

Preface



Our purpose in writing *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation and Appreciation* is to open the door for readers to explore young adult literature. To do so, we have tried to establish a foundation of knowledge about young adult literature while providing pathways leading to the literature itself.

New to This Edition

In addition to the updated popular features from the second edition such as Considerations for Selecting Young Adult Literature, Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet, Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature, From Page to Screen, renamed From Page to Screen with the Common Core, and Collaborating with Other Professionals, the third edition includes a number of new features.

Much of the content within chapters has been rearranged to make the book more user-friendly.

Throughout the chapters, the discussions and lists of young adult literature have been updated to include literature published since the second edition of this book and literature that reflects some of today's concerns, such as bullying and cultural diversity, including sexuality.

We firmly believe a number of young adult texts are complex and can serve multiple purposes, including encouraging critical thinking. The new Using the Common Core: Developing College and Career Readiness feature is found in selected genre chapters and is designed for teachers and library media specialists. It is influenced by the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts. Sample questions about selected young adult literature are included, all of them designed to encourage critical thinking.

Chapter 3 presents a new section on standards, including information about the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts, a new Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet feature based on the Common Core State Standards, and several revised Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature features that include resources for teaching English Language Learners.

A new section on using international picture books with young adults is included in Chapter 12. There are suggestions for picture books that teachers can use throughout

the secondary school curriculum, with information on choices to add to the school library media center.

The completely new Suggested Readings section in each chapter features recent journal articles, including those from leading young adult literature journals such as *The ALAN Review* and the *Signal Journal*, that help teachers and library media specialists continue learning about young adult literature beyond the information included in this book.

From Page to Screen has been renamed From Page to Screen with the Common Core, and the suggested activities are influenced by the Common Core State Standards for the Language Arts. We have also made it easier to discern the source of the movie ratings indicated, and we have updated movies to motivate readers and class discussions about books now available as movies.

Organization

A young adult literature text must allow you, the reader, to find a balance between actual literature and the instructional text. For you to be able to guide young adult readers, you will need to read age and developmentally appropriate literature, finding your own favorites and learning firsthand how enjoyable and meaningful these books can be.

You will need more than just your own experiences with the literature. To use this literature effectively with young adults, you will need to form clear objectives:

- Know what literature is available and be familiar with a wide range of genres
- Appreciate, understand, and evaluate the literature
- Develop ways to connect readers with the literature

This balance is important, because young adult literature is a significant aspect of middle and secondary school curricula as well as an invaluable source of enjoyment.

With the current emphasis on literature-based instruction, literature across the curriculum, reading to learn across the curriculum, and the use of literature to integrate curricular areas, the use of young adult literature will become increasingly important for all middle and high school teachers and librarians. Slim enough to guarantee that you have the opportunity to read the books themselves and comprehensive enough to ensure that you understand adolescents, their literature, and how to connect the two, the third edition of *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation* will help you provide a rich educational experience for adolescents while nourishing their love of reading.

Driving Principles

For a young adult literature text to be truly valuable, it must accomplish specific goals:

- Provide readers with the knowledge of quality, age-appropriate books.
- Offer information on literary exploration, emphasizing the evaluation, teaching, and appreciation of young adult literature.

- Be sufficiently concise, allowing readers the time to read the literature itself.
- Use technology as a means of learning more about young adult literature and about making it an integral part of the middle and secondary curriculum.
- Include both fiction and nonfiction as well as graphic formats in order to reflect the reading interests of all students and to meet the needs of both classroom teachers and librarians.
- Recognize and value students' diversity.

Recognition of and Commitment to Diversity

Diversity must be respected and recognized in the middle and secondary school curriculum, and young adult texts need to reflect our nation's and schools' growing diversity. Rather than segregating multicultural literature in a single genre chapter, we interweave diversity and multiculturalism throughout the text. The following threads will help you address and celebrate diversity in your classroom:

- Exploring diversity—cultural, gender, ability, and sexual orientation
- Identifying multicultural literature
- Selecting and evaluating multicultural literature
- Uncovering multicultural literature for and about specific cultural groups
- Investigating award-winning books with multicultural representations
- Integrating multicultural literature throughout the curriculum
- Discovering appropriate literature that crosses curricular boundaries

Exploring, Evaluating, and Appreciating Young Adult Literature

Special features blend with chapter content to support the book's three underlying and unifying themes.

Exploration: Get to Know the Students You Teach and the Literature That Interests Them

- Chapter 1 discusses adolescence and how it affects your students.
- Chapter 7 examines fantasy, science fiction, and horror, all popular genres with adolescents, and explains how to use a reader's interest in these areas to literacy's advantage.
- Chapters 9 and 10 examine nonfiction formats that are useful for promoting reading across curricular areas.
- Chapter 12 explores the popular and burgeoning areas of graphic novels, comic books, and other nontraditional literature such as picture books and magazines, providing an excellent way to motivate young readers.

- Diversity and multicultural literature are major threads that run throughout the book.
- Suggested Readings in each chapter list journal articles and books that will benefit your teaching.

Evaluation: Learn What Makes a Young Adult Title Great

- Chapter 2, “Evaluating and Selecting Young Adult Literature,” sets the stage for a text intended to help you select the finest examples of young adult literature.
- The Considerations for Selecting Young Adult Literature feature in every genre chapter provides clarity on how to determine the value of specific titles.
- The Young Adult Books feature in each chapter helps you choose the best titles for your students.

Appreciation: Help Young Adults Learn from and Love Young Adult Literature

- Chapter 3, “Teaching, Using, and Appreciating Young Adult Literature,” helps you see how best to use young adult literature in your classroom, including ways of integrating curricular areas.
- Chapter 4, “Protecting Intellectual Freedom,” along with the discussions in various genre chapters, will help you learn how to address censorship.
- The Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet feature enriches your teaching with technology.
- The Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature feature includes activities for teaching, exploring, and helping young adults appreciate young adult literature.
- The From Page to Screen with the Common Core feature in each genre chapter explores the best film adaptations of young adult literature, providing opportunities to engage readers and compare films to books, as suggested by the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts.
- The Collaborating with Other Professionals feature provides preservice and in-service teachers and library media specialists with ideas for collaboration on topics being addressed in the text.
- Young adult literature is a valuable resource that can promote meaningful literacy learning. The Using the Common Core: Developing College and Career Readiness feature offers sample discussion questions influenced by the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts.

Acknowledgments

Authors always have a number of people to whom they are grateful—people who motivated them, inspired them, challenged them, and provided actual assistance with the writing and preparation of the book. We thankfully acknowledge the

assistance of Michelle Hochberg at Pearson for her encouragement and patience. In addition, we thank Shannon Lanier Lovejoy for his assistance and support. Finally, we are particularly grateful to the following individuals who served as reviewers for this book and offered numerous constructive suggestions:

Steven T. Bickmore, *Louisiana State University*

Brenda Dales, *Miami University*

Barbara A. Fiehn, *Western Kentucky University*

Patricia L. Jones, *University of South Florida*

Jeffrey Stuart Kaplan, *University of Central Florida*

Andrea Neptune, *Sierra College*

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Understanding Young Adult Literature

FOCUSING POINTS

In this chapter, you will read about:

- * Characteristics of adolescents
- * Definitions of young adult literature and how it reflects adolescents' ages and development, contemporary interests, and their world
- * The history of young adult literature, its qualities, and its place as transitional literature between children's and adult literature
- * Genres of young adult literature and selected authors
- * Young adult literature and the school curriculum and how this literature can be integrated throughout the curriculum

“Like an awkward kid who’s finally shed the braces and baby fat, young adult literature is coming into its own” (Crocker, 2003, p. 76) and has become an “electrifying genre for getting today’s young adolescents reading and exploring who they are” (Stallworth, 2006, p. 59). Attracting the attention of middle and high school readers, as well as their teachers and library media specialists, well-written young adult literature provides adolescents with considerable reading enjoyment; assists in the development of their sense of self; allows them to explore life experiences and realities; and helps them understand the many joys, trials, successes, and problems of life. With excellent authors writing high-quality literature especially for adolescents, young adult literature has earned a respected place between children’s and adult literature. Young adult literature can be used throughout the school curriculum—with an integrating theme across subjects, as part of an interdisciplinary unit, or in specific content areas to expand the information found in textbooks.

Describing Adolescents

Today's young adults differ significantly from the individuals found in the 12- to 20-year-old age group 30 or 40 years ago. Contemporary adolescents develop faster.

- Physically, they mature earlier.
- Cognitively, they know more (although their cognitive experiences might not be the types that are valued in school).
- Socially, many have a preoccupation with friends and peers (Manning & Bucher, 2009).

They also face issues—eating disorders, including crash diets; alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; AIDS and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases); peer pressure; and physical and psychological safety concerns—that previous generations might not have confronted as young adults. Knowing adolescents' developmental characteristics will help teachers and library media specialists select appropriate literature as well as plan learning experiences around young adult literature. Table 1–1 lists some adolescent developmental characteristics in more detail. It is important to remember that these developmental characteristics are complex and interrelated. For example, physical development affects self-esteem, socialization tendencies, and abilities to handle social tasks.

Although developmental characteristics can be listed with considerable certainty, educators must remember the importance of individuality and diversity. A wide range of physical developmental characteristics can readily be seen. For example, some 14-year-olds look like 18-year-olds, while others resemble 10-year-olds. Other characteristics are more subtle. Psychosocially, some adolescents place priority on friendships and may socialize at every opportunity; others might continue to be somewhat shy and may avoid social opportunities. Cognitive development is even less evident, with some younger adolescents performing formal and higher level thinking, while others continue to think in concrete terms. Every adolescent is maturing, but each is taking a different road and going at a different speed on his or her journey from childhood to adulthood (Manning & Bucher, 2009). Thus, it is important to know adolescents on an individual basis and to use this knowledge to select appropriate young adult literature.

In addition to the internal changes happening to adolescents, the environment or “communities” in which a young adult lives also mold the individual. These communities, including the family and its socioeconomic group, the neighborhood (including the school), the ethnic/racial/religious community, and young adolescent peers, affect the development of adolescents. Often these communities exert conflicting influences. Expectations from an ethnic community may be different from those of peers or the neighborhood, while family expectations may conflict with the neighborhood or peer norms.

All of these developmental and community factors have an effect on young adults and an impact on their reading. However, the outcomes are as diverse as young adults themselves. Some adolescents may read to escape the confines of their homes and communities, while others may choose not to read because of peer pressure or the lack of importance placed on reading by their families. Although some young adults prefer literature that realistically addresses the problems of growing up, depicts their

TABLE 1-1 Developmental Characteristics During Adolescence

PHYSICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical changes (e.g., growth spurt, skeletal and structural changes) are rapid and visually apparent. Considerable diversity in physical developmental rates occurs due to genetics, environmental factors, and health issues. Distinct gender differences are evident in size, strength, and age of growth spurt (e.g., girls around age 12, boys around age 14). Health risks increase due to behavioral issues such as eating disorders, sexual experimentation, and drug use.
PSYCHOSOCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendships form and social interactions increase, potentially boosting self-esteem and reducing anxiety. Distinct gender differences occur in socialization patterns (e.g., females tend to have smaller numbers of close friends, males tend to have larger "social networks"). Allegiance and affiliation shifts from parents and teachers to friends and peers. Social tasks and situations are handled without adult supervision and advice. Self-esteem changes due to adolescents' home and school lives. Preoccupation with the self lead to critical self-examination and, subsequently, to the formation of self-perceptions. Argumentative and aggressive behaviors become evident and often disturb parents and teachers.
COGNITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of cognitive functioning (e.g., reasoning, higher level thought processes) develop. Moral and ethical choices are now possible and often guide behavior. Developmental diversity leads to varying abilities to think and reason. Cognitive ability is often affected by overall socialization. Perspectives about past, present, and future develop that allow enhanced perception of time. Language and overall verbalization skills increase, allowing improved communication in both school and home situations.

Source: Based on Manning, M. L., & Bucher, K. T. (2009). *Teaching in the middle school*.

culture, or delves into the conflicting emotions they are experiencing, others prefer literature that will allow them to forget day-to-day life and vicariously experience adventures, travel to a fantasy world, or just have a good laugh.

Defining Young Adult Literature

The term *young adult literature* can be difficult to define. Is it the literature that young adults select, on their own, to read? If so, some mainstream adult novels by Danielle Steele or John Grisham might be classified as young adult literature. Or is young adult literature any book that is written specifically for a young adult audience?

In that case, consider that highly recognized young adult authors such as Bruce Brooks and Robert Cormier actually became young adult authors because of their publishers. Their books, which were written as adult novels, were sent to the juvenile editors because their subjects captured the essence of being a young adult (Aronson, 2001). Publishers sometimes go into the final sales conference not knowing whether to market a book as a young adult or adult title (Maughan, 2000).

In fact, there really is no consensus among publishers, librarians, teachers, reviewers, and booksellers about exactly what young adult literature is (Aronson, 2002). There is not even agreement about who is a young adult. When Joan F. Kaywell surveyed members of the Conference on English Education Commission on the Study and Teaching of Young Adult Literature, she found several definitions of young adults, including ages between 11 and 16, between 10 and 21, between 12 and 22, and grades 6–12 (Kaywell, 2001). Even professional associations and award committees do not agree on an age span. A two-year overlap exists between the ages noted for children’s literature’s Newbery Award (up to age 14) and young adult literature’s Michael L. Printz Award (ages 12–18). While the members of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference on English Education Commission on the Study and Teaching of Young Adult Literature could not reach a consensus on an age range (Kaywell, 2001), most committee members did put the range somewhere between ages 11 and 18 with a grade range between sixth and twelfth grades.

