Literature for Today’s Young Adults

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Arizona State University
To the memory of

Our dear friend and teacher,

G. Robert Carlson,

1917–2003

And to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren,

Who are happily finding many of these books:

From Alleen

to

Taryn, Britton, Kami, Erich, David, Lauren,
Michael, Jenna, Avery,
Jim, and Luke

From Ken

to

Kayden, Haylee, Emiley, and Dylann
About the Authors

Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen, professors of English at Arizona State University, became friends and colleagues before they met each other. They both earned their Ph.D. degrees at the University of Iowa from G. Robert Carlsen, a pioneer in the field of young adult literature. Ken was Carlsen’s first Ph.D. student, with Alleen coming along a decade later. When Alleen and her husband moved to Arizona State in 1973, one of the first people she visited was Ken because Professor Carlsen had talked about him in class and had recruited Alleen as a writer for the Arizona English Bulletin, which Ken was editing.

Nevertheless, Professor Carlsen was surprised when his two former students, who happened to find themselves in the same part of the country, started working together because he thought they were so different. Ken writes like a historian, focusing on what’s old, while Alleen writes like a journalist, focusing on what’s new. And while Ken was a leader in fighting censorship, Alleen was a leader in fighting sexist language, which some people interpret as a form of censorship. She is the one who suggested they take turns with whose name goes first on each edition.

In spite of their differences, what they learned from Professor Carlsen brought them together in support of the academic study of young adult literature. In 1973, they helped found ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE); both have received ALAN’s Award for “Outstanding Contributions to the Field of Young Adult Literature,” and both served as presidents of ALAN. In 1974, they were the founding editors of The ALAN Newsletter, the forerunner of what is now The ALAN Review.

After proving that they respected each other and could work together, they applied to be coeditors of the English Journal, a job they held from 1980 to 1987 when they wrote the first edition of Literature for Today’s Young Adults. Thanks to Ken’s knowledge of history and his interest in censorship, the book was more complete than other textbooks of the time which mostly focused on realistic problem novels—books sometimes identified as bildungsroman or apprenticeship novels—which are still the books most obviously identified as YA. But what Ken and Alleen demonstrated was that every genre, from adven-
ture and biography to mysteries, fantasy, poetry, and the supernatural, were being written for teenagers and deserved a place in schools and libraries. And because Alleen’s first job at Arizona State University was teaching in the Department of Library Science in the College of Education, it seemed natural for them to bring in the work of librarians and reading teachers as well as of English teachers.

What has kept *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* the leading textbook in the field is the authors’ continuing love and enthusiasm for their chosen field of study. For each edition they have highlighted new and interesting trends and illustrated them with lively discussions of well-written books. It has helped that they are well-rounded scholars and have remained active in education as a whole.

Ken has published over five hundred articles, mostly on censorship, YA books, and problems in teaching secondary English reflecting his thirteen years of teaching high school English in Iowa. His articles, as well as others related to college teaching, have appeared in such journals as *Clearing House*, *English Journal*, *High School Journal*, and *School Library Journal*. Ken collected YA books published from 1850 through 1950 and when he retired from ASU he donated some eight hundred historical YA books and a nearly complete run of *The Dime Novel Round-Up* to ASU’s Hayden Library. The collection is strong in books by Kirk Munroe, Ralph Henry Barbour, and John Tunis, and in two Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate heroes, Tom Swift and Nancy Drew.

Alleen has worked with her husband, linguistics Professor Don L. F. Nilsen, to promote a new approach to the teaching of vocabulary, as explained in *Vocabulary Plus: High School and Up: A Source-Based Approach* and *Vocabulary Plus K–8: A Source-Based Approach* (Pearson, 2004). Their *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century American Humor* (Oryx/Greenwood) was chosen by the American Library Association as one of the twenty best reference books published in 2000. In 2007, they published *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* as part of the Scarecrow Series in Young Adult Literature, edited by Patty Campbell. Alleen is also the author of *Joan Bauer*, the first book in Greenwood Press’s series Teen Reads: Student Companions to Young Adult Literature (2007), edited by James Blasingame.
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We began our first preface back in 1980 with these words: “We had many reasons for writing this book, but chief among them was our belief that it was needed and worth doing.” We believed in those words then and we believe in them now. We hope that our eighth edition will continue to answer the needs of teachers and librarians, neophytes and old-hands alike.

One of the saddest parts of growing old—other than watching the Cubs blow their race over and over—is watching literary tastes change and once-favored books slowly go out of fashion and drop off recommended reading lists. Today, for example, we have writers as fine as these being avidly read and recommended: David Almond, Laurie Halse Anderson, M. T. Anderson, Kimberly Willis Holt, John Green, David Klass, Stephanie Myers, Nancy Werlin, Ellen Wittinger, and Markus Zusak. And some writers continue to write books that win praise and readers: Avi, Joan Bauer, Aidan Chambers, Chris Crutch, Nancy Farmer, Nancy Garden, Diana Wynne Jones, Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Lipsyte, Walter Dean Myers, Gary Paulsen, Richard Peck, and Vivian Vande Velde.

All that’s to the good. It’s great to have new authors hit new notes and standard authors continue to produce provocative books. But what of the once-reliable writers who were constantly on the lists of worthwhile young adult books? What of the writers who, once hot, are increasingly forgotten? What of the Norma Kleins or the M. E. Kerrs? And what of writers as fine as: Alice Childress, James Forman, Bette Green, Rosa Guy, Isabelle Holland, Mildred Lee, Margaret Mahy, Zibby Oneal, Todd Strasser, Julian F. Thompson, and John Rowe Townsend?

Ten of Ken’s favorites whom we rarely see mentioned today are Nancy Bond, Bruce Clements, John Donovan, Jane Gardam, Monica Hughes, Irene Hunt, Sandra Scoppettone, Walter Wangerin, Barbara Wersba, and Robert Westall. And he is more than a trifle irritated about the fact that Harry Mazer’s *The Island Keeper* is out of print. The way young adult literature is marketed is a major concern for all of us.

In a preface, it’s customary to mention lots of names—graduate assistants, members of the department who have contributed this or that, graduate students who are doing wondrous things. We’ll do that in a few moments.

First, we’d like to list some names that rarely get mentioned, unless it’s as footnotes. We’re referring to critics and historians and commentators of all sorts, people who have written about young adult (YA) literature and who have taught us to be critical and to recognize what is worth knowing about YA literature and what is ephemeral, what is new and flashy and what is sound and worth knowing. We say this knowing that individual critics may not recognize what Nilsen and Donelson learn from them, but we say sincerely that we have read and
learned from all of them, and we truly believe that our writing—not necessarily this book but whatever we have under way—is the better for having read these good people. In alphabetical order, we salute them: Gillian Avery, Dorothy Brod- erick, Mary Cadogan, Michael Cart, Aidan Chambers, Mary K. Chelton, Sheila Egoff, Jerry Griswold, Peter Hunt, Fred Inglis, Deidre Johnson, Monica Kiefer, Teri S. Lesesne, Anne Scott MacLeod, Cathi Dunn MacRae, Maria Nikolajeva, Bob Probst, David Rees, Hazel Rochman, William Sloane, Bob Small, Mary F. Thwaite, and John Rowe Townsend.

We saved one name for special commendation for all she’s contributed to young adult literature. Patty Campbell has done so much for so many people it is difficult to mention specifics, but here are a few of her accomplishments. Her columns in the Wilson Library Bulletin and the Horn Book Magazine have made her one of the most quoted writers in our field. Her editing of the Twayne Young Adult Writers series and the Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature has provided work on authors and topics valuable to us and to our students. We are sure there are things she cannot do, but we have no idea what they are.

Anyone who has read in the history of English education will recognize how much we owe the spirits of four great master teachers and writers, four people who were devoted to young students and their literature—Samuel Thurber, Dora V. Smith, Lou LaBrant, and Dwight Burton. Without them and their words there would never have been a reason for a book like this.

Another group, one even closer to heart and home, is made up of friends and colleagues we have known over the years from our work at the University of Iowa, Arizona State University, and in the National Council of Teachers of English, the Conference on English Education, ALAN, the International Reading Association, and assorted other groups. Here are a few people, some now gone, a coterie who meant much to us. We worked with them and argued with them and learned from them—and maybe they even learned from us: Dick Abrahamson, Bruce Appleby, Jackie Cronin, Chris Crowe, Hazel Davis, Bryant Fillion, Don Gallo, Beverly Haley, Bob Harvey, Ted Hipple, Terry Ley, Ben and Beth Nelms, Maia Pank Mertz, Bill Ojala, Linda Shadiow, John Simmons, David Sohn, Diane Tuccillo, Anne Webb, Jerry and Helen Weiss, and Carol Williams.

And now to thank the people here at ASU who helped with this eighth edition, we need to mention our Department Chair Neal Lester and our colleague James Blasingame. Erika L. Watt served as an amazing editorial assistant, doing everything from tallying the results of our survey, to gathering photos and permissions and even posing for pictures herself (see p. 425). The teachers and student teachers who administered our survey include Nicole Ainsworth, Bekka Besich, Jeri Brimhall, Kate Copic, Cynthia Kiefer, Frank Machado, and Jessica Zellner. We also thank Nichole Gilbert from the Young Adult Library Services Association of ALA for helping us obtain author photos.

And again we thank Aurora Martínez, the executive editor at Allyn and Bacon, who supported us on this edition, along with the reviewers that she arranged for. We are grateful for the guidance of Beverly J. Hearn, University of Tennessee at Martin; Raymond P. Kettel, University of Michigan–Dearborn; Carol B. Tanksley, University West Florida; and Joy L. Wiggins, University of Texas at Arlington. Thanks to their suggestions, we made the following changes:
We devoted one page to the winners of the Margaret A. Edwards Award, which is given annually to an author in honor of a significant contribution to young adult literature. The award is sponsored by the School Library Journal and the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association. We were happy to do this as a reflection of how much growth has taken place in our field over the last two decades.

Because of devoting these twenty pages to the Edwards Award winners, we invited fewer other authors to contribute statements, but we are pleased at the variety and the content of those who allowed us to use some of their words: Our thanks to Laurie Halse Anderson, Michael Cart, Stefanie Craig, James Cross Giblin, Kimberly Willis Holt, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Aaron Levy, Pat Mora, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Vivian Vande Velde.

Again we tried to cut down on the length of transitional material by moving more books out of paragraphs and into focus boxes or time lines.

Over Ken’s objections, we moved even more of his material on films to our website, not because we disagree that film can be a wonderful teaching tool but because teachers tell us that in today’s schools the study of full-length films has virtually disappeared.

And also to save space, we cut down on the printing of the kinds of things that change rapidly and that can easily be found through Internet searches; for example, the addresses and prices of popular magazines and other URLs that are likely to change.

In hopes of gaining some insights into just what people mean when they talk about “new literacies,” we conducted a fairly extensive survey with 266 students attending various high schools and one junior high school in the metropolitan Phoenix area. We also launched a Media Watch during the first four months of 2007. See Chapters 3 and 10 for what we learned.

And of course we have tried to find and include information on worthy new books, but we will be the first to admit that just because we haven’t included a particular book in our discussions or focus boxes, you should not dismiss it from consideration. The field is so lively, with so many good books coming out, that we could not possibly have found them all.

We’ve often told our friends that while writing this textbook is a labor of love, it hangs over our heads sort of like the Golden Gate Bridge, which we’ve been told is constantly being repainted because as soon as the painters get to the end, it’s time for them to go back and start scraping the rust from the other end. If we’ve missed some spots here and there, please forgive us, but also know that we will be happy to hear from readers so that we can make additions and corrections.

As a good-luck talisman, we will end by repeating the quote from Edward Salmon, which we started out with when it was only 90 years old. We agree with its sentiments even more now that it is closer to 120 years old.

It is no uncommon thing to hear children’s literature condemned as wholly bad, and some people are good enough to commiserate with me on having waded through so much ephemeral matter. It may be my fault or my misfortune not to be
able to see my loss. I have spent many pleasant and I may say not unprofitable hours in company with the printed thoughts of Mr. Kingston, Mr. Ballantye, Mr. Henry, Jules Verne, Miss Alcott, Miss Meade, Mrs. Molesworth, Miss Doudney, Miss Yonge, and a dozen others, and hope to spend as many more in the time to come as a busy life will permit. (“Should Children Have a Special Literature?” The Parents’ Review 1 [June 1890]: 339)

And that, really, is why we are happy to have been given the privilege of writing—and rewriting—this textbook.

Alleen Pace Nilsen
Kenneth L. Donelson
"Of all passages, coming of age, or reaching adolescence is the purest, in that it is the loneliest. In birth one is not truly conscious; in marriage one has a partner, even death is faced with a life’s experience by one’s side,” wrote David Van Biema for a special issue of Life magazine devoted to The Journey of Our Lives.

He went on to explain that going from boy or girl to man or woman is “a huge leap on the slimmest of information.” The person who fails grows older without growing wiser and faces ostracism, insanity, or profound sorrow. Because such a debilitated or warped individual is a “drag on the community,” the community bands together with the young person to see that the journey is accomplished.1

Life would go more smoothly if young people’s aspirations were simply to step into the roles of their parents. The job of growing up, however, is more demanding because, at the same time that young people are trying to become adults, they are also trying to show that they are different from their parents. This leaves each generation scrambling to find its own way to be unique, which is one of the reasons that literature for young adults tends to be a contemporary medium. Each generation wants its own stories. See Film Box 1.1 on page 2 for some of these stories told on the screen.

**What Is Young Adult Literature?**

We have heard young adults defined as those who think they’re too old to be children but who others think are too young to be adults. In this book, we
The World of Young Adults

- **American Graffiti** (1973, color, 112 min., PG; Director: George Lucas; with Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, and Cindy Williams) Here is high school graduation in 1962 and what a few students learn about the real world.

- **Bend It Like Beckham** (2003, color, 112 min., PG-13; Director: Gurinder Chadha; with Parminder Nagra) In this British film, Jess is an Anglo-Indian teenager who has grown up in London and loves soccer, but her traditional Sikh parents don’t want her to play.

- **The Breakfast Club** (1985, color, 97 min., R; Director: John Hughes; with Emilio Estevez, Judd Nelson, Molly Ringwald, Anthony Michael Hall, and Ally Sheedy) Some critics credit Hughes with creating the genre of YA movies in this story about five rebellious teenagers assigned Saturday morning detention.

- **Fast Times at Ridgemont High** (1982, color, 92 min., R; Director: Amy Heckerling; with Sean Penn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Judge Reinhold) California high school students spend most of their time in the mall thinking about drugs and sex.

- **Finding Forrester** (2001, color, 135 min., PG-13; Director: Gus Van Sant; with Sean Connery and Rob Brown) A reclusive writer serves as a friend and mentor to a basketball player on scholarship at an exclusive New York prep school.

- **Juno** (2007, color, 92 min., PG-13; Director: Jason Reitman; with Ellen Page, Michael Cera, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Allison Janney, and J. K. Simmons) It wasn’t the situation (a teen pregnancy) but the characterization that made Roger Ebert nominate *Juno* as the best film of 2007.

- **The Last Picture Show** (1971, black and white, 114 min., R; Director: Peter Bogdanovich; with Jeff Bridges, Timothy Bottoms, Cybill Shepherd, Ben Johnson, and Cloris Leachman) From Larry McMurtry’s novel, the death of a movie theater is a symbol of the dying of a small Texas town.

- **My Life as a Dog** (1985, color, 101 min., NR; Director: Lasse Hallström; with Anton Glanzelius, Tomass von Brömssen, and Anki Liden) A twelve-year-old boy is sent to live with relatives in 1950s Sweden.

- **Napoleon Dynamite** (2004, color, 90 min., PG-13; Director: Jared Hess; with Jon Heder, Jon Gries, and Efren Ramirez) Part of the unexpected popularity of this indie film is its rural Idaho setting and the earnestness with which a geeky high school boy with the ironic name of Napoleon sets out to find success.

- **October Sky** (1999, color, 107 min., PG; Director: Jake Gyllenhaal; with Chris Cooper and Laura Dern) In this film from Homer Hickam’s *Rocket Boy*, a boy growing up in a West Virginia coal-mining town sees *Sputnik* streaking in the skies and determines to build his own rocket.

- **The Outsiders** (1983, color, 91 min., PG; Director: Francis Ford Coppola; with Matt Dillon, Rob Lowe, and Thomas Howell) S. E. Hinton’s novel is about two teenage groups in 1960s Oklahoma—the social superiors and the greasers.

- **Real Women Have Curves** (2002, color, 86 min., PG-13; Director: Patricia Cardoso; with America Ferrera and Lupe Ontiveros) A bright young Hispanic girl in Los Angeles wants to go to college, but her mother wants her to work in a dress factory, lose some weight, and get married.

- **Rushmore** (1998, color, 97 min., R; Director: Wes Anderson; with Jason Schwartzmann, Bill Murray, and Olivia Williams) A schoolboy is near expulsion because he is in almost every possible school activity and has no time for his studies. He falls in love with a first-grade teacher.

- **Slums of Beverly Hills** (1998, color, 93 min., R; Director: Tamara Jenkins; with Alan Arkin and Natasha Lyonne) A father moves his motherless family first to this place and then that in Beverly Hills to give them a chance at a good education.

- **Whale Rider** (2002, color, 101 min., PG-13; Director: Niki Caro; with Keisha Castle-Hughes) Filmed in Whangara and Auckland, New Zealand, this is a classic story of a young girl proving her worthiness to be a leader in modern Maori culture.
use the term to include students in junior high as well as those graduating from high school and still finding their way into adult life. By *young adult literature*, we mean anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments. When we talk about *children’s literature*, we refer to books released by the juvenile or junior division of a publisher and intended for children from prekindergarten to about sixth grade.

While our definition of *children’s literature* is fairly standard, we should caution that not all educators define young adults the same as we do. The Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), for example, defines young adults as those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, whereas the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), administered by the Educational Testing Service, refers to “young adults, ages 21 through 25.”

We confess to feeling pretentious when referring to a twelve- or thirteen-year-old as a *young adult*, but we shy away from using the term *adolescent literature* because as one librarian told us, “It has the ugly ring of pimples and puberty,” and “it suggests *immature* in a derogatory sense.” Still, many college courses in English departments are entitled Adolescent Literature, and because of our English teaching backgrounds, we find ourselves using the term for variety, along with *teenage books*, *teen fiction*, and *YA* or *young adult literature*. The
terms juvenile literature, junior novel, teen novel, and juvie have been used in the past, but they became so weighed down with negative connotations that they are seldom heard today. Even with the newer terms of young adult and YA, some teenagers feel condescended to, so librarians and teachers are looking for alternatives. David Spritz, writing in Time magazine in 1999, used the term teen fiction for the genre that he said “used to be called” young adult novels. While some librarians and bookstores have experimented with the term popular literature, at least in academic circles chances are that young adult is so firmly established that it will continue to be used for the near future. Anyone well acquainted with teenagers realizes that there is a tremendous difference between twelve-year-olds and seventeen-year-olds, or even between fourteen-year-olds and sixteen-year-olds. As teenagers are buying more books and publishers have become more interested in developing this market, a subcategory of young adult literature has developed. These are the books aimed primarily at students in junior high or middle school. Most Newbery Medal and Honor Book winners are written for the age level described as tweens; see several examples in Focus Box 5.5, Books to Make Readers Smile (pp. 170–171).

Patty Campbell has described tweener books as fiction “hanging on to the literary coat tails” of young adult fiction. Tweener books sell better than “true” young adult fiction because in nearly every geographical area there are more middle school and junior high libraries than high school libraries. Also, this is an age in which adults (parents, grandparents, teachers, and librarians) are still purchasing books for young readers or at least having an influence on what they read. The books are, of course, shorter and simpler, and because they are about younger protagonists, the love relationships—and the language—are fairly innocent. This means the books are less likely to be censored.

Tweener books also are better fitted to series books because at least in the old-fashioned kind of series books, the protagonists resemble those in sitcoms. The story starts with the protagonist in a particular situation, then a complication occurs, which is solved as much through luck or help from outside as through the efforts of the protagonist. By the end, the situation is back to normal so that the protagonist is ready to be picked up and put into a similar, but slightly different story. This differs from “true” YA fiction because, as Patty Campbell explains,

The central theme of most YA fiction is becoming an adult, finding the answer to the question “Who am I and what am I going to do about it?” No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity.

She then cited a Richard Peck statement that “the last page of every YA novel should say not, ‘The End’ but ‘The Beginning.’”

As you will learn in Chapter 2, young adult literature has a relatively brief and unsettled heritage, and there are many disagreements about its quality and the role that it should play in modern schools, but on the positive side, such a changing field (see Michael Cart’s statement) makes for a lively and interesting
Young Adult Authors Speak Out

**Michael Cart** on the Importance of Young Adult Literature

I was a teenager in the 1950s, a decade before what we regard as modern young adult fiction came into being with the 1967 publication of S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender*. For that reason I looked in vain for my face in the pages of books for young readers and, as a result, spent too many years thinking I was the only one of my kind and wondering what on earth was wrong with me. I was hardly unique in that, as I would discover years later when I would also realize there had been nothing whatsoever wrong with me. But how much easier my adolescent life would have been if only I could have read about me when I most urgently needed to. As a result, I have devoted my own career as a writer, reviewer, editor, and anthologist to creating and promoting books that give faces and fully realized lives to all young people but especially to those who have been invisible, overlooked, and neglected because of their sexual orientation, countries of national origin, religious beliefs, physical appearance, or personal idiosyncrasies—all of those, in short, who have been regarded as the outsiders, the other, and who, therefore, have been relegated to the darkest margins of society.

Teenagers urgently need books that speak with relevance and immediacy to their real lives and to their unique emotional, intellectual, and developmental needs and that provide a place of commonality of experience and mutual understanding, for in so doing, they bring the outsiders out of the darkness and into the light of community. But books can’t do that unless their authors trust young readers with the truth, as the best writers—people like Robert Cormier, M. E. Kerr, Nancy Garden, Francesca Lia Block, Jacqueline Woodson, Adam Rapp, David Levithan, and others—have done and continue to do.

Since the mid-1990s something wonderful has happened to young adult literature. Not only has there been an explosion in the sheer quantity of new books being made available every year but also their quality has improved exponentially. For the first time, the term *young adult literature* can no longer be dismissed by its detractors as an oxymoron. Young adult literature has come of age, as literature. One has to look no further than to the establishment of the Michael L. Printz Award for evidence of that, for this is the first young adult book prize to be based solely on literary merit. Its recipients since its inception in 2000—Walter Dean Myers, David Almond, Angela Johnson, An Na, Aidan Chambers, Meg Rosoff, John Green, and Gene Yang—represent a “who’s who” of contemporary YA authors. Like all of the best writers for young adults, their work offers a detailed map of the minds and hearts of young people everywhere. To say this reminds us that young readers need to see not only their own faces but also those of people who are different from them, for it’s in this way that books show them not only the differences but also the commonalities that comprise their humanity.

By acquainting readers with the glorious varieties of the human experience, young adult literature invests young hearts and minds with tolerance, understanding, empathy, acceptance, compassion, kindness, and more. It civilizes them, in short, and for that reason I believe no other genre or literary form is as important. And that’s why I am so deeply honored to be part of its world.

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It is a new level of sophistication for YA books to explore how different groups are crossing boundaries and learning about each other as shown in this cartoon illustration taken from Sherman Alexie’s The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, which won the 2007 National Book Award for young readers and the 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Award in young adult literature.
So many new books are published for young readers each year (nearly 5,000, with about one-fourth of them aimed at teenagers) that people who have preconceived ideas about what constitutes young adult literature can undoubtedly find examples to support whatever opinion they already hold. One illustration of the mixed feelings that people have is the argument that was waged in the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), which is part of the American Library Association, before the 1998 establishment of the Alex Award, which each year honors ten titles published for a general adult audience but judged to have special appeal to young adults. The purpose is to help librarians encourage readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen “by introducing them to high-quality books written for adults.” The award is named for Margaret Alexander Edwards, who, for her work during the 1940s and 1950s at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, is generally credited with being the first YA librarian.

A decade earlier, the Margaret A. Edwards Award had been established as a way to bring attention to an author who has made a lifetime contribution to literature for teenagers. The authors who have been so honored are each given their own page in this textbook. See S. E. Hinton’s and Madeleine L’Engle’s on pages 8 and 15, respectively. The winners are listed here in the order in which they received the award. (No award was given in 1989 when the ground rules were still being established.) Their pages are placed mostly in chapters related to the kind of writing they do.

- S. E. Hinton, 1988, see Ch. 1, page 8
- Richard Peck, 1990, see Ch. 8, page 275
- Robert Cormier, 1991, see Ch. 2, page 72
- Lois Duncan, 1992, see Ch. 6, page 207
- M. E. Kerr, 1993, see Ch. 10, page 331
- Walter Dean Myers, 1994, see Ch. 8, page 257
- Cynthia Voigt, 1995, see Ch. 4, page 137
- Judy Blume, 1996, see Ch. 2, page 74
- Gary Paulsen, 1997, see Ch. 6, page 187
- Madeleine L’Engle, 1998, see Ch. 1, page 15
- Anne McCaffrey, 1999, see Ch. 7, page 225
- Chris Crutcher, 2000, see Ch. 6, page 195
- Robert Lipsyte, 2001, see Ch. 6, page 197
- Paul Zindel, 2002, see Ch. 5, page 164
- Nancy Garden, 2003, see Ch. 12, page 414
- Ursula K. Le Guin, 2004, see Ch. 7, page 222
- Francesca Lia Block, 2005, Ch. 3, see page 82
- Jacqueline Woodson, 2006, see Ch. 11, page 371
- Lois Lowry, 2007, see Ch. 7, page 239
- Orson Scott Card, 2008, see Ch. 4, page 144
The Outsiders; Rumblefish; Tex; and That Was Then, This Is Now are the books that earned the very first Margaret A. Edwards Award for S. E. Hinton. Admittedly, our title is an exaggeration because no one person could have brought about all the changes that came to young adult literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but S. E. Hinton was at the right place at the right time to give the whole field a nudge that changed “the rules” about what was expected and what was possible in books published for teenagers.

After The Outsiders proved to be such a success, Hinton, who by the time it was published was nineteen, wrote in an August 27, 1967, article in the New York Times Book Review:

The teenage years are a bad time. You’re idealistic. You can see what is, too. You’re disillusioned, but only a few take it as a personal attack. . . .
Teen-agers know a lot today. Not just things out of a textbook, but about living. They know their parents aren’t superhuman, they know that justice doesn’t always win out, and that sometimes the bad guys win. They know that persons in high places aren’t safe from corruption, . . . and that some people sell out. Writers needn’t be afraid that they will shock their teen-age audience. But give them something to hang onto. Show that some people don’t sell out, and that everyone can’t be bought. Do it realistically. Earn respect by giving it.

The Outsiders spoke with such resonance to teenagers that in the spring of 1980, Jo Ellen Misakian, a librarian at the Lone Star K–8 School library in Fresno, California, mailed a copy of the book, a cover letter asking that the book be turned into a movie, and a petition signed by seventh- and eighth-grade students to film director Francis Ford Coppola. Coppola turned the letter over to his producer, Fred Roos, with instructions to “check it out.” Three years later, on March 17, 1983, Roos and five of the young stars—Darren Dalton, Leif Garrett, Patrick Swayze, C. Thomas Howell, and Ralph Macchio—paid an official visit to the Lone Star School library to thank the students for suggesting the book. Star Matt Dillon arrived that night for the premier showing. Seventy-five of those who signed the petition and were now sophomores at Sanger High School came back for the celebration and to cheer their own credit line given at the end of the movie.

Hinton says that she has been lucky with the films of her books. She was invited to work with the producers on three of them. In 1983, when Tex was released, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert did a special TV program about movies with young male protagonists. They cited Tex for being what the others only pretend to be—stories of growing up to be a man. They criticized the falseness of the male/female relationships shown in such movies as Porky’s, The Last American Virgin, Going All the Way, Spring Break, Homework, Class, and Private School. In what they described as an epidemic of horny teenage movies, they pointed out how the boys never risk a real relationship. There is always a wall—either real or figurative—between them and the women they lust after. What is missing in these “lust/hate” relationships is affection, friendship, and honesty. They praised the line in Tex where big brother Mace confesses to fifteen-year-old Tex that he’s never had sexual intercourse. The implication is that probably most of his friends haven’t either and that it’s generally unwise to believe everything one hears in locker rooms. Siskel and Ebert thought this bit of honesty was worth all the other movies put together.

On September 29, 2007, the Associated Press carried a long feature story written about Susan Eloise Hinton (who since 1970 has also been Mrs. David Inhofe) in celebration of the publication of a 40th anniversary edition of The Outsiders. Reporter Hillel Italie toured Tulsa with Hinton, who gladly pointed out landmarks from both the book and the 1983 film. At Will Rogers High School they visited the library where Hinton had sat while writing parts of the book and where her picture now sits in a glass case. Librarian Carrie Fleharty laughingly explained that she knows the book is still popular because so many students “forget” to bring it back. Hinton said it would “be a piece of cake” to write another book about Ponyboy, but not with the same passion she felt as a teenager so she doesn’t want to interfere with the place he holds in the high school canon. She’s now trying to write a “paranormal suspense” story for adults. She despises the newly fashionable “chick lit” because “It’s just another version of ‘Mary Jane Goes to the Prom.’ . . . It’s all about the boys.”
Librarians, who voted against the idea of the additional Alex awards, were questioning the wisdom of moving teenagers out of YA books and into adult literature as fast as possible. Fans of YA literature point out that once students start reading adult books, they are unlikely to return to YA books. The situation is similar to that of parents who take pride in sending their fifth and sixth graders to Saturday morning “Great Books” programs where they struggle through some of the greatest and longest classics in the English language. In our university classes in children’s literature, we sometimes meet students who have had such an experience, and they are amazed—and often resentful—at how much pleasure they missed by being forced into struggling through books that they did not have the life experience to understand and appreciate when they could have been reading wonderful “classics” written for children.

As shown by the fact that throughout the chapters in this book, and even on the Honor List, we include some books that were published for general adult audiences but “adopted” by teen readers, we do not believe in limiting high school students to YA books. But we do believe in letting young people know that some wonderful authors have written books across many different genres that focus on the kinds of experiences and emotions they are likely to relate to. This is why when we assign our college students to choose books for individual reading related to the chapters of this textbook (except for Chapter 2 which includes many books published before there were official young adult divisions in publishing houses) we ask them to read books that the publishers have marketed as YA. When students argue that they know teenagers who are reading whatever “adult” book they want to count, we assure them that we do, too, but since this is probably the only class they will ever take where the focus is on books specifically directed to young adults, we want them to read those books.

A Word about Spoilers

Another complaint we occasionally get is from people saying that we have broken a cardinal rule by giving away the ending of a book and have therefore spoiled their desire to read the book. Of course we do not want to go around “spoiling” people’s pleasure as they read some of the books we recommend. But on the other hand, there is a difference between our goals in writing a textbook for professionals and the goals of teachers and librarians who give booktalks and newspaper and magazine writers who write reviews. Such people are probably communicating about only five or six books in hopes of inspiring their listeners or readers to pick up one of the books and begin reading. We, on the other hand, are writing about more than a thousand books, many more than even the most ambitious of you will be able to read within the next year or so. One of the benefits of taking a class in young adult literature is that both from what we write in our textbook and from what you hear from your instructor and from your fellow students, you will be able to give honest information to students about many more books than you have “personally” read. And to do this, you sometimes need to know the ending.
We are not saying that you should spoil a book by telling a potential reader everything you know about the story, but that as a responsible adult making recommendations to individual students, there are often things you need to know and so, yes, we do sometimes give away the endings. But in our own defense, we also want to say that the more you read, the more your pleasure will come not so much from being surprised at how a book ends but from your recognition of all the things the author did to bring you as the reader to the end of the story. As discussed in the following section, “Stages of Literary Appreciation,” reading is similar to a journey where what you experience along the way is often as important as what you experience at your final destination.

