

# The Undergraduate YA Lit Course:

## One Iteration

I teach the course Children’s and Adolescent Literature at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), located 12 miles from the Mexican border in Texas. At the 2011 ALAN Workshop, my colleague, Dr. Amy Cummins, and I offered a break-out session titled: “The Undergraduate YA Lit Course: What? How? Why?” Our stated goal for the session was to allow instructors of this course a forum for sharing some of the particulars of their courses with fellow practitioners. Though I was invested in the cause, I was skeptical about our likelihood for success; our session was to occur late in the afternoon of the second day, just before the close of the conference. To our delight, however, every chair in the room was taken by an enthusiastic teacher of undergraduate young adult literature, eager to talk shop. The article that follows is an extension of that workshop session and those conversations.

My goal in writing this article and in sharing information about my course with readers is to inspire a dialog about how the undergraduate young adult literature course is being taught around the country, in a variety of contexts and configurations, in the second decade of the 2000’s. I believe such a dialog will support the professional development of instructors teaching those courses, support the development of the curriculums of those courses, and provide a resource to people new to the field who are beginning their journeys as teachers of this undergraduate course—instructors and courses that could rightly be seen as the pillars of the developing young adult literature discipline. Based on this article, I invite comment from and

correspondence with professionals who are currently teaching this course or who have recently taken what they feel is a representative or exemplary version of this course.

### The Broz Course

Though an English department offers this course, it is constructed and presented as a teacher education course. Any undergraduate eligible to take upper division English courses can enroll, but I discourage those who have no particular interest in the literacy development of children and young adults. I perceive my students’ professional development needs to be in most ways similar to students in other regional state universities where I have worked. Most intend to be teachers, and like many future teachers, most of them intend to return to the local schools from whence they came to pursue their careers. Also like many future teachers, a lot of them are first-generation college students. I want students in my classes to learn about a number of highly recommended titles for young people, including the subgenres that help define those books and the teaching issues that surround them. I want them to learn how to find other highly recommended titles and how to keep up with developments in the field. I want them to learn how to invite their future students to read these books, and how to organize and manage that student experience to optimize the development of students’ reading and interpretive abilities.

In my case, because of the high poverty rate in Hidalgo County, Texas (one of the top ten poorest

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counties in the nation for the last 60 years), many of the students at my 20,000-student commuter campus are nontraditional—older, married with children, and/or working full-time. The most unique feature of my students, and one that I account for in the design of the course, is that 86% of the students at UTPA share some degree of Mexican American heritage. Many are bilingual with their first language being Spanish. Many of the elementary education-focused students in my classes intend to teach in bilingual classrooms. Therefore, I include culturally relevant Mexican American and bilingual titles in my reading list and in my book talks.

In a context that I am guessing is not uncommon across the country, UTPA combines children’s literature and young adult literature into one undergraduate course that is recommended for or required of a variety of K–12 teacher education candidates, including mid-level and high school ELA teachers, elementary reading and bilingual teachers, and some others. Each semester, about half of the 33 students who enroll in each section of my class have a secondary focus and about half have an elementary or early childhood focus. Besides this professional course, the UTPA English Department offers a literature methods course, a course in linguistics for teachers, and a writing methods course, all required for secondary English education candidates.

### **Who Am I as a Teacher of Young Adult Literature at the College Level?**

To borrow a term from Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, I claim membership in one of the “First Families of Virginia” (p. 23) in the YA literature world. I took my undergraduate YA literature course at the University of Iowa in 1970, in a program headed by G. Robert Carlsen. Carlsen wrote one of the first popular texts describing and promoting YA literature, *Books and the Teenage Reader: A Guide for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents* (1967), and was himself a student

of Dora V. Smith, another of the founders of the discipline. In that class, I read *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967) and *The Contender* (Lipsyte, 1967) when they were hot off the presses. This was a reading-intensive course in which I may have read 25–30 titles. But because I went on to teach high school English, mostly to eleventh and twelfth graders, and because my personal professional interests were composition and creative writing, I had very little classroom teaching contact with YA literature over the next 25 years. At my first two postings as a professor of English Education beginning in 1997, someone else was already teaching the undergraduate YA lit course and not about to give it up. The 2012–2013 academic year will be my sixth as a teacher of this course. I suspect that many college teachers of young adult literature come to it either as an avocation or as a draftee of a desperate department chair. That is not exactly the case with me. I am more of a returning prodigal.

