

The Look of Classic Young Adult Literature

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of ALAN, it seems only appropriate to celebrate the significant contributions of authors who have blazed a trail for the field of young adult literature (YAL) with poignant, raw depictions of the world of adolescents. This trail has evolved over the past 40 years into a multi-lane interstate, crossing borders into current social issues, accelerating to adapt to new technologies, and merging with other genres. While the future of YAL appears limitless, a tribute to these great authors speaks to the unique and powerful attributes that have propelled this field into scholarly debates concerning its relationship to the literary canon, its role in the English classroom, and its struggles against censorship. Before paying tribute to these individual authors' contributions, however, we believe it is important to foreground the ongoing conversation about the place of YAL in secondary schools as we move toward a broader discussion of current and future classics in YAL.

Current scholarly discussions leave little room for doubt concerning the necessity of incorporating YAL into the English curriculum. There is even a sense of urgency that failing to introduce students to YAL may have dire consequences for their future reading habits. As Alan Sitomer (2010) suggests, “[T]eens today are reading almost *in spite of* school, not because of it” (p. ix). Aside from great storytelling, YAL offers a connection to teenagers’ lives that many of the classics lack. Susan Groenke explains that YAL has always “featured teenagers, dealing with life on their own terms as best they could” while honoring “teens’ lives and their experiences . . . [and showing] teens as capable,

smart, and multidimensional” (Groenke & Scherff, 2010, p. xii). Jeffrey Kaplan (2012) adds, “Despite all the recent social, environmental, and technological changes, young people are still interested, above all, in their own lives” (p. 20).

Young adult literature is written *about* teenagers, *for* teenagers, and within contexts that mirror the world of teenagers. In these texts, they are not asked to identify with Dostoevsky’s 19th-century Russian protagonist who is contemplating the murder of a pawnbroker or Hawthorne’s adulteress who is shunned by her Puritan community. Instead, they see their lives reflected in the characters, settings, plots, conflicts, and themes, and they find issues nested in familiar contexts that are pertinent to their daily lives: social pressures, bullying, eating disorders, familial strife, and identity crises. Some educators argue that despite its relevance to teenagers’ lives, the low quality of young adult literature makes it unworthy of precious classroom time. However, Soter and Connors (2009) contend that current YAL has “the kind of literary merit that canonical literature demonstrates . . . stylistically complex (with) thoughtful social and political commentaries” (p. 66). Furthermore, Hazlett (2012) argues that within the English classroom, the value of YAL surpasses canonical literature due to its developmental appropriateness for teenagers:

[D]evelopmental theorists . . . state that YAL best fits adolescents’ maturity and cognitive development. Bluntly summarized, a tenth-grade geometry textbook is obviously unsuitable for an ordinary second-grade student; likewise, much classical literature is similarly difficult for adolescents’ comprehension—but unlike elementary educators, secondary teachers expect discernment of the classics. (p. 156)

Because the most outstanding YA novels are both well written *and* accessible to a wide variety of students from various reading levels, the argument for expecting *all* students to engage with Faulkner’s or Hawthorne’s prose because they are examples of “great” literature becomes less tenable. This is not to say that YAL should supplant “classic” novels in the English classroom, but that YAL’s ability to combine high-quality, accessible writing with characters and topics that are relevant to adolescents’ lives should make us think more critically about how and when we choose to teach both YAL and the classics. If, as research and classroom experience have demonstrated, YAL engages and motivates adolescents to become lifelong readers, then we cannot, in good conscience, allow it to remain on the sidelines of the English curriculum. As educators, we must value our students as individuals and as readers and be willing to enter *their* worlds by utilizing relevant fiction (and nonfiction) in the classroom as often as possible. As Groenke and Scherff (2010) suggest, “Teenagers’ reading habits and their out-of-school lives *must* matter in today’s classrooms if we don’t want to further students’ disengagement with school” (p. 2).