A July 2007 *Time* magazine article entitled “Harry Potter and the Sinister Spoilers,” by Lev Grossman and Andrea Sachs, hinted that the “Azkaban-level security” measures that were being taken to keep the plot of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* secret was more of a marketing ploy than an understanding of what reading is all about. If all readers care about is the ending, then “why would they turn out in such numbers to see the movie versions of the book?” They went on to explain:

People read books for any number of reasons; finding out how the story ends is one among many and not even the most important. If it were otherwise, nobody would ever bother to read a book twice. Reading is about spending time with characters and entering a fictional world and playing with words and living through a story page by page. The idea that someone could ruin a novel by revealing its ending is like saying you could ruin the *Mona Lisa* by revealing that it’s a picture of a woman with a center part. Spoilers are a myth; they don’t spoil. No elaborate secrecy campaign is going to make *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* any better than it already is, and no website could possibly make it useless and boring.5

### Stages of Literary Appreciation

The development of literary appreciation begins long before children learn to read. Table 1.1, Stages of Literary Appreciation, presents an approximation of how individuals develop the personal attitudes and the reading, watching, and listening skills that are a necessary part of literary appreciation. The table should be read from the bottom up because each level is built on the one below it. We used to draw it as a wedding cake, but this cut down on how much information we could put on the page. Our reason for the wedding cake shape was to illustrate that the levels get increasingly smaller. There are dropouts all the way along, with many people never rising to even the level of losing themselves in a good story, much less coming to appreciate the aesthetics of particularly well-done presentations of drama, film, or writing. People do not go through these stages of development; instead they add on so that at each level they have all that they had before plus a new way to gain pleasure and understanding (see also the discussion of teaching literature in Chapter 11).
**TABLE 1.1 Stages of Literary Appreciation**

Read this chart from the bottom up to trace the stages of development most commonly found in reading the autobiographies of adults who love to read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Optimal Age</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Sample Literary Materials</th>
<th>Sample Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Adulthood to death</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation</td>
<td>Classics, Significant contemporary books, Drama, Film</td>
<td>Reads constantly, Dreams of writing the great American novel, Enjoys literary and film criticism, Reads many books a year, Sees plays, Revisits favorites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Reading widely</td>
<td>Best-sellers, Acclaimed novels, poems, plays, films, magazines</td>
<td>Talks about books and films with friends, Joins a book club, Gathers books to take on vacation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Venturing beyond self</td>
<td>Science fiction, Social issues fiction, Forbidden material, “Different” stories</td>
<td>Begins buying own books, Sees movies with friends, Gets reading suggestions from friends, Reads beyond school assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Junior high</td>
<td>Finding oneself in literature</td>
<td>Realistic fiction, Contemporary problem novels, Wish-fulfilling stories</td>
<td>Hides novels inside textbooks to read during classes, Stays up at night reading, Uses reading as an escape from social pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Late elementary</td>
<td>Losing oneself in literature</td>
<td>Series books, Fantasies, Animal stories, Anything one can disappear into, Comic books</td>
<td>Reads while doing chores, Reads while traveling, Makes friends with a librarian, Checks books out regularly, Gets “into” reading a particular genre or author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary grades</td>
<td>Learning to decode</td>
<td>School reading texts, Easy-to-read books, Signs and other real-world messages</td>
<td>Takes pride in reading to parents or others, Enjoys reading alone, Has favorite stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Birth to kindergarten</td>
<td>Understanding of pleasure and profit from printed words and from visual and oral presentations</td>
<td>Nursery rhymes, Folktales, Picture books, Television programs, Songs</td>
<td>“Reads” signs for certain restaurants and food, Memorizes favorite stories and pretends to read, Enjoys singing and listening to stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Level 1: Understanding That Pleasure and Profit Come from Literature

Children are fortunate if they have loving adults who share songs and nursery rhymes and who talk with them about the television and the movies they see together. They are also lucky if they get to go to bookstores and libraries for buying and borrowing books and for participating in group story hours. Researchers in reading education are discovering the social nature of reading. Children who seem to get the most from their reading are those who have had opportunities for “talking story” and for having what Ralph Peterson and Maryann Eeds call “grand conversations” both with other children and with adults.6

If children are to put forth the intellectual energy required in learning to read, they need to be convinced that it is worthwhile—that pleasure awaits them—or that there are concrete benefits to be gained. In U.S. metropolitan areas, there’s hardly a four-year-old who doesn’t recognize the golden arches of a McDonald’s restaurant. Toddlers too young to walk around grocery stores reach out from their seats in grocery carts to grab favorite brands of cereal. We know one child who by the time he entered first grade had taught himself to read from TV Guide. While its format breaks almost every rule any good textbook writer would follow in designing a primer for clear and easy reading, it had one overpowering advantage. The child could get immediate feedback. If he made a correct guess, he was rewarded by getting to watch the program he wanted. If he made a mistake, he knew immediately that he had to return to the printed page to try again. Today’s equivalent is children who learn to read from the tiny screens on computerized games or from going online to find information, advertisements, or cartoons.

One of our students, Marlinda White-Kaulaitry, who has now graduated with a Ph.D. (see her photo on p. 309) grew up on the Navajo Reservation in northern Arizona, and when she looked at our stages of literary appreciation, she thought our examples were too specific and too limited. See the article she wrote, “Reflections on Native American Reading: A Seed, a Tool, and a Weapon,” published in the April 2007 Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy.7 As you look at the chart, it might be a good idea for you to do what Marlinda did in questioning the different levels, as well as the examples, and thinking about how you developed your own interests in literacy. For her culture, she thought we focused too heavily on print literacies, while as we will show in Chapter 3, people living in today’s world make use of many other kinds of literacy. Her earliest memories were of sitting on her grandfather’s knee and being told stories and of participating in games and dances. She doesn’t remember her parents ever reading a bedtime story to her, yet she grew up with a strong interest in stories and later in reading.

Level 2: Learning to Read

Learning the principles of phonics (i.e., to turn the squiggles on a page into meaningful sounds) is the second stage of development. It gets maximum attention during the primary grades, where as much as 70 percent of the school day is devoted to language arts. Developing literacy, however, is more than just decoding; it is a never-ending task for anyone who is intellectually active. Even at a mundane level, adults continue working to develop their reading skills. People tackling new computer programs or rereading tax guides in preparation for an
audit exhibit the same symptoms of concentrated effort as do children first learning to read. They point with their fingers, move their lips, return to reread difficult parts, and in frustration slam the offending booklet to the floor. In each case, however, they are motivated by a vision of some benefit to be gained, so they increase their efforts.

Those of us who learned to read with ease may forget to help children who are struggling to find pleasure and enjoyment. Children who learn to read easily—the girl who sits in the backseat of the car and reads all through the family vacation and the boy who reads a book while delivering the neighborhood newspapers—find their own rewards for reading. For these children, the years between seven and twelve are golden. They can read the great body of literature that the world has saved for them: *Charlotte’s Web*, the Little House books, *The Borrowers*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, and books by Beverly Cleary, William Steig, Dr. Seuss, and hundreds of other good writers.

At this stage, children are undemanding. They are in what Margaret Early has described as a stage of unconscious enjoyment. With help, they may enjoy such classics as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Treasure Island*, and *Little Women*, but by themselves they are far more likely to turn to less-challenging material. Parents worry that their children are wasting time, but nearly 100 percent of our college students who say they love to read went through childhood stages of being addicted for months to one particular kind of book. Apparently, readers find comfort in knowing the characters in a book and what to expect, and this comfort helps them develop speed and skill.

**Level 3: Losing Oneself in a Story**

Children who read only during the time set aside in school and children who live in homes where the television set is constantly switched from channel to channel and where the exigencies of daily life leave little time for uninterrupted conversations and stories probably have a hard time losing themselves in a good story. There are exceptions, of course, who are like Worm (short for bookworm), the eleven-year-old character in Rod Philbrick’s *Max the Mighty* who escapes the horrors of her everyday life by reading. She even uses a miner’s helmet and headlight to read in the dark.

Because of life’s complications, many children do not lose themselves in a good story until much later than the third or fourth grades, which is typical of good readers, or it may not happen at all. In this segment quoted from *The Car Thief*, by Theodore Weesner, Alex Housman, who is being kept in a detention home, is seventeen years old when he first experiences losing himself in a story (i.e., finding what we refer to as “a good read”). Someone has donated a box of books to the detention home, and, because there’s nothing else to do, Alex starts to read. He is intimidated by the words because he had never read anything before except school assignments, but because the book is straightforward and written in a style he can understand,

[he] sat on the floor reading until he grew sleepy. When his eyelids began to slide down and his head began to cloud, he lay over on his side on the floor to sleep.
awhile, pulling up his knees, resting his head on his arm. When he woke he got up and carried the book with him to the bathroom . . . reading the book again, he became so involved in the story that his legs fell asleep. He kept reading, intending to get up at the end of this page, then at the end of this page, if only because he would feel more comfortable with his pants up and buttoned, but he read on. . . . Something was happening to him, something as pleasantly strange as the feeling he had had for Irene Sheaffer. By now, if he knew a way, he would prolong the book the distance his mind could see, and he rose again, quietly, to sustain the pleasant sensation, the escape he seemed already to have made from the scarred and unlighted corridor. Within this shadowed space there were now other things: war and food and worry over cigarettes and rations, leaving and returning, dying and escaping. The corridor itself, and his own life, was less present.9

Level 4: Finding Oneself in a Story

The more experience children have with literature, whether through words or pictures, the more discriminating they become. To receive pleasure they have to respect the story. In reminiscing about his childhood fondness for both the Hardy Boys and motorcycles, the late John Gardner remarked that his development as a literary critic took a step forward when he lost patience with the leisurely conversations that the Hardy boys were supposed to have as they roared down country roads side by side on their motorcycles.

Good readers begin developing this critical sense in literature at about the same time they develop it in real life at the end of childhood and the beginning of their teen years. They move away from a simple interest in what happened in a story to ask why. They want logical development and are no longer satisfied with stereotypes. They want characters controlled by believable human motives because now their reading has a real purpose to it. They are reading to find out about themselves, not simply to escape into someone else’s experiences for a few pleasurable hours. They may read dozens of contemporary teenage novels, looking for lives as much like their own as possible. They read about real people in biographies, personal essays, and journalistic stories. They are also curious about other sides of life, and so they seek out books that present lives totally different from their own. They look for anything bizarre, unbelievable, weird, or grotesque: stories of occult happenings, trivia books, and horror stories. And, of course, for their leisure-time reading and viewing they may revert to level 3, escaping into a good story. When they are working at the highest level of their capability, however, their purpose is largely one of finding themselves and their places in society. Parents and teachers sometimes worry when children seem stuck at a particular level or with a particular kind of book. In most instances, as long as there are other choices available as well as time for reading, students sooner or later venture onward in a natural kind of progression.

Level 5: Venturing beyond Themselves

The next stage in literary appreciation comes when people go beyond their egocentrism and look at the larger circle of society. Senior high school English teachers have some of their best teaching experiences with books and stories by such writers as Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Harper Lee, F. Scott Fitzgerald,
Margaret A. Edwards Award
Winner (1998)
Madeleine L’Engle, A Writer Who Asks the Hard Questions

Madeleine L’Engle, who died on September 6, 2007, was honored by the Edwards committee for two books from her series about the Austin family (Meet the Austins and Ring of Endless Light) and for two books from her Time Quintet about the Murray family (A Wrinkle in Time and A Swiftly Tilting Planet). While both sets were originally published as books for children, they have achieved a crossover audience partly because of the way L’Engle brings in philosophical and “other-world” considerations. The Time Quintet is about the intellectual Murray family and the disappearance of their physicist father, who is engaged in secret work for the government.

The introduction to the series, A Wrinkle in Time, which won the 1963 Newbery Medal, is still the most popular and as far as we know is the earliest of all the Edwards Award books. The next most popular one is A Swiftly Tilting Planet, which won the American Book Award. In it, the “baby” of the family, Charles Wallace, is now a fourteen-year-old who, with help from his sister Meg, inherits the task of rescuing their father.

In May 2007, the Time Quintet was reissued with two different covers for each book. Peter Sis drew the illustrations for the set designed to be marketed to children, while the well-known science fiction illustrator Cliff Nielsen drew the designs for the mass-market editions. Anna Quindlen wrote a new introduction to A Wrinkle in Time; also included as extras are a new interview with L’Engle and the text for her 1963 Newbery acceptance speech. In this speech, L’Engle noted that because of when she was born (1918) she belongs to the first generation who grew up benefiting from the wisdom of the librarians who chose to bring attention to particularly good books.

L’Engle grew up in New York City surrounded by artists of one kind or another; her father was a writer and her mother a pianist. In 1930, the family moved to Europe where they lived mostly in France and Switzerland, but Madeleine came home for college, first in South Carolina and then at Smith in Massachusetts. After college she lived in Greenwich Village with three college friends. Here she met and later married actor Hugh Franklin. In 1952, he retired from the theater and they moved to an old white farmhouse in northwestern Connecticut where they raised three children and supported themselves by resurrecting a defunct general store—a life not conducive to writing, L’Engle laughingly admits. Nevertheless, she plugged away at her writing, with her own children being her first audience. It took two years of rejection letters before she had a book accepted.

L’Engle frequently explores questions of science, philosophy, and religious faith, sometimes in the same book. When A Wrinkle in Time won the 1963 Newbery Medal, critics in the field argued that the book was a poor excuse for sci-fi. A colleague at a university where we previously taught conjectured that the women on the Newbery Committee had never read any “real” science fiction and were so bowled over by just a whiff of the genre that they gave it the prize. When, thirty-five years later, L’Engle won the Margaret A. Edwards Award, in her acceptance speech she said that she knew when she wrote Wrinkle that she was breaking taboos. One was that sci-fi protagonists had to be male and her protagonist was female: “I’m a female. Why would I give all the best ideas to a male?”

Another “rule” was that fantasy and science fiction don’t mix. “Why not?” she asks. “We live in a fantastic universe, and subatomic particles and quantum mechanics are even more fantastic than the macrocosm. Often the only way to look clearly at this extraordinary universe” is through imagination. In her defense, she cited Erich Fromm’s book The Forgotten Language (Rinehart, 1951), which makes the point that “fairy tales, fantasy, myths, and parables are the only universal language which crosses over barriers of race, culture, and time.”

I learned about mankind from Hendrik Willem van Loon; I traveled with Dr. Dolittle, created by a man I called Hug Lofting; Will James taught me about the West with Smoky; in boarding school I grabbed Invincible Louisa the moment it came into the library because Louisa May Alcott had the same birthday that I have, and the same ambitions.
Carson McCullers, William Faulkner, Arthur Miller, and Flannery O’Connor. Students respond to the way these books raise questions about conformity, social pressures, justice, and other aspects of human frailties and strengths. Book discussions at this level can have real meat to them because readers make different interpretations as they bring their own experiences into play against those in the books.

Obviously, getting to this level of literary appreciation is more than a matter of developing an advanced set of decoding skills. It is closely tied to intellectual, physical, and emotional development. Teenagers face the tremendous responsibility of assessing the world around them and deciding where they fit in. Reading at this level allows teenagers to focus on their own psychological needs in relation to society. The more directly they can do this, the more efficient they feel, which probably explains the popularity of contemporary problem novels featuring young protagonists, as in the books by Will Hobbs, Brock Cole, M. E. Kerr, Robert Cormier, Jacqueline Woodson, Virginia Euwer Wolff, and Nancy Garden.

Although many people read fantasy and science fiction at the level of losing themselves in a good story, others may read such books as Nancy Farmer’s *The House of the Scorpion*, Neal Shusterman’s *The Dark Side of Nowhere*, Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Tehanu*, and Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass* and *The Subtle Knife* at a higher level of reflection. Such readers come back from spending a few hours in the imagined society with new ideas about their own society.

**Levels 6 and 7: Aesthetic Appreciation**

When people have developed the skills and attitudes necessary to enjoy imaginative literary experiences at all the levels described so far, they are ready to embark on a lifetime of aesthetic appreciation. This is the level at which producers, playwrights, authors, critics, talented performers, and literary scholars concentrate their efforts. Even they don’t work at this level all the time, however, because it is as demanding as it is rewarding. The professor who teaches Shakespeare goes home at night and relaxes by watching *The Simpsons* or *The Office* or by scanning the Internet to see what might turn up on someone’s blog or on YouTube. The author who writes for hours in the morning might put herself to sleep at night by listening to a CD of Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, while the producer of a new play may flip through magazines as a way of relaxing. Teenagers are much the same. Top students take a break from the seriousness of homework by watching *CSI*, skimming the sports page, listening to music, or playing video games.

In summary, the important points to learn from this discussion of stages of literary appreciation are that teachers, librarians, and parents should meet young people where they are and help them feel comfortable at that stage before trying to move them on. We also need to continue to provide for all the levels below the one on which we are focusing; for example, people at any stage need to experience pleasure and profit from their reading, viewing, and listening. This is especially true with reading, which requires an extra measure of intellectual effort. People who feel they are not being appropriately rewarded for their efforts may grow discouraged and join the millions of adults who no longer read, view, or listen to materials for personal fulfillment and pleasure. Their literary efforts focus
entirely on acquiring the factual information that is needed to manage the daily requirements of modern living.

A University of Exeter Study on the Qualities of Good YA Books

“The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Teachers’ Perception of Quality in Fiction for Adolescent Readers” is the way Rosemary Hopper, a lecturer in English Education at the University of Exeter, entitled her 2006 article published in the British journal English in Education. The article reported on the first part of a study designed to assess the attitudes and the knowledge of educators in relation to how they view quality in young adult literature and how this affects their view of its place in schools.

The Exeter University researchers suspected that educators, who work mostly under the philosophy of a cultural literary heritage, do not make as much use of young adult literature as they could or should, now that the quality and the availability of YA books (including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and drama) has increased over the past decade. Their underlying assumption was that the literary canon as it is usually interpreted marginalizes many students and does not provide opportunities for students to continue their development of literary appreciation in a smooth, upward line. The goal of the researchers was to see whether it is feasible for teachers to use young adult literature to teach principles of literary judgment and discernment. Teachers want to help teenagers learn to deconstruct stories and to apply criteria showing that they understand such literary conventions as story structure, narrative perspective, and genre conventions. The question being asked by the study was whether or not teachers and librarians think that young adult literature is rich enough to support such pedagogical uses.

The researchers conducted twenty-five in-depth interviews with twenty-one English teachers, three librarians, and one teaching assistant. The interviewees came from eleven different schools and were all volunteers, which the researchers cautioned may mean that they are not typical because they at least knew enough about young adult literature to want to be involved in the study.

One of the first questions asked in the semistructured interviews was how young adult literature should be defined. Some of the interviewees gave basically negative definitions that used such terms as “commercial,” “stuff silly girls might read,” “lacks weight,” and “books set in schools.” More positive interviewees focused on the content and used such terms as “issues teenagers would identify with,” “explicitly informing,” “technically aimed at teenagers,” “relevant, accessible . . . and entertaining,” “opportunities to explore other things/cultures,” “allowing children to work out problems,” and “having teenagers as the main characters.”

The researchers suggested that those teachers who had the most negative views toward the concept of young adult literature probably “miss an opportunity to move their pupils forward in their reading.” While the majority of the interviewees held more positive feelings toward YA books, they did not think
they could accomplish their goals with just any book written for teenagers. They wanted to work with “well-written” young adult books, and expressed a shared assumption that books either were well written or poorly written. However, the researchers felt challenged to understand what the interviewees considered “good” books because they all found it easier to describe what made books “bad.”

Nevertheless, while not managing to list “absolute criteria,” the Exeter University researchers did find consistent patterns in what the teachers judged to be qualities that would help readers develop. Condensed here are the qualities that the interviewees judged to be important because of the way they allow young readers and their teachers to operate at several levels.

1. Imaginative and well-structured plots going beyond simple chronologies to include time shifts and differing perspectives.
2. Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative hooks and a fast pace.
3. Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.
4. Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.
5. Lively, varied, and imaginative language that is grammatically correct while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through lexical density or complexity.
6. Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.
7. Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.
8. Varied levels of sophistication that will lead to the continual development of reading skills.

A challenge for the teachers and librarians who were being interviewed was to think of examples of books that would demonstrate these qualities. Ones they mentioned included Louis Sachar’s *Holes*, David Almond’s *Skellig*, and Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*. We were pleased to note that most of these books are included on our United States Honor List (pp. 21 to 26) even though the majority are from England. This gave us the idea of seeing how closely the eight characteristics of “quality” young adult literature developed in the Exeter study fit with the seven “characteristics” of the best young adult literature that we have been using in this textbook.

An important difference is in the methodology. The Exeter study set out to find the characteristics of “good” YA literature, while we started with YA literature judged by many people to be “good” (the books on our Honor List) and then examined the literature to see what characteristics it has. As we describe these characteristics, we will keep the Exeter ones in mind and note places where
there are especially good matches. By doing this, we hope to fill in one of the needs noted in the Exeter study, which is the shortage of teachers’ acquaintance with books containing the desired qualities. The teachers being interviewed assumed there were many such books, but they lacked knowledge of them.

**Looking for the Exeter Qualities in the Books on the Honor List**

Since 1980 we have been compiling a yearly Honor List in hopes of finding a manageable list of “best” YA books as judged by fellow critics, teachers, and librarians. We devise our yearly lists by examining those YA books that make it to the editors’ choice lists of *School Library Journal* and *Booklist* and onto such prize lists as that of the National Book Awards, which now includes a youth section. As soon as the American Library Association meets in January, we receive news releases announcing more “best” books than we can hope to read. The Michael L. Printz Award, established in 2000, goes to the best YA book of the year, while the Newbery Medal winner and Honor Books are sometimes of interest to teen readers, as are the winners of the Coretta Scott King Awards for best African American books, the Pura Belpré Awards for best Latino/Latina books, the Robert F. Silbert Award for most distinguished informational book, and the Margaret A. Edwards Award, given to an author for a lifetime contribution to young adult books. On the YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) best-book list of some seventy books, we pay the most attention to the eight or ten that receive unanimous votes. We also look at their list of Quick Picks (designed for reluctant YA readers), and, as general interest has increased in books for young adults and the new category of tweeners, we look for the annual recommendations in such newspapers as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Horn Book* magazine, with its *Horn Book Fanfare* and the *Horn Book/Boston Globe* Awards.

Over the past thirty years we have seen a tremendous increase in the number of awards and best-book lists, but deciding on the final selection for our Honor List is as hard as ever because readers’ and critics’ tastes are increasingly diverse and books are selected as “the best” on the basis of many different criteria. We hope that you will read many books so that you can recommend them not because you saw them on a list, but because you enjoyed them and believe they will appeal to a particular student.

When we made our first Honor List, we started with 1967 because this seemed to be a milestone year, when writers and publishers turned in new directions, but as the years have gone by, the number of books has made the list so unwieldy that for this edition we moved the books from the 1960s and 1970s to Focus Boxes in Chapter 2. We also deleted a few books that are out of print and we stayed with our earlier decision to move the biographies, nonfiction, and collections of poetry and short stories to Focus Boxes in appropriate chapters. Occasionally, we add a book to the Honor List when it appears to be growing in respect and popularity, as has happened with Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game*, Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*, Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Tehanu*, and Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*. 

**Chapter 1** Young Adults and Their Reading
We used to identify books as coming from either the juvenile division or the adult division of a publishing house, but this no longer seems like crucial information because within the last fifteen years nearly all the Honor books have been published by juvenile divisions. This is partly because the reviewing sources from which we take our lists are slanted toward juvenile books, and partly because today’s publishers have a kind of freedom they did not have in 1975 when, for example, Bradbury felt it necessary to create an “adult” division to publish Judy Blume’s *Forever* in hopes of softening the controversy over its sexual content.

Starting here with the Honor List, and continuing through this textbook, we have tried to be consistent in listing the original hardback publisher because this is the company who found the author and did the original editorial and publicity work. Readers interested in finding paperback editions or sound recordings, and so on, can easily check online with such marketers as amazon.com or Barnes and Noble or look in an online version of Bowker’s *Books in Print*. However, there is still a challenge in recognizing which subdivisions or imprints belong to which companies because companies often merge and within the larger companies subdivisions are constantly being formed.

If a book is included on this Honor List, obviously it is outstanding in some way, but one book may be here because of its originality, another for its popularity, and another for its literary quality. We should also warn that many excellent books did not happen to find their way to this list and should not be dismissed as mediocre. The chart format was chosen for the convenience of those who want an efficient list of high-quality books to carry with them to a bookstore, a library, or to a computer for online research and buying.

Since 2000, Professor James Blasingame, Jr., who joined our English department faculty, has helped us make the decisions and write the Honor List reviews. These reviews have been published in the *English Journal*—usually the September or November issues—for the past decade or so. Here we use fairly recent books from the Honor List to illustrate the different qualities that over the last several editions of this textbook we have identified as characterizing high-quality young adult literature. And when a book seems to us to be a good illustration of one of the eight qualities outlined by the Exeter University researchers, we make a note. Other books on the Honor List are described in connection with the subjects of particular chapters.

**Characteristic 1: Young Adult Authors Write from the Viewpoint of Young People**

A prerequisite to attracting young readers is to write through the eyes of a young person. One of the ways authors do this is to write in first person, as with this beginning paragraph of Norma Fox Mazer’s 1997 *When She Was Good*:

I didn’t believe Pamela would ever die. She was too big, too mad, too furious for anything so shabby and easy as death. And for a few moments as she lay on the floor that day, I thought it was one of her jokes. The playing-dead joke. I thought that at any moment she would spring up, seize me by the hair, and drag me around the room. It wouldn’t be the first time. . . .

(text continues on page 26)
## Honor List The Best of the Best, 1980–2007

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This kind of immediacy serves as a narrative hook to grab and hold readers. First-person narration is so common that we have heard people discuss it as a prerequisite for YA fiction. It isn’t really, but because when authors are writing from an omniscient viewpoint, they are careful to tell what the young protagonist thinks and says, readers come away with the impression that most, if not all, YA literature is told in first person.

Nancy Werlin’s 2006 *The Rules of Survival* exemplifies the common practice of telling a story through the voice of the main character. Matthew, the oldest brother in a severely troubled family, is the narrator who starts his story after the dedication page, which reads: “This book is for all the survivors. Always remember: The survivor gets to tell the story.” Matthew begins with a letter written to his youngest sister:

Dear Emmy,

As I write this, you are nine years old, too young to be told the full and true story of our family’s past, let alone be exposed to my philosophizing about what it all meant. I don’t know how old you’ll be when you do read this. Maybe you’ll be seventeen, like I am now. Or maybe much older than that—in your twenties or even thirties. . . .

After the boy finishes his two-page letter, he begins the story of his family life starting when he was thirteen, his sister Callie was eleven, and Emmy was five. His father is separated from Nikki, Matthew’s extraordinarily beautiful mother, who about a third of the way through the story invites the “demons into her soul” and asks them to help her get whatever she wants.

What she wants is to win back the love and dependence of her children, which she thinks someone has stolen from her, but which, in fact, she forced away. The children’s father and an aunt live nearby, but they find Nikki hard to deal with and so they mostly look the other way. The children accept their “fate,” with the two older ones trying to protect their young half-sister. Their fear of being separated keeps them from going to authorities and asking to be placed in foster care, but when they witness an act of true bravery by a man who, in their neighborhood convenience store, comes between an angry father and his young son, they go looking for this stranger with the unrealistic idea that he can save them.

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The harrowing story ends four years later when Matthew is getting ready to go away on a college scholarship. And thanks at least partially to the stranger in the convenience store and to Matthew’s aunt and his father, he thinks his sister and his half-sister will be taken care of, but he has learned enough by now to know there are no guarantees. The real mark of how far Matthew has come is that the book ends with his writing another letter to Emmy, in which he confides, “You’re never going to read this, are you? I’m never going to give it to you. I didn’t write it for you. I wrote it for me.”

Matthew’s change of heart illustrates something that YA editor Stephen Roxburgh talked about at the 2004 NCTE/ALAN workshop. He said that the defining literary characteristic of young adult books is that the first-person narrator starts out as unreliable and then by the end of the book evolves into a reliable narrator. Werlin’s book is a perfect example. Readers travel with the protagonist through a series of harsh but believable events that allow them to develop not only a literary knowledge about reliable versus unreliable narrators, but also to learn some hard lessons in life without having to undergo the dangers of Matthew’s atypical life (Exeter Quality number 4) and to undergo emotional and intellectual growth (Exeter Quality number 7) through engaging with personal issues.

M. T. Anderson’s The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation: Volume 1: The Pox Party provides another example of a protagonist who changes from being a narrator who does not understand his role in life to being so knowledgeable about how other people view him, that he rebels. See Chapter 8 p. 248 for a fuller discussion of this amazing book, which exemplifies nearly every one of the Exeter qualities.

Another technique related to point of view is for authors to have a young narrator even when the story belongs to someone else. For example, Joan Abelove’s 1998 Go and Come Back is the story of two anthropologists who are in their late twenties when they go for a two-year study visit to a mountain tribe in Peru. What readers learn about the anthropologists comes through the eyes of a young Peruvian girl, Alicia, who refers to the anthropologists as “old women.” The tribe is fictionally named the Isabos, and Alicia’s first-person observations are supplemented by the conversations she has with her friends, with the two “old women,” and with her observant and sarcastic mother.

In his 1988 Fade, Robert Cormier uses the technique of having the story told by the protagonist, Paul Moreaux, as long as he is in his youth. When the story gets to his adult years, however, Cormier changes the narrator to Moreaux’s young female cousin, who aspires to follow in Moreaux’s footsteps as a writer.

The most consistent characteristic of the books on the Honor List is the age of the protagonists. Teenagers like to read about other teenagers as shown by such books as Yann Martel’s 2001 Life of Pi: A Novel, Orson Scott Card’s 1985 Ender’s Game, Bobbie Ann Mason’s 1985 In Country, and Sandra Cisneros’s 1983 The House on Mango Street. In spite of being published and marketed to general adult audiences, these books found their way to teen readers at least partly because the protagonists were young.

With other Honor List books published for adults, young people play important roles even if they aren’t the main characters, as with the grandson in Olive Ann Burns’s 1984 Cold Sassy Tree. General adult books that do not include teenagers—for example, William Wharton’s 1982 A Midnight Clear and Douglas Adams’s 1980 The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy—have protagonists who
are only slightly older than teen readers and who are involved in activities with which young people can identify.

The big dividing line—the final rite of passage—between childhood and adulthood used to be having children of one's own so that stories about parenting seldom, if ever, appeared in young adult fiction. With the public acknowledgment of a soaring birthrate to teenaged mothers, however, this is no longer true, as shown by the success of Virginia Euwer Wolff's 1993 *Make Lemonade*, the story of fourteen-year-old LaVaughn, who answers a babysitting ad and is surprised to find that it was put up by Jolly, the teenaged mother of two-year-old Jeremy and a younger “gooey baby” named Jilly. Rita Williams-Garcia's 1995 *Like Sisters on the Homefront* is the story of fourteen-year-old Gayle, whose mother forces her to have an abortion after she gets pregnant a second time and then sends Gayle and her seven-month-old baby boy from New York to rural Georgia to live “with family.”