Adding to the difficulty of defining young adult literature is a lack of agreement on the exact term that should be used to refer to it. Poe, Samuels, and Carter (1995) noted that finding research on young adult literature can be difficult because it may be indexed as children’s literature, juvenile literature, or sometimes adult literature. Barnes and Noble, a major bookseller, has changed its signage so that the term *Young Adult* has been replaced by the terms *Teen Fiction* and *Teen Series* (Maughan, 2000).

Even award committees have struggled to define young adult literature. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), part of the American Library Association (ALA), gives several awards for young adult literature, including the Michael L. Printz Award and the Margaret A. Edwards Award. The Printz Award is given to the best young adult book (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or anthology) published in the previous year, while the Edwards Award is given to an author whose “book or books have provided young adults with a window through which they can view their world and which will help them to grow and to understand themselves and their role in society” (YALSA, 1996). Although both awards are given for young adult literature, the criteria defining young adult literature are very different for each award.

In selecting the Edwards Award, the committee considers a number of questions, including:

1. Does the book(s) help adolescents to become aware of themselves and to answer their questions about their role and importance in relationships, in society, and in the world?
2. Is the book(s) of acceptable literary quality?
3. Does the book(s) satisfy the curiosity of young adults, yet help them thoughtfully to build a philosophy of life?

4. Is the book(s) currently popular with a wide range of young adults in many different parts of the country?
5. Does the book or book(s) serve as a “window to the world” for young adults? (YALSA, 1996)

In contrast, the Printz Award is given to a book that has “been designated by its publisher as being either a young adult book or one published for the age range that YALSA defines as ‘young adult,’ i.e., 12 through 18” (YALSA, 2004). The award is given for “quality” or “literary excellence,” not “popularity” or the “message” that the book presents (YALSA, 2004). Additional criteria vary by the individual book and include story, setting, theme, voice, accuracy, style, illustration, characters, and design.

Contemporary young adult literature is more than fiction. As Chelton (2006) points out, many adolescents read nonfiction, including biographies, and turn to magazines for pleasure reading and not just for research. Graphic novels are also an important “literature” for young adults, as are comics and picture books. Sometimes the literature is not even in print format, as adolescents turn to audiobooks and downloads in MP3 format and podcasts.

A Brief History of Young Adult Literature

Perhaps a definition of young adult literature lies in its history. Poe, Samuels, and Carter (1995) contend that in the 1960s, young adult literature separated from both children’s literature and adult literature with the publication of S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) and Paul Zindel’s *The Pigman* (1968). Other critics add Robert Lipsyte’s *The Contender* (1967) (Cart, 2001) and Ann Head’s *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* (1967) (Campbell, 2003a) to this list of groundbreaking books. These early young adult books were mainly novels that addressed the problems of growing up (Aronson, 2001) with “hard-edged realism” (Cart, 2001, p. 96) and “issues of relevance to the real lives of teen readers” (p. 96). *Go Ask Alice* (Sparks, 1971), published with “anonymous” listed as the author, became a best seller, showing publishers the value of young adult literature in paperback format (Campbell, 2003a). Then, in 1974, Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (1974) shook young adult literature, opening the door for “honest, fresh, stylistically daring, startling, terrifying, and wonderful fiction” (Campbell, 2003a, p. 183). The following year, Judy Blume pushed the boundaries of sexual content for adolescents in her novel *Forever* (1975). In libraries, the new young adult literature was promoted to high school or college students, while students in sixth and seventh grades were still being directed to the children’s collection (Campbell, 2003a).

At the same time, scholars began to recognize the growing importance of young adult literature. In the 1960s, G. Robert Carlsen began writing his *Books for the Teenage Reader: A Guide for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents* (1967, 1971, 1980) calling for the incorporation of young adult literature into schools. In 1973, Ted Hipple became the first executive secretary of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN), an independent assembly of the NCTE, for individuals interested in young adult literature. In 1980, Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen wrote a seminal textbook for teachers and librarians on young adult literature that is now in its eighth edition (Donelson & Nilsen, 1980–2008).

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, the media attention given to adolescence influenced it (Aronson, 2001). Talk shows, cable television, and the Internet began to address teenagers' problems and concerns. The decline in young adult readership in the 1980s resulted in changes by publishers. There was a growth of series books such as *Fear Street* and *Sweet Valley High* (Campbell, 2003a; Cart, 2001) and an increased interest on the part of young adult readers in fantasy and science fiction, multicultural novels, and poetry (Aronson, 2002). By the late 1980s, publishers "youthen[ed]" (Cart, 2001, p. 95) their main characters in an attempt to target middle school students.

Young adult literature continued to evolve throughout the 1990s. Theme-based short story collections became popular, as did novels in verse such as those by Mel Glenn and Karen Hesse. Visual elements worked their way into young adult literature and changed the way books looked (Cart, 2001). Cart maintains that the words and pictures in graphic novels are presented in "fresh, original, and exciting ways" (p. 97). These new graphic formats asked readers to examine both the words and pictures when "reading" a story (Dresang, 1999). While the *Harry Potter* phenomenon rekindled an interest in fantasy and science fiction books, there were changes in the traditional linear plot style of realistic fiction. Books began to reflect the interactivity and connectivity of the digital world with shifting perspectives, diverse voices, and even multiple genres within a single book, such as Avi's *Nothing but the Truth* (1991) and Virginia Walter and Katrina Roেকেlein's *Making Up Megaboy* (1998) (Dresang, 1999). In *Seedfolks* (1997), Paul Fleischman simultaneously used several storylines, and in *Holes* (1998), Louis Sachar created a multilayered story. When the first Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult literature was given in 1999, it changed "the way young adult literature is regarded and published" (Michael Cart, quoted in Crocker, 2003, p. 77). Now, young adult literature had its own national award equal in status to the Newbery Medal, which is given for excellence in writing in children's literature. No longer were young adult books forced to compete for recognition with books for younger readers. Aronson (2001) noted that the constraints on young adult literature disappeared.

By 2000, both young adult literature and its readers had changed significantly from its founding in the 1970s. Campbell (2003a) maintains that today, most young adult readers are in sixth to ninth grade; and Cart (2001) notes that the book market for this age group is thriving (p. 95). Publishers have taken advantage of the fact that the teen population has had a yearly disposable income in excess of \$169 billion (Rosen, 2005). According to Michael Wood of the marketing firm Teenage Research Unlimited, for the next two decades, teenagers will be the majority of the adult population ("The marketing battle for Generation Y," 2004).

Publishers are capitalizing on this new, large, more sophisticated audience. As Campbell (2004) points out, more books are speaking "directly to teens themselves, not teachers or librarians" (p. 63). To take advantage of the changes in literature, librarians and teachers need to continually update their collections and booklists. Collaborating with Other Professionals 1–1 provides some information on the importance of keeping such resources as summer reading lists current.

Looking back at the first years of young adult literature, the editors at *Booklist* asked authors to identify personal favorites and/or watershed books that were innovative, changed the direction of young adult literature, and challenged notions about



COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

If your school provides summer reading lists for students, it is important to form a team of school library media specialists, teachers, and public librarians to assist in their development. They can take nonbinding recommendations from adolescents as well. The team should know what the goal for summer reading is (e.g., to create lifelong readers) and should develop a reading list that actually promotes that goal. The team needs to remember that adolescents, like adults, do not all like the same types of books. Therefore, plenty of choices need to be on the list. Williams (2003) indicated that one-third of

Connecticut school summer reading programs in 2003 gave “students complete freedom to choose their own reading” (p. 369). However, most “offered suggested lists” (p. 369) but made it clear that “it was not necessary to read from the list” (p. 369).

SUMMER READING RESOURCES

<http://bankstreet.edu/library/children-resources/childrens-book-lists/summer-reading-lists/>
www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?lid=3120

SUMMER READING COLLABORATIVE

www.cslpreads.org

the expectations of books for youth (Engberg, 2007). A few of the recommendations and the recommending authors are listed in Table 1–2.

Young Adult Literature Today

As young adult literature has matured, authors have begun to incorporate more complex characters, subjects, and situations (Cart, 2001). The boundaries of young adult literature have expanded as authors explore topics of cruelty and crime, personal abuse, and racial violence (Dresang, 1999), accompanied by a change in the perspectives represented in literature. The previously unheard voices of gays, lesbians, the homeless, and people with disabling conditions now join the voices of

TABLE 1–2 Selected Watershed Books and Personal Favorites of Young Adult Authors

Book	Recommended by
<i>After the First Death</i> (1979) by Robert Cormier	Robert Lipsyte
<i>Celine</i> (1989) by Brock Cole	Ellen Wittlinger
<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</i> (1998) by J. K. Rowling	Tamora Pierce
<i>I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip</i> (1969) by John Donovan	Nancy Garden
<i>Speak</i> (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson	John Green
<i>The Chocolate War</i> (1974) by Robert Cormier	Christopher Lynch
<i>Weetzie Bat</i> (1989) by Francesca Lia Block	Laurie Halse Anderson and Michael Cart
<i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> (1962) by Madeleine L’Engle	Meg Rosoff
<i>Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush</i> (1982) by Virginia Hamilton	Angela Johnson

Source: Based on Engberg, G. (2007). 50 years of YA favorites. *Booklist*, 103(19–20), 60–61.



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

The following websites are excellent starting points for links to information about young adult literature.

Young Adult Library Services Association (American Library Association)

www.ala.org/yalsa/

The ALAN Review (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE)

www.alan-ya.org

Vandergriff's Young Adult Literature Page

www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/YoungAdult/

TeenReads

www.stage.teenreads.com/authors/

Random House for High School Teachers

www.randomhouse.com/highschool/

adolescents who are speaking out in books through various modes, including journals, diaries, and letters. Young adult literature is “as varied as the multimedia mix of teenagers’ lives, as complex as their stormy emotional landscapes, as profound as their soul-shaping searches for identity, as vital as their nation-forming future” (Aronson, 2001, p. 11).

Technology is also changing young adult literature. As we mentioned, adolescents are turning to audiobooks in MP3 format and podcasts. They are reading e-books. Author websites, common for a number of years, now feature multimedia experiences (Beaman, 2006) and blogs to keep in touch with readers. Beaman (2006) reports that authors such as Sarah Dessen and Stephenie Meyer have even created iTunes playlists to accompany some of their young adult novels. Authors have created pages on Facebook. Social networking sites even have groups for Teen Lit, which provide a forum for members. In *Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet*, you will find the URLs for this and a few general young adult literature websites.

What, then, is contemporary young adult literature? Aronson (2002) calls it a blend of enduring adolescence and constant change. For our purposes, young adult literature will be defined as literature in prose or verse that has excellence of form or expression in its genre (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995), provides a unique adolescent point of view (Herz & Gallo, 1996), and reflects the concerns, interests, and challenges of contemporary young adults (Brown & Stephens, 1995). In sum, it provides a roadmap for readers 12 to 20 years of age (Bean & Moni, 2003).

Criticism, Praise, and the Future

There are some who believe young adult literature only attracts the poorer readers who do not have the reading and analytical skills to enjoy the classics of literature (e.g., the plays of William Shakespeare, *The Odyssey*, the works of Charles Dickens) that are part of the traditional literary canon. Christenbury (1997) related comments she had heard about young adult literature such as “It’s just for younger kids”; “It’s for weaker readers”; “We are a high school, and the parents would complain if we gave their children this watered-down stuff”; and “Our students would be bored by these books” (p. 11). Aronson (1997) maintained that some adolescents, often those

praised as the best readers, purposely avoid young adult books and gravitate to adult science fiction and fantasy in an effort to avoid the conciseness of much young adult literature.

Other critics downplay the role of young adult literature, especially in the high school curriculum. Jago (2000) rationalized that because young adults do not need guidance to understand a young adult novel, young adult literature should be used for independent, pleasure reading—not studied in the curriculum. She found that the characters were frequently one-dimensional, and the books lacked the rich language and complex themes found in the classics (Jago, 2000). Other critics have advocated the use of young adult literature primarily for developmental English classes, in middle schools, or for unmotivated students who would find the traditional literary canon of the high school English curriculum too challenging (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002).

Perhaps because of the criticism surrounding it, or because of other factors such as the widening gap between young adult literature and the media-saturated world of modern adolescents, in the 1990s the consumption of young adult literature began to decline (Crocker, 2003). Thankfully, this changed in 1999 (Maughan, 2000) as authors found ways to create literature that appealed to young adults entertained by music videos, video games, and the Internet (Crocker, 2003). As Michael Cart, former president of the Young Adult Library Services Association, said, young adult literature was once in critical condition, but it has since been revived and seems to be expanding (Crocker, 2003).

Some literary critics (Hipple, 2000; Moore, 1997) note the excellence in some contemporary young adult literature. As Patty Campbell, young adult critic for *The Horn Book Magazine*, noted, there are “risk-taking, exciting books being published” (Crocker, 2003, p. 76) with the current young adult literature being some of the best literature available. Campbell goes on to say that young adult literature is well-crafted, accessible, and easy to read and that the stories are powerful and intense (Crocker, 2003).

While young adult literature helps younger adolescents find themselves in books and begin to think critically about literature, older adolescents use young adult literature to help them explore social issues and examine their role in society (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002). When adolescents perceive books, especially those in the traditional literary canon, as less relevant, they become disconnected and lose interest in reading. In contrast, many young adult novels “possess themes that merit and reward examination and commentary” (Hipple, 2000, p. 2) and appeal to adolescents. According to Knickerbocker and Rycik (2002), adolescents are more likely to become lifelong readers if they are given opportunities to read, respond to, and interpret a variety of young adult literature and make sense of how the pieces they read connect across genres.

