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◆ **THE ALAN REVIEW** ◆ **Volume 44** ◆ **Winter 2017** ◆ **Number Two**

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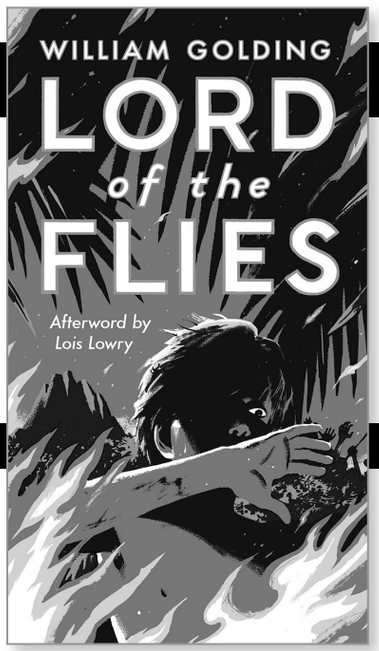

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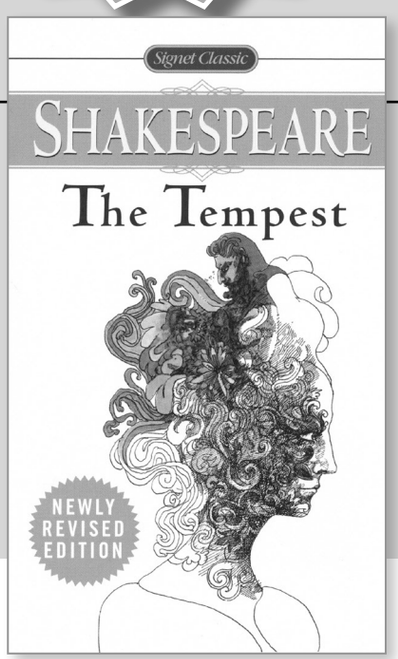

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Instructions for **Authors**

ABOUT *THE ALAN REVIEW.* *The ALAN Review (TAR;* ISSN 0882-2840 [Print], ISSN 1547-741X [Online]) publishes articles that explore, examine, critique, and advocate for literature for young adults and the teaching of that literature. Published pieces include, but are not limited to, research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genres and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews with YA authors.

AUDIENCE. Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of young adult literature, librarians, YA authors, publishers, reading teachers, and teachers in related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 United States and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than twenty double-spaced, typed pages, not including references. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for young adults and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a clearly defined topic and be scholarly in content, as well as practical and useful to people working with and/or studying young adults and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as articles rather than formal reports. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender-specific terms such as "chairman."

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. The names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully documented within the manuscript and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by written permission from the copyright owner. YA author interviews should be accompanied by written permission for publication in *TAR* from the interviewed author(s). Interviewers should indicate to the author(s) that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. Original short tables and figures should be double-spaced and placed on separate sheets at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text indicating proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review uses the bibliographic style detailed in the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Please adhere to that style when including in-text citations and preparing reference lists.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors should submit manuscripts electronically to thealanreview@gmail.com. In the subject line, please write: ALAN Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA bibliographical format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: 1) An abstract of no more than 150 words; 2) A manuscript without references to the author(s) and with name(s) removed in the Properties section under the File menu to ensure the piece is blinded; 3) A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100- to 150-word professional biographies for each submitting author, as well as a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editors and at least three members of the Editorial Review Board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks. Manuscripts are judged for the contribution made to the field of young adult literature and mission of *The ALAN Review*, scholarly rigor, and clarity of writing. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of the editors. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style. Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

DEADLINES. Please observe these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*.

FALL (October) Issue Deadline:	**MARCH 1**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

Wendy **Glenn,** Ricki **Ginsberg,** and Danielle **King**

From the Editors

Story and the Development of Moral Character and Integrity

As lovers of literature, we want to believe that through books, adolescent readers may gather insights and knowledge that support their efforts to make sense of themselves and others. That while accessing worlds they might never know, they broaden their perspectives and vicariously experience decision-making processes that parallel those encountered in their lived realities. And yet, if fiction has the power to achieve this good, might it also have the capacity to engender the bad?

It might be true that "It's a lot easier to be lost than found. It's the reason we're always searching and rarely discovered—so many locks, not enough keys" (Dessen, 2008, p. 365). We might "envy the trees/ that grow/ at crossroads./ They are never/ forced/ to decide/ which way/ to go" (Engle, 2013, p. 138). But sometimes we need to consider the difficult possibilities, and "sometimes the best way to find out what you're supposed to do is by doing the thing you're not supposed to do" (Forman, 2013, p. 125).

In this issue, contributors consider the complex moral interactions that might occur when adolescent readers enter a text, particularly one intended for them as young adults. They explore whether young adult literature (YAL) can foster opportunities for readers to assess what might be right and what might be wrong—and who decides; provide avenues for exploring dark, forbidden paths; reinforce or challenge belief systems contradictory to those grounded in democratic values of equity and social justice; and/or foster more empathetic and nurturing dispositions and behaviors among young people.

We begin this issue with Jandy Nelson's ALAN 2015 Workshop keynote address, "Our Contemporary Shamans." In this lyrical piece, Nelson describes the influence of English teachers who taught her to think, to dream, to risk, to be unique. As she describes it, each teacher "blasted through stone and found me, a truer me. I think this is what English teachers do. They blast through stone and find us. And then they talk in our sleep for lifetimes."

Our exploration of morality begins with the reflections of three authors we admire—Becky Albertalli, Kekla Magoon, and Aisha Saeed—and their collaborative conversation, "Who Decides What's Right for Me?: Morality and Cultural Norms." These writers help us better understand the ways in which culture influences individual and societal perceptions of morality and how literature can help adolescent readers decide who and what is right in a world of moral complexity and contradiction.

"'Just Take One Step': How YA Novels Empower Bystanders to Stop Sexual Assault," written by Sarah E. Whitney, closely examines six YA bystander books, or texts that narrate adolescent sexual assault from the perspective of a witness or confidante. Whitney analyzes how such titles can challenge and support teen audiences by helping them discern problematic peer behaviors, identify and confront rape myths, and recognize their own power to disrupt potential episodes of sexual violence.

In "Taking Down Walls: Countering Dominant Narratives of the Immigrant Experience through the Teaching of *Enrique's Journey*," Ashley Boyd

and Jeanne Dyches explore how YA nonfiction can be used concurrently to satisfy the demands of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and cultivate social justice dispositions among preservice English teachers. Drawing upon blog responses to Sonia Nazario's (2007) *Enrique's Journey,* the authors argue that the text helped participants begin to develop a sense of critical consciousness.

In "Reviewing to Exclude?: Critical Discourse Analysis of YA LGBTQ Book Reviews for School Librarians," Jenna Spiering analyzes book reviews of YA LGBTQ literature to consider how the language within the reviews might influence the decisions that school librarians make about including such literature in their collections. Spiering also forwards examples of reviewers' discourse that encourage school librarians to disrupt normative understandings about what might be considered appropriate content with regard to LGBTQ literature.

Nicole P. Clawson offers evidence of the lasting effects of literature on life in her piece, *"Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War*: Fostering Morally Mature Young Adults through Amoral Fiction." She argues that Robert Louis Stevenson (1883/2012) and Robert Cormier (1974/2004) incited literary revolutions that provided (and continue to provide) opportunities for young adult readers to navigate complex and ambiguous moral situations without didacticism.

Hilary Crew, in her article "Revisiting the Vietnam War: Chris Lynch's Vietnam Series and the Morality of War," examines five young adult novels in which Chris Lynch presents the experiences of four protagonists who serve in the US military during the Vietnam War. She argues that Lynch's war narratives honor the value of friendship over nationalistic objectives of war, and she offers advice and resources for using these titles in the classroom to help students employ theories of war to think critically and carefully about the Vietnam conflict.

In his article "Read This Book Out Loud: A Review of Young Adult Works by Artists from the Poetry Slam Community," Adam D. Henze gives readers an overview of YA texts written by poets from the slam community. He shows how YA literature shares numerous conventions with the narratives commonly shared in the poetry slam scene and discusses the moral implications of using these titles in the classroom.

In Book in Review: A Teaching Guide, Toby Emert's "Of History Lessons and Forbidden Loves and Stories Worth Telling Twice" reviews two historical fiction texts, *Lies We Tell Ourselves* (Talley, 2014) and *Something Must Be Done about Prince Edward County* (Green, 2015). Emert provides educators with ideas and resources for using these texts to support students in developing empathetic understandings of people who inhabited times past and those who live in the present day.

In his Right to Read column, "The Undercover Life of Young Adult Novels," Angel Daniel Matos asks readers to think carefully about the role of book covers in the conveyance of content and the ways in which glossy images can reaffirm deficit perspectives of LGTBQ individuals. As he explains, "Given the status of a book cover as an interpretative threshold, it is important for us to question which audiences are invited to 'step inside' a book's pages through the implementation of certain paratextual features and the extent to which these thresholds are deliberately designed to reach out to, or withdraw from, a particular readership or purchaser by omitting crucial information."

Guest author William Kist joins Peggy Semingson in the Layered Literacies column, "The Multimodal Memoir Project: Remembering Key YA Texts." Kist describes the ways in which this project affords students opportunities to make intertextual connections across a wide variety of texts and media. The reflective process of creating these digital literacy narratives encourages students to explore their literate identities, particularly the YA titles they read as young people, to better make sense of themselves and their world.

We end this issue with a deeply felt piece, "Meanings of Life and Realities of Loss: A Collaborative Conversation," that includes the voices of YA authors Martha Brockenbrough, Jennifer Niven, Adam Silvera, and Francisco X. Stork. Their thoughtful conversation focuses on the role morality plays in defining the value of life and facing the realities that come with loss. Their words remind us that story can breed love, that hope can come from sadness, and that navigating right and wrong makes us both vulnerable and strong.

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Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines. All submissions may be sent to thealanreview@gmail.com.

Winter 2018: "All" in the Family: Conceptions of Kinship in Young Adult Literature
Submissions due on or before July 1, 2017

The idea of family is complicated by the reality of life. While some may envision family as consisting of those to whom we are related by blood, others might hold a more inclusive definition. Family might be associated with home and safety and tradition and love or connected to feelings of betrayal and loss and loneliness and anger. Although our unique experiences with family might conjure differing definitions and perceptions along the continuum, we all likely have some type of emotional response to the concept.

We wonder how YA literature might influence how young people make sense of their own families. How is family perceived and depicted—conventionally? contemporarily? What roles do parents and guardians, extended family members, siblings, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, etc. play in defining family? Is it true that "Everyone plays a purpose, even fathers who lie to you or leave you behind" (*More Happy Than Not,* Silvera, 2015, p. 84)? We are curious, too, as to how YA titles might help readers consider the moral obligation to stand by family. Is the family bond immutable, or can/should we cut ties and under what circumstances? Do we agree that "[N]o matter what, we're still family, even if we don't want to be" (*Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, Quintero, 2014, p. 168)? As educators, we want to know how you have reached out to families to foster young people's reading and engagement with stories. How and why have you valued and celebrated the funds of knowledge and lived experiences of those in our students' families?

continued on next page

Summer 2018: Dollars and Sense?—Economic (In)Equities in YAL
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2017

Some might agree with Billy Idol: "It doesn't matter about money; having it, not having it. Or having clothes, or not having them. You're still left alone with yourself in the end." Others, like Franklin D. Roosevelt, might subscribe to the belief that "Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort." These words, however, reflect the voices of those with money, those who have the privilege of deciding that the money they possess isn't all that it's worth. We can't shake the steady voice of Nelson Mandela who advises us to remember that "Money won't create success, [but] the freedom to make it will." When it comes to money, our local and global realities are complicated. We talk of the top 1%, those in positions of power by virtue of their hefty investment portfolios. We learn of the vastly different living wage earned by people around the world. We hear of families in our own communities without homes, of jobs lost, of educational opportunities denied, of institutional oppression that limits access and mobility.

For this issue, we invite contributors to consider the complexities of economics and how they are taken up in young adult literature. How do authors represent class systems in the settings they create? How often is race conflated with socioeconomic status? What are the implications of such representations for young adult readers? How can we support critical reading and understanding of wealth and poverty and their role in politics and policies, in literature and life? Do those with financial equity benefit inequitably? Are they "untouchable, immune to life's troubles" (*The Dream Thieves*, Maggie Stiefvater, 2014, p. 66)? Is it true that all young people have a chance, that "Someday an opportunity will come. Think about Harry Potter. His life is terrible, but then a letter arrives, he gets on a train, and everything is different for him afterward. Better. Magical" (*Boy 21*, Matthew Quick, 2013, p. 73)? Can we find truth in the advice to "Take care not to listen to anyone who tells you what you can and can't be in life" (*The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind*, Meg Medina, 2012, p. 79)? Do economic disparities leave us in despair?

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to this theme.

Jandy **Nelson**

Our Contemporary Shamans:

ALAN 2015 Workshop Keynote Address*

First off, I want to tell you how honored I am to be sharing the stage this morning with the amazing, electrifying Kwame Alexander, who I heard speak at the Newbery banquet, and it was like getting struck by lightning, *that* inspiring and dazzling. And now I'm just going to get right to it and tell you all how beside myself I am to be in a room full of English teachers and that I'm going to sound a bit nutty and evangelical in this talk today because of this belief I have that English teachers are our contemporary shamans: the wakers of sleeping souls, the planters of dreams in heads, the imparters of some of life's most valuable gifts: compassion, empathy, humanity, ambiguity, wonder, joy. Steinbeck said, "A great teacher is a great artist . . ." and that ". . . teaching might even be the greatest of all the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit."

This has indeed been my experience, and I thought I'd talk about a couple of those experiences today.

It all started in ninth grade.

A year earlier, I'd moved to Southern California from the East Coast with my mother, and I was still reeling at how light poured out of the sky, how I could swim in the ocean before school, how right outside our living room window, there were kids carrying actual surfboards with which they planned to ride actual waves. Also, I'd always had highly hippie tendencies and realized quite quickly I could ask absolutely anyone in this town their astrological sign without receiving a single eye-roll. All to say, I was most definitely *California Dreamin'* when Ms. W came along and shook me awake.

It became apparent to all of us right away that our new ninth-grade English teacher was half-woman, half-tornado. She did not smile at us as we all filed into her class that first day, nor would she much for the rest of the year. She was a serious, formidable woman with anguish in her face. And she had this extraordinary hairdo. Perhaps the most extraordinary hairdo I've encountered to this day. The best way to describe it is that there was a nuclear mushroom on her head.

So there she sat on the edge of her desk that September back in the Paleolithic era when I was 14, nuclear mushroom on her head, this elegant and thundery woman, who had an air of the Gulag about her, who belonged in a black-and-white movie with subtitles, cigarette holder in a black-gloved hand even—completely out of context in this Technicolor Southern California idyll. And this impression was further confirmed when she finally spoke and announced that our theme for the year was going to be Man's Inhumanity to Man. We were going to read books that explored genocide, poverty, oppression, racism, human cruelty and brutality, existential angst, social alienation, loneliness, moral bankruptcy, spiritual impoverishment. The list went on and on. We were going into The Heart of Darkness.

The surf was not up, dude. Not in this classroom. I knew I would not ask Ms. W her astrological sign . . . ever.

Every day that year, the "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad" world filled the classroom, and with Ms. W guiding us, we soon stopped being ourselves. As Marilynne Robinson said, "Nothing is more human than a book." And David Foster Wallace, "Fiction's about what it is to be a f*#cking human being." And so the stories we read became our stories. We became a Jewish boy in a Nazi death camp with Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960), an African American boy living in fear and poverty in Jim Crow Mississippi with Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945); we became Samsa Gregor with Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915), and then we were all stoned to death by our community with Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" (1948).

Audre Lorde said, "The learning process is something you can incite, literally, incite, like a riot." This is what happened that year. We read and talked and disagreed, and the world, so very much world, began to shake inside us as we found our humanity in all this inhumanity, found empathy and compassion, found moral compasses, as we learned to hold history accountable, to hold the newspaper headlines accountable, to hold each other accountable. And all this in English class, not at home, not at church or temple or mosque, but from reading novels with Ms. W. In one year, she'd turned us into thinkers. I began to understand reading and writing as revolution, thinking as being a profoundly active verb. I began to understand that a person writing quietly in a room might be burning down the world. And then rebuilding it, word by word, into something magnificent.

It's like this: You don't even know you're sleeping until a great English teacher comes along and wakes you up.

In my novel *I'll Give You the Sun* (2014), I've given Jude's stone-carving mentor Guillermo Garcia some of Ms. W's mojo. I describe him as I would her: as someone who walks into a room and all the walls fall down. Guillermo says to his sculpture students, "No time to waste. Nothing to lose. We are remaking the world, people." Because that's what I learned in Ms. W's class when I was 14.

"A professor is someone who talks in someone else's sleep," W. H. Auden said. Ms. W has been talking in my sleep for 35 years now.

Then we blinked, and we were seniors, and another kind of English teacher altogether was about to change our lives. If what Steinbeck said is true and teachers are the greatest of the artists using minds and spirits as their medium, in ninth grade Ms. W attended to our minds; as seniors Mr. E attended to our spirits.

Mr. E was a human of the magical variety: elfin, brilliant, funny, joyful, and madly, passionately, ridiculously in love with words. He spoke with *drama*. "*Death*," he would say. "*Life*." "*Love*." And we'd reel with emotion, hormones off the charts, on the brink of adulthood, hungry and tortured, and so very alive like most 17- and 18-year-olds, waiting for life to begin already.

The best way to explain Mr. E's English class is to go back to 1817 when the great French writer Stendhal went to Florence and visited the Basilica of Santa Croce and saw Giotto's frescoes for the first time. Stendhal was overcome with emotion and wrote: "I was in a sort of ecstasy . . . . I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations . . . . Everything spoke so vividly to my soul . . . . I had palpitations of the heart. . . . I walked with the fear of falling."

Stendhal swooned from seeing art! I love this so much, and the amazing part is it's an actual medical condition called the Stendhal Syndrome, and it strikes people viewing art the world over, though for some reason, most often from seeing Michelangelo's *David* in Florence. It's described as a disorder that causes rapid heartbeat, dizziness, confusion, fainting, even hallucinations, when an individual is exposed to an experience of great personal significance, particularly viewing art, or for our purposes, reading literature.

I think Mr. E had a permanent case of Stendhal Syndrome—words and stories sent him into deliriums—and we all promptly caught the wonderful disorder. It was a collective, year-long, literary bender, like being inside a Gabriel Garcia Marquez story, or in a Chagall painting, with our desks floating in the air, words bursting from our chests like riots of birds, the ceiling blown off the classroom, and Mr. E above us, hands up as if orchestrating a symphony, coaxing us closer and closer toward the miraculous.

At 17, I longed for something, longed for everything really. And then came this class, this sacred book-y space. The books we read—*Macbeth*, *Letters to a Young Poet* (Rilke, 1929), *Ordinary People* (Guest, 1976), and many more—(as Ezra Pound said) became

"balls of light" in my hands. There are so many ways to read and to teach literature, all of which—because of the nature of great literature, because "fiction is about what it is to be a f*#cking human being"—result in this intimate transformative encounter. Looking back now, I think Ms. W's way was to foster empathy, chapter by chapter, so we could understand and get inside lives outside our own, so we'd become engaged citizens of this terrible beautiful world. Mr. E's was to frame reading as a discourse with the sublime, reading as a form of prayer, reading as a way to grapple with the big questions, reading as a way to marvel at the world. He showed us how to reach into books and pull out handfuls of joy and to stuff our pockets with that joy, stuff our lives with it.

So much of what I first experienced in his English class at 17 has paved my long and windy creative path and is what I was exploring thematically when writing *I'll Give You the Sun*. The ecstatic impulse of the artist, the numinous and sacred in art itself, the mesmerizing delirious Stendhalian response to art, the mysticism, the magic and mystery involved in creating it. Jude's ceramic teacher in *Sun* is absolutely channeling Mr. E when he tells her, "We wish with our hands, that's what we do as artists."

I understand that there's this tragic trend to push novels out of the high school English classroom. I can't imagine a graver affront to learning, to becoming a thinker, to becoming a wonderer, a citizen, a changer of the world, to becoming a human being.

Obama said recently in a conversation with Marilynne Robinson, "The most important stuff I've learned I think I've learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there's still truth there to be found . . . and the notion that it's possible to connect with some[one] else even though they're very different from you." Hail to the chief.

I could go on and on too with this ode to the English teacher, so crucial to my life has been the English classroom. There was the poetry professor in college who, fed up with our horrible, pedestrian attempts at poetry, jumped up one day, threw his arms in the air, and hollered, "You guys think you're poets? You have to stick your asses in the wind!" And then promptly left the classroom and did not come back. The next week, you can be sure our asses were in the wind, and all our poems had come alive. I put these words of Ken McClane almost verbatim in Lennie's music teacher's mouth in my first book, *The Sky Is Everywhere* (2010), and 30 years later, I still hear each butt-kicking one of them pretty much every time I sit down at my computer.

One last thing. There was an English teacher I studied with recently at 40 years old, and she conveyed something to me that inspired me—after a lifetime of only ever writing poetry—to try to write a novel. This was the brilliant and huge-hearted middle grade author Deb Wiles, who was my mentor my first semester at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. "Be yourself," Oscar Wilde said. "Everyone else is already taken." This is what Deb drilled into me, that to write fiction, what you need to do is be yourself, but on the page, fearlessly, devotedly, recklessly yourself on *every single page*. I don't think I would ever have attempted to write a novel without understanding this, without having had Deb as a mentor that first semester.

When doing research for *I'll Give You the Sun*, I took a stone-carving class and got to see my carving teacher repeatedly take a drill to a hunk of rock and get lost in a cloud of dust, and when the dust cleared, there would be a woman unfurling in the stone. Again and again, I watched him do this. I think that's what each teacher I mentioned today did in his or her own way; he or she blasted through stone and found me, a truer me. I think this is what English teachers do. They blast through stone and find us. And then they talk in our sleep for lifetimes. They say: "No time to waste, nothing to lose, we are remaking the world, people." They say: "Wish with your hands," "Stick your ass in the wind," "Curb toward joy," and "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken."

Ray Bradbury said, "We are cups constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over to let the beautiful stuff out." I think it's you, the English teachers, who not only quietly fill the cups every single day in your classrooms, but who, most importantly, know how and when to tip those cups over so all the beautiful comes out.

Thank you.

***Jandy Nelson**, like her characters in* I'll Give You the Sun *and* The Sky Is Everywhere, *comes from a superstitious lot. She was tutored from a young age in the art*

of the four-leaf clover hunt; she knocks on wood, throws salt, and carries charms in her pockets. Her critically acclaimed New York Times *bestselling second novel,* I'll Give You the Sun*, received the prestigious Printz Award and Stonewall Book Award honor. Both* Sun *and* The Sky Is Everywhere *have been YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults picks, have appeared on multiple best of the year lists, have earned many starred reviews, and continue to enjoy international success. Currently a full-time writer, Jandy lives and writes in San Francisco, California—not far from the settings of her novels.*

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Becky **Albertalli,** Kekla **Magoon,** and Aisha **Saeed**

Who Decides What's Right for Me?

Morality and Cultural Norms

From the Editors: In this article, we are honored to feature a written conversation between several YA authors who have addressed explicitly issues of morality and cultural norms in their presentations and writings. We appreciate the generous response of these authors (and their publishers) and their willingness to engage so thoughtfully and candidly in this public collaboration around deciding who and what is right in a world of moral complexity and contradiction.

As to process, we generated and sent a series of questions to each author. We compiled the responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to authors to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the resulting piece. We hope that in reading this article, you gain both an increased appreciation for these authors and the challenging topics they tackle.

In what ways do cultural norms influence individual and societal perceptions of morality?

Kekla: Morality is almost entirely a social construct. The only way to learn what is "right" and "wrong" is to experience consequences and observe other people experiencing consequences for their actions.

Aisha: The culture in which we are born is the guiding force for most of the morality we adopt as our personal code of beliefs and conduct. Our families and communities are our first teachers, and as we get older, our teachers and peers also inform us on the nature of morality. As our teaching on what is right and wrong begins at such an early age, cultural norms have a deep and lasting effect on our perceptions of morality.

Becky: Yes, our perceptions of morality are heavily grounded in cultural norms. Furthermore, as social norms evolve, our interpretations of right and wrong evolve alongside them. Consider, for example, the shifting attitudes in the United States toward homosexuality. Up until very recently, there was a relatively mainstream perception that gay couples were somehow immoral. Now, thanks to shifting cultural attitudes, there's a more firmly rooted belief that *discriminating against* gay couples is immoral. It's not a complete shift, and progress tends to come in fits and starts, but these changes are observable and even somewhat measurable.

It's important to note that this is an example of a shift in what *individuals and society perceive* to be moral, as opposed to what actually constitutes moral behavior. I believe the attitude that gay couples are immoral is fundamentally wrong and unjust, no matter the societal context. In other words, I believe cultural norms influence perceptions of what is moral without necessarily influencing morality itself, but perceptions of morality influence behavior in tangible ways.

Kekla: Even though some people would argue that there are natural laws, how true is that, really? Nature is defined by a survival-of-the-fittest mentality,

but human morality is entirely about taking into consideration the needs of others as well as your own. Society is built upon expectations that we will collectively care for one another; we establish rules about not hurting, killing, lying to, or stealing from other people so as not to undermine the life and successful existence of other people in service of our own needs. Morality has to be taught, as does compassion, which explains why human cruelty exists in so many corners of the world. Sometimes we fall down on the job of teaching right and wrong, or circumstances combine to produce individuals who choose to act outside of the expected cultural norms.

Aisha: As someone who was raised in both the American culture and Pakistani culture, I saw how our cultural norms shape our perspectives in a way that many children who inhabit two cultures do. For example, I grew up viewing arranged marriages as an acceptable way to find a partner. It was how my parents met and how many of my friends' parents met. When I began school, however, I learned that my classmates believed it was unacceptable for parents to choose their child's marriage partner. This early examination of morality in the context of arranged marriage (note: not forced marriage) allowed me to see the different ways morality can fluctuate based on individual and societal upbringing. I learned that what can seem appropriate and acceptable in one culture can be considered unequivocally wrong in a different culture. While once upon a time arranged marriages were acceptable in Western society, they are no longer the norm and are now seen through a different lens.

How might literature foster opportunities for readers to assess what might be right or wrong and to examine how such determinations are made?

Becky: Our perceptions of morality are influenced by cultural norms; books (and other media) help shape and define these norms. Consider portrayals of disability in literature. Disabled characters are often presented as somehow less than fully human, lacking agency, and existing only to further the development of abled protagonists. This trend has significant real-world consequences for the ways abled people view and treat disabled people. Misconceptions about disabled people can lead to tremendous harm, even at the hands of people who are actively trying to behave ethically.

Aisha: As we grow into an increasingly diverse society, with many different beliefs, it is vital that we learn empathy for and understanding of views outside of our own. Because many of us may not meet people who are different from ourselves in our daily life, a work of literature can help bridge that gap; it allows us to understand others and to realize that though they may not believe or think exactly as we do, their perspectives may be valid and understandable. Literature is the most powerful medium to achieve this.

Becky: Literature presents tremendous opportunity for encouraging progressive social norms, thereby influencing perceptions of morality in positive ways. For example, Julie Murphy's (2015) *Dumplin'* portrays a fat character who is unapologetically human, and in a landscape where fat people are often treated as subhuman, this is a radical choice. When thin/average-sized readers internalize this portrayal, it changes the way they view fatness. Murphy's Willowdean Dickson and her experiences are integrated into the reader's perception of fatness, and they inform the reader's moral decision making in relevant moments.

Kekla: Books show characters making moral decisions, and just as often, books show characters making poor choices and experiencing the consequences of their actions. This allows readers to vicariously enjoy taking risks that they could never (or should never) take in real life, and it also gives them a chance to consider how it might go if they made certain good or bad choices. It's an incredibly powerful experience to be so close inside another person's head (like a character in literature), to feel what that person feels, and to gain a perspective on the world that you might not be able to arrive at on your own.

Aisha: Literature is in the unique position of challenging people's views on right and wrong because it is an opportunity to inhabit the mindset of someone

different. While television and film can achieve a close approximation, they cannot bring a person so completely into the inner life of other people, exposing their thought processes about the choices they make. The goal of inhabiting another person's point of view in literature is not necessarily to change the reader's opinion about the topic at hand, but to help the reader empathize and relate to a person whose point of view he or she may never have considered before. This can help a reader who originally considered certain decisions as black-and-white to recognize that they are, in fact, rife with complexity.

How might your books help readers ponder the question, "Who decides what's right for me?"

Aisha: My novel *Written in the Stars* (2015) follows the life of Pakistani American Naila. From the time she was a young girl, her parents told her that while she had many choices, they would choose her husband for her. As much as Naila loves her parents and knows they want what is best for her, she struggles with their rule regarding marriage, particularly when she falls in love with a boy in high school. She faces a conflict many teenagers do when raised in two different cultures with occasionally conflicting norms.

I hope that for readers from within the culture who were perhaps raised with similar constraints, this book can provide an examination of this rule and question just how far parents can go in choosing a spouse for a child before it is no longer acceptable and moral. I can only imagine what the effect of a book like this could have had on my friends who faced similar struggles and were conflicted about what the right course of action was.

For those outside the culture who may find the premise a simple black-and-white issue, my hope is that this book draws out the nuanced issues involved. Naila's parents believe they are doing the right thing in forcing her to get married. They think they are saving her from bad decisions and that, as her parents, they know what is best for her. When she ultimately gets forced into the marriage, and her husband learns that she is not a willing participant in this relationship, he believes they should try to make it work, even though she does not want to; in his mind, this is the right thing to do.

While forced marriages are unequivocally immoral and illegal, there is benefit in learning why someone would do this to a loved one; it is important to understand that Naila's parents believe it is the right thing to do because of the cultural and societal norms they grew up with. I also hope this book serves as an examination of how one's personal norms can evolve over time, as Naila's did.

Becky: In my debut, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015), the main character is a gay 16-year-old boy named Simon. At the outset of the book, Simon is only out to one person, and that person doesn't know Simon's real-life identity. However, a straight classmate discovers Simon is gay and uses that information to coerce Simon into helping him meet his own needs. Ultimately, this classmate, Martin, outs Simon to the entire school.

There's a moment in the book where Simon reflects on the fact that every decision related to coming out was taken out of his hands. Later in the book, Martin reflects on his actions as well. I like to imagine that readers will have the opportunity to consider these issues alongside Simon and Martin. What does it mean that Simon lost the opportunity to come out to his family and friends on his own terms? What impact did Martin's actions have on Simon's safety and well-being? What could have been the impact on Simon's safety and well-being in a different environment and cultural context? And how would Simon's coming out experience have played out differently if he had been able to initiate it on his own terms?

Kekla: My books very often contain an element of choice for the main character—choices about who they are and who they want to become. In *The Rock and the River* (2009), set in 1968 Chicago, 13-year-old Sam's father is a civil rights activist, so he was raised in the movement. When his older brother, Stick, joins the Black Panther Party, Sam finds himself torn between the path his father has chosen and the one his brother has chosen, and he struggles to figure out where he fits and the kind of person he wants to become.

When I talk with middle schoolers about this book, we discuss the fact that everyone faces these kinds of choices in life—am I going to be like my parents? My siblings? My friends? My teachers? What am I willing to fight for? What do I want to dedicate my time to? For my character Sam, these choices are made within a particularly fraught moment in American history, and so his choices are cut in very sharp relief, which is great for the purpose of creating compelling fiction.

Similar themes appear in *X: A Novel* (2015), in which the teenage Malcolm X struggles to come to terms with his complicated past in order to develop the identity of the civil rights leader and humanitarian that he would ultimately become. While many readers will come to the novel already having a sense of who Malcolm will grow up to be, it is interesting to consider how a person makes choices that lead him to a path of greatness. At age 16, Malcolm had no idea that he was going to become a speaker and leader, so the novel can inspire modern teenagers to recognize that they can change their own lives, and that the choices they make today, tomorrow, and the day after actually make a difference—nothing is set in stone when you are young. *You* get to choose, *you* get to act, *you* get to become the person you want to be.

Do you tend to have specific plans or aims for addressing moral issues and/or personal integrity when you begin your novels, or do explorations of right and wrong develop organically through your characters and the situations they encounter?

Kekla: I don't set out to put characters in situations where they will have to address moral issues, but it invariably happens in the course of writing a novel, if the story is going to be interesting. Moral dilemmas can be big or small—deciding whether to join a civil rights organizing movement like the Black Panther Party, potentially placing your life on the line, or deciding whether to sneak out of the house after curfew, potentially angering your parents. The significance and possible consequences of these choices are very different, but readers are always going to be interested in watching characters confront the intersections between their desires, their goals, the "right thing to do," and the rules.

Aisha: The inspiration to write *Written in the Stars* stemmed from a desire to understand how parents can force their children into marriage and how societal and cultural forces can lead to someone finding it difficult to leave such a marriage. I had childhood friends who were pressured and coerced into marriages they did not want to enter into. It was difficult to witness, and my novel was written in some ways to understand for myself how such things come to pass and how parents who I myself knew so well could force their children into unhappy situations. Writing this novel helped me understand the nuances and complexity regarding the matters involved.

Becky: To be honest, much of the creative process is a mystery to me, and it honestly feels as though these explorations develop organically. For example, in my book, Simon arrives at certain understandings of issues related to race and privilege. I never deliberately set out to include these themes; these were issues I explored alongside my characters. That being said, I do think my personal beliefs bleed into my work, and my own growth makes room for my characters to grow with me.

Should there be a place for character exploration of dark, forbidden, or seemingly "wrong" paths in books for adolescent readers, or could this lead to undesirable consequences?

Aisha: I believe that adolescent readers are capable, insightful, and thoughtful individuals who can handle difficult subject matter. As much as we may wish young readers all had conflict-free lives where they did not have to endure painful situations, many young people face incredibly difficult circumstances. *Written in the Stars* covers the dark territory of forced marriage, and the truth is that my friends and many others even today experience this reality. Those readers need and deserve books that mirror their experiences and help educate others on the seriousness of this human rights issue.

Kekla: Reading about difficult or challenging or "forbidden" things isn't going to make people run out and try these things—books carry much less influence than peer pressure in this regard. In fact, they

are more likely to serve as cautionary tales and to allow young readers to imagine themselves doing strange and dangerous things as a form of escape, rather than actually going out into the world and trying these things firsthand.

Becky: The reality is, many teens experience dark and challenging feelings, and they often experiment with "wrong" or dangerous paths. Books can provide safe spaces for teens to explore these aspects of their internal experiences. When authors approach these stories with care and sensitivity, they have the opportunity to present hopeful outcomes and healthy or ethically sound choices. I honestly believe that it is far more toxic, and even dangerous, to allow these impulses to remain unexplored.

Kekla: It would be unfortunate if the first time a teen learns what alcohol intoxication can look and feel like occurs at a party where she is being offered liquor-laced drinks. Sheltering young readers won't stop them from ever being exposed to risky opportunities, and reading fiction can help prepare them to make good choices when the moments do come in real life. It's essential for books to allow readers a chance to explore things they might not encounter in real life. There is no place safer for a reader to explore potentially dangerous things and to learn about boundaries and consequences.

Becky Albertalli *is the award-winning author of* Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda. *She is a clinical psychologist who has had the privilege of conducting therapy with dozens of smart, weird, irresistible teenagers. Her new book,* The Upside of Unrequited, *will be published in April 2017.*

Kekla Magoon *is the author of nine young adult novels, including* The Rock and the River, How It Went Down, X: A Novel, *and the Robyn Hoodlum Adventures series. She has received an NAACP Image Award, the John Steptoe New Talent Award, two Coretta Scott King Honors, the Walter Award Honor, and been long-listed for the National Book Award. She also writes nonfiction on historical topics. Kekla conducts school and library visits nationwide and serves on the Writers' Council for the National Writing Project. She holds a BA from Northwestern University and an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts, where she serves on faculty.*

Aisha Saeed *(aishasaeed.com) is a Pakistani American writer, teacher, and attorney. Her writings have appeared in publications that include* The Orlando Sentinel, Muslim Girl, *and* Rivaaj. *As one of the founding members of the much talked about We Need Diverse Books campaign, she is helping to change the conversation about diversity in literature. She is also a contributing author to the highly acclaimed* Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women, *which features the story of her own (happily) arranged marriage. Aisha lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and sons.*

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Sarah E. **Whitney**

"Just Take One Step":

How YA Novels Empower Bystanders to Stop Sexual Assault

In January 2015, a young college student, now seared into public consciousness as "Emily Doe," was dragged behind a dumpster by a fellow undergraduate and sexually assaulted while she lay unconscious. At her assailant's sentencing, Doe read a 12-page victim's impact statement, which was later shared widely online. Her compelling account of post-traumatic survival describes both her physical pain and her ongoing emotional wounds. Within its pages, Doe also praised two Swedish graduate students who came to her aid. The students, who had been biking in the area during the night of the rape, discovered Doe's naked assailant lying on top of her unresponsive body. They confronted and restrained the rapist until police arrived. "I sleep with two bicycles that I drew taped above my bed to remind myself there are heroes in this story. That we are looking out for one another," Doe notes in the letter's conclusion (2016, p. 12).

