Essentials of Young Adult Literature is a brief comprehensive textbook with rich resources—a compendium of information about young adult books. It is tailored to a course in young adult literature but, by virtue of its brevity and affordability, is also suitable as a companion text for a course on teaching reading or literature in middle and high school.

We embrace the idea that the primary focus of a course in young adult literature should be reading actual young adult books, not reading an exhaustive textbook about these books. University students need direct experience with young adult books—reading independently, reading aloud to others, discussing, writing, comparing, criticizing, evaluating, and connecting to their lives, as well as exploring ways of sharing these books with young people. We deliberately do not include book reviews and plot summaries within the narrative of the chapters. However, the recommended booklists at the end of each genre chapter contain briefly annotated titles.

One of our goals is to awaken or reawaken the joy of reading for college-level students. This reawakening can happen only if they experience the pleasure and excitement of reading excellent books. At the same time, the body of knowledge about literature and about teaching literature to young adults can be conveyed most efficiently through a textbook. Essentials of Young Adult Literature presents this body of knowledge in a clear, concise, direct narrative using brief lists, examples, figures, and tables in combination with prose, thus freeing class time for involvement with literature.

This third edition of Essentials of Young Adult Literature heralds a change in authorship as Kathy G. Short and Holly Johnson take on the role of senior authors. Kathy G. Short, professor of children's and young adult literature at the University of Arizona, engages in research about global literature and intercultural understanding, dialogue about literature, and inquiry-based curriculum. Holly Johnson, an associate professor of adolescent literature at the University of Cincinnati, engages in research on adolescents' response to literature, literature across the curriculum, and content analysis of young adult literature.

The field of young adult literature is currently enjoying an explosion of new titles that reflect new formats, genres, styles, and authors. Our goal for this book, however, remains true to Carol’s and Carl’s initial concept—a comprehensive but brief alternative to compendium textbooks.

Features of Essentials of Young Adult Literature

- Comprehensive coverage and content of young adult literature in a brief paperback format
- A genre approach to literature with connections to topics, authors, and notable books
- A logical, well-organized structure
• Useful charts and tables on history, research, read-aloud recommendations, and examples of literature to use across the curriculum

• Notable author features for the genre chapters

• Definitions of terms that appear in bold italics

• Coverage of multicultural and international young adult literature, graphic novels, short stories, novels in verse, and picture books for older readers

• Clearly stated positions on current issues affecting schools and literature: censorship, classics, and standards

• Attention to the needs of resistant readers

• Recommended book lists that are logically organized and briefly annotated

• Awards recognizing young adult literature with listings of the winning titles

Features New to This Edition

• Hundreds of new young adult books in annotated lists and as examples throughout the chapters

• More integration of multicultural and global titles and authors throughout chapters

• Discussion of text complexity, close reading, and other aspects of the Common Core State Standards

• Research on reading interests and discussion of why reading and literature are at risk in our society moved to Chapter 1

• Evaluation and selection criteria in genre chapters revised as questions to facilitate their use as an evaluation tool

• Excellent Books to Read Aloud feature added to the genre chapters

• Types of fantasy and realistic fiction updated to reflect current trends

• Plays and readers theatre added as a genre in the poetry chapter

• Science fiction as a genre

• Chapter 8, “Literature for a Diverse Society,” revised to highlight the importance of critically responsive, critically expansive, and culturally critical approaches to literature.

• Previous three chapters in Part Three are reorganized into two chapters

  • Chapter 9, “Literature in the Curriculum,” includes the political context of Common Core State Standards, ways of organizing a literature curriculum and developing literature units, and the resources to support this curriculum. The chapter ends with the critical issues to consider in a literature curriculum—censorship, classic texts, and literary criticism.

  • Chapter 10, “Experiencing Literature,” begins with a discussion of how to create a literate environment for all readers, especially resistant readers. Teaching strategies and literature engagements are organized into three sections: reading widely for personal purposes, reading critically to inquire about the world, and reading strategically to learn about literature and literacy.
Preface

• Expanded discussion of literature circles and literature response engagements
• Additional emphasis on young adult–classic literature pairings
• A discussion of the teaching of literary criticism using young adult literature
• New conceptual planning webs on the forced journeys of refugees and taking responsibility for action in Chapter 9
• Resistant readers addressed in Chapter 10 on experiencing literature through a discussion of the types of adolescent resistant readers and the integration of suggestions for reaching these readers into classroom engagements
• Technology connections integrated across the chapters

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Aurora Martínez, who made possible the original publication of Essentials of Young Adult Literature.

For their generous help, good advice, and valued opinions concerning Essentials of Young Adult Literature, we wish to express our appreciation to the following reviewers: Dr. Leslie Crabtree, North Central University; Dr. Thomas Eaton, Southeast Missouri State University; Dr. Julie Gates, Angelo State University; Jeffrey Stuart Kaplan, University of Central Florida; Amy Walsh MacKrell, Simpson College; Dr. Charlotte L. Pass, State University of New York College at Courtland.

We are indebted to illustrator David Wiesner for the cover of this edition of Essentials of Young Adult Literature. His images of adolescents who are reaching new heights through literature capture the potential and the challenge that readers experience as they explore ideas and experiences that take them beyond their current understandings and experiences.
Part One introduces you to the field of young adult literature. These chapters will support you in considering the value of this literature for adolescents and learning how to select and evaluate young adult books, currently the fastest growing area in book publishing.

Chapter 1 begins by defining young adults and young adult literature as well as presenting an overview of the history of young adult literature, including milestones in the evolution of the field and early important works. We discuss the value of this literature for adolescents along with research evidence supporting its benefits for readers and for society. Evaluating and selecting the best books for adolescents involves knowing both readers and books and so includes knowledge about adolescent reading interests, useful selection sources, and ways of determining text complexity.

Chapter 2 presents important literature concepts, including elements of fiction, fictional literary forms, and aspects of book format, as they connect to young adult literature. The major fictional literary forms of novels and novels in verse, short stories, picture books, and graphic novels are also highlighted.

Although examples are given throughout this text of well-known young adult books as well as recent notable titles, lengthy plot summaries or book reviews are not included. We believe that more is gained from reading and discussing the actual young adult books than from reading about the books in a lengthy textbook.
Change is always accompanied by anticipation, anxiety, excitement, and fear, often felt all at the same time. The years between childhood and adulthood magnify these emotions because they are a time of tremendous change at many levels for young adults as they engage in “becoming” and redefining themselves personally, socially, and culturally. Young adults are old enough to be conscious of this change process and so find reassurance and understanding in the company of those who share their experiences and feelings. That company includes the people in their lives, some of whom are characters in books and the worlds adolescents enter and experience through literature.
Definitions of Young Adult Literature

“Young adult” is a term that has no clear definition, often connoting words such as puberty, adolescence, and teenager, which suggest different things to different people. Even professionals in the fields of sociology, psychology, and education do not agree on the meanings of these terms. In the United States and most other Western countries, young adulthood is associated with biological changes and a growing sense of independence from adults.

Young adults are seen as evolving through a search for self and identity as they grow and change. At some point and for varying economic, social, political, and biological reasons, a child transitions to adulthood, and young adulthood ends. These developments occur at different ages and at different rates for different people, yet the prevalent school configuration in the United States defines middle school as grades 6 through 8 (ages 11 through 14 for most students) and high school as grades 9 through 12 (ages 15 through 18 for most students).

The dominant ideology of adolescence as a life stage that is biologically or psychologically determined by “raging hormones” has been criticized (Flinders, 1999). Adolescence is traditionally viewed as a period of incompleteness when hormonal changes need to be contained during growth toward adulthood, or completeness. Teens are seen as struggling with identity and making risky choices about peer pressure and harmful substances—a perspective that ignores the diverse lives and cultures of adolescents. A social construct view of adolescence supports more complex, contradictory, and multiple portrayals of teens that address the influences of race, gender, social class, and sexuality. In addition, adolescence as a socially constructed life stage recognizes that the concept of adolescence grew out of economic conditions, rather than biological forces, during the Great Depression when teens were pushed out of the workforce and into schools to keep them under control.

Young adult literature, as defined in this text, is literature written for young people ages 12 to 18 and books marketed as “young adult” by a publisher. Our focus is the books that adolescents choose to read in contrast to the books they are required to read, with an emphasis on the best of young adult literature while recognizing that a book does not have to be an award winner or receive rave reviews to have value for a reader. Typically young adult literature has these characteristics:

- The main character is an adolescent who is at the center of the plot.
- The events revolve around the adolescent's actions, decisions, and struggle to resolve conflict.
- The events and problems in the plot are related to adolescents, and the dialogue reflects their speech.
- The point of view is that of an adolescent and reflects an adolescent's interpretation of events and people, rather than an adult reflecting back on adolescence.
- The book is written for young adults and marketed to a young adult audience.

Young adult literature is not a genre or category of literature, but includes all of the traditional genres from realistic fiction to poetry. It is a body of literature appropriate for individuals at a certain time of life. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the genres typically found within young adult literature.
History of Young Adult Literature

The history of young adult literature parallels that of adolescence in that books for teens could not precede the concept of adolescence. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the United States was mostly a rural, agrarian society. Children were sent out to work as early as age 7, and by ages 15 or 16 were fully incorporated into the workforce. Independence from parents and families came to young people much earlier than it does today. Schools were scarce, and school attendance was seasonal, sporadic, and short-lived. Consequently, there was little need for books in the general population and the concept of “adolescence” did not exist.

The general acceptance of adolescence as a distinct stage of life emerged in the mid-twentieth century, although its social, economic, and political roots developed earlier, as shown in Table 1.1. The efficiencies of industrialization and modern technology, as well as the passage of child labor laws, removed most children from the workforce and placed them in schools by the early 1900s. Other factors—the Great Depression in the 1930s, a shift away from agriculture to industry, a resulting increase in educational requirements for employment, a demographic shift from rural to urban, and the growth of compulsory school attendance laws—extended this workplace-to-school transition to teens by the 1940s. The National Center for Education Statistics indicates a 72 percent increase in the population of the United States from 1900 to 1940, while the number of high school graduates in the same period increased by more than 1,700 percent (Gopel, 2005). The middle school movement in the 1980s resulted in the inclusion of middle-graders in the definition of young adult.

Of course, young people read and enjoyed books long before there was a body of literature labeled “young adult.” Classics such as Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847), Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations (1861), Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (1726), Jules Verne’s Journey to the Center of the Earth (1864), and Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) may have been written for adults, but young people enjoyed them too. After the establishment of juvenile divisions in publishing houses in the 1920s and 1930s, a few noteworthy books such as Seventeenth Summer by Maureen Daly (1942) and The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger (1951) were precursors to today’s young adult books, although librarians shelved them with books for adults at the time.