Qualities of Young Adult Literature

Although some children’s and adult’s books appeal to young adults, literature written primarily for young adults should reflect several criteria:

- It should reflect young adults’ age and development by addressing their reading abilities, thinking levels, and interest levels.

- It should deal with contemporary issues, problems, and experiences with characters to whom adolescents can relate. This includes topics such as dealing with parents and other adults in authority; facing illness and death; dealing with peer pressure, specifically relating to drugs, alcohol, and sexual experimentation; and facing the realities of addiction and pregnancy.
- It should consider contemporary world perspectives, including cultural, social, and gender diversity; environmental issues; global politics; and international interdependence.

There is no doubt among scholars that “today’s young adult literature is sophisticated, complex, and powerful . . . [and that] it deserves to be part of the literary tradition in middle and high schools” (Stallworth, 2006, p. 59). In addition to helping students develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, it can offer a connection to alienated students, mirror the lives of young adults, improve literacy skills, and provide a forum for adolescents to discuss what it means to come of age, including navigating difficult problems, accessing tools needed to become problem solvers, and fostering empathy (Stallworth, 2006).

Characteristics. Young adult literature reflects the changes adolescents experience. As they make their first excursions into adult territory, adolescents are learning to take responsibility for their own actions. Young adult literature reflects their experiences with conflicts, focuses on themes that interest young people, includes young protagonists and mostly young characters, and has language common to young adults (Campbell, 2003b; Vogels, 1996). Rather than being watered down in content or style, it is often sophisticated, artistic, and compelling (Christenbury, 1997). Campbell (2003b) believes that young adult literature must not contain long “introspective passages” from the point of view of adults or children (p. 503). In addition, she says that the “point of view must have the limitations of an adolescent perspective” (p. 503).

Although young adult fiction no longer shies away from plots that center on topics once considered only for adults, authors of young adult literature use less graphic details while still conveying the reality of the situation (Campbell, 2003b; Vogels, 1996). However, the literature is not boring in subject matter or in its appeal to young people. Rather, it contains exciting and intriguing plots and characters (Christenbury, 1997) with a “minimum of description” (Campbell, 2003b, p. 503). Young adult fiction usually has a concise plot with a time span of two months or less, as well as a focus on the present and future in the life of one central character (Vogels, 1996).

Purposes. Young adult literature serves a number of purposes. It

- Teaches adolescents about diverse peoples and the world beyond their community
- Provides pleasure reading
- Demonstrates the range of human emotions and allows adolescents to experience them as a result of reading quality literature
- Reveals the realities of life
- Provides vicarious experiences
- Focuses on “essentials” that make order out of chaos
- Depicts the functions of institutions of society

1-1

CONNECTING ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR LITERATURE

One key to getting adolescents to read is providing access to the types of materials they want to read. Deborah Warren (2011) suggests an interesting approach to helping readers locate books about topics they are interested in: bookmarks. Create bookmarks that list the titles and authors of books about subjects that are popular at your school. For example, if students often ask for books with LGBT characters in them, you can give them a bookmark with titles that other students recommend.

- Allows readers to escape into the realms of fantasy
- Introduces readers to excellent writers and writing
- Increases literacy and the ability to analyze literature

Of course, young adult literature cannot provide these benefits unless adolescents actually read the books. In *Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature 1–1*, library media specialist Deborah Warren (2011) offers an idea for helping adolescents find books they will love.

Young Adult Literature as Transitional Literature

Young adult literature should be appreciated and enjoyed “in and of itself,” and young adults should have access to books written especially for them. Young adult literature should not be considered merely a stepping-stone to “better” literature or a “holding ground” until readers are ready for adult literature. It is imperative that teachers and library media specialists provide young adults with excellent, well-written books that deal with important adolescent issues and that reflect their interests and concerns. Throughout this book, especially in Chapter 2, you will read about ways to identify outstanding young adult literature.

Nonetheless, there is no question that reading excellent young adult literature can help adolescents make the transition from children’s books to adult books. Young adult novels provide the perfect bridge to help adolescents cross from literature for children into the traditional literary canon that is studied in high school and college. Generally shorter than adult novels, sometimes less complex in structure, but often well-written and tightly constructed, young adult novels can lead students to a better understanding of the novel form and the elements of fiction. By studying these novels, young adults can understand the craft of fiction so that they are better able to read and to comprehend the messages and literary conventions of the classics.

According to Gillet and Temple (2000), students move through stages of reading development. Independent reading begins in the Building Fluency State (usually second or third grade) and continues into Reading for Pleasure/Reading to Learn, and finally into Mature Reading, which includes critical reading and analysis. When teachers understand both the developmental and reading appreciation levels of their students, they are best able to help adolescents find appropriate materials that will simultaneously challenge and entertain them (Bushman & Haas, 2001). In *Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature 1–2*, Knickerbocker and Rycik (2002) suggest

1-2

CONNECTING ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR LITERATURE

Knickerbocker and Rycik (2002) believe that “it is inappropriate to make sharp divisions in the instructional practices for middle and high school students” (p. 200). Instead, they suggest four types of literary experiences that all adolescents should have:

1. Reading young adult literature
2. Developing bridges between young adult literature and more complex texts and revisiting texts to apply “new understandings or methods of analysis” (p. 201)
3. Interpreting literature by listening to dramatic oral readings by skilled individuals such as teachers and library media specialists
4. Responding to literature in ways including discussion groups, journals, and group conversations

four broad categories of literature experiences that all young adults should have as they move toward becoming mature readers.

In addition to using young adult novels to teach literary conventions, educators can pair young adult novels with the more sophisticated books in the literary canon. Through pairing, teachers can introduce adolescents to a theme, situation, or setting the students find appealing and manageable. After a positive reading experience in which the adolescents become familiar with the concepts presented in the young adult novel, the teacher can introduce the students to the more complex format and ideas of the adult book. Teachers can use the pairing system to match books or authors (Samuels, 1992). A variation of this is to select one adult novel as the core book and then to identify a number of young adult novels that relate to it. The teacher can divide the class into groups and have each group read a different young adult novel. Following discussions within the individual groups, the teacher can host a whole class discussion on the various young adult novels before moving to a study of the core book.

Joan F. Kaywell (1993–2000) has edited a series of books that provide detailed instructional guides for linking young adult literature with the classics. A few of the combinations include linking Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* with Cynthia Voigt’s *The Runner* (1985); Ibsen’s *A Doll House* with Sue Ellen Bridgers’s *Permanent Connections* (1987); or *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* with several novels, including Lois Duncan’s *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978), Will Hobbs’s *Downriver* (1991), and Bruce Brooks’s *No Kidding* (1989).

Genres and Authors

Young adult literature consists of a number of different genres or categories that serve unique purposes and satisfy individual reading choices. Many books overlap genres, making the distinction between types difficult to see. For our purposes, we will use the following categories: fantasy, science fiction, horror fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, adventure, mystery, humor, historical fiction, biography, non-fiction/information, poetry, drama, short stories, comic books, graphic novels, and

magazines. The following sections provide only a brief overview of the genres. You will find detailed information in the individual chapters of this book.

Contemporary Realistic Fiction. The topic of Chapter 5, contemporary realistic fiction, sometimes called the problem novel, appeals to many adolescents and uses plots, themes, settings, and characters to reflect the world as we know it and the problems and challenges many young people face daily. By reading about characters in situations similar to their own, some adolescents can see that their personal problems, though difficult, are not unique. For other adolescents, realistic fiction provides a vicarious experience through which they learn to overcome their fears and accept responsibilities and to deal with problems related to adoption, divorce, disabilities, disease, sexual relationships, changes within their families, relationships, sexual orientation, alienation, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.

Adventure, Mystery, and Humor. In looking for excitement, many adolescents are attracted to books about adventure and survival or mystery and suspense. Adolescents enjoy the usually fast-paced plots found in adventure stories and the challenges to find out “who-done-it” in mystery novels. Some young adults read humorous novels to have a good laugh and to escape the problems of everyday life. Chapter 6 provides information on these genres.

Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror. There is no doubt that science fiction, fantasy, and horror, the categories discussed in Chapter 7, appeal to many young adults. Books from these genres regularly appear in top 10 reading lists selected by young adults (“Fantasy books top the list for teens,” 2004). In fantasies, readers can go to magical places while, in science fiction, they can explore the possibilities of science and technology both on Earth and on other worlds. Horror books allow readers to confront the terrors that populate their worst nightmares.

Historical Fiction. Helping adolescents experience the past, explore misfortunes and triumphs, and examine the background of current events, historical fiction can be both interesting and informative. Young adults can read and learn new perspectives of cultural diversity; perceive challenges associated with disabling conditions; examine societal ills such as poverty, drug addiction, crime, and racism; and explore almost any historical period. As discussed in Chapter 8, historical fiction includes stories based in actual events as well as stories set in the past with little or no reference to recorded history or actual people. Recurring topics include wars and clashes of people, quests for freedom and equality, and overcoming disabling conditions.

Biography. Through biographies, young adults explore the frustrations, obstacles, and achievements in the lives of all kinds of people, from the historically famous to contemporary leaders and names in the news, as well as those who have persevered through challenging circumstances. These life stories can add new perspectives to young adults’ learning and reading pleasure. Chapter 9 discusses this genre of young adult literature.

Nonfiction/information. While many adolescents read fiction, others enjoy well-written informational books (“Reading remains popular among youth, according to

poll,” 2001). Authors and publishers try to meet young adults’ needs and expectations by providing books on timely topics that are written on appropriate reading and interest levels. In fact, some nonfiction authors write with reluctant readers in mind and provide lots of photographs and other illustrations. Chapter 10 discusses nonfiction in more detail.

Poetry, Drama, and Short Stories. Poetry, drama, and short stories are important categories for many young adults, especially for readers who prefer shorter pieces to longer books. Rather than relying on the classics, many adolescents look for works that deal with their contemporary concerns and daily interests and that speak directly to them with words they can understand and situations they can relate to. Information on these categories is provided in Chapter 11.

Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Picture Books, and Magazines. Growing up in a visual and digital society, contemporary adolescents are comfortable with the visual styles found in comic books, graphic novels, and magazines. Although they differ dramatically from the genres that educators have traditionally encouraged adolescents to read, these formats have the visual impact and clipped, pared-down writing style that adolescents have grown accustomed to. Chapter 12 discusses these categories in more detail.

Authors of Books for Young Adults. There are a number of excellent writers of young adult literature. During the spring of 1998, McElmeel and Buswell (1998) published the results of a survey of teachers, librarians, and adolescents to determine the most important authors of books for young adults. Although they based their survey on one conducted by Donald Gallo in 1988, McElmeel and Buswell (1998) changed the survey and sampled a wider population. Table 1–3 shows the individual authors who received votes from at least 40 percent of the respondents.

Then, in June 2001, the magazine *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* published its list of books receiving its highest ratings for quality and popularity from 1996 to 2000 and compared them to the ALA’s Best Books for Young Adults list (Jones, 2001). The authors who appeared on both lists are shown in Table 1–4.

TABLE 1–3 Important Authors of Books for Young Adults

Louisa May Alcott	Avi	Judy Blume
Ray Bradbury	Betsy Byars	Lewis Carroll
Beverly Cleary	Anne Frank	Robert Frost
S. E. Hinton	Langston Hughes	Washington Irving
Madeleine L’Engle	C. S. Lewis	Jack London
Lois Lowry	Scott O’Dell	Gary Paulsen
Richard Peck	Christopher Pike	Shel Silverstein
R. L. Stine	E. B. White	Laura Ingalls Wilder

Source: Based on McElmeel, S., & Buswell, L. (1998). Readers’ choices: The most important authors of books for young adults. *The Book Report*, 16(4), 23–24.

TABLE 1-4 Outstanding Authors, 1996 to 2000

The following authors appeared on both the *VOYA* Perfect Tens list 1996–2000 and the American Library Association’s Best Books for Young Adults list for the same years.

Caroline Cooney	Anita Lobel	Gary Paulsen
Robert Cormier	Albert Marrin	Philip Pullman
Sarah Dessen	Carol Matas	J. K. Rowling
Jackie French Koller	Walter Dean Myers	Cynthia Voigt

Source: Based on Jones, P. (2001). *The Perfect Tens: The top forty books reviewed in Voice of Youth Advocates 1996–2000. Voice of Youth Advocates, 24(2), 94–99.*

Since that time, *VOYA* has continued to issue an annual “perfect ten” list based on its own ratings and has compared its picks to the YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults, the Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and/or the Teens’ Top Ten Books. Table 1-5 shows the authors identified in these lists (“The Perfect Tens,” 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

New, exciting, and skillful authors continue to enter the field of young adult literature each year. Educators often strive to help adolescents make connections with outstanding authors. One way to do this is through author visits. Before an author’s visit, teachers and librarians can introduce students to the author’s life and work, increasing the students’ interest in the author’s books and possibly in researching the topics and themes the author addresses in his or her books.

The accessibility of some authors online has made contacting authors easier. Here are a few suggestions for making the initial contact:

- Contact the author directly via the author’s fan page on Facebook.
- Visit the author’s blog and use the contact information listed there.
- Check the author’s website for information about how to schedule a visit.
- Search for the author’s publisher online and click on their publicity, marketing, or author visit departments.

Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet features URLs of some Internet sites where you can find information about authors of young adult literature. Collaborating with Other Professionals 1–2 contains ideas for planning an author visit in your school or community.

