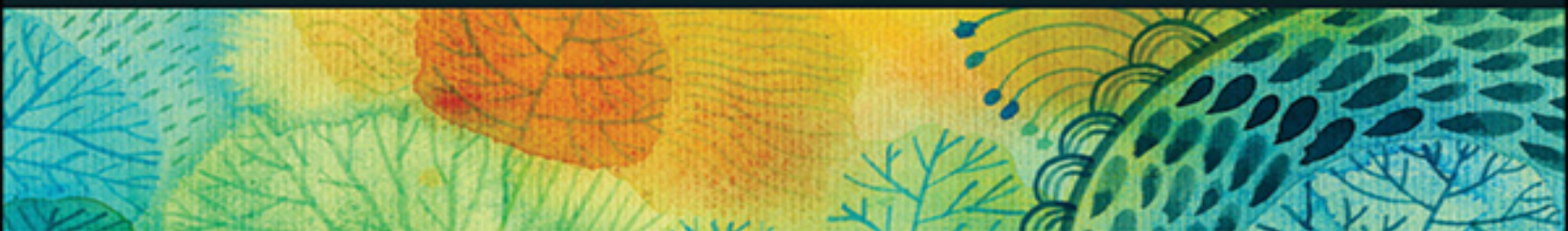




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THIRD EDITION

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN ACTION

A LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE

Rose Brock



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Young Adult Literature in Action

A Librarian's Guide

THIRD EDITION

Rose Brock

Library and Information Science Text Series



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For a lack of a better and less exaggerated way of describing it, getting to complete this project feels a bit like winning the lottery; championing young adult literature has been such at the heart of my professional work for so long that it seems in regard to YA lit, I've forever had a book in one hand and a pompon in the other trying to get the world excited about this category of books. I'm so grateful that there are many fans today. While I'm celebrating this accomplishment, I have to send out some cheers for the folks on my team who helped in a number of ways and for personally cheering me on:

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Introduction

As an adolescent in the 1980s, the story of my identity as a reader can be described as hodge-podge, and it featured the best and worst the decade had to offer in regard to book choices. My family moved to the United States when I was in elementary school, and due to some language barriers, I struggled with reading. I finally became smitten with books toward the end of elementary school after meeting my then fictional best friend at my school's library—she was a titian-haired vixen with a power blue roaster and a tight team of mystery solving friends, and I wanted to be just like her. I can honestly say that Nancy Drew turned me into a reader, and from that point on, books mattered to me. After repeatedly working my way through Nancy's adventures, I moved my reading needle significantly by consuming an equal measure of very adult novels that had been made for TV movies (*The Thorn Birds* and *Lace*), but around the same time, I also discovered S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Judy Blume's body of work for older readers. From those years, I can remember rereading *Tiger Eyes* over and over (something about that heartbreaking YA novel wouldn't let me go, and it satisfied my need to work through Davey's grief with her), but it was Blume's *Forever* that had the most profound effect. Given to me by my mother as an accidental twelfth birthday gift, this novel was nothing like *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*; *Forever* explored teen sexuality and first experiences so honestly that I remember these things: first, I reread it a number of times not just because of the candid way it approached an intimate physical and emotional relationship between two teenagers, but it also answered so many questions I had that felt I had no place asking the grownups in my life. Long before knowing I'd spend part of my career serving as a teen librarian, I enthusiastically shared Blume's novel with my girlfriends as I knew they'd also be equally appreciative of this honest portrayal of sexuality and first experiences. The rest of my teen years left me obsessed with the 1980s iconic book series, *Sweet Valley High*, and in the

lives of the Wakefield twins, I realized I longed to escape my pedantic teen life stuck in Oklahoma and run away to the seemingly glamorous high school scene in fictional Sweet Valley, California.

Because college life as an English major left me reading little beyond the required literary canon, my passion for young adult literature didn't resurface until I landed my first teaching job. As a teacher of young adults, I quickly realized that the classic novels for young people dictated by the curriculum offered very little—with few exceptions, these were not books that my teens were excited about or felt any great connection with; for that reason and out of a deep sense of desire to find a book they might love (and a bit of desperation on my part), I landed at my local Barnes and Noble, hoping to discover something new, anything that might appeal to my readers. The offerings in the mid-1990s were sparse—at that time, two shelves made up what the bookstore considered its "teen" collection, but from it, luckily, I discovered Chris Crutcher's novel, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* and from that moment on, my YA reading life changed.

More than 20 years later, young adult literature has remained at the forefront of my professional work and personal interest, and I've been delighted to study and watch as YA has changed and continues to adapt and grow. Today, bookstores have extensive dedicated YA sections in their stores, and this category of literature continues to evolve and diversify in rich and wondrous ways.

The purpose of this textbook is to showcase young adult literature and provide a survey of YA for undergraduate and graduate students seeking licensures and degrees leading to careers working with young adults in school and public libraries. It's also intended to acquaint college students with classic and current literature published for young adults. Although young adult literature can refer to anything that young adults read, for the purposes of this textbook, I'll focus primarily on books published for young adults, using the definition agreed upon by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. The association defines young adults as ages 12 through 18. This textbook will also focus on books specifically published for those ages with one exception:

recognition of young adults' interest in books published for adults. Early classics plus two YALSA award lists—the Alex Award and Outstanding Books for the College Bound—contain adult titles of interest to young adults.

The goal of this textbook is twofold: (1) to provide an introduction to young adult literature with recommended titles and acquaint readers with some of the best loved and heralded YA authors writing today and (2) to suggest a few basic activities for promoting and using literature with young adults in middle schools, high schools, and public libraries as offered by librarians working with teen readers today. Recommended titles have won awards or been placed on award-winning or best lists. Titles are a mix of classic books that continue to resonate with young adults—published at least 20 years ago and still in print, "classic" books and recent books—those published close to the time of writing this textbook. It's not the intention of this textbook to be a comprehensive list of books. With access to the treasure trove of Internet resources, learning about award-winning titles and the latest titles published by favorite authors is easy, and librarians and those working with young adult literature and youth are encouraged to always seek out additional "best" lists and other resources.

New features found in this third edition are snapshots about craft and writing intention from beloved young adult writers, brief interviews with authors of YA, as well as more authors sharing their answers to the question, "Why do you write YA?" Their answers are fascinating and as varied as their individual writing styles and personalities.

Each of the book's chapters includes specific activities for promoting and discussing specific genres and titles and suggested activities to be used when promoting young adult literature. Embedded are action items related to history, books, authors, librarians, assignments, and recommended professional resources to help librarians who work with young adults. [Chapter 1](#)—"An Introduction to Young Adults and Their Literature"—describes young adults and their literature; it shares a snapshot on the history of YA literature; and examines reading preferences, interests, choices, and the importance of diversity and inclusion in regard to representation in young adult literature. The chapter also provides lists of awards, book review

sources, and professional organizations and resources, and closes with book promotion.

[Chapters 2](#) through [7](#) describe young adult literature according to genres, using award-winning titles and those popular with young adults. [Chapter 2](#), "Book Access through Quick Reads and Audiobooks," includes a focus on the graphic format—comic books, graphic novels, and manga, series books, magazines, anthologies and story collections, and poetry. [Chapter 2](#) ends with a close examination of audiobooks and their role in defining reading. [Chapter 3](#), "Contemporary Realistic Fiction for Young Adults," focuses on both the lighter side and the more serious side of modern realistic fiction. [Chapter 4](#) examines historical fiction. [Chapter 5](#), "Fantastic Fiction," presents fantasy and science fiction. [Chapter 6](#) focuses on informational books for young adults that include biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and other informational books. Lastly, [Chapter 7](#), "The Freedom to Read," defines intellectual freedom and provides scenarios to help understand the role of a librarian who faces complaints and challenges in school and public libraries.

After studying young adult literature, you will feel confident in recommending books to young adults, either singly or in groups. You'll know why many books are important reads for young adults because you have read and studied them in your young adult literature class, and you were just waiting for the right young adults to recommend them to. I hope you find this text both helpful and hopeful—making the match between YA literature and the right reader can be a richly rewarding experience.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Young Adults and Their Literature

I write YA because I acutely remember being a teen, and I'm drawn to the feeling of immediacy I associate with that time of my life. I love exploring firsts, especially first love stories (all my books are first love stories). Honestly, I feel very connected to the teens I'm writing for, I have a hard time imagining writing for another audience.

—Becky Albertalli, New York Times best-selling author of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (a finalist for the ALA's Morris Award) and the other books in the *Simonverse*, *The Upside of Unrequited*, *Leah on the Offbeat*, and *What If It's Us* (with Adam Silvera)

Do you remember reading as a teen when you were one? What were your choices? Classics? Adult novels? Graphic novels? Did you read the category of fiction considered young adult? Were your family members and friends reading as well? Did you read any young adult books in school and if so, was it a young adult classic such as *The Outsiders* or *The Chocolate War*? Recently, have you read any contemporary young adult novels like *The Hate U Give*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, or *Long Way Down*? While the category „young adult“ is fairly new (as compared to the distinction of children's literature), young adult literature isn't a new invention. While books written for youth have existed for centuries, scholars of young adult literature often credit Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* published in 1942 as the first young adult novel though Daly's intention was for her work to be read by adults (Cart 2016). Others credit Susan Elizabeth Hinton for creating the young adult novel in 1967. Regardless of which scholarship with which you agree, Hinton's examination of the class warfare and issues at the forefront of the teens in her world, *The Outsiders* effectively revolutionized young adult fiction. Fortunately for young adults today, the 15-year-lag between the real life of teens and the literature of teens is gone. Authors are writing

about issues and concerns important to young adults. The taboos of the twentieth century have disappeared from poetry, fiction, and informational books, helping to open up literary possibilities. In this chapter, young adults will be defined by age, as individuals and through reading interests. Young adult literature will begin to be defined historically and through the viewpoints of award criteria; the role of diversity and inclusivity in young adult collections will be examined, and book formats and young adult outreach opportunities will be considered as well. Chapters that follow will focus on the variety and specifics of genres.

Defining Young Adults

Until the mid-twentieth century there wasn't a clear designation for young adult literature. Once children grew out of juvenile books, they read adult classics. Sometimes teenagers fell into the juvenile category. Today the term "juvenile" suffers from negative connotations, such as childish and immature. The publication of J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* in 1951 and other coming-of-age novels marked the beginning of "adolescent" literature. The term "adolescent" became popular and continues to be used today although it has an outdated feel to it. Today's preferred term is "young adult" although in recent years experts in the field of young adult services and literature have suggested using the term "tween" to identify children in grades five through seven. Tweens bridge the gap between children and young adult. Realistically, in public and school libraries the terms "teen" and "young adult" are used interchangeably to indicate young people anywhere between and including ages 12 through 18, though a separate classification of middle grade (MG) has been adopted by the publishing industry to capture and categorize books for readers who are between the ages of 9 and 13.