From composition studies I bring to my undergraduate YA lit course the promotion of robust writing processes, requiring drafts and peer response, for the course’s major papers. I know how to construct a writing workshop classroom and how to merge that community with a reading workshop classroom. I understand that, in inviting ninth graders to read and interpret books and “fifteenth” graders to learn to teach, I am helping students develop facility with processes.

My teaching of the course is also influenced by an event that took place at the University of Iowa (and likely at other institutions) in the 1990s. In about 1992, Dr. Jim Marshall was head of the English Education program and coauthor with Richard Beach of *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School* (1990), the forerunner to *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2010), which is now the most widely used and influential college textbook for teaching secondary literature pedagogy. Amid much controversy, Dr. Marshall changed the title of the Carlsen YA literature course, from simply “Adolescent Literature” to “Reading and Teaching Adolescent Literature.” That title change marked the change in content and focus from what was essentially a literature course about YA titles, authors, genres, and the history of the young adult book, to a course focused on contemporary titles and genres, *and how to teach them*. My course is more influenced by Marshall than by Carlsen, devoting perhaps 50% of its

energy to literature pedagogy and related issues.

Additionally, I must mention that as a high school English teacher working with rural and working-class Iowa students, I had already learned the value and importance of culturally relevant literature. More farm kids would actually read Faulkner's short story "Race at Morning," about deer hunting with an adolescent main character, than his short story "A Rose for Emily," about unrequited love with no kids in sight (both in Faulkner, 1993). That understanding led me to the utility of inviting students to read literature by Iowans about Iowa. When I came to UTPA, situated in the Texas borderlands, I immediately began looking for local texts by local authors and found many (see Broz, 2010).

The absolute best thing that happened to me upon being hired as an assistant professor to teach children's and YA literature at UTPA, however, was that Virginia Broz, national board certified teacher of Early Adolescent English Language Arts, M.A. English Ed. (U. Iowa), and 30-year veteran eighth-grade teacher (and, as it happens, my wife), was also hired as an instructor for the course. I was well aware that I owed most of my knowledge of young adult literature in the '70s, '80s, '90s and '00s to Virginia. If I had not been assured of at least her coaching, I would not have had the guts to apply for the UTPA job. Delightfully, we had the opportunity to develop the course together. All of the initial reading list and most of the modeled teaching practice are hers. I contributed most of the pedagogical theory and professional development aspects of the course. Though Virginia has now retired from teaching, the iteration described below is still her/our course.

### Stated Learning Goals for the Course

One of the first things we did was to revise the learning goals for the course (see Fig. 1). I hope my readers and students find most of these goals self-explanatory. Number 6 refers to issues such as the importance of offering students multicultural and culturally relevant books, preparing future teachers to deal with censorship, and the use of young adult books like *The Misfits* (Howe, 2003) in anti-bullying campaigns. Number 7 seems vitally important because the literacy narratives students write reveal that many of them do not read for pleasure, and many students admit that they

did not read the books assigned in high school. Occasionally, a student tells me that reading the kick-off book in our class, *Night* (Wiesel, 2006), marks the first book he or she has ever read cover to cover. Remember, many of the students in my classes are not English majors. Number 8 refers primarily to teaching students how to find and interpret professional reviews of children's and YA books for the purpose of professional decision making about text selection and use.

