Table of Contents

About Us

Call for Manuscripts .......................... 2
Author Guidelines ................................ 2-3
Manuscript Guidelines .......................... 3-4
Advisory Board ................................ 5
Executive Board ............................... 5
ORC Has A New Look! .......................... 6
Introduction: Focusing on Children’s and Young Adult Literature ...................... 7-8
NCTE and OCTELA membership forms .......... 14

Focusing on Children’s and Young Adult Literature

Meeting the Deadline and Making A Difference: An Interview with Chris Crutcher ......... 9-13
By Colleen Ruggieri

Not Quite 20 Questions: An Interview with Dandi Daley Mackall .............................. 15-21
By Michele Winship

Poetry: Dear Mother, Dear Daughter .................. 22
By Jane Yolen and Heidi E. Y. Stemple

Off the Field and Into the Classroom: Using Sports Literature to Prompt Critical Thinking and Deep Feeling in Students ...................... 23-31
By Lisa Beckelhimer

By Issac Willis Larison, Ph.D.

Promoting Engagement: Young Adult Literature, Picture Books and Traditional Themes for Secondary Students ........................................ 38-47
By Sally Lamping, Ed.D., Nancy Mack, Ph.D. and Angie Beumer Johnson, Ph.D.

The Choices of Reading Material and Response in One Seventh Grade Classroom ...... 48-55
By Jennifer Miller

The Case for Young Adult Literature .............. 56-60
By Gary M. Salvner

Other Conversations

“Imagination 2 Go Project: Planning Preschool Experiences with Intellectual Integrity” .......... 61-67
By Lynn S. Kline, Ph.D.

Familiar Voices

Visiting “Faraway” Places with International Children’s Books ...................... 68-70
By Evelyn B. Freeman

I am a Teacher .................................. 71-72
By Judy Elsesser-Painter

Teacher Talk .................................... 76-81

The Best Source of Information about Authors Who Write for Teens .............. 82-85
By Donald R. Gallo

The Literary Half Dozen .......................... 86

Library Links:
Soon-to-Be Classics for Early Readers ........................................ 87-88
Reviewed by Regina Rees — Youngstown State University

Soon-to-Be Classics for Young Adults .................. 89-93
Reviewed by Cynthia Beach, Beverly Chearno and John Waller — Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County

2008 Spring Conference Call for Proposals .............. 95
2008 Conference Keynote Speakers .................. 96
OJELA’s Call for Manuscripts

Assessment & Achievement in Language Arts
Volume 48.1
Winter 2008
Deadline: September 1, 2007

Teachers across the nation have been surviving the years of testing frenzy initiated by No Child Left Behind. One positive lesson from this era of testing, however, has been a stronger understanding of the importance of ongoing assessment in the classroom. How do you assess student writing? What types of projects might universally work as the culmination of a literature unit? What types of alternative assessment can work in place of a pencil-and-paper test? What types of ongoing assessment have been particularly helpful? How can we avoid “teaching to the test?” How have you prepared students for the SAT, the ACT...and beyond?

Teaching about Tolerance and Acceptance
Volume 48.2
Summer 2008
Deadline: February 1, 2008

As English teachers, we are constantly striving to reach students who have different learning styles and backgrounds. How can we also use our curriculum to teach learners the importance of understanding and appreciating diversity? What texts do you use in your language arts classroom to teach about issues such as race, gender, or gay and lesbian issues? How can instructors discuss religion and its impact on world views, even in a public classroom? How do you approach instruction so that students learn for themselves why tolerance is an important part of their attitudes?

Dealing with Violence
Volume 49.1
Winter 2009
Deadline: August 1, 2008

From locked down schools in suburban and urban areas to bloodshed in Amish country, none of our schools is completely safe from an act of violence. Whether we are dealing with student hit lists or examining the impact of war on our country and the world, language arts instructors are at a unique advantage when it comes to teaching about threats to peaceful living. What do you do in your classes to teach students about violent acts and their aftermath? What lessons and projects do you use to examine issues such as child abuse, school shootings, and war? How can younger students learn about tragedies in nurturing ways? How can young adults be taught to deal with the violence surrounding them?

Author Guidelines

The Ohio Journal of English Language Arts (OJELA) is the official journal of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (OCTELA). Published twice per year, OJELA circulates to approximately 2,300 language arts teachers of elementary, secondary, and college students. The journal seeks to publish contributions on all aspects of language arts learning and teaching within a number of editorial columns, departments, and feature articles.

Types of Manuscripts Sought

In each issue, we publish a range of information and ideas. We welcome submissions and inquiries for the following sections of the journal. When you submit a manuscript, please identify the type of manuscript you are submitting.

NEW! I AM A TEACHER: Language arts instructors are invited to submit original essays that reflect their passion for teaching. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words. What keeps you going, even during the most difficult times? How do you avoid teacher burnout? What motivates you to be a teacher? Why do you stay in our profession? What was your most rewarding experience as an educator? We are looking for real stories written in a conversational tone.

NEW! TEACHER TALK: Readers are invited to respond to our themed question for each issue. This is a forum for teachers to share their ideas, materials and activities in short pieces of 300 words.

✦ How do you deal with colleagues who believe that adolescent literature is not as challenging as the cannon? How can teachers get enough books to teach a supplemental title? What piece of children's literature is a “must have” for all teachers, and why? (February 1, 2007)
✦ How do you find the time to offer alternative assessments? What do you say to teachers who are critical of project based learning? What is the best assessment tool you have ever used? (August 1, 2007)

✦ What incidents of intolerance have occurred in your classroom, and how have you dealt with them? (February 1, 2008)

✦ Explain a violent situation that you have endured as a teacher. What can be done to make our schools safer? What are the best ways to avoid and stop violent actions? How do you deal with colleagues or parents who believe that you should keep your political opinions to yourself? (August 1, 2008).

**Classroom Voices** presents short descriptions of classroom ideas and activities.

**Poetry.** Submissions relating to teaching will be accepted. We suggest that you submit no more than two poems at a time. Please keep in mind that we cannot return submissions.

**Editorial cartoons,** focusing on educational issues, run periodically in the journal. Like poetry, cartoons cannot be returned.

**Issue Theme articles** are concerned with topics designated by the issue theme. Themes for upcoming issues are detailed in the Call for Manuscripts.

**Art and Photos** beginning with Volume 47.2, the Spring/Summer 2007 issue. Teachers are invited to submit original student art in keeping with the theme of each issue or photos/artwork that illustrate written articles. Art should be no more than 8” x 10” and meet industry standards for reproducibility. For details see the Manuscript Guidelines below. Permission to publish forms must be included with all submitted art.

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**Manuscript Guidelines**

The following guidelines are intended to answer the most common questions associated with preparing and submitting manuscripts. For more detailed questions, contact the editors.

**Manuscript format.** Submit 5 clear copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), and 2 self-addressed stamped envelopes for correspondence with the editors regarding your manuscript. At the same time you submit hard copies, email an electronic copy in Word or as an RTF file to camp_mf@access-k12.org with the subject line, “OJELA Manuscript.”

Manuscripts should have 1-in. margins on all sides and be printed in a 12-point font. In general, manuscripts are 10 to 20 pages in length, and all pages should be numbered.

On one of the 5 copies, attach a cover page with the following information: title of the article, author name, address, school affiliation, phone number, fax number (if available), email address (if available). If the article is intended for a themed issue, indicate that also on the cover page. Your name (and names of any co-authors) should appear only on this cover sheet, and nowhere else in the manuscript. This ensures an impartial review of the manuscript by outside reviewers (explained below).

Finally, with the copies of the manuscripts include a letter that guarantees that the article is your original work and has not been published or submitted elsewhere.

**Style Issues.** The readership of OJELA includes language arts teachers at all grade levels, so we recommend you adopt a conversational style that avoids educational jargon and highly specialized terms. Within such a style, the use of “I” is appropriate when making personal observations. We do not accept term papers or other lengthy manuscripts filled with references. Manuscripts should also adhere to the “Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications,” available from NCTE (1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801-1096).

When a manuscript is accepted for publication, we may make suggestions or revisions in consultation with the principal author. However, because of publication deadlines we reserve the right to make minor revisions without seeking prior approval from the author.

If you reference other writers’ work, please follow APA style, as outlined in Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th ed., available in libraries or from the American Psychological Association (APA Order Dept, Box 2710, Hyattsville, MD 20784).

Tables, graphs, and charts are often difficult to read and expensive to typeset. Unless absolutely necessary, please do not submit manuscripts containing these items. Photographs and artwork are accepted with manuscripts, although you should keep in mind that permission to use images is required. Authors must obtain written permission from the photographer and the subjects in the photograph. (For more on permissions, see below.)

**Please note:** If tables, graphs, charts or other artwork are an essential part of your manuscript, you must submit these items as separate files. We cannot guarantee the quality of embedded images! Charts and graphs that are drawn using numerical values must have these values
MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES

accessible, either as separate line list items or on the art itself. This allows us to accurately reformat this information to fit the column width of the issue.

Art/Photography. We encourage readers to share art and pictures that reflect the learning communities in your school and classroom. All reproduced artwork should be at least 8” x 10” and on high quality, opaque paper. Photography submitted as prints should be printed on gloss paper free of smudges and preferably no less than 5” x 7”. Digital photography should be taken at the highest setting possible—no less than 3 megapixels. An image at this setting is approximately 31” x 22” or 10 megs. This setting will allow us to reproduce at full column width while meeting the quality standards of the printing industry.

Manuscript Acceptance. After your manuscript is accepted, please submit the final version via email attachment (in Microsoft Word OR as a RTF file). In the subject line of the email put the author’s name and a condensed title of the article we’ve accepted. In the text of your email, please include the complete title of your article, author’s name, plus contact information where you can be quickly reached in case of problems. Also include the issue of OJELA for which your article was accepted.

Permissions Policy
It is your responsibility as the author to secure permissions for copyrighted work that appears in your article. While short excerpts from copyrighted material may usually be quoted without permission, any excerpts from poetry and song lyrics almost always require the author’s written permission. Likewise, any student work, text or graphic, requires a signed release from the student and, if the student is a minor, the signature of a parent. To protect students’ identities, it is generally recommended that you use pseudonyms. If real names must be used, the author must secure permission as above. The OJELA editorial office will provide forms for permissions and releases, though the author must pay any costs associated with permissions. If you are using student work, please request the Student-Consent-to-Publish form.

Manuscript Review Process
We will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript with a card, sent to you in one of the stamped envelopes you provide with copies of the manuscript. The co-editors initially read all manuscripts to assure that they are appropriate to the audience of the journal. If we deem the manuscript inappropriate, we will send a letter advising you of our decision and suggesting other sources for your work. Unfortunately, we cannot return manuscripts; however, if you wonder about the appropriateness of your topic, we suggest you contact the editors and discuss your article before you submit your manuscript.

Once the editors have read manuscripts, copies are sent to at least two outside reviewers, whose interests and expertise are matched to the subject of the manuscript. Reviewers read the manuscript and make recommendations for publication and revision. Once recommendations from all reviewers have been returned to the editors, we will make our final decisions about whether to publish your manuscript. The review process takes at least three months.

Our decision will be communicated to you in a letter sent in the second stamped envelope you provide. In the letter we will summarize the reviewers’ comments, suggest revisions based upon the reviewers’ and our own readings of the manuscript, and provide a deadline for revisions. You will also be assigned a supervising editor who will assist you in revisions and the details of preparing the final copy of your manuscript for publication.

How to Contact the Editors
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The Ohio Resource Center for Mathematics, Science, and Reading (ORC), a project of the State University Education Deans, has been funded by the Ohio General Assembly and established by the Ohio Board of Regents. The ORC provides links to peer-reviewed instructional materials that have been identified by a panel of Ohio educators as exemplifying best or promising practice. The resources are correlated with Ohio’s academic content standards and with applicable national content standards.
Our focus in this issue could possibly be what drew us to teaching – our love of literature, most particularly our enjoyment of those stories we read as children and young adults. How lucky children of today are with the wide variety of rich and evocative literature that teachers can include in their lesson planning. Sometimes our necessary focus on student achievement especially in regard to ODE standards blinds us to the necessity of using the important ideas and images inherent in fine children’s and young adult literature as a base for classroom activities and lessons. However, when we find the lessons and units that are memorable to our students, we realize that the most meaningful were rooted in wonder-filled and significant reading.

The authors that we showcase in this issue have provided us with brilliant models, provocative questions, and unforgettable experiences all focusing on their use of children’s and young adult literature. Beginning our theme showcase are two wonderful interviews. Colleen Rugieri interviews acclaimed young adult author Chris Crutcher. She gets him to talk about his new book Deadline, the importance of story, and how he uses his experiences as both a therapist and an educator to inform his writing. In addition, Colleen’s provocative questioning invites Crutcher to comment on a variety of contemporary issues that concern all of us. Next, Michelle Winship shares a fascinating interview with Dandi Daley Mackall who, through Michelle’s skillful questioning, lets us walk around in her head and see how her experiences influence her writing. How exciting to witness the appeal this author holds for multigenerational audiences as well as her varied experiences and voracious love of reading that lead to the wide variety of books she writes. Next, noted children’s and young adult author Jane Yolen and Heidi E. Y. Stemple address our theme through poetry as they pose a delightful conversation between mother and daughter about the power of literature and reading. Following these pieces are provocative articles detailing diverse application focusing on this issue’s theme of children’s and young adult literature.

In “Off the Field and Into the Classroom” Linda Beckelhimer not only shares a sampling of young adult literature that focuses on a wide variety of sports, but also focuses on the ways that sport literature can help students become better readers and writers and how this literature can provide a deeper understanding of important social and emotional issues young adults face as they mature. She also includes examples of middle school, high school and college writing assignments and links with ODE standards. In “Let Me Tell You About Dogs: Persuasive Writing and Picture Books,” Isaac W. Larison presents a variety of picture books and then shares his ideas for meaningful, multi-dimensional lessons that could extend from each. He also details ways in which even young children can successfully construct persuasive arguments in response to teacher-read texts and includes some fascinating examples of children’s writing. In “The Choices of Reading Material and Response in One Seventh Grade Classroom,” Jennifer Miller reflects on the dilemma middle school teachers face who want to motivate all of their students to become life-long readers at the same time the state demands that all students achieve high standards on state-wide tests. She then shares the experiences of one middle school teacher and her students as they balance test preparation with the negotiation of YA reading choices and response assignments for the year. In “Promoting Engagement: Young Adult Literature, Picture Books and Traditional Themes for Secondary Students,” Sally Lamping, Nancy Mack, and Angie Beumer Johnson provide a fascinating glimpse at the way partner teachers learn to listen to their students and begin to use young adult and children’s picture books in middle and high school while still focusing on helping their students develop into accomplished readers by using reading circles and trusting the power of their students as learners. They also share strategies to integrate student choice and young adult literature in a more traditional curriculum.

Finally, noted YA advocate and college teacher, Gary Salvner offers “The Case for Young Adult Literature” where he details all the reasons that we love the genre. In addition, her reaffirms the importance of...
using young adult literature to achieve ODE standards. Adding to this issue although not focusing on the theme, Other Conversations continue with Lynn S. Kline’s “Imagination 2 Go Project: Planning Preschool Experiences with Intellectual Integrity.” Kline advocates the importance of using quality response opportunities with emerging readers through her description of literacy project for preschool teachers who are applying for licensure.

This issue’s Familiar Voices begin with comments by distinguished educator Evie Freeman who offers “Visiting Faraway Places with International Children’s Literature” where she shows how reading international children’s literature promotes critical reading skills as well as cultural understanding. In “No Fear Cormier” well-known YA teacher Virginia Monseau challenges middle and high school teachers to include the works of renowned YA author Robert Cormier in their classrooms.

Continuing our new series of testimonies on the importance of our profession is Judy Ellsesser-Painter who, in “I Am a Teacher,” shares her inspiring self-portrait as a young professional and describes for us how she learned to create a learning community in her classroom. The Teacher Talk in this issue focuses on an assortment of ways that teachers motivate students with literature. High school teacher Margaret L. Blevins shares her passion for picture books and reminds us that they are not only effective with very young readers. Blevins offers a compelling list of reasons that middle and high school teachers should include picture books in the lessons they plan. She then shares her experience with pairing picture books with the classic literature her students read and using YA literature to help students better understand themselves. High school teacher Gina Cardillo describes how she gives students structure while also allowing them to choose their own YA and classic reading and collaborate on their responses. Finally, college teacher Linda Rice offers several novel ways to help students celebrate poetry that they read and that they create.

We are fortunate to have a multitude of resources detailed in this issue. First, noted YA anthologist Don Gallo describes the mega YA resource Authors4Teens.com. Gallo shares details of this lavish subscription-only website which focuses on rich author biographies, including the process that professional writers use to work and create, inspirations which led particular authors to a specific work, annotations which link biographical information with a wide variety of sites providing additional information for the researching student or teacher – all of this religiously kept up-to-date by Gallo. Then, Marge Ford who titled this issue’s web resources The Literary Half-Dozens includes wonderful resources for teachers, parents, and readers of all ages including links to websites focusing on authors, illustrators, discussions of award winning texts, bibliographies, and so much more. Finally, Regina Rees, and Teen XTreme (the pen name for noted public librarians, Cynthia Beach, Beverly Chearno and John Waller) share a whole host of children’s and young adult reading choices that have not received all of the commendation that they should have, but which are, in their eyes, the classics of the future.

What fun you have in store for you! We know that you will find loads of ideas and oodles of texts to contemplate and reflect upon. Enjoy reading and talking about this exceptional issue.

Co-Editors
Margaret Ford, Campbell City Schools (retired)
Colleen Ruggieri, N.B.C.T., Canfield High School
Susan L. Stevens, Youngstown City Schools (retired)

July, 2007

We are sad to lose Cindy Bowman as co-editor. Because of health problems and an extremely busy schedule, she has decided to support OJELA through writing and soliciting articles. We will miss her editing skills, but we are glad that she will continue to help us find outstanding articles for future issues.

Marge Ford is an adjunct instructor at Youngstown State University and a former president of OCTELA. In 2002, she was recognized by OCTELA as an Outstanding Language Arts Educator. She serves as director and treasurer of ALAN and is OCTELA’s liaison to NCTE. She recently retired from the Campbell City Schools where she spent 35 years as both teacher and library/media specialist.

Colleen Ruggieri is a National Board Certified language arts instructor and National Writing Project consultant who teaches at Canfield High School and Youngstown State University. She is the editor of “Tools for Teaching,” a column in the English Journal, NCTE’s scholarly journal for secondary language arts educators. Colleen was recognized as OCTELA’s Outstanding High School Language Arts Educator in 2001.

Susan L. Stevens, Ph.D., was recognized as OCTELA’s Outstanding High School Language Arts Educator in 1996. She has since served the Youngstown City Schools as Language Arts, Foreign Language and Social Studies Supervisor and Supervisor of Professional Development. She was co-director of the Far East Regional Professional Development Center. She has also taught at Youngstown State University and Kent State University where she also was the project director for the Jennings Urban Fellows project.
By Colleen A. Ruggieri

Meeting the Deadline and Making a Difference: An Interview with Chris Crutcher

CHRIS CRUTCHER was born in Dayton, Ohio but grew up in the Cascade, Idaho, a rural logging town north of Boise. He graduated from Eastern Washington State College (now Eastern Washington University) with Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Sociology. Finding it difficult to get a job, Crutcher went on to earn teaching credentials and become an elementary and secondary teacher in Washington and California, where he influenced the lives of many students who were considered “at risk.” His first book, Running Loose, was published more than twenty years ago. Still working as a therapist and an advocate for child protection, Crutcher’s life experiences as a teacher and mental health professional have made his fiction seem real to today’s readers. Though much of his time is spent writing, lecturing and traveling, in his spare time he enjoys swimming, music and basketball.

“Why do we have to read all of this old stuff?” moaned a reluctant reader in my classroom a couple of years ago. We were just starting The Scarlet Letter, and one look at the first chapter made him realize that this book was not for him. “Why can’t we read something cool like Stotan! or Ironman?” he lamented.

While I reflected on this student’s comment and prepared an answer for him, I was secretly cringing. Yes, the classics are truly important in the study of American literature. Yes, it is important for our students to rise to the literary level to comprehend them. However, I am sure that most of us know that in our heart of hearts, we would be thrilled if we could inspire each of our students to become a lifelong reader. Though I am a lover of the “classics,” my experience has made me realize that the books penned by the often maligned “dead white guys” are not the total prescription for curing the reading ailments of today’s teens or inspiring students to read more literature.

Thankfully, we have options. Enriching our existing curriculum with young adult literature can help our students to make connections with works they are assigned. Furthermore, giving teens the opportunity to read modern literature can open their eyes to the fact that writing is indeed a reflection of culture. In YA literature, students may read an author’s spin on a controversial issue—alcoholism, child abuse, rape, incest, homosexuality, murder, …the real-life topics that are often perceived as untouchable taboos in an English classroom. Under the direction of their instructors, students reading YA literature can make sense of today’s world by applying their analysis skills while reading books that were written for them. In the end, they may discover that the trials and tribulations of life depicted in these works are indeed connected to the classics through the universality of conflicts and themes.

Anyone who has read Chris Crutcher’s books has more than likely seen the direct impact they have on student interest toward reading. He creates real dramas to which teens can relate, and
Meeting the Deadline and Making a Difference: An Interview with Chris Crutcher

his storylines create easy springboards for discussion. Perhaps what makes Crutcher such a favorite among readers is his accessibility. Everyone has known someone like one of his characters, and his books are written in an authentic, conversational style that is never contrived. While many writers grapple with strategies for handling sensitive subjects, Crutcher has woven the thread of humor as a healer throughout his works.

Most school libraries are filled with Crutcher titles, including: Stotan!, Chinese Handcuffs, The Crazy Horse Electric Game, The Deep End, Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes, Ironman, Whale Talk, The Sledding Hill, and Athletic Shorts. Many of us instructors have enjoyed his life story as it was captured in King of the Mild Frontier. His latest work, Deadline, was published this fall. Crutcher still keeps an amazingly busy schedule. Lucky for those of us living in the Buckeye state, he returns here often. I was lucky enough to catch up with him to talk about life, tragedy, and his latest novel.

Interview with Chris Crutcher

I am really excited about the release of your newest book—I watched the video on YouTube! What is the premise of the story, and what inspired you to write Deadline?

CC: Ben Wolfe discovers just before the beginning of his senior year that he has a terminal illness and probably about a year to live. After finally accepting his fate, he decides to make it the most meaningful year of his life. That’s the premise. My inspiration came from the number of times I’ve heard people in general, but adolescents in particular ask, “Who am I? Why am I here? What’s important to me?” Having a Deadline as it were, exerts pressure to answer that question.

How have your experiences as an educator and therapist influenced this book?

CC: Well, as a therapist I’ve worked with countless people facing crippling loss of one kind or another. We all face it all the time, I suppose, but as a therapist I’ve been forced to help people come up with strategies to combat the feelings that accompany it. As an educator – and as an educatee – I’ve come to notice all that is not happening in education. My protagonist, Ben Wolf, is determined to get the best education in his final year, and is not willing to be lied to or dismissed in the ways students sometimes experience that.

Many of your books use sports (Ironman, Stotan!, Running Loose, Athletic Shorts) as a vehicle for story. Do you think that sports are still a good arena for learning?

CC: Yes. Sports provide a way for us to test ourselves, to find our limits. They can take us a long way toward answering, “Who am I?” Far too often the culture or coaches or parents cloud athletic matters with their own issues, but in pure form, sports can be a fabulous teacher.

Last spring, “Imus in the Morning” made racist and misogynistic comments about the Rutgers women’s basketball team and lost many of his sponsors, costing Imus his job at MSNBC and CBS. How can we use these real life dramas as teachable moments with our kids?

CC: That was a particularly potent teachable moment, and one that illustrates the necessity of using careful consideration in engaging it. It would be easy to say that the “lesson” was that bigotry is wrong and you better watch your mouth, or watch your mouth when the “wrong” people are listening. But Don Imus had been on the air for nearly thirty years, engaging in so-called “shock jock” radio dialogue. He was, arguably, an equal opportunity bad-mouther over that time. Big time politicians; print, television and radio personalities; authors, appeared on the program despite Imus’ continued use of slurs of all kinds. And no matter what they say in hindsight, the executives who fired him, knew
exactly the nature of Imus’ dialogue through the years, and didn’t do a thing about it until sponsors and the public rose up. When he stepped over the “line” that hadn’t been drawn until he stepped over it, the nature of what the entire culture has been doing with language was suddenly exposed. We started asking who could and who could not, use certain phrases. We started asking what we could and couldn’t use those phrases for. In short we had to confront our use of the language of bigotry and, more important, bigotry itself. It was an interesting time for me. When it happened I was in Florida at a gay pride celebration, urging that gay rights be brought to the fore with all other rights, in the face of a homophobic state senator who believes that gays shouldn’t be allowed to be foster parents or teachers and who had earlier, in her capacity as a county commissioner, removed a gay pride display from a library (two of my books were in that display). As a therapist I’ve worked with lots of gay foster parents who were lifesavers, and of course I have had and have worked with many gay teachers. Her point of view was obviously preposterous. I was getting a close look at the human damage done when we allow any group to be discriminated against. I’m aware that many people who profess to be against discrimination, exempt the gay community from inclusion. So it wasn’t hard to not only cringe at Imus’ statement about the Rutgers girls basketball team, but to translate it to the folks I was talking with in Florida. At the same time, I’ve long been an “Imus in the Morning” listener. Many of the best and brightest came on his show and were given the time to thoughtfully lay out their ideas instead of cramming them into sound bites. I knew Imus and his wife ran a ranch in New Mexico for kids with terminal illnesses, including those with sickle cell anemia, a disease that strikes African Americans. I knew he helped raise money for causes affecting a lot of the folks in our society who I believe are marginalized.

I am also aware that I’ve used racial and sexual slurs aplenty in my books when I’m depicting racists and misogynists, and that I’ve had long discussions with teachers and librarians and students of color and gay kids about whether or not a heterosexual white guy should be allowed to do that. So the educational issue of what literature is about also came up. Plus, I needed to address the issue of how I could watch or listen to Imus all these years and not rise up against his racial, sexual and personal shots, because if you understand something at a personal level, you have a better chance of understanding it at a cultural level. All kinds of educational possibilities there, wouldn’t you agree?

YA lit often takes a back seat because it is perceived as lower-level reading than the classics. How would you defend the choice to include YA titles in a secondary classroom?

CC: Back seat? Most places it’s in the trunk.