Although the forerunners of the young adult book began to appear in the mid-1800s, an emphasis on studying adult classic works of literature in high school dominated the twentieth century, delaying the development of young adult literature. Some of the early important works of young adult literature were published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but this first flowering of young adult literature was diminished by the simultaneous publication of a plethora of books in which problems overpowered character development and plot. These gloomy problem novels were responsible for a widespread notion that young adult books were categorically poor quality.

In the liberal political climate of the 1960s and 1970s many topics previously considered taboo for young adults (e.g., sex, drug abuse, war, suicide, and pregnancy) were addressed head-on by pioneering young adult authors of contemporary fiction, establishing the first golden age of young adult literature. In response, the number of censorship attempts on books rose steadily throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, due in part
**Table 1.1 Milestones in the Concepts of Adolescence and Young Adult Literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Era</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Formation of the Committee of Ten (mainly presidents of well-known universities)</td>
<td>Promotion of the study of English and literature in high school; established a university-influenced high school canon of classics by basing college entrance exams on knowledge of these books</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>Growth of the middle class and educational institutions</td>
<td>Positive view by adults of obedience, self-restraint, dependency, conformity in youth</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td><em>Adolescence</em> by G. Stanley Hall</td>
<td>First formal description of adolescence as a distinct psychological state</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of English established</td>
<td>Early effort to broaden English curricula beyond the classics to meet the needs of a diverse, democratic society</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Children's divisions established by many publishing houses</td>
<td>Indication of widespread acceptance of the importance of books for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>The Great Depression (1929–early 1940s)</td>
<td>Encouragement of teenagers without work to go to high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Young Adult Services Division established by the American Library Association (now called Young Adult Library Services Association—YALSA)</td>
<td>Recognition of the distinction between childhood and young adulthood and the books appropriate to each group</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960s–1970s</td>
<td>Civil rights and women's liberation movements; more permissive social and sexual climate</td>
<td>Encouragement of books by and about minorities and females and books on topics previously considered taboo for youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Publication of many excellent YA books</td>
<td>First golden age of YA literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Adolescent Literature Assembly of NCTE (ALAN) established</td>
<td>Forum for discussion and advocacy of reading YA books in middle/high schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Margaret A. Edwards Award established</td>
<td>Acknowledgment of authors for their lifetime achievement in writing YA books popular over a period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult literature established</td>
<td>National recognition of YA literature as a worthy body of literature</td>
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## Early Important Works of Young Adult Contemporary Fiction

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Literary Work</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td><em>The Outsiders</em> by S. E. Hinton</td>
<td>Herald of realistic young adult novel; considered by many to be the prototypical young adult book</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td><em>The Pigman</em> by Paul Zindel</td>
<td>YA book well received by critics; counters the argument that this literature is poor quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td><em>My Darling, My Hamburger</em> by Paul Zindel</td>
<td>One of the first YA novels to address abortion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td><em>Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret</em> by Judy Blume</td>
<td>One of the first YA books to feature a frank treatment of female puberty</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td><em>Go Ask Alice</em> by Anonymous (Beatrice Sparks)</td>
<td>One of the first problem novels; controversial topic of drug abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td><em>The Man Without a Face</em> by Isabel Holland</td>
<td>One of the first YA books on homosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td><em>Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!</em> by M. E. Kerr</td>
<td>One of the first YA books to realistically portray family dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td><em>A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich</em> by Alice Childress</td>
<td>One of the first YA books to address drug abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td><em>The Chocolate War</em> by Robert Cormier</td>
<td>Set a trend toward “dark” or “bleak” YA novels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td><em>Forever</em> by Judy Blume</td>
<td>Book on teenage sex challenges taboos against frank discussion of such topics in YA books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Fallen Angels</em> by Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>Signal of growing strength of multicultural authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td><em>Weetzie Bat</em> by Francesca Lia Block</td>
<td>One of the first crossover novels; helps open YA writing to innovation and new forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–2007</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter</em> series by J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>Created a generation of preteen and teen readers and cross over into pop culture and adult readers</td>
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</table>

To an increase in the number of teens in the 1990s, the field matured and came into its own with the better written, more serious, and more varied young adult books published during the last two decades.

The postmodern movement, which emerged after World War II, significantly influenced young adult literature. This movement responded to the fragmented and multimodal
nature of modern society characterized by frequent changes in attitudes, styles, and knowledge. The view that everything is constantly shifting challenged the philosophy and practices of art and literature and rejected fixed ideas about the form and meaning of texts. Postmodernism brought a greater playfulness, cynicism, and unpredictability to books as authors delighted in breaking the rules of convention and giving greater power to readers. A broader range of books were accepted into the mainstream, including graphic novels, novels in verse, docudramas, and novels of mixed genres.

Although postmodern books began as a trend in adult literature, postmodern works continue to grow in number for young adults. Nikolajeva (1998) identifies the defining characteristic of postmodern literary work as genre eclecticism, writing that includes aspects of more than one genre and integrates elements of popular culture such as film and television. Postmodern literature is also characterized by narrative structures that mirror life and may not have distinct beginnings, middles, and endings; emotion-driven rather than event-driven stories; and multiple protagonists, perspectives, and narrators. Inviting readers to consider varied viewpoints on social and personal problems raises issues of equity and identity and the tensions between stability and growth as points of uncertainty, rather than as lessons to be learned—a major shift in young adult literature.

Some postmodern stories include multiple plots or realities with parallel times and places. Authors of postmodern works sometimes encourage readers to take a more active role in the storytelling by using open endings or a choice of endings that invite readers to project subsequent events or by using less authoritative narration that leaves readers to draw their own conclusions. Another interesting feature of postmodern literature is metafiction, or having characters or the author talk to the reader about the act of creating the literary work. This technique crosses the line between the imaginary world and real life.

The rising popularity of crossover novels—books read and marketed to both young adult and adult audiences—is another manifestation of the trend toward broader definitions of what constitutes young adult literature. Initially, crossover books were published for adults and then crossed over to young adult audiences. These books were often written by young authors, frequently as first novels or a collection of connected stories with protagonists in their teens or twenties who were struggling with right-of-passage issues (Cart, 2004). Recently, the opposite trend has dominated the field, and many adults in their twenties and thirties are reading young adult titles, effectively expanding the young adult market and significantly increasing sales with adults often constituting half of the reading audience for particular books. This trend is most commonly associated with fantasy, especially the Harry Potter, Twilight, and Hunger Games series, and has been accompanied by an increase in movies developed from popular young adult novels.

A developing genre, New Adult, is fiction aimed at the 18- to 25-year-old audience with a focus on leaving home, developing sexuality, and negotiating career and educational choices. These novels also cross over to both adult and young adult audiences.

Young adult literature is currently experiencing what many consider its second golden age with new teen imprints at major publishing houses, teen reading groups in bookstores and libraries, and many new exciting authors (Reno, 2008). The increasing sophistication and emotional maturity of adolescents and the freedom of authors to explore almost any topic or issue have led to better writing, more compelling stories, and a tremendous diversity in formats, styles, and content. The separation of teen books from children’s books in bookstores and libraries and the use of social media by teens to communicate interactively with
Each other and with authors have propelled young adult books into the heart of pop culture with television series, movies, video games, and the internet. This golden age was influenced by the Harry Potter books, which created a passion for reading in an entire generation of readers who then moved on to other books and fantasies. The mature content of current young adult books, including sometimes graphic depictions of addiction, sexuality, and violence, has generated controversy and occasional censorship challenges as well as increased readership.

**Benefits and Values of Young Adult Literature**

Excellent works of young adult literature have a definite place in the lives of adolescents as a source of enjoyment and life experiences. Literature is not written to teach something, but to illuminate what it means to be human and to make accessible the most fundamental experiences of life—love, hope, loneliness, despair, fear, and belonging. Literature is the imaginative shaping of experience and thought into the forms and structures of language. Adolescents read literature to experience life and their experiences inside the world of a story challenge them to think differently about their world. They read because the books are relevant to their lives, addressing their needs and interests.

Young adult literature also has a place in the academic learning of teens in middle and high schools—as class study books in English classes, as reading material in content-area courses, and as independent reading material. Their use is not in competition with the values of classic works of literature, and, in many instances, these two bodies of literature can be used effectively in tandem.

**The Value of Literature in the Lives of Young Adults**

The primary benefit derived from reading excellent young adult literature is enjoyment. Good young adult books authentically portray the diverse experiences and issues of adolescence and appeal to teens because of the relevance of these books to their lives. Along with enjoyment, reading offers an escape from the pressures of school and personal problems with family or friends, especially with fantasy and humorous stories. Teens also appreciate that many of these books include a focus on sexuality and romantic interest in another person as a major or secondary theme. Young adult books have a social and emotional benefit, offering guidance, comfort, and answers to questions as teens experience romantic feelings and changing relationships.

Another benefit is the contribution of literature to personal and cultural identity. Stories connect adolescents to their past, to the roots of their cultural identities and national heritage, and to the general human condition. When readers find themselves and their families and communities within books, they can explore the multiple connections of their identities, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, language, disability, region, family structures, and social class, as well as consider new possible identities in their process of becoming. Books are also the repositories of culture. Knowing the literature, characters, and expressions that are part of the cultural heritage of adolescents allows them to become culturally literate.
Literature based on actual events in the past helps adolescents gain a greater appreciation for what history is and for the people, both ordinary and extraordinary, who made history. By reading stories set in the past, readers can relate on a more personal level with their predecessors and the events that affected their lives. History presented in this way, because it is more interesting, is more memorable and powerful in considering what can be learned from past mistakes.

Literature encourages imagination and transformation. By seeing the world around them in new ways and by considering ways of living other than their own, adolescents are encouraged to think creatively and divergently. Books can provide alternative pathways for understanding the past or imagining the future. As adolescents enter a world through stories that differ from their present, they develop imagination and are inspired to overcome obstacles, consider different perspectives, and formulate personal goals. They transform their understandings of the possibilities for themselves and the world. Often, characters are placed in situations that require them to make difficult life decisions. As the story unfolds and the consequences of characters’ choices become apparent, readers can critically consider their decisions and develop their own moral concepts and values.

