



One More Time?

In this graduate-level YA lit class, students were discussing a novel in which two teens confront each other because one didn't want to go to a community event; he just wanted to be left alone that evening. This led the bully to call the other boy "a faggot." The bully later told his friends, word spread, and the devastated small-town boy was shunned.

A teacher taking the course who had read this book was so distressed that he arose and stated: "I'd never let any of my students read such a book. It could give them ideas!"

Isn't it interesting that there are some who worry that reading a book might give students ideas?

At a conference in March of this year, an author spoke eloquently about his growing up in poverty in Texas and the effects on his whole family. He read briefly from his novel based on this experience, and then he opened his presentation for questions and remarks.

One teacher started: "Does your book have any cursing, drinking, sexual situations?"

The author responded: "Some. But the sexual situations are not

detailed."

The teacher immediately scratched out all of her notes about the author and the book and couldn't wait for the session to end. All around her noticed her fidgeting and restlessness.

This author and his book have been nominated for several special literary awards.

A supervisor of language arts and social studies at a large urban high school asked if there were any books that could be recommended that had a more modern approach to critical issues confronting our country, books that would hook the students on reading about critical issues. When I suggested a few titles about conflicts and consequences of wars, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, she looked at me and stated, "Those won't do. Some of our students might have relatives involved in those battles and might be deeply disturbed about reading such books. How about WWI?"

Aren't all wars hell?

A professor invited me to speak in a class about censorship. I started with a few cases and explained

the importance of book selection policies that would be approved by the administration and the board of education. I listed the resources at NCTE, Office of Intellectual Freedom at ALA, and The National Coalition Against Censorship. We discussed ways of handling issues when someone objected to a student reading a certain book, either assigned or taken out of the library for a report.

I asked the students to list some of the topics they thought might be controversial. The list included sexual situations (straight, gay, lesbian), curse words, drugs, gangs and violence, abuse, death and dying, unruly school situations, bullying, drinking, unhappy home situations, supernatural, fantasy, science fiction.

The professor then turned to me and said, "In this city, we don't need to worry about such matters. No one seems to care. We don't have to worry about selection processes."

Why did he invite me to speak about censorship and to involve his students? For the sensationalism?

Spread the Wealth

I have done limited research on

an outstanding author's works in the New Jersey schools. This author has won many awards and is regarded as a major figure in young adult literature. However, the author's overall works include a number of the issues listed above. I wrote to English department chairs throughout the state, asking if any books by this author were being used as required reading in any of their middle school or high school classes. I had a decent response, and the overwhelming answer was "No." I didn't have to ask why. Then I wrote to a number of school librarians; a few had some of the titles on their shelves.

Students discover many books on their own. They spread the word about what they like, and then these books become popular. Sales go up. Circulation increases. Many of these books are personally enjoyed, but they are not part of any school activity or curriculum. Yet, many teachers have heard the authors of these books speak at such conventions as NCTE, IRA, ALAN Workshops, local and state conferences, public libraries, book store signings. When I meet teachers professionally or socially and ask them about some of these books, they tell me they already have a curriculum that has been approved, and it's too much trouble to add anything else. Besides, some of these books are controversial, and they don't want to have any more problems than they already have with students who don't want to read or write anything.

How do teachers get students to read and write more?

Hardly anyone enjoys writing book reports. But having students share their reading experiences

with others can often be not only enjoyable, but also motivating. Yes, give students credit for all books they are reading. Find books that meet the abilities and interests of students. Fiction, nonfiction, plays, poems, short stories, essays. Students might start a book because of the subject matter, but find they don't enjoy an author's literary style. Finding another book on that subject is not all that difficult. Reading is so personal. How long can one impose one's taste on others? Isn't this extremely limiting?

There are so many good books out there. ALAN and *The ALAN Review* do an excellent job in helping teachers discover the wealth of resources available. We need to engage more teachers in our organization and help them become familiar with the many ideas for bringing students and books together. Reading achievement is not a test score. It's a lifetime experience.

Some Themes to Consider

A thematic approach allows students to look at several possible titles and to select a book that meets their personal interests. These are just a few suggestions. Most of the titles listed here are recent publications.

A Dash of Humor

- Andrews, Jesse. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*. Amulet, 2012.
- Bray, Libba. *Beauty Queens*. Scholastic, 2011.
- Clark, Jay. *The Edumacation of Jay Baker*. Henry Holt, 2012.
- Collins, Tim (illustrated by Andrew Pinder). *Prince of Dorkness*. Aladdin, 2011.
- Greenwald, Tommy (illustrated by J. P. Couvert). *Charlie Joe*

Jackson's Guide to Not Reading. Roaring Brook, 2011.

Korman, Gordon. *Ungifted*. Balzer & Bray, 2012.

Mellon, Robin. *Ditched: A Love Story*. Hyperion, 2012.

