

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES ASSOCIATION  
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# *young adult* library services



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O C T O B E R 1 8 - 2 4 , 2 0 0 9

## INSIDE:

BANNED BOOKS WEEK

STINKY FISH AND  
TOSSED EGGS

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PRESENTATIONS

AND MORE!

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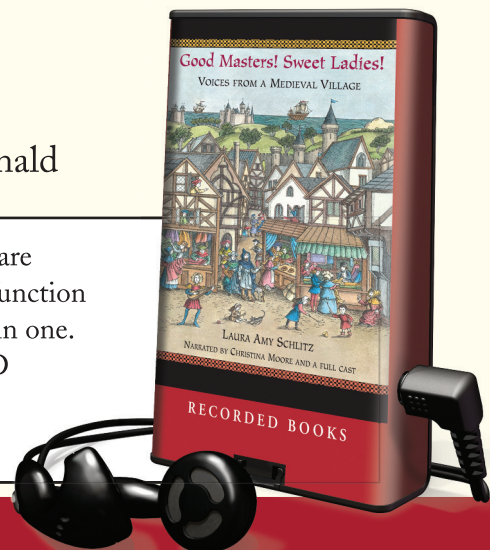
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# young adult library services

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## About This Cover

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#### Statement of Purpose

*Young Adult Library Services* is the official journal of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. YALS primarily serves as a vehicle for continuing education for librarians serving young adults, ages twelve through eighteen. It will include articles of current interest to the profession, act as a showcase for best practices, provide news from related fields, publish recent research related to YA librarianship, and will spotlight significant events of the organization and offer in-depth reviews of professional literature. YALS will also serve as the official record of the organization.

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# from the Editor

RoseMary Honnold

Taking the lead from this year's Teen Read Week slogan, Read Beyond Reality, I am indeed changing my reality this year. After twenty-five years in Coshocton Public Library, I am retiring and taking on a new exciting challenge, editing VOYA magazine. I began this editorial in April, the transition month in which I transferred my library and YALSA responsibilities to others, a very strange feeling! Luckily, I won't have to say good bye to my many friends and colleagues in YALSA. I plan to see as many of you as possible at conferences and hear from you in e-mail at [rhonnold@voya.com](mailto:rhonnold@voya.com).

This summer issue of YALS is packed with Teen Read Week ideas, program ideas, tips on reviewing books, and all those many bits of association news and articles that make YALSA such a supportive professional organization to those working with teens in libraries. It is the YALSA membership dedicated to sharing ideas and resources that makes YALS possible. YALSA has also given me opportunities for meeting friends, active participation, new experiences, and networking.

YALS was passed on to a very capable guest editor for a short time, Tina Frolund, who I had the pleasure of working with on her book, *The Official YALSA Awards Guidebook*. YALSA has announced Sarah Flowers as the new YALS editor, who is now working on the fall issue. You can contact Sarah through the YALS editor's e-mail address, [yalseditor@gmail.com](mailto:yalseditor@gmail.com). Sarah will be eager to hear from you if you are interested in writing for YALS. As I always tell librarians in my workshops, share your successes! Someone else is looking for good ideas and yours might be a perfect match for what he or she needs.

I send a big thank you to Stephanie Kuenn of YALSA! Stevie knows everybody and has been so helpful when I was looking for authors on specific topics or if I needed to toss around an idea. I know YALS is in good hands with Sarah and Stevie steering the way.

## A Word from the Guest Editor

It's an honor to act as the bridge between RoseMary and Sarah and to guide this issue of YALS to you, dear readers!

You will find this summer issue full of tips for achieving that goal we all strive toward—getting young adults to be engaged with reading, learning, and thinking! You will definitely want to incorporate some of Ken Petrilli's Banned Books Week suggestions into your observance this year. And all of the from-the-field advice for Teen Read Week can only enhance your own programs and celebrations.

This issue can also give you a career boost. Check out Carlie Webber's advice for getting a reviewing gig. For those of you wanting to be involved in YALSA but unsure how to proceed, be sure to read Paula Brehm-Heeger's article about the nomination process for serving on a YALSA award committee or in a YALSA office.

How many opportunities in life pay you back more than you give? YALSA is definitely one of those opportunities—please join the fun. See you at a YALSA event!

Tina Frolund



# Engaging the YALSA Community

## from the President

Sarah Cornish Debraski



It's hard to believe that I'm already writing my final column as YALSA president. This has been an incredible year for me as I've been at the head of our association during a time I think has been quite exciting. My first column outlined my theme, "Engaging the YALSA Community." I believe that we have made great strides this year towards engaging members more. The member survey in the fall was useful in identifying what current members want from YALSA—more opportunities and information about how to participate in YALSA, and more ways to participate virtually.

Presently we are exploring interest and discussion groups as a way to meet these needs. Committees have been conducting evaluations to see if they would function better as an interest or discussion group. Some committees are already in the process of transitioning to an interest or discussion group. How can interest and discussion groups help engage our community?

- Unlike committees, which, as per ALA policy, may consist of no more than 33 percent virtual members, there is no limit on how many virtual members a

discussion group (DG) or interest group (IG) can have.

- DGs and IGs allow for grassroots participation because (1) they can be established by any group of fifteen YALSA members via a petition to the Board and (2) the convener is elected from among DG and IG members, eliminating the top-down method of committee appointments.
- Unlike committees, where a specific number of members is appointed, there is no limit as to how many members can participate in a DG or IG.

As you can see, these groups will create many more opportunities for participation. Given the rapidly changing nature of teen interests and library services, it also makes sense to encourage groups that are not designed to last forever. They emerge when there is an interest, and then when the interest or need for them fades, they dissolve.

Another way we are engaging the YALSA community is through Road Trip '09 ([www.tinyurl.com/yalsaroadtrip](http://www.tinyurl.com/yalsaroadtrip)). Social events hosted by YALSA members will be held across the country at state conferences, giving YALSA members the

opportunity to network and socialize outside of the ALA Annual Conference.

I discovered this year yet another way YALSA members are engaged. Throughout the year, so many members have taken the time to e-mail me with concerns or compliments and introduce themselves to me at events. I think this level of open, friendly, professional communication speaks volumes about our association and its members. We are not a didactic hierarchy, but a group of individuals who share a common desire to serve teens well and excel in young adult librarianship. I think that bond can only be strengthened as we continue to explore new ways to form member groups and share resources.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve as your president. I've gotten to know so many more members this year and see even more the enthusiasm and dedication so many of you give to this association. It has been a privilege to observe the passion of young adult librarians across the entire country. With great sincerity, thank you! YALS

# Banned Books Week: Celebrating Your (and Your Teens!) Freedom to Read

*By Ken Petrilli*

**E**ach year for a week in September, the eyes and ears of the library world turn toward one of the more prevalent issues that face libraries and librarians every day—the issue of intellectual freedom. This week is Banned Books Week, observed this year September 26 to October 3.

For those not familiar with this event, here's a bit of background. Banned Books Week is observed the last week of September each year, and has been observed every year since 1982, after many inside the profession noticed a great surge in the number of book challenges in the United States. The event is jointly sponsored by the

American Booksellers Association, the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, the American Library Association (ALA), the American Society of Journalists and Authors, the Association of American Publishers, and the National Association of College Stores.

Why take the time to celebrate Banned Books Week? As teen and young adult librarians, we are on the front lines of intellectual freedom issues more than anyone else in our profession. Don't believe me? Let's take a look at the list of the ten most challenged books of 2007, according to ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF):

1. *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson/Peter Parnell
2. *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier
3. *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes
4. *The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman
5. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
6. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
7. *TTYL* by Lauren Myracle
8. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
9. *It's Perfectly Normal* by Robie Harris
10. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

Any of these titles look familiar? I would think so; it is safe to say that at least seven of these books are in many YA collections across the country.

For the most part, challenges to these (and many other) books are issued by parents concerned about what their children are reading. This, in and of itself, is not necessarily a bad thing; we want to see parents who are concerned! What we don't want is that concern turning to outright fear. As Judy Blume so eloquently pointed out,

"I believe that censorship grows out of fear, and because fear is contagious, some parents are easily swayed. Book banning satisfies their need to feel in control of their children's lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don't read about it, their children won't know about it. And if they don't know about it, it won't happen."<sup>1</sup>

I think it is important for us to remember not to overtly demonize most potential challengers. They are, after all, people just like us, and being concerned for our children's well-being is never wrong. Lauren Myracle, an author whose books

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**KEN PETRILLI** is the Teen Services Librarian at the New Rochelle Public Library in New York, as well as being a musician, notorious anime fanatic, and pop-culture junkie. He is currently serving on YALSA's Intellectual Freedom Committee.



are frequently challenged, spoke beautifully about this very notion when she spoke in Denver this past January at the Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF)'s author event. She responds to every angry and outraged e-mail she gets from parents, and many times finds that they are not quite as angry at her as it might, at first, seem (see link under "Resources" for the entire speech). At the same time, never forget that potential challengers are out there, and some are motivated by fervent religious or political beliefs. They are often highly organized and have the time and resources to back their agenda. Remember that having a clear and well-written collection development policy goes a long way towards deflecting most challenges.

## How to Celebrate Banned Books Week?

- Make a display, or two or three! Create booklists to go with them, or order the ones available from ALA (along with posters and other materials). Place them strategically and they'll spark discussions. And try to step away from the traditional banned books week oldies and goldies (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Huck Finn*, and the like) and display newer items like *TTYL*, *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, or *Looking for Alaska*.
- Don't forget to promote Banned Books Week on your blog, MySpace, or Facebook (Banned Books Week is on both social networking sites so be sure and friend them). Tweet about it if you're on Twitter. Link to some of

the many resources listed elsewhere in this article.

- Hold a banned books discussion, or a banned books reading. There are tons of lists available on the OIF's Web site.
- Don't forget your comic readers! The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is the industry's watchdog and the site has many examples of comics that have been challenged or banned.
- Take some time to look at your library's collection development policy. Is it up to date? Are you prepared if a challenge is issued? YALSA has resources available if you need help.

Banned Books Week was created in large part to remind us and our patrons that books and libraries are an important part of our democratic society. We provide equal access for anyone to whatever it is they are looking to read; and that includes the teens we work with every day. I like to think that the last week of September is an opportunity to remember that what I do is important, and that fighting for our collections and our teen patrons is a worthy battle. I hope you all feel the same.

Happy Banned Books Week! YALS

## References

1. Smith, P. "Judy Blume - 1938," [www.ncteamericancollection.org/litmap/blume\\_judy\\_nj.htm](http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/litmap/blume_judy_nj.htm) (March 29, 2009).

## Banned Books Week Resources

For ideas, materials, and more, check out the official Banned Books Week sites:

- ALA. "Banned Books Week: Celebrating the Freedom to Read," [www.ala.org/bbooks](http://www.ala.org/bbooks) (April 2, 2009).
- BannedBooksWeek.org. "Banned Books Week," [www.bannedbooksweek.org](http://www.bannedbooksweek.org) (April 2, 2009).

ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom has lots of resources not only for Banned Books Week, but all facets of intellectual freedom:

- ALA. "OIF," [www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif) (April 2, 2009).
- The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. "Welcome to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund!" [www.cbldf.org](http://www.cbldf.org) (April 2, 2009).
- This link will take you to Lauren Myracle's excellent presentation from Midwinter last January.
- OIF Blog. "Lauren Myracle's Presentation at FTRF Midwinter Event," [www.oif.ala.org/oif/?P=198](http://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?P=198) (April 2, 2009).
- YALSA's resources on dealing with challenges.
- YALSA. "Dealing with Challenges to Young Adult Materials," [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/profdev/yachallenges.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/profdev/yachallenges.cfm) (April 2, 2009).
- YALSA's IFC.
- YALSA Wiki. "Censorship and Challenges," [http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Censorship\\_%26\\_Challenges](http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Censorship_%26_Challenges) (April 2, 2009).

## Help Shape YALSA's Future

*By Paula Brehm-Heeger*

**E**nsuring YALSA's continued success requires input from you, our talented members! Standing as a candidate for election to a YALSA office or award committee offers the chance to share your expertise and gain valuable leadership skills. Self-nominations are welcome. Interested members should complete the online nomination form at [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/aboutyalsa/nominating.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/aboutyalsa/nominating.cfm).

The Nominating Committee is seeking member candidates for the following positions on the 2010 election slate:

### **Vice President/President-Elect**

Term: three years (one year President-Elect, one year President, one year Past President)

Minimum number of candidates: 2  
Number elected: 1

### **Board of Directors**

Term: three years  
Minimum number of candidates: 4  
Number elected: 2

Additional information about the duties and responsibilities of the President and Board members is available at: [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/aboutyalsa/dutiesresponsibilitiesboard.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/aboutyalsa/dutiesresponsibilitiesboard.cfm).

### **Margaret A. Edwards Award**

Term: two years

Minimum number of candidates: 6  
Number elected: 3

### **Michael L. Printz Award**

Term: one year  
Minimum number of candidates: 8  
Number elected: 4

### **Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults**

Term: two years  
Minimum number of candidates: 8  
Number elected: 4

Check out the awards section and view the policies and procedures for each award to get an idea of the duties and responsibilities at [www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists).

All elected offices require attendance at the Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference. Please know your availability before you nominate yourself (or another) for a YALSA office. Nominating Committee members are Chair Paula Brehm-Heeger, Sophie Brookover, Molly Collins, Sharon Rawlins, and E. M. Roublow.

### **Tips**

Let the committee know you are interested in running for office.

- Submit the online form to the Nominating Committee to let them

know that you are interested in running for office. This form is different from the committee volunteer form so if you have already submitted that one for Printz or Edwards, you would need to also submit a nomination form to be considered as a candidate to run for an award selection committee.

- Don't be afraid to nominate yourself! As the membership gets bigger, the Nominating Committee's job gets harder. Make their job easier by helping them find you!  
Submitting a nomination form does not guarantee that you will be a candidate for an elected position.

- Before determining the final slate of candidates, the Nominating Committee evaluates each candidate to determine who will be the best qualified for that year. Some factors the committee considers are: Are you overcommitted in YALSA or your state associations? Do you have a good track record in your past YALSA committees and task forces? Do you need to gather more experience before running for an office?
- If you are not selected as a candidate, you can submit a petition to add your name to the ballot.

Questions? Here's who to contact:

- Nominations Chair: Paula Brehm-Heeger at [paulabrehmheeger@fuse.net](mailto:paulabrehmheeger@fuse.net).
- Current President Elect/President/ Past President: Any one of these three individuals knows the process (because they've been through it) and can direct you to whom you need to contact. If you want information about a specific office, try contacting someone holding it presently. They'll be glad to tell you what they know!
- The YALSA Office will also direct you to whom you need to speak. YALS

**PAULA BREHM-HEEGER is chair of YALSA's Nominating Committee and was 2007-2008 YALSA President.**



**T**he Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Baker & Taylor Conference Award

Committee happily announced the two grant winners for 2009: Laurie Amster-Burton and Kate Toebbe. Each recipient receives a \$1,000 grant to attend the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference this summer in Chicago. The grant is awarded for first-time attendance at an Annual Conference.

Laurie Amster-Burton, a librarian at Washington Middle School in Seattle, Wash., was delighted to receive the award, and her plans for the conference include meeting school and public librarians from around the country—and perhaps a few famous authors! She is looking forward to hearing the innovative ways librarians are promoting books and teaching information skills to teenagers. Laurie, an enthusiastic fan of the Printz Award, is looking forward to attending both the Printz Program and Reception as well as the YA Authors Coffee Klatch.

Besides checking out Chicago and its libraries, Kate Toebbe, a librarian at the Bond Hill Public Library, part of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, wants to attend as many programs as she can; especially the YALSA

# YALSA's Baker & Taylor Conference Award

*By Geri Diorio and Christopher Shoemaker*

President's Program, the awards receptions, and the Coffee Klatch. Kate is excited to attend the Annual Conference and connect with so many energetic librarians, especially as she plans to continue her involvement with YALSA.

The YALSA/Baker & Taylor Conference Award is given out each year to up to two recipients and funded by the Baker & Taylor Company. YALSA offers more than \$35,000 in member awards and grants each year; applications

for all are due to the YALSA office by December 1.

The YALSA Baker and Taylor Award Committee members are: Geri Diorio, Chair, Ridgefield (Connecticut) Library; Lisa Morris-Wilkey, Casa Grande, Ariz.; Jennifer Ralston, Harford County Public Library, Belcamp, Md; Christopher Shoemaker, New York Public Library; and Janine Waters, South Hampton Free Library and Huntington Valley Library, Chalfont, Penn. **YALS**

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**GERI DIORIO** is chair of YALSA's Baker & Taylor Conference Award Committee; **CHRISTOPHER SHOEMAKER** also served on the committee.

## Fabulous Films for Young Adults

*By Susan Wray*

**Q**uestion: If you put several people around a table with snack food in the middle and drinks (nonalcoholic, of course!) all around, turn out the lights, and then turn on a TV and DVD player, what do you have? Answer: The Fabulous Films for Young Adults Committee hard at work creating the 2010 list of great movies for teens. This will be the ten lucky and dedicated librarians on the 2010 committee in Boston during the Midwinter Meeting in January. In the meantime, the same lucky librarians will be very busy at home watching all the films, good, bad, or indifferent, nominated for this year's list.

The name of the committee, Fabulous Films for Young Adults, nicely sums up our purpose. The committee is charged with creating a list of good, high interest, quality films created for or about young adults. For the 2009 list, the charge was new: create a list based on a theme. Prior to

this year, the committee created a list of films (formerly known as Selected DVDs and Videos for Young Adults) that could be on any topic as long as they were released the previous year and fit the criteria of being technically and visually well made and of interest to young adults.

The same criteria, with the exception of the release date, were used when creating the first themed list. The 2009 theme was "Coming of Age Around the World" and has sixteen titles, both fiction and nonfiction, feature film and documentary. To make the final list, a film needs a simple majority of the members voting in favor of inclusion. Some of the movies incited good discussions among committee members, sometimes swaying opinions and final voting results.

This year the committee has chosen the theme: "Outside-In: Rebellion vs. Conformity." We are looking for films that find young adults on the outside of society,

whether that be voluntarily or involuntarily, and how they learn to adjust to, accept, or change how people view them and how they go about trying to fit in while trying to remain true to themselves. Being on the outside may mean different socioeconomic standards, educational levels, intellectual abilities, sexual preferences, or other differences.

The Fabulous Films for Young Adults Committee has plans to present at the Annual Conference in Chicago to share clips of some of the 2009 films and to discuss the importance of a teen film collection and programming using movies. We will also meet at the Annual Conference to begin reviewing titles already nominated as a group. With the broad theme, we are hoping to have many films to watch, consider, and discuss during the year.

Anyone may nominate a film they feel fits the theme between now and December 1. To nominate or to see past lists, please go to [www.ala.org/yalsa/fabfilms](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/fabfilms). Suggested films do not need to have been produced or released in a specific year, making this list a wonderful way to reintroduce libraries and teens to films that may have been forgotten or missed the first time around. Films do need to be readily available for purchase.

We are looking forward to an exciting year with lots of movie watching and great discussions both at the Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting. Our discussions are always open, so drop in anytime to see how the Fabulous Films list is created. **YALS**

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**SUSAN WRAY** is currently the director at the Joplin Public Library, Joplin, Missouri. She has had two incarnations as a youth services librarian and believes that is the best place to be and is the heart of the library. Susan was always a reader and joined a Teen Advisory Group as soon as she met the minimum age requirement. This volunteerism led to her first library job as a page and she's not left libraries since.



**W**onder what the experts would do? This is the place to ask tough questions that library students and new librarians have about working with teens. The experts who answer are YALSA members and YALS readers who have learned through experience and are happy to share what they have learned with you. If you have a question for YA Q&A or would like to share what you know, e-mail [yalseditor@gmail.com](mailto:yalseditor@gmail.com).

### Q. How do I get a reviewing gig at a professional journal?

**A:** Ask! Is this answer too simple? Yes and no. Not all review journals have the same requirements for their reviewers. You may have to fill out a lengthy reviewer application form, or a simple e-mail and a writing sample may suffice. Some journals have in-house staff who take the responsibility of writing a percentage of the journal's reviews. The journal you apply for may regularly take on new reviewers, but that doesn't mean its current staff isn't full. Be prepared to face rejection, but know it's not personal. Keep checking back with the journal's review editor.

To prepare for your application, try writing some reviews of both fiction and nonfiction works in the style of the journal you want to write for. One size in this case does not fit all. If you're interested in writing for a journal that prints both positive and negative reviews, write a few in each style. How do these styles compare? Here's a quick rundown of some of the major journals that print reviews written by librarians:

- *Booklist*, online at <http://booklistonline.com>: This ALA publication prints reviews of books they deem to be of good quality.

