



From the Editors

How We Play the Game: YA Literature and Sport

Sport, culture, identity, and power are intimately related. Sport can both reaffirm and challenge societal beliefs, strengthening and calling into question existing ideologies related to gender, race, and class. While it might be true that “it’s a long race and you can always outwork talent in the end” (Quick, 2012, p. 8), the relationship between sport and socioeconomic, for example, is real: sport is an industry driven by profit, and young people pay to play. Working hard sometimes is not enough to gain access, leading us to wonder who gets to participate and if and how such issues are addressed in YA literature.

Sport can also unite and divide people—with real consequences. It is true that the team element of sport can connect people in memorable ways, as “it’s amazing how two thin pieces of clothing can hold such deep memories. Laughter, pain, victory, defeat, friendship, fatigue, elation . . . they’re all there, but only to the person who’s worn the uniform” (Van Draanen, 2011, p. 187). But it is also true that sport can remind players of inequities across spaces, as evidenced by Brigitte Lacquette’s (Ojibwe) account of her experiences playing hockey in *#NotYourPrincess*: “I grew up in a small town and I played with Métis kids, Aboriginal kids—it was great. Then I started going to the bigger cities like Winnipeg, and racist stuff started happening. At one hockey tournament, a girl called me a ‘dirty indian’ and told me to ‘go back to your reserve.’ I got really emotional and started crying. My dad told me, ‘Beat them on the ice. Be the bigger person’” (Charleyboy & Leatherdale, 2017, p. 91).

We open this issue with Meg Medina’s 2017 ALAN Workshop speech, “Opening Hearts, Changing Minds: YA Lit and Defending the Immigrant Voice.” In this piece, she explains her role as a writer who aims “to provide dignity for young people who are sometimes denied it by those at the very highest reaches of our country.” As an author and activist, she reminds us of the power of story to both affirm personal identities and challenge misrepresentations of groups of people.

In “Sport and Identity: A Collaborative Conversation,” middle grade and YA authors Diana Harmon Asher, Shannon Gibney, Miranda Kenneally, Kristin Bartley Lenz, and Randy Ribay help us explore the relationship between athletics and the self in the context of their novels and in the lives of readers. They share their impetus for writing about sport, the complex identities of their athletic protagonists, the privileges that often come with sport in the US context, and the formation of their own athletic identities.

Alan Brown, Wendell Dunn, Corrie A. Knapp, Sunday Okeke, and Elijah Shalaway describe a semester-long inquiry into jock culture and its impact on students in schools in their piece, “Writing the Unwritten Rules of High School Sports with Young Adult Literature.” The project draws from Kelly Gallagher’s (2011) *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing through Modeling and Mentor Texts* and James Coleman’s (1961) “Athletics in High School” and asks students to examine the unwritten rules of high school sports by exploring the impact of sports culture on middle and high school students and comparing their

findings with the unwritten rules found in YA fiction.

In their article, “‘I thought coaches were supposed to set an example’: Coaches’ Divergent Roles in Young Adult Literature,” Luke Rodesiler and Mark A. Lewis present the findings of a thematic analysis that examines how coaches and their relationships with adolescent athletes are depicted in contemporary YA texts. They focus on five emergent relationship types and explore the implications for teachers and their students.

David Premont, Johnny Allred, and Lauren Dalton, in their piece “Young Adult Sports Literature and Identity Construction in the ELA Classroom,” examine how sports literature can facilitate positive reading identities in students, even those who do not identify as readers. They highlight scholarship centered on including YA sports literature in ELA classrooms and provide examples from three YA sports texts that could be used with students to achieve desired reading identities: *The Running Dream* (Van Draanen, 2011), *Mexican WhiteBoy* (de la Peña, 2008), and *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015).

In the Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column, “From Rec Leagues to Elite Clubs: How the Game Changes,” Sarah J. Donovan traces her own footsteps as a student athlete as she examines critically what happens when adolescents go from beginning a sport at a recreational level to participating on a more elite level. Through this lens, she provides teachers with strategies for using three YA sports books with their students: *The Art of Holding on and Letting Go* (Lenz, 2016), *Grand Theft Horse* (Neri & Wilkin, 2018), and *Takedown* (Shovan, 2018). She also introduces a blog series project that teachers can use with students to help them dig more deeply into their passions, whether they focus on athletics, the arts, or something else.