Literature also offers information and wisdom and so combines the heart and mind, reason and emotion. Informational books provide factual knowledge, whereas fiction and poetry offer insights into life along with information. When a story is so convincingly written that readers feel as though they have lived through an experience or been in that place and time, that book has given them a valuable personal experience beyond the constraints of their current lives. These experiences encourage adolescents to view situations from perspectives other than their own. As they come to see the world around them in new ways and consider ways of living other than their own, adolescents increase their ability to think critically and to better understand the different ways people live.

Literature encourages understanding and empathy through gaining an appreciation of the universality of human needs across history and culture, which makes it possible for adolescents to understand what connects us as human beings as well as what makes each of us unique. Living someone else’s life through a story can encourage a sense of social justice and a greater capacity to empathize with others. All readers can benefit from stories that involve them in the lives of characters who struggle with disabilities, politics, or difficult circumstances or whose lives differ because of culture or geography. Literature thus plays an essential role in building intercultural understanding as adolescents immerse themselves in the lives and thinking of characters within global cultures.

### The Value of Literature in the Academic Learning of Young Adults

Reading good literature rewards the reader academically by providing interesting relevant texts that encourage learning across all content areas. The proponents of young adult literature, however, have long encountered resistance to the use of these books in schools from administrators, high school teachers, and university professors who rely on history or science textbooks or believe that only the classics are of sufficient literary quality to be taught to young adults in English classes.
The resistance to young adult literature in high schools has been documented in multiple studies that indicate that secondary English teachers believe that young adult literature is only for struggling, reluctant readers or out-of-school recreational reading and that these books lack sophistication and literary merit (Gibbons, Dail, & Stallworth, 2006; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). High school English teachers continue to use classic, canonical works for whole-class instruction, relying on their own experiences in reading these same classics in high school and college and standing by the classics as time-tested works of art. Teachers also cite the time constraints and pressures created by tests and standards and their belief that young adult books are often too controversial to use in class. Tellingly, the most positive attitudes exist among secondary teachers who have read young adult literature, with the less knowledgeable having the most negative perspectives (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

Secondary teachers who have integrated young adult novels into their classrooms find that young adult literature is a vehicle that facilitates learning the same literary elements as found in the classics while also engaging adolescents in thought-provoking discussions and developing a desire to read (Santoli & Wagner, 2004). An analysis of a young adult book can set the stage for analysis of a classic work, and students can explore significant themes or issues across contemporary young adult literature and classics. The breadth and depth of young adult literature today are equal to any genre, with many high-quality pieces of literature that address the life themes found in the classics, but that also connect directly to the lives of adolescents.

Many classics have serious shortcomings when examined through a critical lens and as works suitable for young adults. They tend to be gender and ethnically biased against women and people of color with authors who are primarily male and white. Their language and writing styles are often difficult for adolescents to understand because of arcane expressions and convoluted syntax rarely used today. They are set in the world of the past with abstruse historical references and rarely have teens as main characters. Even if the protagonist is a younger person, the author’s point of view is decidedly adult in looking back at adolescence with an adult’s interpretation of events and people. Adolescents frequently find classic works difficult and frustrating to read and disconnected from their immediate lives, requiring a teacher’s assistance to be understandable. Forcing a steady diet of only classic texts can lead to a dislike of reading and work against the goal of creating lifelong readers.

Young adult literature, in contrast, offers well-written books with everyday vocabulary, compressed plots, a limited number of characters, and a focus on a teen protagonist with issues and concerns that engage and resonate with adolescents, making these books accessible and understandable. The books reflect a range of cultural experiences and perspectives and a diversity of writing styles and formats in addition to addressing modern-day issues in the popular culture world in which teens live. Adolescents read more books and more willingly when they can choose reading materials of interest to them, and by reading more, they gain experience and become better readers.

These strengths of young adult literature provide a pathway to discovering and appreciating required classic titles in the curriculum while also creating a community of readers who develop reading habits that will carry them into adulthood. Some classics, of course, continue to hold appeal for adolescents, particularly if taught in an interesting way. In addition, some adolescents are mature beyond their years and prefer adult classic texts. The issue is not either/or but how to integrate classics and young adult literature to provide connection as well as challenge to readers.
The Value of Story in Our Lives

These values of literature for the lives and learning of adolescents are even more significant when considered within the broader frame of story as meaning-making. Stories of all kinds are woven so tightly into the fabric of our everyday lives that it’s easy to overlook their significance in framing how we think about ourselves and the world. They fill every part of daily life as we talk about events and people, read books, browse online news, send text messages, listen to music, watch video clips, check in with friends on Facebook, and catch up on a favorite television show. We live storied lives.

Stories are thus much more than a book—they are the way our minds make sense of our lives and world. Stories allow us to move from the chaotic “stuff” of daily life into understanding. An endless flow of experiences surrounds us on a daily basis. We create stories to impose order and coherence on those experiences and to work out their significance (Gotschall, 2012). Stories thus provide a means of structuring and reflecting on our experiences. We tell our stories to invite others to consider our meanings and to construct their own, as well as to better understand those experiences ourselves. We listen to others’ stories to try on other perspectives or ways of living in the world.

Story is a mode of knowing—one of the primary ways in which we think and construct meaning from our experiences. Our views of the world are a web of interconnected stories, a distillation of all the stories we have shared. This web of stories becomes our interpretive lens for new experiences and is culturally based. Our human need to story about our experiences may be universal, but there is no one way to tell stories. Our stories are always interwoven with the stories that exist within our own cultures both in content and in the style and structure of the telling.

We also construct stories to make sense of information. Theories can be viewed as just bigger stories. Scientists create a theory by using current information to tell a story that provides an explanation of a natural phenomenon, such as black holes. They change their stories over time as new information and perspectives become available. A story is thus a theory of something—what we tell and how we tell it reveals what we believe (Gotschall, 2012).

Story is at the heart of who we each are as human beings and who we might become. We often treat books as instructional lessons rather than recognizing their broader role as story. The values of literature for adolescents, both inside and outside of school, are interwoven with story as meaning-making.

Evaluating and Selecting Young Adult Literature

Selecting the best available materials for independent reading, literary and literacy instruction, and reading in the content areas is based in a deep knowledge of adolescents as well as books. Finding the right book is always a combination of knowing the reader and knowing the books. This intersection of books and readers develops from knowledge of the reading interests of adolescents and strategies for book selection.

Know the Reader

The best teachers know their students well, both as a group and as individuals. For those who work with adolescents this is no small challenge, since change is such a constant part of the lives of 12- to 18-year-olds and due to the tremendous diversity among adolescents.
The most apparent change is physical growth, with its accompanying awkwardness, self-consciousness, mood swings, and awakening interest in sex. Also apparent are changes in social interaction, primarily the need to be with and communicate with peers and to establish independence from parents and other adults. Less apparent at times is the development of complex and critical thinking and the ability to communicate that thinking to others.

Young adults, if presented with an array of good reading materials by teachers and librarians, are capable of making their own book choices. Peer influence can positively affect these choices through opportunities for adolescents to share their responses to books with each other. Teens who speak up about their reading exert a strong influence on their peers’ decisions to select and read certain books.

Book recommendation or selection should include a consideration of students’ reading abilities and purpose for reading. Books selected for whole-class assigned reading need to fit many students’ needs, interests, and reading levels, keeping in mind that even the most able students who are forced to read uninteresting, irrelevant materials often stop reading voluntarily (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Students reading independently usually fare best with materials that are at or slightly below their reading ability, but keen interest in a topic enables them to read and understand difficult materials.

Another consideration is the experience and maturity of readers. Individual differences and the influence of home, community, and school lead to great variances in maturity within any classroom. For this reason, selections of reading material for whole-class use might be based on the general maturity of a particular group of students, but selections for independent reading material should be determined by an individual’s maturity. For example, the treatment of war in Rosemary Wells’s Red Moon at Sharpsburg (2007) and Margi Preus’s Shadow on the Mountain (2012) is appropriate for middle-grade classes, but the more graphic treatment of war in Walter Dean Myers’s Sunrise over Fallujah (2008) and Elizabeth Wein’s Code Name Verity (2012) is more appropriate for class reading in high school or independent reading for a younger but more mature student.

A person’s interests are one of the most powerful forces in motivating reading. Teens’ interests, both as a group and individually, are highly diverse and change rapidly, so assessment of student interests must be done regularly to be effective. The first consideration in helping adolescents select books should be the topics they find interesting, particularly for resistant readers. Anderson, Shirey, Wilson, and Fielding (1987) reported the results of four experimental studies where interest accounted for 30 times as much variance in sentence recall as text readability. They also reviewed other studies on interest and concluded that whether or not students find materials interesting had a strong and pervasive effect on learning. Knowledge of adolescents’ friends, social activities, skills, and hopes or plans for the future are considerations in recommending books.

Reading interest, reading preference, and reading choice studies provide useful information to those who purchase books or encourage young adults to read. Generally, a reading interest study suggests a feeling one has toward particular reading material; a reading preference implies making a choice from two or more options; a reading choice study investigates the materials that adolescents select and read from a predetermined collection. These studies do not always provide an opportunity for students to express their interests. If, for example, the study does not include graphic novels or dystopias, then students will not be able to select those books as an interest. Although the findings from this body of research can be useful, the results are based on group data or aggregated data and reflect the interests of groups of students, not individuals.
Common sense tells us that adolescents will apply themselves more vigorously to read something they are interested in than something they find uninteresting or boring. Interest generates motivation and engagement, so knowing the reading interests of adolescents makes a difference (Hale & Crowe, 2001). Many studies of adolescent reading interests have been conducted over the past 40 years, indicating the following patterns in reading interests:

- Mysteries and scary stories/horror have a high appeal for many adolescents.
- Adolescent males prefer nonfiction, adventures, sports, and science fiction/fantasy.
- Adolescent females prefer romances and realistic stories, especially novels that connect to their life experiences and that convey the characters’ feelings.
- Books of any genre that reflect familiar teen experiences and concerns are a strong draw.
- Recent book sales indicate strong interest in fantasy and dystopias, particularly series books.
- Recent publications are of much higher appeal than older titles.

Research studies continue to show gender differences in reading interests which may be connected to differences in emotional and developmental needs as well as to societal gender expectations. Reading books is considered a female rather than male activity, with boys responding on surveys that they are not reading when, in fact, they are reading a lot of nonfiction and internet materials, but not what they consider “books,” which they define as fiction (Hopper, 2005). Another related trend is that females increasingly identify themselves as readers and as valuing reading as they move from middle school through high school, while males’ sense of themselves as readers and as valuing reading decreases (Pitcher et al., 2007).