I defend its use because kids will read it and they will enjoy much of it and because of that they will see reading as a possible source of pleasure instead of drudgery. We need to remember that when the classics were being written, they weren’t classics. Some author was trying to get his or her book published. Times and language have changed so much that, except for the most academic of kids, enjoyment of many of the classics is unattainable, and I’m not just talking about low level readers. Good stories are supposed to make an emotional, even a spiritual, connection. YA lit addresses contemporary issues and contemporary people, as did the classics when they were written. Many educators who do respect YA lit, say it can be used as a bridge to the classics. I say the best of it (and I’m not necessarily including my work here) can be used as a companion to the classics. I
believe most teachers who refuse to use good YA lit in their curriculums appear arrogant and out of touch. Reading is not just an academic exercise. It is first a personal exercise, meant to spur the imagination. It is also my experience that most teachers who refuse to use YA lit, haven’t read much of it.

Recent trends in content area indicate that teens are reading little or no fiction outside of school. Instead, they are reading online materials such as emails, instant messages, Web sites, etc. In addition, the corporate world is using its influence to push “informational texts” ahead of literature. How can we bring kids back to enjoying the art of the story?

CC: Another good reason to push YA lit in the curriculum. I can’t tell you how many emails and letters I’ve had from kids who say they can’t believe their teacher assigned them one of my books instead of the “same old boring crap” to almost quote one. I’m not bragging. Other YA authors get at least as much or more of that kind of mail than I get. We have to make it cool to read. Paul Valponi and I just participated in an event with the WWE to promote kids reading and the entire place rocked. J. K. Rowlings has taken us a long way with Harry Potter. If you’re a kid (or an adult) carrying one of her books around the day after it comes out, you have status.

Do you think that our fast pace of living is causing students to be too distracted to connect with texts?

CC: A lot gets blamed on the “fast pace” and I suppose it would be ludicrous to argue against that, but if we figure out a way to get pleasure reading into that fast pace, we’ll have solved the problem. It’s about priorities. When we get back to the place where we realize that expression and creativity are more important than learning to take tests, I think we’ll have a better shot at promoting and celebrating story.

How can we teach kids growing up in today’s world that it is important to be responsible and that we are all accountable for our actions?

CC: I have long believed that experience is the only real teacher, so I don’t know whether it’s possible to teach responsibility in the classic sense. Warning a small child that a stove is hot has little meaning until the kid touches the stove. So while it seems important give the warning, it’s more important to be ready with the burn salve and empathy. We are so committed to punishment in this culture and in creating consequences, we forget that actions have their own consequences and that we can far better use our time exploring those consequences with kids when they happen, than railing against predicted behavior. I think it helps to tell certain of our own historical anecdotes (true ones) particularly if we’re talking with kids who have our respect, because they can use their imaginations to put themselves in our shoes, or us in theirs. Words become experience when run through the imagination. That’s why story is so important. Good readers connect to characters in books, and if the book is compelling enough, those characters become friends, and reading becomes an experience.

Do you think that kids are victimized more today than they were when you were young? Or do you think that the media and open lines of communication have allowed stories to be told that would have been suppressed.

CC: I think if kids are more victimized it’s because there are fewer family and community connections now than there were when I was young, but the truth is, things haven’t changed much. I can’t tell you the number of people from my past who have written me after reading one of my books, saying something like, “I’ll bet you didn’t know this was going on in our house.” When I was young it was a cardinal sin to get into someone’s family business. We turned a deaf
ear to far more than anyone would suspect. I don’t know that it’s important to figure out whether there’s more or less mistreatment of the young now than there was then. What’s important is that it existed then and it exists now and it’s hard to get the right people to care. I started working in the world of child abuse and neglect in the early eighties, and if I left tomorrow I’d be leaving it in worse shape than I found it. We live in a culture that knows money talks, but won’t direct any major bullhorns toward relief and treatment for people who have so little. We don’t seem to understand that unregulated capitalism is simply greed. The people who feed that greed, the people in power, often refuse to turn back and lend a helping hand. They purport to feel bad when they hear of children in the eye of some abusive hurricane, then vilify those same children when they grow up to repeat the outrages committed against them. What’s ironic about all that is that the powerful have as much abuse and neglect, particularly sexual abuse, as do those with no resources. It’s just easier to keep secrets when you have the money to do it.

What titles are on your bookshelf right now?

CC: Big bookshelf, but SOME of the titles are To Kill a Mockingbird, The Color Purple, The Things They Carried, If Rock and Roll Were A Machine, everything by Kurt Vonnegut, a lot of Pat Conroy, at least that much Sherman Alexi…

In the little spare time that you have, what do you read?

CC: Almost anything that bashes the current administration, Sweet Jesus, I Hate Bill O’Reilly, A Short History of Almost Everything, Scott Turow, Vonnegut, Alexi, Molly Ivins (see first sentence). On a different day I’d give you different answers, probably.

If there was one book (other than your own titles) that you think every teen should read, what would it be?

CC: It’s hard to pick one, because we are so different. It would be impossible to say because whatever I’d pick would seem great to some and not-so-great to others. That’s why I like that there is so much out there. (Though it couldn’t hurt to read either To Kill A Mockingbird or The Things They Carried or The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.)

Of all of your accomplishments, of which one are you the most proud?

CC: I’m probably most proud of those few times when I’ve really made a difference in someone’s life, like a client who had everything it took to be a good family member but just didn’t know it. There have been a few times when I’ve helped someone dodge the bullet. As a writer, I liked getting the Margaret Edwards Award because it was for my body of work, and I’ve certainly been proud of my intellectual freedom awards. But the “accomplishments” have been better felt in individual letters from kids or adults talking about how they made a connection with one of my characters.

Colleen Ruggieri is a National Board Certified Teacher at Canfield High School and a past-president of OCTELA. Her areas of expertise include adolescent literacy and content area writing. She resides in Canfield with her husband, David; her children, Maya and Ryan; and her West Highland Terrier, Belle.
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Not Quite 20 Questions for Dandi Daley Mackall

Dandi Daley Mackall may not be the most recognized name in children’s and young adult literature, but check your bookshelves. Chances are you own at least one of her books. Maybe one of her Blessings board books, or one of her lushly illustrated picture books based on Ohio history. Go ask your students. You probably have readers/fans of Winnie the Horse Gentler or the new BLOG ON! teen series. And, it could be that you have just seen one of her Cinnamon Lake or Puzzle Club mysteries animated and broadcast on national television. After publishing more than 400 books with almost every major publisher over the past 20 years, to call Dandi prolific would be an understatement.

If you wonder how any one person could be so productive and successful and not yet be a household name, Dandi has a simple answer. Unlike other authors who find a niche genre, stick with one publisher, and build a consistent reader base, Dandi has far too many stories to tell to her diverse audiences ranging from pre-readers to adults. She has multiple projects in process at any given time, along with a shelf full of potential book ideas. And just when she finishes a project and thinks the well may finally be dry, five more story ideas pop into her head demanding to be turned into words.

Dandi’s writing is inspired by the people and events of her life, and her neighbors in the heart of Ohio Amish country are accustomed to seeing her walking around the 5-mile circumference of Cinnamon Lake talking her ideas into her hand-held tape recorder. Animals figure prominently in her books, and just down the road in a neighbor’s barn, her paint horse Cheyenne, the inspiration for her Winnie series, waits patiently for a break in Dandi’s writing. Her house is filled with treasured family memorabilia, and somewhere on the horizon is a historical novel bringing to life the story of her grandparents’ romance in a WWI military hospital.

I had the opportunity to spend a blustery spring day with Dandi and her daughter Katy in her book-filled home and see first-hand where and how she writes. Katy, her first reader, and her husband Dan, college professor, author, and crack editor, round out the perfect support team for a full-time writer whose speaking and touring schedule makes me wonder how she ever even finds the time to sit in front of the computer.

I bet there’s a story behind your name. What is it?

DM: There are many stories to this, but only because I come from a long line of storytellers. My grandpa said they took one look at me, and he said, “She’s a Dandi!” I’m afraid the truth is nearer to my dad’s version, who claimed he thought it would be “funny” to have a kid named “Dandi Daley.”

As a child and young adult, what things were you reading? How do those early reading experiences influence your work now?
DM: I remember going through reading phases, genre jags. The earliest phase I recall was the fairytale one, when I begged everyone to read *The Little Red Hen, Chicken Little*, then any and all fairytales. I loved rhyming books. There was a comic phase (Veronica and Archie, Betty and Jughead, Donald Duck, etc.). Then I loved horse books and read *Black Beauty, Flicka, Misty*. This was followed by mysteries, and I discovered Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes. Somewhere in there, I fell in love with *To Kill a Mockingbird* and read it over and over.

One of the best lines of any review for me was when the reviewer said my Laney in *Larger-Than-Life Lara* reminded her of Scout. Could there be any greater compliment?

Now, I write all of those genres I loved, from rhyming books and fairytales, to horse novels and mysteries. I owe a lot of authors….

At what point in your life did you first identify yourself as a writer?

DM: Before I could write—literally, before I knew how to form words on paper. I’d make wavy lines on paper and claim to be writing a story, which I’d gladly “read” to you, if you’d let me. I was always “the writer” among my school friends. But in a sense, I didn’t honestly see writing as my career and profession (just my salvation and recreation and hobby) until it had to be, until I had to make enough to put food on the table for my daughters.

What is your writing process like? Do you start with the whole story in your head, or does it develop as you go along? What about research? Any typical speed bumps along the way?

DM: I’m a firm believer in allowing myself a rotten first draft, and I think that’s the writing process that works best for me. I start with a character, and I have to “hear” that voice in my head before I get into the story.

Sometimes I begin with a great idea, but I still have to wait on the character to play it out and take it, generally, in another direction. I’ve written a number of series (where I originate the series and write all the books). I try to outline those books, but I usually end up meandering anyway, writing to see how things will come out. I do like to “see” the climax, the big moment or imagine milestone events and conflicts before I start…but I don’t always get that. So I just start writing, knowing I’ll probably cut away most of it to find the real story.

Research is something I do all the time, especially when something’s on the back burner. While I watch TV with my family, I cheat and thumb through books on WWI, or take notes from trivia books, or read articles about teens and tweens, or play with a rhyming dictionary.

You are such a prolific writer in so many genres. Do you set writing goals for yourself? How many projects do you have in process at a given time?

DM: I really don’t set writing goals. I just write all the time. I have dozens and dozens of ideas I’m yearning to get to when I get a minute. I really do try to focus on only one “long” book at a time. I can’t write two YAs simultaneously because I have to stay in the voice of my point of view character. I have to walk around in life as if I’m this character and let the little gifts that come at me every day fit into what I’m writing—that leaf that lands on my head, the funny thing Daughter Katy says, the woodpecker outside my window. I want to stay in that world.

But, that doesn’t mean I can’t visit other worlds and play with a rhyming picture book, or write a legend, or research WWI, or brainstorm the next middle-grade novel in my horse series, or create a four-book board book concept with dogs.
Right now I’m still promoting *Eva Underground* for Harcourt (giving talks to groups about the Iron Curtain and living in Eastern Europe during the communist era), and *Larger-Than-Life Lara and Crazy in Love* for Dutton/Penguin (school visits and talks on how to write a story), plus *Rudy Rides the Rails* for Sleeping Bear (need to prepare presentations on the Great Depression and hobos), plus *BlogOn Series* (lots of interviews on Internet safety and teen girls-bullying), plus Easter and Christmas radio interviews for 2 brand new Easter releases and three upcoming Christmas picture books.

Meanwhile, I’m working on the second teen novel in a new series called *Starlight Animal Rescue*, a spin-off from *Winnie the Horse Gentler*, which has sold over 260,000 copies. I promised my husband I wouldn’t do any more series fiction for a while because the pace is grueling, on top of everything else. But these wonderful, horse-loving readers talked me into doing this animal series. When I finish these, I want to write a YA mystery and a YA historical fiction, so I’m researching those two. I’m working on a 6-book contract for a new long chapter-book series, *That’s Nat!* Yes, it’s a series, but it makes me laugh out loud, and I write it as a reward, after I do other “work.” That’s how much fun it is. I’m working on a Christmas picture book with Dutton, called *Not Such a Silent Night*, another Sleeping Bear picture book, based on a real event that happened to me when I was growing up a tomboy in Missouri, and the guys stopped letting me play baseball with them “because I was a girl.” I won my first writing contest with 50 words on why I wanted to be batboy for the Kansas City A’s. Then they wouldn’t let me be batboy “because I was a girl.” So, *A Girl Named Dan* will be my final revenge; I’ll get the last word. I’m also working on a 4-book contract for 4 holiday legends, classic picture books. No doubt I’m forgetting something….

What does a typical writing day look like for you? (Or IS there a typical writing day?)

DM: When there IS a typical day, it goes like this: Up by 5:30 am., read the Bible with 2 dogs on my lap until 6 or 6:30. Send husband off to Ashland University to teach (I pack his lunch, which is the extent of my wifely cooking duties—he’s a very understanding man.) 7am – I do the crossword puzzle with my 87-year-old mother. 7:30 a.m., I kneel by the toilet with chronically ill daughter, Katy, while she vomits or dry heaves (too much information??), then put her back to bed. 8 a.m. – 5 or 6 p.m., I write. Depending on the interruptions and the weather, I’ll usually do the “fresh” writing, the first-draft writing in the morning. If I can, in the afternoon, I’ll walk around the lake (5 miles), talking into my mini-tape recorder, brainstorming or talking in dialog (people think I’m talking to myself and they leave me alone….). I’ll rewrite or “change channels” and work on something else in the afternoon. I might walk to the barn and brush Cheyenne. We might eat dinner, if anything good is frozen and ready for the microwave. I’ll work an hour or so after dinner, then spend a couple of hours with Joe and Katy.

You have several different audiences, all the way from early readers to adults. Is there one reader with whom you identify more than others?

DM: Nope. Thankfully, although I can’t remember what, or if, I ate for breakfast, I have full-color, vivid memories from every age in my past. I can still remember and feel the despair of not being able to read, of having my first crush, suffering the first death of a pet. When I’m writing for young adults, I think, “This is it. This is the age I want to write for forever.” But when I’m writing for
Not quite 20 questions for Dandi Daley Mackall

elementary age, I’m convinced that’s my perfect age group. It helps to be schizophrenic.

There seem to be many parts of your life that appear over and over again in your books. How do you draw on your own experiences when you are crafting a story?

DM: Frequently, the only “drawing” is on the subconscious. I don’t even realize I’ve written about myself, or about one of my kids, until someone else (usually in a fan letter) points it out. Other times, I call up “frozen moments” from the past, the way it felt when I rode my horse bareback across a spring pasture or fell off in the road. Sometimes I’ll be in the middle of writing a scene, and I’ll realize that what’s about to happen in this manuscript did actually happen to Katy or Jen or Dan, my kids. Then I have some more details and emotions to draw on.

*Larger than Life Lara* is really Laney’s story. As I read, I felt a strong connection to Laney…she’s been in my classrooms several times over the years. Who does Laney represent for you?

DM: I love Laney. She is so much her own person—matter-of-fact, tough, real, but a secret dreamer. She hasn’t gotten her fair share of childhood. In a way, I think Laney is in all of us, observing worlds we don’t inhabit, watching, finding our way through a life that can throw us rotten tomatoes and free ice cream, all on the same day.

You have created a novel within writing “lessons” framed by each chapter. Laney is using what she’s learned in class to tell her story, so readers are getting an insider’s look at how a book is created. How did you develop this structure?
DM: I honestly didn’t develop that structure—which is why I call this book my “miracle book.” True, it really is how I write and find the story, so I suppose the process is well ingrained. But I was well into the novel before I realized that it was also a story about story, that it teaches story writing, as well as, hopefully, teaching or encouraging kindness. But it’s all there, from character, to plot, climax, to details. I’m not sure I could have pulled that off if I’d set out to do it.

Many of your books, including Lara deal with bullying issues. Why is this such a prominent theme in your writing?

DM: Several reasons. I hate bullying in any form and injustice in every form. I suppose part of the reason is that we’ve seen a lot of bullying and its effects in our house. Our youngest daughter, Katy, is a special needs kid and attended public school until her last 2 years of high school, when none of us could take it anymore. She’s the sweetest person on the planet, but has endured every imaginable kind of bullying, from physical and verbal, to non-verbal, or being totally ignored. And every person on earth has either bullied, been bullied, or silently watched it take place.

_Eva Underground_ is based on your own experiences in Poland behind the iron curtain. What made you decide now was the right time to finally write this novel?

DM: Truth is, I’d decided a couple of times since then that “now” was the right time. But the story never came together—not until I realized it was now historical fiction. That allowed me to set the story in the exact years I lived there. Thankfully, the important memories were still in my head, pushing to get out. It was wonderful to be able to write about the most amazing people, those brave and generous teens I got to know there. I’m a better writer now than I was 20 years ago, so it’s probably a good thing I waited.

Eva is a typical self-involved American teenager when the novel starts, but by the end she has developed both a strong sense of empathy and political purpose. How much a factor was the setting in Eva’s growth? Did you experience anything similar as a result of your time in Poland?

DM: Definitely! Eva and I will never be the same because of our time in Poland. I was humbled by the experience of living with people who were awed that I arrived with two suitcases full of “stuff.” I’d been patting myself on the back for having only two suitcases for what I thought would be a couple of years or more. Then they shared everything they had with me and welcomed me as a friend. I went over there as an American; I came back as a world citizen, grateful for the freedoms on this side of the Wall.

_Crazy in Love_, your newest YA novel, is all about the ups and downs of girls’ friendships, especially when boys enter the picture. We’ve had a lot of focus on girls’ relationships lately in the media (Paris Hilton and company, _Mean Girls_). How did that influence your story?

DM: No influence I know of. That book could have been historical fiction, too, set in my old high school (but don’t tell that to the teens who are reading the book and seeing their own high schools in contemporary set!) It’s funny how timeless human nature is. That’s why we can read _Anna Karenina_ or _Troilus and Criseyde_ or Shakespeare and be touched and identify. Our nature is the same now as it was then, and that’s how we can connect.

Mary Jane lives in a state of conflict, characterized by her two inner voices, Plain Jane and MJ. I think most teen girls can relate to this very easily. Was this your experience?

DM: “Was” and “is,” I must admit. Don’t you think we all have those voices? I credit our mothers with at least one of the voices.
Not quite 20 questions for Dandi Daley Mackall

When I wrote the first draft of *Crazy*, I had four voices—a Janie and a Miss Mary Jane, I think. My editor convinced me to pare it down to two; she was right. But I love that neither voice is all good and all right, although I’d rather listen to the voice telling me I look great in those jeans than the voice telling me I look fat.

Although *Crazy* is full of humor, you tackle a serious issue, losing one’s virginity, through several different characters. Why was it important to take this one on?

DM: Quite a number of YA novels tackle the issue; but too many just report and don’t tackle, making that decision seem like no big deal. It’s a big deal. Again, when I started *Crazy*, I had no idea Mary Jane would have to make that decision. But the story took me there because that’s part of so many girls’ stories, many without a happy ending. One of best reasons to read is that you can climb inside the head of a person and see, hear, feel how that person makes decisions and lives her life—all without having to make the same mistakes yourself to cull that information. We all make mistakes—including teens. Unfortunately, losing one’s virginity isn’t something you can go back and undo.

You have also written several series, including a new Blog On series for AYA readers. How is writing a series a different experience for you than a one-time novel?

DM: What I love about writing a series is that I get to create a whole world that I know I’ll be coming back to. I can disappear into that world when I need to escape from my own for a few hours. The characters in a series become part of our family. I remember when I wrote Cinnamon Lake Mysteries, my first series, and my kids were in elementary school. They’d run in from the bus and ask what Sam and Molly did that day. I love having a series contract because I know where the next check will be coming from for quite a while. And I love writing series because I get so many letters and emails from readers, who have ideas and names for the horses or the characters’ friends, and tell me they’re waiting for the next book and when will it be out.

The trouble with writing series is that I feel the pressure of having committed to write a book every few months, but my publishers are so understanding. I’ve never been late on a deadline, but I know I could be and they’d be okay; and they’ll usually schedule the books farther apart if I freak out and think I need more time. I’m only good for 8 books in a series, even when they want 12 or more, because my characters have to change and grow; and after 8 gut-wrenching plots to make them grow, I run out of room!

What’s next? What books should your readers look for in the next year or so?

DM: *The Blanket Show* and *A Gaggle of Geese & a Clutter of Cats* – My first two rhyming picture books in my new line, Dandelion Rhymes, with WaterBrook/Random House.

*Toes, Dandelion Rhymes*, with WaterBrook/Random House.


*It Was Not Such a Silent Night*, Dutton/Penguin

*A Girl Named Dan*, Sleeping Bear Press

*The Legend of Saint Nicholas: A Story of Christmas Giving*, Zonderkidz

*The Legend of the Easter Robin*, Zonderkidz

*The Legend of the Christmas Cookie*, Zonderkidz

*The Legend of Christmas Holly*, Zonderkidz

*That’s My Colt!* Concordia Publishing House

*Seventeen Christmases!* Zonderkidz
Cool! I had no idea I had so many books ready to come out! I only listed the titles I’ve finished. Several more are under contract and I’m working on them.

It must be obvious by now that Dandi Daley Mackall won’t run out of stories any time in the near future. And, you will be able to find her sharing her writing and her wisdom of practice with all manner of readers, writers, teachers, and librarians. To find out what’s coming up next or to arrange for a visit, see Dandi’s website http://www.dandibooks.com or email her at dandi@dandibooks.com.

Michele Winship is an associate professor in the education department of Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. She is a National Writing Project Fellow, and has been a teacher for most of her life.
Dear Mother,
Just entering the library makes my heart beat fast.
Do I choose a silly or serious tale?
From future? Present? Past?
Creatures call out “read me first!”
Dragons, fairies, elves...
Each more tempting than the last from their homes upon the shelves.
How is it possible to pick just one then ignore all the rest?
I think this is what my teacher calls a Literary Test!

Dear Daughter:
I never think to take just one since no one book suffices.
Some books are written just for fun. (Like chocolate and ices.)
Some books are meant for muscles, They are spinach for the mind.
Do not get into tussles
With good readers of this kind.
In fact take two, don’t diet
When it comes to books you read,
Each book needs you to try it
For a mind meal to succeed.

Jane Yolen is an author of children’s books, fantasy, and science fiction, including *Owl Moon*, *Devil’s Arithmetic*, and *How do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight*? She is also a poet, a teacher of writing and literature, and a reviewer of children’s literature. *HOW DO DINOSAURS GO TO SCHOOL?* was published this fall.

Heidi E. Y. Stemple is an author of books and poetry for children and adults. She authors her own materials, and often writes with her mother with the help of cyberspace.


The photo of Heidi E. Y. Stemple and Jane Yolen was taken at the 2004 OCTELA Spring Conference where they were Keynote speakers.
I first became interested in sports literature as a way to engage my students in contemporary works that address an influential aspect of our culture. Our students seem to identify with the commonly held views of sports as recreation and competition, but they also want to explore the cultural and societal significance of sports as well as personal applications to their own lives. I wanted students to read works from well-known, established literary authors and the more accessible and popular YA authors with whom they were already familiar. I also wanted my administrators and colleagues to respect sports literature as relevant and rigorous. What I discovered was a huge body of YA sports literature that engages students from middle school through college.

YA Sports Literature Evolves

As I researched the state of sports literature for young adults in particular, I perceived a need among readers to analyze, explore, and think more deeply about sports, a cultural phenomenon we often take for granted. Crowe (2004), for example, attributes the growth of YA sports literature to the “pervasiveness of sports in America today,” alluding to Title IX; competitive athletics among children at younger ages; electronic media such as ESPN, the Internet, and cell phones; and sports products such as sports drinks and athletic shoes. “At no other time in U.S. history have sports so thoroughly infiltrated American culture,” says Crowe. “Young adult sports literature, fiction and nonfiction, is a natural outgrowth of the widespread influence of sports in society and of the subsequent demand for books about sports and athletes” (p. 3). I thought briefly about my own school’s obsession with sports and athletes, and I became convinced that Crowe is right.

Unfortunately, says Crowe, also a former high school athlete, YA sports literature only recently began filling that need for more critical thinking. In his article “Going deep: A fan applauds a growing genre of YA sports novels,” Crowe (2005) recounts his experiences as a student: “In the juvenile sports novels that I read in elementary school, I became the star player, the hero; the vicarious nature of fiction put me at the plate, the free-throw line, or the goal line of the story I was reading. Play-by-play action was the heart and soul of the sports novels I loved, so I didn’t have to read about girlfriends, social issues, the state of the world, or other such boring stuff” (p. 42). As he matured, however, and as our own students mature through middle school, high school, and college, Crowe “recognized the stories for what they were: didactic fantasies set on the playing field” and he lost interest in many of those books.

To what, then, did he turn? Fortunately, he points out that “…YA sports literature gained momentum in the 1980s as sports novels began to
rely even less on sports-driven plots and more on social issues and character development” (2005, p. 42). An example is *Whale Talk* (2001), by one of the most successful authors in YA sports literature, Chris Crutcher. *Whale Talk* is about T.J., a multicultural athlete who, in response to the community’s prejudice, refuses to participate in the high school sports arena. But when his English teacher begs him to form a swim team for the school, T.J. takes the opportunity to exact revenge on “the establishment” and recruits the school’s outcasts to participate on the team. According to *Publisher’s Weekly*, T.J.’s team ends up with “a representative from each extreme of the educational spectrum: a muscle man, a giant, a chameleon, and a psychopath” (From the Critics, 2001).

This evolution of YA sports literature from simple sports stories to reading that applies directly to our society and our students’ lives has given teachers many more relevant works to use in class. The list of recommended reading at the end of this article is not exhaustive but it does offer a good starting point for a teacher who wants to incorporate sports literature into a course.

**Literature that Prompts Thought and Feeling**

I vary the readings I assign based on two goals: literature that improves students’ ability to think deeply and critically as with novels that address social issues but also literature that touches students personally. The two styles of reading also fulfill one of the goals of Ohio’s Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts, that students reading literary texts can respond “to text in [both] critical and creative ways” (ODE, Ohio Department of Education). One of my former students Jenn notes, “I really liked how this class provided me with a chance to really read into and think about sports—culture, history, social impacts. This is something I never have done before.” On the other hand, Nick says simply, “The reading assignments engaged me to find a connection between sports and life.” A variety of literature, then, seems to serve both purposes: prompt students to think and prompt students to feel.

Sometimes stories that prompt critical thinking overlap with those that touch personally. A student might identify with and feel for the characters of a story, but might also think more deeply about an issue. An example is a 40-year-old classic that helped set the standard for quality YA sports literature, Robert Lipsyte’s *The Contender* (1967; reissued in 1987), about a high school dropout who discovers that boxing might help him get his life back together. When asked how the book might be different if written today, Lipsyte answers, “. . . I think the basics are pretty much the same. Kids still have to deal with the pressures of their families, their peers, and the world of their street. Teen violence and despair, gangs, absentee fathers, overstressed mothers, drugs and alcohol, poor education and health care …” (Scales, 2006, p. 41).