TABLE 1-5 Outstanding Authors, 2001 to 2010

Libba Bray	Gail Giles	J. K. Rowling
Suzanne Collins	Nikki Grimes	Francisco X. Stork
Christopher Paul Curtis	Pete Hautman	Jonathan Stroud
Sarah Dessen	Julius Lester	Gloria Wehlan
Mariah Fredericks	Graham McNamee	Nancy Werlin
Helen Frost	Richard Peck	Patricia Wrede

Source: Based on “The Perfect Tens,” 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010.



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

Many authors have individual websites with interesting features. Here are some links for a few of the authors listed in Tables 1–4 and 1–5.

Libba Bray
www.libbabray.com

Sarah Dessen
www.sarahdessen.com

Nikki Grimes
www.nikkigrimes.com

Mariah Fredericks
www.mariahfredericks.com

Christopher Paul Curtis
www.nobodybutcurtis.com

Helen Frost
www.helenfrost.net

Gail Giles
www.gailgiles.com/Welcome.html

Pete Hautman
www.petehautman.com

Jonathan Stroud
www.jonathanstroud.com

Nancy Werlin
www.nancywerlin.com

Young Adult Literature and the School Curriculum

The importance of having quality young adult literature available in schools is reflected in the International Reading Association's Adolescent Literacy Commission's position statement, which notes that "adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read" (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 4). One way to encourage young adults to read is to supplement the curriculum with high-interest young adult literature and utilize engaging activities and class discussions (Bean, 2002). Thus, there is an increasing trend to incorporate young adult books and other forms of literature across the middle and high school curriculum. In fact, Chapter 3 focuses entirely on this topic.

All educators agree that reading is an important skill. However, when voluntary reading declines, the problems of struggling readers are only aggravated (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner, 2002). By allowing adolescents to read good young adult literature, educators are able to encourage the independent reading that will, in turn, help adolescents develop the skills necessary to succeed. Bean (2002) argues that teachers who wish to help students become lifelong readers must teach interesting and relevant literature.

Richardson and Miller (2001) cite four reasons for using literature in the curriculum. Although they target the social studies curriculum, their reasons are valid for other subjects as well. They found that literature can:

1. Help students become emotionally involved with events and people
2. Aid students in understanding reality
3. Provide stories with satisfactory endings
4. Provide a common, shared experience for the teacher and all students



COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Meeting an author can generate enthusiasm for reading not only that author's books but also books that are similar.

To make an author visit more affordable, several organizations can combine resources to sponsor one in the local community. Partners can include both public and private schools; public libraries; and local reading, literacy, and friends of the library organizations. Another way to control costs is to combine the visit with an author's presentation at a nearby state convention or to see if a local bookstore will help with financial support. In addition, many humanities organizations and councils for arts and cultural affairs have grants that can be used to support authors. Some libraries have used book sales with the proceeds devoted to funding author visits. Another possibility is to schedule a paid ticket presentation or "dinner with the author" for the general public in addition to school and library visits. Costs for the visit will vary. In addition to the author's fee, there will be travel and accommodations charges, as well as costs for promoting the event.

Preplanning is very important. As part of your plan, determine where the author will make her or his presentation(s) (e.g., in several schools, in one large auditorium); whether the presentations will be open to all students in the community, as well as

parents, or if invitations will be issued; who will receive invitations (e.g., members of school book clubs, students in particular English classes, students who work in the school or public library); and whether there will be any charge for attending the presentation(s).

Asking young adults to nominate a favorite author can be one way to involve them in the process. However, it may be better to start with a suggested list from which they can make their recommendations. Once the author has been chosen, teachers and librarians should promote the author's books either through library book discussion groups or in classroom discussions. Be sure that students have read at least some of the books written by the author.

Contact a local bookstore or paperback distributor as soon as you know the name of the author, and be sure that copies of the author's books are available for sale before, during, and after the visit. Decide whether you will have a special autograph session with the author during the visit (some authors prefer to send autographed bookplates) and if you will need to limit the number of books any one individual can have autographed at one time.

For additional information on planning a visit, check online at:

www.michigan.gov/authorvisits

You have already read about the use of young adult literature as a transition to the classics and the pairing of young adult and adult literature. In addition, newer trends such as using literature across the curriculum and creating a literature plan have provided more productive ways to use young adult literature not just in the English classroom but also in science, social studies, art, and physical education. By working collaboratively, teachers and library media specialists can implement a literature program that reflects the abilities and interests of young adults, that encourages adolescents to read for enjoyment, and that develops an awareness of authors and literary works. This literature program should also teach adolescents to interpret literature and develop literary awareness. When the entire school environment reflects literature and a respect for reading, young adults learn the importance the school places on literature and reading.

However, as Chapter 3 explains, the effort to use young adult literature across the curriculum does not have to be an "all or nothing" approach. Teachers may elect

to implement literature-based approaches of varying degrees at various times during the year. What is essential is that teachers and library media specialists recognize the need to use a variety of materials, ranging from books, magazines, and graphic novels to short stories and poetry, and provide time for adolescents to read. By varying their approaches to literature in the content areas, teachers can assure that fiction is read from an aesthetic stance and nonfiction from an efferent stance to ensure learning for all adolescents (Galda & Liang, 2003).

Rather than working in isolation, many educators now make collaborative decisions on curricular themes and use young adult literature that crosses subject areas and helps students see new and different perspectives about issues and subject content. In addition, Bean (2002) suggests that educators provide a variety of ways for adolescents to interpret literature through the use of book clubs, journals, graphic organizers, readers' theater, or even a "dinner party" (p. 36), at which students who are playing a character from a novel are interviewed by a moderator. Today's adolescents will also welcome the opportunity to produce multigenre papers that, like some recent young adult novels, depart from the traditional linear report format and employ a variety of styles (e.g., graphic novel, essay, poetry, drama, magazine article) as well as a number of voices and perspectives to provide "multilayered, nonlinear stories and information" (Glasgow, 2002, p. 49).

Concluding Thoughts

Since its beginnings in the 1960s, young adult literature has come a long way in its quest for respectability and acceptance. More and more teachers and library media specialists have recognized the need for and the value of quality literature that speaks directly to the interests, needs, and desires of adolescents. Professionals working with young adults are seeing increasingly the reasons and techniques for implementing young adult literature throughout middle and high school curricula. However, young adult literature is not static. It is changing along with the students who read it and the society in which it is written. Boundaries are pushed as new forms of graphics and multigenre or nonlinear plots become part of the accepted body of work that is young adult literature. For teachers and library media specialists, the challenge remains to identify the most appropriate strategies to provide young adult readers with well-written literature that they can appreciate and enjoy.

Young Adult Books

This section includes young adult titles mentioned in this chapter.

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- Block, F. L. (1989). *Weetzie Bat*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

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- Bridgers, S. E. (1987). *Permanent connections*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
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- Cole, B. (1989). *Celine*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Cormier, R. (1974). *The chocolate war*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

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- Donovan, J. (1969). *I'll get there, it better be worth the trip*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Duncan, L. (1978). *Killing Mr. Griffin*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Fleischman, P. (1997). *Seedfolks*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Hamilton, V. (1982). *Sweet whispers, Brother Rush*. New York, NY: Philomel.
- Head, A. (1967). *Mr. & Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*. New York, NY: Putnam.
- Hinton, S. E. (1967). *The outsiders*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Hobbs, W. (1991). *Downriver*. New York, NY: Bantam.
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Suggested Readings

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Evaluating and Selecting Young Adult Literature

FOCUSING POINTS

In this chapter, you will read about:

- * The purpose for selecting young adult literature
- * The use of selected awards, book lists, review journals, and bibliographies in the book selection process
- * The elements of literature that library media specialists and teachers can consider when evaluating and selecting young adult literature
- * Our increasingly multicultural nation and the need to select young adult literature that reflects our schools' diversity
- * The need to consider gender differences and preferences when selecting young adult literature for both females and males

“It doesn’t matter what students read as long as they are reading something.”

We have heard a comment like this many times and, while we agree that it is important to “hook” students on reading by offering a variety of materials, we also believe that teachers and library media specialists have the professional responsibility to lead young adults to literature that represents the best of its genre or format. In order to do this, educators must know how to evaluate and select appropriate literature, purchase it for classrooms and libraries, and then incorporate it into lesson and unit plans. By consulting recognized selection aids, checking the winners of book awards and prizes, and actually examining books for literary elements such as plot, character, theme, setting, style, and point of view, teachers and library media specialists can identify high-quality young adult literature.

When selecting literature, educators must also consider the religious, ethnic, social, racial, physical, sexual, and other diversities found in contemporary society and examine the way all groups are represented in young adult literature. Although there has been a concerted effort in the last decade to depict all groups with respect and understanding in young adult books, the challenge remains to identify appropriate literature and take the steps necessary to acquaint young adults with it. When selecting and recommending literature for adolescents, educators must also recognize gender differences and reading preferences and take them into consideration. Good books, even in the genres of science fiction or fantasy, should contain

interesting, realistic characters who play out important themes against an accurately depicted and realistically detailed backdrop. . . . If we

demand good literature, we will get . . . the lasting pleasure that comes when we finish reading a memorable piece of writing. (Jordan, 1996b, pp. 20–21)

The Purpose of Selecting Young Adult Literature

Thousands of new young adult books are published each year. When these are added to the books already in print, teachers and library media specialists often face a difficult task in selecting appropriate, quality literature that meets the developmental, intellectual, and social needs of adolescents as well as the school's curricular standards. Perhaps the ideal way to accomplish this is for educators to read young adult literature and make their own judgments about its quality and appropriateness. Unfortunately, given the large number of young adult books published each year, it is not possible for any educator to read more than a sample of the new young adult literature that reaches the market. For example, 191 newly published books were nominated for the annual Best Fiction for Young Adults list for 2011 ("2011 Best Fiction for Young Adults," 2011). Given that these were just a portion of the total number of books published, teachers and library media specialists have developed other strategies for selecting quality literature.

Relying on Others When Selecting Young Adult Literature

Many teachers and all library media specialists have learned to rely on the recommendations of others when selecting materials. However, it is important not to rely on just anyone for these recommendations. Publishers include glowing blurbs in the catalogs and advertisements that they publish, but these publicity reviews are not recognized review sources. As one school library media specialist said, "I never met a book that its publisher didn't love."

Thankfully, a number of resources or selection aids such as book awards, book lists, book-length bibliographies, and review journals exist to help teachers and library media specialists select appropriate young adult literature. We will only be able to list a few of them in this chapter; we refer you to *The Children's and Young Adult Literature Handbook* (Gillespie, 2005) for a detailed listing of over 1,000 bibliographies, awards, and other resources. Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet provides links where you will find more information, including detailed selection criteria for the resources we mention. Later chapters mention additional selection aids that target specific genres of young adult literature.

Book Awards

While any group can give an award, it is important to identify awards that are given by recognized groups and associations with established committees that read and evaluate a wide range of books. The review committee members must consider not only the impact of the book on the reader but also the quality of the book and its appeal to teenagers (Gentle, 2001). Some younger adolescents enjoy reading books



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

Information on book awards, including complete information on selection criteria and eligibility, is available on the Internet.

AWARDS

Alex Award

www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/alex/

Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award

www.alan-ya.org/page/walden-award/

*Américas Award

www4.uwm.edu/clacs/aa/index.cfm/

Boston Globe–Horn Book

<http://archive.hbook.com/bghb/>

Carnegie Medal

www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/home/index.php

*Carter G. Woodson Award

www.socialstudies.org/awards/woodson/

*Coretta Scott King Awards

www.ala.org/emiert/ckbookawards/

Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Award

www.ala.org/yalsa/nonfiction-award

Garden State Teen Book Award

<http://njla.pbworks.com/w/page/12189805/Garden%20State%20Teen%20Book%20Awards>

*Jane Addams Children's Book Awards

www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/index_jacba.shtml

Los Angeles Times Book Prize—Young Adult Fiction

www.latimes.com/extras/bookprizes/index.html

Margaret A. Edwards Award

www.ala.org/yalsa/edwards/

Michael L. Printz Award

www.ala.org/yalsa/printz/

Mildred L. Batchelder Award

www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward/

National Book Award

www.nationalbook.org/

Newbery Award

www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberymedal/

Orbis Pictus

www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus/

*Pura Belpré Award

www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/

*Sydney Taylor Book Award

www.jewishlibraries.org/main/Awards/SydneyTaylorBookAward.aspx/

William C. Morris YA Debut Award

www.ala.org/yalsa/morris-award/

Virginia Reader's Choice

www.vusra.org/virginia-readers-choice/nominate-vote/

*Awards with an Asterisk have a Multicultural perspective.

BEST BOOKS LISTS

Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults (YALSA)

www.ala.org/awardsgrants/amazing-audiobooks-young-adults/

Best Fiction for Young Adults (YALSA)

www.ala.org/yalsa/bfya/

Stuff for the Teen Age (New York Public Library)

www.nypl.org/voices/blogs/blog-channels/sta

Fabulous Films for Young Adults (YALSA)

www.ala.org/awardsgrants/fabulous-films-young-adults

Outstanding Books for the College Bound (YALSA)

www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/obcb/

Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (YALSA)

www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/poppaper/

Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (YALSA)

www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks/

Teachers' Choices list includes a category for grades 6–8

www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/TeachersChoices.aspx

Teens' Top Ten Books at YALSA

www.ala.org/yalsa/teenstopten

Young Adults' Choices

www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/YoungAdultsChoices.aspx

REVIEW JOURNALS

The ALAN Review (NCTE)

www.alan-ya.org

Book Links

www.ala.org/offices/publishing/booklist/booklinks

Booklist (ALA)

booklistonline.com/Default.aspx

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

<http://bccb.lis.illinois.edu/>

English Journal (NCTE)

www.ncte.org/journals/ej

Horn Book Magazine

www.hbook.com/

Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy

www.reading.org/general/Publications/Journals/JAAL.aspx

Youth Adult Library Services (ALA)

www.yalsa.ala.org/yals/about_yals/

Kirkus Reviews

www.kirkusreviews.com/kirkusreviews/index.jsp

Language Arts (NCTE)

www.ncte.org/journals/la

Library Media Connection

www.librarymediaconnection.com

School Library Journal

www.slj.com

Voice of Youth Advocates

www.voya.com

Voices from the Middle (NCTE)

www.ncte.org/journals/vm

that have won the Newbery Medal, presented annually by the ALA for excellence in literature for children; the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award*, given by the *Boston Globe* and *The Horn Book Magazine*; or the Carnegie Medal, presented by the British Library Association. Other young adults, however, are ready for books that are intended specifically for an older adolescent audience.