Angela Johnson’s 2003 *The First Part Last* is the most unusual of the books about teen parenting. Nia and Bobby are two middle-class, African American teenagers in Brooklyn who find themselves expecting a baby. They plan to give the baby up for adoption, but a medical aberration causes Nia to go into a permanent coma and so Bobby decides to “be a man,” and raise their daughter. Bobby was not really ready for such a responsibility and the chapters alternate between telling about his old life and his new one. This is a fast-moving story that fits well with the Exeter Quality number 3 in presenting a story about a character not often found in the literary canon, Quality number 4 in taking readers beyond typical experiences, and Quality number 7 encouraging readers to develop their own emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.

**Characteristic 2: “Please, Mother, I Want the Credit!”**

With formula fiction for young readers, one of the first things an author does is to figure out how to get rid of the parents so that the young person is free to take credit for his or her own accomplishments. Although the Honor List is not made up of formula fiction, authors have devised a multitude of ways for the young character to be the one who solves the problem or who in some other way becomes the hero of the story. This ties in with the Exeter qualities number 3 and 4 because when the focus is on a young protagonist, readers are encouraged to identify with the characters and to see what is relevant to them.

Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* won the 2003 best children’s book award in Australia and received high acclaim when it was published in the United States in 2006. It especially exemplifies Exeter Quality number 1, which asks for a plot that goes beyond simple chronologies and includes time shifts and differing perspectives; Quality number 3, which asks for strong female characters; and Quality number 5, which calls for lively, varied, and imaginative language. The story is narrated off and on by Death, who comes to pick up the soul of anyone who dies. The book is set in Nazi Germany during World War II and so, of course, Death is busy, especially in 1942 when the human race was cranking things up a little and increasing production “from Poland to Russia to Africa to Hawaii.” See a fuller discussion in Chapter 8, pp. 248–249.
Paul Fleischman’s 1998 *Whirligig* is more typical in having a male protagonist. Brent Bishop needs to atone for causing a fatal traffic accident, so author Paul Fleischman contrives to have him travel on a Greyhound bus to the four corners of the United States where he constructs a memorial in remembrance of the girl who was killed in the accident. Brent’s wealthy father had brought his checkbook to the meeting with the grieving family and is surprised when they refuse his money and ask Brent to make amends by himself.

Other Honor books in which young people are forced to come to terms with their problems without the help of their parents include Iain Lawrence’s 1998 *The Wreckers*, Gary Soto’s 1997 *Buried Onions*, Carol Matas’s 1996 *After the War*, Nancy Farmer’s 1996 *A Girl Named Disaster*, Francesca Lia Block’s 1989 *Weetzie Bat*, and Chris Crutcher’s 1987 *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*.

Perhaps because they are on the edge of—close but not central to—the mainstream of power, young people seem able to relate more comfortably with elderly than with middle-aged adults. In Joan Bauer’s 1998 *Rules of the Road*, sixteen-year-old Jenna Louise Boller is happy to leave behind her troublesome father when she is offered the summer job of driving the “supremely aged” Mrs. Gladstone cross-country to inspect each of the 172 shoe stores that her company owns. In Han Nolan’s 1997 *Dancing on the Edge*, Miracle McCloy is at the mercy of some truly bad adults, but at least she knows that her grandfather is there for her. In Nancy Farmer’s 1996 *A Girl Named Disaster*, it is the maternal grandmother and the paternal great-grandfather who save the girl, even though they come from different sides of an alienated family.

In keeping with the variety that exists in the Honor List, other books lead young readers to look more realistically at themselves and at parent-child relationships. Among the books that feature at least one capable parent playing a strong, supportive role for a young protagonist are Louis Sachar’s 1998 *Holes*, Berlie Doherty’s 1990 *White Peak Farm*, Peter Dickinson’s 1998 *Eva*, Virginia Euwer Wolff’s 1998 *Probably Still Nick Swanson*, Virginia Hamilton’s 1982 *Sweet Whispers*, *Brother Rush*, and Alice Childress’s 1981 *Rainbow Jordan*. In Bobbie Ann Mason’s 1985 *In Country* and Bruce Brooks’s 1986 *Midnight Hour Encores*, the young protagonists place great importance on learning about an unknown parent.

**Characteristic 3: Young Adult Literature Is Fast Paced**

In July 1999, *Time* reporter David Spritz wrote that, “Teen fiction may, in fact, be the first literary genre born of the Internet. Its fast-paced narratives draw upon the target demographic’s kinship with MTV . . . and with the Internet and kids’ ease in processing information in unconventional formats.” In reality, teen fiction, which Spitz calls “edgy” was around long before the Internet, but his point is well taken that many of the most popular books tell their stories at almost the same frantic pace and with the same emphasis on powerful images that viewers have come to expect from MTV. This concept will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Postindustrial countries have become hurry-up societies, and people want their stories to be presented in the same fashion. Books from the Honor List that
come close to being MTV stories because of their pace and their exaggerated and powerful images include Louis Sachar’s 1998 *Holes*, Annette Curtis Klause’s 1990 *The Silver Kiss* and 1997 *Blood and Chocolate*, and Francesca Lia Block’s 1993 *Missing Angel Juan* and 1989 *Weetzie Bat*. The latter is only eighty-eight pages long. When it was published, it was a shocking book because people were so accustomed to reading realistic problem novels providing role models for teenagers that they weren’t ready for a fairy-tale spoof of Hollywood and for a writer who was less interested in presenting role models than in presenting vivid images and unforgettable characters. See more about how Block’s books resemble MTV in Chapter 3, p. 82, where we write about Block as a winner of the 2005 Margaret A. Edwards Award.

Not all young adult books are going to have the disjointed punch of music videos or the randomness of the Internet, but there is a relationship because modern mass-media entertainers appeal to the same powerful emotions of adolescence—love, romance, sex, horror, and fear—as do young adult authors. These strong emotions are best shown through a limited number of characters and narrative events and language that flows naturally while still presenting dramatic images. The shorter and more powerful books are among those that have been made into impressive movies.

The assumption that publishers start with is that teenagers have shorter attention spans than adults and less ability to hold one strand of a plot in mind while reading about another strand. However, there is a tremendous difference in the reading abilities of young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen. As students mature and become better readers, they are able to stick with longer, more complex books, and as proven by the Harry Potter books, even young readers can stick with long books if they are interested. Zusak’s *The Book Thief*, discussed earlier, is 551 pages, and the first book in Philip Pullman’s Dark Materials trilogy, *The Golden Compass*, is 351 pages long and, as with the other books in the set, exemplifies Exeter Quality number 1 in having an imaginative and well-structured plot that goes beyond simple chronologies as it includes time shifts and differing perspectives, and also Quality number 2 in having an exciting plot, secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative hooks and a fast pace. One of our college readers characterized the conflicts in *The Golden Compass* as a “*Da Vinci Code* for kids,” citing such terms as the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Magisterium, the Oblation Board, the Papacy, and the absolute power of the Church. While Pullman includes many plots and subplots, what impressed us was how quickly he draws readers into the story. On page 1, they are introduced to Lyra and the fact that she has a soul mate—a daemon who has the ability to change his shape as he serves as her guardian, conscience, companion, and pet—and that together the two of them are involved in something mysterious, secretive, and serious. Within a few pages readers figure out that the story takes place somewhere in the past, but not too far back because the 1898 Tokay wine is considered to be “old” and precious and the scholars prefer the softer Naphtha lighting to the newer anbaric (electric?) lights. There’s also some edginess to the story as Lyra smells and watches the Master cut open half a dozen poppy heads to prepare for serving after the feast to clear “the mind and stimulate the tongue” of the scholars.
Characteristic 4: Young Adult Literature Includes a Variety of Genres and Subjects

Because moving from being a child to being an adult is at the core of most young adult fiction, the “genre” is commonly thought of as featuring a troubled teenager in some kind of rebellion. It is true that young adult writers have created thousands of variations on this theme, but the reason we put genre in quotation marks is that there is a tremendous crossover with what are traditionally defined as genres. Young protagonists might take important steps toward growing up while in outer space or while challenging nature by climbing a mountain or finding their way home after being lost. It could occur in a courtroom when a young person is either a witness or is on trial; it could occur as part of a love relationship or as part of facing up to a disaster in one’s family or one’s own life. The taking of such steps is a favorite theme for film producers as shown by the movies listed in Film Box 1.1, The World of Young Adults (p. 2). The world’s great myths often feature young people accepting and overcoming challenges, and, as will be shown in the rest of this textbook, the story is an intrinsic part of the archetypal images that reside in the human psyche. This is why we not only have chapters about modern realistic, problem novels, but also about all the other genres including poetry, drama, humor, adventure, sports, the supernatural, mystery, fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, and both literary and informative nonfiction.

Although we have moved such nonfiction books as poetry, biographies, memoirs, and information books to the appropriate chapters, in keeping with the Exeter Quality number 8 about varied levels of sophistication and Quality number 4 about going beyond typical experiences, the books on the Honor List reflect a tremendous variety of subjects, themes, and genres. Historical fiction includes Gary Paulsen’s 1998 Soldier’s Heart, Katherine Paterson’s pre–Civil War Jip: His Story (1996), Olive Ann Burns’s 1984 romantic Cold Sassy Tree, Kathryn Lasky’s 1983 pioneer story Beyond the Divide, and Rosemary Sutcliff’s 1990 The Shining Company, set in England in 600 AD. Elements of fantasy and science fiction are as old as the oldest folktale, as in Gale Carson Levine’s 1997 Ella Enchanted, and as new as the latest board game in William Sleator’s 1984 Interstellar Pig. Occult fiction is filled with romance as shown by Annette Curtis Klause’s 1990 The Silver Kiss and Stephenie Meyer’s 2005 Twilight, while futuristic stories thrive on high-tech intrigue as shown in Peter Dickinson’s 1989 Eva and Robert Cormier’s 1983 The Bumblebee Flies Anyway.

Although about half the books are contemporary, realistic fiction, they range from tightly plotted suspense stories as in Nancy Werlin’s 1998 The Killer’s Cousin and John Marsden’s 1994 Letters from the Inside to serious introspection as in Paula Fox’s 1984 One-Eyed Cat. Threats to the social order are explored in William Sleator’s 1984 Interstellar Pig and in Lois Lowry’s 1993 The Giver. A search for values is shown in Chris Crutcher’s 1987 The Crazy Horse Electric Game. What it means to care for others is examined in Kimberly Holst’s 1999 When Zachary Beaver Came to Town, Norma Fox Mazer’s 1984 Downtown, Francesca Lia Block’s 1993 Missing Angel Juan, and Gary Paulsen’s 1993 Harris and Me.
Characteristic 5: The Body of Work Includes Stories about Characters from Many Different Ethnic and Cultural Groups

Characteristic 5 fits with Exeter Quality number 6, which asks for themes that truthfully inform about the wide world and allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues from both local and global perspectives. Forty years ago, the novels written specifically for teenagers and sold to schools and public libraries presented the same kind of middle-class, white-picket-fence neighborhoods as the one featured in the Dick and Jane readers from which most U.S. children were taught to read. But the mid-1960s witnessed a striking change in attitudes. One by one, taboos on profanity, divorce, sexuality, drinking, racial unrest, abortion, pregnancy, and drugs disappeared. With this change, writers were freed to set their stories in realistic rather than romanticized neighborhoods and to explore the experiences of characters whose stories had not been told before.

This freedom was a primary factor in the coming of age of adolescent literature. Probably because there was such a lack of good books about non-middle-class protagonists, and because this was where interesting things were happening, many writers during the late 1960s and the 1970s focused on minorities and on the kinds of kids that S. E. Hinton called *The Outsiders*. With the conservative swing that the United States took in the 1980s, not as much attention was paid to minority experiences; but with more globalization and instant communication, the trend is reversing so that there are many appealing new books that will be read by large numbers of teenagers of all races. It is also encouraging that we are seeing less segregation of characters. People are relating across ethnic boundaries, and in many of the books, the characters’ ethnicity is downplayed. For example, in Virginia Euwer Wolff’s 1993 *Make Lemonade*, there is no overt mention of skin color, but as one reviewer stated, Jolly and LaVaughn are held together by “the race of poverty.”

In Chapter 3, we are going to discuss some of the reasons that today’s teenagers are more interested in global concerns than they were a decade ago, but for now we will just mention a few books that demonstrate these expanded interests. Allan Stratton’s 2004 *Chanda’s Secrets* is about a sixteen-year-old girl who lives in sub-Saharan Africa, and is faced with arranging for the burial of her baby brother and eventually for her mother, both of whom succumb to AIDS. Patricia McCormick’s 2006 *Sold* is a terrible—but beautifully told—story about Lakshmi, a girl in Nepal, who is sold to Auntie Bimla at the village store. She thinks she is going to work as a maid in a rich family, and that the money she earns will be sent home to provide her family with the new tin roof that their house needs. But actually Auntie Bimla sells her to “Uncle Husband.” The reason for his name is that Lakshmi must pretend to be married to him when they cross the border into India. At the store where the arrangements are made, the store owner allows her stepfather to fill her mother’s basket with goods. He chooses mostly things for himself, but Lakshmi bravely adds two things to the basket: “a sweater for Ana [her mother] and a coat for the baby.” Then on this “rich and happy day for our family, an 800-rupee day, a festive and auspicious day” she adds “a bottle of Coca-Cola, the sweet drink that people say is like having tiny fireworks in your mouth.”
My stepfather scowls, but he does not say anything. On any other day, he would not tolerate such defiance, especially from a mere girl.

But today I am no mere girl. (55)

Michael Morpurgo in his 2004 *Private Peaceful* tells a story from World War I, which is based on the British Army’s practice at that time of summarily executing soldiers for relatively minor infractions. Today, the soldiers’ actions would more likely have been recognized as a result of shock and fatigue. Other Honor List books that present a worldview include Joan Abelove’s 1998 *Go and Come Back*, set in 1970s Peru; Carol Matas’s 1996 *After the War*, set in 1940s Poland and Palestine; Nancy Farmer’s 1996 *A Girl Named Disaster*, set in 1980s Mozambique and Zimbabwe; and Suzanne Fisher Staples’s 1989 *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, set in present-day Pakistan. Staples was a UPI news correspondent, who uses the story of a young woman’s betrothal to introduce English readers to a culture very different from their own. Gary Paulsen’s 1985 *Dogsong* is about a young Inuit; John Marsden’s 1994 *Letters from the Inside* is set in Australia; Margaret Mahy’s 1988 *Memory* is set in New Zealand; while Berlie Doherty’s 1990 *White Peak Farm* grew out of her work preparing a BBC documentary in Sheffield, England.

Although most schools and libraries are making a concerted effort to stock and teach books reflecting many different cultures, educators worry that as publishers look more to marketing directly to teenagers, they may be less likely to publish “serious” stories about protagonists from minority groups because less-affluent kids, many of whom are from minorities, are not as likely to spend money on books as are white, middle-class teenagers. Also, as publishers try to attract readers by filling their books with wishful thinking, they tend to return to the romanticized beautiful-people view that was characteristic of the old adolescent literature.

Another fear is that, as with most television programming, everything will be watered down to suit mass tastes. But there are some crucial differences, because one person at a time reads a book, while television is usually viewed by a group.
Even with cable television, the number of channels from which a viewer can choose is limited, but books offer a vast choice. Moreover, advertisers pay for most television programs, while readers pay the production costs of books.

**Characteristic 6: Young Adult Books Are Basically Optimistic, with Characters Making Worthy Accomplishments**

The Exeter Quality number 6 mentions truthfulness, which relates closely to credibility and believability. It is emotionally satisfying to teenage readers to have the young protagonists portrayed as smart as, or even smarter than, their parents or teachers. Of course this isn’t usually the situation, but good authors know that they have to write about their protagonists in such a way that they will be respected by the readers. The difference between short stories written for adults and those written for teenagers is often the attitude of the author. An author who views a teenager with either condescension or nostalgia will turn young adults away from the story. In young adult books, the protagonists must be involved in accomplishments that are believable but still challenging enough to earn the reader’s respect. In the 1970s, when realism became the vogue and books were written with painful honesty about the frequently cruel world that teenagers face, some critics worried that YA books had become too pessimistic and cynical. However, even in so-called downer books, authors created characters that readers could admire for the way they faced up to their challenges.

A comparison of E. B. White’s beloved *Charlotte’s Web* and Robert Newton Peck’s *A Day No Pigs Would Die* illustrates one of the differences between children’s and adolescent literature. In White’s classic children’s book, a beloved but useless pig wins a ribbon at the County Fair and is allowed to live a long and happy life, whereas in Peck’s young adult book a beloved but useless pig wins a ribbon at the County Fair but must be slaughtered anyway. Nevertheless, rather than being devastated by the death of the pig, readers identify with the boy and take pride in his ability to do what had to be done.

This kind of change and growth is the most common theme appearing in young adult literature, regardless of format. It suggests, either directly or symbolically, the gaining of maturity (i.e., the loss of innocence as part of the passage from childhood to adulthood). Such stories communicate a sense of time and change, a sense of becoming and catching glimpses of possibilities—some that are fearful and others that are awesome, odd, funny, perplexing, or wondrous.

One of the most popular ways to show change and growth is through a quest story (see Chapter 4 for a discussion and Focus Box 4.6, p. 138, for examples). Avi’s 1990 *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* is an almost pure example of a quest story camouflaged as a rollicking historical adventure. The intrepid narrator explains on page 1:

. . . before I begin relating what happened, you must know something about me as I was in the year 1832 when these events transpired. At the time my name was Charlotte Doyle. And though I have kept the name, I am not for reasons you will soon discover the same Charlotte Doyle.
This captures the psychologically satisfying essence of quest stories, which is that the events in the story serve as a catalyst for the Exeter Quality number 7, which asks for emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues. This idea goes back to Stephen Roxburgh’s observation (see p. 27) that by the end of most good books the young protagonist will have gained enough wisdom and understanding to become a reliable narrator.

**Characteristic 7: Successful Young Adult Novels Deal with Emotions That Are Important to Young Adults**

This characteristic overlaps with the Exeter Quality number 7 about emotional and intellectual growth. Often the difference in the life span between two books that are equally well written from a literary standpoint is that the ephemeral book fails to touch kids where they live, whereas the long-lasting book treats experiences that are psychologically important to young people. Of course, good authors do not peruse psychology books searching for case histories or symptoms of teenage problems that they can envision making into good stories. This would be as unlikely and as unproductive as it would be for a writer to study a book on literary devices and make a list: “First, I will use a metaphor and then a bit of alliteration and some imagery, followed by personification.” In the best books, both the literary devices and the psychological insights must emerge from the honest telling of a story.

Pete Hautman’s 2004 *Godless* is one of the Honor List books that does a good job of probing sixteen-year-old Jason Bock’s psyche. As our colleague Jim Blasingame wrote when we reviewed the Honor List books for the *English Journal* (September 2005), Jason is “bullied, threatened, coerced, degraded, ridiculed, manipulated, and generally pinballed through life.” The local tough guy “scares the crap” out of him, while his mother keeps scheduling him for doctors’ appointments to see what’s wrong with him, and his father, who is an attorney accustomed to getting problems solved, enrolls Jason in a church youth group called TPO (Teen Power Outreach).

In a moment of rebellion, Jason mockingly tells the TPO group that instead of being a practicing Catholic he is founding a new religion, one that will worship the town water tower and will be called *Chutengodianism*. To Jason’s surprise, several of the teens join his new religion. They find it fun to be doing something so different, but Shin, a younger boy who, when the story starts, was Jason’s only friend, takes the whole thing seriously.

A playful night spent “worshipping” the water tower (which really means climbing up and accidentally going swimming in the “holy water”) ends badly and Jason is branded as a lost soul, a weirdo, a troublemaker, and a bad influence. Readers know differently and so does Jason, but still the book leaves readers, as well as Jason, pondering several questions of the kind that are often on kids’ minds but not very often brought out for open discussion.

Psychological aspects of well-written novels are a natural part of the story as protagonists face the same kinds of challenges readers are experiencing, such as the developmental tasks outlined two generations ago by Robert J. Havighurst.
Focus Box 1.1

Books to Help Adults Understand Teenagers

Adolescents at School: Perspectives on Youth, Identity, and Education, edited by Michael Sadowski. Harvard Education, 2003. In giving this 182-page book, written by sixteen educators, a positive review in School Library Journal, Mary Hofman wrote, “You will have an interesting and well-documented read that will support much of what it is hoped you are already doing.”

The Culture of Adolescent Risk-Taking by Cynthia Lightfoot. Guilford Press, 1999. Lightfoot helps adults understand and deal with the pressures that contribute to teen attitudes of invincibility and daring.

Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation by Neil Howe and William Strauss. Vintage, 2000. The authors claim that the Millennial Generation (those born between 1980 and 2000) are the grown-up kids of Barney rather than Sesame Street, of soccer moms rather than working moms, and of such bumper stickers as “Have you hugged your child today?” These “wanted” and loved children are having a different kind of adolescence than did the last generation.

Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescents by Rosalind Wiseman. Crown, 2002. Although the intended audience is adults, the writing is accessible to young women who might want to skim or read parts of it.

“Real Boys”: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood by William S. Pollack. Random House, 1998. Pollack is a clinical psychologist with the Harvard Medical Center and is asking people to take a second look at “the boy code,” which describes boys as tough, cool, ram- bunctious, and obsessed with sports, cars, and sex. He thinks our major job is to help boys develop empathy and explore their sensitive sides so as to increase their ability to cope with frustrations.

When We’re in Public, Pretend You Don’t Know Me: Surviving Your Daughter’s Adolescence So You Don’t Look Like an Idiot and She Still Talks to You by Susan Borowitz and Ava L. Siegler. Warner Books, 2003. Siegler is a child psychologist and Borowitz is a Hollywood writer and producer, as well as a mother. The book is filled with sensible advice aimed mostly at mothers, but teachers and librarians can learn some things too.

1. Acquiring more mature social skills
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine sex role
3. Accepting the changes in one’s body, using the body effectively, and accepting one’s physique
4. Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults
5. Preparing for sex, marriage, and parenthood
6. Selecting and preparing for an occupation
7. Developing a personal ideology and ethical standards
8. Assuming membership in the larger community

Some psychologists gather all developmental tasks under the umbrella heading of “achieving an identity,” which they describe as the task of adolescence. Some aspect of this is in practically any piece of fiction, poetry, drama, informative nonfiction, biographies, and self-help books that are written and published specifically for teenagers.

Close connections exist between adolescent literature and adolescent psychology, with psychology providing the overall picture and literature providing individual portraits. Because space in this text is too limited to include more than
a hint of what you need to know about adolescent psychology, we suggest that professionals working with young people, read one or more of the books listed in Focus Box 1.1, Books to Help Adults Understand Teenagers. And as a reminder of the fact that teenagers face many different problems from those of adults, you might also want to view some of the films recommended in Film Box 1.1, The World of Young Adults. The more that you know, not only about the individual

Focus Box 1.2

Memoirs by Outstanding YA Authors

The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer’s Life by Sid Fleischman. Greenwillow, 1996. Fleischman’s story of his teenage years as a traveling magician is so interesting it was chosen for the Honor List.

All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou. Random House, 1986 and 1970. These lyrical and powerful autobiographies remain favorites of both adults and young readers.


Bad Boy: A Memoir by Walter Dean Myers. Amistad Press, 2001. The two strengths of this book are the vivid details that Myers presents about Harlem in the 1940s and the documentation of his development from a street kid into a writer.

Counting Stars by David Almond. Delacorte, 2002. These eighteen stories about Almond’s growing up in a large Roman Catholic family are told in the same magical and poetic tones that he has used in Skellig, Heaven Eyes, and Kit’s Wilderness.

Frenchtown Summer by Robert Cormier. Delacorte, 1999. Although Cormier doesn’t say this is an autobiography, the thirty narrative poems, all in first person, are told with such feeling that readers feel they are Cormier’s own stories.

Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos. Farrar, 2002. Gantos spent a year in jail between high school and college because he helped sail a boatload of hashish from the Caribbean to New York City.

King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography by Chris Crutcher. Greenwillow, 2003. Because Crutcher works as a family counselor, many of us thought his plots came from the kids he counsels, but this forthright memoir shows that he has personally “lived” many of the emotions he writes about.

Knots in My Yo-Yo String by Jerry Spinelli. Knopf, 1998. Spinelli uses the lively style of his fiction to tell about the events he remembers from his first sixteen years.

Looking Back: A Book of Memories by Lois Lowry. Walter Lorraine, 1998. Lowry comments on and explains photos from four generations of her family. One reviewer shuddered at the thought of less-skilled writers following suit.

ME, ME, ME, ME, ME, Not a Novel by M. E. Kerr. HarperCollins, 1983. Although these eleven short stories are just as much fun to read as are Kerr’s novels, she says they are true accounts of the young life of Marijane Meaker, which is Kerr’s real name.

My Life in Dog Years by Gary Paulsen. Delacorte, 1997. Paulsen recounts his experiences with ten different dogs—not the ones that went with him on the Iditarod race, which he writes about in his 1990 Woodsong.

Oddballs by William Sleator. Dutton, 1993. Kids who dream of getting even with family members by telling the world how strange they are can use Sleator’s nine funny stories as a model.

The Pigman and Me by Paul Zindel. HarperCollins, 1992. Readers will both laugh and cry at this true account of a year in the teenage life of Paul Zindel when he was lucky enough to have Nonno Frankie (the model for Zindel’s fictional Pigman) as a neighbor and friend.

teen readers that you work with but also about the emotional challenges and the
interests that are common to most—if not all—young adults, the better able you will be to:

- Judge the soundness of the books they read.
- Decide which ones are worthy of promotion.
- Predict which ones will last and which will be transitory.
- Make better recommendations to individuals.
- Discuss books with students from their viewpoints.
- Gain more understanding and pleasure from personal reading.

Also included in this chapter is Focus Box 1.2, Memoirs by Outstanding YA Authors (p. 37). Because the authors are good writers and know what young adults are interested in, they have written their biographies with a focus on their own coming-of-age, a subject dear to the hearts of both adult and teenage writers. Besides introducing teen readers to some wonderful authors, these biographies illustrate new techniques and new attitudes, which can serve as models for teens’ own creative writing and, in some cases, for their own artistic endeavors as with the drawings in Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, and the illustrations in Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (see p. 6). Students can get lots of inspiration and insight from looking at authors’ websites, but they will get even more from reading such Honor List books as Yang’s and Alexie’s or one of the memoirs listed in Focus Box 1.2.

Notes

A Brief History of Young Adult Literature

Of course, the best way to learn about young adult literature is to read widely in current books, but you will get more from that reading if you also know something about the history and the background of these new books. Knowing our common background gives us a sense of the past and insights into the values that our society wants to pass on to its young people. It also helps us realize why certain kinds of books have consistently proven popular while giving us a deeper understanding of current events and trends in the world of books and modern entertainment.

For example, when we went to our local theater to see Judd Apatow’s 2007 Knocked Up comedy starring Katherine Heigl and Seth Rogen, we smiled at the poster featuring an enlarged quote from reviewer Joe Leydon because it reminded us of the differences between domestic and dime novels of the 1800s. Leydon praised the film as a balance of “the madcap swagger and uninhibited bawdiness of a high testosterone farce” (that is, a dime novel) with “the unabashed sweetness and romantic yearning of a chick flick” (that is, a domestic novel).

And in May, 2006 we thought of the Stratemeyer Syndicate when we read about Little, Brown recalling thousands of copies of a hot new book, How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life. The nineteen-year-old author, Kaavya Viswanathan, a sophomore at Harvard, was found to have plagiarized dozens of passages from two young-adult novels by Megan McCafferty.

Little, Brown editors shifted some of the blame by saying that the book had been prepared by a “book packager.” According to a May 8, 2006, article in Time magazine entitled “An F for Originality” (p. 184), the book came to
Little, Brown through Alloy Entertainment, a company, “which develops book ideas, hires writers, then delivers a finished product to publishers.” Such packagers usually work with nonfiction cookbooks or joke books, but Alloy, which owns a teen shopping website, delias.com, “has turned itself into a giant of young-women’s fiction.” Sara Nelson, the editor of Publishers Weekly, was quoted as explaining that book packagers do “the market researching of books, and every publisher is desperate for the teen market.” Earlier, Alloy Entertainment had better luck in shepherdng such books as Ann Brashares’s The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants and Lisi Harrison’s The Pretty Committee Strikes Back (Book 5 of the Clique Series) to number one positions on the New York Times children’s best-seller lists.

When we read an article in the Arizona Republic (April 13, 2007) under the title, “Whodunit? Your Favorite Author May Be Just a Brand Name,” we again thought of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which pretended to have such writers as Carolyn Keene for the Nancy Drew books and Victor Appleton for the Tom Swift books. Arizona Republic reporter Kerry Lengel started his article with the trick question, “Who wrote Tom Clancy’s Splinter Cell?” and then went on to say that it certainly wasn’t Tom Clancy. While Clancy’s name is the biggest on the cover, David Michaels is identified as the writer, but there is really no David Michaels. It is a pseudonym created by ghostwriter Raymond Benson.

Lengel observed that in this age of high-power marketing, a new “common denominator is the centrality of an author’s name as brand,” as opposed to characters’ names, as with James Bond or Nancy Drew. While “ghost writing is probably as old as Homer,” today even the names of the “collaborators” are accruing value. James Patterson is supposedly the author of eight of the hundred most-popular books of 2006, but the majority of his books are written by coauthors who take a detailed outline and flesh it out. Clive Cussler’s NUMA Files series is being written by Paul Kemprevos, and Dirk Cussler (Clive’s son) is now doing the writing about the Dirk Pitt character. This is similar to the way that Christopher Tolkien is carrying on his father’s Middle-earth universe and Brian Herbert is keeping Dune in the public eye.

In another example, when we read such highly acclaimed books as Patricia McCormick’s 2006 Sold, about the sex trade in Nepal and India, and Allan Stratton’s 2004 Chanda’s Secrets, about the AIDS epidemic in Africa, we saw them as part of a continuing—but ever-changing—desire on the part of adults to use books as a way of instilling values and attitudes, and perhaps even inspiring social action, in the young.

Another reason to get acquainted with the history of young adult literature is that teachers and librarians may profit from discovering that books as different as John Bennett’s Master Skylark (1847), Mabel Robinson’s Bright Island (1937), and John Tunis’s Go Team, Go! (1954) are fun to read or that Susan Coolidge’s What Katy Did (1872), Ralph Henry Barbour’s The Crimson Sweater (1906), and Mary Stolz’s Pray Love, Remember (1954) are not without their charm.

See Focus Box 2.1, A Sampling of Books Appreciated by Young Adults 1864–1959 (p. 42) and also Focus Box 2.2, New Tellings of Old Stories (p. 44), which illustrates an interesting kind of recycling in which authors adapt and retell with contemporary sensibilities some of the same stories that young readers have appreciated over the last few centuries.
For the convenience of readers, this chapter is divided into four parts: 1800–1900, 1900–1940, 1940–1960, and 1960–1980.

1800–1900: A Century of Purity with a Few Passions

Before 1800, literature read by children and young adults alike was largely religious. Such books as John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) reminded young people that they were merely small adults who soon must face the wrath of God. In the 1800s, the attitude of adults toward the young gradually changed. The country expanded, we moved inevitably toward an urban society, medical knowledge rapidly developed, and young people no longer began working so early in their lives. The literature that emerged for young adults remained pious and sober, but it hinted at the possibility of humanity’s experiencing a satisfying life here on earth. Books reflected adult values and fashions, but of this world, not merely the next.

The American Sunday School Union

Largely forgotten, a spiritual and practical movement that began in 1817 in Philadelphia under the title of the Sunday and Adult School Union changed its title to the American Sunday School Union in 1824. By 1830, it had determined to change the course of U.S. education by offering Sunday School lessons that taught religion at the same time they educated young people in mathematics and grammar and history and all sorts of practical, job-related skills.

