2003) is delightfully whimsical, and the accessible Bluford High (Langan, 2006) series features positive characters from tough backgrounds.

This reading of city landscapes in young adult

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, formed another convergence where geographies of privilege and challenge intersected.

novels is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but to provide insight into looking at privilege, challenge, and the contact zones where the two geographies intersect as a method of highlighting urban issues that future generations will have to consider within the context of their 21st-century world. Discourses of cosmopolitanism, gentrification, increased attention to the local, and managing conflict and tension within contact zones

Urban geographies provide an opportunity for young readers and the stakeholders in their lives to consider the present and future states of our cities wherein the privileged and the challenged meet.

dominate national and global politics as well as media headlines. At a time when our natural resources are being depleted, our energy sources are becoming strained to the breaking point, and there is a dearth of unfiltered information about the challenges that even the most privileged of our teens will face in their lifetimes, texts that present urban geographies provide an opportunity for young readers and the

stakeholders in their lives to consider the present and future states of our cities wherein the privileged and the challenged meet.

Learning More about Urban Landscapes in Literature and Life

Examining urban landscapes has practical applications for teaching, learning, and activism. A popular activity used in multicultural education and diversity training is the *privilege walk*, during which a series of statements are read, and participants must move backwards or forwards according to whether it applies or not. Previously, a colleague and I described our use of the privilege walk with a challenging ninth-grade class:

In this activity, space is used to visually represent the racial, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic differences among the students in the class. The objective of the privilege walk is to help students understand the nature of privilege (in society). Students line up across the middle of the room, the facilitator reads a series of statements, and students take steps forward or backward depending on whether the statement applies to them.

Sample statements include, “If you were ever discouraged from academics or jobs because of race, class, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back” and “If your family ever inherited money or property, take one step forward” (Sassi & Thomas, 2008).

At the end of the activity, the most privileged participants are standing near the front of the space, while the least privileged are near the back. This provides a visual landscape representing the persistence of inequities in our schools and society. Participants often report that the privilege walk is transformative for them and aids their understanding of issues of social justice (Cooper, 2007; Sassi & Thomas, 2008).

A useful extension after reading a young adult novel set in urban spaces would be to conduct a *challenge walk*. This is an activity that I often facilitated in my Creative Writing and Magazine classes in an urban magnet high school. First, I secured permission from building administrators and/or parents, depending upon the age range of the students involved. Then I did a bit of informal pre-teaching about participant-observation methods and strategies. I did not prescribe what students ought to take away from the experience of walking the neighborhood nearest the school, nor did I provide a set of questions. Instead, I talked about the best ways to capture details, and brainstormed with the students about how to proceed. Next, students were equipped with disposable cameras and small notebooks. Finally, we mapped out our route and started walking.

Once we returned, the students and I processed what we saw. They chose to journal about their experiences, write poetry, and conduct investigative journalism about unsafe conditions. Now that I am a teacher educator, I ask my university preservice and inservice teachers to write and draw a *conceptual map of local challenge and privilege*. When I talk to my preservice teachers about this activity, I suggest that they use the *Beginner’s Guide to Community-Based Arts* (Schwarzman & Knight, 2006), *Ethnographic Eyes* (Frank, 1999), and even the delightful *My Map Book* (Fanelli, 1995) if they are planning to guide students through analyses of their own neighborhoods and communities. (Students could also use one of the young adult novels discussed above to make their conceptual maps.) Young adults are asked to first think, then write, using the following series of prompts:

- What challenges are unique to our neighborhood? Where is privilege located? Where and how do privilege and challenge intersect?
- Which areas are unique? Which might interest a newcomer? Which are most beloved and sacred to us?
- What resources are here? What is being overlooked? What is being exploited and overused? What is being treasured?
- What might we wish to preserve? What might we wish to change?

Another related project that can be done with secondary English language arts students is a *literary social analysis*. Students first read a young adult novel of their choosing, or an adult novel that features teen characters. Selection guidelines for the project are: 1) the book has to have an urban setting, and 2) a parent or guardian has to sign a permission slip acknowledging that they are aware of what their teen is reading. Students then identify a primary social challenge that their characters face, or that is inherent in the setting. Using school and district libraries, they find three or more nonfiction articles that deal with the topic—teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, urban violence, mental health, etc. They present summaries and analyses of their research to the class. These drafts eventually become a position paper. During the next two weeks, students read their high-interest urban novels, summarize them, and then use their position paper as a secondary source to write an analysis. Students then present and publish their finished papers as a capstone project for the benefit of the class and community.

At the dawn of a new century, it is as vital for urban dwellers to recognize hope and possibility in the city as it is for suburban and rural kids to view cities as opportunities for new visions of empathy for others, virtual experiences, and cross-cultural understanding. Urban adolescent literature has the potential to encourage all of us to recognize and critically interpret the real conditions of our existence. Authors of today's fiction for young adults are on the vanguard of new ways of visualizing urban spaces. Those of us living at the intersections of these trajectories—teachers, librarians, students, and activists—are similarly positioned to build the cities of our dreams.

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NCTE Literacy Education Advocacy Day 2011: April 28

Join NCTE members from across the nation for NCTE's Literacy Education Advocacy Day on Thursday, April 28, 2011. NCTE members attending Advocacy Day will learn the latest about literacy education issues at the federal level and have a chance to interact with people highly involved with those issues. See <http://www.ncte.org/action/advocacyday> for details.

“A Family from a Continent of I Don’t Know What”:

Ways of Belonging in Coming-of-Age Novels for Young Adults

We must have looked like some kind of family
going along in our separate kinds of walks:
Jeremy dancing his Hacky sack dance,
Jilly shimmying her shimmy of
“I got no problems, no babies’ dads disappeared on me
and I ain’t been fired from my job”
Jilly bouncing on my arm and humming
and leaning out from my hip like a flag waving itself.
A family from the continent of I don’t know what
—Wolff, *Make Lemonade*, p. 91

The students in our classrooms learn to comprehend, make meaning of, and express information and ideas when they become literate, but they also develop a very particular social self in relation to their interaction with texts (e.g., Collins & Blot, 2003; de Castell, 1997; Yageleski, 2000). Whether they are aware of this or not, students are met with the work of resisting and challenging particular constructions of texts, thinking through meanings signified by the words and formulas of texts, and finding somewhere in what they read “a place for one’s own story” (Willinsky, 1991, p. 60). But *one’s own story* is of course always relational; it constructs and is constructed by both written and unwritten texts. It is determined, in part, by what Jean Francois Lyotard calls *grand narratives*: stories that explain and further circulate certain belief systems and practices that are entrenched in dominant cultures (Willinsky, 1991).

If we believe that the students in our high schools are in the throes of identity development, then we

might ask ourselves what the *grand narrative* of that development might look like. When students are trying to find and make a place for their own story, what ideas about identity development are they working with and coming up against? The answer to this question is complicated, but it lies deeply embedded in traditional school philosophy and in some classic texts that still have a powerful presence in high school classrooms. The *bildungsroman*, in particular, might be said to embody grand narrative. This genre—which includes texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868/2004), *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908/1989), *Homecoming* (Voigt, 1981), and *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967)—focuses specifically on self-formation and is narrated from the perspective of the character who is coming-of-age, or who reminisces about doing so.

In exploring the grand narrative of self-formation that underwrites the traditional *bildungsroman*, we find a strong link between identity and community.

In this article, I want to express my concern with this connection. The background knowledge many students bring to their reading today may reside in a paradigm that is incommensurate with the one that underlies the grand narrative of adolescent growth. While I acknowledge a continuous need for the classics, I am interested in the ways in which more contemporary young adult coming-of-age novels, such as *Theories of Relativity* (Haworth-Attard, 2005) and *A Room on Lorelei Street* (Pearson, 2005) might be useful for adolescents who struggle to understand traditional relationships between identity and place.

The Purpose of Literacy Practice during the Nationalist Regime

For many teachers, education is, at least in part, about fortifying students' characters—establishing their social selves (de Castell, 1996). Before new technologies competed with the written text, the book was the definitive resource for self-preservation and self-formation, and the high school English curriculum valued texts that would shape the character of the students, the community, and the nation (de Castell, 1996). English teachers who embrace this tradition might still provide their classes with a survey of canonical texts in order to trace the character or the spiritual and ideological essence of places and times in history. Whether a character's growth takes place in an urban setting, such as the Williamsburg tenement in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (Smith, 1943/2005), or a pastoral setting, as with *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908/1989), canonical coming-of-age novels have been, and continue to be, lessons in how identity and character are very much affiliated with time and place.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, or what is known as the early nationalist phase in Western society, the production and consumption of literature enacted a "capacious, symbolic form of nation and belonging" (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 78). Filled with national lore, the literature of America, the nascent land of opportunity, encouraged self-improvement above all else. By reading texts, Americans began to faithfully "construe themselves as and through a 'fictive people' who share an origin" (p. 78). We might say that most educators of this nationalist phase, which stretches to the middle of the twentieth century, linked Western literature to notions of belonging,

considered reading to be a process of self-making, and valued education as a way to prepare young people to belong to the nation in various ways, through stable employability, citizenship, and domesticity (Collins & Blot, 2003).

The Classic *Bildungsroman*

The *bildungsroman* is deeply rooted in culture; its primary focus is on "the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience" (Hardin, 1991, pp. xxii–xxiii). The young character achieves cultivation and education through linear stages of development, moving from error to truth and from confusion to enlightenment. Although writers focus on the character's unique private life and thoughts during this growth process, these thoughts are ultimately representative of an age, culture, and place (Tennyson, 1968, p. 136).

As in many well-known folktales and fantasies, there is often a period in this novel where the young adolescent steps outside his or her comfort zone and attempts to impose private meanings and ideologies over the unknown world in order to make sense of it. This aspect of the text speaks to the angst-ridden, disorienting years of meaning-making that a teenager grapples with. However, the main character often learns that the world must be *domesticated*, normalcy must be found, and preparations must begin for life in a middle class society (Barney, 1999, p. 69)). The denouement of the *bildungsroman* ensures that the private identity and ideologies of the main character are commensurate with those of the public sphere. According to Bakhtin, the action and discourse of characters in novels always represent a definite ideological position (Davidson, 1993); in the traditional coming-of-age novel, the ideological position is ultimately posited as unified and representative (Kester, 1995).

Time has a generative and productive purpose in the coming-of-age text. The growth of the main character is related to the growth of his or her culture; "the son will continue the father, the grandson, the son—and on a higher level of cultural development" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 204). The *bildungsroman* is meant to promote a sense of self in the reader to a greater degree than any other text, and the protagonist, such as Fenwick in Capote's *The Grass Harp* (1951), or

Spaulding in Badbury's (1957) *Dandelion Wine*, is encouraged to see himself or herself belonging to something larger (Kushigian, 2003). Coming-of-age novels such as *Huck Finn* (Twain, 1884/2001) and *Little Women* (Alcott, 1989/2004) disseminate values that are both national and normative, where what is national constitutes what is considered normative growth within that nation's parameters. These values are personified in the discourse and action of memorable young characters.

The grand narrative behind this depiction of adolescent growth supports the humanist conception of identity as an entity with a core or essence, which develops in layers throughout stages of life, progressing toward a fixed place. In 1968, Erikson spoke for an ideology deeply ingrained in the academy when he noted that identity formation is "a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (p. 22). Although the adolescent experiences angst while grappling with this external frame of reference in the community, humanists assure us that there *is* a homogenous core in his or her communal culture—something to grow toward, to negotiate, and to, ultimately, define the self by.

The Classic *Bildungsroman* and Today's Teen

There are various reasons why some students in our modern schools cannot relate to characters that grow up in linear fashion to become cohesive representatives of their communities. Our late-capitalist society has outgrown the industrial paradigm that loomed large throughout the nationalist phase and viewed school as an institution that could, alongside parental and community assistance, prepare students to obtain lifetime employment or settle into a home in a stable community. Ideally, in the *bildungsroman*, characters are apprentices who inherit stability. Parents and benefactors augment, or supplement, formal education with informal training and guidance towards specific, fixed trades, careers, and proper positions in society. The *bildungsroman* begins as a hopeful subgenre, catered to middle class audiences with—as Charles Dickens aptly noted—great expectations.

More often than not, the notion of inheriting stability is a chimera that may betray our youth or may be too remote for today's students to entertain. Many

students, especially those of lower socioeconomic status, are all too aware of the unstable, changing job market, with its high unemployment and welfare rates. It may be difficult for some students to seek additional or supplementary guidance from parents who are still shifting jobs and identities themselves. Case studies of inner city youth highlight these conditions and seem to suggest that they no longer live life "as a journey towards the future, but as a condition" (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 640). The grand narrative that views education as a means of allowing the adolescent to promptly reach a fixed, stable place does not provide a road map that many of our teens will buy into.

Mass immigration and globalization has also changed our student bodies and has called into question the relevance of the notion of a community core that our curriculum materials support and to which our students are expected to relate (Luke, 1998). A large percentage of our urban youth belong to immigrant families and may still have strong affiliations with other countries and places. To this end, national space cannot be figured as a fluid extension of family and communal space; each of these spaces may be affiliated with completely different, shifting signs and meanings. Instead, we might view national, community, home, neighborhood, and virtual (Internet) spaces as "exist[ing] in both hierarchical and dialogical relations with each other," competing to inform the identity of urban teens (Moje, 2004, p. 20). Coming-of-age texts featuring young characters who grow up in cohesive communities do not speak to the multiple spaces of youths' lives and their negotiation of different, provisional communities.

Identity and Difference

The general response to this change in the student body addresses the need to place multicultural fiction alongside traditional favorites like the *bildungsroman*. If a reading of the text enacts a process of self-creation, new voices and choices of self-creation must be added to the canon, so that every reader can develop "heightened sensitivity to others, and a more fully articulated set of values and principles" that are representative of different races, genders, and classes (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 380).

However, a conception of culture that often informs multicultural education tends to view attributes

of social groups and communities as closed entities, which can be represented by exemplary pieces of literature that frame cultural essences (Yon, 1999). For example, educators might attempt to address alterity—any condition of feeling “other” that remains unexpressed—by using multicultural anthologies, which come replete with introductions that frame and represent different cultures. The middle class, human-

The subculture of the adolescent and the construction of adolescent growth-into-community is a theme high school students might be interested in exploring as researchers, positioning themselves as objects of their own critical inquiry.

ist discourse the school employs to talk about a novel or short story from an ethnic-minority author might overlook the heteroglossia of that text, specifically, the diverse discourses within the text that challenge the establishment of characters as cohesive ideologues of their culture (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). The notion that differences reside *between* and not *within* different cultural, ethnic, and social communities accompanies this resistance to heteroglossia. Such

education runs the risk of promoting what Fish calls *boutique multiculturalism*—a superficial, if genuine and well-intended, appreciation of another culture or ethnicity that is all too easily compartmentalized (1997, p. 378).

This boutique multiculturalism might be seen as a resonance of the nationalist legacy that still permeates the language arts classroom in North America. For years, the hope was that literature in the school might familiarize diverse populations with a community or national core (Collins & Blot, 2003); currently, even though a plurality of cultures might be recognized, there seems to be a continued orientation toward community that “assumes relationships between ‘personal identity’ and ‘cultural identity’ as unproblematic” (Yon, 1999, p. 624). When this relationship is problematic in education, we have for too long construed the resolution as simply a matter of locating and unveiling the unique, different cultural core of a marginalized individual. To this end, educational practice employs alternative ways of endorsing the same grand

narrative of identity development we have become familiar with through the years.

Trying to escape this quandary proves to be a difficult feat for English educators. It is difficult to read for difference without framing alterity when we read within a humanist institution founded on a collective, communal goal. If we push education to a place that resists an orientation toward community and confronts an entirely different conception of citizenship, our tendency to cling to the value of literature as a social cohesive and reading as something that unites us makes it difficult to promote solidarity. As a starting point, however, we have to discard the grand narrative that fails to note how increasingly complex the link between identity and place is becoming. We need to acknowledge new affiliations made between different socially situated identities and appreciate the conception of identity as fragmentary, local, and contingent on a person’s involvement and interaction with his or her world. As Giroux (2000) noted,

Identity can no longer be written through the lens of cultural uniformity or enforced through the discourse of assimilation—rather students bring to the classroom not some unified grand narrative but multiple narratives representing diverse immigration and language and cultural experiences. (p. 190)

When reading coming-of-age novels, the focus on individuals, in and of themselves, might be redirected to a focus on how individuals are *produced* in an effort to sort through this production (Leander, 2002). Identity is not just a matter of being; it is continuously, endlessly, and elusively a matter of becoming (Yon, 1999, p. 625)

New Narratives: A Selection of Contemporary Young Adult Novels

This conception of identity-as-process has multiple, overwhelming implications for literacy practice. Spatial and discourse theorists have come up with numerous ways in which students can interact with others, reposition themselves, and engage with multiple written and nonwritten texts in order to continually deconstruct and rewrite their identities. Most of these implications reach far beyond the scope of this article, but the *bildungsroman* is a particularly useful resource because it is explicitly and primarily concerned with *becoming*. It is a novel of apprenticeship, of learning, and of self-development.

We might find many classic coming-of-age novels for young adults to be valuable for much more than, and in spite of, the hegemony and cultural capital they advocate. The subculture of the adolescent and the construction of adolescent growth-into-community is a theme high school students might be interested in exploring as researchers, positioning themselves as objects of their own critical inquiry. Teachers might juxtapose a traditional *bildungsroman* with a contemporary rewriting of the novel to help students explore what was and what is expected of them as they become young adults, so that they might resist or deal with such expectations with a discerning eye.

If teachers were to do a lesson on the theme of identity development, it might be interesting to pair Alcott's (1868/2004) classic, *Little Women*, with a contemporary *bildungsroman* for young adults. *Little Women* chronicles the experiences of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy—as they grow up, each with unique desires and aspirations. Critics have disagreed about whether the novel seeks a new vision of women's subjectivity or argues for the continued confinement of women to the domestic realm (Parille, 2001, p. 34). Feminist readings of little women focus on sympathy for Jo's impatience with ladylike decorum and her career aspirations (Seelye, 2005), and yet Amy's troubles as an artist, and the way in which Beth's death aids in the strengthening of the sisters' bonds and their sense of familial loyalty might be read as a nod to the endurance of provincial life—and family and communal sphere that binds the identity one grows into.

There is a longing in Alcott's (1868/2004) young female characters to present themselves in particular ways, to find and become the best part of themselves. Jo has become a much-loved character for her tomboyish, defiant ways, but she, too, along with the other sisters, sets out specific goals to help better herself: "You laugh at me when I say I want to be a lady, but . . . I want to be above the little meanness and follies and faults that spoil so many women" (Alcott, 1868/2004, p. 279). This desire to find the best version of the self sets the girls on different and conflicting paths; at times it sends them out into the world, and this leads to excitement, but this excitement is then countered with questions of where a person's responsibility should lie and where one might best seek a place for fulfillment.

A passage worthy of students' attention involves a philosophical debate Jo attends in the city. This debate fascinates her and stirs in her the aspiration to do big things in the world. Professor Bhaer quickly reminds her of religious and familial bonds, and the idea that one's natural character is most important—"a better possession than money, rank, intellect, or beauty" (p. 320). Here, character begins and ends with an identity that is grounded in community.

Regardless of where the March sisters seek fulfillment, Hollander (1981) noted that a "satisfying continuity" informs all the lives of girls who seek to find themselves (p. 28). The characters are possessed with traits that allow for some form of stasis in their personality, even amidst tribulations and change. For Hollander,

Alcott creates a world where a deep "natural piety" indeed effortlessly binds the child to the woman she becomes. The novel shows that as a young girl grows up, she may rely with comfort on being the same person, whatever mysterious and difficult changes must be undergone in order to become an older and wiser one (p. 28).

There is something quite beautiful and compelling in the loyalty and love we find in Alcott's (1868/2004) text, but it may be interesting to pair this text, or sections of it, with more contemporary novels, such as those in Wolff's (1993) *Make Lemonade* trilogy, where loyalties are more fractured and difficult and where love lies in unusual places, with untraditional characters. This series focuses on the coming-of-age experiences of Verna LaVaughn. Unlike Jo's comfort in the stability of character, *True Believer's* (Wolff, 2002) Lavaughn muses that

When a little kid draws a picture
it is all a big face
and some arms stuck on.
That is their life.
Well, then: you get older,
and you are a whole mess of things:
new thoughts, sorry feelings,
big plans, enormous doubts
going along hoping and getting disappointed
over and over again
No wonder I don't recognize
my little crayon picture.
It appears to be me.
And it is.
And it is not. (p. 3)

This reflection is understandable when the reader con-

siders all that fourteen-year-old LaVaughn has been privy to by the end of *Make Lemonade* (1993): her father's accidental death during a gang shooting from a bullet that wasn't meant for him, the violent physical and sexual abuse of a young woman she babysits for, and urban poverty that structures all of her surroundings. The complexity of LaVaughn's life results in occasional feelings of displacement from her younger self. LaVaughn's attitude is life-affirming; like the March sisters, she is vivacious and inspired, and she also wants to better herself. And yet, for LaVaughn, this betterment involves self-sustainability. She desires a college education that will allow her to move on from her makeshift, poor, and troubled community.

It is significant that the place of LaVaughn's upbringing remains unnamed; she lives in public housing, but this could be any project in North America. The projects are, of course, owned by others. They are not marked by national and communal history and character; they do not carry with them a *spirit* or *essence* to which the growing adolescent can hinge his or her identity. In the *Make Lemonade* trilogy, the communal sphere is unstable and shifting, and what little sense of community LaVaughn grows into is found almost by default, when she answers a babysitting ad posted at school. In order to make money for college, she hesitantly takes the job and finds herself caught up in the life of

Jolly, teenage mother of two children from different fathers. Jolly lives in squalor and disorder as she continues to struggle against the experiences and the dangerous web of connections made during her life on the streets.

Make Lemonade (Wolff, 1993) is filled with self-reflexivity, and as LaVaughn reflects on her growth, she brings salient memories of her life to the reader's attention. Often, these memories are fragmented: she sees parts of her dead father's face; she confronts sudden smells on unnamed street corners that remind her of him; she sees flashes of the mismatched socks and short pants belonging to Jeremy, the young boy she babysits and grows fond of; she indulges in visions of herself, Jolly, and Jeremy and the baby on the city street one afternoon, all disheveled, all lost in their own world, and yet in some ways happy together "like a family from a continent of I don't know what" (p. 91).

When Jolly loses her factory job, LaVaughn has to decide if she should continue giving her time to the family for free or if she should remove herself from the situation. She reflects on the words she hears in the esteem class she takes at school:

One good thing you do in a day for somebody else don't cost you.
But then they go on about how you have to find the good thing
that ain't the wrong good thing. (Wolff, 1993 p. 120)

In some ways, this is not too far from *Little Women* (Alcott, 1868/2004). Here, the process of making a self still happens at the intersection of the personal and the communal; the process of self-creation happens in relation to others and with others. But in *Make Lemonade* (Wolff, 1993), LaVaughn alone seems to be the harbinger of care; her single mother can't really support her college dreams or understand her attachment to Jolly, Jolly isn't paying her and is too troubled to register LaVaughn's own needs, and Jolly's children are too young to really 'know' LaVaughn. She must break through barriers to self-discovery on her own, while she sorts out the people who matter to her and how they fit with what she wants to do. She ponders what is worth carrying with her as she tries to move beyond the world she was born into and mourns, in her own way, what she has to leave behind. LaVaughn's inner resolve, her determination to live a better life, allows her to handle such weighty tasks without being pulled under by them.

Other *bildungsromans* featuring characters who struggle with the issues of modernity and community are briefly explicated in Table 1. The contemporary coming-of-age novels for young adults listed there all resist, to varying degrees, the grand narrative that delineates what a coming-of-age character looks like. Many of these texts feature ethnic minority characters living in major urban centers, and this provides a particularly poignant challenge to the concept of self-formation. Within the nationalist paradigm, immigrant characters are expected to leave their lives into entirely new forms in order to be accommodated into their new schools and communities. Coming-of-age novels, such as *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* (Myers, 2005) and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat, 1994/1998), feature characters who grapple with this process and who do not want to be compromised by

Table 1. Contemporary Coming-of-Age Novels

***A Room on Lorelei Street* (Pearson, 2005).** Pearson's novel features Zoe, a 17-year-old protagonist whose father has passed away, whose mother is an alcoholic, and whose grandmother is too demanding, if caring. These circumstances lead Zoe to rent her own small space and attain a job to support herself. There, she finds an unexpected friend in her elderly landlord. Throughout the novel, she struggles with her desire for happiness and self-sustainability and her need to sort through her confused feelings of love and anger toward her mother. This book asks if teens can create a community and a life for themselves that is uniquely theirs, while still reflecting the complexities and difficulties of dealing with adolescent vulnerabilities and issues.

***Theories of Relativity* (Haworth-Attard, 2005).** Dylan, a 16-year-old street youth, is apathetic to the challenges life has thrown at him—mainly, his family and troubled upbringing. The novel is told from Dylan's wry, bright perspective and is filled with his philosophical musings on what it's like to lack a real place of one's own. Dylan struggles with people who want to help him find his way off the street, but who refuse to invest in more than a superficial understanding of his life's realities and what he needs.

***Alice, I Think* (Juby, 2000).** Alice is a girl who fits nowhere neatly. After her brief stint in public school demonstrated that she was a bit too creative and different to fit in with her peers, she was home-schooled by her new-age parents. Nine years later, her counselor creates some goals for her to help her find a place of belonging beyond her eccentric family sphere. She finds herself attending public school and negotiating her desire to fit in with her desire for a more alternative way of living.

***Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat, (1994/1998)).** Sophie is a Haitian girl growing up in New York. She vacillates between tradition and modernity, between old ideologies and new ones, and finds that her identity falls nowhere neatly. She is deeply affected by the problems, the loneliness, and the lack of community she encounters in the modern city. She learns that she can never really go back—that her longing for home, for tradition, and for an identity that is tied to place, is a regressive, reductive act.

***Born Confused* (Hider, 2002).** *Born Confused* tells the coming-of-age story of Dimple, an Indian American girl growing up in New Jersey. Dimple's best friend, a "blond-haired blue-eyed Marilyn for the skinny generation" calls her "Indian girl," but Dimple reveals to the reader that this description doesn't ring "entirely true to me in terms of how I felt inside, but the thing is, I never really considered myself as American, either" (p. 12). Dimple negotiates different belief systems as she interacts with the people around her and grows close to specific members of her family and her love interest. Her development is a recursive process that turns back on itself, is hindered, and then reworked as she faces the challenges of growing up in a plural, urban, fast-paced society. At the end of the novel, she takes pride in her unique identity—an identity by no means fixed or tightly packaged.

***Tyrell* (Booth, 2006).** Tyrell is a 15-year-old whose coming-of-age experiences, like those in *A Room on Lorelei Street* and *Theories of Relativity*, do not take place in one stable community. Tyrell tells us that the Bronxwood houses, in the Bronx, "used to be my whole world" (p. 1), but we find him in a shelter and then in a roach-infested motel with his mother and brother after they are evicted from their apartment. Tyrell has talents as a DJ and schemes and daydreams about DJing in the Bronx in order to make enough money to help his family. In the meantime, he struggles with teenage issues of sexual frustration, confusion, loneliness, and angst. Tyrell's pursuit of happiness—his own attempt to progress in life—is a challenging one, and he struggles with the moral choices around staying clean and honest while also trying to maintain a sense of belonging with his friends and family in the Bronx.