General Awards. In addition to the specialized awards that are discussed later in this book (those given to books in specific genres or to specific categories of authors), a number of general awards are also given to young adult literature. While these awards honor specific authors and books, they also promote quality young adult literature in general by heightening “public awareness of excellent literature and increas[ing] the readership of good books” (Gentle, 2001, p. 27). For example, the **Margaret A. Edwards Award** is given to an author for her or his lifetime contribution to writing for young adults. Winners have included Sir Terry Pratchett, Laurie R. King, and Lois Lowry.

Established in 1999 by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA; a division of the ALA), and *Booklist* magazine, the **Michael L. Printz Award** recognizes, honors, and promotes excellence in young adult literature for ages 12 to 18. The award is not limited to any specific genre. Each year, a committee selects one award-winner and up to four “honor” books. For example, in 2011, the winner was Paolo Bacigalupi’s *Ship Breaker* (2010), while the honor books were *Stolen*

(Christopher, 2010), *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* (King, 2010), *Revolver* (Sedgwick, 2009), and *Nothing* (Teller, 2010). Given yearly since 1998 by the Adult Books for Young Adults Task Force of YALSA, the **Alex Award**, now given by the Alex Awards Committee, identifies up to 10 adult books, such as *Room: A Novel* (Donoghue, 2010), *Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard* (Murray, 2010), *Girl in Translation* (Kwok, 2010), *Salvage the Bones* (Ward, 2011), and *The Round House* (Erdrich, 2012), that will appeal to young adult readers. The award is named after Margaret Alexander Edwards, a public librarian who believed that adult books can help adolescents “broaden their experiences and . . . enrich their understanding of themselves and their world” (“YALSA announces 2002 Alex Awards,” 2002, p. 58).

In 2009, the YALSA introduced the William C. Morris YA Debut Award. The award is given to a previously unpublished author. Winners have included John Corey Whaley, Rachel Hartman, and Blythe Woolston. The following year, the YALSA established the Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Award for quality young adult nonfiction. Past winners include *Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon* (Sheinkin, 2012), *Janis Joplin: Rise Up Singing* (Angel, 2010), and *The Notorious Benedict Arnold: A True Story of Adventure, Heroism, & Treachery* (Sheinkin, 2010), and *Charles and Emma: The Darwins’ Leap of Faith* (Heiligman, 2009).

A number of other awards have young adult literature categories. For example, the **National Book Award** has a Young People’s Literature category. Newspapers often give awards that have categories for young adult fiction such as the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize*. Several state library associations have young adult literature awards, including the **Garden State Teen Book Award** (New Jersey), the **Utah Beehive Award for Young Adult Fiction**, and the **Virginia Reader’s Choice Award**. Collaborating with Other Professionals 2–1 has suggestions for participating in an award process.

Awards with Multicultural Perspectives. Several awards have multicultural perspectives. Given by the National Council for the Social Studies, the **Carter G. Woodson Award** includes middle- and secondary-level books and recognizes works such as *Simeon’s Story: An Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of Emmett Till* (Wright & Boyd, 2010) and *Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration* (Bausum, 2009) that authentically depict ethnicity in the United States and examine race relations sensitively and accurately. The **Sydney Taylor Book**

2-1

COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Adolescents may not be able to select the Academy Award winners, but they can vote for the best books in their state or in the nation. For example, the national Teens’ Top Ten Books list is sponsored by YALSA (www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-top-ten).

Check your state library association(s) and your state reading association for information on existing state awards. If there is no existing award for adolescent literature in your state, lobby for one, or start your own local or regional award.

Award for outstanding Jewish content in children's books, given by the Association of Jewish Libraries, has a category for older readers. Given since 1953 by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Jane Addams Peace Association, the **Jane Addams Children's Book Award** honors children's books that promote peace, social justice, and world community, and has a category for older children through age 14.

Although not specifically given for young adult literature, a few awards honor multicultural literature and may include young adult literature among the award or honor winners. These include the **Coretta Scott King Award** for African American authors and illustrators of outstanding literature for children and young adults. Winners and honor books have included Rita Williams-Garcia's *One Crazy Summer* (2010) and Jewell Parker Rhodes's *Ninth Ward* (2010). The **Pura Belpré Award**, given for books that portray the Latino cultural experience for children and youth, has honored books such as Julia Alvarez's *Return to Sender* (2009) and Pam Muñoz Ryan's *The Dreamer* (2010). Providing an international viewpoint, the **Mildred L. Batchelder Award** is given to a book originally published in a foreign language and translated into English. It has honored books such as Annika Thor's *A Faraway Island* (2009) and Anne-Laure Bondoux's *A Time of Miracles* (2010). The **Stonewall Book Awards**, which began in 1986, honors Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) books for adults, but added a **Children's and Young Adult Literature Award** in 2010 ("Stonewall Book Awards History," 2010). It has honored Paul Yee's *Money Boy* (2011) and John Green and David Levithan's *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010). Other multicultural awards are mentioned later in this chapter.

Best Books Lists

In addition to awards, a number of organizations and associations develop lists of outstanding books for young adults. The New York Public Library issues an annual **Stuff for the Teen Age**; YALSA produces a number of these lists, including **Best Fiction for Young Adults**, **Outstanding Books for the College Bound**, **Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults**, **Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers**, **Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults**, and **Fabulous Films for Young Adults**. Some of the lists are general in nature; others are more specific. For example, each year the YALSA Popular Paperbacks committee identifies several themes (not necessarily in specific genres) and selects materials related to those themes. The 2011 themes were **Thrillers & Killers**; **What's Cooking?**; **What If . . .**; **Zombies**, **Werewolves & Things with Wings**; and **Spies & Intrigue**. The ALA-sponsored **Rainbow Project Book List** provides titles for youth up to age 18 about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning issues.

Some lists are based on suggestions by young readers themselves. The **Young Adults' Choices** is a yearly list created by adolescents in grades 7 to 12 at participating schools throughout the United States. Students make their selections from books nominated by publishers; in order to be nominated, each book must have received at least two positive reviews from recognized review sources. The Literature for Young Adults Committee of the International Reading Association supervises the voting. A companion **Teacher's Choices** list includes a category for grades 6 to 8. The ALA sponsors an annual **Teens Top Ten** list; adolescents vote online for their favorite books.

Each year, the Children's Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association lists its **Notable Books for a Global Society, K–12**. The books, including past notables such as *Wanting Mor* (Khan, 2009), *Cycle of Rice, Cycle of Life* (Reynolds, 2009), *Sunrise over Fallujah* (Myers, 2008), and *Broken Memory* (Combres, 2009), are culturally authentic and enhance the understanding of world cultures while showing the common bonds that exist (2000 Notable Books for a Global Society, 2001).

Review Journals

A number of reputable journals have reviews of young adult literature, including:

- *The ALAN Review*
- **Booklist** (published by ALA)
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*
- *The Horn Book Magazine*
- *Kirkus Reviews*
- *Library Media Connection* (combination of *Library Talk* and *Book Report*)
- *School Library Journal*
- *Voice of Youth Advocates*

Review journals are available by subscription; however, many of them are available free through a university or public library database.

These journals devote a significant number of pages in each issue to reviews or, in the case of *Booklist* and *Kirkus Reviews*, contain only reviews. In addition to the regular reviews in each issue, a number of these journals, including *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*, publish yearly best books lists. While most of these evaluate young adult literature on the basis of quality and literary merit, *VOYA* includes both a quality and a popularity rating with each review.

Other journals may include reviews or bibliographies of suggested young adult literature in addition to articles. These include *The ALAN Review* (affiliated with the NCTE), *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* (affiliated with ALA), *Language Arts* (affiliated with NCTE), *English Journal* (affiliated with NCTE), *Multicultural Review*, *Voices from the Middle* (affiliated with NCTE), and *Children's Literature in Education*. Taking a thematic approach, *Book Links* publishes curriculum-related bibliographies and essays on linking books with topics of interest to children and young adults.

Book-Length Bibliographies

In addition to the awards and review journals, a number of books contain bibliographies of recommended books for young adults. Table 2–1 is a list of some recent titles. A number of books also examine the literary elements of young adult fiction. These include the series *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (Kaywell, 1993–), *Authors and Artists for Young Adults* (1989–), and the multivolume *Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults* (Beetz & Niemeyer, 1989–), the latest volumes of which were issued in 2003. Each volume in the *Twayne Young Adult Author Series* and the *Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature*, both edited by Patricia Campbell, focuses on a specific young adult author and includes information about his or her works.

TABLE 2-1 Recent Bibliographies of Young Adult Literature

Title	Author	Date
Best Books for Young Adults	Koelling & Carter	2009
Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature	Trupe	2006
Popular Series Fiction for Middle School and Teen Readers	Barr	2005
Serving Teens Through Readers' Advisory	Booth	2007
Making the Match	Lesesne	2003
Middle and Junior High School Library Catalog	Price	2005
Senior High School Core Collection	Barber & Bartell	2007
Book Crush	Pearl	2007
500 Great Books for Teens	Silvey	2006
Connecting with Reluctant Teen Readers	Jones, Hartman, & Taylor	2006
Gentle Reads	McDaniel	2008
Big Book of Teen Reading Lists	Keane	2006
Best Books for High School Readers	Gillespie & Barr	2006
A Core Collection for Young Adults	Jones, Taylor, & Edwards	2003

Evaluating Review Sources

While Internet sites such as Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com are not review sources, they do include reviews from reputable selection journals as part of their descriptions of many of the books found on their sites. By knowing the legitimate, quality selection aids, you can identify appropriate reviews on the websites of these and other Internet superstores. However, beware of reviews from sources that you do not know or that are from “readers.” Some sources are nothing more than publishers’ or distributors’ catalogs. In addition, in 2004, Amazon discovered a computer error that led to Internet users discovering that a number of so-called reviews from readers at Internet bookstores were actually written by the book’s author or by the author’s friends using a variety of fictitious names in order to promote specific books (Harmon, 2004). The best approach is to use only reviews from reputable sources that you know and trust.

Relying on Your Own Judgment to Evaluate Young Adult Literature

In many cases, you can rely on selection aids to identify appropriate young adult literature; however, in some cases, you must rely on your own judgment. For example, you might find conflicting reviews of a book, or you may not be able to locate reviews from recognized sources. In other instances, only a publisher’s advertisement that catches a school library media specialist’s attention, a mention of a new book in an article, or a display at a conference or bookstore may be available. Certainly, all teachers will want to read and review the young adult books that they assign in their classes or put on their reading lists. When your own evaluation is needed, you must have a set of guidelines to use.

2-1

CONNECTING ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR LITERATURE

While agreeing that it is important for adolescents to understand and evaluate the elements of literature, Arthea J. S. Reed (1994) suggested that educators should not lecture young adults about the literary elements of young adult novels. Rather, she believed that educators must allow young adults to discover, experience, and respond to the elements of a literary work by examining the work as a whole rather than dissecting the elements. When students are asked to dwell on the elements, they may lose sight of the work as a whole. This does not mean that readers cannot be encouraged to understand how these literary elements work. However, the elements should not be emphasized to a point where adolescents no longer enjoy reading.

Elements of Literature

Throughout this book, you will read about criteria for evaluating each of the genres of literature. Behind these specific criteria are the literary elements such as character, plot, theme, setting, style, point of view, and tone. Although these elements are found in all good literature, they can vary according to the genre or type of literature as well as the age of the intended audience. Although we can provide guidelines that you can use when examining these elements in books, it is important that you remain flexible when using them to select appropriate materials for a specific group of adolescents. Connecting Young Adults and Their Literature 2–1 presents one educator’s view of the study of literary elements by adolescents themselves. Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet provides links that discuss some of these elements in more detail than we can present in this chapter.



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

Information on the elements of literature can be found at the following websites.

Lynch Glossary of Literary and Rhetorical Terms (Rutgers University)

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Terms/>

Elements of Fiction—slide overview

www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/lit-elements/overview/

Glossary of Literary Elements (Gale Cengage Learning)

www.gale.cengage.com/free_resources/glossary/index.htm

Elements of Fiction—Interactive Fiction Tutorial

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/fiction/elements.asp>

Lesson Plan on the Elements of Fiction

www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1983/3/83.03.07.x.html

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature—A Research and Reference Guide

www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/append/AXG.HTML/

Plot. The plot is the story; it is what happens in the story (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995). Acting as a thread to hold the book together, the plot shows the characters in action and makes the reader want to continue reading (Lukens, 2007).

In young adult literature, the plot's importance cannot be overemphasized. For many reluctant readers, it is the action and movement of the plot rather than the detailed descriptions of the setting or the characters that draw them into the story. Young adults seem to prefer books with interesting plots to which they can relate. In books with well-written plots, events seem logical and natural, not contrived or artificial, and reflect the interests of adolescents. Successful authors such as Walter Dean Myers and Karen Hesse know when to allow readers to predict actions and when to surprise them.