Writer Chris Lynch agrees. The author of *Iceman* (1995) says his book is not a “hockey story.” He argues, “I may be writing about hockey, [but] it feels to me like I am writing about a teenager in turmoil who cannot properly express emotions” (Crowe, 2005, p. 8). Closer to home, Cincinnati’s Sharon Draper, 1997 National Teacher of the Year and winner of multiple awards, tugs at the heartstrings of many teen drivers when a high school basketball star is killed in a drunk driving accident in *Tears of a Tiger* (1996). However, the story also prompts teens to think about their driving habits. Other books that encourage students to think and feel include Robert Lipsyte’s *Raiders Night* (2006) about a high school athlete’s bout with peer pressure and steroids; Virginia Euwer Wolff’s *Bat 6* (1998) about a post-WWII girls softball team’s experience with bigotry; and Walter Dean Myers’ *Slam* (1998) in which the character wants basketball to “save him” from inner-city life. Based on these books and similar examples on the recommended reading list, it is clear that combining thinking with feeling can make reading literature a valuable experience.
Emphasizing variety in both reading and writing assignments helped me achieve these two goals: make my students think and make my students feel. Two assignments are particularly appropriate in a discussion of YA literature. Both 1) use YA literature to complement adult or literary readings, 2) use both fiction and non-fiction, and 3) are adaptable to student levels ranging from middle school to college. The first assignment asks students to research a sociological change in sports. The second assignment changes directions and requires students to write personal, compelling narratives about themselves after reading gripping narratives by or about athletes.

The Sociology/Research Essay.

This assignment asks students to consider why a phenomenon in our society is the way it is today. For example, why are more girls than ever participating in sports at all levels? What factors have contributed to the increase in female participation in sports—Title IX, influential female role models, college recruiters, more funding, the WNBA? In this essay, students research people, events, time periods, and other factors to analyze how they contributed to a sociological impact or change in sports. I caution my own college students not to write a simple profile about a famous person or summarize a time period or event in history—they must analyze how a person, time period, or event has created sociological change or development. However, the assignment can be adapted to various grade levels and can provide important lessons in foundational concepts such as summary and profile writing, as well as advanced skills such as research and analysis.

This assignment addresses many of the ODE’s standards and benchmarks for English Language Arts. As early as grades 5 through 7, students are expected to “write responses to literature that extend beyond the summary and support judgments through references to the text” and “locate and summarize important information from multiple sources” (ODE). As students progress through early high school, they must be able to “evaluate the usefulness and credibility of data and sources” and “organize information from various resources and select appropriate sources to support central ideas, concepts and themes” (ODE). Students in grades 11 and 12 must “compose open-ended questions for research, assigned or personal interest, and modify questions as necessary during inquiry and investigation to narrow the focus or extend the investigation” (ODE).

Two books that I have used help meet those standards and are also considered YA literature. One is chapter 19 of Maya Angelou’s I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in which Joe Louis defeats Primo Carnera in 1935 to become the first “official” black heavyweight champion in boxing. We discuss this story and Angelou’s recollection of it in our discussion of events and people that have created sociological change in regard to race.

My student Gaehl used this story particularly well in his essay about one of Louis’ later fights against German Max Schmeling in 1938. To analyze what Joe Louis meant to his race at the time, Gaehl quotes from a part of the chapter when Carnera has Louis against the ropes: “My race groaned. It was a people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed. It was hounds on the trail of a man running through slimy swamps. It was a white woman slapping her maid for being forgetful” (Angelou, 1983, 135). Gaehl further explains that while Louis eventually defeated Carnera in that scene he later lost the title to Schmeling, much to the delight of the rising powers in Nazi Germany, who claimed that a black man could never beat the superior Aryan fighter. In fact, Nazi propagandist minister Joseph Goebbels celebrated, “In round 12 Schmeling knocks out the Negro. Wonderful… The white man defeats the black man, and the white man was a German!” (Goodman, 2004). Gaehl’s analysis: “They [the black community] couple their own hopes and dreams with Louis’ success
and, unfortunately, his failure. . . to have to read in the papers that Max Schmeling, the man he had lost the most important match of his life to, being quoted about his superior race must have been humiliating and infuriating.” While Gaehl certainly feels for Louis and perhaps for the entire race, he also thinks critically about the pressure society places on role models such as Louis.

In another discussion, this one on the sociological changes prompted by technological advances in sports, we read excerpts from one of the Harry Potter books and discuss futuristic sports such as Quidditch. Students brainstorm a list of all the real sports that are combined into Quidditch and discuss why J.K. Rowling felt sports were important enough in culture that she needed to create one of her own in her books. That discussion leads into one about sports’ development into video games and fantasy sports and their impact on today’s youth. One student, Cara, successfully argued in her essay that “Advancement in the entertainment industry, mainly highlighting the enhancements in video game multimedia and software, has led to a downfall in society’s overall concern and interest in physical activity, schooling, and behavioral performance expected of its youth.” To support her argument, she used articles from a combination of adult and YA non-fiction publications, including Prevention and TeensHealth (online at kidshealth.org). In her essay, Cara cites TeensHealth author Barbara Homeier (1995) that 15% of children 5-16 years old are obese. Homeier concludes that this statistic can be directly related to inactive people who choose to play video games or some sort of multimedia invention instead of interacting in physical exercise.

Other books suitable for use in research of sociological change include biographies and reference books on particular historical events. Some of the better-known non-fiction books center on successful or inspirational teams. Since most teachers have a mix of male and female students, it’s a good idea to vary reading selections to appeal to both genders. Of particular interest to teen readers are In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle by Madeleine Blais (1993) sometimes referred to as the female companion to the story told in the film Hoosiers and Friday Night Lights by H.G. Bissinger (2000), a biting criticism of the crazed obsession over high school football. Other titles about teams include The Boys of Winter by Wayne Coffey (2005) about the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team; Season on the Brink by John Feinstein (1989) which follows the Indiana Hoosiers basketball team then coached by the controversial Bob Knight; We’re Got Spirit: the Life and Times of America’s Greatest Cheerleading Team (2000) by James McElroy; and Glory Road by Don Haskins and Dan Werzel (2005) about the 1966 NCAA basketball championship in which Haskins’ all-black starters for Texas Western College defeated Adolph Rupp’s all-white University of Kentucky team. Some books on the list of recommended reading are about the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League featured in the film A League of Their Own (1994).

A number of good books discuss the impact of individuals in sports. These stories range from mountain-climber Joe Simpson’s story of suffering and survival when he was left for dead after a mountain-climbing accident in Touching the Void (2004) to YA author Walter Dean Myers’ critically-acclaimed biography Greatest: Muhammad Ali (2001). Prolific children’s and YA author Matt Christopher has a series of books that profile prominent athletes and Barnes and Noble Books publishes the Sports Heroes and Legends Series that profiles several athletes, including figure skater Michelle Kwan and golfer Tiger Woods.

Finally, there are several novels and non-fiction works that make students think about cultural or societal change in general. For example, in Avi’s Nothing But the Truth: A Documentary Novel (1993), a ninth-grade student is accused of creating a “disturbance” by singing The Star-Spangled Banner. Written as a combination of journal entries, memos, letters, and dialogues, this book tackles issues of high school politics, censorship, and patriotism. Other thought-provoking books include: Little Girls in Pretty Boxes (1996) by Joan Ryan which is about eating disorders among
gymnasts and figure skaters; Orson Scott Card’s classic *Ender’s Game* (1985), a futuristic story about a child recruited for military training based on his skill at simulated war games; and Nina Revoyr’s breakout novel *The Necessary Hunger* (1998) which takes on racism, sexual identity, and parental love.

The Narrative Assignment

The narrative essay assignment is adaptable to any grade level and requires students to read compelling narratives and write one based on their own personal experiences. Writers at ESPN and *Sports Illustrated* have become masters at telling stories—sometimes hysterically funny tales, while other times heart-wrenching tear-jerkers. After reading some model narratives, students write about a particular event or influential person in their lives.

The narrative provides a way to address both reading and writing standards for our students. For example, students at all levels are encouraged to self-monitor their reading choices for texts that not only provide information, but those that provide “enjoyment” or “literary experience” (ODE). Students enjoy reading narratives not only because they think about but also because they often feel for the narrators. This personal stake continues as students write their own narratives. Sometimes students don’t even realize that they are learning some of the foundation principles of the writing process, including “a purpose and audience” for their writing, “effective and engaging introduction, body, and conclusion” and use of “precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers, and style as appropriate to audience and purpose… and techniques to convey a personal style and voice” (ODE).

To show students that good narrative writing can come from a variety of sources, I often assign a combination of books and shorter pieces. For example, *Sports Illustrated* publishes a print and online version of its magazine for kids (*Sports Illustrated for Kids* in print; sikids.com online). Many other YA publications also feature narratives that relate to sports. These magazines range from *Boys’ Life* and *Highlights for Children* to *Teen Ink* and *Listen* to specific sports publications in soccer, baseball, and more. For book-length narratives, many adult biographies and memoirs are appropriate for teen readers. Some of the better ones are Lance Armstrong’s *It’s Not About the Bike* (2000), about his fight with cancer, and Jon Krakauer’s best-selling *Into Thin Air* (1997), a riveting account of his experience in a blizzard on Mount Everest. Related adult and YA books are Lynne Cox’s *Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer* (2004); Gary Paulsen’s *Winterdance* (1994), his first-hand account of participating in the 1,100-mile-long Iditarod; Will Hobbs’s novel *River Thunder* (1998) which chronicles the harrowing experiences of Jessie as she rafts the might Colorado River; and Mark Pfetzer’s *Within Reach* (2000), an uplifting personal account of the 16-year-old’s ascent of Everest. (Pfetzer lives in Northern Kentucky, five minutes south of Cincinnati, Ohio.)

Not all non-fiction narratives deal with rugged, outdoor sports such as mountain climbing or dog sled racing. For example, two inspirational books that I have used in class are *Eleven Seconds* by Travis Roy (with *Sports Illustrated*’s E.M. Swift; 1998) and Bethany Hamilton’s *Soul Surfer* (2004). The first is an intensely personal account of Roy’s first college hockey game. Just 11 seconds into the game, Roy hit the wall and was paralyzed from the neck down. Roy still has a foundation and web site and is a motivational speaker. *Soul Surfer* details this champion surfer’s ordeal when she lost her arm to a shark attack. Says *Publisher’s Weekly* (From the Critics, 2004): “Despite her narrative’s sometimes overly zealous inspirational overtones, Hamilton’s optimism, determination and resilience (she climbed back on her surfboard within a month of the attack) are undeniably impressive and uplifting and may well reassure teens dealing with distressing or life-altering events.”

What’s interesting about this assignment is that, while our inclination is to assign non-fiction
reading, the models do not necessarily have to be non-fiction. Reading powerful fiction can also be an exercise in the characteristics of effective narrative, such as narrative organization, thesis that shows a lesson learned or a point made, and detail and description. Novels on the recommended reading list that employ effective narrative techniques include Chris Crutcher’s *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* (1987) about a baseball star who is disabled in an accident; Cynthia Voigt’s *The Runner* (1985) in which a school track star must choose between fighting in Vietnam or working on his family’s farm; and Lurlene McDaniel’s *Last Dance* (2006) about a ballerina whose dreams are threatened by diabetes. Catherine Gilbert Murdock’s *Dairy Queen* (2006), a novel about a 15-year-old who works on her family’s Wisconsin dairy farm and tries out for her high school’s varsity football team, works well with Katie Hnida’s non-fiction book *Still Kicking: My Dramatic Journey as the First Woman to Play Division One College Football* (2006).

These and other narratives can provide powerful models for students as they prepare to write their own stories. Because not all students are athletes, I do not require students to relate their narratives to sports. However, some students choose to do so. For example, Trevor, a star football player at my school, told a story that impacted his family’s life and his love for sports. “In 1997, I was in 7th grade when the flood took everything my family owned except for my older sister’s brand new pair of Reebok shoes,” Trevor writes. He recounts the last great Cincinnati flood when the water rushed through the first floor of his family’s inner-city apartment. Though he and his family escaped injury, they were forced to live at a hotel for a month while the Red Cross worked to find them a more permanent home. “My family lost everything,” Trevor explains, “and I couldn’t play football that year. This is when I realized how much I loved football and wanted to succeed.”

In his essay, Ryan relates a more positive experience. As a walk-on for a major collegiate basketball team, he practiced but never expected to play. But in one amazing moment captured on ESPN, “Patz” as he was nicknamed, became famous. He writes how the infamous coach yelled at him, “‘Patz, go!’ Patz, go? What did that mean? Where was I supposed to go? Did he want water? Was I supposed to go to the locker room?” Patz made a three-point shot that later showed up on ESPN’s *Sports Center* and writes, “I wanted to call a timeout myself, live in this moment forever, but I couldn’t.”

The narrative assignment, while it does require critical thinking, provides an effective balance to the research-oriented, analytical skills required in the sociological research essay.

**The Future of YA Sports Lit**

As positive as my experience with sports literature has been, I realized in the course of my research that YA sports literature is still struggling to find its place. Scholars who study adult sports literature have their own organization, The Sport Literature Association (SLA), along with their own scholarly journals. But according to Crowe (2004), the SLA still does not review YA titles. He also notes that *Sport’s Illustrated’s* Dec. 2002 article “The Top 100 Sports Books of All Time” did not name any YA titles, though it did include three nonfiction books that are about high school sports: H.G. Bissinger’s *Friday Night Lights*, Madeleine Blais’s *In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle*, and Darcy Frey’s *The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams* (Crowe, 2004, p. 2).

I likewise noted that *Booklist’s* September 2006 issue listed “Top 10 Sports Books” and “Top 10 Sports Books for Youth” as two separate sidebars, one on page 44 (the adult list) and the YA list on 117. One book on the adult list, *Eagle Blue: A Team, a Tribe, and a High School Basketball Season in Arctic Alaska* (2006) “chronicles a season spent following a high school basketball team in Fort Yukon, Alaska” and two of the books relate to college sports: John Feinstein’s *Last Dance: Behind the Scenes at the Final Four* (2006) and Don Haskins and Dan Wetzel’s *Glory Road* (2005).
What these lists don’t take into account when they rank “effective” literature, though, is that YA sports literature can lead students to more advanced, “literary” and classic adult sports literature. Younger or reluctant readers can become hooked on sports literature through the shorter length and sometimes less intense themes of YA sports novels. Familiar YA authors on the list of recommended reading for younger readers include Jerry Spinelli and Sharon Creech. Two good collections of short stories are Crutcher’s Athletic Shorts: Six Short Stories (1991) and Donald Gallo’s Ultimate Sports: Short Stories by Outstanding Writers for Young Adults (1995).

As readers mature and their skills advance, some might be challenged by Don DeLillo’s End Zone (1986), a novel that draws comparisons between football and war through a college player’s eyes. As a literary author, DeLillo can lead readers to sports literature by giants in both the sports literature genre and in classic literature. Some of the more famous books in sports literature that would appeal to advanced readers include Bernard Malamud’s The Natural (1980) and Pulitzer-Prize winner Michael Chabon’s hefty YA fantasy Summerland (2002). Familiar literary authors on the list of recommended reading include Ernest Hemingway and John Updike. Even contemporary authors are getting in on the game, so to speak. Though I don’t like it Bleachers by John Grisham (2003) appealed to many of my students. A much better book by a popular author is Stephen King’s The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon (1999).

Regardless of the type of readers you have in your classes, it’s important to choose sports literature with the same scrutiny you would use to choose any other material. As Crowe (2004) advises, “Whether they’re helping adolescent readers vicariously release rage and frustration, or understand themselves and their world better, or learn valuable life lessons, good sports stories provide much more than entertainment. The best young adult sports novels offer the same benefits, challenges, and intellectual stimulation as any other well-written novel” (p. 9).

**YA Sports Literature Works**

At the end of my first year teaching sports literature, I wanted to gauge my students’ and colleagues’ reactions. Did my theories about combining adult and YA literature, choosing assignments that encouraged critical thinking and deep feeling, and guiding students toward YA and literary authors really work? In their evaluations, most students said that reading literature about sports was “more interesting” and made the class seem “easier.” As a teacher, I interpreted that response to mean that the material was more engaging and therefore seemed easier.

One of my concerns—and probably a concern for most authors and teachers who use much YA literature—was that the reading and writing assignments might not seem as challenging as “traditional” or canonical reading (to my students or my colleagues). Fortunately, both camps confirmed in separate evaluations that this was not an issue of concern. For example, my student Jonathan writes, “I was impressed with how you incorporated sports into all of the assignments and still kept them challenging. This class has helped me think about the deeper meaning of sports and the cultures that go along with them.” Sarah adds, “For some reason I felt the sports topic allowed me to open up and share my opinion on topics. I really thought the sports theme was fun, but also required just as much work as other classes.” My associate director observed me—of all days—when students had read a variety of magazine articles and an excerpt on Quidditch from one of the Harry Potter books. Professor McCord wrote in her evaluation of the course that I “pulled in the assigned texts to show students how to successfully build an analysis.” She noted that “the fast moving discussion covered a broad range of topics including… the increasingly volatile role of the spectator in these imaginary sports and the impact technology has had on contemporary sports.”

My theories are further supported by Crowe (2004), who reflects, “A good sports novel, poem, or biography can have a beneficial effect on a
teenage reader that’s equal to or greater than the benefits of attending a sporting event. … the work of literature may bring … a thoughtful, comforting opportunity for the reader to reflect on sport, society, family, human nature, love, life, death—all the things that matter most to us as human beings” (p. 5).

That’s really what we want of all literature we expose our students to, isn’t it? We want them to think and feel about issues that are important to our society. It seems ironic that, as I reflect on my experiences with YA sports literature, I should turn to a well-known author of adult work for my concluding thought. It was Henry David Thoreau, himself an avid outdoorsman, who said: “To read well, that is to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention, almost of the whole life to this object” (Gentile, 1980, p. 7). I suggest that we begin that “training” in middle school and carry it through college with YA sports literature.

References


Appendix: Recommended Reading
Thought-provoking books:
Bat 6 by Virginia Euwer Wolff, 1998
The Contender by Robert Lipsyte, 1967; reissued in 1987
Iceman by Chris Lynch, 1995
Raiders Night by Robert Lipsyte, 2006
Slam! by Walter Dean Myers, 1998
Tears of a Tiger by Sharon Draper, 1996
Whale Talk by ChrisCrutcher, 2001

Sociology/Research Essay—Teams:
A League of My Own by Patricia I. Brown, 2003
The Boys of Winter by Wayne Coffey, 2005
Eagle Blue: A Team, a Tribe, and a High School Basketball Season in Arctic Alaska by Michael D’Orso, 2006
Friday Night Lights by H.G. Bissinger, 2000
Girls Got Game, edited by Sue Macy, 2001
Glory Road by Don Haskins and Dan Wetzel, 2005
In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle by Madeleine Blais, 1993
Last Dance: Behind the Scenes at the Final Four by John Feinstein, 2006
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"Let Me Tell You About Dogs." Persuasive Writing and Picture Books

By Issac Willis Larison

Introduction

The NCTE guidelines encourage teachers to read authentic texts with children from a variety of literary genres. When teachers use an array of reading comprehension and writing strategies with books, children build their critical thinking and writing skills. One way teachers encourage writing development in children is through having students write for a wide range of purposes and for different audiences. Ideas will be offered here on several books to show how they might be used with children of various grade levels for constructing persuasive arguments. One book will be explored in greater detail to show how literature contributes to the quality of learning experiences for children when they are learning to write persuasively for a specific audience.

Persuasive Writing and Children

Tompkins (2005) and Petit and Soto (2002) discuss the importance of teaching elementary children critical listening and thinking skills and persuasive writing. They examine numerous strategies teachers use to develop these avenues of thought in their classrooms. Specifically, Tompkins (2005) discusses three kinds of persuasive arguments often taught to children: (a) persuasion through a reasoned argument that reaches a logical conclusion; (b) persuasion through the recommendation of a trusted friend; (c) and persuasion through a feeling approach—generally used to appeal to our sense of caring for other people or animals.

Children have found great success constructing persuasive writing pieces in early elementary grades when they construct an appeal to a sense of caring for other people or animals. A way to learn how to create that “appeal” is by reading a variety of genres of literature and responding to the literature through book discussions, brainstorming activities, constructing story charts, and writing letters. However, some teachers may need encouragement to use literature as a resource and springboard for teaching about, and critiquing, persuasive arguments and writing persuasively. Tompkins’ (2005) focus is on the use of historical fiction because events and issues of a political
nature are often presented to children in historical fiction. While it is true that historical fiction tends to present controversial topics more directly than other genres, any genre could be used effectively.

**Literature: A Valuable Resource**

How do teachers find the good books? Perhaps the easiest and most reliable way is through talking with other teachers. One teacher tells another teacher about a good book who tells another teacher. Like a good recipe, a good book is shared among teacher friends—tried and shared again. Each teacher may add his or her own spice or flavor to the presentation of a book and passes along ideas to be tried and shared with others. Teachers discover which picture books work especially well in their classrooms for teaching specific skills or styles of writing. One elementary colleague explained that teachers cannot inspire children with a shrink-wrapped approach to education devoid of creativity.

The need to be creative with the curriculum may make incorporating literature in the classroom a more daunting, but interesting process. Many teachers are required to demonstrate how the use of a particular book will benefit children, and explain how a work can serve as a catalyst for learning. Regardless there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate how picture books inspire children of all ages as a source for appreciation of art, different styles of writing, and help build empathy for others. Teachers have to choose books carefully and use them wisely (Huck, Keifer, Hepler, and Hickman, 2006).

**Something Old, Something New—Resources for Persuasive Writing**

Great stories allow teachers to develop ideas and encourage critical listening and thinking skills that often lead to persuasive writing activities for students. *Heckedy Peg* by Audrey Wood and illustrated by Don Wood was published in 1987. In this tale of fantasy, a mother leaves her seven children (Each is named for a day of the week.) at home unattended while she goes to the market—promising to bring each child something special. They have been given strict instructions, “Now be careful, and remember—don’t let a stranger in and don’t touch fire” (Wood, 1987). It is easy to guess what might happen. A cunning old witch bribes the children with gold, tricking them into opening the door. She promptly turns each child into different types of food. The witch loads the food onto her cart to take home where she will have a delicious dinner. The mother returns just in time. She is led to the witch’s hovel by a friendly bird and rescues the children through a clever bit of trickery of her own. Primary grade children might construct a story map to outline the details of the story. Following their conversation about the book, teachers might want children to discuss personal safety. Young children could easily brainstorm a list of practical safety tips to follow. Each child could choose a particular tip to follow, list three reasons why the rule should be followed, and draw a picture to illustrate her/his idea. They are simply learning to make a persuasive argument through a reasonable list of ideas that reach a logical conclusion.

Diane Stanley wrote and illustrated *The Giant and the Beanstalk* which was published in 2004. It is a great book to encourage the examination of perspective in stories and will allow children an opportunity to express their sense of caring. Otto is a polite giant who takes care of his pet hen, Clara. When Clara is stolen by Jack, a boy who lives in the fairytale, human village below the giant kingdom, Otto sets off to rescue her before she is sold at the market. Children easily identify with the loveable Otto and relate to his caring nature for animals. Teachers will find children have an easy time explaining how they would feel and offering suggestions about what they would do if a similar thing happened to them. The children could be asked to identify other characters (They are all nursery rhyme characters by the name of Jack.) in the story and list their actions and recite the rhymes that go along with each character. The students would enjoy making advertisements for
“Let Me Tell You About Dogs.” Persuasive Writing and Picture Books

arguments and propaganda are used is: The Yellow Star: the Legend of King Christian X of Denmark by Carmen Agra Deedy and illustrated by Henri Sørensen. This book was published in 2000. The story begins with a discussion about who the Danes are and how they are all one people despite some obvious differences in size and shape. After Nazi soldiers invade the country and demand the Danish Jews adhere to wearing the Star of David sewn onto their clothes, the king is forced to act on behalf of the people. But, knowing Denmark is a tiny country that would be easily destroyed by the German army there was little that could be done. “The people of Denmark were frightened. They had heard terrible stories. In some places, once Jews wore the yellow star, they were taken away and not heard from again” (Deedy, 2000). In the end, the Danes follow the example of their trusted and beloved King Christian X rather than accept the tragic fate experienced by countless people of the Jewish faith in other European countries during World War II.

Teachers may want to discuss how easy it is to follow the actions and recommendations of friends. The students may explore how sometimes, as in the case of the Danes following the example of their king, the result is a good one. Sometimes the result may not be so good. The consequences for following the recommendation of their trusted king are not completely outlined in the book. The seriousness of questioning authority (in this case the Nazis) may not be easily understood by younger children. It may be necessary to approach this topic differently. The focus of a book discussion could be less dire if children are asked to do some personal writing using the following expression: Just because __________ (name of person) __________ (action they did), it doesn’t mean you have to do the same. Young children will enjoy sharing about times when they have simply followed the advice of a friend when they needed to think through their actions more carefully.

each character using one of the techniques listed in the set of propaganda devices list below. The following questions/statements may be useful in beginning a discussion of the story. Jack is trying to save his cow named Milky White. How could Jack convince Otto to help him? What reasons could Jack’s mother use to persuade Jack not to sell Clara? How did the characters respond when they first met Otto? What helped them to change their attitudes toward Otto? Children will feel, and learn to express, empathy for others by putting themselves into Otto’s situation.

Momma, Where Are You From crosses over genres. This book, written by Marie Bradby and illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet is a delightful walk down memory lane told in Bradby’s exquisite poetic style. A child innocently asks her mother, “Momma, where are you from? Where are you from, Momma?” (Bradby, 2000). The mother gives a beautiful recounting of simpler days, growing up in a smaller community on the edge of town. “Where families grew into a neighborhood as close as a knit sweater; where we threw up a hand to everyone we saw” (Bradby, 2000). But, all of the memories the mother shares were not pleasant. For older children, this seemingly innocuous, feel-good memory book will allow them an opportunity to examine America’s recent history of inequality, segregation, and racist policies. Students will want to examine the various underlying contexts for the story. Why does the sidewalk end just before it reaches this part of town? Why does Miss Mary work in someone else’s house? Why are the children in the story not allowed to attend the school that is a short distance from their homes? Older students could use this book as a springboard into research about racism (or other social and political issues). Their research could examine the use of propaganda devices and the deceptive arguments that were used to support racist policies in the past.

Another book that may help children begin to examine the power of persuasion and what can happen socially and politically when faulty...
Classroom Experience with Persuasive Writing

The Old Woman Who Named Things by Cynthia Rylant illustrated by Kathryn Brown was published in 1996. This wonderful story inspires readers to think about the love, care, and the responsibility people feel toward animals. The main character, an older woman, has outlived all of her friends. It seems she has tried to protect herself from the painful feelings of suffering loss from caring for others by naming the objects she has come to depend on in her daily life. She is content knowing she will never outlive them and is resolute in her attitude of detachment from living. Like the Little Prince and his rose in Saint-Exupery’s classic story, The Little Prince, she becomes entangled in caring for another (a puppy) and comes to learn she is responsible for the things she “tames.”

