

## Portrait of the Artist as a Young Adult:

Who Is the Real Me?

**B**ecause 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

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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.

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

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- 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.

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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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