Conflict is the tension between people or things (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995) and is at the core of the plot. Conflict usually takes one or more of the following forms:

- *Person against person.* Conflict arises between the main character (protagonist) and one or more opposing characters, as in the struggle between Harry Potter and Voldemort or Draco Malfoy in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, 1998).
- *Person against society (culture).* The protagonist struggles against the rules or expectations of society, as in the struggle of Jonas against a utopia/dystopia in *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993).
- *Person against nature (environment).* The protagonist struggles to survive; often found in adventure stories such as those by Gary Paulsen and Will Hobbs.
- *Person against self.* An internal emotional or intellectual conflict pulls the protagonist in different directions.

Some critics add another form of conflict: person against fate (spirit or deity). In any book, several types of conflict may be present.

Writers of young adult literature can employ a number of plot features. A plot may be linear/chronological (moving forward in a chronological pattern) or may contain flashbacks that move the action between the past and present. At times, an author may use two or more parallel plots, such as those in Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese* (1978), or an episodic plot that consists of a series of loosely connected stories or scenes (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995). *Holes* (Sachar, 1998) is an example of a circular or cyclical plot, in which the end of the novel returns to the beginning. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Plot* provides several guidelines for evaluating plot.

Characters. In literature, *character* refers to the individuals (human and nonhuman persons, animated objects, or personified animals) about whom the book is written. Although the plot or action drives some books, in others, effective characterization maintains the reader's interest. When adolescents identify closely with the characters, they become involved with the experiences in the book. Authors reveal information about individual characters in a number of ways: what a character says, thinks, and does; what others say or think about the character or how they relate to the character; and the narrator's description of the character.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **PLOT**

- _____ Is the plot enjoyable and interesting?
- _____ Is the plot logical or contrived? Natural or artificial?
- _____ Is the plot credible and believable?
- _____ Is there the right amount of predictability for the intended audience and genre of the book?
- _____ Are the themes/topics of the book represented appropriately by the actions within the plot?
- _____ Is the plot carefully constructed?
- _____ Does the plot lead to a well-defined, logical, and identifiable climax?

Several terms are used to describe the characters within a book. The *protagonist*, or principal/main character, is usually confronted with the *antagonist*. *Round*, or *dynamic*, characters are “complex and undergo development throughout the story,” whereas *flat*, or *static* characters, although essential, are “two-dimensional . . . uncomplicated, and do not change” (*Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995, p. 420). Stereotypes or stock characters are usually flat and static. The static or dynamic nature of characters helps the reader to understand the ideas behind the action in the plot (Lukens, 2007).

All of these types of characters are found in the popular *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Rowling, 1998). With Harry Potter as the protagonist, Voldemort emerges as the principal antagonist throughout the series, and although Professor Quirrel is his servant, he also serves as an antagonist as does the stereotyped or stock character of Draco Malfoy. Many dynamic characters grow in the book, including Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and Neville Longbottom dramatically changes from a bumbling comic to a student who stands up for his beliefs. This is in contrast to the static Dursley family, who remain cruel throughout the book. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Character* details several guidelines for examining this literary element in more detail.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **CHARACTER**

- _____ Are the characters’ emotions, actions, thoughts, and words believable, credible, and consistent?
- _____ Are the characters realistic rather than contrived?
- _____ Do the characters complement each other?
- _____ Do the characters contribute to the action and believability of the plot?
- _____ Do the characters avoid being stereotypes?
- _____ What will the readers learn from the characters?
- _____ Will adolescents relate to or understand the characters?
- _____ In series books, will the characters make adolescents want to continue with the series?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **SETTING**

- _____ Even if imaginary, is the setting appropriate and consistent?
- _____ Does the setting complement the other literary elements?
- _____ Does the setting contribute to an understanding of the time and place?
- _____ Is the setting authentic and credible?
- _____ Does the author use the setting effectively?

Setting. Basically, the setting is the time and place in which the action takes place (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995). However, the setting can be much more than a physical description. Sounds, smells, the kinds of buildings, the quality of light, and climate may combine to create the mood and atmosphere for the characters and the conflict (Lukens, 2007). Anne Devereaux Jordan (1996b) suggested that the setting can assume the role of a character, especially in situations where nature or the environment helps or hinders characters.

Although some works, such as historical fiction, may depend heavily on a specific realistic setting, other books may have a setting that expands rather than limits the universality of the story (Lukens, 2007). Perhaps the setting is totally imaginary—or it may be loosely defined to provide additional interpretations to the book. A setting may create a mood, create conflict, provide historical background, or add to the symbolism in the plot. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Setting* provides several suggestions for examining this literary element.

Theme. A theme is sometimes described as the main message in a book (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995) or the underlying or unstated idea that provides organization. Russell (2009) maintains, “If the plot tells us what happens in a story, the theme tells us why it happens” (p. 48). Theme is often a statement about why humans live the way they do (Lukens, 2007). You may forget the exact events in a novel, but the theme will often remain with you because it goes beyond the action of the plot to reach a level of deeper meaning. This does not mean that all themes are serious; however, they should be substantial, not trivial.

A theme is more than a single word or phrase such as “love” or “growing up.” As Reyes (n.d.) notes, a theme such as “growing up asks us to make difficult choices and decisions about who we love” is much more complex and requires more thought and analysis on the part of the reader.

Although some authors openly state an explicit theme, in most cases, the theme is implicit or implied and is revealed through the characters, the conflict, and the setting of the book. Sometimes, a book has several themes, often with one more important than the others. Common themes in young adult books usually present the author's perspective on concepts such as growing into adulthood or “coming of age”; accepting responsibility; confronting problems in life such as death and dying, illness, or poverty; and learning to deal with parents, other adults, and friends. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Theme* provides several guidelines for examining this literary element.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **THEME**

- _____ What is the theme?
- _____ Is the theme appropriate/worthwhile for adolescents?
- _____ Will adolescents be able to understand the theme?
- _____ What will adolescents learn from the theme?
- _____ Is the theme too “preachy” or blatant, or is it natural and objective?
- _____ Does the theme complement the other literary elements?
- _____ Does the theme provide cohesion to the work?
- _____ How is the theme revealed to the reader?

Point of View. The author’s perspective in telling the story is called the *point of view*; the three main points of view are first person, third-person singular, and third-person omniscient (*Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995). For readers, the point of view determines what the readers know, how involved they are in the story, and how the story develops.

In the first person point of view, the pronoun “I” is used, and the story is told from the perspective of one of the characters (*Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995), and the reader sees everything through the eyes of that character, who may or may not be the protagonist. Sometimes authors present the first-person point of view through a diary or journal written by the character. When an author writes in the third-person singular, he or she writes from the point of view of one character and only describes those feelings or experiences of which the character is aware. Sometimes this is referred to as looking over the shoulder of one of the characters. Finally, using the third-person omniscient point of view, an author is all-knowing about the details of the plot as well as the conscious or unconscious feelings of all of the characters (Lukens, 2007). Sometimes, authors use multiple points of view, perhaps by having different chapters told by different characters, switching between two major characters for alternating chapters, or interspersing short, first-person reflections in an otherwise third-person omniscient narrative. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Point of View* provides several guidelines for evaluating this literary element.

Style of Writing. In writing, the word *style* refers to the author’s unique way of conveying meaning (*Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995) or how the writer chooses and arranges words (Lukens, 2007). Using the most appropriate words and phrases, the author adds details and meanings to plots, shows characters’ thoughts and reasons for actions, and provides more intricate descriptions of settings. With unique exposition, dialogue, vocabulary, imagery, figurative language, or sentence structure, the author’s style conveys information, feelings, and perspectives. By putting them together, the author creates the book’s mood or overall atmosphere.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **POINT OF VIEW**

- _____ Is the point of view appropriate for the plot and characters?
- _____ Is the point of view appropriate for the developmental level of the intended reader?
- _____ Is the point of view consistent, and does it add to the understanding and appreciation of the story?
- _____ Does the point of view complement the other literary elements?
- _____ Is the point of view clear to the reader, and is the reader able to determine how objective or subjective it is?
- _____ Does the point of view contribute to the reader's understanding of the book?
- _____ Is the point of view credible and maintained throughout the book?

The author's style also sets the tone of the book or the author's attitude toward both the book and the intended readers. According to Lukens (2007), the author's choice of words is a means of showing attitude toward the subject. Condescending, moralizing, didactic, sensational, cynical, or sentimental tones are usually not appropriate (Russell, 2009). In contrast, serious, humorous, passionate, sensitive, zealous, poignant, and warm tones are common in young adult literature. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: *Style and Tone* provides several guidelines for evaluating these elements.

Literature with Diverse Perspectives

The U.S. population is becoming more diverse. The U.S. Census reports show that in 1900, 85 percent of immigrants came from Europe. In contrast, in 1990, only

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **STYLE AND TONE**

- _____ What literary devices comprise the author's style?
- _____ Is the author's style appropriate for the plot and the theme?
- _____ Is the author's style appropriate for adolescents?
- _____ What mood does the style create?
- _____ Does the author's style complement the other literary elements?
- _____ Does the style contribute to the understanding of the book?
- _____ Does the author maintain the same style throughout the book? If not, why, and is the change effective?
- _____ Does the tone of the book help young adults to understand the author's perspectives and biases?
- _____ Will the tone appeal to adolescents?
- _____ Is the tone consistent throughout the book?

TABLE 2-2 Major Cultural Groups in the United States

Cultural group	2009	Percent change 2000 to 2009
Hispanic American	48.419 million	37.1%
African American	39.641 million	11%
Asian American	14.014 million	32.3%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders	0.578 million	25%
Native American	3.151 million	18.3%
White Americans	244.298 million	7.1%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

22 percent came from Europe (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). By the 2010 census, 2.9 percent of the population claimed a multiracial heritage (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). As the anticipated growth in selected cultural groups (Table 2-2) continues, there will be an increase in the school-age population from these groups.

There are many ways of talking about diversity. In addition to nationality based on a person's specific country of birth or naturalization, there is cultural and ethnic diversity. Within a specific country, there may be different ethnic groups whose members identify with others of the same group because of commonalities such as race and religion (*Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*). *Culture* is defined as the shared beliefs of a people (*Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*). Thus, people in a specific ethnic or social group may share cultural beliefs, values, social practices, and conventions.

We discuss books with gay and lesbian perspectives as multicultural texts. According to McLean (1997), gays and lesbians make up a cultural group and belong to "cultural subgroups . . . people who are homosexual can point to a history, to cultural artifacts, to famous people, and to a celebration of life that is uniquely their own" (p. 179).

Responding to Diversity: Values of Multicultural Literature

What is a common pleasure for mainstream students—connecting with a character who has a similar name and a familiar experience—truly delights children who don't typically see themselves reflected in the books they use. (Carger, 2003, p. 34)

As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, educators are attempting to reflect this diversity in both the literature that is available to adolescents and in the school's curriculum. James Baldwin maintained that literature is "vital to how people perceive reality and the world in which they live" (cited in Boyd, 2002, p. 59). Multicultural literature, described as a "vehicle for socialization and change" (Harris, 1997, p. 51), allows readers to connect to people from other cultures in a way that Western male writers in the traditional literary canon are unable to do (Chew, 1997).

Through multicultural literature, young adults can:

- Learn about their own and others' cultural backgrounds.
- Realize the many similarities that all people share and experience.
- Begin to understand the injustices of the past.
- Develop self-esteem and cultural identity.
- Understand the problems faced by refugees and immigrant groups.
- Develop a respect for a variety of cultural and individual characteristics.
- “Build a positive self-image by . . . [observing] characters like themselves and their families who are able to work out problems and succeed in various ways” (McGlenn, 2002, p. 50).

In addition, quality literature from diverse cultures connects readers to other peoples and lands (Lo, 2001). By using universal themes such as justice, friendship, survival, or conflict resolution, authors of multicultural literature are able to make connections across cultures (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998). Authors are also able to “raise the consciousness and awareness of differences between and among people across contexts, countries, and cultures” (Boyd, 2002, p. 89). For example, in a study by Athanases (1998), a diverse group of 10th-grade students eliminated stereotypes as they read multicultural literature and learned about diversity in race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

As all adolescents begin to shape their identity, students from parallel cultures (Hamilton, 1999) begin to develop their ethnic identity (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998). In addition to learning about other cultures, multicultural literature helps adolescents “of diverse backgrounds shape cultural identity” (De León, 2002, p. 51) and their personal identity (Klein, 1992). Multicultural literature “frees the many voices in the reader” and encourages the reader to “explore all of her selves: the master and the slave, the male and the female, the black and the white” (Aronson, 2001, p. 17).

Morales (2001), writing about “Chicano/a” students (p. 16), mentions considerations that hold true for other adolescents as well. Adolescents must learn about their cultural identity and “how it fits into their complex identity” (p. 20). When teachers promote a “shared experience” through multicultural literature while also “fostering an exuberance for one’s own identity” (p. 18), the result will be a multicultural classroom that will empower all students.

A Brief History of Multicultural Literature

For many decades, children’s and young adult literature focused primarily on middle-class Anglo American populations and, of course, dealt with situations, problems, and challenges representative of this cultural group. Other groups, if represented at all, were usually shown as minor characters or in menial and subservient positions. For example, American Indians were often stereotyped as savages, and African Americans were portrayed only as servants. These representations had the potential to distort the readers’ views toward an entire culture of people. Table 2–3 outlines some of the historical events in the development of multicultural literature.