Her interactions with the puppy begin innocently enough. She feeds the shy brown puppy that comes to her gate everyday and tells it to go home. But, everyday the puppy returns. She makes excuses why she cannot keep the puppy and has decided not to name it or keep it because she is afraid she will outlive it and this would make her very sad. Just when she feels content with her thinking and how things are, the puppy (which has grown into a dog in all this time) does not return one day. The old woman waits and watches all day for the puppy. The next day she tries to find the puppy by driving all over town. She calls the animal shelter too. In the end, she makes a trip to the shelter and finds the puppy and realizes there is room enough in her life for the puppy.

Simply reading the story with children would be sufficient. It is a tender story. It would be easy enough and certainly worthwhile to have children reflect on and respond to events/messages in the story: friendship, love and care of animals, aging and older adults, and death. The book lends itself to constructing various levels of questions (literal, inferential, and critical) too. What color was the puppy? Could/Did this story happen to anyone you know? Explain what happened—(why and how). Why do you think the main character in this story is an old woman instead of an old man? Teachers will find it is easy for children to make text connections to the story (Text-to-Self, Text-to-Text, and Text-to-World). Children are always at the ready with pet stories, pet names, connections to other books about animals or pets, and events in their community regarding the care of animals, etc.

Teachers might want to read the book straight through with children doing a fairly typical Directed Listening-Thinking Activity (DL-TA) as suggested by Tompkins (2005) and allow the children a few minutes to say what they appreciated about the story. Then, ask for their assistance in helping you construct a good argument to use with a parent about how wonderful it would be to have a dog. Ultimately, students are asked to write a letter attempting to persuade another (in this case a parent) of the benefits of being a pet owner. The children seem very interested in constructing an argument to demonstrate the merits of owning...

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Dear Mrs. Larison,

I am writing to you about getting a dog. A dog would be a good pet because it can play with you. It will keep you company. A dog can win a competition. I know you might say it will be hard to groom him but it will pay off if you win. If you take him for a walk you can get exercise. I know you might say we can get a treadmill but that would be too much money. So please buy a dog.

Sincerely,

Drewsmith
“Let Me Tell You About Dogs.” Persuasive Writing and Picture Books

...a dog. Some groups are a bit savvier in their articulation of arguments. Some groups are better with the number of ideas they supply. Some provide better concrete evidence as support for owning a dog. Included here are a few sample letters from a recent visit to a fourth grade classroom. They were just beginning to focus on expository writing.

During this classroom visit, the students listened to the story. After a brief time of reflection, they were invited to brainstorm a list of reasons why it would be good to have a dog. They suggested a fairly typical set of items. A dog would protect you. A dog will keep you company. A dog will help you exercise. A dog can be entertaining because you can teach it to do tricks. A dog can help you get your work done. However, this group of children suggested a novel idea. They suggested entering the dog in agility competitions so the dog could participate in contests, become famous, and win money. While dog competitions have been around for ages, the influence of television and access to information through the Animal Planet channel seems to have had an impact here.

Following the brainstorming activity, the teacher had the students role-play a conversation using the arguments they had constructed. They offered reasons for owning a dog and gave possible responses someone who is reluctant to own a dog might suggest. Each child seemed eager to share his arguments and her rebuttals with the other group members. This seemed to make the response process come alive for the children. They seemed able to think of and articulate responses to the ideas each had suggested. They were able to give evidence to support their ideas whether pro or con and worked these into their writing also. Once the children had a chance to do the role-playing they wrote rough draft copies of their letters. On a second visit to their classroom, the groups listened to each letter. The students offered ideas for improving the quality of their letters by trying to anticipate how a person might respond to their reasons for owning a dog. They attempted to make the improvements as they wrote a second draft. Individual conferences with all of the students helped fine tune their letters and address any other editing concerns.

To show appreciation for the work the children did, they were given mini packages of animal cookies accompanied with a new request. The students were encouraged to think about how they might convince someone to get an unusual kind of pet like a giraffe, or hippopotamus, etc. This task might be an opportunity for them to extend their persuasive writing skills in several ways. In addition to writing persuasive letters, the children could be encouraged to do other types of expository writing based on research. They could easily do research on various breeds of dogs (or other animals) to write a feature article. They could search for information about other canine animals (bears, wolves) for science. They would enjoy reading and writing animal poetry or poetry specifically about dogs. At any rate, copies of their letters will be mailed in the near future.

Building an Argument

Explanations of three types of arguments are listed below. These are often used to persuade a listener or reader to agree with the argument being made (Tompkins, 2005).
Glittering Generality—a term such as “freedom” or “patriotism” is used to make a comparison between the term being used and a cause or person. The term is something individuals care about and/or wish to associate with or they wish to possess the same qualities. Attempts in writing are made to draw a comparison between the two objects or ideas in such a way so that a reader will not challenge the argument offered. For example, “The following morning the King of Denmark, with courage and defiance, rode alone through Copenhagen. He was dressed his finest clothing. As they watched him pass, the subjects of King Christian understood what they should do” (Deedy, 2000).

Name Calling—attempts are made to associate negative feelings with a product or idea being discussed. The intention is to have readers or listeners dislike or oppose the ideas being presented. “He looked, in other words, like your typical fierce, ferocious young giant” (Stanley, 2004).

Snob Appeal—is often used to point out the quality of a product, idea, or experience that makes it superior to other products, ideas, or experiences of a similar nature. “I am from beans—green, lima, and pea-picked, strung, snapped, and shelled into pans, then put on the stove to simmer for an hour” (Bradby, 2000).

A complete list of propaganda devices can be found in Tompkins, 2005.

**Summary:**

Through exposure to a wide variety of genres of literature, children learn to question the ideas they hear and read. They begin to express themselves creatively through the use of comprehension and writing strategies. Children demonstrate logical thinking and grow in their ability to use persuasion through written language. Reading good literature helps children learn to write with a clear purpose for a specific audience.

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Promoting Engagement: Young Adult Literature, Picture Books and Traditional Themes for Secondary Students

Classrooms as Memorable Spaces

“For he had learned…if you surrendered to the air, you could ride it” (Morrison, 1977, p. 341).

Sometimes in education courses, future teachers are asked to reflect on the reasons they wish to become teachers. Often, students will recall a certain teacher who influenced their lives. Frequently, their descriptions include the phrase: “I hope I can be that kind of teacher.” They remember specific aspects of the room, what they wrote about, and the titles of books they read in that classroom. Ultimately, students will often conclude that these classrooms made them feel a certain way that is indescribable and unforgettable. David Ragsdale and Peter Smagorinsky (2005) describe this feeling in a classroom as flow: “A flow experience is one in which people become so involved in what they’re doing they lose track of time…. On these occasions their levels of skill and the challenges provided by the activity produced a fine tension that resulted in complete engrossment” (p. 85). Such classrooms are the center of possibility: they are places where teachers and students feel safe, successful, and motivated to take risks with the curriculum. These are classrooms that allow students to experience what Milkman Dead ponders in the end of Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon (1977): the invitation to fly.

As authors of this article, we believe that the use of young adult literature and picture books in middle and secondary curricula offers teachers and students ways to develop “flow” in their English classrooms. Because these texts are accessible to students, connect to their individual experiences, and serve as methods for activating and reflecting upon prior knowledge, they encourage them to flourish as independent, critical readers. Subsequently, they can be used as vehicles for the discovery and analysis of author’s purpose, conflict, universal themes, and a variety of other literary elements. Likewise, YAL and picture books can give students a new, not alternate, way of looking at history, literary movements, other genres, and the profundity of the human experience.

At times, however, a text alone cannot be the sole method by which students experience “flow” in the English classroom. We argue that such classrooms are also places where students can be active, social human beings who self-select literature, question, collaborate, lead others to new ideas, and are encouraged to find themselves in novels. We know that if these texts and activities are an integral part of our classrooms, the possibilities are endless.
Making Room for Young Adult Literature

As a middle and high school teacher, Sally often found Young Adult Literature to be an excellent way of coaching her students into the world of reading for pleasure. *Bud, Not Buddy* (1999) by Christopher Paul Curtis, *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* (1999) by Kimberly Willis Holt, *No More Dead Dogs* (2000) by Gordon Korman, and *Freak the Mighty* (1993) by Rodman Philbrick were solid quick picks for independent reading in her classrooms. She wanted her students, however, to become the kinds of readers Kelly Gallagher (2004) describes: “Readers who move beyond the literal and who can interpret the text. Readers who read way beyond a ‘puzzle’ mentality. Readers who can read between the lines to see the real game being played” (p. 6). Nevertheless, she resisted YAL as a valid genre for encouraging students to critically consider a text. Instead, because novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) or *The Great Gatsby* (1925) were readily available in her school and, as a student, she remembered such novels encouraging her own critical reading, she often assigned them as whole class texts.

Ultimately, for Sally, it was her students who pushed her to make room for YAL. Originally, Sally taught whole class novels with a few cycles of carefully planned literature circles, book groups, and independent reading woven into the curriculum. During these times, students were free to self-select texts and she continually noticed students reading mostly YAL. At these points in the curriculum, her classroom differed considerably from the cycles of whole class novel study: students talked about their novels outside of class, passed books to each other after reading, and completed chosen assignments with excitement. From their discussions, she knew these novels provided immediate engagement for her students and often held protagonists they understood on individual levels. In addition, these cycles allowed students to make choices, collaborate with each other in book groups or literature circles, and read during class time. She loved these times of year, but struggled as a teacher to make them a constant part of the curriculum. She feared that without the unifying, teacher-selected, whole class novel, she would be unable to meet the demands of the state standards and the school’s ninth grade English curriculum.

In her book *The Reading Zone* (2007), Nancie Atwell discusses this pressure for high school English teachers and calls them to: “Consider bucking the secondary English status quo” (p. 107). Atwell challenges teachers and teacher educators to heed the research about students, achievement, and reading:

> Every measure that looks at pleasure reading and its effects on student performance on standardized tests of reading ability—and science and math—tells us that the major predictor of academic success is the amount of time that a student spends reading. In fact, the top 5 percent of U.S. students read up to 144 times more than the kids in the bottom 5%. (p. 107)

Even before Atwell’s publication, Sally knew this to be true from experience with students, but she was still cautious about YAL and year round student choice: she wondered how texts that she had previously considered light teen reading could uphold the level of rigor she desired in her classroom and open the doors for analysis. She still separated pleasure reading from the serious, analytical reading she believed should be a major part of the English classroom.

It was through a yearlong collaboration that Sally and her partner English teacher were able to meet Atwell’s challenge in their own respective classrooms. From their previous classroom research and journals, the two teachers began revising the ninth grade English curriculum. They believed that together they could create a standards based, rigorous, curriculum that incorporated year round student choice, YAL, and social and individual reading opportunities. The teachers realized it would be difficult, but they knew that with ongoing collaborative planning, discussion, and reflection, they could make the curriculum...
Promoting Engagement: Young Adult Literature & Picture Books for Secondary Students

successful. They began by creating lists of books that they had seen students choosing to read over the years. They then added other student, faculty, and librarian recommendations to their master list. In an effort to make these texts available to their students, they networked, pleaded, and invested their own money to increase their existing classroom libraries. In addition, they made sure that the titles were also available at the local public library because their school did not have its own library. Ultimately, they established the framework for what Atwell (2007) describes as “The Reading Zone”: a place where students self-select titles and read for pleasure in and out of the classroom. They also created opportunities in their new curriculum for students to be social readers by engaging in book groups, whole class Socratic seminars, book talks, and read-alouds.

In order to create an individual and social reading space and scaffold independent reading, they began the year with book groups and the unifying guiding question: What does it mean to be an individual? They identified three conflict categories that influence individuality: human vs. human, human vs. society, and human vs. him or herself. From their master list, they selected four book titles that would fit under each conflict category. After a brief mini-lesson on conflict, they asked students to choose a conflict category of personal meaning. The students were organized into groups by their chosen conflict categories and given the list of books for that conflict. In order to familiarize students with the titles and assist them in making informed choices, the teachers provided written student or faculty recommendations for each book and copies of the texts for groups to peruse. Students were then asked to pick one book from their lists to read together as a group. During that first cycle, one English class chose: *Luna* (2004) by Julie Anne Peters (human vs. him/herself), *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* (1986) by Art Spiegelman (human vs. society), and *The First Part Last* (2003) by Angela Johnson (human vs. human).

Because each novel is incredibly different in plot and characters, the teachers wondered if they would need to modify some of the planned reading activities, especially whole-class Socratic seminar. They believed it might be difficult for students to have an engaging discussion if they were reading seemingly divergent texts. *Luna* is beautifully written, funny, YAL novel about a somewhat shy and unpopular teenage girl (Regan) whose best friend is her 12th grade brother Liam. Readers discover early in the book that Liam’s biggest wish is to be able to be Luna, his female self, in the outside world. As Liam struggles to fully become Luna, Regan battles with the pressure to fit in while still supporting him. *Maus I* is an extremely popular graphic novel with teenagers. Students often choose it for independent reading and highly recommend it to classmates. Art, an adult mouse, is in the process of writing a comic book about his father’s story of persecution during Nazi Germany. His father’s stories are embedded in the larger narration of Art’s struggle to understand his relationship with his father as he records and writes the book. Because it uses an unfamiliar lens to reframe a familiar historical event, students are often drawn to *Maus I*. Equally, its artwork and the portrayal of the father-son relationship make it accessible to a variety of students. Finally, *The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson is about a sixteen year old boy and his girlfriend who decide to put their baby up for adoption. Sally’s students were drawn to the series of alternating narratives (then and now) in this book told from the boy’s perspective. They were quickly engrossed in his story about the daily demands of fatherhood and his struggle, amidst everything, to make the right decision for his child.

On the surface, these books deal with a wide range of characters, time periods, and a diversity of conflicts. Equally, they are also three novels that blurred the lines of conflict for their respective categories. For Sally’s students, these were extremely accessible texts, and, as a result, there was always a danger that they might only read them on a surface level. The problem with choosing to use YAL in book groups is that often teachers cannot be physically present for every discussion; as a result, some of the more difficult issues in the
books are processed in peer groups. As teachers, Sally and her partner feared book groups might not push students to grapple with the texts on multiple levels.

Ultimately, they found their fears to be misguided. When the teachers began to trust their students to lead them through their interpretations, they understood how these texts and activities allowed students to experience the flow of reading as an individual and social endeavor. Throughout the first week’s book group meetings, the teachers kept cards in the middle of the tables that stated the guiding question: What does it mean to be an individual? The teachers hoped these cards would remind students to get under the surface of the text. When Friday seminar arrived, they asked each book group to review their discussion log for the week and have a five minute focused conversation about the guiding question. They asked students to bring any unresolved issues, questions, or thoughts to seminar and pose them to the larger group.

In Sally’s classroom, the first Socratic seminar that year opened with a student stating: “Um, we have an issue with the category our book (Luna) was placed under. In our book, one of the main characters really wants to be herself as an individual. But we think she’s not really struggling with herself, she’s got that figured out, she’s struggling with her society instead.” As Sally furiously documented the conversation in her journal, another student responded: “Yeah, we agree, in Maus, the main character is having a struggle with himself and with the individual his father is right now. He can’t really accept his father for who he is, and so he can’t be happy as the individual that he wants to be.” The students moved on to the meaning of individuality for the characters in their books, for the society of each book, and, ultimately for themselves. It was one of those little classroom miracles teachers often share with students. Sally watched them socializing and talking about multiple texts, characters, and settings, and the meaning of the individual across texts and time: they were living the ninth grade standards.

Looking back on her teaching journals, seminar notes, and collaborative planning from that particular year, Sally knows that the teachers trusted the students and the texts. Although they continually coached students on leadership, book group responsibilities, and Socratic seminar, the teachers also knew students could get into the “zone” and that the texts students had chosen could pave the way for successful journeys: those are the perks of YAL and student choice. Each of these texts told stories of individuality that students would encounter again and again in literature from Hester Prynne to Othello. Yet, the beauty of this was that the texts were student-selected and easily lent themselves to their lives, reading levels, and the issues they saw in their worlds. Equally, they had accessible universal themes that students could collaboratively discover and analyze. Because of this, students in both classes were successful at dissecting these novels while still enjoying them for their own personal reasons.

Holocaust Literature: Young Adult Literature and Picture Books

Although book groups, seminar, and YAL are often used as excellent methods for coaching students into reading texts on a variety of levels, not every secondary teacher will take the risk of using picture books with students. However, many picture books work better with older students than they do with younger ones. Pairing picture books with young adult novels adds numerous pedagogical possibilities for accomplishing curricular goals. Since they are brief, picture books adapt well for minilessons used before, during, or after reading a longer novel. Picture book authors use graphics to create a meaningful storytelling experience for readers.

Erika’s Story (2003) by Ruth Vander Zee is a compelling true story told in first person about a woman who as an infant was thrown from the train that was transporting her mother to a concentration camp. A German woman saves Erika and raises her as her own. Roberto Innocenti, who
also did the artwork in the more familiar picture book *Rose Blanche* (1990), provides realistic, haunting drawings with an added symbolic quality. As an advance organizer this picture book quickly relays a mother’s conflict and horrible decision to take action to save her baby. *Erika’s Story* can be shared to set a serious tone and to engender emotional identification for the naïve reader who may have trouble identify with longer, more difficult Holocaust novels. Some of Nancy’s middle school students had trouble immediately identifying with Anne Frank’s narrative partly because they did not fully understand the danger that her family faced. For a minilesson about first person narrators, *Erika’s Story* can be compared with *Diary of a Young Girl*. Since *Diary of a Young Girl* is a diary written as the experience is being lived, Anne is a naïve narrator who does not know all the horrors of the concentration camps, whereas *Erika’s Story* is told by a narrator who has survived the Holocaust and tells her story with this knowledge. The other picture books and novels described below can also be analyzed for the narrator’s awareness of danger. Students can discuss how the reader’s involvement in the story is affected by the narrator’s perspective.

*Star of Fear, Star of Hope* (1995) by Jo Hoestlandt can be used for a highly effective minilesson about symbolism. Discussing symbolism in a picture book increases the likelihood of drawing the whole class into participation. As the title implies *Star of Fear, Star of Hope* embeds symbolic meaning for stars inside of a story about a birthday sleepover for a little girl. Before reading the story aloud, Nancy passes out a large Star of David containing six numbered lines for students to record six uses of the star symbol in the story. First, she reads the whole picture book, sharing all the pictures. Hoestlandt’s story is told as a flashback, a story of regret, told by an elderly woman who as a child in France became angry with her Jewish friend when she had to leave a birthday sleepover because her family faced the Nazis were arresting Jews. After the first reading, she reads the picture book again stopping when the author references a star in the text. She and her students do the first star together so that students understand that a symbol is more than a literal reference to a visual or something concrete; a symbol has a connection to a larger theme in the story and extends the meaning through its use. In the first use in the story, the mother of her friend is sewing a star on her friend’s jacket. The mother understands the star as a symbol whereas the narrator does not. This represents the main conflict of the story in which the narrator is too young to understand the danger to her Jewish friend’s life. Later, on the first page, there is reference to stars being both a warning and a hope. In a story that is not merely literal, the main symbol(s) changes and accrues meaning as the plot develops. The point isn’t to gain the right answer for what the symbol is but to become a sophisticated reader who can interpret a richer meaning from the text. Students can discuss how Hoestlandt cleverly uses the symbol of the star to draw the reader’s attention to the growing conflict in the novel. *The Butterfly* (2000) by Patricia Polacco and *The Harmonica* (2004) by Tony Johnston are other picture books that have a central symbol. After they have discussed the use of symbolism in picture books, students can consider how the symbols used in novels such as *Number the Stars* or *The Book Thief* add to the interpretation of the story.

*The Cats in Krasinski Square* (2004) by Karen Hesse tells the story of a young girl who smuggles food to fellow Jews being held behind the walls in the Warsaw Ghetto. When the resisters learn of the Gestapo’s plan to use trained dogs to find the smuggled food, the main character gathers her beloved stray cats to provide a clever distraction for the dogs. On the last page Hesse provides endnotes that document where she found this inspirational story and the historical background about the Ghetto and the resistance. Students can discuss how authors research factual information for fictional writing. This book, with simplified drawings and a repeating refrain, begs the question: How does one write ethically about such an unspeakable horror for children? In addition,
Some fictional books about the Holocaust have been critiqued for presenting an unrealistic or inaccurate view of Jewish victims. For example, the illustrations have been faulted for portraying concentration camp children as too clean and healthy in *Luba: The Angel of Bergen-Belsen* (2003), which is a powerful true story about a concentration camp survivor who saves a field full of Dutch children left by the Nazis to freeze to death. Students can look at an assortment of picture books to decide if the illustrations, plot, and characters are age appropriate and historically accurate. Then students can apply the same critical thinking to novels and other texts about the Holocaust. Does the *The Book Thief* use too much fantasy or too many witty details to create a heroine and a villain? Is the inclusion of the myth about the Danish resistance historically accurate in *The Lily Cupboard* (1992), *Number the Stars*, and *The Christmas Menorahs* (1995)? Does Anne Frank’s memoir only represent a part of the Holocaust story that avoids her torturous life in a concentration camp? What are the benefits and drawbacks of both fictional and memoir accounts of the Holocaust? It may be interesting to note that *Night* was originally a much longer memoir that was translated and cut down considerably in length from over eight hundred pages. Moreover, should readers be given the perspective of a Nazi to help them understand how anyone could be persuaded to join such an inhumane cause as is presented in the dual memoir of *Parallel Journeys*? When they begin to understand that all illustrators and authors make choices that affect readers, students can transition from personal response to critical analysis of a text.

The *Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate* (1995) by Janice Cohn is different from the other picture books mentioned in that it is several stories in one. This picture book tells of a present-day incident in which a rock is thrown through a young Jewish boy’s bedroom window for displaying a Menorah. The neighbors respond by all displaying Menorahs to protest the hate crime. Embedded within the third person narrative are two other stories that are told to help Isaac and his friends understand Jewish history and Nazi resistance. The fourth story is the introduction by the author who carefully explains the truth and fiction of the myth about the Danish King who resisted the Nazis as well as her decision to include the myth in her book. Nancy likes to use this book as closure for any reading of Holocaust novels because it describes the role that young people can have in stopping hate and injustice in their community. Too often we valorize mythological heroes rather than the everyday sort who bravely choose to stand up against individual acts of bigotry.

While writing about this group of novels and picture books, Nancy became more aware of how multiple texts make it easier to define literary elements within one text. Without a complimentary or conflicting story, the use of a first person narrator, symbolism, plot conflicts, or historical facts may not be fully illuminated. The class could make a chart rating the authors of these texts for their use of these curricular elements. Individual students might add evaluations of more texts on this topic. Still other students may check to see if a particular author has written other books with strong symbolism or naïve narrators. This type of evaluative analysis helps the reader to understand how some works of literature do a better job than others of telling their stories.

**American Literature: Transcendentalism, Young Adult Literature, and Picture Books**

Sometimes school-wide English curricula do not allow for students to self-select YAL texts as part of their classroom experience; yet, these classrooms can still carve spaces for YAL when we recognize its connections to more typical high school pieces and the exploration of literary movements. High school American literature classes typically explore the New England transcendentalist authors and their ideas of the significance of nature, individualism, intuition, self-reliance, self-trust, and democracy (Harmon & Holman, 2006,
p. 527). Classic authors such as Emerson and Thoreau espouse these ideas as well as more current figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. In Angie’s high school American literature courses, students used a workshop format to explore literary and non-fiction texts that fit their lives and interests. In addition to those beliefs mentioned above, some students explored personally relevant movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and Unitarianism; they brought the transcendentalists close to home.

YAL also proves a valuable tool for helping students connect to transcendentalism. One terrific read-aloud is the YA novel The Gospel According to Larry (2001) by Janet Tashjian. Seventeen-year-old Josh Swensen is “Larry”—the pseudonym for his internet “sermons” against materialism, consumerism, and superficiality. Fond of the transcendentalists, Josh retreats to nature when he has important decisions to make. Josh also personifies the transcendentalist call to simplify his life by maintaining fewer than 80 possessions at any one time. His sermons become extremely popular, leading up to Larryfest, a rock concert ironically celebrating transcendental ideas—except with big-name performers and companies coveting sponsorships. With complications from Beth (his best friend and potential girlfriend) and Betagold (a nemesis bound to reveal the true identity of Larry), Josh finds his life more complicated than ever. Drastic measures must be, and are, taken.

In addition to The Gospel According to Larry, well-known YA author Gary Paulsen’s The Island (1990) parallels transcendentalist philosophies. The story of fifteen-year-old Wil Neuton carries readers to an island inhabited only by animals near his new home in Wisconsin. Escaping typical teenage difficulties, Wil finds a new side to himself as he observes, writes, paints, sketches, and generally communes with nature on the island. The peaceful island experience is deemed odd by his parents, and television news crews disturb his island experience. The multigenre format of the novel—Wil’s journals, an omniscient narrative, and Wil’s first-person narrative—provides readers with an experience of connecting transcendental ideas with a contemporary teen.

Transcendentalist thoughts also flourish in picture books for use with students of all ages. Jon J [sic] Muth’s Zen Shorts (2005) and The Three Questions (2002) exemplify transcendentalist philosophies of intuition, self-reliance, and self-trust. Zen Shorts provides an opportunity to teach the literary concept of frame stories as well: we have the story of a giant panda, Clearwater, subtly teaching his three young friends by telling them stories which are clearly distinguished visually from the main storyline through separate titles and black-and-white illustrations on pale backgrounds. The three stories-within-stories include lessons on giving, even when others are against us; on considering how good luck and bad luck are “all mixed up”; and on learning to prevent the negative side of others from interfering with our own sense of peace (Muth, 2005, n.p.).

Muth’s The Three Questions focuses on transcendentalist notions of contemplation and intuition. In the story Nikolai asks his animal friends his three questions: “When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?” (Muth, 2002, n.p.). As he helps others and intuitively puts himself in danger to save a baby panda, the boy learns the answers to his three important questions. For world literature classes, students could also read the Leo Tolstoy story from which The Three Questions is adapted.

Marian Wright Edelman’s I Can Make a Difference (2005) also connects to ideas of transcendentalism. An illustrated book (one which primarily uses text to convey its stories but includes illustrations), I Can Make a Difference shares stories of cooperation, peace of mind, acceptance, and justice. Similarly, transcendentalists were reformers and sought to improve the lives of others and create a more just society (Harmon & Holman, 2006). One story from the book describes the ways in which humans interact, and we can see how society can easily become viewed as a positive
or negative force. “Heaven and Hell,” a Chinese tale, describes the same situation for both locales—a feast with individuals attempting to eat with extremely long chopsticks, far too long to reach to one’s own mouth. In hell, everyone was starving due to the long chopsticks; in heaven everyone was filled by feeding one another (2005, p. 68). Poems, folktales, and lovely illustrations by Barry Moser link this book solidly with the ideals of transcendentalism.