For the next forty years, the Union produced millions of books for use in Sunday Schools, which were open from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM and from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM. All titles were approved by a board representing six major religions. Titles varied from *History of Patriarchs*; *Wild Flowers: or the May Day Walk*; *The Early Saxons*; and *Curiosities of Egypt*; to *Delaware and Iroquois Indians*; and *Kindness to Animals, or the Sin of Cruelty Exposed and Rebuked*.

The Union was best known, however, for its heavily moralistic fiction, rarely deviating from two basic formulas. First, a young child near death would remind readers of all his or her virtues, all that they must remember and practice, and then the child would die, to the relief of readers. On page 1 of E. P. Grey’s *My Teacher’s Present: A Select Biography of the Young*, the author wrote:

You have in this little volume the biography of six Sunday school pupils, who were early called from this world. They were happy and beloved whilst they lived, and deeply lamented when they died.

Another formula portrayed good children who had temporarily forgotten duties to parents and siblings and who would soon get their come-uppance. Most of the books were little more than sugar-coated sermons; the titles usually gave away the plot, and the writing was unbelievably mawkish. By the 1870s and 1880s, the Union books lost most of their readership to the almost equally badly written work of Horatio Alger, to the often brilliant prose of Louisa May Alcott, and to various writers of dime novels or domestic novels. At a time when few
A Sampling of Books Appreciated by Young Adults 1864–1959

1864: *Frank the Young Naturalist* by Harry Castlemon (really Charles Austin Fosdick) is close to unreadable today, but Castlemon’s series books were popular well into the twentieth century.

1868: *Little Women: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. The Story of Their Lives. A Girl’s Book* by Louisa May Alcott is so honest that it is still loved today.

1870: *The Story of a Bad Boy* by Thomas Bailey Aldrich launched a new kind of literature about boys who were imperfect and tough—a refreshing counterbalance to the good-little-boy figures prevalent in too many unrealistic books of the time.

1872: *What Katy Did* by Susan Coolidge (really Sarah Chauncey Woolsey), featured a prankish and fun-loving tomboy and for a time rivaled *Little Women* in popularity.

1876: *The Boy Emigrants* by Noah Brooks is a romanticized but fascinating tale of boys traveling across the plains.

1883: *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson is filled with the kind of adventure and derring-do that still appeals to boys.

1888: *Derrick Sterling* by Kirk Munroe. When Derrick’s father dies, Derrick must leave school and work eleven-hour shifts in the mines. In this early, realistic picture of the mines and child labor, he becomes a hero when disaster strikes.

1897: *Master Skylark: A Story of Shakespeare’s Time* by John Bennett is the witty account of young Nick Attwood, a golden-voiced boy singer involved in more than his share of adventure.

1899: *The Half-Back* by Ralph Henry Barbour was the first of many popular sports books, including *The Crimson Sweater* (1906), in which boys at school learn who and what they might become through sports.

1899: *Peggy* by Laura Elizabeth Richards is about a poor girl going to school and becoming a basketball hero.

1904: *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* by Kate Douglas Wiggin sold more than 1.25 million copies and launched a formula in which a young child (usually a girl) makes life happy for apathetic or depressed adults.

1908: *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery continued the Wiggin formula when an orphan girl is sent by mistake to a childless couple who wanted a boy to help on the farm.

1913: *Pollyanna* by Eleanor Porter, the climax (or the finishing blow) to the child-as-savior formula, was a popular adult novel, eighth among best sellers in 1913 and second in 1914.

1919: *High Benton* by William Heyliger. Steve Benson’s parents want him to go to high school, but his friends are getting jobs. Heyliger shows Steve’s next four years as he struggles between his ambitions and education. *High Benton, Worker* is the sequel.


children had any chance of a formal education in schools, however, the American Sunday School Union books were widely read and did much to advance the cause of literacy in America.

**Alcott and Alger**

Louisa May Alcott and Horatio Alger, Jr., were the first writers for young adults to gain national attention, but the similarity between the two ends almost as it begins. Alcott wrote of happy family life. Alger wrote about broken homes. Alcott’s novels were sometimes harsh but always honest. Alger’s novels were
were the first sympathetic and rich portraits of young protagonists from minority cultures.

1936: *Peggy Covers the News* by Emma Bugbee, a reporter for the *New York Times*, launched a deluge of career books for girls that included Helen Boylston’s books about nurse Sue Barton and Helen Wells’s books about nurse Cherry Ames and flight attendant Vicki Barr.

1937: *The Great Tradition* by Marjorie Hill Allee intrigued young adults with its mixture of romance, college life, and the spirit of research among five graduate students at the University of Chicago.

1937: *Bright Island* by Mabel Robinson is the story of spunky Thankful Curtis, who was raised on a small island off the coast of Maine and later attends school on the mainland.

1938: *Iron Duke* by John Tunis was the first of several popular books written by an amateur athlete and sports reporter. Other Tunis titles, some of which have been recently reprinted, include *All American* (1942), *Yea Wildcats* (1944), and *Go, Team, Go!* (1954).

1942: *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly is the story of shy and innocent Angie Morrow and her love for Jack Duluth during the summer between high school and college.

1942: *Adam of the Road* by Elizabeth Janet Gray reveals the color and music of the Middle Ages as young Adam Quartermain becomes a minstrel.

1943: *The Innocent Wayfarer* by Marchette Chute covers four days in June 1370 when Anne runs away from her convent school to join a band of strolling players.

1945: *Pray Love, Remember* by Mary Stolz is one of the earliest and one of the best of Stolz’s many quiet, introspective books; it is a remarkable story of Dody Jenks, a popular but cold young woman who likes neither her family nor herself.

1947: *The Divided Heart* and *A Cup of Courage* (1948) by Mina Lewiton were pioneering problem novels in being, respectively, an honest and groundbreaking study of the effects of divorce on a young woman and of alcoholism and its destruction of a family.

1950: *Swiftwater* by Paul Annixter (really Howard A. Sturzel) mixes animals, ecology, symbolism, and some stereotyped characters into a rousing tale that remains a better than respectable book.

1952: *Two and the Town* by Henry Gregor Felsen. A young girl is pregnant and a marriage is forced on two teenagers, something that at the time was taboo for YA books. Felsen is better known for *Hot Rod* (1950) and *Crash Club* (1958).

1957: *Ring Around Her Finger* and *The Limit of Love* (1959) by James Summers, were effective delineations of young people’s sexual feelings and actions told from the boys’ points of view. Critics feared readers were too young to handle such emotional intricacies.

1958: *The 23rd Street Crusaders* by John F. Carson. When Ed Sorrell’s son dies in a reformatory, Sorrell gives up his job coaching basketball. Later, he finds some boys on probation and talks them into becoming a basketball team.

1959: *Jennifer* by Zoa Sherburne is an enduring portrait of the effects of alcoholism, but it is not as good as Sherburne’s *Too Bad about the Haines Girl* (1967), a superb novel about teenage pregnancy that is honest and straightforward without being preachy.

The Ballad of Sir Dinadan by Gerald Morris. Houghton, 2003. Students who have enjoyed this lighthearted Arthurian tale about the younger brother of the famous Sir Tristram will have a head start when they get to college and read *The Faerie Queene*.


Book of a Thousand Days by Shannon Hale. Bloomsbury. 2007. In giving this retelling of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tale “Maid Maleen” a star, the School Library Journal reviewer praised it “as quite an improvement” over the original, especially in the way that Hale created its medieval and magical setting. Earlier Shannon Hale retellings that have been praised are *River Secrets* (2006), *The Goose Girl* (2003), and *Enna Burning* (2004), all from Bloomsbury.

Bound by Donna Jo Napoli. Simon & Schuster. 2004. This retelling of Cinderella is set in China where Xing Xing’s stepmother’s only concern is a good marriage for her daughter. Other Napoli retellings in which she creates fully developed characters include *Zel*, based on “Rapunzel”; *The Magic Circle*, which tells “Hansel and Gretel” from the witch’s viewpoint; and *Sirena*, about a siren who falls in love with a mortal.

Fairest by Gail Carson Levine. HarperCollins. 2006. The fairy-tale setting allows readers to come with fresh eyes to this exploration of inner versus outer beauty. Levine’s earlier retellings of fairy tales include *Ella Enchanted* and *Cinderella and the Glass Hill*.

Golden by Cameron Dokey. S & S/Pulse. 2006. Two beautiful girls, Rapunzel and Rue, have their lives irrevocably changed at birth, one because she’s bald and one because a wizard wants to teach her mother a lesson. Through a series of ins and outs worthy of the most complicated fairy tale, there is a happy ending.

The Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan. Hyperion/Miramax. 2005. The hero of this contemporary story, teenaged Perseus Jackson, is surprised to learn that he is the son of Poseidon and a mortal woman. He (along with readers)

She sent a manuscript to Niles, who thought parts of it dull, but other readers at the publisher’s office disagreed, and the first part of *Little Women: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. The Story of Their Lives. A Girl’s Book* was published September 30, 1868. With three illustrations and a frontispiece for $1.50 a copy, *Little Women* was favorably reviewed, and sales were good, here and in England. By early November 1868, Alcott had begun work on the second part, which was published on April 14, 1869.

*Little Women* has vitality and joy and real life devoid of the sentimentality common at the time, a wistful portrait of the life and world Alcott must have wished she could have lived. The Civil War background is subtle, expressing the loneliness and never-ending war far better than many adult war novels. *Little Women* has maintained steady popularity both with new readers and with adults who reread it (sometimes repeatedly) to gain a sense of where they were when they were children.

Horatio Alger, Jr., son of an unctuous Unitarian clergyman, graduated from Harvard at 18, and, in 1864, was ordained a Unitarian minister. He served a Brewster, Massachusetts, church, only to leave it two years later under a cloud of
is also surprised to learn how active the Greek gods are and that they have a job for him in Hades’s underworld, which he has to enter through Los Angeles.

**Not the End of the World** by Geraldine McCaughrean. HarperTempest, 2005. Both humans and animals get to offer their views in this 244-page retelling of Noah and his ark. Daughter Timna, who went against her father’s instructions and helped save a young boy and his baby sister from drowning, has the most to say. The book won the Whitbread Children’s Book Award in England. In her 1997 *The Silver Treasure: Myths and Legends of the World*, McCaughrean gives new life to Rip Van Winkle, King Arthur, and Sir Patrick Spens.

**Robin of Sherwood** by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Michael Foreman. Harcourt, 1996. The characters have the same names as in the classic tale, but they have distinguishing characteristics that make them quite different. The story starts with a contemporary boy’s finding Robin’s skull, fainting, and dreaming of Robin. The team also created *Arthur: High King of Britain* (Harcourt, 1995).

**Shadow Spinner** by Susan Fletcher. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 1998. A young crippled storyteller, Marjan, brings a new story to Queen Shaharazad, who has already been spinning stories for nearly 1,000 nights. Complications ensue when Marjan can’t remember the ending.

**Spider’s Voice** by Gloria Skurzynski. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 1999. Skurzynski retells the story of the twelfth-century French lovers Abelard and (H)Eloise through the voice of a fictional servant nicknamed Spider. The plot is as tangled as a spider’s web and the characters’ lives as easily dismantled.

**Undercover** by Beth Kephart. HarperFestival, 2007. In this beautifully written story, when Elisa’s English class reads *Cyrano d’Bergerac*, the self-effacing girl, who has been writing notes for boys to give to their girlfriends, realizes that she has fallen into playing a role she does not want.

**William Shakespeare’s Hamlet** retold by Bruce Coville, illustrated by Leonid Gore. Dial, 2004. Coville has kept a richness of language, along with all the “ghosts, murder, madness, and revenge,” of the original story, but at the same time has made the story accessible to young teens.


scandal and claims of sodomy, all hushed up at the time. He moved to New York City and began writing full time.

He sent a manuscript, *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York*, to Oliver Optic’s magazine, *Student and Schoolmate*, a popular goody-goody magazine. Optic recognized salable pap when he spotted it, and he bought Alger’s book for the January 1867 issue. Published in hardcover in 1867 or 1868, *Ragged Dick* was the first of many successes for Alger, and it is still his most readable work, probably because it was the first from a mold that soon became predictably moldy.

The plot, as in most Alger books, consisted of semiconnected episodes illustrating a boy’s first steps toward maturity, respectability, and affluence. Ragged Dick, a young bootblack, is grubby but not dirty, he smokes and gambles occasionally, but even the most casual reader recognizes his essential goodness. Through a series of increasingly difficult-to-believe chapters, Ragged Dick is transformed by the model of a young man and the trust of an older one into respectability. While this sequence of events is hard to believe, Alger soon makes events impossible to believe as he introduces the note that typified his later books. What pluck and hard work had brought to Dick is now cast aside as luck enters
in—a little boy falls overboard from a ferry, Dick saves the child, and a grateful father rewards Dick with new clothes and a better job. Some readers label Alger’s books “rags to riches” stories, but the hero rarely achieves riches, although at the close of the book he is a rung or two higher on the ladder of success than he has any reason to deserve. “Rags to respectability” is a more accurate statement about Alger’s work.

**The Two Most Popular Types of Novels: Domestic and Dime Novels**

In 1855, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote his publisher, bitterly lamenting the state of American literature:

> America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter*, and other books neither better nor worse?—worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 10,000?!

The trash was the domestic novel. Born out of the belief that humanity was redeemable, the domestic novel preached morality; woman’s submission to man; the value of cultural, social, and political conservatism; a religion of the heart and the Bible; and the glories of suffering.

Most domestic novels concerned a young girl, orphaned and placed in the home of a relative or some benefactor, who meets a darkly handsome young man with shadows from his past, a man not to be trusted but worth redeeming and converting. Domestic novels promised some adventure amid many moral lessons. The heroines differed more in names than characteristics. Uniformly submissive
to—yet distrustful of—their betters and men generally, they were self-sacrificing and self-denying beyond belief or common sense and interested in the primacy of the family and marriage as the goal of all decent women. Domestic novels were products of the religious sentiment of the time, the espousal of traditional virtues, and the anxieties and frustrations of women trying to find a role in a changing society.

Writing under the pen name of Elizabeth Wetherell, Susan Warner wrote more than twenty novels and the first domestic novel, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850). As much as forty years later, the novel was said to be one of the four most widely read books in the United States, along with the Bible, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. An abridged edition was published in England in 1950 by the University of London Press, and the Feminist Press republished Warner’s book in 1987.

The novel was rejected by several New York publishers. George Putnam was ready to return it but decided to ask his mother to read it. She did, she loved it, she urged her son to publish it, and the book was out in time for the Christmas trade. Sales slowly picked up, and the first edition sold out in four months. Translations into French, German, Swedish, and Italian followed, and by 1852, *The Wide, Wide World* was in its fourteenth printing.

The author’s life paralleled that of her heroine, Ellen Montgomery. Warner’s father was pathetically and persistently broke, and although the fictional world is not quite so ugly, Ellen’s mother died early, and her father was so consumed with family business that he asked Aunt Fortune Emerson to take over Ellen’s life. Ellen, to her aunt’s irritation, formed a firm friendship with the aunt’s intended. Ellen’s closest friend—the daughter of the local minister—was doomed to die soon and succeeded in doing just that. In the midst of life, tears flowed. When Ellen and her friends were not crying, they were cooking. Warner’s novel taught submission, the dangers of self-righteousness, and the virtues of a steadfast religion. Despite all the weeping, or maybe because of it, the book seemed to have been read by everyone of its time. E. Douglas Branch called it, “The greatest achievement of any of the lady novelists.”

Warner’s popularity was exceeded only by Augusta Jane Evans Wilson for her *St. Elmo* (1867). Probably no other novel so literally touched the American landscape—thirteen towns were named, or renamed, St. Elmo, as were hotels, railroad coaches, steamboats, one kind of punch, and a brand of cigars. The popularity of Wilson’s book may be gauged by a notice in a special edition of *St. Elmo* “limited to 100,000 copies.” Only *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had greater sales, and Wilson was more than once called by her admirers the American Brontë.

Ridiculously melodramatic as the plot of *St. Elmo* is, it was so beloved that men and women publicly testified that their lives had been permanently changed for the better by reading it. The plot concerns an orphaned girl befriended by a wealthy woman whose dissolute son is immediately enamored of the young woman, is rejected by her, leaves home for several years, returns to plead for her love, is again rejected, and eventually becomes a minister to win the young woman’s hand. They marry, another wicked man reformed by the power of a good woman.

While domestic novels took women by storm, dime novels performed almost the same miracle for men. They began when two brothers, Erastus and Irwin
Beadle, republished Ann S. Stephens’s *Malaeksa: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* in June 1860. The story of a hunter and his Indian wife in the Revolutionary War days in upper New York state may be as melodramatic as any domestic novel, but its emphasis is more on thrills and chills than tears, and it apparently satisfied and intrigued male readers. Indeed, 65,000 copies of the six- by four-inch book of 128 pages sold in almost record time. The most popular of the early dime novels, also set in the Revolutionary period, appeared in October 1860. *Seth Jones: or, The Captives of the Frontier* sold 60,000 copies the first day; at least 500,000 copies were sold in the United States alone, and it was translated into ten languages.

For several years, dime novels cost ten cents, ran about 100 pages in a seven-by five-inch format, and were aimed at adults. Some early genius of publishing discovered that many readers were boys who could hardly afford the dime cost. Thereafter, the novels dropped to a nickel, although the genre continued to be called the *dime novel*. The most popular dime novels were set in the West—the West of dime novels increasingly meant Colorado and points west—with wondrous he-men like Deadwood Dick and Diamond Dick. Dime novels developed other forms, such as mysteries and even early forms of science fiction, but none were so popular or so typical as the westerns.

Writers of dime novels never pretended to be writing great literature, but they did write satisfying thrills and chills for the masses. The books were filled with stock characters. Early issues of the *Library Journal*, from 1876 onward for another thirty years, illustrate how many librarians hated dime novels for their...
immorality; but in truth dime novels were moral. The Beadles sincerely believed that their books should represent sound moral values, and what the librarians objected to in dime novels was nothing more than the unrealistic melodramatic plots and the stereotyped characters, more typical of the time than of just the dime novel.

Development of the American Public Library

The development of the public library was as rocky and slow as it was inevitable. In 1731, Benjamin Franklin suggested that members of the Junto, a middle-class social and literary club in Philadelphia, share their books with other members. That led to the founding of the Philadelphia Library Company, America’s first subscription library. Other such libraries followed, most of them dedicated to moral purposes, as the constitution of the Salisbury, Connecticut, Social Library announced: “The promotion of Virtue, Education, and Learning, and . . . the discouragement of Vice and Immorality.”

In 1826, the governor of New York urged that school district libraries be established, in effect using school buildings for public libraries. Similar libraries were established in New England by the 1840s and in the Midwest shortly thereafter. Eventually, mayors and governors saw the wisdom of levying state taxes to support public libraries in their own building, not the schools, and by 1863, there were 1,000 public libraries spread across the United States. In 1876, Melvil Dewey, then assistant librarian in the Amherst College Library, was largely responsible for an October 4, 1876, conference of librarians that formed the American Library Association and created the first professional journal for librarians. The American Library Journal appeared that year, but soon changed its name to the Library Journal. While there had been an abortive meeting in 1853, the 1876 meeting promised continuity that the earlier meeting had lacked.

In 1884, Columbia College established the first school of Library Economy (later to be called Library Science) under Melvil Dewey’s leadership. These early public libraries grew immeasurably under the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant who donated millions of dollars for the creation of public libraries across the United States.

Fiction and Libraries

The growth of public libraries presented opportunities for pleasure and education of the masses, but arguments about the purposes of the public library arose almost as fast as the buildings. William Poole listed three common objections to the public library in the October 1876 American Library Journal: the normal dread of taxes; the more philosophical belief that government had no rights except to protect people and property—that is, no right to tax anyone to build and stock a public library; and concern over the kinds of books libraries might buy and circulate. The controversy of whether a public library is established for scholars or for the pleasure of the masses raged for years. Poole believed that a library existed for the entire community, or else there was no justification for a
general tax. Others argued that the library’s sole raison d’être was educational. Waving the banner of American purity, W. M. Stevenson maintained:

If the public library is not first and foremost an educational institution, it has no right to exist. If it exists for mere pleasure, and for a low order of entertainment at that, it is simply a socialistic institution.6

Many librarians of the time agreed. Probably, a few agree even today. The problem lay almost entirely with fiction. Indeed, the second session of the 1876 American Library Association meeting was devoted to “Novel Reading,” especially by young people. A librarian announced that he permitted no fiction in his library. His factory-patrons might ask for novels, but he recommended other books and was able to keep patrons without supplying novels. To laughter, he said that he had never read novels so he “could not say what their effect really was.”7

Teachers worried almost as much as librarians. A principal of a large endowed academy was approvingly quoted by a librarian for having said,

The voracious devouring of fiction commonly indulged in by patrons of the public library, especially the young, is extremely pernicious and mentally unwholesome.8 That attitude persisted for years and is occasionally heard even today among teachers and librarians.

1900–1940: From the Safety of Romance to the Beginning of Realism

During the first forty years of the twentieth century, the western frontier disappeared, and the United States changed from an agrarian society to an urban one. World War I brought the certainty that it would end all wars. The labor movement grew along with Ford’s production lines of cars, cars, cars. President Hoover came along, then the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. By 1938, three million young people from age 16 through 25 were out of school and unemployed, and a quarter of a million boys were on the road. Nazi Germany rose in Eastern Europe, and in the United States, Roosevelt introduced the “New Deal.” When the end of the Depression seemed almost in sight, the New York World’s Fair of 1939 became an optimistic metaphor for the coming of a newer, better, happier, and more secure life. But World War II lay just over the horizon, apparent to some, ignored by most.

Reading Interests versus Reading Needs

In the high schools, which enrolled only a tiny fraction of eligible students in the United States, teachers faced pressure from colleges to prepare the young for advanced study, which influenced many adults to be more intent on telling young people what to read than in finding out what they wanted to read. Recreational reading seemed vaguely time-wasting, if not downright wicked. Young people nevertheless found and read books, mainly fiction, for recreation. Popular choices were
series books from Stratemeyer’s Literary Syndicate, including Tom Swift, Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Baseball Joe, and Ruth Fielding. Non-Stratemeyer series books were also popular, as were individual books written specifically for young adults, along with some classics and best sellers selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club when it began in 1926 and the Literary Guild when it began a year later.

Arguments over what students choose to read have raged for years, and the end is unlikely to come soon. In 1926, when Carleton Washburne and Mabel Vogel put together the lengthy Winnetka Graded Book List, they explained, “Books that were definitely trashy or unsuitable for children, even though widely read, have not been included in this list.” Apparently enough people were curious about the trashy or unsuitable to lead the authors to add two supplements. Elsie Dinsmore was among the damned, and so were Edgar Rice Burroughs’s Tarzan of the Apes, Eleanor Porter’s Pollyanna, Zane Grey’s westerns, books from the Ruth Fielding and Tom Swift series, Mark Twain’s Tom Sawyer Abroad, and Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Hound of the Baskervilles. The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, however, was considered worthy of inclusion.

Representative of the other side of the argument is this statement by English professor William Lyon Phelps:

I do not believe the majority of these very school teachers and other cultivated mature readers began in early youth by reading great books exclusively; I think they read Jack Harkaway, an Old Sleuth, and the works of Oliver Optic and Horatio Alger. From these enchanters they learned a thing of tremendous importance—the delight of reading. Once a taste for reading is formed, it can be improved. But it is improbable that boys and girls who have never cared to read a good story will later enjoy stories by good artists.

**Girls’ Books and Boys’ Books**

Up to the mid-1930s, teachers and librarians frequently commented that girls’ books were inferior to boys’ books. Franklin T. Baker wrote that with the obvious exception of Alcott, girls’ books of 1908 were “painfully weak” and lacking “invention, action, humor.” Two years later, Clara Whitehill Hunt agreed that many girls’ books were empty, insipid, and mediocre. In 1935, Julia Carter broke into a review of boys’ nonfiction with what appeared to be an exasperated obiter dictum:

William someone please tell me why we expect the boys to know these things and still plan for the girls to be mid-Victorian, and consider them hoydens beyond reclaiming, when instead of shrieking and running like true daughters of Eve, they are interested in snakes and can light a fire with two matches?

Such writers as Caroline Dale Snedeker, Cornelia Meigs, Jeanette Eaton, Mabel Robinson, and Elizabeth Forman Lewis responded to these kinds of criticism by writing enough good girls’ books that in 1937 Alice M. Jordan wrote as if the difference in quality was a thing of the past:

There was a time not long ago when the boys had the lion’s share in the yearly production of books intended for young people. So writers were urged to give us more
stories in which girls could see themselves in recognizable relationship to the world of their own time, forgetting perhaps that human nature does not change and the vital things are universal. Yet, nonetheless, the girls had a real cause to plead and right valiantly the writers have responded.\textsuperscript{15}

Critics believed then, as they continued to insist for years, that girls would read boys’ books, but boys would never read girls’ books. At least part of the problem lay with stereotypes of boys’ and girls’ roles as expressed by two writers. Clara Vostrovsky, author of the first significant reading interest study, went back to ancient times for her stereotypes, suggesting that it was “probable” that the differences in reading interests between boys and girls lay “in the history of the race.”\textsuperscript{16} Psychologist G. Stanley Hall predicted reading interests of girls and boys on psychological differences:

Boys love adventure, girls sentiment. . . . Girls love to read stories about girls which boys eschew, girls, however, caring much more to read about boys than boys to read about girls. Books dealing with domestic life and with young children in them, girls have almost entirely to themselves. Boys, on the other hand, excel in love of humor, rollicking fun, abandon, rough horse-play, and tales of wild escapades. Girls are less averse to reading what boys like than boys are to reading what girls like. A book popular with boys would attract some girls, while one read by most girls would repel a boy in the middle teens. The reading interests of high-school girls are far more humanistic, cultural and general, and that of boys is more practical, vocational, and even special.\textsuperscript{17}

The simple truth, perhaps too obvious and discomforting to be palatable to some parents, English teachers, and librarians, was that boys’ books were generally far superior to girls’ books. That had nothing to do with the sexual or psychological nature of boys or girls but rather with the way authors treated their audience.

**The Changing English Classroom**

By 1900, some librarians were helping young adults find a variety of materials they liked; however, this was rarely true of English teachers saddled as they were with responsibility for preparing young adults for college entrance examinations. At first, these examinations simply required some proof of writing proficiency, but in 1860 and 1870, Harvard began using Milton’s *Comus* and Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* as alternative books for the examination. Four years later, Harvard required a short composition based on a question about one of the following: Shakespeare’s *The Tempest, Julius Caesar, and The Merchant of Venice*, Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*, or Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

In 1894, the prestigious Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies presented its report making English an accepted discipline in the schools, although not yet as respectable as Latin. The committee had been appointed by the National Education Association and was chaired by the controversial Harvard president Charles W. Eliot. It was charged with determining the nature, limits, and
In the decades before the 1929 stock market crash, U.S. high schools developed in their present form, including the establishment of athletic teams as a way of “bribing” boys into reading and writing. Shown here is the 1917 Tempe Public Schools baseball team.

(Photo courtesy of the Tempe Historical Museum)

methods appropriate to many subject matters in secondary school. Samuel Thurber of the Boston Girls’ High School tried unsuccessfully to promote his belief that a high school curriculum should consist almost entirely of elective courses. However, two adopted recommendations liberalized and dignified the study of English by saying that English should be studied for five hours a week during all four years of high school and that uniform college entrance examinations should be established throughout the United States.

The result was the publication of book lists dictating such classics as Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, Milton’s Books I and II from *Paradise Lost*, Scott’s *The Abbot* and *Marmion*, and Irving’s *Bracebridge Hall* be used as the basis for college entrance exams. Teachers, inevitably concerned with their students’ entry into college, increasingly adapted their classroom reading to fit the list.

**National Council of Teachers of English Begins**

Out of the growing protest about college entrance examinations, a group of English teachers attending a national Education Association meeting formed a Committee on College Entrance Requirements in English to assess the problem through a national survey of English teachers. The committee uncovered hostility to colleges presumptuous enough to try to control the secondary English curriculum through the guise of entrance examinations. John M. Coulter, a professor
at the University of Chicago, tried to sound that alarm to college professors but without much success:

The high school exists primarily for its own sake; and secondarily as a preparatory school for college. This means that when the high school interest and the college interest comes into conflict, the college interest must yield. It also means that the function of a preparatory school must be performed only in so far as it does not interfere with the more fundamental purpose of the high school itself.\textsuperscript{18}

Some irate teachers recognized that the problem of college control would hardly be the last issue to face English teachers and formed the nucleus of the National Council of Teachers of English. The First Annual Meeting in Chicago on December 1 and 2, 1911, was largely devoted to expressing resentment about actions of the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements, particularly because that body had representatives from twelve colleges, two academies, and only two public high schools (principals, not English teachers). Wilbur W. Hatfield, then at Farragut High School in Chicago and soon to edit the \textit{English Journal}, relayed instructions from the Illinois Association of Teachers of English that the new organization should compile a list of comparatively recent books suitable for home reading by students and that they should also recommend some books of the last ten years for study because the “present custom of using only old books in the classroom leaves the pupil with no acquaintance with the literature of the present day,” from which students would choose their reading after graduation.\textsuperscript{19}

James Fleming Hosic’s 1917 report on the Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools, part of a larger report published under the aegis of the U.S. Bureau of Education, looked at books and teaching in ways that must have seemed muddle-headed or perverse to traditionalists. Hosic chose works that pleased many, puzzled others, and alienated some. He explained that English teachers should lead students to read works in which they would “find their own lives imaged in this larger life,” and would gradually attain from the author’s “clearer appreciation of human nature, a deeper and truer understanding. . . . It should be the aim of the English teacher to make [reading] an unfailing resource and joy in the lives of all.”\textsuperscript{20} Hosic’s list included classics as well as modern works, such as Helen Hunt Jackson’s \textit{Ramona} and Owen Wister’s \textit{The Virginian} for the tenth grade, Rudyard Kipling’s \textit{The Light That Failed} and Mary Johnston’s \textit{To Have and To Hold} for the eleventh grade, and John Synge’s \textit{Riders to the Sea} and Margaret Deland’s \textit{The Awakening of Helena Richie} for the twelfth grade. Teachers terrified by the contemporary reality reflected in these books—and perhaps equally terrified by the possibility of throwing out age-old lesson plans and tests on classics—had little to fear. In many schools, nothing changed. \textit{Silas Marner}, \textit{Julius Caesar}, \textit{Idylls of the King}, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, and \textit{Lady of the Lake} remained the most widely studied books. Most books were taught at interminable length in what was known as the “intensive” method with four to six weeks—sometimes even more—of detailed examination, while horrified or bored students vowed never to read anything once they escaped high school.