During last year’s NCTE roundtable session entitled “Eight Great American Young Adult Novelists”—a session in which preservice and inservice English teachers engage with important topics surrounding great American writers and texts—keynote speakers and roundtable leaders tackled many of the aforementioned issues as they discussed authors who have had a tremendous impact on both young adult literature and adolescent literacy. For the purposes of this article, we asked roundtable leaders to reflect upon the author they chose to discuss with session participants and focus on that author’s specific impact on the field of YAL, the appeal of his or her novels to adolescent readers, and the general highlights of the roundtable discussion.

In the forthcoming sections, nine teacher educators—eight from the session “Eight Great American Young Adult Novelists” and one, Joan Kaywell, winner of the 2012 Hipple Service Award, who presented on Robert Lipsyte at a separate NCTE session—will each describe the significant impact of one of their favorite YA novelists. These authors have all communicated to adolescents that their lives *do* matter, weaving stories that capture much more than stereotypical

“teen angst.” Their characters are rich and dynamic; the social issues they tackle are complex and messy; but more than anything, these authors do not shy away from depicting the reality of adolescence with its simultaneous beauty and brutality. Ultimately, these authors represent the best of YAL and verify Monseau and Salvner’s (2000) claim that today’s young adult literature has “come of age and proven (itself) to be literature of quality” (p. ix).

Robert Lipsyte

By Joan Kaywell, University of South Florida

Some believe that S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* is the signature book for young adult literature because Hinton herself was a teenager when she wrote the book. That same year, however, a young journalist in his twenties also published his debut novel, *The Contender*, which went on to become another seminal YA novel. After Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston and became the heavyweight champion of the world in 1964, Robert Lipsyte became the new boxing reporter for the *New York Times*. Not even a year later, Lipsyte got the idea for *The Contender*, and it was this book that started his professional fiction writing career. In Lipsyte’s (2013) own words, “I’ve always had two writing lives, one as a journalist and one as an author of fiction. I love them both. They complement each other” (para. 1).

Lipsyte was the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award honoring his lifetime contribution in YA literature with 13 YA novels and 8 YA nonfiction to his credit. Lipsyte’s journalistic side has fed his imagination with sports stories that bring pleasure to young and old alike. His memoir, *An Accidental Sportswriter*, describes Lipsyte’s two professional sides: the journalist who has interviewed some incredible sports stars (e.g., Muhammad Ali, Mickey Mantle, Billie Jean King) and the novelist who has incorporated his knowledge of sports into fiction.

One of the reasons Lipsyte is so popular among teens, especially boys, is that he addresses relevant issues in a style that does not preach, but simply gets them to stop and reflect on their fears, choices, possibilities, and relationships. *The Contender*, for example, encourages teens to think twice about dropping out of school, whereas *Raiders Night* exposes the gritty reality of hazing and steroid use in high school

football. Though most of his YA novels have come out of his experiences as a journalist, his personal life has also infiltrated his novels. Lipsyte admitted that the overweight and bullied protagonist in *One Fat Summer* mirrors his own boyhood, struggling for real friendships while trying to like himself—all of himself.

At the roundtable, we mostly talked about Lipsyte's latest and first middle-level novel *The Twin-*

ning Project. I wondered how his professional or personal side influenced the writing of this tale. Had he visited Roswell in order to create this story of twins raised on separate planets who must unite to save the world? Lipsyte himself participated in our discussion and explained that this book originated from his boyhood experience of staring at the stars and wondering if his twin lived elsewhere. If that's the case, I'm sure his twin, a renowned journalist in his own right, is somewhere on

his planet interviewing the likes of Ender and writing about Quidditch.

Lois Lowry

By Jacqueline Bach, Louisiana State University

Lois Lowry has published over 30 novels and won two Newbery Medals as well as a Margaret A. Edwards Award. Perhaps best known for her novel *The Giver*, Lois Lowry was writing about utopias and dystopias well before the era of *The Hunger Games*. In many of her novels, protagonists find themselves, very often for the first time, confronting the problems of the adult world, fighting to keep their personal freedom, and attempting to save human lives.