Adolescents are highly influenced by prior knowledge of an author or enjoyment of a particular author’s style and often have a favorite genre or author that they search out over and over. They also choose books that their peers have enjoyed and which allow them to claim cultural membership within their peer group. Certain books become part of popular culture with many references integrated within peer talk and so become important referent points and status markers. Adolescents who engage in regular interactions around books with members of their social circles are most likely to see themselves as readers—reading becomes part of their social life (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Beyond topic or genre, certain characteristics of books are significant for adolescent readers. The patterns across studies (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) indicate the appeal of:

- Visual texts, including illustrated books, picture book, comic books, and graphic novels
- Cover illustrations that include teens and provide a context for the content of the book
- Adolescent protagonists that are the age of the reader or slightly older
- Fast-paced and humorous stories
- Books based on movies and television
Identifying the reading interests of resistant readers is particularly significant in order to invite them to move beyond their active avoidance of any reading engagement. Less research has been conducted on the reading materials preferred by resistant adolescent readers, but educators have written about their work (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner, 2002; Beers, 2003), indicating that resistant adolescent readers are interested in books with the following characteristics:

- Short books or longer books that have short chapters or sections
- Lots of white space in books; fewer words per page; easy-to-read typeface and font size
- Books with illustrations, photographs, or sketches
- Books after seeing the movies
- Comic books and graphic novels or books with comic book—style illustrations
- Series books, especially horror, mystery, or adventure plots

Characteristics of fiction that appeal to, and support, resistant readers include:

- Rapid introduction to main characters with only a few (two to four) characters, each with one name used consistently and each character well delineated
- Characters whose experiences and cultural backgrounds seem similar to their own
- Quick start to the story with action beginning on the first or second page to hook the reader
- Fast pace throughout; less introspection and rumination by characters
- Gripping, memorable stories with emotional impact, especially with a focus on teens’ concerns
- Single narrator or single point of view
- Episodic plots or progressive chronological plots that can be easily followed
- Familiar settings that need little description or settings described briefly or shown through illustrations to avoid lengthy descriptions of setting that slow down the pace of the story
- Dialogue with realistic everyday teen talk

Characteristics of nonfiction that appeal to, and support, resistant readers include:

- Heavily illustrated books such as Dorling Kindersley’s Eyewitness books
- Trivia books such as the Guinness Book of World Records, sports statistics books, and joke books
- Biographies of celebrities, actors, pop musicians, and sports figures
- Game system guides for video and computer games
- Books and magazines about cars, sports, teen advice, and other current topics

Although reading interest research studies report what groups of students like, individual interests often differ from these descriptions. These suggestions of topics and characteristics provide a starting point in collecting and presenting books to groups of adolescents, but do not indicate the interests of a specific adolescent.
Know the Books

Teachers and librarians who are well-read and current with young adult literature are more likely to be able to suggest books that will be of interest to students. Sharing information about books with colleagues, being familiar with notable young adult authors, and reading book reviews are ways to learn about good books. Teachers and librarians will, of course, want to have read any book they plan to use as reading or teaching material with a class.

Knowing the major authors writing for young adults and having a general idea of the kinds of books they write can help a teacher or librarian make good book suggestions. Knowing something interesting about the author—that John Green was a chaplain at a children's hospital and has a funny, frenetic vlog with his brother, or that Libba Bray was in a serious car accident at age 18 that required the reconstruction of her face and that she sings in Tiger Beat, an all-YA author rock band—can motivate a person to read that author's books. Each genre chapter in this text provides a list of notable authors as a starting point to get to know the major authors in the field of young adult literature.

Several book award programs have been established for the purposes of elevating and maintaining the quality of books for young people and for honoring authors whose work is judged by experts in the field to have the greatest literary merit. These award lists can be used as resources for selecting excellent works to share with young adults. Appendix A contains lists of winners of the following major national awards for books for young people:

- Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature
- National Book Award for Young People's Literature (outstanding literary merit, U.S. author)
- Newbery Medal (author of most distinguished contribution in the United States)
- Sibert Award (authors and illustrators of distinguished information books in the United States)
- Orbis Pictus Award (excellence in writing of nonfiction for young people)
- YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults (best nonfiction for young adults)
- Carnegie Medal (author of most outstanding book in the United Kingdom)
- Boston Globe–Horn Book Award for text (author of poetry or fiction)
- The Governor General’s Literary Award for text (author of outstanding literature in Canada)
- Book of the Year for Older Readers Award (author of outstanding literature in Australia)
- Coretta Scott King Award for writing (African-American author)
- Pura Belpré Award for writing (Latino author with Latino-themed book)
- Mildred L. Batchelder Award (American publisher of an outstanding translated book)
- Margaret A. Edwards Award (author's lifetime achievement for young adult books over time)
- Phoenix Award (author of a book first published 20 years earlier)

Journals that review young adult literature are an important source of current titles. In addition, these journals contain articles discussing effective strategies for incorporating
literature into reading and content-area instruction and for bringing young adults and books together. Each of these publications offers evaluative annotations and age-level recommendations. Review journals that cover the full spectrum of literature from baby books to adult books are not included here:

- *The ALAN Review*, three issues/year, Assembly on Literature for Adolescents, National Council of Teachers of English
- *English Journal*, six issues/year, NCTE
- *The Horn Book Magazine*, six issues/year, Horn Book, Inc.
- *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literature*, eight issues/year, International Reading Association
- *School Library Journal*, 12 issues/year, Reed Elsevier Inc.
- *Voices from the Middle*, four issues/year, NCTE

Annual book lists are developed by library and education organizations and are accessible online. Notable among these related to young adult literature are:

- Best Books for Young Adults, American Library Association (www.ala.org)
- Teachers’ Choices, International Reading Association (www.reading.org)
- Alex Award List (books written for adults that appeal to teens), American Library Association (www.ala.org)

Massive amounts of buzz precede the publication of many young adult books, with authors reading the first chapter of an anticipated novel on their blogs and releasing book trailers on YouTube. Teens stay on top of trends at sites like Young Adult Book Central (www.yabookscentral.com) and readergirlz (www.readergirlz.com). Teachers and librarians tap into anticipated new books at sites like Reading Rants! (www.readingrants.org) and Guys Lit Wire (http://guyslitwire.blogspot.com).

### Know Readers and Books to Examine Text Complexity

The readability and conceptual difficulty of books is another variable in selecting books to meet the reading needs of students and involves knowledge of both readers and text. **Readability** is an estimate of a text’s difficulty based on its vocabulary (common versus uncommon words) and sentence structure (short, simple sentences versus long, complex sentences). **Conceptual difficulty** examines the complexity of ideas in the book and how these ideas are presented. Symbolism and lengthy description contribute to the complexity of ideas, just as the use of flashbacks contributes to the complexity of plot presentation.

The reading levels of adolescents differ greatly, making it important to provide materials of varying difficulty. Being able to assess the difficulty of reading materials is helpful; however, for independent reading, adolescents should be encouraged to read books of interest to them regardless of level, so long as they can comprehend the material and want to read it. As adults, we would not appreciate our reading being determined by others who decide that a book is too easy or difficult for us. Adolescent selections for personal reading are balanced with teachers’ selections of complex texts for instructional purposes.
Chapter 1  Understanding Young Adults and Their Literature  17

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus attention on text complexity and the need for students to engage with texts that gradually increase in difficulty of ideas and textual structures. This focus on rigor in reading is based on the goal that students understand the level of texts necessary for success in college and careers by the time they graduate from high school (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). Text complexity is determined by consideration of three dimensions in the CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

1. Qualitative Dimensions of Text Complexity—Informed decisions by teachers and librarians about the difficulty of a text based on their judgments about the influences of these aspects on a specific reader:
   a. Levels of Meaning and Purpose. Determining greater or less complexity based on how many layers of meaning are in the text and whether the purpose of the text is implicit or clearly stated.
   b. Structure. Examining if the text is organized around a simple, well-marked, and conventional structure that readers will quickly recognize or a structure that is unusual and seldom used, such as flashbacks or complex graphics.
   c. Language Conventionality and Clarity. Examining whether the text uses clear, literal, contemporary language or relies on figurative, ambiguous, archaic, academic, or unfamiliar language.
   d. Knowledge Demands. Evaluating assumptions about the types of life experiences and cultural or content knowledge that readers will bring to a text.

2. Quantitative Dimensions of Text Complexity—Computerized readability formulas that rate a text on word familiarity, word length, and sentence length, based on the assumption that unfamiliar words, long words, and long sentences increase complexity.
   a. CCSS recommends the lexile framework (www.lexile.com; Schnick, 2000), but notes that this framework does not provide accurate levels for poetry and complex narrative fiction for young adults.

3. Reader and Task Considerations Related to the Texts—Considering the fit between a text and a specific reader who is engaging in a particular task with that text.
   a. Experiences and strategies of the reader including cognitive abilities, motivation, interest, knowledge, and experiences.
   b. Task that the reader is asked to engage in with a particular text.

Considering all three dimensions of text complexity instead of relying only on quantitative leveling of texts, such as the lexile levels, is essential. Readability formulas may be helpful in selecting books, but they have drawbacks because they do not factor in prior knowledge or interest in a topic. The formulas also have difficulty measuring conceptual difficulty, the complexity of the ideas in a book and how these ideas are presented. Symbolism, abstraction, and figurative language contribute to the complexity of ideas, just as nonlinear plots or shifting points of view contribute to the complexity of the plot. *Skellig* (Almond, 1999) is a novel of magical realism in which two children become involved with an otherworldly being hidden in a garage. The text has easy vocabulary and short sentences with a readability of around grade 3.5. Yet the concepts of spirituality, faith, and prejudice cast the conceptual level...
of this novel at a higher level, making it more appropriate for students who are 11–15 years old, depending on the background of the specific student. John Stenbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) scores at a second- to third-grade level on quantitative measures because of the use of dialogue with familiar words and short sentences. The many layers of meaning and mature themes indicate that this book is meant for grades 6 and above. Information on readability can be found through online databases that list lexile reading levels.

The CCSS include a list of Text Exemplars consisting of stories, drama, poetry, and informational texts at each grade level. Excerpts from these texts are provided to help educators explore text complexity. This list of texts is not intended as a core reading list for all students; instead these texts are provided as exemplars for teachers to use in understanding text complexity so they can make more effective selections. Students should not be restricted to reading only the books on these lists since many are dated and do not reflect the multicultural or global nature of the world.

**Balance and Variety in Book Selections**

The balance and variety of books influences the potential academic benefits of literature as well as addresses the wide range of reading interests and abilities among young adults. Many different types of books, including novels, picture books for older readers, collections of short stories and poetry, graphic novels, books of plays, and works of nonfiction, should be available. Balance among topics, literary forms, and genres of literature is essential.