Emily Doe's statement attests to the critical, lifesaving power of a bystander. While the term "bystander" might simply seem synonymous with "witness" or "observer" in the language of sexual assault education it takes on additional meaning, depicting an observer who is empowered to disrupt a sexually violent scenario. Within young adult literature, a growing corpus of *bystander novels* similarly contends that teenagers who witness sexual assault can make pro-social choices to stop violence. These fictional worlds deconstruct contemporary rape culture, indicting sports programs that create a toxic brew of hyper-masculinity and sexual entitlement, and revealing the tremendous pressures placed upon adolescent girls to police their own dress, speech, and behavior for fear of victimization. Yet bystander novels also *place faith* in young people to enact profound social change. Within their narratives, we learn of characters questioning rape myths, developing empathy for others, building alliances across peer hierarchies, and interrupting sexually violent scenarios. A blossoming—and needed—genre, bystander novels represent a significant new educational resource in the fight against sexual assault.

Bystander Beginnings: Kitty Genovese, Psychological Theory, and Sexual Assault Education

Young adult literature has never shied away from exploring the difficult issue of sexual violence. During the YA social realism boom of the 1970s, both Richard Peck (*Are You in the House Alone?,* 1976) and Sandra Scoppettone (*Happy Endings Are All Alike,* 1978) took on victim-blaming and asserted that rape was a crime of violence against women.[1] More recently, Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), a first-person account of rape trauma by a self-silenced teenaged survivor, has sold over three million copies and is frequently taught in schools.

Fortunately, today's readers have access to a diverse array of topics about the aftermath of sexual violence. Recent YA novels have focused on drug-facilitated sexual assault and post-rape abortion (*Exit Pursued by a Bear,* Johnston, 2016), socioeconomic class and "legitimate" victimhood (*All the Rage,* Sum-

mers, 2015), social media shaming (*Asking for It,* O'Neill, 2016), survivor self-injury (*Faking Normal,* Stevens, 2015), traumatic behavioral changes (*The Way I Used to Be,* Smith, 2016), rape revenge (*The Mockingbirds,* Whitney, 2010), and even the Catholic Church abuse scandal (*The Gospel of Winter,* Kiely, 2015). These novels all address important aspects of sexual assault trauma and recovery, and nearly all are narrated directly by survivors. Young adult literary resources about sexual assault extend beyond the page as well; the librarian-designed website *Sexual Violence YA Literature* (#SVYALit) has, since 2015, collected information about depictions of assault in teen literature. Meanwhile, education researchers have begun mapping the correlation between classroom units on these novels and an overall reduction of rape-supportive attitudes among adolescents (Malo-Juvera, 2012).[2]

The bystander novel, which performs antirape work from the teenage observer's perspective, represents another helpful resource. Its rise, however, must be contextualized within the larger paradigm shift of American sexual assault prevention education. Over the past two decades, colleges and high schools have abandoned *risk-reduction* models of prevention (which focus upon women's self-defense and personal safety) in favor of *bystander education*, which recognizes the presence in many threatening scenarios of onlookers who can stop or alter the course of sexual violence. Bystander education curricula seek to empower those individuals to, in the words of Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante (2007), interrupt "situations that could lead to assault before it happens," protest against "social norms that support sexual violence," and "be an effective and supportive ally to survivors" (p. 464).

The bystander concept entered the popular lexicon following a high-profile murder in 1964. Kitty Genovese, a young New York City bar manager returning home late at night, was stalked, raped, and killed by a stranger in the vicinity of her own apartment. The perpetrator, Winston Moseley, first stabbed Genovese outside in view of her neighbors; subsequently, he tracked her inside her building, sexually assaulting and mortally wounding her. "For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens," while "not one person telephoned the police during the assault," began the famous account of her ordeal in *The New York Times* (as cited in Lemann, 2014). While historians later revised downward the number of neighbors who were actually aware of Genovese's ordeal, the incident has nonetheless lingered in popular consciousness as a symbol of anomie. Today, psychology students still study the Genovese case, for it galvanized the bystander thesis of Darley and Latané (1968), which claims an inverse relationship between the number of witnesses to a distressing event and the likelihood that any one person will intervene. A typical bystander, the duo write, assumes "his own intervention would be only redundant—perhaps harmfully or confusingly so. Thus, given the presence of other onlookers whose behavior cannot be observed, any given bystander can rationalize his own inaction by convincing himself that 'somebody else must be doing something'" (p. 378).

Over the decades, the bystander thesis has been successfully replicated in multiple scenarios of distress, including falls, shocks, seizures, requests to help a child, and smoke filling a room (Thornberg, 2007). It is important to note that in their original article, Darley and Latané rejected labeling the bystanders as evil or uncaring, suggesting instead that their reticence was contextually driven. "If people understand the situational forces that can make them hesitate to intervene," they observed, "they may better overcome them" (p. 383). Taking to heart the idea of empowering such bystanders, youth researchers in the 1990s began to integrate the theory into sexual violence prevention efforts.[3] Early 1990s pilot programs, such as Northeastern University's MVP (Mentors in Violence Program), focused on engaging peer leaders, such as male athletes, to "discourage, prevent, or interrupt an incident of sexist abuse, gay-bashing, or same-sex bullying" (Katz, Heisterkamp, & Fleming, 2011, p. 686). Other models followed; today, hundreds of college campuses participate in similar programs, including Green Dot, Red Flag Campaign, and Know Your Power.

A typical bystander curriculum includes cultural discussion intended to challenge rape culture, defined by Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth (1993) as "a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women" in which "women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself " (preamble).[4] Students may discuss their reac-

tions to various attitudinal statements identified on the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA), such as "If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape." Interactive activities, such as role plays where students mull over how to safely get an intoxicated friend home from a party, allow the largely freshman audience to rehearse intervention scenarios. While efficacy research on bystander programs is still in its early stages, the findings are promising. Participants tested before and after one program expressed higher self-reported rates of willingness to intervene and lower acceptance of rape myths (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Foubert, Brasfield, Hill, & Shelley-Tremblay, 2011).[5]

Organized athletics' codes of behavior can be taken to the extreme of hyper or hegemonic masculinity, where boys learn that maleness is affirmed both by acts of aggression and by the denigration of femininity and homosexuality.

Bystander trainings, which are increasingly popular not only in colleges but also in high schools, workplaces, and other organizations, represent a profound reconceptualization of sexual assault from "private business" to a public problem demanding widespread social accountability. Even the United States government has embraced this philosophy, creating the "It's on Us" campaign (It's on Us, 2014) in which celebrity spokespeople urge Americans to "identify situations in which sexual assault may occur," and pledge to "intervene" in situations where consent has not or cannot be given (itsonus.org). The inclusivity of the bystander approach, researchers argue, "reinforces the belief that everyone can contribute to prevention efforts" and recognizes that all citizens "are likely to be friends, parents, grandparents, coaches, teachers, brothers, sisters, and community members of rape victims" (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2011, p. 745).

Young adult novels narrated by bystanders are vehicles for teenage antirape empowerment. However, before delving into the individual contribution of these novels, it is important to contextualize the role that sports (particularly football and basketball) play within their pages. Indeed, *all six* novels studied here contain sexual traumas involving men's high school athletics. Timothy Davis and Tonya Parker (1998) have succinctly deemed sport a "key component of our current gender order" (p. 774), and while women have made noted strides in participation in sports on all levels, historically and even today, sports' economic and social power is the primary domain of men. Furthermore, sports often shape young people's perceptions of masculinity, serving as "the preeminent arena where preteen and early adolescent boys establish a respected male identity for themselves in most communities" (Kivel, 1999, p. 131).

Organized athletics' codes of behavior can be taken to the extreme of hyper or hegemonic masculinity, where boys learn that maleness is affirmed both by acts of aggression and by the denigration of femininity and homosexuality. Many (though not all) players in bystander novels enact hyper-masculinity. Lucas, a sympathetic football player in *A Step toward Falling* (McGovern, 2015), provides a helpful illustration when speaking of his teammates: "They have this violent streak. Like if you hit someone pretty hard and then help them up afterward . . . [they think] it shows weakness. They think every game is a battle. If you don't go for the kill, you're a pansy-ass loser" (p. 110).

Most portrayals of sports culture in YA bystander novels also emphasize homophobia and aggression toward women. Readers of *What We Saw* (Hartzler, 2015), for instance, encounter the basketball team bullying a smaller male student with the epithets "faggot" and "sweetheart" (p. 88). Language of sexual violence related to sports is also manifested later in the novel at a pep rally, when the audience is encouraged to "BUCC" any "losers" who "run up against the Buccaneers" team (p. 130). *Leverage*'s (Cohen, 2011) players continue such discourse, describing football tackles as enacting violent penetration, as of "a virgin on prom night" (p. 240). Through their varied individual plots, the novels studied here suggest that the "revenue sports" of football and basketball create a poisonous hyper-masculine atmosphere that confers unearned social dominance upon its players, encourages the sexual exploitation of women, and persecutes boys judged insufficiently "tough" and/or heterosexual.[6]

Bystander novels' connection between athletic privilege and sexual violence is echoed in the popu-

lar press. In recent years, college teams and the pro leagues have been rocked by multiple high-profile incidences of sexual assault and domestic violence. Notorious high school cases like the one in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, where football players gang-raped a mentally disabled girl (which I discuss in greater detail later), and Steubenville, Ohio, where multiple athletes filmed and shared an assault of an Ohio teenager, have reinforced the connection between sports and sexual violence in the public eye. Some college researchers have indeed found overrepresentation of athletes in data collected on reported rapes; most caution, though, to focus less upon the numbers than upon the outsized *influence* that student athletes can wield.[7] As high-status individuals and role models, student athletes can indeed reinforce sexist and homophobic attitudes—or they can change them.[8] Bystander novels also work to affirm that adolescents can create social justice through individual alliances across gender, social subculture, and class. Yet first they ask us, as readers, to journey through their worlds and experience the self-silencing and emotional trauma that female and male victims face in a sexually violent landscape.

"We Are Taught Fear, We Girls": Female Bystander Novels Confronting Rape Myths

Three recent bystander novels—Cammie McGovern's *A Step toward Falling*, Kristin Halbrook's *Every Last Promise*, and Aaron Hartzler's *What We Saw*, all published in 2015—inhabit the minds of young women confronting the sexual assault of a female peer. Each novel provides sophisticated political critique of high school sports and players' sense of sexual entitlement. Most also vividly demonstrate rape culture's psychological impact on young women; the female characters' fear of being assaulted leads them to self-police "appropriate" behavior and dress and to *dis*-identify with female victims. While girl-centric bystander novels paint a toxic picture of victim-blaming rape culture, they also suggest young women's power to manifest positive change. McGovern, Halbrook, and Hartzler portray characters who find meaning in social alliances with other young women and who take the difficult step of reporting sexual assault to create a more equitable culture for girls everywhere.

A Step toward Falling presents a negative example of bystander education, chronicling the consequences of a young woman's failure to act. Emily, a high school student, witnessed the attempted rape of a classmate named Belinda at a football game but did very little to stop it, in part because she incorrectly assumed another individual had reported it (in fact, Belinda's screaming saved her). Emily expresses her contrition both through personal interactions with Belinda, a girl with an intellectual disability, and through her school-mandated community service work. The two girls also alternate narration, a literary technique that allows us access to Belinda's recollections as a victim and brings the costs of Emily's inaction home to readers.

While girl-centric bystander novels paint a toxic picture of victim-blaming rape culture, they also suggest young women's power to manifest positive change.

Emily is introduced as a bright, compassionate student who co-founded the Youth Action Coalition, a social justice group that sponsors an antiviolence ribbon campaign each year. However, she failed to live up to her own principles at a school football game, where she witnessed an expelled male student pushing a girl she recognized against a wall. "*Wait*, I kept thinking. *Wait a minute*," Emily recollects. "I should have screamed *anything* to make it clear this didn't seem right . . . . I didn't do that, though. I was struck mute in that instant." Emily's choices illustrate the bystander redundancy principle, for she justifies her nonintervention by assuming another person is managing the situation. "I know that at some point, a football player ran out from the locker room, which must have jolted me momentarily out of my panic," she narrates. "Maybe I thought, *It's okay to leave because he's here now and he will take care of this*" (p. 20).

Wracked with guilt about her inaction, Emily generates alternative endings in her head. "I could have screamed NO! I could have rushed out to the crowd fifty feet away and yelled at the top of my lungs about what was happening. If I'd done any of those things, I would have changed the story," she despairs (p. 33). She does not attempt to fight the school's disciplinary

sanctions, which include volunteering in a healthy relationships classroom, that serves people with disabilities. Drawn to the individual students, Emily helps them learn about sexual consent, personal space, and positive romantic interactions.

Through the community service plotline and through Belinda's story, McGovern emphasizes the unique vulnerabilities experienced by special needs adolescents, who are frequently subject to predatory behaviors. In fact, sexual predation is evident in McGovern's classroom story. The special needs teacher tells Emily that many past volunteers attended for inappropriate reasons, and one male volunteer in Emily's class is clearly "cruising" the class for sexual partners. Unfortunately, assaults like the one perpetrated against Belinda are far from rare. The United States Bureau of Justice's most recent report on crimes against persons with disabilities indicates that "rates of serious violent victimization—rape, sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault—were more than three times higher for persons with disabilities" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013).

[Belinda's] feelings of shame and guilt and her ongoing bouts of post-traumatic stress all make clear for readers the imperative to intervene before assaults occur.

The trusting Belinda was first victimized by the football team's physical and verbal abuse and subsequently by an opportunist's sexual predation. Like many other YA novels about sexual assault, *A Step toward Falling* critiques how, in Emily's own words, "football players have too much power at our school" (p. 16). When Belinda shows up outside the locker room with homemade gifts for a team member who had sarcastically "flirted" with her, she becomes a sexualized flashpoint for the boys' anger about their losing season. A player confides to Emily that Belinda's game-night presence symbolically transformed into "our whole problem this year . . . they said it was her fault we were losing." He adds that the players "made all these threats about what they were going to do to her when they got out there. They were going *to rip her a new one* for bothering Ron in the middle of a game. They were going to show a few people *what happens when you ask too much of football players*" (p. 228, emphasis added). Belinda recounts her own dehumanization, remembering being shoved, yelled at, and kicked. "Someone stepped on my hair which hurt more than the kicking did," she recalls. "Someone said 'What the fuck is this?' I didn't know if he was talking about me. After that, I don't remember much" (p. 223).

It's important to remember that Belinda's perpetrator is *not* a member of the football team; he is in fact an expelled student who silently watched the attack and pretended to "help" Belinda before his unsuccessful rape attempt. Nevertheless, McGovern has written the dynamics of the mob scene in particularly resonant ways. The boys' use of sexualized and contemptuous language serves as male bonding and brings to mind Peggy Sanday's work (2007) on group sexual assault, whereby a "wounded girl who is unable to protest" often becomes an object upon whom "boys both test and demonstrate their power and heterosexual desire by performing for one another" (p. 7). The predation of football players upon a mentally disabled girl will also recall, for many adult readers, the previously mentioned 1989 national-headline-making case at Glen Ridge, New Jersey. The conviction of several standout athletes who brutally raped and sodomized a mentally challenged girl who believed she was going on a "date" exposed a suburban town that prioritized male athletic achievement above all else, including basic compassion for a brutalized young girl.[9]

McGovern's novel consistently emphasizes reader empathy by providing us with Belinda's narration. Her feelings of shame and guilt and her ongoing bouts of post-traumatic stress all make clear for readers the imperative to intervene before assaults occur. Emily, who has advocated for the rights of those with disabilities in the abstract, must also make personal amends to Belinda.[10] Directly apologizing for her failure, Emily also decides to work with Belinda to create a school theatre production. The girls' partnership makes the point that adolescents can work across social hierarchies to form new empathetic connections. Emily concludes that respectful community is essential, for her own experience has taught her that "bad things happen when people don't help each other" (p. 327).

This lesson reverberates for another bystander, farm girl and Midwestern homebody Kayla, in Kris-

tin Halbrook's 2015 novel *Every Last Promise*. The complex narrative, told half in flashback, details the aftermath of a car accident. Prior to the crash, Kayla had witnessed the gang rape of her barely conscious friend Bean by two members of the football team; when the perpetrators pursued Kayla, she wrecked her car, killing one player/rapist in the process. The sexual assault, however, was never reported, allowing the surviving athlete to continue his social dominance over the school. Holbrook's novel explores the personal and emotional costs of female bystander intervention within rape culture. Kayla misguidedly believes that staying silent about the rape is some sort of feminist act; these thoughts are rooted in her cultural knowledge of rape scripts—particularly the maelstrom of blame, anger, and reprisals confronting female victims.

Every Last Promise situates the sexual assault narrative within a larger discussion of male athletic privilege in Kayla's high school. The quarterback/rapist Jay is smiled upon by teachers and administrators alike. Jay tells a flunking teammate that "no one's going to fail you. I'll make sure of it," in full view of an adoring cafeteria worker who "piled noodles on [Jay's] plate, paused to glance up at him, then piled some more" (pp. 83–84). Jay's privileges also extend to sexual access; in Kayla's childhood memory, he asserts that "he always got what he wanted," causing her to cross her arms over her chest in protection (p. 55). In fact, the whole town acts as bystander to Jay's behavior, ignoring his past domestic abuse of a girlfriend.

Jay continues to dominate the high school ecosystem to which the "amnesiac" Kayla returns several months after the accident. It's clear to readers, though, that Kayla remembers all. Readers, in fact, become the audience to whom Kayla attempts to justify her failure to report the rape. In running interior monologue, she tells us that the victim Bean's silence justifies her own nonintervention. Not telling is "*what we've decided, right?*" she asks Bean in her head. *"To go along like nothing happened? Right?* Right?" (p. 187). At other times, she naively speculates that Bean does not even remember being raped. Her cognitive dissonance is also textually manifested in repeated self-questioning. "Is telling Bean that I remember clearly what happened that night the right thing to do?" Kayla wonders. "Or does she want to bury it, pretend it never happened, as much as I do?" (p. 47). Careful readers discern the right moral path from the beginning. When Kayla cautiously mentions that "maybe I will remember" the night of the accident, for instance, Bean's "entire body perks up," clearly seeking her old friend's help (p. 46).

Kayla's strategy of muteness is itself morally complex. She is motivated in part, of course, by self-preservation. Katz, Heisterkamp, and Fleming's bystander research (2011) reveals that "anxiety about rejection from the group" is cited by witnesses "as the main reason for their reluctance to intervene" in many scenarios (p. 690). In addition, Kayla, a homebody who does not wish to leave town even for college, longs for the comfort of her previously established peer community. Yet she also misguidedly believes that keeping the rape quiet offers Bean a sisterhood of social protection. Holbrook demonstrates that though Kayla's reasoning might be flawed, it is rooted in her lived experience. The threat of male violence clearly shapes the behavior of the female peer group, most notably Bean's former best friend Selena, who now shuns her and dismisses all rumors about the rape. Selena shows why she keeps quiet when she hisses to Kayla that "we both know," speaking of Bean's rape and subsequent harassment, "they'd do it to us, too" (p. 249). "We are taught fear, we girls," Kayla agrees (p. 266).

It's clear to readers, though, that Kayla remembers all...[r]eaders, in fact, become the audience to whom Kayla attempts to justify her failure to report the rape.

As Kayla's bystander dilemma approaches crisis, she weighs her love for the community against her internal desire for social justice. In a rather unlikely ending, she reveals that she is in possession of the rapist's cell phone, which displays the attack. "*Why doesn't [Bean] ask for it? Take it. Make the choice for me*," Kayla thinks, realizing that she must autonomously make the decision to "do the right thing" (pp. 219–220). There are indeed personal consequences when she does, including exile. Yet Kayla's resilience is evident in her reconceptualization of home as not a zip code but as ethical comfort, a place "where you can live with yourself" (p. 272).

Every Last Promise portrays a world where girls feel too silenced and intimidated to even report sexual violence against others. Aaron Hartzler's bystander novel *What We Saw* (2015), meanwhile, shows us how rape culture's climate of fear leads some young women to disavow female victims. *What We Saw* tells the unique story of a bystander to a bystander. The protagonist, Kate, left a party before a rape occurred; its alleged perpetrators were her boyfriend's basketball teammates. The narrative involves both literal and cultural detection. While Kate searches for material evidence in the form of a purported "rape video," she also investigates cultural scripts about sexual consent and "appropriate" victim behavior. Ultimately, when she alone becomes physical witness to her boyfriend's complicity, Kate must choose her course of action.

Aaron Hartzler's bystander novel *What We Saw* (2015) . . . shows us how rape culture's climate of fear leads some young women to disavow female victims.

While the sport in *What We Saw* is basketball and not football, its narrative of power abuses is, by now, familiar. When four key players are arrested for sexual assault, the school quickly lauds them as "examples of fine sportsmanship" who "have rallied our community, despite a difficult economy, as members of our most winning basketball team in recent history" (p. 99). Kate finds her school's overt expressions of allegiance uncomfortable, musing that she wants "to know what [the victim] has to say" and that "not everyone has decided who's guilty or picked a side" (p. 139).

Kate's female peer group, though, has. In a revealing look at female adolescent conduct in a rape culture, her three close friends repeatedly parrot rape myths, some of which could be plucked from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, particularly the sections "She asked for it" and "She lied." One insists that clothing signals sexual consent, affirming "this is not rocket science. It's common sense. If you don't want to work a guy into a lather, keep your cooch covered up" (p. 115). Another explains the unwritten social rules that place the onus of rape prevention squarely on women: "You don't get wasted. You don't take off your top. You don't flirt with raging drunks. You don't dress like a slut. You have to play by the rules. If you don't, this is what happens" (p. 244). Yet another sadly accepts rape as the natural consequence, or "learning the hard way," for a girl who "drinks too much and wears a short skirt" (p. 257).

While her friends emphatically dis-identify with the victim for psychological self-preservation, Kate emotionally identifies with Stacey, the prototypical wrong-side-of-the-tracks victim (here signified by too much eyeliner and a trailer park address). She reminds her friends of the childhood bond they shared with Stacey before the socioeconomic stratifications of adolescence separated them. Kate also stresses her own situational similarity to Stacey on the night in question, asking her boyfriend Ben, "I was just as wasted as she was. Why do *I* get driven home and kept safe but not her? Why not just leave *me* to Dooney and Deacon and the boys in the basement?" (p. 184, emphasis added).

In rejecting the rules of female self-policing, Kate embraces another set of lessons about consent, self-determination, and integrity. They are offered as impromptu classroom pedagogy after a geology student sarcastically refuses to attend a field trip on the grounds that a "wasted" girl might falsely accuse him of rape (p. 280). Kate's teacher addresses the relationship between intoxication and consent and enjoins the class to create a chalkboard list of interventions for a "wasted" friend; their examples include "*Find her friends. Call her parents. Get her a pillow. Some Advil. Make sure she has a safe place to sleep. Don't let her drive*" (pp. 282–283, italics in original). The teacher further challenges a male student's assertion that male sexual response is uncontrollable. When "you say that you 'can't help yourself' if a girl is wasted," argues the teacher, "you're saying that our natural state as men is 'rapist.' That's not okay with me, Reggie. That's not okay with the rest of this class, either" (p. 283). Mapping bystander education onto the classroom setting, Hartzler demonstrates how such conversations can evolve organically from students' concerns and how teachers can thoughtfully teach consent and peer intervention.

The last third of *What We Saw* focuses on Kate's sleuthing for, and finally uncovering, a whispered-about "rape video." The clip narratively functions as much more than sensationalism, however; it creates

a way for Kate to act as the victim's ally. Kate frames viewing it as an act of witness, telling her brother: "We have to see what happened, so we can tell the truth about it. Stacey can barely remember. We have to help her" (p. 297). The ending footage reveals the blurry image of Kate's boyfriend on the periphery. Kate refuses the role of virtual bystander; she submits the evidence and bears significant social reprisals from her peers. Her choice, contrasted with Ben's, provides two different readings of the word *bystander*. While Ben was the classic *passive* bystander to Stacey's rape, reminiscent of the Genovese case, Kate represents the *empowered* bystander who acts pro-socially to help another girl.[11] If female bystander novels portray a worrisome landscape in which young women police their dress, drinking, and behavior lest they be culled from the herd, then the complex moral actions of characters like Kate, Kayla, and Emily symbolize the promise of change.

"Just Take One Step": Male Bystander Novels and the Challenge of Hyper-Masculinity

Like their fictional female counterparts, male witnesses in bystander novels also wrestle with feelings of fear and guilt as they confront social exclusion and threats of violence for their interventions. The YA bystander novels *Leverage* (Cohen, 2011) and *Swagger* (Deuker, 2013) explore the trauma of sexual violence between boys. Both critique the hyper-masculine culture of elite athletics for denigrating femininity and homosexuality; both also indict it for creating punishing expectations of invulnerability amongst the players themselves, which too often prevents victims from reaching out for help.

By discussing intra-male sexual assault, *Leverage* and *Swagger* enter a landscape that remains underreported and under-studied. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 1.7% of the current American male population (or almost 2.0 million men) have been raped during their lifetimes.[12] Like their female counterparts, male victims are typically assaulted by those they know. Michael Scarce (1997) warns that male violence is more likely to occur in all-male settings, including athletic teams. "Whether it is a sense of macho competition, violence as a rite of passage, an expression of dominant status, or an initiation of hazing, groups of men have traditionally inflicted pain on others at rates much higher than individuals who act independently of such peer influence," Scarce notes (p. 35). Male survivors face many of the same traumatic after-effects as do women; they may also encounter attitudes of homophobia (regardless of whether they are themselves gay). Historian Raymond M. Douglas, who was raped as a boy by a Catholic priest, writes that the American public does not even provide "a vocabulary with which to describe the events to oneself, much less to others," relying instead upon "the crudest possible stereotypes" like "Hollywood films," thus exponentially increasing trauma for male survivors (Rabin, 2016).[13]

If female bystander novels portray a worrisome landscape in which young women police their dress, drinking, and behavior lest they be culled from the herd, then the complex moral actions of characters like Kate, Kayla, and Emily symbolize the promise of change.

The YA novel *Leverage* enters this unknown territory through the traumatic narratives of two boys who occupy divergent positions in the high school social hierarchy. Both the small, timid gymnast Danny and the hulking football star Kurt witness a rape and sodomy committed by three other football players. *Leverage* sagely analyzes how the two boys' bystander behavior is rooted in past experience. Both have experienced hyper-masculine violence—Danny at the hands of the football team's pranks and Kurt by years of his foster father's abuse. In the rape's aftermath, Danny chooses silence, fearful for his own safety. Kurt, meanwhile, physically disrupts the rape but is unable to further act as an ally, trapped by his learned philosophy that masculinity prohibits any discussion of pain. When the football players' victim commits suicide, both bystanders must decide whether or not to report the assault. Creatively combining Kurt's explosiveness and Danny's eloquence, the boys make the sports public their witness, securing postmortem justice for the victim and emotional relief for themselves.

Leverage's high school landscape looks familiar; it is ruled by the football players, who are granted under-the-table cash, gifts, and steroid prescriptions. Males who do not meet a hyper-masculine standard of large body size and domineering rhetoric are terrorized. As a gymnast, Danny and his teammates are constantly assailed with sexist and homophobic slurs like "needledicks" and "midget pussies" (p. 43). Of course, not every football player embraces the team's ideology. Kurt, a hulking new transfer with a pronounced stutter, is quite different. Physically scarred by foster care abuse in childhood, Kurt is also psychically haunted by the rape and murder of his foster brother, Lamar, long ago. While Kurt's teammates view their body strength as a source of pride and privilege, Kurt understands it as armor. "All I ever needed to know [about weightlifting] was that it made you bigger and stronger," he remarks. "And if you got big enough, you'd never suffer someone else's temper ever again" (p. 34).

Bereft and alone, Ronnie commits suicide; subsequently, Kurt and Danny must reassess their bystander decisions and work together to provide a measure of postmortem justice.

The reserved, wounded Kurt is a thoughtful literary application of masculinities scholar Paul Kivel's "man box" (1999), an oft-used teaching tool that helps students reflect on the social expectations for men and boys. "The key to staying in the Box is control," writes Kivel. "Boys are taught to control their bodies, control their feelings, control their relationships—to protect themselves from being vulnerable" (p. 14). Kivel emphasizes the "man box's" emotional costs, including the loss of closeness with others; the need to self-monitor behavior, clothing, and activities to avoid being "labeled gay"; and a constant, free-floating anxiety that accompanies a culture of male peers "constantly challenging each other, putting each other down, hitting each other" (p. 13). Though he visually exemplifies the box, thanks to his athletic prowess and his invulnerable verbal facade, Kurt, as readers learn, becomes willing to step outside its borders.[14]

Kurt interrupts a graphic scene in which three football teammates take turns anally raping Ronnie, a freshman gymnastics recruit, and sodomizing him with a broom handle. The perpetrators use disciplinary language to reassert their masculine dominance over the victim, chanting, "See. If. You. Dis. Re. Spect. Me. Now" as they violate him (p. 167). Danny, inadvertently trapped in the supply room, is a silent bystander—not for reasons of transferred responsibility or disinterest, but because he legitimately fears he will be next. "As I'm forced to hear all of it, my nose runs and a sickness enters me like poison gas, burning out my lungs and brain," he agonizes (p.168). Kurt, meanwhile, runs into the room kicking and punching. "I return fire. I *rock* them," he recalls. "I heave a lifetime of damage and pain at them, teach them they can't do this" (p. 173).

Kurt's corporal response is unusual and a cautionary tale for some critics of bystander intervention. Chief Elk and Devereaux (2014) have disputed the model's efficacy on the basis of transferred risk, arguing that "bystanders who 'did what they were supposed to' have ended up injured, incarcerated, or killed." Many bystander intervention programs respond to this critique by asserting, as does MVP, that "numerous options" beyond physical intervention exist, including locating adult assistance or making a third-party report (Mentors in Violence Prevention, n.d.).[15] Kurt's intervention is made possible by his intimidating physique; however, as immensely helpful as he is in the moment, his inability to frame the rape outside of his own abusive history means he is of limited post-traumatic efficacy. When Ronnie later seeks to file a report, Kurt rebuffs him, thinking, "He's got to toughen up if he's going to survive. Brush it off. That's how me and Lamar handled it" (p. 192). Danny, meanwhile, struggles to find a language for what he has seen, which speaks to the larger social silence surrounding male assault. Like the girls of *Every Last Promise*, he too dis-identifies with the victim out of fear for their similar subject position. "I despise that it was only luck and timing," Danny thinks, "that kept the two of us from switching places in those awful moments" (p. 190).

Bereft and alone, Ronnie commits suicide; subsequently, Kurt and Danny must reassess their bystander decisions and work together to provide a measure

of postmortem justice. Kurt uses his social silence strategically, allowing the perpetrators to brag about their actions and berate him, while he surreptitiously records their conversation. Danny, meanwhile, acts as Kurt's mouthpiece, entering the locker room—the zone of masculinity he has always most feared—to verbalize their story to the coaches. "*One step. Just take one step,*" he thinks to himself, "and then my mouth opens—not to scream but to fight. To protect Kurt. To be his and Ronnie's voice" (pp. 402–403). In a dramatic display, Kurt's fan-cam-equipped helmet broadcasts the locker room confrontation across the packed stadium. Thousands of spectators witness the sexist and homophobic rhetoric of rape culture; the teammates brag about how the victim "wanted it" and "loved it" and how "popping fresh meat" like Ronnie is the "best way to keep 'em in line" (pp. 369–370). Like other bystander novels, Cohen uses recording technology (the fan cam) to enact a dramatic ending. Perhaps these digital denouements represent our wish for "tangible" evidence in sexual assault cases, which will support and reinforce the bystander's actions. In real life, of course, such *deus ex machina* endings are rare.

Leverage's drama reaches resolution on the football fields, in keeping with Cohen's critique of hyper-masculine athletics, big money, and rape culture. Yet Cohen does not simply indict sports; he also establishes that football's order and discipline provide needed structure for Kurt. Furthermore, athletics offer genuine leadership opportunities, which Kurt's fellow (non-offending) team members recognize in the finale. *Leverage* uses the language of sports to speak to readers; so too does another bystander novel, Carl Deuker's *Swagger* (2013).

Deuker's sports fiction is acclaimed both for its serious themes (which include steroid abuse, anger management, and corruption) and for the fully realized athletic worlds it portrays. In *Swagger*, new transplant Jonas arrives on an established high school basketball team and befriends the quiet, stable Levi. The pair struggles against the elderly coach's staid rules of play, but they find him quickly displaced by a flashier assistant who is all too eager to provide the team with beer, soft-core porn, and test answers. Levi subsequently confesses to Jonas that Hartwell, the assistant coach, sexually assaulted him. Jonas is supportive but also pragmatic about his own future, in which a scholarship hangs on the line. "Once the title game is over, then we'll get help—you and me," he tells Levi. "We'll go to the principal or a counselor or whoever you want. It'll be your choice, but I'll be with you every step of the way. I promise. Okay?" (p. 237).

However, in a textual move similar to the fate of Ronnie in *Leverage*, the victimized Levi kills himself. "All that time, I asked myself the same question," Jonas thinks in the aftermath. "*What should I have done differently*?" (p. 268). Sacrificing a scholarship that he achieved with the facilitated cheating of the abusive coach, Jonas discloses the assault to the authorities. Interestingly, Jonas frames his decisions in courtside language. In arguing that he "couldn't let Hartwell take basketball from me too," he separates the skill and power of sports, as well as the genuine pleasure it provides young athletes, from the culture of corruption and abuse in which it is often mired (p. 296). Determined to "work hard both on the basketball court and in the classroom" and "scratch my way into college somewhere," Jonas also symbolically pledges to carry his fallen teammate (p. 296). "I'm going to do all these things for myself, and I'm going to do them for Levi, too," he declares. "I owe him" (p. 297).

Without resorting to excessive gender stereotyping, it seems fair to say that boy-centric sports fiction is generally marketed to adolescent male readers. Sullivan (2009) reminds us that such novels often go unrecognized for literary merit and are frequently dismissed by adults as "so external, so physical, and not inward or reflective" (p. 65). Yet both *Leverage* and *Swagger* create narrative worlds with satisfying physical rhythms *and* meaningful moral dilemmas for readers. Amidst Deuker's immersive chapters of breaks, drills, and fouls, careful readers may note—even before Jonas does—how Hartwell's aggressive court style and isolation of players prefigure his sexual predations. Furthermore, both novels utilize the drama, interpersonal conflicts, and powerful potential of team sports to tell stories about the development of male leadership without violence or exploitation. In so doing, they reaffirm what intervention programs, including MVP and Green Dot, have long claimed—male athletes can be empowered bystanders, rejecting sexism, homophobia, and cultures of silence.

"Good Guys Aren't Rapists": When Readers Are Bystanders

What happens, though, when young adult authors tackle the perspective of the *offender*? Chris Lynch's acclaimed novel *Inexcusable* (2005), recently repackaged in a tenth-anniversary edition, undertakes this challenge. The narrative unfolds from the perspective of high school football player Keir, who is accused of raping Gigi, a friend. While *Inexcusable* is not a bystander novel by any traditional interpretation, I include it here due to the reading audience's implication in Keir's story. Bystanding readers of *Inexcusable* are powerless to stop the explosive chain of events leading to Gigi's rape, but through careful textual attention, they can read "around" Keir; that is, they can discern textual gaps in Keir's presentation that point to alternate versions of events. *Inexcusable* is thus both compelling narrative and also, through the power of close reading, moral exercise.

Keir's obstinate, repetitive discourse, coupled with his abdication of moral responsibility, show the extent to which he expects others to set boundaries for him.