## YA Q&A

### Expert Advice on Tough Teen Services Questions

*By Carlie Webber*

- *Horn Book*, online at <http://hbook.com>: Runs two publications, the *Guide* and the *Magazine*. Reviews that run in the *Magazine* are 200-250 words and more in-depth than reviews in the *Guide*. Like *Booklist*, *Horn Book* only prints positive reviews in the *Magazine* and *Guide*. Books are vetted by staff before they are sent to reviewers.
- *Kirkus*, online at <http://kirkusreviews.com>: Reviews run no longer than 185 words, which has garnered *Kirkus* a reputation for pithy, honest writing. *Kirkus* reviews all genres of fiction and nonfiction and is known for offering both positive and negative reviews.
- *VOYA*, online at <http://voya.com>: *VOYA* is best known for its Q (for quality) and P (for popularity) ratings, which are especially helpful if you're looking to add certain types of materials to your collection. Reviews run 200-250 words.
- *School Library Journal (SLJ)*, online at <http://schoollibraryjournal.com>: Reviews run approximately 250 words. Like *Kirkus*, *SLJ* offers both positive and negative reviews. They also have excellent coverage of professional materials and graphic novels.

### Q. What are the elements of a great professional book review?

**A:** A professional book review should always answer the following question: "Is this book worth buying?" The answer will be different not just for every book, but for every librarian who reads the review. It is the reviewer's job to give the purchaser enough information about the book so the purchaser can take what she knows

**CARLIE WEBBER** is a librarian, writer, speaker, and consultant who reviews YA literature for *VOYA* and *Kirkus Reviews*. For more of her advice and opinions on literature and library services, visit her blog, *Librarilly Blonde*, at <http://blogs.bccls.org/carlie>.

about her community's reading habits and say yes or no. By the end of your review, a purchaser should be able to answer the following questions:

- Who is this book for? Is it for middle school, high school, both? Is it an adult book with strong young adult appeal?
- What is this book about? Talk about the plot for no more than half your review. The other half of the review should include discussion of the book's themes, audience, and how well the author conveyed his ideas to the reader.
- How does this book compare to others in its genre?
- Will this book make my collection better or more diverse? Public library collections need a balance of popular and literary books (not that the two must be mutually exclusive). If the book covers a topic seen in many school curricula, make note in your review of anything that will help school librarians make collection decisions, including the author's authority and comparisons to other books on the same topic. When reviewing nonfiction, always make note of supplements like indexes and bibliographies.

- Do the dialogue, characterizations, plot, and narration work together to form a whole, or, for example, does the dialogue feel like it was written by a different writer when compared to the descriptions?

Early in your reviewing career, it may be hard to get all of this in the required 200-250 words, especially if you're reviewing a literary book heavy on themes. When this happens, the best thing to do is edit your review using the perspective of a buyer, not a reviewer. When describing the plot, think of writing a booktalk, something that will entice the reader. Then, follow it with notes on overall themes and audience. If the book has multiple plot lines, limit yourself to a sentence or two on each.

## Words and Phrases to Avoid

1. *Well-written*. This phrase is essentially meaningless. Instead of saying "well-written," try listing one or two phrases that moved you, using evidence from the book to show the quality of the writing.
2. *For the sophisticated reader*. This immediately discourages your

colleagues from buying or recommending a book to those they deem not-sophisticated readers.

3. *For boy/girl readers*. Because a person's gender does not limit their ability to read a book, neither should your review suggest who should read it.
4. *Every library should have this book or Everyone should read this book*. There is no one book that every library should own or everyone should read. Furthermore, it is not up to a reviewer to dictate what libraries should buy. Instead of making blanket statements about the overall appeal, focus on the book's themes and emphasize which ones will have special resonance with teen readers.
5. *Readable*. All books are readable, just like all food is edible. If a book fails because of certain aspects of the writing, that is what you should emphasize in your review.

As with any other craft, writing not just great but useful reviews takes a lot of trial and error. Read all the professional reviews you can get your hands on. Practice emulating their styles in a blog or journal. Persistence and developing an eye for self-editing will lead to a successful reviewing career. **YALS**



The County of Los Angeles Public Library Teen Services team went literal in interpreting the theme of transformation during the metamorphosis summer reading program of 2008. Capitalizing on the success of *Project Runway*, a Peabody Award-winning, fashion-driven reality television show, more than thirty county libraries seized the opportunity to create a catwalk event of their very own. Dubbed Project Morph, this program-in-a-box encouraged young adults to strut their stuff in tees that they cut, ripped, then altered using fabric markers, adhesive, assorted trim, transfers, gems, and needle and thread.

Teen Services Coordinator Deborah Anderson first implemented this program in 2007, at West Covina Library. "Whenever possible, programs have to be field tested before turning them into programs-in-a-box, so that all the bugs can be worked out," she said. "We had a lot of fun testing Project Morph twice, and we learned a lot about what works and what doesn't."

Twenty-five West Covina young adults responded to flyers, signs made by volunteer teens, and word-of-mouth promotion, arriving with siblings, parents, and dated garments in need of refurbishment. Contestants snagged ribbon, buttons, and other decorative notions to rehab outmoded styles. For example, an aging pair of jeans that looked novel as bell-bottoms became pedal pushers, and gems adorned seams. Participants also took advantage of the free T-shirts provided for transformation. Young adults worked steadily for one hour and fifteen minutes to complete garments, then the teens and two sibling models rocked the catwalk. A local newspaper photographer planted himself at the far end, and music compiled by teen volunteer, John Kim, blasted from a CD that included top *Project Runway* competitor Santino's runway selections. Meanwhile, the tube featured *The Devil Wears Prada*. The top three winners received kitschy-fun prizes, including a tiara, golden Barbies, and swag bags of books and

# Project Morph

## Bringing Fashion Rehab to Los Angeles Library Teens

*By Monique Delatte*

gift certificates (like those given at the Oscars). Two additional runners-up received coffee shop gift cards.

This sewing extravaganza featured Anderson and Regional Youth Services Coordinator Sandi Novoa machine-stitching the teens' dream garments. Young adults lined up for her tailoring expertise. Lessons learned by the teen services team for the 2008 rollout include a switch from fabric paint to fabric markers, as Novoa took a wet paint stain while speedily constructing an award-winning garment. "All in the name of fashion and our community teens," laughed Novoa.

The second trial event traveled to nearby La Puente Library two weeks later.

Though a smaller library than West Covina, even more young adults showed up to cut, stitch, then paint T-shirts in an effort to win fashion Oscars, fashion-oriented books, cool backpacks, and a variety of hip gift cards. Anderson kept the sewing machine hot and advised teens on how to rehab passé garments or reinvent the shape and look of the basic tee.

In the interim between these 2007 fashion events and the rollout of the summer 2008 program-in-a-box, John Kim reinvented Project Morph at La Puente Library during the spring. Nominated twice for county teen volunteer of the year, the inventive Kim rethought his favorite young adult event, by

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**MONIQUE DELATTE is a children's/teen/reference services librarian with the County of Los Angeles Public Library (CoLAPL). She collaborated with Deborah Anderson to develop and implement a teen services pilot program in East Region, which led to a centralized CoLAPL teen services department at library headquarters. Delatte's passion for fashion places her among a minority of librarians with an apparel and textile design degree, a background in staging runway shows, and an affection for all things *Project Runway*. Project Morph is the fierce brainchild of Anderson and Delatte.**

acting as tailor for teens sewing iPod cozies and filming his contribution for a high school graduation capstone. Kim explains, “Crafts, at any age, are important stimuli. Plus, any excuse for sewing is fine by me!”

## Project Morph Arrives

During the flaming hot summer of 2008, the four regions of the county system each received the Project Morph program-in-a-box, and teen librarians implemented their own unique version of the event. The first of these, Temple City Library, strayed from their popular gaming and book club programs to try this more artistic fare. Young Adult Services Librarian Josh Irwin explained, “Most of our regular programming slants towards boys, even though we get a fifty-fifty ratio. It was nice to have something that wasn’t video games or nerdy board games.”

Library Assistant Jose Parra agreed, “This represented an audience that we usually don’t connect with because of the nature of our events.”

Irwin added, “It provided an opportunity for different people to experience our programming. It let people bond and brought different cliques together. Some parents attended, so it familiarized people with what we’re doing.”

Parra concurred, “It definitely was a success. We had a good turnout. About thirty people came, so we saw a lot of new faces. It’s great to see the same people, but it’s really great when you know you’ve reached a new audience.”

“Also, we have Pizza and Pages, a boys’ book club with pizza, and we took some of the Project Morph flyers to the book club,” said Irwin.

Parra continued, “So, now there is a girls’ Pizza and Pages book club and it spawned from the Project Morph event.”

During the program, Parra printed images onto T-shirt transfer paper using a library computer, as teens suggested and

selected favorite slogans, characters, and themes that Irwin then melded to T-shirts using a hot press. Next, teens cut and stitched designs worthy of competition with peers.

After an hour of sweating over the popular hot press, Irwin suggests that although his library received T-shirt design samples in interoffice mail, libraries would do well to create their own example tees and practice using the design tools beforehand.

Midsummer, in a community meeting room in southeast Los Angeles, Cudahy Library corralled nearly forty teens and tweens with parents and siblings in tow. At 4,400 square feet, the library is small; however, the community served is particularly large, as Cudahy is nestled among four cities that represent four of the most populous cities in California, with more than 23,000 persons per square mile.<sup>1</sup> This community responded to the Project Morph invitation in droves, and throughout the two-hour T-shirt preparation time, more and more locals dropped in to create and compete. Library Assistant Jaime Hueyopa appreciated the good fun of the program, exclaiming, “They really got into it! The winner did an awesome drawing.” Community Library Manager Meera Prasad concurred, “This was a very successful event.”

In late summer, Leland Weaver Library, located in the South Gate, a city of seven square miles with a population of approximately 13,100 persons per square mile,<sup>2</sup> doubled previous teen program participation statistics by attracting twenty-five teens to the Project Morph program. Young Adult Librarian Grisel Oquendo felt inspired by the increased participation by locals, saying, “Project Morph was a definite success because we had high teen participation and the teens really enjoyed themselves during the program. Also, about twenty to thirty percent of the teen participants in this program were teens who had not attended previous programs.” As the program-in-a-box included books, Oquendo mentioned, “They were using the books

provided to help them with their projects. Teens also discovered books in the library about fashion that they may not have asked for before the event.” She observed, “Since there were three awards, some of the teens were competitive about the event.” This competitive environment elicited creativity among teens in this south region library. One model even accessorized with an anime-inspired chapeau carved from excess jersey fabric. Appreciating this inventive piece, Oquendo mused, “The catwalk is a must!” In a grand finale tying in to the now celebratory atmosphere, Oquendo unveiled a spectacular surprise ice cream cake in celebration of two birthdays that coincided with the event.

## Do It Yourself!

Planning a mock *Project Runway* of your own? The vendors utilized by Teen Services included Nancy’s Notions, Home-Sew Inc., Dick Blick Art Materials, S&S Worldwide, Craffthobbywholesale.com, Rhode Island Novelty, Office Depot, Inc., Best Buy, and Oriental Trading Company. Anderson explained, “We are limited to vendors that will accept purchase orders from us, and these are the best companies that we have found to work with in terms of friendliness and helpfulness.”

The La Puente Library MySpace page<sup>3</sup> provides pictures of suggested room configurations for expediting participants from the hot press transfer station through to the fabric markers, style inspiration books, and trim station.

Irwin suggested, “I think it’s important that if you are doing a registration for it, then get a sense for what transfers people want. Print the transfers out in advance. Make sure that you have more than one staff person in there to run everything. We discovered that it was nice to have three people, so we could rotate over the heat of the hot press.”

Project Morph continued on page 18

**D**ecomposing, stinky fish prominently displayed in small jars on the circulation desk and eggs tossed from the roof aren't exactly what you would expect to find if you dropped by the library to check your e-mail on a Wednesday afternoon. But that's exactly what you would experience at the Ogden Valley Branch of the Weber County Library System if you happened upon one of our extremely popular, science-based after-school programs.

Our after-school program began with weekly activities involving booktalks, crafts, and entertainment, but we soon realized they needed more substance if they were going to keep our creative teen population motivated and interested. We decided to incorporate science activities to show teens that learning can be fun and entertaining. Although we knew it would be a challenge to teach young people anything after a full day of school, not to mention the fact that our funds were limited, we felt it would be a worthwhile project to get our teens more involved at the library.

What we experienced was even better than any of us imagined. Our after-school program transformed into a successful blend of science, art, and reading. We'd like to share a few things you can do with a small (or nonexistent) budget and a little creativity.

## Stinky Fish

How did we come up with the idea to have a bunch of fish slowly rotting around the library in the name of science? It all started when our property manager was telling us about a dead skunk he found behind the library. We asked him what he did with it, and jokingly we told him we should have kept it to teach the after-school kids about decomposition. From there, the idea began to percolate until we thought of a way to do the same thing without stashing roadkill behind the circulation desk.

# Stinky Fish and Tossed Eggs

## Science Programming on the Cheap

*By Brannigan Cheney and Sarah Lovato*

We tried to think of a small animal that would be easy to store in the library and wouldn't upset the kids as they watched it decompose. Of course kittens, puppies, and birds were out of the question. Then, we realized pet stores around the country have to clean dead goldfish from

their aquariums each morning. Why not see if a store would donate some of these fish for science? Luckily, the local Wal-Mart was willing to help.

Next, we asked staff members to bring in empty baby food jars. We bought a food scale to weigh the fish as they decomposed

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**SARAH LOVATO** is a Youth Services Librarian with the Weber County Library System in Ogden, Utah. She received her Masters of Information Science from the University of North Texas. Sarah has been developing and implementing public programming for six years. Currently she is creating and expanding technology based science and gaming programs for children and teens.



to record the decrease in weight. We also made (rather than purchased) small notepads for the teens to use to take notes and write their hypotheses about what they expected to happen throughout the process. The teens were then asked to hypothesize which fish would decompose the fastest and the slowest, with prizes awarded for the closest predictions.

### The Experiment

Six fish were placed in different environments and their decomposition was measured.

- One fish, as our control, was placed in a jar with air holes in the lid and stored at room temperature.
- One fish was put in a jar with no lid and buried outside at a marked location.
- One fish was placed in a jar filled with water at room temperature.
- One fish was placed in a jar, then covered in ice.
- One fish was placed in a jar with no lid, then put in a hot, dry location.
- One fish was placed in a jar containing a material of the teens' choosing (pickle juice), then stored at room temperature.

Due to the nature of decomposition, we knew this was going to be a long-term program. We began the project at the beginning of the school year. During the first program, we discussed decomposition, how specific conditions affect the process, and why it is essential for the environment. We talked about animal life cycles, specifically how the death of one animal can support the life of another. We also talked about the importance of recycling, and why some materials decompose differently than others.

We left the fish alone for about seven months to do their thing. Every week, before each program, the teens would look

at and record the progress, or lack of progress, for each fish. At the end of the school year, we completed the program, reviewing the results of our experiment.

### Experiment Results

- The control fish decomposed, but not as fast as if the air holes had been large enough to allow flies in.
- The buried fish was completely gone. We don't know if this was due to a scavenger or complete decomposition.
- The water fish was decomposed to an almost fluid state except for the bones and skull.
- The ice fish was mummified.
- The hot, dry fish was also mummified.
- The pickle-juice fish was pickled.

The program was a success, and the teens really enjoyed themselves. But of course, there are things we would change in the future. First, we would obtain larger fish. The teens greatly enjoyed watching the fish decompose so observing larger fish go through the process would be even more interesting. We also discovered our scale wasn't high-tech enough to measure the small differences in weight. With bigger fish we may have been able to record the differences; however, it was not essential for the experiment.

### Materials Needed and Cost

Dead goldfish: \$0, donated from pet store  
Baby food jars: \$0, donated from staff  
Small notebooks: \$0, recycled paper from library  
Food scale: \$10, optional  
Liquids: \$0, from staff refrigerator  
Prizes: \$0, from an existing prize bin  
Grand total: \$10

### Tossed Eggs

When we were asked to direct the after-school program toward science-based activities, the physics-geek antennas of the

staff were set abuzz. We knew one program had to be presented—the Rooftop Egg Drop. With fond memories from our own childhood experiences constructing containers to protect an egg from a two-story drop, we knew the Rooftop Egg Drop Contest would be an effective and fun way to teach teens about physics and engineering.

Facing the usual end-of-year budget drain, we also knew we could conduct this program for just a few dollars and use materials that were already a part of our craft supplies. The contest began with a short briefing on physics and engineering principles, such as speed, gravity, impact, shock absorption, and force. Contestants were asked to consider types of container designs that would slow the speed of descent and create enough shock absorption to prevent eggs from cracking or breaking after being tossed from the library roof.

Contestants were given lidded container options of different shapes and sizes. They were then presented with a variety of construction and packing materials, such as yarn, tape, bubble wrap, Styrofoam, cotton balls, plastic grocery bags, shredded paper, and rubber bands. They were then given thirty minutes to construct their egg containers, using the available materials.

Once completed, an acrophobia-free staff member climbed to the library roof, approximately twenty-five feet high, and tossed each container off. (Absolutely no participants are permitted on the library roof. Extreme caution and appropriate safety measures should be taken to ensure the safety of the staff member and the contestants below.) Upon impact, contestants examined their eggs. Those that were still intact advanced to the next round of tosses. In the end, only one egg remained unblemished. The winner was crowned and participants gathered for a discussion of effective and ineffective designs.

In 2008, the winner chose a Pringles container. She created a parachute with a grocery bag to slow its descent and packed the egg near the top to create maximum shock absorption. Though only one winner was crowned, each contestant enjoyed designing containers and seeing them splat against the concrete. Most teens didn't even realize they were learning about science because they were too busy having fun!

### Materials Needed and Cost

Three dozen eggs: \$8.25

A variety of lidded containers: \$0, donated from staff

Plastic grocery bags: \$0, donated from staff

A variety of packing and cushioning materials: \$0, donated from staff

A variety of construction materials: \$0, existing craft supplies

Prizes: \$0, "After-School Dollars" to be spent during quarterly auctions  
Grand total: \$8.25

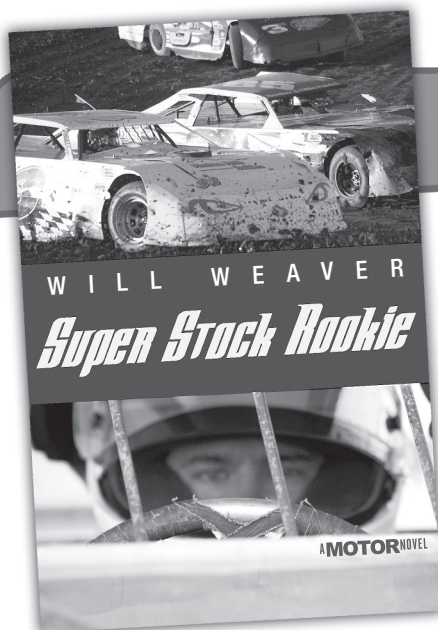
In 2009, we will host the third annual Rooftop Egg Drop Contest. We have learned a few things along the way. The 2009 contest will encourage participants to bring their own containers and packing materials from home, allowing contestants to evaluate a much larger array of material options. Also, building and packing materials provided by the library will be parceled out equally to discourage hoarding and ensure equality of construction options.

### Resources

For more information about conducting a Rooftop Egg Drop Contest and the science

behind effective construction, visit a few of the Web sites we consulted to create our contest.

1. Houghton Mifflin. "Project 3: The Egg-Drop Experiment: A Hands-On Investigative Activity," <http://college.cengage.com/education/pbl/project/project3.html> (accessed Feb. 21, 2009).
2. NASA. "Spacecraft Design and Testing," <http://stardust.jpl.nasa.gov/classroom/activities/5-stardst-ch04.pdf> (Feb. 21, 2009).
3. Winston-Salem Forsyth County. "Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Egg Drop Competition," [www.wsfceggdrop.com/index.htm](http://www.wsfceggdrop.com/index.htm) (Feb. 21, 2009). YALS




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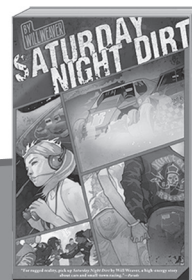
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# Easing the Pain of the Classics

By Katie Porteus

Few words strike more fear in the hearts and minds of high school students than the English teacher's announcement, "We will be reading a classic." Truth be told, as an English teacher, I dreaded *The Scarlet Letter* and *Silas Marner* as much as the students, not because I didn't recognize these works as fine and deserving literature, but because I knew that I would be pulling metaphorical teeth trying to get my students to read them. As a school librarian and keeper of the school's laptops, I observe the constant use of Sparknotes with empathy for the struggling readers. As Don Gallo points out, "The classics are not about teenage concerns! They are about adult issues. Moreover, they were written for educated adults who had the leisure and time to read them. They were incidentally, written to be enjoyed – not dissected, not analyzed, and certainly not tested." (Gallo, p. 34)

But what do educators do? We discuss, quiz, and test the books to death, as the students' eyes glaze over and they recall just enough to pass the test.