The mood of the books should also be varied to include stories that are sad, humorous, silly, serious, reflective, dramatic, and suspenseful. A steady diet of light, humorous books might, at first, appeal to teens, but eventually, the sameness becomes boring. Reading books with the same dominant emotion ignores the rapid change and growth in personal lives and choices that are the hallmark of young adults. Because their interests are changing, different books help them meet new challenges.

School and classroom collections need a wide range of topics with a gender balance among the main characters. A balance between male and female main characters meets the needs of adolescents and helps them more fully understand perspectives, problems, and feelings across genders. In addition, understanding and empathy for people with physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral disabilities can be gained through their portrayals in books. A positive image of people with disabilities can be conveyed, providing young adults with disabilities the opportunity to see characters like themselves in books.

The representation of people of color as main characters is also essential to presenting a realistic view of society and the world. Through well-written *multicultural literature*, adolescents can see characters from cultural backgrounds similar to their own in leading roles. Characters with whom one can identify permit a deeper involvement in literature and help adolescents understand situations in their lives. Adolescents need to see that someone from a different race, ethnic group, or religion has many of the same needs and feelings as well as come to recognize and value differences in experiences and cultural views. Literature by and about people different from oneself can develop an understanding and appreciation for difference as a resource, not a problem.

*Global and international literature*, literature set in nations and regions of the world, should also be included in classrooms and libraries in order to encourage the development of global understanding. Through reading books about young adults from global cultures,
adolescents can gain cultural literacy on a worldwide basis and develop awareness of global issues and their responsibilities for taking action both locally and globally.

Finding this range of books and staying current with new releases involves familiarity with the major book awards and review journals as well as attending professional conferences to meet authors and illustrators and attend sessions on literature. These resources will help you locate the best in books being published as well as books that meet the specific needs and interests of the diverse group of adolescents who read young adult literature.

So Why Are Literature and Reading at Risk in Our Society?

Given the significant values of story and literature, engaging with all kinds of books for personal reading should be a valued activity in our society. Research indicates that the opposite is true and that voluntary reading is at risk. Newspaper headlines put a spotlight on illiteracy, the number of people who cannot read and write at the levels needed to function in our society, when the much bigger problem is aliteracy, the number of people who can read and choose not to. They read work-related materials, but reading books for personal purposes is not part of their lives.

Voluntary reading of literature in the United States has been monitored by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) since 1982. From 1982 to 2002, NEA reports show a steady decline in voluntary reading across all age groups in the United States, but particularly among young adults, ages 18–24. The NEA's 2008 report shows that this slide has finally reversed itself and that, for the first time in 25 years, our love of literature has been rekindled with a 7 percent rise in adults reading literature, particularly novels and short stories. Despite this slight rise, there is still cause for concern because only 50.2 percent of Americans report reading any literature in 2008, and only 54.3 percent read a book that was not related to school or work. The U.S. population now breaks into almost equally sized groups of readers and non-readers, not because the non-readers cannot read but because they are choosing not to read books, either online or in print. The NEA (2008) believes that one reason for the recent slight rise in reading is that parents, teachers, librarians, and civic leaders took action and created thousands of programs for families, schools, and communities based on publicity about the major declines in earlier reports.

The NEA's 2007 report noted that the percentage of 17-year-olds who do not read for pleasure doubled over a 20 year period while the amount they read for school (15 or less pages a day) stayed the same. There was also a significant decline from childhood to adolescence from 54 percent to 22 percent for those who read almost daily for pleasure. College attendance is no longer a guarantee of active reading habits with one in three college seniors reading nothing for pleasure in a given week. Our assumption is that high school and college students stop reading for personal purposes because reading becomes associated with textbooks and school work, hardly motivating reading!

On a positive note, researchers at the PEW Research Center (Zickuhr, Rainie, & Purcell, 2013) found that although Americans ages 16 to 29 are heavy technology users with almost all reporting being online, they also read and borrow printed books and value libraries. Readers in this age group report increased use of e-books (25 percent), but their print reading remains steady. They access the online services of libraries and are just as likely as older
adults to visit the library, borrow print books, browse the shelves, and use research databases. They are also more likely to ask for assistance from librarians and express the need for separate teen hangout spaces in libraries.

The NEA 2007 report details the consequences of the loss of reading for pleasure, noting that voluntary reading correlates strongly with academic achievement in reading and that proficient readers have more financially rewarding jobs and opportunities for career growth. Literary readers are three times more likely than non-readers to visit museums, attend plays or concerts, and create artwork, and twice as likely to exercise, volunteer, and vote. Print reading, in contrast to online reading, allows for more of the focused attention and contemplation that is essential to complex communication and insight. The greater academic, professional, and civic benefits associated with higher levels of leisure reading and reading comprehension point to the potential significance of young adult literature in the lives of adolescents.

Books do change lives for the better, and so you need to be a reader to engage adolescents as readers. Some of you are likely to be among those college students who stopped reading for pleasure due to the lack of relevance in teacher-selected reading materials, dull textbooks, boring instructional practices, lack of time, peer pressure, past failures, a preference for electronic media, and a perception of reading as hard work. Due to the heavy load of coursework, textbook reading, and assigned literature, you may be more likely to watch television or surf the internet, activities that require passive participation, when you have free time. One of our goals is that you re-discover the joys of reading for pleasure and insight through reading lots of young adult books—online and in print, graphic novels, and novels in verse, fantasy in new worlds, and fiction about the past, information about the world, and fiction about the struggles of daily life. If you are to immerse adolescents in reading good books that add to their lives, you need to find those books for your life as well.

As you learn about literature in the chapters of this textbook, be sure that you immerse yourself in interesting books. Read picture books and novels, fiction and nonfiction, stories and poems, to reclaim these values for yourself and for the adolescents with whom you will interact. We have kept this textbook concise with many invitations for you as a reader to encourage you to reclaim your reading life. We want you to experience reading as life—not school work.

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Learning about Literature

An understanding of how literary elements relate to young adult literature can heighten awareness of literary criticism and provide a vocabulary for expressing responses to books. Literary terms can also be tools that adolescents use to initiate and sustain conversations about literature. By using these terms in your interactions with adolescents, you support them in acquiring a literary vocabulary. An exploration of these literary elements, however, is based in a particular stance about reading and studying young adult literature with adolescents.
The Study of Young Adult Literature

The scholarly study of literature generally focuses on the meaning found in a work of literature and how readers construct that meaning. When readers subject a work to deep analysis through exact and careful reading, it is referred to as new criticism or structural criticism. In this approach, the analysis of the words and structure of a work is the focus; the goal is to find the “correct” interpretation. Until the 1960s structural criticism dominated middle and high school literature classrooms, and many teachers continue to use this method today. Often teachers using this approach take the view that there is one correct interpretation of any work of literature and so reading is a process of taking from the text only what was put there by the author. The success of young adult readers with any work of literature is determined by how closely their interpretations match the “authorized” interpretation. Students’ responses to literature are thus limited to naming (or guessing) the “right” answers to teachers’ questions.

Many of you experienced this approach as students and know the frustration and apathy that can result from trying to replicate the teacher’s interpretation. You may have even been one of many readers who did not bother with reading the actual book and instead consulted CliffsNotes study guides. Structural approaches do not encourage adolescents to see reading as relevant to their lives outside of school or help them develop confidence in their abilities to construct meaning from a book or connect those meanings to their lives. Often these experiences are so painful that adolescents stop reading books other than to meet school assignments.

Louise Rosenblatt introduced reader response theory or the transactional view of reading in 1938. She asserted that what the reader brings to the reading act—his or her world of experience, personality, and current frame of mind—is just as important in interpreting the text as what the author writes. Reading is thus a fusion of text and reader. Consequently, any text’s meaning will vary from reader to reader and, indeed, from reading to reading of the same text by the same reader. Most of us have experienced reading a book only to discover that a friend has reacted to or interpreted the same book quite differently. Rosenblatt (1978) points out that the text of any book guides and constrains the interpretation that is made, but that a range of personal interpretations are valid and desirable as long as readers can support an interpretation by citing evidence from their lives and the text. Once young adults have made a personal connection, they are more likely to be interested in pursuing a more in-depth analysis of a text.

Readers bring connections from their worlds of experience to a book, including (1) knowledge of various genres and literary forms gained from previous reading that help them understand new, similar books; (2) social relationships that help them understand and evaluate characters’ actions and motivations; (3) cultural knowledge that influences their attitudes toward self and others and their responses to story events; and (4) knowledge of the world or topic that can deepen readers’ understanding of a text and enrich their response (Beach & Marshall, 1990). Reader response theory, in accepting different interpretations of the same literary work, accommodates both traditional, genre-specific works and genre-eclectic, nonlinear, postmodern literature with its multiple perspectives and plots and demands on the reader to act as coauthor. This coauthorship is based on what the reader brings to the text and interprets from the text, in essence, creating a new text from the one produced by the published author.
Another aspect of Rosenblatt's theory is her focus on the importance of the stance that readers choose related to their purpose for reading. Efferent reading focuses on taking knowledge or information from the text, while aesthetic reading involves living through a literary experience and immersing yourself within the world of the story. Whether people read efferently or aesthetically depends on what they are reading (e.g., a want ad versus a mystery novel) and why they are reading (e.g., for information versus for pleasure). Many teachers encourage an efferent stance toward literature by asking questions on specific details or literary devices, and readers are so preoccupied with reading for those details that they fail to engage with or understand the story itself.

Reading is a fusion of text and reader, so each reading of a particular literary work results in a different transaction. Even a rereading by the same reader will result in a different experience. Rosenblatt (1985) argues that, although the notion of a single correct reading of a literary work is rejected, some readings are more defensible than others once the group has agreed upon certain criteria for evaluating interpretations. Although each reading of a given literary work will be personal and distinct, there are a range of certain generally-agreed-upon interpretations of that work by a community of educated readers. Chapter 10 provides a detailed discussion with suggestions of literature-response engagements, and each genre chapter includes criteria for the evaluation and assessment of that genre.

Many educators fear that the focus on close reading in the Common Core State Standards will result in a return to the painful interrogation of texts to get the “right” interpretation. The authors of the standards seem to have a limited understanding of reader response theory, as only involving personal connections and not recognizing that Rosenblatt argued that personal connections are essential but never sufficient. After sharing initial personal connections, readers are encouraged to examine and challenge their responses with other readers and engage in close reading of both themselves and the text for evidence related to their interpretations. Discussions of the following elements of fiction can provide a vocabulary for this close reading, but should not negate the importance of first sharing personal connections before analyzing how these elements influenced their interpretation of a text.