A 1927 study by Nancy Coryell offered proof that the “intensive” method produced no better test results and considerably more apathy toward literature
than the “extensive” method in which students read assigned works faster.21 Again, however, little changed. But fortunately the work of two college professors influenced more English teachers. A 1936 study by Lou LaBrant on the value of free reading at the Ohio State University Laboratory School revealed that students with easy access to different kinds of books and some guidance read more, enjoyed what they read, and moved upward in literary sophistication and taste.22

Earlier, University of Minnesota professor Dora V. Smith discovered that English teachers knew next to nothing about books written for adolescents. She began the long process of correcting that situation by establishing the first course in adolescent literature. She argued that it was unfair to both young people and their teachers “to send out from our colleges and universities men and women trained alone in Chaucer and Milton and Browning to compete with Zane Grey, Robert W. Chambers, and Ethel M. Dell.”23

School Libraries

The development of the school library was almost as slow and convoluted as the development of the public library. In 1823, Brooklyn’s Apprentice Library Association established a Youth Library where boys and girls over twelve were allowed . . . but with their access limited to one hour an afternoon, once a week. In 1853, Milwaukee School Commissioner Increase A. Lapham provided for a library open Saturday afternoons and recommended that schools spend $10 a year for books. Rules for the Milwaukee library were clear and more than a bit reminiscent of rules in some school and public libraries until the 1940s:

1. Only children over ten years old, their parents, teachers, and school commissioner could withdraw books;
2. books might be withdrawn between 2:00 PM and sunset on Saturdays and kept for one week;
3. withdrawals were limited to one book per person; and
4. fines were to be assessed for overdue or damaged books.24

Writers in the early years of the Library Journal encouraged the cultivation of friendly relations between “co-educators.”25 The National Education Association formed a Committee on Relations of Public Libraries to Public Schools, and its 1899 report announced that “The teachers of a town should know the public library, what it contains, and what use the pupils can make of it. The librarian must know the school, its work, its needs, and what he can do to meet them.”26

A persistent question was whether schools should depend on the public library or establish their own libraries. In 1896, Melvil Dewey recommended to the National Education Association that it form a library department (as it had for other subject disciplines) because the library was as much a part of the educational system as the classroom. In 1912, Mary E. Hall, librarian at Girls’ High School in Brooklyn, argued the need for many more professionally trained librarians in high school libraries. She wrote that it was a pretense to organize high schools around the idea of preparing students for college, when “for the great majority of pupils it must be a preparation for life.” Her other point was that
school librarians were in the best position to offer not only reading guidance for students but also to provide teachers with “magazines, daily papers, pictures, and lantern slides to supplement the textbook.”

In 1916, C. C. Certain, as head of National Education Association committee, began standardizing high school libraries across the United States. He discovered conditions so mixed, from deplorable (mostly) to good (rarely) that his committee set to work to establish minimum essentials for high schools of various sizes. A 1923 study by the U.S. Office of Education found only 947 school libraries with more than 3,000 volumes, and these were mostly in the northeastern part of the United States. Six years later, 1,982 school libraries had holdings of more than 3,000 volumes, and the libraries were more equally spread over the country with New York having 211 such libraries and California having 191. However, the steady growth of high school libraries slowed drastically during the Depression.

**Edward Stratemeyer’s Literary Syndicate**

The Boston publishing firm of Lee and Shepard established the format for young adult series, and to the distress of teachers, librarians, and parents, series books became the method of publishing for many young adult novels. If sales were any index, readers delighted in Lee and Shepard’s 440 authors and 900 books published in 1887 alone. However, the format became far more sophisticated a few years later when Edward Stratemeyer became the king of series books.

Whatever disagreements librarians and English teachers may have had about books suitable for young adults, they bonded together, although ineffectively, to oppose the books produced by Edward Stratemeyer and his numerous writers. Stratemeyer founded the most successful industry ever built around adolescent reading. In 1866, he took time off from working for his stepbrother and wrote on brown wrapping paper an 18,000-word serial, *Victor Horton’s Idea*, and mailed it to a Philadelphia weekly boys’ magazine. A check for $75 arrived shortly, and Stratemeyer’s success story was under way. By 1893, Stratemeyer was editing *Good News*, Street and Smith’s boys’ weekly, building circulation to more than 200,000. This brought his name in front of the public, particularly young adults. Even more important, he came to know staff writers such as William T. Adams, Edward S. Ellis, and Horatio Alger, Jr. When Optic and Alger died, leaving some uncompleted manuscripts, Stratemeyer was asked to finish the last three Optic novels, and he completed (or possibly wrote from scratch) at least eleven and perhaps as many as eighteen novels published under Horatio Alger’s name.

His first hardback book published under his own name was *Richard Dare’s Venture; or, Striking Out for Himself* (1894), first in a series he titled Bound to Succeed. By the close of 1897, Stratemeyer had six series and sixteen hardcover books in print. A major breakthrough came in 1898. After Stratemeyer sent a manuscript about two boys on a battleship to Lothrop and Shepard, one of the most successful publishers of young adult fiction, Admiral Dewey won his great victory in Manila Bay. A Lothrop editor asked Stratemeyer to place the boys at the scene of Dewey’s victory. He rewrote and returned the book, and *Under
Dewey at Manila; or, The War Fortunes of a Castaway hit the streets in time to capitalize on all the publicity. Not one to miss an opportunity, Stratemeyer used the same characters in his next books, all published from 1898 to 1901 under the series title Old Glory. Using the same characters in contemporary battles in the Orient, Stratemeyer created another series called Soldiers of Fortune, published from 1900 through 1906.

By this time, Stratemeyer had turned to full-time writing and was being wooed by the major publishers, notably Grossett and Dunlap and Cupples and Leon. For a time he turned to stories of school life and sports, the Lakeport series (1904–1912), the Dave Porter series (1905–1919), and the most successful of his early series, the Rover Boys (thirty books published between 1899 and 1926). These books were so popular that somewhere between five or six million copies were sold worldwide, including translations into German and Czechoslovakian.

Stratemeyer aspired to greater things, however. Between 1906 and 1910, he approached both his publishers, suggesting they reduce the price of his books to fifty cents. The publishers may have been shocked to find an author willing to sell his books for less money, but, as they soon realized, mass production of fifty-centers increased their revenue and Stratemeyer’s royalties almost exponentially. An even greater breakthrough came at roughly the same time, when he evolved the idea of his Literary Syndicate. Stratemeyer was aware that he could create plots and series faster than he could possibly write them. He advertised for writers who needed money and sent them sketches of settings and characters along with a chapter-by-chapter outline of the plot. Writers had a few weeks to fill in the outlines, and when the copy arrived, Stratemeyer tightened the prose and checked for discrepancies with earlier volumes of the series. Then the manuscript was off to the publisher and checks went out to the authors, from $50 to $100, depending on the writer and the importance of the series.

Attacks on Stratemeyer were soon in coming. Librarian Caroline M. Hewins criticized both Stratemeyer’s book and the journals that praised his output:

Stratemeyer is an author who misuses “would” and “should,” has the phraseology of a country newspaper, as when he calls a supper “an elegant affair” and a girl “a fashionable miss,” and follows Oliver Optic closely in his plots and conversations.28

Most librarians supported Hewins, but their attacks hardly affected Stratemeyer’s sales. A far more stinging and effective attack came in 1913 from the Boy Scouts of America. Chief executive James E. West was disturbed by the deluge of inferior books and urged the organization’s Library Commission to establish a carefully selected and recommended library to protect young men. Not long afterward, Chief Scout Librarian Franklin K. Mathews urged Grosset and Dunlap to make better books available in fifty-cent editions—to compete with Stratemeyer—and on November 1, 1913, the first list appeared in a Boy Scout publication, “Safety First Week.”

But that was not enough to satisfy Mathews, who in 1914 wrote his most famous article under the sensational title “Blowing Out the Boy’s Brains,”29 a loud and vituperative attack, sometimes accurate but often unfair. Mathews’s attack was mildly successful for the moment, although how much harm it did to
Stratemeyer’s sales is open to question. Stratemeyer went on to sell more millions of books. When he died in 1930, his two daughters ran the syndicate.

Series books were inevitably moral. Whatever parents, teachers, or librarians might have objected to about the unrealistic elements of the books or the poor literary quality, they would have agreed that the books were clearly on the side of good and right, if simplistically so. Series books—and many adult books as well—repeatedly underlined the same themes. Sports produced truly manly men. Foreigners were not to be trusted. School, education, and life should be taken seriously. The outdoor life was healthy, physically and psychologically. Good manners and courtesy were essential for moving ahead. Work in and of itself was a positive good and would advance one in life. Anyone could defeat adversity, any adversity, if that person had a good heart and soul. The good side (ours and God’s) always won in war. Evil and good were clearly and easily distinguishable. And good always triumphed over evil (at least by the final chapter).

The Coming of the “Junior” or “Juvenile” Novel

Although for years countless books had been published and widely read by young adults, the term junior or juvenile was first applied in 1933 to Let the Hurricane Roar by Rose Wilder Lane. Lane was a journalist and the daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder. She is now known to have given her mother considerable help in the writing of the Little House on the Prairie books published between 1932 and 1965. Her novel Let the Hurricane Roar had been marketed by Longmans, Green, and Company as an adult novel. A full-page blurb on the front cover of the February 11, 1933, Publishers Weekly bannered THE BOOK THAT MAKES YOU PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN! and quoted an unnamed reader, presumably an adult, saying, “Honestly, it makes me ashamed of cussing about hard times and taxes.”

The tenor of the ad and ones to follow suggest an adult novel likely to be popular with young adults as well. It had been the same with the earlier serialization of the novel in the Saturday Evening Post and also with many favorable reviews. Sometime later in 1933, Longmans, Green began to push the novel as the first of their series of “Junior Books,” as they termed them.

That the company wanted to attract young adults to Lane’s novel is not difficult to understand. Lane wrote of a threatening frontier world in a compelling manner certain to win readers and admirers among young adults. Let the Hurricane Roar tells of newly married David and Molly and their life on the hard Dakota plains. David works as a railroad hand for a time, Molly waits for her baby to arrive, and both strive for independence and the security of owning their own fifty-acre homestead. When they realize that dream and the baby is born, all looks well, but David overextends his credit, grasshoppers destroy the wheat crop, and no nearby employment can be found. David heads east to find work and later breaks his leg, leaving Molly isolated on the Dakota plains for a winter. Neighbors flee the area, and Molly battles loneliness, blizzards, and wolves before David returns. In summary, Let the Hurricane Roar sounds melodramatic, but it is not. In a short, quiet, and loving work, Lane made readers care about two likable young adults living a tough life in a hostile environment. The book’s popularity is attested to by its twenty-six printings between 1933 and 1958 and a recent television production and reissue in paperback under the title Young Pioneers.
The development of publishing house divisions to handle books lying in limbo between children’s and adults’ books grew after *Let the Hurricane Roar*, although authors of the time were sometimes unaware of the “junior” or “juvenile” branches as was John T. Tunis when he tried to market *Iron Duke* in 1934 and 1935. After sending the manuscript to Harcourt, Tunis was invited into the president’s office. Mr. Harcourt clearly did not want to talk about the book but instead took the startled author directly to the head of the Juvenile Department. He explained that Harcourt wanted to publish the book as a juvenile, much to Tunis’s bewilderment and dismay, since he had no idea what a “juvenile” book was. Thirty years later, he still had no respect for the term, which he called the “odious product of a merchandising age.”

1940–1960: From Certainty to Uncertainty

During the 1940s, the United States moved from the Depression into a wartime and then a postwar economy. World War II caused us to move from hatred of Communism to a temporary brotherhood, followed by Yalta, the Iron Curtain, blacklisting, and Senator McCarthy. We went from “Li’l Abner” to “Pogo” and from Bob Hope to Mort Sahl. Problems of the time included school integration, racial unrest, civil rights, and riots in the streets. We were united about World War II, unsure about the Korean War, and divided about Vietnam. The twenty years between 1940 and 1960 revealed a country separated by gaps of all kinds: generational, racial, technological, cultural, and economic.

Educators were as divided as anyone else. Reading interest studies had become fixtures in educational journals, but there was little agreement about the results. In 1946, George W. Norvell wrote, “Our data shows clearly that much literary material being used in our schools is too mature, too subtle, too erudite to permit its enjoyment by the majority of secondary-school pupils.” Norvell offered the advice that teachers should give priority to the reading interests of young adults in assigning materials that students would enjoy and in letting students select a portion of their own materials based on their individual interests. He thought that three-fourths of the selections currently in use were uninteresting, especially to boys, and that “to increase reading skill, promote the reading habit, and produce a generation of book-lovers, there is no factor so powerful as interest.”

Other researchers supported Norvell’s contention that young adults’ choices of voluntary reading rarely overlapped books widely respected by more traditional English teachers. In 1947, Marie Rankin surveyed eight public libraries in Illinois, Ohio, and New York and discovered that Helen Boylston’s *Sue Barton, Student Nurse* was the most consistently popular book. Twelve years later, Stephen Dunning surveyed fourteen school and public libraries and concluded that the ten most popular books were Maureen Daly’s *Seventeenth Summer*, Henry Gregor Felsen’s *Hot Rod*, Betty Cavanna’s *Going on Sixteen*, Rosamund Du Jardin’s *Double Date*, Walter Farley’s *Black Stallion*, Sally Benson’s *Junior*
Miss, Mary Stolz’s *The Sea Gulls Woke Me*, Rosamund Du Jardin’s *Wait for Marcy*, James Summers’s *Prom Trouble*, and John Tunis’s *All American*. Near the height of the outpouring of published studies, Jacob W. Getzels assessed the value of reading interest surveys and found most of them wanting in “precision of definition, rigor of theory, and depth of analysis.” He was, of course, right. Most reports were limited to a small sample from a few schools, and little was done except to ask students what they liked to read. The studies at least gave librarians and teachers insight into books young adults liked and brought hope that somewhere out there somebody was reading—a hope that for librarians and teachers needs constant rekindling.

In the mid-1950s, G. Robert Carlsen summarized the findings of published reading interest surveys as showing that young people select their reading first to reassure themselves about their normality and their status as human beings and then for role playing:

> With the developing of their personality through adolescence, they come to a partially integrated picture of themselves as human beings. They want to test this picture of themselves in the many kinds of roles that it is possible for a human being to play and through testing to see what roles they may fit into and what roles are uncongenial.

Carlsen’s observations tied in with those of University of Chicago psychologist Robert J. Havighurst, who outlined the developmental tasks necessary for the healthy growth of individuals. (See Chapter 1, p. 36, for the tasks that Havighurst thought crucial to adolescence.)

An outgrowth of the tying together of reading interests and psychology was an interest in *bibliotherapy*, a term coined in 1929 by Dr. G. O. Ireland, who wrote about using books as part of his treatment for psychiatric patients. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, articles about bibliotherapy became almost commonplace in education journals, and by the 1950s, the idea of using books to help readers come to terms with their psychological problems was firmly entrenched. Philosophically, it was justified by Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the theory of emotional release through catharsis, a theory with little support except for unverifiable personal testimonials.

One clear and easy application of bibliotherapy was the free reading program (sometimes too clear and too easy for the inept psychologist/English teacher who, finding a new book in which the protagonist had acne, sought the acne-ridden kid in class and handed over the book saying, “You must read this—it’s about you!”). Lou LaBrant, popularizer of free reading, sounded both a recommendation and a warning when she wrote:

> Certainly I can make a much wiser selection of offerings if I understand the potential reader . . . [but] [t]his does not mean, as some have interpreted, that a young reader will enjoy only literature which answers his questions, tells him what is to be done. It is true, however, that young and old tend to choose literature, whether they seek solutions or escape, which offers characters or situations with which they can find a degree of identification.
Rise of Paperbacks

Young adult readers might assume paperbound books have always been with us. Despite the success of dime novels and libraries of paperbacks in the late 1800s, paperbacks as we know them entered the mass market in 1938 when Pocket Books offered Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* as a sample volume in mail-order tests. In the spring of 1939, a staff artist created the first sketch of Gertrude the Kangaroo with a book in her paws and another in her pouch. It became Pocket Books’ trademark. A few months later, the company issued ten titles in 10,000-copy editions, most of them remaining best sellers for years. Avon began publishing in 1941; Penguin entered the U.S. market in 1942; and Bantam, New American Library, Ballantine, Dell, and Popular Library began publishing in 1943. By 1951, sales had reached 230 million paperbacks annually. Phenomenal as the growth was, paperbacks were slow to appear in schools despite an incredible number of titles on appropriate subjects. Librarians complained that paperbacks did not belong in libraries because they were difficult to catalog and easy to steal. School officials maintained that the covers were lurid and the contents little more than pornography. As late as 1969, a New York City high school junior explained, “I’d rather be caught with *Lady Chatterley* in hardcover than *Hot Rod* in paperback. Hard covers get you one detention, but paperbacks get you two or three.”

Regardless of “official” attitudes, by the mid-1960s paperbacks had become a part of young adults’ lives. They are easily available, comfortably sized, and inexpensive. Fortunately, not all school personnel were resistant. The creation of Scholastic Book Clubs and widespread distribution of Reader’s Choice Catalogs helped paperbacks get accepted in schools and libraries. Eventually, Bantam and Dell’s Yearling books became the major suppliers of books written specifically for young adults.

Changes and Growth in Young Adult Literature

Through the 1940s and 1950s, the quality of young adult literature rose steadily, if at times hesitatingly and uncertainly. Series books, so popular from 1900 to the 1940s, died out—except for Stratemeyer Syndicate stalwarts Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and the new Tom Swift, Jr., series. They were killed by increasing reader sophistication combined with the wartime scarcity of paper. Many of the books that replaced the series celebrated those wonderful high school years by focusing on dating, parties, class rings, senior year, the popular crowd, and teen romances devoid of realities such as sex. The books often sounded alike and read alike, but they were unquestionably popular.

Plots were usually simple, with only one or two characters being developed, while others were stock figures or stereotypes. Books dealt almost exclusively with white, middle-class values and morality. The endings were almost uniformly happy and bright, and readers could be certain that neither their morality nor their intelligence would be challenged.

Taboos may never have been written down, but they were clear to readers and writers. Certain things were not to be mentioned—obscenity, profanity, suicide, sexuality, sensuality, homosexuality, protests against anything significant,
social or racial injustice, or the ambivalent feelings of cruelty and compassion inherent in young adults and all people. Pregnancy, early marriage, drugs, smoking, alcohol, school dropouts, divorce, and alienation could be introduced only by implication and only as bad examples for thoughtful, decent young adults. Consequently, young adult books were often innocuous and pervaded by a saccharine didacticism.

Despite these unwritten rules, some writers transcended the taboos and limitations and made it possible for Stanley B. Kegler and Stephen Dunning to write in 1961, “Books of acceptable quality have largely replaced poorly written and mediocre books.”

**Adult Books That Set the Stage for Contemporary YA Novels**

Perhaps as a reaction to the realities of war, the most popular series of books for both adults and teenagers during the 1950s and on into the 1960s centered around the fascinating James Bond, Agent 007. Ian Fleming caught the mood of the time with escapist excitement tinted with what appeared to be realities. Kathleen Winsor was also one of a kind, although what one and what kind was widely debated. When her *Forever Amber* (1944) appeared, parents worried, censors paled, and young adults smiled as they ignored the fuss and read the book. The uproar was much the same as that awaiting Grace Metalious and *Peyton Place* when it appeared in 1956. Well-written romances include Margaret E. Bell’s Alaskan story *Love Is Forever* (1954), Vivian Breck’s superior study of young marriage in *Maggie* (1954), and Benedict and Nancy Freedom’s *Mrs. Mike*, set in the northern Canadian wilderness. Elizabeth Goudge’s *Green Dolphin Street* (1944) had everything working for it—a young handsome man in love with one of two sisters. When he leaves and writes home expressing his wishes, the wrong sister accepts. The true love, apparently overwhelmed by his unfaithfulness, becomes a nun. Passion, love, and adventure are all handled well by a first-rate writer.

Young readers, especially in the last year or two of high school, have often been receptive to books about human dilemmas. Between 1940 and 1960, society changed rapidly and drastically with deeply disturbing consequences. There was a growing awareness that the democracy described in our Constitution was more preached than practiced. As the censorship applied to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937) lessened—although it never entirely disappeared—young people read of the plight of migrant workers and learned that all was not well. Many were deeply disturbed by Alan Paton’s stories of racial struggles in South Africa, *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948) and *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953). Still more were touched by Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) set in the U.S. South.

Richard Wright and his books *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945) served as bitter prototypes for much African American literature. One of the greatest novels of any kind in the last fifty years is Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952). Existential in tone, it is at different times bawdy (the incest scenes remind readers of Faulkner without being derivative), moving, and frightening, but always stunning and breathtaking.
The development from this period that has had the most direct effect on young adult literature was the popularization of the *bildungsroman*, a novel about the initiation, maturation, and education of a young adult. Most *bildungsroman* were originally published for adults but soon read by teenagers. Dan Wickenden’s *Walk Like a Mortal* (1940) and Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) were among the first. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1955) is better known, but none of these books won young adult favor or adult opposition as did J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). It is still the most widely censored book in U.S. schools and still hated by people who assume that a disliked word (that word) corrupts an entire book. Holden Caulfield may indeed be vulgar and cynical and capable of seeing only the phonies around him, but he is also loyal and loving to those he sees as good or innocent. For many young adults, it is the most honest and human story they know about someone they recognize (even in themselves)—a young man caught between childhood and maturity and unsure which way to go. Whether *Catcher* is a masterpiece similar to James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* depends on subjective judgment, but there is no question that Salinger’s book captured—and continues to capture—the hearts and minds of countless young adults as has no other book.

Nonfiction was not yet as popular as it would become, but Jim Piersall’s *Fear Strikes Out* (1955) and Roy Campanella’s *It’s Good to Be Alive* (1959) attracted young readers. Popular true stories about battles and survivors included Richard Tregaskis’s *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), Ernie Pyle’s *Here Is Your War* (1943) and *Brave Men* (1944), Robert Trumbull’s *The Raft* (1942), and Quentin Reynold’s *70,000 to One* (1946).

**Rise of Criticism of Young Adult Literature**

Today we take criticism of young adult literature as discussed in Chapter 10 for granted, but it developed slowly. In the 1940s, journals provided little information on, and less criticism of, young adult literature except for book lists, book reviews, and occasional references in articles on reading interests or improving young people’s literary taste. The comments that did appear were often more appreciative than critical, but given the times and the attitude of many teachers and librarians, appreciation or even recognition may have been more important than criticism.

In 1951, Dwight L. Burton wrote the first criticism of young adult novels, injecting judgments along with appreciation as he commented on works by Dan Wickenden, Maureen Daly, Paul Annixter, Betty Cavanna, and Madeleine L’Engle. Concluding his article, Burton identified the qualities of the good young adult novel and prophesied its potential and future:

The good novel for the adolescent reader has attributes no different from any good novel. It must be technically masterful, and it must present a significant synthesis of human experience. Because of the nature of adolescence itself, the good novel for the adolescent should be full in true invention and imagination. It must free itself of Pollyannism or the Tarkington–Henry Aldrich–Corliss Archer tradition and
These “good girls” of the 1950s, waiting here to shake President Eisenhower’s hand at Girls’ Nation, were more likely to be reading fiction published in women’s magazines and such books as Mrs. Mike, Forever Amber, and Peyton Place than books published specifically for teenagers.

maintain a clear vision of the adolescent as a person of complexity, individuality, and dignity. The novel for the adolescent presents a ready field for the mature artist.40

In 1955, Richard S. Alm provided greater critical coverage of the young adult novel.41 He agreed with critics that many writers presented a “sugar-puff story of what adolescents should do and should believe rather than what adolescents may or will do and believe.” He cited specific authors and titles he found good and painted their strengths and weaknesses in clear strokes. He concluded by offering teachers some questions that might be useful in analyzing the merits of young adult novels.

A year later, Emma L. Patterson began her fine study of the origin of young adult novels showing that “The junior novel has become an established institution.”42 But despite the leadership of Burton, Alm, and Patterson, helpful criticism of young adult literature was slow in arriving, yet biting criticism was soon forthcoming. Only a few months after Patterson’s article, Frank G. Jennings’s “Literature for Adolescents—Pap or Protein?”43 appeared. The title was ambiguous, but if any reader had doubts about where Jennings stood, the doubt was removed with the first sentence: “The stuff of adolescent literature, for the most part, is mealy-mouthed, gutless, and pointless.” The remainder of the article added little to that point, and although Jennings overstated his case, Burton, Alm, Patterson, and other sensible supporters would have agreed that much young adult literature, similar to much adult literature, was second-rate or worse. Jennings’s article was not the first broadside attack, and it certainly would not be the last.44
1960–1980 Uncertainty Becomes Turbulence

In the 1960s, civil rights marches were almost a commonplace, and the war in Vietnam was increasingly controversial. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and so were Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Tidings were a little better in 1969 when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, but then the 1970s brought the National Guard’s killing of four Kent State University students and the Mississippi police’s killing of two black students at Jackson State University. Scandals forced the resignation of Spiro Agnew as vice president, and then Watergate did the same for President Richard Nixon.

It was not a great twenty years for our country, but at least some people feel that positive changes came from the 1966 founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW); the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in a New York City bar, which started the modern gay rights movement; the 1970 passing of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA), the 1971 lowering of the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, and the 1973 U. S. Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade, which protected women’s freedom to have a legal abortion. Some of these events were controversial when they took place and some remain so controversial that even today they are rallying cries for political actions.

Changes Related to Young Adult Literature

This twenty-year period was especially exciting to those of us who were already working with young adult books. The changes came from so many directions and were so interrelated that we decided the best way to show them would be through a timeline, more or less adapted from the “Two Hundred Years of Young Adult Library Services History” that is posted on VOYA’s (Voice of Youth Advocates) website and the timeline included in a February 2007 School Library Journal article, “John, Paul, George, and YALSA.” The article was published as part of the fifty-year anniversary of the founding of the American Library Association’s Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), which happened to coincide with the founding of the Beatles singing group. We are adding perspectives from English teachers and other educators. See Focus Box 2.3, A Sampling of Good Books from the Sixties and Focus Box 2.4, A Sampling of Good Books from the Seventies. These are the books that set the stage for the success of such revolutionary authors as Robert Cormier and Judy Blume, both winners of the Margaret A. Edwards Award (see pages 72 and 74).

One of the things that made the 1960s such a pivotal time in education is that Russia’s 1957 launching of Sputnik struck fear into the hearts of Americans. We were afraid that we could not compete against the Soviet Union and so the general public, along with government agencies and educators, scrambled to focus attention on education in high tech fields. Funds were first set aside for science and math, but very soon, people realized that students could not learn math and science if they did not know how to read, and so the educational focus was broadened to include the language arts and to advance the education of all young people.
Focus Box 2.3

A Sampling of Good Books from the Sixties (in addition to those written by Edwards Award winners)

Across Five Aprils by Irene Hunt. Follett, 1965. In this historical novel, the Civil War comes to a farm family.


The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander. Holt, 1964. This was the first of the Prydain series that came to include The Black Cauldron (1965), The Castle of the Llyr (1966), Taran Wanderer (1967), and The High King (1968).


Jamie by Jack Bennett. Little, Brown, 1963. A young boy has one mission, to avenge his father’s death by one of Africa’s most dangerous animals, a water buffalo. See also Bennett’s The Hawk Alone (1965).


Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones by Ann Head. Putnam, 1967. Head was one of the first to treat a premarital pregnancy with respect and understanding.


The Pushcart War by Jean Merrill. Scott, 1964. In this wonderful satire, war erupts between New York City pushcart owners and the drivers of those mammoth trucks that hog city streets.

Red Sky at Morning by Richard Bradford. Lippincott, 1968. A boy and his mother go to live in New Mexico while their father is at war and the experience brings the boy to examine his values.

A Separate Peace by John Knowles. Macmillan, 1961. The story of two boys whose friendship ends in tragedy, was predicted to be a story that would be taught in high school English classes for generations.


Sounder by William Armstrong. HarperCollins, 1969. An Academy Award–winning film brought even more readers to this sad story of a 1920s African American family that loses both its father and its dog.

1960: The American Library Association begins giving more attention to teenagers as shown by the Young Adult Services Division establishing a committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults and sending delegates, along with copies of the newly published Youth in a Changing World in Fiction and Fact, to the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth.

1960: Questions related to civil rights for African Americans come to the forefront. In Danville, Virginia, thirteen African American high school students entered the main library and refused to leave. During the 1960s, books by three African American nonfiction writers were appreciated by many young adults. They include Claude Brown’s stark picture of African American ghetto life in Manchild in the Promised Land (1963), Malcolm X and Alex Haley’s...
Focus Box 2.4

A Sampling of Good Books from the Seventies (in addition to those written by Edwards Award winners)


*Bless the Beasts and Children* by Glendon Swarthout. Doubleday, 1970. Boys at a summer camp are appalled to see a government-sponsored slaughter of penned-up buffalo. Swarthout presented the first copy of his book to the governor of Arizona, where the slaughter was held.


*A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck. Knopf, 1972. On this Depression-era farm, Rob has to become the man of the family after the death of his father, whose job was slaughtering pigs.

*Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep. HarperCollins, 1975. When Yep found a historical allusion to a Chinese kite maker who succeeded in flying years before the Wright Brothers, he wrote a story of how it might have happened.

*Happy Endings Are All Alike* by Sandra Scoppettone. HarperCollins, 1978. Two lesbian girls are stalked by a dangerous young man interested only in rape.

*A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich* by Alice Childress. Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1973. A family tries to save a young drug user from himself.

*Home Before Dark* by Sue Ellen Bridgers. Knopf, 1976. A girl in a family of migrant workers manages to come to terms with a new life. In Bridger’s 1979 *All Together Now*, a young girl comes to a small Southern town during the Korean War and becomes friends with the retarded but delightful Dwayne.

*House of Stairs* by William Sleator. Dutton, 1974. Six young people are placed in a strange house with stairs going everywhere and nowhere at all.

*The Last Mission* by Harry Mazer, Delacorte, 1979. Mazer tells at least part of his own story in this book about a young Jewish boy who enlists during World War II to destroy Hitler.


*Ordinary People* by Judith Guest. Viking, 1976. When two brothers are boating and one of them drowns, the surviving brother and his parents have a hard time moving on.

*Run Softly, Go Fast* by Barbara Wersba. Atheneum, 1970. In this haunting novel of the 1960s, a boy’s father dies and his angry son is left trying to figure out why he hates the man he used to love.

*The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox. Bradbury, 1973. A fife-playing boy is kidnapped and brought to a ship where he is to play exercise music to help keep the cargo (slaves) in good health until they can be sold.

*The Strange Affair of Adalaide Harris* by Leon Garfield. Pantheon, 1971. A comedy of errors begins when two schoolboys leave a baby sister outdoors to see if wild animals will rescue her.

*A String in the Harp* by Nancy Bond. Atheneum, 1976. A dysfunctional family, transplanted to Wales, learns how to become a family again when one of the children finds an ancient harp-tuning key that opens the door to the sixth century.

*A Wild Thing* by Jean Renvoize. Little, Brown, 1971. In this tragedy, a fifteen-year-old outcast and runaway girl is living in a cave and wanting one thing—a baby.

*Z for Zachariah* by Robert C. O’Brien. Atheneum, 1975. A girl in an isolated valley that had been protected from a nuclear blast, thinks she is the last person on earth—but then she discovers another survivor who makes it worse than being alone.

VOYA’s timeline poster prepared for the 2007 American Library Association conference celebrated fifty years of young adult librarianship and two hundred years of libraries.

1962: In what is almost a repeat of the kinds of arguments that resulted in the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1912, the Modern Language Association criticizes how high school students are, or are not, being prepared for college. High school English teachers are not amused, but they nevertheless participate in a series of Basic Issues conferences and in twenty Project English summer institutes held in 1962. Many of these institutes focused on what should be included in the high school English curriculum. Nearly everyone agreed on the holy tripod of literature, language, and composition, but from there opinions varied widely. Marjorie Smiley’s center at Hunter College was exceptional in the way the participants focused on student involvement and interest and on finding personal and social significance in literature.45

1963: The Knapp Foundation sponsors a School Libraries Project to set up model media centers throughout the country. This new focus on media contributed to the alternative name of media centers for school libraries.

1963: Alfred E. Bestor publishes the first edition of Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools (Univ. of Illinois Press), which sang what would become a national anthem of complaints about how U. S. schools were not preparing our country to compete against the Soviet Union.