The truth is that it's difficult to find one term that's appropriate for this special group of people. It's impossible to draw a sharp line between children

and teens and also young teens with older teens. Puberty may emerge with little prior notice, and a child becomes a pre-teen or a teen. Still, adults struggle to label this ever-changing population. Librarians are advised to remember that, especially in the case of younger teens, middle grade books may also be the right fit as again, there is no one-size-fits-all approach within these categories. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association (ALA) defines young adults as youth aged 12 through 18. This textbook will focus on materials published specifically for these ages.

Defining Young Adults as Individuals

It's tempting to try to define a "typical" young adult. If we know what a typical young adult is like, then we will know which materials to select and purchase and promote. Of course, that's not the way it works. There isn't a typical young adult. They are defined by their heritage, environment, and individuality just as adults are. Today's young adults live in cities, suburbs, and rural settings. They are valedictorians, athletes, chess players, musicians, and sometimes all of those at once and often none of any of those. They are defined by what they read, what they watch, and what they purchase. Young adults are popular at school; they are also bullied and invisible. They are religious or not. They take drugs and drink alcohol; they are healthy. They are sexually active or not. They perform community services. They go to prison. They are kind, and they are violent. The challenge for librarians is to find the right books for such a diverse population and the right book for the individual.

Defining Young Adult Literature

Flux is a major trait of young adult literature. It changes and grows as quickly as the life of a teenaged boy or girl. In the past several years, new types of literature have become established, extending the range of young adult fiction and informational books by format and genre. Format-wise, verse novels and graphic novels may be fiction or informational. Popular fantasy and science fiction includes stories about dystopias, teen paranormal romances, witches, zombies, and many other kinds of speculative fiction. Realistic fiction reflects societal issues of the day and includes survival stories, urban stories, contemporary romances, sports stories, and both light and dark realism. Before examining current young adult literature, it's worthwhile to view the beginnings of this literature to better understand its development into the vital literary field it is today.

[Authors in Action: On Writing YA By Kate Hart](#)

Why do writers choose YA? There are some standard answers, whose frequency doesn't make them any less accurate: *Because my characters appeared to me as teens; because I love the immediacy; because everything is new at that age; just because, okay?*

But my own answer has never really been clear to me, which allows those ~*~other~*~ suggested motives to worm their way in. Why *do* I feel most comfortable writing about teens? Is it because I'm stuck in high school? Because I'm scared to write as a grown up? Because I lack ambition?

Funny thing: Sometimes people ask my father-in-law or my grandmother why they spent 30 years teaching middle/high school. But no one insinuates it's because they're immature, or tried to relive the glory days. No one claims they "wasted" their master's degrees by using them for the benefit of young people.

But use your degree to write books for young people? Tsk tsk. What a waste!

What people *are* insinuating is that teachers are crazy to willingly spend time with teens. And I'll be the first to admit: young people can be annoying. But having spent time in the teachers' lounge, I can also say: adults are annoying too.

Case in point: "You'll understand when you're older." It was an infuriating thing to hear—not because I thought I was so smart and knew everything, but because I *did* know my perspective would change, and the only way I could get there was by going through what I was stuck in *now*, whether I wanted to or not. (Spoiler alert: This is also an issue in adulthood. "Just wait until it's your [publishing; pregnancy; progeny; property]!")

I hated knowing that I didn't know things. I wanted to know ALL THE THINGS, ALL THE TIME (and still do). Worse, not only was I a teen, I was a teen *girl*—trivial, laughable, ridiculous. Unimportant. Immature and annoying. I understood, on some level, that this was BS but insisting that it wasn't made me more immature and annoying so I directed it elsewhere. And inward. Especially inward. I hated being that girl. I hated being a girl at all.

And books, which had always helped (god bless Judy Blume), suddenly didn't. The classics and standards served other admirable purposes, of course, but only *The Handmaid's Tale* made me stop and say, "Wait. Someone else gets it." It made me realize my perception wasn't as skewed as the world wanted me to think. That maybe I wasn't a problem, but a symptom of something much bigger.

But for a long time, Atwood was all I had. Authors like Laurie Halse Anderson or Sara Zarr or Libba Bray just weren't available to me, for whatever reason, and I wish it hadn't taken until adulthood for me to find them. Writing and reading YA helped me forgive the girl I was—and realize she never needed forgiveness in the first place.

I write YA because a girl's problems can be trivial, but *she* is not. And that's something she should know at every age.

Kate Hart is the author of *Before I Fall*, Contributor, *Hope Nation* and *Toil and Trouble*

History of Young Adult Literature in Action: Early Adult Books Read by Young People

Before books were specifically written and published for them, young adults were reading adventure stories written for adults. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) were read for the excitement of the story rather than for religious and didactic themes. Imitators of *Robinson Crusoe* are known as robinsonades; examples are stories such as Johann Wyss's *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) and Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet* (1987). Upon the re-publication of Anne Stephens's *Malaeksa: Indian Wife of a White Hunter* (1860), dime novels captured the attention of men seeking adventure. Featuring action and overwritten prose, dime novels, originally costing a dime and usually set in Colorado and farther west, became wildly popular for their thrilling plots (Nilson and Donelson 2000).

Other adult adventure books avidly read by young people and considered among today's classics are Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1860), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886), Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1883), and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). These are some of the best-known and most popular books to capture the attention of teenagers. They continue to be in print and to appeal to an audience as classic literature.

If dime novels were satisfying reading for men, domestic novels were the answer to reading selections for women. The first domestic novel, *Wide, Wide World* (1850), was written by Elizabeth Wetherell under the pen name of Susan Warner. Her novel remained popular for 40 years. Domestic novels such as Warner's featured an orphaned girl who meets a handsome man

needing redeeming. Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856), a story about a large family, reflects the Christian ethic of the Victorian period. These adventures for women included moral lessons that were conspicuously absent from dime novels (Nilsen and Donelson 2000, 49).

More Young Adult Literature History in Action: First Books Written for Young Adults

Published almost a century before Dally's *My Seventeenth Summer*, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is also sometimes referred to as the first young adult novel although there was no such designation in 1868 when it was published. Unlike previous novels heralded for women, Alcott's story more closely depicted real life with its joys and sadness, but devoid of extreme sentimentality. Today *Little Women* shines as a readable and enjoyable classic story.

Published in the same year as *Little Women*, *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York* by Horatio Alger, Jr., was the first book of a popular series for young people. Dick leaves home to find a more affluent life and through luck, goodness, and a little work, he is transformed into a respectable young man. Unlike Alcott's timeless book, Alger's books are seldom read for pleasure due to their stilted language, unrealistic plots, and stereotypical characters. Other popular books for boys in the last half of the 1800s include "bad boy" books and adventure novels. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870) set in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, treats readers to the charming and humorous adventures of mischievous Tom (Meigs et al. 1969, 244). Based on his boyhood recollections in Missouri, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), like his adult book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), "combine[s] adventure, imagination, realism, humor, and human nature to a degree which makes them—especially *Huckleberry Finn*—great books and books that are essentially American" (Meigs et al. 1969, 243). These few books mark the beginning of a flood of

young adult books. Other historical books will be discussed in subsequent chapters as they relate to specific genres.

Defining Young Adult Literature

Loosely defined, young adult literature is anything that young adults read or listen to: magazines, newspapers, graphic novels, manga, comic books, novels, audiobooks, anthologies and short story collections, poetry, podcasts, folktales, informational books, biographies, and even picture books and adult books. If young adults are reading it, it can be considered young adult literature. While it's expected that young adults will read broadly according to their tastes and abilities, this textbook focuses on books published specifically for young adults, ages 12 through 18.

Classic Young Adult Titles

The trouble is, grownups write about teen-agers from their own memories, or else write about teen-agers from a stand-off, I'm-a-little-scared-to-get-close-they're-hairy view. Teen-agers today want to read about teen-agers today. The world is changing, yet the authors of books for teen-agers are still 15 years behind the times."

—From *"Teen-Agers Are for Real"* by Susan Hinton (1967, 26)

Classic titles for young adults are those that have not only remained in print for at least 20 years (well beyond the age of a young adult), but they are also titles written for adults that appeal to teens. Young adult classics may be well written and have great style. They may be disturbing and have meaningful themes. Whatever the specifics, classic titles touch young adult readers generation after generation. A sampling of classics for young adults:

Little Women (1868) by Louisa May Alcott

Out of the Silent Planet (1938) by C. S. Lewis

Seventeenth Summer (1942) by Maureen Daly

The Martian Chronicles (1950) by Ray Bradbury
Lord of the Flies (1951) by William Golding
Stranger in a Strange Land (1960) by Robert Heinlein
The Ship Who Sang (1961) by Anne McCaffrey
The Chosen (1967) by Chaim Potok
The Outsiders (1967) by S. E. Hinton
The Pigman (1968) by Paul Zindel
The Chocolate War (1974) by Robert Cormier
Forever (1975) by Judy Blume
Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast (1978) by Robin McKinley
Jacob Have I Loved (1980) by Katherine Paterson
Annie on My Mind (1982) by Nancy Garden
The Blue Sword (1982) by Robin McKinley
Poetspeak: In Their Work, About Their Work (1983) by Paul Janeczko, ed.
Running Loose (1983) by Chris Crutcher
Lincoln: A Photobiography (1987) by Russell Freedman
Eva (1988) by Peter Dickinson
Fallen Angels (1988) by Walter Dean Myers
Make Lemonade (1993) by Virginia Euwer Wolff
It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health (1994)
by Robie Harris
Tears of a Tiger (1994) by Sharon Draper
Speak (1998) by Laurie Halse Anderson
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (1998) by J. K. Rowling
If You Come Softly (1998) by Jacqueline Woodson

Defining Young Adults through Reading Preferences, Interest, and Choices

It's relatively simple to determine which books young adults want to read. Two of the best ways to make that determination is by asking the young adults you serve and by observing what they check out and read and by following the social media and digital tools they prefer.

Reading Surveys

Regardless of how information is collected, reading surveys offer insight into the reading preferences, interests, and choices. Through reading surveys, you can determine what individual readers are already reading and what they want to read. By collating the data on the surveys, you can determine what the majority of readers want to read. For results a librarian can use to better understand the reading interests of young adults, questions should be both open-ended and specific. For a quick survey, ask a dozen or fewer questions. Answering these questions shouldn't feel like a homework task to teens. Ask for specific titles of books, movies, and media they have enjoyed. These choices will give you clues to similar titles. Ask what topics they're interested in reading. It may be the first time anyone has ever asked them. Ask about favorite authors. Prepare to be surprised at the range of authors, including authors of children's and adult books. Ask if they prefer novels to informational books. Ask what types of fiction and informational books they like to read. A sample of possible reading survey questions are listed here:

Reading Survey Questions

1. What is the title of the last book you read for pleasure?
2. What is the title of the last movie you watched and enjoyed?
3. If you have a choice between a really good novel and a really good informational book on a topic you're interested in, which would you choose?
4. What are some topics you would like to read about?
5. Would you rather read a novel or an informational book about those topics?
6. What's the title of the best book you ever read?
7. What's the title of the best movie you ever saw?
8. Who's your favorite author (or authors)?
9. Which magazines do you like to read?
10. What do you read on the Internet?
11. Do you prefer to read e-Books or print books?
12. Do you like to listen to audiobooks?