**British Literature: Othello and YAL**

While many high schools opt for teaching Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet; Hamlet; and Macbeth; Othello, The Moor of Venice* has much to offer teenage readers. Sadly, almost all of us (teenagers included) can identify with problems of the heart, betrayal by our supposed friends, or things ultimately being not quite as they had seemed. While Shakespeare’s words are definitely to be savored, the YA novelization of the play by Julius Lester, *Othello: A Novel* (1995), offers an accessible text rich in imagery and metaphor.

In his introduction to the novel, Lester explains the differences between his novel and Shakespeare’s play. While Lester changes some names (Lord Bertrand for Brabantio, Desdemona’s father; Emily for Emilia), the most intriguing adaptation is the change of the ethnicity of Iago and Emily to black African from white European. Lester wanted to explore the complexities of betrayal from within the same ethnicity and community. According to Lester, it would have been too simple to label Iago a racist—end of story (xiii). Instead, Lester adds another level of complexity when he makes Iago and Emily from the same tribe as Othello (Johnson & Ciancio, 2003).

The theme that perception is typically not reality is nicely reinforced not only in Lester’s young adult novel, but also in poetry written by teenagers. Editor Betsy Franco collected students’ poems in two volumes: *You Hear Me? Poems and Writing by Teenage Boys* (2000) and *Things I Have to Tell You: Poems and Writing by Teenage Girls* (2001). The students’ words in these poems and short musings are rich and inspiring—and they are particularly inspiring to teens because their peers write them. Reinforcing the theme that perception is not always reality, the poem “Joker” describes how one young man plays the clown in school, and yet he is truly the sad one (2000). We also hear poems of young women and men who are individuals and who seek to be heard. Shakespeare’s timeless themes are brought to life through these young writers.

One odd thing about the two books of poetry is that the book written by males contains no photos while the females’ writing is accompanied by photos that could be construed as sexist; many pictures portray segments of girls’ bodies, lacking a focus on the faces of the individuals. Angie has used selected poems without the photos; however, the absence of photos in the males’ book and space for more writing (73 entries for males vs. 32 entries for females) presents a convenient jumping-off point for a discussion of media literacy. Sometimes we forget that the language arts also include viewing and visually representing. Examining *Things I Have to Tell You and You Hear Me?* can help teach reading, writing, and also viewing skills. To further media literacy skills, pair the two books above with *Every Girl Tells a Story: A Celebration of Girls Speaking Their Minds* (2002). Carolyn Jones’ book, created in collaboration with the Girls Scouts of the USA, displays respectful photos and writing that provide role models of a tremendously diverse array of young women. Students can analyze and evaluate the use of images and writing in the texts and at the same time appreciate the stories and style of the writers.

**Conclusion: The English Train**

Award-winning poet and Ohio native Nikki Giovanni (2002) writes that her favorite teacher was her English teacher: Miss Delaney. In addition to fostering choice in her classroom, Miss Delaney also helped Giovanni to recognize English as “the train” for other personal literary pursuits.
I always loved English because what…
tellers. It is our stories that give a light
to the future. When I went to college
I became a history major because his-
story is such a wonderful story of who
we think we are. English is much more
a story of who we really are. It was,
after all, Miss Delaney who introduced
the class to ‘My candle burns at both
ends; it will not last the night. But, ah,
my foes and, oh, my friends -- it gives
a lovely light.’ And I thought, YES.
Poetry is the main line. English is the
train. (p. 108)

In English classrooms everywhere there are
teachers who help students choose the right book
at the right time in their lives and, as a result,
have the power to help such students recognize
this train in their own lives. Yet, as English teach-
ers, we are often pulled by demands of our cur-
ricula, state testing, and the diversity of our stu-
dents; thus, we struggle to continually open our
classrooms to new possibilities and discovery.

Nevertheless, we would argue that English
could still be the “train” that Giovanni describes.
Within our classrooms, we can provide students
with literature that reflects, “Who we really are”
regardless of time and social context. Through
YAL, we push students to connect on a variety of
levels with a text that speaks to them as individu-
als and as a community of readers. We connect
with them as fellow readers on this journey when
we use picture books to scaffold and broaden the
reading of more difficult pieces. Such texts not
only remind us of where we all started as readers,
but of the multiple ways we can critically imagine
a story or a time period. Ultimately, we lead them
from one train car to the next by using YAL to
broaden our understandings of more traditional
texts and literary movements in high school class-
rooms. These practices open our classrooms to
students who are also fellow storytellers on this
train. When we couple such texts with interac-
tive, student-led activities that honor students
as individual and social beings, we can ride with
them as they discover, for themselves, what might
be their “main line[s]”. We know such practices
courage our students to fly.

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For several years, Sally Lamping, Nancy Mack, and Angela Johnson taught English/Language Arts at the middle, high school, and adult level. Their research interests focus on best practices for using multi-genre projects in middle and high school classrooms, incorporating Young Adult Literature into standards-based curricula, and working with Limited English Proficient students. Currently, they are all happy to be Integrated Language Arts professors at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.


The Choices of Reading Material and Response in One Seventh Grade Classroom

In the executive summary of No Child Left Behind, President George W. Bush makes his case for strengthening education with reading as its cornerstone by saying, “Too many of our children cannot read. Reading is the building block, and it must be the foundation, for educational reform” (Bush, 2001, p.4). While the legislation known as No Child Left Behind was enacted as a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the focus on reading lies primarily in the preschool and elementary years with programs such as Reading First and Early Reading First. The commitment is to have every child reading by third grade, to make schools accountable by implementing mandatory testing programs in reading in grades 3-8 at the state level, and to use the National Assessment of Education Progress at the national level in grades four and eight as additional data for success (Bush, 2001). This focus on grades pre-K to three raises an important question for middle level educators, what happens in grades four and beyond? What support and intervention is in place for struggling readers in grade six? Grade eight?

Another question raised by No Child Left Behind centers around its source of data and research to set these standards. President Bush quotes from the National Reading Panel:

- effective reading instruction teaches children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they have learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading), and applying comprehension strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension.

(National Reading Panel, 2000, as quoted in Bush, 2001, p. 10)

For teachers at the middle level, the emphasis on phonics instruction does not have direct application, and the near afterthought of comprehension strategies leaves little in the way of direction for middle level reading instruction. Reading and language arts teachers, as well as teachers in the content areas, face questions of the nature of reading, the purpose, and the material. What do we ask children to read in the middle grades? How do we use reading material? What is the goal? The fear among many educators is that we ask children to read in order to pass standardized tests, and we choose reading material that we think will meet that need. In the state of Ohio, with achievement tests occurring in nearly every grade level in the middle level licensure band, teachers are under considerable pressure to raise reading test scores. What does that mean for
language arts teachers in middle grades? How are these standards interpreted into classroom practice? And ultimately, how do students respond to the reading curriculum as they encounter it in school each day? By aligning curriculum to standardized tests, are we teaching to the tests and the standards and thus creating school time readers, or are we still able to foster a love of reading that will last a lifetime while meeting the demands of No Child Left Behind? As part of my interest in classroom reading material, I examined the perceptions and interpretations of a teacher and her students surrounding the reading curriculum in their classroom. My goal was to find some understanding of how teachers make choices of reading material and activities in light of the Academic Content Standards and how students respond based on their interest.

Reading at Risk

In support of the need to create lifelong readers versus school time readers, the National Endowment for the Arts (2004) recently reported findings of “Reading At Risk: a Survey of Literary Reading In America” that showed our reading habits as a nation are on the decline. Specifically, the NEA not only showed a downward trend in literary reading as a leisure activity, but it especially marked a decline among adolescent boys. In an editorial piece summarizing the research study entitled, “Jane Reads, Johnny Won’t. Why?” steering committee members Mark Bauerlein and Sandra Stotsky marked a disturbing trend in reading habits and gender from 1992 to 2002. The percentage of overall book reading for young adult girls slipped from 63% to 59%, but in young men the drop was from 55% to 43%. The report goes on to identify some possible causes for this difference, one of which is the reading material in today’s classrooms. As Bauerlein and Stotsky describe it, “…the K-12 literature curriculum may in fact be contributing to the problem. It has long been known that there are strong differences between boys and girls in their literary preferences” (p. XX).

Middle level teachers face the struggle of motivating boys to read and know that we seem to be able to give girls a wider variety of reading material. As teachers, we have a multitude of factors to consider when choosing reading material. We want all of our students to be able to relate to the text and want to read it. This research is telling us that, especially for the boys in our classrooms, that is not what is happening.

The Classroom Study

I conducted this study as a graduate course project in a single 7th grade language arts classroom in a suburban middle school in Ohio. There were 23 students and one teacher. This class was set to take the 7th grade achievement test, part of the state-wide assessment program required by No Child Left Behind that spring for the first time. This assessment tests students in reading and math on the benchmarks and indicators set forth in the state’s Academic Content Standards for language arts and math. Earlier in the year the class took a half-length practice test as a pre-assessment. My questions in this study involve gathering information from the teacher and the students regarding the reading experiences in this classroom. What is the teacher assigning students to read? What is the teacher using for activities and methods of delivery related to those texts? What is the student response to those choices? If given a choice, what would the students choose to read on their own or in school?

I collected data through observations in the classroom, interviews with the teacher and six of the students, three surveys administered to all students, and collection and analysis of materials and response activities given to students during the observation period. In the early stages of the study, I kept to the back of the room, observing and taking notes. As the study progressed, I began...
to participate in the classroom, circulating during seatwork, assisting students with projects, and leading the class through the completion of the three surveys using the interactive white board in the room to project a copy of the survey while students completed it individually at their seats.

The interviews were different between the teacher and the students. With the teacher I focused on instructional decision making. I asked her how she chooses reading material and accompanying classroom response activities. I asked the students what they like to read on their own, how that is similar or different from what they read in school, and how they feel about response activities in the classroom.

It was important to begin by asking the teacher, who I will refer to as Mrs. M., how she chose what I was seeing so that I could set the context and make better sense of the classroom observations. She begins the year by asking students what they have read before so as not to duplicate material. *Holes* by Louis Sachar was dropped from her classroom collection because too many students were coming to her having already read it. There is also an agenda in her classroom to deal with bullying. Mrs. M. takes a stand against bullying in her classroom and does her best to make her room a safe environment. She chooses literature that reflects the themes of dealing with the bully and uses that to have discussions about bullying. The unit that was part of this research centered on Carl Hiaasen’s novel *Hoot* and was chosen because most students had not read it and it deals with a student who is bullied. Mrs. M. seeks what she calls “high interest” novels, but does not have a formal system for determining what constitutes high interest other than years of teaching experience in the middle school grades and past successes and failures with text. No student interest survey is administered prior to selecting novels, only a survey of previously read works. She placed great emphasis in the interview on choosing things students had not read or completed before. It is important to her to be able to introduce students to what she considers a good and high interest book for the first time, capitalizing on students discovering the plot in her class.

High interest is also a deciding factor for her in choosing response activities. Again, there is no formal assessment of interesting activities, but a commitment to what she believes are high interest such as story maps, Venn diagrams, work packets that are visually appealing with illustrations and creative fonts, and listening to selections on audio tape while reading along. When asked about meeting the state standards for language arts, Mrs. M. responded that she feels that she is meeting the standards “pretty well.” The district lesson plan template asks teachers to list the benchmarks and indicators met by each lesson on the lesson plan form.

The first survey administered to students asked for similar information from the students’ perspective. Students were asked to rate items on a scale of 1-5 (1 highest) responding to types of reading and response activities. When the teacher listed listening to stories on audio tape as one of her preferred methods, the students concurred based on the survey data in the table below. Of the choices provided, the majority of students ranked “listen to the story on tape” as the number one preference for covering material in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you like to read material for class?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher read aloud</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students take turns reading</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to the story on tape</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent reading</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read for homework</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the student interviews this idea received additional support. All six students preferred listening to the story. Larry said of the audio tape, “The tape was better because instead of visually looking at words and reading them we had someone else that was talking for us and saying the words along while we were reading the book.” Nikki echoed that same sentiment when she said
...it’s easier to listen to it than like read it individually cause sometimes when I read I kinds lose interest in it but like the way they did it on the tape it was like they had the different voices and it was a lot easier to listen than having you read it or the class read it.

This led to a question regarding learning styles. If a majority of the students preferred listening to the story on tape, were they predominately auditory learners? The table below shows the results of a learning styles survey (USD, 2005) that was administered to the whole class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning styles</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic/Tactile</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 equal styles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data were shared with the teacher and her conclusion was that kinesthetic/tactile learning style was as much a developmental characteristic for this age group as a preferred learning style. While there are five students with visual learning predominant, there were several with only one point different between visual and another learning style and the two that had equal breakdowns were also a combination of visual and another style. Mrs. M. attributed the link between visual learning and the audio tape as one that allows students to visualize as they read when they are free from the burden of decoding. By listening to the phrasing and new vocabulary in context from the professional recording, students’ minds are more able to focus on the story and creating that “movie in the mind” as they listen.

In terms of reading selections, while fewer of the students chose “books with characters my own age” as a top preference in the class survey, none of the students interviewed expressed a dislike for the teacher’s choice *Hoot*.

When asked what they like to read and how *Hoot* was similar to or different from that kind of material, students had a range of responses. Robert expressed a preference for action/adventure books, but said that *Hoot* was close saying “that’s an action story cause the boy runs away from his ah mom cause she’s been mean to him and she doesn’t want him so he runs away” Lisa said, “*Hoot* was a good book but we first started reading it I didn’t know if I’d like it cause it was kinda boring and stuff like that, but as we got into it I really liked it.” Lisa’s reading preferences included fan fiction on the Internet and the *Harry Potter* series which she said she also read with an accompanying audio tape. In a whole class survey, no student said that s/he did not like the book. Responses were open ended and data was tabulated based on common themes or key words used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I liked <em>Hoot</em> because...”</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot Specific</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting/ Wasn’t boring</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was okay</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several methods of delivery and response activities were observed during the study period including the previously mentioned audio tape. Students listened to the tape exclusively as a means of covering the text during the researcher’s observations. There was only one class set of books, so students were never able to take the book home and read outside of class. The teacher created an accompanying packet of materials that students were to complete during the reading of the novel. This packet included some materials from a commercially prepared novel unit including pages to get students familiar with the text, make predictions, investigate the geography of Florida, some free-writing prompts, a chapter-by-chapter study guide, story map, foreshadowing chart, a conflict and resolution chart, and a sociogram used for character analysis. During the observation period, students worked primarily on the study guide questions. In addition the students were given a research project in pairs to research an animal from the story and create a poster presentation. The table below illustrates student responses when asked about preferences for response activities in the classroom on a scale of 1-5 (1 highest).

Of the nine choices, book reports had the highest number of students expressing dislike for the activity, even more than tests. When that class had finished reading *Hoot*, they were surveyed for reactions to the activities. Surveys were open ended and students could write in what they chose, but we did brainstorm as a class and list all of the things we could think of that had been done in the unit. Items such as whole class discussion and small group discussion were on the brainstormed list, but no students used those ideas when writing in answers. As a celebration at the end of the reading, Mrs. M. brought in an electric griddle and supplies and served the students pancakes during the weekly vocabulary test in honor of Mother Paula’s Pancake House in the book. That was just before the survey was administered, so the results show Pancake day as a favorite.

There were three additional, ongoing assignments in the classroom: weekly vocabulary words targeted at improving functional vocabulary, weekly grammar lessons, and students were asked to read a self-selected novel outside of class and complete a monthly book report. The vocabulary and grammar were specifically targeted at improving skills for the achievement test. The teacher chose a genre each month (nonfiction, mystery/suspense, biography/autobiography, etc.) and provided a list of required questions for the actual report in a prepared template on the computer, but students were allowed freedom of choice for the material within the genre. The following table shows books chosen for the November nonfiction book report.
Nonfiction Book Titles Selected | # of responses
---|---
Reptile Titles *(Iguana, Chameleon, Gecko)* | 3
Dogs | 2
*The Munich Olympics* | 3
*Kids at Work* | 2
*School Smarts* | 4
*A Thousand Cranes* | 1
*The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* | 1
*Micigan Wolverines* | 1
*Mr. President* | 1
*No choice yet* | 2

All of these choices were made from the classroom library. In a related questionnaire, students expressed one of three reasons for choosing the book for this report as either the teacher recommended it, it was short, or it looked interesting. Not one student in the class made a selection from an outside source that reflected a personal interest.

**Discussion**

As I spent more time in this classroom, I realized that the findings in this study support other studies showing that often what we ask students to read and do with that reading material in school are geared more toward passage of statewide assessments and curriculum standards than toward what students actually prefer. While no student in the class expressed outright displeasure with the choice of *Hoot*, it was clear from survey data and interviews that students like to read a wider variety of materials than is provided in the classroom. Even when students are given choices in book reports, they often selected from the teacher’s classroom library basing decisions on teacher recommendations or choosing something based on length because it had to be read within a one month timeframe and meet the criteria of a specified genre for the required report.

Mrs. M. repeatedly expressed the feeling of pressure to perform on the state level achievement test. Vocabulary and grammar lessons were specifically targeted at that goal and following the study of *Hoot* instead of another novel, students would be moving into a test-taking unit and a dictionary unit to further prepare for the test. Worthy et al. (1998) found similar results in their study of self-selected reading, “When teachers are told, either explicitly or implicitly, that their major responsibility is to improve test scores, they may understandably be driven to spend precious class time in the option that leads to short-term results” (p.302). The seventh grade classroom in this study was part of an entire class that had failed to meet the state required 75% reading score on the previous year’s sixth grade reading proficiency test, scoring at a 63.8%. Overall the district had an “Effective” rating in the state scale ranging from excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch, or academic emergency, but has not met Adequate Yearly Progress as outlined in *No Child Left Behind*. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) also cite that “overwhelming pressure on teachers and schools to improve scores on high-stakes tests may subvert any efforts to make long-term foundational changes in middle school reading programs” (p. 68). In the classroom studied the message was clear to the teacher, students, and to me: There is a test coming and we are doing everything we can to prepare for it. When the pressure of the test has passed, the teacher then felt she will have time for her most interesting and fun unit of the year, one on chocolate.

Ivey and Broaddus (2000) describe similar situations in their observations of middle school language arts classroom as teachers teach “skills for taking comprehension tests, but also covering topics and content that appear on test passages as opposed to focusing on the kind of instruction that would lead students to becoming life-long independent readers” (p.76). The struggle in this classroom between these two dichotomous roles
The Choices or Reading Material and Response in One Seventh Grade Classroom

was apparent. The teacher wanted to expose students to what she considers good adolescent literature with a message that they can apply to living life as seventh graders, but another part of living that life is passing a test and she is obligated to success on that measure as well.

Limitations

This study of a single classroom does not allow us to generalize to other seventh grade language arts classrooms. Instead it gives a view of one situation with the intent of adding to the conversation another conception of how reading instruction in the middle grades can be a struggle between testing requirements and other curriculum needs. I was able to observe this classroom on a consistent two-day per week schedule for six weeks, so field notes and observations were limited to those days’ routine. Social desirability may also be a limiting factor when talking to both the teacher and the students. The students were promised confidentiality, but that doesn’t mean that they did not respond in some ways that they thought would be what I wanted to hear, seeing me as another teacher.

Implications

This study holds implications for both practice and further research. In terms of practice, this study examines one classroom as an example of the balance to be struck between teaching to enhance test performance and teaching for lifelong reading. We live in an era where teaching for test performance is a reality in nearly every classroom across the country. Teachers and administrators need to further examine practices and the resulting effect on student performance, not only on the standardized tests, but also as lifelong readers. Must these two ideas be mutually exclusive or can we increase scores on standardized tests while reading interesting and exciting pieces of literature and allowing students to discover and expand their personal interests and passion for reading? We live in an era of accountability and high stakes testing. For the foreseeable future that is not going to change. However, that should not mean that we sacrifice literary reading and creating lifelong readers for the sake of test scores. The Ohio Academic Content Standards (ODE, 2001) provides flexibility within the framework of benchmarks and indicators that allow for a variety of reading materials, methods of delivery, response activities, and student choices. We need more research to study classrooms in a variety of districts to create a more comprehensive picture of how teachers are struggling with and striking a balance between testing and teaching. We need to identify exemplary teachers who are creating motivated readers while excelling on the required tests, examine their practice, and create curriculum models for others to follow.

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The Case for Young Adult Literature

By Gary M. Salvner
Youngstown State University

Why would you want to spend your time, and your students’ time, with young adult novels? There are several reasons, actually.

First, YA novels—the best anyway—make for great reading. Taken together, the best young adult literature is dazzling, thought-provoking, affecting. Young readers (and we) meet adolescents in these books who are usually interesting, sometimes even riveting. Some are people we know—like ourselves, like friends or acquaintances. Some are people we’ve not met before, but we recognize them because they encounter conflicts we recognize, opportunities we understand. From Jerry Renault’s meditations on whether to “disturb the universe” in Robert Cormier’s The Chocolate War to Miles Halter’s struggles with identity and loss in John Green’s stunning 2005 Printz Award-winning novel Looking for Alaska, the YA protagonist is, often, an every-adolescent—trying to understand self and others, trying to adjust to (or challenge) the rules of the adult world.

Additionally, the best young adult novels take us to places we wish to visit, from Alaskan king salmon fishing grounds in Will Hobbs’ Leaving Protection, to the Cholistan Desert in Suzanne Fisher Staples’ Shabannu: Daughter of the Wind, to the magical Pern in Anne McCaffrey’s fantasy series, to a family farm in Northern Minnesota in Gary Paulsen’s comical Harris and Me, to the old West in Theodore Taylor’s Billy the Kid.

Young adult novels draw us in with great opening lines, like “They murdered him.” (p. 7) in The Chocolate War and this opener from Laurie Halse Anderson’s Speak: “It is my first morning of high school. I have seven new notebooks, a skirt I hate, and a stomachache.” (p. 3) After such openers, great YA titles draw us into many human emotions, inviting us to laugh (e.g., Gary Paulsen’s The Schernoff Discoveries), weep (Mildred Taylor’s Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry), wonder (David Almond’s Skellig), feel despair (Gary Soto’s Buried Onions), and fret about alternate worlds (Lois Lowry’s The Giver and M.T. Anderson’s Feed).

Yes, YA novels make for great reading.

Second, good YA books help teachers to satisfy Ohio’s academic content standards in reading literature. Curiously, some teachers I talk to believe quite the opposite, that Ohio’s standards prescribe a more traditional curriculum of the classics. Not so. Here, for example, are the eleventh grade “Reading Applications: Literary Text” standards from the Academic Content Standards: K-12 English Language Arts (slightly abbreviated for efficiency):

1. Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters confronting similar conflicts…
2. Analyze the historical, social, and cultural contexts of setting.
3. Explain how voice and narrator affect the characterization, plot and credibility.
4. Evaluate the author’s use of point of view in a literary text.
5. Analyze variations of universal themes in literary texts.
6. Recognize characteristics of subgenres, including satire, parody and allegory.
7. Analyze the characteristics of various literary periods.
8. Evaluate ways authors develop point of view and style to achieve specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes.

You’ll notice that there is no mention of specific titles here, nor are there in any Ohio grade-level standards—just references to literary elements and techniques, the understanding of which makes one a better reader of literature.

Young adult novels are efficient means for accomplishing these aims. In my chapter “Time and Tradition: Transforming the Secondary English Class with Young Adult Novels” (Reading Their World: The Young Adult Novel in the Classroom, pp. 85-99), I argue for the effectiveness and efficiency of young adult novels in accomplishing our traditional curricular goals—claiming, for example, that virtually all literary elements and techniques proposed for study in secondary schools can be introduced effectively with young adult novels. To exemplify this I discuss Paul Zindel’s The Pigman, proposing that its engaging characters, suspenseful plot, dual points of view, stylistic repetition, and treatment of powerful themes can reveal to young readers how a good novel is crafted and, thus, accomplish all of the standards named above.

A more contemporary example for accomplishing the same goals might be Gary D. Schmidt’s 2004 Newbery Honor Book Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy. Read this wonderful work, and you’ll immediately notice what can be learned about characterization through the deft, gradual development of the characters Turner Buckminster and Lizzie Bright Griffin; about the cultural and historical contexts that shape setting, in this case Malaga Island and the accompanying coastal town of Phillipsburg, Maine; about how subplots—here the stories of Mrs. Cobb and Mrs. Elia Hurd—enrich a novel; about how a skilled author can manipulate the tone of a good work so that we laugh at one moment, mourn at the next; and about the book’s startling treatment of the universal themes of racism and friendship. Finally, read only a single passage like this

“One afternoon, after another dreary Sunday, he walked home from Mrs. Cobb’s with the sea breeze determined to shove him to Malaga Island. It scooted around him and pulled at his ears. It threw up the dust of the road into his face to turn him around, and when he leaned into it, it suddenly let go and pushed him from behind, laughing” (100-101)

and you may immediately decide—as I have—that nearly everything I want secondary school students to appreciate about imagery and personification can be illustrated through this one, slim book.

Standard seven in the eleventh grade Ohio Standards poses that students learn to “analyze the characteristics of various literary periods.” Though YA works are largely contemporary, many can serve as portals for understanding other literary periods and authors. Any reader of Dickens is immensely informed by the works of Leon Garfield (e.g., Smith, Black Jack). Titles such as The Shakespeare Stealer by Gary Blackwood, Loving Will Shakespeare by Carolyn Meyer, and Othello by Julius Lester give students contexts for understanding Shakespeare. Will Hobbs’ Jason’s Gold contains a character named Jack London and recounts London’s actual experiences in the Alaskan gold rush, Kevin Crossley-Holland’s The Seeing Stone and its sequels re-cast Arthurian legend, and numerous works by Donna Jo Napoli (e.g., Crazy Jack, Zel) illuminate our oral tradition by retelling and extending famous folk tales.
(For a more complete introduction to how young adult novels might inform the classics, see Sarah K. Herz and Donald R. Gallo’s excellent From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics).

Third, and maybe counter-intuitively, we should encourage the use of young adult novels because they have the capacity to get us into trouble. There are probably two reasons why YA books are common lightning rods for censors. One is that they’re contemporary, exploring today’s issues. This means that YA novels take up issues like incest (Chris Crutcher’s Chinese Handcuffs), homosexuality (M.E. Kerr’s Deliver Us from Evie), and now even transgender experiences (Ellen Wittlinger’s Parrotfish). A second reason is that young adult books are written with teenagers in mind, and typically they seek to capture the voices of adolescents. So young people swear in YA novels occasionally, and they talk bluntly about issues that might make those of us from another age wince (e.g., oral sex in John Green’s Looking for Alaska or Ellen Wittlinger’s Sandpiper; high school sports brutality and steroid use in Robert Lipsyte’s Raiders Night).