I think goals 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 are clearly pedagogical in nature. These goals are part of the reason I judge my class to be 50% focused on reading and literature pedagogy. The Carlsen course I took as an undergraduate was by contrast a "titles, authors,

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By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Write an effectively developed analytical essay on one or more YA or Children's Lit texts.
2. Participate meaningfully in small- and large-group discussions focused on YA or Children's Lit texts.
3. Practice a variety of classroom writing, discussion, and cooperative learning activities designed to engage readers with literary texts.
4. Understand basic strategies of effective pedagogy in elementary and middle-school level ELA classes.
5. Demonstrate enhanced appreciation of genre, format, and quality of texts in YA and Children's Literature.
6. Demonstrate a strong understanding of contemporary issues, concepts, and knowledge in YA and Children's Literature.
7. Demonstrate a continued or renewed reading fluency and interest in reading for pleasure and enjoyment.
8. Understand and use professional resources that support the selection of quality books for children and young adults.
9. Recommend to Borderland students, parents, and teachers a variety of culturally relevant and bilingual, English/Spanish-language texts, and understand the utility of such texts for bilingual students.

Figure 1 . Learning goals for the Broz YA literature course

genres” course that paid little or no attention to literature pedagogy. Along with *Hot Rod* (Felsen, 1950) and *Escape from Nowhere* (Eyerly, 1969), we could

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have been reading Dixon’s *Growth through English* (1967), but we weren’t. If we talked about teaching, it was in the contexts of “individualized reading” or free reading. I know that the Carlsen course is still one of the popular models today. Every course could likely be placed on a continuum from literature and genre courses on one end to primarily pedagogical courses in which YA

titles are featured on the other. I hope an emerging dialogue about the undergraduate YA lit course will help me see where on that continuum our course fits. I am guessing that it will fit well into the pedagogical end of the scale.

### **My Teaching Philosophy for Teacher Preparation Courses**

My approach to this and to other teacher education courses for preservice teachers is heavily influenced by Grossman’s *The Making of a Teacher* (1990), Schon in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), and the work of Fullan in *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (1991). One important experience that Grossman highlights in her study of preservice English teachers in a fifth-year M.A. program is the binocular vision teachers must develop in order to learn new practice and how to teach reflectively. Grossman demonstrates the effectiveness of preservice students experiencing the modeled practice of the methods professor with student’s eyes while reflecting on those experiences with their developing teacher’s eyes. Therefore, in my class, when I invite students to read the young adult titles, I ask them to do the exact same kinds of activities that I would ask eighth graders or tenth graders to do, and I manage those activities with the same pedagogical moves and goals as I would use and have used in a public school. Then, as part of the university course work, we think, write, and talk

about those teaching practices and learning experiences. In Schon’s words, “At the same time that they are reflecting on the problem, they are experiencing the phenomena of the problem” (p. 277).

There are several layers of reasoning for this approach. One motivation for modeling my own teaching practice for preservice students comes from Fullan (1991), citing Doyle and Ponder (1977–1978). In the article, “The Practicality Ethic in Teacher Decision-Making,” Doyle and Ponder discussed concepts of instrumentality, congruence, and cost, saying that in order to enact new practice, teachers need to learn instrumentality, or how to enact the practice, through observing an experienced professional who is successfully enacting it. All of the students who enroll in our course have participated elsewhere in their student lives in ineffective small-group activities. I want each of them to experience book-group discussions that are engaging and that work to develop interpretive abilities and promote further reading (Broz, 2011). I believe my students will learn the instrumentality of how to manage book groups through my modeled practice.

Teachers also need to believe that a teaching practice has congruence, meaning that they must believe the practice fits the needs of their students. If the professional students in our course believe that their book discussion of *The House of the Scorpion* (Farmer, 2004) meets their own needs for reading and interpretive development as readers and students, they are likely to believe their future students, who sit in the same or similar classrooms as my students did in their youth, will benefit from that practice.

Last, teachers must believe in the worth of the cost in time, energy, and risk of sanction necessary to change practice or to institute practices that are new to a school. This concept suggests that preservice teachers in my classes need to be very excited about their experiences with children’s and YA literature if they are to go forth and bring those experiences to their future students. This last point ties to another of Grossman’s concepts, the necessity for “over correction” (p. 127) for past faulty or ineffective student experiences, which really amounted to faulty “apprenticeships of observation” (Lortie, 1975). These faulty apprenticeships of observation, if not examined and corrected, will lead my students to future teaching practices based in their own “institutional biogra-

phies” (Britzman, 1986, p. 443) and to teaching just as they were taught during their K–12 educations.