Yet the classics are with us and will certainly remain with us for some time. No

one can argue that they teach a certain discipline in reading, which helps to prepare high school students for the more rigorous reading they will face in college. Students will expand their vocabulary and gain cultural literacy by recognizing the relevancy of quotes such as "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times" from *Tale of Two Cities*. Finally, educators and administrators feel obligated to keep the classics on the syllabus of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) English classes. So how do we, as librarians, soften that blow? How can we ease the pain? How can we help to make a connection between a one-hundred-year-old novel and a sixteen-year-old student?

One solution is the pairing of a classic with a young adult (YA) novel. Recently, a plethora of quality YA novels complementing classic novels have been published. These fall into five general categories:

- Novels with an alternate or modern setting;
- Novels with an alternate narrator or point of view;

- Novels serving as prequels or sequels to classics;
- Time-travel novels, in which a character finds him or her self in a classic setting; and
- Companion novels that serve to enrich the lessons of the classic.

*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is a staple of most high school curricula. It tells the story of teenage boys suddenly in a world without adults. Similarly, in *Gone* by Michael Grant, everyone over the age of fifteen suddenly and inexplicably disappears. Set in a modern beach town in California, the first act of rebellion is fifth graders breaking into the candy machine. Still, as the main character Sam observes, "This school was dangerous now. Scared people did scary things sometimes, even kids. . . . Fear could be dangerous. Fear could get people hurt. And there was nothing but fear running crazy through the school." (Grant, p. 11). Like Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*, the protagonist Sam is a sensible and resourceful young man, thrown into a position of responsibility and facing opposition from the Jack-like bully, referred to as Caine and his sadistic Roger-like henchman, Drake. He is witness to the power struggles and brutality illustrated in *Lord of the Flies*. Like Ralph, he must remain the voice of calm reason amid the rampant cruelty of his youthful companions.

*Ringside 1925: Views from the Scopes Monkey Trial* by Jen Bryant takes the perspective of the residents of Dayton, Tennessee, with particular focus on the students of Rhea County High School as the trials portrayed in the play *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee begin. Written in the free verse so favored by today's teens, alternating narrators tell the story of the teacher who dared to break the brand new Butler Act, a Tennessee law making it illegal to teach evolution in the science class. The novel depicts the atmosphere of a small Southern town in 1925, as well as examining the various

**KATIE PORTEUS** spent fourteen years as a high school English and reading teacher before earning her MLS from Kent State University. She is currently employed as the district librarian in Cardington, Ohio, serving a combined junior/senior high school library. This is her eighth year as a librarian. She is the proud sponsor of a high school book club with approximately twenty members.



motives of those who chose to prosecute Mr. Scopes. The students are perplexed by the arrest of their favorite teacher and unable to grasp how his teaching is in opposition to the Bible. Peter Sykes, a student with a deep love of science says, "Our state lawmakers passed the Butler Act because they think science will poison our minds. Well, I don't feel poisoned. I still believe in the divine. Why should a bigger mind need a smaller God?" (Bryant, p. 11). Wouldn't it be fascinating to take the topic a step further with an examination of events surrounding a certain science teacher in Mount Vernon, Ohio?

*Finn* by Jon Clinch tells the story of Huckleberry Finn's father, "a worthless old drunk" (Clinch, p. 4) before the onset of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Though not necessarily marketed as a YA novel, *Finn* provides a back story for Twain's original novel, with language that older teens will find more accessible than Twain's dialect. Pap's racism and brutality, the atmosphere of life on the river, and some mysteries of Huck's family are all examined by Clinch. This is most certainly a novel for older teen readers, although Twain's complex original is generally assigned in a junior or senior AP class and not to younger readers.

Does anyone get through high school without *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare? *Saving Juliet* by Suzanne Selfors opens with Mimi, a young actress forced to play the role of Juliet with the very self-absorbed teen idol Troy Summers as Romeo. Naturally, they hate each other and Juliet is further distressed by her pushy stage mother's refusal to allow her to pursue her own dreams of college and medical school. Transported back to sixteenth century Verona, Mimi encounters the real Montagues and Capulets, realizing Juliet's mother has much in common with her own. As Juliet is being forced to marry Paris to pay off some family debts, Mimi is expected to perform to save the family theater. The background knowledge of life in Elizabethan times as well as the

characterization of the play's minor characters adds insight to the classic tragedy.

The most numerous categories for YA pairings with classic literature are the companion stories, which refer to a classic novel as a part of its own story. John Greene's *Paper Towns* uses Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as a series of clues, left to the young protagonist Quentin (also known as "Q"), by his mysterious neighbor and lifelong crush, Margo. Margo's disappearances, as well as

Whitman's deeper meanings, are clarified as the story progresses. A most challenging piece of nineteenth century poetry is broken down and analyzed in a most intriguing manner, as a compelling story of adolescence is told.

These are just a few of the many YA novels that may be connected with classic literature, with the keyword here being *connected*. The problem with most classics is that students find it difficult, if not impossible, to connect with the obsolete

## Modern Novels Paired with Classics

### Novels that reset classics to other time periods

*Jake, Reinvented* by Gordan Korman paired with *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald  
*Clay* by David Almond with *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley  
*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins with *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson  
*Romiette and Julio* by Sharon M. Draper with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

### Novels with alternate points of view of a classic

*Dating Hamlet: Ophelia's Story* by Lisa Fiedler with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*  
*Ophelia* by Lisa Klein with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*  
*Enter Three Witches* by Caroline B. Cooney with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

### Novels as prequels

*Capt. Hook: The Adventures of a Notorious Youth* by J. V. Hart and *Peter and the Starcatchers* by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson with *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie.

### Sequels to classic literature

*Just Ella* by Margaret Peterson Haddix, which tells of the further adventures of Cinderella  
*Bloodline* and *Bloodline: the Reckoning* by Kate Cary with *Dracula* by Bram Stoker

### Time travel novels

*A Tale of Time City* or *The Merlin Conspiracy*, both by Diane Wynne Jones, with *A Once and Future King* by E. B. White or any Arthurian reading

### Companion pieces

*Hunchback* by Randall Wright with *Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo  
*In Search of Mockingbird* by Loretta Ellsworth with *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee  
*Enthusiasm* by Polly Shulman with *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen  
*The Minister's Daughter* with *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller  
*King Dork* by Frank Portman with *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger.

characters. Perhaps these YA novels, with contemporary teens, dealing with familiar issues, can serve to establish a connection, to create some empathy for the characters, and finally to ease the pain of the classics. YALS

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Project Morph continued from page 12

"The room should be set up a couple of hours in advance so nothing is overlooked," recommended Oquendo. Even three-hour Project Morph events at La Puente Library did not provide enough time according to comment forms, so Young adult librarians should prepare for concern from participants that no amount of time is sufficient. Hueyopa notes that the two hours of garment creation time seemed to fly, "We really could have used more time!" When time runs short, remind young

adults of the *Project Runway* catch phrase, "Make it work!" YALS

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**H**aving worked on both sides of the circulation desk—as a classroom teacher and a school librarian—it is easy to understand the challenges and rewards of teacher-librarian collaboration on Teen Read Week. Unfortunately, as much as both teachers and school librarians might want to collaborate, it is often easier said than done. Scheduling problems, heavy workloads, and just plain lack of time frequently hamper good intentions. Although every school and library program is unique, with a little advanced planning and creative use of resources, teachers and librarians can join forces for a Teen Read Week that is out of this world.

## Getting Started

Getting off on the right foot can set the stage for a fun and beneficial Teen Read Week experience for the entire school community. Here are a few suggestions for getting Teen Read Week kicked off right:

- Like librarians, teachers' calendars fill up quickly with responsibilities and activities. At the same time, many schools are being asked to do more with less, particularly given the current economy. This means that most school personnel are being asked to take on increasing responsibilities in addition to those in the classroom or library. Let teachers know early when Teen Read Week will take place so it won't get squeezed out of their calendars.
- Let teachers know as much as possible about Teen Read Week activities early in the school year. Provide them with a calendar and explanations of planned activities to let teachers know what to expect. A good time to do this might be during preservice days prior to the start of the new school year.
- Creating a calendar of all library program events gives teachers a heads-

# Joining Forces with Teachers for an Unreal Teen Read Week

*By Jennifer Maede*

up and an opportunity to incorporate them into their own classroom activities. This calendar could be made available to teachers through e-mail, flyers, or the library Web site. Be sure to use the method that is most preferred by your teachers!

- If Teen Read Week is the major library event for the school year, or if it is a new event for the school, holding a brief drop-in open house with Teen Read Week information, and maybe snacks, might be a good breather for teachers during preservice days, or even after the school year has begun.
- Make use of social networking sites such as Facebook to create a presence for and share information about Teen Read Week. If your teachers are not particularly familiar with such sites, create an online tutorial or plan a

quick workshop. Check with your principal to see if this could be done for inservice credit.

## Get Help

Planning and carrying out events and activities for Teen Read Week doesn't have to be a solitary task. Enlist teachers and other school personnel to share their own talents by using some of the following ideas:

- One of the simplest ways to collaborate with teachers on Teen Read Week is to ask them how Teen Read Week might best fit in with the curriculum and their own plans. This can be done through casual conversation, e-mail, or even a wiki or chat room. Use their input to help

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**JENNIFER MAEDE** is currently a 7th and 8th grade Language Arts teacher at Holston Middle School in Knoxville, Tennessee. She has also worked as a middle school librarian.



develop and schedule Teen Read Week events.

- One of the best and most personal ways to get teachers involved with the library program in general is to get to know their own reading interests. Knowing your teachers as people can help you to suggest ways in which they might be able to help you with Teen Read Week or other library activities, such as serving on a Teen Read Week committee or supervising a Teen Read Week event.
- If students are not already scheduled for regular library visits, offer to come to classrooms or have students come to the library for a class period prior to Teen Read Week to discuss what is coming, and then for activities during Teen Read Week. Teachers would surely appreciate having a few extra minutes to themselves during the school day.
- Ask for teachers to nominate students to serve on a Teen Read Week committee. A student committee can be responsible for tasks that teachers themselves might not have time to complete, such as keeping track of a class reading log or making announcements about Teen Read Week activities.
- Find ways to reward teachers, too. For example, if classrooms are competing in a reading challenge for the week, find a way to reward not only the students in the winning class, but the teacher as well.
- Ask teachers to share information about their own reading habits and preferences. For example, a bulletin

board of teachers' favorite books related to the theme could be created in the library or in another common area of the school, such as the cafeteria or in a hallway.

## Making the Connection

Linking Teen Read Week activities and events to the curriculum is a great way to collaborate with teachers. Use or adapt some of the following suggestions to integrate Teen Read Week into the curriculum in all subject areas:

- Find out how the curriculum at each grade level and within each subject might fit with the Teen Read Week theme. Teachers may already be using novels and other materials that fit well with the theme. Ask around to see if you can get this information from department leaders or individual teachers.
- Make sure to check with teachers of all subjects, not just reading or language arts teachers. Social studies, science, or fine arts teachers may be able to fit the Teen Read Week themes into their activities in unique and unexpected ways that would be appealing to students. Enlisting the involvement of teachers outside the reading subject area is also a great way to show students that reading is valued in all academic areas.
- Provide teachers with ideas for how the Teen Read Week theme or activities could be used in their individual classrooms. Once again, providing such a list early in the year

will allow teachers time to fit new activities into their schedules.

## Wrapping Up

Once this year's Teen Read Week is wrapped up, you should be enjoying the rewards of a great school community experience. This is also a great time to use the suggestions below to set a foundation for next year's Teen Read Week.

- Say thank you! Everyone enjoys being appreciated. Be sure to thank all of those faculty and staff members who help to make Teen Read Week a success in your school.
- Ask for feedback! Getting feedback both formally and informally from faculty and staff members can help school librarians to better understand what works and does not work in their particular school during Teen Read Week. Feedback can be gathered through pencil and paper surveys, in casual conversation, and through e-mail.

Obviously, there are many different ways that school librarians can work with teachers to make any Teen Read Week successful. Choosing those strategies and ideas that are the best fit for each unique school environment and planning carefully can only help when attempting to increase opportunities for collaboration. But most importantly, enjoy the opportunity to work together within the school community to create an "unreal" Teen Read Week experience for your students. **YALS**

As Teen Read Week approaches, it's time to start planning activities that will get teens involved in reading.

For many school librarians this means working with principals to get school-wide programs going, working the theme into the school curriculum, or even getting student aides to do something other than check books out to other students. Many public librarians work with school librarians to hold awesome Teen Read Week programs, or do their own programming to promote teen reading. But for some public librarians, Teen Read Week can mean something else all together.

As many public librarians know it can be difficult to get a teen program going in a library branch. Money spent on teen programs is often scrutinized ("You spent *how much* for only nine attendees?") Inevitably there is a staff member that writes it off entirely ("We don't want *teenagers* in the library!") So often there is an invisible wall between the youth and adult services departments—crossover programming is rare, and in some libraries, isn't even encouraged.

Teen Read Week is an opportunity for us to change this! It's a chance to get these two sides of the library working together to create something that your teen patrons will remember, even if it's just that the library staff was pretty cool.

The easiest place to start is introducing your adult services staff to the Alex Awards. The Alex Awards are given annually by YALSA to adult books that appeal to young adults. A current list of winners can be found on YALSA's awards page (<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/alex>). Talk with adult services staff about doing a book display using these titles, or a book discussion group that is either geared for or can include teens. Offer to help in any way you can to promote and plan the event or to curb unruly behavior and let

# Break Through to the Other Side

## Get Adult Services Staff to Buy Into Teen Read Week

*By Carla Land*

your teens wow the adult staff with their maturity.

This year's Teen Read Week theme is Read Beyond Reality @ your library. Science fiction and fantasy are incredibly popular genres for all ages, and most library staffs have at least one or two voracious sci-fi-fantasy readers on them. Asking these people to compile a list of favorites that would be good for teens is a great way to introduce them to reader's service for teens. It's also great to have a list handy for other staff needing a little help in finding adult

titles for teens who are ready to move on from young adult collections.

Don't get discouraged if you run into roadblocks or don't get the outpouring of support you were hoping for. It may take some time to convince the other side that library services to teens are a good thing and some staff may never be convinced. Using Teen Read Week to try and break the barrier can be effective if done in nonintrusive ways, though, and it could open the doors for other shared programs and ideas in the future. YALSA

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**CARLA LAND** is the YPL/Children's Services Department Head for the Summerlin Library in the Las Vegas-Clark County (Nevada) Library District. She is a member of the Teen Read Week Committee and is one of YALSA's sponsored Emerging Leaders for 2009. Carla is also the Senior Editor and one of the cofounders of Anime for Libraries ([www.animeforlibraries.com](http://www.animeforlibraries.com)), an anime review Web site created for librarians by librarians who love anime. When not watching anime Carla can be found tweeting on Twitter as AnimeGoddess and playing Peggle or Rock Band 2 on the Xbox 360 as BookDiva.

## Change Your Reality Teen Read Week Programs for a Better World

*By Elizabeth Saxton*

**M**any teens are more interested in the world around them than other worlds. Engage them in Teen Read Week 2009 by offering programs focused on improving their real world and changing their reality. When planning your Teen Read Week activities think of ways that teens can change reality for the better on the global, local, and personal level.

Explore changing reality on a global scale through programs focusing on the environment or social justice issues that are important to your teens. Programs in your community might focus on activities that give teens a larger voice, help people or animals in need, or make public spaces more inviting. Finally, on a personal level, programs on this topic might involve thinking seriously about their future, expressing their opinions, or providing life skills instruction on topics like cooking or finance.

### Ideas for Change Your Reality Programs

- If your library doesn't already have a teen advisory group, use Teen Read Week to give teens a voice by starting one.
- Involve the whole community by asking them to nominate teens who are making a difference in your area for an annual library-sponsored award.
- Have teens use the resources in your collection to create an informative bulletin board or write an article for the library newsletter on a topic important to them, such as the environment or education.
- Educate teens about plastic bags and have a craft program to decorate reusable canvas bags to use instead.
- Have teens write and record video public service announcements for the library or a community partner.
- Hold a panel for teens and their parents about options after high school including traditional colleges, vocational schools, community colleges, and programs like AmeriCorps.
- Have an informal debate with your teens on a serious issue like school dress codes or gender equality, or a fun issue like Facebook versus MySpace.
- Sponsor a contest asking teens to write about their vision for the future, how they will make a difference with their lives, or people who they admire.
- Partner with a seniors' residence or pediatric hospital and have teens create holiday decorations for their institution and residents.
- Let teens help those in need by organizing a food or clothing drive in the community.
- Work with your local government to have teens clean up a park or other public space.
- Hold a blogging or podcasting workshop to help teens speak their mind.
- Create a program to train teens to read to or with younger children in the library.
- Host a volunteer fair at the library by inviting representatives from local organizations that accept teen volunteers.
- Invite an expert in the field to hold a financial literacy workshop for teens.
- Host a chef or nutritionist to teach teens about healthy food and basic cooking skills.
- Hold a book discussion group around an inspirational book such as *The Pact* or *Three Cups of Tea*.
- Offer a simple goal-setting exercise like having teens write a letter to themselves in ten years describing what they hope their life would be like.
- Show a movie or documentary about a person who successfully changed their reality.
- Sponsor a resume and interview workshop for teens looking for employment. YALS

**ELIZABETH SAXTON** is the Teen Coordinator at Cleveland Public Library. She is currently a member of the Teen Read Week Committee and chair of Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults.

**Cable in the Classroom.** Online: [www.ciconline.org/home](http://www.ciconline.org/home) (April 11, 2009)

The Cable in the Classroom (CIC) staff work closely with the cable industry to provide students with experiences that tie in cable content with curriculum, as a means of enhancing learning and promoting effective use of media. Included on the site are sections for teachers, parents, administrators, and cable partners. For classroom use and ideas, click on Cable Resources for Learning. There is a monthly calendar for recording programs, online video clips, TV listings, and copyright and recording guidelines. You can also sign up for e-newsletters that will fill you in on upcoming video and online resources.

Some of the most impressive features are the online video and podcast clips. These can be downloaded and used in the classroom to enhance instruction. The topics covered include science, history, literature, the arts, food, and government among others. I remember looking at this site years ago and was greatly impressed by its improved format, ease of use, and content. CIC was a recent winner of the 2008 Cable's Leaders in Learning Awards. —*Joann Absi, Media Coordinator, Ashley High School, Wilmington, N.C.*

**Carpan, Carolyn. *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths: Girls' Series Books in America*.** The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009; ISBN-13: 978-0-8108-5756-8; 165p; \$35.

I was convinced that I could grow up to be Nancy Drew. My friends and I exchanged books with each other and created a small library in someone's garage. As a preadolescent, I became convinced that I would someday toss my copper curls and Ned and the roadster would appear. It seems I was not unique. Carolyn Carpan's *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths: Girls' Series Books in America* has exposed the reality and appeal of formula fiction. Beginning in the nineteenth century, series books have served as guides for girls' ideals. From the virtuous Victorians to feminism—even today's "mean" girls—characters have represented privileged and independent young women in social history. Clearly, these books are not in-depth literature. Instead, they have charmed and encouraged girls to read for enjoyment. Today's women book club members theoretically began as series readers. Series fiction has contributed to girls' reading for generations. Carpan chronicles the history of this genre in a highly readable narrative. It is also a unique reference source. Students of history, literature, and gender studies will find it informative and enlightening. —*Patty Sands, Librarian, Lakeridge High School, Lake Oswego, Ore.*

**Crane, Beverley E. *Using Web 2.0 Tools in the K-12 Classroom*.** New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009; ISBN-13: 978-1555706531; 189p; \$59.95.

Over the past five years, the Internet has evolved from a vast depository of information managed by the tech-savvy into a communication network of contributors with little to no technological expertise. Thanks to Web 2.0 tools, anyone can add material to the Net in a variety of creative and successful ways. Crane, who holds an Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with emphases in Language Arts and Educational Technology, has over ten years of experience educating librarians and teachers on the use of technology in the classroom; the ease with which she organizes and details the information she shares in this title is a testament to her expertise in the field. Each chapter carefully examines one of seven tools by way of definition and characteristics, implications and benefits for education, examples from actual classroom use in different situations, and practical steps on getting started. Objectives for each chapter are clear and upfront, as is a glossary to help those of us who are not yet familiar with the discourse of the 2.0 world. Crane covers blogs, podcasts, wikis, digital storytelling, Google Tools, social bookmarking, and Voice Thread, complete with screen shots of each tool in action; project plans and activities; Web sites for examples and assistance; and further reading and references. Crane refers to her educational blog in the text, but it is not "updated weekly" as the appendix claims. Hopefully reader response will prompt her with material to keep her online resource growing. —*Kerry Sutherland, Akron-Summit County (Ohio) Public Library.*

**Jones, Ella W. *Start to Finish YA Programs: Hip-Hop Symposiums, Summer Reading Programs, Virtual Tours, Poetry Slams, Teen Advisory Boards, Term Paper Clinics, and More!*** New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009; ISBN: 9781555706012; 217p; \$75.00.