In their votes for the top YA novels of the 1990s, Hipple and Maupin's (2001) participants placed *The Giver* at the top of their lists, in part because of Lowry's memorable characters. Characters in her novels must depend on one another, something Lowry identifies in her own reasons for writing: "I try, through writing, to convey my passionate awareness that we

live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends upon our caring more, and doing more, for one another" (2013, para 9). Caring is often accompanied by gifts, both literal and figurative, that run through Lowry's work and make her stories appeal to readers who perhaps still long for magic as a way to escape the challenges of adolescence. These simple gifts emerge suddenly, such as the appearance of the color red in *The Giver* or a handkerchief in *Number the Stars*, and serve as catalysts for protagonists to discover how important their roles can be in their world.

At our NCTE roundtable, we first discussed Lowry's recently published fourth installment in The Giver series, *Son*, which finally brings us back to Jonas and Gabriel after their infamous snowy sled ride to the village with the twinkly lights. The second topic of conversation illustrated how Lowry's works still appeal to students and are taught in diverse school settings. Johnson, Haynes, and Nastasi (2013) capture one reason for the lasting presence of Lowry's novels: "The works our society tends to deem most worthwhile and those that last the test of time are often titles that present new, often disturbing, insights" (p. 61). And these insights are Lowry's gifts to us.

Walter Dean Myers

By Jennifer Buehler, Saint Louis University

A legendary figure in the field of young adult literature, Walter Dean Myers has been writing award-winning books for teens for over 40 years. Best known for his street-smart works of contemporary realistic fiction, Myers has also written historical fiction, nonfiction, biography, memoir, short story collections, and novels in verse. His books have been honored with almost every award given in the fields of children's and young adult literature, including five Coretta Scott King Awards, two Newbery Awards, and the first-ever Michael L. Printz Award. A three-time National Book Award finalist, Myers received the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Lifetime Achievement in Young Adult Literature in 1994 and was named the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in 2012.

Myers is one of those rare authors whose books are both critically acclaimed and highly accessible to teen readers. By writing about characters who struggle with racism, poverty, and the stresses of inner-city life, Myers makes reading relevant and powerful for youth who do not always see their lives reflected in

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literature. His books respect and validate urban teens' life experiences. At the same time, they challenge readers to develop a critical view of our contemporary world and a deeper understanding of culture and history.

Teens who read Myers's books will encounter a broad range of topics, from the Iraq War in *Sunrise over Fallujah* to a modern-day retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in *Street Love*; from sports and civil rights in *The Greatest: Muhammad Ali* to political philosophy in *All the Right Stuff*. In our roundtable discussion, teachers agreed that the realism in Myers's novels speaks powerfully to African American students in urban schools. However, the issues Myers takes up are equally important for readers of all backgrounds to explore. Readers who say they struggle to "relate" to a story like *Dope Sick*, which features a teen hiding in an abandoned building after fleeing from a drug deal gone wrong, benefit from the perspectives of characters whose lives are different from their own.

One roundtable participant explained how she uses *Monster*, the story of a teenager on trial for murder, to challenge stereotypes about people who are incarcerated and to open up conversations about justice, democracy, and our responsibility to each other as members of a community. Inevitably, books such as this one invite discussion and debate. They provide a space for readers to reflect on different forms of lived experience as well as our common humanity.

Mildred D. Taylor

By Chris Crowe, Brigham Young University

Her best-known novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, earned Mildred D. Taylor the 1977 Newbery Medal and established her as a respected author of historical fiction for young readers. She followed that book with a series of historical novels and novellas that continued the saga of the Logans, a resilient, hard-working, but poor African American family in the Mississippi Delta in the 1930s and '40s. Taylor's stories, based on her own family's history, present African American characters in loving, supportive families who, despite harsh Jim Crow oppression, battle discrimination, poverty, and other obstacles to claim their share of the American dream. Her books are notable because they portray African Americans as courageous survivors to be admired, not as downtrodden victims to be pitied.

In her 1997 ALAN Award acceptance speech, Taylor (1998) reported that she had received criticism from white and African American readers who disliked her use of racist language and/or her portrayal of white and black characters. In her defense, she said,

In the writing of my books I have tried to present not only a history of my family, but the effects of racism, not only to the victims of racism but to the racists themselves. I have recounted events that were painful to write and painful to be read, but I had hoped they brought more understanding. . . . As a parent, I understand not wanting a child to hear painful words, but as a parent I do not understand not wanting a child to learn about a history that is part of America My stories might not be "politically correct," so there will be some who will be offended, but as we all know, racism is offensive.