13. What authors do you follow on social media?
14. Do you follow and watch booktubers?

In schools, surveys can be distributed or taken using digital tools or apps through reading or English classes to reach every student, or they can be available in the library at the circulation desk or as part of a book display. In public libraries, librarians can distribute surveys to young adult volunteers, to members of advisory groups, and to young adults as they check out books at the circulation desk or when they attend library programs. Surveys can be conducted in a variety of ways; traditional paper survey forms will collect data, but also consider using digital tools such as Google form surveys and other smart-phone apps to allow students to access and inform you about their favorite reads.

Goodreads

An alternative to traditional surveys is using an online platform like Goodreads to stay abreast of readers' choices and recommendations. Founded in 2006, Goodreads is a "social cataloging" website that allows individuals to freely search its database of books, annotations, and reviews. Users can sign up and register books to generate library catalogs and reading lists. The online social reading, marketing, and book discovery site has grown into one of the most influential book and reading communities online. Goodreads, now owned by Amazon, recently marked its 10th anniversary with more than 65 million members. As a librarian, you can work with teens to set up private groups to generate book recommendation sharing, and teens can also create their own groups of book suggestions, surveys, polls, blogs, and discussions.

As a journalist and an author, I find writing YA fiction, in particular those that are set in a life that most readers don't know about but would like to understand, an honor. Young readers are as opinionated (sometimes even more so) than older readers, but unlike older generations, I find them more open-minded and malleable to embracing other

opinions. I feel a very strong responsibility in being as factual as possible in my writing — owe it to my subjects I am writing about and the readers who pick up by book. It's the youth that will change our world. And I want them to be armed with as much information—the information—a— they tackle the challenges ahead of them.

—tia Abawi, author of *The Secret Sky* and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, and contributor to *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Personal Moments of Inspiration*

Book Format Choices

With limited budget recourses, an ongoing conversation among librarians who specialize or work regularly on collection development is how to ascertain which percentage of their library's young adult book titles should be bought in various formats. While there is no simple answer, it is clear that young adults choose to read by utilizing a variety of book formats. Though there was much discussion and great collective fear among those who support or work in the book industry that the printed book would be completely replaced by digital formats, in fact, that hasn't transpired. Today's readers of young adult literature consume their books in a variety of ways based on personal preferences and need. Print books still continue to sell well in trade and library markets, as do e-Books and audio-books, which have demonstrated some of the greatest book sale growth in the industry. A closer examination of the role audiobooks play in terms of literacy will be included in [Chapter 2](#), but it is safe to say that as a librarian, making informed collection development decisions based on the needs and desires of your patrons is critical.

Reading Preferences and Gender Roles

Historically, librarians, educators, and parents have perpetuated the notion of "girl books" or "boy books." While this is a deeply engrained practice, as librarians, we need to make a conscious choice to move away from it as it

propagates and prescribes narrow gender definitions and also implies that stories about men are universal, yet somehow female stories are simply for girls or women. Beyond the divisive nature of this kind of thinking, ultimately it may also prevent male readers from learning empathy for women through stories. In a recent *Washington Post* article entitled "What Are We Teaching Boys When We Discourage Them to Read about Girls," young adult author Shannon Hale challenges us to move away from this practice of gender typing books. Hale offers that "the bias against boys reading about girls runs so deep, it can feel daunting to try to change it. But change can start with a simple preposition swap: When talking to young readers, we can communicate that a book is *about* girls without prescribing that it's *for* girls" (2018).

As a librarian, I have been guilty on trying to define boy books versus girl books and have been proven wrong on numerous occasions; it's easy to assume that books in your library with pink covers or appearing as "girly" by old-fashioned standards hold no interest to male readers. This is problematic for a variety of reasons, but at a basic level, all books should be given equal access. If we allow them to do so, boys, like girls, will simply look for stories that intrigue and inspire them, and it's important we don't play a part in perpetuating an unspoken notion that boys should feel shameful for reading about women. Years ago, when Stephenie Myer's *Twilight Saga* was wildly popular in my library, I discovered a young man unabashedly being so excited that he found an available copy of the first book in the series available. I remember asking him what made him so excited to read it, and his response was priceless; he shared that he wanted to read it because he kept hearing over and over again about how it was "un-putdownable" and that he hoped it would help him "figure girls out a bit." That experience taught me that it was critical to not make assumptions about teens and their reading interests, particularly men. I may never have had hordes of young male readers wanting to read about Edward and Bella, but it was my responsibility to respect and support their reading interests without feeding into gender stereotypes. As Hale goes on to share, "Stories make us human. We form bonds by swapping personal stories with others, and reading

fiction is a deeply immersive exercise in empathy. So, what happens to a culture that encourages girls to read books about boys but shoos boys away from reading books about girls? What happens to a boy who is taught he should be ashamed of reading a book about a girl? For feeling empathy for a girl? For trying to understand how she feels? For caring about her? What kind of a man does that boy grow up to be?" (2018).

Some of the most commercially successful literature for youth over the past decade have been books written by women, often starring female protagonists. Beloved and embraced characters like Katniss from *The Hunger Games*, June from Marie Lu's *Legend*, or Triss from *Divergent* prove young men will happily embrace stories with a female protagonist if their book gatekeepers step back and allow them to do so.

While I believe this mind shift is critical for librarians to serve all students well, for transparency, it's also important to note that there are national literacy projects that support boys/men reading and listening, and they are programs that have done great work in helping start important conversations about boys, especially in regard to their reading choices or lack thereof. When created over almost 20 years ago, these programs hoped to speak to the growing gap in academic achievement between male and female students. Labels such as "Guys Read" or "Guys Listen" were not and are not trying to perpetuate a notion that these are intended to be divisive; rather, they were and are programs that attempt to remind adult educational gatekeepers, often women, and parents that by allowing male readers true choice and access to a wide range of book types and formats, boys will be far more likely to choose to read or listen. As this conversation about gender labels continues, I suspect that a rebranding of these important initiatives will transpire as they have already recognized that the "message" is one that isn't beholden to any gender.

As a high school student, I encountered three characters in required reading books who sorta looked like me: one was basically a hunchback with big dreams and no means of pursuing them (Crooks from *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck), one was an escaped slave who I couldn't understand half the time because he was written in vernacular (Jim from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain), and the third was a man

falsely accused of rape and then murdered by a lynch mob (Tom from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee). As I matriculated I struggled to figure out exactly where I fit in the world because of this overt lack of representation in dominant literature. I write YA because I want kids who look like me to have a different experience with books than I had. Representation matters, especially to young adults who need to know that their existences and stories matter in the world at large.

—*New York Times* best-selling author, Nic Stone, author of Morris Award Finalist *Dear Martin*, *Odd One Out*, and contributor to *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Personal Moments of Inspiration*

Inclusivity, Diversity, and Own Voices in Young Adult Literature

Another essential facet of the professional librarian is their understanding of the importance of library services for all young people. Librarians should strive to serve their patrons/teens by offering books that are representational and inclusive. Effective librarians have always committed to searching for and collecting books that offered wide representation, but doing so has been challenging due to the lack of diversity in children's literature being published, as well as a lack of understanding the differences between stories *about* a culture and stories *by* someone of that culture. This issue is finally receiving some national attention; in a recent feature on CNN, "Can Diversity in Children's Books Tackle Prejudice?" the piece examines the current statistics captured by the Cooperative Children's Book Center that has been tracking diversity since 1985. Their annual report indicated that in 2017, only 9% of children's books that includes young adults featured African or African American characters (Scott 2018). While this number shows a slight gain (up from 5% in 2014), only one-third of the 9% of books featuring black children were written by black authors. In regard to representation, the lack of diverse voices and diverse authors writing books still proves to be problematic for readers wanting to see themselves in the books they read. In

a larger context, all readers benefit from windows, mirrors, and sliding glass door experiences in their reading experiences (Bishop 2015).

By definition, diversity is having a wide variety of representations, a variety of experiences, and points of view. It is a book written that includes diverse characters or points of view by an author. These complex conversations have been at the forefront of discussions about young adult literature, and attention has also been brought to the need for "Own Voices" representations in books written by authors from marginalized or underrepresented groups writing about their own experiences. While there is much work that continues to need to be accomplished, these conversations and the following resources to aid librarians in making collection development decisions for young adult collections are in place.

[We Need Diverse Books Organization \(WNDB\)](#)

WNDB is a grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people. Its vision is for young readers of all ages to be able to feel represented or seen in books, and their work. A treasure trove of resources are available at its website, including recommended book lists, book support for underserved communities, and mentoring programs for underrepresented authors and illustrators.

We Need Diverse Books (WNDB)

By Dhonielle Clayton, author and chief operating officer, WNDB

Nicole Johnson, author and executive director, WNDB

Caroline Richmond, author and program director, WNDB

In 2015, the Cooperative Children's Book Center surveyed 3,400 children's books and found that the majority either featured white characters or were written by white authors. Conversely, 49% of American children and teens today are racially diverse, according to the Kids Count Data Center. When these young people open a book, what do they see? More often than not, they do not find characters that look like them.

In 2014, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) began as a simple hashtag on Twitter to respond to the lack of diversity in children's literature. Four years later, it has grown from a grassroots movement into a non-profit with a team of volunteers that spans the globe. It works to create a world where every child can see themselves in the pages of a book.

WNDB strives to strengthen the presence of diverse voices in the publishing industry and among consumers, including educators and librarians, which will create the supply and demand to put more diverse books into the hands of every child. To tackle this problem head on, it runs a range of groundbreaking initiatives that affect change in three facets of the publishing process:

1. **Providing access to diverse books in schools.** The WNDB in the Classroom program targets the literacy gap that affects marginalized youth in the United States. Since 2014, it has donated over 12,000 diverse books to economically disadvantaged schools across 28 states.
2. **Supporting underrepresented authors and illustrators.** Each year, the WNDB Mentorship program support artists early in their career by pairing them with an experienced children's author or illustrators. The WNDB created the Walter Dean Myers Grants program to address the financial roadblocks marginalized artists often face. To date, the WNDB has awarded 11 grants to emerging writers or illustrators from diverse backgrounds. Lastly, it sponsors the Walter Dean

Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature to honor exemplary diverse books created by diverse artists.