***The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984).** Esperanza lives in a rented house in a poor Latino section of Chicago. She describes herself as the "girl who didn't want to belong" (p. 106). "I have inherited my grandmother's name," she tells us, "but I don't want to inherit her place" (p. 11). She does not want to be slotted into a Latino stereotype or to end up like the rest of her family, who fulfill the low expectations others have of them. Esperanza tells us that she has to go far away from her home and neighborhood with her books and paper in order to come back "for the ones who cannot get out" (p. 110). She distances herself from her cultural core in order to find her own place in the world.

***Autobiography of My Dead Brother* (Myers, 2005).** This novel focuses on the lives of three young African American men in the aftermath of a friend's death, the victim of a drive-by shooting. Narrated by Jesse, an aspiring artist with an uncertain future, the text also focuses heavily on CJ, who wants to play more jazz than his family will allow, and Rise, who seems to be headed down the wrong path at full speed. The strength of this novel lies in the way that Myer presents these characters and their families as fallible, yet still paints them with a tender, humanizing brush. Like *Tyrell*, the main character grapples with moral choices and has to negotiate his desire to make good decisions that will improve his lot with his desire to remain connected to the people and places around him.

***Nothing but the Truth and a Few White Lies* (Chen Headly, 2006).** Patti Ho is a biracial American teenager with a strict, conventional Taiwanese mother and an absent Caucasian father, whose own identity lies somewhere in the "murky in-between." Patti claims she does "not have a nuclear family, with two perfect parents, but a broken family that periodically goes nuclear on each other" (p. 328). Though her racial background is unique and her issues with her mother are culturally specific, the author does a brilliant job of universalizing her struggles.

or circumscribed to any place. Such texts destabilize the trajectory of growth-into-core community/culture. The characters in these novels lament *and* embrace this destabilizing process, just as students in our classrooms might.

These novels portray what Willinsky (1991) calls “the constant reworking of the world by the silenced and dispossessed,” who want to find voices that are not necessarily commensurate or representative of their dominant *or* marginalized cultures (p. 66). Authors trace the growth of these characters as they grapple with different discourses, establish relationships with different people, move between different spaces, and answer to a constant need to blend, rework, and reinvent the self. In most of the young adult texts I have just listed, it is not formal education, or a move to a progressive, modern community that allows for and provides access to personal fulfillment and a strong sense of identity. Instead, the protagonists must look to their own strengths, talents, and interests as they attempt to figure out what they want to be in life. For Dimple of *Born Confused* (Hidier, 2002), photography helps clarify this vision; for Tyrell (Booth, 2006), mixing records helps bring happiness and possible financial security; for Jessi in *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* (Myers, 2005), art provides hope. Such texts are not about finding a geographical *place of belonging* but, rather, a *way to belong* in diverse and fragmented societies.

Conclusion

The texts I have discussed and listed are not meant to serve as representatives of distinct cultures, nor are they a panacea to which all students struggling to find their story can turn for a remedy. However, all of the texts feature characters who struggle to separate their personal history(ies) from their representational history: a feat that delineates growth as a difficult, nonlinear, and lonely process—but a feat that points to dignity and resilience. Here, we see that dominant discourses, such as schooled discourse, might silence various private identities of *all students*, but we also see that characters—and adolescent students—can struggle to resist this.

If these texts are used as a *component* of literary practice, combined with instructional methods that facilitate critical inquiry, students in our classrooms

might each find that they can relate, in their own way, to characters who are trying to find their voices amidst all of the written and nonwritten texts in our world that are competing to construct them. Even if a sense of solidarity between student and character is only fleeting, or partial, or understood on a preconscious level, it sets up a nice place of interchange, where “normal growth” can depart from itself to question itself and where variations of memories and histories can persist as students read the texts, think of their own experiences, and perhaps even write their own experiences in an attempt to work and rework their notions of what it means to grow and to belong.

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Portrait of the Artist as a Young Adult:

Who Is the Real Me?

Because young people have concerns about their identities, it is important for those of us who work with adolescents to consider how young adult literature addresses its readers' search for self-knowledge. As part of our exploration, we have been interested in the issues faced by young people who are artists; we wonder whether their art makes life more confusing and whether, in their search for self, it could be helpful to read about other artists. How might reading about young people who use art in crafting their identities help these students better negotiate their real worlds and find a place where they fit in?

In this article and annotated bibliography, we look at how adolescent artists are portrayed in young adult literature geared for older middle and high school students, and we explore what role art plays in the lives of these characters who are musicians, visual artists, photographers, dancers, or thespians. We also provide examples of how to use art-based bridges, or "ways in" to literature and "ways out" of literature to a) appeal to those students in our classrooms who identify themselves as artists, b) appeal to students who may not self-identify as artists but who have diverse learning styles, and c) stretch all our students to think creatively and explore alternative strategies for self-expression. We hope that this process provides to these students a route to self-understanding and healing.

The books we reference could, in some cases, be used for whole-class instruction, given the strong characterization, use of language, or other literary elements; others could be used in classrooms in which

students read one of several books centered on a particular theme, such as "Who am I?" "Finding My Place," "Family Conflicts," or "Courage." We begin our exploration with Junior, who draws cartoons, Billie Jo, who plays the piano, and Kate, who paints.

In Alexie's National Book Award winner *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), Junior is feeling the constraints of his identity as a Spokane Indian, and he is determined to break away from the life he seems destined to live. Junior wonders if he is a traitor when he chooses to leave the reservation to attend an all-white school. He knows that he is a good basketball player, but he is also a budding cartoonist who draws in an effort to negotiate his confusing world and figure out who he is. The complexity of his life is portrayed in his drawing. His words illustrate why he must draw:

I draw all the time.

I draw cartoons of my mother and father; my sister and grandmother; my best friend, Rowdy; and everybody else on the rez.

I draw because words are too unpredictable.

I draw because words are too limited.

If you speak and write in English, or Spanish, or Chinese, or any other language, then only a certain percentage of human beings will get your meaning,

But when you draw a picture, everybody can understand it. . . .

So I draw because I want to talk to the world. And I want the world to pay attention to me.

I feel important with a pen in my hand. I feel like I might grow up to be somebody important. An artist. Maybe a famous artist. Maybe a rich artist. . . .

So I draw because I feel like it might be my only real chance to escape the reservation.

I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats. (Alexie, 2007, pp. 5–6)

For Junior, it is his drawing. For Billie Jo in Hesse’s novel *Out of the Dust* (1997), it is music, specifically playing the piano, which is her “lifeboat.” Faced with the desperation and tragedy of her life during the depression in Oklahoma, she finds solace in playing the piano.

(T)he music
springs straight out of me.
Right hand
playing notes sharp as
tongues,
telling stories while the
smooth
buttery rhythms back me up
on the left.
Folks sway in the
Palace aisles
grinning and stomping and
out of breath,
and the rest, eyes shining,
fingers snapping,
feet tapping. It’s the best
I’ve ever felt,
playing hot piano,
sizzling with
Mad Dog,
swinging with the Black Mesa Boys,
or on my own,
crazy,
pestering the keys.
That is
heaven.
How supremely
heaven
playing piano
can be.
January 1934 (Hesse, 1997, pp. 13–14)

Both Junior and Billie Jo find solace through the making of their respective arts as they also find a way into their sense of self. Through drawing or playing the piano, these young people are able to make sense of the chaos in their lives. A host of other young adult characters use myriad art forms to help explore their identity and order their worlds: Yuki, in *Shizuko’s Daughter* (Mori, 1993), uses her mother’s art and her own photography to move beyond her sorrow over her mother’s death; Patty Yoon, from *Good Enough* (Yoo, 2008), figures out what she wants out of col-

lege and a way to negotiate with her parents through playing her violin; Rosie, in *House of Dance* (Kephart, 2008), manages to reconcile her family through learning ballroom dancing; Gemma, in *The Sweet, Terrible, Glorious Year I Truly Completely Lost It* (Shanahan, 2008), is able to discover some of her core values after being cast as Miranda in *The Tempest*; and in *Skin Deep* (Crane, 2008), Andrea adds color to her world and stands up to her mother as she learns about pottery and new ways of seeing. In our bibliography there are many more examples of young adults who engage in artistic endeavors as part of their quest for identity.

But So What?

Why bother knowing about these stories of young artists? Both of us, now teacher educators, also crafted our identities, at least in part, through our involvement in musical ensembles and theater, so our interest in the topic of the young adult artist comes, in part, from personal awareness of the importance of such activities. Thus, as teachers, we find it relatively easy to make personal connections with our students who juggle their involvement in the school musical, concert choir, or orchestra with their academic responsibilities. However, we both know the limits of our artistic abilities, and while we appreciate visual arts—painting, sculpture, and photography—we do not view ourselves primarily as artists. But then we met Kate, from Oneal’s *In Summer Light* (1985). Kate lives and breathes painting; she sees the world as a painter. Climbing a rock along the shore of the island where she’s spending the summer, Kate finds herself itching to paint its craggy surface with the wet clay of the beach:

. . . she scooped up a handful of clay and made a first great swooping curve low down on the smooth surface. . . she made a series of curves, scooping clay and sweeping it higher on the rock, using the palms of her hands and her fingers like brushes. . . She scooped and painted, laying down great overlapping strokes, interlocking curves, spiraling patterns. She did a series of snail whorls that she remembered having seen on a Cretan vase. Then a sort of free-form octopus shape. Shapes and patterns came to her from pictures she’d looked at, from pottery she’d seen in glass cases in echoing museum rooms. . . Her whole body became a brush. . . She wanted to keep climbing, to keep painting, to go on and on painting her way into the layers of blue above her. (Oneal, 1985, pp. 91–92)

Being with Kate as she paints her rock takes our breath away; we begin to understand that the need of the painter to paint is as strong as the need to breathe. Later in the novel, Kate has fallen in love with Ian; we know this because of the way her painter's mind and heart see him:

When the kite dipped in the evening sky, Kate looked at Ian, looking up. She watched him swim across the pond, walk up through the meadow, butter his toast. She made a hundred drawings in her mind of the angle of his shoulders, the shape of his chin. She imagined painting the terra-cotta of his hair, the white spaces between his fingers when he spread his hand. She learned him in the way she had once learned the meadow, in the smallest, most particular detail—the frayed edge of his shirt sleeve, the crease of his elbow, the squinting lines at the corners of his eyes. (Oneal, 1985, p. 119)

As Kate describes how she sees the world, putting into words the artist's way of being, we have an "aha" moment, we learn a vocabulary for an approach to the environment that we can use to connect not just with Kate, but with those students who are artists in our classrooms. Young adult literature that is centered on characters using art of all sorts to navigate their worlds helps us as teachers make such connections. These books can also give our artistic students a sense of their own worth by letting them find themselves in the pages. And, other students who may at times view their "artsy" peers as outsiders, as "weird," might better appreciate what is going on in their minds and hearts as a result of reading these works.

Using Art to Order the Chaos

There are powerful examples of literature where it is the young person's art that has helped her face very difficult life situations. For example, Melinda, in Anderson's *Speak* (1999/2006), has been traumatized as a result of date rape. It is through an art assignment that she gains perspective and strength enough to express her feelings. In this passage, she looks at her art work and thinks about how she will move on:

My tree needs something. I walk over to the desk and take a piece of brown paper and a finger of chalk. Mr. Freeman talks about art galleries and I practice birds—little dashes of color on paper. . . . I draw them without thinking—flight, flight, feather, wing. Water drips on the paper and the birds bloom in the light, their feathers expanding promise.

IT happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding. . . . And

I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow. (Anderson, 2006, pp. 197–198)

Melinda can now speak. With the help of her art, she has reclaimed her voice.

Similarly, in Krisher's *Spite Fences* (1996), set in Georgia during 1960, Maggie Pugh uses her camera to record the things she witnesses but cannot speak about. Her lack of trust about her own voice is like a fence she cannot climb until she confronts the racism and the abuse in her family and her community. In the meantime, she views life through the lens of her camera, a gift from her black friend Zeke.

Everything was out of control. The colors melted together like a watercolor gone wild: Missy's purple scarf, Bigger's yellow vest, Virgil's black pants, Cecil's blue neckerchief. I saw that it didn't matter what side you were on. When it came to this, it was wrong. . . . I held the camera to my eye. . . . The images before me swam red, filling up the lens. Trip the shutter, Maggie Pugh. What filled my lens was more than the blood gushing from my sweet friend. It was the red color of the fence, the red color of the earth on which I stood. It was red, the color of my life this summer. Cock. Trip. Red: it was the color of Kinship. (Krisher, 1996, pp. 271–272)

Krisher paints vivid, colorful images with her words in Maggie's story, and it is the gift of the camera that gradually helps Maggie find the words to tell what is inside her.

Like Maggie, Georgia, in Bryant's *Pieces of Georgia* (2006), is struggling with what she feels inside. She has been sad and lonely since her mother, an artist, died. She knows her parents met at the Savannah College of Art and Design, but her daddy turns away when he sees her sketchbook, and he doesn't say much. Soon after Georgia's thirteenth birthday, she receives a letter from an anonymous giver with a gift of free admission to the Brandywine River Museum. Her life then begins to change, particularly after her art teacher shows the class Georgia O'Keefe's paintings. Young Georgia had assumed her parents named her for the state where she was born, but when she looks at O'Keefe's works, she remembers her mother's sketches and wonders

if maybe you named me Georgia
for the artist who painted flowers and bones
so that you see them fresh,
like they are secret worlds you can lose yourself inside
if the real one gets too bad. (Bryant, 2006, p. 15)

This lyrical novel by Bryant is an excellent example of how art helps a young person face life's difficulties and come to realize who she really is.

Moving In—Art Activities as Bridges into Literature

It might be the gift of the sketchpad, the camera, or the museum membership that can open up the world to young people like Melinda, Maggie, Kate, and Georgia. As teachers, we, too, in the spirit of Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, can make the gift—of the journal, the crayons, the part in the play, the space to dance or move creatively—available to our students. In so doing, we invite them to explore and perhaps discover an ability or talent previously latent in them that, when tapped, can help them better negotiate the difficult waters of adolescence. Introducing students to such characters is one option for providing them with productive ways of making sense of their pain or confusion, their search for self, while also giving them insights into the artist's way of being in the world.

Bridging in through Music

While the visual arts are the keys to identity for Melinda, Kate, and Georgia, for Patti, in *Good Enough* (Yoo, 2008), it is music. An accomplished violinist, her world is expanded during her senior year when she auditions for the state high school orchestra and meets "Cute Trumpet Boy." She then begins both to develop an appreciation for jazz and a clearer appreciation for the role music can and should play in her life. To introduce *Good Enough*, we can begin by asking students to discuss with a partner the following questions: "How do you define 'the zone'? When do you enter it? What does it feel like? What do you have to do to get there? What brings you back out?"

Then we ask students to free-write individually about a time when they've had to give in to the moment, had to relinquish control of every aspect of a situation in order to be successful. Or, as an alternative, we say they can write about tensions they have experienced between the "shoulds" and "wants" of their lives and how they resolved them. We give the students two minutes to write and then tell them we are going to introduce them to Patti Yoon, whose story is told in *Good Enough* (Yoo, 2008). Patti has always

been able to enter the zone when she's playing her violin. She describes herself as a "B-tier violin prodigy" (p. 15). But music isn't "safe," according to her parents, so she's focused on scoring 2300 or better on her SATs, rounding out her resume with lots of school and church activities, and just using her violin abilities as a hook to help her stand out from the crowd of other exceptional students applying to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. However, from "Cute Trumpet Guy" Ben, she

learns to truly value what music means to her, and, in the process, becomes an even better musician.

After this introduction, we have students listen to an excerpt from Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64: Allegro molto appassionato* as played by Itzhak Perlman. (There is a YouTube video of Perlman playing this piece at age 13, which can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z48nEKIr94>.) As they listen, we have them close their eyes and let their thoughts run loose, keeping track of what they are seeing and feeling.

Here's how Patti describes what happens when she plays:

My bow seems to melt in my right hand, becoming an extension of my arm as I begin the first twenty-four measures of the Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto in E Minor*. The opening melody is played entirely on the E string and is really challenging to play in tune. One tiny slip and the music falls apart. It's like walking on a tightrope with no safety net.

I get into the zone immediately. I'm focused and each note is perfect. As I play, I remember how Mendelssohn was only nine years old when he decided he wanted to write a violin concerto. . . . It took him seven years before he finally finished it. In fact he was so frustrated he almost quit. . . . Remembering all this helps me feel the true emotion behind the music. Of course the opening melody gave Mendelssohn no peace—it's haunting and poignant. The entire concert is filled with tension, with its sweeping lines and complex rhythms. And knowing the composer felt just as frustrated as I do makes me feel better too. . . . (Yoo, 2008, pp. 184–185.)

We tell students that as they read *Good Enough*, they will learn more about Patti's development as both a

It might be the gift of the sketchpad, the camera, or the museum membership that can open up the world to young people like Melinda, Maggie, Kate, and Georgia.

musician, as a “perfect Korean daughter,” and as a young woman growing in self-confidence.

Clearly music can also be used in combination with dance as a related art form to pull students into the world of a character for whom movement becomes a language richer than their everyday vocabulary provides. Rosie, from *House of Dance* (Kephart,

2008), is an example of how students might be guided into the heart of such a young person.

We ask students to stand up and close their eyes and suggest they picture their favorite travel destination—an unusual place they have been to and loved, a place revisited many times, a place they

long to visit often. As they listen to Ella Fitzgerald singing “How High the Moon,” we suggest they let her take them to that place. (There is a recording of her performing this piece at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XauJVEUHXCXCY>.) We might say, “Let your body move and feel the music taking you away from your daily life, away from your nagging siblings or friends, away from the drama and pressures of school. Let your feet follow the path to wherever it is you’re going.”

As Ella sings, we let our students move, or sit still and imagine themselves moving for two minutes. Then we tell them that in *House of Dance* (Kephart, 2008), Rosie is spending the summer looking after her grandfather who is dying of multiple myeloma, “an apocalypse business” (p. 203). In the process, she connects with him, learning of her grandmother’s passion for dancing and his own longings to explore the world, which he never did because, in his own words, he was a “nest-egg man.” We follow by reading pages 137–141, a dialogue between Rosie and her grandfather in which he describes his wife, Rosie’s grandmother, Aideen, dancing to this piece, telling Rosie a bit about Ella in the process:

She came from nothing to become something . . . a school-girl dreaming of becoming a dancer who became a singer almost by accident. Aideen adored her. I’d come home from the refinery, and I’d find her here, in this room, all the furniture all shoved aside and Fitzgerald on the radio, live

from Birdland or the Apollo or someplace. Aideen would be dancing with the moon. Whole moon or quarter. Never mattered. She’d have the music dialed up so loud that she wouldn’t have heard me come in. . . . Nothing was more sensational than Aideen when she danced. . . . (Kephart, 2008, pp. 137–138)

Then we learn Rosie’s response to Ella:

She sang raspy and demanding, giving the song speed. She held some notes forever and chopped others into bits, turned syllables into a million words. . . . There are a hundred million different ways of feeling you’re alone, I once wrote in a paper for Mr. Marinari. There’s the alone of no one home but you. There’s the alone of losing friends. There’s the alone of not fitting in with others. There’s the alone of being unfathered. But then there’s also the alone of a summer day, just after noon, when there’s stillness all around and someone you love nearby is nearly asleep. I sat where I was, didn’t budge one inch, and watched my granddad dreaming. (Kephart, 2008, pp. 140–141)

We tell students that because Rosie becomes intrigued by the images her grandfather conjures up of her grandmother, she steps into the “House of Dance” and enters a very different world of light, color, music, and movement. She is then determined to bring dance to her grandfather’s home, giving him the gift of other times and places. We end by reading a scene in which she talks her friend Nick into helping her out, explaining why dance is so important: “Dancing is the opposite of dying. . . . Dancing is going somewhere without packing your bags. . . . Dancing is the thing I’m giving Granddad” (Kephart, 2008, p. 228). When students read the book, they better understand Rosie and the importance of dance in her life.

Bridging in through Art

Before class, we have to do some preparation.

- First, we create groups of three crayons very close in hue, yellows, greens, purples, blues, peaches, etc., from a box of 64 crayons.
- We make two swatches of color on small pieces of paper from each of the three crayons in the group.
- One set of swatches is numbered #1, a, b, c and additionally labeled on the back with the names of the three crayons in the group. For instance, group # 1, all shades of orange, might include 1a = Neon Carrot, 1b = Mango Tango, and 1c = Sunset Orange. We label the other set of swatches for that group with just the number and letter, no name for the color.

She is then determined to bring dance to her grandfather’s home, giving him the gift of other times and places.

- We put the crayons themselves and the set of color swatches that includes the names of the colors on the back in a baggie and label the whole baggie with the number of the set.
- The other set of swatches for that group goes into a second baggie, also labeled with the appropriate number.

When we are in class, we distribute to groups of three students the baggies with the swatches of color that do not have the actual crayon names on them. The students then work in their groups to explore the differences, though the colors may seem too similar to distinguish. Their task is to come up with names for these colors and reasons for those names; the trick is to be precise enough that someone else can label them in the same way.

We distribute the bags of actual crayons to the same groups, which is fairly easy to do because we have different baggies labeled #1 a, b, c, and #2, a, b, c, etc. We ask the groups to compare the names they gave the colors to the actual names provided by the manufacturer. We ask which names are most descriptive, which ones they prefer, and why. Then we tell the groups, “Collectively, let the colors take you somewhere on the paper; draw something using the colors you have.” We ask the students what colors they might want to add and suggest they swap their bag of colors for another group’s and continue to build their own piece.

This activity serves as an introduction to *Skin Deep* (Crane, 2008), in which Angela learns to see color and to experience a wonderful diversity of points of view, first through caring for Zena, the St. Bernard who is owned by Honora, a potter, and then through caring for Honora herself, who is dying of cancer. Angela is not herself an artist, but by listening to Honora and her friends, and by opening up her mind and heart to the world as Honora sees and experiences it, Angela grows in wisdom, confidence, and self-understanding. At a memorial service for Honora, Angela reads this poem:

Live like you are extraordinary.
 Love like you admire someone’s most painful burden.
 Breathe like the air is scented with lavender and fire.
 See like the droplets of rain each are exquisite.
 Laugh like the events of existence are to be cherished.
 Give freedom to your instincts, to your spirit, to your longing. (Crane, 2008, p. 254)

Another approach is simply to distribute the same bags of crayons to groups of three students, and then, without having them go through the naming of colors activity, ask them to share the colors they have been given, swapping them to draw a geometric shape that will capture in some way their sense of their core identity. We ask them to use the colors they’ve been given in their group to shade and elaborate on the shape. As a safe option, we let them make a shape symbol for a friend or family member. We then ask them to discuss what’s hard about this activity and what’s useful about it.

At this point, we show students the cover of *The Other Half of Me* (Franklin, 2007). We ask them to make a prediction about the story, and we read a description of the artist’s self-portrait. We explain that they can find out more about the main character’s (Jenny’s) longing to discover her father’s identity and how, through her art, she explores her own identity. At one point, Jenny is standing in front of a piece she’s created and she tells us:

I stand in front of it and remember each slash of color, each stroke of purple and orange, the wax I put in to delay the drying time. Tate once commented that my paintings are filled with circles, and I guess he’s right. Now I realize the spheres are like family, everything joined together in teams. Maybe the point of art—and of everything—is that you can’t predict the outcome, that the crazy upheaval of it all is part of life. (Franklin, 2007, p. 237)

Later, Jenny uses her art as a metaphor when she writes a letter to her half-sister:

A lot of painting techniques involve “broken color.” You use one or more colors in choppy layers over a different base coat to create a stippled or textured effect—maybe this sounds way more complicated than I mean. What I’m trying to say, in my own broken way, is that I’m sorry. And I miss you. (Franklin, 2007, p. 243)

At the end of the book, Jenny captures what she’s learned about herself and life in general:

Just when you think you have summed everything up, painted it clearly and given meaning to what was once just a pool of colored paint, another canvas crops up blank and is ready to be filled. (Franklin, 2007, p. 246)

Moving Out—Art Activities as Bridges out of Literature

An important goal in the language arts curriculum involves helping students develop and apply a variety of

Annotated Bibliography

(Note: Titles followed by (MC) are titles that include multicultural perspectives.)

Art—Visual

- Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York: Little Brown. Junior, a budding cartoonist who chooses to attend an all-white school instead of the one on his Spokane reservation, draws pictures of his life and the people in it. (MC)
- Anderson, L. H. (2006). *Speak*. New York: Puffin. With the support of her art teacher and her completion of his art assignment, Melinda gradually confronts the emotional trauma of rape.
- Bryant, J. (2006). *Pieces of Georgia*. New York: Yearling. In this novel in poems, Georgia, like her deceased mother, is an aspiring artist, but her father will not look at her sketchbooks.
- Cole, B. (1989). *Celine*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Celine's artistic talent helps her deal with her parents' neglect while she gains confidence about who she is and what she is capable of doing.
- Crawley, S. (2007). *The very ordered existence of Merilee Marvelous*. New York: Greenwillow. Merilee, a 13-year-old with Asperger's who fills her journal with drawings of dragons, finds her very ordered existence (VOE) threatened after meeting Bismark, an emotionally-damaged eight-year-old who follows her everywhere.
- Franklin, E. (2007). *The other half of me*. New York: Delacorte. Jenny, who loves to paint, is an artist with non-artistic, athletic half-siblings who, unlike her, were not fathered by Donor 142.
- Giff, P. (2004). *Pictures of Hollis Woods*. New York: Yearling. Gifted as an artist, Hollis is a ward of the state who finally feels needed when she meets Josie, an aging artist whose memory is slipping.
- Gallagher, L. (2008). *The opposite of invisible*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books. The friendship between Alice and Jewel (Julian), who both create and appreciate art, is threatened when Alice is noticed by a handsome, popular athlete. She wonders where she fits in. (Also photography and glass blowing)
- Grab, D. (2008). *Alive and well in Prague, NY*. New York: Harper Teen. After her father is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, Matisse and her parents, a painter and a sculptor, move from New York City to Prague, NY.
- Koja, K. (2004). *The blue mirror*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Frances Foster Books. Sixteen-year-old Maggy escapes from her alcoholic mother by losing herself in her sketchbook and sitting at a downtown café where she meets charismatic Cole, a runaway who introduces her to his homeless friends.
- Levine, G. C. (2001). *Dave at night*. New York: HarperTrophy. Only after he experiences the world of musicians, painters, and writers of the Harlem Renaissance can Dave tolerate his life in the Hebrew Home for Boys. Set in 1926 in New York City's Lower East Side. (Also music)
- Mack, T. (2002). *Drawing lessons*. New York: Scholastic. When her artist father leaves the family, twelve-year-old Rory must find a way to regain her ability to draw, paint, and otherwise express herself.
- Mori, K. (1993). *Shizuko's daughter*. New York: Henry Holt. When Shizuko turns her memories into art, she is finally able to come to terms with her mother's death and her cold, distant father and stepmother. (MC)

- Myers, W. D. (2006). *Autobiography of my dead brother*. Art by Christopher Myers. New York: Amistad. Like Jamal in Myers's *Scorpion*, Jesse uses drawing to try to make sense of his life in Harlem. Jesse's black-and-white sketches tell the story of his blood brother's deterioration into a life of crime. (MC)
- Oneal, Z. (1985). *In summer light*. New York: Viking. This story of reconciliation, with help from *The Tempest*, depicts the emotional struggle between Kate and her father, two artists who are much alike, though it takes time before they recognize this fact.
- Rodowsky, C. (1986). *Julie's daughter*. New York: Farrar. After 17-year-old Slug goes to live with her mother who had abandoned her as a baby, Slug helps her care for an elderly, terminally ill artist.
- Vega, D. (2008). *Fact of life #31*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers. Until things in her life change, Kat is content to be the freaky Yoga girl and talented artist with a mother who is a midwife.
- Woodson, J. (1994). *I hadn't meant to tell you this*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell.
- Woodson, J. (2006). *Lena*. New York: Puffin paperback. In these two Woodson stories of interracial friendship, one of the significant subplots follows Lena as she copes with sexual abuse and holds on to hope and her sense of self by drawing on any piece of scrap paper or brown paper bag she can find. (MC)

Dance

- Hurwin, D. W. (1997). *A time for dancing*. New York: Puffin. In alternating chapters, friends Sam and Jules, two gifted dancers, reveal their inner thoughts after Jules is diagnosed with cancer.
- Kephart, B. (2008). *House of dance*. New York: Harper Teen. Rosie, emotionally distant from her mother, finds a way to awaken her dying grandfather's fond memories of watching his wife dance, reconciling the family in the process.
- Matthews, A. (2004). *A winter night's dream*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers. Based loosely on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this tale of young lovers' confusion is narrated by Casey and Stewart, who do the lighting for a dance concert. Lucy, one of the teens, is a dancer extraordinaire. (Also theater)
- Nolan, H. (1997). *Dancing on the edge*. New York: Harcourt Brace. Raised by her grandmother amid mystical rules and beliefs, Miracle's desperate dancing is part of her search for an identity.
- Southgate, M. (1998). *Another way to dance*. New York: Laurel-Leaf. While fourteen-year-old Vicki spends the summer at the School of American Ballet in New York City, she tries to come to terms with her parents' divorce and also considers her future as an African American dancer. (MC)

Music

- Brooks, B. (1998). *Midnight hour encores*. New York: HarperCollins. When Sibillance, a world-class cellist, travels across America with her father, she learns about the music and life of the 60s. In searching for her mother, she also finds out more about herself.