Keir's narration also serves as his bid for audience exoneration. Much of the novel is dedicated to his attempts to avoid the label of "rapist." He calls up his family for self-defense, offering his "two brainy, insightful older sisters, Mary and Fran" as witnesses who "love me to pieces and respect me" and "would not do that if I were capable of being monstrous" (p. 4). His widower father is similarly reeled in for support: "You had to be a good guy if you were Ray Sarafian's kid. You couldn't possibly be anything less" (p. 10). According to Keir, family bonds prove his excellence; so too does football, which he interprets as a set of absolutes. When his tackle paralyzes another football player, for instance, Keir evades any discussion of the harm he has caused, emphasizing only his lack of "official" culpability. "I did what I did, what I always did, what I still always do," he insists. "I followed things to the letter of the law" (p. 16). When Keir's sisters suggest he may feel a complex range of emotions about the incident, he demurs, saying he was "waiting to find out if I was responsible for what happened . . . and I found out, and I'm not" (p. 29). He even admits feeling "just so happy that it was decided *officially that I wasn't bad*" (p. 32, emphasis added). Keir's obstinate, repetitive discourse, coupled with his abdication of moral responsibility, show the extent to which he expects others to set boundaries for him.

Tarr (1997) has discussed ways in which members of the young adult audience, as "active participants in the reading process," are able to "flesh out the skeleton" of underdeveloped characters (p. 61). Such a reading process occurs in *Inexcusable*, where Keir's narration trails off, ends obliquely, or otherwise stifles important content. The introduction, for instance, is rife with his exclamations of regret for something. "I sure as hell feel sorry. I am sorry. I am one sorry sorry bastard. And I feel very sick. I am so sorry," he tells us. Yet he is unable to answer the female speaker's challenging question, "What are you sorry for, Keir?" (p. 1). Readers must fill in the gaps.

Similar interpretive work occurs at junctures where Keir sees, but is unwilling to fully examine, his own moral choices. Midway through the novel, he recounts a senior prank in which he and the football team destroy a pair of old statues. The following day, he returns to the scene of vandalism and recalls being "mortified, trying to pull together the two planets, the one where we were just guys, just having fun saying good-bye to ourselves" and "this putrid stinking planet here where everything was nothing because some animals [in reality, Keir and his friends] brought everything down to nothing" (p. 47). A similar moment occurs when he recollects once forcing soccer players to drink at a party, but he quickly displaces the act onto a phantom other. Readers thus grow to recognize Keir as an unreliable narrator; furthermore, they identify the reversed pattern of his thinking by which he disassociates himself from personal responsibility and blames others for his actions.

Such textual fissures also give insight to readers pondering Keir's criminal culpability. The rape scene is portrayed in flashback, with arguments between Keir and Gigi punctuating the main narrative. Using his characteristic rhetoric, Keir violates Gigi's space, body, and autonomy while denying his own responsibility. However, his victim's adamant insistence on her non-consent ultimately denies Keir the ability to

articulate the assault on his terms; Lynch dramatizes this process through play on the words "know" and "no."

Having utilized his football privilege to obtain a key to a cottage, Keir lures his childhood friend into it on false pretenses, assaulting her as she sleeps. His narration displays his typical entitlement when he misperceives Gigi's moan in her sleep "as the same lonely sound my own heart was making" (p. 160). After this supposedly mutual and magical event, Gigi struggles and even tries to escape out the window. Physically restraining Gigi, Keir reinterprets the action as one of care, noting, "I have her wrapped up snugly, *her arms pinned to her sides*, my nose right in her ear, smelling her skin, her hair" (p. 85, emphasis added). Yet Gigi's greatest weapon proves to be her voice, which clearly and consistently uses the words *rape* and *rapist*—words to which Keir reacts with hysterical aversion.

After unsuccessfully attempting to evade responsibility by blaming Gigi's boyfriend, Keir then rewrites the assault as consensual, saying, "Okay there was sex, we had sex, all right?" (p. 139). He insists he could never perpetrate a rape, saying "especially not to you. You *know* that. You *knew* that. Just *know* it again. Please. Please? *Know* me again" (p. 140, emphasis added). Gigi challenges what Keir *knows* with her *no*. "I said *no*," she responds, rebutting again, "I said no" and "I said no. *That* is what matters" (p. 140). Keir's *known*—that is, his self-construction as a prototypical "good guy"—is undone by Gigi's *no*. Her final verbal rejection, "good guys aren't rapists," destroys his spirit; Keir's dawning sense of guilt points to an ethical resolution, and possible incarceration, as he faces a "cinder-block wall" and waits "for whoever is going to come for me" (pp. 163–165).

Lynch has created a powerful portrait of one offender's psychology. Readers can continue their journey with Keir in Chris Lynch's newly published sequel, *Irreversible* (2016), which depicts the legal and emotional fallout of Keir's actions. Interestingly, Lewis and Durand (2014), who critique the overall portrayal of sexuality in YA as punitive, warn that the novel "invites young readers to consider that even they could be sexual monsters who may not yet be aware of the fact" and "could be used as a metaphor for fear" (p. 47).[16] While this would indeed be problematic, overall I do not read *Inexcusable* as a disciplining text. Author Chris Lynch has written that "Keir is allowed to see himself as a loveable rogue rather than a genuine threat to society. And, I fear this is not an uncommon situation" (Henneman, 2005). Particularly in his play on *know/no*, Lynch makes clear how Keir is a product of his society and how sexual violence is a devastating consequence borne of cultures that encourage some men to believe themselves entitled to women's bodies and wills.

Conclusion

"What *am* I responsible for, really?" wonders *Every Last Promise*'s Kayla, neatly encapsulating the bystander's dilemma (p. 126). Since the days of Kitty Genovese's murder, bystanders have struggled with this very question. The internal monologue of self-questioning running through most YA bystander novels enables young audiences to make connections to their own lives and identify what *they* would do if confronted by similar scenarios. Furthermore, bystander novels offer a range of applied intervention models. The characters' varied responses—Kurt's physical brawl, Kate's sleuthing for evidence, and Danny and Jonas's third-party reports, for instance—provide models of the many different social and legal choices adolescents can make upon learning of peer sexual violence.

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Bystander fiction is an important resource for educators and concerned adults seeking to engage adolescents in discussions about sexual assault, and the genre seems poised only to grow. On a practical level, these literary worlds can supplement the formal bystander education training that continues to permeate college and high school curricula. "Not being able to say no isn't the same as saying yes," *What We Saw*'s Kate points out, in a novel that could easily complement classroom discussions of alcohol

and sexual consent (p. 297). Similarly, when Keir's football teammates congratulate his tackle with "Way to bang him," and "Mowed him," *Inexcusable* opens a dialogue about the sexualization of athletic violence and its relationship to off-field behavior (p. 19). Most important, the bystander genre directly empowers young people to change their societies. The characters believe victims, reject peer arguments that clothing and drinking invalidate consent, critique the attitude of sexual entitlement surrounding elite athletics, and report, or otherwise stop, rapists.

Swagger's Carl has referred to his books as windows for young readers "to peek ahead in their lives and perhaps be a little prepared for what might be coming" (McMahon, 1998, p. 60). Unfortunately, most adolescents *will* encounter sexual violence in their future, whether first hand or via the experiences of someone close to them. Furthermore, as American culture increasingly adapts the "it's on us" model of communal response to sexual violence, teenagers will be expected to display intervention skills. Bystander novels respond to our times, providing moral education, applied suggestions for intervention, and analysis of how rape culture continues to police men's and women's social roles. These sensitive accounts affirm that adolescents' decisions to intervene can contribute to a more equitable world. As *Every Last Promise*'s Kayla concludes, "I choose to own my actions" to bring about "the promise that I will be able to love and live without fear one day" (p. 266).

Endnotes

1. See also Lizzie Skurnick's *Shelf-Discovery: The Teen Classics We Never Stopped Reading* (2009) for insightful essays about Peck's and Scoppettone's novels.
2. Teen Librarian Toolbox (Jensen, 2015) developed #SVYA lit over the course of 2015; this site includes author videos, YA book lists and reviews, academic articles on sexual violence, a Tumblr, and much more. Victor Malo-Juvera's research (2012) examined the use of *Speak* in a five-week instructional unit in a middle school. His findings after administering pre- and post-reading assessments include an overall reduction of rape myths among participating students.
3. Bystander education displaced risk-reduction theory, which taught "women strategies for reducing the likelihood of being victimized" but was generally considered ineffective in the long term (Coker et al., 2011, p. 778). Furthermore, risk-reduction models often failed to engage men as allies and rarely addressed the issue of male sexual victimization.
4. See also Harding (2015) for an updated discussion of the dominant discourses of rape culture.
5. Positive findings seem to correlate in particular with in-depth training (as opposed to short sessions) and to at least some same-gender discussion space. See also Coker et al. (2011) and NotAlone's "Bystander-Focused Prevention of Sexual Violence" (2014) for more on evaluation of the approach's effectiveness. Interest in bystander intervention has also increased since the Department of Education's 2011"Dear Colleague" letter to colleges and universities, which demanded improved processes and services to handle sexual assault complaints. See Winerip (2014) for more on the impact of the letter.
6. Some of the novels also demonstrate the emotional and physical costs to players themselves within a bruising hyper-masculine culture. See *Leverage* (Cohen, 2011), *Swagger* (Deuker, 2013), and *A Step toward Falling* (McGovern, 2015).
7. See Crosset, Benedict, and McDonald (1995), as well as Davis and Parker (1998).
8. In *The Macho Paradox* (2006), Jackson Katz discusses how MVP, his well-known bystander program, was founded on the premise that attracting "high-status high school and college male student athletes" to serve as allies, publicly decrying "rape, battering, teen-relationship violence and sexual harassment," can "make it more socially acceptable for less popular men to speak out" (p. 124).
9. The classic account of this case remains Bernard Lefkowitz's *Our Guys: The Glen Ridge Rape and the Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb* (1997).
10. For instance, when Emily realizes that Belinda has been kept, illegally, from after-school activity participation, she contacts legal aid and is able to restore access for special education students. The novel contains an ongoing discussion between characters of the "best way to help." While Emily is well meaning, she is critiqued both for the overly general nature of the "Youth Action Committee" and for her tendency to get swept away in large gestures (for instance, she momentarily believes she can find ways to employ all individuals with disabilities).
11. See also Katz, Heisterkamp, and Fleming (2011) for more on the double meaning of the word *bystander*.
12. See the federal government publication "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey" (2014) for more on men's experiences.
13. See also Andrews (2003) for an important and moving first-person account of a boy's sexual assault.
14. Kurt's inarticulate nature stems from shame about his stutter. "I hate the sound of my voice, hate hearing my tongue botch everything," he reflects at one point. "I sound stupid" (p. 300).
15. In fact, Danny does accomplish this in a partial re-staging of this scene. When the three offenders menace and beat Kurt in an empty gym, Danny refuses to abandon him. "We've got to help him," he tells a reluctant classmate

(p. 366). Danny is able to appeal to an intervening adult in the after-school melee.

16. See also Trites's *Disturbing the Universe* (2000) on the disciplining of adolescent sexuality in YA.

Sarah E. Whitney's *research interests examine how contemporary women and girls utilize literature to negotiate violence and trauma. Her book* Splattered Ink: Postfeminist Gothic Literature and Gendered Violence *was released last September from the University of Illinois Press. Prior publication venues include* Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature *and* Clues: A Journal of Detective Fiction. *Most recently, she has completed an accepted article on girl surveillance in the YA series Pretty Little Liars for the 2017 Girls Studies issue of* Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature.

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Ashley **Boyd** and Jeanne **Dyches**

Taking Down Walls:

Countering Dominant Narratives of the Immigrant Experience through the Teaching of *Enrique's Journey*

Published in 2010 and adopted widely nationwide in 2012, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a) have dramatically altered the landscape of the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. In 2016, the hotly contested unfunded mandate, which divides ELA into four strands—reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language—serves as the standard course of study in 42 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories (Standards, 2016). The CCSS's Text Exemplars (commonly referred to as Appendix B), a collection of recommended readings chosen for their perceived quality, breadth, and text complexity, have garnered critique for their allegiance to canonical titles, their absence of contemporary issues, and their paucity of young adult literature (Moss, 2013; Schieble, 2014). These shifts in standards offer a new iteration of what Applebee (1992) aptly referred to as the "stability and change" of the secondary English classroom. While many of the texts recommended in Appendix B reflect the voices and authorship that have long marked the secondary English classroom, its promotion of informational texts—culminating with an expectation that 70% of students' reading be classified as such by 12th grade—reflects a radical shift in instructional realities.

How teachers negotiate the demands of the CCSS with their attempts to teach in culturally responsive ways poses another instructional intersection and a moral conundrum worthy of examination. Long have teachers experienced hardships incorporating multicultural literature into their classrooms, with many teachers admitting their preferences for and comfort with canonical and required curricula (Macaluso, 2013). Resources, expertise, and time limitations also influence teachers' willingness and ability to infuse multicultural literature into their classrooms (Stallworth & Gibbons, 2006). Recent scholarship (e.g., Watkins & Ostenson, 2015) suggests that the nonfiction demands of the CCSS, coupled with the influence of Appendix B over teachers' practices, only serve to exacerbate the difficulties teachers already experience in trying to weave in the stories of people, voices, and experiences positioned on the margins of the secondary English canon.

In order to properly prepare and equip preservice teachers (PSTs) with the tools required to navigate these dilemmas, teacher educators must recognize, and respond to, the changing realities of the secondary ELA classroom. We agree with Watkins and Ostenson (2015) that:

> [Teacher educators] must be attuned in our instruction to such reform efforts as the CCSS, given that these efforts are likely to shift the nature of some of these challenges, altering the real and perceived autonomy of teachers. Students who leave our programs clearly aware of the challenges they will face and equipped with some strategies for dealing with those challenges . . . will hopefully be less frustrated and more effective in the choices they make. (p. 264)

As teacher educators, ours is an orientation toward pedagogy driven by our commitment to social justice

and agency; we fervently believe in the importance of using classrooms as spaces in which to reorient preservice teachers' prejudices, biases, and socialized assumptions in order to combat the inequities that permeate the classroom. As such, while we respect teacher educators' various perceptions of the Standards, we espouse the importance of teacher educators learning the nuances of the CCSS so that they can help equip PSTs with strategies for pushing back against their constraints. Thus, we recognize and work to disrupt the ideologies that imbue the CCSS, Appendix B, and other elements of the ELA classroom that may marginalize secondary students. Yet, we simultaneously maintain that this work should not preclude our attempts to foster explicit discussion and design of lessons that help our PSTs satisfy the very system we oppose.

[W]e fervently believe in the importance of using classrooms as spaces in which to reorient preservice teachers' prejudices, biases, and socialized assumptions in order to combat the inequities that permeate the classroom.

We hold with Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) who posit, "English teacher educators must expose pre-service and in-service teachers to diverse literature appropriate to the secondary classroom and facilitate their abilities to create curricula where diverse stories and voices are mainstreamed rather than marginalized" (p. 487). Yet as pedagogical realists, we understand, too, that teachers must negotiate the constraints placed on them by their administration, curriculum, curricular standards, and the court of public opinion that might perceive the incorporation of multicultural, equity-oriented literature as agenda-driven (Bissonnette, 2016). Thus, what we propose here is one strategy for preparing PSTs to deliver multicultural, CCSS-aligned instruction in social-justice-oriented ways, though other powerful possibilities exist (e.g., Bissonnette & Glazier, 2015). Like Sams and Allman (2015), we share our experience using young adult literature to disrupt PSTs' normalized assumptions and deficit narratives of immigration, tending particularly to Central American immigration. We fostered this discussion by incorporating Sonia Nazario's (2007) nonfiction text *Enrique's Journey,* a harrowing account of one Honduran boy's journey from Central America to the United States, into our classroom teaching.

A History and Contextualization of Central American Immigration in the United States

Enrique's perilous journey is but one experience of immigration to the United States. The Latin@ immigrant population makes up approximately 16% of the nation's immigrant population (Gutiérrez, 2013). The United States' Latin@ population grew to at least 14.6 million by 1980, to 22.4 million in 1990, to 35.3 million in 2000, and approached 50 million by 2010 (Kent, Pollard, Haaga, & Mather, 2001; Passel & D'Vera Cohn, 2011). With a combined 75.7%, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans comprise the majority of the US Latin@ population (Gutiérrez, 2013).

But other ethnic subgroups are steadily growing their US presence. The US Census reported that in 2013, 3.2 million Central American immigrants had relocated to the United States, reflecting 7% of the nation's total immigrant population. Though the 1950s and 1960s saw a small Central American immigrant population, a series of civil wars in the 1970s spurred a mass exodus from Central American countries. Displaced by a succession of natural disasters in the 1990s, undocumented Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans entered the US in large numbers. From 2003–2013, the population of Central Americans in the United States grew by more than 56%. Other culprits, such as extreme poverty, hunger, violence, and poor/inaccessible healthcare, have also spurred immigration (Zong & Batalova, 2015). From 2000–2010, the population of Honduran immigrants alone increased by 191% (Gutiérrez, 2013).

How to best respond to the influx of Latin@ immigrants has engendered passionate debate across political parties. In December of 2015, President Obama ordered the deportation of all Central Americans who had not complied with his removal orders. Republican presidential candidates, as part of their platforms for election, promised to end the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows certain immigrants who entered the country prior to the age of sixteen an opportunity to apply for temporary legal status (Starr, 2015). Don-

ald Trump's now infamous allegation that Mexican immigrants are "murderers and rapists" who would be kept out of the United States by a large wall he promised to erect upon election pleased many voters and catapulted him to the front of his party. Immigration has perhaps never been more contested than it is at present.

Our understanding of the CCSS and its incongruence with social-justice-oriented pedagogies, as well as our conception that immigration is a timely, salient issue for PSTs, teachers, and secondary students alike, compelled us to craft an assignment that would synergize—and humanize—these conversations. In crafting the assignment, we had a two-fold purpose. First, given that approximately 6% of Central American immigrants identify as 18 years of age or younger (Zong & Batalova, 2015), teachers must develop an awareness of these issues if they are to sensitively approach immigrant students' realities. Second, secondary students for whom immigration is not an experienced reality need help in developing a critical awareness of this social justice issue in order to develop their empathy and social consciousness.

Ultimately, opening up these channels for conversation provides a means through which students can contribute to a participatory democracy that balances both individual and common interests, with all parties working to better understand the perspectives of others (Liggett, 2014). However, to effect these goals in their future classrooms, PSTs first need spaces to engage with these timely issues as well as opportunities to consider the ways in which they may invite their own future students to do the same. Using nonfiction young adult literature, we present one such possibility for engaging PSTs in the immigration conversation.

Enrique's Journey: Defying the Dominant Immigrant Narrative

In 2002, journalist Sonia Nazario published a six-part series in the *Los Angeles Times* titled *Enrique's Journey*. In 2007, she fashioned her work into a book bearing the same title, and in 2013, the book was adapted for young adult readers. Having spent her career as an activist and journalist dedicated to reporting on social issues, attending specifically to immigration, Nazario has enjoyed great acclaim for her account of a young boy facing formidable obstacles as he travels from Honduras to reunite with his mother in the United States. Among the myriad awards for her work, Nazario was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing. Her book is used for study in high school and university classrooms across the nation, appearing as one of the most frequently chosen texts for college freshmen common reading programs (Thomsen, 2015). Nazario frequently speaks in political arenas, appears on popular media outlets, and delivers addresses to schools nationwide, urging for a deeper consideration of global immigration issues.

Told from a third-person point of view, the story chronicles the life of Enrique, a Honduran boy who, at age five, is left behind by his mother, Lourdes, as she seeks to save her children from extreme poverty by immigrating to the United States. Weary of temporarily living with various family members and overwrought with longing for his mother, Enrique leaves his girlfriend and remaining family at home at age 17 and sets out for the United States. He attempts and fails to reach the United States seven times. Yet each defeat, accompanied by a return to Honduras, only solidifies his will to succeed. His final mission is fraught with a brutal beating, encounters with armed gangs, and dangerous rides atop trains. These horrors are balanced, however, with glimpses of humanity as Enrique is taken in by Olga, a woman who dedicates her life to nursing injured immigrants, and later by Padre Leo, a priest who forfeits his own salary in order to pay the staff of the church where he supports immigrant youth who "go for days without food, for months without resting their heads on a pillow" (p. 123). After his mother gathers enough money to pay a smuggler, Enrique at last arrives in the United States.

The story, however, does not offer a simplistic resolution. Enrique struggles to transition to a new life and to forgive his mother, whom he feels abandoned him. He battles alcohol and drug addiction as well as his own ambivalent feelings for having left his girlfriend, who bears their daughter in his absence, behind. He eventually pays to bring the two to Florida, where he has relocated with his mother. There, Enrique has a run-in with law enforcement, and his undocumented status is uncovered. Nazario intercedes on Enrique's behalf, inserting herself into the story; she explains that the original publication of her book gained him notoriety for which he would be targeted by gangs if deported. The story ends leaving Enrique's legal case unresolved.

Throughout the text, Nazario weaves factual information on immigration policy into the narrative, and in her afterword, she discusses the controversy at length, presenting multiple sides for consideration and including the perspectives of Enrique and his mother on related areas. Her true account grants unflinching insight into the complexities of Latin American immigration.

Classroom Practice: Cultivating Social Justice through the Elements of Nonfiction

Though not a conventional writer of young adult texts, Nazario crafts a work that holds great promise for adolescent readers; therefore, we elected to teach it as a title likely to appeal to young adult readers. Specifically, we adopted this text because it satisfies two purposes: it addresses requirements of the CCSS while it also relates to our broader goals as teacher educators working to stimulate and promote social justice. To achieve this two-fold aim, Ashley's students engaged in multiple critical considerations of the text, examining it as a nonfiction work while simultaneously developing understandings of Enrique's story as a counter-narrative to dominant views on immigration.

Our understanding of the CCSS and its incongruence with social-justice-oriented pedagogies, as well as our conception that immigration is a timely, salient issue for PSTs, teachers, and secondary students alike, compelled us to craft an assignment that would synergize—and humanize—these conversations [about immigration].

Classroom Context

The course on young adult literature described here occurred at a large, northwestern university and was a required pedagogy course for secondary English Education majors. In fall 2015, there were 22 students enrolled. Because the course was open to general English majors in addition to preservice English teachers, approximately one-third of the students did not plan to teach, while the remaining two-thirds anticipated careers as middle or high school educators. The students in the class were predominantly White and female, reflective of the larger teaching population (Boser, 2014), and they encompassed a range of socioeconomic classes.

Throughout the semester, Ashley engaged students with a multitude of young adult texts that spanned varied perspectives and issues. Given that Ashley's pedagogies focused on developing students' critical literacies (Janks, 2013; Luke, 2000), the emphasis was generally on considerations of power and privilege. As Behrman (2006) explains, "Critical literacy espouses that education can foster social justice by allowing students to recognize how language is affected by and affects social relations" (p. 490). Alongside this emphasis on language, a critical literacy approach seeks to facilitate students' readings of texts for the ideologies they create and perpetuate, where texts are broadly defined to include social practices and media (Morrell, 2007). Discussion in Ashley's course during the semester therefore confronted, for example, social class inequities in Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park* (2013), racism and intertextuality in Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), sexuality in John Green and David Levithan's *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), and representations of disabilities in Francisco Stork's *Marcelo in the Real World* (2009). Discussing oft-perceived "hot lava" (Glazier, 2003) topics—that is, those subjects deemed sensitive by society and frequently avoided in conversation—was central to the course. At the culmination of the semester, students engaged with the issue of immigration from Latin American countries to the United States through their reading of Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*.

Blogging with *Enrique's Journey*

To acquaint students with the book's background, Ashley first shared information on Sonia Nazario's career trajectory and provided a brief overview of immigration policy and history in the United States. Students were required to keep a blog throughout the semester where they offered initial, personal reflections on the texts read in class. Each was roughly 500 words, and instructions for blog responses were:

> First, provide an analysis of the text, thinking about traditional literary elements, such as theme, character development, plot, etc. Second, critique the text in terms of what or who it leaves out, what it might reveal about cultural or gender stereotypes, or what social issue it treats and how. Then, answer the following questions: How does this text position adolescents? Why would this text appeal to adolescents? Finally, give the text a rating on an A–F scale based on your personal reading preferences, and justify your answer.

Students in the young adult literature course had a choice of works on which to blog; they were required to complete 10 entries for the semester. In response to *Enrique's Journey,* 15 students wrote blog entries. Ashley made it a point to read students' responses before class; doing so allowed her insight into the students' reactions to the text prior to course discussions. Consequently, she was able to navigate and prompt conversations by referencing anonymously opinions they shared or questions they raised in this forum. Ashley conceptualized this assignment as a form of hybrid pedagogy (Stommel, 2012), seeing blogging as a veritable "third space" that opened up new dialogic opportunities during which students could learn, even when not situated in the physical classroom. As she read, Ashley was first struck by how many of her students stated that they *enjoyed* the text, despite it being a nonfiction work. One student shared, "I was hesitant about reading a nonfiction novel. I have honestly never read that many nonfiction books before. However, I really loved this book!"

Analyzing Students' Reflections

While we were interested in these comments, this study sought to unravel the ways nonfiction young adult literature could facilitate deeper, more critical understandings of immigration. With those goals, we employed the qualitative data analysis software HyperResearch® to code the content of the students' blogs and to construct themes and broader categories from their responses (Saldaña, 2012). In an effort to ensure the accuracy of our findings, we coded approximately half of the blog posts together. This allowed us to make sense of the themes that emerged from the data in a cohesive, consistent way. We began our analysis process by first coding in isolation and keeping analytic memos (Boeije, 2002); we met periodically to discuss our findings, reconciling any incongruence in our analyses. Then, we recoded the data to reflect our understanding of the processes at work, which ultimately allowed us to identify the general findings of the study. Once these were established, we delved into each category with a discourse analytic lens (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1996) to examine *how* the students were discussing particular aspects within themes, noting, for example, word choices and patterns in the ways they constructed responses.

In what follows, we share how the students' responses spoke to Ashley's pedagogical purposes; the discussion illustrates the potential of students reading nonfiction young adult literature for achieving social justice goals. This potential is evidenced by students' development of critical consciousness and their reflection on positionalities that counter deficit, stereotypical perspectives of Latin@ immigrants.

Ashley conceptualized this assignment as a form of hybrid pedagogy (Stommel, 2012), seeing blogging as a veritable "third space" that opened up new dialogic opportunities during which students could learn, even when not situated in the physical classroom.

The Development of Critical Consciousness through *Enrique's Journey*

Overall, PSTs demonstrated that reading a nonfiction informational text helped position them to consider issues in more dynamic, complicated, socially just ways. With regard to this advancement, four themes emerged: the text's power to help PSTs rethink "reality," humanize immigration, develop and apply additive frameworks, and engage in social critique.

Rethinking Reality

Of the 15 students who read the text, 7 offered a rating of the book; of those 7, 5 awarded the book an "A." Part of the reason for their affinity seemed to be the fact that Nazario shared *actual* events. One student whose writing reflected this sentiment noted, "The book reports on very real issues (such as the deportation process of Enrique, and Jasmin's own fear

of her parents being deported one day)." There was an urgency experienced through reading the narrative because of its factual nature. As seen in another student's words, "This one [book] makes me feel anger and unrest toward a very real problem rather than an imaginary one." This aspect of "being real" pervaded students' responses, as there was something about knowing that the hardships faced by Enrique actually happened that resonated with students. In fact, a variation of the word "real," such as in the term "reality," arose at least 30 times in the students' blogs. Students also highlighted Nazario's involvement as a legitimizing aspect of the text; one student expressed, "She just wanted to be able to deliver Enrique's story in the most authentic way in hopes to bring light to immigration and how hard it is for people to obtain a happy life." Many students remarked on Nazario's bravery and commitment, as demonstrated by her undertaking and replicating the journey so that the story would feel credible.

In addition to the inherent qualities of authenticity and style that students emphasized, other elements of nonfiction generally include visual components such as photographs or charts (Kerper, 2003). These items are meant to provide a deeper understanding of text and require students to employ visual literacies.

Beyond emphasis on the content of the text, students also commented on Nazario's style and how it allowed them to draw connections to the work. In their discussion of evaluative components of nonfiction, Keifer and Williams (2011) suggest focusing on traditional elements such as "accuracy and authenticity, content and perspective, style, organization, and illustrations and format" (p. 294), but they also challenge us to consider how nonfiction is actually like literature, with aesthetic qualities such as style, and how works can represent not only facts but also open up conversations. Similar to the types of analysis proposed for informational texts in the CCSS, Keifer and Williams (2011) encourage readers to conceptualize nonfiction as more than mere presentations of facts or information, and the students' blogs offered comments that spoke to these aspects throughout. Assessments of Nazario's writing style arose in remarks such as, "The word choice is very specific and she is using a form of pathos to appeal to the emotions of the readers," and "Making me feel those emotions was something that Nazario succeeded at in her writing." These ruminations defied the latter student's worry that "Nonfiction novels have a harder time drawing [readers] in because they aren't able to connect with the main character." Students' evaluations related to style thus reflected their affective responses, and these emotions allied them with the social justice issue of immigration.

In addition to the inherent qualities of authenticity and style that students emphasized, other elements of nonfiction generally include visual components such as photographs or charts (Kerper, 2003). These items are meant to provide a deeper understanding of text and require students to employ visual literacies, which Seglem and Witte (2009) argue "must be included within all school curricula if teachers want to adequately prepare students for a world that is surrounded by and driven by images" (p. 224). Analyzing supplemental images, therefore, is crucial to a study of the whole text in which they are present. Even further, Schieble (2014) purports the import of *critical visual literacy*, a combination of concepts borrowed from semiotics and critical theory, whereby students read visual texts to interpret "how power relations among people, places, and events flow through the placement of details in an image"; she states that such an activity "provides robust opportunities for building academic skills and articulating ideas about race and justice" (p. 50).

These notions of visual literacy in nonfiction hold true for *Enrique's Journey* and arose in the students' blogs. There is a series of photographs within the book that portrays Enrique as a young boy at the age when his mother left for the United States. In other images, we see Enrique's girlfriend and daughter. Perhaps the most potent pictures, however, are of train jumpers and the encampment on the Rio Grande that is emblematic of where Enrique would have stayed during his journey. This series of depictions is particularly powerful in terms of critical visual literacy, as examining the clothing of the youth in the photos, their age, gender, and conditions of existence aug-

ments the story in ways that presenting the facts in prose cannot. Demonstrating the value of the images, one student blogged, "I really loved the pictures . . . because humans crave images to reference when trying to imagine a place or person and it was cool to see what the places and people actually look like." Bolstering this point, other students shared how the images helped them visualize a topic or area about which they had little knowledge or experience. The illustrative component therefore contributed to the text and to conceptualizing the characters in affirming, rather than deficit, ways.

Humanizing Latin Immigration

In terms of the text allowing for deeper connections beyond those of style, much as literature does, students highlighted various themes and points to which a wider audience could relate. Of those broader categories discussed, family was a focal point throughout. Poverty, drug abuse, love, and abandonment were others. These themes were not limited to Enrique; rather, as the readers determined, they reflect a lived reality of many secondary students. For instance, one responder commented, "A lot of children have single mothers who have to work all day to support their children. They may not be in a different country, but are still rarely seen by their children." Another offered, "I also liked the way the author portrayed drug abuse and addiction. This is something many young people go through or have seen firsthand." Finally, one student drew connections to the parental love in the story, writing, "This story would show students how much their parents love them and the lengths they would go to to take care of them."

Many responders observed how "relatable" Enrique and his story are because of Nazario's depiction of his humanity; she represents him as having both strengths and weaknesses as well as a desire to have a better and more complete and safe life. While perhaps not conventionally identified as elements of nonfiction, it was these characteristics upon which students focused, as opposed to a strict recount of facts and information. And yet it is the story's basis in reality that prompted these affective readings. While the students' blogs did illustrate perspectives on *Enrique's Journey* as nonfiction in a traditional sense—they discussed themes, evaluated the author's style, and conjectured possibilities for making connections—they also moved beyond these surface readings to reveal how nonfiction can be a mechanism for facilitating the learning of social justice content and developing language that counters deficit perspectives.

The same consideration given to Enrique was extended to Lourdes in examining her motivation to leave her children. As one student writes, Lourdes "remembers too well the pain of her childhood poverty, and so refuses to let her children suffer it. As a result, she ironically must abandon them to take care of them; she sees no other option." There is a keen insight in this student's statement, as with others who noted the "disastrous poverty," "death and drugs every day," and "hardships faced by many Central American families" that would lead to the *necessity* to seek a safe existence; these people did not make their decisions lightly, and they were not motivated by a desire simply to have more *things.* In these blog reflections, the Other is positioned in a humane light as a person forced to take action. Taken together, the students' responses form a cohesive counter to the dominant portrayal of Latin American immigrants in the United States who, as one student described, "are viewed as . . . threats, as dangers to society, our American jobs, and our American way of life." After reading the text, the construction of "normal" vs. "other" was no longer allowed because "the Other" had been rendered transparent.

While the students' blogs did illustrate perspectives on *Enrique's Journey* as nonfiction in a traditional sense—they discussed themes, evaluated the author's style, and conjectured possibilities for making connections—they also moved beyond these surface readings to reveal how nonfiction can be a mechanism for facilitating the learning of social justice content and developing language that counters deficit perspectives.

Developing and Applying Additive Frameworks

Students' general framing of the issue of immigration continued to show how the text prompted discourse that was counter to deficit articulations. Kumashiro

(2012) explains, "Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world . . . . In politics, our frames shape our social practices and the institutions we form to carry out policies" (p. 3). Thus, the way students conceptualized their frames around immigration is critical to justice-based understandings and to their development as citizens in a democracy. In their blogs, they located the specific sources of conflicts regarding immigration within government structures, inequality, and poverty, rather than engaging in victim-blaming or shunning of the individuals who seek residency in the United States. As one student stated, "I think oftentimes people and situations, especially immigration and immigrants, are dehumanized and generalized into something that is seen as a problem rather than to actually recognize what is happening." What is happening, others said, is "the desire to escape poverty," and "mass amounts of racism." These narratives concluded with statements such as, "If people were able to see and understand others' points of view, then there might be a lot less xenophobia in today's world." Not only did the text humanize immigrants, but it prompted students to see how the issue of immigration has systemic implications and to analyze it on a macro scale.

[Students'] burgeoning critical consciousness was revealed both in honest admissions of ignorance and in how the students began to question domestic attitudes and policies.

Students consistently connected their framing to the nonfiction aspect of the text. As one student observed, "Having a real account of a person's journey coming across the border was very eye opening. I think that overall this novel portrays adolescents in a positive light. It shows that they are able to overcome extreme obstacles and are able to take care of themselves." Others noted that the "book places adolescents in a very uplifting light," and they discursively defined the individuals in the text as "dedicated," "strong," "vulnerable," "brave," and "diligent." These word choices are in stark contrast to those often associated with immigrant youth who are characterized as drains on society or troublemakers. As one student stated, "It goes to show that not everyone who crosses the border is going with cocaine in their trunk; that desperation more times than not tends to fuel the decision to migrate north." The attention to "desperation" here was key to exploring and recognizing character motivations for actions. Comments demonstrated consistently an understanding for and consideration of the Other—generally implied to mean not White—that is often excluded from discourse on immigration.

The students spoke of Lourdes and Enrique and the fact that they felt compelled to leave Honduras as the only solution to a dire situation. One student argued that Enrique "feels as if he is left with no other options. He is searching for someone to love and care for him, and after being abandoned so many times, he had to find his mom in order to restore himself." Students understood the youth's desperation to find his mother as his catalyst, contradicting typical dominant thoughts on immigrant youth whose background stories are not considered. From a similar perspective, another student avowed, "Not all immigrants that migrate come to places for jobs. They can have various reasons for coming." The book therefore led to a deeper sense of understanding of a complex situation, one that likely many had not delved into previously.

Engaging in Social Critique

Students' growing understanding of additive frameworks and their engagement with social justice was further evidenced by their development of critical consciousness, which involves "accepting that ideas about what is normal, or right, or good are the products of life experience rather than universal laws" (Hinchey, 2004 p. 25). Their burgeoning critical consciousness was revealed both in honest admissions of ignorance and in how the students began to question domestic attitudes and policies. Again and again, in statements such as, "I felt like it gave me insight on a side of a topic that I had never been exposed to before," and "The book was very informative and I learned a lot that I didn't know before reading the novel," students spoke of their lack of knowledge on immigration and related issues. They became impassioned about the issue and their newfound awareness, affirming that it "should get more attention" and proclaiming that it "needs to be discussed" because "many people are not educated on the issue of immigration," or are "all too happy to ignore" it, and "this causes ignorance and falsely backed up accusations and opinions."