Is school the place for such language and content? Well, maybe. I’m not, of course, recommending that teachers charge into the breach by recklessly forcing “dangerous” books on classes with no appreciation of the challenging circumstances in education today, but I am proposing that the causes of such possible controversy—authentic adolescent voices and honest treatment of difficult issues in YA novels—offer us opportunities.

In my experiences with the Youngstown State University English Festival, a university-school collaboration that encourages the reading of young adult novels, I’ve encountered censorship complaints based upon language, sex, violence, challenges to parent authority, negative views of schools or teachers, frightful events, deaths of animals (from animal rights groups, if you wondered), and either glorified or negative views of sports (Once I received both complaints from the same book). To some degree, controversy is endemic in what we do because good books explore what the world is like and what it might become, challenging readers to consider new ideas and experience.

I haven’t enjoyed any censorship confrontations, but most times I’ve been able to step back and look for the opportunities in them. Not all, but many, parents and community leaders are sincere in their concerns, and I am always willing to meet sincerity with sincerity. Young adult books containing hard language or hard questions invite conversation. They invite us to consider what a good book is and can do, what young people perceive and need, what schools and teachers are for. As YA novels reflect back (and sometimes reshape) young adult experience, they likewise reflect and reshape our view of the young, and in doing so they invoke the kind of sympathy and support that young people deserve. Encouraging the use of controversial young adult books requires some courage and more than a little imagination sometimes. But it also offers rich, honest exploration by our students, and it can result in students’ appreciation that books can, indeed, “tell the truth,” and that sometimes we, as advocates for those books, can as well.

Fourth and finally, we need to use more young adult novels because kids read them, and are changed. What can be more simple than that? This argument is best made with stories. Here’s one. A young woman of twelve, having read Harry Mazer’s The Last Mission, meets the author at a literary festival and asks him to sign her book—for her grandfather. She tells Mazer about reading this World War II story, being moved by it, and then giving it to her grandfather because he, too, served in that war. Days later, the grandfather gathers the family together and finally, for the first time, breaks that stolid soldier silence and tells them all, his family, what the war was like for him, its terrors and tragedies. “Put it ‘To William.’” This girl tells Mazer. “He’s my grandfather.”

Young women in a college young adult literature class—barely out of adolescence themselves—read Laurie Halse Anderson’s Speak and
are shattered by reliving their own rapes. Maybe some are also affirmed by Melinda Sordino finding her voice at the end of the story. A young man, in another YA lit class, reads Bette Greene's *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*, and during the class discussion becomes mightily agitated, finally announcing his homosexuality to all and explaining how he was treated in high school. Then he dashes out of the classroom. Days later, he comes back and rejoins a community of readers who give him an honest measure of understanding, acceptance, and support. The class has a new energy and honesty. No longer are these students the usual school-savvy performers or passive listeners. They look at one another as they talk.

Young African-American women, dozens of them, see Jacqueline Woodson after an author presentation and simply cannot leave her alone. Now Woodson is a pretty famous writer, but this isn’t a rock star, after all. What’s going on? Can it be that her books have affirmed their young identities, captured their young experiences, caressed and filled their young hearts with hope, hurt, longing?

And almost forty years ago, a very young and very naïve white teacher in urban St. Louis, Missouri—wholly unable to reach his five classes of thirty-five African-American seventh and eighth graders each, finds one day a ragged book in a desk, Frank Bonham’s *Durango Street*, and then finds another in a student notebook, Robert Lipsyte’s *The Contender*, and his students, aided by the books, teach him about their world. Two neighborhood heroes—the fighting brothers Leon and Michael Spinks, who will soon receive fame—are these students’ real-life contenders, and these young people find, in the books, an affirmation of, an appreciation for, their own world. It is the young teacher who becomes the student.

The ultimate, resounding case for young adult literature is that it can, and does, affirm, challenge, promise, provoke, expand, explore, remake, explain, move, and sustain our young. And maybe us, as well.

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### References


The Case for Young Adult Literature


**Dr. Gary Salvner** is Chair of the English Department at Youngstown State University where he is also the Co-Chair of the Youngstown State University English Festival. He has authored or co-authored several books on young adult literature and is the Executive Secretary of the Assembly on Literature for Young Adults of NCTE (ALAN) as well as a Past-President.
Effective early childhood instruction does not happen by chance; it takes careful and thoughtful planning. To ensure that all children in Ohio enter kindergarten ready to learn, the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Service have collaborated to develop Ohio’s Early Learning Content Standards (ELCS) in English Language Arts. As young children develop their literacy skills, exposure to good literature supports their intellect, imagination, and language development. The purpose of this article is to describe a project completed by early childhood teacher licensure candidates in an undergraduate field-based curriculum course to support children’s early learning. Beginning with observation and assessment of children’s interests and needs, candidates select a children’s picture book, plan content-rich learning experiences, and develop props which support creative play; encourage oral language development; foster cognitive engagement; and teach concepts of print. Candidates gain confidence and competence in designing appropriate integrated learning experiences for young children.

Imagination 2 Go: Supporting Intellectual Integrity

Sarah, a third year early childhood teacher licensure candidate, submitted a lesson plan for an experience that she intended to introduce to kindergarten children. She planned to read a story about a baby bird and have the children color a line drawing of a baby bird breaking through a shell. To complete their picture, she planned for the children to paste different colored shell fragments to the page. She wanted to make sure that the project would be sent home with the children at the end of the day “so the family could see what the child was learning at school.” In preparation for the lesson, she planned to dye several dozen eggs the night before the lesson “to make it easier and give the children a choice of color to make their picture.” When I asked Sarah to reflect on the content and teaching strategies in her plan, she responded by saying the lesson was “hands-on,” and she thought that the children would have fun pasting the egg shells. I had several reactions to Sarah’s response, the first of which was, “But, what did the children learn as a result of the experience or how did the experience maximize opportunities for oral and print language development?”

The lesson itself was neither horrible nor harmful, and one could say it provided opportunities for the children to use fine motor skills as they peeled and pasted the egg shells. Nonetheless, the lesson was a series of missed opportunities for the children to use language, build vocabulary, develop concepts of print, compare and contrast size, shape, texture, color and count. Furthermore, the children missed opportunities to develop important pro-social behaviors such as sharing, taking...
turns, and listening to others. In the final analysis, was the activity worth doing? How can I support pre-service teachers as they learn to plan curriculum with “intellectual integrity” relevant to the knowledge base of the disciple and worth knowing (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992)?

Sharing good literature with young children challenges their intellect, inspires their imagination and nurtures their desire to read (Fisher, Flood & Lapp, 1999). Furthermore, literacy competence opens the door for all other academic learning for preschool and kindergarten children (Casey & Sheran, 2004). In a comprehensive literacy program, early childhood teachers must implement both evidence-based reading research (EBRR) instruction and emergent literacy experiences focusing on the social and meaning-based aspects of literacy (Vukelich & Christie, 2004).

The Imagination 2 Go Project described in this article was developed to help early childhood teacher candidates learn to design language rich, developmentally appropriate, and intellectually stimulating experiences for young children.

In a comprehensive literacy program, early childhood teachers must implement both evidence-based reading research (EBRR) instruction and emergent literacy experiences focusing on the social and meaning-based aspects of literacy.

Literacy Development is Dynamic

The International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children agree that all “teachers of young children, whether employed in preschools, child care programs or elementary schools have a responsibility to promote children’s literacy development…” (NAEYC/IRA, 1998, p. 38). Regardless of the instructional approach, most successful preschool curricula focus intensely on developing children’s language use and skills (Mead, 2004). Reading and writing skills provide a critical foundation for a child’s academic success (Bredekamp & Rosengrant, 1998). Furthermore, language and reading provide a portal to much of the learning that children do throughout their lives. Children who read well often read more and, therefore, acquire more knowledge in other domains. The children who lag behind in their reading skills, miss opportunities to develop reading comprehension strategies, often encounter reading material that is too advanced for their skills and acquire negative attitudes about reading itself (Whitehurst, 2001).

Literacy development in its earliest phase is a dynamic process of forming reading and writing concepts and skills (National Research Council, 1998, 2000). Children need developmentally appropriate experiences and instruction to support literacy learning. These should include positive and nurturing relationships with adults, who engage in conversations, print rich environments, daily reading of high-quality books, opportunities to engage in play that incorporates literacy tools and firsthand experiences that expand children’s vocabulary (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Children’s exploration, manipulation of objects, and dramatic play make critical contributions to children’s literacy development (Neuman & Roskos, 1992, 1993). Play allows children to express and represent their new knowledge, making it their own. “Developing a strong foundation for literacy does not just happen. Instead, early childhood educators must thoughtfully and purposefully interact with children and plan experiences that support emerging literacy” (Ohio Department of Education, 2004, p.11). Learning to read and write for young children is embedded in a larger developing system of communication; “young children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing and they need oral language to help them learn about both” (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003, p. 54).

Curriculum Development

Literature enriches the child’s life and plays a vital role in curriculum development. Teachers promote development when they create learning
experiences that build on and extend the child’s competence. These experiences must be challenging, but achievable. Dewey (1963) suggests that learning is fostered by experiences grounded in children’s firsthand knowledge and to be educative the experience must lead to expanding knowledge of subject-matter facts and ideas. Children’s literature supports cognitive development by encouraging children to exchange ideas and develop their thinking skills as they observe, compare, sort, sequence, summarize and evaluate information. Furthermore, standards-based early literacy programs provide the foundation for the academic success of at-risk preschool children during their elementary school years (Dickinson & Neuman, 2005; McCardle, Scarborough & Catts, 2001).

Interactive, shared storybook reading can positively impact the child’s emergent literacy knowledge (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). As children engage in storybook reading, they begin to understand that letters form words, and words on the page have meaning as the story unfolds (Goodman, 1986). The key to successful literacy experiences is first hand, personal involvement of the children in an active learning experience interacting with story (Orlando, 2005).

Experiences with content-rich literature help children build an understanding of ideas and connect new learning to what they already know (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Teachers facilitate learning by encouraging active inquiry, guiding learners to question their tacit assumptions and coaching them through the knowledge construction process (Kerka, 1997). Informational books or nonfiction books enrich children’s background information, help them explore new ideas and stimulate interest in a topic. However, fewer than 15% of shared reading experiences in early childhood classrooms include non-fiction texts (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). The challenge for preschool educators is to develop classroom experiences that support acquisition of knowledge and development of skills in all domains while engaging and developing children’s interests and abilities.

Imagination 2 Go Project

The Imagination 2 Go Project was a collection of planned experiences and props designed to support creative play, foster development of the whole child, and align to the state’s ELCS. To support children’s social and emotional development, the experiences intentionally provided opportunities for social interaction, appreciation of diversity, and respect for the environment. To support physical development, experiences challenged gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. To support creative development, the candidates designed process oriented arts experiences and creative drama scenarios with authentic props and costumes. Children’s cognitive development was challenged by problem-solving games, auditory and visual perception or memory activities, inquiries and experiments. Language development was encouraged throughout the project with finger plays, songs, guided reading, informational texts and writing experiences.

History of the Project

For the past several years, I have taught a field-based early childhood curriculum course to undergraduate students at the University of Akron. The course is designed for candidates to learn to develop and deliver appropriate curriculum for preschool children with an emphasis on authentic assessment, child-centered instruction, developmentally appropriate practice and Ohio’s Early Learning Content Standards. Candidates complete 33 hours of field experience working with children in a preschool or kindergarten setting.

At the beginning of the semester, candidates completed a semi-structured observation/interview with cooperating teachers to collect information about the students, curriculum, class policies and teaching practices. Cooperating teachers indicated that “state standards, pre-k academic content standards, or Head Start Standards” influenced their curriculum planning. One teacher indicated that she felt the standards were “common sense,” and that she “has been doing what the standards
say for years.” In several instances, cooperating teachers indicated that although they did not intentionally align each lesson with standards, they were “sure that all the standards are hit throughout the program.” Anecdotal information from candidates’ class discussions, site visits, and planning documents indicated, however, that teachers were often spending time in “craft-like” tasks with little intellectual engagement. In addition, candidates’ field journals documented free play time was often shortened or canceled completely to make time for isolated phonics, alphabet or number “skills and drills.” The Imagination 2 Go Project was designed to help pre-service teacher candidates learn to develop curriculum for young children that is intellectually challenging, developmentally appropriate and aligned to Early Learning Content Standards.

Candidate Reaction to the Project

Each candidate implemented at least two planned experiences from this project planner. At the end of the semester, the candidates participated in a colloquium during which each candidate showcased their project. The colloquium provided a context for candidates to exchange ideas and provide each other with professional feedback. Furthermore, the candidates had an opportunity to engage in guided personal and professional self-reflection as they described the successes and challenges of their work.

Data were collected over two semesters between May 2006 and December 2006. At the end of each semester, candidates were asked to reflect on the project as a whole. They identified the strengths of the assignment and made recommendations for the future. All comments were submitted anonymously. Comments from candidates were generally positive, such as, “It was a great idea!”; “Although it was time consuming to make, it was worth using in the field”; “Great project, fun, gained a lot of new ideas, pulled everything together, and something I will use in the future.” One candidate suggested that her project was “challenging and exciting throughout the entire process.” Another said, “I learned valuable insights into my own abilities and the project made me aware of how to think like an educator. This project is a true representation of thinking and behaving as a teacher should.”

One candidate recognized that learning to teach is a developmental process: “Make sure to have taken all of the prereq courses, because
background knowledge from these is really helpful in applying to this class.” Several candidates suggested the project supported collaboration with the cooperating teacher. “She will guide you through the lesson and give you ideas and suggestions, when needed.” Finally, a perceptive candidate suggested, “Make sure to put a lot of planning into lesson plans/activities and think about types of higher level questions to incorporate. I learned that communication with preschoolers is key!”

The project was designed to be flexible enough for candidates to use in student teaching. One student teacher noted, “I used it in my student teaching and the students enjoyed it even though they were in third grade.” Several student teachers said they would use the project in the future: “I haven’t used it yet, but definitely plan to use it when I have my own class.”

Conclusion and Implication
Learning to read and write are among the most important and powerful achievements in life. Preservice teacher candidates recognize that learning to read and write is critical to a child’s success in school and later in life. As an integrated, authentic planning experience, the Imagination 2 Go Project encourages candidates to utilize resources, materials, skills, and knowledge from a variety of sources; fosters a disposition for collaboration; nurtures cognitive engagement and problem-solving; supports developmentally appropriate standards-based instruction; promotes collegiality with meaningful peer feedback and provides for professional growth with guided self-reflection. Additionally, the project provides the candidates with flexible and well designed experiences, materials, props, songs, poems, finger plays, and games that could be used with confidence to springboard effective learning experiences in future teaching situations.

Effective early literacy instruction does not just happen by chance; it takes careful and thoughtful planning. It depends on teachers who are highly skilled, adaptive and responsive. They must have working knowledge of how reading and writing are learned, of how to determine the needs and strengths of individual students, and of what to do next to support student learning. Although a few candidates are still writing lesson plans like Sarah’s, most are more insightful in their planning. The Imagination 2 Go Planner helped candidates focus attention on the content and purpose of the planned experience, as well as on the appropriate strategies to assess students’ learning. Candidates were forced to think through the impact of instruction on all developmental domains before the instruction was implemented. As candidates completed the Imagination 2 Go Project, they gained confidence and competence in designing early learning experiences with intellectual integrity. Confidence was seen in their ability to synthesize knowledge from a variety of sources as demonstrated in the intellectually challenging experiences they planned reflecting knowledge of child development, current research, and core concepts of the discipline. Their competence was demonstrated in their ability to utilize developmentally appropriate practices and to support instructional experiences with Ohio’s Early Learning Content Standards.
Appendix A

Name: ___________________________ Date: __________________

Book Citation: ____________________________________________________________

The following *Imagination 2 Go Planner* is an expandable organizer to use for planning. It is a working document that you will revisit throughout this course.

### Long-Range Planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Project Description: Learning Goals—What knowledge, skills, dispositions or feelings are the focus of this experience?</th>
<th>Standard—What ODE Early Learning Standards &amp; Indicators support this experience</th>
<th>Project Outcomes: What are cognitive (concepts or knowledge), psychomotor (skill), dispositions (habits or tendencies i.e. curiosity, friendliness creativity); feelings (competence, confidence, security, sense of belonging) outcomes for this project?</th>
<th>Activity—Describe grouping, procedures and materials</th>
<th>Assessment Strategy—How will you determine level of mastery/understanding?</th>
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<td>Physical Development</td>
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<td>Project Considerations</td>
<td>What interests did the children display that could springboard other experiences or inquiries? What would you do next in response to their interest(s)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>APA 5.0 STYLE Resources</td>
<td>What resources can be utilized to assist learners (texts, trade book, picture files, websites etc.) and to increase your knowledge of the content? Include narrative and informational text resources..</td>
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References


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Ohio Journal of English Language Arts 67
Visiting “Faraway” Places with International Children’s Books

Visiting “faraway” places is a theme in many children’s books. In the picture book, *Miss Rumphius* (1982), by award-winning author/illustrator Barbara Cooney, young Alice listens to her grandfather’s “stories of faraway places” and tells him: “When I grow up, I too will go to faraway places.” Similarly, Gloria Houston in the biographical picture book, *My Great-Aunt Arizona* (1992), recounts the life of her great-aunt who taught elementary school for 57 years. She describes how her great-aunt “taught students about words and numbers and the faraway places they would visit someday.” Children, too, can visit those faraway places. They can do this by reading international children’s literature.

Multiple points of view have described what kinds of books should be included as international children’s literature. For purposes here, international literature will be considered “books written and published first in countries other than the United States (both in English and in translation), books written by immigrants to the United States about their home countries and published in the United States, books written by authors from countries other than the United States, and books written by American authors and published in the United States with settings in other countries” (Freeman and Lehman, 2001, p. 10). The key commonality among these books is their focus on a global setting and perspective.

The importance of international children’s literature in today’s world is evident. On the one hand, we have a global economy, international organizations working together for mutual benefit in such areas as health and the environment, an increase in international travel and the number of college students studying abroad, and the sharing of ideas, culture, and art among people around the world. Technology and advanced communications link us to all corners of the globe. On the other hand, we have daily reminders of war, disease, poverty, and conflict due to race, religion, and ethnicity. For more than 50 years, children’s literature has been considered a valuable means to promote world understanding and peace.

The international children’s book movement began with Jella Lepman, a German Jew who left her native country to become a British citizen during the Hitler regime. She founded the International Youth Library, located in Munich, in 1948, and the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 1953. Based in Switzerland, IBBY boasts a current membership of 70 national sections from around the globe. The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) is a non-profit organization, representing an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together. Its mission is to: “promote international understanding through children’s books; give children everywhere the
opportunity to have access to books with high literary and artistic standards; encourage the publication and distribution of quality children's books, especially in developing countries; provide support and training for those involved with children and children's literature; and stimulate research and scholarly works in the field of children's literature” (www.ibby.org). IBBY sponsors the Hans Christian Andersen Award, considered the “Nobel Prize” for children's literature authors and illustrators. International authors Astrid Lindgren, Mitsumasa Anno, and Anthony Browne have received this honor, as well as Americans Maurice Sendak, Katherine Paterson, and Virginia Hamilton. The United States has an active section of IBBY (www.usbby.org).

In the United States, librarian Mildred L. Batchelder was a driving force in bringing books published outside the United States to this country. The American Library Association has recognized the importance of books in translation since 1966 when it created the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, presented annually to an American publisher for a children's book considered to be the most outstanding book that year originally published in a foreign language in a country other than the U.S., then translated into English, and published in the U.S. Some award recipients have included The Thief Lord (Funke, 2002), The Boys from St. Petri (Reuter, 1994), and The Island on Bird Street (Orlev, 1984), now in a film version.

The benefits of international literature for children are all encompassing and relate to children's social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development, to specific curriculum connections, and to fostering social justice. Many of the most loved characters in children's literature are from international books—Pippi Longstocking, Pinocchio, Charlie and his chocolate factory, and Heidi. By reading stories from other countries, children are linked to their peers around the world and recognize the similarities that bind all people together. Hazel Rochman (1993), who grew up during Apartheid in South Africa, writes that: “Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community …[Stories] enrich us and connect us and help us know each other.” (p. 19). A book that emphasizes the similarities among children, as well as their unique cultural differences, is Wake Up World! A Day in the Life of Children Around the World (Hollyer, 1999), a photoessay that transports readers to eight different countries to see children eating, sleeping, learning, and playing.

Reading international books can also foster empathy development, the appreciation for differences, and critical thinking. In addition, these books support language and literacy development as children recognize the distinctive sounds and vocabulary of other languages. They become exposed to the beauty of language—its rhythms and images. Books by Australian author Mem Fox are conducive to reading aloud in primary grades and include vocabulary and expressions characteristic of the English spoken in Australia. From color photographs in informational books to paintings and other kinds of media, illustrations help establish the setting of the book, reveal aspects of daily life of a culture, and reflect various cultural conventions. Children's visual literacy is enhanced and supported. In the photo-essay, Here Comes the Bride! An African Wedding Story (Oneyfulu, 2004), color photographs provide children insight into the universal practice of marriage as it occurs in Nigeria. Children gain information and insight into Nigerian life through careful observation of the photographs.

International books can have specific curricular connections. For instance, when teaching about elections and the voting process, teachers could share The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Sisulu, 1999) about the first election to include the black population in South Africa. This book, well-known in South Africa, demonstrates the universal importance of voting and the democracy. International books are related to social studies, science, and current events. For instance, to help children gain a context for the situation in Afghanistan, they can read The Breadwinner (Ellis, 2001), the story about 11 year old Parvana.
living under the Taliban. International books can support integrated themes of study, global education, multicultural education, and Holocaust education. Books about the Holocaust have been written for all age ranges and represent varied perspectives and countries. *I Am David* (Holm, 2004), a reissue of a book that was first published in 1965, is about a 12-year-old boy who escapes from a concentration camp and makes his way to Denmark. It recently was made into a feature film. Children can compare David’s experience to that of 12-year-old Eva, who lives in Holland, and goes into hiding during the German occupation in *The Key is Lost* (Vos, 2000).

As a child, I remember enjoying the song “Faraway Places” and feel most fortunate that I have been able to visit many places outside the United States. As a teacher educator, I try to bring those places and their children’s books, into the courses I teach for preservice and inservice teachers. I hope that the teachers, whose lives I touch, will then share international books with their students. Children’s literature has the power to transport readers to those faraway places and open the global community to them. We can all contribute to Jella Lepman’s vision that books can serve as “messengers of peace” (2002, p. 36), and a bridge to understanding among children of the world.

References


Children’s Books Cited


Dr. Evelyn B. Freeman is the Dean of The Ohio State University Mansfield Campus and is Executive Dean of all The Ohio State University’s regional campuses. A former OCTELA President, Dr. Freeman currently serves as Co-editor of *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature*, the official publication of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).
By Virginia Monseau
Youngstown State University, Professor Emerita

No Fear Cormier

How many of you OJELA readers use Robert Cormier’s works in your classes? (Show of hands.) Just wondering. Over the years I’ve talked with many middle school and high school teachers who include either a novel or short story by Cormier in their curricula, but I’ve also spoken with many who are reluctant to approach Cormier’s work with their students. The reasons are various: fears of censorship, an already overloaded curriculum, concern about fulfilling state and national standards—even a personal dislike of Cormier’s books.

While anyone who knows me knows that I’m a big fan of Robert Cormier’s writing, I do understand that we all have different literary tastes, so I would never disparage anyone who prefers not to read Cormier. Whether our personal tastes should influence the literature we introduce to our students, however, is another question. Let’s talk about that a bit.

I guess first we might ask ourselves how much we love the works we’re already teaching. If we’re including some of the classic British writers in our curriculum such as Dickens, Chaucer, and, of course, Shakespeare—and even classic American writers like Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner—when have we last put any of these authors on our “pleasure reading” list? Do we take Dickens and Faulkner to the beach or under a shady tree? Ah, yes, I know. We’ve already read these works numerous times; now it’s time for our students to be indoctrinated. But have we read the books for pleasure, or because they were assigned to us? Just asking.

What might happen if we let our students read a book we don’t personally care for? If we’re adept at keeping our feelings to ourselves when assigning and discussing the book (very hard, I know), could we be open-minded enough to really listen to what our students have to say? Chances are that some may enjoy reading Cormier’s work, while others may not. What an exciting start for class discussion!

Differing opinions on Cormier’s work can even help us address some of the standards we’re concerned about. Oral skills might be enhanced through a spirited debate about the pros and cons of the work’s literary and/or sociological value. Research skills may be strengthened by a contest between small groups to see who can learn the most about Cormier and his other works. Writing skills, as well as interpretive skills, may be sharpened through argumentative or persuasive essays designed to convince the other side that a particular Cormier work is “good literature” or not.

But how do we make room for Cormier in an already overcrowded curriculum? By finding ways to fulfill standards through studying his works, first of all. Would it be heresy to substitute a Cormier novel for one by another American author just once? If we get good results, we may want to revise our curriculum a bit—not by adding,
but by substituting. My hunch is that students will be a lot more excited about reading *After the First Death* than *As I Lay Dying*. Not that there’s anything wrong with the latter. (It happens to be one of my favorite Faulkner works.) It’s just a way to give a more contemporary American author a chance—and let students know that twenty-first century American authors do exist, and that literature is a living, breathing thing capable of exciting our senses and expanding our reading.

But, still, we have the censorship thing. As many of us are aware, almost all of Robert Cormier’s books have been censored by one group or another over the years. In fact, the author traveled the country in support of teachers who were reading his works with their students and who were encountering criticism from parents and administrators. Complaints ranged from lack of proper adult role models and lack of respect for authority, to mention of bodily functions, to a sense of hopelessness in his books. The complaints almost always came from adults—not from the young people reading the books. Still, censorship is a very real fear among teachers, with good reason. In some cases jobs have been lost and reputations ruined when teachers have taken a stand. Censorship is serious business, and we all need help dealing with it. In addition to learning how to write effective rationales for books we ask our students to read, we can also find help from the National Council of Teachers of English and other anti-censorship groups around the country. A good Internet search should help in that regard.

So how many of you might be willing to give Cormier a chance, if you’re not doing so already? Ah…more hands than last time. So where do we start? Just thinking.