While I am enacting these practices, I follow Grossman and Schon in asking students to reflect on their ongoing student experiences with teacher’s eyes by making explicit the means–ends relationship of my practice. I talk with students as true apprentices, saying things like, “In this class, we read *Night* [Wisese, 2006] first because once they start, most readers cannot stop reading the book, and we want that first experience to really engage readers.” Or I say, “This class used to read *Uglies* [Westerfeld, 2005], until a junior high teacher tipped me off that *The Hunger Games* [Collins, 2010] was going to be *big*. But now I am switching to *The House of the Scorpion* [Farmer, 2004] because nearly everyone has read *Hunger Games* or seen the movie, and the drug violence on the border makes *Scorpion* very relevant.” And I insist that students start talking about and referring to their own developing *teaching practices*.

Modeled practice is especially important in my current teaching position because some of the public schools in the part of Texas from which my students come have been documented as some of the least effective in the country. Some have high school dropout rates approaching 50% (see Murillo, 2012, p. 19). Apprenticeships of observation for the teaching of reading and literature that my students had in some of these schools are very likely to be unsupported by or at odds with current research and recommended practice. Anecdotal reports from my students suggest that in some middle schools, much of the reading/literature curriculum consists of “testing” on Accelerated Reader (AR) titles. Over the last five years, I have read hundreds of assigned literacy narratives, the audience for which is first, the class, and second, me. In these essays, student after student has described ineffective and outdated teaching literature practices that may even include the reading aloud of whole, book-length texts in class for days on end, sometimes student by student, down the row, with no opportunity for students to take the text home, read outside of class, or engage in any orchestrated reading activities that approximate mature adult reading behaviors.

Additionally, the majority of students who take our course tell me that they were never offered any culturally relevant Mexican American or bilingual texts in their public school days, even though their

school was 99% Mexican American. Reports of the absence of Hispanic titles come not only from students who are 40 years old, but also from 21-year-old students who graduated from high school in 2009.

The State of Texas’s liberal alternative teacher certification laws seem to me to result in many classrooms being staffed with teachers who have not taken what would be considered standard teacher education courses, including literacy and English Education courses.

When UTPA students begin to practice in the Texas schools, they will likely meet resistance to introducing culturally relevant texts. They may meet resistance to doing more than pushing the AR buttons. They will be asked how using YA texts will improve state test scores. Consequently, they will need to bring understandings of “congruence, instrumentality, and cost” with them from my class. That is why my students fill out no study guides and take no quizzes or tests over the YA books. I refuse to endorse those teaching methods in any way. That is also why they read three Mexican American titles (one bilingual) out of seven required titles, and my book talks on children’s and young adult titles (about 50) are on culturally relevant Mexican American literature. I am convinced that I have to do a lot of “over correction” for deficits in some Lower Rio Grande Valley public school curriculums and teaching practices. I want the future teachers trained in this class to be determined to enact practices in their own classrooms that invite students to be readers instead of just test takers, readers who read for their own purposes.

In the end, I feel that I must teach our course using the very methods I am advocating that these future teachers use in their own public school classrooms. I have to walk the talk. I cannot lecture about constructivism and sociocultural learning theory. I need to be able to enact it. And I believe YA titles deserve a place in the “taught” literature curriculum, not just at the periphery of free reading or AR choices. The text box on page 74 lists the books assigned for this course. Without being exhaustive, I will outline

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## Reading List for the Course, Fall 2012 (in the order read):

*Night* by Elie Wiesel (2006)

*Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2002)

Choice between:

*The Tequila Worm* by Viola Canales (2007)

or

*The Jumping Tree* by René Saldaña, Jr. (2002)

*Maximilian: The Mystery of The Guardian Angel*

by Xavier Garza (2011)

*The House of The Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer  
(2004)

*Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)

*The Misfits* by James Howe (2003)

**Choice Book** chosen by student for Curriculum  
Project

my reasons for choosing each of these books.