Students attributed the collective silence and misunderstandings around immigration to political figures, wishing, for instance, that "Donald Trump would read this book so that he could see what is really happening to those who have to leave Mexico for a better life," and blaming "biased news networks" that "paint immigrants as these horrible people coming to take over the country." In their ruminations on the dearth of nuanced recognition of the issue, one student offered an interesting comparison, stating, "Many people in America, those who watch . . . news, at least, probably think of immigrants as people with knapsacks crossing the Rio Grande River; if they even know where the Rio Grande River is. What many people don't know is that for many immigrants, it's a life and death decision."

In their development of critical consciousness, students also explicitly engaged in social critique around the issue of American policy and immigration. This was exemplified in such claims as, "We, as Americans, preach about the American dream and how America is the melting pot of the world, and yet when people are risking their lives, desperately trying to come to this country and find a life worth living, we want to build a wall to keep them out." They not only admitted to questioning our policies on immigration, but also the "huge cultural stereotype in our country about immigrants," disclosing, "It makes me sad to think that so many Americans are against people coming in to our country." Policies designed to enhance border control and return undocumented peoples to their country of origin without regard for the situations in those lands came under fire. Students offered thoughtful questions, including "What grounds necessitate our involvement in warring countries?" and "Should people like Enrique from places like Honduras be seen as refugees or immigrants?" *Enrique's Journey* prompted students to ask these difficult questions. It did not permit them to ignore the real and complicated conflicts in our society.

The Potential of Nonfiction to Promote Social Justice and Personal Agency

Findings from this study reveal that nonfiction young adult literature and social justice pedagogies can in fact work in synergistic ways. PSTs found value in reading the nonfiction text *Enrique's Journey,* given that its themes (to some students' surprise) intimately resonated with them, helped concretize "real" issues in ways that traditional literature did not, humanized an issue with which many students had little experience, and positioned them to develop and apply additive frameworks from which to speak about the complexities of the issue. The text also helped PSTs engage in social critique, as evidenced by the responses that revealed how students began to recognize, and talk back to, the dominant narrative of Latin@ immigration that permeates the social milieu and reveals itself via news channels and political rhetoric.

In addition to PSTs in the university context, we believe this work is highly applicable to secondary teachers as well. Because Nazario's text is adapted for young adults, middle and high school teachers could employ *Enrique's Journey* to heighten their students' critical consciousness, both through assignments such as the blog suggested here and through additional components of classroom discussion and historical research. Although there may be more scaffolding needed, depending on students' familiarity with topics related to immigration and surrounding legislation, this very real social justice issue warrants exploration in students' formative years, as they are learning about the structure of our government and growing as citizens in our society. This dialogism likewise invites students to develop their own concepts of citizenry as they begin to contribute to, and shape, a participatory democracy.

Because Nazario's text is adapted for young adults, middle and high school teachers could employ *Enrique's Journey* to heighten their students' critical consciousness, both through assignments such as the blog suggested here and through additional components of classroom discussion and historical research.

The examination of this text and its capacity to build students' critical dispositions across a span of ages fits within the CCSS. First, *Enrique's Journey* meets the shift toward literary nonfiction ("Standards," 2016). The elements of craft, such as au-

thor's style and structure, including images and the retelling of authentic events, were the very elements that prompted students' empathetic understandings. Furthermore, the Reading Standards for informational texts for Grades 9–10 ask students, for example, to: "Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b, p. 40). The students' comments, noting Nazario's viewpoint as a journalist as well as her appeal to their emotions, fulfilled this readily. Finally, informational text Standards for grades 11–12 emphasize "constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 40), to which this book relates as well, especially in the afterword. Therefore, reading *Enrique's Journey,* as we suggest here, can satisfy the moral obligations of teachers who are required to adhere to state mandates, including the CCSS, but who also feel it is their ethical duty to work toward a socially just society.

Although students reported affective responses to the material they learned, we would like to harness that energy, addressing the issue and engaging in planning with those who have future careers in teaching.

This multilayered approach, however, is not without its limitations and challenges. First, we recognize that the work here is reflective of only one text and one course experience. Although Ashley found the blog assignment similarly useful in previous iterations of the course, additional endeavors by teacher educators and secondary teachers alike could be undertaken to further investigate the potential of young adult nonfiction in fostering students' critical consciousness. Second, educators and students may struggle to attain the agency necessary for developing a sophisticated sense of critical consciousness, one that moves beyond awareness and into action.

For a subsequent assignment, we are experimenting with an opportunity for students to intentionally focus on Enrique's story as a counter-narrative and to develop materials to serve as cultural complements to the text. Such work with young adult literature—in which students are acquainted with a social justice topic and asked to connect it to broader plans for action—is on the rise (e.g., Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010; Simmons, 2012; Singer & Shagoury, 2005/2006). What we envision is an explicit explanation of the concept of the counter-narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) followed by instruction that will help students to locate, in media for example, how the dominant narrative is crafted and upheld. Our students named dominant perspectives in their blogs, but having them point to tangible examples would likely further their development. This would help them to discern the ways discourse and power operate in society and how ideologies pervade our daily lives. Although students reported affective responses to the material they learned, we would like to harness that energy, addressing the issue and engaging in planning with those who have future careers in teaching. We would thus not only ask students to locate pieces of media that construct and perpetuate deficit perspectives of immigrants, but also to generate potential action projects for their students that would accompany a reading of *Enrique's Journey*—actions in which students could respond to those dominant constructions, act for more just policies, and spread the awareness that Nazario cultivates.

Conclusion

PSTs need opportunities to engage with materials during their teacher education program that not only facilitate their understanding and successful execution of standards-based education, but that also work toward advancing societal equity. Accomplishing both and meeting those moral obligations is a difficult task. The challenge to teacher educators becomes how to help our candidates create lessons and assignments that provide them with opportunities to consider text types and genres as noted by the CCSS *while* working to create socially just instructional materials. By offering PSTs a multilayered approach to pedagogical instruction, we position them to develop the skills necessary for both missions. By providing the rich substance—and modeling—needed to understand how to perform both tasks in tandem, we hope to equip PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions nec-

essary to balance the duality of these missions in their own classrooms.

Ashley Boyd *is an assistant professor of English Education at Washington State University where she teaches graduate courses in critical theory and undergraduate courses in English Methods and Young Adult Literature. Her research interests include cultural studies, young adult literature, and social justice pedagogies. Currently, she is studying the impact of young adult literature on secondary students' reading attitudes, as well as investigating a teacher discourse community focused on reading social-justice-themed young adult literature. She has published in* Educational Studies, Teacher Education Quarterly, *and* Study and Scrutiny: Research on Young Adult Literature.

Jeanne Dyches *is an assistant professor of Literacy Education at Iowa State University where she researches the possibilities for using literacy classrooms as transformative spaces in which to disrupt inequities. Her current research projects examine the tensions between canonicity and teachers' culturally responsive literacy practices; the distinctions among inservice teachers' preparedness for literacy instruction; and how teachers pedagogically incorporate social movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter, to develop students' sociopolitical consciousness. She has published in* Contemporary Issues in Teacher Education and Technology (English), Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, Journal of Language and Literacy Education, *and* Southern Journal of Linguistics.

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Jenna **Spiering**

Reviewing to Exclude?:

Critical Discourse Analysis of YA LGBTQ Book Reviews for School Librarians

When the junior high school where I work established a GSA (gay straight alliance), I began working with its student members to both build our LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning) school library collection and make it visible. As is my practice (and that of many other school librarians), I turned to professional publications like *School Library Journal* and *Library Media Connection* to read LGBTQ literature reviews. However, as a practicing school librarian and literacy researcher, I became frustrated by the lack of published books recommended for a junior high audience.

In my closer examination, patterns emerged in the book reviews I read in these professional publications. The reviews typically recommended LGBTQ-themed texts for an older, high school audience. The reviews were also regularly written in a cautionary tone that implied that school librarians ought to be wary when thinking about purchasing these books, or they recommended LGBTQ-themed books only if the school library was serving LGBTQ students. This language implies both that not all schools serve LGBTQ students and that non-LGBTQ students would not benefit from or enjoy reading about the experiences of LGBTQ characters. I began to wonder how these book reviews might be influencing school librarians' decisions about purchasing books. Might book reviews be working to restrict access to ideas and information that our students are entitled to and that school librarians are responsible to provide (American Library Association, 2006)? The study I detail in this article explores these questions.

School librarians make important decisions about materials to include in school library collections when they purchase literature for their libraries. They often consult book review sources and selection aides, such as those I mentioned above, to make decisions (Bishop, 2012). In the absence of the time or capacity to read every book that is purchased for a school library, these reviews guide librarians who are attempting to find the books that students need and will enjoy. These book reviews offer short critiques (5–10 sentences) of the books and often alert librarians to any content that could be perceived as controversial, including violence, profanity, and sexuality (American Library Association [ALA], 2015).

Sexual orientation continues to be viewed as a controversial theme for librarians who question the boundaries of acceptable content of their public school collections and worry about book challenges from parents and communities (ALA, 2015). Despite the American Library Association's plea in "The Freedom to Read Statement" (2006) to uphold students' First Amendment rights and make materials available in libraries as well as the publication of collection development manuals that spell out best practices for selecting a wide range of materials for school library collections (Bishop, 2012), pervasive questions still circulate about what is appropriate for certain age groups with regard to "controversial" content related to gender and sexuality (e.g., Scales, 2015a; Scales, 2015b).

Other scholarship has suggested that there is a need for more attention to materials that include sexuality and LGBTQ themes in classrooms (e.g., Ashcraft,

2012; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009). In fact, studies have shown that there is a disproportionately low representation of LGBTQ characters and themes in school library collections (e.g., Garry, 2014; Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, & Harris, 2013; Whelan, 2007) and that self-censorship (the practice of excluding books from the collection for fear of challenge from parents or the community) might be a determining factor in this underrepresentation (Coley, 2002; Hill, 2010; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Whelan, 2009). However, very little research has been done that examines the factors that may be influencing these collection development decisions. This kind of examination is important for librarians as they define the boundaries of acceptable content in their collections in an effort to meet the needs of diverse groups of students (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013).

In this article, I aim to make a connection between critical pedagogy and school library practice because it is crucial that school librarians see their positions as transformational and political.

In this study, I address this problem by looking at one of the key resources that librarians use to make selection decisions—book reviews. Using several tools from Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014), I examine the language of book reviews and the ways in which language may inhibit access to LGBTQ young adult literature (YAL). As a practicing school librarian, a literacy researcher, and someone who currently identifies as a straight ally, my work falls at the intersection of theory and praxis. Using a critical pedagogy framework (Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994), I examine the ways in which ideology is working in book reviews in order to inform the important work of school library collection development.

These research questions guided my analyses:

1. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians position and frame LGBTQ themes and characters?
2. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians frame and position school librarians and the youth readers they serve?

Theoretical and Methodological Grounding

Theorists like Paulo Freire (2000) and bell hooks (1994) see educational spaces as having the potential to be subversive and transgressive. In such environments, students and teachers can challenge the dominant and normative practices that shape and define their lives. However, institutions like schools are at risk of naturalizing language in an effort to control the behavior of large groups of students: "The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better 'fit' for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited for the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it" (Freire, 2000, p. 76). Furthermore, bell hooks is concerned with "what forces keep us from moving forward, from having a 'revolution of values' that would enable us to live differently" (1994, p. 28). I will suggest that this idea of a "revolution of values" is useful as I consider how the discourses of book reviews could be an important site for resisting naturalized discourses about LGBTQ YAL.

In library and information science, scholars have made the important connection between critical pedagogy and critical library instruction (e.g., Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier, 2010) by taking up ideas about anti-oppressive pedagogy and access and applying them to library instruction. My work follows the work of library scholars like James Elmborg (2006) who have challenged librarians to disrupt and question traditional practices: "Librarians need to develop a critical consciousness about libraries, by learning to 'problematize' the library" (p. 198). Others, like Emily Drabinski (2013), have specifically targeted library practices like classification and organization systems through the lens of queer theory in order to challenge the fixed and stable categories that determine patrons' access to materials.

These theorists and others have made the important connection between critical pedagogy and library practice, but their work has focused on academic libraries and higher education. In this article, I aim to make a connection between critical pedagogy and

school library practice because it is crucial that school librarians see their positions as transformational and political. Libraries and school librarians are important forces inside of the school building. When school librarians make decisions about what is appropriate or "normal" content in school library collections, they are working to either uphold normative and common sense understandings of youth or to subvert them. Here, I draw on critical pedagogy and critical librarianship as a theoretical grounding for understanding the role of school librarians as they select materials for students.

The Study

Methods

In this study, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014) to examine book reviews for LGBTQ texts. I chose to use CDA as a method of analysis because the language used in book reviews is created and used for a specific purpose—to evaluate the critical merits of a book. Furthermore, I looked specifically at book reviews that are intended for school librarians in order to examine the ways in which these reviews position texts, characters, and the school librarians who read them as they select the books for students to access.

Data Sources

Each year, the American Library Association puts out a list of LGBTQ books for YA library collections called "The Rainbow List" (ALA, n.d.) Books appearing on this list have "significant and authentic" LGBTQ content and are chosen by members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table. This is a group of individuals working in the profession who are assembled to make recommendations to different kinds of libraries (public, academic, school, etc.) with regard to LGBTQ patrons. Data for this study come from reviews for books on the 2015 list, specifically those that were reviewed by the *School Library Journal* and the *Library Media Connection*. I chose these publications because they have been identified as important resources for school librarians (Bishop, 2012), and their reviews have been crafted specifically for school librarians and authored by librarians or other individuals working in the field of literacy education. I analyzed every review to locate the titles on The Rainbow List. Often the books were either not reviewed by these publications or reviewed only once. Reviews of 13 books appeared in one or both of these publications (although there were 19 YA books on the list in total); I located 21 relevant book reviews (including in other publications) for this data set.

Book reviews written in these publications are often 5–10 sentences in length. In both publications, the reviewer typically summarizes the plot of the book; makes a short, evaluative statement about the literary quality; and ends with a recommendation statement that gives school librarians an idea about whether the book should be added and for what sort of audience (Bishop, 2012). Both publications ask the reviewer to make a judgment about the appropriate age range for the book and also the book's position within the collection (e.g., Who is the reader for the book? Is it similar to any other popular titles?). The recommendation statements in these reviews proved to be especially useful in my analysis, and I will be referring to them in subsequent sections.

Analysis

In my analysis, I focused on the ways that language is used to construct the world and "speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world" (Gee, 2014, p. 9). CDA was useful for my project in that these brief reviews are crafted for a deliberate and specific purpose—to present the information necessary for a librarian to make a selection decision (*School Library Journal,* n.d.). Their focus is narrow and, in that way, the perspective of both the reviewer and, more important, the publication is clear.

Fairclough (2015) discusses the idea of "reproduction" and the way in which discourses are reproduced through the conventions of a particular discourse type. In other words, the reviewer draws on the conventions of review writing for YAL and is therefore limited by the way in which LGBTQ issues have been addressed in past reviews. Because Fairclough sees discourse as a tool for conveying ideology, reviews about LGBTQ YAL become political and mediate larger societal conversations. In this way, the language of book reviews is actively working to distribute social goods (Gee, 2014). Below, I detail the specific tools and concepts from CDA that guided my analysis.

Relational Values

Fairclough is interested in how language can be used to convey connections and relationships between the writer and the audience, or "how a text's choice of wordings depends on, and helps create, social relationships between participants" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 134). In book reviews, these relational values often position the characters and relationships in relation to heteronormative structures and, thus, are "assuming commonality of values with the readers" (p. 134). I looked for cues in the language of the reviews that convey a sense of common ideological ground between the reviewer and the audience. In other words, I watched for how the reviews could be working to "other" (Hall, 1997) certain books and readers who do not experience this common ground.

I looked for ideological creativity by identifying moments when the discourse of book reviews seems to have "gone wrong"—when book reviewers push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may limit the audience for LGBTQ books in school libraries.

Practices and Social Goods

Gee (2014) asks scholars to consider how language is used to enact certain types of practices. In the context of book reviews, language is the basis for making a recommendation about the book's position within a school library collection, the book's audience, and the book's literary merit. However, through this practice of recommending and discouraging the purchase of books, language is also used to distribute social goods; in this case, the social good is access to ideas, identities, and cultural contexts. Gee asks us to consider the question, "What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?" (p. 34). I was especially interested in the practices enacted in the recommendation statement at the end of reviews. The authors of the book reviews not only make statements about the ideal age range for intended readers, but they also attempt to create an audience for the book so that school librarians will know if their patrons will read them. Statements like, "This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone" (Whipple, 2014) not only identify an audience but also limit the potential audience for the book.

Textual Synonymy

Fairclough (2015) asks scholars to examine the experiential values that words have and how "ideological differences between texts in their representations of the world are coded in their vocabulary" (p. 131). In my analysis, I was particularly interested in how the features of experiential values, like textual synonymy, function within the language of book reviews. Textual synonymy refers to the way in which words are listed as equal attributes within a sentence and assume the same level of significance, regardless of how unrelated they may be in other discursive practices (Fairclough, 2015). I looked for cautionary language that linked sexual orientation to other controversial issues in an effort to demonstrate how reviews may be working to maintain and reproduce the controversial nature of LGBTQ themes. I identified several instances where the reviews attempt to alert school librarians to controversial content ("This book contains . . .") by linking homosexuality to controversial behaviors and content like profanity or violence. These instances are important in that they convey a naturalized understanding among librarians about what types of content should be considered controversial and the degree to which a topic can be deemed controversial.

Ideological Creativity

Fairclough discusses the concept of "creativity" (2015, p. 179) and how different discourse types can be restructured, combined, and used to create new ways of producing discourses; "Common-sense elements of discourse are brought out into the open when things go wrong in discourse [. . . and] people attempt to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discoursal common sense" (p. 125). I looked for ideological creativity by identifying moments when the discourse of book reviews seems to have "gone wrong"—when book reviewers push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may limit the audience for LGBTQ books in school libraries. In other words, if controversy is explicitly addressed, school librarians might (re)evaluate their own reluc-

tance to include materials. Within the language of book reviews, I located instances where the reviewer directly addresses potential controversy or book challenges. These instances illustrate how the reviewer can speak back to normative assumptions and work to disrupt some of the forces inhibiting LGBTQ YAL as it makes its way into school library collections.

I began my analysis by examining each review with these four tools and concepts in mind. I then grouped elements from each review based on themes that emerged related to my research questions. (Table 1 shows the frequency with which the themes presented themselves in the reviews.) In the following section, I detail my findings through representative reviews from my analysis.

Findings

Shared Heteronormative Values

The language used in book reviews often positions the characters and relationships in relation to heteronormative structures, thus "assuming commonality of values with the readers" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 134). The reviewer assumes that the reader shares an understanding about LGBTQ youth and their struggles. This idea is demonstrated in a review for *The Book of David* (Anonymous, 2014), a story of a teenage boy who struggles with coming out in his small community:

> Gr 9 Up—Growing up in the Midwest where football is king six days a week and church reigns on the seventh, *David has it all* [emphasis added in italicized quotations throughout

Table 1. Frequency of themes in book reviews

Themes	Exemplar Reviews (out of the 21 reviews analyzed, these were coded for each theme): Title/Author/Publication of Review (Titles in bold are the source of the quote in column 3.)	Additional exemplar quote for each theme
Relational values (Fairclough, 2015) and shared heteronormative values	1. *The Book of David*/ Anonymous/ *SLJ* 2. *The Book of David*/ Anonymous/ *LMC* 3. *I'll Give You the Sun*/ Jandy Nelson/ *LMC* 4. *One Man Guy*/ Michael Barakiva/ *LMC* 5. *Rethinking Normal*/ Katie Rain Hill/ *SLJ* 6. ***Screaming Divas*/ Suzanne Kamata/ *SLJ*** 7. *Some Assembly Required*/ Arin Andrews/ *SLJ* 8. *Tomboy: A Graphic Memoir*/ Liz Prince/ *LMC*	"Harumi is a violin prodigy with overbearing Japanese parents, and Esther is a confused teen struggling with her sexuality" (Pruitt-Goddard, 2014, p. 100).
Practices/social goods (Gee, 2014) and limiting the audience	1. *Beyond Magenta*/ Susan Kuklin/ *SLJ* 2. *Beyond Magenta*/ Susan Kuklin/ *LMC* 3. *The Book of David*/ Anonymous/ *SLJ* 4. *Grasshopper Jungle*/ Andrew Smith/ *LMC* 5. ***One Man Guy*/ Michael Barakiva/ *LMC*** 6. *Rethinking Normal*/ Katie Rain Hill/ *SLJ* 7. *Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel*/ Sara Farizan/ *SLJ* 8. *Tomboy: A Graphic Memoir*/ Liz Prince/ *LMC* 9. *Tomboy: A Graphic Novel*/ Liz Prince/ *SLJ*	"As one of very few YA titles featuring both LGBT and Armenian characters, this book allows readers to learn about these two groups. Readers belonging to one or both of these groups will appreciate seeing their lives reflected in literature" (Morrissey & Glantz, 2014, p. 57).
Textual synonymy (Fairclough, 2015) and naming controversial content	1. *Beyond Magenta*/ Susan Kuklin/ *LMC* 2. ***The Book of David*/ Anonymous/ *LMC*** 3. *Grasshopper Jungle*/ Andrew Smith/ *LMC* 4. *I'll Give You the Sun*/ Jandy Nelson/ *SLJ*	"The book contains scenes with underage drinking as well as some sexual content" (Torres & Glantz, 2014, p. 82).
Ideological creativity (Fairclough, 2015) and disrupting the narrative	1. *Afterworlds*/ Scott Westerfeld/ *SLJ* 2. ***Everything Leads to You*/ Nina LaCour/ *SLJ*** 3. *Far from You*/ Tess Sharpe/ *SLJ* 4. *Grasshopper Jungle*/Andrew Smith/ *SLJ* 5. *One Man Guy*/ Michael Barakiva/ *SLJ* 6. *Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel*/ Sara Farizan/ *SLJ*	"Their relationship proves to be a slow build, but teens will root for its success and relate to the novel's universal themes of love and loss" (Mastrull, 2014, p. 133).

this article] *as a star quarterback. He has a pretty cheerleader girlfriend* and a best friend, Tyler, who also plays football. *Life is sweet for David, until he meets the new kid at school, Jon,* and Tyler gets seriously injured, putting him out for the season. David's stardom rises with a streak of winning games that attracts the attention of college scouts and media. Tyler becomes bitter, and David forms a friendship with Jon. Through his senior English class journal, *David struggles with feelings for his new friend that he doesn't know how to interpret.* Jon evokes something in him like no one else has before, including his girlfriend. The narrative *gives readers realistic insight into the often heartbreaking and confusing world of sexual identity and acceptance. David knows that by accepting that he is in love with Jon, he will seriously damage his relationship with friends, family, and the greater community.* A list of resources for LGBTQ youth is included. This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone. (Whipple, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

In constructing this review, the reviewer is writing for an imagined heteronormative audience of school librarians rather than challenging the naturalized ideas embedded within it.

Although the plot of this book involves a teen who is quietly struggling with sexual orientation, the reviewer does not challenge the idea that David is experiencing this struggle because he is different, thereby naturalizing (Fairclough, 2015) a discourse about gay teens as "others" (Hall, 1997, p. 330). Fairclough explains naturalization: "If a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary and will come to be seen as natural" (p. 113). The reviewer emphasizes that before David started having feelings for Jon, "life was sweet" and "he had it all." Once David begins to struggle, he is given sole responsibility for disrupting his relationships with "friends, family, and the greater community." The reviewer states that "*he* will seriously damage" those relationships by acting on his desire for Jon. By giving David all of the agency in this situation and not problematizing the narrative in the story, the reviewer naturalizes the idea that David's attraction to Jon will disrupt the heteronormative way of life in his Midwestern town. David's struggle, therefore, is constructed as an internal problem that he must address alone; in other words, the reviewer places responsibility on him rather than on the greater community. In constructing this review, the reviewer is writing for an imagined heteronormative audience of school librarians rather than challenging the naturalized ideas embedded within it.

In the review for *One Man Guy*, Michael Barakiva's (2014) bildungsroman about Alek, an Armenian American boy who develops feelings for his friend Ethan, the reviewer reproduces a naturalized narrative about parents and their reaction to learning that their child is gay:

> First time novelist Michael Barakiva offers readers the story of a traditional Armenian-American family. Alek Khederian learns that he will be excluded from a family vacation and forced to attend summer school. Things look up when handsome Ethan appears in Algebra class. The two strike up a friendship, and soon a romance blossoms. Just when things are going well, Alek's parents return home early to a messy house, truancy notices, and Ethan and Alek together. *Alek's parents are relatively unfazed to learn that he is gay, but are very upset about the absences from school.* As one of very few YA titles featuring both LGBT and Armenian characters, this book allows readers to learn about these two groups. Readers belonging to one or both of these groups will appreciate seeing their lives reflected in literature. (Morissey & Glantz, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

By using the phrase "relatively unfazed," the reviewer is working to uphold the unchallenged understanding that when children reveal their sexuality, there is cause for distress, and parents require a period of adjustment and acceptance.

Limiting the Audience

In the recommendation statements of book reviews, the authors attempt to name an audience that would likely read and appreciate the book. In order to demonstrate the way in which this practice leverages social goods, I will discuss a book review for *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (Kuklin, 2014), a nonfiction book that examines the personal stories of several young adults.

> Gr 9 Up—Extended interviews with six very different transgender, genderqueer, and intersex young adults allow these youth to tell their stories in their own words. Author-interviewer-photographer Kuklin interjects only briefly with questions or explanations, so that the voices of these youth—alternately proud and fearful, defiant and subdued, thoughtful and exuberant—shine through. While

> the interview subjects do occasionally ramble or become vague, the power of these 12-to-40 page interviews is that readers become immersed in these young adults' voices and experiences. The youth interviewed here do not uniformly share It Gets Better-style happy endings, but their strength is nonetheless inspirational as they face ongoing challenges with families, sexual and romantic relationships, bullies, schools, transitions, mental health, and more. The level of detail about their lives, and the diversity of their identities—including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and geography—provide a powerful antidote to the isolation and stigma that some transgender youth experience. Photographs of four of the subjects, including some before-and-after transition pictures from childhood and adolescence, help tell their stories and bring their transitions to life. Extensive back matter includes an interview with the clinical director of a health program for LGBTQI [the "I" indicates Intersex] youth, a glossary, and books, media, websites, and organizations of interest to transgender youth. *While this book's format and subject matter are probably never going to attract a broad audience, there is much here that will resonate with and hearten the kids who need it and will foster understanding and support among those who live and work with transgender teens.* (Stone, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

The practice enacted at the end of this review is one that limits the audience for this book. The reviewer writes that the book is "probably never going to attract a broad audience." This statement does two things. First, it assumes that a broad audience would not read a book about LGBTQ teens and, second, it signals to librarians that if they purchase the book, it may not have an audience. The social goods presented in this review are the experiences of LGBTQ teens, and the book reviewer assumes that the readers and receivers of that social good will be LGBTQ teens and those who "live and work with" them. By limiting the audience in this way, the reviewer is communicating a perspective about this social good by denying that it might be important for *all* teens to read.

In another example from the book review of *The Book of David*, the reviewer limits the audience in a similar way: "This compelling story is good for young adults who are quietly struggling with their own sexual identity and need to know they are not alone" (Whipple, 2014).

In this case, the book is for young people who struggle with their sexual identity but not for young adults who are not engaged in that struggle. Furthermore, it assumes that students who do not identify as LGBTQ would not struggle with their sexual identities. This statement is problematic because not only does it limit the audience for the book, but it advances a narrow view about young people and sexual identity.

Naming Content as Controversial

The warning statements found at the end of the following two reviews reveal the ways that textual synonymy is used (Fairclough, 2015). The reviewers alert the school librarian to controversial material, but the naming of content as controversial conveys ideology that is both embedded in and guiding collection development practices. Words take on an ideological character when they are collocated within language or are positioned as textual synonyms. The first book review I discuss was written in response to Andrew Smith's (2014) *Grasshopper Jungle*. In this science fiction novel, the main character, Austin, narrates the end of the world as his fictional Iowa town is overtaken by giant praying mantises.

> Ealing, Iowa is the home to Austin and Robby who like to skateboard and smoke cigarettes behind Grasshopper Jungle, a failing strip mall. Austin and Robby see high school bullies steal a glass globe containing a toxin. When the globe breaks, the toxin releases and combines with Robby's blood: the resulting combination infects several people. Several days later, giant praying mantises hatch from every infected person. The two boys determine that Robby's blood can be used to kill the insects. Andrew Smith has written a book that will appeal to teenage boys. Written in quirky prose, it contains a vast backstory and lots of action. Characters are complex and well-developed. *The book contains sexual scenes, homosexuality, underage drinking, violence, extreme profanity, and tobacco and drug use.* Readers looking for a humorous science fiction horror novel will enjoy *Grasshopper Jungle*. (Thompson, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

With the italicized warning statement, the reviewer places homosexuality in a list of controversial themes in the book, including violence and profanity. By connecting the words in this proximal way, they function as synonyms and carry the same depth of meaning. In this case, homosexuality is controversial in the same ways as violence and profanity.

In a more subtle example from a book review for *Beyond Magenta* (Kuklin, 2014), we can see the experiential value that words have:

> Six teenagers share their positive and negative experiences after discovering they are transgender or gender neutral. They describe their initial confusion, gradual recognition

> of being different, the coming out process and transitioning, and finally acceptance of their sexuality. This book examines a sensitive issue and explains the spectrum and diversity within the transgender community as well as defines the distinction between transgenders and individuals identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Medications such as hormones, including their potential side effects, and surgical procedures are explained. This book is a valuable resource for students desiring information on gender identity and the LGBTQ community. *It contains frank discussion of sexual activity and profanity, and includes photographs of the teens sharing their stories* as well as notes, movies, and organizations. (Schulz, 2014; reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

While book reviews can inhibit collection development, they can also function as important and radical sites for resistance.

Here, textual synonymy connects "frank discussions of sexual activity and profanity" to "photographs of teens sharing their stories." Within other forms of discourse, there would be no connection between these two elements. However, by placing them together, we see that the reviewer believes that a school librarian needs to be aware of both of these elements, and photographs become controversial. Certainly, photographs considered independently would not be considered controversial or worth a warning for a school librarian, but positioning the content next to sexual activity and profanity suggests that the photographs would contribute to that content.

Disrupting the Narrative

While I found many examples of troubling themes throughout the reviews I analyzed, there were also examples of reviewers disrupting these discourses in an attempt to alert the reader to problematic discourses that could be working against these LGBTQ texts. Fairclough (2015) calls this ideological creativity, and by identifying these moments in the discourse of book reviews, it is possible to see the ways in which book reviewers are able to push boundaries and talk back to discourses that may be limiting the audience for LGBTQ books and tightening the boundaries of the collection. In order to demonstrate this, I present another book review for *Grasshopper Jungle* (Smith, 2014):

> It used to be that the only interesting events to occur in crumbling Ealing, Iowa happened between the pages of 16-year-old Austin Szerba's "history" journals. Austin's journals are elaborate and uncensored records about sex; his love for his girlfriend, Shann; his growing attraction for his best friend, Robby; his unique Polish ancestors; even Ealing's decrepit mini-mall where he and Robby hang out. Shann tells Austin, "I love how, whenever you tell a story, you go backwards and forwards and tell me everything else that could possibly be happening in every direction, like an explosion." And that's exactly how Austin narrates the end of the world when a twist of fate sparks the birth of mutant, people-eating praying mantises. Austin not only records the hilarious and bizarre tale of giant, copulating bugs but his own sexual confusion and his fear about hurting the people he loves. Award-winning author Smith has cleverly used a B movie science fiction plot to explore the intricacies of teenage sexuality, love, and friendship. *Austin's desires might garner buzz and controversy among adults but not among the teenage boys who can identify with his internal struggles.* This novel is proof that when an author creates solely for himself—as Smith notes in the acknowledgments section—the result is an original, honest, and extraordinary work that speaks directly to teens as it pushes the boundaries of young adult literature. (Giarratano, 2014; reproduced with permission from School Library Journal. © Copyright Library Journals, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.)

In this review, the book reviewer speaks directly to other reviewers, school librarians, and adults who may be positioning this book and its content as controversial. Rather than hiding the potentially controversial content behind some of the experiential or relational values that Fairclough describes, the book reviewer addresses that content explicitly, demonstrating an effective strategy for pushing against the boundaries of acceptable content in school library collections. This review can serve as a model for ideological creativity that pushes boundaries in book reviews in order to "speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world" (Gee, 2014, p. 9). While book reviews can inhibit collection development, they can also function as important and radical sites for resistance.

Discussion

School librarians engage in critical library practice through the process of selecting materials for their collections. They have a responsibility to provide students with uninhibited access to ideas and identities

through the literature and materials that are put on library shelves (American Library Association, 2006). A main function of the language of book reviews is to define an audience for a given book. However, this study illustrates some of the ways in which the audience for LGBTQ literature is narrowly presented through that language. The stories of LGBTQ youth deserve space in library collections, particularly because books published with these stories are rare (Greenblatt, 2010). While it is true that LGBTQ teenagers should have access to these materials, there is also a need for all students to have access to these materials as schools attempt to encourage the development of students as allies in an effort to combat homophobia (Blackburn, 2012).

School librarians are always working within the constraints of their schools' budgets. That makes it all the more likely that they will respond to book reviews like the ones I have presented by choosing not to purchase these titles, fearing that the books will not be read by a sufficiently broad audience. Contributing to their reluctance are reviewers who speak to their audiences and assume common ground and shared heteronormative values; however inadvertently, these reviewers are upholding and reinforcing oppressive structures.

School librarians have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across curricular areas (Everhart, 2013) and are uniquely positioned to provide and suggest materials to support student learning (Hughes-Hassell, 2005). However, if the books do not find their way onto library shelves, there is no chance that they will be read by students and utilized in classrooms. By naming homosexuality as controversial, the language of book reviews works to exclude LGBTQ materials from many school library collections. However, this study suggests that not only should reviewers consider their language, but school librarians should critically examine what is being named as controversial in these reviews. Given society's rapidly evolving ideas about sexuality and sexual orientation (Thein, 2013), the controversial "nature" of LGBTQ materials has become outdated and should be challenged.

Finally, there is opportunity for subversion of some of these oppressive structures within the language of book reviews. Rather than passively accepting and reproducing assumptions about LGBTQ content, book reviewers have opportunities to disrupt them. For example, the language of book reviews can be used to challenge some of these normative assumptions about what is controversial content in school library collections by calling librarians' attention to limiting discourses. When reviewers speak directly to fears about book challenges, they are asking school librarians to more carefully consider their position on including LGBTQ materials for the students they serve.

Implications

For Practice

The assumptions about audience and constructions of controversial content revealed in this study need to be challenged in order to ensure a wide readership of critically acclaimed and important novels. When we fail to make texts available to all readers, we withhold social goods (Gee, 2014) and naturalize ideas about what young adults should read. Educating school librarians to recognize these discursive practices could position them to challenge these practices. Within school library courses for young adult literature or collection development, students might practice critically reading, analyzing, and writing book reviews. They might also discuss how these reviews can be written in ideologically creative and disruptive ways.

When we fail to make texts available to all readers, we withhold social goods (Gee, 2014) and naturalize ideas about what young adults should read.

Furthermore, because many of these reviews are written by practicing librarians, they as authors are in a position to interrogate and modify their own reviewing practices when they encounter LGBTQ literature. School librarians might also modify their collection development practices by consulting diverse reviewing sources and promoting these materials to a broad audience within their schools. Teachers, librarians, and administrators must advocate for fair and honest book reviews in order to support the inclusion of LGBTQ materials in collections. Access to information and ideas is an important component of social justice (Gregory & Higgins, 2013), and school librarians are

uniquely poised to engage in this kind of social justice work.

For Research

Findings from this study suggest many possible avenues for future research. Book reviews often discuss sex and sexuality if it is present in young adult literature, but it would be illuminating to compare book review language describing sexual content in books that feature LGBTQ relationships with the sexual content in books that feature heterosexual relationships. In her book, Lydia Kokkola (2013) examines how queer sexualities are dismissed and delegitimized by adults. Does queer sexuality in YA titles receive more attention in recommendations and warning statements than heterosexuality does? Parallel to that study, it might also be revealing to conduct a content analysis of sexuality and its function within a book alongside the reviews for the title.

Any work done to challenge and disrupt assumptions about youth that are hidden in language will ultimately work to ensure access to ideas and information that accurately reflect the embodied experiences of young adults.