*Start to Finish YA Programs* is the kind of teen programming guide we've been waiting for: not only does it provide great ideas and suggestions, but follows through with step-by-step instructions on how to make them a reality. This well-organized book contains twenty-five ready-made library programs for teens, from an author who is an accomplished, field-tested young adult (YA) librarian. The programs are categorized into five sections: workshops, music concerts and series, training sessions, events to take place outside



the library, and radically new “outside the box” programs. Goals for each program are listed and backed up by references to specific Developmental Assets from the Search Institute. Programs range from one-shot events like the DJ Workshop to year-long library card campaigns.

Sample press releases and marketing strategies will help librarians who struggle to successfully promote their events. A CD is included that contains customizable Microsoft Word templates and PowerPoint training sessions. For example, the Library Idol competition chapter comes with samples for every necessary form imaginable: rules, tickets, registration forms, flyers, Web site post, press release, sign-in sheet, performance roster, rating forms, letters to the winners, ballots, and certificates of recognition. The design quality and teen appeal of many of the promotional “rave cards” and flyers are somewhat lacking, but they contain all the necessary information and esthetic changes would be easy to make. Some of the program titles themselves are also on the boring side, but this can easily be rectified by a hip librarian who knows what would appeal to those teens in his or her community.

One of the most useful features for each event is the in-depth book list. These are great current books to put on display during your programs, or use for further inspiration and ideas. The author stresses collaboration with schools and community leaders, recommends appropriate partnerships, and gives great advice about how to get feedback. Resources to help with grant writing and an index are also included. This guide would be especially useful for new librarians in urban areas who are willing to try a wide variety of programs, or those established YA librarians who just need a batch of fresh ideas. —Emily Williams, *Young Adult Services Coordinator, Metropolitan Library System, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.*

**World Book Living Green Series.** Chicago: World Book, 2009; ISBN: 978-0-7166-1400-5; \$279.00; 9 volume set.

This new resource from a trusted and recognizable publisher on a very timely and popular topic includes nine volumes of “green” information that is sure to be a hit with students and teachers alike. With easy to understand text and formatting, each volume has a different focus, covering topics that have more personal coverage such as the two on consumable and durable goods as well as those that reach more globally, like forests and wetlands, green buildings, and pollution. Whereas the slim volumes could probably be easily condensed into one covering all topics together, the multiple-volume set is most appealing when considering it for a circulating collection so that it reaches more students. And students will appreciate that they can easily research their chosen topic in a nonthreatening manner. The volumes have a consistent and visually engaging format, with each containing section summaries, eye-catching headings, “green” facts in appropriately green shaded text boxes, and highlighted “closer looks.” The information is peppered with bolded words that are included in glossaries in each volume. Photos, charts, and other graphics supporting the textual information are significantly effectual. Rounding out all of these components is a section in each volume offering activities for that volume’s topics, making the set also desirable for science fair or classroom projects. It is difficult to imagine a school or public library not wanting this set on their shelves. If budgets permit, two sets, one for reference and one as a circulating set, would be ideal. —Stephanie A. Squicciarini, *Teen Services Librarian, Fairport (N.Y.) Public Library.* YALS

# Celebrate TEEN READ WEEK™

October 18-24, 2009

Teen Read Week is a national literacy initiative of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. It is aimed at teens, their parents, librarians, educators, booksellers, and other concerned adults. The 2009 theme, *Read Beyond Reality @ your library*, encourages teens to read something out of this world, just for the fun of it, including sci-fi, fantasy, virtual realities, and much more. For more information on Teen Read Week, please visit [www.ala.org/teenread](http://www.ala.org/teenread).



**Read Beyond Reality Mini Poster**  
9" x 12" \$6

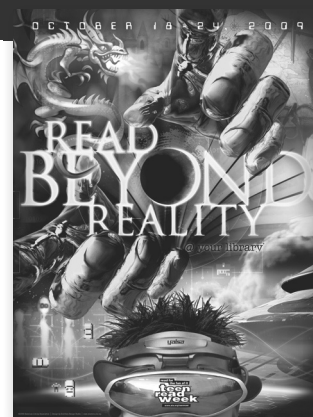


**Read Beyond Reality Bookmark**  
6" x 2", 100/pack \$8.50



**Teen Read Week Neon Pencils**  
12/pack, 4 colors \$9

**Read Beyond Reality Glow Bands**  
15/pack \$13



**2009 Teen Read Week Poster**  
18" x 24" \$12

**algraphics**

**yalsa**  
Young Adult Library Services Association  
A Division of the American Library Association

Teen Read Week purchases support the work of YALSA. ALA Store purchases fund advocacy, awareness, and accreditation programs for library professionals worldwide.

In November 2008, YALSA hosted its first Young Adult Literature Symposium in Nashville, Tennessee, with a theme of "How We Read Now." The symposium featured five authors presenting four papers on various aspects of young adult literature, designed to promote discussion of current issues in young adult literature. The four papers offered research and interesting viewpoints on:

- The treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or questioning teens in YA lit ("Accept the Universal Freak Show," by Angie Manfredi)
- How manga attracts more girls to reading through unconventional narratives ("Are You There God? It's Me, Manga: Manga as an Extension of Young Adult Literature" by Lisa Goldstein and Molly Phelan)
- Reaching incarcerated teens through young adult literature ("Bullies, Gangs and Books for Young Adults" by Stan Steiner)
- Using young adult literature as a basis for teens to gain insight into our current culture ("The Age of Blank? Connecting Young Adult Readers to Each Other and The World by Thomas Phillion).

The full-text of the presented papers are available in this supplement to *Young Adult Library Services*.

Five authors contributed papers for the symposium:

- Angie Manfredi is the Head of Youth Services for the Los Alamos County Library System in New

# The Young Adult Literature Symposium Paper Presentations

Mexico. She is an active member of YALSA and the GLBT Roundtable and 2007 graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi SLIS program.

- Lisa Goldstein works for the Brooklyn Public Library as a young adult librarian. An avid comics reader, she reviews graphic novels for School Library Journal and currently serves on YALSA's Great Graphic Novels for Teens Committee. Molly Phelan is a young adult librarian for Brooklyn Public Library. Beginning as a trainee in 2005, she was sent all over the borough of Brooklyn, and found that teens from Coney Island to Bed-Stuy love manga. She is currently the Information Supervisor for the Cypress Hills Branch in East New York.
- Stan Steiner is professor and chair of the Literacy Department at Boise

State University. Ben Steiner is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of South Carolina, Columbia.

- Tom Phillion is Associate Dean in the College of Education at Roosevelt University. He teaches courses on young adult literature and reading and writing in the content areas, and leads a middle school book club in Oak Park, Illinois.

Members interested in proposing a paper for the next Young Adult Literature Symposium can apply to do so online at [www.ala.org/yalitsymposium](http://www.ala.org/yalitsymposium) through September 15. The 2010 Young Adult Literature Symposium will take place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Nov. 5-7, with a theme of Beyond Good Intentions: Diversity, Literature, and Teens. YALS

## Accept the Universal Freak Show

By Angie Manfredi

In October of 2007, J. K. Rowling threw the mainstream media into a frenzy when, during a Q&A session with a fan, she announced that Albus Dumbledore was gay. Dumbledore, the beloved headmaster of Hogwarts, had served as a role model and mentor for the titular character of Rowling's best-selling Harry Potter series. Rowling's narrative detail quickly stormed onto the pages of such publications as *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *The New York Times*. The story also surfaced in the Associated Press newswire, which put it into hundreds of newspapers across the country. Following the tremendous wave of initial exposure, the news media, cultural critics, and bloggers worldwide weighed in on Rowling's revelation and mused about the implications of the shocking disclosure that a main character in a series of books for children was gay. To those of us in the professional world of children's and young adult (YA) literature, this revelation, while met with a good measure of commentary and a little celebration, was not quite as earth-shattering.

In their comprehensive study of YA fiction with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) content, *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (2006), Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins observed, "In the five publishing years from 2000 to 2004, a total of sixty-

six young adult (YA) titles with (LGBTQ) content appeared, as compared to the total of seventy titles that appeared during the entire decade of the 1990s."<sup>1</sup> In the four publication years since Cart and Jenkins's study, the numbers of YA novels with LGBTQ content have only continued to rise. Beyond mere expansion of the canon, the diversity and sheer topical breath of the titles has exploded. Between 2007 and 2008 alone librarians have seen the publication of a wide swath of titles with LGBTQ content. In 2007, for instance, a handful of titles included: Susan Juby's *Another Kind of Cowboy*, with a gay protagonist who excels at rodeos and horse riding; Perry Moore's *Hero*, featuring a gay protagonist who also has a superhero alter ego; and, best of all, James St. James's *Freak Show*, featuring Billy Bloom, an unapologetic and fabulously over-the-top teenage drag queen. Notable titles from 2008 are Meagan Brother's *Debbie Harry Sings in French*, with a straight, male protagonist who happens to like dressing as a woman; Leanne Liberman's *Gravity*, about a young lesbian coming to terms with her sexuality and her religious beliefs as an Orthodox Jew; and Mayra Lazara Dole's *Down to the Bone*, with an ethnically diverse cast of characters including one who self-identifies as genderqueer within the first one hundred pages.

The field of LGBTQ literature for teens refuses to be ignored; the sheer number and variety of recently released titles within the canon indicate that larger factors than a mere publishing phenomenon are at play. As of late 2008, there is a wealth of titles seeing consistent publication from large publishing companies. These companies have the ability to successfully promote the texts in large markets, helping to fuel this burgeoning genre of YA literature. At this point, the time has come to discuss two factors: the ever-changing and rapidly expanding audience that these titles are being published for and the strategies to maximize and enhance the presence of these titles in library collections.

Looking back on the history of titles published for young adults with LGBTQ content, librarians may just be relieved that we have collectively passed the era of books with LGBTQ characters who felt bad about their homosexuality and sometimes even died in penance. In the contemporary world, we have so many positive and ultimately happy books portraying life as an LGBTQ teenager to offer patrons that it can often seem easy to believe that the days of negativity in the genre have passed into obscurity. Unfortunately, not all YA novels portray such a queer-friendly world view.

Negative messages about homosexuality crop up in Cecily von Ziegesar's best-selling *Gossip Girl* series. In the penultimate volume of the series, *Would I Lie To You* (2006), Dan Humphrey, a major character, gets drunk at a party and kisses a male coworker. Dan deals with this sporadic action by simply and instantly concluding he must be gay. Despite his immediate embrace of the notion, Dan reacts to this revelation with no small measure of hostility and disbelief. The other characters in the book, Dan's family and friends, are also shocked. His ex-girlfriend Vanessa is particularly skeptical, musing to herself: "Now he was

gay. It couldn't possibly last longer than any of his other phases, and when he got tired of being gay or he realized that being gay would mean actually kissing guys and not girls—her in particular—well, she'd be in the bedroom next door."<sup>2</sup> Any mention of bisexuality is brushed aside and Dan unhappily concludes he must be gay with no real deliberation or emotional searching. Von Ziegesar uses the protagonist's sexual confusion as multifaceted plot development; Dan's supposed sexual fluctuation represents both a cheap device to ratchet up dramatic tension between Dan and Vanessa and a way to wring awkward laughs out of both Dan's confusion and the reactions from other characters. Librarians, readers, and critics have seen and participated in a great deal of discussion about the *Gossip Girl* series, conversing over such diverse aspects of the texts as the way they drop name brands and how they reflect social aggression and bullying among girls. Despite the prevalent discussion of von Ziegesar's franchise, though, there has been no serious criticism or even discussion of the author's dismissive and superficial portrayal of same-sex attraction in the lives of teenagers. The message that this treatment sends out to millions of fans of this series is overwhelmingly negative and unrealistic.

Von Ziegesar's series is not alone in using regressive and problematic stereotypes about homosexuality. We can see other negative images in Jo Knowles's 2007 title *Lessons from a Dead Girl*. In *Lessons*, the narrator, Laine, recounts the sexual abuse that she suffered at the hands of her friend Leah in a nonspecific and nondescript manner. Leah, an established victim of prior sexual abuse by an older male family friend, visits a scarring level of abuse that is similar in nature on Laine. It is strikingly evident that *Lessons* is less a narrative of sexual curiosity and more a story of the horror of sexual abuse. Even so, it is hard to escape the fact that the

same-sex element of the abuse is significant. Laine lives in constant, not unjustified, fear that Leah will expose the secret of the abuse to everyone. It is made clear that a large part of that fear of exposure is based on Laine's worry that such a revelation would mark her not just as a victim of abuse but also as a lesbian. Leah uses this as leverage to torment Laine, who remains hyperaware of this as a looming threat. At one point, Laine kisses a boy in front of Leah, thinking, "Look at me with a boy. I'm over you. I'm not what you think."<sup>3</sup> This indirect comparison between sexual abuse and same-sex attraction associates homosexuality with criminal behavior, sexual deviancy, and with the hurtful legacy of sexual abuse. In the end, as the title indicates, Leah meets the same grisly fate as LGBTQ characters in older narratives: she becomes the dead girl of the title. Her death thus gives Laine a chance to live a more normal life.

When examining titles such as these, it grows obvious that books being published for young adults are not queer friendly by default. Although the field has expanded in many positive ways, it is not free from some of the pitfalls of earlier eras. Acknowledging that negative messages and images exist in many YA books does not mean that YA librarians should collectively seek to pull these titles from their collections. Self-censoring these titles before teenagers encounter them does nothing to challenge their negative portrayals. Alternatively, librarians can strive to counter the messages of such texts with exposure and inclusion in their collection of some of the more positive titles being published. This approach can best be described as advocating and integrating.

Advocating and integrating can seem like daunting tasks at the outset. Regardless of initial intimidation, your community or library likely already has the tools on hand to begin this process. If you

are looking for a comprehensive bibliography of positive portrayal titles, two indispensable professional titles are Cart and Jenkin's *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (2006) and Hillias J. Martin and James R. Murdock's *Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (2007). Both of these seminal research volumes include in-depth annotated bibliographies that can help you begin to pursue and promote titles that will match your patron base. Many of these books are well-known, award-winning, best-selling titles that may already be present in your library's collections. With so many new titles with LGBTQ content being published, keeping up can seem overwhelming. However, the benefit of so many major publishing houses releasing titles with LGBTQ content means that the novels are usually reviewed in all the major professional publications, almost always with a specific note to their content. Librarians doing collection development should thus keep an eye on reviews that make mention of LGBTQ content or appeal. Also, several openly LGBTQ writers are now well known for their young adult fiction, and more often than not, their multiple titles contain LGBTQ protagonists and plotlines. Some of these authors are: David Levithan, Brent Hartinger, Julie Anne Peters, and Alex Sanchez. No public or school library should, or could, attempt to purchase every single YA title that contains LGBTQ content. Nonetheless, a well-organized section with even a few titles can offer proper representation and appropriate guidance to a variety of patrons.

Once titles with LGBTQ content have become a part of your collection, the next step in advocating and integrating is to add them to the standard repertoire of your cumulative work as a YA librarian. Even adding a single title with LGBTQ content to reading lists available at the



library can help the process of advocating and integrating. As a youth services librarian, add a positive portrayal text to your standard booktalking routine. With such a wide range of titles now available in every genre, there will certainly be a title with LGBTQ content that matches both your personal reading interests and the interests of any group you may be doing outreach or programming with. The constantly expanding genre works in favor of advocating and integrating: fans of manga, romantic fiction, graphic novels, sports stories, fantasy, nonfiction, comedy, and realistic fiction can all find titles with LGBTQ content to match their genre interests. Just as librarians seek to engage reluctant readers and by including a large variety of genres in their booktalking and class visits, inclusion of titles with LGBTQ content allows librarians to familiarize students of any sexual orientation with the fact that the library has a large selection of titles that can speak directly to their experiences. While mere title suggestions seem like small steps, one or two titles featured on a booklist or one title discussed openly and enthusiastically can convey strong messages that many teen patrons want or need to hear. Advocating and integrating is crucial because librarians must be aware that their actions will help teen patrons from all walks of life.

Including these titles could potentially offer guidance or support to teens who might otherwise choose to remain silent about the prevalence of LGBTQ-related issues within their own respective lives. In a 2005 study at Cornell University, psychologist Ritch C. Savin-Williams conducted a series of related social experiments. Savin-Williams concluded that “at least fifteen percent and maybe as high as twenty percent of all adolescents have some degree of same-sex orientation.”<sup>4</sup> Savin-Williams’s study only applies to adolescents with same-sex orientation. The audience for this new

wave of titles will also include teenagers who have LGBTQ friends and family members. Moreover, such promotion offers potential audiences a chance to see an honest reflection of their lives and struggles in a book. The ability to relate personally and directly with narratives can have a profound impact on these teenagers.

Most young adult librarians understand that not every teenager who picks up a book with LGBTQ content will have same-sex feelings. Hopefully, these teenagers will come to identify themselves as “allies,” heterosexuals who are committed to ideals of equality and dedicated to fighting homophobia. The field of LGBTQ literature for teens reflects this reality, and this hope, as well. For instance, Michael Harmon’s *Last Exit to Normal* (2008) and Julie Anne Peter’s *Between Mom and Jo* (2006) feature heterosexual protagonists with homosexual parents. Many more YA titles portray close friendships between gay and straight adolescents. A decade ago, these titles would have been noteworthy simply because of their inclusion of an LGBTQ character. Now, they have become almost commonplace and are often read more as stories of typical friendships. Usually, they are more the stories of kinship between friends instead of desire or connection between romantic partners. A few titles that explore friendships between heterosexual and LGBTQ adolescents are: E. Lockhart’s *Dramarama* (2007), Brian Sloan’s *A Tale of Two Summers* (2006), Alex Sanchez’s *Getting It* (2006), Brian Malloy’s *Twelve Long Months* (2008), Carrie Jones’s *Tips on Having a Gay (Ex) Boyfriend* (2007), and Steve Kluger’s *My Most Excellent Year* (2008). These titles are part of what might be considered the newest trend in the body of LGBTQ literature. This contemporary wave addresses homosexuality as a de facto part of the larger teenage experience, only one element of the complicated story in YA lit

about friendships, summer camp, makeovers, breakups, going away to college, and other rites of adolescent passage. The appeal and usefulness of these titles, then, is much broader than just to adolescents with LGBTQ feelings. However, it is important to balance a collection featuring these tales of friendship and companionship with stories and novels dealing with the primary romantic and personal relationships of LGBTQ protagonists. Together, both types of these novels can help create a more complete portrait of the life of an LGBTQ teenager or ally and friend.

One of the basic tenets of the profession is that librarians must strive to match the right book with the right reader at the right time. Understanding this means that librarians must understand that not every situation or group may be suited for a booktalk featuring Billy, flamboyant drag queen of *Freak Show*, but what if a librarian was creating a booklist for a program with the theme of “metamorphosis” or “express yourself”? Overly cautious or heteronormative thinking must not limit a librarian’s efforts at advocating and integrating. Myopic thinking must not keep librarians from reaching out to connect the right readers with the right books.

Advocating and integrating can mean more than simply purchasing titles with LGBTQ content for a collection. Although that is a key first step, another important way to approach this within your library is to create a display for LGBTQ History Month, which in the United States is October. This allows a chance to both highlight titles with LGBTQ content and emphasize that your library is committed to integrated library service to all your patrons.

Approaching this display in your library presents a unique set of challenges. Be prepared to work with the administration of your library because

having their support in case of a challenge or a complaint from the community will be important. To make sure your administration understands the importance of this display and is ready to support you, consider creating a proposal for the administration. This proposal will not only provide justification for the display but may act as a rebuttal to any potential challenges. Hopefully, you will not encounter a challenge, but you should welcome questions about the display's intention and usefulness, both from your patrons and your colleagues. A proposal can answer these questions as well as encourage more open discussion and examination of materials. Be prepared to defend this display if it is challenged. A well-thought out and well-researched proposal is just one tool you should have prepared. You should also be familiar with the titles you are featuring—know their content and their literary merit. If you are able to discuss them with patrons, you will be better able to promote and defend them. Remember that approaching this display as part of a larger goal of advocating and integrating within your library will make it seem both more indispensable and defensible. Just as books with LGBTQ content encompass many readers and speak to the larger experience of adolescent life, so too can a display featuring LGBTQ titles and material.