**Elements of Fiction**

Learning to evaluate books can best be accomplished by reading as many excellent books as possible. Gradually, your judgment on the merits of individual books will improve. Discussing your responses to these books with students, teachers, and your classmates and listening to their responses will also assist you in becoming a more appreciative critic. Understanding the different parts, or elements, of a piece of fiction and how they work together can help you to become more analytical about literary works and so improve your judgment of literature. A discussion of the elements of poetry is included in Chapter 7, “Poetry,” and the elements of nonfiction are included in Chapter 6, “Nonfiction: Biography and Informational Books.” The various elements of fiction are discussed separately in the following sections, but it is the unity of all these elements that produces a story.
Plot

The events of a story and the sequence in which they are told constitute the plot, what happens in the story. Plot is an important element of fiction to those who want to find excitement in the books they read. A good plot produces conflict to build excitement and suspense to keep the reader involved.

The nature of the conflict within the plot can arise from different sources. The basic conflict may be one that occurs within the main character, called person-against-self. In this type of story, the main character struggles against inner drives and personal tendencies to achieve some goal. Stories about adolescence will frequently have this conflict as the basis of the story problem. For example, in Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, 15-year-old Aristotle struggles to know and accept himself and others.

A conflict usually found in survival stories is the struggle of the main character with forces of nature. This conflict is called person-against-nature. In Monument 14 (2013) by Emmy Laybourne, the main characters struggle to survive disasters that are plaguing the earth.

In other stories, the source of the conflict is found between two characters. Conflicts with peers, sibling rivalries, and rebellion against an adult are examples of person-against-person conflicts. For example, in Bucking the Sarge (2004) by Christopher Paul Curtis, 15-year-old Luther's conflict is with his mother, whose views on right and wrong collide with his own.

Some young adult books present the main character in conflict with society, such as preventing environmental destruction, surviving in an increasingly corporate culture, or coping with political upheaval and war. This conflict is called person-against-society. In the historical novel Traitor (2010) by Gudrun Pausewang and Rachel Ward, protagonist Anna hides a Russian soldier from her German family and neighbors during World War II. Another example is the thriller So Yesterday (2004) by Scott Westerfeld, in which the consumer culture is exposed. Futuristic dystopias, such as The Hunger Games (2010) by Suzanne Collins, also create this type of conflict.

In some stories the protagonist faces multiple conflicts in which a character may be in conflict with society as well as with other persons. In L. J. Adlington's science fiction novel Cherry Heaven (2008), characters are in conflict with the dystopian society in which they find themselves and also in conflict with the former owners of that world as well as with their own inner struggle.

Plots are constructed in many different ways. The most usual structures found in young adult novels are chronological plots, which cover a particular period of time and relate the events in order within the time period. For example, if a book relates the events of one week, then Monday's events will precede Tuesday's, and so on. Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy (2004) by Gary D. Schmidt has a chronological plot that follows a spiral of disasters that occur when town elders force a poor community of African Americans off a Maine island in order to start a lucrative tourist trade.

There are two distinct types of chronological plots, progressive and episodic. In books with progressive plots, the first few chapters are the exposition, in which the characters, setting, and basic conflict are established. Following the expository chapters, the story builds through rising action to a climax. The climax occurs, a satisfactory conclusion (or dénouement) is reached, and the story ends. Figure 2.1 suggests how a progressive chronological plot might be visualized.
An **episodic plot** ties together separate short stories or episodes, each an entity in itself with its own conflict and resolution. These episodes are typically unified by the same cast of characters and the same setting. Often, each episode comprises a chapter, as in *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg* by Rodman Philbrick (2009), in which each chapter is a different incident in Homer’s journey to find his brother, who has been sold as a substitute solder in the Civil War. In *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008), each episodic chapter is a story that traces Bod’s growth from a spirited boy to a young man ready to set out into the world. Although the episodes are usually chronological, time relationships among the episodes may be nonexistent or loosely connected. Episodic plots range in complexity from humorous escapades to more dire circumstances. Readers who are new to reading full-length novels may find episodic plot novels especially appealing and easier to negotiate. Figure 2.2 suggests how a chronological episodic plot might be visualized.

With greater frequency young adult novels are appearing with new plot formulations such as **complex multiple plots**, in which the traditional chronology is replaced by nonlinear plots that occur simultaneously. In Matt de la Peña’s *Ball Don’t Lie* (2005), a basketball story that involves race relations, a disjointed narrative with various viewpoints alternates between past and present and can be seen as a reflection of the internal life of the protagonist. Other stories are told through a multiplicity of protagonists, each of whom has a vantage point from which to unfold some portion of the story being told. Maggie Stiefvater’s *The Raven Boys* (2012) and *The Scorpio Races* (2011) both have different characters as narrators who propel the story through multiple plot lines.
Authors use a *flashback* to convey information about earlier events in a chronological plot—for example, before the beginning of the first chapter. In this case, the chronology of events is disrupted, and the reader is taken back to an earlier time. Flashbacks can occur more than once and in different parts of a story. The use of a flashback permits authors to begin the story in the midst of the action but later fill in the background for full understanding of the present events. Such plots require a higher level of reading comprehension and can be challenging for less able readers. Teachers can help students understand this plot structure by assigning good examples of stories using flashbacks, such as Sharon Draper’s *Out of My Mind* (2010), Rick Yancy’s *The 5th Wave* (2013), or Libba Bray’s *The Diviners* (2012). Class discussion can then focus on the sequence of events and why the author may have chosen to relate the events in this manner. Figure 2.3 illustrates the structure of a book in which some events occurred before the beginning of the book.

A plot device that prepares readers for coming events in a story is *foreshadowing*. This device gives clues to a later event, possibly even the climax of the story. Elizabeth Wein’s *Rose under Fire* (2013) begins with a diary entry in which Rose reflects on the crash of a pilot who was attempting to tip a flying bomb, a foreshadowing of the events that lead to her capture by the Nazis. Authors use a range of subtle strategies to prepare readers for the outcomes of stories through foreshadowing.

**Characters**

*Characters*, the actors in a story, are another element of fiction vital to the enjoyment of a book. A well-portrayed character can become a friend, a role model, or a temporary parent to a young reader. Although young adults enjoy reading about exciting events, the characters must matter to the reader, or the events no longer seem important. How characters are depicted and how they develop in the course of the story are important to determining whether characters matter to readers.

*Characterization* refers to the way an author helps the reader to know a character, particularly through describing the character’s physical appearance and personality. Portraying the character’s emotional and moral traits or revealing relationships with other characters...
are subtler and more effective techniques. In the most convincing characterizations, we come to know a character through a combination of actions and dialogue, responses of other characters, and narrator descriptions.

**Character development** refers to the changes, good or bad, that the character undergoes during the course of events in the story. If a character experiences significant life-altering events, readers expect that the character will somehow be different as a result of those events. A character who changes in the course of the story is known as a **dynamic character**. In Cynthia Kadohata’s *Weedflower* (2009), Sumiko finds her world turned upside down when moved to a Japanese internment camp during World War II. As she learns to live in her new environment, she grows as a person and as a member of the community.

In a work of fiction for young adults, there are usually one or two main characters and some minor characters. Ideally, the main character, the **protagonist**, will be a fully described, complex individual who possesses complex good and bad traits, like a real person. Such an individual is called a **round character**. In the historical fiction novel *Code Name Verity* (2012) by Elizabeth Wein, Verity is fully present as a real person who is brave but also is afraid and makes mistakes. The character or force that is in direct opposition to the main character is called an **antagonist**. In Sara Zarr’s *Story of a Girl* (2007), Tommy, the former boyfriend, a thoughtless and cruel antagonist, is shown to be vulnerable himself during the course of the story.

**Minor or secondary characters** are described less fully. The extent of description depends on what the reader needs to know about the character for a full understanding of the story. Some of the minor character’s traits are described fully, whereas other facets of the character’s personality may remain obscure. Because the purpose is to build the story and make it comprehensible, fragmentary knowledge of a minor character may suffice. In *Heat* (2006) by Mike Lupica, a sports novel portraying a positive image of Latino teens competing athletically, secondary character Manny is depicted as the catcher and a loyal mate to talented pitcher Michael Arroyo, the protagonist.

Occasionally, an author will insert a **flat character**—that is, a character described in a one-sided or underdeveloped manner. Although such one-dimensional people do not exist in real life, they may be justified within the story to propel the plot. Sometimes the character is shown as an all-evil or all-frivolous person; folktales, for instance, present flat characters as symbols of good and evil. In some stories, a flat character plays the role of **character foil**, a person who is in direct juxtaposition to another character (usually the protagonist) and who serves to highlight the characteristics of the other individual. A character foil may occur as a flat or a round character. For example, in Gordon Korman’s *Born to Rock* (2006), Melinda, childhood friend of the protagonist, Young Republican Leo Caraway, is a flat character who makes Leo aware of the identity of his biological fathers. Melinda also serves as a character foil to Leo in her dislike of Republicans and distaste for Leo’s interest in money.

The main characters in an excellent work of fiction for young adults are rounded, fully developed individuals who undergo change in response to life-altering events. Because young adults generally prefer protagonists of their age, or somewhat older, authors of books for young adults often face a dilemma. In real life, young adults usually have restricted freedom of action and decision making within the confines of a family, but a vivid exciting story requires the main characters to be “on their own.” Thus, in
many young adult novels, authors arrange for parents to be absent, no longer living, or nonfunctioning in the life of that teen.

**Setting**

The time and place(s) in which the story occurs constitute the *setting* of a story. The setting has a more or less important function depending on the story. In historical fiction the authentic re-creation of the period is essential to comprehension of the story's events. In this situation, the setting, fully described both in time and place, is called an *integral setting*. The story could not be the same if placed in another setting. For example, in the post-earthquake novel *In Darkness* (2012) by Nick Lake, the setting of Haiti is vital to the authenticity of the story.

By contrast, the setting in folktales is often vague and general. For example, “long ago in a cottage in the deep woods” is meant to convey a universal, timeless tale, one that could have happened anywhere and almost anytime except the present or very recent past. This type of setting is called a *backdrop setting*. It simply sets the stage and the mood. The term comes from the theater to refer to scenes performed in front of a curtain or a set painted as a generic street or forest, such as occurs in some of the scenes from Shakespeare.