*Night* (Weisel, 2006) is a great first book because it is short and about as compelling as books come. With some front loading and background building, most students will have an engaged reading experience with Wiesel's memoir. I do not know if it is unusual throughout Texas, but very few of the South Texas students in my classes have been assigned *Night* in secondary school. I also use *Night* because it is frequently taught in middle school or high school Holocaust and WWII thematic units, and because it is an excellent example of a book about history. It is also a book for adults often read by teenagers.

I use *Fever 1793* (Anderson, 2002) because it is an excellent example of historical fiction, and because it (with *Speak*) gives me two books by one of the foremost contemporary YA authors. *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2007) and *The Jumping Tree* (Saldaña, 2002) are great Mexican American YA titles, containing plenty of Spanish and written by authors who grew up within 25 miles of our campus. Dr. René Saldaña, Jr. used to teach YA Lit at UTPA. Both authors return to this area of Texas frequently for school and library visits. For these two books, I ask students to read the professional reviews, study the awards and other recommendations for each book, and then choose which of the two titles they want to read for class. *Maximilian: The Mystery of the Guardian Angel* (Garza, 2011)

is another Mexican American title by a local author, this one aimed at a somewhat younger audience. It is the only book for grades four and five I require. *Maximilian* offers a complete bilingual text. Xavier Garza also writes bilingual children's picturebooks and is a frequent visiting writer in local schools and libraries.

*The House of the Scorpion* (Farmer, 2004) is award-winning science fiction. I always include one science fiction text and require students to read a textbook chapter about the genre. I noted above my progression from *Uglies* (Westerfeld, 2005) to *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010) to *Scorpion*. It is about a future time when both the United States and Mexico have given up on border drug violence and created a no-man's-land along either side of the border, which is controlled by drug cartels. Our campus would be situated in that no-man's-land.

I assign *Speak* (Anderson, 2009) because it is just about the best example of the teen problem novel I have found. It also tends to make students think about school and being a teacher (as does *The Misfits* [Howe, 2003]). I require a reading about the teen problem novel genre as well. Additionally, *Speak* is often the object of book challenges, and censorship is one of the issues I ask students to read about, write about, think about, and discuss. *The Misfits* is also a teen problem novel that highlights the subject of bullying and the issue of using young adult books in school anti-bullying campaigns.

For each of these books, students write "reading response journals," prepare written items for discussion, and then participate in in-class book groups and sometimes online, real-time, small-group book chats. The exception is *The Misfits*, for which students participate in a literary letters activity. One major paper offers students the chance to choose one of these books on which to write an analytical paper based on their own reading, with support drawn from scholarship about the specific genre of the book they choose.

### Other Textual and Electronic Resources

Our course is heavily assisted by a Blackboard online teaching platform website. On that site, I provide students access to a limited selection of chapters (within the fair use policy) from two textbooks, one about YA literature and one about children's literature. I also provide four of my own articles and book chapters as

additional required readings (see this list at the end of the references)—one about student choice in reading, one about Mexican American YA lit, one about bullying, and one about censorship. I could just as easily lecture about these topics, but students have a better time reading the articles and, I believe, are more comfortable responding to and even reading against the text when the material is in reprint and not delivered in person.

Our university library has been very supportive in keeping on reserve a collection of 30 exemplary children's picturebooks that are used for another major assignment. And as will be discussed in more depth below, students make significant use of The Children's Literature Comprehensive Database, which is available to them on our library's website. Of course, Blackboard makes it easy for me to provide many other resources, from links to author websites to a timeline of Elie Wiesel's life provided by the US Holocaust Museum.

### **Addressing Special Cultural Relevance and Accommodating Elementary-Focused Students**

I have probably made it pretty clear how I try to accommodate my Mexican American students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of the majority of students in area public schools. Of course, not all of my students are Mexican American, nor are all students in area public schools Mexican American. I do not teach—nor do I advocate for future teachers in my class to teach—only Mexican American titles. But as we teach and take Children's and Adolescent Literature at UTPA, we are in a Hispanic-dominant geographic and cultural area. Anglos or others living in our area of Texas who do not know about quinceañeras, for example, need to learn, just to understand where they are living. During the course of the semester, I book-talk about 30 bilingual picture books, which Spanish-speaking students volunteer to read to the class. I also book-talk about 20 YA titles from authors like Ben Sáenz, Matt de la Peña, Diana López, and Malin Alegria.