3. **Mentoring diverse professionals within the publishing industry.** WNDB's Internship Grant Program provides living stipends to diverse college students who have secured a paid internship at a publishing house or literary agency.

Since its inception, the WNDB has witnessed measurable change within the publishing industry. Through the efforts of WNDB and others the percentage of books with multicultural content has increased from 10% to 25% within a four-year period. Publishers are seeking out and buying manuscripts by marginalized writers, and they are promoting these titles by offering marketing and publicity that propels these books into the spotlight. The Young Adult category of the New York Times Best Sellers' List now often features diverse books by diverse writers, like Tomi Adeyemi, Sandyha Menon, and Angie Thomas, recipient of a WNDB Walter Grant in 2015.

While progress is being made, it has a persistent problem concerning young people's access to these titles and the dearth of marginalized authors and publishing professionals. To get diverse books to children and teens nationwide, the WNDB needs to change the publishing landscape from the top down—from helping diverse interns get a foothold in the publishing industry to boosting marginalized writers and illustrators and to getting these stories to the young people who need them the most.

Types of Diversity to Consider in Collection Development

As librarian and inclusivity advocate Karen Jensen shares, "It would be good to acknowledge upfront that an able bodied, white cishet neutral is assumed in society and in publishing, and, for that reason, 'diversity' is the imperfect

umbrella term used to bring perspectives other than that assumed neutral into focus" (2018). Our goal as young librarians who serve young adult patrons is to make our collections as inclusive as possible. Diversity is the common term that's utilized, but inclusive collections are the goal because all patrons deserve representation.

Diverse Representation Categories Include:

- Indigenous/Native American representation
- Asian representation (broken down by geographic location)
- People of color (black/African American)
- LatinX representation (broken down by geographic location)
- Refugees and new immigrants
- Gender roles/gender bias/nonbinary
- GLBTQAI+

- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Asexuality
- Intersex
- Pansexuality

Family structures

- Same-sex parents
- Interracial families
- Blended/step families

- Adoption and foster care
- Homeless or without stable accommodation
- Socio economic diversity/poverty
- Disability

- Disfigurement
- Impaired hearing
- Impaired sight or sight loss
- Limb loss
- Use of aids

Neurological challenges

Autism

ADHD

Mental health/illness (with multiple categories including bipolar, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc.) Children with allergies and food intolerances

Children with complex health concerns such as cancer, terminal illness, invisible illness, chronic illness, and ongoing treatment

Culture and religion

Atheist

Christian

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Wiccan

Buddhism

Body diversity/acceptance

Incarceration (of both parents and teens)

Intersectionality

Librarians in Action: Using a Diversity Audit to Guide Your Young Adult Collection

A diversity audit is basically doing an inventory of a collection to determine the amount of diversity within the collection. It's a way of analyzing collection data to make sure that librarians include a wide variety of points of view, experiences, and representations within a collection. The goal of a diversity audit is to provide an understanding of where their collection is so librarians can make intentional, professional decisions in purchasing so that ultimately, they establish a well-balanced collection that can be both a mirror to reflect a reader's experience and a window so readers can experience different experiences and points of view.

Librarian Karen Jensen has created an incredible Diversity Audit Toolkit with incredible resources and links to curated and respected resources for finding diverse young adult materials (<http://www.teenlibrariantoolbox.com/files/2017/11/Diversity-Audit-Outline-2017-with-Sources.pdf>).

From the toolkit, Jensen reminds us that "not all representation is necessarily good representation. This is an important point to consider when doing your collection audit. This is also why keeping a separate category for 'Own Voices' is important" and looking for harmful tropes and stereotypes is important (2018).

Tropes are "commonly recurring literary and rhetorical devices, motifs or clichés in creative works." Some tropes to be aware of and look for when doing your audit include:

- The Noble Savage
- The White Savior
- The Magical Negro
- The Mystical Shaman
- Killing the Gays

A stereotype is "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing." Stereotypes in books you'll want to look for when doing your audit include:

- The angry black woman
- Youth of color always being depicted as gang members
- Jewish books always being about the Holocaust
- POC books always being about slavery or the civil rights movement
- LGBTQA+ books always being about coming out
- Refrigerating females
- Unlikeable girls
- Fat shaming
- "Not Like Other Girls"

Own Voice Authors

The goal of the recommended book lists, including those from WNDB, is to offer inclusive titles that promote "Own Voice" stories, the following authors listed through the resources that follow offer insight and authentic cultural experiences in their stories. In all book titles offered throughout the following chapters on genres, own voices stories and people from marginalized groups have been included and are marked with an *. When searching for resources on social media sites, be sure to use the hashtag #ownvoices.

[Interview with Eric Gansworth](#)

Eric Gansworth, author of *If I Ever Get Out of Here* and *Give Me Some Truth*, is a professor of English and Lowery Writer-in-Residence at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. An enrolled member of the Onondaga Nation, he was born and raised at the Tuscarora Reservation in Niagara County in upstate New York. His short stories, poetry, and nonfiction have been printed and reprinted in many literary magazines and anthologies, and his dramatic work has appeared at the Public Theater in New York City.

What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature and seeking out stories that fit the "own voices" description?

I can only speak from my own experiences here. There is an issue, certainly, in my world, with charlatans: "pretendians," non-native writers who have some compulsion to pretend they are native, or have family stories of some long-lost relatives whose supposed existence somehow makes their white upper-middle class background become indigenous. At the opposite end of the spectrum, it seems like readers also can be and have been seduced by one vision. If they happen to love one book, or one writer, they even subconsciously use that writer's narrative as the only barometer.

My work is not full of powwows and does not house a cast whose last names are all vaguely mystical or ceremonial. Consequently, it

does not fit the stereotypes readers may be looking for. I have purposefully chosen to write stories that reflect my experiences and the experiences of my peers, as a representation of reservation life. I would say that readers consciously looking for #ownvoices narratives should perhaps check their own expectations at the door. I grew up entirely on a reservation, surrounded by my extended family (approximately 300 people) and larger reservation community (1,200). Yet, I have continued to hear from readers throughout my career that my work doesn't sound "native enough" to them, because the characters aren't all constantly running off to the sweatlodge and smudging, and doing secret ceremonies and chatting with their animal friends. I imagine that may be a way of life for SOME indigenous peoples but by no means is Pan-Indianism a universal indigenous experience. There are several hundred distinct indigenous nations on this continent, and their indigenouness is manifested in almost as many different ways. If a work you're reading fits MOST of your expectations, the chances are, that work is further from #ownvoices than you are believing.

A Sample of Online Resources for Seeking Out and Selecting Inclusive Young Adult Books

Reading While White: <http://readingwhilewhite.blogspot.com/>

Rich in Color: <http://richincolor.com/>

Diversity in YA—www.diversityiny.com/

31 Young Adult Books with Diverse Characters Literally Everyone Should Read:
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/jemimaskelley/diverse-ya>

Diversity YA Life: Diverse Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror—The Hub
Diversity YA Life: Urban Fiction—The Hub:
<http://www.yalsa.org/thehub/2015/08/31/diversity-ya-diverse-science-fiction-fantasy/>

YA Books Central: <http://www.yabookscentral.com/>

Teen Reads—www.teenreads.com
Book Riot—www.bookriot.com
Barnes and Noble Teen Blog—www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/teen/
YA Interrobang—www.yainterrobang.com
YA Lit—www.yalit.com
Epic Reads—www.epicreads.com
Pop Crush—www.popcrush.com
Bustle—www.bustle.com
Adventures in YA—www.adventuresinya.com

Due to the slow growth in diversity and inclusion in publishing for children's and young adults, and based on the needs of librarians asking for help, *School Library Journal* (SLJ) has also developed a Diversity and Cultural Literacy Toolkit to aid librarians who work with young people. The kit offers a list of recommended resources, including articles, videos, and other content, used in our various face to face and virtual training sessions and workshops on diversity and cultural literacy for librarians.

SLJ believes its kit to be a starting place for further exploration, reflection, and discussion. And while some of the resources are geared specifically to folks selecting or evaluating material for children and teens, the vast majority of the content is applicable to librarians or educators working with students or patrons of any age. The kit can be found here: <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=diversity-cultural-literacy-toolkit>.

[Interview with Jason Reynolds](#)

Jason Reynolds is a *New York Times* best-selling author, a Newbery Award Honoree, a Printz Award Honoree, National Book Award Honoree, a Kirkus Award winner, a two-time Walter Dean Myers Award winner, an NAACP Image Award Winner, and the recipient of multiple Coretta Scott King honors. The American Booksellers Association's 2017 spokesperson for Indies First, his many books include *When I Was the Greatest*, *Boy in the Black Suit*, *All American Boys* (cow-written with Brendan Kiely), *As Brave as You*, *For Every One*, the Track series (*Ghost*, *Patina*, *Sunny*, and *Lu*), and *Long Way Down*, which received both a Newbery Honor and a Printz Honor.

Many of the stories found in libraries about black American experiences have been relegated to a focus on the past; do you agree that this is a disservice to all readers, regardless of their race or culture? Why do you find it so critical that the setting of your books is contemporary, happening in the here and now?

I do think it's a disservice to readers to only focus on the stories of the past, pertaining to black Americans. The truth is, black people are more than Slavery and the civil rights movement. Our lives don't exist within this vacuum of struggle, and only showing us historically basically strips us of our humanity and swaps it out for symbolism. Black people *mean* something, but they can't *be* anything—nyone—tday, which of course is ridiculous and, more importantly, dangerous. The other obvious reason is that black people today, just like black people historically, are incredibly interesting to read about it. Ha! I find that our brimming with energy, that when transferred to the page, makes a story palpabl. brimming with energy, that when transferred to the page, makes a story palpable. Makes a story electric.

Do you find that writing YA keeps you grounded as a writer and if so, in what ways?

It absolutely keeps me grounded as a writer, and as a person. First of all, I have an opportunity to constantly reflect on my adolescence. If that's not grounding I don't know what is! To see myself, full of myself but awkwardly bumbling around knowing that I know everything there is to know about all the things I've yet to experience . . . humbling. To sit in that insecurity and anxiety, coupled with having a bottomless well of moxie . . . inspiring. It reminds me every day that young people are masterpieces, layered and raw, messy and interesting, and that perhaps I'm still that. Maybe I'm still some beautiful mess, just with a fancier frame. The other thing is, writing for young adults puts me in the position to spend time with them. Thousands of them. I sit and listen to their opinions and observe all the things driving youth culture around the world, and it's fascinating to be constantly reminded that I still don't know much. They teach me

things daily. Things I desperately need to know, because, as a writer, if you don't *know* young people, you can't *show* young people.