**Theme**

The literary *theme* of a story is its underlying meaning or significance. The term *theme* should not be confused with *topic* or *theme* as used in the sense of a thematic unit of study. Although we sometimes think of the literary theme as the message or moral of the story, it can just as likely be an aesthetic understanding, such as an appreciation for nature, or a viewpoint on a current societal issue. To identify the theme, think about the author's purpose in writing the story, or what the author is saying through this story.

A theme is better expressed by means of a complete sentence than by a single word. For example, students often suggest survival as a theme found in *Moon over Manifest* by Clare Vanderpool (2011). A better statement of the theme is “Learning to survive takes more than independent effort.” The single word *survival* may be a topic found in the story, but it is not an expression of the theme and does not encourage us to consider more complex issues of survival during the Great Depression and the role of family and community for sense of our well-being.

Readers with different life experiences may not identify the same theme, and so students may perceive the underlying meaning of a work in different ways. Indeed most layered works of literature can be argued to have multiple themes. In *Luna* (2006) by Julie Ann Peters, a reader may identify the theme as “People must be free to be themselves” or as “Life is difficult when you don’t subscribe to societal norms.” A statement of a theme can be a beginning point for students to discuss why they have identified a particular theme, what parts of the novel convinced them of this, and whether they agree personally with a particular theme.

Themes in young adult literature should be worthy of readers’ attention and encourage consideration of moral and ethical issues. A theme must not overpower the plot and characters of the story since young adults read fiction primarily for enjoyment, not for enlightenment. Heavy-handed, obvious, and didactic themes detract from a reader’s enjoyment of a story. Certainly a well-written book may convey a moral message, but it should
also tell a good story from which the message emerges. The theme is thus subtly conveyed to the reader, as in Kirby Larson’s *Hattie Big Sky* (2006), which demonstrates that family is not land, nor a home, but a matter of heart.

Often adults write stories not for the enjoyment of readers but to teach lessons in morality. Moralistic stories are often seen as the thinly disguised religious tracts for children and adolescents found in the 1800s, but some authors use young adult literature as a platform to preach about drug abuse, animal rights, or other contemporary issues. If the literary quality of these novels is weak, then the story and characters become secondary to the issue or problem. However, moral values embedded within the fabric of a powerful story may help readers increase their moral reasoning, develop a sense of right and wrong, and make choices for their lives.

**Style**

*Style* is the way an author tells the story and so can be viewed as the writing itself, as opposed to the content of the book. However, the style must suit the content of the story; the two are intertwined.

Different aspects of style are considered in evaluating a work of fiction. Most obviously, the *words* chosen to tell the story can be examined—are they long or short, common or uncommon, rhyming or melodic, boring and hackneyed or rich and challenging, impassive or emotional, standard dialect or regional minority dialect? The words should be appropriate to the story being told. As an evaluator of books for young adults, consider: Why did the author choose these words? What effect was the author trying to achieve?

The *sentences* may also be considered. Do they read easily? Do they flow without the reader needing to reread to gain the meaning of the text? Sometimes an author chooses to limit the word choices to write a book that conveys the thought processes and voice of a young narrator. Such books may consequently fall within the lower range of difficulty. Yet in the hands of a gifted writer, the sentences will remain no less melodic, varied in length and structure, and enjoyable to read and hear than sentences in the best books at the highest range of difficulty. An example of a novel written in simple yet powerful language is *Your Own Sylvia* (2007), a portrait of the life of Sylvia Plath, in the form of a novel in verse by Stephanie Hemphill.

With greater frequency, new or unusual forms are appearing in young adult literature, from novels told as a movie script, as in Walter Dean Myers’s *Monster* (1999); novels in the form of a diary experimenting with poetic forms, as in Ron Koertge’s *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (2003); novels in the form of e-mails and phone calls, as in Catherine Stine’s *Refugees* (2005); novels in the form of television interviews, radio transcripts, and narrated segments as in Paul Valponi’s *The Final Four* (2012); and novels drawing on letters, diary entries, lists, and e-mails, as in Jaclyn Moriarity’s *The Year of Secret Assignments* (2004). Styles acceptable in young adult literature have grown far beyond traditional ways of telling a story, as is evident in *Eighth Grade Is Making Me Sick* by Jennifer Holm (2012), where the entire story is told through photo-collages of poems, notes, text messages, comics, food wrappers, and other artifacts of everyday life.

The *organization* of the book may be considered by noting the paragraphs and transitions, length of chapters, headings and chapter titles, preface, endnotes, prologue, epilogue, and length of the book. For many readers chapter length is important. Shorter chapters appeal to students who read more slowly or whose attention spans are shorter. For example, Sharon Creech’s *Ruby Holler* (2002) is a 310-page novel with many chapters, but each...
Chapter is only a few pages long. The story’s humorous and lighthearted mood, swift action, and quirky characters make it enjoyable for a range of readers.

Chapter titles can provoke interest, as well as provide the reader with clues to predict story events. Some books also provide the readers with a prologue, an introductory statement telling events that precede the start of the story. Jane Yolen’s and Heidi E. Y. Stemple’s Bad Girls: Sirens, Jezebels Murderesses, Thieves, & Other Female Villains (2013) contains an informative prologue about the female villains through the ages. They invite readers to become interested in an historical account of female felons and allowing readers to decide how bad these felons were.

Some authors include an epilogue, a concluding statement telling events that occur after the story has ended. In How I Live Now (2004), Meg Rosoff describes England during a third world war, but then in an epilogue adds a hopeful note of events taking place six years after the conclusion of the story. Occasionally, an author presents information on the sources or historical facts used in the story. In Yellow Star (2006), for example, Jennifer Roy places an author’s note and a timeline of events in the epilogue.

Point of view is another aspect of an author’s style. If the story is told through the eyes and voice of a third-person narrator (characterized by the use of he, she, it), then the reader can know whatever the narrator knows about the events of the story. In many stories, the narrator is omniscient and can see into the minds of all characters and be at many places at the same time. The reader of Lois Lowry’s Son (2012) can understand and interpret the story from many different perspectives because of Lowry’s use of the omniscient point of view. Other stories are narrated from the perspective of only one character in the story. In this case, the story is still told in the third person, but the reader knows only what that particular character can see and understand. This technique is called limited omniscient point of view. In Ron Koertge’s novel, Margaux with an X (2004), the story is told from the viewpoint of Margaux, the cool protagonist who is attracted to uncool Danny.

Other times authors tell the story through a first-person narrator (the use of I), usually the main character of the story. In such cases the reader gains a sense of closeness to the main character but is not privy to any information unavailable to this character. Some authors have accomplished a first-person point of view by writing as though their main character were writing a diary or letters, as in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian (2006) by Sherman Alexie. Occasionally, a story is told in first person through the eyes of a minor character. In The Book Thief (2007) by Markus Zusak, death is a character who narrates the story of a young book-lover in Nazi Germany.

A shifting point of view permits the reader to see events from different characters’ points of view. When the point of view shifts, the author cues readers to the changing point of view, as Lynne Rae Perkins does in Criss Cross (2005). In this story teen friends offer their varying perspectives on life and on one another during the course of a summer in a small town. The use of several characters as protagonists is being seen more frequently in young adult literature and lends itself to displaying the various ways teenagers perceive one another in a school or social setting.

Symbolism is an artistic convention that authors use to suggest invisible or intangible meanings by analogy to something else through association, resemblance, or convention. Often a symbol—a person, object, or situation—represents an abstract or figurative meaning in the story in addition to its literal meaning. Some symbols are universal and can be found repeatedly in literary works; others may be particular to the story. For example,
a farm often stands for love and security in works of literature. Some students may read only on a literal level, but they can be helped by teachers to note symbols in the books they are reading. If the symbolic feature recurs in the story, it is referred to as a motif. The number three is a common motif in folktales, for example.

A circular plot structure, often seen in adventure novels and quest fantasies, is a narrative device involving setting, character, and theme. Typically a protagonist ventures from home (or the starting place of the story), goes on a journey, often a dangerous one in which many challenges are overcome, and then returns home a changed person. The plot is usually chronological, with the events occurring in a setting that becomes a circle. By returning the character to the place where he started, the author can emphasize the character’s growth or change while also highlighting the theme of the story. In Geraldine McCaughrean’s *The Kite Rider* (2002), a son trying to save his widowed mother from a horrid marriage departs on an adventure across China as a circus kite rider. While gaining strength from this experience, he also gains confidence and resolve from his inner journey in which he confronts his beliefs and prejudices before being reunited with his mother. This home/away/home circular structure is challenged in novels, such as *Moon over Manifest* by Clare Vanderpool (2011), where the character has a failed home or parent and abandons that home, instead of leaving a home on a journey, and so has to construct a new home, instead of returning home.

A story must be more than a plot and a character study, however; a story integrates all the elements of fiction into a pleasing whole. In drawing together these elements, authors create new worlds for their readers.

**Fictional Literary Forms**

In this book we address four fictional literary forms: the novel (including novels in verse), the short story, the picture book, and the graphic novel. Titles of works in these literary forms are noted as such in the list of recommended books at the end of each genre chapter. Collections of short stories are indicated by (COL), picture books are coded as (PI), and graphic novels are noted by (GR). One current trend in novels are novels in verse, coded as (NV).

**Novel**

The novel is an extended fictional narrative, generally in prose, with full development of characters, settings, and plots dealing with human experience. Novels have been the mainstay of the literature program in most high schools since the nineteenth century. Middle schools have included novels in the curriculum but have also relied on anthologies of short stories and poems. Novels have the advantage of being able to fully develop the context in which the story is set, the feelings of the characters, and the attitudes of society, as well as the particular events of the story, in the course of the narrative. Major characters are dynamic and rounded, and often the writer may develop multiple characters through overlapping plots while employing complex plot structures. Many young adults enjoy the greater depth, length, and complexity they find in novels, which highlight experiences most readers would not want to miss.

Novels in verse are narratives told through shortened entries that read like verse, but still give the reader a developed sense of setting, characters, and events. Novels in verse
focus less on the structure or individuality of single poems that relate to each other, as found in poetry anthologies, and more on the use of the verse format to serve the structure of the novel. These novel-length narratives use different kinds of verse forms, but frequently take the form of free verse as in the groundbreaking novel in verse, Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (1997). Recommended novels can be found in the lists at the end of each genre chapter, with novels in verse marked as (NV).

**Short Story**

The *short story* is a brief fictional narrative, generally in prose, designed to create a unified impression quickly and forcefully. A short story highlights a particular moment where change occurs, a seminal moment that changes everything so that nothing will be the same again. Short story authors have to choose the right moment and then write into that moment to pull in the reader (Mark, 1988).