The proposal I created for my library's display incorporated core values of librarianship and information from the Library Bill of Rights from ALA and goals my library listed in their long-range plan to provide service and outreach to all members of our community. It also contained statistics gathered from surveys conducted by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Harris Interactive polling about the climate of hostility and intimidation that many LGBTQ adolescents face in school. Using both these statistics and goals, I was able to

create a compelling proposal for my administration, proving the necessity of having this display at my library (see appendix.)

This display served as a chance to both create an LGBTQ booklist that spotlights a handful of titles in our collection (see handout 1) and provide our patrons with information to help them deal with a variety of LGBTQ issues (see handout 2.) I also featured the works and biographies of LGBTQ authors and activists, including in the display works by Whitman and a biography of Bayard Rustin. This display did not take up a huge amount of space but it was clearly labeled and prominently featured in our teen area. As I hoped, it raised questions in my library, both from teenagers who checked out the books and from my colleagues. My display inspired the head of the adult fiction section at my library to not only create a complementary display, but it led her to discover that their collection of material with LGBTQ content needed updating and she purchased several new titles in response.

I created a sign for this display that tries to reflect the depth of life for an LGBTQ adolescent of today. Not only did it encourage patrons to browse the display and use the library's resources, it also featured photographs of notable LGBTQ Americans. The four people featured in the sign were the late LGBTQ activists Harvey Milk and Barbara Gittings and contemporary celebrities Lindsay Lohan and Lance Bass. Perhaps Harvey Milk and Lindsay Lohan seem like unlikely allies, but they also function as good symbols for the ever-changing and increasingly public face of not just the literature for young adults with LGBTQ content but the complexities of their lives as well. In the same way that there can be no single face of the LGBTQ experience for adolescents, there can be no one novel that sums up the entirety of life for an LGBTQ teenager. Librarians

should, instead, strive to present these patrons with a wide array of literature that can speak to the possibilities and diversity of their lives. At the same time, librarians and readers can hope that the genre will continue to expand as it has in the past two years, bringing the canon even more diversity and depth.

By opening their library shelves to the LGBTQ experience in YA literature through advocating and integrating, librarians open a world of understanding and tolerance to all their patrons, regardless of sexual orientation. Further, through these attempts, librarians may even offer a lifeline to some of the teenagers who need affirmation and support in their lives the most. This advocating and integrating by librarians can create an atmosphere in which LGBTQ teenagers and their potential allies can find information and resources at the library and use them to make their lives, and perhaps even the world, a little bit better.

At the end of *Freak Show*, Billy Bloom ends his campaign for Homecoming Queen with an impassioned speech to his high school classmates, urging them to recognize the commonality of their experience. "I am asking you all to look inside yourselves—look into that secret place—confront your own inner freak. Don't turn away in shame. Stare it down, really examine it, inside and out, and then maybe you'll believe me when I say to you again that I'm not so different from you."<sup>5</sup>

When librarians examine the way teenagers read now they must be like Billy, unafraid to embrace newness and originality in their collections, prepared to do as Billy suggests and "accept the universal freak show" of this often daunting but frequently rewarding task.<sup>5</sup> In doing this, we stand to make a tangible, permanent, perhaps even life-changing impact in the lives of teenagers who seek representation and in the library. YALS

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## Appendix

Young adult (YA) literature is a rapidly growing genre within both the publishing industry and the world of library service. First established in the late 1960s, the genre has flourished and is now a permanent and critical element of library service to youth. One aspect of the genre that has experienced a recent boom in breadth and number of titles in recent years is young adult titles that contain lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) content. This increase in published titles seems to indicate that there is a growing market and interest in titles dealing with LGBTQ content.

Moreover, large numbers of adolescents are admitting feeling same-sex attraction themselves as well as encountering it more often than ever in popular culture and within their interactions with their peers and families. The increase in published YA titles reflects larger societal awareness of LGBTQ sexuality as a whole.

However, the situation for LGBTQ teenagers, their school and social

environment, can be daunting. In their 2005 National School Climate Survey the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a national organization of educators established in 1995 to help schools form Gay/Straight Alliances and combat bullying and harassment, surveyed 1,732 LGBT students between the ages of thirteen and twenty from all fifty states and the District of Columbia and found that 75.4 percent of respondents heard derogatory remarks and 37.8 percent had experienced physical harassment.<sup>1</sup>

A similar study, "From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America," which was conducted by GLSEN through Harris Interactive, polled 3,400 students aged thirteen to eighteen and over 1,000 secondary school teachers and queried them about the climate of bullying and threats in their schools. "Two-thirds (65 percent) of teens report that they have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability or religion." The survey also reported that "one-third (33 percent) of teens report that students are frequently harassed because they are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual." and that "LGBT students are three times as likely as non-LGBT students to say that they do not feel safe at school (22 percent versus 7 percent)." This climate of hostility and threats can have a profound effect on *all* students and negatively impact the entire school community, regardless of sexual or gender preferences. For instance, it is worth noting that in this same survey they discovered that "the reason most commonly cited for being harassed frequently is a student's appearance, as four in ten (39 percent) teens report that students are frequently harassed for the way they look or their body size."<sup>2</sup>

Public librarians have a unique opportunity to be both advocates and a

support system for these teenagers by helping connect them to the increased number of titles currently published with LGBTQ content. By having some of these titles in a public library collection, as well as having a time to spotlight them during such yearly events as LGBTQ History Month, public librarians are not only providing information, and to an underserved population within their community, but also supporting the ALA's Library Bill of Rights first principle, which states "Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves."<sup>3</sup> These actions not only foster community goodwill and understanding for patrons of all ages and sexual orientations but also serve to help libraries fulfill certain core values of librarianship as set out by ALA (such as diversity and social responsibility).<sup>4</sup>

As YA literature as a whole has expanded and changed so has the way libraries have collected and promoted this material. As the reader base has become more voracious and more sophisticated, libraries have responded by creating special teen areas within their buildings and by creating positions for librarians who only serve teenagers. These librarians help spotlight the uniqueness and the scope of their collections with frequent displays, booklists, and events. This also helps interest teen patrons in books they might not have known were part of the library's collection and let LGBTQ teens see that the library has something to offer them. A display for LGBTQ History Month would not only be appropriate for the larger goal of the library in the community but would also serve to showcase some of the wide range of titles with LGBTQ content published for interested teen readers of any sexual orientation.

Books with LGBTQ content are now a familiar presence in the world of YA

literature, both to teen readers and adult reviewers and librarians. More and more titles with a wider appeal and marketability are published every year. Titles with LGBTQ content now appear in almost every genre of young adult literature such as: manga, romantic fiction, graphic novels, sports stories, fantasy, nonfiction, memoirs, comedy, and realistic fiction. Titles with LGBTQ content are also garnering honors. Some honors and awards won by the books that could be featured in this display: Michael L. Printz Award and Honor Award (awarded by the YALSA), a National Book Award finalist, and the Sid Fleischman Humor Award (awarded by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators). LGBTQ titles have also been named to the New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age, YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults lists, YALSA's Popular Paperbacks lists, YALSA's Great Graphic Novels list, and ALA's Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers lists.

The literary merit of these works is not in question and neither is the need within the library and community that they address. A display for LGBTQ History Month would not only be entirely appropriate and justified but would also serve to meet part of the Los Alamos County Library System's Long Range Plan, which has as a stated goal: "Community members will be encouraged to explore the richness of their own and other cultures in order to broaden their cultural experiences and to enhance further understanding and appreciation of diversity," as well as "Community members will be offered an array of programs, events, exhibits, and services that will help them develop a knowledge of and appreciation for the history of the greater community, issues

facing the community and the many cultures that contribute to the richness of community life."<sup>5</sup> As a library system, and a community, we must acknowledge these members of our community and provide for them, regardless of their age, equally comprehensive and representative library services, programs, and displays.

This is a chance to contribute to the richness of our community life. Let us make the most of it while we can.

## LGBTQ Booklist

*Postcards from No Man's Land* by Aidan Chambers

*Down to the Bone* by Mayra L. Dole

*The Bermudez Triangle* by Maureen Johnson

*GLBTQ: A Survival Guide* by Kelly Huegel (TJ 306.766 H871g)

*My Most Excellent Year* by Steve Kluger

*Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan

*Hero* by Perry Moore

*Kissing Kate* by Lauren Myracle

*Luna* by Julie Anne Peters

*Empress of the World* by Sara Ryan

*Freak Show* by James St. James

*Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sanchez

*A Really Nice Prom Mess* by Brian Sloan

*Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger

*Antique Bakery* by Fumi Yoshinaga

## LGBTQ Resource List

Do you need help or just want more info about being LGBTQ or being an ally?

Check out these resources!

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education

Network, [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

OutProud: The National Coalition for

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and

Transgender Youth,

[www.outproud.org](http://www.outproud.org)

Human Rights Campaign, [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians

and Gays, [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

Explore LGBTQ History!,

[www.glbthistorymonth.com](http://www.glbthistorymonth.com)

*The Trevor Helpline* is a twenty-four hour, toll-free crisis hotline for LGBTQ youth. They also have a Web site, [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org), 1-866-488-7386

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## Are You There God? It's Me, Manga

### Manga as an Extension of Young Adult Literature

*By Lisa Goldstein and  
Molly Phelan*

Comics have risen in popularity in recent years. Publishers, bookstores, and libraries are all changing their collections to reflect this demand, which is due in part to comics' newfound appeal to girls. Girls have primarily come to comics through manga, which in Japan has long been written for and marketed to both genders and for all ages. Gender bending and gender fluidity are common themes in manga, especially in the shojo and boys' love genres, both written for females. The boys' love genre depicts romances between two beautiful boys. Critics observe that the male-male love stories offer females safe opportunities to experiment with different sexual and gender roles. Even the more hetero-normative shojo comics, such as *Sailor Moon* and *Oh My Goddess!*, feature gay characters and characters who switch between genders.

Young adult literature has always existed to give teenagers a chance to experiment with different identities, and

manga is extending this function. In this paper, we propose to demonstrate that manga's unconventional narratives give its female audience more agency as readers. Their interactions with and interpretations of the text are not dictated by conventional gender roles and expectations. Girls are driving a demand for comics and manga in the United States in unprecedented ways—and this is changing how teens read now.

#### Changing Shelves, Changing Selves

The bookshelves in U.S. libraries and corporate sellers have changed dramatically in the last five years. Back in 2003, trade magazines took note of the sales of manga and graphic novels. Reid remarked that

have grown at such a phenomenal rate that they are transforming the landscape

of American comics publishing. It's the only type of comic book that's more popular with girls and women than boys and men. Indeed, girls and women are going to bookstores to buy manga in numbers that are unheard of in the U.S. comics industry.<sup>1</sup>

Manga accounts for two-thirds of the U.S. graphic novel market, which was \$375 million in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Girls, primarily those aged 13-17, make up 75 percent of the readership, and publishers are responding. Manga publisher Tokyopop recently partnered with *CosmoGirl* to attract new readers. In 2007 DC Comics, a classic superhero publishing house, created Minx, a graphic novel imprint for teenage girls. This spoke to "a paradigm shift in the comics industry."<sup>3</sup> Harlequin decided to bring their manga versions of their popular paperbacks originally for Japanese markets to America, noting "we know kids are going to the manga section of bookstores."<sup>4</sup> Teens are also going to the manga section of libraries. "Libraries are paying attention to manga because the numbers are clear: adding comic book titles to the shelves put circulation stats 'through the roof.'"<sup>5</sup>

Why, though, is the audience for manga overwhelmingly female? Eva Volin, a librarian who has served as an Eisner Award judge and is currently chair of YALSA's Great Graphic Novels for Teens Committee, notes that "most manga focuses on character development and growth, along with action and humor. It pulls me in as a female reader [more] than a typical superhero comic."<sup>6</sup> One critic explained manga's popularity with the observation that "[m]anga offers adventure, romance, fantasy, erotica, even sports comics—there's something for readers of all ages and both genders."<sup>7</sup> Comics in the United States have long been marginalized, not seen as much more than a temporary diversion for adolescent males. In Japan, however, manga is a "dominant medium in

mass culture viewed neither as a childish nor an impoverished textual medium. . . as it tends to be in the United States.”<sup>8</sup> It is “sold ubiquitously—in newsstands, train kiosks, bookstores, convenience stores and vending machines packaged according to specific subjects and distinct audiences.”<sup>9</sup> Manga is completely integrated into Japan’s popular culture, and is read by all ages and both genders.

This cultural integration is growing in the United States, as girls increasingly seek out shojo manga written for and marketed to them. “The most appealing thing [for U.S. markets] with manga is that it’s been decades since comics have been a meaningful medium for females.”<sup>10</sup> Especially fascinating is the fact that the manga genres teenage girls are reading contain many of the same themes of identity as young adult fiction. A review of these books reveals that manga is more than just a popular format. It performs one of young adult literature’s primary roles: to help teens find their identity. *Publishers Weekly* blogger Heidi MacDonald observes:

The “mainstream” of comics could learn much from the hold this material has over its audience. Themes of mastery and coming of age, ambivalence about emerging sexuality, gender confusion—these are basic themes of all classic literature for young adults, and manga fits the bill.<sup>11</sup>

## Young Adult Identity

Young adult literature has always tested boundaries. In early works such as S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, Paul Zindel’s *My Darling, My Hamburger*, and Judy Blume’s *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, topics that were once considered taboo such as divorce, changing bodies, and sexuality became more mainstream in a more tolerant world.<sup>12</sup> The first efforts paved the way for readers and writers to

find their essential selves. Critic Kay Vandergrift writes, “Engagement with story is life-affirming; it puts us in touch with the world, with one another, and with our essential selves. Story helps us shape and reshape life, to give it importance and reflect on who we are and who we might become.”<sup>13</sup> The “story” is especially important for adolescents, who have left childhood behind and are growing into their adult identity.

Young adult literature concerned with this challenge resonates the most with teens, because adolescence is a time of experimentation and of shifting identities. Cornerstones of young adult literature such as Robert Cormier’s *I Am the Cheese* and Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea* trilogy explore this theme with the use of double identities and name changes. Le Guin and other young adult authors acknowledge the fact that gender is tied up inextricably with identity; it is the one factor that both restricts humans and lets them express themselves to the greatest extremes. Fiction for young adults is increasingly concerned with gender and sexuality, and critic Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins have observed a growing assimilation of gay characters into young adult literature. Early young adult novels with gay protagonists such as John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* and Isabel Holland’s *The Man Without a Face* focused rather turgidly on the issue of homosexuality. These dire stories, which often ended with some tragedy for the gay character, became a ghettoized subgenre.<sup>14</sup> Today, young adult fiction contains many characters that just happen to be gay: their homosexuality is not the main issue. These include Cecily Von Ziegesar’s *Gossip Girl*, E. Lockhart’s *Dramarama*, and Denene and Mitzi Miller’s *Hotlanta*. One critic even observes that “transgender fiction is making a stumbling debut, with novels such as David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy* and Blake Nelson’s *Gender Blender*.<sup>15</sup> “Going from

boy or girl to man or woman is undertaking a ‘huge leap on the slimmest of information,” and this is apparent in manga, in which gender, and reality, are extremely malleable.<sup>16</sup> For example, in Rumiko Takahashi’s *Ranma 1/2*, a splash of cold water turns Ranma into a girl. In this world, the other gender is very accessible, and gender identity is not fixed. Ranma’s femininity is not nonexistent or buried deep within him. Instead, it is barely below the surface, waiting for the smallest prompt to manifest itself. The “exploration of gender fluidity” allows manga artists to “address issues of identity of great importance to them and their readers.”<sup>17</sup>

## Women Manga-ka: We Can Do It!

Characters in manga have switched genders since *Princess Knight* was published in 1953 by the “godfather of manga” Osamu Tezuka.<sup>18</sup> As a child, Tezuka attended performances of the Takarazuka Revue, a female theater troupe that assigned male and female roles to its actresses. Besides “influenc[ing] his habit of showing female characters with large sparkling eyes,” the revue’s gender bending manifests itself in the story of *Princess Knight*, who was born with both a boy’s and a girl’s soul.<sup>19</sup> She is considered to be the “prototype for the magical girls and the sexual ambiguities that would become central to shojo manga.”<sup>20</sup> Similar sexual ambiguities played out in the relationship between the “Takarasiennes” who performed male roles and their ardent female fans. By the mid-1930s, there were warnings against the Revue’s perverting influence on young women.<sup>21</sup> Other critics of the time believed that “the all-female revue provided a safe outlet for the budding passions of teenage girls and young women until they were older and their sexual desires had matured and shifted ‘naturally’ to anatomically

correct men.”<sup>22</sup> Today’s Takarazuka fans have a much more positive, open perspective. They “continue to view the player of men’s roles in a number of affirmative ways, including as a style-setting lesbian and as an exemplary female who embodies contradiction and bridges gender and its spatial domains. . . female fans enjoy vicariously what they too might be able to do if—magically—they were someone else: not male, but players of men’s roles.”<sup>23</sup> The fantastic worlds of manga, in which a girl can successfully pass as a boy at an all boys’ school (*W Juliet, Kill Me, Kiss Me*), or a splash of water can change a person’s gender (*Ranma 1/2*), allow readers to slip on these new, foreign roles easily. Manga’s stylized illustrations aid this: “[they are] intended not to mimic reality but tweak it [and] create a space that distances the reader from her or his everyday world. The manga can lampoon, satirize, romanticize, naturalize, eliminate, transcend, reimagine, ridicule and essentialize the worlds in which people live.”<sup>24</sup>

The Takarasiennes influenced Tezuka, and he in turn influenced shojo manga. However, he did not consider himself a shojo writer, and the characters in *Princess Knight* adhere to traditional gender roles. The dual-gendered heroine’s ultimate goal is to become a complete female. Once this happens, “she immediately begins to use feminine speech and to cook and clean for her future husband.”<sup>25</sup> At the time of *Princess Knight*’s publication, male artists dominated manga publishing, and shojo then “promoted icons which preserved Japanese modern femininity.”<sup>26</sup> In the 1970s, however, an increasing number of women “developed a clear self-identity through changes in labor practices [and the] introduction of new ideas from the western feminist movement.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike the western feminists, who emphasized equality with men, women in Japan began to emphasize their “shared identity as ‘women.’”<sup>28</sup> More women began creating

manga. At this time, shojo branched off into “two types in terms of gender.”<sup>29</sup> One focused on women as characters, and by doing this conformed to the “traditional images of shojo.”<sup>30</sup> These were usually written from the viewpoint of a young girl unable to express her feelings of love to the opposite sex. The other, however, did not present women as its protagonists, and so “subverted the gender convention of previous shojo manga” and “challenged the traditional code of the shojo.”<sup>31</sup> The “49ers,” a group of female artists all born in 1949, began creating work for young girls and women that “transcend[ed] simple minded romanticism and boy/girl conformity.”<sup>32</sup> Ikeda Riyoko’s 1972 manga *The Rose of Versailles* is a seminal example. The heroine’s father raises her as a man in Marie Antoinette’s court so that she may succeed him in his position as head of the Palace Guards. “Oscar” is torn between living as a man and as a woman. However, passing as a man gives Oscar more freedom because she lives “free from fixed gender ideology.”<sup>33</sup> Oscar carries on relationships with both men and women, and her position in the court gives her insight into the corruption of Louis XVI’s rule. Fittingly, *The Rose of Versailles* has been dramatized by the Takarazuka Revue.