Recent years have brought about improvements in this representation, as authors and publishers have attempted to produce books that show more balanced perspectives

TABLE 2-3 Historical Events in the History of Multicultural Literature

Date	Event
1885	Mark Twain's <i>Huckleberry Finn</i> depicted attitudes of that time toward culturally diverse individuals.
1900–1930s	Books included stereotypical perspectives.
1940s–1950s	Books included parallel cultures only on a superficial level.
1960s–1970s	African American authors such as Virginia Hamilton, Alice Childress, Rosa Guy, and Walter Dean Myers began to be published.
1965	<i>The Saturday Review</i> published Nancy Larrick's article titled "The All-White World of Children's Books."
1968/1969	The ALA established the Mildred L. Batchelder Award for translated books; the Coretta Scott King Award for African American authors was first given.
1970s	Books for children and young adults began to reflect a multicultural viewpoint as authors such as Nicholasa Mohr (Puerto Rican experience), Jamake Highwater (American Indian experience), and Laurence Yep (Asian American experience) were published.
1976	Mildred D. Taylor wrote <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> , which challenged stereotypes of African American life in the South.
1980s	Retrenchment occurred. Some established writers from parallel cultures had difficulty getting their books published, and many award-winning books went out of print. Small, independent presses such as Arte Publico began to publish multicultural literature.
Late 1980s–1990s	Rebirth of multicultural publishing among the major publishers.
Late 1990s–2000s	Establishment of multicultural book awards such as the Pura Belpré Award.

Source: Based on Miller-Lachman, L. (1992). *Our family, our friends, our world: An annotated guide to significant multicultural books for children and teenagers*. New Providence, NJ: Bowker, pp. 5–10.

of cultural differences. However, according to a study of the publishing industry by Hill (1998), three "gatekeepers" limit the amount of multicultural literature that is published and made available. First, Hill found, many publishers focus on the profitability of a book and do not seek out diverse authors and illustrators. Second, review journals, knowing that they do not have enough space to review all books, focus on literature that they believe will have a wide appeal to schools and libraries. Third, bookstore buyers and librarians rely in turn on the publishers and the review journals to identify the books they will carry on their shelves or purchase for their collections.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has kept records on the multicultural books published for children and teens. Although there is no specific breakdown for just adolescent literature, Table 2-4 illustrates their statistics.

As Table 2-4 shows, although improvements are still needed, considerable progress has been made, and the number of books focusing on multicultural persons, themes, and issues is growing in quantity and quality. According to Dresang (1999), "the subjugated, unheard voices that are emerging in contemporary literature are not related to ethnicity alone, but speak out on previously unrecognized aspects of gender, sexual orientation, occupation, socio-economic level, and ability/disability" (p. 26). Discussing literature for Hispanic Americans, Schon (2004) pointed out that "from the joys and disappointments of Mexican migrant workers and Cuban exiles in the United States, to Gary Soto's . . . depictions of Mexican American family dynamics,

TABLE 2-4 Statistics in Multicultural Publishing for Children and Young Adults

Year	Total number of books (est.)	Africans/ African Americans		Asian Pacifics/ and Asian Pacific Americans	American Indian	Latinos
		By	About	By & About	By & About	By & About
1985	2,500	18	NA	NA	NA	NA
1990	5,000	51	NA	NA	NA	NA
1995	4,500	100	167	91	83	70
2002	5,000	69	166	91	64	94
2007	5,000	77	150	124	50	101
2010	5,000	102	156	124	31	121

NA = not available

Source: Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Used by permission.

to well-known legends and serious political accounts" today's literature addresses the "dreams, feelings, and celebrations" of different cultures (p. 44).

Evaluating Multicultural Literature

According to De León (2002), "a multicultural approach to literature . . . is essential because it can foster a self-worth and motivation in students of diverse cultural backgrounds that was not present before" (p. 49). In addition, it can show "that there is a great deal to be learned from people who have had different cultural experiences" (Wartski, 2005). This will require a change in secondary English curricula and the ways in which literature is taught (Burroughs, 1999). Chew (1997) supports the study of multicultural literature with the traditional canon by pointing out that an understanding of classical literature can actually assist in the reading of multicultural works. However, the sole responsibility should not reside with the English department (Morales, 2001). Collaborating with Other Professionals 2-2 suggests developing a book selection team that includes educators from throughout the school.



COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Build a book selection team in your school. Too often school librarians and teachers forget that "if . . . collections are to be relevant to the folks we serve, we must strive to respect, and collect, materials that serve tastes not our own" (Benedetti, 2003, p. 29).

- Involve others in the selection process.
- Overcome your personal biases.
- Identify books that are related to the curriculum.
- Determine what young adults are reading in classes and for pleasure.
- Read magazines to see what books are being advertised directly to adolescents.
- Check *Entertainment Weekly* to identify the new films based on novels (Benedetti, 2003).

Even though teachers and library media specialists should evaluate and select all young adult books with care, selecting appropriate multicultural literature may be even more important. As Rochman (1993) noted, a good book can help to tear down barriers and combat prejudice while creating community via the exchange of stories. Jordan (1996a) notes that information should be presented naturally within the storyline and themes should be significant to both the cultural group depicted and to readers.

Currently, peoples from all cultures are shown from more objective perspectives, more multicultural populations are being written about, and more multicultural authors are being published. However, too many inaccuracies, extreme dialectical differences, and stereotypical perspectives and illustrations still populate current young adult literature. As a result, teachers and library media specialists should select and use multicultural literature that is free from bias, distortion, stereotypes, racism, and sexism. As Miller-Lachman (1992) pointed out, stereotyping may occur in characterizations (stock physical, social, and behavioral qualities are depicted), the plot (characters play set roles or are unable to solve their own problems), theme (problems are faced by all members of a cultural group and are specific to only those individuals), setting (all members of a group live in one type of house; e.g., all American Indians live in teepees), language (all members of a group have the same dialect), and illustration (all members of a group look alike). Although writing primarily about books for younger students, Reese (1999, 2007) stresses the need to select books that are both authentic and sensitive to other cultures.

In spite of the fact that “Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Racism and Sexism” (1974) was published over 30 years ago, its suggestions have served as a reliable and respected evaluation tool. In *Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: Multicultural Books*, we have combined this information with ideas from Miller-Lachman (1992) and other sources to provide a set of questions you can ask when examining multicultural literature. Throughout this book, you will find examples of multicultural literature that have the characteristics not only of outstanding books in their genres but also of quality multicultural literature. Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet provides links to resources with additional information.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE **MULTICULTURAL BOOKS**

Ask the following questions when evaluating multicultural books for young adults:

LITERARY QUALITIES

- _____ Does the book meet the qualifications for good literature?
- _____ Does the book exhibit the qualities expected in its genre?

ACCURACY AND CURRENCY OF FACTS AND INTERPRETATION

- _____ Are thoughts and emotions portrayed authentically?
- _____ In historical fiction, is the content realistic for the period?
- _____ Does the content intensify the reader’s sensitivity to the feelings of others?
- _____ Does the author present a balanced view of the issues in the book, especially nonfiction?

STEREOTYPES IN LIFESTYLES

- _____ Are culturally diverse characters and their settings contrasted favorably with an unstated norm of Anglo American, middle-class suburbia?
- _____ Does the story go beyond oversimplifications of reality and offer genuine insights into another lifestyle or culture?

PLOT (IF THE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IS YES, THE QUALITY OF THE WORK IS IN QUESTION.)

- _____ Do European Americans in the story have all the power and make the decisions?
- _____ Do people from diverse backgrounds function in essentially subservient roles?
- _____ Does a character from a diverse background have to exhibit superior qualities (excel in sports, get A's) to succeed?
- _____ How are problems presented, conceived, and resolved in the story?
- _____ Are people from diverse backgrounds considered to be "the problem"?
- _____ Do solutions ultimately depend on the benevolence of a European American?
- _____ Are the achievements of girls and women due to their own initiative and intelligence or to their good looks or their relationships with boys?
- _____ Are sex roles incidental or paramount to characterization and plot?
- _____ Could the same story be told if the sex roles were reversed?

THEME

- _____ Would the book limit or promote an adolescent's self-image and self-esteem?
- _____ Would the book limit or promote an adolescent's aspirations?
- _____ Can a reader from any culture become so involved with the book that he or she can identify with the characters and vicariously experience their feelings?

LANGUAGE

- _____ Is terminology current or appropriate for the time period?
- _____ Does the language refrain from including pejorative terms unless germane to the story?
- _____ Do any dialects reflect the varieties found in contemporary life?
- _____ Does the dialect reflect negatively on an entire culture?

AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

- _____ What qualifications does the author (or illustrator) possess to write about a multicultural topic?
- _____ Is the author (or illustrator) able to think as a member of another cultural group and able, intellectually and emotionally, to become a member of that group?
- _____ If the author (or illustrator) is not a member of the culturally diverse group he or she is writing about, is there anything in the author's (or illustrator's) background that would specifically recommend her or him to write this book?
- _____ If a book has to do with the feelings and insights of women, does a male author (or illustrator) present these appropriately?

(Continued)

(Continued)

ILLUSTRATIONS (IF THE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IS YES, THE QUALITY OF THE WORK IS IN QUESTION.)

- _____ Are there stereotypes, oversimplifications, and generalizations in the illustrations?
- _____ Do pictures demean or ridicule characters?
- _____ Is there tokenism or presentation of European Americans with tinted or colored faces?
- _____ Do individuals within cultural groups look similarly, without attention to individuality and diversity across cultural groups?

Sources: Based on Jordan, A. D. (1996a). Books of other cultures. *Teaching and Learning Literature*, 5(4), 23–25; Jordan, A. D. (1996b).



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

The following are links to multicultural and diversity information in general and to information on multicultural literature.

General Multicultural/Diversity Information

Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence

<http://crede.berkeley.edu/>

Multicultural Pavilion

www.edchange.org/multicultural/

National Association for Multicultural Education

www.nameorg.org

Teaching Tolerance

www.tolerance.org/teach/

Multicultural Literature

Africa Access (Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools)

www.africaaccessreview.org/aar/about.html

Bonnie O. Ericson, At Home with Multicultural Adolescent Literature (*The ALAN Review*)

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall95/Ericson.html>

How to Choose the Best Multicultural Books (Scholastic)

www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/how-choose-best-multicultural-books/

Librarianship Upgrades for Children and Youth Services (LUCY)

<http://education.odu.edu/eci/lucy/bibliography.shtml>

Multicultural Children's Literature (Michigan State University)

<http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/multicultural/>

Awards and Bibliographies of Literature for a Diverse Society

Gillespie, Powell, Clements, and Swearingen (1994) conducted a study of the Newbery Medal books between 1922 and 1994 to determine the ethnicity of their characters. The results showed 90 percent of the books had white, Anglo-Saxon characters, as

TABLE 2-5 Bibliographies of Multicultural Literature

Title	Author	Date
<i>The Best of Latino Heritage, 1996–2002</i>	Schon	2003
<i>Coretta Scott King Award Books 1970–2004</i>	Smith	2004
<i>Hearing All the Voices</i>	Darby & Pryne	2002
<i>Latina and Latino Voices in Literature</i>	Day	2003
<i>The Pura Belpré Award</i>	Treviño	2006
<i>The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–2004</i>	Cart & Jenkins	2006
<i>Many Peoples, One Land</i>	Helbig & Perkins	2001
<i>Integrating Multicultural Literature in Libraries and Classrooms in Secondary Schools</i>	Hinton & Dickinson	2007
<i>Black Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Young Adults</i>	Murphy & Murphy	2007
<i>Understanding Diversity Through Novels and Picture Books</i>	Smith & Knowles	2007
<i>Booktalking Multicultural Literature</i>	York	2008
<i>Recommended Books in Spanish for Children and Young Adults, 2004 through 2008</i>	Schon	2008

opposed to 26 percent with African Americans, 5 percent with Native Americans, 10 percent with Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 10 percent with Hispanics. This imbalance shows how important it is that teachers and library media specialists know and use reputable selection tools to assist in identifying quality multicultural literature for young adults.

Thankfully, educators and librarians can turn to a number of awards and bibliographies (Table 2-5).

Several of them, such as the Coretta Scott King Award, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, were mentioned earlier in this chapter. In addition, the **Américas Award** from the Consortium of Latin American Studies is given to works that portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States and includes some titles suitable for adolescents. The **Asian Pacific American Award for Literature**, cosponsored by the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association and the Chinese American Librarians Association, includes young adult literature. The American Indian Library Association sponsors the **American Indian Youth Literature Awards**. Finally, the **Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award**, presented by Southwest Texas State University, has been given to some books that would appeal to younger adolescents.

Gender Perspectives in Young Adult Literature

The two gender issues that are most important to understand when selecting literature for adolescents are (1) the representation of gender in the books, and (2) the differences in the reading habits of male and female young adults.

Gender and Reading Preferences

Worldwide literacy scores indicate that boys do not perform as well as girls. For example, in England, girls score higher than boys in English when tested at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16 (Haupt, 2003); in Australia, a 1996 survey found literacy scores for boys declining over a 10-year period (Bantick, 1996). Von Drasek (2002), reporting on the National Center for Educational Statistics National Assessment for Educational Progress of 1992–2000 reading assessments in the United States, said that between 1998 and 2000, “the gap between boys’ and girls’ scores increased.” Although the percentage of girls at or above the proficient level in 2000 was higher than in 1992, for “boys, the percentage in 2000 was not significantly different than in 1992” (p. 72).