The short story has long dominated literature anthologies used in middle schools, but until recently the stories included were written for an adult audience. Today many stories included in anthologies are written for young adults. Contemporary short stories can also be found in magazines for young adults, such as those found in Appendix B. The Paul A. Witty Short Story Award is given annually to an author for an original short story published for the first time in the past year in a periodical for young people. 'Zines are a newer category of media that include short stories teens enjoy and are often produced as e-publications.

In the 1980s, collections of short stories written for and about young adults began to be published. Don Gallo deserves much of the credit for this trend with his 1984 publication of *Sixteen: Short Stories by Outstanding Writers for Young Adults*. Gallo has continued to publish short stories for young adults and other anthologists, and individual writers are creating new anthologies. The best short stories grab the reader's attention with the opening lines, contain lively, readable, honest writing, and give readers something to think about while being entertaining through their focus on the lives and experiences of teens.

Short stories have many advantages for classroom use. Because of their brevity, students have time to explore a variety of topics in a short period of time. Short stories usually take 15 to 20 minutes to read aloud and are ideal for use as an introduction to a unit of study in content-area classes as well as English classes. Short stories can be used to introduce readers to diverse cultures and traditions, to explore new genres in the study of literature, and to serve as models for student writing. Short story collections are coded (COL) in the Recommended Books lists at the ends of the genre chapters.

**Picture Book**

The *picture book* is a profusely illustrated book in which both words and illustrations contribute to the story’s meaning. In a true picture book the story would be diminished without the illustrations, and so the illustrations in picture books are considered integral or essential to the story. At one time picture books were considered appropriate only for young children, but in the 1970s picture books for older readers began to appear. These books are more sophisticated, abstract, or complex in themes and subjects and are written in response
to increasingly visual modes of communication now prevalent in society. The advantages in using picture books in middle and high schools include:

- They can be used as teacher read-alouds for introductions and supplements to textbook-based units of instruction and require only a short period of time for sharing the whole text.
- They can be used in text sets (several books on the same subject) for class reading, analysis, and discussion by small groups of students.
- They can stimulate interest in a topic and provoke discussion, leading to deeper understandings of the content, as in *Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson (2005) with illustrations by Hudson Talbott, to explore the history of African American women from slavery to the present.
- They can demonstrate applications of concepts as D. B. Johnson’s *Henry Climbs a Mountain* (2003) does for the concept of civil disobedience.
- They often have factual content that reinforces or enhances that found in textbooks, as Karen Hesse’s *The Cats in Krasinski Square* (2004), illustrated by Wendy Watson, does for a unit about the Holocaust by featuring the courage of two Jewish sisters, escapees of the Warsaw ghetto.

Picture books are coded (PI) in the Recommended Books lists at the end of each genre chapter.

**Graphic Novel**

The *graphic novel* is an extensive book-length narrative in which the text is written in speech bubbles or as captions to comic book–like illustrations. Graphic novels, an extension of earlier comic books, can be of any genre of literature and may be about any theme, topic, or subject. The term *graphic* refers to stories told through images, while *novel* refers to the length of the text regardless of content.

Graphic novels are usually written as sequential frames or panels that go across the page or from top to bottom. Panels are read for both text and picture in order to follow the action. Comics began in the United States, but the comic format also thrived in Europe and Asia. Currently, some of the most popular graphic novels include *manga*, a type of Japanese comic that began as an art form in the early nineteenth century and was influenced by comic books introduced into Japan after World War II. Manga artists typically draw in black and white with characters that frequently have enormous eyes of different shapes combined with distinctive heads of hair. Anime television, which grew out of the manga movement, became very popular in the United States among younger students and sparked young people's growing interest in manga graphic novels. Rarely seen in the United States prior to the 1990s, manga has grown in popularity and represents a new trend in young adult literature.

Graphic novels, with their reliance on illustrations and use of dialogue, can engage students who are visually oriented or struggle with more complex prose. Graphic novels combine excellent, carefully edited text with visuals that are both eye-catching and attention-grabbing, offering a new kind of interactive engagement between reader and text (Cart, 2005). They strongly appeal to a broad audience of adolescents and have greatly increased in popularity and availability.
Graphic novels are now available for all types of readers through new graphic novel imprints from mainstream publishers such as First Second (Roaring Brook Press). Noteworthy graphic novels include:

- *Drama* (2012) by Raina Telgemeier. Middle school musical produces lots of drama.

Graphic novels are coded (GR) in the Recommended Books lists at the end of each genre chapter.

**Building Your Knowledge of Literature**

The purpose of this text is to introduce you to literature as a discipline so that you become familiar with the genres, literary and visual elements, evaluation and selection criteria, critical issues, and resources along with reading widely from young adult books to interact with a range of authors, illustrators, poets, and titles.

A literature curriculum can be organized by genre, theme or topic, author or illustrator, literary element or device, or notable books. We have organized this text by genre to encourage you to read broadly, but within that genre structure, each chapter is organized around themes and topics and includes discussions of literary elements and lists of authors and notable books and awards.

**Genre** provides a context for learning about the various types of books and their characteristics, such as historical fiction, fantasy, and poetry. The goal is to expose you to a wide variety of literature and to explore the evaluation and selection criteria for excellent books within each genre.

**Theme or topic** focuses attention on a book’s meaning. Organizing a set of books around particular themes, such as alienation and acceptance by peers or the tension of interdependence in family relationships, encourages critical thinking and in-depth consideration of issues along with more thoughtful connections across books. Organizing books by topic, such as divorce or World War II, can help students find books that interest them for independent reading but often is not as effective for in-depth discussion and inquiry. You are encouraged to explore both themes and topics within the chapters.

An **author or illustrator** approach involves organizing books around the people who create books and becoming familiar with their books, creative processes, and life experiences. A list of notable authors for each genre is included in the chapters, and you are encouraged to inquire into the life and work of people whose books particularly intrigue you. Excellent reference sources such as *Something about the Author* provide information about young adult authors, and many biographies and autobiographies are available, such as Walter Dean Myers’s *Bad Boy: A Memoir* (2001). An author/illustrator inquiry involves reading books by particular authors or illustrators, examining their writing or artistic style and use of visual and literary elements, noting the
themes they explore in their books, locating interviews or articles about their lives, books, and creative process, and exploring the ways in which their lives have influenced their books.

**Literary elements and devices** are another way to organize a literature curriculum and focus on the literary elements presented in this chapter. Literary devices are particular techniques used by authors for a special effect such as irony, symbolism, or parody. Each genre chapter includes evaluation and selection questions that highlight the role of particular literary elements in that genre.

Organizing around **notable books** involves an in-depth focus on award-winning books or other exemplary classic or contemporary books. The emphasis is on reading a few books closely and engaging in discussions with other readers about your personal connections and the issues you find significant in that book. You can then analyze the features that contribute to their excellence, such as their relevance to readers, unique perspectives or insights, memorable characters, or illustration style. Each chapter includes a list of recommended books for reading aloud and references to award lists that you can consult. You are encouraged to engage in literature discussions around an exemplary book or set of books for each genre to deepen your understandings and ability to evaluate literature.

**The Organization of This Text**

In Chapters 3 to 8, the main categories of books for young adults are defined and explained, followed by book titles recommended for reading in each of the categories. Chapters 3 to 7 focus on the literary genres, as presented in Table 2.1. The number of the chapter in which each genre of literature is discussed is noted next to the genre. For the purposes of this

| **Table 2.1** Genres and Topics of Young Adult Literature |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Fiction**     | **Fantasy and Science Fiction (4)** | **Historical Fiction (5)** | **Nonfiction (6)** | **Poetry and Plays (7)** |
| Realistic Fiction (3) | Fantasy based in Folktales and Myths | Beginnings of civilization | Biographies Informational books | Lyric poems Narrative poems Plays and readers’ theatre |
| Relationships with family and peers | Magical realism | Civilizations of the ancient world |
| Identity and community | Supernatural and paranormal forces | Civilizations of the medieval world |
| Romance and sexuality | Historical fantasy and time-warp | Emergence of modern nations |
| Challenges in life | Imagined worlds and quests | Development of industrial society |
| Suspense and survival | Science fiction | World wars in the twentieth century |
| Sports          |                      | Post–World War II |
textbook, a genre organization, a traditional, though admittedly imperfect, way of grouping literature, is the most practical way to help you make balanced choices in your reading and to demonstrate the wide spectrum of ideas and emotions that can be found in young adult literature. Brief annotations of recommended titles are included at the end of each chapter to encourage your own independent reading in that genre.

Understanding genre characteristics builds a frame of reference for reading a particular genre and can ease the task of comprehension. Furthermore, as you encounter postmodern works of literature that go beyond the traditional boundaries of a genre, knowledge of the traditional literary forms may help you understand what the authors are doing and gain new understandings from the shift in style.

Authors of young adult literature have been experimenting with books that blend characteristics of several genres, and as a result, genre boundaries are increasingly blurred. Magical realism combines realism and fantasy, offering readers new ways to perceive the world, such as Isabel Allende’s *City of the Beasts* (2009) and A. S. King’s *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* (2010). These novels are discussed in Chapter 4, “Modern Fantasy.” Historical fantasy blends historical fiction and modern fantasy, as in Libba Bray’s Gemma Doyle series. These works are discussed as fantasy in Chapter 4. Other blended genres include fictionalized biography and informational books that contain elements of both fiction and nonfiction, as in *The Dreamer* (2012) by Pam Muñoz Ryan and Peter Sis, and David Macauly’s *Mosque* (2003), found in Chapter 6, “Nonfiction: Biography and Informational Books,” and novels written in the style of free verse and other verse forms, such as *The Language Inside* by Holly Thompson (2013). Novels in verse are listed under the particular narrative genre, such as historical fiction or realistic fiction, rather than in the chapter about poetry. These blended-genre works offer readers new perceptions and often provide heightened interest for readers.

Chapter 8, “Literature for a Diverse Society,” diverges from the organization of genre and presents books organized by culture. Although multicultural and international books have been placed in a separate chapter to emphasize significant issues of access and availability, many multicultural and global titles are recommended in the genre chapters.

Chapters 9 and 10 focus on literature in the curriculum and the ways in which you might organize a curriculum around literature with adolescents, as well as strategies for engaging them in responding to literature. In addition, these chapters include a discussion of the political context of policies, tests, and standards that affect the ways in which literature is used in classrooms, with a particular emphasis on the Common Core State Standards and their connection to literature.

### References