The study reported here could also be expanded to consider the book reviews written for titles that are not a part of ALA's "Rainbow List." The books on this list have received some type of critical acclaim and therefore receive attention in many publications, but scholars have yet to consider the books that fall in the more liminal spaces in the young adult publishing world that do not find their way into review publications. Along those lines, this article only considers reviews from two specific journals, but reviews and critical attention for many of these books can be found in other publications (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Booklist*) and in blogs, websites, and even more informal reviewing outlets (e.g., Amazon customer reviews or Common Sense Media parent reviews). It would be useful to compare the ways in which different review sources approach LGBTQ YAL.

Last, with theories from Critical Youth Studies (Lesko, 2012) in mind, it would be useful to examine the age ranges that reviewers assign to LGBTQ books based on the type of content and characters featured in the texts. Any work done to challenge and disrupt assumptions about youth that are hidden in language will ultimately work to ensure access to ideas and information that accurately reflect the embodied experiences of young adults.

Jenna Spiering *is a PhD candidate in Language, Literacy, and Culture at the University of Iowa where she teaches courses in children's and adolescent literature to preservice teachers. She has also worked as a school librarian for five years. Her research interests include young adult literature analysis, literature discussion, and critical youth studies. She can be reached at jenna-spiering@uiowa.edu.*

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Nicole P. **Clawson**

Treasure Island and *The Chocolate War*:

Fostering Morally Mature Young Adults through Amoral Fiction

Almost one century apart, Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Cormier each incited literary revolutions with their first novels, *Treasure Island* (Stevenson, 1883/2012) and *The Chocolate War* (Cormier, 1974/2004). Stevenson broke the Victorian didactic model, and Cormier wrote through the lens of New Realism in the 1970s. These novels changed what was expected of young adult readers in their respective eras. Both authors nurtured in their contemporary young readers, and continue to nurture in their readers today, an ability to work through complex human experiences.

These novels can be classified as amoral fiction, which is fiction that presents characters or situations that cannot be classified as either good or bad. Amoral fiction provides opportunities for readers to navigate murky moral situations without the help or heavy-handedness of adult preaching. Furthermore, *Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War* either highlight or manipulate the role of a moral agent—one who can discern what is right regardless of prior convictions. Discarding didacticism in favor of amoral scenarios in their novels indicates a trust that Stevenson and Cormier have in their readers—a trust that fosters the development of morally responsible adolescents. In essence, the receptive reader can live vicariously through and question the actions of the protagonists. Like Cormier, Stevenson pushes his readers to "*think*, to extrapolate beyond the end and connect what they have read with what they will do with their lives in the world" (Myers, 2000, p. 461). Although *Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War* come from vastly different eras, their revolutionary styles are incredibly similar; each author trusts his readers to navigate morally ambiguous situations to develop their own autonomy.

Stevenson and Amoral Fiction

Stevenson set the groundwork for amoral fiction in his essay "A Gossip on Romance" (1882), originally published in *Longman's Magazine*. In his essay, he underscores the difference between immoral and amoral fiction. He claims that romance fiction should mimic real life and that it should be:

> a-moral; which either does not regard the human will at all, or deals with it in obvious and healthy relations; where the interest turns, not upon what a man shall choose to do, but on how he manages to do it; not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms, or the diplomacy of life. (Stevenson, 1882, p. 70)

In essence, Stevenson proposes that by reading amoral fiction, readers will learn or vicariously experience how to deal practically with conflicts that will inevitably arise in their own lives. Stevenson (1882) writes, "There is a vast deal in life and letters both which is not immoral, but simply a-moral" (p. 70). Amoral fiction, then, introduces readers to the mechanics of dealing with "the human will" in an "obvious and healthy" manner. Stevenson's fiction, like Cormier's, fosters the idea that readers will develop "practical intelligence" as they work through morally complicated dilemmas. Furthermore, this type of literature portrays and gives "obvious and healthy" real-life lessons, whereas the lessons found in didactic pieces are not applicable to real life. It goes without saying that real

life is more complex than the lives presented in *Little Goody Two-Shoes* (Anonymous, 1765) or *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes, 1857)—stories written for young people to provide moral guidance rather than challenging content.

Stevenson redefined Victorian boys' adolescent literature by challenging the sententious children's literature so prevalent in his era. He let go of the accepted practice of didacticism in adolescent literature in favor of entrusting his readers with complex and morally ambiguous situations. *Treasure Island* was Stevenson's landmark amoral text, which changed the face of adolescent adventure literature (Darton, 1982, p. 300). The novel recounts Jim Hawkins's adventure aboard the schooner *Hispaniola* and the hunt for Captain Flint's treasure. Jim hides in apple barrels to learn of mutiny, pilots the *Hispaniola*, and kills a man for the first time. Jim fights against *and* alongside pirates while questioning the meaning of duty. *Treasure Island* highlights the duality that exists in everyone—notorious person of fortune and respectable country squire alike. The moral ambiguity found in *Treasure Island* is underscored by Jim's interactions with Long John Silver's complex and equivocal personality. Silver, the villain, plots the mutiny aboard the *Hispaniola*; however, he also saves Jim's life knowing that the pirates will retaliate with the "black spot." Long John Silver is at times the villain and the hero.

Stevenson's father, who was heavily involved in the development of *Treasure Island*, was unsettled by Stevenson's almost heroic treatment of Silver, especially at the end of the novel where Silver gets away with some of the treasure. In response to his father's disapproval of Silver's outcome, Stevenson wrote, "I own I do not agree with you about the later chapters of *Treasure Island*. I think John Silver in his later developments about as good as anything in it. I should say about the best of it. So there is a hitch" (as cited in Booth & Mehew, 1994, vol. 3, p. 294). It is apparent that Stevenson's strict, Calvinist father was uncomfortable with the "bad guy" getting off scot-free. Furthermore, it is intriguing that Stevenson claims that Long John Silver, the villain, is the "best" of the novel. Even in the *Saturday Review* in 1883, Walter H. Pollock claims that the real hero of the novel is Long John Silver. Pollock wrote, "[A]nd you feel, when the story is done, that the right name of it is not *Treasure Island*, but *John Silver, Pirate*" (as cited in Booth & Mehew, 1994, vol. 4, p. 217). While Stevenson believes that Silver's role in the novel is one of the best parts of the story, he also expects the reader to decide if Long John Silver and Jim each follow a moral path, since neither of their actions can be classified as all good or all bad.

The amoral content of Stevenson's *Treasure Island* was of such caliber that it appealed to both pleasure readers and more discerning readers. It found a ready audience among young readers and older readers alike, and even Prime Minister William Gladstone was known to have stayed awake until all hours enthralled with *Treasure Island* (Sutherland, 2012, p. 225). However, the novel was not without critics. Along with his father's disapproval of the text, Stevenson's wife, Fanny, was less than happy about having her husband's name attached to such a novel (Sutherland, 2012, p. 230). As Stevenson unfettered the adventure story from its didactic chains, such authors as Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*, 1885), Anthony Hope (*The Prisoner of Zenda*, 1894), and John Buchan (*Prester John*, 1910) followed suit, and the genre was never the same. These novels made the genre "grow up into greater maturity, but in doing so gave it also the chance of growing clean out of boyhood" (Darton, 1982, p. 300).

Stevenson redefined Victorian boys' adolescent literature by challenging the sententious children's literature so prevalent in his era. He let go of the accepted practice of didacticism in adolescent literature in favor of entrusting his readers with complex and morally ambiguous situations.

Cormier and the Morally Ambiguous

Almost one century later, ripples from Stevenson's literary revolution were being found in Robert Cormier's work. Like Stevenson, Cormier trusts his readers and expects the same potential for them to gain moral maturity. The years leading up to Cormier's radical text *The Chocolate War* were ones of change. According to Townsend (1996), adolescent literature of the 1960s reflected the general discontent and disillusionment with authority (pp. 272–273). Authors were

considered "pioneers" if they mentioned, let alone discussed, issues such as "unwed motherhood, school dropouts, mental illness and the problems confronting children of divorced or alcoholic parents" in their literature (Townsend, 1996, p. 276). Although Cormier did not intend for *The Chocolate War* to be labeled a young adult novel, it was received as one and should be critiqued as one. Keeping the public's reception of his work as a young adult novel in mind, it should be noted that regardless of Cormier's original intended audience, Cormier's purpose was the same—to portray life as it really is. Cormier "den[ies] his readership a romantic view of society and . . . subvert[s] a unitary view of childhood through the content and form of his work" (Head, 1996, p. 28). Cormier's work blew past all of the previous attempts to break with traditional cultural standards. His violence was grittier; his outcomes were bleaker.

In writing amoral realism, Cormier expunges any bit of didacticism from his texts. Like Stevenson, Cormier trusts his reader to digest his rough content without the heavy-handed guidance of an author.

In writing amoral realism, Cormier expunges any bit of didacticism from his texts. Like Stevenson, Cormier trusts his reader to digest his rough content without the heavy-handed guidance of an author. *The Chocolate War* tells the story of Jerry Renault's interaction with his prep school's secret society, the Vigils, and their ring leader, Archie Costello. As an "assignment," Archie makes Jerry decline participation in the school's chocolate fundraiser for two weeks. At the end of the assignment, Jerry continues to refuse to sell the chocolates and temporarily becomes a hero for standing against the system.

This enrages Brother Leon, who is in charge of the fundraiser, and he enlists Archie's help to turn the tide against Jerry. The Vigils conspire to change Jerry from a hero to pariah and then, ultimately, to victim. At the close of the novel, Archie orchestrates a boxing match and manipulates Jerry and the school bully, Emile Janza, into participating. Brother Leon looks on as Jerry is violently and brutally beaten by Emile. Archie is a complex character, at once commendable and repulsive. Townsend (1996), speaking of the villain in *The Chocolate War*, says, "It is hard to avoid seeing the gang boss—cool, subtle, unscrupulous Archie Costello—as the hero" (p. 279). This sentiment reminds readers of what Walter Pollock said of Long John Silver. Both Long John Silver and Archie might be considered "heroes" of their respective novels, but this is problematic since both of them act good *and* bad, depending on which serves their own self-interests.

Throughout *The Chocolate War*, we see instances of Jerry's resilience as he is beaten only to struggle back to his feet. He is strong and tough, and the reader is imbued with hope that Jerry will come out the hero. However, Jerry is physically and mentally crushed at the end of the novel; he is unable and unwilling to stand in rebellion against the bad guys, which strips him of his earlier heroic title. This demonstrates Cormier's insistence on representing life as it really is—that sometimes bad people win, and sometimes bad people seem to be good.

Because of its amoral characters and morally ambiguous content, Cormier's work has been regularly banned and contested. Even as recently as 2004, *The Chocolate War* topped the ALA's Most Challenged Book List (American Library Association, 2005, para. 1). However, regardless of the criticism, Cormier's success created license for other authors to follow suit. According to Townsend (1996), authors such as Chris Lynch (*Iceman,* 1994), Michael Cadnum (*Calling Home*, 1991), and Erika Tamar (*Fair Game*, 1993) followed Cormier's example and pushed the "frontiers of permissibility" (p. 280). Today, the "frontiers of permissibility" are still being tested with books such as *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell (2005) and *Saga* by Brian Vaughan and Fiona Staples (2012), which also use amoral situations to get to a higher truth. Through using amoral situations, Cormier gets to his higher truth by fostering the growing autonomy of his readers. According to Frank Myszor, Cormier "achieves this moral goal by structuring the novel so as to require an 'interrogative' style of reading" (as cited in Tarr, 2002, p. 96). Cormier expects his readers to be "active and involved critic[s]" and, in doing so, he creates a more knowledgeable and mature young adult (Head, 1996, p. 31). By writing fiction that acknowledges moral ambiguity, Cormier, like Stevenson, anticipates that readers will question morally complex situations so as to learn

from them and determine how they might respond to similar experiences in their own lives.

Moral Agency across Authors

Stevenson and Cormier use amoral literature to underscore the role and value of a moral agent. A "moral agent," as defined by Rachels (1986) in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy,* is:

> someone who is concerned impartially with the interests of everyone affected by what he or she does; who carefully sifts facts and examines their implications; who accepts principles of conduct only after scrutinizing them to make sure they are sound; who is willing to "listen to reason" even when it means that his or her earlier convictions may have to be revised; and who finally is willing to act on the results of deliberation. (p. 11)

By looking closely at the innovative novels *Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War*, one begins to understand the ramifications of such groundbreaking amoral texts. The consequence of these original works is that they push their readers to encounter real-life ambiguities through fiction. In *Treasure Island*, Stevenson showcases the development of Jim becoming a moral agent. *Treasure Island* is rife with instances where Jim needs to put aside his prior convictions and prejudices about pirates and the "best men of society" for the good of the expedition and, frankly, for survival. It is significant that Jim finds his autonomy without relying on the set strictures of his culture. He becomes his own man.

Alternatively, Cormier manipulates the expected role of Jerry, the protagonist, who readers might assume will develop into a self-governing youth. Tarr claims that Jerry "actually has no idea whom he is fighting or what he is fighting for" and should not be considered a moral agent, as he is "clueless as to how his actions will affect others; he does not seem to deliberate on his actions; he does not listen to others' warnings" (2002, pp. 96–97). By playing with expectations, Cormier highlights what can happen if one does not open oneself up to such things as "listening to reason," because Jerry, who refuses to do so, is broken and defeated at the conclusion of the novel. Readers learn that to be a moral agent, one must think of how one's actions might affect others and be "willing to act on the results of deliberation," even if it is in direct opposition to one's prior beliefs.

Jerry, according to Tarr (2002), cannot be considered a rebel hero, either, as he is not actively engaged in any cause, nor does he identify with any cause (p. 96). Jerry's inaction and lack of deliberation affect his peers and teachers because the entire school becomes embroiled in the eponymous Chocolate War. Furthermore, the entire school is implicated in Jerry's destruction by viewing and paying for the brutal Gladiator-like boxing match between Jerry and Emile. By providing a bleak outcome for his hero, Cormier expects readers to question what they might do differently than Jerry. Even though the novel does not show the development of a moral agent, it aids readers in becoming their own moral agents as they respond to Jerry's actions.

Ultimately, the act of reading these amoral novels, though different in their approaches, introduces the reader to what it means to become a moral agent. In turn, the reader learns to examine morally ambiguous situations without leaning on adults' or society's strictures.

Lasting Effects

The ripples first created by Stevenson's amoral text and furthered by Cormier's are still being felt. Many scholars and critics are still asking the same questions about the benefits or disadvantages of amoral messages in the literature read by our youth today. Ratzan (2013) claims that amoral novels, particularly ones like Cormier's and Stevenson's, challenge readers to "be *better* than [Cormier's or Stevenson's] characters, and to make the real world a more hopeful place than [their] imagined one" (2013, para. 10). By creating a situation where the author entrusts his or her readers with the charge of bringing their own hope, the author is "respect[ing] the intelligence of [his or her] readers . . . and this degree of respect may be the most hopeful quality of all" (Ratzan, 2013, para. 11).

According to critic A. S. MacLeod, Cormier, like Stevenson, "departed from standard models and [broke] some of the most fundamental taboos" of adolescent fiction (as cited in Head, 1996, p. 28). Both *Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War* challenged the tradition that adolescent literature was a "sort of cultural touchstone that could, or should, comfort its readers or reinforce certain cultural codes" (Head, 1996, p. 29). Many novels by Stevenson's and Cormier's contemporaries, which reinforced their society's cultural standards, do not reflect reality. Furthermore,

these contemporary novels do not allow young adults to grapple with the reality that good and bad are not always clearly delineated; sometimes the protagonist might not be a good person or might not make morally responsible choices. Alternatively, both Stevenson's and Cormier's novels use morally ambiguous protagonists and, in doing so, are "interested in the relation between childhood experience and the emergence of a moral grownup and how writing can foster that" (Myers, 2000, p. 451).

By looking closely at the innovative novels *Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War*, one begins to understand the ramifications of such groundbreaking amoral texts. The consequence of these original works is that they push their readers to encounter real-life ambiguities through fiction.

Treasure Island and *The Chocolate War* each changed the face of adolescent literature. Stevenson, through *Treasure Island*, eschews didacticism in favor of giving autonomy to his readers in the hopes that they will in turn become morally responsible individuals. Cormier, through *The Chocolate War*, followed suit, placing trust in his readers by breaking standard cultural assumptions of what should be written about in young adult literature. *The Chocolate War* is a gritty, realistic book that allows readers to question how they would respond if they were faced with similar insurmountable odds. No longer did adolescent readers always have the answers to moral dilemmas delineated for them. As both novels made the genre grow up, so too did they change what is expected of the adolescent reader—to grapple with and confront realistic, morally ambiguous situations.

Nicole Clawson *is a graduate student at Brigham Young University. She focuses on late-nineteenth-century British feminist literature, with an emphasis on print culture and book history. Currently, she is the managing editor of the Victorian Short Fiction Project, which is both a pedagogical project for undergraduate students and a digital archival endeavor. Besides spending time in Harold B. Lee Library's Special Collections room reading and researching Victorian periodicals, Nicole loves hiking, eating Mexican food, and traveling. She returned to her first love, Victorian literature, after enduring the early years of raising two sets of twins—a scenario Robert Cormier could have easily added to any of his bleak plots.*

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Hilary **Crew**

Revisiting the Vietnam War:

Chris Lynch's Vietnam Series and the Morality of War

As the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War is being commemorated, there is renewed debate around the moral justification for the United States' armed intervention in Vietnam and the ethical issues relating to the conduct of military personnel. Chris Lynch has revisited the Vietnam War for young adult readers in his five-novel series: *Vietnam: I Pledge Allegiance* (Lynch, 2011), *Sharpshooter* (Lynch, 2012a), *Free-Fire Zone* (Lynch, 2012b), *Casualties of War* (Lynch 2013), and *Walking Wounded* (Lynch, 2014). Teaching about war, argues Paul L. Atwood (2005), involves exploding the myths associated with war and helping students critically examine the rationales and justifications for going to war, including the concepts of patriotism and heroism. Lynch's series can engage young adults in critical thinking about the Vietnam War through the experiences of four young soldier protagonists who serve in the US Navy, Army, Marines, and Air Force. Drawing upon just war theory and writings on the ethics of war, I examine how Lynch's series addresses moral and ethical issues that have been raised post-Vietnam and use examples from Lynch's novels to suggest topics for classroom discussion.

Summaries of Novels

Lynch's novels trace the friendship and service careers of Morris, Ivan, Rudi, and Beck, four young men from Boston who pledged friendship in fourth grade and agreed not to sign up for the Vietnam War unless one of them received a draft notice, in which case they would all sign up. When 19-year-old Rudi receives his draft letter, his friends honor their pledge. Each young man tells about his combat experiences in Vietnam in one of the novels in the series.

In the first, *I Pledge Allegiance* (Lynch, 2011), Morris describes his first assignment as an aviation electrician's mate on the missile cruiser USS *Boston*. He witnesses the superior firepower of the American Navy bombard the Vietnamese coast before the ship is damaged by friendly fire and must return to Boston. When Morris returns to Vietnam, he is reassigned as a radioman on a heavily armed Riverine Assault Force vessel on the Mekong River. Morris's experiences are key to discussions of the ethics of a guerilla warfare waged by a superpower using technologically advanced weapons.

Ivan, the narrator of the second novel, *Sharpshooter* (Lynch, 2012a), is a superior marksman assigned to the Ninth Infantry where he undergoes extensive training as a sniper. Coming from a military family, Ivan willingly honors the pledge to serve in Vietnam. He shares his thoughts as he is tested on his ability to be a sniper in the field, shoots his first Viet Cong sniper, survives a deadly ambush, and participates in a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol operation before volunteering for the Ninth Division's Sniper School.

Rudi, the narrator of *Free-Fire Zone* (Lynch, 2012b), the third novel in the series, struggled in school but thrives in the Marines because he can obey orders without having to think for himself. Rudi describes the patrols, the booby-trap in a deserted Vietnamese village that injures his leg, and his experienc-

es of combat and killing individual Viet Cong soldiers. From Rudi's story, readers gain an understanding of the moral and ethical issues faced by soldiers, including the murder of officers and the implementation of American war policies.

Beck, the narrator of the fourth novel, *Casualties of War* (Lynch, 2013), delays his scholarship to the University of Wisconsin–Madison against his parents' wishes and joins the Air Force. The crew of the plane to which he is assigned sprays Agent Orange on the Vietnamese forests, an act with which he disagrees and one that later informs his pacifist stance. After a group of service men is killed in an explosion while loading bombs, Beck is shaken, but despite his Captain's reservations, he insists that he continue flying missions. When his plane crashes in the jungle, his life is spared by a Christian Viet Cong soldier. Returning to Vietnam after retraining, he serves on an AC-47 gunship and struggles with his pacifist leanings when ordered to fire a gun. Beck's story is key to discussion of the tension between pacifism and patriotism.

Lynch's novels draw attention to policies in the Vietnam War that seem to violate "the principle of proportionality," or the balance between the good a war achieves and the harm it does, required for a just war (Walzer, 1977, p. 192).

In the fifth novel, *Walking Wounded* (Lynch, 2014), the voices of the four friends are brought together after the death of Rudi, who speaks from beyond the grave. Morris describes his journey accompanying Rudi's coffin back to Boston and his decision to return to Vietnam as a mortician. Beck writes to Morris to explain that he plans to join a veterans' anti-war group once his tour is over. Ivan must make a decision after he is awarded medals for his heroic actions in helping a convoy through enemy fire—a convoy he was using for escape following his shooting of Rudi in friendly fire. Morris persuades Ivan, holed up in his family's cabin, to do the right thing and give himself up. This novel places value on forgiveness and the moral responsibility of the individual.

Just War Theory

Political philosopher Michael Walzer (2002) states that it was the opposition to American intervention in Vietnam that prompted him and others to think seriously about the moral argument for war and how, in looking for a "moral language," they focused on the concept of a just war (pp. 928–929). In his seminal work, *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977), Walzer explains that his definition of the "moral reality of war" consists of *jus ad bellum,* which refers to whether a "particular war is just or unjust," and *jus in bello,* which refers to how a war is fought, such as the "observance or violation of the customary and positive rules of engagement" (p. 21). For a war to be considered just, it must be declared by a legitimate authority, involve self-defense against aggression, demonstrate proportionality between the good it achieves and the harm it does, and have a reasonable chance for success (Lee, 2012, p. 70). Walzer (1977) argues that the American war in Vietnam was unjustified because the US was "propping up a government . . . without a local political base" (p. 99) and that "it was an American war, *fought* for American purposes, in someone else's country" (p. 101).

The justness of a war fought on behalf of American interests is questioned by Lynch's soldier protagonists who express limited understanding of what they are fighting for in Vietnam. Ivan, for example, states in *Walking Wounded* that no American GI that he has met understands the mission in Vietnam. An acknowledgment that the Americans may be fighting an unjust war is heard in Ivan's admission that the Vietnamese are on "*their* home field" (p. 63); if their positions were reversed, and the Vietcong had come to his country "looking to shoot up the place," he would be just as vicious in defending his home ground (p. 64). The following sections focus on specific moral and ethical issues confronted by Lynch's protagonists, issues that contribute toward an exploration of the justness of the Vietnam War and how it was fought.

Ethics of the American War Machine

Lynch's novels draw attention to policies in the Vietnam War that seem to violate "the principle of proportionality," or the balance between the good a war achieves and the harm it does, required for a just war (Walzer, 1977, p. 192). America's military might,

viewed through Morris's observations in *I Pledge Allegiance,* is particularly pertinent to discussing the morality of a war in which the possession of a sophisticated weaponry by one side far exceeds the military capability of an adversary. Morris tells how he and his fellow recruits on the USS *Boston* touch with reverence the Navy's cannons that are going to "unleash" the "awesome power" to "change lives" (p. 50). Morris later describes the bombardment of the Vietnam coast from the USS *Boston* at the Gulf of Tonkin as he watches the bombing and shelling, the explosions and the columns of fire, and a sky filled with smoke, ash, and chemicals that represent, as Morris's crewmate puts it, "institutional, industrial-strength violence" (p. 60). Steven P. Lee (2012) points out that new weapons technology, such as precision-guided cruise missiles, was developed for "military effectiveness" and not for "moral effectiveness" (p. 223). An example of Lee's point is evidenced in Morris's recognition that in watching from a distance, it seemed that there was no "human presence" on the coast and that it was just as if they were "blowing up inanimate stuff" (p. 61). When Morris uses the phrases "it seemed" and "just as if," he confirms rather than disallows civilian deaths; he then compounds this sentiment when he goes on to report that the enemy had stopped firing: "From the explosions and ongoing villages of fire we have created, it seems we got our man, and then some" (p. 70).

The above episode can also be used to illustrate and challenge the doctrine of double effect, or justification for the bombing of military targets in which a "foreseeable but unintended side-effect of the action" (i.e., civilian deaths) will result. Under this doctrine, the bombing witnessed by Morris would be "permissible" because the objective is not to "intentionally" kill nearby civilians (Norman, 1995, pp. 83–84). These unintended consequences fall under the category of "collateral damage," to which little attention was paid in Vietnam (Goldstein, 2012, p. 5). The bombardment of the Vietnamese coast by the USS *Boston* in *I Pledge Allegiance* illustrates again the consequences of an asymmetrical war: lesser risk falls on those who kill from a distance. As the USS *Boston* fires on the Vietnamese coast, a Navy gunner comments that infrastructure, such as "tunnels and bridges, and supply lines" can be blown "right off the map," but "nobody even needs to get hurt." As Morris comes to understand, that is only because these "don't tend to shell you back" (p. 70).

Ethics of a Guerilla War

Moral and ethical issues are raised especially in a war like the Vietnam War—a guerrilla war in which military action occurs in the midst of a civilian population. War violates intentionally, or unintentionally, the basic rights of civilians (Lee, 2012, p. 137). In the Vietnam War, American policies resulted in the destruction of villages, the death of many civilians, and the displacement of thousands of rural people from their homes. Additionally, attacks on the infrastructure necessary for the enemy's survival in his or her country, such as destroying crops, livestock, and basic access to food and water, violate the criterion of proportionality in a just war. This violation on the part of US troops in Vietnam is acknowledged in *Casualties of War* when Beck states, "We are burning the life out of the country we are here to fight for" (p. 23), uttered as he sprays Agent Orange on the jungle foliage in South Vietnam.

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Distinguishing between civilians and insurgents in a guerilla war requires that soldiers make distinctions between combatants in military uniform and noncombatants and civilians (Benbaji, 2007, p. 559). The difficulty of distinguishing between innocent civilians and the guerrilla fighters who live among them is acknowledged by Rudi, who comments in *Free-Fire Zone* that he has "never yet worked out a reliable method for deciding which of the local people are innocently going about the business of living and which are hoping to skin [him] like a rabbit supper" (p. 128). An episode in which Rudi watches a Marine severely beat an old man and threaten to puncture him with a "Punji stick" dipped into "animal waste" (pp. 25–26) illustrates how guerilla fighters hiding among noncombatant civilians resulted in exposing noncombatants to attack and to being categorized between "loyal and disloyal, or friendly and hostile noncombatants" (Walzer, 1977, p. 193) rather than being identified as

specifically engaged in military activities. Rudi is told that the old man is a Viet Cong with information, but when he asks how his superior officers "know" that, he is told that they are the "professionals" and that he, Rudi, is "dismissed" (p. 26).

The Combined Action Program (CAP) was designed by the US Marine Corps to prevent guerilla fighters from hiding within villages in Vietnam. The village Chu Lai in which Rudi observes the beating is a CAP village in which units of Marines live full-time among the women, children, and older men left behind. Once you cannot separate guerrilla fighters from civilians, the war cannot be morally won because it becomes "an anti-social war" against the people (Walzer, 1977, p. 187). In *Free-Fire Zone*, Rudy reveals the failure of the CAP program in Chu Lai. He describes a deserted, dusty village whose inhabitants remain inside while American soldiers take turns patrolling the streets, where they are ambushed by Viet Cong hiding out in the surrounding land once farmed by locals. Rudy learns from the sergeant in charge that the CAP program's casualties and desertions have earned the program a reputation of being a "suicide mission" (p. 167). The much-repeated ideological objective of "winning the hearts and minds" of Vietnamese civilians is reiterated by the sergeant in charge of the failed CAP village, but a corporal voices the opinion that despite all they had done for the community, the people "ain't never coming over to our side" (p. 172).

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During the Vietnam War, free-fire zones, in which anyone who is unidentified is considered an enemy combatant, were introduced after "pressure was applied at each level of the [US] military command structure to record higher body counts" (Taylor, 2003, p. 115). In *Sharpshooter*, a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) leader's opinion that everywhere is a free-fire zone and that there are no civilians is illustrative of how a moral critique of the Vietnam War is embedded in Lynch's war narrative (pp. 168–169). Examples of military action in villages with real or questionable evidence of insurgent activity are found in *Sharpshooter* and *Free-Fire Zone.* In *Sharpshooter*, Ivan accompanies the LRRP to a village in Cambodia where he is posted as a guard. As the men of the village are gathered, two young men with American M-16 rifles emerge from a hut. Ivan, knowing nothing of the men, does not hesitate to kill them (p. 180). Soon after, as the women in the village return from fetching water, they witness the American soldiers leaving, each of them pushing a bound "mountain man" with a "bruised and bloodied mess on his face" before him (p. 181). As Ivan notes, other villagers would not be leaving the hut. In *Free-Fire Zone*, Rudi narrates how his unit is engaged in a firefight with guerrillas who are using a village as a communication center and depot for Viet Cong arms. In this village, the civilians have either fled or are among the dead when the Americans enter the booby-trapped huts (pp. 87–92).

An Ethics of Killing

An ethics of killing defines the circumstances under which killing in the context of war is acceptable or not. "At the cutting edge of combat," states Steven M. Silver (2006), "ethics are what separate soldiers from mercenaries and criminals" (p. 76). Pivotal to Lynch's novels are explorations of the differences between a soldier who kills and one who murders. From the beginning of their training, it is made clear to the four young recruits that their mission is to kill. In *Walking Wounded*, Morris explains that they "spend every day trying to slaughter as many as possible of the people we think need killing" (p. 51). He points out that most of the young soldiers "were not allowed to kill people before they arrived in Vietnam, but now they are "*urged* to do it" (p. 52). In *Sharpshooter,* Ivan, a superb marksman, is told at sniper school that he will become "very familiar with the concept of intimate killing" (p. 158). Also in *Sharpshooter*, Ivan describes how he spots and kills a Viet Cong sniper whose shot had just missed his lieutenant (pp. 118–127). Later, taking part of the dead Viet Cong's skull, Ivan holds it in his hands as if praying and bows to the "dead warrior" (p. 127). Ivan sees this as a "righteous" kill (p.130).

In *I Pledge Allegiance,* Rudi writes a letter to Morris describing in graphic terms his first confirmed kill

of a Viet Cong soldier, first by stabbing him with a bayonet and then cutting his throat (pp. 166–167). In *Casualties of War*, Rudi shows a photo of a Viet Cong soldier he has mutilated by carving a large capital "I" on his forehead in honor of his hero, Ivan (p. 176). In her survey of young adult novels about Vietnam published between 1985 and 1997, Overstreet (1998) noted an undermining of morality in her sample of young adult platoon novels, as soldiers were continually exposed to the brutality of combat (p. 130). In *Free-Fire Zone*, Rudi, shown to be fearless in dangerous situations, is Lynch's example of a soldier who, unmoored from the accepted rules and principles governing the ethics of combat, becomes addicted to killing.

Just war theory also addresses the question of whether and under what circumstances a soldier has the right of self-defense. The moral justification for self-defense in war is determined by whether a soldier is a responsible representative of a just or unjust war (Benbaji, 2007; McMahan, 2004). In order for an individual "to rebut the prohibition against the taking of life, one has to show that killing in self-defence [sic] is a necessary response to a threat to one's own life, or to some comparable threat" (Norman, 1995, p. 191). In *Free-fire Zone*, as one of the physically smaller members of his unit, Rudi volunteers to enter a Viet Cong tunnel. After crawling through the dark, he is struck from behind by a Viet Cong who makes a grab for his knife and successfully wrests his bayonet from him. Rudi shoots the Viet Cong, who lunges at him with the knife (pp. 131–144). This scene highlights Lynch's understanding of self-defense (and the complicated realities of right and wrong) in war.

Also related to the morality of killing, dehumanization of the enemy contributes toward the distancing and depersonalization of the enemy—a tactic deemed necessary to shield combatants from the moral and psychological inhibitions of killing (Norman, 1995, p. 185). Episodes and descriptions in the novels where Lynch exposes the amoral and dehumanizing effect of war can be identified in Morris's description of shooting napalmed Viet Cong soldiers on the banks of the Mekong River in *I Pledge Allegiance* (pp. 177–178) and Rudi's description of how he kills and mutilates in *Free-Fire Zone* (pp. 166–167). Rudi's actions, in particular, make the case that strong leadership is required for instilling a moral and ethical stance toward war.

Ethics and Leadership in the Military

Within the military, leaders are expected to instill ethical behaviors and values within their soldiers, emphasizing the "manifestations" of certain desired ethical behaviors: "loyalty, integrity, courage, and honor" (Silver, 2006, p. 76). Within Lynch's novels, military discipline and loyalty to a leader are addressed through the character of Rudi, who is represented as a young man with learning disabilities who had been regarded as a failure in school. He welcomes the discipline of the Marines and develops a new confidence and sense of power in his ability to follow orders. In *Free-Fire Zone,* Rudi's letter to Morris states that he is "great great great at taking orders no matter what they are" (p. 45). When Rudi tells his lieutenant that the best lesson is not to think, he is told that he is a "perfect soldier" (p. 120). In a search-and-destroy mission, Rudi is the only Marine to unequivocally follow the questionable orders of Lieutenant Jupp, who wishes to leave the field of action before visually confirming that the Viet Cong and village are destroyed. Rudi opines that he is a "good soldier" and that it is not his job to judge an officer's decisions (p. 77). It is "easy" for soldiers to free themselves from taking consequences for their actions in a context in which they are relentlessly trained to follow orders, but "it is a mistake to treat soldiers as if they were automatons who make no judgments at all" (Walzer, 1977, p. 311). Individuals are always responsible for their own "murderousness" (Walzer, 1977, p. 308).

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However, discussion can also focus on how the absence of responsible leadership contributes to Rudi's actions in killing the bound Viet Cong described in *Free-Fire Zone* (pp. 32–37). Without strong ethical leadership, unethical behavior can be contagious because of peer loyalty (Silver, 2007, p. 77). The "three excellent guys" on Rudi's patrol encourage him

as he mutilates the trussed up Viet Cong soldier (p. 167). Additionally, the negative influence of a lack of leadership on the morale among soldiers is illustrated by the fragging (murder) of Rudi's commanding officer, Lieutenant Jupp, by some of his own men. Jupp admits to bottoming out and being a "bad leader" during his second tour (p. 105). In this environment of lawlessness resulting from a lack of leadership, "nothing" can be done to maintain military justice (p. 116). This lingering sentiment is contained in the final novel, as well. In a letter to Morris in *Walking Wounded*, Beck writes that soldiers are refusing to fight and are "basically at war" with officers whom they see as failing to care about the lives of the men under their command. He even confides that officers are being killed (p. 154).

Lynch's novels can usefully contribute to a teaching unit on war in that they present a perspective on the Vietnam War that encourages readers to ask questions about the morality of the war and to think critically about the ethical and moral issues faced by the young men who fought in that war.

An Ethics of Pacifism

In defining pacifism, Steven P. Lee (2012) distinguishes between *unconditional pacifism* in which no exceptions are made; *conditional pacifism* that accepts that in war, a moral duty to save others overrides a duty not to kill; and a *relativistic "individual preference"* rather than a "universal moral view" (pp. 22–23). These definitions and the ethics of a pacifist stance to the war can be explored through the character of Beck, who delayed his scholarship to the University of Wisconsin–Madison to honor his pledge to his friends. Because of what he is asked to do in the war, Beck has "reason to form justified beliefs about the morality of the war" in which he is asked to fight (McMahan, 2004, p. 701). Beck's narrative is especially useful in exploring the contradiction he faces between his pacifist position and his patriotic duty.

A pacifist stance is taken up by Beck from the time he signs up for the war. In *Casualties of War*, he narrates that despite his choice to serve, he has "made a decision to fulfill [his] duty without deliberately and consciously taking one person's life" and that his goal when leaving Vietnam "will be to have learned everything possible about the machinery of organized killing, without actually killing" (p. 21). This is his "pledge" to himself, to "keep" him "right": "It was a pledge that got me into this thing, and it's a pledge that's going to get me out" (p. 21). He reiterates that he will neither kill nor get to know anyone he does not have to know because, he rationalizes, then he will not feel that person's loss (p. 27). Beck's pacifist stance is represented as a personal, inner struggle, as he cannot "acknowledge" the "brutality of war" (p. 26).