Seigel, Andrea. *The Kid Table*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Family Matters

Block, Francesca Lia. *Pink Smog*. Harper, 2012.

Chayil, Eishes. *Hush*. Walker, 2010.

King, A. S. *Everybody Sees the Ants*. Little, Brown, 2011.

McCall, Guadalupe Garcia. *Under the Mesquite*. Lee & Low, 2011.

Meredith, Christina. *Kiss Crush Colli*. Greenwillow, 2012.

Michaels, Rune. *Fix Me*. Atheneum, 2011.

Nielsen, Susin. *Dear George Clooney*. Tundra, 2010.

Parkinson, Siobhan. *Long Story Short*. Roaring Brook, 2011.

Sand-Eveland, Cyndi. *Tinfoil Sky*. Tundra, 2012.

Smith, Andrew. *Stick*. Feiwel, 2011.

Weaver, Will. *The Survivors*.

Harper, 2012.

Zusak, Markus. *Underdogs*. Scholastic, 2011.

Fantasy

Archer, E. *Geek: Fantasy Novel*. Scholastic, 2011.

Cross, Sarah. *Kill Me Softly*. Egmont, 2012.

Guilin, Peadar O. *The Deserter*. David Fickling, 2012.

Hirsch, Jeff. *The Eleventh Plague*. Scholastic, 2011.

Meyer, Marissa. *Cinder*. Feiwel, 2012.

Nayeri, Daniel and Dina. *Another Jekyll, Another Hyde*. Candlewick, 2012.

Norcliffe, James. *The Boy Who*

Couldn't Fly. Egmont, 2010.
 Pierce, Tamora. *Tortall and Other Lands: A Collection of Tales*. Random House, 2011.
 Valente, Catherine M. *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. Feiwel, 2011.

Friendships

Chambers, Aidan. *Dying to Know You*. Amulet, 2012.
 Emond, Stephen. *Winter Town*. Little, Brown, 2011.
 Green, John. *The Fault in Our Stars*. Dutton, 2012.
 Handler, Daniel (art by Maira Kalman). *Why We Broke Up*. Little, Brown, 2012.
 Leveen, Tom. *Zero*. Random House, 2012.
 Marcus, Kimberly. *Exposed*. Random House, 2011.
 Saldin, Erin. *The Girls of No Return*. Scholastic, 2012.
 Schroeder, Lisa. *Chasing Brooklyn*. Simon Pulse, 2010.

Historical Fiction

Burg, Ann E. *All the Broken Pieces*. Scholastic, 2009.
 Dogar, Sharon. *Annexed*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.
 Edwards, Eve. *The Queen's Lady*. Delacorte, 2012.
 Fitzmaurice, Kathryn. *A Diamond in the Desert*. Viking, 2012.
 Janeczko, Paul B. *Requiem: Poems of the Terezin Ghetto*. Candlewick, 2011.
 Kent, Trilby. *Stones for My Father*. Tundra, 2011.
 Kurlansky, Mark. *Battle Fatigue*. Walker, 2011.
 Parry, Rosanne. *Second Fiddle*. Random House, 2011.
 Wein, Elizabeth. *Code Name Verity*. Hyperion, 2012.

Wolf, Allan. *The Watch That Ends the Night*. Candlewick, 2011.

In The Schools

Coriell, Shelley. *Welcome, Caller, This Is Chloe*. Amulet, 2012.
 Eulberg, Elizabeth. *Prom & Prejudice*. Point, 2011.
 Jones, Traci L. *Silhouetted by the Blue*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.
 Shank, Marilyn Sue. *Child of the Mountains*. Delacorte, 2012.
 Van Cleave, Ryan G. *Unlocked*. Walker, 2011.
 Vivian, Siobhan. *The List*. Push, 2012.
 Whitney, Daisy. *The Rivals*. Little, Brown, 2012.
 Zeitlin, Meredith. *Freshman Year & Other Unnatural Disasters*. Putnam, 2012.

Multicultural

Booth, Coe. *Bronxwood*. Push, 2011.
 Cortez, Sarah (Ed.). *You Don't Have a Clue; Latino Mystery Stories for Teens*. Pinata Books, 2011.
 Lake, Nick. *In Darkness*. Bloomsbury, 2012.
 Levine, Kristin. *The Lions of Little Rock*. Putnam, 2012.
 Long, Mark, Jim Demanakos, Nate Powell. *The Silence of Our Friends*. :01 First Second, 2012.
 Noe, Katherine Schlick. *Something to Hold*. Clarion, 2011.
 Troncoso, Sergio. *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*. University of Arizona Press, 2011.
 Walker, Brian F. *Black Boy White School*. Harper, 2012.
 Wright, Barbara. *Crow*. Random House, 2012.