## Girls in Love With Boys in Love

Why do girls want to read about boys in love? Boys’ love offers a haven in which readers may contemplate the different sexual and gender roles in relationships, including same-sex relationships and relationships not conforming to traditional gender roles. This harmless subversion can lead to an empowering awareness of the full scope of opportunities afforded by an acceptance of the complexity and fluidity of gender, and of the importance of being open to all feelings, no matter how

confusing they may be. Readers are able to view the daunting challenges of romantic relationships from the comfortable distance of a male character. In Mikio Tsuda’s *The Day of Revolution*, Kei discovers that he is genetically a girl and begins to live as Megumi, a female. Being a girl, Megumi discovers, is dangerous: strangers and former friends harass and objectify her. Female readers of boys’ love, however, are reading romances in which there is no need to “agree. . . with their supposed position as an object of male desire.”<sup>34</sup> One critic further notes that a female reader’s “imagination [is] allowed to run wild without consequence to her body or psyche.”<sup>35</sup> In these stories, there is no possibility of marriage or risk of pregnancy, and the willowy, feminine male characters resemble typical shojo heroines. The art in manga has idealized bodies and faces, the lines are crisp and clean, and the visual aspect of beautiful boys allows girls to identify with either character and imagine relationships, romance, and sexuality without the trappings of gender. The heroes of Toko Kawai’s *Loveholic*, for example, resemble supermodels, with their slim, elongated bodies and impossibly long legs. In Teiko Sasaki’s *Kissing*, the couple moon at each other with limpid eyes framed by long eyelashes. These androgynous pairs could easily be heterosexual couples, lesbian couples, or gay male couples. Because of their androgynous appearance, the male heroes can act as blank slates for whatever gender and kind of relationship the reader wants to assign them. Able to identify with the beautiful boys either as “boys, girls or androgynes, readers are encouraged to experiment with nonhegemonic gender and sexual practices.”<sup>36</sup>

Although a female reader may benefit from the distance afforded by reading a romance between two males, she may also be “encouraged to see not just a girl but herself within the world of boys’ love and, ultimately, is encouraged to explore homoerotic desire, either as a beautiful boy

or as herself.”<sup>37</sup> There are members of the Japanese lesbian community who point to boys’ love as an influence during their adolescence. One lesbian activist says that she “turned to these manga given the lack of representations of female-female desire.”<sup>38</sup> Akira Honma’s *Last Portrait* contains a poignant scene in which lovers Yamato and Sakaguchi pledge to give up everything they have for each other: “Let’s go away. we’ll forget about society and family.” The melodramatic genre of shojo is a perfect setting for expressing the plight of being in a socially unacceptable relationship. This is in accordance with Michael Cart’s wishes for young adult literature with gay protagonists: “Could these books perhaps play a positive didactic role in acquainting young readers with realistically portrayed gay and lesbian characters? And could those readers’ imaginations be pushed a bit further to see such characters from an empathetic, rather than a sympathetic, perspective? Could a young reader not simply feel for gay and lesbian people but also with them?”<sup>39</sup> Empathizing with homosexual characters may also lead to increased empathy with homosexual couples in general. In Emura’s *W Juliet*, for example, Ito falls for Makoto, who must spend high school disguised as a girl to make his father take his wish to be an actor seriously. Ito and Makoto are a straight couple in the closet, and express the same longing to have an open, legitimate relationship that undercover gay couples may have: “In two years. we’ll be sunning ourselves on the beach. Someday the two of us.” Boys’ love can be a discreet way of experimenting with a lesbian identity through empathy for a male couple, or by individually imagining the androgynous couple as women. Like the women in drag of the Takarazuka revue, the pretty boys of boys’ love permit readers to fantasize safely about same-sex feelings.

Boys’ love can engender an acceptance for all feelings, between any combination of

sexes: “boys’ love is a safe expression of feelings, period.”<sup>40</sup> The opportunity to navigate a romance through a male character’s perspective gives female readers of boys’ love a chance to contemplate relationships outside of the usual gender role dichotomy, with the man as the pursuer and the women as the pursued. It can be liberating to see these protagonists exhibiting the insecurities about relationships normally associated with females. In Satoru Kannagi’s *Only the Ring Finger Knows*, Wataru and popular Yuichi find they are wearing the same rings by mistake. Embarrassingly, matching rings signify a couple. Yuichi is cold to Wataru, and discomfited him. Wataru shivers and blushes, and Yuichi taunts: “What, did you think I was gonna kiss you or something?” Maki Murakami’s *Gravitation* tells the story of Shuichi, an aspiring rock star, and Eiri, an established romance author, and contains humorous scenes in which the two men struggle to come to terms with their feelings for each other. At one point, Eiri declares that he is straight, then leans in for a passionate, five-panel kiss with Shuichi, sending Shuichi into hysterics.

In contrast to the frazzled male characters of boys’ love, the female protagonists are calmly confident in their sexuality and desires. Occasionally they give love advice to their male friends, making them aware of their repressed feelings. In *Last Portrait*, Miyabi amiably tells her astonished fiancé to leave her because she noticed that he hid his engagement ring in front of her brother. In *Only the Ring Finger Knows*, Wataru’s sister unnerves him when she mentions his unacknowledged feelings for Yuichi. She teases his defensiveness: “Down boy, don’t get excited. . . You’re so easy to read!” The unflappable females of boys’ love steer their emotional, less experienced male friends towards the truth. Sanami Matoh’s *Fake*, a bestselling boys’ love manga in the United States, tells the story of two New York

City police officers, Ryo and Dee, who feel an increasing attraction towards each other. In the final volume, Ryo is still struggling to come to terms with his feelings for Dee. His friend Diana, a tough, resolute FBI agent, is much more open about sex and homosexuality: “Oh stop it, Sandra Dee. You’re not in junior high. It’s nothing to turn bright red about.” She then tells him, “[you’re] scared [to] have to face up to everything you are.” Ryo fumes, “What is it with straight women, knowing everything a gay guy thinks!”

Occasionally boys’ love fans appear in boys’ love manga, and playfully objectify men. In Satosumi Takaguchi’s *Shout Out Loud!* female fans gush about their favorite voice actors: “he does the best kisses!” In *Gravitation*, Reiji falls in love with Shuichi. In spite of her unrequited love for him, she enjoys his reconciliation with Eiri, admitting she has a “fetish” for “a pretty-boy love scene.” In boys’ love, women suffer from none of the hesitation or prudishness that men do, and this is one way in which the genre “transgressively offer[s] readers new models of masculinity and romance.”<sup>41</sup> Women are assertive, certain of their desires, and ready to pursue men. In Young-You Lee’s *Kill Me, Kiss Me*, Tae Im clenches her fists, warning her crush: “Get ready, Kun! Here I come!” Unlike traditional romances, in which the man is the dominant pursuer, boys’ love offers female readers a choice in relationship roles. A Tokyopop editor observes that “[boys’ love] breaks lots of cultural stereotypes about what relationships are supposed to be. Women are expected to play or serve a certain role. A [boys’ love] reader doesn’t have to associate with a female character. You choose which one you identify with.”<sup>42</sup> Paul Gravett notes that in the stories one male partner is usually more effeminate and one is more dominant, and readers can choose to identify more strongly with one role or the other.<sup>43</sup> Brenner similarly observes,



"Despite same-gender main characters, gender stereotypes are usually maintained."<sup>44</sup> In *Gravitation*, for example, Eiri is the dominant "male" character: he seduces Shuichi, who is much less experienced. Emotional Shuichi is drawn as a child, and is referred to as both "a little pet" and a "blushing bride." Shuichi may play the stereotypical female role in the relationship, but female readers are not tied to the role by gender: "what distinguishes [boys' love] from traditional romances is the idea that the two male leads start off as social equals. Female readers can identify with either hero."<sup>45</sup>

Little else in boys' love breaks with conventions of the romance genre, and this is another source of its appeal. The dance of indecision, doubt, and denial between the protagonists resembles the courtships of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.<sup>46</sup> Boys' love narratives are not bogged down in real-life consequences or issues. Rather, they are escapist romances: "the lack of strictly realistic issues contributes to the appeal. These books are appealing for many of the same reasons that prose romance novels are attractive. . . they focus on relationships."<sup>47</sup> The protagonists' homosexuality is not the issue, their romance is: "[c]haracters are frequently in love with that person only and don't consider themselves gay or lesbian. The topic of how the characters identify their sexuality in most cases is not discussed."<sup>48</sup> In *Gravitation*, Shuichi tells Eiri that he didn't fall in love with him "because you're a guy or anything it was a purely emotional reaction." In Hisaya Nakajo's *Hana Kimi*, a gay character muses, "Unrequited love. I know it well." If one character will not love the other because he will not accept his homosexuality, the story focuses on the drama of unrequited love, not the drama of coming to terms with one's sexual orientation.

Interestingly, this lack of focus on sexuality may assist readers in identifying their own sexuality. Since boys' love is written for girls, they are free to contemplate a same-sex romance that is not exclusively between males. In manga, gender issues are not portrayed as a core issue, and "most teen readers who select a book with gender-variant characters are not looking for a manifesto on gender or gender angst. Instead, readers seek a mirror of their own feelings or experiences to relate to and help them understand the world around them."<sup>49</sup> As gay characters appear in young adult fiction as secondary characters, or even main characters whose sexuality is not the book's focus, the message of tolerance for all orientations becomes more assumed and, as a result, more effective: Cart and Jenkins note that books such as these assume a "melting pot of sexual and gender identity."<sup>50</sup> As Shuichi's friend Hiro tells him in *Gravitation*, "It doesn't matter that Eiri-san is a guy because you love him in the deepest way of all, as a person." Boys' love protagonists learn not to resist their feelings, no matter how confusing they are. This demonstrates that it is acceptable to experience more complex feelings about a relationship than a heteronormative view would expect. Hinako Takanaga's *Little Butterfly*, for example, is a straightforward romance, without any discussion of homosexuality. Boy meets boy and, after a little confusion, they fall in love. Though initially confused by Nakahara's advances, Kojima relents: "I don't really understand it, but I like you, too." In *Kill Me, Kiss Me*, Tae Im disguises herself as a boy to be closer to her crush, Kun, at a boys' school. Tough boy Ga-Woon is attracted to her, or "him": "I can't help it. I can't get [h]im out of my head. Do-do you think I - I could be turning. . . gay?!" Ga-Woon is frightened and confused, but he "can't help it"—he has to go with his feelings. In *Only the Ring Finger Knows*, Wataru's emotions similarly overtake him: "I don't even understand

myself. All I know is that I love Kazuki." Confusion is acceptable in these situations. Identities may not be clear cut, but love is.

## Channeling the Masculine and the Feminine

One of the most powerful messages of gender bending and boys' love manga is that it is empowering to channel both the masculine and feminine; to accept one's full identity, no matter how confusing or complex it is. James Welker describes the boys' love reader as "an exemplary female who can negotiate successfully both genders without being constrained by either."<sup>51</sup> As J. D. Ho points out, "what girl hasn't wanted to have the privileges and the opportunities afforded the other gender?"<sup>52</sup> Gender-bending manga often comes from a character's "desire to change circumstances imposed by culture and custom."<sup>53</sup> Sometimes a girl just has to be a boy to get what she wants. *W Juliet* and *Kill Me, Kiss Me* both feature protagonists who dress up as the other gender to infiltrate boys' and girls' schools in order to get close to a crush. Adopting another gender gets the characters what they want. In *Kill Me, Kiss Me* Tae Im declares, "I don't care! I can be a boy or a girl for you, Kun! Somehow. . . I'm gonna make you mine!" The power of moving between two genders comes from the ability to accept a more complex gender than most people are socialized to do. In *Gravitation*, Eiri is attracted to Shuichi because Shuichi does not worry about being gay. "I can't help being in love," he says simply. Eiri admires this: "[Y]ou can fall in love and not worry about sexuality." By not questioning his desires, Shuichi enjoys more freedom than others. Boys' love readers enjoy this freedom as well, because the stories offer a safe place to try on different identities.

Boys' love readers are even free to envision a gender outside of the

male-female dichotomy. Welker observes that the beautiful boy is “neither male nor female” but a “third sex/gender,” and further observes that “the reader maintains the freedom to renarrate and en-gender—or de-gender—the narrative to her own liking.”<sup>54</sup> Thompson notes that “the characters in [boys’ love] combine male and female traits according to readers’ desires, creating a sort of perfect hermaphroditic creature.”<sup>55</sup> This third gender could be seen as a unique composite of each reader’s desires. It is a gender that exists outside of the more fixed identity of an adult, or outside the constricting societal expectations of conventional gender roles. This recalls the female fans of the Takarazuka Revue, to whom the “key to liberation. . . involves not a change of sex but a new gender identity, and by extension, a transformation in gender ideology,” and Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles*, who proves that gender-bending is often not much more than cross-dressing.<sup>56</sup> By offering readers opportunities to contemplate privately a break with societal expectations, Welker notes that boys’ love offers readers “a way through the looking glass to a world outside the patriarchy.”<sup>57</sup> It is to be hoped that fans of boys’ love will live their lives with the same freedom. Welker continues: “[U]ltimately, the beautiful boy can be read as a symbol of liberation,” and a force to “posit possibilities beyond the norm, or, indeed a different future for the norm itself.”<sup>58</sup>

## Cross-Pollination Between Manga and Young Adult Fiction, or “Who Knew I Would Gender-Bend Everyone Out of Shape?!”

There is less of a need to convince public and school librarians to add manga to their young adult collections than there is a need

to convince them to see it as a valid storytelling format. Manga is more than an alternative medium or style. It presents themes of gender, sexuality, and identity in a unique way, and this has value for young adult readers. Critic J. D. Ho calls boys’ love manga “a safe place to try on different identities without consequence—where we can resolve our problems and face our fears,” an accepted goal of young adult fiction since its inception.<sup>59</sup>

Will teens growing up on manga absorb more enlightened views of gender roles and sexuality? As one critic observes, “[Y]oung Americans are seeing portrayals of sex and gender that are quite different from what their parents probably saw.”<sup>60</sup> Our more “open universe” includes more opportunities for dialogue, and in the last four years transgender characters and issues have begun to arrive in young adult fiction.<sup>61</sup> Novels such as Julie Anne Peters’s *Luna* and Ellen Wittlinger’s *Parrotfish* “are paving the way for an entire canon of transgender-inclusive YA literature.”<sup>62</sup> These are still serious ‘issue’ books, however, and are far from the playful fantasies of boys’ love and gender-bending manga. A recent release, however, may be the *Ranma [1/2]* of young adult fiction: Lauren McLaughlin’s 2008 debut *Cycler*, in which character Jill McTeague turns into a boy every twenty-eight days. McLaughlin’s work mixes the fantastic situations and humor of manga with the more grounded contemplation of young adult fiction, and this is an encouraging sign. The format and history of manga allows for stories that go beyond the conventions of most western young adult literature, and young adult literature benefits from its inclusion. YALS

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This action research project describes the impact a love for reading and access to books had on incarcerated youth and the adults directly working with them. Through adults working inside a juvenile detention center a library was established, young adult (YA) books were made available, and literature discussion groups were conducted. The positive results dispel the myth of high illiteracy rates associated with people serving time for criminal offenses. The act of establishing a library in one detention center evolved into academic course work that brought educators, social workers, and criminal justice students and professionals together for the first time. This action research had ramifications in the surrounding communities and other state agencies working with youth at risk. Suggestions for preventing problems associated with juveniles in schools and communities are part of the outcomes in this paper. A list of YA books around the theme of youth at risk is included.

## A Conversation

"Dad, they don't even have a library!" my son exclaimed. Ben had just graduated with a degree in criminal justice and this was his first week on the job at a juvenile detention center. As a professor of children's and YA literature, I was just as perplexed by Ben's observation. When Ben was growing up he was surrounded by books. We think all kids deserve the same advantages.

"What do these kids do all day if they don't read?" I asked Ben.

"Watch some television, listen to music, go to classes and do some homework. Nothing exciting. This place [detention center] is like a prison for adults," he replied in a matter of fact manner.

"Don't they do some reading with their homework?" I inferred.

"Yeah, but there are no novels or interesting books to read. I have yet to see a

magazine." It bothered Ben that these kids had no access to reading materials. I suggested that he ask his supervisor why there were no books. Ben was told that no one had proposed the idea before, but there was no budget for books anyway. When Ben learned this information, he decided to start a library. I donated the first few boxes of books to help Ben out.

The next day, the boxes were back on my kitchen table. Ben explained that no hardcover books were allowed. Potentially, they could be used as weapons. So we repacked the boxes with paperbacks. The books were placed on a table in a general gathering room of the detention center. Ben returned to work the day after bringing in the books. The boxes on the tables were empty! There were no books lying around. After nosing around a bit, he discovered that the books had disappeared with the juveniles to their cell blocks. This was a new phenomenon. None of the kids had been observed reading outside their individual cell blocks before. As an educator interested in behavior associated with reading, I assumed these kids did not want to be seen reading by their peers.

Even students in a typical junior/senior high school on the outside go from one subject class to another with little time for leisure reading during the school day. One study found that adolescents who engage in leisure reading do it in the privacy of their own bedrooms.<sup>1</sup> Ben noticed, however, that it did not take the juveniles long before they let their guard down and began to read in the commons area. Ironically, the detention center may have provided a safe space for pleasure reading free from the social pressures of athletics, jobs, music, Web surfing, computer gaming, and fitting into social groups kids experience on the outside. Of course we do not recommend detention centers as a cure for adolescent reading, but we do agree with findings on adolescent reading associated with access, choice, and engaged time discussing literature.

Reading in the commons area of the juvenile detention center provided a healthy escape from the stark surroundings of their individual holding cells. The commons area is furnished with tables, chairs, and a television (with restricted programming and viewing hours), although

# Bullies, Gangs, and Books for Young Adults

*By Stan Steiner and Ben Steiner*



there are no windows to tell day from night. This room has a high ceiling and is completely open to cell blocks on two levels. Individual cell blocks are bleak. Each includes a stainless steel toilet stool with no lid, a sink, a raised platform with a thin vinyl covered mattress about two inches thick, a blanket, and pillow. Light inside the cell blocks comes from a single bulb overhead and two windows, one in the door, disallowing any privacy, and another small window constructed of two glass bricks. From the commons area, hallways accessed through secure doors lead to classrooms, lock down rooms, the kitchen, and dining room. To enter and leave the commons area, a person must pass through a series of locked checkpoints with guards much like airport security. The classrooms are off limits to students unless there is a teacher present and the detainees are attending classes. At other times, the rooms are locked. The juvenile detention center is like a prison. Teenaged juvies are under the age of eighteen and some are as young as eleven years old. Most are serving one- to nine-month sentences, but never more than a year. Some are repeat offenders. Infractions include breaking state cigarette smoking laws for persons under eighteen, truancy, running away from home, auto theft, aggravated assault, and breaking and entering. These kids were once attending public schools and will likely return when they get out.

Ben and I took the book usage inside the detention center as a good thing. One social stigma imposed on juvenile delinquents is the generalization that they have reading difficulties.<sup>3</sup> Reading level didn't seem to be a hindrance at this detention center. Ben was able to round up a few more books and circulation remained constant. There was no formal check out system inside the detention center, but books passed between juvies and since this was their temporary residence the books stayed within the center. A few months

later, Ben left the detention center and took a job as a juvenile probation officer in the next county, but we continued to hear about the book project. By coincidence, the father of one of my college students worked at the same detention center. Tina was taking my YA literature class. She asked if Ben was my son. Her father had told her about Ben bringing books to start a library. Tina reported that the paperback books were getting pretty tattered from use and wanted to know if I had more to donate. We talked about the detention center and Tina decided to adopt the library as her class project. She worked with her father to get bookshelves and find approved locations for them in the detention center. She filled them with more donated books. Ben's seedling idea had taken root and was growing.

A year passed and our work demands carried us farther away from the detention center library project. I was busy with my university workload and Ben was pursuing a masters degree in criminal justice. One afternoon, however, a student came by my office to ask for help on a project she was undertaking for a children's literature class. Stella told me she worked part time at the juvenile detention center and wanted to know how to start literature groups. She found my name while thumbing through the books at the center. She said several had my name inside the cover. I explained that Ben had worked at the detention center, too, and had started the library. I also mentioned Tina and her father's helpful contributions. Stella shared that she had been working at the center on a part-time basis for about four months and had really enjoyed working with the kids and the director, Tim. This began an ongoing weekly dialogue with Stella over the course of a semester. She said Tim's classroom setting focused on coping skills, anger management, and positive attitudes. "He even has them read some books," Stella reported. Tim also noticed the impact the library was having on these kids. I learned through Stella that Tim and other

coworkers at the detention center reported that most of the juvies were spending their free time reading instead of watching television or just sleeping in their cell blocks. With all the interest in reading, Stella wanted to try literature groups with the juvies, but there were few multiple copies of books and she was not sure Tim would go for the idea. Stella was experiencing a modified version of literature groups in her children's literature class at the university. Tim already told her there was no budget to buy more books. We talked some more and between the two of us, decided we would find a way to cover the book costs if Tim approved of the literature groups. I recommended two books on literature circles to Stella to provide some background information before she approached Tim on the idea, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student Centered Classroom* by Daniels (1994) and *Getting Started With Literature Circles* by Schlick-Noe and Benson (1999).<sup>4</sup> My first title suggestion was *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson. I encouraged her to read it first to become familiar with the content and decide how she might use the book with the kids at the detention center. Stella went on to share *Touching Spirit Bear* with the director. Tim loved the book, too, and approved of the literature groups. Now there would be solid proof that these kids were reading as they whittled away the hours of their jail sentence. Ben's seedling idea was flourishing.