1964: The International Reading Association, which was founded in 1956 as a professional organization for those involved in teaching reading, begins publishing the Journal of Reading, renamed in 1985 to the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy (JAAL). It presently goes to 15,000 subscribers and represents the interests of reading teachers at the secondary level. In all, IRA has 85,000 members in over one hundred countries, and nearly forty Special...
Interest Groups (SIGs) including a Network on Adolescent Literature. Especially in recent years, *JAAL* has devoted several pages to articles and to reviews of new YA books. And at both national and regional conferences, awards are given and sessions are devoted to authors and scholars working with young adult literature.

**1965:** Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provides money for the purchase of library materials and textbooks. Many schools established their first libraries in order to qualify for these funds, which were available for almost a decade. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) also provided funding for teachers’ institutes throughout the country. Out of these came new ideas for teaching English and working with nonprint media (especially film); multicultural literature; adolescent literature, as it was then called; team teaching, linguistics, and performing rather than just reading Shakespeare.

**1965:** The College Entrance Examination Board turns its attention to the teaching of literature in its widely read *Freedom and Discipline in English*. It rejected the idea that “so-called junior books” might ease young readers into a frame of mind in which they will be ready “to tackle something stronger, harder and more adult,” by writing:

> The Commission has serious doubts that it does anything of the sort. For classes in remedial reading a resort to such books may be necessary, but to make them a considerable part of the curriculum for most students is to subvert the purposes for which literature is included in the first place. In the high school years, the aim should be not to find the students’ level so much as to raise it, and such books rarely elevate. For college-bound students, particularly, no such concessions as they imply are justified. Maturity of thought, vocabulary, syntax, and construction is the criterion of excellence in literature, and that criterion must not be abandoned for apparent expediency. The competent teacher can bridge the distances between good books and the immaturity of his students; that is, in fact his primary duty as teacher of literature. (49–50)

High school teachers resented such criticism coming from college professors who had clearly not read such good books as Marjorie Hill Allee’s 1937 *The Great Tradition*, Esther Forbes’s 1943 *Johnny Tremain*, Paul Anixter’s 1950 *Swiftwater*, Mary Stolz’s 1954 *Pray Love, Remember*, Rosemary Sutcliff’s 1954 *The Eagle of the Ninth*, and Nat Hentoff’s 1965 *Jazz Country*. Such negative criticism galvanized the resolve of knowledgeable teachers to change the public opinion.

**1966:** Daniel Fader publishes *Hooked on Books: Program and Proof* (Berkley). The book grew out of one of the 1962 Project English Centers in Michigan where participants worked with the W. J. Maxey Boys’ Training School (a euphemism for reform school). Each boy was allowed to choose and keep two paperback books from the library, a paperback dictionary, and a spiral notebook (a journal) in which he was to write at least two pages a week. While railing against current practices in the teaching of reading, Fader used
paperbacks of all sorts to get the boys to read—and read they did. His techniques were so successful that his book was revised and republished several times and quoted almost as if it were holy writ.

1967: The Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association combines forces with ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee to cosponsor a conference on “Intellectual Freedom and the Teenager.” Five years later, ALA adopts “Free Access to Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.”

1967: G. Robert Carlsen publishes *Books and the Teenage Reader* (Harper and Row). While bringing national attention and a degree of respect to adolescent literature, his work also attracts several doctoral students to his English Education program at the University of Iowa, including the authors of this textbook, and such scholars as Ben Nelms, Terry C. Ley, Richard Abrahamson, and Ruth Cline, all of whom have gone on to train other doctoral students now working in the field. Carlsen earned his own Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota where he studied with Dora V. Smith, who is usually cited as doing for adolescent literature in English Education what Margaret A. Edwards did for it in libraries.46

1967: S. E. Hinton publishes *The Outsiders* and Robert Lipsyte publishes *The Contender*. See pp. 8 and 197 for statements about them as winners of the Margaret A. Edwards award. Other authors who published outstanding books in the 1960s and 1970s and were subsequently chosen as winners of the Margaret A. Edwards award include Paul Zindel (see p. 164), M. E. Kerr (p. 331), Robert Cormier (p. 72), Judy Blume (p. 74), Richard Peck (p. 275), Anne McCaffrey (p. 225), Lois Duncan (p. 207), and Ursula K. Le Guin (p. 222).

1969: Margaret A. Edwards publishes *The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts* (Hawthorne). The title comes from an essay in *The Old Librarian’s Almanac*, in which Jared Bean advised his fellow librarians that the Treasure House of Literature “is no more to be thrown open to the ravages of the unreasoning mob [the general public, especially the young] than is a Fair Garden to be laid unprotected at the Mercy of a Swarm of Beasts.” Six years later, at the ALAN breakfast in San Diego, two hundred English teachers applaud the choice of Margaret A. Edwards as the recipient of the second ALAN Award for her contribution to the promotion of books for young readers. Thirteen years later, YALSA, in cooperation with the *School Library Journal*, establishes the Margaret A. Edwards Award to honor a living author whose books have spoken to young adults over a period of time. Winners of that award are featured on special pages throughout this text.

1969: Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner publish *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Delacorte), which begins with a metaphor borrowed from Ernest Hemingway: “We have in mind a new education that would set out to cultivate . . . experts at crap detecting.” It may have been Hemingway’s metaphor, but Charlie Weingartner made it his own, and its influence is still felt as shown in Chapter 3 on the “New Literacies.” Neil Postman went on to work with media and language and is perhaps best known for his *Amusing
1972: Francelia Butler, a faculty member in the English department at the University of Connecticut, establishes the Children’s Literature Association as a Division of The Modern Language Association. In these early years, she referred to children’s literature as “the great excluded,” because of the low status that most academics gave it. As the years have gone by, ChLA members no longer use the phrase and they have also begun to interpret “Children’s Literature” as including books for young adults. For example, of the eight feature articles in the 2007 annual Children’s Literature (Volume 35), four of them could have been in a journal focusing on young adult literature. One was an interview with M. E. Kerr, one an explication of David Almond’s Skellig, one an investigation of Gothic elements in prep school literature, and one an exploration of the legacy of Jane Austen in the Harry Potter books.

1973: A group of about a dozen English teachers gather at the National Council of Teachers of English annual conference and form an Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN). In keeping with their goal to promote the reading and teaching of young adult literature, they write their constitution to allow people to belong to the Assembly without having to pay dues to the National Council because they want to encourage membership from authors, publishers, reading teachers, and librarians, as well as English teachers. They planned a preconference workshop to be held at the 1974 convention in New Orleans. These workshops have been held every year since and have now been expanded to two full days. At the 2006 conference in Nashville, over sixty authors and over seventy members had parts on the two-day program attended by nearly four hundred participants, all of whom went home with boxes of books provided by the authors’ publishers.

1974: The Young Adult Services Division (YASD) of the American Library Association tactfully changed the name of its annual listing of recommended books that were of high interest but with a low reading level from “Books for Slow High School Readers” to the more positive sounding “Quick Picks.” This was only one of many changes reflecting an increased respect for the viewpoints of young readers and a desire to involve teenagers as members of library advisory boards and “Best Book” selection committees.

1975: What was to become The ALAN Review, now a glossy, refereed and professional journal of nearly one hundred pages coming out three times a year, has its beginning as a photocopied newsletter with eight pages of text, plus a couple of pull-out clip-and-file reviews. Alleen Nilsen and Ken Donelson were the founding editors, but in 1979, they passed the editorship on to Guy Ellis at the University of Georgia, who in 1984 passed it on to Arthea (Charlie) Reed at the University of North Carolina. In 1990, Leila Christenbury at Virginia Commonwealth and Robert Small at Radford University became coeditors, while in 1993, Patricia Kelly at Virginia Tech became a coeditor along with Robert Small. Pamela Sissi Carrol became editor in 1998, while in 2003 James Blasingame at Arizona State and Lori Atkins Goodson at Wamego...
Margaret A. Edwards Award
Winner (1991)

Robert Cormier, Who Took It to the Top

The Chocolate War, I Am the Cheese, and After the First Death are the books that in 1991 Robert Cormier was honored for. Other exceptionally good books include The Bumblebee Flies Anyway, Beyond the Chocolate War, Fade, We All Fall Down, and Heroes.

In 1967, when S. E. Hinton’s The Outsiders was published, critics rejoiced because Hinton’s novel was a giant step forward for the young adult novel. Its gritty realism and its willingness to take on a hitherto topic like class differences in the teenagers’ world made The Outsiders a hit with critics and young readers. YA books had reached the top.

That euphoria lasted until 1974 when YA books reached an even higher top. Robert Cormier’s The Chocolate War was published to critical acclaim, and readers soon followed the critics. Censors, never willing to let a fine novel pass unnoticed and uncensored, took note. The Chocolate War was attacked from almost every imaginable viewpoint and for almost every imaginable sin. When Cormier’s next two novels, I Am the Cheese and After the First Death, were published to the approval of critics and readers, censors trailed not far behind.

What were Cormier’s sins? The fact that Archie in The Chocolate War had taken a picture of Emile in a restroom stall with his “pants dropping on the floor, one hand furiously at work between his legs.” Masturbation, as decent people knew, was not to be mentioned. Crude language was everywhere in Cormier’s books, and the books were filled with pessimism and, as one censor told the authors of this text, the books were “unnecessarily realistic.” Immorality prevailed, terror and evil abounded, corruption was everywhere, and worse yet, I Am the Cheese and After the First Death were unpatriotic, implying that the Witness Relocation Program was dishonest and that our government could not be trusted.

What were Cormier’s virtues? He was honest, and he told readers what they already knew but were often afraid to admit—that corruption existed around them, not in some far-off place, and that bad guys and evil sometimes won and good guys and innocence could lose even at the end of a book.

Finally in 1974, all of this excitement and rich promise came to fulfillment with The Chocolate War. Oh, there had already been other YA books of lasting excellence. . . . But The Chocolate War was something else again—a book that shook us profoundly, a book that nobody could ignore. The critics went wild, some of them foaming at the mouth, others singing the book’s praises extravagently.

From that first simple sentence in The Chocolate War, “They murdered him,” readers knew Cormier was different. And from the first inklings of the plot, readers had the essentials before them. Jerry Renault was not superhuman, Archie and the Vigils were in charge of Trinity High School, and Brother Leon, who was nominally the assistant headmaster of the school but who “served as a flunky for the Head,” was corrupt and enjoyed manipulating and corrupting others.

Sylvia Patterson Iskander nicely summed up the matter for the 1999 St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers when she wrote, “The novels of Robert Cormier have added a new dimension to young adult literature. Dealing with evil, abuse of power, and corruption, they present a dark view of humanity, but one tempered by an underlying morality.”

Robert Cormier had never thought of himself as a writer for young people, but when his agent submitted The Chocolate War to Pantheon, the editor convinced Cormier that, as good as the book was, it would be simply one more in a catalogue of adult books. If it were published for teenagers, however, it might sell well, and it certainly would not be just one more in a long string of available adolescent novels. The editor’s predictions came true and Cormier later acknowledged that although his initial reaction to becoming a young adult author was one of shock followed by a monthlong writer’s block, he was grateful for the editorial help, which led to considerable attention from reviewers as well as his first financial success as an author.
Middle School in Kansas became coeditors. Editing the journal is a labor of love and each editing team has brought to it a new level of professionalism.

1975: *School Library Journal* begins publication separate from *Library Journal*. While *SLJ* started out with the idea of reviewing all books published for young readers, the burgeoning of the publishing business has forced it to modify such an ambitious goal, but still, in its twelve issues per year it manages to review over 4,000 books. It also publishes four or five feature articles and a half-dozen regular columns in each monthly issue. Readers especially await the December issue in which the editors list their choices of sixty to seventy books identified as the year’s best.

1975: In “Reason, Not Emotion,” published in the April 1975 *Top of the News*, Elaine Simpson expresses the frustration that many of us are feeling about the way new YA books are being received. She wrote:

“For years librarians and others have criticized junior novels saying they are written to a formula: they all have pat, sweetness and light resolutions that instill false conceptions of life; they fail to deal with fundamental problems of personal and societal adjustments that are of immediate concern to young adults, etc. etc. . . .

Then juvenile authors and editors began giving us such books as *Go Ask Alice; Run Softly, Go Fast; Admission to the Feast; Run, Shelley, Run; The Chocolate War* . . . And what happened? All too many of those same people who had been asking for an honest story about teenage problems began protesting: language like that in a book for young people? Are rape, abortion, homosexuality, unwed mothers, suicide, drugs, unsympathetic portrayal of parents, and violence appropriate for junior novels? Are young people ready for such explicit realism?”

1975: Prior to the American Library Association’s annual meeting, the Young Adult Services Division holds a preconference in which participants go through the previous fifteen years of selections of “Best Books for Young Adults” and creates a consolidated list of two hundred books called “Still Alive in ’75.”

1978: *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)* is established by Dorothy Broderick and Mary K. Chelton as a library publication focusing on young adult, as separate from children’s, literature. The bimonthly journal has become a major force in reviewing and promoting young adult books and media. It is now published by Scarecrow Press in Lanham, Maryland, with Stacy L. Creel serving as editor. Although it is directed toward librarians, reading and English teachers have learned to rely on its feature articles, its help in drawing together thematically related units, and its columns to keep up with websites, computer games, and graphic novels.

1978: Patty Campbell, former YA librarian for the Los Angeles Public Library, begins writing “The Young Adult Perplex” column in *Wilson Library Bulletin*. She brought a refreshing level of aesthetic as well as pedagogical criticism to the field. When the *Wilson Library Bulletin* ceased publication, she
The Edwards committee honored Blume for her 1975 *Forever*, but other excellent books that young teens love include *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* (1970); *Then Again, Maybe I Won’t* (1971); *Deenie* (1973); and our favorite, which is *Tiger Eyes* (1981), all published by Bradbury.

When in December of 2004, Judy Blume was the first author of young people’s literature to be honored by the National Book Foundation, for her “distinguished contribution to American letters,” readers all over the country—in fact all over the world—cheered because they owned one or more of the 75 million Judy Blume books purchased by readers within the past thirty-five years. Blume was a young housewife and mother living in a New Jersey suburb when she began writing. On the morning after she received the award, she explained in a PBS interview with Jeffrey Brown that she wrote her first book about Margaret at age twelve because she had such vivid memories and warm feelings toward the thoughts and emotions she remembers from that time in her life. She loves the optimism and the faith that young readers have as reflected in a letter she quoted in her acceptance speech: “Please send me the facts of life, in number order.” She was still pondering on just how to answer that letter, but in general she says that her approach to writing is to go from deep inside herself and to be as truthful and honest as possible.

From the beginning, young readers loved the books and loved talking to Blume, either in person or by mail. Increasingly, college teachers of YA lit began recommending Blume’s books and assigning them for class reading and Blume became a welcome speaker at meetings of teachers and librarians. But the more successful Blume’s books became, the more censors paid attention to them. Her book about Margaret was described as being negative or flippant toward religion, while one principal would not allow *Deenie* in his school because the female protagonist masturbates. The principal told the librarian that it would have been different if she had been a boy.

Another librarian came up with the idea of blacking out unsuitable words and inserting proper words. Some attacks focused on Blume’s lack of moral teachings. Our favorite censorial story came when a mother, upset by two pages about wet dreams in *Then Again, Maybe I Won’t*, accosted Blume and said that she had ripped them out of her son’s copy. When Blume asked, “What if they had been about a girl’s menstruation? Would you still have torn the pages out?” “Oh no,” the mother replied, “that’s normal.” Everyone knows that sexuality sometimes comes into Blume’s books, but as Faith McNulty writing in the *New Yorker* (December 5, 1983) observed “only to the degree that it enters most young minds.”

Sex isn’t Blume’s sole topic. In *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, twelve-year-old Margaret is perplexed about what religion she should belong to. In *Then Again, Maybe I Won’t*, Blume draws a devastating portrait of a family moving up in social class only to discover that the move may not have been a good thing. In *Tiger Eyes*, Davey has to accept the death of her father in a senseless act of violence. And in the most feared of all of Blume’s books, *Forever*, Katherine struggles through the excitement of first sex only to learn that a first love may not endure. For the last edition of this textbook, Blume wrote that:

> Fear has always made people anxious, and we are living in fearful times. . . . Book banning satisfies a need for parents to feel in control of their children’s lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don’t read about something, their children won’t know about it. And if they don’t know about it, it won’t happen.

Blume is encouraged, though, by how many children and their parents and teachers are speaking out and defending children’s right to read. Her message is that parents have “every right to decide what their child should read, but not what all children should read.”
moved as a columnist to the *Horn Book Magazine*, where she writes her “Sand in the Oyster” columns. She also served as series editor for Twayne’s Young Adult Authors series and later for the Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature.

**1980:** Scott Foresman publishes the first edition of this textbook, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, by Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen. It was the first comprehensive textbook to treat young adult literature as more than the problem novel and as an appropriate area of study in English departments as well as in colleges of education and schools of library science.

We will end this history of the 1960s and 1970s by agreeing with those who say that it was a turning point in establishing new ground rules for young adult literature. But it was also a period valuable for the literature itself. Many of the books from this period were written by authors who went on to win the Margaret A. Edwards Award for their overall contribution to young adult literature. Those books are written about in the individual write-ups for these twenty outstanding authors. Refer back to Focus Boxes 2.3 and 2.4 (pages 66 and 67) for a sampling of other books from the 1960s and 1970s that have proven their lasting power.

**Notes**

22. Lou LaBrant, *An Evaluation of the Free Reading Program in Grades Ten, Eleven, and Twelve for the Class of*


28. Caroline M. Hewins, “Book Reviews, Book Lists, and Articles on Children’s Reading: Are They of Practical Value to the Children’s Librarians?” Library Journal 26 (August 1901): 58. Attacks on series books, especially Stratemeyer’s books, persisted thereafter in library literature. Mary E. S. Root prepared a list of series books not to be circulated by public librarians, “Not to Be Circulated,” Wilson Bulletin for Librarians 3 (January 1929): 446, including books by Alger, Finley, Castlemon, Ellis, Optic, and others, the others being heavily Stratemeyer. Two months later, Ernest F. Ayers responded, “Not to Be Circulated?” Wilson Bulletin for Librarians 3 (March 1929): 528–529, objecting to the cavalier treatment accorded old favorites and sarcastically adding, “Why worry about censorship so long as we have librarians?” Attacks continue today. Some librarians and English teachers to the contrary, the Syndicate clearly is winning, and students seem to be pleased.


32. Marie Rankin, Children’s Interests in Library Books of Fiction, Teachers College, Columbia University, Contributions to Education, No. 906 (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947).


42. Emma L. Patterson, “The Junior Novels and How They Grew,” English Journal 45 (October 1956): 381.


45. Arthur Applebee’s Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History (NCTE, 1974) provides succinct comments on the Basics Conferences and Project English in Chapters 7 and 8.


47. A good article on Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner is Herb Karl’s “Of Questioning Assumptions, Crap Detecting and Splinters of Ice in the Heart,” English Journal 94 (November 2004) 20–24.

New Technology, New Attitudes, and New Literacies

It is almost impossible to pick up an education journal or a publisher’s catalog without running across the terms literacy, literacy studies, or new literacies. For example, five of the six books advertised on the opening pages of a spring/summer 2007 brochure from Teachers College Press were entitled:

- Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4–12
- Critical Literacy/Critical Teaching
- Culture, Literacy, and Learning
- The Effective Literacy Coach
- Literacy Leadership in Early Childhood

Phrases in either the titles or subtitles of other new books in the same brochure tied the idea of literacy into the roles that adults can play as active partners in the lives of urban children, immigrant students, and Latino families and communities. A search under “Adolescent/YA Literacy” of the National Council of Teachers of English preliminary program for the November 2007 annual convention yielded the names of fifty-two different presenters who would speak about the subject, while the titles of various articles in the April/May 2007 Reading TODAY, which is distributed to all members of the International Reading Association, included:

- “Adolescent Literacy by the Numbers”
- “Adolescent Literacy Gains Support”
- “Adolescent Literacy ‘Wish List’ Poses Questions for Further Inquiry”
- “Conference Explores 21st Century Literacies”
- “Lessons in the Ethics of Literacy”
Focus Box 3.1
Help for Adults in Developing New Literacies


Building Literary Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel edited by James Bucky Carter. NCTE, 2007. Contributors who wrote the chapters each take a traditional text and pair it with one or more graphic novels; for example, Dante’s Inferno is taught alongside an X-Men story, while Dickens’s Oliver Twist is taught alongside Will Eisner’s Fagin the Jew.

“Don’t Bother Me Mom—I’m Learning!” by Marc Prensky, Paragon House, 2006. The title of Prensky’s Chapter 4, “Our Kids Are Not Like Us: They’re Natives, We’re Immigrants,” spells out the idea that a generation that has grown up “surrounded by and using computers, videogames, DVD players, videocams, eBay, cell phones, iPods, and all the other tools of a digital age” has different thinking patterns and approaches to life than do those of us coming to the digital world as immigrants and still waiting for someone to explain and “teach us” about each new device.

Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter by Steven Johnson. Penguin/Riverside, 2005. Johnson makes a persuasive case for the idea that popular culture entertainment ranging from The Simpsons to The Lord of the Rings and to video games is growing more sophisticated and posing cognitive challenges that make us better thinkers.

Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths behind America’s Favorite Addiction by Jake Halpern. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Halpern speaks out for moderation and for guiding teens into areas where they can feel fulfilled from developing skills and interests rather than longing for instant fame, which is something dependent on many factors outside of any young person’s control.


“Lieutenant Governor of Ontario an Advocate for Literacy, Mental Health, Racial Tolerance”
“Literacy Promotion Award Seeks Applicants”
“No Greater Pool of Expertise in Literacy”
“Verizon Foundation Spotlights Literacy”

In the United Kingdom, the Reading Association has changed its name to the Literacy Association because of wanting to get away from the idea that literacy means reading and that reading means decoding. The concept of literacy is changing not only because of digital technologies, but also because of all the ways that people’s social identities are changing as the world moves closer toward economic and cultural globalization. See Focus Box 3.1, Help for Adults in Developing New Literacies; also see Focus Box 3.2, “Different” Literacies in YA Books for illustrations of how these concepts are finding their way into both fiction and nonfiction for teen readers.
When any field develops, new terms are created and old terms are given new meanings. *Metalanguage* is a term from linguistics referring to language that is used to talk about language. For example, such grammatical terms as *noun*, *verb*, and *adjective* and such literary terms as *plot*, *denouement*, and *onomatopoeia* are metalanguage used by teachers as they communicate about writing and about literature with their students. Some of the metalanguage that refers to new literacy concepts is fairly simple, as with *indie* to refer to films, comics, and magazines that have been independently produced, and *squeeze text* to refer to compressing English by something like 30 percent to 40 percent to accommodate SMs (*Short Messages* or text messaging) as well as the *balloon speech* in comics. Squeezing is done mostly by replacing words with symbols, as when using + to stand for “more,” ++ for “most” and 4 for “for”; leaving out vowels; and using single letters to stand for words as in the title of William Steig’s famous picture book *CDB!* (“See the Bee”), which is made up mostly of letters and numbers “4 U 2 figure out.” That Steig’s picture book was published in 1968, and that for at least three decades Americans have been amusing themselves by looking for underlying
Focus Box 3.2
“Different” Literacies in YA Books

The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl by Barry Lyga. Houghton, 2006. Fanboy loves comics and dreams of being “discovered” at a comic-book convention because of his in-progress Schemata graphic novel, but his real life was far from such success. Then Goth Girl Kyra, herself a loner, reaches out to him through an Instant Message that shows him being beaten up. At first he thinks she is making fun of him, but her friendship is the beginning of better things.

Black Duck by Janet Taylor. Philomel/Sleuth, May 2006. Fourteen-year-old David is the hero of this exciting mystery story that gets told because David, an aspiring journalist, dares to knock on the door of his elderly neighbor and ask about his mysterious past. The Black Duck was a rum-running ship that back in the 1920s played a mysterious role in the posh town of Newport, Rhode Island.

The Braid by Helen Frost. Farrar/Frances Foster Books, 2006. Told through different poems in different voices, this is the unusual story of Scottish teenage sisters whose family is torn from their Highlands home in the 1850s. One stays with her grandmother in Scotland, while one moves with the rest of the family to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The girls stay connected only through pieces of a braid they intertwine in their hair.

Evil Genius by Catherine Jinks. Harcourt, 2007. A boy who hacked into computers when he was only seven and then more or less tests out of high school launches himself into a grown-up career at age fourteen by enrolling in the Axis Institute and taking classes in Misinformation, Disguise, Basic Lying, Embezzlement, and Explosives.

Harlem Hustle by Janet McDonald. Farrar/Frances Foster Books, 2006. Harlem Hustle tells the story of seventeen-year-old Eric “Hustle” Samson, who dreams of making his way out of the projects by becoming a rapper. McDonald, who grew up in the projects and went on to become an international lawyer, was praised for exactly nailing the hip-hop lingo and the street slang, while also throwing in a cultural-history lesson.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, 2007. In this original novel, which was a finalist for the National Book Award, Selznick created 272 full-page drawings plus over 250 pages of text, all deliciously fitted onto black bordered pages that give readers the feeling of stepping into an old fashioned film or more mysteriously into the back rooms of a museum that once housed the predecessors of today’s robots, known as automata. Interwoven is the story of Frenchman Georges Méliès, the inventor of modern day movies.

The Last Days by Scott Westerfeld. Penguin/Razorbill, 2006. The Last Days is a continuation of Westerfeld’s Peeps, but rock music plays a big part in this story, and in fact is the medium that calls up and helps to defeat the mysterious forces that almost destroy New York City.

Lugalbanda: The Boy Who Got Caught Up in a War by Kathy Henderson, illustrated by Jane Ray. Candlewick, 2006. Excavators in the 1800s found the cuneiform tablets on which this Sumerian legend was recorded, but the tablets were not transcribed until in the 1970s. And now readers can enjoy what is perhaps the oldest written story in the world. It is about a boy left behind by a marching army, but who becomes a hero anyway.

Memories of Survival illustrated by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz and told by Bernice Steinhardt. Hyperion, 2005. Thirty-four hand-stitched, embroidered, fabric panels tell in great detail the story of Esther’s early childhood in a Polish village, then the Nazi invasion followed by a labor camp and death.

The Princess Academy by Shannon Hale. Bloomsbury, 2005. Petite fourteen-year-old Miri feels left out because she does not get to work in the quarry with the other girls. Hoping to prove her worth, she goes away to a special school—far different from a typical “princess” school—but while there she discovers her special talent for “quarry speech,” which is a silent way of communicating.

The Road of the Dead by Kevin Brooks. Scholastic/The Chicken House, 2006. Two brothers are trying to solve the murder of their sister on the English moors. It is a grisly and violent story, and the most interesting part is how fourteen-year-old Ruben has the psychic power to see what his older, more impetuous brother, Cole, is doing and thinking even when they are miles apart.

Voices by Ursula K. Le Guin. Harcourt, 2006. Seventeen-year-old Memer and her mentor, the Waylord, are protectors of a secret library in a country where the written word has been declared demonic and books are outlawed. But then the stage is set for change when Orrec, a poet and storyteller, and his wife, Gry, come for a visit.
meanings on license plates, illustrates that many of the “new literacies” are not as new as most people think.

Ethnography relates to such words as ethnic and ethos and to graphic and graphology. It refers to the systematic studying and recording of human culture. Framing is a term used to talk about how contexts and situations provide a backdrop for messages and influence how they are interpreted. Frank Luntz’s Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear is about how politicians, for example, try to frame their words to appeal to the largest number of voters. We recently heard a good discussion of framing when one of our graduate students, Kathy Grismore, wrote her master’s thesis on how the mass media framed news stories about Hurricane Katrina and the city of New Orleans.

Multimodalities refers to differences in the ways that material is presented. The modality part of the word comes from the Latin root modus, which gave us such English words as modem, model, mood, and module, all referring in some way to patterns or shapes. An obvious example of multimodalities is how in comic strips readers are required to interpret more than words. Because the words usually represent only what characters say to each other, the reader must also look at the drawings to get the full picture. Almost everyone knows that a balloon shape indicates that someone is saying the words, that a light bulb over someone’s head means that the character has a “bright” idea, and that a cloud with jagged edges and such onomatopoeic words as Zap! Ka-platz!, Smak! Boinggg! Pow! Klank! and Kazaam! indicate something unusual has happened. Readers also recognize that a series of random typewriter symbols (*%#$+&) means that someone is swearing, but it is not so easy for readers to interpret facial expressions or to know what is symbolized by different colors and shadings.

Semiotics comes from the Greek word séma, which means “sign.” It is related to such English words as signature, signal, design, signify, significant, semantics, and semiology. Before electronic communication, semaphore flags were used to send signals from boats, lighthouses, runways, and watchtowers. Today’s semioticians are not communicating so directly; instead they are looking at what are sometimes called “signs of the times,” which reveal underlying messages and attitudes that people may communicate without being aware of what they are doing. For example, semioticians have pointed out that when mainstream listeners “praise” a speaker from a minority group as “articulate,” they may really be revealing that they had such low expectations that the person’s communication skills come as a surprise worthy of comment. A semiotician might also point out that people are actually communicating the opposite of what the words say when they make such comments as, “Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but . . .,” “Now, I’m not saying he’s guilty, but . . .,” or “I don’t mean to interrupt, but . . . .”

In April 2007, Professor Brian V. Street from King’s College in London came to Arizona State University to speak on “New Literacies: New Times: Ethnographic Perspectives.” One of the points he made is that Western culture has overemphasized writing and the written language as a means of communication. He also argued that some of the practices that we currently view as “new” literacies are very old. Going back to prehistory, cultures have had religious ceremonies and customs and have communicated not only through speech but
Margaret A. Edwards Award
Winner (2005)
Francesca Lia Block, The Bringer of Magical Realism

The five Weetzie books published between 1989 and 1995 (Weetzie Bat; Witch Baby; Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys; Missing Angel Juan; and Baby Be-Bop) are the ones that the Edwards Committee cited when they chose to honor Francesca Lia Block. Her selection was a surprise because the Margaret A. Edwards Award is for lifetime accomplishment and Block is the youngest person to have been so honored. Everyone expects her to continue writing for many more years.

A second reason for the surprise is that her books are so controversial. Block says that she writes urban fairy tales, but critics point out that her fairy tales start where the traditional ones end, and rather than implying that as soon as young people step into adulthood they can walk off into the sunset and live happily ever after, Block encourages her characters to seek happiness and fulfillment wherever in life’s journey they happen to be.

Having grown up in Hollywood and lived all her life in California, Block makes her Los Angeles setting as important as any of her characters. Actual names taken from the Los Angeles area include Hollywood Boulevard, Tick Tock Tea Room, Fredericks of Hollywood, Loves, Shangri-la, Shangri Los Angeles, Shangri-L.A., and Hollywood. She also uses the way Weetzie’s father, Charlie Bat, describes Hollywood as an illusion and an imitation and a mirage, to help prepare her readers for the magical realism that she incorporates into the plots of her books.

Most readers think of the stories as lighthearted and fun, even while her characters take in stride heavy issues as drug overdoses, broken families, sexual experimentation, and abandoned children left on their own. We remember reading The Hanged Man when it came out in 1994 and conjecturing with our students on whether Block had studied the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom and made a list of all the reasons censors give for wanting to keep particular books away from kids and then concocted a story to include 90 percent of the actions and words that fundamentalist critics abhor.

When Block won the Margaret A. Edwards Award, even she was surprised. She told David Levithan, who interviewed her for the June 2005 issue of School Library Journal, that she suspected in this conservative political climate, the committee members said something like “In defiance of what’s happening now, we’re going to do this.”