- Cannon, A. E. (2008). *Loser's guide to life and love*. New York: HarperTeen. Ed, bored with his work at Reel Life Movies, pretends to be "Sergio" and is caught in a love triangle with friends Quark and Scout in this contemporary twist on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights' Dream*.
- Conner, L. (2008). *Waiting for normal*. New York: Katherine Tegen Books. Sixth-grader Addie, living in a less than "normal" world, tries to work on her flute music for the orchestra performance.
- Curtis, C. P. (2004). *Bud, not Buddy*. New York: Laurel-Leaf. After his mother dies, Bud searches for his father and wonders if he is the famous jazz musician. When Bud finds the band, will he become a member? (MC)
- Hesse, K. (1997). *Out of the dust*. New York: Scholastic. Billie Jo's love of playing the piano is a thread that runs through this beautiful story of tragedy and reconciliation set in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl.
- Klass, D. (2001). *You don't know me*. New York: Harper Teen. John's clever, amusing thoughts about life, school, and his participation in the school band—playing a tuba he calls a bullfrog—help him hide the reality of life with his abusive stepfather. The support of his band teacher is significant.
- Levine, G. C. (2001). *Dave at night*. New York: HarperTrophy. Only after he experiences the world of musicians, painters, and writers of the Harlem Renaissance can Dave tolerate his life in the Hebrew Home for Boys. Set in 1926 in New York City's Lower East Side. (Also visual art)
- Wolff, V. E. (1993). *Mozart season*. New York: Henry Holt. Allegra is ready for a relaxing summer after her demanding softball season, but her violin instructor tells her she has qualified for a young musicians' competition where she would perform Mozart's Fourth Violin Concerto.
- Yoo, P. (2008). *Good enough*. New York: HarperTeen. Patti, whose Korean American parents expect the best from her, loves both her violin and rock concerts. Her very ordered existence becomes more complex when she meets the Cute Trumpet Guy. (MC)

Other Arts

- Hirahara, N. (2008). *1001 cranes*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers. Angela, a twelve-year-old Japanese American, spends her summer in a small town outside Los Angeles working in her grandmother's flower shop and creating 1001 paper crane displays for newlyweds. (Origami) (MC)
- Crane, E. M. (2008). *Skin deep*. New York: Delacorte. Andrea feels like a Nothing until, caring for a sick neighbor's dog and garden, she learns about pottery, about life, and about herself. (Pottery)
- Woodson, J. (2005). *Show-way*. New York: Putnam Juvenile. In this autobiographical tale written in part to tell her infant daughter about the strong women from whom she descends, Woodson uses the image of the "show way" quilt as a metaphor for the importance of the art of "showing the way" to each succeeding generation. (Quilting) (MC)

Photography

- Bauer, J. (2005). *Thwonk*. When a cupid allows Allison (A. J.) one wish, she must decide between her passions: her photography and getting into art school or handsome Peter.
- Gallagher, L. (2008). *The opposite of invisible*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books. The friendship between Alice and Jewel (Julian), who both create and appreciate art, is threatened when Alice is noticed by a handsome, popular athlete. She wonders where she fits in. (Also visual arts and glass blowing)
- Krisher, T. (1996). *Spite fences*. New York: Laurel-Leaf. Until Maggie Pugh can face the racial violence she witnessed in her small Georgia town, she looks at life through the lens of her camera. (MC)
- Myers, W. D. (1995). *One more river to cross: An African American photograph album*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. Myers's poetic narrative accompanies black-and-white pictures in this beautiful portrait of people of African descent in the United States. (MC)
- Uhlig, R. (2008). *Last dance at the Frosty Queen*. New York: Laurel-Leaf. In this sometimes steamy novel, Arty Flood, a design assistant, wants to escape his middle-of-nowhere Kansas town as soon as he graduates. Then strange, disturbed Vanessa swims into his life using her photography to help her regain emotional equilibrium. (Also visual arts—design)
- Rylant, C., & Evans, W. (1994). *Something permanent*. New York: Harper Children's Books. With Rylant's poetry to accompany Evans's photos taken during the 1930s, this book tells about ordinary moments in the lives of people living in America during the Great Depression.

Theater

- Kluger, S. (2008). *My most excellent year: A novel of love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park*. New York: Dial. Three ninth-graders gain clarity about aspects of their identity through their involvement in musical theater as one begins to recognize that he is gay, and one realizes she has theatrical talents she needs to use in spite of her parents' disapproval. Political activism, baseball, and romance are also key elements in this happy novel.
- Lecesne, J. (2008). *Absolute brightness*. New York: Harper Teen, 2008. Strange Leonard, who moves in with Phoebe and her mother, wants to change everyone, but he disappears after being cast in *The Tempest* at Drama Camp.
- Matthews, A. 2005. *The flip side*. New York: Laurel-Leaf. While studying Shakespeare and playing the part of Rosalind, Robert, a British fifteen-year-old, becomes confused about who he really is.
- Matthews, A. 2004. *A winter night's dream*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers. Based loosely on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this tale of young lover's confusion is narrated by Casey and Stewart, who do the lighting for a dance concert. Lucy, one of the teens, is a dancer extraordinaire. (Also dance)
- Shanahan, Lisa. 2008. *The sweet, terrible, glorious year I truly completely lost it*. New York: Delacorte. Gemma Stone, usually a calm person, is cast as Miranda in the school's production of *The Tempest* in this Australian author's first book for teens.

strategies to comprehend and interpret text. Therefore, art activities as bridges *out* of literature are significant components in our repertoire of approaches. As opposed to the “bridges in” activities that help students get ready to read a text, bridging from their world into that of the artist, we can use art activities to help them, in a more holistic way, make sense of a text they have already read, or to revisit a text to expand their understanding and find a deeper meaning from it.

We have invited readers to first go *back into* a book by asking them to draw (or describe) one vivid image that comes to mind as they think about a story they have already read. Their responses to literature grow as they think about and articulate what pictures are left in their minds and as they hear what other students see. Their understanding is deepened as they talk about the significance of the images in the story.

We can use art activities to help them, in a more holistic way, make sense of a text they have already read, or to revisit a text to expand their understanding

For example, after reading Wolff’s *Make Lemonade* (1993), students talk about the images of poverty in Jolly’s apartment: the dirt and filth, little Jeremy and Jilly leaking liquids everywhere, the headless doll with its arm twisted in a direction no person could reach, and the small lemon seed that finally sprouts. And who can forget Archie’s black box in Cormier’s *The Chocolate*

late War (1974), or the shadows of the goalposts that resemble a network of crosses or the grotesque faces of the other football players coming at Jerry?

Rief’s *Vision & Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum* (1999) includes powerful examples of ways she invites her students to participate in a literary work by using visual images and other forms of art, including musical creations, to explore and extend their understanding and appreciation of a piece of literature.

We have also begun a book discussion by telling students we are going to *read* a picture to them. We ask them to draw a picture of what they visualize as they listen to us read a select passage. A powerful example in *Make Lemonade* (Wolff, 1993) is when Jeremy puts LaVaughn’s purse on his head to become

King of the Bus, and he’s in charge until they are back on earth to buy shoes they can’t afford (p. 78). To draw a picture of the many colorful scenes from Krisher’s *Spite Fences* (1996), students need crayons or colored pencils. When they recall the vivid imagery in the story, the issues of prejudices, family relationships, social consciousness, deep friendships, and the liberation that comes from art are all made more powerful.

When listeners hear a selected passage read to them *after* their own reading, they are surprised by what they see in their mind’s eye, which can then lead to a discussion of how the selected image relates to the rest of the story. The powerful images brought to mind by carefully chosen words in well-written literature are examples of how the artistic dimension contributes to a work’s impact on readers and their growing understanding of the human condition.

These art activities work even if the characters in the stories are not artists. The protagonist in Staples’s book *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (1989) does not draw, but when she sings, her beloved camel Mithoo dances. Staples’s work is filled with the art of her rich figurative language, excellent examples of the power of metaphor and simile: “I know without a doubt that my heart is crumbling up inside me like a burning piece of paper” (p. 62). Readers probably have not owned a camel, but who could not feel Shabanu’s loss when her Dadi must sell Mithoo: “But the dull ache around the hole where my heart used to be leaves me drained of all energy” (Staples, 1989, p. 65). As in Staples’s more recent work *Under the Persimmon Tree* (2005), readers’ personal responses to the powerful and vivid imagery lead to their understanding of how the literary elements in these works also deepen their knowledge of young people’s lives in contemporary Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Reflections and Illuminations

By using art activities that help ready students to move into a piece of literature and then to enhance the meaning of a text after reading it, and by giving our students opportunities to read about young artists portrayed in literature, we show them what can happen when we participate with art. The possibilities are endless. For example, the love and practice of art is a topic that matters to author Kathe Koja. For her char-

acters, art is a comfort as they negotiate their world, and it is a guide to help them become who they really are.

Maggy, in Koja's story *The Blue Mirror* (2004), likes being in the art room at school: "the smell of it, chalk and oils and turpenol, that underwater-skylight glow that reminds me a little of the Blue Mirror" (p. 12). In this book filled with gritty street scenes, Maggy goes to the café called the Blue Mirror as an escape from her alcoholic mother. As she sits there, she creates her own personal paper world in her sketchbook, which she also calls "The Blue Mirror." She makes everything she sees come alive again in a different way, like a fairy tale she tells herself: "Anything can happen in 'The Blue Mirror,' anything I want" (p. 6). But Maggy can't seem to draw the mysterious, charming, homeless Cole. When she realizes the destructive nature of their relationship, she uses her art to draw away from him and his group. Her art has both reflected and illuminated her world.

For Rachel in Koja's *Straydog* (2002), it is writing; for Jinsen in *Buddha Boy* (Koja, 2003) and Maggie in *The Blue Mirror* (Koja, 2004), it is drawing; and for Kit in Koja's *Talk* (2005), it is acting. Kit, who is struggling with his sexual orientation, seeks to become someone else for awhile by auditioning for the school play and finds out he has a talent for acting. But when he and Lindsay, the female lead, must rally to save the controversial play *Talk*, they face issues about truth and confront questions about themselves.

It is interesting to note that a significant adult often helps young people find a way to use the arts to help them make sense of their world and to learn more about themselves and others. In *Speak* (Anderson, 2006), it is the art teacher Mr. Freeman who encourages Melinda to complete her art project; in Klass's *You Don't Know Me* (2001), it is the band teacher Mr. Steenwilly who helps John discover the healing power of music; in Levine's *Dave at Night* (2001), it is the art teacher who comes to the Hebrew Home for Boys and encourages Dave to express his feelings or moods through drawing. When the teacher sees what Dave has drawn and tells him he has a gift, Dave is delighted: "Gift! I didn't just like to draw, I didn't just have the beginnings of an eye, I had a gift!" (p. 225).

While most of us, as English language arts teachers, probably lack the specific skills and abilities of

Mr. Steenwilly and our colleagues who teach art, music, or theater, we *can* be that significant adult for our artistically inclined students. Books such as those in our bibliography can help teens explore their worlds—and our curriculum—by using their gifts. And, by sharing these books with students who are less artistically inclined, we help them enlarge their understanding of how artists see the world.

Conclusion

Tracy Mack's speech, "Lighting the Dark Places: The Longing for Beauty and the Restorative Power in Art," delivered during the SIGNAL session at the IRA Conference in New Orleans, May 3, 2001, pointed out that "art had lit a path on the sometimes dark journey of my own childhood and adolescence . . . it not only buoyed and sustained me through turbulent times but it actually healed[. . . M]ore than anything I could think of, I longed to find the beauty in this world and add some of my own to it." She drew on her own experiences with art when creating Rory for the book *Drawing Lessons* (Mack, 2002). Rory's father is an artist, but she must find her own way of creating and her own way of being. Rory's father has taught her about light and color, perspective and form. But when he leaves the family, she is lost. Rory ultimately learns that "The great thing about painting is you can bring back something you've lost and keep it forever" (p. 166). She comes to understand her father better, but also herself:

I looked back at my mural, painted in bold greens and browns and blues and pinks across the barn wall. I saw my tree, standing strong and tall on the riverbank, its sturdy branches reaching for me again like outstretched arms. I saw this place, our world that was real, that I painted all on my own just for Mom. I saw my painting style, rooted in my father's but branching out in new directions that were entirely my own. I felt him watching from the other side of the river, and even though that wasn't where I wanted him to be, at least I knew he was there.

But most of all, in every solid layer of paints and within every sure stroke of the brush, I saw that I was there, breathing out the colors of my own voice. (pp. 167–168)

Like Rory, the young artists who populate the books referenced in our bibliography are buoyed and sustained through the turbulence of their relationships, school and family environments, and their journey toward identity and self-acceptance. These young

adults provide great role models for our students who are struggling to answer their own questions about who they are. Young adult literature has an important role in the lives of our students, whether they are the ones who create art or we are the ones encouraging various art activities; either way, these students have an opportunity to understand themselves and others more deeply as they read and respond to literature in their search for self-knowledge.

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Goth Girl Reading: Interpreting an Identity

Comic books and graphic novels: kid stuff, the bastion for bored students stuck in math class, the mortal enemy of English teachers everywhere, right? Media and literacy specialists who wrote to revamp the image of this literature and outlined methods for its inclusion in libraries and classrooms would answer with a resounding “wrong!” (Krashen, 1993; Carter, 2007; Goldsmith, 2005; Gorman, 2003; Copeland, Fletcher-Spear, and Jenson-Benjamin, 2005). Self-proclaimed “recovering comic book geek” and young adult author Barry Lyga would also cheer on these texts. Lyga’s decade-long work in the comic book industry and coauthored book, *Graphic Novels in Your Media Center: A Definitive Guide* (Lyga & Lyga, 2004), indicate as much.

But for teachers unconvinced or unable to incorporate the genre into more prohibitive programs of study, Lyga’s young adult novels, *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* (2007; heretofore called simply *Fanboy*), and, particular to this study, its sequel, *Goth Girl Rising* (2009), provide a curricular compromise. While neither book delivers the benefits that graphic novels and comics provide to “reluctant readers” (Lyga and Lyga, 2004) or ESOL students (Krashen, 1993), each prose work includes the comic book universe as a central concept for study and affords teachers an opportunity to reference and utilize graphic novels and comic books in combination with these more conventional texts.

In *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009), protagonist Kyra Sellers fashions a more stable identity after coming to interpret Gaiman’s graphic novel series, *Sandman* (1991), in a new way. Likewise, readers engaged in

the process of interpretation of the novel act as mirror images of Kyra. As Kyra reinterprets Gaiman, she revises her self. As students examine her transformation, they too gain the skills to reread themselves, learning, as Kyra does, to read texts as they exist in vast webs, not in isolation.

In the novel, Lyga crafts a familiar adolescent backdrop where high school conflicts, strained relationships with parents, and complicated connections to peers take center stage. This familiar milieu and the accessible language facilitate students’ interest and understanding of Kyra’s transformation, which occurs on three levels: the textual, or plot level; the metatextual, or the level that provides us instructions for how to read Kyra’s story; and the intertextual, or the level that links Kyra to characters in the comic book cosmos—specifically the Ur Goth girl, Death, from Gaiman’s *Sandman* series, who also appears in a comic book edition entitled *Captain Atom* (Bates, Weisman, Kayanan, and Tanghal, 1989).

Fanboy Rising

The initial salvo of descriptions in Barry Lyga’s *Fanboy* unnerves readers. Donny Marchetti, a lonely high school boy with a fixation on a bullet and a running list of his high school foes, broods over his parents’ broken marriage, dreads the birth of his stepsister (which will herald the formation of a new family led by the man he calls “step fascist”), isolates himself from most of his peers, and holes up in his basement bedroom. Though intelligent and artistic, as indicated in both text and illustrations for his own graphic

novel, *Schemata*, he stewes in his disaffection, thumbing the lonely bullet in his pocket when bullied.

Donny dreams of physical retaliation instead of acting to better his life in rational ways. For some, this “boy with a bullet” representation proves frightening at best, irresponsible at worst. Reading past the stereotype of violent male adolescence, however, allows readers to experience an interpretive rever-

sal, for “Fanboy” Donny Marchetti’s lack of a gun and possession of a bullet mark him as a young man in stasis, armed but unable to shoot.

Enter the second titular character, “Goth girl” Kyra Sellers. Her face is a “thumb dipped in white paint” (Lyga, 2007, p. 39), first glimpsed from across a crowded gymnasium by

Donny as he endures his daily dose of physical abuse at the hands of Mitchell Frampton. Later, a virtual, “near-Kyra” takes shape in cyberspace through her online screen name, “Promethea387.” Embodying the angry voice inside of Donny, she instant messages him to ask one, loaded question: “*Why do you let him hit you?*” (Lyga, 2007, p. 44). Thus begins Donny and Kyra’s friendship, one in which she acts as a catalyst that, like Promethea, the Alan Moore character from whom she takes her screen name, refuses to transform but endlessly shapeshifts. As such, she is not given full countenance and remains true to her online screen name, about which Donny thinks:

In the comics, Promethea was a sort of physical and metaphysical avatar for the nature of ideas themselves. She was the incarnation of imagination, and her purpose [...] was to bring about the end of the comic book universe she inhabited. Sort of a metatextual commentary on the self-destructive cycle of superhero comics or something like that. (p. 47)

Indeed, for much of the novel, Kyra’s puzzling, self-destructive nature works to bring about the end of Donny’s largely inaccessible universe. Her appearance, caustic attitude, unwillingness to open up to Donny in meaningful ways, and the faint scars on her wrists fascinate Donny, who wishes only to blend into his surroundings, not to stand out. Despite these

physical differences, their social detachment connects the pair, their shared disdain for the endless stream of peers focused on blasé things like lacrosse. Their interest in comic books and graphic novels also unites them, and Donny eventually allows Kyra to review pages of *Schemata* so that she can offer feedback. Her blunt criticism and vaulted praise inspire him as he plans to attend a comic book convention in hopes of showing his work to his idol, Bendis.

In this first novel, these commonalities culminate in ways that indicate Donny’s positive movement toward stability and, true to her avatar’s shifting form, Kyra’s slide towards instability, since, by the end of *Fanboy*, Donny has talked to the girl of his dreams, attended a “popular kids” party, gone to the comic book convention, gotten rebuffed by Bendis, and come to understand that not all of his peers are like Mitchell Frampton. He has also lost the bullet but distanced himself from Kyra, who sits brooding on a deserted playground, contemplating death while thumbing Donny’s bullet.

My students, high school teachers interested in adopting young adult literature for their classrooms and teachers-in-training studying crises and resolutions in adolescent literacy, were pleased with Donny’s burgeoning ability to reread his life circumstance in increasingly mature ways. I, however, wondered about Kyra. I felt her behavior made her the perfect candidate to become a solitary girl with a bullet *and* a gun. My students invariably reminded me, this is not *her* story. It is through his own grappling with Kyra’s impulsive behaviors that Donny becomes an agent in his own life, rising up out of the basement and gaining perspective. I conceded, though labeling Kyra a mere cipher continued to alarm me, since the absence of resolution for her character marks her as yet another female put under erasure in service of her male counterpart’s growth. Complicating the propagation of this all too ubiquitous message is the text’s adolescent target audience, many of whom already struggle with enculturated gender roles and do not need another representation of a girl sublimating her identity.

Because Kyra’s tale has no satisfying resolution, I often returned to *Fanboy*, not to reread Donny’s story but to find more evidence of Kyra’s. I wanted to traverse the faint, “dead white” scars on her wrists that are “like a topographical map [with] raised ridges representing mountain ranges built through trauma

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and age” (Lyga, 2007, p. 86). Instead, I found Donny foregrounding his own body as he looks at Kyra’s wrists: “I think of scar tissue on my knee, memento of my mad dash up the stairs when Dad’s old coat goosed my imagination; it’s a senseless dead zone on my body where I can feel nothing” (p. 86). In order to negotiate the terrain of Kyra’s trauma, I had to walk in Donny’s footprints—that is, until the sequel, *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009), where Kyra and the wilderness of her scars are mapped out.

Goth Girl Reading

Before reading Lyga’s follow-up, I revisited notable passages in *Fanboy* that describe Kyra: her see-through skin—“chalk [. . .] Kabuki makeup [. . .] Liquid Paper” (Lyga, 2007, p. 87)—the black clothing that covers her for most of the book, the ample breasts she hides but uses to shock at inappropriate moments, the surly girl alone on a playground with Donny’s bullet, thinking about death. I returned also to Kyra’s online screen name, Promethea, that comic book character who functions as a “metatextual commentary on the self-destructive cycle of superhero comics” (p. 47). Finally, I thought about my needs as a reader of *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009). I sought to understand Kyra’s behavior, to find some Ariadnic thread that could lead me through the labyrinth.

The term “metatextual” comes up again in *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009), when Donny, now a secondary character, explains that “A meta-level [. . .] is when the story comments on itself.” He goes on to say that “[A meta-level] is like the old Sherlock Holmes stories, [. . .] mysteries [. . .] designed to teach you how to read them. You weren’t just watching Holmes solve the mystery—you were also being taught how to solve the mystery of the story” (p. 270). Such a definition dropped into the novel not only explains the term in an accessible manner, but provides an example of it at work. Intertextuality, then, became the golden thread I sought. Reading with it in mind allows readers to connect *Fanboy* to *Goth Girl Rising* and then leads us through the intricacies of Kyra Sellers’s transformation. Kyra is the Holmesian mystery. The stories referenced in the book instruct her how to read and reread her self and, in turn, help us to read her.

At first, Lyga renders Kyra with intensity familiar to readers of *Fanboy* (Lyga, 2007). She is an adoles-

cent dealing with the loss of her mother and emotional distance from her father, her changing body, her sexuality, and volatile friendships. She has just returned from a six-month stay in a mental health facility where she was labeled as “DCHH”: a “Daddy Couldn’t Handle Her” patient. She is, much like Donny at the beginning of *Fanboy*, isolated and angry. She blames Donny for her “incarceration” in the institution, since he resourcefully called her father once he realized that Kyra stole his bullet; she is hell-bent on revenge, especially when she sees that Fanboy is now a well-adjusted student—closer to his mother, step-father, and new baby sister, and, most important, a young artist whose graphic novel has moved from a basement room to a regular school publication. She is no longer the avatar who brings about change through destruction and creation of a new perspective, but rather one who, at least at this point, seeks utter destruction.

For a large portion of the novel, Kyra vacillates. Her best friends, Jecca and Simone, exemplify her gender-role confusion. She makes out with Jecca, wanting to find “a touch, warmth, connection, heat, anything” (Lyga, 2009, p. 25), yet finds her self increasingly uncomfortable with Simone’s promiscuity. At night, she dreams about loving Fanboy, yet she schemes about revenge during her waking hours. One day, she revels in her dark hair, a curtain she can hide behind, and her black clothes that also obscure, but on the next, she shaves her head, dons ElekTrick Sex blue lipstick, and wears all white clothing. She thinks about her mother’s lung cancer and death in agonizing snippets of poetry and snipes hatefully at her father. In several places, she even embodies various allegorical characters from Gaiman’s Sandman series: Death, her her; Despair; and Dream.

Such uncertainty is enough to give the reader whiplash. However, the inability to take a definite shape is not only a hallmark of adolescence but harkens back to the eponymous character from the series penned by Alan Moore, *Promethea* (2000), a character who is both physical and metaphysical, the “incarnation of ideas themselves.” At first, then, the text instructs us to see Kyra as a shape shifter, as someone who may have power to change another’s life as she did Donny’s, but not as someone who can exist as a single embodiment.

Soon, though, the graphic novel and comic book trope begins to give distinct shape to Kyra. In *Fanboy*

(Lyga, 2007), Donny papers his walls with his own drawings and thinks incessantly about showing his work to his idol, Bendis, at the Comic Convention. He has to make this journey and suffer disappointment in order to grow. To evidence this trope at work in *Goth Girl* (2009), Lyga writes several chapters in epistolary style, as letters from Kyra to her favorite graphic novelist, Neil Gaiman. Though unsent and therefore existent in a liminal space, they inform readers of Kyra's innermost thoughts. In an early letter, she writes:

I wish life could be simple like the actual page of a comic book. You look at a comic book page and there are rules, rules that make sense. The page is always the same size. There are panel borders and you know that the art-work goes inside the panel borders. Word balloons. Caption boxes. One panel leads to the next, one balloon to the next, and it makes sense [. . .] It all fits together and if you tried to look at just part of it, it really wouldn't work. You look at the whole thing, though, and you have a little piece of the story. (p. 45)

Beyond illustrating a desire for simplicity and structure, this letter also supplies readers with Kyra's initial understanding of the comic book universe. It is one safely contained, made up of lines and blocks where "everything makes sense." Her definition fits the common "escapist" classification of comic books but also fits her life experience. Losing her mother, attempting suicide, being committed, and struggling to find a place with peers and her father have evidenced that the world is a menacing place where idealistic rules don't matter. But the balloons, boxes, and panels of graphic novels enclose her, keeping this riotous world at bay. In this letter to Gaiman, Kyra's desire for borders illustrates, for the first time, a semi-static young woman who longs for permanence in an increasingly complex adult world. Ironically, though, a belief in these foundational elements also traps Kyra and, at least at first, prevents her from evolving.

In two subsequent scenes, Donny prompts Kyra to reconsider Gaiman's *Sandman* series and her elementary definition of graphic novels and comics. First, he asks her if she knows that Gaiman's entire series was supposed to be half as long. He also sets up a meta-level, telling Kyra that he reread the series with the letters that came after each installment, in particular one to which Gaiman himself replied. Authorial intrusion that crafts a meta-level is not at all something Kyra is prepared for. She thinks, "My head's spinning.

[. . .] I never even thought about *Sandman* in issue numbers" (Lyga, 2009, p. 179). Kyra read the story as a whole, following one panel to the next, finding comfort in the structure. To think of that structure in any other way sets her reeling. Her ordered reading life cannot be superseded with Donny's rereading.