Sadly, racism still exists today. As we examined at our roundtable, Taylor's books provide opportunities to discuss racism past and present, and they deserve a place in English classrooms not just because they are examples of effective writing and storytelling, but also because they provide opportunities for students to read authentic accounts of African American life prior to the civil rights movement and to discuss still-relevant issues of social justice and equality.

Virginia Euwer Wolff

By Kia Jane Richmond, Northern Michigan University

Virginia Euwer Wolff creates "contemporary realistic novels that engross readers with the struggles of everyday life" (LaTrobe & Hutcherson, 2002, p. 72). In 1988, Wolff published her first young adult novel, *Probably Still Nick Swansen*, an award-winning story of a 16-year-old boy troubled by the death of his sister. She has penned five YA books: *The Mozart Season*, *Make Lemonade*, *Bat 6*, *True Believer*, and *This Full House*. Although she received the Addams Book Award in 1999 and a National Book Award in 2001, Wolff's books are rarely the focus of academic scholarship, as evidenced by the fact that only a few essays focus exclusively on teaching Wolff's work.

One such essay is "'Making It More Real': Book Groups, *Make Lemonade*, and the School Nurse" (Chandler, 1996). NCTE roundtable participants were introduced to this essay, and they discussed Wolff's accessible format (lyrical, open-verse poetry), her successful use of figurative language and character development, and her thoughtful treatment of social issues.

Participants agreed that Wolff's novel, *Make Lemonade*, about a teen babysitter, a single teen mother, and their interdependent relationship makes a fantastic choice for the high school English curriculum.

Participants discussed numerous avenues to encourage students' responses to Wolff's novels, including online discussion forums, art pieces, and photographs (Richmond & Delorey, 2004). Discussion also centered on Wolff's decision not to have the char-

acters in *Make Lemonade* "be any race, any particular ethnicity" and her hope that readers "would have the characters be whatever ethnicity they needed them to be" (as cited in Sutton, 2001, p. 281). Wolff said, "I wanted young girls in Jolly's situation, maybe pregnant or with babies, and maybe going back to school, to be able to say, 'I read two chapters!' In the amount of time they had, with the amount of concentration they could muster, I wanted them to be able to get through the book" (as cited in Sutton, 2001, p. 282).

Additionally, young readers could critique Wolff's description of teen mothers to determine whether or not she stereotypes them, perhaps by utilizing contemporary examples in shows such as MTV's *Teen Mom* series. Further recommendations for students responding to Wolff's novels include writing oral narratives (Juzwik & Sherry, 2012) and other alternatives to typical book reports (Mitchell, 1998). Wolff's accessible style, engaging characters, and social awareness invite students to see themselves and the world around them more clearly.

Laurie Halse Anderson

By Wendy Glenn, University of Connecticut

Laurie Halse Anderson's commitment to creating stories that enrich, disquiet, and guide the teens she admires led to her selection as the 2009 recipient of the prestigious Margaret A. Edwards Award. Commit-

tee members describe Anderson's first three novels, *Speak*, *Fever 1793*, and *Catalyst*, as "gripping and exceptionally well-written," noting how Anderson uses "various settings, time periods, and circumstances" to "poignantly reflect the growing and changing realities facing teens" (Glenn, 2009, p. 2). Anderson has published five additional novels, *Prom*, *Twisted*, *Chains*, *Wintergirls*, and *Forge*, along with several titles for younger readers.

Our roundtable conversation centered on two quotations drawn from scholarship on Anderson and her work. We looked first at how she describes teenagers as "rough drafts":

They're always adding details to fit these new personalities. They're putting in new information; they're expanding to fit their larger bodies and their larger sense of self. They cut, they contract, they pull back in when they run up against unexpected pain or harshness; they're always polishing these new versions of themselves, trying to see who will stay in control. (Glenn, 2009, p. 1)

Participants appreciated how Anderson respects the complicated nature of growing up and creates relatable characters in a variety of settings to help readers connect with stories across time and place. Whether we follow Isabel (*Chains*) through Revolutionary America or Melinda (*Speak*) through the halls of a contemporary high school, we find ourselves imagining parallels between their richly described worlds and our own.