Pacifism and patriotism are shown to be contradictory positions for Beck when, deployed as a flight engineer on a gunship, he is conflicted between his pledge not to kill and his moral duty as a soldier. In *Casualties of War*, he is called upon to man one of the guns. He initially refuses until he realizes that not to fire is "absolutely, unequivocally, not a possibility" (p. 135). The overriding call to fulfill his duty causes Beck to begin firing a gun as "the rightest thing there could be" in the circumstances in which he finds himself (p. 136). Beck realizes that, morally, it is his "function" to protect his people, one of whom could be his friend, Ivan (p. 136). He therefore makes a moral choice based on what seems most important to him in terms of moral responsibilities. He asks himself whether he is "any different" after killing somebody than before and knows that the answer is "yes" (p. 137).

Jeff McMahan (2004) argues that it is reasonable for soldiers who are concerned that the war they are fighting be a just war to also question their leaders about the violation of *jus in bello*, or how the war is fought. But Beck is the only airman in his unit to question the military actions to which he and his peers have been assigned. In *Walking Wounded*, Beck refuses to man a machine gun and protests the action of the gunners who are "pouring heavy, brutal fire . . . into a human ants' nest of a village" that Beck believes is "plainly no threat to anybody" (p. 167). "The war was always stupid," he writes to Morris (p. 153), announcing his intention to "join up with Veterans Against the War," and "scream . . . out about the wrongness of the war" (p. 154).

A Warrior Ethics

In their analysis of post-war Vietnam films, Jennifer A. Lucas and David M. McCarthy (2005) note a move from films that seek to justify the Vietnam War, such as *Green Berets* (1968), to films such as *We Were Soldiers* (2002) that depoliticize the war and focus instead on the idea of "fighting men united by shared loyalty and purpose" (p. 169). They argue that a "war ethics" gave way to a "warrior ethics" that focuses "on bonds of fidelity experienced by fellow soldiers amid the inhumanity of war" (p. 176). I use this concept of a warrior ethics to categorize Lynch's war narrative not only as one that emphasizes the bonds of friendship among Lynch's four protagonists, but also as one that focuses on the personal ethics of four young warriors in the midst of war.

A pledge of allegiance to friendship displaces the nationalistic concept of allegiance to one's country by dissociating the word "allegiance" from the "flag." The last sentence of *Walking Wounded*—"And if war has an opposite, it's friendship" (p. 197)—echoes the opening sentence of the first book, *I Pledge Allegiance,* emphasizing that allegiance to their pledge of friendship (a "warrior ethics") has more meaning for Morris, Ivan, Rudi, and Beck than the nationalistic objectives of war. From the beginning of his training, Morris sees his moral mission as protecting his friends. He rationalizes that if his work as a soldier also helps fulfill the Navy's mission, then it is a win for all. This moral mission, Morris avers in *I Pledge Allegiance*, rather than the official mission of the Navy to stop "the spread of communism," is what will keep him sane in a "crazy" war (p. 57). In *Casualties of War*, Beck's reason for being in Vietnam has "more to do with three bozos from Boston than it does with Ho Chi Minh and his trail" (p. 64). The narrative strategy of including Rudi's ghost voice in *Walking Wounded* also works as a device to emphasize the importance of the bond of allegiance among friends by bringing the voices of the four young men together again.

Redemption, forgiveness, and moral responsibility become important to maintaining a pledge to friendship**.** Lucas and McCarthy (2005) write of a "redemptive warrior ethics, a politics of fidelity and union which can redeem a fractured nation" (p. 175). They refer to post-war Vietnam films, such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Platoon* (1986), in which the murder of soldiers who represent the brutality and horror of war has a redemptive purpose. *Walking Wounded* is composed of interrelated discourses on fidelity, redemption, forgiveness, and justice. Readers can debate Beck's justification of Ivan's shooting of Rudi that appears in the subversive *Grunt Free Press* and begins with the line, "There is hardly a single person here with a gun who has not thought about using it on somebody he is not supposed to," and continues:

> To kill.
> But—to kill only part of that somebody.
> To kill the part that is unrecognizable and wrong and new.
> The part that is hateful and living like the river leech off the good and sweetest
> nature.
> The part that was born here in Vietnam. (p. 189)

"Don't put your eye out," Rudi's mother tells her son in this same novel (p. 115). The justice encoded in the old code of retribution, "an eye for an eye," carries real meaning for Ivan, who loses an eye in a fight against Viet Cong forces.

Finally, the death of Rudi tests the morality and ethics of a young soldier who kills the friend whom he has called a monster. Heroism and hero are devalued when Ivan gives away his Purple Heart—"the loser's medal" (p. 135). He can take no pride in being awarded the Distinguished Service Cross "for extraordinary heroism" in engaging with "an armed hostile force" that occurred as he was riding in a convoy away from the scene of his crime (p. 181). The belief in the power of friendship in Lynch's novels is sutured to justice as Morris helps Ivan take moral responsibility for his actions and reassures Ivan that he and others will support him.

Teaching about War

Walzer (2002) states that "The ongoing critique of war-making is a centrally important democratic activity" (p. 93). Lynch's novels can usefully contribute to a teaching unit on war in that they present a perspective on the Vietnam War that encourages readers to ask questions about the morality of the war and to think critically about the ethical and moral issues faced by the young men who fought in that war. The following prompts can be used to generate conversation with students on the conduct of war more generally:

- When Ivan accuses Rudi of being a murderer, Rudi justifies his action with the claim, "We're all mur-

derers in this job, only difference is some of us are good at it and some aren't" (pp. 25–26). Consider this, along with Ivan's comment that "*War doesn't create monsters, it just explains them*" (p. 177), to discuss the ethics of killing in war.

- Analyze examples of the treatment of civilians in a guerrilla war, namely the use of coercion on suspected informants and the form that coercion takes, in *Free-Fire Zone* (pp. 25–26) and *Sharpshooter* (pp. 180–181). Discuss the morality of such acts.
- Discuss the killing of Rudi by Ivan together with Beck's published justification, "To Kill" (p. 189).

The images and rhetoric of war are constantly before us as the media reports on the increased instability in the Middle East. As the United States considers how it should confront current crises in that region, it is important, as Atwood (2005) and Kieran (2012) point out, that young people do not depend on the myths of war and patriotic discourses of a nationalistic ideology to understand war. The following discussion topics may serve to link Lynch's Vietnam War narrative with ethical and moral issues of current American political and military policies in the Middle East:

- Goldstein (2012) claims that since the Vietnam War, in which the principles of *jus in bello* were ignored and thousands of civilians killed, the "United States has taken significant steps to minimize its own casualties and to reduce the chance of collateral damage" (p. 6). In light of this statement, discuss the moral and ethical implications of the United States' current policies of employing drone attacks and the consequences of aerial bombing.
- Discuss the argument made by Jerry Kaplan (2015) that employing weapons based on A.I. (artificial intelligence) to do "dangerous jobs" is a "moral obligation" if, by so doing, soldiers' lives are saved. Discuss this statement in conjunction with passages from *I Pledge Allegiance* in which Morris describes the effects of America's superior weaponry and firepower. What are other moral implications of using new weapons technology?
- Discuss the violation of citizens' rights, humanitarian issues, and the destruction of infrastructure in current conflicts in the Middle East in the context of just war theory.

A retired associate professor and graduate coordinator of the School Library Media Program at Kean University in Union, New Jersey, ***Hilary Crew*** *holds a MLS and PhD in Communication, Information, and Library Studies from Rutgers. As a librarian, she has worked in public, school, and university settings. Her publications include* Is It Really Mommie Dearest? *(Scarecrow, 2000),* Donna Jo Napoli: Writing with Passion *(Scarecrow, 2010), and* Experiencing America's Story through Fiction *(ALA, 2014). Her articles have been published in* Children's Literature in Education, The Lion and the Unicorn, *and* Children in Libraries. *Crew has served on several award committees, including those for the Printz (ALA), Phoenix (CHLA), and Hans Christian Andersen awards.*

Additional Resources for Educators

Hibbert, G. (Author), & Hood, G. (Director). (2015). *Eye in the sky* [Motion picture]. Beverly Hills, CA: Sierra/Affinity. [This film centers on a drone attack in Somalia and examines whether the military should strike a house containing known insurgents.]

Marlantes, K. (2010). *Matterhorn*: *A novel of the Vietnam War*. New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press. [Emphasis is placed on the ethics of leadership.]

Marlantes, K. (2011). *What it is like to go to war.* New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press. [Marlantes writes about his combat experience.]

O'Brien, J., Lawrence, N., & Green, R. (2015). To war or not: Engaging middle school students in an ongoing online discussion. *The Social Studies*, *105*, 101–107. [Curriculum is suggested for an online discussion with middle students on the justification for war.]

O'Brien, T. (1998). *The things they carried.* New York, NY: Broadway Books. [This collection of short stories brings an emotional truth to the experience of war in Vietnam.]

Sheehan, N. (2015, November 15). At the bloody dawn of the Vietnam War. *New York Times,* p. SR2. [This piece offers a description of America's "military might" in Vietnam.]

Sheinkin, S. (2015). *Most dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the secret history of the Vietnam war.* New York, NY: Roaring Book Press. [This book examines the leaking of the Pentagon Papers.]

Soli, T. (2010). *The lotus eaters*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. [The Vietnam War is viewed through the lens of a female photographer. Questions are raised about the ethical use of photography.]

References

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Adam **Henze**

Read This Book Out Loud:

A Review of Young Adult Works by Artists from the Poetry Slam Community

Whenever I find myself standing in front of a cafeteria or gymnasium filled with hundreds of secondary students, my arms spread wide like I'm suspended on a high dive, I always think about how badly I needed a good poet in my life when I was 14. Instead, I learned to write by carving on my arm with twisted staples. I learned to speak by shrieking obscenities at my teachers. The first day I can remember not wanting to die came a couple years later when I was introduced to a book called *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poet's Café* (Algarín & Holman, 1994). For many spoken-word enthusiasts around the world, the phonebook-sized tome of poems was the first glimpse at a radical new vehicle for performance art called *poetry slam*. Emotional and raw, with content ranging anywhere between confessional testimonials, political assaults, raunchy stand-up comedy, and hip-hop holler-if-you-hear-me flows, the poetry chronicled in *Aloud* reinvigorated a public interest in performed verse (Kaufman, 1999). A large part of that public interest was reflected in kids like me (Weiss & Herndon, 2001). When I was 16, I stopped writing drafts of my suicide note and I started writing poems.

Those are the memories I think about now, 15 years later, when I'm rapid-fire whipping words at crowds of school kids. I became the poet that a young me needed, a move similarly made by hundreds of artists who've transitioned from the slam scene to the classroom (as educators, academics, guest performers, and mentors). Moreover, the poetry I heard from the slam community was influential in helping me develop a moral compass as a young person. Slam was my first introduction to multiculturalism and cultural competency. It was also one of my first experiences with critical citizenship because poetry let me imagine the various ways I could change the world. Most important, slam reinforced a notion in me that the language I use has an impact on others and consequences for myself.

Since *Aloud*'s publication in 1994, numerous educators have recognized the immediate benefits of introducing performance poetry in the classroom (Holbrook & Salinger, 2006), particularly noting the medium's ability to engage reluctant readers (Low, 2011). Despite the increased desire to use the spoken word in classroom settings, many educators outside the slam community are uncertain how to introduce poetry into their lesson plans beyond playing a short video or inviting a practitioner like myself to class for a one-time performance. The blame need not rest solely on the shoulders of uninformed secondary teachers; although slam academics have approached spoken word as a writing pedagogy (Fisher, 2007) and a performance pedagogy (Sibley, 2001), there has been relatively little discussion on how slam as a reading pedagogy fits into the holistic trifecta known as *spoken word pedagogy*.

In the forward of *Aloud*, coeditor Bob Holmon declares, "Do Not Read This Book. You don't have to. *This book reads you.* This book is a Shout for all those who have heard the poem's direct flight from mouth

to ear. Hear this book with your eyes! When the Mouth marries the Eye, the Ear officiates" (p. 1). This self-professed "invocation" points to spoken word's ability to transcend the page. While many slammers record their work on audio or video in lieu of the traditional print medium, educators would be surprised to learn how many notable artists have published their poems in literary journals, anthologies, and as collected works on small and large presses (Somers-Willett, 2009). And although proponents of New Literacy Studies commonly use the audiovisual work of slammers to meet newly imposed digital literacy standards (Brawley, 1994; Harlan, 2008), nearly every practitioner from the slam community with whom I have collaborated insistently uses textual analysis as part of his or her spoken word pedagogy. Just because the works are multimodal does not mean that the print form needs to be excluded (Michael, 2001).

Understandably, this textual barrier has resulted in a low number of opportunities for slammers to create age-appropriate literature ideal for use in classroom reading instruction. By reviewing a few examples of print-based literature from the slam community written specifically for young adult audiences, this article hopes to serve as an initial effort to discuss how the reading component of spoken word pedagogy connects with writing and discussion. In an attempt to create a familiar ground for instructors of literacy, I draw comparisons between poetry from the slam circuit and common conventions found in young adult literature. By identifying the similarities between spoken word pedagogy and pedagogies typically associated with young adult literature, I hope to give literacy educators a foothold for approaching slam through typical means, such as textual analysis, group discussion, and short written responses.

This literature review also serves as a resource for educators who want exposure to more artists from the slam community. I include brief suggestions for Secondary English Language Arts educators and reading specialists about various ways that the featured texts can be incorporated into curricula. It is my hope that the selected YA texts demonstrate various ways that poetry can spawn critical classroom conversations regarding morality, citizenship, and cultural competency.

Themes Shared by Slam and Young Adult Literature

Many educators mistakenly refer to slam as a genre, when in fact it is more of a mechanism. In 1986, a Chicago construction worker named Marc Smith decided to drastically change the way we experience poetry. Academic practices such as New Criticism had alienated casual patrons of performed verse (Gioia, 1991), and Smith fought back by devising a populist contest where competing poets faced off in front of rowdy blue-collar bar patrons (Smith & Kraynak, 2004). Some audience members were given score cards to judge each performance, while others were encouraged to cheer for the poets they loved and boo the poets they did not. Though it began as a quirky game in an Uptown pub, *poetry slam* exploded into a worldwide literary movement in the mid-nineties after it garnered the attention of mainstream entities such as MTV, Lollapalooza, NPR, and HBO (Aptowicz, 2008). More notable, teens around the world came to embrace slam as a powerful avenue for self-expression (Erlich, 1999).

When I was 16, I stopped writing drafts of my suicide note and I started writing poems.

Since scholars are at odds regarding whether slam competitions have spawned an actual genre known as *slam poetry*, many proponents such as myself use the terms *slam*, *spoken word*, and *performance poetry* interchangeably. The mainstream appropriation of the underground art form has spawned some misconceptions about what slam actually is; I will attempt to clarify some misunderstandings in the next section. Regardless, although slam can be difficult to categorize or place into an easy-to-describe box, educators who have used poetry from the slam community in the classroom have found it to be an ideal way for young people to vocalize themes related to character and ethicality (Bruce & Davis, 2000).

Considering that spoken word has reached young readers from countless backgrounds and cultures (Poole, 2007), it is not surprising that poetry used in slam shares numerous conventions with the characteristics of young adult literature. By establishing such

connections, educators should feel empowered to draw upon familiar aspects of their instructional skill set to form their own unique methodology for reading the poetry of slammers in classroom settings.

First, poetry slam's initial aim was to reject the cryptic nature of academic verse by crafting lyrical content that utilizes "common language" more familiar to everyday audiences (Ellis, Gere, & Lamberton, 2003). In a 1988 *New York Times* article—one of the first major newspapers to cover the then-new *slam* thing—Marc Smith famously quipped "Hifalutin metaphors got no place here" (Johnson, 1988). Bob Holman echoed Smith's cry, claiming that slam began as an attempt to return written verse back to community spaces by "mak[ing] poetry as natural a use for language as ordering a pizza" (Aptowicz, 2008, p. 10). Many slammers accomplish this task in their verse by utilizing colloquial speech, slang, and non-English phrases spoken in the home (Fisher, 2007). Numerous educators have singled out this characteristic as a vital way to revitalize the stale, antipodal material of traditional poetry units: "We think the problems teachers face with teaching poetry can be addressed by making its oral nature more visible and audible to students" (Ellis, Gere, & Lamberton, 2003, p. 44).

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Second, like the underdog main characters in many young adult works, the spoken word medium often showcases protagonists with marginalized identities (Lacatus, 2009). The open format of slam encourages all participants to share their own story, which essentially promotes the voices of traditionally muted groups and allows writers to feature elements of their unique cultures and backgrounds in their attempts to construct a literary identity (Biggs-El, 2012). An ethnographic study of a youth poetry slam team in Ohio revealed that participants referred to themselves as having "outlaw identities" (Rudd, 2012); in another study, participants in a youth writing group in the Bronx claimed they adopted a "blues singer identity" (Fisher, 2007). In both studies, groups of young learners from diverse backgrounds used identities constructed in the writing process to form a familial bond, thus developing a literacy community.

Third, similar to the many popular "socially aware" young adult novels, a substantive number of slammers use spoken word as a way to address critical issues that affect their local and global communities (Stovall, 2006). Ingalls (2012) explains, "The spoken-word venue becomes a forum in which participants assert and defend the legitimacy of their social and political views, and the audience is a critical component in the exchange of ideas; their responses to the messages they see and hear help to spark and sustain dialogue, and to validate the voices of youth" (p. 101). In their own study, Bruce and Davis noticed a commonality in the background knowledge of their students: teens in the classroom were familiar with both the conventions of hip-hop and the grim realities of systemic violence (2000). By using spoken word as a conscious alternative to hip-hop (Aptowicz, 2008), students can address issues including racism, gun violence, gang warfare, poverty, and drug dependency in a way that allows the spoken word to function as an agent of change (Bruce & Davis, 2000).

Clarifications and Dispelling Some Misconceptions

As mentioned in the previous section, poets and scholars have been arguing for decades about whether an actual genre called "poetry slam" even exists. Canadian slammer Chris Gilpin writes, "At this point, the term *slam poetry* is shorthand for the kind of poetry that happens at a poetry slam, which fails as a definition because it provides no formal parameters that indicate what makes this style of poetry distinct from any other" (2015). Personally, I've seen everything from sestinas to haiku to hip-hop freestyles in competitions. I've seen poems that only exist as sounds, silence, or guttural utterances. My friends once held a "bad poetry slam"—where the goal was to get the worst score—and Atlanta poet Theresa Davis read verbatim from an old telephone book. Ergo, it would be irresponsible of me to claim that a literature review of slam poetry is even possible. Instead, this article

claims to be a survey of the most notable YA works written by authors who have participated heavily in slams.

This distinction is important for two reasons. First, there are numerous YA books about slam poetry that are not covered in-depth in this article. For example, Patrick Flores-Scott's book *Jumped In* (2014) tells the story of a scoffy teen who is obsessed with Kurt Cobain and discovers his love of writing from a slam poetry unit introduced by his tenth-grade English teacher. And while the book has been embraced by educators, from a poet's perspective, I have trouble viewing it as authentic. Trust me, I had all five of *Nirvana*'s albums on cassette (including *Incesticide)*, yet besides some ripped jeans and pink hair, I have never met a single slammer that resembles the protagonist Sam. In other words, this does not meet the undoubtedly crucial requirement that teens see accurate representations of themselves in YA literature.

Other novels not addressed here are the numerous (and arguably more genuine) novels in verse that have depicted slam culture, such as Nikki Grimes's *Bronx Masquerade* (2002). The novel-in-verse is told from the point of view of 18 different students who create Open Mike Fridays with their English teacher. However, there are already many accessible reviews and articles written about quality YA novels-in-verse by Grimes and other authors, including Ellen Hopkins and Karen Hesse. This article hopes to highlight authors who come from the very community that has seen its culture represented both successfully and unsuccessfully in YA literature.

The second reason this distinction is important is that some of the works included in this article may defy educators' expectations of what poetry slam is supposed to look like. For example, the novel *Stickboy* (2012) by Shane Koyczan tells the story of a picked-on kid who fights back against his bully, only to later find that he has taken his aggression to the point that he's become a bully himself. Instead of the explosive 3-minute poems we typically see at slam competitions, *Stickboy* is one sprawling 173-page poem. In a different format entirely, Carlos Andrés Gómez's *Man Up: Cracking the Code of Modern Manhood* (Gómez, 2012) explores the dynamics of masculinity and chauvinism in young men. The autobiographical work is told through a collection of essays and poems that demonstrate the various ways spoken word can be scaffolded with creative nonfiction and informational texts. Perhaps the most notable book written by a former slammer is Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011). The dystopian novel is not written in verse at all; however, the teenage protagonist's love of video games, comic books, and role-playing games are representative of the fan cultures often promoted at events such as The Nerd Slam (Aptowicz, 2009). The fact that Cline's book is being turned into Steven Spielberg's next blockbuster suggests that artists who've cut their teeth at the poetry slam can tell a great story in a multitude of ways.

Each work functions as a coming-of-age morality narrative, features a school-aged protagonist, promotes the voices of young people, and models ideal behaviors necessary for making the world a better place.

Although the three aforementioned books contain language and themes that disqualify them from being considered young adult literature, it is difficult to imagine that these texts were created without young readers in mind. Each work functions as a coming-of-age morality narrative, features a school-aged protagonist, promotes the voices of young people, and models ideal behaviors necessary for making the world a better place.

Young Adult Literature from Slam's First Wave

Although slam has thrived in underground bars and coffee shops since its inception in the mid-eighties, a market where slam artists could make a living never really appeared until 1996 when corporate media outlets like MTV gave their attention to the booming literary scenes popping up in cities such as New York and San Francisco. Poet and slam scholar Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz refers to this pre-professional era as slam's First Wave (2008). One such pioneer from this time is a poet named Allan Wolf, whose organizational efforts were vital in helping establish slam as the sustainable grassroots community we know today (Abbott, 2008). Like many poets from the First Wave who viewed slam as a temporary stepping stone for writers

(Aptowicz, 2009), Wolf eventually left the competitive slam circuit to pursue a career as a full-time author and educator. What sets Wolf apart from most of his peers from that era is that his efforts as an artist have focused almost entirely on crafting poetry for children and young adults.

Wolf is the author of two middle grade historical fiction novels: *New Found Land* (2004), which details Lewis and Clark's epic journey to find America's rumored Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean, and *The Watch That Ends the Night* (2011), which documents the maiden voyage and final moments of the RMS Titanic. Meticulously researched and accompanied by lengthy appendices, both collections (over 450 pages each) follow a similar template of one or two page-length poems told from the first-person perspective of witnesses to each historical event. A common writing convention in the slam scene is the use of the persona poem; slam icon Patricia Smith (2000) explains, "In a persona poem, the writer eliminates the middle man and actually becomes the subject of his or her poem. The voice is both immediate, and immediately engaging. In the best cases, the poem's audience is drawn into a lyrical narrative by someone they want to know better—a taxi driver, Little Richard, an undertaker" (p. 71). Wolf answers Smith's challenge literally by ending each chapter with a poem from the perspective of Jon Snow, the undertaker tasked with identifying the bodies of those from the Titanic who died in the Atlantic Ocean. While space in the books is dedicated to notable characters like Sacagawea and the Unsinkable Molly Brown, Wolf spoke in an interview about his authorial intent: "I wanted to know what the story was from all the people behind the scenes. The ones that are in the background" (Wolf, 2012). In *New Found Land,* we are privy to the thoughts of William Clark's slave York, who observes how Clark goes to great lengths to ensure no "family men" enlist for the voyage as he simultaneously forces York to leave his wife and children behind.

[B]y juxtaposing Wolf's poems with the information from the appendix, educators can model ways for students to write creatively about historical documents.

Slammers often approach the exercise of the persona poem in a unique way by giving anthropomorphic voice to animals and inanimate objects (Smith, 2000). The title *New Found Land* is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Newfoundland dog owned by Meriweather Lewis; the shaggy pup's internal monologue serves as the dominant narrative thread that ties the collection of poems together. In fact, Wolf juxtaposes the dog's observations of being property owned by a master with York and Sacagawea's own critiques of bondage, which could serve as a catalyst for in-depth issue-based classroom discussion on America's history of slavery and colonialism.

Wolf's historical books of verse present unique opportunities for classroom activities. First, by juxtaposing Wolf's poems with the information from the appendix, educators can model ways for students to write creatively about historical documents. For example, in *The Watch That Ends the Night*, Morse code messages are used in an imaginative way: as the ship begins to sink, the ink of the SOS messages becomes more and more faded. Second, by using Wolf's persona poems as quality samples, students can recontextualize historical narratives by telling stories from unique perspectives. One of the most outstanding sequences from the Titanic book is voiced by the actual iceberg itself: *I am the ice. I see tides ebb and flow. / I've watched civilizations come and go, / give birth, destroy, restore, be gone, begin* (Wolf, 2012, p. 7). Finally, some of the poems suggest opportunities for constructive group-writing activities, perhaps giving classmates a chance to practice spatial literacy by creating poems on graffiti boards. As the hulking ship slips into the Atlantic, the reader turns the page to discover a sucker punch of a concrete poem: a thrashing pile of italic phrases such as *god help us* and *you'll kill us all* pools around the center of the page, peppered with words like *frío*, *kälte,* and *cold* to represent the frigid cries of the immigrant third-class passengers. The books produce numerous possibilities for cross-curricular activities with history and social studies.

A departure from Wolf's creative-nonfiction poesy is his young adult novel *Zane's Trace* (2007). A heroic epic in the style of a stream-of-conscious road-trip novel, the book-length poem reads like the sequential entries of a poetry journal penned by a teenage boy driving cross-country to the gravesite of his mother. Coming to grips with his mother's recent suicide, pro-

tagonist Zane uses written verse to formally question the rigidity of his own fleeting mental state—a warranted assessment considering the impulsive exodus, stolen car, and loaded gun he's stashed in the glove box. The short chapters (1–5 pages) are labeled as mile markers along the historic Zane's Trace highway, which serves as an allegory for Zane's transcendental search to trace the origins of his identity. Zane's own exploration of his ethnicity and heritage could serve as a stark catalyst for students to discuss and write about their own identities as well.

Zane's Trace incorporates common language through pattern and repetition by visually representing Zane's synesthesia—a neurological condition of the senses where individuals may, for example, ascribe a taste to a certain word or see a sound represented as a color (Spasic, Lukic, Bisevac, & Peric, 2010). Zane's synesthesia takes the form of spatial mantras that weave in and out of the narrative almost like the reprise of a piece of music: *Give my mother back her mind. / Calm the demons in her head. / Leave the darkness far behind. / If need be, take me instead* (Wolf, 2007, p. 6). The closer our protagonist gets to Zanesville, the more his internal monologue touches on the topic of suicide. Recent high-profile incidents have begged the need to discuss suicide and mental illness with young learners in our schools, and the relatable anti-hero of *Zane's Trace* could provide an effective way to start a complex classroom conversation on the topics of mental health and self-esteem. Teachers might challenge students to create a mural of words taken from *Zane's Trace,* perhaps by cutting out sentences or using colored markers.

Closing out Allan Wolf's YA catalogue is a 64-page novella titled *More Than Friends: Poems from Him and Her* (Holbrook & Wolf, 2008), coauthored with Sara Holbrook, another poet from slam's First Wave era. Holbrook's path differs from Wolf's in that she was an established children's book author before she transitioned into the slam community. If nothing else, Holbrook's success in both the slam and young adult literary circuits suggests that the two have many shared conventions.

As the subtitle of the book implies, *More Than Friends* uses a dueling narrative to tell the story of two high school students' first romantic relationship (Holbrook authored the point of view of the girl, and Wolf wrote the point of view of the boy). The shuffling efforts of the two unlearned adolescents in the book are made instantly relatable by our access to the characters' inner monologue. In a tanka called *Foolish* (Holbrook & Wolf, 2008), Wolf writes: *My fly was open. / Spilled our popcorn on the floor. / Stepped on your foot—twice. / Yet the more the night went wrong, / The more you and I felt right* (p. 26). The dueling author approach forces readers to stretch their empathetic reasoning, as the young couple's relationship waxes in poems like "Making the First Move" and wanes in poems like "Do Not Bolt Screaming, Clutching All Your Stuff."

The multi-voiced poems beg to be read out loud—readings that could be enhanced by engaging readers' theatre exercises in the classroom.

The multi-voiced poems beg to be read out loud—readings that could be enhanced by engaging readers' theatre exercises in the classroom. The poems in the book could also serve as templates for how groups of 2 or 3 students could write poetry that dialogues and debates across pieces. Many of the poems are written in traditional forms like sonnets and villanelles, with a short instructional appendix to assist young writers who want to learn the conventions of traditional verse forms. The book could serve as a catalyst for form-based writing responses about sex, young love, consent, and the heartache involved with breakups. An author's note from Holbrook and Wolf concedes that they cannot speak for the feelings of all young men and women, which suggests that the authors would be open to instructors using their text to spark a conversation about gender roles and nontraditional relationships.

In addition to a lengthy catalogue of picturebooks and collections of children's poetry, Sara Holbrook is also the author of one tween-aged book of verse called *Walking on the Boundaries of Change* (1998). Subtitled as a collection of *Poems of Transition*, the cover of the book depicts a pair of legs—familiarly clad in rolled blue jeans and Chuck Taylor All-Star sneakers—pensively walking a tightrope in the foreground of swollen storm clouds. Lending authentic voice to the anxious uncertainties with which many adolescent readers can identify, Holbrook uses a common

convention in stand-up poetry called confessionalism. Authors of confessional verse typically give voice to issues plaguing their personal lives, as popularized by Sylvia Plath's poems on suicide and Robert Lowell's poems about his deteriorating marriage (Rosenthal, 1991). In the poem "A Different Fit," Holbrook (1998) uses first-person narrative to articulate the awkward feelings of preteens experiencing physical changes brought on by puberty: *Today / I want to fit in / another speck in the sparrow crowd. / Not be perched like ostrich in hiding / with embarrassing parts sticking out* (p. 8). Holbrook cleverly uses metaphor to open up dialogue about life experiences that can be uncomfortable to discuss in classroom settings. Topics in the book could be coupled with journaling exercises, which could give students a chance to make sense of growing pains and formative discoveries in creative ways.

Reading and writing about issues like gang violence and body dysmorphia tell students that the negative aspects of their lives don't have to be the final chapter. They can be the first.

In her poem "Blown Away," Holbrook (1998) uses street speech to tell the story of a boy named Tony whose dress and slang are the envy of the entire school. Tony joins a gang, which swallows up the individuality his classmates once admired; this turn of events allows Holbrook to address the issue of urban tribalism as it manifests itself through the experiences of young people. Whereas many young adult novels focus on crafting super-characters who exhibit desirable behaviors and execute world-saving decisions, *Walking on the Boundaries of Change* creates a space where young readers can approach life issues therapeutically alongside Holbrook's characters, with little attention paid to formulating strategies for solving life problems.

The poem "My Plan" (Holbrook, 1998) features an adolescent girl vocalizing the insecurities she feels about her physical appearance—detesting her beak nose, big feet, and Minnie Mouse voice. While many young adult authors might feel compelled to teach this protagonist a lesson in self-acceptance, Holbrook instead allows the character to air her grievances in an environment free from judgment and recourse. Essentially, the poems give students an crucial starting point. If students read and discuss the narratives of imperfect people, they can begin to take steps to rewrite their own stories. Reading and writing about issues like gang violence and body dysmorphia tell students that the negative aspects of their lives don't have to be the final chapter. They can be the first.

The Later Waves and the Rise of the Spoken Word Youth Movement

In 1996, poetry slam exploded into a mainstream global phenomenon, meaning that poets from the Second Wave did not have to leave the slam circuit to make a living as artists (Aptowicz, 2008). Perhaps this is the reason why few slammers have made the transition to the young adult market. However, a major characteristic of slam's Third Wave has been a resurgence of small press publishers that have given a few spoken word practitioners the chance to create texts ideal for reading instruction in secondary schools. Possibly the most successful independent press featuring artists from the slam community, Write Bloody Publishing, was created in 2004 by Second Wave slammer Derrick Brown after he observed that many career poets still relied on Kinkos to personally craft their own self-made chapbooks to sell on tour. Although primarily a publisher of adult market poetry and prose collections, Write Bloody has released collections of poetry for young adults: *Learn Then Burn*: *A Modern Poetry Anthology for the Classroom* (Stafford & Brown, 2010) and *Courage: Daring Poems for Gutsy Girls* (Finneyfrock, McKibbens, & Nettifee, 2014).

The cover of *Learn Then Burn* depicts a flaming book sitting on top of an empty classroom desk beside the words *A modern poetry anthology for the classroom* inscribed within a sunflower seal. Edited by Chicago teacher and poet Tim Stafford and Write Bloody owner Derrick Brown, *Learn Then Burn* features classroom-friendly poems by dozens of poets in the slam scene—including fan favorites such as Buddy Wakefield and Shira Erlichman. Some poems are original works written specifically for the press; others are popular poems edited for content, such as Anis Mojgani's poem, "For Those Who Can Still Ride an Airplane for the First Time": *I'm 31 years old and I'm trying to figure out most days what being a*

/ man means. / I don't drink fight or love / but these days I find myself wanting to do all three (p. 82). Fans familiar with the poem will recognize that the editors substituted the euphemism "love" for another four-letter word. Vocalizing what many teenage boys may experience as they grow to question societal expectations of manhood, Mojgani's sobering tone could provide an open door for classroom discussion on gender roles and masculinity.

Several authors in the anthology adopt the voices of their younger selves in order to address issues important to young adults. Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz's "Benediction for Prom Night" gives voice to a young girl's anxieties as she prepares her hair and makeup for the prom, while Geoff Trenchard's "Pox" depicts a teenage boy's inner monologue as he examines his acne-inflicted complexion in the bathroom mirror. To help bring the poem to life, an audio-recording of a live performance of "Pox" is available on an online site called *IndieFeed*, a performance poetry podcast featuring an archive of thousands of poems. Considering that many of the poets in the book also have videos of poetry on YouTube and Vimeo, there are many opportunities for educators to turn their poetry units into multimodal literacy experiences that combine textual, visual, and oral literacies. With material ranging from hip-hop sonnets to 8-bit Nintendo odes to zombie persona poems, the verses featured in *Learn Then Burn* use digestible language to address topics that kids care about. A separate *Teacher Guide & Workbook Companion* (2010), edited by Stafford and fellow public school teacher and slammer Molly Meacham, is also available as a resource for educators.

Recent release *Courage: Daring Poems for Gutsy Girls* (Finneyfrock, K., McKibbens, R., & Nettifee, M., 2014) is labeled for ages 12 to 21 as "a fierce collection of poems for anyone who is, or has been, or knows a teenage girl." Featuring the work of 33 women, all prominent artists in the slam scene or in periphery literary circles, the anthology contains works original to the publication and selected works from other Write Bloody titles. Edited by an all-women team of Second Wave slam vets, *Courage* showcases poems that tackle issues important to girls, such as body image, gender roles, and motherhood. Many critical educators use the short, fiery poems like the ones found here to serve as classroom warm-up activities. For example, Tara Hardy's poem "My, My, My, My, My" or Jeanann Verlee's "Swarm" could provide a powerful introduction to a themed unit centered on consent and sexual assault.

Like *Learn Then Burn*, several authors in *Courage* adopt a reflective voice to address topics important to their younger selves: in the poem "Pretty," Shanny Jean Maney uses a humorous tone to reminisce about her awkward attempts to match the "beautificiality" standards of Vanna White and Miss Piggy, while in the poem "A Letter to the Playground Bully, From Andrea, Age 8 ½," Andrea Gibson uses whimsical childhood imagery to create an imaginary confrontation between the author and the third-grade boy who used to torment her. Students could follow suit and write a poem to (or from) their younger selves. In a way, this transforms writing into a reflexive activity regarding morality and character building; through poetry, students can see where they've come from and where they need to head in the future.

In a way, this transforms writing into a reflexive activity regarding morality and character building; through poetry, students can see where they've come from and where they need to head in the future.

Several poets also utilize non-English words spoken in their childhood households. In the poem "What It's Like for a Brown Girl," Jessica Helen Lopez addresses the struggles she faced as a bilingual speaker in a stuffy MFA program. Lopez uses artistic license to vocalize the thoughts she believes her professors had of her: *You slam poets you, with all your hip-hop and speaking in / tongues. I hope you choke on all that alliteration* (p. 133). The work of multicultural, multilingual authors could have an advantageous impact on ESL and EFL classrooms. Like *Learn Then Burn*, work by most of the authors is available via audio and video online, which could give English learners a rich, multifaceted introduction to poetry.