In another significant moment, Donny and his friend, Cal, offer Kyra a different interpretation of "Brief Lives," an issue within the *Sandman* series. Cal says, "When you read the whole thing, you see all these meta-levels that Gaiman put in there. Like the whole thing in "Brief Lives" where Dream has to go see the oracle [. . .] He's going there to find [. . . Destruction and] it turns out that Destruction is hiding out on the bluff right across from the oracle's temple." Cal begins laughing, to which Kyra replies, "I don't think it's funny." Donny, trying to mediate the interpretive moment, says "It's funny and sad [. . .] It's ironic, Kyra" (Lyga, 2009, p. 271). Cal then asks Donny to talk about whether or not the whole series is a dream. Again, Kyra says she cannot "believe that. The series is real" (p. 273). The new interpretation of a much-beloved graphic novel series is not something Kyra can merely disagree with; rather, she refuses the different analyses altogether, and the anger and confusion born of these new ideas are palpable. She thinks:

Are they right? Did I read the whole series and not get it at all? [. . .] I read it over and over and over again. I took it so seriously, and those two think it's all a dream and that all the sad parts are actually funny [. . .] It makes me angrier and angrier as the day goes on. Because even if they're right, who the hell are they to tell me I'm wrong? (p. 274)

Here, she reinforces her need to see comics as simple, as untouched by the complications of the world, interpreted in one of two ways: right or wrong. She finds stability and reassurance in Gaiman's text, qualities absent from her young life. Donny and Cal problematize her reading and, since she connects heavily to Gaiman's character Death, her own conception of self. Kyra's bewilderment and anger after these conversations prevent her from achieving a new understanding of her self through interpretation. They do, however, pinpoint a crisis for her, a moment in which the panels of the comic book universe are not as self-contained as she once believed.

When Kyra is held in police custody for trying to steal a car, she becomes a captive audience, forced to encounter yet another example of intertextuality.

In this scene, she finally sees beyond her monolithic reading of the Sandman series and the character of Death from the series. One of the few items in her bag after her arrest is a gift from Fanboy—an edition of a comic entitled *Captain Atom* (Bates et al., 1989) in which the character of Death from Gaiman’s Sandman appears. Kyra relates, “The first time I saw it, I thought it looked like a million other dumb superhero covers, but now that I’m actually studying it, it’s sort of different. For one thing, he really looks like he’s straining [. . .]. And for another thing, he’s so tiny compared to the stone and the whole cover” (Lyga, 2009 p. 339). Behaving as a close reader, Kyra reads the comic and then “[flips] back to the beginning and [reads] it again. Slowly this time, paying lots of attention” (p. 340). Then, she reads it a third time before declaring that she “feels like [her] head’s been messed with” (p. 343). She narrates,

I mean, yeah, it’s got some Sandman characters in it, even though it’s a superhero comic. But it’s not like what you normally expect from a superhero comic. And it’s nothing like a Sandman comic, either. It’s this different thing, this different way of looking at the same characters and ideas (Lyga, 2009, p. 343).

Since her mother’s real-world death and her initial, simplified reading of Gaiman’s character Death, Kyra has envisioned death as “cool and mysterious,” the being that “didn’t let [people] get away with shit [. . . who] always told [. . .] the truth [and went] around to people and [smacked] them in the head [to] make them see” (p. 177). She even attempts to embody Gaiman’s Death in the way she dresses, talks, and, at least on one occasion, sees Death as a “blessing” that inspires her to “slit her wrists and get some blessing of [her] own” (p. 343).

In issue 42 of *Captain Atom*, however, Gaiman’s perky, dimpled Goth girl named Death appears alongside another embodiment of death, the “Black Skier,” characterized as the “Race Everyone Runs—and loses” (p. 341). In this installment of the comic, Captain Atom chooses to die so that he can go to see his dead wife, Angela. He must first travel to Purgatory to pay for his sins. Once in heaven with his wife, he wants to stay. Kyra relates that there is “some sort of mystical mumbo jumbo about how Captain Atom can’t stay [but must] return to life to fight another version of Death: This one is a villain called Nekron” (p. 342). Thus, Captain Atom returns to the world to battle,

leaving his beloved behind.

This particular reading event, made possible by Fanboy’s gift of the comic and, ironically, because of her own attempted sin of stealing, provides Kyra with an epiphanic moment in which she is reborn through Death’s changing context. She thinks,

“But what if Death *isn’t* a comfort? Or at least, what if it’s not *just* comfort? What if Death is a bunch of different things, depending? Like sometimes it’s comfort and sometimes it’s just this inevitable conclusion and sometimes it’s ‘Nekron, Lord of the Unliving!’” (p. 344)

The young woman who could only see interpretation as right or wrong now sees multiplicity and possibility:

“It’s Jecca. It’s Captain Atom. It’s Death and Nekron and Morpheus and all of it. It’s Mom. It’s Dad. I don’t know how to put it into words. All those people, all of those characters . . . Connecting. Interacting. Some for real. Some in my head.” (p. 345)

No longer is the comic book universe simple for Kyra. Death jumps Gaiman’s pages and lands in the middle of *Captain Atom* (Moore, Williams, & Gray, 2000). Here, she stands alongside other significations of death that complicate Kyra’s own worldview. As

Kyra encounters and accepts intertextuality as a means to understand texts and her self in relation to them, readers of Kyra’s tale also encounter a meta-level: issue 42 is a microcosm of the larger narrative that surrounds it—the Goth girl’s rise. Captain Atom’s story is Kyra’s, and readers see this parallel at the same time as Kyra.

Like Atom, she must confront her sins against her self and others, accept a different identity, and return to the world where she will fend off her own Nekron—her destructive and suicidal tendencies. At the end of these chapters, Kyra is no longer a faceless Goth girl, a shape-shifting Promethea meant only to decode another character. Though she confesses she doesn’t understand everything she has read or experienced, she accepts responsibility for her crime by starting at the beginning: she finally tells the

No longer is the comic book universe simple for Kyra. Death jumps Gaiman’s pages and lands in the middle of *Captain Atom*.

arresting officer her name. In doing so, she becomes a solid figure, made up of atoms and by *Captain Atom*.

The Possible Adventure

The curricular trappings of high school figure largely into our students' reading lives. Oft-taught epics like *The Odyssey* and *Gilgamesh* present students with archetypal journeys that remain abstract and largely inaccessible. As students study other types of canonical texts in their high school English classes, alien language can lock them out and may cause secondary teachers to focus inordinate amounts of time solely on

linguistic features or plot-lines. Standards related to close reading and analysis can easily fall by the wayside, and teachers, frustrated, may assign yet another list of vocabulary words, create end-of-unit tests that ask students to regurgitate memorized data, or, worse, provide canned interpretations for students.

Most horrific are the studies of this "canon as cultural medicine"

philosophy that dominates some curricula. Atkins-Goodson (2009) contended that numerous teachers "have wrinkled their noses at the possibility of using [graphic novels] in literature circles and as independent reading choices." As a result, she said, "we're making our own teaching lives a little more difficult, and we're not doing our students any favor by being the gatekeepers on quality literature. By asserting our own tastes regarding literature, we're not letting our students find their own favorites" (2009). In programs where teachers refuse literatures that could reach pupils and/or stick to an all-classics-all-the-time syllabus, students are unlikely to become lifelong readers or critical thinkers (Bushman and Haas, 2005). In these sorts of programs, reading becomes an activity that takes place in school for teachers and tests, not for students' acquisition of advanced literacy and certainly not as an activity connected in meaningful ways to their lives.

To be sure, countless teachers and media specialists have revised their role as literary "gatekeepers," evolving into literacy experts who provide pathways. They expose secondary students to classics and to contemporary works, and myriad schools have responded to students' voracious appetite for young adult literature and sundry genres by creating and promoting self-select reading programs (Cavazos-Kottke, 2005) or permitting independent reading and creative writing projects. Teachers also actively bridge to the classics, connecting more orthodox literature to texts more tangible for adolescents (Bushman and Haas, 2005).

Using young adult literature like Lyga's *Goth Girl Rising* (2009) allows us to continue this kind of evolution in the classroom. Locating *Goth Girl*'s journey lets us address a typical standard with a somewhat atypical text, and we instill value in the genre of graphic novels and comic books—a twin win. Like other journeyers, Kyra travels from the *nadir*—which, for her, is the mental hospital—to the societal return—a reentrance into her adolescent world's mounting complications and the impending adult world with which she has already grappled but failed. At the end of *Fanboy* (Lyga, 2007), she was unable to channel the grief over her mother's death in productive ways or negotiate a relationship with her father, whom she blames for her mother's cancer. In *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009), she eventually tackles these issues and goes home—to school, to her friends, and, of course, to her friendship with Donny. She accomplishes this return not by battling a Cyclops or an angry Scylla of the sea but by overcoming her own monolithic views of graphic novels and comics and rereading the sometime maelstrom of her life circumstance in the resulting context that her increasing literacy provides.

Donny's role as helpmate in *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009), especially if placed alongside Kyra's identical role in *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* (Lyga, 2007), permits teachers to talk about the equalization of a previously one-sided relationship in which Kyra can be read only through her interaction with Donny. Donny's role, while integral, is not primary in the sequel, and Kyra gains new perspective at *Fanboy*'s urging, just as he gained agency via her actions in the first novel. She inspires him to handle rejection at the comic book convention, and he stages a graphic novel intervention that asks her

She accomplishes this return not by battling a Cyclops or an angry Scylla of the sea but by overcoming her own monolithic views of graphic novels and comics.

to evaluate her reading, even providing her with the crucial copy of *Captain Atom*. This reciprocity, then, removes any sublimation and positions Donny as a key figure who aids Kyra as she travels.

Most important, *Goth Girl Rising* (Lyga, 2009) allows us to introduce intertextual and metatextual levels to students. Kyra's journey, begun but by no means satisfyingly finished at the end of *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* (Lyga, 2007), finds resolution in her own expanding horizon of experience as a reader. She achieves new understanding of her self through striving to understand texts differently. Advancing her literacy, which includes complicating her previous definition of graphic novels and comic books and rereading Gaiman in a new context, ushers in a new identity for Kyra, who becomes "Promethea unbound" and bound for adulthood. We hope for that same result in our students.

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Creating Realms of Possibilities: Offering Mirrors and Windows

Even as early as elementary school, girls would curiously ask Marcus (all names are pseudonyms) if he were gay, and Marcus would deny it. By middle school, because of his clothing choices and his vocal inflections, he frequently heard random shouted slurs—“faggot,” “fag,” “queer”—during gym or assemblies. In response to this, Marcus would isolate himself in a bathroom stall for up to 40 minutes, just to avoid walking past older students on his way to sit with his own grade level during these assemblies. Marcus’s high school experiences resonated with his previous experiences when he was confronted by a popular student who asked him if he liked a girl; Marcus’s response was to lie, even as the popular boy walked away to his snickering friends.

Marcus had an urgent desire to hide his sexuality from everyone in his life. Even Jon, his good friend from sophomore year, returned for junior year behaving as an enemy. This pivotal incident brought out suicidal tendencies in Marcus, leading him to start cutting himself. He then turned to forging online friendships in order to find support, while hiding his identity from his family and classmates. English class provided a real-life refuge for Marcus as teachers offered him literature selections, such as *The Odyssey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Equus* (2005), and *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (2002), that told him that the world cannot always shape how we define ourselves. As McLean (1997) points out, “multicultural literature is seen to be both a mirror to validate a group’s experiences and knowledge, and a window through which those experiences and knowledge can be viewed” (p. 178). The literature he encountered helped Marcus to feel

more connected to his teachers, and the themes they explored gave him the courage to come out during his junior year. Despite coming to terms with his identity through literature, Marcus still experienced hateful responses during his senior year of high school, as when a male student slammed him into a locker and walked off, leaving the hateful word “queer” lingering in Marcus’s mind longer than the purple and yellow bruise running down his shoulder and arm.

I (Jennifer) met Marcus early in his educational career at Kennesaw State University, a somewhat urban campus about 20 miles north of Atlanta where our English Education program strives to create a safe environment where students can explore many difficult issues and make personal connections without fear of consequences. Over time, Marcus enrolled in four different courses I taught, as did another student, Jordan. We got to know each other well during those classes, and it was in this context that we came to learn about Marcus’s experiences as a gay teenager struggling with sharing his identity. Through his connection with Marcus, Jordan, who intended to become a teacher, began to explore ways he might help students like Marcus feel more safe, welcome, and accepted in his classroom.

Jordan recognizes that his own students will struggle with many aspects of identity, just as Marcus did. He also recognizes that identity extends well beyond safer mainstream topics, such as family and friends, and that topics like sexual orientation and gender identity are often skirted during open discussions. Through his courses in our undergraduate English Education program, Jordan could not get

Marcus's story out of his mind and chose to actively explore young adult literature relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) content. Since reading these texts, Jordan has started questioning why teachers don't (or feel they cannot) incorporate them into the classrooms.

In our program, we specifically address the inclusion of various texts—young adult and canonical—including LGBTQ novels. We talk about why novels with LGBTQ topics may not be represented, including classroom teachers' possible discomfort with or misconceptions about novels focusing on these issues (Mason, 2008). However, this is a core aspect of the identity of some students who sit in our classrooms. Offering literature with which students like Marcus can identify benefits *all* students; it can help some to feel more mainstream and others to become more understanding and tolerant of those who identify as LGBTQ (Mason, 2008; McLean, 1997). The inclusion of these novels also helps answer questions about identity that many students have,—“questions that can't be answered by the pink and blue playbooks we've been using to define girls and boys since forever” (Zeisler, 2006, p. 5).

Few will argue that adolescence doesn't include much personal turmoil and conflict, and for many students, these situations relate to sexual orientation and gender identity. During this time in their development, “teens naturally push away from authority figures in order to discover their identities, or ‘who they are’” (Cole, 2009, p. 32). In Marcus's accounts, while he was pushing away from day-to-day authority figures, such as his parents and teachers, he was turning to religion, where he hoped to find acceptance. Just as the themes introduced to Marcus through traditional literature in high school helped him to identify his true self through a literary mirror, young adult literature serves as a vehicle to introduce teens to characters who “live in the same time and face the same dilemmas” (Cole, 2009, p. 41) as they do. Because Jordan recognized the role literature played in helping Marcus with his identity struggles, he hopes to introduce his students to texts whose characters mirror their identity struggles and whose characters can offer them some comfort and reassurance.

Young adult literature addresses almost all facets of adolescent—even preadolescent—identity. The reading classroom of today's youth brings friend-

ships, family, divorce, eating behaviors, and even fantastical possibilities into perspective through texts and discussions. Yet, in Marcus's high school experience less than five years ago, teachers only offered him canonical literature to read. While those works undoubtedly presented quality literature, they did not necessarily offer a relatable context for Marcus's primary teenage struggle—being gay. Until his senior year, Marcus found nothing in the literature offered to him that helped him define or accept his identity, encountering instead only American literary canon and social stigma. Later in college, the introduction of young adult literature allowed Marcus to find a connection to the gay teen who once slid quietly along the hallway lockers hoping to go unnoticed. That same literature allowed other students, like Jordan, to forge a connection to students like Marcus, who he will one day teach in an English language arts classroom. Had young adult literature with its variety of topics been introduced into Marcus's high school classroom, perhaps his own voice of identity could have been heard instead of passively ignored by the implemented curriculum.

Compelling authors such as Julie Ann Peters (*Luna*, 2004), David Levithan (*The Realm of Possibility*, 2004; *Boy Meets Boy*, 2003), and Martin Wilson (*What They Always Tell Us*, 2008) have genuinely captured LGBTQ perspectives for audiences of all orientations and identities. Marcus's experiences from elementary through high school led him to college feeling that, for many audiences, homosexuality, or being “gay,” still stands as a negatively stigmatized “lifestyle choice.” By allowing young adult literature dealing with LGBTQ concerns into the classroom before the post-secondary level, silent students, who are afraid of their peers, may finally feel connected and far less isolated in a world full of diversity.

Identifying Texts That Serve as a Mirror and Window to LGBTQ Issues

In the introduction to *How Beautiful the Ordinary: Twelve Stories of Identity* (2009), Cart writes, “There are countless reasons for reading, but when you're young and uncertain of your identity, of who you may be, one of the most compelling is the quest to discover yourself reflected in the pages of a book” (p. 1). He continues to point out that for too many years,

students like Marcus searched their library shelves “in vain for [their] own face” (p. 1)—that “was the plight of gay, lesbian, and transgender young adults” (p. 1). As noted earlier, perhaps this is because teachers “still don’t feel safe or confident talking in their classrooms about LGBT people or texts, fearing backlash from parents and administrators” (Ressler & Chase,

2009, p. 17). Like Jordan, many preservice teachers recognize the need to allow students like Marcus to discover themselves in books and to allow other students to learn about a non-mainstream group of people, yet “time and again, English educators

[like Jennifer] hear preservice teachers [like Jordan], especially, voice their fears about the negative consequences they might face for introducing LGBT texts and interpretations” (Ressler & Chase, 2009, p. 17).

For reasons such as these, 63.77% of teachers surveyed about their attitudes toward YA literature with LGBTQ content either did not know much about such literature or did not find importance in “incorporating YAL with LGBT content into [their] curriculum and teaching” (Mason, 2008, p. 56). Regardless of teachers’ understandable fears about incorporating LGBTQ texts and topics into their classrooms, students like Marcus need to have texts available to them that mirror and validate their identities. McLean (1997) reminds us that adolescents like Marcus, who identify as LGBTQ, “need to read about stable, committed, and loving gay and lesbian relationships, and about contented, productive, and quite ‘normal’ lesbian and gay characters” (p. 183).

Because of Jordan’s recognition of the tensions created for students like Marcus and of the potential for literature to address their identity struggles, we examined some young adult novels with LGBTQ content for their feasibility in the classroom setting, either for direct instruction or simple inclusion on the classroom bookshelf. Much of our consideration focused on what we know about schools and teachers in the Bible Belt—the area of the country in which Jordan plans to teach. Like Sieben and Wallowitz (2009), Jordan wants to teach “students to read the word and the world (Freire, 1970/2000) from multiple perspectives

and to understand the complexities of gender and sexual orientation” (p. 48), but when he looks at the school experiences he has had as a preservice teacher, he does not feel comfortable in pushing too hard in his position as a new teacher. Sieben and Wallowitz also acknowledge that teachers sometimes “fear repercussions for teaching an LGBT curriculum” because they “assume their students’ parents to be closed-minded” (pp. 7–8). This characterizes Jordan’s fear, so in our conversations, we talked about which LGBTQ texts he felt comfortable including in the curriculum and why.

In considering the most appropriate young adult books dealing with LGBTQ issues for use in the classroom, we identified six criteria, which we used to rank the texts from *most appropriate* to *most debatable* use in classroom readings. In creating this ranking system, we took into consideration the concerns teachers have about incorporating these texts into their curriculum. In the study of teachers’ attitudes toward YA literature with LGBTQ content, Mason (2008) speculated, “Perhaps it is teachers’ unfamiliarity with the texts that contributes to their concern and/or negative attitudes” (p. 57). Therefore, our goal in ranking the texts from *most appropriate* to *most debatable* use in classroom readings was to consider inservice and preservice teachers’ current knowledge of and comfort with young adult novels presenting LGBTQ content. The criteria are as follows:

1. Realistic consequences toward public behavior of LGBTQ identification
2. Societal view of homosexual behaviors
3. Issues addressed other than the LGBTQ community
4. Confrontation of stereotypes
5. Accessibility to students not identifying as LGBTQ
6. Existing benefits for textual analysis in the classroom

Using Specific Criteria to Select Classroom Texts

Realistic Consequences toward Public Behavior of LGBTQ Identification

Several books for teens, such as Alex Sanchez’s *Rainbow Boys* (2001) and David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), address fantastical perspectives of reality and offer unrealistic consequences to life actions. To us, books like these are appropriate for leisure reading, but not necessarily for the classroom book-

Students like Marcus need to have texts available to them that mirror and validate their identities.

shelf. Therefore, our first criterion for introducing an LGBTQ young adult text into the middle or high school classroom strives to maintain a fair and realistic perspective on consequences resulting from public behavior by gays or lesbians. According to GLSEN's 2009 School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010), "Nearly 90% of students reported being verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) at school because of their sexual orientation" and "4 in 10 students reported being physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) at school because of their sexual orientation" (p. 25). Undoubtedly, Marcus was one of these statistics. Perhaps seeing himself realistically mirrored in young adult literature might have helped him to make decisions about how to present or hide his identity.

Texts such as Garden's *Annie on My Mind* (1982) that address realistic consequences to openly identifying as gay are more appropriate than those creating a false, or even absent, attitude about being gay. Garden writes about two lesbian girls experiencing trials of their discovered lesbian identity, along with the joys. However, two lesbian teachers suffer job loss because of society's reaction to openly gay behavior. Wilson (2008) also depicts a very realistic social tone when one of his gay teen protagonists is harassed by high school peers in *What They Always Tell Us*.

However, it is even more appropriate to include texts where adolescents experience acceptance by others as a result of openly identifying as gay. Levithan presents such teens and acceptance in *The Realm of Possibility* (2004). Teens need to see both ends of the spectrum concerning realistic consequences for openly identifying as LGBTQ. Seeing characters who mirror the positive and negative struggles associated with this facet of identity can help teens make informed decisions about presenting their sexual orientation to others while helping other teens develop more empathy for peers struggling with sexual orientation.

Societal View of Homosexual Behavior

Young adult literature might also be considered according to the *degree* of social views (along a continuum from condemnation to complete acceptance and support) about gay, lesbian, and/or transgender issues. Parents, teachers, and even students vary in degrees of acceptance toward LGBTQ issues. In Mason's (2008) survey of preservice and inservice

teachers' attitudes, the findings showed that "although nearly a quarter of the participants' responses indicated a sense of appreciation of YAL with LGBT content, many others' responses indicated little tolerance for LGBT people and literature" (p. 57). GLSEN notes that high incidences of harassment toward students identifying as LGBTQ in schools "is exacerbated by school staff rarely, if ever, intervening on behalf of LGBT students" (Kosciw et al., 2010, p. xvi).

Consequently, more YA texts dealing with more accepted zones of LGBTQ identities, such as lesbian-

ism in *Annie on My Mind* (Garden, 1982) and being gay and straight in *What They Always Tell Us* (Wilson, 2008), can be introduced into the curriculum.

In this spectrum on YAL, *The Realm of Possibility* (Levithan, 2004) offers an even broader range of teenage voices, presenting 20 students who are gay, straight, lesbian, and, above all, intertwined with one another. Simply reading such texts and looking through the window

to "glimpse into the lives of the 'other'" (McLean, 1997, p. 178) can begin to address the stereotypes that parents, teachers, and students may hold about LGBTQ issues. By allowing a diverse range of voice in the young adult books introduced, our students can gradually demolish all socially stigmatized levels of sexual identities that keep some of the richest voices silenced in our literature and our society.

Issues Addressed Other than the LGBTQ Community

It is crucial that young adult literature in the classroom deal with issues other than those of LGBTQ identity. These texts deal not just with concerns of sexual identity, but also with suicidal tendencies, the struggle with honest decision making, and the pressures at home that most teens face. This criterion informs students about the diverse backgrounds that surround them, and makes the literature more relatable from their point of view. McLean (1997) asserts,

These texts deal not just with concerns of sexual identity, but also with suicidal tendencies, the struggle with honest decision making, and the pressures at home that most teens face.

“When I look at multicultural education materials, I usually find that one particular ‘segment of all humanity’—the 10% of the population that is homosexual—is conspicuously absent” (p. 179).

More often than not, teachers will shy away from texts that have an array of homosexual or transgen-

der ideas, deeming them taboo or anticipating that parents and administrators will find them so (Mason, 2008). By ignoring texts because of these concerns, students can form slanted perceptions of our world. We also wonder if teachers’ fears about including LGBTQ literature for teens in the classroom leads them to overlook other themes on which they might focus students’

attention when reading these novels. While LGBTQ characters certainly play a role in the novels we considered, each offers other themes and topics worthy of classroom exploration.

Confrontation of Stereotypes

As previously noted, LGBTQ voices tend to be silenced in our classroom literature; however, literature offers a window into those voices, confronting and dismantling stereotypes—a vital element in the curriculum (McLean, 1997). In *What They Always Tell Us* (Wilson, 2008), Alex steps away from the anti-sports homosexual stereotype, embracing his desire to run cross country. Konigsburg’s *Out of the Pocket* (2008) also attempts to shine light on the arena of straight-dominated high school football, intriguing readers with a closeted star quarterback. Stereotypes exist and are perpetuated out of ignorance and lack of realistic representation in some young adult literature. Including literature that varies the gender identity roles of teens not constrained by stereotypes is a healthy means of mirroring the similarities between adolescent LGBTQ characters and readers.

Accessibility to Students’ Not Identifying as LGBTQ

In order for young adult literature to relate to all of our students’ lives, the texts’ accessibility for students

not identifying as LGBTQ must also be weighed.

Students carry preconceived notions about sexual identity, as evidenced by the harassment of students like Marcus who identify as LGBTQ. Students’ negative attitudes may make them reluctant to read texts with an LGBTQ lead character who has “come out” or with descriptive romantic encounters between LGBTQ characters. Reluctance to read these texts, for whatever reason, makes them inaccessible to straight students.

Peters’s *Luna* (2004), Wilson’s *What They Always Tell Us* (2008), and Kluger’s *My Most Excellent Year* (2008) offer strong considerations for classroom use because their approach to LGBTQ topics is not centered solely on a gay protagonist. Regan in *Luna* (Peters, 2004) and James in *What They Always Tell Us* (Wilson, 2008) are straight siblings dealing with their respective brothers’ struggle to fit into a world that would likely shun them. In *My Most Excellent Year*, T.C. unquestioningly accepts his friend’s open homosexuality. By diving into the literature through the perceptions of a character *not* identifying as LGBTQ but who must come to terms with someone he/she cares about who *does* identify as LGBTQ, students can broaden their level of understanding and empathy. This, then, segues into the sixth and final criterion for selecting LGBTQ literature that incorporates honest teen identities—classroom application.

Existing Benefits for Textual Analysis in the Classroom

These novels can offer many levels for textual analysis, allowing for critical evaluation of characters and plot, as well as the sticky grammar usage teachers mostly dread. For example, *What They Always Tell Us* (Wilson 2008) is written in free verse, encouraging pairings with poetry, perhaps from Whitman or other canonical texts. Herz and Gallo suggest that if teachers and critics compare quality young adult fiction “with the elements of adult fiction, we begin to realize that many YAL authors . . . reflect mastery of the novel form combined with well-crafted writing” (2005, p. 11).

Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) use the literary lens of queer theory to engage students with analyzing texts. (Textual analysis is not limited to queer theory, of course; other lenses for engaging students in textual analysis are offered by Appleman in *Critical Encoun-*

ters in *High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* [2009]). Even discussion resulting from students' thoughtful opinions about the texts can engage a range of social and diplomatic skills necessary for creating prosperous citizens and lifelong learners who contemplate the cosmos one voice at a time. What better way to begin than by opening a book, one inclusive of all manner of identities?

Possible Texts to Act as Mirrors and Windows

The following six texts by no means offer an inclusive list of possibilities for introducing young adult novels with LGBTQ content in the classroom. Rather, they represent the specific texts that Jordan explored and discussed with me through his course work, and they represent texts that he saw as offering a mirror of identity for students like his classmate Marcus. Using the aforementioned criteria, they are presented from *most appropriate* to *most debatable* use in classroom readings.¹

***My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park* by Steve Kluger (2008)**

This novel presents endearing and dynamic characters who embark on a series of personal journeys during their freshman year of high school. T.C. tries to help a deaf child meet his idol, Mary Poppins; Augie, who loves musical theater, realizes that he is gay; and Alejandra, whose father is a Mexican ambassador, reveals her theatrical talents to her traditional parents. The novel is rich with cultural allusions and facts ranging from the Red Sox to Japanese Internment to Mary Poppins, so it offers something for every reader.

***Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden (1982)**

This novel was originally published in 1982 but still holds relevant themes for today and remains on banned booklists almost 30 years later. Liza and Annie are two girls from different New York schools who become friends after meeting at the museum one day. As the girls spend more time together, they develop a loving relationship, which they keep a secret despite feeling that it is right. While Liza's house sits for two lesbian teachers at her school, which is ruled by an authoritarian principal, she and Annie have a chance to fully explore their feelings for each other. After they

are caught having sex, they discover that their actions have consequences that reach beyond them.

***What They Always Tell Us* by Martin Wilson (2008)**

This heartwrenching and realistic novel illustrates the unique relationship that exists between two brothers. James and Alex are enduring high school intent on simply making it through. After Alex commits social suicide by drinking cleaning solution at a high school party, James must try and finish his senior year with some dignity. However, the distance that has grown between the two brothers is blown apart as Alex finds acceptance with cross country and with Nathan, James's senior friend. The two brothers deal with sports, homosexuality, tests, friendships, family, and a brotherhood that sees them through it all. These brothers' struggles can mirror issues many students face and open their minds to perspectives they may have previously ignored.

***The Realm of Possibility* by David Levithan (2004)**

This poetic novel presents a collective teenage voice that deserves noticing, as Levithan sculpts 20 voices from high school students. He tries to recreate the traditional high school clichés without restricting the characters to traditional stereotypes. Characters in the book grapple with issues of homosexuality, love, sex, friendship, fights, school, rejection, and acceptance. Adolescents' emotions and realities are all told through poetic verse, thereby adding a creative and personal tone to the perspectives reflected. Individuality and the ties that bind are woven into this novel and help students understand the complex emotions of others while also introducing them to poetic free verse.

***Out of the Pocket* by Bill Koningsberg (2008)**

This novel is a refreshing and needed book for young adult readers. Koningsberg creates a world with quarterback Bobby Framingham at the center. Bobby is beloved by his friends, his team, his family, and especially the college scouts. However, what everyone doesn't know is that Bobby is hiding a secret that could alter his dreams of a professional football career, and his world all together. Bobby is gay. Yet, with the betrayal of a friend, Bobby's secret is splashed across the national headlines. Bobby must grapple with reality and rejection, but he also experi-

ences acceptance and love. This book has the ability to compel students to reject traditional stereotypes of homosexuality and athletics, as well as to open the minds of readers to a current, important social issue.

***Luna* by Julie Ann Peters (2004)**

Regan, Liam's sister, tells this story about her brother, a transgender male with the inner female personality of Luna. After reading *Luna*, a story of struggle and acceptance, students are better able to see this girl, born in the wrong body, and the pain that accompanies her situation. Regan is dealing with her brother, Liam, and the constant struggle of seeing the inner Luna trying to escape social pretenses. *Luna* creatively and realistically portrays a sister's struggle to help her brother find him/herself, as well as her struggle to find her own self. This novel has the capacity to broaden mindsets by entrenching readers directly in the middle of an issue that is real, current, and important.

Conclusions

With the recent proliferation of young adult literature dealing with LGBTQ characters, readers are introduced to protagonists whose sexual identity is not "mainstream." Because these novels are character driven, "readers are challenged to understand [the protagonists] as fuller human beings with thoughts, desires, and interests that may mirror their own and that are not necessarily silenced by the novel's end" (Banks, 2009, p. 35). Including such novels helps to construct an inclusive curriculum that provides "positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events" called for by GLSEN (Kosciw et al., 2010, p. 20). Seeing themselves mirrored in such an inclusive curriculum can also help improve LGBTQ students' experience in school (Kosciw et al., 2010). Finally, GLSEN found, "Students in schools with inclusive curriculum were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBT people than students in schools without (61.2% vs. 37.3%)" (Kosciw et al., 2010, p. 20). These findings show that the curriculum we teach can transform students through the reflections of self they see in the literary mirror and through the views of "other" they see through the literary window.

We are by no means advocating that every classroom teacher rush out and include these or other

books like them in their classrooms. We know that is not within the realm of possibility for many teachers, including many with whom we work. Unquestionably, "the role of any good teacher is to instill in students the desire to be lifelong readers" (Cole, 2009, p. 315), which requires that we become familiar with what teens want to read and the texts that will mirror their lives and connect with them, especially as they struggle with that great question, "Who am I?" Herz and Gallo (2005) assert, "Too often reading for pleasure is not a goal, and students' opinions are irrelevant" (p. 16). They question, "Shouldn't a major purpose in teaching literature be to help students find pleasure in reading and to become lifetime readers?" (p. 17). And while not all books need to be (or can be) taught to all students, any classroom library should include books that mirror our students, no matter what their struggles or circumstances. If those books are at hand, we need only reach for them when we see a need in a student's life. Think how different Marcus's life would have been if his teacher had offered him the right book at the right time. Let us strive to be that teacher.

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Note

¹ During our ongoing discussion, we have begun adding to this list; some of our additions include *Parrotfish* by Ellen Witlinger (2007), *Freak Show* by James St. James (2007), *Ash* by Malinda Lo (2009), and *In Mike We Trust* by P. E. Ryan (2009).

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- Sanchez, A. (2001). *Rainbow boys* (1st ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.
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Call for Nominations: James Moffett Award

NCTE's Conference on English Education offers this grant to support teacher projects inspired by the scholarship of James Moffett. Each proposed project must display an explicit connection to the work of James Moffett and should both enhance the applicant's teaching by serving as a source of professional development and be of interest and value to other educators. All K–12 classroom educators who teach at least three hours or three classes per day are eligible to apply for the grant. Proposals on which two or more K–12 classroom educators have collaborated are also welcome.

Applications for the Moffett Award must include:

- A cover page with the applicant's name, work and home telephone numbers and addresses, email address, a brief profile of the applicant's current school and students, and a brief teaching history (when and where the applicant has taught)
- A proposal (not more than 5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) that includes an introduction and rationale for the work (What is the problem or question to be studied? How might such a project influence the project teacher's practice and potentially the practice of other teachers? Why is such a project important?); a description of the explicit connection to the work of James Moffett; initial objectives for the project (realizing these might shift during the project); a clear, focused project description that includes a timeline (What will be done? When? How? By whom?); a method of evaluating the project (What indicators might reviewers note that suggest the work was valuable to the applicant and to other teachers?); and a narrative budget (How will the money be spent?)
- A letter of support from someone familiar with the applicant's teaching and perceived ability to implement and assess the proposed project

Moffett Award winners receive a certificate designating the individual as the 2011 recipient of the CEE Moffett Award and a monetary award (up to \$1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project.

Submit proposals to CEE Moffett Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096 or cee@ncte.org, Attn: CEE Administrative Liaison. Proposals must be postmarked by **May 1, 2011**. 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 project.



Is the Sky Really Falling?

According to the National Education Association in early 2010, 300,000 teachers and other school personnel were expected to lose their jobs before the fall of 2010. It's a budget issue. Academic programs, athletics, club activities, libraries, remedial programs are among the areas that will be affected.

In one New Jersey community of 37,000, the school board has identified 96 positions to be eliminated. Ten school librarians have been pink-slipped. Only the position of the high school librarian has been spared. Can volunteers fill the gap? The job is much more than checking in and out books. How will these people get students hooked on books? How can they answer teachers' questions about titles related to what is being taught? Is there money for new titles? Who will evaluate what's out there and order? Who has the answers?

What about the public library? In this same community, there is a main building and one branch. The staff and hours have been reduced, and very little money has been allocated by the town council. The State has cut funding drastically. Now the main building will

be open shorter hours Tuesday through Sunday. The branch will be open only on Monday.

And this is a literate community! What are the implications for the rest of the country? How do publishers assess these developments?

Pique Their Interests

Freedom of choice is essential in developing a love of reading. As an adult, I enjoy visiting bookstores. I browse, looking at the covers and reading the blurbs. A title might grab my attention. *Fly by Night* by Frances Hardinge (HarperCollins, 2006) has this on its cover: "IMAGINE A WORLD IN WHICH ALL BOOKS HAVE BEEN BANNED!" How could I resist this book? The author has crafted a thrilling story, filled with deceptions and lots of action. Students have to browse—pick up books, sample them, and make their choices. Teachers and librarians can do book talks, guide students once they know these young peoples' interests and abilities. But choosing one's own reading matter is the ultimate goal.

I know there are programs such as DEAR (Drop Everything

and Read). The thing that bothers me about this activity is that it is not viewed as being as *real* an academic experience as when students read and study a book in common. Why? Shouldn't any reading experience carry the same academic weight? If one student reads *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (Scholastic, 2008) and another reads *Raised by Wolves* by Jennifer Lynn Barnes (Egmont, 2010), can't both discuss literary styles, plot, climax, and reasons for their choices? Isn't this what literacy development is all about? Developing independence?

I have always preferred teaching with a thematic approach. I broadly interpret a theme within a book, maybe a subplot, and let students choose a book, classic or modern, that develops that theme. Here are some examples for consideration.

Interesting People

Angel, Ann. *Janis Joplin Rise Up Singing*. Amulet, 2010.

Calcines, Eduardo F. *Leaving Glory-Town—One Boy's Struggle under Castro*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

Fleischman, Sid. *Sir Charlie: Chaplin, the Funniest Man in the World*. Greenwillow, 2010.

Hoose, Phillip. *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

Jarrow, Gail. *Robert H. Jackson: New Deal Lawyer, Supreme Court Justice, Nuremberg*

Prosecutor. Calkins Creek, 2008.

Levy, Debbie. *The Year of Goodbyes*. Hyperion, 2010.

Tunnell, Michael O. *Candy Bomber: The Story of the Berlin Airlift's "Chocolate Pilot."*

Charlesbridge, 2010.

Fantasy

Abbott, Ellen Jensen. *Watersmeet*. Marshall Cavendish, 2009.

Catanese, P.W. *The Books of Umber: Dragon Games*. Aladdin, 2010.

Coville, Bruce. *The Last Hunt*. Scholastic, 2010.

George, Jessica Day. *Princess of Glass*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Marchetta, Melina. *Finnikin of the Rock*. Candlewick, 2010.

Ryan, Carrie. *The Dead-Tossed Waves*. Delacorte, 2010.

Yolen, Jane. *Dragon's Heart*. Harcourt, 2009.

Families

Brandeis, Gayle. *My Life with the Lincolns*. Holt, 2010.

Chaltas, Thalia. *Because I Am Furry*. Viking, 2009.

Holt, Kimberly Willis. *The Water Seeker*. Holt, 2010.

Kent, Rose. *Rocky Road*. Knopf, 2010.

Kupers, Alice. *Lost for Words*. Harper, 2010.

Mendle, Jane. *My Ultimate Sister Disaster*. St. Martin, 2010.

Omololu, C.J. *Dirty Little Secrets*. Walker, 2010.

Growing Up around the World

Abdel-Fattah, Randa. *Where the Streets Had a Name*. Scholastic, 2010.

Gray, Keith. *Ostrich Boys*. Random House, 2010.

Lloyd, Saci. *The Carbon Diaries 2017*. Holiday House, 2010.

Nanji, Shenaaz. *Child of Dandelions*. Front Street, 2008.

Paterson, Katherine. *The Day of the Pelican*. Clarion, 2009.

Perkins, Nitali. *Bamboo People*. Charlesbridge, 2010.

Sheth, Kashmira. *Boys without Names*. Balzer + Bray, 2010.

Sports

Gifford, Clive. *The Kingfisher Soccer Encyclopedia*. Kingfisher, 2010.

Heldring, Thatcher. *Roy Morelli Steps Up to the Plate*. Delacorte, 2010.

Koertge, Ron. *Shakespeare Makes the Playoffs*. Candlewick, 2010.

Lupica, Mike. *The Batboy*. Philomel, 2010.

Wallace, Rich. *Sports Camp*. Knopf, 2010.

Weaver, Will. *Checkered Flag Cheater*. Harper, 2010.

Williams, Suzanne Morgan. *Bull Rider*. McElderry, 2009.

Make Way for Laughter

Behrens, Andy. *The Fast and the Furriest*. Knopf, 2010.

Crawford, Brent. *Carter's Big Break*. Hyperion, 2010.

Dionne, Erin. *The Total Tragedy of a Girl Named Hamlet*. Dial, 2010.

Gephart, Donna. *How to Survive Middle School*. Delacorte, 2010.

Law, Ingrid. *Scumble*. Dial, 2010.

Rennison, Louise. *Are These My Broomas I See Before Me?* Harper, 2009.

Soup, Cuthbert. *A Whole Nother Story*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

On School Time

Barnes, Derrick. *We Could Be Brothers*. Scholastic, 2010.

Brody, Jessica. *The Karma Club*. Farra, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Draper, Sharon M. *Just Another Hero*. Atheneum, 2009.

Franklin, Emily, and Brendan Halpin. *The Half-Life of Planets*. Hyperion, 2010.

Lynch, Janet Nichols. *Addicted to Her*. Holiday House, 2010.

McGowan, Anthony. *The Knife That Killed Me*. Delacorte, 2010.

Quinter, Sofia. *Efrain's Secret*. Knopf, 2010.

Supernatural/Gothic

Cast, P. C., & Kristin Cast. *Burned*. St. Martin's, 2010.

Fantaskey, Beth. *Jekyll Loves Hyde*. Harcourt, 2010.

Henderson, Jason. *Alex Van Helsing: Vampire Rising*. Harper, 2010.

Mead, Richelle. *Vampire Academy: Spirit Bound*. Razorbill, 2010.

Plum-Ucci, Carol. *Fire Will Fall*. Harcourt, 2010.

Rowen, Michelle. *Demon Princess: Reign Check*. Walker, 2010.

Schreiber, Ellen. *Love Bites*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2010.

Historical Fiction

Cushman, Karen. *Alchemy and Meggy Swann*. Clarion, 2010.

Gleitzman, Morris. *Once*. Holt, 2010.

Gonzalez, Christina Diaz. *The Red Umbrella*. Knopf, 2010.

Kephart, Beth. *Dangerous Neighbors*. Egmont, 2010.
Lasky, Kathryn. *Ashes*. Viking, 2010.
Preus, Margi. *Heart of the Samurai*. Amulet, 2010.
Watts, Irene N. *No Moon*. Tundra, 2010.

Friendships

Carbone, Elisa. *Jump*. Viking, 2010.
Ehrenhaft, Daniel. *Friend Is Not a Verb*. Harper, 2010.
Elkeles, Simone. *Rules of Attraction*. Walker, 2010.
Finn, Daniel. *She Thief*. Feiwel, 2010.
Frank, Hillary. *The View from the Top*. Dutton, 2010.
Pearson, Mary. *The Miles Between*. Holt, 2009.
Sheinmel, Alyssa, B. *The Beautiful Between*, 2010.

Mystery and Suspense

Abrahams, Peter. *Bullet Point*. Harper, 2010.
Cooney, Caroline B. *They Never Came Back*. Delacorte, 2010.
Grisham, John. *Theodore Boone: Kid Lawyer*. Dutton, 2010.
Peacock, Shane. *The Secret Fiend*. Tundra, 2010.
Schrefer, Eliot. *The Deadly Sister*. Scholastic, 2010.
Sedgwick, Marcus. *Revolver*. Roaring Brook, 2010.
Wynne-Jones, Tim. *The Uninvited*. Candlewick, 2010.

Graphic Novels

D'Errico, Camilla. *Burn*. Simon Pulse, 2009.
Guibert, Emmanuel, Didier Lefevre, & Frederic Lemercier (Alexis Siegel, Trans.).

The Photographer. First Second, 2009.
Hague, Michael. *In the Small*. Little, Brown, 2009.
Hale, Shannon & Dean Hale (Nathan Hale, Illus.). *Calamity Jack*. Bloomsbury, 2010.
Kneece, Mark (Adaptor) (Anthony Spay, Illus.). *Rod Serling's The Twilight Zone: The Midnight Sun*. Walker, 2009.
Novgorodoff, Danica, Benjamin Percy, & James Ponsoldt. *Refresh, Refresh*. First Second, 2009.
White, Tracy. *How I Made It to Eighteen*. Roaring Brook, 2010.

Search for a New Editor of *English Journal*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal*. In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011**. Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

Books about Young Adult Literature (2000–2010):

A Retrospective

In recent years, the field of young adult literature has seen an explosion of books for and about adolescent readers. This plethora of new material—*books for teens* (fiction and nonfiction) and *books about teens and their literary preferences*—continues to line the bookshelves of popular bookstores and avid readers with an abundance that would make the founders of young adult literature smile with glee and pride.

With this in mind, I have prepared reviews of selected textbooks published from 2000–2010 that are devoted to the study of young adult literature. This column will not speak to specific new books of fiction for young adults, but I believe the books that are reviewed will serve for years to come as rich resources for those who care deeply about the promulgation of work that speaks openly and honestly about good books for teens.

References

The forerunner of all reference textbooks on the study of young adult literature is *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (Allyn & Bacon, 2008) by Nilsen and Donelson. Now in its eighth edition, this comprehensive and absorbing text frames the importance of the study of young adult literature within literary, historical, and social contexts.

Historically, it is worth noting that Nilsen and Donelson are pioneers in the study of young adult literature, both having studied with G. Robert Carl-

son (University of Northern Iowa), one of the leading lights in the study of books for adolescents. Together, in 1973, they helped create ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE), serving as its initial presidents and the founding editors of *The ALAN Newsletter*, which eventually became *The ALAN Review*.

Bucher and Hinton's *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation* (2nd ed., Pearson, 2009) is another innovative text revealing what is current and viable in the study of books for young adults. Filled with detailed suggestions for use in the classroom and multiple readings on critical viewpoints, this is a smart compendium for any young adult book lover.

Essentials of Young Adult Literature (2nd ed., Allyn and Bacon, 2009) is a delicious text filled with relevant information and tidbits about books for teens. Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown have compiled a text that includes extensive lists of recommended books, organized by genre and topic and annotated for ease of consideration for classroom use and personal reading. This resource is a perfect complement to Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, and Short's equally compelling text, *Essentials of Children's Literature* (Allyn & Bacon, 2010).

Cole has a terrific new text entitled *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century* (McGraw Hill, 2008). Cole's good work discusses in considerable depth the reading interests of adolescents. Each of the genre chapters includes illustrative methods for teaching

reading to all learners and annotated lists of relevant resources.

The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature (Continuum, 2005), edited by Cullinan, Kunzel, and Wooten, contains over 800 signed entries written by 200 contributors on every aspect of young adult literature. This one volume is suitable for those with both a passing and serious interest in the growth and depth of young adult literature.

Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature (Routledge, 2010) by Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins is the first attempt to pull together in one volume the research on children's and young adult literature that is currently scattered across three intersecting disciplines: education, English, and library information science. The book's organization reflects the special interests of each of these disciplines. Section one focuses on readers, the province of education; section two on the analysis of text, the province of English and literature; and section three looks at the social contexts surrounding and influencing the intersections of readers and texts.

Edited Texts

Without a doubt, the birth of books for teens has brought forth a collection of texts with multiple essays about the study and teaching of young adult literature. What follows are some resources that highlight the best of this specific genre of edited works.

Exploding the Myths: The Truth about Teenagers and Reading by Aronson (Scarecrow, 2001) is a series of essays challenging what is considered acceptable and worthy for young adult readers.

Hit Lists for Young Adults 2: Frequently Challenged Books by Lesesne and Chance (American Library Association, 2002) is an excellent resource that illuminates some of the more frequently challenged young adult books of our day.

The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction (Scarecrow, 2005) by Brown and St. Clair is a sharp companion for teachers and media specialists seeking to use historical fiction in their lessons.

From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics (2nd ed., Greenwood, 2005) by Herz and Gallo examines how literature for teens has evolved from classical texts to

more contemporary fare and how each can complement the other.

The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–2004 (Scarecrow, 2006) by Cart and Jenkins explores how sexual identity reveals itself in contemporary books for teens.

Trupe's *Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature* (Greenwood Press, 2006) is a critical look at prominent ideas and issues raised in teen books and how these issues can be made relevant to young people.

A fun book is *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* (Scarecrow, 2007) by Nilsen and Nilsen. This intriguing work demonstrates how authors of young adult literature use the creation of names for people, places, events, inventions, animals, and imaginary concepts as one of their most important literary techniques.

Brenner's *Understanding Magna and Anime* (Libraries Unlimited, 2007) explores Japanese art forms anime and manga and their influence on books for teens. Highly visual, emotionally charged, and action-packed, this handy reference provides a brief history of anime and manga, discusses its common themes, cultural significance, and impact on adolescents everywhere.

Keeling's *Discovering Their Voices: Engaging Adolescent Girls with Young Adult Literature* (International Reading Association, 2007) is a thematic read about the portrayal of young girls in adolescent novels and how that has changed considerably since the birth of teen fiction.

A remarkable volume is Beers, Probst, and Rief's *Adolescent Literacy* (Heinemann, 2007), a collection of essays by educators and young adult authors alike on the profound forces and influences shaping contemporary adolescent literature as well as reading habits and resources.

Waller's *Constructing Adolescents in Fantastic Realism* (Routledge, 2008) allows the reader to explore one area of a literary genre that never tires—fantasy that speaks so vividly of real world events.

Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults (Routledge, 2009), edited by Hintz and Ostry, explores the creation of perfect and near-perfect societies in young adult books

Young Adult Literature and Culture (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), edited by Eiss, examines the interrelationship between teen books and popular culture.

Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature (Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009) is a highly analytical study of today's young adult literature. Latrobe and Drury explore numerous critical theories of literature—New Criticism/Formal Criticism; Psychological Criticism; Sociological Criticism; Relationships in Context; Historical Criticism; Gender Criticism; Opposite Sexes or Neighboring Sexes; Archtypal/Mythological Criticism; Popular Culture and Criticism; and Reader Response. In this book and accompanying CD-Rom set, the authors explore a multiplicity of methods to develop vibrant reading communities among adolescents, including understanding multiple intelligences, inquiry-based learning, and diverse beliefs. A detailed appendix, complete with annotated book lists, rounds this welcomed young adult resource.

Learning Curves: Body Image with Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature (Scarecrow, 2009) by Younger explores in perceptive and insightful commentary an often-overlooked critical discourse: the female body as portrayed in books for adolescents.

Reynolds's *Mixed Heritage in Young Adult Literature* (Scarecrow, 2009) is a critical exploration of how mixed-heritage characters (those of mixed race, ethnicity, religion, and/or adoption) and real-life people have been portrayed in young adult fiction and nonfiction.

In *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity across Cultures and Classrooms: Contexts for the Literary Lives of Teens* (Routledge, 2010), edited by Alsup, leading scholars examine the theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical connections between the reading and teaching of young adult literature and adolescent identity development. Specifically, this critical work addresses who is reading young adult literature, why they are reading it, and why teachers should teach it.

A unique spin on the study of young adult literature is Dewan's *The Art of Place in Literature for Children and Young Adults: How Locale Shapes a Story* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), a work that illuminates how a story's locale often underscores a book's theme.

Campbell's Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature (Scarecrow, 2010) is a collection of essays whereby Campbell, a noted young adult book expert, shares her ruminations about trends and issues in the presentation of young adult books.

Finally, *Reading the Adolescent Romance: Sweet*

Valley High and the Popular Young Adult Romance Novel (Routledge, 2010) by Pattee is a terrific piece highlighting this very specific genre of young adult literature.

Practical Texts—Teaching

To be sure, there are a plethora of books devoted to teaching young adult literature—and in most unique ways. Here are a few.

Joan Kaywell put together a series using young adult literature to help resolve real-life issues. This sharp series from Greenwood Press pairs an educator with a therapist to share insights about troubled adolescent characters. Books included are Bowman's *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Health Issues* (2000), Kaplan's *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Identity Issues* (1999), Carroll's *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Societal Issues* (1999), Kaywell's *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Abuse Issues* (2004), and Allen's *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teens Cope with End of Life Issues* (2001).

Reading Rules: Motivating Teens to Read by Knowles and Smith (Libraries Unlimited, 2001) details numerous ideas for motivating teen readers. Included are practical classroom ideas and annotated lists of books for adolescents, educators, and parents.

Book Bridges for ESL Students: Using Young Adult and Children's Literature to Teach ESL (Scarecrow, 2002) by Reid provides practical classroom strategies using picture and chapter books for helping emerging English speakers grow in their proficiency.

Elliott and Dupuis's *Young Adult Literature in the Classroom: Reading It, Teaching It, Loving It* (International Reading Association, 2002) is a smart companion for teachers who are always asking themselves (or being asked), "Should I use young adult literature in the classroom? And if so, how?" Dividing the work into three sections—"Responding to Reading," "Exploring Genres," and "Studying Authors,"—this reference answers many questions about why young adult literature is relevant to classroom instruction (and a perfect substitute for the literary canon) and suggests a host of classroom instructional practices and related websites.

Sheppard's *Using Literature to Connect Young Adolescent Concerns throughout the Curriculum* (Na-

tional Middle School Association, 2004) and Bushman and Haas's *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* (4th ed., Prentice Hall, 2005) are both highly accessible classroom references filled with practical strategies for incorporating young adult literature in the traditional middle and high school English classroom.

Kunzel and Hardesty's *The Teen-Centered Book Club: Readers into Leaders* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) is a practical how-to guide that addresses how book clubs "by, for, and about teens" are the only ones destined to succeed.

Similarly, Lesesne's *Naked Reading* (Stenhouse, 2006) is a book that lives up to its title. Unabashedly, Lesesne invites readers into how she motivates young readers to glom onto the intriguing and illuminating world of young adult books.

Equally appealing is *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* (Erlbaum, 2006) by Beach, Appleman, Hynds, and Wilhem, which examines the myriad methods with which one can introduce teen books to kids.

Rice's *What Was It Like? Teaching History and Culture through Young Adult Literature* (Teachers College Press, 2006) is a highly specific teaching text, one that aims to elucidate the role of historical fiction in teaching kids about their world.

Sprague and Keeling's *Discovering Their Voices: Engaging Adolescent Girls with Young Adult Literature* (International Reading Association, 2007) details a curriculum that infuses literature-based discussions to help adolescent girls deal positively with their lives and develop their own voices. Extensive literature reviews and a bibliography help in selecting appropriate books for teen girls.

Teaching Young Adult Literature: Sharing the Connection (Wadsworth, 2007) by Brown and Stephens is a good resource for all things possible and real when using young adult books in secondary classrooms.

Kaywell's *Dear Author: Letters of Hope—Top Young Adult Authors Respond to Kids' Toughest Issues* (Philomel, 2007) is a smart piece about letters written to authors by teens who care about the books they read.

Literature and the Web (Heinemann, 2008) by Webb and Rozeman explores how the World Wide Web can be your best resource for studying books for and about teens.

Layne's *Igniting a Passion for Reading: Successful*

Strategies for Building Lifetime Readers (Stenhouse, 2009) is a smart, inspiring read by an author who both writes for teens and prepares teacher educators.

Polette's *Mysteries in the Classroom* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) outlines strategies for introducing adolescents to 17 teen mystery titles and 6 favorite teen mystery authors.

Practical Texts—Library

Not surprisingly, there have appeared a number of good resources that are aimed at librarians, so they, too, can help teens find good books written specifically for them.