With this perspective in mind, participants explored Anderson's thoughts on writing for teens:

Being a teenager usually sucks. It's hard and confusing and few adults have the guts to talk about it honestly. That's my job . . . In my books, characters mess up. They make mistakes. Sometimes they drink. Sometimes they have sex. Sometimes they cut class and are disrespectful to adults. They mess up and then they have to deal with the consequences of messing up—just like in real life. (Glenn, 2009, p. 18)

Participants were intrigued by the way Anderson crafts stories that allow readers to (re)experience their lived realities in a fictional way, creating spaces in which they can explore and wonder and ultimately choose a path that reflects who they want to be and become. When Tyler (*Twisted*) chooses integrity over popularity and Lia (*Wintergirls*) faces the truth about friendship and loyalty, we find models of young people worth emulating.

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John Green

By Lisa Scherff, Estero High School (Estero, FL)

John Green entered the young adult literature world in 2005 with his debut novel *Looking for Alaska*, which won the prestigious Printz Award. Since then, Green has published several award-winning novels, including *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns*, and *The Fault in Our Stars*. He also coauthored *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* with David Levithan. Green's impact on the field is enormous—teen readers love his books, and the ongoing series of videos that he and his brother Hank have been posting on their website Vlogbrothers have expanded his reach to an even wider audience.

Readers love Green's novels because the "characters are real teens who learn, grow, think, and change . . . [and] unabashed realism is what propels Green's works" (Barkdoll & Scherff, 2008, p. 67). Green himself is unapologetic and uncompromising in his desire to capture life in all of its complexity:

Humor and tragedy coexist everywhere. . . . All the sick people I've known were still funny. I wanted to capture the fact that people who are chronically ill or in pain, those people have very difficult lives. It's not a joyous laugh fest, but those people are as alive and human as anyone else and part of being alive is being able to crack jokes. (Carpenter, 2012)

Although Green is referring to his most recent novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, his quote could apply to almost all of his novels, which is why they appeal to students (and adults).

Our table discussion focused mainly on how to teach Green's novels and not get in trouble with the censors. We only wish administrators and parents loved his novels as much as we do and would recognize their value. As Green has suggested:

Telling a story that includes drinking, drug use, and sexuality can be a platform for discussion, but I really hope that the most interesting questions in my book are not, "Should you get drunk and let your friend drive drunk to her death?" (Of course you shouldn't.) To me, the significance of the drinking and the drugs is that these kids are experiencing self-destructive impulses (as so many teenagers do) and are trying to find ways to respond to those impulses. This weird desire that a lot of us have as teenagers—to hurt ourselves without killing ourselves—is one of the ways I think we cope with the unfairness of suffering. (Barkdoll & Scherff, 2008, p. 70)

Chris Crutcher

By Alan Brown, Wake Forest University

I still remember my first reading of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993) by Chris Crutcher and my first encounter with the story's protagonist, Eric Calhoun, who, in so many ways, reminded me of myself as a teenager:

In truth, the only reason I don't allow people up close and personal with my emotional self is that I hate to be embarrassed. I can't afford it. I spent *years* being embarrassed because I was fat and clumsy and afraid. I wanted to be tough like Sarah Byrnes, to stand straight and tall . . . But I was paralyzed, so I developed this pretty credible comedy act—I'm the I-Don't-Care-Kid. . . . But I'm not stupid; I believe there is more important shit to be dealt with [in life]. (p. 77)

Chris Crutcher is a gifted storyteller, someone who tells real stories about real teenagers. These stories are the result of years of working as a child and family therapist specializing in abuse and neglect, a time during which Crutcher witnessed the raw, emotional, and disheartening side of children's lives. In telling these stories, he teaches teens about themselves, their peers, and the world around them, a world that can be as cruel as it is compassionate. Through these stories, teens consider what it means to face their fears, overcome obstacles, and seek a light in the proverbial darkness.