For this issue, Kristine Gritter, Editor of the Right to Read column, invited James E. Fredricksen and Jason M. Thornberry to contribute their article, “Censored Young Adult Sports Novels: Entry Points for Understanding Issues of Identities and Equity.” The authors examine the stories of athletes in two challenged young adult novels, *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) and *Mexican WhiteBoy* (de la Peña, 2008), to argue that how people see and understand themselves in relation to others (identity) and whose needs are shared and met (equity) are limited when certain stories are not circulated in a community.

In the Layered Literacies column, James Joshua Coleman joins Column Editor Leigh A. Hall in “What Story, What Identity, Wattpad?: Teaching Youth to Restory YA Literature.” They explore the potential for digital platforms such as Wattpad in the cultivation of restorying practices with students. They argue that digital platforms provide space for students to reshape novels and identities and reflect on their lived experiences. These literacy practices help students develop skills in reading and writing while also introducing the world to new, more diverse stories—allowing youth to restory both YA literature and the world.

For his first Bending and Bridging Borders column, Column Editor Raúl Alberto Mora invited Jurana Aziz and Phillip Wilder to contribute their piece, “YAL as a Tool for Healing and Critical Consciousness: An International Perspective.” Jurana and Phillip share their experiences from Bangladesh and Tanzania and explore how YA literature and a conscious stance in the classroom foster student consciousness, particularly regarding oppression and false deficit narratives.

We close this issue with the piece, “Sport and Society: A Collaborative Conversation,” in which YA authors Carl Deuker, Kelly Loy Gilbert, and Claudia Meléndez Salinas discuss the interconnectedness of sport, society, and the characters in their respective texts. They examine sport and whether or not, in the context of our society and their books, it is an equalizer, a divider, or a bit of both.

We hope that contributors to this issue help readers consider the presentation of sport in YA titles and how YA sports literature might be used to foster a more nuanced understanding of the game and its players, its history and institutional norms, and its impact on life on and off the court.

References

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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 tar@utk.edu.

Adolescents On the Move: Immigration, Refugeeism, Asylum-Seeking, and Border Control in YA Literature Manuscripts due 7/1/2019

Immigration has been a focus in the news and public opinion of late, with worldwide politicization around immigration, refugee rights, asylum, and border control. The 2016 election and significant actions on immigration taken by the current administration have further raised the issue in political and public debates. Several recently published young adult novels focus on the immigrant and refugee experience, shedding light on the violent historical and modern events that have forced people to flee their homelands, and the varied lived experiences of documentation, deportation, family separation, and discrimination. For this call, we are interested in hearing from you about the immigration and refugee teen literatures you are reading, teaching, and using in your research. We invite correspondence about ideas for articles, and submission of completed manuscripts. Here's a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- How can young adult literature help us navigate conversations in our classrooms and communities about freedom of movement as a human right, and who is and isn't allowed to seek refuge or a new home in the United States?
- How can young adult literature help us examine and better understand the lived experiences of youth and their families directly implicated in legal mechanisms and global processes of border control?
- What experiences of immigration, refugeeism, and asylum-seeking—and discursive constructions of refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers—are presented in young adult literature? Whose stories are being told, and by whom? Whose stories are missing?
- How can young adult literature help us examine and better understand the intersectional identities (e.g., race, class, [dis]ability, gender, religion, age, geography, sexual orientation) of immigrant and refugee teens, including adolescent identities?
- Many teens want to better understand the hardships that immigrants and refugees face, and what leads to someone needing to leave their homeland. What books about immigration and the refugee experience are the teens in your lives reading, and what do teens have to say about these books? What can youth learn about the immigration and refugee experience—and themselves—through literature that explores adolescents on the move?
- In her 2018 YA novel *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, journalist and refugee Atia Abawi tells the story of a Syrian teenage boy, Tareq, who loses many of his family members in a bomb strike and must flee Syria. At the end of the book, Tareq reflects on all he has lost: “[W]hen your soul feels too much, that trauma makes a home in your heart. But it's not a weakness or even an illness. To feel so much means you can find empathy. When you can sense the pain of others, that is a power to hold onto. That is a power that can change the world you live in” (p. 221). When we read stories about youth

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like Tareq—or see US immigration agents fire tear gas at men, women, and children fleeing violence in Central America on our TV screens—how do we respond? What is our response-ability when we are called to bear witness to human trauma and tragedy? What is our responsibility in the current humanitarian crises taking place at our borders?