*Virginia Monseau* is a Professor Emerita of English at Youngstown State University. She recently published *Teaching the Selected Works of Robert Cormier*.
January of 1977 marked the beginning of my teaching career and nearly ended it as well. I was living in Elyria and accepted a long-term sub position to fill in for a teacher who was taking maternity leave. I did not realize it until years later, but taking that class in the middle of the year taught me one of the most important and enduring lessons I would ever learn: the importance of building community in the classroom. Those six months were an unmitigated disaster, and it's still painful to think about, so I will pick up the story with my second job in Chillicothe. I entered the classroom that September bound and determined to prove to myself that I was not yet ready to start looking for another profession. I put all the lessons to use that I had learned the previous year, took my mother's advice (also an English teacher), and did not smile until Christmas. I did, however, pay attention to one instinct of genius. I remembered my fourth grade teacher, Judy Watts, reading Laura Ingalls Wilder every day, and I recalled how much I looked forward to that as a student in her classroom. So I brought my copy of *Watership Down* to class and began reading it aloud to my students the last 20 minutes of every day. The rule was that everyone had to have book bags packed up, desktops cleared, and everything ready to go home. Then I would take the book from the corner of my desk and begin reading.

Early on, it was simply a matter of reading aloud to my kids, but as time went on, I began to realize that we were creating a world together in that classroom, and our shared world revolved around that book. I saw rabbits pop up as illustrations in corners of papers that were turned in. Rabbit ears adorned the date whenever possible. I overheard conversations during lunch that included references to Fiver, Hazel, and Blackberry. Sixth graders began to understand the implications of the term “Bigwig.” I watched, intrigued, as students became interested in the impact of development in their relatively rural area. Earth Day 1978 became a day for us to get together and walk about our downtown area picking up trash. We all became learners that year, and I began to realize the impact that book had on me as a teacher and learner. Thirty years later, as I continue my life as a teacher, I understand how critical it is to be a learner if you want to be a teacher. I cannot count the times I have heard teachers say that they became an educator because they love to teach. I used to say the same thing. I have since come to realize that I became a teacher because I love learning.

My learning has taken the conventional path at times. I have always attended professional development activities with an open mind, and my current superintendent kids me about how I always come back from conferences and workshops “fired up” about this idea or that theory. I suppose
I am a Teacher

I do, but it is only because I so enjoy the act of learning. As I have continued my own learning, I have become an educational consultant, providing workshops on such topics as higher order thinking skills, the writing process, National Board Certification, and, most recently, SIRI, State Institute for Reading Instruction, training for the state of Ohio. I can think of little that is more inspiring to me than working with other teachers in this capacity. The workshops that I conduct, whether in a weekend, across several weeks, or yearlong, never fail to provide me with fresh learning experiences. For me, it is very much akin to looking through a kaleidoscope. Together with other teachers, we hold up the instrument to our eyes. Contained within are similarly colored fragments—similar kids, similar working conditions—but once we begin to collaborate as professionals, we get a fresh perspective each and every time we turn the end of the kaleidoscope. This is how teaching is for me, and it is what keeps me coming back year after year, ready to begin anew, to create a world for a year.

Reading Watership Down aloud almost proved impossible. By the time the school year was drawing to a close, we still had quite a bit of the book to cover. We lengthened the reading time to 30 minutes at the end of each day, but we still had three chapters to go on the very last day of school. We had quite a list of chores to accomplish on that day, too. Newspaper had to be applied to bulletin boards. Books had to be counted and shelved. Desks had to be washed. I made a list, taped it to the blackboard, and told the kids that it all had to be done before we could read. We worked together and got it all done with 55 minutes to spare. Could we do it? We were going to try.

It was a sunny day in May, and blue skies of summer beckoned, but I looked down at 36 pairs of expectant and excited eyes before me. I began to read. Time passed much too quickly. The first bell rang to tell us to get ready for dismissal in ten minutes. Anxiously the students urged me on. They simply had to hear the end of the book. Only a few more pages. The second bell rang to tell us to line up. No one moved. Several students said they were not going anywhere until that book was done! Outside at the curb, parents waited in cars, buses idled, the faint smell of diesel exhaust floated into the open windows. As I glanced up at the classroom, I couldn’t help but think of the previous year when neither the students nor I could wait to close the door on the classroom. Here they sat, refusing to move—though swimming pools waited for joyful shouts and splashes, though bikes stood at the ready, fresh streamers hanging from handlebars, awaiting the wind to grab them and glide into summer, though leafy trees and summer breezes called us all—we were putting the finishing touches on our year of learning. Sister Mary William came down to my classroom to see what the holdup was. As I read the final words and closed the book, several of my students came up and hugged me, wished me a happy summer, and then walked out into the beauty of summer vacation. When the last footstep echoed down the hall, I looked around at my classroom, and I knew that I would want this feeling forever. I had finally learned what it meant to be a teacher.

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Children’s and Young Adult Literature

Submitted by Margaret L. Blevins

In the forward to James Marshall’s *George and Martha: The Complete Stories of Two Best Friends*, Maurice Sendak writes, “The picture book is a peculiar art form that thrives on genius, intuition, daring, and a meticulous attention to its history and its various, complex components. The picture book is a picture puzzle, badly misunderstood by critics and condescended to by far too many as merely a trifle for ‘the kiddies’” (qtd. in Culham 8).

I agree with Sendak, but I have found that students in grades 7-12 enjoy picture books if they are presented in an appropriate way. I teach in a high school setting. I have spent the last thirty-two years teaching grades 9-12 in Adams County, Ohio. Before that, I taught grades 7-8 in Crawford and Marion counties in Ohio. This experience has taught me that no one is too old, too advanced, or too mature to enjoy and profit from the bountiful table of learning that children’s books provide. I enjoy them, most of my colleagues enjoy them, my own biological children enjoy them, and so do my students. I use them in workshops for grown ups and I use them regularly in my units of study at the high school level.

Picture books enrich the learning experiences of middle and high school students whose interests, experiences, homes, and skill levels are as varied as the sights, sounds, and smells at the Ohio State Fair. Although they often have big physical bodies, their cognitive development falls on various rungs of the developmental ladder. My students, like most others, are expected to meet the same learning goals and even cover the same material, but they cannot all read the same books. I have found that most textbooks have reading levels far above that of many of my students. Picture books enrich learning for my students by providing combinations of the following:

1. A nostalgic but meaningful visit to the days and experiences of yore.
2. Interesting and fun examples of various textual techniques.
3. Entertaining examples of concise, controlled language that fits the audience.
4. Fun examples of various communication forms.
5. Enticing springboards for student writing.
6. Professional examples of the various modes of writing.
7. Examples of artistic techniques for poetry and the visual arts.
8. Examples of how art and words can complement each other.
9. An alternative avenue of experience to the word.
10. An important resource to help students learn to visualize texts.
11. The same texts in a variety of forms and by various authors.
12. Supplemental and background knowledge on various characters, settings, and events.
13. A fun, colorful, aesthetic, comfortable scaffold on which to build learning.
15. A means by which limited readers can keep up and not be left behind.

In high school, I cover units that include Beowulf, Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey, selections from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Valmiki’s The Ramayana, Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur, and any number of works by Shakespeare. I ask my county librarians to request, via interlibrary loan, as many children’s books on these works as possible. Since these works are from historical periods completely foreign to my students, I also request reference books about the periods of history to which these works belong. This is necessary for scaffolding. Even the students who can and do read the textbook selections can be seen reading the versions found in children’s books. Most high school males are especially prone to read the children’s selections because the selections “cut to the chase.” Many of my students have other things to do; they have jobs and some are self-supporting. They want the facts right now so they can meet the requirements for graduation and “get on with it.”

When I teach George Orwell’s Animal Farm and the elements of propaganda and persuasion, I always include James Clavell’s The Children’s Story. All my students remember their K-2 days and the faces of teachers associated with those years. They remember how special those early teachers seemed and how much they wanted to please them. Most of them are quite appalled by how easily Clavell’s teacher can destroy so many of our basic American values—respect for parents, God, and country—in just 30 minutes.

For units on The Holocaust, World War II, and The Great Depression, I include books like Let the Celebrations BEGIN! by Margaret Wild, So Far from the Sea by Eve Bunting, and Rose’s Journal: The Story of a Girl in the Great Depression by Marissa Moss, respectively. My list could go on and on, but that is not the purpose of this column.

“The educational values of picture books,” write Susan Benedict and Lenore Carlisle in Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers, “go beyond content. Hearing and reading picture books, thinking about and working with them, can help children become better readers and writers” (qtd. in Culham 126). And, that is why I use children’s books. I want all my students to become better readers and writers.

Though often caught in the middle of children’s literature and novels written for adults, Young Adult (YA) literature has found a home in middle and high school classrooms. Young adult books provide excellent bibliotherapy. Students have so many problems, and I am not expert help for all their needs! The right book by the right author, however, can serve as a private source of support, introspection, and reflection, as long as the teacher talks with the student about the book. I do not recommend a book to a troubled teen unless I provide discussion or talk time as a follow up. Today, YA literature provides such variety in subject matter, reading levels, and interest levels that there always seem to be a right book for the right reader at the right time. We just have to look for it. The biggest problem is making sure that a recommended book won’t grossly offend parents and caretakers. YA selections introduce teens to mature subjects, inform them, and provide them safe vicarious experiences into somewhat dangerous explorations. Most titles are school-appropriate, but some parents are not ready for their teens to grow up and learn about “adult subjects and language.”

I have found success with the works of Chris Crutcher because he “tells it like it is.” Most older teens, especially boys, prefer that. His Athletic Shorts and Ironman are always in my reading tubs. I have found Gary Paulsen to be very popular with the freshman boys. I also recommend the works of Walter Dean Myers, Sharon Draper, Richard Peck, and numerous other authors for the general readers. I place a particular book in the hands of a general student only when there is a special need. I encourage my students to find their own choices for independent reading. One book that I do recommend that all students in high school read at least once is Elie Wiesel’s Night; I keep eight to ten copies in my nonfiction reading tub. Students fall for it because it appears to be a quick, easy
read, but I have yet to find one student who does not finish Night and want to talk about it. I also keep on hand copies of Julie Alveraez’s Before We Were Free, Allan Rune Pettersson’s Frankenstein’s Aunt, and Kathryn Lasky’s The Night Journal.

Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers credits Thomas Newkirk for saying: “We need to consider picture books as literature—not children’s literature—but as literature” (qtd. in Culham 12). I would add that we need to do the same for Young Adult literature. Much of it is just as good or better that some selections we find in the canon.

Reference:

Reaching Reading Goals with YA Lit Reading Groups
Submitted by Gina Cardillo

The students in grades 9-12 who enter my semester young adult literature course do so with great enthusiasm, yet they are unsure of exactly what types of books they will be reading. When we first discuss the true definition of YAL and their experiences with this genre, my students praise the change from the “classics” they usually study in English class.

In order to demonstrate the relevance and timelessness of theme, I use a panel discussion assignment. Four students are required to work in a group with a focus on a common theme of their choice. Some examples of themes often found in YAL include fitting-in, guilt, pressure, divorce, rape, abuse, violence, and death.

Upon selecting their approved theme, the students must research and choose one book to read for each of the following categories of books that demonstrate their theme: multicultural, historical, contemporary, and classic. Although the students must complete the research, the teacher should guide and approve all book selections in order to ensure their appropriateness. Each student in the group must read all four books in order to complete the assignment with success.

Using any of a variety of creative mediums, the students must present a discussion on their chosen theme. The students should be able to illustrate the timelessness and universality of their theme through these genres and make connections between the texts. One example of this would be the theme of teenage love and/or infatuation:

Multicultural: If You Come Softly by Jacqueline Woodson
Historical: Second Bend in the River by Ann Rinaldi
Contemporary: Tenderness by Robert Cormier
Classic: Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Another example would be the theme of tolerance/diversity:

Multicultural: The Watsons Go to Birmingham by Christopher Paul Curtis
Historical: Night by Elie Wiesel
Contemporary: Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher
Classic: To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

With this assignment, the possibilities are endless. Even if two groups choose the same theme, their book selections can be completely different.

Each individual student must also submit a comparison/contrast essay that examines the similarities and differences of these books with a focus on the emergence of the common theme. Not only is YAL an excellent way to bridge the classics, it also helps students to develop their reading and writing skills while providing them with a forum to address many of the difficult issues they face as teenagers today.

Gina Cardillo teaches English at Austintown Fitch High School.
The Power and Promise of Poetry Outings
Submitted by Linda J. Rice,
Ohio University, Athens

One of my favorite movies is Dead Poets Society; in that film there’s a scene where the beloved teacher, Mr. Keating, tells his students they’re going to be studying Shakespeare. “Oh yes,” he says, “I know some of you look forward to Shakespeare like you look forward to root canal work.” I think the same might be said for some students and the study of poetry. Yet what we know is that great teachers can turn the most intimidating or seemingly irrelevant subject matter into some of the greatest delights and most meaningful learning experiences students have ever had. In this regard, I want to share four ideas for bringing poetry to life by taking it outside the classroom. While these ideas are brief and by no means comprehensive in terms of what could be done, I offer them to get the creative juices flowing and trust that readers will be able to brainstorm similar types of poetry outings that would be most relevant to their communities.

1. The Mocha House—In Warren, Ohio there is a large coffee shop (and wonderfully smoke-free now) that exhibits the work of local artists on the walls that bolster high, ornamented ceilings. This hub sometimes hosts local musicians and always offers a fine array of decadent pastries. After reading and writing poetry in class, my students and I gather for an evening at the coffee house where we pull several tables together and sit around and share what we’ve written. What place near you could serve a similar purpose? Could you transform your cafeteria, media center, or classroom into such an interesting venue by lowering the lighting, brewing some coffee, tea, or cocoa, and bringing in some homemade—or store bought—cakes, pies, and cookies?

Contextual Side Bar: Although I do believe it’s best to include poetry—and in fact a variety of genres—throughout the academic year, I also believe that an in-depth unit featuring poetry is a great idea. It’s important to begin with very approachable poems that help students really enjoy poetry and see how fun it is and how easy to understand. I think Gwendolyn Brooks, Sharon Draper, Paul Fleishman, Mel Glenn, Sara Holbrook, and Shel Silverstein are excellent starting points in this regard. Teachers can always move to T. S. Elliott and The Waste Land later on, but please, I and students beg of you, don’t start there. While any season could work for an intensive poetry unit, I particularly like using the genre in spring or toward the end of the school year when some students are, let’s face it, checking out of the net and less likely to read longer works.

Poetry offers many opportunities for meaningful teaching, intellectual depth, personal reflection, and enjoyment while still being concise in ways that make isolated lessons and activities possible, in ways that diminish homework and increase the likelihood that students will be engaged and that learning will occur. This leads me to the second poetry outing.

2. Saturday Picnic—While this could take place in any season, spring works particularly well. After reading and writing a variety of poems, have students meet at a local park on a Saturday for a picnic and poetry. This could be done as a potluck, cookout, or bagged lunch outing, but adding food—since most of us like to eat—is always appealing; it psychologically pairs poetry with pleasure, good things, and being social. Wouldn’t it be great if students left our classrooms wanting to pick up poems, read them, and share them with others for the rest of their lives? My requirement—beyond the food—for the Saturday Picnic is for students to each bring two poems: one they have written and another published by someone else. Sometimes it’s also good to add the stipulation that the poem must not be printed from the
internet, but taken from a book; this way we know students have books in their hands, and this increases the potential that they will read more than one poem. My students and I have met at Mosquito Lake State Park near the water, and I have contributed poems by the Romantics and the Transcendentalists since so much of their work reflected a love of nature and an alignment of priorities away from materialism.

3. The Cemetery—Obviously this one needs to be preceded by some clear expectations about reverence and advance preparation as you will see. This poetry outing begins with Edgar Lee Masters’ *Spoon River Anthology*; students peruse the book and select one poem in particular that they want to memorize and read at the cemetery. To remind readers, Masters’ work, as I like to summarize it, is a set of epitaphs representing a diverse group of people who lived and died in the imaginary town Spoon River. Each poem is the name of one of the townspeople, and each poem offers indicators about who the person was, including status, struggles, personality, victories, tragedies, and failures. Having memorized their chosen poems, students should select corresponding props and/or costumes to represent their citizen from Spoon River then meet reverently at the cemetery. Once there, students should select a tombstone that they believe represents their citizen. As a class, we walk from location to location and hear the recitations, learning who these citizens were and considering the reputation they left behind. A wealthy citizen, the town mayor or doctor, might stand by a large granite monument; the humble clergy by a small, decaying marker made of sandstone. As any professional educator would acknowledge, with an activity like this, we need to know our audience and our community before embarking on such an endeavor appropriately. Without going into too much detail, it should be apparent that there would be circumstances where this outing would not be a good idea, for instance if a student recently lost a loved one or perhaps if there is any fresh grave in the cemetery. Also, the size of the group should be very limited and behavior exemplary as we would not want our students to be running around a cemetery, an act that would be upsetting and viewed as clearly inappropriate to a majority of passers-by.

4. The Japanese Steakhouse—Besides the haiku, Japanese poetry forms include the renga, the tanka, the sedoka, and the dodoitsu. Because these poems are so tightly constructed involving a limited number of lines and syllables per line, prompting students to write the various forms in response to artwork is highly effective. This is an easy in-class activity where the teacher simply projects an artistic image or photograph from the overhead onto a screen and gives students an appropriate amount of time to write a haiku, renga, or any form and share with the rest of the class. Having several examples to take home with them, students can then revise or write totally new poems. Then, meet at a place that serves Japanese food. In Niles, Ohio we were fortunate to meet at a steakhouse called Yamato’s where the food was prepared in front of us by a Samurai chef. While enjoying a wonderful dinner and atmosphere representing another culture, all of the students took turns sharing their favorite original poems representing the various Japanese forms.

**Closing Notes:** Obviously not every town will have a Japanese steakhouse, but again the idea is to prompt my fellow teachers to be creative. No
matter how small, poor, or homogeneous in culture our communities may be, there are always ways to think outside the box and bring incredibly rewarding experiences to our students—experiences they will treasure for a lifetime and always remember as “what happened in Ms. or Mr. So-and-So’s class that was so incredible.” Yes, these activities involve extra time and collaboration with parents and even administrators, but the reward for the teacher and students is phenomenal; these are the kinds of extras that make true the statement “To teach is to touch a life forever.” Be that special teacher who goes above and beyond. It may mean making pirogis; it may mean having a farm day; it may mean brushing up on Italian poets and having a spaghetti night, but whatever you do, be that special teacher.

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The Best Source of Information About Authors Who Write for Teens

Information about hundreds of contemporary authors, thousands of recently published novels, and dozens of valuable print resources can be found on numerous Web sites available to teen readers and their teachers. But one Web site stands out for its diversity, its depth, its insights, and its up-to-date value: Authors4Teens.com.

The main attraction of this site is the array of in-depth interviews with authors who write for teenagers. Right now, 51 prominent authors are featured—among them Chris Crutcher, Sarah Dessen, Jack Gantos, Nancy Garden, Robert Lipsyte, David Lubar, Walter Dean Myers, Tamora Pierce, Sonya Sones, Jerry Spinelli, Nancy Werlin, and Jane Yolen, and three others are currently being interviewed.

More important than the number of authors is the length and content of the interviews. Most authors respond to more than 60 questions, many of them shaped to the individual author, all of the questions and answers exchanged via e-mails over several weeks, usually over several months.

In addition to the usual questions about birthplace and advice to young writers, we explore childhood and teenage activities, relationships with parents and siblings, school experiences, reading and writing experiences that may have shaped the author’s professional life, and work experiences before publishing became their major source of income. So the site is an unmatched source of biographical information presented in a conversational format. Readers will also discover how each writer gets ideas, does research, goes about organizing (note: most do not outline), revising, working with critique groups, and visiting schools and libraries to promote their work. So it’s an insightful source of information about how professional writers actually write. In addition, each writer takes readers on a verbal tour of his or her workspace, talks about their favorite authors, describes the music that may play in the background as they write, and may even confess to whether or not they snack as they write. Where else can you get that kind of inside information?

And authors talk about the backgrounds of their major books—what got them started, what difficulties they faced, what rewards resulted. You can learn, for example, how an overheard conversation among three teenage girls got Gail Giles
started writing *Shattering Glass*. You can find out how a boy with cerebral palsy and a tattooed female drug addict became the main characters in Ron Koertge's *Stoner & Spaz*. And Sarah Dessen describes her experiences attending the world premier of *How to Deal*, the movie based on two of her novels.

I should pause here to explain that I’m being self-serving by promoting this site. Authors4Teens.com is a commercial site provided by the Greenwood Publishing Group. You have to purchase it. Because I do all the interviews and am responsible for the content on the site, I get a royalty check from the sponsor once a year (though I’ve estimated that over the past seven years I have made about three cents an hour for my time). But this is really no different from any author talking about the value of a book she or he has published, and this Web site has so much more to offer teachers and students about this topic than any single book ever could.

I started this Web resource because I wanted to do more extensive interviews of authors who write for young adults than what were already available. Previously I had solicited 500-word autobiographies from 177 contemporary authors that were published by the National Council of Teachers of English in two volumes under the titles of *Speaking for Ourselves* and *Speaking for Ourselves, Too* in 1990 and 1993 respectively. Following that, I considered making a series of videotaped interviews with notable authors, in their homes if possible, but the cost of making high-quality tapes was prohibitive at that time. Videotapes, furthermore, had the same major weakness as print interviews and biographies: they were dated at that time. Videotapes, I considered making a series of videotaped interviews with notable authors, in their homes if possible, but the cost of making high-quality tapes was prohibitive at that time. Videotapes, furthermore, had the same major weakness as print interviews and biographies: they were dated before they were published. For example, while any reader can still gain significant information about Richard Peck in *Speaking for Ourselves*, the most recently published book listed in his bibliography there is *Those Summer Girls I Never Met*, published in 1988. No *Last Safe Place in Earth*; no *A Long Way from Chicago*; no *A Year Down Yonder*; no *A River Between Us*. Nor is there any mention of his ALAN Award, Margaret A. Edwards Award, or Newbery Medal. Those have all occurred since *Speaking for Ourselves* was published.

I love books. But the information in any nonfiction source is at least a year old before it reaches your local bookstore or library or is listed on Amazon.com. That’s just a reality of publishing. The time lag doesn’t matter with fiction, but it’s always been a serious weakness of informational books. The only sensible solution was to use the Internet.

Anyone who uses Web resources knows that information gets transmitted instantly. New information, instead of taking months or years to reach students, teachers, and librarians, can be available daily. Hourly, even. Which is what I love about Authors4Teens.com: when I receive new information from or about one of the featured authors, I can get it on the Web site the same day, or at least the same week. And there are no page limits with electronic publishing—interviewees can say as much as they like about a topic. Which is why some of the interviews on the site—Tamora Pierce’s, for instance—would take more than 60 pages to print out double-spaced.

As a result, there is hardly any topic that we don’t explore. In fact, as I was finishing my interview with Robert Lipsyte, I asked him if there was anything we hadn’t covered, anything that he’d like to add. He said: “I can’t think of anything else, since you’ve asked questions I’ve never been asked before and gone places I haven’t thought about.” And Paul Zindel, whose interview we completed just one year before he died, said: “This interview is the most complete I’ve ever given. No one has ever asked me more original and refreshing and prying questions, and I don’t think anyone in my lifetime ever will.”

In addition to the interviews, each author provides several photographs, most of which are inserted into the interview while others are displayed in the Image Gallery section of the site. For example, there’s often a photo of the author as a child as well as a teenager. Several authors provide a photo or their office. Some show
the author speaking with students at a school or autographing books. Some of those photos have never appeared in a public place before. No other source, print or electronic, contains as many personal photos of young adult authors as Authors4Teens.com, not even some of the writers’ personal Web sites.

Something else about these interviews is unique: all sorts of links are provided to further information for interested readers. For example, when Graham Salisbury mentions that his father was a fighter pilot on the aircraft carrier USS Essex during World War II, a reader can click on “USS Essex” in the text and information about that famous carrier appears on the screen, along with a photo of it. When Chris Crutcher says one of his favorite musical groups during his teen years was the Kingston Trio, a click takes readers to the official Kingston Trio Web site. When Jack Gantos describes his sojourns into the Everglades as a kid living in Florida, readers can click on “Everglades” and be taken immediately to a Web site that provides official information about that unique part of Florida. When Nancy Garden mentions gay-straight alliances, a click brings readers to the homepage of GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network for more details.

The site also provides links to authors’ personal Web sites, to Amazon.com for publication information about each of their books, to young adult literature resources on the Internet (such as Teen Reads.com and Booklists for Young Adults on the Web), to professional journals and magazines online, and to professional organizations such as the American Library Association and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN). Resource books aren’t able to provide that kind of instant access to supplemental information.

The Authors4Teens site also includes a list of each author’s publications. Not just their books, but also their short stories, poems, and essays in professional journals, along with the awards each publication has received. No other reference source provides as much bibliographical information about their featured authors. None. Not even the personal sites of most of our featured authors.

And we are continually adding to the database. For example, within hours of the announcement of the Best Books for Young Adults and the Printz Awards at the American Library Association conference, those honors are added to the bibliographies of each of our respective authors.

Several times a year I also contact each author to learn what’s new in their writing lives, interviewing them further about their most recent or forthcoming publication, and adding a Latest News piece to the end of their original interview. So although the original interview with Laurie Halse Anderson was completed in July 2000, there have been several Latest News pieces added about her life and work since then, the most recent on February 27, 2007 in which she discusses her latest novel, Twisted. In fact, subscribers to Authors4Teens can often read what an author has to say about his or her next book before it’s ever published.

A special feature we call Teri’s Corner provides a lengthy list of recent book awards, upcoming professional conferences, and book reviews from the world of young adult literature, many with links to additional information and related resources. That information is provided by one of the most knowledgeable people in the book business today, Dr. Teri S. Lesesne, associate professor in the department of library science at Sam Houston State University in Texas.

Reading the work of an author can be engaging. But seeing that person face-to-face and hearing him or her speak can be thrilling. To guide readers, we provide a list of where most of our authors will be appearing in the near future—at schools, libraries, bookstores, and conference of national organization like the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. (I say “most” because a few authors do not wish that information to be divulged.) For example, a check of Chris Crutcher’s future appearances shows that
he is scheduled to be a featured speaker at the English Festival at Youngstown State University on April 16-18, 2008. That allows you to plan to attend that event or arrange for the author to visit your school either before or after those dates while he’s in the Youngstown area.

By now you will likely have thought of several ways you can use this site, including the way I’ve just described. Having students research reliable information about an author whose book they are reading is one of the most common uses. Another common way is for you to read about an author’s background before you teach his or her book, noting especially what that author says about how that book came into existence or how teenage readers have responded to it. Students in a writing course can use the site’s Search feature to find how various authors get started writing each day, how they organize their research, or how their lives affect their work. Journalism students can use the interviews as examples of how to formulate good questions. You might want to know what advice these respected authors provide for teachers about teaching literature and writing to teenagers. And before you recommend a new book for classroom reading, you may find it useful to prepare a rationale for its use, in which case the list of awards and honors that book has received will prove valuable.