Crutcher's most important novels include *Deadline*, *Whale Talk*, *Ironman*, *Chinese Handcuffs*, *Running Loose*, and his most recent novel, *Period 8*, many of which are included on banned book lists across the country due to challenges based on language and content. As a result, Crutcher has become a leading voice in the fight against censorship by promoting what NCTE has titled "students' right to read." For his outstanding contributions to YAL and his continued efforts to battle censorship, Crutcher was awarded NCTE's National Intellectual Freedom Award. His numerous other awards include the ALAN Award and ALA's Margaret A. Edwards Lifetime Achievement Award.

In a recent issue of *English Journal*, Crutcher talked about how writing influenced his adolescence and the impact great teaching can have on a teenager's future: "A good writer and a good teacher just do their work in a different place. After all, what is education if you don't feel better about yourself in the world? If

you want to save lives as a teacher, empower kids” (Eisenbach & Kaywell, 2013, p. 78). As Joan Kaywell discussed with attendees at our roundtable, the idea of student empowerment can provide a powerful narrative in teaching literature, particularly for students who need help dealing with the “more important shit” (Crutcher, 1993, p. 77) of their everyday lives.

Robert Cormier

By Steve Bickmore, Louisiana State University

I have recommended Robert Cormier’s books since I began teaching in the late 1970s. His books were available for students’ self-selected reading and literature circles. I am especially

fond of *I Am the Cheese*, and I have passed it on to numerous students and other teachers. With this NCTE roundtable in mind, I decided to use Cormier’s novels as touchstone texts for my English methods class and have students collaborate to practice constructing small activities, lessons plans, and completed units based on a shared reading.

The students picked one of seven Cormier novels. Imagine my surprise

when students accused me of selecting old, dated, and possibly irrelevant works from a dead white guy for possible use in their contemporary classrooms. For me, Cormier was instrumental in pioneering dark, realistic fiction for adolescents with open, unconventional endings. Aside from his influence in the early years of realistic young adult literature, there are other issues to consider. Teachers and librarians have championed his books, especially *The Chocolate War*, in the battle against censorship. His characters are complex and well crafted; they frequently confront mental and physical abuse as they struggle with what is “real” in their environment. His themes of betrayal, government conspiracy, and terrorism seem current today. Nevertheless, there I was, standing accused of suggesting antiquated fiction. Students were encouraging

me to be relevant with my choices, just as I normally am in my young adult literature and English methods courses. Ultimately, students agreed that the novels were teachable, but old.

This dilemma was the topic of our roundtable discussion. We discussed Cormier and his quality contributions. But, I admit, the majority of the participants were closer to my age than the ages of my preservice teachers or their future students. We concluded that the study of young adult literature has arrived at an era of maturity. We have writers, like Cormier, Hinton, Zindel, Kerr, Blume, and others, who are now examples of classic authors with an established history and texts that have stood the test of time—we have a canon. Perhaps the pertinent question is: will these authors be considered too old by the new generation of English educators as they select texts? In other words, will they be . . . well, too canonical?

Conclusion

The group of YA novelists depicted here are all prolific, award-winning authors who have significantly impacted the field of YAL as foundation builders, risk takers, and boundary pushers. Due to their contributions and those of many other YA authors, critics and censors have been unable to dissuade the growing number of teachers, teacher educators, and librarians who have embraced the opportunity to provide great books for teens that reflect their own lives. And yet, it is Steve Bickmore’s final question about whether classic YA novels might someday become too canonical for new generations of readers that challenges us and advances the conversation about the future of YAL. A central attribute of YAL is its capacity to adapt to the ever-changing world of adolescents. While the struggles and themes of adolescence (e.g., discovering one’s identity, familial conflicts, social pressures) may persist, the contexts in which teens deal with these issues are always changing—and thus YAL changes with them. Jeffrey Kaplan (2012) suggests that “young adult literature changes as quickly as teens do themselves” (p. 20). As educators, we must discern how to keep pace with current trends and changes in YAL while still retaining quality titles that remain timeless.