In addition to being a Write Bloody author and editor, poet Karen Finneyfrock achieved success outside the small press market when her first young adult novel, *The Sweet Revenge of Celia Door* (2013), was published by Viking Press (Penguin). The cover art depicts a pigeon-toed girl wearing knee-high black

boots and black fishnet stockings, with folded arms and a head conveniently cut off by the top of the page. In the classroom, educators could task students with writing a poem about this stark cover image. Celia Door is a friendless 14-year-old girl tasked with navigating catty school politics and her parents' impending divorce. Incessant teasing and bullying has urged Celia to "turn Dark" (p. 7), meaning she's adopted a Goth identity with black eyeliner and skull hoodies. While young adult books commonly use toxic tropes to depict members of Goth culture as whiny, cynical, and emotionally unstable, Celia stands in stark contrast as an earnest, relatable, lonely girl whose only wish is to find a friend. She tells readers, *When I say I turned Dark, what I really mean is that I gave up. I gave up on trying to fit in and make everyone like me . . . I realized that, in a field of sunflowers, I'm a black-eyed Susan* (Finneyfrock, 2013, p. 7). While a majority of the novel is told through prose, the chapters are peppered with notes and poems that Celia writes to herself in her journal; these could serve as catalysts for themed classroom writing responses. The young protagonist utilizes metaphors to help the reader internalize the emotional implications of plot points in the story, as evidenced by the line, *All you need is one friend and suddenly a weekend looks like a wide-open field* (Finneyfrock, 2013, p. 138). Powerful phrases like this could be plucked out and analyzed on their own. Teachers could write the phrase on a chalkboard or overhead projector and task students with writing a response.

Though slam has been commonly documented on audio and video, literacy educators should not feel discouraged from approaching the written work of slammers through conventional textual analysis.

Celia's luck changes when a cool, handsome kid from New York named Drake moves to town and befriends her. Though the relationship begins as a love interest for Celia, Finneyfrock flips the young adult trope on its head when Drake admits to Celia that he is gay. Although she is initially crushed, the well-read Celia helps Drake learn more about LGBTQ culture by taking him to the library to learn about the Stonewall Riots and the anti-AIDS activist group ACT UP. When Celia attempts to take revenge against her middle school tormentors, her plans backfire, and as a result, Drake's sexuality is outed in front of the entire school. Feeling the brunt of the backlash, Celia learns a valuable lesson about the responsibilities of being an ally. The *Sweet Revenge of Celia Door* tackles the themes of self-esteem and suicide, and Celia's perspective can offer a fresh way to approach classroom conversation about the impacts of bullying.

We can only hope that more large-scale publishers notice these artists from the slam community. Karen Finneyfrock's second book of prose for young adults, *Starbird Murphy and the Outside World*, was released by Viking in June of 2014 and is a testament to her success entering the young adult market. A sequel to *Learn Then Burn,* titled *Learn Then Burn 2: This Time It's Personal: An Awesome Anthology of Modern Poems for the Classroom* (Stafford) was also released in early 2015. Representation in both large and small presses is vital for a healthy arts movement, so it is important that poetry patrons support the young adult efforts of presses like Write Bloody and Viking. If publishers recognize that there is a desire for more young adult works written by slammers, perhaps they will be willing to take risks by giving new authors a chance.

Hear This Book with Your Eyes

This article is an initial attempt to familiarize educators with the conventions of spoken word written for young adult audiences, as well as print titles that might be used in classrooms. Though slam has been commonly documented on audio and video, literacy educators should not feel discouraged from approaching the written work of slammers through conventional textual analysis. The best advice I can give to educators is to turn their reading instruction into a multimodal learning process (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, & et al., 1996; Ong, 1980) by reading poems out loud, listening to audio and watching video along with reading texts, crafting written responses, drawing pictures and text on graffiti boards, discussing the content of poems in small and large groups, and even facilitating a classroom poetry slam that tackles themes discussed in shared work. Although educators should feel encouraged to treat artists from

the community as a resource, it is ethically imperative that teachers avoid quick fixes and familiarize themselves with the arts community they intend to promote and dissect. While this article serves as a review of notable works by slammers marketed as young adult literature, there are thousands and thousands of poems written for general audiences that could also be effective in the classroom. Educators wishing to foster conversations related to moral issues such as war, police brutality, abortion, and environmentalism are encouraged to use the references accompanying this article as a resource to find new poets.

It is also beneficial for young adult publishers to embrace populist movements like slam that are commonly revered for their inclusion of diverse artists (Somers-Willett, 2007). A study of the 2013 *New York Times* Young Adult Best Sellers List (Lo, 2014) revealed that only 15% of main characters were non-White, only 13% of overall characters where LGBTQ, and only 3% of overall characters were disabled (Lo & Pon, 2014). The multicultural artists from the slam community could help meet the public demand for literature that features diverse characters; however, the authors featured in this literature review are a poor representation of slam's overall diversity, which suggests that authors of color from the slam circuit have faced similar barriers in regards to being supported by young adult publishing companies. We have an ethical duty as educators to make sure voices from diverse backgrounds are included in our canon, and promoting queer artists and authors of color from the slam community could be a needed push.

As a spoken word practitioner tasked with assessing my own biases (Peshkin, 1988), I welcome additional research and discourse from academics and educators who are further removed from the community. While other researchers may need convincing, I know that spoken word can save lives because it saved mine when I was 16 years old. I'm sure the teacher who placed that copy of *Aloud* in my hands had no idea how far that book would take me. Those of us who were inspired by the anthology know the power of placing poetry in the palms of a young person, and it is the moral imperative of this poet-that-my-younger-self-needed to ensure that the youth of today do not walk away empty-handed.

Adam D. Henze *is a PhD student in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at Indiana University, as well as an associate instructor in the English Department and Student Academic Center. His primary research interests are hip-hop and spoken word pedagogy, critical literacy, juvenile justice, New Literacies, and Youth Literacies. Adam is also a teaching artist and poet, lecturing and performing in over 30 US states, Canada, Puerto Rico, Ireland, and England. His poetry has appeared on PBS's* Main Street *and NPR's* All Things Considered*, and he has one book of verse available from Chatter House Press. Adam is also an organizer in the poetry slam community and is the director of a poetry writing and performance camp for high school youth. He currently lives in Bloomington, Indiana.*

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Book in Review: A Teaching Guide

Toby **Emert**

Of History Lessons and Forbidden Loves and Stories Worth Telling Twice

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

My mother, a youthful 72-year-old, has a terrific memory. She remembers the first and last names of her elementary school classmates, the plaid skirt her mother made for her to wear on Easter when she was 14, and the date that she and my father left Farmville—the small town in Virginia where she grew up—and moved to Tennessee, as well as the date, six months later, that they packed their belongings and headed "home." She knows the whereabouts of second cousins, the locations of family burial plots, and the news about the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of old family friends. When I ask her about her senior year in high school, however, she recalls only sketchy details.

My mother would have graduated from Farmville High School (FHS) in 1960, but because Prince Edward County, Virginia, was the only locality in the nation that, rather than follow the Supreme Court mandate to integrate its public schools, chose instead to withhold funding for public education, the doors of her high school were padlocked the summer between her junior and senior years. Farmville High School never reopened, and public schools in Prince Edward County remained closed for five years. So the year my mother would have graduated from FHS, she attended classes in church basements at the newly formed private school for the children of White families. The closure of the public schools, part of a movement called "massive resistance," stunted the county's public education system, which still suffers from the effects more than 50 years later. (To read more about the closure of the schools in Prince Edward County, see http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/closing-prince.)

When I have asked her over the years to tell me about being a teenager living through the fight for civil rights, she has always struggled. I'm not sure that she or her former classmates comprehend the primary role the county and the town played in the national tumult that ultimately led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin illegal. (Read more about the Civil Rights Act of 1964 at https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/1964-civil-rights-act.htm.)

In her recently released book, *Something Must Be Done about Prince Edward County* (2015), Kristen Green, the granddaughter of one of the leaders of the massive resistance movement in the county, explores this phenomenon of institutional memory loss among the White members of the community and works to explain the history and contextualize the pathos of the era. Green, a journalist, spent several years researching the compelling story she tells. Married to a man with "mixed racial heritage" (p. 23), whom she met while working as a reporter in San Diego, Green frames the richly detailed narrative she constructs

with a personal question about how her grandfather, whom she knew as a doting and affectionate "Papa," might have responded to her husband and his great-grandchildren. She wonders how he and his contemporaries could have so clearly misjudged the historical moment in which they were living.

The harrowing predicament that Sarah and her teenaged friends encounter as the small contingent of Black students in an otherwise White school invites discussions of individual responsibility, moral judgment, and competing belief systems.

Green's book captured my attention not only because, like her, I grew up in Prince Edward County and, also like her, I have often wondered how many of the people I know and respect could have misunderstood their potential role in supporting human rights by opposing the school closures, but also because her thorough investigative approach to telling a nuanced story, documented in the appendix of her book, is impressive. She humanizes the complicated narrative, indicting the culture that sanctioned discrimination but also approaching interviews and her examination of secondary sources with curiosity and a need to comprehend. Interestingly, I read Green's book shortly after reading Robin Talley's debut title *Lies We Tell Ourselves* (2014), a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in 2015, which is the only young adult novel I have read that explores the effects of the massive resistance efforts.

Talley's book, like Green's, is an ambitious attempt to paint a portrait of a small Virginia community struggling to respond to the shifting social and political landscape and the institutional racism that plagues the community. Talley creates the fictional town of Davisburg, Virginia, as well as fictional Jefferson High School, and imagines the turmoil that erupts when the school is forcibly integrated. She narrates the story of her two protagonists, Sarah Dunbar, who is African American, and Linda Hairston, who is White, as alternating first-person accounts in an effort to dramatize the situation and to highlight the personal impact of the events. When Sarah transfers to Jefferson as a top-notch student at her old high school, she is forced to prove herself as capable to teachers and administrators, as well as to her abusive peers. Conversely, Linda, the self-centered daughter of the influential newspaper editor in Davisburg, feels justified in her outrage that the fight for desegregation has marred her high school experience. Ultimately, it is a coming-of-age story for both characters who, when required to work on a school project together, discover a romantic attraction that both surprises and frightens them. Neither character fully comprehends the repercussions of defying the cultural expectations for race, gender, and sexual identity.

I use the adjective "ambitious" to describe Talley's novel partially because I think she gives herself multiple challenges as a writer. She wants to educate readers about the contentious climate of the period, write in two oppositional first-person voices, develop a plotline that explores intricacies of both racism and homophobia, and balance the line between rendering dialogue that is authentic and evocative but that does not read as gratuitous or too insensitive. For the most part, she succeeds. Reviews of the book commend Talley's commitment to render a raw but realistic depiction of the daily abuse Sarah and the nine other children chosen to attend the previously all-White school must endure. Ellen Goodlett (2014) writes in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that she appreciates that "Talley didn't shy away from giving her characters a lot to deal with and clear character arcs as they navigate difficult choices along the way" (para. 12). Writing for National Public Radio (NPR), Alaya Dawn Johnson, author of *The Summer Prince* (2013) and *Love Is the Drug* (2014b), notes that Talley "raises hard questions that [she] was glad the text addressed" (2014a, para. 5).

I agree with these reviewers that Talley effectively challenges readers to contemplate the despicable faces of discrimination, which she portrays vividly in a number of scenes set in school hallways and classrooms. Her protagonists, however, are as much "types" as they are characters: Sarah is saintly and long suffering, and Linda is self-righteous and smug. Despite this tendency to draw the characters a bit too broadly, Talley succeeds in providing an interesting perspective on the nation's history of struggle to live up to its own expectations of equal access and equal treatment of its citizens. The harrowing predicament

that Sarah and her teenaged friends encounter as the small contingent of Black students in an otherwise White school invites discussions of individual responsibility, moral judgment, and competing belief systems.

In the Classroom

In the call for articles for this issue of *The ALAN Review*, the editors ask this question: "Can YAL foster more empathetic and nurturing dispositions and behaviors among young people?" In many ways, *Lies We Tell Ourselves* exemplifies an author's attempt to address this type of question through provocative storytelling. Talley, who grew up in a small Virginia town herself and is scarcely more than a generation removed from the events she chronicles, clearly hopes that readers will experience a sense of connection with Sarah and her friends and will empathize with them as they navigate an onslaught of racially motivated abuse. She also purposefully complicates her narrative by introducing the same-sex attraction between her main characters, further dramatizing the climate of political injustice and social conditioning. It is unlikely that adolescent readers would be reticent about their reactions to the romance or to the instances of race-baiting, bullying, and the use of racial epithets that are integral to Talley's plotline. The novel invites conversations about her depiction of historical events, as well as the implications for a generation of readers still negotiating the consequences of a system that institutionalized inequality.

What follows offers a framework for reading and discussing provocative historical fiction like *Lies We Tell Ourselves*, as well as other texts that explicitly engage questions about the ethics and morality of human behavior. To begin with, it is important to recognize that it is not possible to fully comprehend the scope and intention of many historical novels without exploring the events that serve as background information for the story. Context becomes key to the novel's intellectual and emotional impact, especially for younger readers, whose grasp of history may be limited. Take, for example, Rita Williams-Garcia's novel *One Crazy Summer* (2010), which won the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction and was a Newbery Honor selection in 2011.

Williams-Garcia sets her story in Oakland, California, in 1968, and offers a nuanced portrayal of the Black Power Movement, focusing on the social justice aims of an organization like the Black Panthers. She anchors her story in the political milieu of the era. Three sisters, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern, leave the safety of their neighborhood in New York, where they live with their father and grandmother, and fly across the country to spend the summer with their estranged mother, Cecile, a feminist poet who has adopted the name Nzila. Cecile's choice to leave her children and make a new life for herself both confuses and intrigues her young daughters. As the girls learn about the politics of the era, so do readers, clearly making it easier for them to identify the cultural events and figures Williams-Garcia references.

Context becomes key to the novel's intellectual and emotional impact, especially for younger readers, whose grasp of history may be limited.

If students lack contextual familiarity, they miss key themes and misunderstand the import of the situations the characters encounter. Learning activities that prepare students for texts situated within historical time periods provide them an informed entry into the story, deepen their interest, and ready them for small-group and whole-class discussions.

Activity I: Background Knowledge Probe

A Background Knowledge Probe (BKP) is a prereading activity designed to help students self-assess the requisite knowledge they have or need to read a given text. We might think of it as a variation of a familiar strategy used by many language arts teachers, the Anticipation Guide, which "elicits students' thinking, arouses curiosity, and focuses attention" (Merkley, 1996, p. 366). The BKP expressly helps "teachers determine the most effective starting point for a given lesson and the most appropriate level at which to begin instruction . . . [b]y sampling the students' background knowledge before formal instruction on the topic begins" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 121). This activity serves as both a review and a preview of the material to be studied. When I use this strategy, I typically create a questionnaire that lists important information, events, and characters/figures that appear in the text the

class will be reading. Each inventory item includes a simple multiple-choice-style set of responses. Before we begin the reading or discussion, I ask students to fill out the questionnaires individually, then collect them, tally the responses, and use the information to help plan the first formal lesson related to the text.

[T]he discussion serves as an explicitly constructivist strategy, building on past experiences and prior cultural knowledge to prepare the students for their interaction with the reading.

I share the class tally for each item and ask students to explain concepts they understand to their peers. This step allows students to demonstrate a level of expertise and allows me to add detail or context to the information they share, explaining how the concepts appear in the text. In creating the questionnaire, I work to select a range of concepts—some of which will likely be at least vaguely familiar to students and others that may be completely unfamiliar to most of the class.

Here's an example of how the BKP could work for a unit that includes *Lies We Tell Ourselves*. Having basic knowledge of the school desegregation movement will affect students' understanding of the moral questions the novel raises. The questionnaire might include these concepts, each specifically related to the social and legal structures that serve as the historical background for Talley's narrative: Jim Crow, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Fourteenth Amendment, "separate but equal" doctrine, Justice John Marshal Harlan, NAACP, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS*, and Civil Rights Act of 1964. The students respond to each concept with one of the following four options:

1. I have never heard of this concept/term/person;
2. I have heard of this concept/term/person, but I don't really know what it means or what her or his significance is;
3. I have some idea of what or who this concept/term/person is, but I'm not too clear; or
4. I have a clear idea about what or who this concept/term/person is and can explain it to others.

After reading through the students' responses, the teacher creates a summary to share with the class, illustrating which of the concepts are most familiar and which are least familiar. In a follow-up lesson, the class discusses each of the questionnaire items, with the students who suggested that they could explain the concepts sharing first. In this way, the discussion serves as an explicitly constructivist strategy, building on past experiences and prior cultural knowledge to prepare the students for their interaction with the reading.

Activity II: Collaborative Timelines

Another strategy that I have found especially helpful when teaching historical fiction is the development of a Collaborative Timeline of Events that influence the plot. For this activity, I develop a list of events to research, write each event on a note card, and then have the students randomly select one of the events by drawing the cards from a hat. Students, working individually or sometimes with a partner, are responsible for becoming an expert on the event they select and creating a short summary of the event to share with the class. I ask the students to write their summaries either on large note cards or on small whiteboards. Their objective is to illustrate their research efforts by explaining the event in a few thoughtful sentences. As an element of the class discussion, we construct a timeline by displaying the synopses in chronological order on the wall of the classroom. We use the display as a tool to assist us with the discussion; students share their cards with the class in order to foster a more informed understanding of the text. Occasionally, I have also asked students to share their summaries electronically using Google Docs, free wiki sites (such as www.pbworks.com), or the flashcard site Study Blue (www.studyblue.com). These tools allow for the co-construction of a shared class document that all students can access and edit.

Though it could certainly be helpful for students to research historical events that led to the story Talley offers in *Lies We Tell Ourselves*, it could also be useful for them to trace the history of human and civil rights from 1959—the year the novel is set—to the present. The era of school desegregation has been followed by remarkable changes in the culture's thinking about race, gender, and sexual identity, but it has been a stormy trek. It could be especially instructive for students to trace the events of the last 50 years, focusing on an imagined life journey of the two pro-

tagonists. In the novel, Sarah and Linda are both high school seniors: if they were 18 years old in 1959, they would now be women in their early 70s. Developing a historical timeline of the progress in civil rights the two characters would have witnessed over their lifetimes is a creative assignment that allows adolescents to chronicle the hard-won victories, as well as the setbacks, that have positioned us as readers of a story like the one Talley tells.

Activity III: Language Use Inventory

When studying historical fiction that purposefully incorporates what we now consider insensitive dialogue, especially epithets, it is only appropriate to address the author's use of terms that readers recognize as aggressive or incendiary. Talley draws some of the White students at Jefferson as persecutors who hurl brutal insults at Sarah and her friends. It is a deliberate rhetorical choice designed to heighten readers' discomfort and engage their sense of empathy, but the scenes are difficult to read. As Vanesa Evers (2015) writes in a review of the novel for the Lambda Literary website, "The white students treat the African American students with so much hatred it is hard to breathe . . ." (para. 3). It is important to ask students to consider the import of an author's decisions about language use; doing so allows students to interrogate their own uses of language. Granted, this is sticky work, but it is expedient if we aim to enable our students to become aware of themselves as language users. Furthermore, neglecting to engage students in a critical conversation about language when reading a text that incorporates potentially offensive vocabulary may signal to students that its use has little consequence. It becomes an ethical responsibility for classroom teachers to explain their purposes in introducing a text that includes language that could be considered dehumanizing or demeaning and to encourage their students to analyze the impact of such language on an audience of readers. These discussions can be challenging, of course, but as Burke and Greenfield (2016) point out in a recent article in the *English Journal*, "Students are capable of the challenge if given a chance" (p. 50).

A reading strategy that addresses this kind of objective is a Language Use Inventory, which helps students to be reflective and prepares them for class discussions. As students read a text, the inventory helps them keep a list of vocabulary for fundamental analysis. The teacher guides the students as they create a chart that includes columns for note taking. In one column, the students simply record any terms or phrases that they consider to be important to discuss. In related columns, the students reflect on their selections; the categories for reflection can either be designated by the teacher or co-created with the class. When I have used this strategy, I have often divided the class into small conversation groups and asked each to generate possible categories for responding to language use. I model the work by sharing a word or phrase that elicits response, such as *queer*. I then invite the class, working in the small groups, to help me brainstorm a list of possible ways to think about the word; ultimately, we select the three or four categories that seem most intriguing or appropriate and use those as the headings for the other columns in the chart.

It is important to ask students to consider the import of an author's decisions about language use; doing so allows students to interrogate their own uses of language.

For a term like "queer," for instance, we might choose categories such as "Who uses this word and for what purposes?"; "Where have I heard this word and in what context?"; "How might this word be used to support or belittle someone?"; or "Do I use this word and, if so, what is the context?" The intention of offering the students this kind of note-making assignment is to help them focus on the author's rhetorical decisions as they read and contemplate the impact of their own word choices. In my experience, students find this method of attentive reading quite challenging; on the other hand, it demands that they begin to develop a critical awareness of language use. The charts support lively classroom discussions and often serve as prewriting for more formal responses to the text we are reading together.

Concluding Notes

Well-told stories have the potential to move us, inform us, and change us. When students read young adult

literature situated within a specific historical context, they have the opportunity to imagine themselves in the historical situations depicted and to reflect on the choices the characters make. If the writer is successful in building realistic, believable moments of conflict, readers will naturally grapple, alongside the characters, with consequential decisions. This experience of what we might call *perspective taking*—"the ability to take someone else's viewpoint into account when thinking" (Markman, 2015, para. 3)—is the cornerstone of empathetic understanding.

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Scaffolding readers' experiences of a text with intentionally designed learning activities that animate their capacity to "walk in someone else's shoes" magnifies the text's emotional impact. And intentionally offering students stories that explore historical struggles against social injustices that are mirrored in our contemporary world encourages them to consider the impact of precedent, personal responsibility, and sociopolitical engagement. In other words, stories about the history of our cultural struggles particularize and humanize, and they coax students to examine the world as it has been and to fight for what it might become.

Toby Emert *is a professor in the Department of Education at Agnes Scott College, a small liberal arts school for women, located just outside Atlanta, Georgia. He teaches courses in literature, literacy, research, and the arts and writes about his work on arts-based instructional interventions, students with less access to quality educational experiences, and the need to advocate for more inclusive classrooms, especially classrooms that incorporate texts that feature queer and questioning characters. He is currently partnering with the Matthew Shepard Foundation to develop a teaching guide for the verbatim play* The Laramie Project, *writing about his work doing digital storytelling with refugee learners, and serving as panel chair for the Children's and Young Adult Category of the Lambda Literary Awards. He can be contacted at temert@agnesscott.edu.*

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Angel Daniel **Matos**

The Undercover Life of Young Adult Novels

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

As teachers of and experts on young adult literature, many of us believe that books written for adolescent readers possess the ability to change lives. Young adult literature offers narratives in which teenagers are able to learn from, if not overcome, the harsh realities of everyday life. Even more so, it provides readers with the potential to explore different ways of existing in the world that depart from normative thinking and values. But what if the very elements of a young adult book prevent readers from detecting this potential? In this issue of *The ALAN Review*, we are concerned with examining the moral and ethical dynamics that surface when readers engage with young adult narratives. In this column, I am interested in taking a step outside of the narrative and focusing on the ethical interactions prompted by the very element that binds a literary work's narrative together: a book's cover.

Broadly speaking, the act of censorship entails the use of a particular ideological or moral framework to justify and enact the repression or deletion of knowledge that is considered objectionable to a certain audience. Among potential acts of censorship, we can identify "micro" types of repression and deletion that may not be intentional or grand in scale but that nonetheless lead to the withholding of information that is crucial to understanding a novel's stance toward particular notions of identity, democracy, and social justice. But why are book covers so important when it comes to the expression (or concealment) of certain types of knowledge? The intuitive answer would be that book covers are often the first component of a literary work with which we interact. As Genette (1997) argues, paratext[1] functions as an *invitation* for a reader to engage with the conversation depicted in a book's pages:

> More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, [. . .] a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text). (p. 2, emphasis in original)

Whether perusing books in a store or browsing for books online, a book's cover is often the main element that captures potential readers' attention and compels them to engage with a book's content. Given the status of a book cover as an interpretative threshold, it is important for us to question which audiences are invited to "step inside" a book's pages through the implementation of certain paratextual features and the extent to which these thresholds are deliberately designed to reach out to, or withdraw from, a particular readership or purchaser by omitting crucial information.

Phillips (2007) points out that book publishers are able to identify "types of segmentation" that are important for the marketing and distribution of a book, and covers are thus designed with these segments in mind: "This then influences the marketing mix chosen for their books—what combination of product,

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price, place (distribution) and promotion. Publishers that aim to sell to a mass market, for example through supermarkets, will decide to play it safe with their cover design" (p. 22). Publishers therefore create book covers that are very deliberate in terms of their appearance—and although young adult novels provide readers with a source of entertainment, inspiration, and/or education, they first and foremost must *sell*. In the remainder of this discussion, I briefly examine the ways in which book covers problematically suppress, conceal, contradict, or delete the knowledge contained in a young adult novel's pages—either because the content is considered contentious and controversial or because it has been determined that the novel's content could affect its distribution and sales.

Blowing Their Cover

One of the first times I noticed a discrepancy between a book's cover and its content occurred over a decade ago when I read Brian Sloan's *A Really Nice Prom Mess* (2005). The novel itself, which can be categorized as a comedy of errors of sorts, is narrated by a gay teen named Cameron, who is convinced by his boyfriend to bring a fake date to the prom in order to conceal their queerness and their relationship. Virginia, Cameron's decoy date who possesses distinctive flaming-red hair, soon determines that Cameron is gay, which leads her to drown her sorrows in alcohol. As Virginia wallows at the prom, Cameron attempts to deal with the tensions of having a boyfriend who expresses no desire to come out of the closet. After Cameron escapes the prom with a drug dealer, the narrative focuses mostly on Cameron's comedic coming-out tale, whereas characters such as Cameron's boyfriend and Virginia are largely dismissed throughout most of the plot.

Given Virginia's peripheral role in the narrative, it is baffling to notice that her character is put front and center on the cover of the hardcover version of Sloan's novel (see Fig. 1). The cover spotlights Virginia, along with her scarlet dress and signature red hair, while the character representing Cameron is found in the background donning a white and black tuxedo. Although Virginia is one of the most memorable characters in the novel, she only appears in a couple of the chapters and is peripheral to many of the novel's main events. However, the novel's cover focuses significantly on this secondary character, giving readers the impression that she plays a much larger role in the narrative. The aesthetic choices made on the cover become even more problematic when taking into account Virginia's cleavage. Although her chest is loosely covered by the novel's title, it is clearly the focus of the cover's image—an emphasis that does not quite sync with the gay coming-of-age narrative depicted in the novel's pages. As a matter of fact, the blatant presence of cleavage on the novel's cover was initially so prominent that sellers such as Barnes & Noble

Figure 1. Front cover of the hardback version of Sloan's *A Really Nice Prom Mess*, originally published in 2005

refused to promote the novel in their stores, leading the book's designers to make some adjustments to the cover, which consisted of moving the title of the novel upwards to partially obscure Virginia's chest (Walker, 2009).

Sloan himself has noted the somewhat deceptive nature of the original front cover of his novel, going so far as to claim that the cover is "subversive in that the racy image might catch the attention of those notoriously reluctant boy readers, even though the narrator is a gay teen" (Walker, 2009). While the redesigned version of the hardcover novel partially (and somewhat ineffectively) shields Virginia's cleavage, the image nonetheless remains quite suggestive. It is here that we notice that the book's design is caught in a double-bind. The cover's concealment of the narrative's gay themes could potentially help boost the novel's readership, making it attractive to teens who are apprehensive about reading queer narratives. However, this repression harkens back to a major issue in queer representation in the parallels created between the concealment present in the book's cover and the issue of the closet that permeates lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. Even if the novel's cover was not *deliberately* designed to conceal the narrative's queer content, this camouflaging aligns with examples of censorship present in the young adult publishing industry and the hesitation that often arises when branding a young adult novel as a queer narrative. If a young adult novel possesses queer content, should book designers, authors, and publishers be held accountable for making sure that this queerness emanates from the book's paratextual features? Intuitively, the answer would seem to be a resounding "yes," but the truth of the matter is that queerness is often approached by publishers as a contentious issue that complicates the creation and distribution of young adult literature with LGBTQ themes.

It is no secret that the publication of young adult fiction with LGBTQ themes has gone through a turbulent history. Cart and Jenkins (2006) have pointed out that the first young adult novel with gay content, John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969), was published apprehensively on behalf of HarperCollins, as the company was skeptical that a novel with queer content could be successful in the market. Decades after the publication of Donovan's novel, many agents and publishers are still wary about publishing young adult novels with queer themes and characters. One of the most recent and well-documented cases of this issue arose when Rachel Manija Brown and Sherwood Smith first attempted to find a publishing firm that would be willing to sell and distribute their novel *Stranger*, which was eventually published in late 2014. *Stranger* is a post-apocalyptic novel told from multiple viewpoints, including that of a queer character known as Yuki Nakamura. While seeking representation for their novel in 2011, an agent from a major publishing firm agreed to sign on Brown and Smith as long as they removed all references to Yuki's sexual orientation from the book. The authors refused this caveat because by eliminating reference's to Yuki's sexuality, they would be sending teenagers a message that homosexuality is "so utterly horrible that people like them can't even be allowed to exist in fiction" (Flood, 2011, n.p.). This encounter with censorship pushed Brown and Smith to question the extent to which other authors have been coerced to suppress or eliminate minority characters in young adult fiction in an effort to make a book more marketable: "This isn't about one agent's personal feelings about gay people. We don't know their feelings; they may well be sympathetic in their private life, but regard the removal of gay characters as a marketing issue. The conversation made it clear that the agent thought our book would be an easy sale if we just made that change" (Flood, 2011, n.p.).

If a young adult novel possesses queer content, should book designers, authors, and publishers be held accountable for making sure that this queerness emanates from the book's paratextual features?

Given the tendency for publishers to demand the "straightening" of queer characters, we as readers must be sensitive to instances in which a novel's queer content is potentially sidelined or overshadowed through its paratextual features. Novels such as Sloan's *A Really Nice Prom Mess* may have covers that can be approached as "subversive," but this subversion can potentially prevent a novel from reaching the very audience that could receive nourishment from

its narrative. Scholars such as Jiménez (2015) have pointed out the dismal number of young adult novels with LGBTQ protagonists that are available to readers, especially when considering the number of young adult novels that are published annually, which she estimates to be around 4,000 books (p. 408). The ability for queer teens to identify the very small number of queer narratives published every year only becomes more difficult when a novel's cover conceals or contradicts its non-normative bent.

The young adult publishing industry has been well aware of the ethical and moral issues that are encountered when designing a cover for a young adult novel that represents the experiences of minority communities. On one hand, publishers face pressure to comply with trends and fashions prominent in the industry. Yampbell (2005) encapsulates this pressure succinctly, claiming that the covers of contemporary young adult novels have had to depict extravagant and highly visual designs in order to make books more salient and purchasable. Publishers of young adult books must identify ways of making their titles stand out in a postmodern book market, and the book covers must always "reflect the times and connect with consumers" (p. 368). On the other hand, book designers and publishers have to be conscious of the important sociocultural and political themes present in a text and deliberate about the extent to which they want to highlight a novel's treatment of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and class.

Burnett (2012) has provided an in-depth overview of the ideas discussed in a panel on the topic of diversity in children's book covers organized by the Children's Book Council's Diversity Committee. Burnett points out that publishers must make a choice—follow recent trends in cover design or veer away from these trends to highlight the significance of the book's message. Laurent Linn, an art director at Simon & Schuster and presenter on the aforementioned panel, discusses the rationale behind the covers of three texts that focus on the lives of racial minorities and LGBTQ teens.

One of the texts on which Linn focuses is Bil Wright's *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy* (2011), a young adult novel about an overweight, gay, Latino character. When Linn conceptualized the cover for Wright's novel, he originally wanted to represent the protagonist with overt markers of queerness and Latino identity. However, the book was eventually published with a cover that depicts an "illustrated profile of a teen" standing with his hands on his hips, thus preventing the novel from being pigeonholed as LGBTQ literature. The use of an illustrated profile, says Linn, would facilitate the depiction of "a sassy character without getting too specific" (Burnett, 2012). Here, it is clear that the cover of Wright's novel was deliberately designed to avoid conveying the protagonist's queerness and potentially his Latino heritage. The use of coded and vague terms such as "sassy" harken back to the aforementioned apprehension that publishers have when it comes to the dissemination of young adult works with non-normative content. Once again, we observe a tendency to use a book's cover to deliberately conceal or repress the knowledge disseminated through a novel's narrative; this emphasizes a problematic, market-driven desire to avoid embracing or highlighting a novel's treatment of non-normative identities through its paratexts.

It is uncertain whether the cover of *A Really Nice Prom Mess* was deliberately designed to conceal the novel's queer narrative, although it is important to note that the novel was later repackaged in its paperback form and now possesses a cover that could *potentially* reflect the novel's gay content (see Fig. 2). Virginia is presented in the background casting

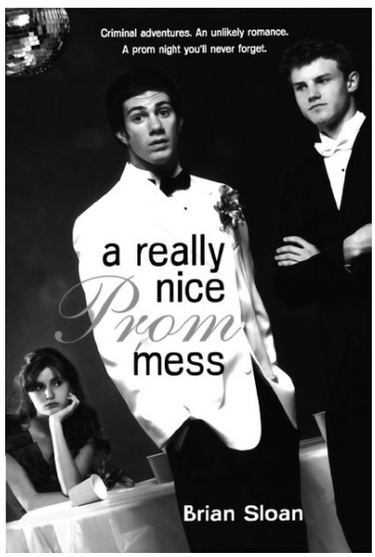

Figure 2. The repackaged cover of the paperback novel published and distributed in 2008

a bored and disinterested glance, and Cameron and his boyfriend take center stage. The two young men stand in close proximity, and the cover explicitly illustrates tension between these two characters. While this cover certainly meshes with the novel's narrative, there is still the potential for readers to think that the novel is focused on a love triangle between the three characters on the cover. There are many potential reasons why the publishers decided to change the cover for this novel. Perhaps they were attempting to avoid the issues that arose with the cleavage controversy of the original cover, especially since paperback novels typically have a wider distribution because they are more affordable to produce. Perhaps they were attempting to be more up front about the fact that the novel depicts a queer narrative, given that the original cover gives little to no indication of the novel's queer themes. But be aware, too, that publishers often change the cover of a book when hardcover sales are low. Repackaging can therefore be a potential consequence of an original cover's inability to reach particular target audiences.

Other covers of young adult novels seem to have more deceptive intentions when it comes to their design and the concealment of certain knowledge in that they explicitly contradict a novel's portrayal of minority characters. A handful of young adult novels possess covers that partake in the process of "Whitewashing," a practice that complies with a broad definition of censorship precisely because non-hegemonic races are erased or sidelined due to the prevalence of a normative framework that prioritizes White, heterosexual, cisgender identity. The most notorious and widely circulated incident of Whitewashing is perhaps the case of Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* (2009) in the United States (see Fig. 3 below). The US cover of the advance review copy of *Liar* portrays an obviously White, young woman with long, straight hair. Conversely, the novel's protagonist, Micah, describes herself in the following fashion: "I have nappy hair. I wear it natural and short, cut close to my scalp. That way I don't have to bother with relaxing or straightening or combing it out" (p. 7). Soon after, the protagonist *explicitly* identifies as a person of color when she claims that "Most of the white kids don't believe in God; most of us black kids do" (p. 10). The choice of the original cover is baffling considering how explicit Micah is about her race throughout the entire narrative, and this inconsistency has led to intense debates about minority representation in young adult fiction. According to Cornwell (2009), the publisher of *Liar* eventually changed the cover after receiving immense backlash from readers and scholars. Nonetheless, Bloomsbury denied accusations of deliberate Whitewashing, claiming that the original image was intended to reflect the protagonist's "complex psychological make-up" and was not "a calculated decision to mask the character's ethnicity" (Cornwell, n.p.).

Carter (2013) has pointed out some of the chief issues that arise when the content of a book's cover contradicts the content in a book's pages, especially in the case of young adult novels centered on the experience of racial minorities.[2] She points out that when teens read stories, they are often aware of the narrative conveyed by both the cover *and* the text, leading her to argue that we should develop greater awareness of the connection between cover and story: "Instead of being disjointed, these stories should be one and the same. Appropriate cover art is necessary because it helps to match the inside story to the story the cover portrays" (n.p.).