Some teachers and librarians have found this site so useful personally that they have their own individual subscription. But the more economical approach is to purchase a subscription for your entire school, or school system. (Discounts are available for multiple related institutions and consortia.) In that case, you will have personal access to the site; your teaching colleagues will have access to the site; and every student in your school system will have access to the site. Even from their home computers. Hundreds of teenagers can be doing research on the same site at the same time. Think of what it would cost to provide one book of (outdated) author biographies to every student just in your classes and you will see what a relatively inexpensive resource this Web site is. And it’s constantly being updated at no additional cost to any subscriber. In addition, technical support is free and readily available.

Don’t just accept my biased recommendations. Go to www.Authors4Teens.com and see for yourself what the site has to offer. You can examine the entire site free for 24 hours. Be warned, however: Authors4Teens.com can be addicting. Reading just one interview is like eating potato chips—you’ll likely want to try another…and another…and another…

A resident of Solon, Ohio, Don Gallo is a former professor of English and one of the country’s leading authorities on books for teenagers as well as the editor of the Bold Books for Teenagers column in the English Journal and the editor of twelve highly acclaimed collections of short stories for young adults. His most recent anthology is What Are You Afraid Of? Stories about Phobias.
# The Literary Half-Dozen

So many websites, so little time! Did you ever get overwhelmed by lists of recommended websites? Do you really remember what you stashed in your Favorites? Here is a little list of quality websites to support the use and enjoyment of great literature in the English Language Arts Classroom.

**Reading Rockets — [http://www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)**

Reading Rockets will blast you to the moon with wonderful, research-based resources aimed at parents, but extremely helpful for teachers. Supported by PBS station WETA, the site hosts wonderful video interviews with your favorite children’s authors (see Podcasts & Videos), links to strategies to help struggling readers and free reading guides that a classroom teacher could share with parents.

**Children’s Literature — [http://www.childrenslit.com](http://www.childrenslit.com)**

Children’s Literature has an extensive list of links to authors’ websites — ranging from authors who write for the pre-school crowd to those who write for mature, young adult readers. In addition to noting the monthly “What’s New at Children’s Literature,” don’t miss the blue drop down menus at the top of the home page—full of resources that are maintained and updated regularly. The site also offers a subscription to a useful, fully searchable database of children’s and young adult books, with reviews. However, the numerous FREE resources make this a site you will not want to miss.

**Authors4Teens — [http://Authors4Teens.com](http://Authors4Teens.com)**

Likewise a subscription site, Authors4Teens offers extensive information about young adult authors. Read Don Gallo’s informative article in this issue which fully describes the site he originated!

**Cynthia Leitich Smith Children’s and Young Adult Literature Resources — [http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/cyalr_index.html](http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/cyalr_index.html)**

In addition to interviews, Cynthia Leitich Smith provides links to author and illustrator websites, bibliographies and award lists. Diverse Reads is especially valuable for links to multicultural literature.

**Kay Vandergrift’s Children’s and Young Adult Literature Pages — [http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/ChildrenLit/index.html](http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/ChildrenLit/index.html) and [http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/YoungAdult/index.html](http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/YoungAdult/index.html)**

Both of these links, created by Kay Vandergrift, support the study of children’s and young adult literature. There are numerous lists, bibliographies, and links to full text articles for students of literature.


I know it may seem that I’m cheating by slipping in yet two more paired links, but Lisa R. Bartle, the creator of these two searchable databases, believes the Internet and the wealth of its resources and collaborative power should be free. The DAWCL is a searchable database of 6000 titles that have been awarded one or more of 77 awards originating in six English-speaking countries. Inclusion in the database virtually guarantees quality choices for the classroom and library. ABC-Lit provides a searchable database of annotations of articles for those studying children’s literature.


This site is dedicated to providing reader support for children’s and young adult literature according to various audiences. Links are provided for “kids” as well as parents and it is updated regularly (sadly, many of the “classic” sites are not and have many frustrating dead links). If you didn’t find your favorite children’s or young adult literature site in the half-dozen, it is more than likely a link on this site.

**Disclaimer:** Didn’t find your favorite site? Remember, this is a “little” list for you to explore. You can also find this list in a clickable format on the OCTELA website at [http://www.octela.org/newoctela/newresources.html](http://www.octela.org/newoctela/newresources.html).

While you’re there, explore the other resources for English Language Arts teachers maintained by our grade level liaisons. Do you have a suggestion for a great resource? Email Marge Ford at camp_mf@access-k12.org and the editorial team will evaluate it for inclusion on the resource page.
Reviewed by Regina Rees
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Soon-To-Be Classics for Early Readers

Have you ever second-guessed the experts as you voted in your local mock Caldecott balloting? Some of the enduring classics of children’s literature never made the finals! Regina Rees shares some of her choices of books that deserve a place on the bookshelf of classic children’s literature.

Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons.

Did you ever think that you could learn about life just by biting into a nice, warm, chocolate chip cookie, fresh from the oven? Amy Krouse Rosenthal makes learning about cooperation, patience, respect, and other positive traits a delicious treat in Cookies. The book is presented as a dictionary with an important character trait and a definition related to cookie etiquette on each page. The book begins with “cooperate means, how about you add the chips while I stir” and continues to guide the reader to be polite, generous, fair, and honest when baking and eating cookies. The charming illustrations by Jane Dyer feature adorable multi-ethnic children and precious animals portraying each new vocabulary word. Especially touching is the bunny who obviously overindulged. He says, “regret means, I really wish I didn’t eat so many cookies.” This book is a perfect read aloud for young children, but certainly will appeal to all ages. It is a must for a lesson on character education. Cookies: Bite Size Life Lessons is as irresistible as a homemade cookie. It is sure to be a favorite on bookshelves for years to come.


“What does the American Revolution have to do with me?” is the question posed to the reader in the introduction to this book. Thomas Fleming skillfully answers this question as he shows that the Revolutionary War was more than a conflict between “two groups of Englishmen who happened to live on opposite sides of the ocean.” He explains that forty percent of American colonists were Irish, German, Jewish, Dutch, French, or African. Everybody’s Revolution examines the Revolutionary War from these diverse perspectives. In addition to chapters that describe the contributions made by various ethnic groups, the book devotes a chapter to women who contributed to the fight for freedom and a chapter that tells of the deeds of young people. Especially fascinating is the account of Agent 13, a female spy for the Colonists, whose identity is still unknown today. Everybody’s Revolution is not the usual retelling of battles and war strategy. It delves into the very soul of the birth of America by relating interesting stories of courageous men, women, and children who truly believed in the future of the country. Supported by historic art, a glossary, and recommended further reading and websites, this book is a valuable resource that will appeal to readers from grades four through eight.

Library Lion.

When the king of beasts wanders into the library, he causes some confusion. Miss Merriweather, the librarian, can’t find a rule against lions in the library, so he is permitted to stay as long as he does not roar. This lion takes a fancy to story hour, and soon becomes a regular at the library. The lion soon wins everyone’s heart as he licks the envelopes for the overdue notices, dusts the shelves, and lets the children use him as a back rest when they read. Everyone agrees that the lion is very helpful—everyone but Mr. McBee, the nervous assistant librarian. So when Miss Merriweather has an accident, the lion must decide
whether he should break the rules and roar in order to save her. This sweet tale features subtle humor and charming illustrations by Kevin Hawkes. Young readers will enjoy the clever plot. Librarians will hope that this lion becomes a regular among the stacks. *Library Lion* is a perfect read aloud for story hour.

**The Encyclopedia Prehistorica Series.**


*The Encyclopedia Prehistorica Sharks and Other Sea Monsters. 2006.*

*Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Mega-Beasts. 2007.*

Master paper engineers, Sabuda and Reinhart have taken the art of pop-up books to an amazing level in this fact-filled series about prehistoric creatures. Each book features a large pop-up on each page surrounded by interesting information and Sabuda’s signature sidebars with smaller pop-ups. In *Dinosaurs*, the reader will be startled as T. Rex emerges from the page with an open mouth and amazed as the raptor seems to fly right off the edge of the book. In *Sharks and Other Sea Monsters*, the reader is treated to an ancient shark with fearsome teeth, a giant sea scorpion, and monsters that could be Nessie’s relatives. In the final book in the series, *Mega-Beasts*, saber-toothed tigers, wooly mammoths, and other extinct creatures come to life as they leap from each page. Each book in the series contains plenty of interesting information and supplemental illustrations. The pop-ups are so detailed and emerge so dramatically that it is difficult to stop turning the pages. The text is easy to read and provides “up-to-the-minute” information about the creatures and prehistoric times. The *Encyclopedia Prehistorica* series is a visual treat for paleontologists of all ages.

*Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom.*

Harriet Tubman led hundreds of people to freedom on the Underground Railroad. But how did she become her people’s Moses? Harriet Tubman’s spiritual awakening is beautifully portrayed in this Coretta Scott King award-winning book. Weatherford uses free verse to tell the story of the decision Harriet made to flee from slavery. Various typefaces are used to show Harriet’s words and God’s message to her. Breathtaking illustrations by Kadir Nelson take the reader along with Harriet on her journey through the dark forest, swamps, a wide river, and finally to freedom. “In the promised land, Philadelphia, the sun shines gold in the trees, and Harriet feels as light as a cloud.” The book ends with Harriet’s decision to return to the South to rescue her family. When she returns to Philadelphia, Harriet “dreams of slaves still in the yoke. She hears their groans, sees their tears.” She makes the decision to devote the rest of her life to becoming “Moses” and leading others out of slavery. *Moses* is a moving portrayal of Harriet’s journey that will help children understand this brave woman’s passion for freedom.

**Jazz.**


“There’s a crazy syncopation And it’s tearing through the nation And it’s bringing sweet elation To every single tune It’s jazz.”

Just reading the seventeen poems in this book makes the reader feel like a real “jazz cat.” The poems are cool, hip, solid, and evoke jazz music from blues to Bourbon Street. Each poem covers an aspect of jazz music including be-bop, jam sessions, jazz vocals, and a tribute to Louis Armstrong. Each poem appears on a two-page spread with the coolest illustrations ever by Christopher Myers. An informative history of jazz, a glossary of jazz terms, and a timeline of events in jazz complete this volume. The father and son team of Walter Dean and Christopher Myers show that they have some “good chops” and are really “hip” when it comes to creating *Jazz.*

Regina Rees is an assistant professor in the department of teacher education at Youngstown State University. She has over twenty years of teaching experience in grades four through twelve. Regina is also a professional storyteller. She is currently the Vice President of OCTELA.
Soon-To-Be Classics for Young Adults


Most readers would agree that these titles have earned a place among the classics of Young Adult Literature. If you could choose recently published books, sure to become classics, which titles would you choose? The TeenXtreme librarians have peered into their crystal ball and reviewed books that have the qualities of a future classic.

**A Northern Light**

Carnegie Medal winner and Michael L. Printz Honor Book, Jennifer Donnelly’s *A Northern Light* is at once a historical novel, a murder mystery and a coming-of-age story.

In her first book for young adults, Donnelly also explores racism and women’s rights in the life of 16-year-old Mattie Gokey who wrestles with the burden of promises made. She promised to fulfill her mother’s dying wish to remain at the family’s hard-scrabble farm and to help raise her siblings when her own dream lies with her scholarship to Barnard and a chance at becoming a writer. She has also promised to marry Royal Loomis, her handsome and attentive neighbor, who has big dreams of a farm of his own but doesn’t understand Mattie’s love of language and of literature. And finally, Mattie has promised Grace Brown, a guest at the resort where Mattie waitresses, to burn some personal letters. Before Mattie fulfills this final wish, Grace’s body is found in the lake. At first thought to be an accidental drowning, it is discovered later that she may well have been the victim of murder. Once again Mattie must decide if her promise should be kept. This is a fictionalized version of an actual murder that took place in 1906 that is also the setting of Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy.* Told in alternating chapters of past and present time this is a haunting tale written with vivid description and realistic characters. Readers will find Mattie’s dilemma all too identifiable.

**Incantation**

Set during the uneasy and perilous time of the Spanish Inquisition, *Incantation* marks the journey of a young girl’s self-discovery. Times are perilous indeed for Estrella de Madrigal’s family who are Marranos, secret Jews pretending to be Christians to save themselves from persecution and death. Such is the need for secrecy that Estrella herself isn’t told until the violence reaches her small village of Encaleflora. It begins with the burning of books. Estrella knows that her family is different. They never eat sausage, her pet name is Esther, they light candles on Friday night. The realization finally dawns upon her following the arrest of a family who lives next door when a decree is posted in the plaza notifying citizens that they must report all those suspected of being false Christians. The placard lists the ways to tell if someone is a hidden Jew. One by one the clues support Estrella’s suspicions. This is also a tale of betrayal. Led by jealousy and greed, Estrella’s best friend reports the de Madrigal family to the authorities. Estrella’s grandfather is arrested and then her mother and brother. Estrella must watch the destruction of her family. A spare, compelling novel told in a genuine, authentic voice.

**Nick & Norah’s Infinite Playlist**

Cohn and Levithan, two of the brightest shining stars in the young adult literature universe, contribute alternating chapters in this wild roller-coaster ride of
Soon-To-Be Classics for Young Adults

A story that takes place in the short span of one night. Nick is the only straight member of a queer-core punk rock band. He’s recently had his heart broken. Just how recently? Exactly three weeks, two days and twenty-three hours ago his girlfriend Tris told him it was all over. He still has his music, though, and is performing in a New York club when she walks in with a new guy. Not willing to make small talk at the bar with the new couple, Nick turns to the girl next to him and asks her to be his girlfriend for the next five minutes. Norah, also acquainted with heartbreak, has her own reasons to avoid Tris and her answer to Nick is to pull him close for a kiss. The rest is one wild night of music, passion, confusion and romance as they roam Manhattan trying to figure out if what they feel for each other is real and if it is worth the risk of opening their hearts once more. Full of witty dialogue that is on the far side of clean, this is a sexy novel suited for an older teen audience.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Christopher John Francis Boone cannot stand to be touched. He will not eat anything that is yellow or brown and calms himself by groaning and doing math problems in his head. He knows all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,057. He is also a fan of Sherlock Holmes, so when he finds the neighbor’s dog dead on the grass with a gardening fork sticking out of the body, he decides to find out who killed Wellington. He also decides to write down everything he discovers in his “murder mystery novel” much to the aggravation of his father, his neighbor, Mrs. Shears and the police. Things come to a head when Christopher’s father forbids any more detecting and confiscates Christopher’s book. A search for the book leads Christopher to discover answers to another mystery surrounding Christopher’s mother whom he had been told died in the hospital two years earlier. Christopher’s extremely literal viewpoint and misunderstandings of human social interaction make the deception his father has created and his subsequent confession seem very threatening. This causes Christopher to run away on his own to find his mother. Readers will at once sympathize with Christopher’s parents as they struggle in their sometimes frustrating task of caring for their autistic son and cheer Christopher on in his goal of getting an A grade on his maths A level exam.

Looking for Alaska

As you open and read “one hundred thirty-six days before” in Looking for Alaska, the tone is set for the inevitable tragedy to follow. Sixteen-year-old Miles (Pudge) Halter is off to an Alabama boarding school to seek “a Great Perhaps.” Roommate Chip, the Colonel, is just the person to help him with that search. Chip gives him the inside skinny on the school, the instructors, and the students. His friends become Pudge’s friends, including the beautiful, intelligent, and enigmatic Alaska. She’s unlike anyone Pudge has ever known, and despite the fact she has a boyfriend, Pudge falls for her. Over the next several months, Pudge is introduced to smoking, drinking, and sex. While some might consider these to be “normal” rites of passage, they also mask and help diminish the pain and baggage these teens bear. One particular night of heavy drinking ends with Alaska’s death. For the rest of the term, Pudge and his friends attempt to discover if it was just an accident or suicide, and in the end learn about Alaska and themselves.

Looking for Alaska was the 2006 Michael L. Printz award-winner and listed as a 2006 YALSA Best Book for Teens and 2006 Quick Pick, as a 2005 School Library Journal Best Book, and as a 2005 Booklist Editors’ Choice for Young Adults.

How I Live Now

It seemed to be a win-win situation—Daisy’s dad is involved with his new (and pregnant) wife and has little time for her. Daisy absolutely despises her stepmother, and the feeling seems mutual. Daisy’s “revenge” is anorexia. No better time for a trip to England to visit the aunt and cousins Daisy’s never met. She’s immediately intrigued by her cousin Edmond when he meets her at the airport. Several days pass pleasantly enough although the attraction between Daisy and her cousin becomes mutual, and soon also physical. Her aunt’s government job has taken her on assignment to Oslo, so Daisy and her cousins are alone when the unthinkable happens—unnamed forces attack England. The cousins manage to feed and take care of themselves and stay “under the radar” of officials. Eventually the war does reach them—their home is confiscated, and the cousins are separated and relocated. Daisy is sent with nine-year-old Piper and Jet, the family dog, to Reston Bridge. Piper and Jet help with herding dairy cows, and Daisy gets to picking fruit, but all they can think about is finding cousins Edmond, Isaac and
Osbert. British soldiers billet nearby and more or less “adopt” Piper. When they’re reassigned, Daisy and Piper take the opportunity to head for home to search for the boys. After days of walking, evading troops, and scrabbling for food, the girls finally reach home only to find it abandoned by the military with no signs of Edmond and his brothers. Then a phone call finally gets through to them; it’s Daisy’s father and Daisy is soon able to go back to America to recuperate, a lengthy process. It’s not until six years later that she’s able to return to England to see what has become of her cousins. In this winner of the 2005 Michael L. Printz Award, sex between fifteen-year-olds, and cousins at that, is a very sensitive subject and is portrayed neither graphically nor gratuitously. Elements of survival for young people on their own during war conditions are realistic. How I Live Now was also a 2005 YALSA Best Book and a 2004 Booklist Editors’ Choice.

**The Battle of Jericho**

A 2004 Coretta Scott King Honor Book, The Battle of Jericho exposes the abuses of hazing when Jericho and his cousin/best friend, Josh, are invited to join the “Warriors of Distinction,” a so-called boys’ service club active at, but not officially sponsored by, their high school. When their friend Dana sneaks into their “bonding” ceremony and also takes the oath, the Warriors are left with little choice but to let her pledge. As in most situations of hazing, there will be at least one member who enjoys it just a little too much. Eddie Mahoney makes Dana his personal project, resorting to sexual harassment and more. Jericho begins to realize this isn’t the kind of club he bargained for—the hazing is cruel; pledges are called upon to shoplift; and a chance to compete for a music scholarship has to be forfeited. Yet the idea of being with a popular crowd and having the girl he’s liked from afar as his girlfriend overrule his better judgment. It’s not until the final rite of initiation, which ends in tragedy, that parents and town officials become aware of how out of control the club has become.

**The First Part Last**

Winner of the 2004 Michael L. Printz and the 2004 Coretta Scott King awards, The First Part Last relates the trials and tribulations of Bobby, who finds out on his 16th birthday that his girlfriend is pregnant. He takes an interest in Nia’s pregnancy from the beginning and wants the three of them to be a family. However, Nia realizes she is too young for the responsibilities of motherhood and decides to opt for adoption. Unfortunately, there are complications and Nia is hospitalized in a permanent vegetative state, but that doesn’t deter Bobby from his dream of raising his daughter. Ms. Johnson does not sugarcoat the pressures, problems and sacrifices of single, teen fatherhood. But it is a wonderful testament to those teens that accept responsibility for their actions. The book was also listed as a YALSA Best Book, a YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers, and was a Booklist Editors’ Choice.

**The Book Thief**

In this 2007 Printz Honor Book, Death himself narrates this poignant and unforgettable tale of ordinary Germans in a small town outside Munich during World War II. After her brother falls ill and dies on their way to a foster home, nine year old Liesel Meminger steals her first book—The Gravediggers Handbook—at his funeral, even though she has not yet learned to read. After her arrival at the home of Rosa and Hans Hubermann, Liesel’s frequent nightmares are assuaged by Hans’ late-night reading lessons using the book she has stolen. The Hubermann household provides a refuge for the troubled girl; it will also become sanctuary for Max, a young Jewish man whose father once saved Hans’ life. The story of the next four years of Liesel’s life revolve around books she steals (from book burnings and the mayor’s wife) or is given (by her foster parents and Max), as well as by the book she eventually writes and which Death carries with him. Death, as narrator, is surprisingly compassionate, deeply moved by the human capacity for tenderness in the midst of despair as epitomized by Liesel. He also has a tendency toward “spoiling the ending”, but it is a testament to Zusak’s skill at humanizing his characters that even though we know they are doomed, we are still devastated when Death finally reaches them. With its interwoven storylines, the novel clearly depicts the tragic effects of war and the salvation of words, and this makes it timeless.

**The Wee Free Men**

When denizens of the fairy realm begin invading her family’s land in the “chalk country” and her little brother is kidnapped by the Queen of the Elves, young
Soon-To-Be Classics for Young Adults

Tiffany Aching takes matters (as well as a large frying pan) into her own hands. Aiding her in her quest to retrieve her brother is a rowdy, thieving band of six inch high blue "pictsies", the Nac Mac Feegle (a.k.a. the Wee Free Men). As it turns out, Tiffany’s Granny Aching, recently deceased, was something of a witch—the "hag of the hills"—and the Feegle clan views Tiffany as her successor; as such, the clan is bound to protect her— with hilarious results. Tiffany eventually succeeds in her quest, and (like all true heroines) winds up learning much about herself and is, consequently, unable to return to her plain old life. This tale, like most of Pratchett’s books, takes place in Discworld, that literary blue screen on which the author can project his masterful high satire and quirky characterizations; also, as usual, this superbly crafted story provides as much wisdom and compassion as fantasy, adventure and humor. As such, this 2004 YALSA Best Book for Young Adults has classic potential and appeal for a wide audience, especially teens with a liking for such young heroes and heroines as are found in the work of J.K. Rowling.

**Poison**  

Wooding, author of *The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray*, offers up a darker take on the faerie theme in this novel, a 2006 YALSA Top Ten Book for Young Adults. Classic fairy-tale characters such as the passive but loving father, the evil stepmother and the encouraging teacher/mentor inhabit the eponymous 16-year-old heroine’s life in the Black Marshes. But when her baby sister Azalea is kidnapped by faeries, Poison is forced to venture from her familiar surroundings to not only the outside world but also to other Realms in order to retrieve her. Treated with contempt by the rulers and denizens of the Realms, she places herself under the protection of the mysterious Hierophant only to discover a larger secret that challenges her will to survive. Wooding offers plenty of plot twists, and even stock characters develop depth as the story unfolds. The villains vary from chilling (the Bone Witch, Spider Lady Asinastra) to darkly charismatic (Phaerie Lord Alethar) and Poison’s companions are appealing, but it is our heroine’s wit, courage and determination that carry the tale. Without giving away the ending, suffice it to say that her ultimate destiny is a fitting metaphor for the self-absorbed alienation that accompanies adolescence. Suggest this one to teens who like their stories heavy on the gothic or phantasmagorical.

**Fat Kid Rules the World**  

Troy is a 300-pound, friendless 17-year-old who, at the beginning of this offbeat and moving 2004 Printz Honor Book, is standing at the edge of a subway platform contemplating suicide. He is interrupted in his depressed reverie by the alarmingly skinny local punk rock legend Curt MacCrae, who then says that Troy owes him lunch for saving his life. Thus begins the sometimes comic, sometimes poignant relationship between these two misfits that drives this superior novel. Hyperactive and iconoclastic Curt, longing to form his own groundbreaking band, is convinced that Troy is the perfect drummer— even though Troy can’t play drums. By completely ignoring Troy’s negative self-image and pushing him (however unwillingly) into the limelight, Curt forces the big guy to see that there more to life than his own misery. Troy begins to find his own path to self-confidence through caring for others, especially Curt, who has a self-destructive streak exacerbated by incessant pill-popping. Gritty and intense, with multi-faceted characters and (unlike many YA music novels) realistic situations and dialogue, this story of two desperate teens attempting to save one another— and ultimately, perhaps, saving themselves— has universal appeal.

**The Amulet of Samarkand**  

In this anachronistic modern fairy tale, which was a pick for YALSA’s Top Ten Books for Young Adults, magicians rule the British empire not with abilities they themselves possess, but with power they derive from demons- afrit, djinn, imps, etc. Eleven-year-old Nathaniel is a magician in training whose master, a coward and of mediocre ability, cares little for his welfare. However, Nathaniel is actually quite gifted, and, practicing in secret, has developed well beyond his years. When another magician, Simon Lovelace, publicly humiliates him, Nathaniel takes revenge by summoning 5,000-year-old world-weary djinni Bartimaeus and ordering him to steal the Amulet of Samarkand, an object that protects Lovelace from the attacks of other magicians. The escalating chain of events that follows this act is told in alternating viewpoints from Nathaniel and Bartimaeus, who uses braggadocio and sardonic footnotes to enhance the tale. The uneasy relationship between the arrogant Nathaniel and the enslaved Bartimaeus, who has a lifetime’s worth of built-up contempt for magicians, is surprisingly multifaceted and provides a solid core for the story. Stroud
successes incorporates first- and third-person narration, rich vocabulary and dialogue, sophisticated wit and a bevy of magical creatures into a well-orchestrated plot that will enthrall fantasy readers of all types.

TeenXtreme is the appellation ascribed to the jovial triumvirate that coordinates systemwide young adult services for the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. Beverly Chearno is an adult specialist and founding member/overall coordinator of TeenXtreme and has been with the library for 35 years. During that time, she has been a children’s librarian, a branch supervisor and a regional coordinator in addition to her current position. Cindy Beach is also a founding member of TXT. An adult librarian who specializes in young adult services, she has been instrumental in developing teen services at YPL. John Waller, the newest TXT member, also divides his time between adult and young adult services but likes to think of himself as a young adult... uh, librarian.

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Tips and Techniques
Laura Hennessey DeSena

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Susan Campbell Bartoletti is an award-winning author of fiction and informational books for younger and middle level readers. *Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850,* was the winner of the Robert F. Sibert Medal and Orbis Pictus Award. *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler’s Shadow,* was a Newbery Honor Book. Her picture books for younger readers, including *The Flag Maker* and *The Christmas Promise,* have received starred reviews from *Booklist* and *Kirkus.*

Luong Ung is a survivor of the killing fields of Cambodia. Her memoir, *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers,* was a national best seller and has been published in eleven countries. *Lucky Child* describes how she was reunited with her family after years of persecution in Cambodia. Luong Ung is the national spokesperson for Campaign for a Landmine-Free World. For a preview of her compelling story, log on to: www.luongung.com.

Rick Sowash has lived in Ohio all his life. He is a storyteller, composer, and author. He has delighted audiences with his tales about the animals and heroes of Ohio. Rick has written musical scores for several documentaries about Ohio and recently performed at Carnegie Hall. Rick’s books include: *Heroes of Ohio: 23 True Tales of Courage and Character,* *Ripsnoring Whoppers!: Humor from America’s Heartland,* and *Critters, Flitters and Spitters: 24 Amazing Ohio Animal Tales.*

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