- YA books about immigration tell the stories of those who are seeking a better life, yet leave whole existences behind. These books also “look at life after the movement happens, exploring what it means to live with a foot in multiple cultures while trying to establish a sense of self” (Jensen, 2018). As example, in Sara Farizan’s new YA novel *Here to Stay*, Bijan Majidi, a teenage male of Jordanian and Persian descent, is suddenly the popular kid in school when he makes the winning basket in a varsity basketball game. But when someone sends the entire school an anonymous email, captioned “Our New Mascot,” with an image of Bijan Photoshopped to portray him as a terrorist, he realizes he will have to take a courageous public stance. How can young adult literature help us examine and understand all of the movements—the multiple steps and phases—adolescents experience in their immigration, refugee, and asylum-seeking journeys?
- How can YA literature help us better understand the role US economic, transnational, and foreign policies have played in im/migration and refugee movements?
- Other ideas welcome!

Exploring Adolescent Neurodiversity and Mental Health in YA Literature **Manuscripts due 11/1/2019**

Approximately one third of adolescents nationwide show symptoms of depression, and one of five adolescents has a diagnosable mental health disorder. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15- to 24-year-olds, and the majority of adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression. Yet teen depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses may go unrecognized, misunderstood, or ignored by teachers and other adults, and an ongoing stigma regarding mental health illnesses inhibits some adolescents and their families from seeking help.

As YA author A.S. King shared at the 2018 ALAN Breakfast, her teenage daughter’s depression was often written off by teachers and other adults as “drama and a need for attention.” Fortunately, authors of young adult literature have begun to explore issues associated with mental health in the genre, confronting the stigma of mental illness head-on while presenting narratives of inclusion, validation, hope, agency, and empowerment for adolescent readers. For this call, we are interested in hearing from you about the YA literature depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity you are reading, teaching, and using in your research. We invite correspondence about ideas for articles, and submission of completed manuscripts. Here’s a partial list of topics, meant only to suggest the range of our interests for this issue:

- How can young adult literature help us navigate conversations in our classrooms and communities about what it means to see and experience the world in different ways? How can young adult literature help us think about the idea that neurological differences (e.g., ADHD, depression, anxiety, autism) should be recognized and respected as any other human variation? What does it mean to be a “normal” human being? What does it mean to be abnormal, disordered, or sick?
- Neuroscience increasingly identifies the complexity of human brains, and is beginning to shift cultural perceptions of mental health. Some psychologists explore and celebrate mental differences under the rubric of *neurodiversity*. The term encompasses those with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, schizophrenia, depression, dyslexia, and other disorders affecting the mind and brain. The proponents of neurodiversity argue that there are positive aspects to having brains that function differently. But others, including many parents of affected youth, focus on the difficul-

ties and suffering brought on by these conditions. What experiences of adolescent mental health and neurodiversity—and discursive constructions of neurodiverse youth—are presented in young adult literature?

- Whose stories are being told, and by whom? Whose stories are missing?
- Do YA books stigmatize, romanticize, and/or normalize adolescent mental health and neurodiversity? What are the dangers of these representations?
- How can young adult literature help us examine and better understand the intersectional identities (e.g., race, class, [dis]ability, gender, religion, age, geography, sexual orientation) of neurodiverse adolescents?
- How do TV and movie adaptations of YA novels depicting adolescent mental health and neurodiversity (e.g., the Netflix series “Thirteen Reasons Why”) affect readers’ understandings of adolescent mental health? What intertextual connections about adolescent mental health can be drawn from multiple representations of the same story?
- Popular YA author John Green admits to writing his own mental illness into his latest novel, *Turtles All the Way Down*, explaining that “having OCD is an ongoing part of my life.” Similarly, in Jessica Burkhart’s edited collection *Life Inside My Mind: 31 Authors Share Their Personal Struggles*, YA author Sara Zarr describes her ongoing struggles with depression (“Sometime between getting out of bed and standing in front of the coffeepot, I feel the cloud...Maybe more like quicksand than a cloud...I feel fear and worthlessness, or fear that I’m worthless” [p. 260]). In the same collection, YA author Francisco X. Stork describes his own suicide attempt and experiences with bipolar disorder (“When I talk about bipolar disorder, I use words like ‘loneliness’ and ‘uncontrollable longing’ rather than words like ‘depression’ and ‘mania’ because the former are more descriptive of what I actually feel, even though depression is a bundle of feelings and thoughts more complicated than loneliness, and mania is more than irrepressible longing” [p. 284]). We wonder: When YA authors disclose their own struggles with mental health, how does this impact teen readers?

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes. Please see the ALAN website (<http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines>) for submission guidelines.