The first title was a hit and the literature discussion groups were off to a good start. I suggested to Stella that she read some of the book to them as she introduced the story. I also suggested she tape it or get a copy from the library in case there were struggling or nonreaders who still wanted to participate. Tim had a tape recorder in his classroom. Our framework for the literature group tasks was loosely based on Daniels' (1994) model for literature groups.<sup>5</sup> We talked about groups of five students each with designated roles

to play, from discussion leader to illustrator. As she experimented, Stella tailored the literature groups to the unique setting. In the detention center there is always a turnover of residents to contend with, making the literature group dynamics ever changing. We discovered small groups became a challenge because of attrition. Of course I was curious about the students' ability to write, so I asked Stella if she could get them to record some of their reactions or draw pictures as they read or listened to the story. Some sample student comments were clear indications of their personal connections to the book. The subject material provided a way for them to talk about their own struggles with the law:

This is fun, were just chillin listenin to a story havin a good time. Story is tight I like it. I can relate to it because the kid Cole is careless about breaking the law just like I do but you always get the worst end of it. Troy

The story's pretty good, and we're having fun drawing pics of what's going on in the book tape. I can relate because Cole likes to be in control of where his life is going, and isn't thinking about the repercussions of his actions. Matt

Stella had the groups going and Tim was amazed at how easily the kids joined in. Tim and Stella invited me to observe what was taking place at the detention center. I had hoped for this day, since my curiosity was peaked. The staff greeted me with warmth and ease. They all knew and remembered my son Ben. The kids were equally comfortable with my presence. I discovered that the literature groups were really one large group that varied in size depending on the number of students who wanted to participate and how many were residents at the time. As mentioned, student turnover was commonplace. Stella learned over the course of the semester that the flexibility of personal choice from the

books in the detention center library was the best working arrangement. She learned that students showed variation in reading interests, books were passed among students based on personal recommendations, and the juvies enjoyed talking about their books. On the day I participated, there were thirteen students and three staff members, including Tim. We sat in a large circle around two tables and chatted as we ate lunch, but the book discussion began in earnest when most had eaten. Each student took a turn talking about the book they were reading or had just finished. I received no indication that this was rehearsed or that they were putting on a show for me. They seemed comfortable saying what they had on their minds. Some students made comments if they had read the same book. Tim often probed with a guiding question to get them to talk more. The setting was subdued and respectful without the usual interruptions that often occur in a regular classroom, but there was an excitement, with several students who clearly loved the book they were reading.

I was surprised by my observation of the literature groups because I had assumed they were all reading the same book. Stella and Tim said this still occurred, but mostly the literature group experience had morphed into free-choice reading. With more books available, Tim and Stella had developed a book evaluation system that asked students a series of questions such as: title, author, number of pages, genre, characters, summary, how they related to the story, adventure scale 1-10, favorite part or character, recommendation, vocabulary words, did they like the ending, and what would you write differently if you wrote the book. These written responses became useful guides for students sharing their book. Stella, Tim, and the staff got the evidence they wanted to prove that the students had read the books. There were some other

interesting developments and discoveries resulting from their move toward free choice. Staff members were prompted to read some of the same books and they began to engage the students in dialogue about characters or book content.

Student book choices and the authors surprised me. More titles had been added to my original donation. These included books by Ben Grisham, V. C. Andrews, Christopher Paul Curtis, Robert R. McCammon, Stephen R. Covey, Will Hobbs, Anthony Horowitz, Tamora Pierce, and Chris Crutcher. It was clear that these kids were readers. They had a lot of time on their hands on the inside; through their teachers' encouragement, reading provided an escape as well as a social activity. This evidence of reading among juvenile delinquents also is in contrast to the high percentage of adult inmates who are functionally illiterate or the predictors associated with reading success in the early grades used in at least one state to determine prison cells.<sup>6</sup> Is reading among these juvies an anecdote to further trouble with the law? Perhaps this is another scenario of leisure reading that needs further study, as suggested by Tim Shanahan's (2006) editorial piece in *Reading Today*.<sup>7</sup> Knowing the life outcomes of the juvies we worked with once they returned to their neighborhood schools and life on the outside was beyond the scope of this paper. We did learn from our work that access, choice, and discussion around literature did have a rewarding effect on the juvies while inside the detention center. Much of their down time was used for reading, and we looked at that as a positive use of time with potential positive benefits later.

I was elated that Ben's initial book idea had evolved into a regular part of the educational program at the detention center. I was pleased that Ben and I had found a way to share our common love of reading. Also, the two of us had many

discussions about youth in public schools, incarcerated youth, juvenile probation officers, and school personnel. Another idea emerged. At this time, Ben was near completion of his master's degree in criminal justice. His thesis chair was also the department chair at my university. I proposed an idea to Ben about co-teaching a university class crosslisted with education, criminal justice, and sociology. The department chairs mutually agreed. These departments represented three groups of professionals who work with kids and families but all too often run parallel tracks with each other that do not intersect. We envisioned the class as a good way to begin more dialogue among the professional groups. We combined my expertise about schools and adolescent literature with Ben's knowledge of the juvenile justice system and called the class *Bullies, Gangs, and Books for Young Adults*. The combination was a fresh idea that turned out to be popular among students across the different fields. Enrollment numbers were high.

Ben and I made plans, and the content of the class began to take shape. I suggested a list of YA novels (see bibliography) in which students would select any two as part of the reading for class. I wanted to model literature discussion groups as part of the class. Ben suggested several films to set the tone of the class. We also decided to bring in guest speakers relevant to our overall theme, which included: a school resource officer (SRO), law enforcement experts on gang activity, a colleague from the Department of Criminal Justice who specialized in school violence, active school social workers, and community members who directed activities or worked with youth. Our class plans had the right combination of lecture, media presentations, speakers, group activities, and discussion. I was excited about the class and the chance to teach with my son. This was a first for both of us.

Ben had decided we should show a film, *Kids* (1995), on the very first day that would bring awareness of today's adolescents.<sup>8</sup> Although I hadn't viewed the film, I trusted Ben's judgment. After we gave the usual introductions and Ben queued the film, I gazed over the audience. The class was a mix of students from different fields of study, work experience, and diverse ranges of age and ethnicity. Some students I recognized from prior classes within the College of Education, but others were new to me. Ben knew some from the Criminal Justice Department, while others were actively working with adolescents in some other capacity. As the film rolled on, I became more and more nervous about the content. Though our university is nestled in a liberal pocket of a large urban city, our state is predominantly conservative in its political and religious views. The teenaged main character of the film was obsessed with sex. He was always trying to hit on girls. One line in the film he says often, "f\*\*cking is what I love, take that from me and I have nothing." The same character also contracted AIDS, but was unaware of it because his health was still intact. The film also depicted the lives of several other youth in a city setting. Scenes included drinking, smoking, socializing, partying, experimenting with drugs, involvement with group-related violence, sexual activity, athletic feats, and life in varied family structures. Parental and adult interactions ranged from tension to laughter. In many ways these kids looked quite normal on the outside, feeling immortal, unclear about facts related to sex, influenced by older siblings, maturing faster physically than mentally, submitting to peer pressure, searching for guidance but wanting to be independent, and being adventurous. The date rape scene was probably the segment of the film that bothered me the most. I surveyed the class nervously, knowing some of their religious backgrounds. At last, the film ended. I

broke the silence by saying, "not exactly Academy Award winning material," which got a laugh. Then we asked for comments. The first person to speak was an elderly lady who had mentioned in the introductions that she was retired and taking the class purely for enrichment and curiosity. She said, "I am surprised how the lines [pick up lines from males, i.e., 'I love you so much,' 'trust me,' 'I just want to make you happy,' 'do you care about me'] have not changed in all these years." We could not have asked for a better response had we staged the whole thing. The ensuing discussion was lively and nobody left the room, nor dropped the class. From that moment, the class took shape in amazing ways.

We learned many things from our diverse students. The characteristics and behaviors of the teenagers we discussed were mirrored in the YA books we suggested for reading. The books were the centerpiece of our discussions and opened the door for many discoveries about adolescents, so unique and different from elementary aged students. Below are a few book connections to the adolescent behaviors discussed with a complete YA list from the class in the bibliography:

- Adolescents on the edge lack strong social ties and are often antisocial—*Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson; *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick.
- Computer gaming is often an escape world for them—*Crusader* by Edward Bloor.
- Most offenders begin with nonserious delinquent acts, have poor school attitudes and performance, and often suffer from some psychological disorders (i.e., depression, anorexia, self-destructive behaviors, anxiety, etc.)—*Staying Fat For Sarah Byrnes*, *Whale Talk*, and *Ironman*, all by Chris Crutcher; *A Hole in My Life* by Jack Gantos.

- Outside school factors also play a role, such as the community in which these kids live—*Scorpions* by Walter Dean Myers.
- Is their neighborhood poverty stricken? Are drugs readily available? How do local laws view sex offenders, firearm possession, or family physical abuse? —*Monster* by Walter Dean Myers; *Hero* by S. L. Rottman; *We're Not Monsters: Teens Speak Out About Teens in Trouble* by Sabina Solin Weill; *When She Hollers* by Cynthia Voigt.
- Is there an accepted expectation for adults and adolescents in the community to spend time in prisons or detention centers?—*Somewhere in the Darkness* by Walter Dean Myers; *Life in Prison* by Stanley "Tookie" Wilson.
- Another characteristic is the media's portrayal of these communities. Do they use stereotypes? Do they generalize the families as transient, single-parent families, and unemployed?—*Hermanas/Sisters* by Gary Paulsen; *Always Running La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* by Luis Rodriguez; *Buried Onions* by Gary Soto.
- Additional factors that contribute to delinquency include a history of family problems such as psychological and emotional abuse and physical abuse; emotional trauma is more devastating to the children—*Forged by Fire* by Sharon Draper; *Cages* by Peg Kehret
- Another factor is parents who deny that their child could do anything wrong—*Tangerine* by Edward Bloor; *Split Image* by Mel Glenn.
- Schools also exhibited a host of risk factors for youth such as students who committed crimes early, showed persistent antisocial behavior, experienced academic failure particularly in reading and math, had been retained, felt isolated, and lacked commitment to school.

Ben and I had hoped from the outset that class discussions around YA books and presentations would foster dialogue among these students from many walks of life. Our class of varied professionals exceeded our hopes, creating a host of recommendations and considerations for school and community settings, found as an appendix to this article. An overriding theme through all the discussions and suggestions was to have a presence with our youth. Don't sit back and assume others will be their mentors. Of course our goal as professionals, parents, and community members who interact with youth is to keep them out of trouble and out of detention centers.

This article grew out of real life experience, but it all began with a love for reading and the desire to share this passion with kids who had made big mistakes. Since the idea first took root, the adult participants have grown in various ways. Tim, the director of the juvenile detention center, still runs literature discussion groups and the library keeps growing as others in the community hear about our story and feel compelled to donate books. According to Tim, free-choice reading among the juvies is still the favored activity for passing time on the inside. The idea is spreading, too. Across the state in another residential setting for adolescents on the edge, known as a youth ranch, a counselor who attended the class reads aloud to his residents each night before they drift off to sleep. He reported that throughout the day residents ask if he "is going to read to them tonight" despite the attrition that naturally occurs at the youth ranch. Tina's interest in YA literature blossomed as she read and continued to collect books. She shifted from wanting to be a teacher to becoming a librarian. She was recently promoted to Youth Services Director at a library in Alaska. Stella, now working full-time in a preschool, returned to work on a graduate degree in reading. In another offshoot from

this branching idea, one of our class participants started a library from scratch in the alternative high school where she is teaching. Her efforts were noticed. This past summer she was hired as a consultant to create a library in a newly built alternative high school. This time they gave her a budget. In various high school neighborhoods, parental groups are meeting with school personnel to dialogue about substance abuse. Youth task forces are popping up in area high schools. Neighboring communities are inviting gang activity experts from law enforcement connections to raise awareness and head off potential problems. I have conducted numerous workshops about adolescents at risk with colleagues, staff members, and teachers who work in public schools or facilities for incarcerated youth. Ben decided to combine two of his passions, working with juvies and teaching adults, by working on a doctorate in criminal justice. A seed planted among people who share a love of books and a genuine concern for youth continues to flourish. YALS

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## Appendix

### Recommendations For Schools and Communities Focused on Adolescents

- When positive role models are not available, students will drift toward gangs to meet their need to belong. To avoid this misguided direction, set up a task force with parents, school

personnel, school resource officers, probation officers, and other adults in the community who work with adolescents.

- Schools need to take action to create a climate that welcomes students.
- School staff need to seek out kids on the edge and communicate with them on a daily basis. Schools need to organize activities that keep kids on campus over the noon hour and seek input from students on what they think would make the school a welcoming place.
- Create mentoring programs with community and faculty members.
- Offer a host of choices, from therapy groups to courses in which the content

includes strategies to improve self-esteem, anger management skills, family dynamics-related issues, sexuality, and positive social skills.

- Set clear rules and treat students fairly. Students seek respect just like any adult. Develop a climate in the community that shows empathy, not judgmental behavior, toward youth.
- Channel students toward other subjects and interests besides academics, such as creative writing, computer graphics, drawing, and all aspects of music including composing and recording.
- Communities must take responsibility for teens rather than leaving it all to the schools. Communities, regardless

of size, must act on any gang-related activities immediately and not live in denial until it is too late.

- Offer opportunities for parents and the community to learn about available services ranging from gang prevention and youth activities to support groups and adult mentoring programs.
- In addition, students who were held accountable by a school that lacked appropriate services, such as school counselors, school resource officers, social workers, reading and study skills support staff, parenting workshops, and alternative school options, have led to delinquent behavior.

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## The Age of \_\_\_\_\_?

### Using Young Adult Literature to Make Sense of the Contemporary World

By Thomas Phillion

*Literature is the expression of a nation's mind in writing.*

—William Ellery Channing

Thirty-two boisterous seniors make their way into Room 422 of Morris High School, a comprehensive high school of approximately 2,400 students located in Jeffersonville, Illinois.<sup>1</sup> The energy of these seniors parallels the vibrancy of this sprawling, formerly rural community, located about forty-five minutes northwest of downtown Chicago. New housing developments and strip malls line Laramie Road, a busy, four-lane thoroughfare adjacent to the school. Jeffersonville is a community on the move, up and coming, embodying many of the social trends and values of 21st century America.

Despite the energy and large class size, the student teacher that I am here to observe, Christina Russo, appears calm, confident, and poised. Christina is an undergraduate at Roosevelt University, completing her studies in secondary English

education; she is about 5' 4", and looks like she could have played a supporting role in the movie *My Cousin Vinny*.

"Ok, everyone, the journal prompt is on the board, I'll read it out loud." Christina's voice is barely audible above the excited chatter of her students, who are continuing conversations started in the hallways, on their cell phones, and during the preceding lunch period. She walks toward her mentor teacher's desk, and gently swipes at the chimes that hang from the ceiling. Her students respond appropriately, and Christina reads aloud the words that she has written on the board:

If you had to choose a word to complete the phrase "The Age of \_\_\_\_\_" to describe the time in which we live, what word would you choose, and why?

Perhaps because the question interests them, or maybe because Christina has earned their respect, these seniors do not scoff, nor do they ask dilatory questions. Instead, they briefly bat around ideas with

nearby peers, and then concentrate on the writing task at hand.

After approximately ten minutes, Christina invites discussion. A young man against the far wall begins. "I wrote that this is the age of sexuality."

"Interesting," says Christina, her eyebrows rising. "Why do you think that?" He explains that sex is everywhere: it is used in advertising, you hear about it in the news, you can get it on the Internet, and it is even in the movies.

A small group of two boys and a girl giggle. They volunteer that Disney movies are inundated with sexual imagery and tension. "Can you give me an example?" asks Christina. A young man explains that *The Little Mermaid* is pretty charged with sexual energy, and more laughter follows.

"Sex is what everyone is most concerned about," the young man who started this conversation, closes. I smile, assuming he means teenagers, but recall that more than a few adults are obsessed with this topic, judging from the popularity of reruns of *Sex And The City*.

Another young man, Scott, raises his hand: "I wrote that this is the age of fear." Scott's classmates are still exchanging comments related to the previous proposal, so Christina waits for quiet and asks him to repeat what he has said.

Scott does so, and accepts Christina's invitation to elaborate. He talks about 9/11, and the increased concern that he perceives with regard to security, both nationally and locally. A student sitting next to him talks about fears in the media regarding child safety, teenage driving, and sexual predators. Christina looks surprised, and asks if anyone else has "fear" as a descriptor for the current time period. A smattering of hands wave in the air.

Over the next several minutes, other responses are shared. One student suggests that this is the age of technology, with all sorts of new developments in computers and telecommunication devices. Another

proposes that this is the age of unrest, exemplified by the war in Iraq and tensions that exist among a host of nations and people. A young man echoes this idea, calling our time “the age of struggle,” as represented by the conflict with North Korea, and ongoing debates between Democrats and Republicans.

After this last student speaks, Christina begins a lecture about the Age of Reason. She explains that there are many different ways of describing the period of time from 1600-1800 CE, just as there are many different ways of describing our current time period, but the “Age of Reason” is one label that has stuck, that is still in circulation today, because it captures an important dimension of this historical era.

As Christina turns on her overhead and begins to outline significant people and events associated with the Age of Reason, I look down at the desk in front of me. On a piece of paper are the words “the age of artificiality,” my own response to Christina’s question. In support of this idea, I had noted the prevalence of designer labels in this classroom, as well as the many new homes and apparel stores just outside its walls. I also had referred to the lack of social and ethnic diversity among the students around me—something I know is inconsistent with the demographics of this area. However, in light of the discussion that I have just heard, I am rethinking my proposal. Maybe there is more to this classroom, and the contemporary age, than meets the eye.

What labels might we apply to the current age in which we live? And how might English teachers and other advocates of youth and literature invite teenagers to research, discuss, and evaluate the possibilities? Over the remainder of Christina’s lesson, these are the questions that I return to, perhaps because I think such questions would be interesting to explore with teenagers and other adults,

perhaps because I feel a need to understand better the nature of the time in which I live, and how I ought to act within it.

## Researching the Current Age

Since my observation of Christina Russo’s lesson, I have completed a pilot study of the current age. This essay represents a report of my investigation, and the implications for teen librarians and other members of the YALSA.

To understand the current age, I did not immerse myself in social science research, nor did I examine the plethora of nonfiction that has been written in recent years exploring the changes that have occurred in the world since the dawn of the 21st century. I did not travel the world, or even the United States, in search of face-to-face knowledge. Instead, I did what advocates of young adult literature do. I read young adult literature.

I read young adult literature for one simple reason: I believe that readers have the capacity to use literary discourse and knowledge to generate useful insights on the world. With a variety of reading experts, I believe that readers generate such insights when they are able to create “text-to-world connections,” or linkages between literary language and messages and prevailing social issues and contexts.<sup>2</sup> Although many people, maybe most, conceive the idea of using literature to generate insights on the contemporary world as analogous to the conviction that life exists on other planets, I take the opposite position. I believe that literature opens up windows on the world just as clear and powerful as the vantage points provided by statistics, interviews, polls, journalism, and even science.

The question that I faced early on in my project was how to demonstrate this power in relation to the current age. My first step toward solving this dilemma was to select a list of books to read. After considering a variety of options, I decided

to read forty books drawn from four YALSA booklists published in 2007: the Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults, the Alex Awards, the Top Ten Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and the Teens Top Ten. I also decided to read *An Abundance of Katherines*, by John Green, because it was the only finalist for the 2007 Printz Award not listed among the Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults.

I selected these texts, from among others that I could have chosen, because most were published in 2006, and therefore were written within the circumstances about which I desired insight. In addition, I assumed that all of these books had the potential to be taught or read in schools or teen book clubs, since they had been recognized as exemplary within their respective categories; this was important because I wanted to model an examination of literature that English teachers and other youth advocates could employ in schools and libraries, with modifications. Last but not least, because the population of the United States is younger and more diverse now than at any other time in history, I felt it was imperative to read texts representing an ethnically and socially diverse mix of young adult protagonists and situations.<sup>3</sup> Using the YALSA booklists enabled me to obtain this heterogeneity and young adult focus, because the booklists have different goals and orientations, and therefore embody a variety of protagonists and situations centered upon the experiences of young adults.

Having decided upon the texts that I would read for my study, I turned my attention to the challenge of generating and holding my insights on the contemporary world. Because I had a poor record with journal writing, I went to the open platform Blogger and created a blog called *The Age of \_\_\_\_\_?* (go to <http://theageof.blogspot.com> to access this blog).



I decided to publish a modified book review to this blog each and every time I finished a book on my reading list, giving special attention to what my reading inspired me to notice about the contemporary world.

This excerpt, from my review of Stephanie Meyer's *New Moon*, provides a snapshot of the world-focused book reviews that I generated over the duration of my project.<sup>4</sup> Although the format of my book reviews changed over time, I almost always began with a rhetorical hook, and a picture of the cover of the book under discussion. Next, I briefly summarized the plot, and highlighted key literary elements, themes, and especially text-to-world connections. To substantiate my text-to-world connections, I embedded hyperlinks to other Internet Web sites and resources, and digital video obtained from open platforms. Typically, I ended with an evaluation of the text in terms of its appeal to teens, parents, and teachers.