Sullivan's *Reaching Reluctant Young Readers: A Practical Handbook for Librarians and Teachers* (Scarecrow, 2002) and *Serving Young Teens and Tweens* by Anderson (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) are smart companions for any librarian looking to enliven their services for both enlightened and uninformed teen readers

The Guy-Friendly YA Library (Libraries Unlimited, 2007) by Welch promotes a lively discussion about designing library and teen programs that are appealing to young male readers.

Tuccillo's *Teen-Centered Library Service: Putting Youth Participation into Practice* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) is a detailed practical guide that can help you get teens involved in local libraries.

Farrelly's *Make Room for Teens!: A Guide to Developing Teen Spaces in the Library* (Libraries Unlimited, 2010) outlines in vivid detail step-by-step instructions for providing a highly accessible and engaging adolescent reading area in your local library.

Becoming a Young Adult Author

Naturally, eager readers aspire to be accomplished authors, and there are a number of helpful resources for budding young adult novelists.

Pelrberg's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing for Young Adults* (Alpha, 2006) is a comprehensive guide that introduces aspiring storytellers to the ins and outs of writing fiction and nonfiction for young adults. Information includes an overview of writing: dialogue and point of view; plot, setting, and character construction; choosing an agent and publisher; marketing the finished work, and more.

Crook's. *Writing Books for Children and Young*

Adults (Self Counsel Press, 2007) and Liu's *Writing for Children and Teens: A Crash Course (How to Write, Revise, and Publish a Kid's or Teen Book with Children's Book Publishers)* (Pivotal Publishing, 2008) are both excellent resources for learning the ropes about young adult publishing.

Wild Ink: How to Write Fiction for Young Adults (Cottonwood Press, 2008) by Hanley is a highly entertaining guide to the ins and outs of writing fiction for teens. Complete with exercises to help budding authors find their inner voice, this fun read also includes interviews with accomplished young adult authors—Joan Bauer, Chris Crutcher, T. A. Barron—that prove both informative and enlightening.

Brooks's *Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know from Crafting the Idea to Landing the Publishing Deal* (Sourcebooks, 2009) is another text that provides information for aspiring authors of young adult literature.

Annotated Texts—General

No list would be complete without mentioning all the annotated resources that concisely summarize the array of young adult books available.

Stephens's *Coretta Scott King Awards: Using Great Literature with Children and Young Adults* (Libraries Unlimited, 2000) is a book that combines annotations of these award winners with practical strategies for their classroom use.

Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues by Cai (Greenwood, 2006) examines multiple viewpoints surrounding the place of multicultural literature in schools—including who should write it, how it should be selected, and what function it plays. Although primarily geared to children's books, this is still an important critical resource.

In *100 More Popular Young Adult Authors: Biographical Sketches and Bibliographies* (Libraries Unlimited, 2002), Drew presents a treasure trove of information about contemporary authors and their good books for teens.

Libretto and Barr's *High/Low Handbook: Best Books and Web Sites for Reluctant Teen Readers* (4th ed., Libraries Unlimited, 2002) annotates more than 500 titles for kids who “are least likely to read.” Fiction and nonfiction are included, organized into broad topics designed to appeal to young readers.

Ansel & Holley's *What Do Children and Young Adults Read Next?: A Reader's Guide to Children and Young Adults*. (Gale Cengage, 2004) and Gillespie's *The Children's and Young Adult Literature Handbook: A Research and Reference Guide* (Libraries Unlimited, 2005) are invaluable resources that evaluate more than 1,000 publications, covering the entire range of materials dealing with the study and promotion of books for teens—general references, bibliographies, literary awards, professional organizations, etc.—from all over the world. Each chapter begins with a complete analysis of the chapter content, followed by many detailed annotations of related references.

Nadelman's *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: A Comprehensive Guide* (5th ed., Libraries Unlimited, 2005) describes and categorizes nearly 7,500 fantasy novels and story collections published in English in the US between 1900 and 2004.

Mahood's *A Passion for Print: Promoting Reading and Books to Teens* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) offers inspiring and practical guidelines for “turning on” even the most reluctant readers.

Keene's *The Big Book of Teen Reading Lists: 100 Great, Ready-to-Use Book Lists for Educators, Librarians, Parents, and Teens* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) has more than 100 reproducible lists of books for ages 13–18, listed under every conceivable subject and theme, designed to motivate young readers.

In *Classic Teenplots: A Booktalk Guide to Use with Readers Ages 12–18* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006), Gillespie and Naden have selected 100 classic YA titles published from 1966–2006; each title is categorized by genre, and the authors provide detailed information about the book, the author, similar stories, and key passages that can motivate adolescent readers. Additionally, in *The Newbery/Printz Companion: Booktalk and Related Materials for Award Winners and Honor Books* (3rd ed., Libraries Unlimited, 2006), Gillespie and Naden provide the same treatment to all Newbery Medal winners from 1922–2006 and all Printz Award winners from the prize's inception in 2000 until 2006.

In *War and Peace: A Guide to Literature and New Media, Grades 4–8* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006), Walter presents about 400 annotated books, videos, CD-ROMs, and websites that discuss war and peace in defined thematic chapters.

Fichtelberg's *Encountering Enchantment: A Guide to Speculative Fiction for Teens* (Libraries Unlimited,

2006) organizes and annotates by genre, subgenre, and theme some 1,400 titles of fantasy, science fiction, and the paranormal, most published from 1990–2005.

Gotcha for Guys! Nonfiction Books to Get Boys Excited about Reading (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) by Baxter and Kochel offers citations for more than 1,100 books specifically intended to pique the interest of middle grade boys.

Cultural Journeys: Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults by Gates and Mark (Scarecrow, 2006) is a great resource for selecting literature that speaks of diverse cultures.

Young Adult Literature in Action: A Librarian's Guide (Libraries Unlimited, 2008) by Chance is a smart guide for those desiring a good, concise, smart overview of what is current and viable in young adult literature. For the uninitiated, Chance provides an activity-oriented survey of young adult books—realistic, fantastic, and informational—combined with theoretical understandings of why young adult literature matters. Using the genre approach allows the author to embed both classroom strategies and reader rationales for classroom teachers who are just beginning to use young adult books with their students.

Thomas and Barr have compiled *Popular Series Fiction for Middle School and Teen Readers* (Libraries Unlimited, 2008), providing a handy reference for the best and most popular adolescent fiction that appears in series format. For each of the 700-plus series titles, the authors provide a description, tips about its general appeal, and a list of each book in the series.

Gentle Reads: Great Books to Warm Hearts and Lift Spirits, Grades 5–9 (Libraries Unlimited, 2008) by McDaniel recommends nearly 500 affirmative feel-good stories about the triumph of the human spirit. These stories include tales of survival, strong women, and quick-witted souls. What makes these books unique is that they are for young readers who desire a great read, but want to avoid reading about risky or potentially dangerous activities.

Zbaracki's *Best Books for Boys: A Resource for Educators* (Libraries Unlimited, 2008) is the perfect compendium for those who know reluctant readers, especially boys. All 500 entries are organized by genre and offer detailed age-specific annotations. Genres include everything from reality to fantasy, including nonfiction and poetry.

Fraser's *Reality Rules! A Guide to Teen Nonfiction*

Reading Interests (Libraries Unlimited, 2008) describes more than 500 titles published since 2000 with a special appeal for teens interested in true-to-life stories.

In *Best Books for Middle School and Junior High Readers, Grades 6–9* and *Best Books for High School Readers, Grades 9–12* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009), Barr and Gillespie present approximately 15,000 entries for high school adolescents in each volume, with easily discernible annotations that cover the best in fiction and nonfiction published from 2004–2008. Special mention is made of Lexiles and titles available in audio format.

Genre Talks for Teens: Booktalks and More for Every Teen Reading Interest (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) by Schall previews more than 100 titles released between 2003–2008, detailing their plots, appeal, and age-level appropriateness.

Green Reads: Best Environmental Resources for Youth, K–12 (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) by Wesson organizes and describes some 450 fiction and nonfiction titles, both print and electronic resources, all designed to appeal to young readers and engender discussion about the environment.

Koelling's *Best Books for Young Adults* (3rd ed., American Library Association, 2009) is a perfect compendium for teachers and parents wanting to know the latest in books for teens. Arranged by genre and with a thorough index, the list of books with clear annotations makes for a smart presentation and easy resource.

Hilbun and Claes provide a comprehensive review of book awards in each of America's 51 states in *Coast to Coast: Exploring State Book Awards* (Libraries Unlimited, 2010).

A Family of Readers: The Book Lover's Guide to Children's and Young Adult Literature (Candlewick, 2010), edited by Sutton and Parravano, and *Reading Ladders: Leading Students from Where They Are to Where We'd Like Them to Be* (Heinemann, 2010), by Lesesne, help educators find the right book for the right kids.

Meloni's *Teen Chick Lit: A Guide to Reading Interests* (Libraries Unlimited, 2010) is a comprehensive guide that categorizes and describes more than 500 titles; the 6 major chapters represent themes indicative of "literature for teenage girls." Each chapter includes a complete description of the representative theme or subgenre and then provides full bibliographic informa-

tion, age recommendations, awards, etc. As Meloni writes, “chick lit” has become one of the most popular genres for young women—even landing a Library of Congress subject heading.

In *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teen Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests* (Libraries Unlimited, 2010), Webber outlines some 300 fiction and nonfiction suggestions for straight and GLBT teens and their families. Complete annotations include sexual orientation references (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) and additional resources.

Literature Links to World History, K-12: Resources to Enhance and Entice (Libraries Unlimited, 2010) by Adamson presents over 2,700 titles, fiction and nonfiction, for specific grade levels, essential to making literary connections to world history.

About Young Adult Authors

Finally, no list of books would be complete without a list of all the smart biographies that have been written about young adult authors:

Angela Johnson: Poetic Prose (Scarecrow, 2006) by Hinton

Caroline B. Cooney: Faith and Fiction (Scarecrow, 2002) by Carroll

Critical Companion to J. D. Salinger by Mueller and Hochman (Facts on File, 2010)

Gary Paulsen (Greenwood, 2007) by Blasingame

Jacqueline Woodson (Mitchell Lane, 2008) by Hinton

Janet McDonald: The Original Project Girl (Scarecrow, 2008) by Ross-Stroud

Laurie Halse Anderson: Speaking in Tongues (Scarecrow, 2009) by Glenn

Richard Peck: The Past Is Paramount (Scarecrow, 2008) by Gallo

Russell Freedman: Nonfiction for Teens (Scarecrow, 2009) by Bloom

Sharon Draper: Embracing Literacy (Scarecrow, 2008) by Hinton

Teaching the Selected Works of Chris Crutcher (Heinemann, 2008) by Monseau and Hauschildt

Teaching the Selected Works of Gary Paulsen (Heinemann, 2009) by Salvner and Monseau

Teaching the Selected Works of Katherine Paterson (Heinemann, 2007) by Stover

Teaching the Selected Works of Mildred D. Taylor (Heinemann, 2007) by Crowe

Teaching the Selected Works of Robert Cormier (Heinemann, 2007) by Monseau

Teaching the Selected Works of Walter Dean Meyers (Heinemann, 2007) by Zitlow

Virginia Euwer Wolf: Capturing the Music of Young Voices (Scarecrow, 2003) by Reid

The lists and descriptions in this article are not exhaustive, but they represent a fair overview of what is available when one begins the study of young adult literature. And the best thing is . . . there are more to come!

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Have a comment on *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature*? Please share your thoughts with us:

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Comments:

Hear Us Out!

LGBTQ Young Adult Literature Wishes Are Answered!

Michael Cart issued his clarion call for the inclusion of “gay/lesbian adolescent literature” in libraries and classrooms in 1997 with his landmark article, “Honoring Their Stories, Too: Literature for Gay and Lesbian Teens,” published in *The ALAN Review*. His emotional plea at the conclusion resonates:

We urgently need more serious attention to books for and about gay and lesbian and—yes—bisexual young people. We need more good novels that give faces to gay and lesbian young people; we need more good novels that offer them the shock of recognition, the knowledge that they are not alone; more good novels that inform the minds and hearts of non-homosexual readers, that offer them opportunities for insight and empathy by shattering stereotypes and humanizing their gay and lesbian peers. Not to have such books is an invitation to ignorance, which leads to fear, which leads to demonizing instead of humanizing, which leads to violence against not only the body but the spirit. (p. 45)

Cart remains one of the leading voices in the quest for more compassionate and realistic young adult literature (YAL) texts, both fiction and nonfiction, that feature Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) themes, plots, and characters. Following his lead, at the 1998 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention, we (Judith and Lisa) presented our summary of the then-current YAL offerings featuring LGBTQ themes and a wish list of suggestions for future works. The titles we reviewed were overwhelmingly similar, sharing common themes and characteristics that occurred so frequently as to become stereotypical.

During that 1998 presentation, we identified common characteristics of past LGBTQ young adult

novels, one of which was a tendency to present *being* LGBTQ as the central difficulty to be faced or reconciled. That being said, LGBTQs were also often secondary characters, rather than main ones, and victims rather than leaders. The overwhelming majority of LGBTQ characters were gay or lesbian; bisexuality was seldom represented. Characters were underdeveloped, representing *types*, such as males who had ominous pasts involving predatory behavior toward boys. Males were portrayed as especially feminine or flamboyant. Females were portrayed as especially masculine and were often physical education teachers who guided teens until, mocked by heterosexual girls and plagued by rumors, were pushed toward an unwanted outing. Unlike males, females’ sexuality was usually not revealed until the story’s end.

Characters’ lives remained abnormally isolated, and they were seldom seen with a partner, although older females had “roommates.” Murky, undefined past problems brought characters to current locations for new beginnings or led to current situations. Their lives were considered questionable by heterosexuals, and when characters’ sexuality was discovered, few heterosexual characters offered support. Men were frequently physically attacked and/or driven from the community by male mobs. Women were usually subject to rumors, anonymous letters, ridicule, etc. Characters became resigned to unfair fates, did not fight for themselves, and displayed shame over being LGBTQ.

Novels’ resolutions usually depended upon the LGBTQ character’s story departure. Female outings were often from quick, quiet job resignations

and relocation. However, males usually died, often violently and frequently from car accidents. If characters remained, they were frequently seen as having HIV/AIDS or terminal cancer. After LGBTQ characters absented a story, the remaining characters and town “returned to normal.” The LGBTQ character was remembered as an unfortunate “lesson.”

Nearly all religious views espoused hatred of LGBTQs in the form of Christian fundamentalism. Significantly, characters were mainly white and middle class.

While this compilation of issues in its entirety is dated and demeaning, it must be remembered that these qualities, although common, were of course neither novel templates nor did they necessarily represent all novels with LGBTQ characters. Many works had merit, but regardless, the majority did not display the quality found today. However, what these novels lacked is as telling as what they contained; for literary and genre excellence, LGBTQ works needed reality and vision. With that focus, we created our 1998 wish list:

Qualities Necessary for Excellence in LGBTQ Young Adult Novels

- Sexuality is not the central issue or problem to be overcome.
- LGBTQ characters are protagonists.
- LGBTQ characters are multifaceted rather than stereotypes.
- LGBTQ characters are admired and in leadership positions.
- LGBTQ characters have a wide circle of friends, including heterosexuals.
- LGBTQ characters are seen in healthy, positive romantic relationships.
- LGBTQ characters represent various diversities, such as non-white, disabled, elderly, etc.
- LGBTQ characters represent genres other than contemporary issues/problem novels, such as mystery, fantasy, science fiction, etc.
- Various religions are portrayed rather than solely Christian fundamentalism; hatred is not synonymous with any religion or view, and not all aspects identifying with a religious view are homophobic. In addition, LGBTQ characters are shown with positive religious beliefs.

What has been published since 1998 that both answers Cart’s request and addresses our wish list? What are the reading choices for all teens that give identity to today’s LGBTQ young people? Where can they find themselves in their own stories? Where are texts that help heterosexual readers understand gay/lesbian struggles as they all traverse the journey of what is too often painful adolescence? The young man who committed suicide in the fall of 2010 at Rutgers University after his roommate and a female acquaintance posted online video of his romantic encounters with another male illustrates that our concerns are still valid.

Fortunately, there are signs that many educators, librarians, and authors are continuing efforts to expand and popularize the field. For instance, *English Journal (EJ)* in March 2009 published a themed issue on Sexual Identity and Gender Variance, compiled by guest editors Paula Ressler and Becca Chase. The promise and premise stated that the contributions would “discuss the place of LGBTQ people, curriculum, and concerns in schools” (p. 5). The compilation begins with the National Council of Teachers of English’s “Resolution on Strengthening Teacher Knowledge of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Issues,” proposed and passed at the 2007 NCTE Annual Business Meeting in New York, ironically ten years after Cart’s appeal.

EJ’s themed issue is filled with articles about using young adult LGBT texts in the classroom and about bolstering the knowledge, confidence, and support of teachers who are inexperienced or uncomfortable with the subject. In their “Introduction,” Ressler and Chase cite chilling statistics compiled by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network and others:

- 73.6% of LGBT students heard derogatory remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often at school.
- 86.2% of LGBT reported being verbally harassed, 44.1% reported being physically harassed, and

Fortunately, there are signs that many educators, librarians, and authors are continuing efforts to expand and popularize the field (of LGBTQ adolescent works).

22.1% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation . . . (p. 18).

Equally painful are these LGBT teen statements, compiled during 2002–2005 by The Lambda Organization (2010):

- 97% of LGBTs regularly heard homophobic remarks, with 53% by school staff; 80% of preservice educators reported that they themselves held some level of negative views toward homosexuals.
- Educators failed to intervene in 97% of incidents involving verbal harassment or physical violence of LGBTs.
- 89% of LGBT teens reported severe social isolation, with 42% of homeless youth LGBT.
- LGBT teens accounted for 30% of teen suicides. (p. 2)

Can young adult literature produce better understanding of LGBTQ issues for teens, in schools and out, while providing real solutions to these horrors?

In many works, all characters are treated as adolescents living the teen experience, no matter their sexuality. . . . [This] is also the single most positive and defining movement toward LGBTQ adolescent works.

The *EJ* editors provide a blueprint for those of us who intend to continue to champion the problems LGBTQ youth experience by offering quality YAL to all.

The ALAN Review (*TAR*) continues to publish book reviews, text analyses, and author interviews that keep LGBTQ at the forefront, although issues can be found where no articles about LGBT authors, texts, or classroom practice

are evident. However, in 2004, Cart again examined the status of the field in *TAR* as he traced the “evolution” of the literature. He assured readers that the number of opportunities for gay and lesbian teens to see themselves in quality YAL has indeed risen. We concur.

LGBTQ young adult literature titles are indeed routinely reviewed in English language arts and other professional journals, with various articles also regularly appearing without the necessity of isolating the

topic into “special” issues. *VOYA* (*The Voice of Youth Advocates*) continually reviews and features print and nonprint LGBTQ texts and resources, along with information about authors, teens, and related concerns. Additionally, *VOYA* publishes issues with LGBTQ-themed sections, rotating them with features on other YAL genres, such as poetry or mystery/suspense, thus eliminating any hint of dissimilarity among genres.

Multicultural Review consistently reviews the newest LGBTQ-themed titles, also placing them with all other young adult texts. These journals and others no longer attach the once-common “content warning” labels on such titles. Stand-alone and online bookstores continue to provide access to LGBTQ works for all ages. The market expands and increases with demand.

After Cart’s 2004 update, we found additional compelling evidence that a body of literature does indeed exist that focuses on problem novels where being LGBTQ was not the plot’s nucleus; rather, in many works, all characters are treated as adolescents living the teen experience, no matter their sexuality. Not only is this thematic change the first item on our 1998 wish list, it is also the single most positive and defining movement toward LGBTQ adolescent works that not only leave binding stereotypes behind, but also free the way for new publications featuring homosexual teens as adolescents first, sharing the same difficulties and issues as other teens rather than being featured as the problem themselves.

A few years ago, we recommended titles we both consider important contributions to the field (Hayn & Hazlett, 2008). Some of those books continue to resonate with us today, along with more recent publications that have the potential to influence teens, no matter who they are. Many of the same authors we cited then continue to write specifically for and about homosexual teens and their search for identity.

As stated above, the best works portray LGBTQs in various situations and genres, interacting with an array of people, their sexuality simply one part of them, while they maintain heterosexual friendships. Current YAL continually offers texts that match the first six items of our 1998 wish list. A notable example appears in David Levithan’s 2004 *The Realm of Possibility*, where Daniel states, “My parents are okay with me being gay but they would kill me if they saw me with a cigarette . . .” (p. 5). Later, he worries about

classmates' reactions to his homosexuality and boyfriend; after this becomes known, he says, "We . . . were a little surprised when nothing happened except our surprise . . ." (p. 9).

It is refreshing to read novels featuring LGBTQ characters that are just plain funny; earlier novels were often so focused upon the "problem" of homosexuality that humor was excluded. Today, however, it would be difficult not to laugh aloud reading Brian Sloan's 2005 *A Really Nice Prom Mess*, with gay Cameron somehow taking a girl to the prom, becoming involved in an on-stage performance, suffering multiple misunderstandings, and finally experiencing a police chase during his beyond-disastrous prom. Most teens have surely had catastrophic party experiences, and this novel and others show the shared humorous universalities. Perhaps more important, readers are laughing with, rather than at, LGBTQ characters.

Humor and commiseration continue in Sarra Manning's 2005 *Pretty Things*, featuring straight Bree in love with gay Charlie, who has a crush on straight Walker, who likes Daisy, who is unsure of whether she is lesbian or bisexual. This amusing and realistic jumble of friends seeking love focuses upon their messy relationship quests and sometimes dubious advice to one other, with sexuality simply a given; moreover, the characters assist Daisy, and presumably readers, in clarifying her bisexuality.

All adolescents beginning relationships are vulnerable and susceptible to some degree, with abusive partners a danger to all, as illustrated by awkward Johanna who excitedly embarks upon her first relationship with the experienced Reeve in Julie Ann Peters's 2009 *Rage: A Love Story*. Although Reeve becomes increasingly abusive, naïve Johanna blames herself in striving to maintain their disastrous partnership. Only afterwards can she objectively assess her relationship, which could be both cautionary and reassuring to readers.

Older novels frequently featured religion as a weapon used against homosexuals; now both LGBTQ and heterosexual teens are shown grappling with sexuality versus religious doctrine realistically—informative for all readers and particularly the devout. A notable example of this wish list item is Leanne Lieberman's 2008 *Gravity*, featuring Ellie, a devoted orthodox Jew until falling in love with another female. She believes she must either alter her sexuality or

renounce her religion, until her mother and sister offer alternative concepts of God that assist her (and readers') acceptance of herself as a devout Jewish lesbian. Alex Sanchez's *The God Box* (2007) offers another example of realistic religious issues when Paul, a traditional Christian with a long-time girlfriend, meets openly gay Manuel, also a Christian. Manuel causes Paul to reexamine his beliefs of Christianity as they both come to terms with their own homosexuality.

Another wish list item was LGBTQs' appearance in genres other than contemporary realistic fiction; this small but growing category has the added bonus of incorporating several genre elements within novels. In Malinda Lo's 2009 *Ash*, a retelling of the Cinderella fairy tale, Ash intends to remain in the faery world with her beloved, handsome Sidhean—until meeting the seductive Kaisa, the king's huntress, and the kingdom's equally stunning prince. Twists abound, with Ash finally and dramatically choosing Kaisa as romance/fantasy readers are held spellbound.

The one wish list category poorly represented remains diversity and exceptionality, as few current quality titles feature LGBTQ protagonists who also struggle with other specific characteristics of difference, whether they be physical, spiritual, or psychological. An exception is a supporting novel, Pamela Ehrenberg's 2009 *Tillmon County Fire*, where an adoptee, a gay male, a religious zealot, a pregnant female, and an autistic boy narrate their versions of a shocking fire in their town. Another option is Alex Flinn's 2005 *Fade to Black*, portraying an HIV-positive high school student, hospitalized after being attacked; the bigot accused of the crime, and the sole witness, a classmate with Down syndrome, share from three perspectives how the assault changed them and their lives. We urge more titles focusing on all aspects of diversity; their limited LGBTQ presence should spur this category's growth.

Naturally, wish lists look toward the possibilities of the future, with LGBTQ offerings doing likewise.

It is refreshing to read novels featuring LGBTQ characters that are just plain funny; earlier novels were often so focused upon the "problem" of homosexuality that humor was excluded.

In David Levithan's 2005 *Boy Meets Boy*, the high school quarterback is also the homecoming queen, the school's gay/straight alliance exists only to teach straight kids how to dance, and being gay is just that. Similarly, Garden's 2007 short story collection *Hear Us Out! Lesbian and Gay Stories of Struggle, Progress, and Hope: 1950 to the Present* contains stories chronicling the lives of lesbians and gays in America from the 1950s to the present, with its final story portraying universal acceptance for all. Her title is particularly insightful for the view we maintain; "struggle, progress, and hope" abound in the YAL world, too.

The state of current young adult literature featuring LGBTQ characters is thriving and, with a few exceptions, fulfilling those needs espoused by our original 1998 wish list with titles that are of quality and offer entertainment. Viewed as good books, rather than "LGBTQ" books, and enjoyed by a variety of readers, we highlight just a few of the titles that facilitate teens' perception, awareness, and inclusion of others and themselves while developing their ability to lead meaningful, productive adult lives.

William Banks, in his article in that 2009 themed *English Journal*, "Literacy, Sexuality, and the Value(s) of Queer Young Adult Literature," agrees with us when he writes of his own experience seeking out LGBT as a young man: "The characters that inhabited gay literature from the 1960s to the 1990s, even if at times positive and sympathetic, taught me to disconnect and move on" (p. 33). Our hope is that the texts listed above and others lead you and your students to engage with these characters, ultimately leading all of us to knowledge, self-awareness, and action regarding those teens in our classrooms who are LGBTQ and those who are not.