Block’s books appeal to older teens and to what Michael Cart describes as a “crossover” audience of readers between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. In 2005, HarperCollins published a follow-up adult book about Weetzie Bat entitled Necklace of Kisses. In this book, written almost twenty years after the first one, Weetzie’s relationship with My Secret Agent Lover Man has withered and so Weetzie leaves the man who now goes by the more ordinary name of Max. Even though HarperCollins published the book in its adult division, a bookseller who brought the Weetzie Bat books to the 2006 convention of the Children’s Literature Association in Mission Beach, California, laughingly assured customers that teen readers were going right through the original Weetzie books, now published in a single volume entitled Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books, and then happily buying Necklace of Kisses to see what happens to the adult Weetzie and her uniquely named pals and children.

When Block was in college she started writing “short, odd, little punk-influenced stories.” She remembers one about a girl who was mad at her boyfriend and so she got a Ken doll and practiced voodoo on him. She told Levithan how she came up with the concept of Weetzie. She was driving on the freeway in the Valley when she saw a Pinto:

this weird box of a cartoon-looking car. It was light bubblegum pink, and at that time you never saw a pink car—ever, ever. On the license plate it said WEETZIE. And I just remember the moment—the time of day, the way the sky looked kind of smoggy—everything. And there’s this bleach-blonde head of this girl in this car. (47)

That was all it took—one name and one flashing image—for a character now loved worldwide to move into Block’s creative mind and to make herself at home for at least the next twenty-five years. Only the future will tell if she’s going to stay through middle and old age. Many readers hope she does.
through gestures and drawings and have had means of trading goods and of establishing respect and consideration for people besides oneself. Even in the modern world, people who are described as “illiterate” often understand such concepts as tickets, taxes, and maps. They are also skilled in trading and in interpreting such symbols as the internationally agreed-upon highway markers and such commercial logos as the golden arches for a McDonald’s restaurant and the classic red and white design of Campbell’s soup cans. We chose to put the page on Francesca Lia Block as a Margaret A. Edwards Award winner in this chapter because of the way she has her characters create symbols and meaning out of places and objects that go unnoticed by the majority of people who live in Hollywood.

Professor Street’s speech reminded us of some of the new books we’ve recently seen in which authors are exploring alternative kinds of communication strategies. See Focus Box 3.2, “Different” Literacies in YA Books. Some of the literacies are as old as the hills, while others are so new that we considered putting the books in the science fiction and fantasy chapter. But with communication tools there is a shrinking line between fantasy and reality. Ten years ago who would have thought that today we would be picking up our cell phones, punching in a location, and waiting for a voice to guide us to our destination, or that we could go into YouTube and be like the proverbial fly on the wall watching total strangers “do their thing.”

To describe a group’s literacy practices, one must know a great deal about the social world of the group, which is where ethnography comes into the picture as a point of departure. Professor Street talked about how literacy is part of an array of modes including visual literacy, computer literacy, and political literacy. Lowrider literacy involves “reading” the stories told in the artwork drawn by Hispanic American youths. He has even heard of palpatory literacy to refer to the knowledge of masseuses about the feelings associated with particular kinds of touching. And today many people use the term literacy as a metaphor or a code to refer to “general competence” or awareness. For himself, he restricts literacy to ideas that somehow relate to communicating through visible or auditory symbols, but this is not as simple as it sounds because of all the different ways people either send or receive messages. He left his audience to ponder:

- How do genres and modes vary across disciplines, subjects, and fields?
- How do academic literacy practices vary from informal literacy practices?
- How can an understanding of New Literacy Studies, Multimodality, and “Literacy as Artefact” help in the development of literacies for “new times”?

When students in our spring 2007 young adult literature classes were discussing Trudy Krisher’s *Fallout*, a book set in Florida during the 1950s cold war and Senator McCarthy’s anti-communist crusade, they were especially interested in the futuristic predictions of the 1950s. Not a single prediction touched on the importance of communication or on what changes might occur. No one foresaw computers and how the digital age would change daily life.

The conversation made us aware of the fact that we are all experiencing some surprising changes, and so in preparation for writing this chapter we undertook
two projects. One was to survey 266 local high school students about their literacy activities. We asked them about their favorite books, authors, magazines, games, and other online activities. We also gave them a chance to offer advice to teachers and librarians, most of which we are saving to report on in other chapters. We also conducted a Media Watch over the first four months of 2007. We clipped or downloaded news stories or took notes when we happened to hear of events related to or reflecting different kinds of literacy.

A New Kind of Democracy with an Emphasis on Youth

The first thing we noticed in our Media Watch is a new kind of digital democracy with an emphasis on youth and the valuing of individual opinions. The year of 2007 started with Time magazine’s selection of “You. Yes, You as Person of the Year” (Time, December 13, 2006). A computer was pictured on the cover with a mylar screen that would reflect the viewer’s face. Managing Editor Richard Stengel explained that individuals are changing the nature of the information age because as creators and consumers they are generating their own content and in doing so are transforming art and politics.

Time editors devoted practically the whole issue to exploring the ways that we have all become “Citizens of the New Digital Democracy.” Lev Grossman observed that Thomas Carlyle’s philosophy of the world’s history being “but the biography of great men” has taken a beating because of the way the Internet allows the many to wrest power from the few. We counted over thirty individuals whose photos and stories were shown and were surprised that only a hundred were over thirty; the others were young people still in their twenties. Some were there simply as representatives of the 65,000 people who every day post new videos to YouTube, while others were there for specific contributions they had made; for example, the three young men who founded YouTube (Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim); a twenty-two-year-old Pakistani photographer (Ali Khurshid) who has loaded two hundred beautiful pictures to Flickr and brought the world an “alternative” image of his home country; the twenty-one-year-old news photographer (S. R. Sidarth), who Senator George Allen insultingly referred to as macaca and lost his re-election bid perhaps because of publicity surrounding the incident. There was also serious political fallout when Lane Hudson, the former Congressional page who is now twenty-nine, posted online the suggestive emails that he received in 1995 from now-deposed Congressman Mark Foley. Twenty-five-year-old Simon Pulsifer was featured because of having authored somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 Wikipedia articles, while fifty-four-year-old Harriet Klausner, a former librarian, was featured for having posted nearly 13,000 reviews on amazon.com.

While many people decry this new democratization of information as “amateur,” Time editor Stengel wrote that America was founded by amateurs. The framers of the Constitution may have been professional lawyers and military men and bankers, “but they were amateur politicians, and that’s the way they thought
it should be. Thomas Paine was in effect the first blogger, and Ben Franklin was essentially loading his persona into the MySpace of the eighteenth century, Poor Richard’s Almanack.”

The article that resonated the most with us was the concluding page, written by NBC news anchor Brian Williams, who under the headline “Enough About You,” asked some interesting questions about “the celebration of self,” and whether we’ve raised a generation of young people who are so focused on their own successes that they will miss out on some great things. “It is now possible,” he wrote, “even common—to go about your day in America and consume only what you wish to see and hear.” We can tune into a television network that we know will agree with what we already think, and just as we can program our iPods to play music we already know we like, we can filter our reading of news on the Internet.

But Williams argued, “there’s a lot of information out there that citizens in an informed democracy need to know” especially in a world as complicated as ours is today. He is worried that:

Millions of Americans have come to regard the act of reading a daily newspaper—on paper—as something akin to being dragged by their parents to Colonial Williamsburg. It’s a tactile visit to another time . . . flat, one-dimensional, unexciting, emitting a slight whiff of decay. It doesn’t refresh. It offers no choice. Hell, it doesn’t even move. Worse yet: nowhere does it greet us by name. It’s for everyone. (78)

Unexpected Complications Revealed through Our Media Watch

Here is a sampling of the kinds of technology-inspired complications that made it into the news between January and May 2007.

● “MySpace Sued, Blamed in Abuse of Kids” was the headline on an Associated Press story about four families suing News Corp. and its MySpace social-networking site in relation to underage daughters being sexually abused by adults they met online. The families from New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina filed suits in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleging negligence, recklessness, fraud, and misrepresentation. Attorney Jason A. Itkin said that he hopes the lawsuits, which are seeking monetary damages “in the millions of dollars” will spur MySpace into action and will prevent such events from happening to other children. Actions already taken by MySpace have included educational efforts and partnerships with law enforcement. “The company has also placed restrictions on how adults may contact younger users on MySpace, while developing technologies such as one announced [January 17] to let parents see some aspects of their child’s online profile, including the stated age.” (January 19, 2007)

● Sean Stevens, twenty-eight, and Peter Berdovsky, twenty-seven, were pictured in an Associated Press photo as they left Charlestown District Court in Boston after posting $2,500 bonds. The accompanying story said that on January 31 they had attached thirty-eight blinking electronic devices to poles, bridges, overpasses, a hospital, and other high-profile spots, including Fenway Park. The
Headlines make it clear that many changes are taking place in the way people communicate, but just how educators should prepare their students for such changes is not so clear.

Blinking circuit boards, with dangling wires, showed a cartoon character giving the finger. They were planted in ten cities as part of a guerrilla marketing campaign to promote the cartoon Agua Teen Hunger Force appearing on The Cartoon Network owned by Turner Broadcasting. Only in Boston, probably because of where they were placed, did a bomb scare ensue with highways, bridges, and part of the Charles River being closed to traffic. Within ten days, the general manager of The Cartoon Network resigned over the event and Turner Broadcasting and an advertising agency agreed to pay $2 million in compensation to the city of Boston. (February 2, 2007)

• A different kind of complication was discussed in an Associated Press story from London under the headline, “Terrorists Using YouTube for Propaganda.” It told how “Anyone with an Internet connection can watch videos of bombings and sniper attacks against U.S. forces—shot and edited by Islamic militants and broadcast on YouTube, the world’s largest video-sharing Web site.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s chief of staff, Thomas de Maiziere, said authorities are struggling to glean information from cyberspace, but “Trying to uncover Internet meetings of terrorists is like searching for a needle in a haystack.” The problem is even more complicated when looking for propaganda because 65,000 new clips are loaded onto YouTube every day and viewers tune into 100 million videos daily. Google, Inc., the owner of YouTube, reserves the right to remove videos that users flag as unsuitable, but nothing is done until someone complains. And even when a video is removed, someone else can post it under a different
account where it will remain available until another complaint is received. (February 20, 2007)

- According to the Associated Press, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee suspended four executions because the 100-page manual of instructions was so jumbled that it no longer made sense. It was designed to give prison officials minute-by-minute directions on how to conduct an execution. The state now uses lethal injections in place of electrocution, but apparently because of the ease of cutting and pasting when doing revisions on a computer, the manual still contained paragraphs left over from when prisoners were electrocuted. For example, officials were told to shave the prisoner’s head and to engage the automatic rheostat and have a fire extinguisher on hand. They were also cautioned to disconnect the electrical cables in the rear of the chair before a doctor checks to see if the injection was successful. (February 20, 2007)

- “Egypt Blogger Gets 4 Years in Prison” read the headline on an Associated Press story about Abdel Kareem Nabil, a twenty-two-year-old former student at Egypt’s Al-Azhar University. He was “sentenced to four years in prison for insulting Islam and Egypt’s president.” On his blog, he often lashed out at Al-Azhar, the most prominent religious center in Sunni Islam, calling it “the university of terrorism” and accusing it of encouraging extremism. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York–based media rights group, said “Internet writers and editors are the fastest-growing segment of imprisoned journalists.” As of December 2006, forty-nine were behind bars. (February 23, 2007)

- “Web Anonymity in Danger in Europe,” began an Associated Press story from Frankfurt, Germany, about how the German and Dutch governments are taking the lead in crafting legislation that will make it illegal to provide false information to Internet service providers and will require phone companies to save detailed records on customer usage. Graham Cluley, a tech consultant, said that Europeans have a long history of fighting for personal freedoms and are “unlikely to accept such regulations.” He added that “No one disagrees with the need to take decisive action against terrorism and organized crime, but to introduce such restrictive surveillance . . . without proper safeguards in place, seems positively Orwellian.” (February 25, 2007)

- About this time, our College of Education at Arizona State University had to devise new guidelines for its student teachers, one of whom was in trouble at the middle school where he was teaching because of the disruption caused when students in his class passed around a cell-phone picture of him downloaded from MySpace. He was dressed in nothing but a miniature Christmas stocking and was holding something that looked like an assault rifle—really a large water gun. He said it was all a joke for his college-age friends. The FBI searched his computer messages both because of the gun and the fact that he was working with children.

- Shortly after this, educators in the Phoenix area were even more surprised to read in the Arizona Republic, “Kids are finding new, technological ways to hurt or embarrass each other, and school officials have few answers for it.” A twelve-year-old girl in Cave Creek (a suburb of Phoenix) “borrowed” a cell phone from an eleven-year-old classmate and then took a photo of herself “below the waist.” She sent the image to other students giving the impression that the picture was of the owner of the telephone. The enterprising photographer was suspended
from her middle school and may face criminal charges. The official reason given
for her dismissal was that district rules say that cell phones must be turned off and
concealed during school hours. (March 10, 2007)

- Publishers Weekly proudly began a story with “In case you needed proof
that books can save lives—Michael Auberry, the twelve-year-old who disappeared
from his Boy Scout troop on Saturday in North Carolina, was found alive Tues-
day morning in a remote mountain area, and a children’s book may have helped
him survive.” The boy had been missing for four days and near the beginning of
the ordeal, Michael’s father expressed hope that his son would manage to come
out alive because together they had read Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet*, a powerful sur-
vival story of a lone boy lost in the Canadian woods after a plane crash. The
father’s comment was widely reported, and CNN newscaster Anderson Cooper
managed to contact Gary Paulsen, who was in Alaska with his Iditarod dogs,
and conduct a long-distance interview. Paulsen was gracious in not claiming to
have provided a survival manual, and after the boy was found he told Fox News
that he was just glad if remembering the book had helped Michael stay calm.

During the four days that the story was in the news, *Hatchet*, which over its
twenty-year lifespan had already sold 131,000 copies, suddenly climbed to num-
ber 182 on the amazon.com sales list, but soon after Michael was found the story
began losing some of its luster because it was learned that Michael had not
wanted to go on the Scout trip and had purposely snuck away in hopes of finding
the highway and hitchhiking home. His first comment to rescuers was that he
wanted a helicopter ride out. (He was brought home in an ambulance.) When we
talked about the event in our YA literature class, everyone was happy that
Paulsen’s book was gaining a new set of readers, but a couple of students sug-
gested that it was just as likely that *Hatchet* inspired Michael to run off into the
woods as it was that *Hatchet* saved his life. (March 20, 2007)

- The April 16, 2007, shootings on the campus at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg
occurred eight years to the week after the shootings at Columbine High School
in Colorado. Differences in communication strategies vividly demonstrate the
kinds of changes occurring in less than a decade. The twenty-three-year-old
shooter was an immigrant whose name variously appeared in news stories as Cho
Seung-Hui, Seung-Hui Cho, and Cho Seung Hui. He bought one of his guns and
several rounds of ammunition on eBay. He had been dismissed from Nikki Gio-
vanni’s creative writing class because of using his cell phone to take under-the-
desk pictures of women students’ legs and knees. The women felt intimidated
and stopped coming to class, choosing instead to send their work in online. Email
was used to warn students that a gunman was shooting on campus, and while the
incident was still in progress, action photos from students’ cell phones were
broadcast. Within twenty-four hours, over 100,000 messages had been posted
on the university’s social network, which the university closed because of racist
and hateful messages. A new site, which would be monitored, was opened. And
most amazing of all, the shooter prepared his own press packet, which, between
shootings, he took to the post office and sent by express mail to NBC in New
York. It arrived a day late because he wrote the wrong zip code. When the video
was broadcast, critics feared the publicity would inspire copycat crimes, while
other critics said they did not want media officials deciding to withhold news.
A happier story printed in the *Arizona Republic* began with “OMG!” It was about thirteen-year-old Pennsylvania teenager Morgan Pozgar’s winning $25,000 by defeating nearly two hundred competitors to become first the East Coast text-messaging champion and then going on to beat the twenty-one-year-old West Coast champion, Eli Tirosh, by spelling Mary Poppins’ famous “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” in fifteen seconds. The contest was sponsored by LG electronics company. Morgan estimated that she probably sends out more than 8,000 text messages a month. (April 23, 2007)

“Schools Banning iPods to Beat Cheaters” read the headline on an Associated Press story about how some schools are banning digital media players because it is so easy for students to download formulas and other material onto their players and then to thread the ear bud up a sleeve. They can listen to a recording in such a way that it appears that they are simply resting their head on their elbow. A spokeswoman for the National Association of Secondary School Principals said that “Trying to fight the technology without a dialogue on values and expectations is a losing battle,” but there may be “a backdoor benefit” because as teachers think about how technology has corrupted some school practices, they might also think about ways it can be used productively. (April 27, 2007)

We had a lesson in *T-shirt literacy* while observing a student teacher at a middle school. All the teachers were wearing bright new T-shirts emblazoned with the message “ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.” The screened-on picture showed three sneakers of different colors and different sizes. We thought the teachers were frustrated by the standardized tests they had been giving all spring and were protesting the heavily prescribed lessons that are now the rage. Then we noticed a few students also wearing the shirts and so took a second look at the fine print and read “Unity through Diversity: April 27, 2007.” The shirts were a fund-raiser for a unity celebration to be held that evening. The mistake reminded us of our own ASU English Department T-shirts that say in large letters “English,” and then underneath in the style of a dictionary definition “(n): Define Yourself.” Our intended message relates to the idea that students who major in English will experience personal growth, but when we wear the shirts off campus we get comments and thumbs-up from people who think we are making a statement in favor of the “English Only” laws that frequently make their way to Arizona ballots.

According to the numbers column in *Time* magazine, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 21 percent of people ages eighteen to twenty-nine cite *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live* as regular sources of their election news. (April 30, 2007)

“Everyone Will Be World Famous for Fifteen Minutes.”

The incidents cited, especially the *Time* magazine feature, are a vivid illustration of Andy Warhol’s best-known observation made in 1966 when he looked into the future and declared that “everyone will be world famous for fifteen minutes.” Other people had made similar observations, but art critic Harold Rosenberg has said that it is perfectly fitting that Warhol gets the credit because he devoted his life to getting credit.
Googling the phrase “fifteen minutes of fame” turns up three-and-a-half-million citations, with the most popular ones being associated with YouTube, which in March 2006 changed its offer of providing customers with fifteen minutes of fame to ten minutes of fame because they found that when people had fifteen minutes to fill, they were more likely to bring in bits of copyrighted materials from television shows and movies; hence the new time limit.

The same week that Time honored “everyone” as Person of the Year, Jake Halpern’s book Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America’s Favorite Addiction was released by Houghton Mifflin. The author, who as a kid was hooked on Robin Leach’s Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, empathizes with people’s desire to become famous, but still he views it as an addiction, which in today’s media-saturated world has “metastasized.” He cites Roman stories about Zeus and his sexual exploits to point out that people have always enjoyed hearing about bad behavior among the powerful, but while celebrity gossip used to be “contained,” today it is everywhere, particularly among young people who have grown up to view the mass media as a kind of fairy godmother who at any moment is likely to tap the next “winner” with her magic wand.

Halpern thinks that young people are mostly responsible for the popularity of the American Idol television show, and he thinks it is teenage girls who are mainly responsible for making Paris Hilton’s name the one “most Googled” in 2006. When he surveyed 653 middle-school students in the Rochester, New York, area he found that:

- Given a choice of becoming the CEO of a major corporation, the president of Yale or Harvard, a Navy SEAL, a U.S. senator or “the personal assistant to a very famous singer or movie star,” almost half of the girls—43.4 percent—chose the assistant role.
- When given an option to become stronger, smarter, famous, or beautiful, boys in the survey chose fame almost as often as intelligence, and girls chose it more often.
- The teens who regularly watch certain celebrity-oriented TV shows were more likely than others to believe that they themselves will be famous someday.

While Halpern is not setting himself up as an ayatollah calling for a fatwa on shows such as Access Hollywood, he does think there’s something to be said for moderation.¹

Those of us who work with young people can probably tell stories of our own to illustrate the changing times and changing attitudes. During spring break, we were surprised to hear from the neighborhood boy who, when he was in middle school, used to come over and feed the Nilsens’ cat when they were out of town. Now a freshman in college and home for a few days, he dropped off a fat envelope with the explanation that he wanted help in getting a book published. He had saved his emails from the last three years, and having heard that J. K. Rowling is now richer than the Queen of England, he decided that he too wanted to become a published author. Some of his emails were interesting, but for being
It’s a new trend for parents to help their children become published authors. Here a father and daughter display their jointly produced book at the 2006 NCTE convention in Nashville. Penda Diakité wrote the story *I Lost My Tooth in Africa* (Scholastic, 2006) and her father, Baba Wagué Diakité, illustrated it on ceramic tile plaques.

such a bright young man, he was terribly naïve about what goes into writing a truly “publishable” book.

The incident reminded us of what Joan Bauer told us in an interview. She is always impressed when, after she makes a presentation, earnest young teenagers come up and tell her they have written a book. She congratulates them and tells them that she was in her thirties before she wrote a book. Then she braces herself for their next question: “How do I get it published?”

She struggles with her answer because she does not want to discourage young writers, but at the same time she knows that very few books written by teenagers—with some notable exceptions—really get published. What has surprised her over the last few years is that students come to her not only with their manuscript but with publicity packages they have designed for themselves. One girl even included a letter of endorsement from the mayor of her town.

Bauer wonders whether “our success-oriented culture is causing some young people to miss the joy of learning to love writing by focusing too much on publishing as the ultimate goal.” We wonder if perhaps we English teachers are a contributing factor because of our emphasis on praising and “publishing” our students’ work.

We also began wondering whether our attempts to make school “fun” have led students to unreasonable expectations. A colleague who prides himself on making attractive and entertaining PowerPoint presentations was shocked when teaching evaluations came out and a boy complained that when the professor doesn’t have time to finish a PowerPoint in class he “sends it to us through email and expects us to take our own time to look at it.” His attitude was similar to that
of a student who responded to our survey question asking whether he had listened to a sound recording of a book—with, “Just in school—never for my own benefit.”

**Critical Literacy**

At least until fairly recently, the most common kind of literacy talked about in educational circles was *critical literacy*, whose advocates believe in questioning the social, political, and economic conditions that underlie the creation of stories, novels, books, films, essays, and other kinds of communication. Some advocates of critical literacy have as their first goal simply training people to look beyond the obvious and to become aware of the conditions under which they live and how these conditions are reflected in daily communications. Other advocates want to inspire people to transform the world in humane ways to make it a more just place to live. None of us could argue with such lofty goals, nor with asking thoughtful questions, but we need to strive for balance lest we raise a generation of students who will be as pessimistic and gloomy as Eeyore, the doleful donkey in *Winnie the Pooh*.

Cynicism can be dangerous to one’s health. We overheard part of a discussion on National Public Radio about people who have become so critical of modern medicine and health care that they shell out millions of dollars to pay for alternative medicines that are often little better than snake oil. And in our own field of young adult literature, we have met some English teachers who are so cynical about books that are written and published specifically for teenagers that they choose the easy path of simply ignoring the whole field.

Educators are divided on the matter of critical literacy, with some complaining that it is a “bumper sticker” approach to life because teachers naturally tend to ask questions about issues of particular interest to themselves. It might balance out if students have teachers with different viewpoints, but still, it is sad when the joy of relaxing and losing yourself in a good story is replaced with feelings of angst and suspicion.

If we really believe that readers are going to bring their own experiences to a book, we cannot expect that they will all come away with the exact same “lesson.” For the sixth edition of this textbook, Louis Sachar told how, when he won the Newbery Medal for *Holes*, he was besieged with interviewers asking him what he wanted “kids to learn from the book.” He was so surprised that it took him a while to come up with an answer, but finally he told the *Houston Chronicle*:

> The best moral kids get from any book is just the capacity to empathize with other people, to care about the characters and their feelings. So you don’t have to write a preachy book to do that. You just make it a fun book with characters they care about, and they will become better people as a result.³

He went on to say that people do not ask authors of adult novels, what morals or lessons they are trying to teach the reader, “but there is a perception
that if you write for young people, then the book should be a lesson of some sort, a learning experience, a step toward something else.” He sees this attitude not just with reporters but also with teachers, whose influence pervades some of the letters he receives, such as one in which a boy wrote, “Your book taught me that the acts of your great-great-grandfather can affect your life.”

This boy was so involved in looking for a lesson that he missed the joke about the family curse. Sachar said he included the part about the curse to trigger smiles of recognition because most teenagers have at least occasionally thought they were cursed by family connections. The only lesson he was hoping to teach was that reading is fun.

Don Gallo is the editor of a regular column in the *English Journal* entitled “Bold Books for Teenagers.” The underlying philosophy of the column is one of critical literacy, and in the September 2004 issue, he interviewed his wife, C. J. Bott, with the focus being on books about homosexuality. He used the subtitle of “The Boldest Books,” and in January 2005, the *English Journal* editor printed three well-developed letters, each illustrating a different reaction to the column. One was from a gay man who appreciated the “open and honest article” and was going to distribute copies and buy some of the books for his community’s Rainbow Club, “an accepting and nonthreatening place for gay and lesbian teenagers to gather once a week.” The second letter was from a teacher who began by citing Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s *The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn from Each Other* (Random House, 2003). She quoted the statement that “Schools have always been the arena where the cultural and historical dramas of our society get played out.” She agreed with the idea that educators must help students “frame philosophical stances without animosity,” but “the column did not offer validation for opposing groups” and implied that “religious groups are serving as ‘a major obstacle’ to achieving real equality in American education.” She does not want “religious belief categorized as illogical or unenlightened.” She concluded with the fact that she teaches to a captive audience and does not have a right to elevate one ideology over another:

As a teacher, I am the permeable skin between politics and the classroom—a place where all students, including those of religious identity, are welcome. I cannot draw lines. The students make those decisions for themselves. My intent is to arm with objectivity so that when a proverbial bullet does fly, it hits an idea, not a person.

The third letter was from a man who appreciated the article because “There can be no denying that the avoidance in our schoolrooms of literature that focuses on lesbian and gay lives amounts to silent censorship.” But Gallo’s postscript, in which he said that the woman he was interviewing was his wife, made the man “grit his teeth.”

I’m sure that Gallo was sincere when he stated that “full disclosure” was the motive for inserting this fact, but I don’t believe that’s the only reason heterosexuals find it necessary to underline their heterosexuality when they find themselves defending (or even acknowledging the existence of) gay and lesbian people. How much more courageous it would have been to let some readers infer, even erroneously,
that C. J. Bott had been an organizer of the Gay/Straight Alliance in her former school because she was a lesbian. . . . True solidarity with gay and lesbian colleagues and students means being willing to experience some of the onus that falls on us when we are visible.4

We quoted these letters to illustrate that when real issues are being talked about, it is not easy to get agreement. In the typical high school class, teachers are keeping so many balls in the air that it is hard to predict what might happen in a conversation where, in an attempt to “get closure,” teachers might lead students to oversimplify complex issues. When Robert Cormier was criticized for not providing a happy ending to The Chocolate War, he argued that he was simply providing a balance. He wanted his young readers who had been raised on television programs where every problem was solved within an hour—including time out for commercials—to recognize that the world is filled with problems that even with the best people putting forth their best efforts cannot be solved so quickly or easily.

In Christopher Paolini’s 2003 Eragon, it is left to Saphira, the dragon, to try to explain this to Eragon. He and his traveling companion, Murtagh, are attacked by a group of slavers when they are on their way to take Arya, the drugged elf, back to her own people for healing. Eragon and Murtagh defend themselves with magic as well as with their highly cultivated warrior skills. As the finishing touch Eragon calls Saphira from the sky and the men race frantically away. Their leader, Torkenbrand, is accidentally knocked down by one of his own men’s javelins and Murtagh rushes over and beheads the man.

Eragon is horrified and accuses Murtagh of being a murderer, of killing a defenseless man who could have just been left behind. Murtagh argues that he was only trying to stay alive; “No stranger’s life is more important than my own.” The next day Eragon flies on Saphira’s back instead of riding with Murtagh because he wants to be away from his former friend. As they communicate back and forth in their thoughts (which Paolini puts in italics), Eragon argues,

*That was murder yesterday. I’ve no other word for it.*

Saphira banked to the left. It was a hasty deed and ill-considered, but Murtagh tried to do the right thing. The men who buy and sell other humans deserve every misfortune that befalls them. If we weren’t committed to helping Arya, I would hunt down every slaver and tear them apart.

Yes, said Eragon miserably, *but Torkenbrand was helpless. He couldn’t shield himself or run. A moment more and he probably would have surrendered. Murtagh didn’t give him that chance. If Tornkenbrand had at least been able to fight, it wouldn’t have been so bad.*

Saphira “tells” Eragon that the results would have been the same because he and Murtagh are skilled swordsman, plus there were two of them. How would a mismatched duel have been more fair?

*I don’t know what’s right!* admitted Eragon, distressed. *There aren’t any answers that make sense.*

*Sometimes,* said Saphira gently, *there are no answers.*
Visual Literacy for the Eye Generation

When Washington Post reporter Linton Weeks went out to do a story about young adults in a three-week summer movie production workshop, he described the participants not so much as members of the Me Generation as members of the Eye Generation. His clever pun may catch on because it truly describes a generation who has grown up surrounded by the kinds of eye candy that makes not only television and movies fun to watch, but also influences consumers in making decisions of what to buy and where to go. For example, owners of athletic stadiums are now expected to put up giant screens to provide close-up views so that spectators who have chosen to come to the stadium can have the same advantages of the close-ups that people get when they stay home and watch on television. Manufacturers are eager to beat the competition by putting more and more technology into smaller and smaller items even though few buyers are computer literate enough to take full advantage of their digital cameras, global positioning systems, and even their cell phones.

Back in 1970, when the National Council of Teachers of English passed a Resolution on Media Literacy and endorsed a “Summary Statement on Multimodal Literacies,” few members realized the responsibility they would soon have in teaching their students to think critically about still images, photos, movies, animations, drama, art, alphabetic and nonalphabetic text, music, speech, sound, physical movement, gaming, and whatever else might come down the road or over the airwaves. We will write about film, television, and the Internet in Chapter 11 on the teaching of English, and about comic books, graphic novels, anime, and video games as interactive literature in Chapter 5, which used to be restricted to poetry, humor, and drama.

Religious and Ethnic Literacy

We are writing about religious and ethnic literacies not because they are the same thing, but because as some of the stories we collected in our Media Watch show, they are often related. For example, an Associated Press story under the headline “Hawaii Park Rangers Urge Folks Not to Trash Volcano,” told about an ongoing conflict at the summit of Mount Kilauea, an active volcano in the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. A Native Hawaiian belief is that lava is the physical representation of the goddess Pele, and so it is the custom to bring food and other offerings to be left at the summit. Rangers are trying to balance the kind of religious literacy that inspires people to leave ornately packaged and flower-bedecked food offerings against a new kind of literacy about caring for the earth and protecting its resources. The park superintendent explains that “the accumulation of rotting food and foliage attracts rats, flies, ants and cockroaches,” and that officials are looking to the leaders of local communities to assist in communicating the message while still being sensitive to local customs (April 22, 2007).
In January of 2007, a long-festering debate at the University of Illinois about the school’s use of Chief Illiniwek as an “honored symbol,” moved a step closer to a resolution when the Oglala Sioux Tribe presented a demand for the return of the Lakota regalia worn by the school’s mascot. According to a story written by Michelle Keller for the Chicago Tribune, the immediate impetus for the demand was racially insensitive comments posted on a social networking site, but for more than a decade, various groups had been pointing out that the Chief Illiniwek tradition begun in 1926 by the university marching band was insulting to peoples of the Kaskaskia, Peoria, Piankeshaw, and Wea nations because the gymnastic performance of whoever was “playing” the role of Chief Illiniwek perpetuated degrading racial stereotypes. The dances and other actions were a mish-mash of nonauthentic customs and although the ceremonial dress was authentic to one of the tribes, its original purpose was religious and tied to serious ceremony rather than “play.”