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2008

*New Moon*, by Stephanie Meyer

Here is a quote from a commentary a couple of Sundays ago by sports writer George Vecsey of *The New York Times*. He offers his own view on the popularity of Barack Obama among today's youth:

"The way I see it, the younger generation is much more cool about racial, religious and gender differences than the older generations were. There are a lot of jerks among athletes, but young voters follow sports enough to be familiar with Shaquille O'Neal's goofy jokes and Tiki Barber's burning ambition and Dontrelle Willis's warm smile."

Vecsey's point is that this is a new age where traditional boundaries between white and black, sports and politics, men and women, are being blurred so that cultural differences basically don't mean as much as they once did. Vecsey credits

athletes like Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan for generating this new attitude among younger members of the American public.

It's an interesting interpretation. And it's useful, too, as an explanation for the popularity of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, of which I have read merely *one*, *New Moon*, which was selected in 2007 as the top pick of the Teens Top Ten booklist, sponsored by YALSA. *New Moon* has very few explicit connections to the contemporary world; it is about as insular and isolated as a contemporary novel can be (curiously, exactly opposite the other vampire novel that I have read for this project, *Blue Bloods*, by Melissa De La Cruz). But one thing you can say about this novel is that it articulates very well the blurring of cultural boundaries that Obama's campaign also evokes, and that Vecsey identifies as a defining characteristic of the contemporary age.

In general, I consider this snapshot a strong demonstration of my approach because my text-to-world connection is clearly announced at the start of the review, and substantiated throughout with links to other resources on the Internet (to read the entire review, go to [http://theageof.blogspot.com/2008\\_03\\_01\\_archive.html](http://theageof.blogspot.com/2008_03_01_archive.html)).

Publishing modified book reviews like this one to my blog enabled me to collect and hold the insights on the contemporary world that each of my selected texts inspired; however, it did not enable me to see the broader patterns and themes embedded within my connections. Consequently, after I finished reading all of the books for my project, I went back to my blog and re-examined all of my writing. From this examination, I identified four strong themes consistently discussed in my reviews of YALSA recommended literature from 2007: fear, diversity, exceptionality, and creativity.<sup>5</sup>

These four themes represent the findings of my project related to the nature of the current age. To be perfectly honest, because these findings are derived from literature that was published only in 2006, I hesitate to make too much of them. However, I do think that they are evocative of the current era, and deserve further interrogation and study, perhaps through an expanded examination of young adult literature published since 9/11.

In addition, I believe that these findings suggest the outline of an argument in favor of inviting teens, and just about anyone, really, to use young adult literature to think critically about the nature of the contemporary world. This argument rests on the idea that young adult literature enables readers to acquire perspective on the world that reaches beyond the experiential and improvisational. When I began my project, I really wasn't that different from the teens in Christina Russo's classroom; I had never given much sustained thought to the current age, and I had no clear vision of the range of options I might consider in conceptualizing its nature. By the end of my project, I not only was aware of a plethora of options for describing the contemporary world, but I also had acquired enough knowledge about what was going on in the world, and in recently published young adult literature, to evaluate and narrow the options. What this tells me is that reading literature, and young adult literature in particular, with an eye toward text-to-world connections really does open up a window on the world. All teen readers have to do, really, to tap into this potential, is pay attention.

## Engaging Teens

How to help teens pay attention is, of course, the critical question. Hopefully, my project overview has given you some ideas about how to embed an investigation of the contemporary world within your own work with teens, if you are not already engaged in

such inquiry. But I know that there are complexities to working with teens in libraries and schools that I did not face in my own project. Consequently, I would like to offer three suggestions for modifying the aims and methods of my inquiry to fit youth contexts.

Suggestion number one is to take full advantage of new technologies. To tell the truth, when I began my project, I had never written to a blog, much less created one. Very quickly, though, I recognized the advantages of blogging, especially in comparison to writing in a journal. In addition to having a much clearer sense of audience and purpose, I had a lot more options in terms of the look, design, and even depth of my writing. Recently, I created a blog for a middle school book club that I have organized, and it has been fascinating for me to see how quickly the teens in this club have taken to sharing and developing ideas electronically (even though, I have to admit, at first, they did confuse blogging with writing on AIM). I think the ability to use hyperlinks, graphics, and digital video to advance personal expression and connections to other ideas and audiences makes writing on the Internet a terrific tool for activating teen interest in using literature to reflect critically upon the contemporary world. Whereas I learned from writing to a blog, I suspect that teens might find social networking platforms like Facebook, wikis, and other new digital platforms just as enjoyable and productive.

My second suggestion is to alter the approach to reading and research that I have described here such that it becomes less intensive and more team oriented. If you are leading a teen book club, you might direct each teen in your club to read just one or two contemporary books with the goal of creating text-to-world connections. Except in rare cases, I would not advise assigning a lot of books to individual teen readers; instead, I think it is more productive to find categories or lists of

contemporary literature that work for your purposes, and then ask your students or the teens in your book club to each select a small number to read for the purpose of generating *together* useful insights on the contemporary world.

Essentially, this is the approach that I use in an online course on young adult literature that I teach at my university. Prior to the beginning of a six-week unit, I direct my students to each choose four or five books that have been nominated in the current year for inclusion on the YALSA booklists that I cited earlier, as well as the Great Graphic Novels booklist. Once my undergraduate and graduate students obtain their books—usually from local libraries—they read them and post world-focused book reviews to a blog that I have created for this purpose (see <http://rulift.blogspot.com>). The advantage of this approach is that even though each student only reads four or five books, they learn about many more books because they are also reading and responding to the book reviews of their peers. At the end of this unit, my students use their own posts and the posts of their classmates to write essays explaining the insights about the contemporary world that they have derived from their individual and collective reading.

My third and final suggestion is to demonstrate, demonstrate, demonstrate. The most effective way to convey understanding of how to write on a blog, and generate a text-to-world connection, is simply to model. If you are working with older teens, especially academically oriented ones, I would suggest directing them to my blog, or to the RU LIFT blog that I just cited. On these sites, you will find several good examples of book reviews containing text-to-world connections and essays that present persuasive claims about the contemporary world based upon evidence from young adult literature. If you are working with younger or more resistant teens, I think you can provide shorter, targeted examples of text-to-world connections. My

guess is that your students or book club members will catch on very fast to the critical thinking required to turn literature from mere entertainment to a useful lens on the contemporary world. YALS

## References and Notes

1. All names and identifiers related to this high school have been changed in order to preserve the anonymity of the students and student teacher.
2. Stephanie Harvey and Ann Goudvis. *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* (Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000); Chris Tovani. *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers* (Portland, Me.: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000).
3. Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais. *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
4. The timeline for my project was approximately March of 2007 to August of 2008.
5. The theme of fear is self-explanatory; the diversity theme is evidenced in my review of *New Moon*. I generated the theme of exceptionality immediately after reading *An Abundance of Katherines*; it refers to the affluence and high performance ethos that several social commentators associate with the current age (Remnick, David. *The New Gilded Age. The New Yorker Looks At The Culture of Affluence*. New York: Modern Library, 2001; Krugman, Paul. "Gilded Once More." *The New York Times*. April 27, 2007.). My fourth theme, creativity, speaks to the positive imagination that many people, especially young people, are enacting at the present time (Friedman, Thomas. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History Of The 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2005.).

# the YALSA update

## ASSOCIATION NEWS

Find the latest YALSA news every Thursday at the YALSA Blog, <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>.

### Teens' Top Ten Voting Starts Early

Encourage Teens to Read Now, Start Voting on Aug. 24.

Make sure your teens are up to speed for this year's Teens' Top Ten, in which teens across the world voice their choice for their favorite books. Download the 2009 Teens' Top Ten nominations at [www.ala.org/teenstopten](http://www.ala.org/teenstopten) (you can even download bookmarks to promote the titles to your teens!) and encourage teens to read them before voting starts in August.

This year, Teens' Top Ten voting will take place earlier than usual, starting August 24, and will remain open longer than in past years, with polls closing on Sept. 18. The votes will determine the 2009 Teens' Top Ten booklist, which will be announced in a webcast featuring Superstars of World Wrestling Entertainment during Teen Read Week, October 18-24. TTT is the only national literary list selected and voted on entirely by teens.

Librarians seeking new titles for readers' advisory, collection development, or simply to give to their teens as part of summer reading programming can see the 2009 nominations at the TTT Web site at [www.ala.org/teenstopten](http://www.ala.org/teenstopten).

TTT is a part of YALSA's Young Adult (YA) Galley Project, which facilitates access to advance copies of young

adult books to national teen book discussion groups. Fifteen public libraries and school library media centers from across the country evaluate books from publishers and nominate books for TTT.

### Kim Patton Elected YALSA Vice-president

YALSA members chose Kim Patton as the association's next vice president/president-elect. Patton will begin her term as president-elect in July 2009, becoming president for one term in July 2010.

"I am excited for the opportunity to serve our growing membership and help ensure that YALSA remains a strong organization and continues the tradition of providing our members with the support and tools they need to bring library services to teens in every community," said Patton. "I'd like to thank Jerene Battisti, my esteemed colleague who ran for president-elect with me, for her continued service and leadership to YALSA. I look forward to working with her in the future."

Patton has been an active YALSA member for several years, serving on the YALSA Board of Directors and the Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers committee. She also chaired the WrestleMania Reading Challenge jury and is the convenor of the Summer Reading Interest Group.

She is the central youth services teen librarian at the KC Public

Library in Kansas City, Mo. She is also the co-author of "A Year of Programming for Teens," with Amy Alessio (ALA Editions, 2006).

### YALSA 2009 Election Results

**President-Elect:** Kim Patton

**Board of Directors:** Sara Ryan and Stephanie Squicciarini

**Councilor:** Nick Buron

**Margaret A. Edwards Committee:** Amy Alessio, Robin Brenner, and Betsy Levine

**Michael L. Printz Committee:** Dr. Joni Richards Bodart, Jamie Watson, Melissa Rabey, and Erin Downey Howerton

**YALSA Nonfiction Committee:** Jeanette Larson, Don Latham, Mary Frances Long, and Monique Franklin

Interested in running for office? Contact Paula Brehm-Heeger, chair of the 2010 Nominating Committee at [paulabrehmheeger@fuse.net](mailto:paulabrehmheeger@fuse.net) (see the article on page 6 for more information).

### YALSA Names Winner of Great Ideas Contest

Laurie Cavanaugh, assistant head of adult services at the Brockton (Mass.) Public Library, won YALSA's Great Ideas contest.





WrestleMania® Reading Challenge Champions Stephanie Diaz (grades 7–8 category), WWE diva Layla, winner Christian Cervantes (grades 9–12 category) and wrestler Matt Hardy.

## YALSA, WWE Name 2009 WrestleMania Reading Challenge Champions

Christian Cervantes and Stephanie Diaz of Houston were crowned national champions in the WrestleMania® Reading Challenge, sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association, and World Wrestling Entertainment®, with support from Mattel.

In the grade 9–12 finals, Cervantes just beat fellow contestant Angelica Kruth of Munhall, Pa., in a race to answer the most questions correctly about the book “Shift” by Jennifer Bradbury. Other regional finalists in the grade 9–12 competition were Gavin Marriott, Edgemont, S.D.; William Matthew Haggerty, Snow Hill, N.C.; and Karolina Flores, El Monte, Calif.

Diaz successfully defeated her competition in the grade 7–8 competition by answering the most questions correctly about the book “Soccer Chicks Rule” by Dawn Fitzgerald. Other regional finalists

in the grade 7–8 competition were Marissa Brann, Corydon, Ind.; Hansel Caraballo, N.Y.; Kyle Hoskins, Louisville, Ky.; and Kayla Bell, Los Angeles;

In addition to being named national champions, Cervantes and Diaz won ringside seats to WrestleMania. Participating in the finals were WrestleMania Reading Challenge spokespeople and WWE Superstars Mark Henry™, MVP™, and Matt Hardy™ and WWE Diva Layla™. Bradbury served as the judge for the competition.

Ten regional winners in grades 7–8 and 9–12 from across the United States came to Houston as the guests of World Wrestling Entertainment. The national finals took place at the Houston Public Library the day before the 25th anniversary of WrestleMania.

Also present as guests of the WWE were regional champions for grades 5–6: Jose Castro, Houston; Herlinda Aparicio, Overland Park, Kans.; Nicolas Covelli, Stormville, N.Y.; Donte Edwards, Alpharetta, Ga.; Neom Rose Chacon, El Mirage, Ariz.

More than 50,000 teens and tweens from more than 1,800 libraries participated in this year’s competition. Participants read 10 books, magazines or graphic novels over a period of 10 weeks, and then created a slogan and bookmark design that promoted reading at their library. The regional finalists were chosen by a national judging committee of YALSA members. **YALSA**

Cavanaugh suggested YALSA create a downloadable widget, with code for embedding, containing recommended books for teens that is updated regularly through an RSS or Atom feed. Librarians could add the widget to their library Web sites, offering book suggestions tested by librarians without needing to know complicated code. This would also help bring attention to YALSA’s book awards and materials on YALSA’s selected lists.

“I originally came up with the idea because I had been thinking it would great

to have a syndicated column of YA book reviews with recommendations from YALSA members,” Cavanaugh said. “Then I thought it might be better to put them online, where teens tend to be anyway. Plus it’ll help get YALSA’s name out more.”

The Great Ideas contest sought ideas from YALSA members in achieving goals laid out in the division’s strategic plan. Cavanaugh’s idea addresses the division’s marketing goals, particularly in marketing YALSA’s

award-winning books and materials from its selected booklists.

## YALSA Announces 2010 Symposium Theme, Opens Proposals

YALSA chose “Beyond Good Intentions: Diversity, Literature, and Teens” as the theme for its 2010 Young Adult Literature Symposium, sponsored in part by the William C. Morris Endowment. In addition, the division opened its call for



preconference proposals, program proposals and paper presentations for the symposium. The symposium takes place in Albuquerque, N.M., Nov. 5-7, 2010.

"Beyond Good Intentions" recognizes that today's generation of teens is the most diverse ever and invites attendees to explore whether contemporary literature reflects the many different faces, beliefs and identities of today's teens. The conference will also examine the impact this diverse generation will have on teen literature in the future.

YALSA invites interested parties to propose a half- or full-day preconference centering on the theme, as well as 90-minute programs and paper presentations offering new, unpublished research relating to the theme. Applications for all proposals can be found [www.ala.org/yalsisymposium](http://www.ala.org/yalsisymposium). Proposals for programs and paper presentations must be sent electronically [yalsa@ala.org](mailto:yalsa@ala.org) by Oct. 1, 2009. Applicants will be notified of their proposals' status by Jan. 15, 2010.

## YALSA Seeks Applications for 2010 Symposium Stipends

YALSA is now accepting applications for stipends to attend the 2010 Young Adult Literature Symposium, to be held Nov 5-7, 2010, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The symposium is sponsored in part by the William C. Morris Endowment.

One stipend will be awarded to a library worker who has worked directly

with teens for one to ten years; the other will be awarded to a student in an accredited library school program (the student must be enrolled in an MLS program at the time of the symposium). Each stipend provides up to \$1,000 to fund attendance at the symposium. To win a stipend, applicants must be personal members of YALSA.

Stipend applications are available at [www.ala.org/yalsisymposium](http://www.ala.org/yalsisymposium). Complete applications must be sent to [yalsa@ala.org](mailto:yalsa@ala.org) by Jan. 4, 2010.

Applications that are incomplete or that are not sent electronically will not be accepted. Winners will be announced the week of March 1, 2010.

Questions regarding the 2010 Young Adult Literature Symposium should be directed to Nichole Gilbert, YALSA Program Officer, at [ngilbert@ala.org](mailto:ngilbert@ala.org).

## YALSA Chooses New Quarterly Journal Editor, New Blog Manager

YALSA named Sarah Flowers the editor of Young Adult Library Services, its quarterly journal, starting with the Fall 2009 issue. Flowers previously served as guest editor of the journal in 2007.

In addition, Heidi Dolamore began her three-year term as YALSA's blog manager on June 1. As blog manager, Dolamore will work with YALSA to oversee the content and look of the blog

and recruit and oversee bloggers for the site. The YALSA blog receives more than 13,000 page views per month.

## YALSA Announces New Book

YALSA welcomed a new title to its stable of high-quality professional materials: *Quick and Popular Reads for Teens*, edited by Pam Spencer Holley for YALSA (ALA Editions, 2009). This new book focuses on two of YALSA's most popular selected booklists, Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers.

Edited by Pam Spencer Holley, a YALSA past president and chair of the 2009 Odyssey Committee, this jam-packed volume includes:

- Experts on youth services explaining each lists' selection criteria
- Guidance on using the selected titles in programming, displays, and readers' advisory
- Lists of the honored titles, including brief annotations and publication information
- Thematic booklists

*Quick and Popular Reads for Teens* is available at the ALA Store, [www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org) or by calling 1-866-SHOP-ALA. It costs \$45 or \$40.50 for ALA members. **YALS**

# Guidelines for Authors

*Young Adult Library Services* is the official publication of the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. *Young Adult Library Services* is a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with young adults (ages twelve through eighteen) that showcases current research and

practice relating to teen services and spotlights significant activities and programs of the division.

For submission and author guidelines, please visit [www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa) and click on "Publications."

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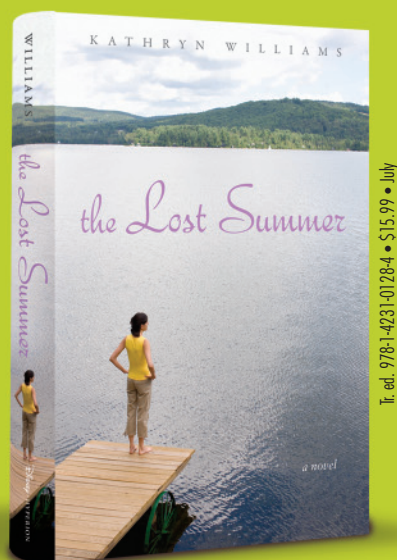


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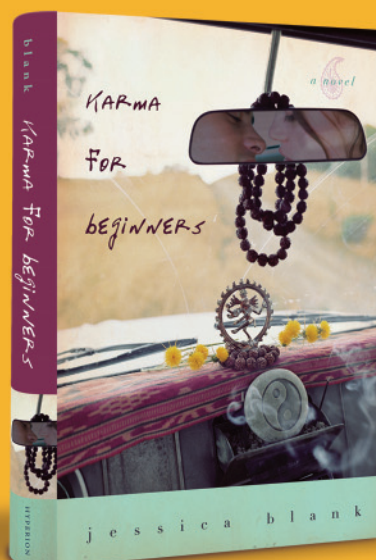


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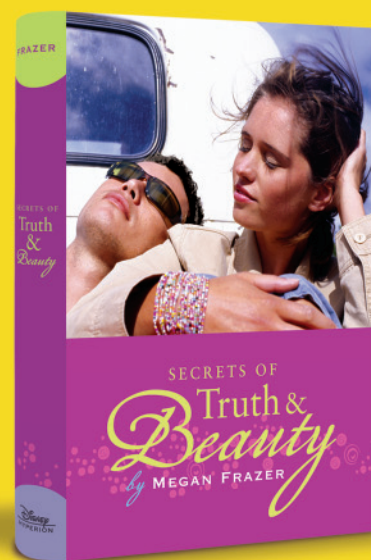
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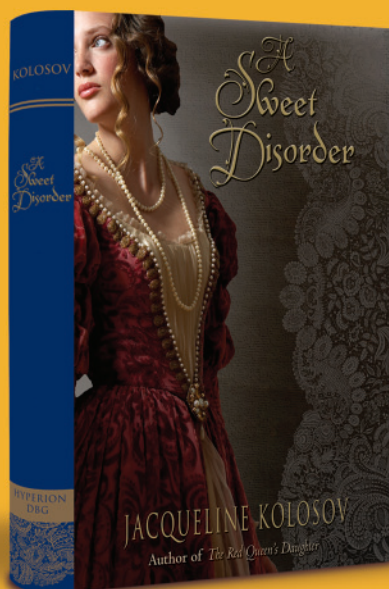
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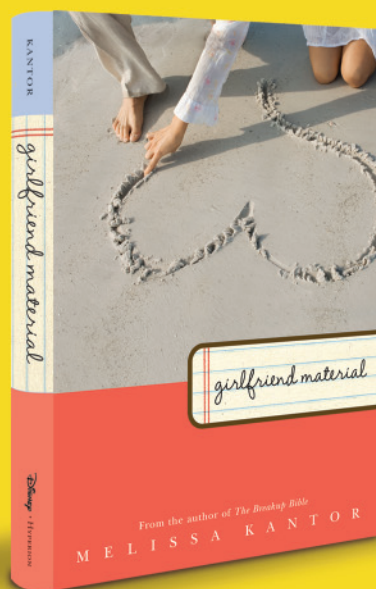
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