Mystery And Suspense

Berk, Josh, Guy Longman. *Crime*

Scene Procrastinator. Knopf, 2012.
 Child, Lauren. *Ruby Redfort: Look into My Eyes*. Candlewick, 2012.
 Fredericks, Mariah. *The Girl in the Park*. Knopf, 2012.
 Gilman, David. *Blood Sun*. Delacorte, 2011.
 Harrington, Kim. *Clarity*. Point, 2011.
 Hathaway, Jill. *Slide*. Balzer & Bray, 2012.
 Jarzab, Anna. *All Unquiet Things*. Delacorte, 2010.
 Johnson, Maureen. *The Name of the Star*. Putnam, 2011.
 Lee, Y. S. *The Agency: The Traitor in the Tunnel*. Candlewick, 2012.
 Peacock, Sharon. *The Dragon Turn*. Tundra, 2011.
 Petrushka, Stefan. *Ripper*. Philomel, 2012.
 Plum-Ucci, Carol. *Following Christopher Creed*. Harcourt, 2011.
 Valentine, Jenny. *Double*. Hyperion, 2012.
 Wood, Mary Rose. *The Poison Diaries: Nightshade*. Balzer & Bray, 2011.

Nonfiction

Bernstein, Richard. *A Girl Named Faithful Plum*. Knopf, 2011.
 Hopkinson, Deborah. *Titanic: Voices from the Disaster*. Scholastic, 2012.
 Hunter-Gault, Charlayne. *To the Mountaintop: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement*. Roaring Brook, 2012.
 Lakin, Patricia. *Steve Jobs: Thinking Differently*. Aladdin, 2012.
 Sommer, Shelley. *Hammerin' Hank Greenberg: Baseball Pioneer*. Calkins Creek, 2011.
 Swanson, James L. *Bloody Times: The Funeral of Abraham Lincoln and the Manhunt for Jefferson*

Davis. HarperCollins, 2011.
Winkler, Lisa K. *Black Cowboys Ride across America*. CreateSpace, 2012.

Science Fiction

Asher, Jay, and Carolyn Mackler. *The Future of Us*. Razorbill, 2011.
Bush, Penelope. *Alice in Time*. Holiday House, 2011.
Gordon, Roderick, and Brian Johnson. *Closer*. Chicken House, 2012.
Grant, Michael. BZRK. Egmont, 2011.
Johnson, Elana. *Possession*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Oliver, Lauren. *Delirium*. Harper, 2011.
Reese, Jenn. *Above World*. Candlewick, 2012.
Smith, Alexander Gordon. *Death Sentence*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.

Special People, Special Problems

Anthony, Jessica, and Rodrigo Corral. *Chopsticks*. Razorbill, 2012.
Blackstone, Matt. *A Scary Scene in a Scary Movie*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.

Cerrito, Angela. *The End of the Line*. Holiday House, 2011.
De La Pena, Matt. *I Will Save You*. Delacorte, 2010.
Goodman, Shawn. *Something Like Hope*. Delacorte, 2011.
Jordan, Dream. *Bad Boy*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2012.
Koertge, Ron. *Now Playing: Stoner & Spaz II*. Candlewick, 2011.
Vaught, Susan. *Going Underground*. Bloomsbury, 2011.
Walton, Kim. *Cracked*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Woodson, Jacqueline. *Beneath a Meth Moon*. Nancy Paulson Books, 2012.

Sports World

Aronson, Marc, and Charles R. Smith, Jr. (Eds.). *Pick-Up Game*. Candlewick, 2011.
Bloomberg, Georgina, and Catherine Hopka. *My Favorite Mistake*. Bloomsbury, 2012.
Keplinger, Kody. *Shut Out*. Poppy, 2011.
Ockler, Sarah. *Bittersweet*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Quick, Matthew. *Boy 21*. Little, Brown, 2012.
Ritter, John H. *Fenway Fever*. Philomel, 2012.

Volponi, Paul. *The Final Four*. Viking, 2012.

Supernatural

Billingsley, Franny. *Chime*. Putnam, 2011.
Clement-Moore, Rosemary. *Texas Gothic*. Delacorte, 2011.
Despain, Bree. *The Savage Grace*. Egmont, 2012.
Faegin, Trinity. *The Mephisto Covenant*. Egmont, 2011.
Feasey, Steve. *Dark Moon*. Feiwel, 2011.
Grant, Michael. *Fear*. Katherine Tegen, 2012.
Healey, Karen. *Shattering*. Little, Brown, 2011.
Miranda, Megan. *Fracture*. Walker, 2012.
Reese, James. *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mademoiselle Odile*. Roaring Brook, 2012.
Reeves, Dia. *Slice of Cherry*. Simon Pulse, 2011.
Spotswood, Jessica. *Born Wicked*. Putnam, 2012.
Taylor, Laini. *Daughter of Smoke & Bone*. Little, Brown, 2011.
Wiggins, Bethany. *Shifting*. Walker, 2011.