[Worlds of Words](#)

Another resource for librarians wanting to make inclusive collection development decisions is Worlds of Words, a youth literature resource from the University of Arizona's College of Education and is supported by faculty and students from the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies. According to its mission and goals, Worlds of Words is committed to providing a range of resources to encourage educators at all levels to integrate global literature into the lives of young people. The resources on this site grew out of work in schools around the world and the identification of needs, such as:

- Access to titles of global literature for various age levels, themes, and global cultures
- Critical evaluations of the cultural authenticity of books
- Ideas for integrating global literature into experiences with children in school and library contexts and in teacher education programs.
- Discussions of current issues related to global literature in order to become more informed as an educator
- Access to resources such as book lists, curricular strategies, author information, and so on related to global literature (2018).

The website of Worlds of Words, <https://wowlit.org/>, includes a searchable database, a journal of critical book reviews, a journal of classroom vignettes, a weekly blog, book conversations, and a section of resources in response to these needs. All of the journals and resources on the site are available free in order to provide the widest access.

Using tools that heighten the visibility of marginalized writers is key to successful collection development as the best young adult collections are those that are representative. In addition to the resources offered, there are a

number of award and "best lists" to help guide your selection decisions, as well as seek feedback from young adult readers themselves.

As it is likely to be discovered from a diversity audit or simply a closer inspection of your young adult titles in your collection, there is room for growth in the inclusivity of almost already-established young adult collections. Throughout this textbook, the goal is to offer title recommendations that broaden your exposure to inclusive young adult titles.

Selecting Books for Young Adults

What's the best way to approach selecting books for young adults? Thousands of books are published each year for ages 12 through 18. As a librarian, it's your job to sort through those books and select the best ones for the young adults who frequent "Your" library. If you could purchase everything appropriate for the age levels you serve, your job would be really easy. Available funding for books forces you to be carefully selective when choosing books for a young adult collection. Library books must meet one of two major needs of young adults: help with school work and reading for pleasure. Conducting reading surveys, observing teens, and talking with them about books are excellent ways to gain insight into reading preferences. Consulting curriculum guides, book award lists, and book reviews enable librarians to approach selecting books in a professional manner.

Literature in Action: Awards and Award Lists

The list of awards for young adult books and authors is growing each year. These lists can help you decide which books to read, order, and recommend

to young adults. The trick is to understand what each award is given for.

In this section, major young adult literature awards and award lists will be highlighted: Best Fiction for Young Adults, Young Adults' Choices, Margaret A. Edwards Award, Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers, Michael L. Printz Award, Popular Paperbacks, Outstanding Books for the College Bound, Alex Award, Stonewall Book Awards, Rainbow Book List, Coretta Scott King Book Award, Walter Award, Pura Bepre Award, Tomas Rivera Mexican Children's Book Award, Americas, Indian Youth Literature Award, Association of Jewish Libraries Book Awards, Arab American Book Awards, and the Batchelder Award. Information about state awards will be shared, too. Nonfiction book awards and other specialty awards will be discussed in later chapters. Still other awards that include books for both children and young adults will be discussed as appropriate. Young adult literature awards provide a representative selection of the best in young adult literature, including quality of writing and appeal to teens.

[Best Lists by State](#)

Similar to the lists published by organizations such as the ALA and the International Literacy Association, there are many "best" lists that are created annually that highlight books gathered for recreational reading. Like the Young Adult Choices project, some of these feature lists selected by teens themselves; others offer recommended reading or curricular connections. Check in your state to see what awards exist that highlight or recognize young adult or youth literature or consult Janet Hilbun and Jane Claes's *Exploring State Book Awards* (2010) for more information. Sponsored by the Texas Library Association, and working with teen readers, the Young Adult Roundtable (YART) creates the following lists to assist librarians in making book selections for their libraries:

- The Texas Lone Star Reading List (booklist of recommended books for grades 6-8)

- TAYSHAS High School Reading List (booklist of recommended books for grades 9-12)
- The Maverick List (booklist of recommended graphic novels)
- The Texas Topaz Lit for Nonfiction Gems
- Spirit of Texas Reading Program for Middle and High School (highlights the work of authors and creates school programs throughout the state)

[Best Fiction for Young Adults](#)

The award list with the most history is Best Fiction for Young Adults (BFYA), currently sponsored by YALSA, a division of ALA. The idea of a recommended list for young adults began in 1930 and was called "Books for Young People." The list has since evolved from 30 titles to approximately 100 titles, and the committee has evolved from 3 members to 15 (Carter 1991). According to the ALA website, until 2011 the purpose of the award list remained the same: It was "a general list of fiction and nonfiction titles selected for their proven or potential appeal to the personal reading tastes of the young adult. Such titles should incorporate acceptable literary quality and effectiveness of presentation." In 2011 the YALSA Board voted to focus the award list on fiction alone. Twice a year at Midwinter Meeting and at Annual Conference the BFYA committee gathers to discuss current quality fiction that has been published for young adults and that appeals to young adults. The list showcases the quality and diversity of fiction published for young adults during one year. For a sampling of the range of titles and the ones considered best by the committee, consult the Top Ten list of titles. Personal favorite titles from the Top Ten of 2018 include *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *Strange the Dreamer* by Laini Taylor, *Goodbye Days* by Jeff Zentner, and *Piecing Me Together* by Renee Watson. Winning titles are announced during the Midwinter Meeting

of ALA and are available on the association's website at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/bfya>.

Young Adults' Choices Project

A list that differs from BFYA in its purpose and procedures is Young Adults' Choices (YAC). Sponsored by the International Literacy Association since 1986, the Young Adults' Choices (YAC) project has developed an annual list of new books that will encourage youth to read. With more than 12,500 young readers participating by reading and voting, the YAC books are selected by the readers themselves (grades 7-12) from representative locations across the country, which ensures popularity with other middle and secondary school students. The reading list is a trusted source of book recommendations, used by adolescents, their parents, teachers, and librarians to provide middle and secondary school students with an opportunity to voice their opinions about books being written for them and in whose pages they can find characters and experiences to which they can relate. The books included on this reading list reflect themes, topics, and stories young adults value.

The International Literacy Association (ILA) supports this program with a variety of resources available online, including teen-selected reading lists. The goals of YAC include:

- Give young adults an opportunity to voice their opinions about books written for them.
- Develop an annual annotated reading list of new books that young adults enjoy.
- Help teachers, librarians, booksellers, parents, and others find books that will encourage young adults to read more.

Additional resources for YAC can be found here: <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/reading-lists/young-adults-choices-reading-list>.

Librarians in Action!: Teen-Selected and Recommended Book Lists

Stephanie Burdic, librarian at Millard North High School in Omaha, Nebraska, earned her master's degree in educational administration with an emphasis in school libraries from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her doctoral degree, an Ed.D in educational leadership, is from the University of Nebraska at Omaha through the NxtWave program. She is committed to providing international perspectives in education. An advocate for literacy, Burdic has worked with the International Literacy Association (ILA) on the Young Adults Choices committee for several years. She is energized to promote reading in her school, community, and beyond in the hope of building awareness as to the needs and aspirations of others.

It took 17 years of teaching for Lisa Morris-Wilkey to determine that her heart was in the school library. She earned her master of information resources and library science (MIRLS) degree from the University of Arizona in 2003 and currently is the teacher librarian for a K-8 school in Casa Grande, Arizona. Lisa is also the co-chair of the Young Adult Choices Committee for the International Literacy Association (ILA) as well as a member of the conference committee for the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

Selecting the Young Adults Choices Awards

By Dr. Stephanie Burdic and Lisa Morris Wilkey

The Young Adults Choices (YAC) Award, sponsored by the International Literacy Association (ILA), has been in operation since 1986. Its purpose is to encourage young people to read; make schools, libraries, students, and teachers aware of new literature available for

young adults; and provide secondary-level students an opportunity to voice their opinions about new books written for them as a target audience. Each year students from across the United States in grades 7–12 read and vote on a wide selection of books published for young adults. Major publishers send what they consider the best of recently published books for consideration to YAC participants. Over 350 titles are up for consideration each year.

The YAC project divides the United States into five regions, with at least one active team per region every year. Candidate YAC team leaders apply through the ILA for a three-year term of service. They must have access to at least 2,500 students at the middle and high school levels. The process for becoming a Team Leader is competitive. Successful applicants are literacy advocates, knowledgeable about current young adult literature, and passionate in actively involving teens in reading. Part of the application process involves ensuring support from school district officials, school librarians, and classroom teachers. Projects without wide involvement and buy-in from an educational community are less successful than those that receive far-ranging support.

Once selected, team leaders are responsible to organize the distribution, reading, and balloting of books they receive from the publishers. Each team receives between two and five copies of the books up for consideration. Every book copy should have at least two student readers. Students rate the books on a 0–2 Likert scale. Individual students may read as many of the candidate books as they wish. The balloting period lasts between August and February. The results are tabulated in March at which time authors and publishers are directly notified of their award. The ILA promotes the winning selections through its website and other publications.

With a large number of books up for contention, students have a range of choices. The books represent a wide variety of genres, appealing to a range of interests. Winning books represent all age levels. Realistic books are favorites, but fantasy, science fiction, and graphic novels are strong contenders as well. Through the years, the YAC winning books

reflect diversity, empathy, and thoughtful consideration of issues and problems that challenge teens. While the teams sort the candidate books by age appropriateness, titles are not screened or taken out of contention because of potentially controversial content. Books with edgy, contemporary themes that might be removed in other award programs due to worries of parental objections are read and considered by students in the YAC projects.

Team leaders usually work within several schools or districts because of the number and variety of books received. They are responsible for making sure that their sites run smoothly and produce results. Volunteers are a necessary component of success because of the scope of the project. Many sites ask for student helpers, especially with tasks that can be corporately accomplished, such as processing and tracking of books. Opening multiple boxes of new books generates student enthusiasm and builds curiosity.

In an era of limited budgets, schools that are involved in the YAC project find a windfall in their young adult literature selections. The publishers deliver many of the books to the project sites over the summer. As students return from vacation, they find a fresh supply of books waiting to be read. Because project books are new and visible, students can see the richness and variety that young adult literature can hold for them.

The YAC project solicits candid student responses to the books. Since the teams have no vested interest in promoting one book over another, students can be free to express their opinions. With the numbers of books received, it is impossible for team leaders to read all the books that are in the project. They rely on student feedback to make recommendations to other students. Because so many books need to be read and evaluated in a relatively short amount of time, many sites rely on visibility and promotions to build student interest and enthusiasm. Having a special location to make and continuously change book displays helps build and sustain interest. Some site leaders post completed student review ballots on large bulletin boards. Visible

promotion of the project through student announcements, school video segments, YAC book clubs, and school webpages or social media helps keep a strong momentum for project participants.