The book talks about bilingual picture books are one way I accommodate elementary-focused students who take our course. Also, all students review the 30 picture books on reserve and write a response journal about 12 of them. For the literary essay assign-

ment mentioned above, students can choose to write about one of the YA books or about two of the picture books. Often the elementary-focused students write about the picture books, while the secondary-focused students write about one of the YA titles.

One of our major assignments is a Reading Interest Inventory project I borrowed from Richard F. Abrahamson in which students interview a child between ages 4 and 14 and use that information to write a report about the student's interests, reading development, and reading habits. Based on that report, my students use the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database to find and write recommendations for three highly recommended books that match the child's interest, age, and reading ability. I encourage students to interview a child whose age matches that of the children with whom they intend to work. The final project for the course asks students to write a curriculum proposal for a thematic unit at a grade level and on a topic of their choice. I suggest that this project be tailored to the age level at which each of my students intends to work, whether they plan careers as teachers, librarians, or something else, such as youth corrections officers.

In the above narrative, I have discussed most of the course assignments except the Reflective Essay, which I cast as a literacy narrative, and which begins with a personal reading development timeline. These narratives serve two purposes: one is to reacquaint students with their own literacy development and allow them to analyze and make some conclusions about the influences that helped or hindered them in becoming a reader; the other is to broaden students' understandings of the literacy development of others who largely grew up in the same geographical area they did under some of the same socioeconomic and cultural influences. The latter is accomplished by offering students the opportunity to read 12–15 literacy narratives by other students in the class. Some of these future teachers benefit from knowing that they are not the only ones who struggled with second-

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**The final project for the course asks students to write a curriculum proposal for a thematic unit at a grade level and on a topic of their choice.**

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language acquisition or fell behind in reading because there were no books in their childhood homes. Additionally, students who had a more successful and less painful literacy development, like many of the English majors, need to know that a lot of people who struggled with reading still learned to read and even made it to college. Anyone with experience assigning literacy narratives knows that they are often amaz-

ing, disturbing, touching, unique, and surprising. The Reflective Essays in my class run the whole gamut.

The course builds to the final project mentioned above, which then asks students to create a proposal for a thematic reading unit based on an anchor book for common

reading and five supplemental titles for individual or small-group reading. I see such units as vehicles for wide reading, deep reading, individual and small-group reading, reading from titles differentiated by such factors as length and difficulty, and an opportunity for students to exercise choice in reading. Restricting their choice to highly recommended books emphasizes and reinforces professional decision making about text selection. Previous assignments using the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database to find highly recommended books create the foundation for this culminating activity. The model for the Curriculum Proposal Project is a real interdisciplinary thematic teaching unit devised by Virginia and the eighth-grade core team of teachers at Fairfield Middle School in Fairfield, Iowa. The theme for that unit is epidemics.

### **A Highlighted Theme of the Course—Professional Decision-Making in Choosing, Justifying, and Defending Specific Titles**

Our course has several themes. One is asserting that the purpose of promoting children's and young adult titles is to help students develop their reading and interpretive abilities, and *not* so they will gain the knowledge of what happens in a particular book or so

they will improve their test-taking abilities regarding supposedly "discreet" reading comprehension "skills," such as making inferences. Reading in school should always be about, at least in part, becoming mature adult readers.

Another theme, one that accounts for the emphasis on book-discussion groups, is that social interaction with other readers can be, should be, and often is the motivation and reward for reading. Book groups provide this social interaction; Accelerated Reader does not.<sup>1</sup>

A theme I want to highlight here, and one I feel is central to teaching children's and YA literature in schools, is professional decision making about what books to use and to invite students to read. I tell students that all stakeholders should reasonably expect that books teachers assign in class, include in their classroom lending libraries, or recommend from the school library should be highly recommended by professional sources and should be age-appropriate. The fact that we personally like a book, or that there is a class set in the book room, is not good enough. Excellent reviews from *School Library Journal* and a couple of national awards are, by my standards, good enough. Appearing on your state's annual school library association reading list is also great.