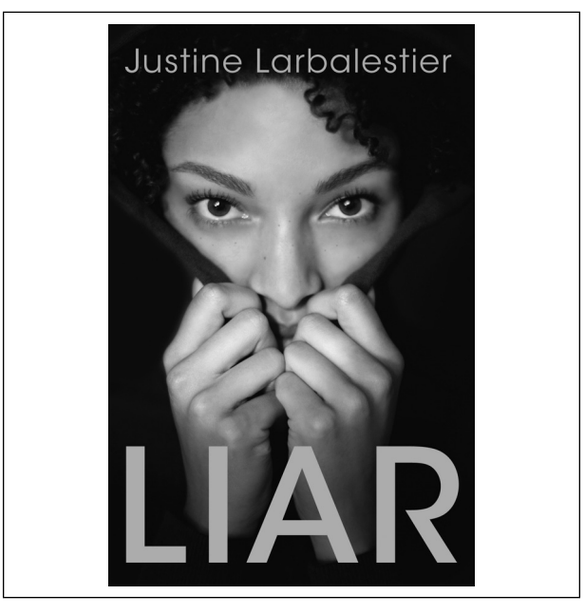

Figure 3. The repackaged version of the cover of *Liar* that was distributed in 2009. See Cornwell (2009) for a side-by-side comparison of this cover with the version that was distributed on the advance review copy earlier that year. (Danielle Delaney, designer; released by Bloomsbury Publishing, Inc.)

A mismatch between a young adult novel's cover and the content in the novel's pages leads to a withholding of information that can be confusing and downright harmful to readers, especially if we believe in the influence of young adult literature in the formation of ethically informed persons.

The mismatch between cover and story, however, is not unique to young adult literature. Perkins (2009) suggests that book covers often portray the main character "as *less* foreign or 'other' than he or she is in the actual story" with the goal of increasing book sales (n.p.). Authors such as Ursula Le Guin have explicitly addressed the issue of race and book covers, claiming that the publishing industry's perspectives on marketability are vexing because they do not consider whether minorities abstain from purchasing certain genres of literature simply because they do not see themselves represented on book covers (Perkins, 2009).

Judging a Book by (and Beyond) Its Cover

When we approach the issue of censorship in young adult literature, it is easy for us to think about censorship on a macro level and focus our attention on acts such as book banning by institutions and governments. While these acts certainly merit our attention, it is also important for us to consider acts of censorship on a micro level—acts that are not as large in scale but that nonetheless lead to the concealment or suppression of important information. A mismatch between a young adult novel's cover and the content in the novel's pages leads to a withholding of information that can be confusing and downright harmful to readers, especially if we believe in the influence of young adult literature in the formation of ethically informed persons.

Drew and Spencer (2005) argue that the most effective book designs are those that invite the reader to participate in the construction of a novel's meaning. While they acknowledge that book covers primarily exist as a marketing tool, they also suggest that a book cover should highlight an artist's creative voice and "engage the viewer in active interpretative exchange" (p. 171). As readers and teachers of young adult literature, we must demonstrate a willingness to engage in these acts of interpretation and examine the dialectical relationship that exists between a book's cover and text. Furthermore, we must express an openness toward exploring the ethical implications often attached to the visual images that young readers have access to, especially when said images perpetuate the very acts of concealment and suppression that literature should ideally liberate people from. Part of this exploration entails providing students and young readers with theoretical frameworks that can assist them in deconstructing the rhetoric of book covers and the alignment that the visual has (or does not have) with the textual.

Given our awareness of the potential issues that arise when judging or selecting a book solely by its cover, we have to be savvier when identifying and consuming young adult literature. We could definitely develop more critical awareness of the ideologies and marketing practices behind book cover design, but this will only get us so far in avoiding censorship, especially with the rise in popularity of abstract cover art. Carter (2013) has suggested that while abstract cover art may help a book reach a wider audience, it might also prove to be a hindrance for people who identify minority literature by examining a novel's cover art.

When purchasing or borrowing a young adult novel, we must recall the importance of being critical of covers, and we must learn how to look and research beyond a novel's paratexts. We can do this by reading the first few pages of the novel, reading the book summaries often found in a book's front matter, taking a close look at the blurbs that pepper the back cover and front matter of a text, or taking advantage of social media platforms such as *Goodreads*, which allow readers themselves to identify and categorize the content and genre of a book. Book covers are indeed interpretative thresholds—invitations that compel us to engage with a particular narrative. However, we must continue to think carefully about who these invitations are extended to and the ways in which some of these invitations might limit our right to read and, more important, our right to *know*.

Angel Daniel Matos *is a Consortium for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow in English at Bowdoin College. He is interested in young adult queer literature, affect, narrative, and LGBTQ fiction and media. He obtained his PhD in English, with a graduate minor in gender studies, from the University of Notre Dame. His doctoral dissertation, entitled* Feeling Infinite: Affect, Genre, and Narrative in Young Adult Queer Literature, *explores how contemporary young adult novels implement positive emotion and narrative innovation to reconfigure perspectives on queer community, queer politics, and identity.*

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End Notes

1. Paratexts, often referred to as paratextual features, are the verbal and visual productions that often accompany a literary text. They include, but are not limited to, a book's cover, illustrations, front matter, title, companion websites, and preface. In simpler terms, paratexts are elements that are external to a literary work's narrative, "often approached as non-diegetic elements to a story or the verses of a poem." Although it is uncertain as to whether paratexts belong to a text, "in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (Genette, 1997, p. 1).
2. Perkins (2009) discusses the phenomenon of Whitewashing on young adult covers in much more detail and offers deconstructions of book covers that provide more insight into the tensions that exist between authors, publishers, and book designers when it comes to visual representations of race in young adult fiction. She also reflects on the future of book covers and shares potential strategies that book creators should take into account when designing book covers.

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William **Kist**
with
Peggy **Semingson**

The Multimodal Memoir Project:

Remembering Key YA Texts

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

The Layered Literacies column aims to explore digital and online resources that enhance the use of young adult literature in teaching practices. Multimodal texts are increasingly present in the literacy experiences of students' lives both in and out of school (Albers & Harste, 2007). Young adults are reading and engaging with multimodal texts such as film, television, popular culture, video games, and video; these texts become facets of their identities (e.g., Gee, 2003). Multimodality is present not just in digital text(s), but also in various genres of young adult (YA) literature. We see multimodality in both YA graphic novels and Manga, for instance, as well as in the artistically influenced and visually compelling novels of YA writers such as Shaun Tan.

This Layered Literacies column, written by colleague William (Bill) Kist, explores the Multimodal Memoir Project. Through the project, students learn to make intertextual (text-to-text) connections between a variety of texts and young adult novels in order to explore their literate identities. This issue of *The ALAN Review* focuses on "Story and the Development of Moral Character and Integrity." Here we provide a concrete example of a creative approach to using a variety of YA texts to give students an opportunity to make sense of their world, to develop their sense of self, and to foster empathy toward others. Through the Multimodal Memoir Project, students use technology to construct a digital literacy narrative while making connections to a wide variety of YA texts and multimedia.

In the assignment, Bill broadens and redefines what constitutes the notion of a "text" as a way to help his students gain insight into their own literacy narratives and to develop a multifaceted sense of self. Bill is a preeminent expert in the area of multimodal literacies. He is a professor at Kent State University in Ohio where he teaches literacy courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. His current area of research focuses on blended learning in secondary settings.

The Multimodal Project

by William Kist

For almost ten years, I've been teaching a project called the "Multimodal Memoir." This assignment has grown from a fairly routine multimedia "literacy narrative" into a powerful process in which students begin to curate their past, and perhaps future, literacy lives. In this column, I'll be writing about my experiences with my students' Multimodal Memoirs (MM) and the many layers of textual lives they have uncovered for themselves, with a special focus on YA literature in all of its many forms.

I have written about my experiences with this assignment previously (Batchelor, Kist, Kidder-Brown, & Bejcek-Long, 2015; Kist, 2010; Kist, in press), but writing this column for *The ALAN Review* allows

me to focus on the evident strong impact that young adult literature has had on my students' literacy lives. Indeed, students have overwhelmingly referenced YA titles of all kinds when engaging in this project, demonstrating the importance of these texts in their development as literate people. This assignment is designed to invite thoughtful consideration of YA texts in students' lives; in the memoirs I have collected over the years, the evidence is clear that it has.

I should note that the assignment is not solely intended to highlight the role of YA literature in the lives of my students. And indeed, I will define "young adult literature" expansively in this column, meaning that it can take the form of any kind of text—book, film, song, visual art—that has been created expressly for and about young adults. This piggybacks on Ostenson's (2016) recent work in which he suggests that certain narrative-format video games should be considered YA texts. Several texts discussed in this piece could lie at the cusp of either young adult literature or children's literature (or both), and other texts referenced were written for an adult audience but are read widely by adolescents. My expansive definition of young adult literature encompasses all of these texts.

The point of the MM is to get students to reflect on key textual experiences of their lives, to realize that we are all shaped by the plethora of multimodal texts we have experienced, and to reflect upon how these various texts have shaped their literacy lives. Because I predominantly teach preservice teachers, the assignment is also designed to incite thinking about the implications of their multimodal lives for their future classrooms. What often occurs within the MMs is a kind of blurring of the lines regarding categories of texts. Students come out questioning why some texts "count" as legitimate texts and some texts don't and how these considerations might help them critically evaluate how the inclusion of differing texts might contribute to readers' literate worlds. In looking at the MMs that my students have created, it's clear that YA texts have figured prominently in their lives. What is also clear is that these experiences with YA texts often come outside of schools and classrooms.

The Assignment

The assignment started out very simply, drawing from an activity created by my friend Denise Stuart. I saw her do "multigenre" (Romano, 2000) autobiographies with her students at the University of Akron. She asked her students to bring in objects related to their reading and writing pasts. I decided to take this assignment and add a multimodal component so that my students would not only include multimodal texts that had been important to them, such as films, music, and even fashion, but also so they would compose their memoirs in a multimodal format. For the project, students are invited to build their memoirs in PowerPoint or Prezi or within video editing systems such as iMovie. Each student is required to present his or her memoir to the entire class. This presentation can be accompanied by live narration on the part of the writer or via a prerecorded soundtrack. In sum, the memoir itself is designed to be multimodal, and students are challenged to compose in a medium likely unfamiliar to them. Since I typically give this assignment to preservice teachers, I have included a prompt for the project that asks students to reflect upon what this work has meant to them as future classroom teachers (see Figure 1).

Students have overwhelmingly referenced YA titles of all kinds when engaging in this project, demonstrating the importance of these texts in their development as literate people.

Sometimes I start the project by using texts that have been written to help kids become better memoir writers (Bomer, 2005; Goldberg, 2007). I show them my own MM that I have created in PowerPoint. It is filled with all the important texts of my life, including many key YA texts, such as *Harriet the Spy* (Fitzhugh, 1964/2001), *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1962/2007), and the Encyclopedia Brown series of mysteries. I talk about how these texts were very influential for my literacy development.

Once I've given the students the basic guidelines of the assignment, they are off and running. They use new technologies and various video editing systems and apps to organize and exhibit their experiences with both very old and very new media. Soon, students not only realize how multimodal and multilayered their literacy lives are, but also how some very dominant aesthetic threads are evident. I've seen inquiry pathways that they may have never acknowl-

Multimodal Memoir Project

This assignment encourages you to think about all the various texts of your life. Your own history as a reader and writer of various texts has a significant impact on your teaching career. Doing the following exercises should help you reflect on your own multigenre literacy past.

Your objective is to create a screen-based representation of the influence of these various texts on your life. Such texts may include books, films, television shows, music, newspapers, magazines, sports, restaurants, food, cars, fashion, architecture, and/or interior design (to name a few examples). Visit Google Images, Flickr, Yahoo Image Search, YouTube, etc., and find some non-copyrighted images or video clips related to the important texts of your life. You may also want to create your own images/clips using a camera checked out from the IRC or your own camera.

You may create this assignment in any one of the following programs: VoiceThread (http://voicethread.com/#home); Powerpoint; digital storytelling tools such as Storymaker (http://story-box.co.uk/sm.php), Umanjin (http://www.umajin.com/), or MixBook (http://www.mixbook.com); or comic book portrayals of a character or yourself using Comic Life (http://plasq.com/comiclife). Audio may be recorded using Audacity or some other recording software.

If you use one of these digital storytelling tools, you will just go to that website and call it up when it comes time to present your autobiography. For example, you would go to VoiceThread and set up an account. Embed your images into VoiceThread and add a commentary—either text and/or voice commentary. Then you would log into VoiceThread on the day of your presentation and take us through your autobiography.

You will not turn anything in physically. You will be graded on your presentation that day.

You will be assessed based on:

1. Have you presented some specific and important artifacts from your life? Did you just get something out of today's newspaper, or are the objects/artifacts presented obviously meaningful from your past? Does your autobiography appear to have been just thrown together at the last minute, existing almost as a list, or has some real thought gone into it? Is there a balance between emergent literacy years, adolescent literacy years, and adult years? (30 points)
2. Has some creativity gone into the creation of the autobiography? (20 points)
    a. Are there one or more themes about your multimodal life running through your autobiography?
    b. Did you build a presentation with innovative use of graphics and/or music? That is:
        Did some thought go into the graphic design used in the slides or video?
        Were there some relevant, interesting music clips included?
        Were there some uses of sound effects?
        Were there some video clips included?
        Was there some imagination displayed (humor, pathos, interesting juxtaposition of images and/or sound, etc.)?
        (Please note: Not all of these elements must be included.)
3. In your presentation, how thoroughly did you present a reflection on the place nonprint-dominated media held in your life? Are there multiple kinds of texts represented? Have you reflected on lessons you have learned from your multigenre past? (20 points)
4. Do you make implications for how reflecting on your multigenre past may shape your eventual instructional practices, if they haven't already? (20 points)
    Do you give specific examples of how multigenre texts will be used in your classroom in the future?
    Are these implications thoroughly explained (rather than just saying, "I'll play music in my classroom")?
5. Is your presentation between 5 and 10 minutes long? (10 points)

Figure 1. Multimodal Memoir assignment prompt

edged come to the forefront of their consciousness during this assemblage experience, often related to the YA texts they read or viewed during adolescence.

YA Texts and the Multimodal Memoir

Over my years of assigning this project, I've seen several central themes related to students' past experiences with YA texts. First, I've noticed that students often mention YA books and other texts as linked to important milestone events or phases in their lives. The ways in which students link texts to important milestones shows how the YA texts become a part of their lives—allowing them to grow, learn, and develop as adolescents and as readers. Either the YA texts include characters undergoing similar life experiences—books by Judy Blume (Blume, 1972/2007, 1975/2014) are often mentioned as examples of this trend—or the YA texts cited provided escape from difficult situations, such as the much-loved Harry Potter series (Rowling, 2009). One student remarked, "Harry was my gateway to another world." The Harry Potter series is often included in the memoirs, not only for the immersive escape it provides through reading the texts, but also for the excitement of the life events surrounding the books, such as the midnight book-release parties at bookstores or the first-day release viewings of the films. In fact, several students have discussed that an important literacy element of the Harry Potter phenomenon was the experience of comparing and contrasting the Harry Potter books with the films. These experiences with book series are often described in addictive terms, with students reporting that they devoured the books as fast as they could be published.

Many times, experiencing a certain book, film, or show was itself the milestone. Many students recalled the first chapter book they read, for example, or the first film they viewed at the cinema. Such films are often those created for a young adult audience. Musicals—both on Broadway and in films—are also often mentioned as being these kinds of milestone texts, experienced once and then repeated again and again in a kind of ritualistic way. The act of revisiting YA texts via the MM served to help students realize how important the reading and viewing of these YA texts was during this crucial adolescent period of their lives. Going through the exercise of creating the MM helped them shape a vision of themselves as literate people from a very young age and realize just how multimodal their literate lives are.

Another main theme of the MMs related to YA texts is that students encountered and enjoyed most of these texts outside of school—and not just books with controversial themes. Students reported that, even by middle school, there was more of an emphasis at school on canonical texts, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1952/1993) or *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/2010), leaving little room for any other kind of reading. Sadly, students often report that there was little "choice reading" time after elementary school and that, not surprisingly, this was the time their interest in reading diminished. In fact, within my students' memoirs, the key YA texts during adolescence were more often introduced to them by parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends, or librarians outside of school.

Going through the exercise of creating the MM helped them shape a vision of themselves as literate people from a very young age and realize just how multimodal their literate lives are.

As students reminisce about the key texts of their lives, they often bring up pop culture texts created for young adults. Many students talked about the boy bands they first followed during early adolescence or the television shows that meant so much to them throughout adolescence. One student explained how she liked to go through songbooks to find lyrics: "Music is huge for me. It is poetry in one form or another." She explained that The Verve and Modest Mouse, two of her favorite bands, provided hours of listening and reading pleasure during her teen years. Students also often remarked on texts that they shared with their siblings and family members. They included the famed Friday night ABC sitcom lineup known as TGIF, which included *Boy Meets World* (Gibson & Young, 1993) and *Full House* (Franklin, Miller, & Boyett, 1988). One student talked about the life-changing event of meeting an actor from the television series *One Tree Hill* (Hamilton & Stoteraux, 2004).

In their memories of films during their adolescence, students also reported gravitating toward

movies created for adults, such as *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) and film adaptations of Nicholas Sparks novels. Interestingly, many of the films mentioned in the memoirs, such as *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) and *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen & Kelly, 1952), would fit well on the Turner Classic Movies channel.

When students unpack the texts discussed, what is often revealed are the family literacies and common human experiences that link us all, whether we are fans of Ozzy Osborne or The Osmonds.

Video games were often cited by students as important YA texts in their memories. One student felt that he had had extensive literacy experiences via games with a narrative structure. "SuperNintendo was huge," he remembered. "A lot of them are role-playing games," he said. "You had to read everything that was going on to play the games. . . . [They were] huge, rich, immersive experiences." Until he created his MM, he said, "[I] forgot how much of my literary experience didn't come from books."

It's worth noting that there is much diversity in readers' experiences with texts meaningful to their literate growth, and some of this is related to issues of access. "I didn't play video games," one student said. "I grew up with five channels. . . . My family didn't get Dish until I came to college. . . ." Important YA experiences for this student centered on varied books such as *Out of the Dust* (Hesse, 1997/2009), the A Series of Unfortunate Events books (Snicket, 2006), and unnamed compilations of cartoons by Gary Larson. The textual experiences that students defined as most meaningful to their reader development seem to occur outside of the classroom, even when they read traditional YA texts.

Debriefing

After the students' MM exhibitions, we debrief and attempt to peel away the layers of literacies on display. Often, students make comments such as, "I didn't know that you liked [a certain artist]! I do, too!" Or they will discuss overall trends (or anomalies) in texts that have been included in the memoirs: "I didn't know that so many people [were in a band]" or "I didn't know that liking Choose Your Own Adventure books was so common!" or "Am I the only one who likes polkas?" Once these initial textual comparisons occur, students often start to say things like, "I didn't know you had gone through something like that," or "If I had known earlier you had survived that experience, we would have talked more." The most personally revealing elements of the MMs typically emerge during the portion when the students refer to the influence of YA texts on the challenging experiences they went through during adolescence. When students unpack the texts discussed, what is often revealed are the family literacies and common human experiences that link us all, whether we are fans of Ozzy Osborne or The Osmonds.

Multimodal Memoir has revealed several implications for my practice and for that of others considering this assignment. Perhaps the most impactful is that this assignment has been a way for me to remind my students and myself of the essential role that so many different kinds of texts play in the development of our literacy lives. From the very first picturebooks we read to the crucial YA texts we encounter in adolescence to the books and films we read today, these texts become part of us. Within the MMs, students admitted that these texts have, for the most part, helped them realize that they (we) are not alone. And no matter what specific texts have affected us, there can be no doubt that even the staunchest nonreader has been impacted by some kind of text, particularly during adolescence. I'm not sure that all of my students "get" that lesson after having done the MM or will "pay it forward" to their future students, but I do know that I have seen it engender real empathy and that it has helped students recognize the richness of their own literacy lives.

William Kist *is a professor at Kent State University, where he teaches graduate courses in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies. A former high school English teacher and district curriculum coordinator, Bill has worked as a consultant with schools nationally for over 15 years in the areas of adolescent literacy and technology integration. The author of over 50 articles, Bill has also penned four books, including* New Literacies in Action, The Socially Networked Classroom, The Global School, *and the recently published* Getting Started with Blended Learning *(ASCD, 2015). Bill can be found online at www.williamkist.com and at https://twitter.com/williamkist.*

Peggy Semingson *is an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Arlington where she teaches online courses in Literacy Studies. Dr. Semingson has experience as a classroom teacher and reading specialist in both Southern California and Texas. Her research interests include social contexts of literacy learning, digital pedagogies, and online literacy teacher education. She has published in* Teachers College Record, Language Arts, *and* Research in the Teaching of English. *She was awarded the Jeanne S. Chall Research Grant from Harvard University in 2009–2010.*

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Martha **Brockenbrough,** Jennifer **Niven,** Adam **Silvera,** and Francisco X. **Stork**

Meanings of Life and Realities of Loss:

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this article, we are honored to feature a written conversation among Martha Brockenbrough, Jennifer Niven, Adam Silvera, and Francisco X. Stork, influential authors known and respected for their willingness to tackle difficult yet important topics that are relevant to so many adolescents. We appreciate the generous response of these authors (and their publishers) and their willingness to engage with challenging questions that center on morality and how it relates to life's meanings and the realities of loss.

As to process, we generated and sent a series of questions to all four authors. We compiled their initial responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the end result. We hope our readers enjoy the poignant insights offered in the direct and honest responses from these authors of adolescent literature.

How can literature complicate conceptions about life's meaning and the realities of loss?

Francisco: Kafka once said that a book must be an axe for the frozen sea within us. We numb ourselves to aspects of reality because it is so messy and complicated and painful. The problem is that as human beings, we are meant to grow, and growth can only take place when we are open and accepting of what is—the "is" that is mysterious and complicated and paradoxical and simple, beautiful, and painful all at once. Meaning will only reveal itself in the messiness of life; literature pierces through the familiar but incomplete reality of our routine lives and takes us into the messiness and mystery of existence. It can be an instrument for remembering and discovering the meaning we may have lost.

Martha: Books almost never begin at the beginning or at the end of a character's life. There are great reasons for this, but it does mean that we have a pretty narrow definition of success in the context of story. Success for a character means slaying the dragon. In reality, though, the dragon always wins. If not now, later. Loss is inevitable, and it is everywhere.

Jennifer: I believe literature can actually simplify our conceptions about life and loss, at least in the sense that it can illuminate and expand the reader's experience. In life, we have only our own personal perspectives, which can complicate our understanding of things like loss. But in literature, we're offered a full array of opinions and ideas—thoughts and feelings we might not be privy to otherwise—which opens us to numerous perspectives. It's easy to judge others or feel isolated when we have only one point of view, but literature enables us to put ourselves in the minds and hearts of others.

Martha: My favorite books are the ones that acknowledge the full complexity of humanity—books where villains and heroes maybe aren't so different from each other, where we can understand the motiva-

tions of each, even as we might prefer the point of view of one.

Adam: My favorite books are complicated in some arena, usually with relationships that become so messy I would have no idea how to navigate them in real life; I wish those characters the best as I read on with snacks in hand to see how they'll untangle these messes. My second novel, *History Is All You Left Me* (2017), is about two boys grieving the same boy—childhood love for one, recent boyfriend for the other. You have these two possessive boys who've had their futures shattered and are now turning to each other to try and heal, which of course isn't simple when both boys are withholding pieces of the puzzle. I was really fascinated by the idea of a relationship like this, and I couldn't shake it, which of course led me to write the book, but the true genesis was loss. The reality of hard-hitting loss is that you're forced to rediscover yourself afterwards, almost as if the old you has died. The only issue I have with representation of loss in literature is when the characters appear fully healed of their grief by the end. Unless your book spans a decade, it feels unrealistic. And even then.

How might your books foster opportunities for readers to explore the gray areas of morality?

Jennifer: I think it's by helping readers to see varying points of view and presenting those gray areas in an accessible way. In my new YA novel, *Holding Up the Universe* (2016), my main male character commits an act that he knows is bad. It's an act of bullying, bordering on sexual harassment, but he commits this act for what he believes are necessary reasons, ones he sees as self-preservation. My challenge in creating him was making him sympathetic because *I* didn't approve of this thing he did, and I knew my readers wouldn't either. However, I understood why he felt he needed to do this thing, and so my job was to convey that and hopefully enable readers to not give up on him, even to like him and empathize with him.

Adam: I work really hard to form characters that read like real humans. No one is 100 percent good, nor is someone 100 percent evil. In *More Happy Than Not* (2015), the main cast of characters—narrator Aaron, his girlfriend Genevieve, his best friend/love interest Thomas—are all likable, for the most part, but everyone makes questionable decisions. If they were painted to be too good or too evil, those questionable things they do wouldn't even be considered questionable; they'd be obvious to their highlighted nature. That's not interesting storytelling or realistic representation. People can be awesome, but people can really drop the ball, too. That's a life lesson to learn ASAP so you know how to protect the friendships that mean everything to you with forgiveness.

Francisco: If you go to a place of worship or if you read a religious text, you might be told what is right and what is wrong. When I write, I am more interested in creating questions than in giving answers. I try to write about characters who need to make moral choices that are difficult or ambiguous or involve personal sacrifice. In *Marcelo in the Real World* (2009), Marcelo has to choose between helping an injured girl and hurting his father. In *Irises* (2012), Mary and Kate hold equally convincing but opposing beliefs as to when life ends. The contemplation of choices for which there is no one universal answer can help break our internal rigidity and encourage us to be more compassionate toward others.

Jennifer: So much of the message of *Holding Up the Universe* is about acceptance—of others and of oneself—and of learning not to judge others before we understand who they are. I think that's an important lesson, no matter what gray area you're exploring with your characters. As my female character Libby observes, "This was the thing Mom did—looked at all sides of things. She believed that situations and people were almost never black-and-white."

Martha: One person's immorality might be another person's Monday morning. *The Game of Love and Death* (2015) portrays both interracial and same-sex love, both of which might be seen as immoral—not by me, but to readers who grow up in different parts of the country and world. So, while I don't view these things as gray areas at all,

I did choose to show them in 1937, a time when interracial marriage was in some states illegal, and same-sex relationships were almost universally condemned. I chose this time because it helped dramatize more vividly some of the heartbreak experienced by people who find themselves in love with the so-called wrong person. Falling in love is a universal or near-universal experience. Readers can relate to how it feels to be in love, and this is a way for a reader to recognize common aspects of humanity. Even if your own life looks different, you can feel how these differences are superficial in the face of deeper truths.

In dealing with loss, do your characters grow stronger or more vulnerable? Perhaps both? Or something else altogether?

Adam: Loss will make your characters stronger eventually, though they're absolutely more vulnerable when we're introducing them to the reader. The characters are in that murky phase of rediscovering themselves, which will lead to some out-of-character behavior before growing into their new selves. It's metamorphosis brought on by tragedy, basically.

Martha: Both, for sure. Some losses are an unburdening. You let go of things you didn't need to achieve or possess in pursuit of something with deeper meaning. Some losses weigh you down with grief that never really diminishes, even as you grow better at carrying it.

Jennifer: It depends entirely on the character, but I think characters, like real, breathing people, tend to grow both stronger *and* more vulnerable through loss. Perhaps it's more accurate to say they grow deeper, more resilient, more aware of life and of their own ability to continue and grow.

Martha: All loss has the potential for helping a character find her strength—strength displayed when she gets up one more time to face her foe. It's not loss doing this, though. It's the character.

Francisco: Suffering and loss bring my characters to a place of self-honesty and surrender to what is happening in their lives. They are more vulnerable, but vulnerability is no longer something to be feared because when they finally get to this place, there is nothing more that life or others can do to hurt them. There is a certain kind of strength in this. Not the strength of power and force. More like the quiet, gentle dignity of knowing who you are.

What are some take-away messages or thoughts you hope your readers have after reading about challenging moral issues in your books?

Jennifer: I hope they realize the importance of acceptance, of not judging others, and of walking around, as Atticus Finch said, in another's skin. I hope they realize that everyone is important and necessary, including them. That they are not alone. I hope they see that there are bright places around us and within us, even in the darkest times.

Martha: I hope readers grow to love my characters. It's practice in loving other people. This is how nourishing morality emerges—as opposed to the kind that insists on dividing us into the damned and the saved based on superficial differences.

Francisco: Similarly, more than messages, I would like my readers to remember my characters the way you would remember a real person who impressed you with the quality of his or her soul and made you want to be like him or her. My books are always hopeful, even when their endings may not be what we traditionally consider a happy ending. Hope, then, is the virtue that I would like the reader to take from my books.

Adam: *More Happy Than Not* is ultimately about the pursuit of happiness and the desperate avenues we'll wander down to achieve true happiness. But I want readers to understand sooner rather than later that true happiness will very rarely make itself available to us in our teen years. It's always rewarding to see your characters get the guy/get the girl or defeat the bad guy, but readers must also come to understand that lives aren't *less* just because they lack a significant other or some huge victory. It's important to see characters that maybe win the war but lose other battles. I wish I had

understood this sooner. I love happily-ever-after endings, but I can see why some of us become depressed when that literature doesn't match our reality at these ages. I don't think I'm ever going to write a book that doesn't leave you wondering how the characters are going to grow beyond their circumstances after the final page.

Martha: When you can root for a character to be brave, you can root for yourself and others in the real world in the same way. The path isn't necessarily the same for all of us, but we should all be allowed to walk our own paths to their ends. The more we take care of each other along the way, the better. In truth, we are all walking each other home, all of the time. The journey is better with kind company.

Is loss universal or shaped by unique external forces (geographic, financial, social, etc.) that make the experience unique? Can I know your loss?

Adam: Loss—and life—in my experience have been heavily shaped by outside forces. I've lost family members, grandparents mainly, but it was my favorite uncle's plane crash two months after 9/11 that really ingrained itself in me and generated a fear of airplanes that I didn't escape until I decided to fly across the country to see someone I loved. Loss of love has its own sucker punches, but I've been charmed enough to mend those lost loves into my greatest friendships. The details of loss, though, are totally going to be intimate to someone's situation. Some of us will have closer relationships with grandparents than we do our own parents, while others are missing a sibling who's gone away to college. The universal component of loss is emptiness and a desire to feel whole again, which can be impossible in the worst of cases, but finding happiness in our new lives is hugely instrumental in the healing process.

Jennifer: I feel that so much of loss is universal. As humans, we inevitably, unfortunately, must face losing the people we love or a job/home/relationship/pet we love, or something we love. I think loss is one of the things that ties us together. Can you know my loss? Not every facet. Not every single way that loss affects me. Not my particular way of expressing loss. Maybe for you loss causes anger or depression, or maybe you pretend it isn't there. Maybe I grieve in a different way. But I believe that the loss itself comes from a similar, universal place, and the fact that you can know what your own feels like is enough to understand mine. It's also enough to know—however you process your loss—that you are not alone.

Martha: I agree that loss is universal. We all experience it. Our ability to empathize with others is the variable here. I suspect there is an empathy spectrum. Some more naturally do this, while others struggle. Everyone can get better with practice. Of course, we also need to practice the flip side, which is not projecting our feelings onto others and making assumptions.

Francisco: In real life, I can only truly know your loss to the extent that I can connect it to a loss I've experienced. Literature, however, allows us to understand through empathy and imagination a loss that we ourselves have not experienced.

Martha: Fiction is a safe way to know another person's loss. We get to read a book however we like, love and despise whichever characters we like. However a book serves readers is fine and dandy, especially when it helps them put their own losses in perspective. To feel less alone in this world is a good thing.

Can hope come from loss? How is the relationship between loss and hope manifested in your work?

Martha: Hope doesn't come from loss. Hope comes from inside of us. It is our decision to be stronger than our disappointments and heartbreaks. You can have hope without loss. Having it after loss is a testament to the wonders of resilience.

Francisco: In many ways, most of my books are about the journey from loss to hope. How does hope come, and how do we hold on to it when hopelessness often seems like the more appropriate response to the world we live in? There are qualities of hope that are gift-like, and there are quali-

ties that require our effort. Learning how to wait for hope in the midst of despair and learning how to create hope in the midst of loss are some of the ultimate concerns expressed in my work.

Jennifer: I don't know that hope can *come* from loss, but I think it can definitely be found *in spite of* loss. In *All the Bright Places* (2015), the thing Violet realizes is that even after devastating loss, life continues, and even in the darkest times, bright places are all around—and within—us. Like Violet, I've lost too many people I love—grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, a boyfriend, and, most tragically, both my parents. So I know what loss is, and I know what resilience is, and part of that resilience is born from hope and from those bright places that remain.

Adam: There's nothing more defeating than hopeless loss. Loss provides opportunities to grow, but some of us can be really, really stubborn about allowing ourselves to reach that next level. I know this may be an unpopular opinion, but I love when another character/person helps pull someone out of his or her (metaphorical) grave. People need people. And being healed by someone you love or fall in love with isn't a bad thing! Some of us can't be trusted to take care of ourselves independently. Get me the knight in shining armor; then I'll be able to help others heal after learning from someone who saved me.

Martha: I think it's worth making this point: Sometimes bad things happen. They don't always—or ever—happen for a reason. Children don't get cancer because they were manifesting negativity. People don't get hit by cars because they were insufficiently grateful.

Loss is not something we experience so we have fuel for better living. It's something we experience because we are alive. It's the price we pay to be alive. How beautiful we want our lives to be is directly related to how much hope we summon, and it tends to come from the deepest parts of ourselves after we've been crushed by loss. We get the credit for it, though. Loss is generally a jerk.

Martha Brockenbrough *has worked as a newspaper reporter, a high school teacher, and an editor of* MSN.com; *she is the author of* Devine Intervention *and* The Dinosaur Tooth Fairy. *She is also a devoted grammarian and founder of National Grammar Day and the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar (SPOGG). Martha is the social media diva for readergirlz, the nonprofit literacy organization that received the Innovations in Reading Award from the National Book Foundation. She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband and their two daughters.*

Jennifer Niven *is the author of the* New York Times *bestseller (as well as international bestseller)* All the Bright Places. *Her latest young adult novel,* Holding Up the Universe, *was published in October, 2016 and is also a New York Times and international bestseller. She has also written four novels for adults*—American Blonde, Becoming Clementine, Velva Jean Learns to Fly, *and* Velva Jean Learns to Drive—*as well as three nonfiction books*—The Ice Master, Ada Blackjack, *and* The Aqua Net Diaries, *a memoir about her high school experiences. She grew up in Indiana and now lives with her fiancé and literary cats in Los Angeles. For more information, visit JenniferNiven.com, GermMagazine.com, or find her on Facebook or Twitter.*

Adam Silvera *was born and raised in the Bronx. He has worked in the publishing industry as a children's bookseller, marketing assistant at a literary development company, and book reviewer of children's and young adult novels. His debut novel,* More Happy Than Not, *received multiple starred reviews and is a* New York Times *bestseller and recipient of a* Publishers Weekly *Flying Start. He writes full-time in New York City and is tall for no reason.*

Francisco X. Stork *is the author of* Marcelo in the Real World, *winner of the Schneider Family Book Award for Teens and the Once Upon a World Award;* The Last Summer of the Death Warriors, *which was named to the YALSA Best Fiction for Teens list and won the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award; and* Irises. *He lives near Boston with his wife. You can find him online at www.franciscostork.com and follow him on Twitter at @StorkFrancisco.*

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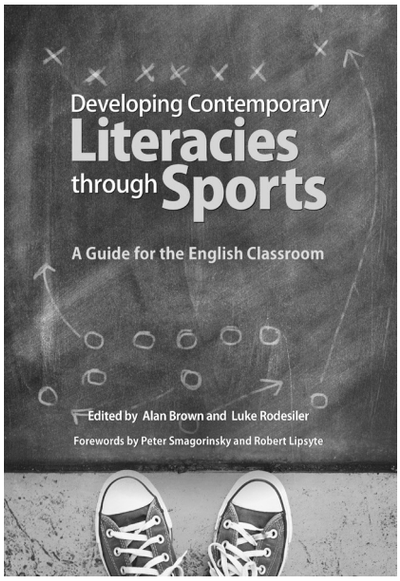

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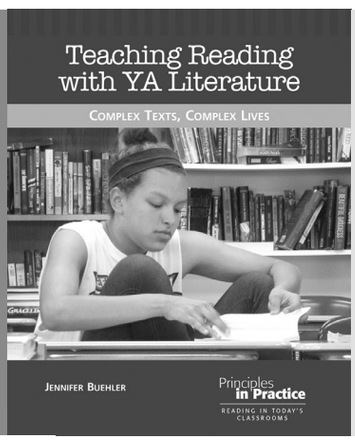

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