The YAC program helps nurture a reading culture in schools. Team leaders can encourage teachers to explore young adult literature as part of the project promotion. This can lead to lively discussions between students and teachers. Challenges in which students are encouraged to read more than the teacher can also result in fun, spirited competitions. Librarians have a powerful voice in promoting books waiting to be read through book talking with classes at all grade levels. Book trailers, when available, are particularly helpful. Additionally, highlighting books that have been previous winners is useful in assisting students to understand the scope of award books. YAC books can be used to enhance the school curriculum. Team leaders can place specific titles in classrooms where they know a particular genre is being studied.

Students at the secondary level respond well to contests that involve prizes and recognition.

At many sites, students who submit book ballots are entered into drawings. The prizes can range from smaller incentives, such as candy, to certificates for local restaurants, or to gift cards for popular destinations. Other schools have gone to major prizes that range from bicycles, electronics, and even athletic shoes. Finding donors for prizes can give further visibility to the YAC project and has resulted in community awareness through newspaper and other media.

Promotions that encourage participation in the YAC projects, including displays, poster contests, and book trailer competitions, help create and promote a positive climate of reading within schools. Encouraging teachers to give incentives to students who participate improves student engagement. Some sites have teachers who regularly offer incentives for those who participate in reading YAC books, including bonus points on quizzes, a homework pass, or other such academic incentives.

One team leader commented, "My kids keep a list of how many they read. When they have read five, they get a cookie in the cafeteria. When they have read 15, they earn an invitation to a pizza party at the end of the program. The pizza party is really fun. We talk about our favorites, and I share which books made the final list. The kids are pretty competitive and get into trying to see who can read the most."

The YAC award is a genuine reflection of student interest and enjoyment in relevant young adult literature. It conveys to students that their opinion counts and lets publishers know the opinions of their target market. When the winners are revealed, students understand their voices have been heard. This factor, in and of itself, gives students a vested interest in actively participating in YAC.

Margaret A. Edwards Award

Imagine that your task is to choose the best young adult author in the United States. Whom would you choose? The first Margaret A. Edwards Award was given to S. E. Hinton in 1988. To be eligible for the award, the authors must have published their titles at least five years before nominations to allow time for young adults and librarians to read and recognize their work. Administered by YALSA, the young adult division of the ALA, the Margaret A. Edwards Award annually honors an excellent young adult author and one or more of his or her books. The winner must be a living author chosen by a five-member committee of YALSA. The award specifically gives "recognition to those authors whose book or books have provided young adults with a window through which they can view their world and which will help them to grow and to understand themselves and their role in society." According to criteria for the award listed on the YALSA website (www.ala.org/yalsa/edwards), "The committee making its selection of nominees must be aware of the entire range of books for young adults and will take into account the following:

1. Does the book(s) help adolescents to become aware of themselves and to answer their questions about their role and importance in relationships, society and in the world?
2. Is the book(s) of acceptable literary quality?
3. Does the book(s) satisfy the curiosity of young adults and yet help them thoughtfully to build a philosophy of life?
4. Is the book(s) currently popular with a wide range of young adults in many different parts of the country?
5. Does the book(s) serve as a 'window to the world' for young adults?"

The award honors Margaret A. Edwards, an early champion of young adult literature and services. Edwards was a librarian and administrator of young adult programs at Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland, for more than 30 years. She is the author of *The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts: The Library and the Young Adult*, a must-read for public and school librarians who work with young adults. Edwards's dedication to young adults and their literature, outreach services to young adults, and training programs for librarians beginning to work with young adults continues to inspire librarians today.

For more information about the Edwards Award winners and for promotional ideas, visit <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/edwards>.

[Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers](#)

Commonly known as "Quick Picks," the titles in this list try to entice reluctant young adult readers to read. Titles are chosen by a YALSA committee of 11 members. Books selected for the list are intended for leisure reading and are evaluated by "subject, cover art, readability, format, and style," according to the website. Besides fiction, the Quick Picks list includes a large variety of informational books. Access lists and more information about Quick Picks can be found at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks>.

Michael L. Printz Award

Most parents, teachers, and librarians have heard of the John Newbery Medal, awarded to the most distinguished book for children of those published during one calendar year. In 1999, the YALSA Board decided to honor a young adult book that exemplifies literary excellence. At last, young adult librarians had an award comparable to the Newbery Medal for older readers. In 2000, *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers was the first winner of the Michael L. Printz Award. *Monster* was a groundbreaking title. On trial for felony murder, Steve Harmon, 16 years old, tells his story through a pretend screenplay and journal entries detailing his time in prison. As an accessory to murder, but not the one who pulled the trigger that shot and killed a grocery store owner, Steve disturbs readers with his possible verdict. Each year one winner and up to four honor books may be chosen for ages 12 through 18.

The Printz Award is named for a long-time active member of YALSA, Michael L. Printz, a school librarian at Topeka High School in Kansas. A nine-member YALSA committee chooses the winning books for this annual award. "Books previously published in another country are eligible (presuming an American edition has been published during the period of eligibility)." Unlike the Newbery Medal that honors a book published by a U.S. author, Printz Awards can be given to British, Canadian, and Australian authors. For easy access to lists of winners and other information about the Michael L. Printz Award, go to <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz>.

Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults

For great book lists with variety in genres, topics, themes, and age range, Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults delivers both wacky and practical lists with appeal to teens. The purpose of the lists is to encourage pleasure reading available in paperback from classic to current titles. A 15-member

YALSA committee creates one to five annotated lists of 10 to 25 recommended paperback titles. Visit <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/popular-paperbacksyouth-adults> for all lists and titles starting in 1997 and continuing through the present year.

Outstanding Books for the College Bound

Designed for students planning on continuing their education beyond high school, this list provides reading recommendations in up to five topical categories. Traditionally, lists include fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. Begun in 1992 as a YALSA committee, 15 members revise the list once every five years and include both young adult titles and adult titles appropriate for young adults. The major strengths of the lists are quality writing and variety in style and topic. Each committee has freedom to focus on specific criteria within the general framework of the lists. These annotated lists would typically be promoted among high school students. To view the annotated lists, go to <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/obcb>.

Alex Award

Although this textbook focuses on books published specifically for young adults, ages 12 through 18, we know that teens read adult books. You will not be surprised to know that YALSA also has an award list specifically for adult books with special appeal to teens. The first Alex Awards were given in 1998 by a task force charged with selecting 10 adult titles, and in 2002 the award was approved as an official ALA award governed by a committee of nine members. Further details of the award and award lists are available at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/alex-awards>. Books chosen for the award can be fiction or nonfiction, but the majority of the titles are fiction.

Stonewall Book Awards

Begun in 1971 with one award, the Stonewall Book Awards are sponsored by ALA's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Round Table. Each year the awards honor books of exceptional merit, including books for adults, young adults, and children. Annual lists of award winners are available at <http://www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/award/stonewall>.

Rainbow Book Lists

The Rainbow Book List is created by the Rainbow Book List Committee of the GLBT Round Table of ALA. Originally a joint project between the GLBT Round Table and the Social Responsibilities Round Table, the Rainbow Book List presents an annual bibliography of quality books with significant and authentic gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer content, which are recommended for people from birth through 18 years of age. The lists can be found here: <https://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/rainbow-books-lists>.

Coretta Scott King Book Awards

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards' purpose is "to encourage the artistic expression of the African American experience via literature and the graphic arts, including biographical, historical and social history treatments by African American authors and illustrators," according to the ALA website. The first award was given in 1970 to Lillie Patterson for *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*. Currently, the award is presented annually by the Coretta Scott King Committee of ALA Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT).

Criteria for the awards listed on the website are the following:

- a. Must portray some aspect of the African American experience, past, present, or future.
- b. Must be written/illustrated by an African American.
- c. Must be published in the U.S. in the year preceding presentation of the Award.
- d. Must be original work.
- e. Must be written for a youth audience in one of the three categories: Preschool—grade 4, Grades 5-8, Grades 9-12
- f. Must meet established standards of quality writing for youth which include: Clear plot, well-drawn characters which portray growth and development during the course of the story, writing style which is consistent with and suitable to the age intended, and accuracy
- g. Particular attention will be paid to titles that seek to motivate readers to develop their own attitudes and behaviors as well as comprehend their personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society.
- h. Illustrations should reflect established qualitative standards and "heighten and extend the reader's awareness of the world around him. They should lead him to an appreciation of beauty. The style and content of the illustrations should be . . . neither coy nor condescending. . . . Storytelling qualities should enlarge upon the story elements that were hinted at in the text and should include details that will awaken and strengthen the imagination of the reader and permit him to interpret the works and pictures in a manner unique to him." (Cianciolo, *Illustrations in Children's Books* [24-25])

More details about the Coretta Scott King Book Awards, including its history, are available on the ALA website at <http://www.ala.org/rt/emiert/cskbookawards>

The Walter Dean Myers Award

Also known as "the Walter," the Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature celebrates the legacy of prolific author Walter Dean Myers (1937-2014). Myers served as the third National Ambassador for Young People's Literature (2012-2013), authored over a hundred titles, and won countless awards, including the first-ever Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature; he was a three-time National Book

Award finalist. Myers also received two Newbery Honors, five Coretta Scott King Book Awards. Throughout his lauded career, Myers was a lifelong champion of diversity in children's and young adult books.

Inaugurated in 2016 and presented by the organization WNDB, the annual Walter Dean Myers Awards for Outstanding Children's Literature recognizes diverse authors (or coauthors) whose works feature diverse main characters and address diversity in a meaningful way. Two to four Honor Books are also named annually. WNDB defines "diverse" to be one or more of the following: a person of color, Native American, LGBTIA, a person with a disability, and a member of a marginalized religious or cultural minority in the United States. The 2016 and 2017 Walter Awards and Honor Books represented young adult titles only. The 2018 Walters included two categories: Teen (ages 13-18) and Younger Readers (ages 9-13).

Pura Belpre Award

Similar to the Coretta Scott King Book Award, special awards for Latino/Latina American literature provide role models and encourage the writing and publishing of quality literature for young adults. The Pura Belpre Award is one of the best-known awards. According to the ALA website, the award, "established in 1996, is presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth. It is co-sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA, and the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking (REFORMA), an ALA affiliate." As a children's librarian, storyteller, and author, Pura Belpre was the first Latina librarian at the New York Public Library where she enriched the lives of Puerto Rican children in the United States "through her pioneering work of preserving and disseminating Puerto Rican folk-lore." Two awards are given annually, one for narrative and one

for illustration. Honor Books may also be named. The winners include books for children and young adults. For more details consult Awards and Scholarships at

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal>.

Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award

A lesser-known state award specifically geared to children's and young adult books is the Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, named in honor of Tomas Rivera, a native of Crystal City, Texas. He was the first Mexican American to be selected as Distinguished Alumnus at Texas State University in San Marcos. According to the website, "The creation of this Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award in his honor goes a long way towards keeping alive the prophesy he saw as part of our legacy as members of a healthy and responsible community. This children's book award will also work towards sustaining the vision he saw for the education of Mexican Americans in the Southwest and the United States." The first Tomas Rivera Award was given in 1995 to *Chato's Kitchen*, a picture book written by Gary Soto and illustrated by Susan Guevara. A few of the award-winning young adult titles include *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sanchez, *The Memory of Light* by Francisco X. Stork, and *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Perez. For further information consult <https://www.education.txstate.edu/ci/riverabookaward/>

Americas Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature

A third award honoring children's and young adult books about Latino/Latina Americans is the annual Americas Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature, which is awarded for titles published "in English

or Spanish that authentically and engagingly portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States. By combining both and linking the Americas, the award reaches beyond geographic borders, as well as multicultural-international boundaries, focusing instead upon cultural heritages within the hemisphere," according to the website. The award names Honorable Mentions and Commended Titles as well as Award Winners. The first award was given in 1993, and the award is sponsored by the national Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. For more information about the award, visit <http://www4.uwm.edu/clacs/aa>.

Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature

The Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature (APAAL) is a recent award established "to honor and recognize individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage, based on literary and artistic merit," according to the ALA website. Eligible works must be originally written in English by a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Adult, children's, and young adult categories are included in this annual award. Two Newbery Medal winners have also won an APAAL Award: *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata and *A Step from Heaven* by An Na. For more information visit <http://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/>.

The American Indian Youth Literature Awards

First awarded in 2006, the American Indian Youth Literature Awards are presented every two years. The awards were established as a way to identify and honor the very best writing and illustrations by and about American Indians. Books selected to receive the award will present American Indians in the fullness of their humanity in the present and past contexts. Additional

information about the award and criteria used to evaluate books can be found here: <https://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youthliterature-award/>.

The Association of Jewish Libraries—Book Awards

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) established a children's book award in 1968, later named the Sydney Taylor Book Award after the author of *All-of-a-Kind Family*. According to guidelines for the award on the web site, the purpose "is to encourage the publication of outstanding books of Jewish content for children, books that exemplify the highest literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience. We hope that official recognition of such books will inspire authors, encourage publishers, inform parents and teachers, and intrigue young readers. We also hope that by educating readers about the Jewish experience, we can engender pride in Jewish readers while building bridges to readers of other backgrounds." The award includes books written about Jews, no matter their geographical location, as well as the experiences of Jewish Americans. The award was expanded to include books for teens, named "The Association of Jewish Libraries Teen Book Award" instead of the Taylor Book Award. For more information visit https://jewishlibraries.org/Sydney_Taylor_Book_Award.

Arab American Book Awards

The Arab American Book Awards is a literary program created to honor books written by and about Arab Americans. The program generates greater awareness of Arab American scholarship and writing through an annual award competition and educational outreach. In addition to a category for young adults and children, the award recognizes adult fiction, nonfiction,

and poetry. To be eligible for the award, a book must be written, edited, or illustrated by an Arab American or address the Arab American experience. The portrayal or representation of Arab Americans should be accurate and engaging, avoid stereotypes, and reflect rich characterization. More about this award can be found here: <http://arabamericanmuseum.org/bookaward>.

Mildred L. Batchelder Award

One unique award for youth makes international literature particularly accessible. The Mildred L. Batchelder Award brings attention to countries where English is not the first language. The award is given to an American publisher for the translation of an outstanding book for youth originally published in a foreign country and translated into English. The annual award was first given in 1966 and honors a former executive director of the ALSC. According to the ALA website, Mildred Batchelder's life's work was "to eliminate barriers to understanding between people of different cultures, races, nations, and languages." In the past 10 years winning books have been translated from Italian, German, French, Danish, Hebrew, Swedish, Dutch, and Japanese. Anne-Laure Bondoux's *The Killer's Tears*, winner of a Batchelder Award, is a brief novel set on the desolate tip of Chile and tells a shocking story. A man suddenly appears at the poor farmhouse of 10-year-old Paolo and his parents. The man kills the farmer and his wife but spares their son. Another man joins them, and the trio lives together until tragedy once again strikes. This thought-provoking novel of innocence, guilt, and love is recommended for grades 9-12. Intriguing Batchelder Honor Books include Jean-Claude Mourlevat's *The Pull of the Ocean*, translated from French, and *Son of a Gun* by Anne de Graaf, translated from Dutch. For more information about the Batchelder Award visit <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward>.

Librarians in Action!: Introducing Your YA Collection to Readers

Dana Hutchins, the librarian at W.W. Jackson Middle School in San Antonio, Texas, earned her master of library science at the University of Texas at Austin. She has focused her 20 years of librarianship on connecting teens and tweens with just the right books. She has served on and chaired several state and national reading list committees, including The Texas Lone Star Reading List and Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers. When she is not filling her free time with massive amounts of reading, she loves to travel, play board games, and compete in pub quizzes.

Not Your Same Old Boring Orientation

By Dana Hutchins

Tired with the same old boring library orientation, I decided to try my hand at filmmaking. In the middle of the night, when I couldn't shut my brain off, I came up with the idea of integrating a little pop culture into my library orientation. I pitched the idea to a couple of librarian colleagues, and together we wrote a script, story boarded, filmed, edited, and presented an orientation that students would not soon forget.

The first year we focused on mystery. Knowing that pretty much every person on the planet has seen an episode of *Law & Order*, we chose this show to make an introductory video with a goal for the year to promote the Mystery genre.

We used iMovie to put together a video that featured a montage of pictures in grainy, black and white of various crime scenes, investigators, campus police, and confidential informants passing clues in the library. We called our show *Law & Order: Library Crimes Unit*. The video went on to discuss the crime, a stolen copy of *The Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes*, and presented the lineup of suspects, volunteer teachers who had their mug shots taken.

Prior to the orientation, we designed our “evidence” which we hid throughout the library. We filmed six separate confession videos of the suspects to add variety and so the students didn’t give away the solution to the crime to other classes. The students played junior detectives and followed a series of clues that led them to the correct evidence, and a confession video was played to reveal the perpetrator. The orientation was a huge success that students and teachers talked about the rest of the year. We also checked out a record number of mysteries.

The bar had been set, so the following year we created a new video based on the popular show, *Ghost Hunters*. This time we played the role of paranormal investigators and called ourselves LAPS: Library Apparitions and Paranormal Society. We created special effect shots to replicate paranormal activity. Teachers and the principal volunteered to give eyewitness testimony of the spooky happenings in the library.

Students played the role of ghost hunters and followed a series of clues that led them to seven ghosts hidden in the library. The goal this year was to promote the Horror and Supernatural genres. We also introduced a “Read It Forward” title that students could read and pass along to other students throughout the year. We integrated aspects of the “Read It Forward” book into our video and into the activities the students completed to find the ghosts.

Our most recent orientation video was a remake of the classic film *Frankenstein*. This time we used a green screen to put ourselves in Frankenstein’s “Libratory,” see what I did there? We dressed up as mad scientists and used props from our science department to re-create the lab. We set up the video as a silent film and used title cards to tell the story as an angry mob closed in on us. At the end, we used stop motion animation to reanimate a copy of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Our goal this year was to promote classic novels and the Science Fiction genre.

In conjunction with the videos, I also created eye-catching displays of young adult titles for each of the highlighted genres. Students are drawn to books with their covers on display. Furthermore, I routinely display the state and national library association’s recommended reading lists

for young adults. Displays help facilitate on the spot one-on-one booktalks.

Although these videos took a lot of time, energy, and collaboration to create, the rewards were innumerable. The process built a community of readers from the campus principal to the faculty and most importantly to the students. Former students still mention these experiences when they visit, and that means everything to me as I work to inspire lifelong learners and readers.

Promoting Books and Authors with Young Adults

Connecting with teens readers can happen in a myriad of ways; examples of ways to do so are imbedded throughout this book in the "Librarians in Action" snapshots. In addition to those offerings, remembering the role you can play in making book connections with readers is essential. Though there are almost an endless number of examples of effective programming ideas (be sure to see the professional resources I've highlighted at the end of this chapter for examples), besides doing face-to-face readers advisory, running student and book clubs, connecting young adult readers by sharing book social media platforms, movies, and young adult book events can be effective hooks to building enthusiasm for young adult literature.

Booktube

Booktube is a small community in YouTube that has exploded during these past few years. It is a place in which passionate readers, called Booktubers, upload videos in which they film themselves discussing their favorite books,

among other bookish activities. Booktube is a place where people share and talk about what they have been reading recently, as well as connect with other avid readers; it's a great way for readers to get recommendations from other teens, as well as find an online community committed to books. Though new booktubers start channels daily, consider connecting your teens with these well-loved 'tubers: Polandbananas Books, Jesse the Reader, Peruse Project, Booktube Girl, Book Beauty Ameriie, Naya Reads and Smiles, and Little Book Owl or encourage your passionate readers to start their own channel.

Instagram, Book Blogs, and Building Other YA Book Communities

Social media applications (or apps) such as Instagram also offer ways to connect young adult readers to writers and books; several publishing companies have a dedicated following to their Instagram accounts such as Epic Reads (HarperCollins), Penguin Teen, Underlined (Random House), Fierce Reads (Macmillan Teen), Riveted (Simon & Schuster), I Read YA (Scholastic), and Novl (Little, Brown). Authors themselves have taken to Instagram to make connections with readers; young adult writers such as Leigh Bardugo, Marie Lu, Angie Thomas, Nic Stone, Jenny Han, and Rick Riordan all have active social media accounts where they share book news; these writers have fan followings from the tens of thousands well up to a half of a million.

Book Blogs

Though there is a huge range of book blogging options for librarians to follow, Book Riot, <https://bookriot.com/>, offers the most extensive and comprehensive book blog recommendation resource. Book Riot is a blog

covering book-related news, reviews, commentary, advice, and information along with the latest in book-reading technology.

As stated in its "about us" section, Book Riot is:

dedicated to the idea that writing about books and reading should be just as diverse as books and readers are. So sometimes we are serious and sometimes silly. Some of our writers are pros. Many of them aren't. We like a good list just as much as we like a good review. We think you can like both J.K. Rowling and J.M. Coetzee and that there are smart, funny, and informative things to say about both and that you shouldn't have to choose. And the only thing we like as much as books is talking about books with other readers. So welcome to Book Riot—you seem like our kind of people. (2018)

Other book blogging sites such as Epic Reads and YA Books Central feature up-to-date, nonstop information on their blogs and "communities," providing readers videos, author interviews, and a myriad of other ways for readers of young adult literature to get and feel tuned in.

Young Adult Literature—Focused Podcasts

In simplest terms, a podcast is a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device; typically available as a series, new installments of podcasts can be received by subscribers automatically. In recent years, podcasts have grown increasingly popular, and a number of well-produced, insightful podcasts with a focus on young adult literature have been launched. These recommended podcasts offer ample author interviews, book coverage, and reviews with the discussion of timely issues pertinent to young adult literature.