All of this information is available for hundreds of thousands of children's and young adult books on the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database and possibly on other databases with which I am not familiar. This database tells teachers that *Speak* is listed on 24 Best Books Lists from the likes of The American Library Association, has won 15 honors or prizes, and is recommended on 14 state reading lists, including Texas. The citation for *Speak* offers excerpts from ten professional reviewing sources—both academic (like *The ALAN Review*) and commercial (like *Booklist*). The age-appropriateness recommendations for *Speak* vary from a beginning age of 12 to a beginning age of 16. The review from the journal you now hold in your hands calls *Speak* "a book of distinction," while *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* gives it a 5 for quality, its highest rating. They say it is "hard to imagine it being any better written."

This information is not only valuable in choosing books to invite students to read, but also in defending books against book challenges and in convincing library and curriculum officials to buy books and

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## **Social interaction with other readers can be, should be, and often is the motivation and reward for reading.**

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incorporate them into the curriculum. Using this database or others like it allows teachers to find books to include in thematic units or to match the particular interest of individuals or groups of students. If a teacher reads a good book like *Fever 1793* and wants to create a thematic unit on epidemics, she or he can easily use the searchable CLCD to find other highly recommended books, like *An American Plague* by Jim Murphy (2003). My students readily find six highly recommended books for their thematic units aimed at grades one through twelve and on such diverse themes as astronomy for third graders and mythology for middle schoolers. Additionally, checking the CLCD could help teachers avoid some popular but inferior titles that the reviews and recommendations from professional sources do not justify reading. Many of my students report being assigned to read *A Child Called It* (Pelzer, 1995), which would not be the case if their teachers had met a reasonable standard for choosing only books with good professional recommendations. Students in this class also use the database to find three highly recommended and age- and interest-appropriate books of their choice for the child who is the subject of their reading interest survey.

## Conclusion and Invitation

So that is our course. It is one way that undergraduate children's, adolescent, and young adult literature courses are being taught in 2012–2013.<sup>2</sup> I would like to have more YA genres included in my reading list. For instance, I need a graphic text. I could be using online discussion boards, if I knew how to manage and grade them. I am weak on the traditional juvenile-aged chapter books for grades three through six. I know that all students do not have to be reading the same book at the same time, and I should allow more choice and independence. But I live in AR Land, and I feel the need to emphasize reading for social purposes, which fits with common readings or at least thematic choices. I have thought about splitting the course into young adult literature and children's literature. That could "up" our department's numbers of course hours taught and make more room for the young adult books that I currently don't have time to include. But then the secondary people would miss out on the picturebooks, which do have some applications in higher grades. And I worry that the elemen-

tary-focused reading teachers, some of whom need to get their personal reading motors going, would not get the same adult reading workout from children's books as they get from the YA books. Could we get a grad course in contemporary YA lit to "make" once a year? One cannot do everything.

I am sure there are practitioners out there who will read about our course and say, "'bout like mine." Others may suggest that G. Robert Carlsen is rolling over in his grave. Let the discussion begin.

## Notes

1. My professional negative opinion of Accelerated Reader is based on my understanding of sociocultural learning theory and the scholarship of Stephen Krashen (in his volume *Free Voluntary Reading* [2011], Chapter 4, "Should We Reward Recreational Reading?"). I am also influenced by anecdotal accounts from my students that speak of loss of interest in reading after AR and widespread cheating on AR tests.
2. Readers are invited to email me at brozwj@utpa.edu for additional information about any of the following topics related to this course: assignment guides, typical classroom activities and routines, hybridity and online teaching.

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### Additional Required Readings for the Course

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### Call for Abstracts on Teaching YAL Courses

Instructors of YA lit courses at any academic level are invited to inquire about submitting abstracts for chapters (or smaller pieces) for a possible edited collection on teaching such courses. Send inquiries to Bill Broz at brozwbj@utpa.edu or James Blasingame at James.Blasingame@asu.edu using the subject line “Abstract Inquiries.”