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<p><i>A Faeriewalker Novel: Gimmerglass</i> by Jenna Black St. Martin's Griffin, 2010, 294 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>Dana Hathaway has had a difficult time growing up with an alcoholic mother and no father. Her father is Fae and lives in Avalon, the most desirable and beautiful place on our planet. After one of her mother's typical binges leaves Dana feeling embarrassed at a recital, she decides it is time to go to England to meet her father. What Dana doesn't realize is that her life is about to become much more complicated. Avalon, with all its spectacles, is a dangerous place for Dana to be.</p> <p>Dana always knew she was half Fae, but never expected to be a possible tool in political battle. Through getting to know her father, her relationships with hot Fae guys, newfound friendships, and magic, Dana struggles to figure out where she belongs in two very different worlds. This young adult novel follows Dana through the discovery of her true and powerful identity.</p> <p>Patricia E. Lovelette Northbrook, IL</p>	<p><i>Bullet Point</i> by Peter Abrahams HarperTeen, 2010, 304 pp., \$ 16.99</p> <p>Wyatt has never met his father—Sweetwater State Penitentiary and his mother had made sure of that. But when the economy takes a turn for the worse and Wyatt's school baseball team gets cut, the teen's world begins to change. Not only does he move to a new city and school, but Wyatt also meets Greer, an adventurous and independent 19-year-old girl. Now living just a short distance from Sweetwater, Wyatt begins to receive phone calls from his incarcerated father.</p> <p>As his relationship with his dad and his romance with Greer blossom, Wyatt begins to challenge what he has always believed. Could his father actually be innocent of the crime that has put him away for life? For mature readers, this action thriller will keep readers engaged at every twist and turn.</p> <p>Leslie Ostrowski Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Dark Flame</i> by Alyson Noel St. Martin's Griffin, 2010, 320 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>The fourth installment in the Immortals series, <i>Dark Flame</i> opens with Ever breaking the news to her best friend Haven that she has been turned into an immortal. Contrary to Ever's expectations, Haven is ecstatic about her new powers, and soon begins behaving recklessly to test them. Meanwhile, Ever's quest to free her boyfriend Damen from a magick spell has accidentally bound her to her greatest enemy—Roman.</p> <p>Now, Ever must not only try to save her best friend from making a huge mistake, but she must also fight the strange, foreign pulse that is beginning to completely take her over. While she is trying desperately to reverse her mistake, her family and friends are becoming more and more worried about her—especially Damen. Ever knows if she doesn't figure out a way to fix her mistake soon, she could lose everything important to her, including her life.</p> <p>Jessica S. Joyner Memphis, TN</p>	<p><i>Dead Fred, Flying Lunch Boxes, and the Good Luck Circle</i> by Frank McKinney Health Communications, 2009, 308 pp., \$18.95</p> <p>Imagine that you are walking to school with your dad, minding your own business, when you spot a dead fish. Oh, yuck! But wait, this dead fish talks! Ppeekk has just moved to Florida. Her parents are too busy for her, and her new school uniform is itchy. Her life is ordinary and lonely until she picks up a talking dead fish named Fred. Ppeekk's life changes when she is given a mission that can possibly lead to her death. With the help of her new friends, Ppeekk must find the courage to save High Voltage, Fred's kingdom in the sea. But how can such a small girl battle the great and terrible prehistoric shark, Megalodon? With the help of flying lunch boxes, manatees, and a charmed good luck circle, of course. This is a fantastical adventure beyond anything you will ever experience, and one you certainly won't forget.</p> <p>Kim Coyle Nashville, TN</p>

<p><i>Falling In</i> by Frances O’Roark Dowell Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2010, 245 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-4169-5032-5</p> <p>Fantasy/Friendship/Identity</p> <p>Things are not always what they seem. A closet door in the nurse’s room leads to another world discovered by Isabelle Bean, an outcast at her middle school. Determined to find the witch who terrorizes the enchanted land, Isabelle begins her journey. Along the way, she meets a best friend, the only friend she’s ever really had. Together they encounter a kindly old woman who teaches them the healing arts. When the old woman tells her story, Isabelle figures out that the woman is both the supposed witch and her unknown grandmother. Isabelle must battle her presuppositions in order to complete the quest her grandmother gives her: tell the children of the land the truth so they no longer live in fear.</p> <p>Dowell gently challenges her readers to examine personal beliefs that lead to false judgments.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tamara Fyke Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Forge My Fins</i> by Tera Lynn Childs Katherine Tegen Books, 2010, 293 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-06-191465-2</p> <p>Fantasy/Romance</p> <p>Being a teenage girl is tough, especially when there is a boy you can’t live without. Lily Sanderson has been trying to catch the attention of the god-like Brody Bennett for the past three years. She has been waiting to tell him a secret that must be kept quiet. She is half human, half-mermaid. Not just any mermaid, that is, but the princess of a kingdom called Thalassina.</p> <p>When Lily found out her mom was human, she decided to see how she fit in on land. After her love at first sight encounter with Brody, she knows he is the one she wants to join her when she rules Thalassina. Her plan to kiss Brody goes all wrong with a case of mistaken identity. Lily must figure out how to break the bond she made by kissing her sworn enemy—Quince Fletcher. Will her true love be who she thinks?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jessica Long Cincinnati, Ohio</p>
<p><i>God Is in the Pancakes</i> by Robin Epstein Dial, 2010, 265 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-8037-3382-4</p> <p>Identity</p> <p>Grace is 15, and her first job is as a candy stripper in a nursing home. There, she connects with 84-year-old Frank Sands, who is dying from Lou Gehrig’s disease. He stockpiles his pills and asks Grace to help him die. She loves the elderly man for sharing her quirky humor and teaching her to play poker, especially since her dad left home for another woman. She also grows to love and admire his wife Isabelle as she struggles with her decision.</p> <p>Using a breezy, authentic voice coupled with light-hearted humor, Epstein’s first novel for teens should resonate with adolescent girls. Grace faces thoroughly believable complications as her feelings begin to change toward her best guy pal Eric; as they try to figure out their new relationship, life, faith, romance, and high school all intertwine symbolically, just like pancake bubbles.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>	<p><i>Jump</i> by Elisa Carbone Viking, 2010, 258 pp. \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-670-01185-8</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Adventure/Relationships</p> <p>When PK’s parents have finally had enough, they decide to send her to boarding school. PK decides differently. If she is going to be away from her family and friends, she is going to do it on her own terms. None of her friends will join her in an escape to the rock climbers’ dream of Yosemite National Park, but she finds an unlikely partner in the mysterious Critter. Initially struggling with issues of trust, PK learns to appreciate Critter’s strange insights into her feelings and moods. Together, they find peace in the act of climbing and a budding relationship, although they are never quite able to outrun their pasts that are quickly closing in.</p> <p>Readers with climbing experience will appreciate the authentic descriptions of climbs, falls, and the thrill of the summit as they root for PK and Critter to beat the odds.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ali Wilson Nashville TN</p>

<p>Linger by Maggie Stiefvater Scholastic Press, 2010, 368 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Science Fiction/Romance ISBN: 978-0-545-12328-0</p> <p>The second in the Wolves of Mercy Falls series, <i>Linger</i> picks up with Sam and Grace, relieved that their cure—injecting Sam with bacterial meningitis—seems to have worked. Despite the cold, Sam has stopped shifting into his wolf form. Now, however, they are faced with even more dangerous challenges. A new wolf, Cole, has joined the pack, and his reckless behavior may threaten everything that keeps them safe. Meanwhile, Mr. Culpepper, who believes the wolves are to blame for his son’s death, is waging a personal war on their population.</p> <p>As Sam struggles to assume the role as the leader of the pack, he and Grace are pulled apart, a situation made more difficult when her parents disapprove of their deepening romance. Something more sinister also threatens their love for one another, and it leads them to a decision point for which neither of them is ready.</p> <p>Ali Wilson Nashville TN</p>	<p>Little Miss Red by Robin Palmer Penguin Group, 2010, 254 pp., \$7.99</p> <p>Youth Romance/Coming of Age ISBN: 978-0-14-241123-0</p> <p>Sophie Greene is a teenager in Los Angeles and craves the passion and excitement she finds in a romance series featuring Devon Devoreaux, who falls for the gorgeous and dangerous Dante. Sophie is tired of her predictable boyfriend, Michael, who calls her at the same time each night and prefers television to thoughtful conversation. She visits her grandmother in Florida and meets Jack, a motorcycle-riding, smooth-talking musician, who wins her heart instantly. Sophie feels like she is living a life comparable to Devon’s and that she has found her Dante.</p> <p>As Sophie gets to know Jack, she realizes he is not what she imagined. She discovers there is more to love than motorcycles and sparks and that she may be passing up a meaningful relationship with Michael. Sophie learns that fictional characters are fun to read about, but she must make her own story, rather than follow Devon’s.</p> <p>Jamie McGee Nashville, TN</p>
<p>Lockdown by Walter Dean Myers Amistad, 2010, 247 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Self-Perception ISBN 978-0-06-121480-6</p> <p>Maurice Anderson, or Reese, is 14 years old and serving time at Progress Center, a juvenile detention facility. He tries to keep himself out of trouble there, but the antics of several other inmates, who prey on a younger, weaker boy, cause him to lash out at them. As part of a work-release program, Reese begins visiting curmudgeonly Mr. Hooft at Evergreen, a facility for senior citizens. There, Reese learns both how to control his reactions to those who would provoke him and a strategy for life, one that will help him find his place outside Progress and the dangers of his own neighborhood and old life.</p> <p><i>Lockdown</i> is the story of one boy’s efforts to reconcile his fight for life with his need to stay out of the system.</p> <p>Elizabeth Self Nashville, TN</p>	<p>Misty Gordon and the Mystery of the Ghost Pirates by Kim Kennedy Amulet Books, 2010, 218 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN-978-0-8109-9257-0</p> <p>While assisting her father in the family’s business, the D.E.A.D., “Deceased’s Estate and Antiques Dealer,” a teenaged Misty Gordon discovers a possessed journal that had belonged to the late Fannie Belcher, “the richest old lady in Ashcrumb.” On another voyage with her father to the town’s recently departed clairvoyant’s house, Misty uncovers a pair of eyeglasses, which she soon realizes allow her to see ghosts. With the help of her new powers and her best friend, Yoshi, Misty learns that her small town in New England was not settled by highly regarded colonists but instead by pirates. The ghosts of the pirates are returning to reclaim a dangerous, yet extremely potent treasure—a golden statue with mystical powers that they had lost many centuries ago. Therefore, it is up to Misty to save her hometown by uncovering the treasure before the ghost pirates find it.</p> <p>Alison E. West Memphis, TN</p>

<p><i>Orphan</i> by John R. Weber WestSide Books, 2010, 302 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Adventure/Historical Fiction ISBN: 978-1-934813-38-6</p> <p>When Homer turns 13, he finds out he's an orphan. Startled and traumatized by the truth of his past, he runs away from Iowa to New York City, taking his best friend, Jamie, with him. Their adventure doesn't go as planned, however. After a dangerous run-in with a railroad detective, Homer and Jamie partner up with the hobo Smilin' Jack and take a detour that takes them through much of the United States. On their journey, they learn about the hobo lifestyle and learn more about not only survival but also themselves.</p> <p>Eventually Jamie and Homer make it to New York City, but Jamie falls deathly ill. Only then does Homer realize what his impulsiveness could cost him—his own family and Jamie's family back home. <i>Orphan</i> is a book best suited to a younger audience, maybe even middle grade. The plot is action-driven with endearing characters.</p> <p>Charlotte Wood Portland, OR</p>	<p><i>Princess of the Midnight Ball</i> by Jessica Day George Bloomsbury Books, 2010, 272 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Fairytale Retelling ISBN 978-1-59990-322-4</p> <p>This story is a retelling of the fairy tale <i>The Twelve Dancing Princesses</i>, in which 12 princesses of Westfalin attend lavish parties and dances at their Father's palace. However, they are forced to attend another celebration every night deep underground at King Under Stone's palace. It was their mother's deal with an evil magical King that cursed them with their dancing fate. The head gardener's nephew sets out to find the reasons behind the princesses' worn out dancing shoes, though many princes have lost their lives in the attempt.</p> <p>This is a knight-in-shining-armor tale with a twist. It is bravery of under-gardener Galen Werner that saves the day, and ultimately, the princesses. Galen's invisibility cloak and instincts are part of an exciting journey to free the 12 princesses from King Under Stone's control.</p> <p>Kathryn Fry Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Prism</i> by Faye Kellerman and Aliza Kellerman Harper, 2009, 264 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Reality/Survival/Health Care ISBN 978-0-06-168721-1</p> <p>Kaida Hutchinson, an independent 15-year-old with purple hair, is dreading her class trip to the Catsbad Caverns because her best friend, Maria, will not be on the trip, and she will have to put up with the company of both Zeke Anderson and Joy Tallon. However, the two end up being the least of Kaida's worries when suddenly the van carrying all of the students crashes in the middle of a desert, turning their trip into a nightmare.</p> <p>The three students band together and seek shelter in a nearby cave where something magical and mysterious happens: the three are transported back to their homes in California at the present time where everything and everyone look the same, but eventually they realize they are in a different dimension. Kaida, Zeke, and Joy must find a way back or they must find a way to endure this new future.</p> <p>Lauren Wiygul Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Rush</i> by Jonathan Friesen Speak, 2010, 295 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>Contemporary Fiction ISBN: 978-0-14-241258-9</p> <p>His father is the wealthiest, most powerful man in Brockton, but nothing ever seems to go Jake King's way. It has something to do with those dark gray clouds that constantly cover his mind and only disappear when he's around Salome, his best friend and secret love, or when he's putting his life in serious danger in order to feel a rush.</p> <p>But trouble is brewing in the area that has nothing to do with Jake's adrenaline junkie ways. Forest firefighters in Brockton have a habit of dying young and their deaths are shrouded in mystery. When Jake is given the chance to join one of the crews, he jumps at the chance. For him, rappelling into wildfires is the best rush he could ask for. But this new life comes with serious choices and consequences, and Jake has to maneuver the thin lines between life, love, and the rush.</p> <p>Mollie Johnson Houston, TX</p>

<p><i>Shiver</i> by Maggie Stiefvater Scholastic, 2010, 390 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Wolves/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-545-12327-3</p> <p>Few people in Mercy Falls adore the wolves the way Grace does; in fact, most want them dead after the attack on a local teenage boy. But Grace feels a connection with the wolves, especially the one with the yellow eyes. After all, he is the one who saved her years ago when she was attacked.</p> <p>Sam may not remember everything when he shifts, but he remembers Grace. He has silently watched her from the woods since she was a young girl, feeling a connection to her but never knowing why. When the two finally meet, both of their worlds fall into place as Grace and Sam find something in each other that they have never felt before. But winter is fast approaching and Grace risks losing Sam forever to the pack. Every shiver is a reminder that everything she has always wanted could be gone in an instant.</p> <p>Mollie Johnson Houston, TX</p>	<p><i>Solomon's Thieves</i> by Jordan Mechner, LeUyen Pham, Alex Puvillan First Second, 2010, 139 pp., \$12.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1-59643-391-5</p> <p>Paris. 1307. The knights Templar are straggling back into Western Europe after decades of fighting bloody crusades in the Middle East. Martin and his fellow crusaders arrive home to a changed France, one buckling under poverty and government tax. Before the fighters can reestablish themselves in the community, they are wrongly accused of turning on the church and engaging in witchcraft. While Martin escapes, hundreds of his fellow Templars are imprisoned and tortured. Betrayed and abandoned, Martin joins a small group of Templars in hiding. Afraid for their lives and furious at the false accusations against them, they plan revenge on the church they once served—a heist so incredible, readers will be hearing of it for hundreds of years.</p> <p>The first in a series of books exploring Martin's tales, <i>Solomon's Thieves</i> combines edge-of-your-seat plot with explosive graphic illustrations, perfect for lovers of history, graphic novels, or action books.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>
<p><i>Sweet Treats & Secret Crushes</i> by Lisa Greenwald Amulet Books, 2010, 304 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Friendship/ Romance / Relationships ISBN: 978-0-8109-8990-0</p> <p>Olivia, Kate, and Georgia are seventh graders and best friends who revel in the possibility of a Valentine's Day full of romance. But when a winter storm derails their plans to realize their Valentine dreams at school, they learn that a holiday about love and relationships doesn't necessarily have to be romantic. They bake and deliver fortune cookies to total strangers throughout their apartment building. Ironically, as they begin to build new friendships and acquaintances, they each come to accept the fact that their friendships with each other are experiencing some growing pains and changing in uncertain ways.</p> <p>In this novel directed at tween girls, Greenwald captures the uncertainty that comes with growing up. Chapters are narrated by each character on a rotating basis, giving the reader a well-told story that encompasses the day's events and what it means to not just <i>have</i> a friend, but <i>be</i> a friend.</p> <p>Julee Phillips Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Tell Me a Secret</i> by Holly Cupala HarperTeen, 2010, 292 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Teen Pregnancy/Sisters ISBN: 978-0-06-176666-4</p> <p>Miranda Mathison's life is built on secrets. Since the death of her sister Xanda, her family has become separated and withdrawn, each holding beliefs about what really happened the night of the car crash. But Miranda's got a secret of her own: she's pregnant. Without the support of her angry mother and absent father, Miranda has to make an impossible choice. When her best friends desert her, Miranda turns to the only place she can find help—her own secret support system, where no one is as they seem.</p> <p><i>Tell Me a Secret</i>, the breakout novel by Holly Cupala, takes an honest and unflinching look at the world of teen pregnancy. She faithfully details the pain, frustration, and fear that accompanies Miranda as she struggles alone to make decisions about her world, even as her boyfriend and parents abandon her.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>The Dark Days of Hamburger Halpin</i> by Josh Berk Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, 250 pp., \$16.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fiction/Mystery ISBN: 978-0-375-85699-0</p> <p>Overweight and deaf, Will Halpin does not fit in his new mainstream high school. In one week he has only befriended the strangest kid in his class, Devon, and he's madly in love with a girl who previously dated Pat, the pretentious captain of the football team. Week two of school proves to be more interesting, when on a field trip Pat is mysteriously murdered. Will and Devon decide they are going to crack the case!</p> <p>Will's superior lip-reading skills and Devon's wily antics make them excellent detectives. The two communicate via text message and a primitive form of sign language. The sultry math teacher, the strange bus driver, and everyone who did and did not receive an invitation to Pat's party are suspects. This dynamic duo not only learns the surprising outcome of their investigation, but they also understand a new meaning of friendship and personal history.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Brooke Heidcorn Armonk, NY</p>	<p><i>The Dreamer</i> by Pam Muñoz Ryan Scholastic Press, 2010, 384 pp., \$17.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Historical Fiction/Semi-Biographical ISBN: 978-0-439-26970-4</p> <p>Young Netfali Reyes is a shy child who can never meet his father's expectations, nor can he stop himself from daydreaming about all the wonders he finds in the simple world around him. With an overbearing father and social conflict stirring in his small Chilean town, Netfali must find sources of strength in unlikely places and actions.</p> <p>Based on the childhood of the Nobel Prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda (born Netfali Reyes), Ryan paints a tale about a sensitive boy trying to make sense of the world and stand up for what he feels is right. The tale is laced with Neruda-like poems and delicate, whimsical drawings that augment the sense of wonder, magic, and beauty in the young poet's thoughts and imaginings. Additional information about Neruda and excerpts of his works are included, adding insight to the life and accomplishments of one of the world's most read and renowned poets.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Laura Codron Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Freak Observer</i> by Blythe Woolston Carolrhoda Lab, 2010, 202 pp., \$16.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fiction/Emotional Problems ISBN: 978-0-7613-6212-8</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old Loa Lindgren witnesses a gruesome car accident that takes the life of her best friend, Esther. The event leaves Loa with a debilitating case of post-traumatic stress disorder. A mysterious figure known as the Bony Guy—death incarnate—terrifies her through vivid hallucinations and haunts her dreams at night. When Loa's cherished baby sister Asta dies from medical complications, her already-broken family unravels even more.</p> <p>Loa meets Corey, a confident and peculiar schoolmate, who persuades her to join the debate team. But as their strange friendship blossoms, Corey abruptly leaves for Europe. Without friends or family to help, Loa begins to cope with her condition through, of all things, theoretical astrophysics. Loa's mom enrolls at a university and the once-private and rural family find themselves connecting to each other and learning what it means to move on.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kevin Sawyer Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>The Gardener</i> by S.A. Bodeen Feiwel and Friends, 2010, 232 pp., \$16.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Science Fiction/Environmental Concerns ISBN: 978-0-312-37016-9</p> <p>Life is difficult for 15-year-old Mason: he longs for a father he's never met, his face is permanently scarred from a vicious dog attack, and his mother is struggling to make ends meet . . . and to keep herself sober. But his world grows even more complex when he encounters a beautiful girl whose dark past lingers just outside the borders of her memory. Mason feels compelled to rescue this fascinating stranger at any cost. Little does he know that following his protective instinct will lead him to uncover his own past, which is entangled with a scientific experiment that may change the fate of humanity.</p> <p>The fast-moving plot of <i>The Gardener</i> will draw readers in, and the ethical dilemmas it raises will keep them thinking long after they close the book.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Allison Matthews Columbia, SC</p>

<p><i>The Ghosts of Ashbury High</i> by Jaclyn Moriarty Arthur A. Levine Books, 2010, 480 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>The “real world” threatens Emily, Cassie, Lydia, and Toby as they begin their final year at Ashbury High. Right away they commence the Higher School Certificate exams required for entrance to a university. Unexpectedly, a mysterious couple transfers to Ashbury to begin their final year, as well. Students and faculty wonder about the reclusive yet talented Amelia and Riley and the rumors they hear of the couple’s delinquent pasts. What’s more, Emily is convinced that the ghost of a former student haunts the school.</p> <p>In this suspenseful tale, the characters realize that a wealth of intriguing connections and potentially dangerous secrets lie beneath the surface of their experiences and relationships. Moriarty weaves traditional elements of a Gothic novel with a contemporary multigenre format, and breathes life into quirky adolescents who, in the midst of grappling with heavy life issues, learn a lot about themselves.</p> <p>Erin Bridges Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner: An Eclipse Novella</i> by Stephenie Meyer Little, Brown, 2010, 178 pp, \$13.99</p> <p>In this young adult novel, Stephenie Meyer brings to life a minor character from <i>Eclipse</i>, the third book in the Twilight series. Bree Tanner is a newborn vampire created for a purpose she doesn’t quite understand or give much thought to. That was before she met Diego and realized there can be more to her new life than the thirst for blood. Throughout this <i>Eclipse</i> novella, Bree tries to piece together the lies, the identities of her creators, and the world of vampires while attempting to stay alive.</p> <p>Bree was created to fight—to fight in a battle against the vampires well known for their roles in the Twilight series. As Bree becomes more familiar with the myths and realities of being a vampire, she comes closer to meeting the Cullen clan, closer to a fight she isn’t sure she has a choice about being a part of.</p> <p>Patricia E Lovelette Northbrook, IL</p>
<p><i>The Unwritten Rule</i> by Elizabeth Scott Simon Pulse, 2010, 210 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Seventeen-year-old Sarah has been best friends with Brianna forever, but when she starts liking Brianna’s boyfriend, their friendship takes a turn for the worse. Sarah knows the Unwritten Rule: “You don’t like your best friend’s boyfriend.” But she can’t help but think of him looking at her, holding her hand, and kissing her.</p> <p>Through the eyes and mind of Sarah, Elizabeth Scott tells the honest and realistic story of how high school dating can be complicated and confusing. Sarah has always been the quiet one who never stands up for herself, while Brianna is the outspoken one who gets what she wants. When something happens between Sarah and Ryan one night, Sarah has to live with the guilt of going behind her best friend’s back. Does she continue liking her best friend’s boyfriend or does she forget about him in order to save her friendship?</p> <p>Lauren Wiygul Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>This Gorgeous Game</i> by Donna Freitas Frances Foster Books, 2010, 209 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>When 17-year-old Olivia Peters wins a writing contest, she’s thrilled to be able to study one-on-one with celebrated author and priest Mark Brendan. He’s charismatic, brilliant, and very interested in her work. But soon, Father Mark’s interest shifts to Olivia herself, complicating their relationship and leaving Olivia confused and frightened. Afraid to speak out, Olivia desperately tries to hide the constant pressure and attention from her mentor, until Father Mark pulls them both one step too far.</p> <p>Donna Freitas continues her success in merging religion and adolescence with this, her second young adult novel. A timely and intense work, <i>This Gorgeous Game</i> highlights one girl’s struggle to confront the truth and to save herself from a situation she never dreamed of being in. A novel that is unafraid to address both faith and failure, the book would appeal particularly to high school readers, ages 14 and up.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Fayetteville, AR</p>

Finding Her Voice:

A Conversation with Allison Whittenberg

Sweet *Thang*. *Life Is Fine*. *Hollywood & Maine*. These are all books by poet and dramatist Allison Whittenberg. These novels are about young black women coming to terms with who they are intellectually, emotionally, and culturally. Critics say Whittenberg's young adult fiction is well written, and they praise the way she crafts convincing dialogue and moving narration (Jones, 2009; Rochman, 2008; Brautigam, 2006; Hutley, 2006). They also commend her for offering readers an opportunity to see characters grapple with issues they are concerned about. For example, Martin (2006) points out that in *Sweet Thang*, "Charmaine struggles with many issues integral to African American life: whether to wear her hair straightened or natural, how to deal with her feelings of inferiority about her dark skin, and how to embrace her own intellectualism without inciting the ire of jealous peers" (p. 197). According to Brautigam (2006), the depiction of "[s]olid, loving parents" and a stable home in *Sweet Thang* ". . . provides a welcome respite for readers whose own lives are chaotic or who have had to read one too many problem novels" (p. 52).

Finding Allison Whittenberg

I discovered Whittenberg's work in 2007 when I reviewed *Life Is Fine* for a magazine. The novel's tone, dialogue, and complex intergenerational friendship offer a fresh addition to the field. Interested in learning more about Whittenberg's work, I recently arranged a telephone interview with her. We talked about her childhood and her entrée into young adult literature. This profile is based on that interview and other sources.

Allison Marlo Whittenberg grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the middle child of Luther and Faye Whittenberg. Whittenberg's father was a salesman, and her mother took care of their three children. Though Whittenberg liked school, she describes herself as a "good but not excellent student." Yet, her teachers recognized she had writing talent early on. She says she always did well in English classes and she loved reading. "I would read anything. I was just that type of person," she maintains. In high school, she served as editor of the literary magazine, but she did not always feel an urgency to write. "It wasn't that I was burning to write. I did not say, 'I want to write. I want to write.' It was just that people told me that I had some aptitude for it," Whittenberg explains. She tried other forms of expression, too, including dance and music.

Whittenberg recalls, "Though neither of my parents went to college, I was on that track" (<http://allisonwhittenberg.com/page5/>). After high school, she earned a Bachelor of Arts and went on to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, where she earned a Master of Arts degree in 1995. Since then, she has taught English at several universities, most recently for Drexel University.

Finding Young Adult Literature

When Whittenberg took writing classes in literary centers, she rarely met writers who produced literature for youth. Yet, her focus eventually turned to young adult literature. Her first young adult novel, *Sweet Thang*, did not begin with an adolescent at the center. Instead, the novel originally captured the father's point of view. Whittenberg says, "Then I reworked it,

making 14-year-old cousin Charmaine the protagonist (feeling the conflicted feeling worked better coming from someone who is trying to understand the world)” (The Brown Bookshelf & Whittenberg, 2008). Whittenberg says she wishes she had discovered young adult literature sooner. “People are very serious about [writing young adult literature] and they know from the start that that’s what they want to do. They don’t necessarily go a few years writing poetry, a few years of playwrighting, and then finally getting to it,” she says.

But a background in playwrighting has influenced how she approaches invention; it is one of her best

remedies for the blank screen. She uses dialogue generation, a process that involves experimenting with how characters might respond verbally to each other, and role-play as methods of invention:

I love doing dialogue. I usually just do a lot of dialogue when I’m doing novels. A lot of my poetry is basically dramatic monologue, sort of cut up. I really just go line by line. I hope it’s not because I’m part of the television generation. I hope it’s because I just like the feel of it, playacting, pretending like I’m that person.

Whittenberg imagines she is the character she is writing about and shapes the dialogue so it reads the way she envisions the character would say it. She

“Just a Taste”: Two Whittenberg Teasers

Hollywood & Maine

Allison Whittenberg

Realistic fiction

Delacorte Press, 2009, 166 pp., ISBN 978-0-385-73671-8

Reviewed by Jacqueline Bach, Baton Rouge, LA

It is January 1976 and Charmaine Upshaw’s life is perfect. She’s beginning a relationship with Raymond, trying to get into modeling, maybe acting, and starting her second semester of ninth grade. Then her Uncle E, the ex con, returns, and her family takes him back in, even though he left Philadelphia several months ago and cost her family the \$1,000 they had lent him for bail. Maine finds herself without her own bedroom, on the brink of losing Raymond, and her personal life interfering with classroom discussions.

Often humorous and always heartwarming, Whittenberg’s follow-up to *Sweet Thang* captures life in the late 70s from the point of view of a black teenager who lives in a close community and finds herself negotiating with the larger themes in the world—such as redemption, doubt, and acceptance.