A February 16, 2007, University News release posted at www.uillinois.edu/chief was headlined “Chief Illiniwek Will No Longer Perform: NCAA to Lift Sanctions on Illini Athletics.” The last appearance would be at the season-ending men’s home basketball game on February 21, at which time the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) would lift the sanctions it had leveled against the university in August of 2005 when it ruled that teams using Native American logos would not be allowed to host tournament events.

A story more specifically related to religion ran under the heading, “The Bible Makes a Comeback” in Education Week. It featured Harriet Kisilinsky, a veteran English teacher on Florida’s northeast coast, who had successfully lobbied for a course to be added to the humanities curriculum for the 125,000-student Duval County public school district. She wanted the course because when the district began pushing to get more students into Advanced Placement classes, she noticed that many of them were unprepared to understand biblical allusions. “How can you expect them to read Dante’s Inferno,” she asked, “and write about it if they don’t understand his nine circles of hell?” In another example, she told about teaching Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress,” and when they came to the line, “I would love you ten years before the Flood,” a boy asked, “What flood?”

Kisilinsky says she does not aspire to give students the same knowledge of the Bible that ministers have, “But they have to know the basics.” Melissa Rogers, who teaches in the Divinity School at Wake Forest University cautioned that we are not likely to get agreement on how classes in the Bible as Literature should be taught because on one side are people who fear that such classes will be “equivalent to Sunday school,” while on the other side are devout believers who “think it’s really not sound to teach the ‘holy book’ in a neutral way.” Other concerns are whose Bible will be taught. Students need to know that there are different versions and they also need to know something about religions of the world that go beyond the Judeo-Christian beliefs. Stephen Prothero from Boston University knows that problems will occur resulting in court cases, but thinks that eventually teachers and students will be able to “get it right.” In an opinion piece quoted from the Los Angeles Times, Prothero had explained that biblical illiteracy is not just a religious problem; it is a civic problem. “How can citizens par-
participate in biblically inflected debates on abortion, capital punishment, or the environment without knowing something about the Bible?"

*Time* magazine devoted seven pages to a cover story, “The Case for Teaching the Bible,” in its April 2, 2007, issue. Writer David Van Biema started with a description of a “Bible-literacy class” being taught at New Braunfels High School in Texas, where the curriculum was designed to teach the Bible “as an object of study, not God’s received word.” It is now used in over 450 districts in at least thirty-seven states. Van Biema pointed out that “Not only is the Bible the best-selling book of all time, it is the best-selling book of the year every year.” Shakespeare is said to have alluded to scripture some 1,300 times. A sidebar story, “The Bible in Pop Culture,” showed how “Even our superficial pleasures are enhanced by a background in the Good Book.” Cited films include *Babel*, *Superman*, *The Matrix*, and *Pulp Fiction*. Books made into films included C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. The televised teen drama *One Tree Hill* was described as echoing the birthright struggle of Cain and Abel, while the hit Broadway musical *Spamalot* is based on the 1975 film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Van Biema’s most persuasive example centered around seventh graders reading Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea*. He observed that most teachers would be able to “tick off the references to Christ’s Passion,” which include the way the old man’s palms bleed, the way he stumble while carrying the boat’s mast over his shoulder, and the way his hat cuts into his head, but then Van Biema asks, “wouldn’t the thrill of recognition have been more satisfying” if students knew enough to ask for it on their own?

**Global Literacy**

Thomas L. Friedman’s *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, is a book that *School Library Journal* recommended to teens as well as adults. Friedman is not using “flat” in a negative sense as we might talk about a “flat drink” or a “flat tire.” He is talking about the lowering of borders and dividers between countries, and how it is now possible to “innovate without having to emigrate.” He makes a persuasive argument that today more people than ever before from all parts of the world can collaborate and compete in real time on a huge variety of tasks. He focuses on three contributing factors: the collapse of Communism, the worldwide Y2K gearing up for adjusting the world’s computers to the new century, and the dot-com bubble, which resulted in heavy investments in fiber-optic telecommunications. When the bubble burst, the fiber optics were still in place and available below cost, which is what enabled Delta airlines, for example, to hire reservation clerks who are living in India and Jet Blue airlines to hire retirees and housewives to take its reservations from their homes in Utah.

The Friedman anecdote that is most likely to interest teenagers is the one about an owner of several McDonald’s restaurants in Colorado who decided to consolidate the way his customers order their hamburgers at the drive-through window. In fast-food restaurants, nothing slows things down more than for a
The day of the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, I was working in a federal law office in Chicago. My tribe, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, is located in Oklahoma. We have family living in the area, including a great-uncle who was on his way to the building just before the explosion, a cousin who was one of the first nurses on the scene, and another cousin who is in law enforcement and worked on the case. The tragedy inspired me to follow my dream and offer something positive to the world.

I took a long walk along Lake Michigan and came home to my husband, Greg. At the time, we still owed tens of thousands of dollars from student loans that had helped us to earn our law degrees. With little prior discussion, I announced, “I want to quit my day job and write full-time for kids.” He paused before asking, “Are you any good at it?” I shrugged. He said, “Let’s find out.”

We did. The manuscript for my first children’s book, Jingle Dancer, sold in 1998. Four years later, Greg joined me in the author ranks with the sale of Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo for preteens. Along the way, we decided the Internet would be a perfect way to raise awareness of quality books. At a time when library budgets were being cut, independent bookstores were closing, and celebrities were crowding literary voices off shelves, it wasn’t enough to light a candle. We wanted to light a torch.

I have a background in journalism, while Greg has a technology background, and so we joined forces to create what might be the largest youth books website on the Internet: Cynthia Leitich Smith’s Children & YA Literature Resources at www.cynthialeitichsmith.com. The site launched in 1998. Early on, I did the design work myself. I started small, with two author interviews and a few new customers to get to the window and have the wrong order so that the whole line of cars has to wait while the new order is prepared. This owner managed to cut his restaurants’ average wait time significantly by having all orders taken by someone in a sound-proof room trained to “get it right” and to send the correct order via computer to the kitchens in the originating restaurant. Although he set up his order system in his home state of Colorado, he could have as easily set it up in a different country or a different part of the United States.

We thought about Friedman’s observations when we recently visited with Shannon Hale, author of the Newbery Honor Book Princess Academy. She is a young mother living in Utah, who flew into Phoenix to make a presentation and do a book signing at Changing Hands Bookstore. She was coming to promote her new book Austenland: A Novel, which is officially an adult book but which we are sure teen lovers of Jane Austen will be reading. Hale had brought her four-month-old baby with her and right after eating with us, then being interviewed by a newspaper reporter, making her presentation, and autographing books, she
links each month. I added book recommendations as I read or rediscovered each title. Greg contributed his share, too, especially those reflecting Asian American characters.

The site features a section about me and my work, which may be characterized as Native fiction, comedic picture books, and young adult Gothic fantasy. The largest section, though, is on the body of literary children’s and young adult trade books as a whole. Articles, bibliographies, and links abound. But it’s best known for interviews with authors, illustrators, editors, and other industry professionals. Multicultural, nonfiction, and genre titles are featured along with mainstream fiction. New and quality mid-list voices are highlighted alongside national award winners and New York Times best sellers. Put another way, the site contains some 1,000 files, 275 pages, 700 images, and more than 12,000 links to related Web pages. Those links include hundreds to my blog, Cynsations (cynthia leitichsmith.blogspot.com). The main site is easy to navigate with a guide bar and a search engine. In 2006, 1.6 million unique visitors surfed by.

Our family is European-Asian-Native American. Greg is the son of an immigrant. I’m descended from Native peoples who originally settled what’s now the southeastern United States. Our family backgrounds offer us a certain insight into the need for multicultural literature—historical and contemporary—done well.

With regard to my Native fiction, I was one of the first writers to craft modern-day stories about young Indian characters. My books were cheered for bursting inaccurate and dated stereotypes. My debut tween novel, Rain Is Not My Indian Name, was one of the first to feature the Internet in an integrated way. An extension on my site was a natural tie in.

More globally, the site is important to us in that it offers a way to hear from and about young readers. I’ve gotten letters from kids who’ve lost a friend like Rain, and from black Indians who appreciate that my works reflect diversity within Native America. And since the publication of Tantalize, I am hearing from Gothic fantasy fanatics who want their sequel—now!

The Web is all about information and connections. With Greg’s support, the site personalizes it to our work and that of our beloved colleagues. We hope you’ll surf by!

Cynthia Leitich Smith’s books for young adults include Tantalize (Candlewick, 2007) and Rain Is Not My Indian Name (HarperCollins, 2001), while Greg is the author of Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo (Little, Brown, 2003) and Tofu and T. rex (Little, Brown, 2005), both for preteens.
Focus Box 3.3

Newly Translated YA Books with Starred Reviews

The Crow-Girl: The Children of Crow Cove by Bodil Bredsdorff, translated from Danish by Faith Ingwersen. Farrar, 2004. Young teens will be the ones to appreciate this historical tale set in a remote coastal area of Denmark. A young girl lives with her grandmother, who does everything she can to prepare the girl to survive when she dies, and with the help of the crows the girl manages.

Emil and Karl by Yankev Glatshteyn, translated from Yiddish by Jeffrey Shandler. Roaring Brook/A Neal Porter Book, 2006. Middle school students studying the Holocaust will be the ones to appreciate this novel written about two boys growing up in prewar Vienna. Glatshteyn wrote it after returning to America from a 1934 visit to Poland where he saw how Nazi persecution was changing all of Europe.

Inkheart by Cornelia Funke, translated from German by Anthea Bell. Scholastic, 2003. Twelve-year-old Meggie has a loving father, whom she calls Mo. He is a book mender, but unknown to her he has the accidental, and sometimes dangerous, talent of making characters come right out of a book into real life. Middle school readers especially like this charming fantasy, which is continued in Inkspell.

Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You by Hanna Jansen, translated from German by Elizabeth D. Crawford. Carolrhoda Books, 2006. For mature students, this painful book was written by the author as she tried over and over to help her adopted daughter, Jeannine d’Arc Umubyeyi, recover from the sadness and the anger she feels toward the Hutu neighbors in Rwanda who participated in the 1994 genocide killing of Jeannine's family and destroying her home and life as she knew it.

The Pull of the Ocean by Jean-Claude Mourlevat, translated from French by Y. Maudet. Delacorte, 2006. Middle school readers who like mysteries and stories set in the past are likely to be charmed by this mysterious story of three sets of twins and their dwarf-sized little brother. When they learn that their father intends to kill them, they set off to sea.

Secrets in the Fire by Henning Mankell, translated from Swedish by Anne Connie Stuksrud. Annick, distributed by Firefly, 2003. This fictional account is based on the true story of Sofia Alfate, a friend of the author who survived the civil war in Mozambique (1975–1992), only to lose both of her legs when she stepped on a landmine.

The Water Mirror by Kai Meyer, translated from German by Elizabeth D. Crawford. S&S/Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2005. Part of the Reflections series, this fantasy is set in medieval Venice. Protagonists are two orphans apprenticed to a maker of mirrors. One of them is blind. The adventure starts when the Egyptian Army invades and the survival of Venice is in doubt.
nie reading a chapter from the third book, *Eclipse*, which was not going to be released for three more months; however, attendees could buy an edition of the second book (*New Moon*) that would include the forthcoming chapter. The $8.00 tickets, which Meyer offered on her website, sold out so fast that the organizers quickly set up both a matinee and an evening event. Girls, mostly accompanied by a parent (a small number came with boyfriends), flew in from all over the country, with one girl coming from London. Just prior to the big event on our campus, Stephenie and her husband had been on a book signing trip to Rome. They had also been invited to go to South America, but had turned down the invitation, at least for the time being, because such a trip would keep them away from their three young sons as well as from the rigorous writing schedule that Stephenie is committed to.

Other evidence of a flat world in relation to young adult books is how many more YA books are being translated into English from other languages. See Focus Box 3.3 for recent translations that were given starred reviews in *School Library Journal*. And besides the translated books, more books from other English-speaking countries are being successfully marketed in the United States, as with Marcus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* and Sonya Hartnett’s *Surrender*, both of which were originally published in Australia, but made their way to our 2006 Honor List.

In three different sections of the survey we conducted in local high schools, students expressed positive feelings toward entertainment coming from Japan. When we asked about comic books, for example, one thirteen-year-old boy wrote that he liked reading the Japanese ones because they go backward and “they are good artists.” When we asked about favorite magazines, a student listed three (to us, unrecognizable) names and explained, “they are all Japanese music magazines.” Another listed *Shonen Jump*, praising it for including various manga, while another listed *Cure* (a Japanese fashion magazine). And then of course, in the section asking about computer games, many of the students’ favorites were Japanese imports.

Some of the credit for American teenagers developing more of a worldview must also go to the Harry Potter books, which are now a worldwide phenomenon. When we attended the 2007 International Society for Humor Studies meeting, we talked with a woman from Spain whose research project was comparing the humor in the German, Spanish, and Portuguese translations with the original English version. Because we have studied J. K. Rowling’s clever invention of names, we asked her about how the names were translated. For the most part, she said the names had stayed the same, so that readers would miss some of the jokes, but many of them were still understandable because the names were based on Latin roots, which have carried over into many other languages, especially the Romance languages of Spanish and Portuguese.

We wrote a letter to Scholastic, the American publishers of Harry Potter, to ask about the level of changes being made to accommodate American readers. We knew that several changes had been made in the first book, with fewer in the second one, which Scholastic decided to publish sooner than they planned because people were going online and buying the British version rather than waiting for the American one. Editor Arthur A. Levine responded that very few changes were
being made between the British and the American versions, not because of Scholastic’s fear of losing sales, but because by now American readers are so well acquainted with the setting and the vocabulary that they feel comfortable with “Britishisms.”

More evidence of Americans developing more of a worldview is the publication of *The Real Revolution: The Global Story of American Independence*, by Marc Aronson. Aronson is one of our most thoughtful YA writers and editors and here he takes a second look at the American Revolution as he develops the point that America has always been part of a wider world and that the real revolution occurred not in the 1776 war but in the minds and hearts of the people who came from, and were influenced by people from, many different countries between 1760 and 1775.

At a 2006 meeting of the Children’s Literature Association, we heard Cornelia Funke’s name included in a list of celebrities who had suddenly begun to publish children’s books just because they had name recognition. Actually, Cornelia Funke did not belong in that list because she had written some forty books in German before *The Thief Lord* was translated into English and into nearly thirty other languages. She compared seeing her books in other languages (she reads Italian, German, and English) to seeing them in a new dress. For the last edition of this textbook she wrote:

> So, with the help of many translators and publishers my stories have started traveling to places I’ve never been. They find their way to people I’ve never met who choose to spend some of their time walking in my imagination. In a world where borders still cut the world into artificial pieces, where differences are thought to be more important than the things that people share, it is wonderful that writers and readers can travel together for a while in their imaginations. It still feels like a miracle.7

We were surprised to read on the back of Listening Library’s boxed set of CDs for *Inkspell* that “Funke lives in California, with her husband and children.” When we received this statement from Funke for the 2005 edition of the text, we communicated through international mail, and she was still excited about her first trip to the United States in 2002.

Joan Bauer, whose *Thwonk*, *Squashed*, and *Hope Was Here* have been translated into several languages, compares seeing the translated editions of her books to seeing a friend who has gone off for plastic surgery and come home with a new face. Even though it takes her a while to get used to the new look, she loves seeing them and knowing that people are reading them in places very different from where she was when she wrote them. She took the Korean version of *Squashed* to a friend who read Korean, but the only thing he could figure out was that on the cover it promised a “better story than Jack and the Beanstalk.” One of Bauer’s most memorable experiences was a week that she spent at the American School in Shanghai where the students had read her books as part of their English studies. She was surprised when she arrived to see that the students were not Chinese, but were the children of diplomats and business people from all parts of the world. The one thing they had in common was that they had all been plucked from their homes and brought by their parents to Shanghai.
While not telling them about the American slang term *to be shanghaied*, she changed her speaking plans and worked mostly with *Hope Was Here*, the story of a girl plucked from Brooklyn and taken to a small town in Wisconsin. Many of the students had read the book, but had not connected it to their own lives. Bauer began by leading the students to talk about their own experiences of moving and adjusting to a new home and then they began talking about what similar feelings they had all experienced. As the week went on, they began writing a group story. Fortunately, Bauer’s husband, a computer programmer, had come with her, and while the students were composing he would type their words into his computer and then project them onto the ceiling. She has since led similar activities in Croatia and in Kazakhstan on visits sponsored by the United States Department of State, which sometimes sends American authors on cultural exchange visits.

We wrote to several publishers asking them if they now sponsor their writers on overseas visits or if they paid to have “foreign” writers come to the United States. They mostly said they were not the ones sponsoring such visits, but that they were always happy when visits were arranged and they would be supportive in furnishing publicity handouts, and so forth. On rare occasions, for example, if an author were invited to appear on the *Today* show or to accept an award and speak at a big convention, they might help with expenses, but usually the bookstores or the host school or conference handles the finances.

We chatted with Linda Sue Park (author of *A Single Shard*) when she came to Phoenix to participate in our state library convention. She told us about feeling fortunate to be invited to a large conference in Hong Kong connected with the Man Booker Awards. She was invited as the Asian American children’s writer, while Amy Tan was the Asian American general writer. Another international tidbit that we happened to hear about is that the Fitchburg State College in Massachusetts, whose library houses the Robert E. Cormier collection, holds an annual memorial service in which attendees stand and read a favorite portion of one of his books. A highlight of the program is when foreign students read some of Cormier’s writing in their native languages.

A flat earth does not mean that the world is free from dangers and fears, but there is something comforting in knowing that young people around the world are reading many of the same books and being exposed to many of the same ideas and values. Even dictators are known to warm up to children’s stories. As one author confided when he was invited for a two-week visit to a totalitarian country, the people who invited him tactfully explained that in order to get his visa approved, he should identify himself not as an “author,” but as a “children’s storyteller.”

**Deciding on the Literary Canon**

The factors already mentioned in this chapter are contributing to an ongoing debate over what books should be taught. An oversimplification is to say that on one side are those who believe in acculturation or assimilation. They think that if we all read approximately the same books, we will come away with
similar values and attitudes. On the other side are those who believe in diversity and want individuals and groups to find their own values, attitudes, and ways of life reflected in the literature they read. This latter group views the traditional literary canon as racist and sexist, with its promotion in schools serving to keep minorities and women in their place.

Katha Pollitt, a contributing editor of The Nation, wrote that “In a country of real readers a debate like the current one over the canon would not be taking place.” She described an imaginary country where children grow up watching their parents read and going with them to well-supported public libraries where they borrow books and read and read and read. At the heart of every school is an attractive and well-used library, and in classrooms children have lively discussions about books they have read together, but they also read lots of books on their own, so that years later they don’t remember whether “they read Jane Eyre at home and Judy Blume in class, or the other way around.”

Pollitt wrote that in her imaginary country of “real readers—voluntary, active, self-determined readers”—a discussion of which books should be studied in school would be nothing more than a parlor game. It might even add to the aura of writers not to be included on school-assigned reading lists because this would mean that their books were “in one way or another too heady, too daring, too exciting to be ground up into institutional fodder for teenagers.” The alternative would be millions of readers freely choosing millions of books, each book becoming just a tiny part of a lifetime of reading. Pollitt concluded that at the root of the current debate over the canon is the assumption that the only books that will be read are those assigned in school: “Becoming a textbook is a book’s only chance: all sides take that for granted.” She wonders why those educated scholars and critics who are currently debating this issue and must be readers themselves have conspired to keep secret two facts that they surely must know:

... if you read only twenty-five, or fifty, or a hundred books, you can’t understand them, however well chosen they are. And... if you don’t have an independent reading life—and very few students do—you won’t like reading the books on the list and will forget them the minute you finish them.  

Pollitt’s argument puts even more of a burden on those of us who have as our professional responsibility the development of lifelong readers. We are the ones who should be raising our voices to explain the limitations of expecting children to read just what is assigned in class. We are also the ones with the responsibility of helping students develop into the kinds of committed and enthusiastic readers that Pollitt described in her imaginary country.

In the meantime, we also have an obligation to become knowledgeable about the issues underlying the current debate over the literary canon and to assist schools and libraries in making informed choices with the resources they have. We, as authors of this textbook, have already committed ourselves to the idea of an expanded canon. Some of the harshest critics of adolescent literature are those in favor of promoting only the traditional canon; others tolerate adolescent literature only because they view it as a means to the desired end of leading students to appreciate “real” literature.
At the 1991 National Council of Teachers of English convention in Seattle, Washington, Rudolfo Anaya, author of *Bless Me, Ultima* and a professor of creative writing at the University of New Mexico, talked about the incorporation of minority literature into the mainstream. He did not mean just the inclusion on book lists of the names of authors who are members of minority groups but also the incorporation of new styles and ideas into the writing of nonminority authors.

One example is the incorporation into mainstream literature of the kinds of magical realism that for a long time has been common in Hispanic literature. Another way is through the desegregation of characters as seen in several of the books listed in Focus Box 4.5, Relating across Cultures (p. 129).

Anaya went on to explain that Mexican Americans have a different worldview. When he was in college, he loved literature and read the standard literary canon with enthusiasm and respect, but when he went to write his own stories, he couldn’t use Hemingway or Milton as models. He could create plots like theirs, but then he was at a standstill because nowhere in the literary canon did he find people like the ones he knew. His Spanish-speaking family has lived in eastern New Mexico for more than one hundred years. The harsh but strangely beautiful landscape and the spirit of the Pecos River had permeated his life, as had stories of La Grande, the wise old woman who had safely pulled him from his mother’s body even though the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck.

Anaya worked on *Bless Me, Ultima* for seven years, during which he felt he was “writing in a vacuum. I had no Chicano models to read and follow, no fellow writers to turn to for help. Even Faulkner, with his penchant for the fantastic world of the South, could not help me in Mexican/Indian New Mexico. I would have to build from what I knew best.” He went on to explain:

I began to discover that the lyric talent I possessed, as the poet I once aspired to be, could be used in writing fiction. The oral tradition which so enriched my imagination as a child could lend its rhythm to my narrative. Plot techniques learned in Saturday afternoon movies and comic books could help as much as the grand design of the classics I had read. Everything was valuable, nothing was lost.9

Anaya’s observations about not having models to follow and being forced to create a new narrative style to tell a story coming from his own experience relates to the frustration that teachers and librarians often express when they go to look for young adult novels about minority characters. They look for the same kinds of coming-of-age stories that are typical in mainstream young adult literature except they want the characters to have brown skin and “different” names. The absence of such books, especially such books written by Native American authors, is in itself part of the cultural difference. We’ve noticed that the more closely a book with a Native American protagonist resembles what we described in Chapter 1 as a typical young adult book, the greater the chance that the author is not a Native American and that the protagonist is of mixed parentage or is living apart from the native culture.

Being in the blood line of a particular group does not guarantee acceptance by the group. Most high school teachers think they are contributing to an awareness of cultural diversity and the enlargement of the literary canon by leading students
to read Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*. But noted Chinese writer Frank Chin criticizes Kingston, along with Amy Tan for *The Joy Luck Club* and David Henry Hwang for his plays, *F. O. B.* and *M. Butterfly*. He accuses these writers of “boldly faking” Chinese fairy tales and childhood literature. Then he goes on to ask and answer the question of why the most popular “Chinese” works in the United States are consistent with each other but inconsistent with Chinese culture and beliefs: “That’s easy: (1) All the authors are Christian; (2) the only form of literature written by Chinese Americans that major publishers will publish (other than the cookbook) is autobiography, an exclusively Christian form [based on confession]; and (3) they all write to the specifications of the Christian stereotype of Asia being as opposite morally from the West as it is geographically.”

Chin’s comments are in an essay, “Come All Ye Asian American Writers,” that is used as an introduction to an anthology entitled *The Big Aiiiiiiieee!*, apparently put together for use in college classes. The 619-page book is too intimidating for most high school students, but they could appreciate many of the individual stories, poems, and essays. The book’s title comes from the sound in movies, television, radio, and comic books assigned to “the yellow man” who “when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering” either “whined, shouted, or screamed, ‘Aiiiiiiieee!’”

Chin’s introductory essay illustrates the complexities involved in the whole matter of ethnic differences. As Chin goes on to state his case, he brings in religion and gender differences as well as differences caused by race, history, social class, and politics. In answer to the kind of criticism he offers, Kingston has explained:

> Sinologists have criticized me for not knowing myths and for distorting them; pirates [those who illegally translate her books for publication in Taiwan and China] correct my myths, revising them to make them conform to some traditional Chinese version. They don’t understand that myths have to change, be useful or be forgotten. Like the people who carry them across oceans, the myths become American. The myths I write are new, American. That’s why they often appear as cartoons and Kung Fu movies. I take the power I need from whatever myth. Thus Fa Mu Lan has the words cut into her back; in traditional story, it is the man, Ngak Fei the Patriot, whose parents cut vows on his back. I mean to take his power for women.”

Knowledge of these opposing viewpoints should not frighten teachers back into the comforts of the established canon; instead, it should help teachers prepare for meeting the challenges involved in going beyond the “tried and true.”

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**Teaching Ethnic Literature**

Most educators feel a duty to bring ethnic-based literature to young people in hopes of increasing general understanding. Besides that lofty goal, here are
some additional reasons for making special efforts to bring ethnic books to young people:

- Young readers can identify with characters who straddle two worlds because they have similar experiences in going between the worlds of adulthood and childhood.
- Motifs that commonly appear in ethnic-based stories—including loneliness, fear of rejection, generational differences, and troubles in fitting into the larger society—are meaningful to teenagers.
- Nearly all teenagers feel that their families are somehow different, and so they can identify with the theme of family “differentness” that often finds its way into stories about immigrant families.
- Living in harmony with nature is a common theme, especially in Native American literature, and this theme appeals to today’s ecology-minded youth.
- As movies, television programs, mass media books, and magazines inundate teens with stories and photos of people who are “all alike,” readers find it refreshing to read about people who have their own individuality.
- Myths and legends that are often brought into ethnic-based literature satisfy some deep-down psychological and aesthetic needs that are not met with contemporary realism or with the romanticism masked as realism that currently makes up the main body of fiction provided for young adults.

One of the most important concepts that needs to be taught is that there are large differences among people typically identified as a group. When Europeans first came to the American continent, there were more than thirty distinct nations speaking perhaps a thousand different languages. During the past five hundred years, these people have had such common experiences as losing their lands, being forced to move to reservations, and having to adapt their beliefs and lifestyles to a technological society. These experiences may have affected their attitudes in similar ways, but still it is a gross overgeneralization to write about Native Americans as if they were one people holding the same religious and cultural views. Although in a single class it would be impossible to study dozens of different Native American tribes, a compromise solution might be to study the history and folklore of those tribes who lived, or are living, in the same geographical area as the students. With this approach, it is important for students to realize that they are looking at only one small part of a bigger group, and that if they studied a different group they would learn equally interesting but different facts.

Similar points could be made about the thoughtlessness of talking about Africa as if it were one country and as if one set of folktales could represent a continent that contains nearly twelve million square miles and over forty independent countries. Asian Americans also resent being lumped together. The Chinese and Japanese, the two groups who have been in the United States the longest, come from countries with a long history of hostility toward each other. A refugee from Vietnam or Cambodia has very little in common with someone whose ancestors
came to California in the 1850s. Likewise, Puerto Ricans in New York have a different background from Mexican Americans. Even in the Southwest, people whose families have lived there from the days before Anglo settlers arrived resent being grouped with people who just came over the border from Mexico.

We need to teach about the histories of groups whose literature is being read to help readers understand the bitterness that finds its way into some ethnic literature. Readers who get impatient with Hispanic authors for including words and phrases in Spanish will probably be a little more tolerant if they realize that today’s generation of Mexican American authors went to school in the days before bilingual education. In their childhoods, many of them heard nothing but Spanish and were amazed to arrive at English-speaking schools where they would be punished for speaking the only language they had ever known.

While Rudolfo Anaya broke new literary ground with his *Bless Me, Ultima*, many other minority writers are breaking new ground by changing the format of stories and translating them from an oral tradition into a written form. Before printing presses, typewriters, word processors, movies, radio, and television, people had more of an incentive to remember and tell the stories that communicated the traditions and values of a society. Even today, oral traditions play an important role, as seen on television talk shows as well as with kids telling stories and workers and travelers whiling away long, boring hours. Because minority writers are translating oral stories into written and printed formats, some of the first publications to come from particular groups are more likely to be poetry and short stories than novels.

There are many beautifully designed collections presenting art, poetry, photographs, essays, observations, interviews, and short stories. Besides the obvious advantage that anthologies present a variety of pieces short enough for classroom and library use, the differences in the statements demonstrate that members of groups are first and foremost individuals. They have their own thoughts, feelings, and values, just as do the members of one’s own family, one’s own church, and one’s own neighborhood. A helpful new book is *Integrating Multicultural Literature in Libraries and Classrooms in Secondary Schools* by Kaa Vonia Hinton and Gail K. Dickinson. The authors include specific examples of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, screenplays, and picture books with suggestions of how to use them alongside the more standard offerings found in most textbooks.

This is probably a lesson that works better through demonstration than through lecturing. Jim Burke, in *The English Teacher’s Companion*, gives two examples of ways that teachers might introduce Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*.

**Scenario One**

Okay guys, today we’re going to be getting a new book called *The House on Mango Street* by a Latina author. I thought it was really important that we read an author from a different culture since so many students here are Latino.

**Scenario Two**

(after reading a brief section from Cisneros’s book) So, we’ve been talking about this whole idea of growing up, about creating an identity for oneself, what it means, how and when it happens. Huck Finn allowed us to talk about some impor-
tant aspects of that whole experience. And Nathan McCall’s book told us what it was like for him to grow up as a young black man in the sixties. I thought it would be interesting to see what this other book has to say about the experience since unlike Huck she didn’t take off but stayed on Mango Street. I love this book a lot. It took her five years to write this 120-page book. It’s like a poem almost, the language and images are so intense.12

As Burke explains, the second scenario is clearly better in that the teacher grabbed students’ interest by reading an excerpt and then linked the book to what the class had been doing. By emphasizing the book’s literary quality, the teacher helped students see why they were reading the book while the teacher in the first scenario left students with the idea that they were reading The House on Mango Street to be politically correct.

We’ll conclude this section with a plea for all those working with books and young adults to continue seeking out and promoting the use of minority literature. Educators have shied away from working with minority literature because:

- They didn’t study it when they were in school and so they feel less prepared than when teaching mainstream literature.
- They fear censorship both because of prejudice against minorities and because of the fact that some minority writers use language considered inappropriate for schoolbooks.
- Minority literature is harder to find, especially minority literature that has been given a “seal of approval” by the education establishment (i.e., positive reviews and suggestions for teaching).
- Ethnic identification is such a sensitive topic that teachers fear that when they are discussing a piece of literature either they or their students may say something that will offend some students or hurt their feelings.

Being a professional means that you do not shy away from responsibilities just because they are challenging. Instead, you prepare, so that you can be successful—at least most of the time. The fact that we are working in an exciting and changing field where we have to keep learning new things is something to be grateful for rather than afraid of. Pablo Casals, the great cellist, was still practicing three hours a day when he was ninety-four years old. When someone asked him why he was still practicing, he answered, “I’m beginning to notice some improvement.”

Notes

7. Cornelia Funke, “On the Miracle of Translation,”

chapter 3 ● New Technology, New Attitudes, and New Literacies