As we reflect on an adolescent literature course we had with Dr. Joe Milner at the beginning of our master’s program at Wake Forest University many

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years ago, we fondly recall some of the now canonical YA novels we read during that course: *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel; *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli; *Nothing But the Truth* by Avi; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor; *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse; and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. As we think back on these stories, we vividly recall the many characters we came to know and love: Lorraine, Jeffrey, Phillip, Cassie, Billie Jo, and Jonas. These characters might

not be widely known to everyone, but that is the beauty of reading; there are always more characters to meet.

As we compare these characters to those of other classic American novelists, authors such as Harper Lee, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Alice Walker, J. D. Salinger, and John Steinbeck, we realize that they, too, remain front and center through the strength of their characters: Scout, Gatsby, Celie, Holden, and Lennie. While

Table 1. Classic characters from classic YAL

Classic Characters	YA Novel	Author
Junior	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i>	Alexie, Sherman
Melinda	<i>Speak</i>	Anderson, Laurie Halse
Matilda	<i>Fever 1793</i>	Anderson, Laurie Halse
Octavian	<i>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation</i>	Anderson, M. T.
Phillip	<i>Nothing but the Truth</i>	Avi
Weetzie	<i>Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books</i>	Block, Francesca Lia
Margaret	<i>Are you There, God? It's Me, Margaret</i>	Blume, Judy
Tyrell	<i>Tyrell</i>	Booth, Coe
Charlie, Patrick	<i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	Chbosky, Stephen
Adam	<i>I Am the Cheese</i>	Cormier, Robert
Jerry, Archie	<i>The Chocolate War</i>	Cormier, Robert
Salamanca	<i>Walk Two Moons</i>	Creech, Sharon
T.J.	<i>Whale Talk</i>	Crutcher, Chris
Sarah, Eric	<i>Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes</i>	Crutcher, Chris
Miguel	<i>We Were Here</i>	de la Peña, Matt
Matt	<i>The House of Scorpion</i>	Farmer, Nancy
Annie, Liza	<i>Annie on My Mind</i>	Garden, Nancy
Alaska, Miles	<i>Looking for Alaska</i>	Green, John
Hazel, Augustus	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Green, John
Patty	<i>Summer of My German Soldier</i>	Greene, Bette
Billie Jo	<i>Out of the Dust</i>	Hesse, Karen
Ponyboy, Dallas	<i>The Outsiders</i>	Hinton, S. E.
Gene, Finny	<i>A Separate Peace</i>	Knowles, John
Alfred	<i>The Contender</i>	Lipsyte, Robert
Jonas	<i>The Giver</i>	Lowry, Lois
Steve	<i>Monster</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
Jamal	<i>Scorpions</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
Cat	<i>Shine</i>	Myracle, Lauren
Ann	<i>Z for Zachariah</i>	O'Brien, Robert
Brian	<i>Hatchet</i>	Paulsen, Gary
John	<i>Nightjohn</i>	Paulsen, Gary
Stanley	<i>Holes</i>	Sachar, Louis
Jeffrey	<i>Maniac Magee</i>	Spinelli, Jerry
Cassie	<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>	Taylor, Mildred D.
LaVaughn	<i>Make Lemonade</i>	Wolff, Virginia Euwer
Lorraine	<i>Pigman</i>	Zindel, Paul

the latter list of character names may be more recognizable to the current generation of adults, it does not necessarily make them better, just older, or perhaps just more accepted in popular culture and society. At the same time, many adults may not know the names of the characters our students will remember most vividly: T.J. (Chris Crutcher), Steve (Walter Dean Myers), Alaska (John Green), and Melinda (Laurie Halse Anderson). We hope someday they will, though, because, like many sports Halls of Fame who induct new members each year, there is always room in the canon for future classics. And as we reconsider the look of classic literature, we would love to see Scout mingle with Cassie, Holden with Alaska, and T.J. with Jeffrey. More important, we believe our students would benefit from seeing these enduring characters interact in the English classroom.

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