Tutored

Allison Whittenberg

Realistic fiction

Delacorte Press, 2010, 192 pp., ISBN 978-0-385-73869-9

Reviewed by KaaVonia Hinton, Chesapeake, VA

Love at first sight is hardly the case for Hakiam Powell and Wendy Anderson. Binary opposites, Wendy is a black, middle class, high school junior overwhelmed by stacks of letters from college admissions officers, while Hakiam is a high school dropout who was once in foster care. They meet at a tutoring center where Hakiam hopes to study for the GED exam. After several meetings, Wendy becomes interested in Hakiam’s home life, including his responsibility for cousin Malikia when her mother, Leesa, is working. Hakiam and Wendy start dating, and before she knows it, his problems impact her. Wendy’s father, Mr. Anderson, is not impressed with her decision to associate with poor people like Hakiam, introducing additional tension.

Whittenberg’s new novel, told in alternating chapters from both Wendy and Hakiam’s perspectives, has crisp dialogue, a rich setting, and poignant issues. Her portrayal of Mr. Anderson’s prejudice toward poor blacks is honest and revealing, as is her depiction of the poverty and hardships that Hakiam and Leesa face. Perhaps along with some of the characters, readers will be “schooled” on how to treat people, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

says most of her young adult literature came from thinking of the youth in her work written for an adult audience. As mentioned above, *Sweet Thang* was originally written from an adult male perspective until Whittenberg decided to focus on the youth in the story instead, shifting the book's focus.

Leaning on Experience

Many of Whittenberg's poems for adults have been published in literary magazines, and some of her plays—*The Bard of Frogtown* and *Skylark*, for example, which were performed at the InterAct Theatre at the "Writing Aloud Festival" in Philadelphia in 2006—have been produced. Whittenberg says that when she began writing, she was writing outside her own experiences:

When I started writing, I was doing sort of sci-fi, apocalyptic sort of stuff. I list the *Twilight Zone* as one of my favorite shows. I read a lot of *Twilight Zone Magazine* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, so I was doing more things like that. I thought, these people are much older than I am. I'm trying to get these exotic locales that I've never gone to. Why am I doing this? I was reading that the first thing Lorraine Hansberry published was about football, so I thought that was odd. Women could definitely know football but, I don't know, I think the closer that she got to her own experience, *A Raisin in the Sun*, which is loosely based on her family—not necessarily socioeconomically, but her family did try to move into a white area—she was able to get a lot of truth out of that.

Although Whittenberg's work is not autobiographical, there are often remnants of the storyline that do come closer to her own experience than her earlier work did. For example, Whittenberg says,

Sweet Thang was loosely based on my recollections and observations growing up in West Philly until I was in second grade and there after, the first tier, predominately African American suburb of Yeadon, PA (which in the book I call Dardon). I wanted to show the type of intact, largely wholesome black family that myself and most of my friends grew up in. Most important, in *Sweet Thang*, Charmaine fiercely misses her Auntie Karyn. I channeled the deep loss I felt regarding my mother's passing. [<http://thebrownbookshelf.com>]

Whittenberg says she decided to set her novels in West Philadelphia because of its rich atmosphere: "West Philadelphia is an interesting place to live. There is such a range of incomes (University of Pennsylvania is on one end) and ethnicities (recent immigrants move there). I grew up around 52nd St.,

which to the outside eye seems rough, but I like the hustle and crowds."

Like Charmaine, Whittenberg is the middle child, and she also tried modeling and got about as far as Charmaine Upshaw did in the sequel to *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood & Maine*. Laughing, Whittenberg says, "I would really dissuade anyone [from modeling]. I tell young ladies when I go to different schools to do something else with your life." Whittenberg's family is musical like the Upshaw's, too: they sing and play instruments. Whittenberg cautions, "It's one thing to, as they say, write what you know, but I think you also need to take a little bit of a leap too, to step outside [of your experience]."

Reading Backward

While talking to Whittenberg, our conversation kept returning to books. Whittenberg reads widely, fast, and often. She is influenced by several authors, but Gwendolyn Brooks and Richard Wright are particularly special to her. Whittenberg says, "I wouldn't be a writer today without either of them" (<http://thebrownbookshelf.com>).

Her favorite contemporary author is probably Sherman Alexie. She says, "[Alexie] stands out in terms of who I currently admire. I've heard him speak a couple of times, and he's a very off the cuff, uncensored type of person." She also likes the work of young adult authors such as Laurie Halse Anderson, Walter Dean Myers, and Rita Williams-Garcia. When Whittenberg reflects on reading young adult literature, she says,

I would say reading these books as an adult is a totally different experience than reading them when I was at that particular age. You know you always read a little bit ahead of your age when you're young. You're reading *Seventeen* magazine when you're twelve or something like that, so I would always read that far ahead, but now I'm reading in the opposite direction. So when I pick up a young adult book, I feel like I've already sort of been through this, and I'm sort of going backwards.

Whittenberg believes it is important for readers to expand their reading interests. "I see people now who say, 'I only want to read women authors or I only want to read this time period.' I would read anything, things that wouldn't necessarily relate to me. I think people cut themselves off pretty quickly with what they think they can relate to, but I think they'd be surprised." Whittenberg continues, "I'm keeping my

reading up because I don't just want to write or do my own thing. I try to keep a balance." Whittenberg says she learns more about writing when she reads:

I'd read a lot of anthologies. There was an anthology that I found about nurses who were writing poetry about their experiences. It's different than a doctor's experience, their closeness to the patient. That sort of helped. I like people who are not necessarily trained but can write. I think that makes all the difference. A lot of times when people are trained, it all sounds the same. They're doing technique, technique, but there's something to be said for someone who has a story first and then finds their own voice.

Pushing through the Writing

Whittenberg is a disciplined writer, writing daily for about four hours. "I wake up early and do some writing. I used to be a night person for writing, but now I'm a morning person." The dedication to her craft has yielded a steady flow of fiction. Her fourth novel, *Tutored*, was released in December. *Tutored* is told from the perspective of Wendy Anderson and Hakiam Powell, two adolescents with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who meet at a tutoring center. Of her new book, Whittenberg says,

[Writing] the male perspective was easier actually than the female perspective because she's upper class and I didn't grow up in an upper class household. I didn't necessarily grow up in quite his household either, but I've definitely seen that [poverty] enough. It was harder to get her voice, and there are more things that happen with him. He's in more dire circumstances than she is. She's going to an all-white private school. This is modern day; it isn't *Brown vs. Board of Education*, but it's still very hard if you're one of the few—I have this line [in the book]: "the only chip in the cookie." That's what she always felt like. It's hard to be different.

Whittenberg is already at work on another book:

The thing that I'm working on right now is not really going well. It was a short story, and I said, well, maybe I can make it longer. Now it's sort of at the novella length. It really does have a definite ending. It has a young adult protagonist, but I think it works better as an adult book. Two teen boys are being abused by their father, and they're devising a plan to kill him because they've had enough. This sounds really dark, especially compared to the other things that I've written. There was something about domestic violence in *Sweet Thang*. I wanted to write a little bit more, not salaciously, but I wanted to write a little bit more about it, just about how trapped some people are. How do they figure to get out of it, run away?

When asked about advice for writers, Whittenberg laughs and says, "Writing? I really wouldn't say that's a good profession. Yes, it's bad on the posture. It has horrible hours. You get obsessed with things that aren't really reality. I think writers just can't help themselves. Once you get the bug, you just can't stop yourself from writing. Having written is great, but writing?"

However, if you are bit by the bug, Whittenberg suggests you ignore distractions and commit to writing. "You have to push through . . . and just finish it," she says. If you're wondering what keeps her returning to the keyboard, the answer is simple: stories. Whittenberg explains,

When things happen to the people I know or I'm reading the paper, I always think, let's put a story around it, or a "what if" with it. I think that's just something that you can't stop once you start doing it. It helps to make sense of the work in a lot of ways. I'm just a girl from Philadelphia with very humble beginnings and you can get someone to listen to you, which is amazing. You're not going to get the world to listen to you, but you get someone to read your mind, to sort of see your thoughts. Now, that's priceless. That's incredible. That someone would actually read your book? That's amazing.

KaaVonia Hinton is the coauthor (with Gail K. Dickinson) of *Integrating Multicultural Literature in Libraries and Classrooms in Secondary Schools* (Linworth Publishing, 2007) and (with Sueanne McKinney) *Mathematics Literature in the Classroom and Library* (Linworth Publishing, 2010). She is the author of *Angela Johnson: Poetic Prose* (Scarecrow Press, 2006). She can be reached on her blog, <http://kaavoniahinton.blogspot.com/>.

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Taking a Closer Look:

Ellen Hopkins and Her Novels

Ellen Hopkins once told me that she tries to always write the truth in her books because “my readers will call me on it if I don’t.” Because of this, she tries hard to write the entire picture—no matter how ugly, deceiving, or raw it is—so her readers will know that she is being as honest as she can be. This truth telling is what has endeared her to her readers. The honesty, while an affront to many people, is the core of her seven (soon to be nine) books that deal with teen prostitution, drugs, abuse, homosexuality, religious fundamentalism, suicide, cutting, and many other issues. As a result, she receives hundreds of thousands of letters and emails from her readers, most of which she will answer, making an effort to impart whatever advice her readers are asking for.

While Hopkins started out as a nonfiction writer of high-interest books for juvenile readers, her fiction work is what drew the acclaim of critics and her readers. At first, teachers and school librarians were slow to recommend these books, but once teens began to pick them up, read, and then talk about them, teachers and librarians could not ignore her popularity with young adult audiences. As a result, her books are more often off the shelves than on, since they are checked out regularly, and now her readers include parents, librarians, and teachers, along with drug and school counselors, juvenile court officials, and rehab treatment specialists. Many of her books

are interrelated; for example, the recently published *Fallout* (2010) and the soon-to-be-released *Perfect* (according to Hopkins’s website) both continue a story line developed in earlier works. Through these books, we see the end of one character’s journey and the continuation of another character’s life.

Fallout (2010) is a continuation of Hopkins’s *Crank* (2004), her first foray into fiction. A lofty 544 pages, she wrote *Crank* in free verse, something she originally thought might be “off putting to people.” In the end, though, she has found that most people like the verse, which, she believes, also makes her books more accessible to reluctant and nonreaders. In addition, she thinks that the verse format allows her regular readers some “breathing room,” since the books involve very tough subject matters.

Her books are also very personal to her. In her author’s note to *Crank*, she writes, “While this work is fiction, it is loosely based on a very true story—my daughter’s. The monster did touch her life and the lives of her family. My family” (front pages). In the book, she tells the story of Kristina, her 15-year-old narrator, as she becomes addicted to crank (crystal meth). A straight-A student, the free verse propels the reader through Kristina’s first introduction to the “monster” when visiting her biological, but addicted father after a court-ordered required visit. As her alter ego, Bree, Kristina meets Adam, a deceptively hunky guy

Hopkins tries hard to write the entire picture—no matter how ugly, deceiving, or raw it is—so her readers will know that she is being as honest as she can be.

An Interview with Ellen Hopkins

Ellen Hopkins spends a lot of her time writing for young adults, but she also spends a lot of time just answering their emails and letters. For Hopkins, this comes with her job as a writer for young adults. But as you might guess, she also ends up learning a great deal about what is going on in a teen's world. Since she started writing, she has received hundreds of thousands of letters from teens in all types of life situations. Not only are her books in great demand in school libraries, but they are also used by school counselors, drug courts, residential treatment centers, and juvenile halls because they deal with the tougher issues of abuse, self-mutilation, drugs, alcohol, suicide, and teen prostitution. But Hopkins's impact often goes beyond the page and directly into the lives of the teens who read her books. I talked to her recently about her books, about her audience, and the impact of her books on her audience.

TAR: Do you think that teens today are faced with tougher choices?

EH: I don't know if they have tougher choices. When I was a teenager, we didn't talk as freely about choices or issues like drugs, alcohol, abuse, or psychological problems that we faced in our lives. But now, because we have given teens permission to talk and open up, I think that they are encouraged to do that more. We are also more aware of the issues.

TAR: Since we are more open about issues today, do you find it easier to write about them?

EH: I absolutely find it easier to write about these issues. There was certainly a reticence to talk and write about them before. When I was a teenager, we really didn't have young adult literature, so we looked to adult books to try to explain what we were feeling and what was happening in our lives. But adults are affected by issues differently than teens, so I think that it is really helpful to have authors who are writing YA novels now that speak to kids, especially those kids who are going through major challenges. As parents, we often want to put the blinders on and don't believe that

these things are happening to our kids. This happened with my daughter, the daughter that my book *Crank* is based upon. We didn't go looking for problems until we couldn't *not* look at them. With today's YA literature, kids can see that they are not the only ones going through these issues, so they are more likely to talk about the ones they are confronting. I think it is so important that they feel free to be open. It's when they don't feel free to be open that any problems they might be experiencing are compounded.

TAR: Do you think that kids read your books to find answers to their problems or affirm that their life is okay?

EH: I think that a lot of them are reading my books for answers. Some of the "normal" kids like to read my books so they can vicariously experience what it is like to do those things without really doing them. There are other kids who are looking for ways out, and I try in my books to show them a way out, a different choice.

TAR: Do you think that, on the whole, we are too overprotective of kids in our society?

EH: I think that all parents want to save their children from pain and hurt, but they need to share information to do that. They are not protecting kids by keeping knowledge from them or pretending that rape and drug addiction do not happen. Kids see it happening every day—if not in their lives, then in the lives of their friends' or people they know. I understand wanting to make childhood as easy as you can, but closing your eyes to these issues will not make them go away. You empower your child when you give them information on which to base choices. When parents don't want their kids to read my books, I think that they mostly want to protect their kids from reading about the kind of lives that my characters have.

TAR: Do parents ever read your books and, if so, what do they tell you about their experience?

EH: I have had parents who read my books write to me to ask if I think that they are too much for their

teens. Other parents will thank me for the books. Some have thanked me for opening lines of communication. Only a narrow group of people challenge my books, but I think that they should read my books and talk about them with their children.

TAR: How do you feel about influencing the lives of your readers?

EH: It is sometimes overwhelming. I will get letters and be sitting at my desk when my husband comes into my office and asks, “Why are you crying?” It hurts when a young person shares their own deep hurt. I really, truly think that what I do is to give permission to open up the conversation. I want my readers to feel like they can talk to me. It is one of the reasons that I am here doing this. I think that my daughter is part of it. If I can positively impact a life, it means a lot. But if I can positively impact thousands of lives, that, to me, is a gift. I feel like I have been given a gift to use. It started with my daughter, but it goes deeper than that. I feel like there is a responsibility in having that gift, so I take it very seriously.

TAR: Are you ever shaken by the intensity of the scenes that you write?

EH: Yes, sometimes after writing a scene, I have to get up and come back to it. Sometimes, I go outside and process it.

TAR: Does this intensity propel you to keep writing?

EH: I just finished a book in which the end was so important to me, I could not stop writing. I never write more than 25 pages a day, but for that book, I wrote 25 pages a day for a week because I just couldn't stop writing. It was so important to me to get the book done and get it right. I love when that happens, too . . . when the story is pouring through me and out of me. This is much better than when I am stressing over every scene. But with this book, the writing just came to me. I absolutely go to another place. I don't become the character, I channel them. They are just writing through me.

TAR: You have said before that you must be honest

with your readers or they will call you on it. Why is honesty in your writing so important to you?

EH: One example that I can give of readers expecting my honesty is from *Identical*, where I wrote about the abuse between the father and daughter. In that scene, I kept the door open while he abused her. Several of my readers told me later that, if I had shut the door in that particular scene, people reading the book could have assumed that nothing happened behind the closed door. I tried to show the honesty of both sides in that book, the father's and the daughter's, because I felt that it was important to write him as honestly as I wrote her. In *Crank*, when Kristina first does drugs, she enjoys it. It is fun. So I feel that if I don't write honestly about it, I am just another person saying, “Don't do it.” I have to show that it is fun until it's not fun anymore. Because that's the truth.

TAR: You have said that *Identical* was inspired by three of your friends. Have you had stories from teens who have risen above the abuse in their lives?

EH: I have heard from quite a few. I love those stories. They are amazing because they show just how resilient people are and how much they want to get life right. *Identical* was inspired by friends who had been through abuse, and to see them today as these successful women is just what I want kids to understand. They need to know that a) it wasn't their fault, and b) you can have a good life, if you decide that is what you really want. I tell kids who write to me that they can choose to create a different future for themselves, that they have the power to make a different choice and reclaim control over their lives.

TAR: What about your friends? How did they feel about *Identical* when it was released?

EH: They all three thanked me. They wanted the story out there, but couldn't write it themselves. One of them wrote me a two-page letter and told me how much it meant to her that the book showed they could still love their father beyond the abuse. The truth is, victims of abuse often do love their abuser;

just because abuse occurs doesn't mean the love isn't still there.

TAR: In your books, is it important to you to balance adult influences and presence, to show that not all adults are "damaged" people?

EH: Yes, it is important to me to show that not all parents are bad or have serious problems. In my recently finished book, *Perfect*, the kids feel pressured by their parents in some ways, but I also tried to show the parents' own problems and the influence those problems have on their lives and parenting. I think, too, that it's healthy for kids to have mentors others than their parents. When I talk to kids, they often tell me that they can talk to a teacher or their school librarian. School librarians are people that kids feel safe with, and I think that's so interesting. I am always fascinated by the relationships that school librarians form with their kids.

TAR: You have been called a "controversial writer." Does that label bother you in any way?

EH: I have always been a *rabble rouser* so, no, it doesn't bother me. I know that my books are not for everyone, but I think that my books need to be on the shelf for some kids, not for every kid. So facing censorship challenges head-on is hugely important to me. I think that all authors need to do this. You can't back away. You cannot write with censorship in mind. You cannot write books with challenges, reviews, or awards in mind. You have to write books where the story speaks to you. You

don't write for anyone but your readers.

TAR: Your new book *Fallout* came out in September 2010. It continues the story of Kristina and her family, doesn't it?

EH: It does. For *Fallout*, I wrote the future, although it is only a possible future of how I see things now. I did that because I wanted to write a book about Kristina's kids and their lives and the impact of her choices on their lives. I had hundreds of requests for another book about Kristina, so I felt like it was something that I wanted to give my readers.

TAR: What are your future writing plans?

EH: I plan to move into adult novels and verse because my publisher's imprint is interested in having me write in that market. I also see that my readership is getting older, going to college and/or sharing these novels with their parents. I feel like people are starting to like the verse format, though for some time, there were not any adult novels in verse. The first one, I think, will be about an adult midlife crisis and will deal with the idea that people face middle age so differently.

I will also continue to write young adult novels. I love my YA audience and love doing school visits. I love being out among teens. They are, to me, the future. They look forward to life, and there is something so vibrant and alive about them. I love that audience and feel like my books are important to them. They tell me, "Never stop writing!"

who introduces her to her first whiff of crank, and Bree gets her first experience with the drug she likens to a wild roller coaster ride. From that point on, Bree/Kristina is a disciple of crank. She becomes addicted, is raped, then returns to her home in Reno, where she has her first child, Hunter. For Kristina, "Life was good before I met/ the monster./ After life was great. At least/ for a little while." (*Crank*, 2004, p. 1).

Hopkins's second book, *Glass* (2007), continues Kristina's story and her addiction becomes a permanent, ongoing fight, which makes her a bona fide addict, whether she wants to be or not. Ever since

her first toke of crystal meth, her life has spiraled downward—she is controlled by her addiction, loses custody of her son, and she and her addicted boyfriend become dealers who burglarize her parents' home. When she looks in the mirror, she can't believe that the person she sees is herself—"no one to see the vacant-/eyed girl, staring/ in the mirror. Staring at a stranger/ who doesn't care/ if she dies. Maybe/ wants to die. Who would care/ if I died?" (*Glass*, 2007, p. 639). When she and her boyfriend are arrested, she ends up behind bars back home again in Nevada, where she asks herself if she would ever be worthy of

forgiveness and love, but she says with hope and an admission of her unflinching optimism that “by/ the time I get out of here,/ the monster will be nothing/ more than a distant memory./ An unforgettable nightmare.” (*Glass*, 2007, p. 679).

In Hopkins’s upcoming book, *Fallout* (2010), the story of Kristina is continued, but through the point of views of her three children. Hopkins felt compelled to write the continuation of Kristina’s story for her readers, many of whom had asked for closure on the two books, but she couldn’t bring herself to write another book from Kristina’s point of view.

“I didn’t want to keep writing the same book,” said Hopkins. “So I was talking with a friend of mine who said, maybe it is not her [Kristina’s] story anymore, but it is Hunter’s story.” For Hopkins, this was the resolution she was looking for: “I wanted to write about her kids and their lives; and I wanted to write about their lives and give voice to them about dealing with their parents’ addictions and how their lives were built through their parents’ addictions.” As a result, Hopkins believes that *Fallout* is the best of the three books and believes that she finished the series that was inspired by her daughter.

Recently, Hopkins also completed yet another book, *Perfect*, which will come out in the fall 2011. Though she doesn’t consider it a sequel book, *Perfect* is intended to be a companion book to Hopkins’s third book, *Impulse*. Even though the issues are still very tough, *Impulse* is perhaps one of Hopkins’s most optimistic books. In it, three teenage residents of Aspen Springs treatment facility meet and form a bond of friendship, despite the issues that have brought them to the treatment facility. Vanessa, a daughter of a manic depressive, is also manic depressive and deals with her illness through cutting. Connor is the son of wealthy parents who expect nothing but perfection from him, but who cannot show love and affection. Connor’s twin, Cara, remains at home. After being locked up in juvenile detention for killing his mother’s child-molesting boyfriend, Anthony believes that he is gay. All three are in the treatment facility because they attempted suicide.

As their treatment progresses, these three open up to their counselors to show the pain, and they move through levels of treatments. In *Impulse* (2007), Hopkins shows the gritty realities of a treatment facility and its “loonie bin” patients. As the treatment

of the three advances to the point where they can now participate in an “Outward Bound” wilderness experience, their struggles in the wilderness parallel their struggles to build relationships between the three friends, their counselors, and other patients. Perhaps the most poignant character is Connor, whose struggle to find love and affection overwhelms him.

As he proceeds through the wilderness challenges, he receives a dour letter from his mother; seeing only the futility of his life, he wonders if he will ever be able to love anyone. He folds the letter into a paper airplane and says:

Into a perfect paper/ airplane, take a walk under/ a sequined night sky, try to/ silence the chatter in my brain./ The sound of cheerful voices/ drifts towards me from camp./ Their letters are tucked into/ pockets and sleeping bags, gifts./ Rewards for accomplishments/ and, with any luck at all, change./ But nothing has changed for me./ I’ll go home to the same grand/ house in the same manicured/ neighborhood/ . . . I’ll go home to expectations/ no way I can live up to, no/ longer want to. But I’ve never/ had a say about my future./ I close my eyes, and all/ I can see is my mother’s/ face. Sculpted. Beautiful./ Angry. So often angry./ And I am so much like her./ A grenade of my own anger/ explodes inside my head./ I am damaged. Decayed./ A gust of wind roughs up/ my hair. The paper airplane/ sits heavy in my hand. I cock/ back my arm, release, let it fly/ straight to hell.” (*Impulse*, 2007, p. 635).

This passage perhaps lays the best groundwork for Hopkins’s upcoming book, *Perfect*, which takes place at the same time with Connor’s twin, Cara. In this book, Hopkins wanted to define what perfection was and to demonstrate how kids will come to understand that they have this power without really realizing what it means to use it. “One of my *Perfect* characters is so set on a baseball scholarship that he uses steroids, even though he knows what it will do to him,” said Hopkins. “I have another character that uses her good looks to get guys to buy her booze, and then the wrong guy buys it and rapes her.” Hopkins hopes to show that her characters in *Perfect* have “these unrealistic goals,” but go to great lengths to achieve them, despite understanding the power and how using it the wrong way can get them into trouble.

In *Fallout* (2010), the story of Kristina is continued, but through the point of views of her three children.

With this book, as with all of her books, Hopkins's greatest hope is that kids will make their choices wisely. "I have readers who say, 'You give me comfort.' Or some come right down to it and say, 'Your books saved my life. I saw where I was headed and saw what was happening to your characters and I chose not to do it.'" In these letters and expressions of appreciation, Hopkins finds all the affirmation she needs to know that she is writing as honestly as she can for an audience who expects no less.

Rebecca Hill is a freelance writer who writes on education, literacy, and reading issues. She has been published in the American Library Association's magazine, Book Links, Middle Ground (the magazine for the National

Middle School Association), YALSA Journal, School Library Monthly, School Family Media, B Magazine, and VOYA—Voice of Youth Advocates. She also writes the VOYAGES column on science fiction for VOYA magazine. She has a Masters in Library and Information Sciences from Indiana University-Purdue University.

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Search for New Editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*. In May 2013, the term of the present editors, Mark Dressman, Sarah McCarthey, and Paul Prior, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received no later than **August 15, 2011**. Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in August 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *Research in the Teaching of English* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

Stories from the Field

Editors' Note: Stories from the Field invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to: jbach@lsu.edu.

A Special Guest

Matt Skillen

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While reading about the Klondike Gold Rush in Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, my seventh-graders wondered why the author points out the fact that tenderfoot explorers of the frigid Alaskan frontier would bring short-haired pointers to pull their dogsleds. It seemed like an interesting question that deserved some time for investigation. And, as it turned out, this question, and the possible answers it would produce, aligned with state standards as they pertain to the connections readers make between characters and setting in literature.

Austin, a six-year-old German Short-haired Pointer, joined our family after we adopted him from the Kansas Humane Society. Austin was a gentle soul who loved being around people. To facilitate this line of inquiry in my classes, it was decided that Austin

would be our special guest. By introducing Austin to my students, thereby allowing them to infer how a dog like Austin might survive in Alaska, it was my hope they would begin to understand London's purpose for including those details about the inexperienced mushers.

If you have read London's story, you know that the main character is Buck, a large Scotch Shepherd/St. Bernard mix breed. Buck's story progresses through the hands of the many owners he encounters throughout his life. The turning point in the story involves a hero named John Thorton, who saves Buck from imminent doom. After sharing the story of how I met Austin at the Humane Society and brought him home to be a part of our family, Jacob, a student in one of my classes, looked up from his desk and said, "Mr. Skillen, you and Mrs. Skillen are like Austin's 'John Thorton,' aren't you?"

I thought about it for a moment and said, "Yes, Jacob, I suppose we are."

"The Family That Reads Together . . ."

Charity Cantey

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*Dear 7th-grade family,
This copy of The Hunger Games is a gift to you in celebration of the joy of reading. We hope that you will read it together as a family or pass the book from one*

family member to another. As you read, discuss your thoughts about and reactions to the book, its characters, and the issues it raises. Then join us on Wednesday, May 5, at 6:30 p.m. in the school library for an evening of book discussion and refreshments.

Happy Reading!

With that invitation, our middle and high school library played host to an enthusiastic community of readers eager to share their thoughts about YA literature. Aiming to bring parents, teens, and school personnel together through literature, we utilized grant funds to purchase a copy of Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* for each family in 7th and 10th grades. We prepared some discussion-starter questions (Team Peeta or Team Gale—which should Katniss choose? What was your first thought when you finished the book? If you were Katniss, would you have

volunteered for the Games?), decorated the library with student artwork (illustrations of favorite scenes, a hand-carved model of Katniss's bow), brought in the food, and let the book talk begin. The discussion was lively—who knew 10th-grade boys would have such strong opinions about Katniss's romantic prospects??—and the sense of community from this shared reading experience was inspiring.

Among its many benefits, the event provided a unique opportunity to 1) connect teens and parents with books and get them talking together in interesting ways, 2) allow teens to see their parents reading for enjoyment, and 3) expand the idea of reading, making it a social event. The Community Reads received rave reviews from parents, teachers, and students, and we're looking forward to hosting them as an annual event.