In *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys*, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) identified a number of general research findings about boys, girls, and reading:

- Girls comprehend fiction better than boys.
- Boys seem to prefer nonfiction, magazines, and newspapers.
- Boys tend to prefer short texts or texts with short sections.
- Girls enjoy leisure reading more than boys.
- Many boys enjoy reading about sports and hobbies.
- Some boys enjoy fantasy and science fiction.
- Graphic novels and comic books are more popular with boys than girls.
- Boys prefer visual texts.
- Boys really do judge a book by its cover.

However, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) went on to caution educators that all boys are different and that depending on statistics alone can cause educators to generalize and ignore their individuality. While these findings cannot be applied across the board to all adolescents, they must be kept in mind when selecting young adult literature. Citing Millard (1997) and Telford (1999), Smith and Wilhelm (2002) noted that “teachers tend to use conventional wisdom to reinforce traditional notions of gender and gender preferences, thereby denying boys wider choices and chances to expand their tastes” (p. 60).

Gurian (2001) pointed out that most of the “reading-traumatized and reading-deficient high school students” (p. 297) are boys. In a national survey conducted during the 2001 Teen Read Week, adolescents responded to the question “If you don’t read much or don’t like reading, why?” Boys reported the following as obstacles to reading: boring/not fun (39.3%); no time/too busy (29.8%); like other activities better (11.1%); and can’t get into the stories (7.7%). Other responses constituted less than 5% (Jones & Fiorelli, 2003).

In a survey of Arizona high school students that was repeated in 1982, 1990, and 1997, Hale and Crowe (2001) found that contemporary boys’ favorite books are about adventure, sports, science fiction, and mystery, while contemporary girls rank mystery and romance/love stories as their favorites. The lowest-rated categories of books for both boys and girls were historical, western, and biography/autobiography. Although humor books were favorites in 1982, they dropped significantly in popularity by 1997. It should be noted there was no category for realistic fiction on the survey and that the top pleasure reading titles in 1997 were from the genres of fantasy/science fiction/horror, mystery, contemporary realistic fiction, and historical fiction.

According to Conrad-Curry (2010/2011), analysis of National Assessment for Educational Progress results revealed that the gap between boys and girls transcends race and parental educational attainment. White sons of college-educated parents were among the nearly “one in four boys with college-educated parents who cannot read a newspaper with understanding” (Conrad-Curry, 2010/2011, p. 27–28).

Another thing to consider is that while the gender gap between boys and girls seems to widen, the gap between racial and ethnic groups is also significant (Sadowski, 2010). For example, Husband (2012) cites data from the National Center for Educational Statistics of 2009 that found there is a gap between boys who are black and boys and girls who are from other racial and ethnic groups. He concludes that black boys are a part of “two groups that have historically underachieved in reading—boys and blacks” (p. 23). Scholars argue that teaching culturally relevant texts and offering boys opportunities to self-select books and make connections to their own lives motivate black males to read (Tatum, 2006; Jenkins, 2009).

Reading takes practice. A coach would never say to a basketball player, “You know how to shoot a basket so you don’t need to practice anymore.” Instead, both the coach and the player know that practice improves performance. The same holds true with reading. Von Drasek (2002) notes that “skilled readers read an average of 11 pages a day” (p. 72). However, if teachers and library media specialists are not providing the kinds of materials that boys and girls enjoy reading, there is a lower probability that adolescents will spend time practicing their reading skills and thus developing reading proficiency (Sadowski, 2010). Connecting Adolescents and Their Literature 2–2 has some suggestions for encouraging boys to read.

2-2

CONNECTING ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR LITERATURE

A number of strategies exist that teachers and library media specialists can use to encourage adolescent boys to read.

- Identify role models and “catch” them reading. The ALA has a series of Read posters that reinforce this, but local personalities, male mentors, coaches, and community leaders can work just as well.
- Find things boys like to read and make them available.
- Include comics and graphic novels in the library and classroom.
- Make sure that both boys’ and girls’ reading interests are included on reading lists.
- Introduce an “all boys book club” (Haupt, 2003).
- Make magazines and newspapers available.
- Identify books that feature Brozo’s 10 positive male archetypes that are relevant to male development: King, Patriarch, Warrior, Magician, Pilgrim, Wildman, Healer, Trickster, Prophet, and Lover (Brozo, 2002).
- Visit author Jon Scieszka’s website for ideas: www.guysread.com.
- Display books where boys will notice them.

Traditional Perspectives Toward Gender

What we read shapes us, in books we see ourselves as male or female (Fox, 1993). A number of writers (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Thorne, 1993; Walker & Foote, 1999/2000) have focused on the issue of gender in education and the need for gender equity. Along with other researchers, they have documented gender inequities in educational experiences, as well as differences in socialization and ways educational experiences reflect gender.

Traditionally, in schools, educators have provided educational experiences that are based on gender-specific mindsets. For example, males, both at the top and the bottom of the class, attract a great deal of the teacher's attention (Sadker & Sadker, 1994) while textbooks and other curricular materials cater to males and their learning styles (Textbook sexism, 1994). Clark (1994) found that educators often use teaching strategies that reflect primarily male learning styles, while Levine and Orenstein (1994) found that educators often perpetuate gender-specific attitudes and beliefs about appropriate motivation and learning behaviors of males and females.

Beginning in the 1960s and gaining momentum from the women's movement of the 1970s, feminist criticism began as some women resisted the exclusion of women and the female consciousness in the accepted literary canon that was taught in schools. By identifying with women writers and their works and by focusing attention on the repression, trivialization, and misinterpretation of female texts, these critics called for studies of the images of women in literary works and, consequently, a feminist revision of the literary canon itself. Female critics pointed out that women bring to a work of literature different experience from that of men. Feminists also claimed that male critics not only suppressed female works but also tried to convince women that their interests reflected immature tastes. To reinterpret the literary world and change readers' consciousness, feminist criticism focused on rediscovering female authors and on establishing an alternative historical criticism that would relate literary events to both female and male social concerns (Vandergrift, 1993).

Contemporary Gender Issues

Thankfully, there have been changes over the years in the ways in which genders are represented in adolescent literature. Fouts (1999) reported a move away from traditional role perspectives for female characters in Spanish children's literature; and Houdyshell and Kirkland (1998) found strong, independent heroines with a sense of self in the most recent Newbery Medal books. In 2002, the Feminist Task Force of the ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table instituted the **Amelia Bloomer List of Recommended Feminist Books for Youth** to recognize risk-taking and life-changing books about women.

Young adult literature has also begun to include gay and lesbian perspectives. Building on John Donovan's *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969) and Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind* (1982), young adult realistic novels often address gay and lesbian themes, whereas nonfiction books feature gays and lesbians

teens might want to emulate (Aronson, 2001). Today's stories go beyond exploring the idea that a character's difference is accepted; they now include characters who are questioning their identity (Aronson, 2001). Increasingly, more books such as *Rage: A Love Story* (Peters, 2009) and *Inferno* (Stevenson, 2009) are being published. These books include gay or lesbian key characters, but gay-related themes are on the periphery. Today, books that include gay-related themes have received awards; a National Book Award went to Virginia Euwer Wolff's *True Believer* (2001), and a Printz Honor Award went to Adam Rapp's *Punkzilla* (2009). In 2003, Nancy Garden won a Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime contributions to young adult literature. A few years later, in 2006, Jacqueline Woodson, who also includes gay-related themes in a number of her novels, won a Margaret A. Edwards Award as well.

Rockefeller (2007) noted that transgender characters are beginning to make “a stumbling debut” (p. 526) in young adult fiction, although he finds many of the first books are didactic, with “an unbalanced attention to issues” (p. 519). Among those with “multidimensional characters who embody or face transgender themes in a plausible way” (p. 521), he lists *Luna* (Peters, 2004), *Choir Boy* (Anders, 2005), and *Parrotfish* (Wittlinger, 2007).

Selecting Literature for Diverse Gender Perspectives

Teachers and library media specialists need to be aware of gender perspectives when selecting and using young adult literature. This is important because the ways in which genders are depicted in books have an impact on attitudes and the perception of gender-appropriate behavior (Singh, 1998). Both genders deserve fair and equitable treatment. Thus, educators must identify literature that reflects respect for both females and males, shows both genders in nonstereotypical ways, and represents both female and male perspectives. When gender stereotypes are present in young adult literature, both girls and boys are deprived of a range of strong alternative role models.

Everything adolescents read, from advertisements and magazines to sports stories and romance novels, helps develop perceptions and mindsets (Fox, 1993). Too often, young adult literature portrays individuals in stereotypical ways—girls who are overly concerned with their clothes, hair, makeup, and figures or who are victims in need of a male's help; men who are unable to express emotions or show fear. Just as educators should avoid generalizing about a particular culture, they should also avoid selecting literature that perpetuates stereotypes, false perceptions, and half-truths about both males and females.

As with multicultural literature, some critics make the argument that a book with a main character of one gender cannot be written by a writer of another gender. While having “lived” a particular gender perspective might be an advantage, requiring writers to write only about experiences they have encountered limits their imagination and creativity. Would the same critics suggest that an author must have personally been an alcoholic, drug user, or abused child to write about these real problems? In an interview with female young adult author M. E. Kerr, B. Allison Gray (1991) asked Kerr why she often wrote from a teenage male's

perspective. Kerr responded that many males do not like to read stories about females. Thus, in an effort to encourage boys to read, she decided to write from a male perspective.

Contemporary young adult literature reflects the “complex identities of today’s teens” (Pavo, 2003, p. 23), and “readers of all ages are proving that they are ready to move into more complex territory” (p. 25). As authors and publishers continue to diversify the representation of gender in the books that they write and publish, educators must select appropriate titles that support the social, physical, and intellectual needs of adolescents. Considerations for Evaluating Young Adult Literature: Gender Representations includes some guidelines for examining all gender representations in contemporary young adult literature. In *Expanding Your Knowledge with the Internet*, you will find additional information on gender in education and in young adult literature.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE GENDER REPRESENTATIONS

If the answer to any of the following questions with an asterisk is yes, the quality of the work is in question.
When examining young adult literature for gender and sexuality, ask the following:

- _____ Are the characters developed as individuals, no matter what their gender or sexuality?
- _____ Do the descriptions, words, and actions of the characters expand gender roles or reflect traditional stereotypes?
- _____ Are occupations, aspirations, and achievements gender neutral?
- _____ Do both males and females evidence emotional as well as logical characteristics?
- _____ Do both males and females ask questions, confront others, interrupt, and initiate conversations?
- _____ * Are females “trapped in passive and whiny roles” (Singh, 1998)?
- _____ Are females competitive with a desire to meet high expectations?
- _____ * Do the illustrations depict gender stereotypes?
- _____ Does the book include any reversals of traditional gender roles (Rose, 2000)?
- _____ Are various family structures shown?
- _____ How do males and females gain status (sports, competitions, nurturing, or goodness)?
- _____ How does the author want readers to view members of the genders?
- _____ What effect does the author’s gender have on the book?
- _____ Is the book truthful and does it respect its readers (Aronson, 2001)?
- _____ Does the book help readers overcome their personal discomfort with sexual roles (Pavo, 2003)?

Sources: Based on Mitchell, D. (1996). Approaching race and gender issues in the context of the language arts classroom. *English Journal*, 85(8), 77–81; Roberts, P., Cecil, N. L., and Alexander, S. (1993). *Gender positive! A teachers’ and librarians’ guide to nonstereotyped children’s literature, K–8*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland; Rudman, M. (1995). *Children’s literature: An issues approach*. White Plains, NY: Longman.



EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH THE INTERNET

A number of resources that focus on gender representation and literature are available on the Internet.

Amelia Bloomer List of Recommended Feminist Books for Youth

<http://libr.org/FTF/bloomer.html>

Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture

<http://library.duke.edu/specialcollections/ingham/>

Vandergriff's Feminist Page

www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/Feminist/index.html

Chicago Public Library: Best of the Best Books for Teens

www.chipublib.org/forteens/teenspages/bestofbest_teen.php

Guys Read

www.guysread.com

Male Coming-of-Age Stories

www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/YoungAdult/male.html

GLBTQ—Young Adult Literature

www.glbtq.com/literature/young_adult_lit.html

Alex Sanchez's Great Gay Teen Books Page

www.alexsanchez.com/gay_teen_books.htm

Concluding Thoughts

In spite of the number of awards, best books lists, and book-length bibliographies, evaluating and selecting young adult books will never be an easy task for teachers and library media specialists. With more books published, the realities of school budgets, and an increasing demand to select books and other forms of literature that can be integrated or at least used across the middle and secondary curricula, educators feel the pressure to select the best and most appropriate young adult literature that will, hopefully, also appeal to young adult readers. Added to the selection dilemma will be the increased diversity within school-age populations that will call for more multicultural literature in the school. Then, too, educators will likely see more accurate and realistic reflections of gender in young adult literature, with increasing numbers of powerful female protagonists, books written by exceptional female writers, and female critics, along with a more balanced view of all gender perspectives.

In response, educators will need to make the commitment to read and consider thoughtfully young adult literature and to seek out reviews in journals and resources that review it. If they are successful, the lives of all young adults and their respective needs and perspectives will be represented accurately and fairly in the literature in their schools.

Young Adult Books

This section includes young adult titles mentioned in this chapter.

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Anders, C. (2005). *Choir boy*. Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press.

Angel, A. (2010). *Janis Joplin: Rise up singing*. New York, NY: Amulet.

Bacigalupi, P. (2010). *Ship breaker*. New York, NY: Little Brown.

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- Christopher, L. (2010). *Stolen*. New York, NY: Chicken House.
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- Donoghue, E. (2010). *Room: A novel*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Donovan, J. (1969). *I'll get there: It better be worth the trip*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
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- Ward, J. (2011). *Salvage the bones*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
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Suggested Readings

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