Recommended Young Adult Literature Podcasts

- *First Draft* with Sarah Enni
- *Write or Die* with Claribel Ortega

- *BN Teen Blog Podcast* with Melissa Albert
- *Minorities in Publishing* with Jennifer Baker
- *88 Cups of Tea* with Yin Change
- *This Creative Life* with Sarah Zarr
- *Hey YA* with Karen Jensen and Eric Smith
- *Books and Boba* with Reera Yoo and Marvin Yueh
- *The Librarian Is In* from the New York Public Library
- *Adventures in YA* with Kristin Treviño and Sara Roberts

Also worth your attention is the new web-based series from SLJ named *Book Nerds @ SLJ TV*.

Connecting with young adult readers has even become a business endeavor for creative book lovers; subscription book boxes such as OwlCrate, Uppercase, and Lit-JoyCrate market month subscriptions for bookworms that send out thematic and curated new young adult books and treats straight to readers' doors. Booktube and social media book platforms are terrific ways to excite and encourage readers; sharing and showing books to movie trailers or movies adapted from young adult books is another great promotional tool.

[Promoting Young Adult Literature through Visual Literacy: Movies Based on Young Adult Books](#)

Young adults often have strong opinions about viewing movies based on books. Some are outraged that their favorite scenes are eliminated from the movies; others don't want their own vision of the characters to be disrupted by a producer's view. Still others like to see how a producer envisions the setting, plot, and characters. For some young adults, viewing a movie based on a book encourages them to read the book. Librarians can capitalize on interests in movies based on books by arranging displays of books that have been made into movies. In addition, they can collaborate with teachers to examine the role that text and film play together to promote visual literacy.

Thanks to the incredible success of young adult book adaptations such as the *Hunger Games*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Divergent*, *The Maze Runner*, and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, filmmakers continue to mine young adult literature for their next big cinematic success.

YA Novels Made into Movies

The Golden Compass—Philip Pullman

I Am Number Four—Pittacus Lore

The Lightning Thief—Rick Riordan

The Mortal Instruments—Cassandra Clare

Perks of Being a Wallflower—Stephen Chbosky

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants—Ann Brashers

Tiger Eyes—Judy Blume

Twilight Saga—Stephenie Meyer

Speak—Laurie R. King

Vampire Academy—Richelle Mead

The Book Thief—Markus Zusack

Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist—David Levithan and Rachel Cohn

The Fifth Wave—Rick Yancy

Divergent Trilogy—Veronica Roth

Fault in Our Stars—John Green

If I Stay—Gayle Forman

Maze Runner Trilogy—James Dashner

Me, Earl and the Dying Girl—Jessie Andrews

Everything, Everything—Nicola Yoon

Monster—Walter Dean Myers

The Spectacular Now—Tim Tharp

Before I Fall—Lauren Oliver

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children—Ransom Riggs

Every Day—David Levithan

Love, Simon (Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda)—Becky Albertalli

Ashes in the Snow (Between Shades of Gray)—Ruta Sepetys

The Darkest Minds—Alexandra Bracken

To All the Boys I've Loved Before—Jenny Han

The Hate U Give—Angie Thomas

The Sun Is Also a Star—Nicola Yoon

Dumplin'—Julie Murphy

Book and Film Comparison Discussion Questions

- Did the main characters look and act like you expected? Why or why not?
- Which did you enjoy more—the book or the movie? Why?
- Did the settings look like you expected? Why or why not?
- Which scenes in the movie changed so that they were different from the book?
- What scenes do you wish hadn't been changed? What scenes were better because of the change?
- What are some other differences between the novel and the movie adaption?
- What parts of the book did the movie leave out? What scenes were added to the movie that weren't in the book? Were these changes good or bad, and why?
- What stayed the same in both the book and the movie?
- Whose point of view do you agree with more—the authors or the movie's director? (Teaching Made Practical, 2018)

Author Visits

Though a great deal of planning is required to bring authors into schools, author visits held both face to face and virtually are powerful motivators for readers of young adult literature. Use the following checklists and information for planning and executing a successful visit.

Author Visits Checklist

Selecting an Author

- Pay attention to what your students are reading,
- Consider what are book clubs or teachers are reading to and with their students.
- Search state reading lists for ideas.
- Commit to a midlist or a debut author—, it's unlikely that a current *New York Times* best seller will be available (plus his or her honorarium will likely be higher than the average going rate).
- Estimate what authors cost. Fees for a full day at a school vary widely, though an average visit will run \$1,000-\$2,500. Don't forget that you get what you pay for—there are definitely less-expensive options out there, but students love seeing names they recognize.

Making the Request. Once you've found a few authors you'd like to consider, start researching to see if you can make a match. Search the author's website for information on visits (if none is listed, don't assume they are unavailable). If a publishing house contact is listed, contact either the author or the representative with all known details including:

- Name of the sponsoring organization
- Request for fee information or your available offer
- Location of event, date, time, anticipated audience size/age/makeup of audience
- Name of the contact person

- State exact nature of event and the author's participation, including your idea for how the schedule would look—length of the presentation, question and answer period
- Be upfront and specific about expenses you can cover (or not). This includes speaker's fees, transportation, hotel, meal costs
- Once the author has said "yes," confirm all arrangements/agreements with a follow-up e-mail or letter
- Make arrangements for books to be sold (these can often be acquired working with your local bookseller or find out how to get the books from the publisher).
- Create your own or work with bookseller for student order forms.
- If you anticipate low sales due to financial constraints of your students, consider partnering with your administrators or PTA to purchase books for students.

Promote, Promote, PROMOTE!

Make the trip as worthwhile as possible from the author's/publisher's point of view by creating a solid plan of action to spread the word about your event, consisting of some or all of the following:

- Get all the faculty informed and involved.
- Mention the event on your website, all library social media platforms, school e-newsletter.
- Promote the event with signage in your library.
- Educate your students in advance by collaborating with teachers—the more buy-in on the part of the teachers, the better the visit will be. Prepare students in advance with class readings, author studies, assigned reading—whatever is appropriate.
- Invite classes to share in the anticipation—using a book element to decorate throughout the school before the author visits. Hang banners/display welcome signs on the marquee in the street welcoming the author to your school.
- Take photos and notes at the event. Afterward follow up with a thank you to the author and any representative from the publishing house with whom you worked.

Hosting the Event

Create and share an agenda of the day's events in advance, including specific information about the location, where to go upon arrival, exact start time, and detailed overview of the day. Provide the author contact information for the host and a school phone number in case you can't be reached.

- Request information about dietary needs and offer a variety of meal options (many authors may want a quiet lunch to decompress or to get out from the building for a bit). Do not take them to the cafeteria or teacher's lounge.
- Stick to the plan—don't add sessions or double the audience.
- Find out what technology the author needs and provide it and a backup plan.
- Provide sufficient space for the author to move.
- Provide students an opportunity to ask smart questions (this is another pre-visit teachable moment).
- Supervise the student audience (remember that authors have no disciplinary or classroom management power)
- Working with your administration, expect classroom teachers to be present.
- Remind adults they need to role-model respect and enthusiasm for the author speaker. Don't use the presentation as a time to check messages, grade papers, chitchat, or staple.
- Provide water at all times.
- Provide bathroom breaks.

Virtual Author Visits

Advancements in technology have provided teachers and librarians with a wonderful way to connect teens with authors. Virtual conference sites such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Hangout are easy-to-use avenues that are relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of a typical on-site author visit. In some cases, authors will meet with groups of students for free.

While the process for preparing students for the "visit" remains the same, the effort, in many ways, is dramatically less. For example, for a typical author visit, organizers must stress over the travel and local transportation

arrangements for the author. With a virtual visit, these details aren't needed. By avoiding travel, the costs are also reduced, making it more affordable to bring authors "into" schools and libraries.

Another positive aspect of virtual visits is in regards to timing. Authors are very busy people. If they aren't traveling to promote their latest book, they are probably chained to their desk while working on a current project. This may make arranging for actual visits difficult; however, if the author only needs to log on to a computer, no matter the location, he or she may be more willing to take a break from a busy schedule to visit with teens since the author will be able to get right back to work when the visit is completed.

If you are interested in hosting a virtual author visit, you can often find authors willing to Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangout by searching online for "virtual author visits." Finally, if you have a particular author you'd like to invite, you can always contact the publisher or alternatively, check the author's personal website to see what contact information is listed rather than trying to connect on a social media platform; it's simply more professional and will likely yield better results.

After choosing an author, prepare teens as you would if the author were visiting the school in person. You would meet with the teens to talk about the author and familiarize them with the author's works. You would most likely want to focus on one or two novels written by the author. Finally, you would meet with the teens a day or two before the visit to discuss questions they would like to ask the author. It saves time and stress to have students write out their questions and for you to choose the order they will ask them in.

In addition to preparing the teens, you will want to prepare your equipment. You'll want to have a computer, Internet access, speakers, and a projector/screen. If possible, a test run of the connection should be made the day before the event.

A typical virtual author visit will last about 45 minutes. Usually, the author speaks about his or her writing process, describes his or her book(s), and answers questions last. It is possible to have a large group of teens watching the event if you have sufficient equipment (speakers, large screen,

etc.), but a smaller group (1-2 classes) is the best arrangement. More teens will have a chance to interact with the author by asking or answering questions and will have no problem seeing or hearing the author in a smaller space. It will be an event the teens will remember for years to come.

Promoting Young Adult Literature at Teen-Focused Author Events

Over the past 10 years, young adult book festivals have become a huge draw for teens and adult readers alike. Festivals across the country work hard to help young adult readers connect with their favorite authors by offering a day of programming and fun. Across the United States, a number of noteworthy teen-centered events exist. Examples of these include the Greater Rockchester Teen Fest, sister book festivals—YALLFest and YALL-West, the Austin Teen Book Festival (now part of the larger Texas Book Festival), and the North Texas Teen Book Festival (NTTBF) in the Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) area of North Texas. Events vary greatly in scope and size, but what each event has in common is a deep desire to connect readers to young adult literature and the authors who create their favorite books.

Serving Readers with a Young Adult Book Festival: The NTTBF Model

For years, lucky Texas teens and tweens in the Houston and Austin areas have had the opportunity to attend great youth-focused book festivals, but for those living in the DFW area, the distance to these faraway cities to see beloved young adult and middle-grade authors has made attendance at those events almost impossible. Irving Public Library (IPL) teen services librarian Kristin Treviño decided to change that, and in 2014, Treviño called me to ask if I wanted to join her and

colleagues to help bring the NTTBF to life. The inaugural festival in 2015 was a tremendous success and recorded an attendance of more than 3,500 and featured 53 authors, including young adult favorites David Levithan, Stephanie Perkins, and middle-grade rising star Soman Chainani. The festival's sophomore effort showed a huge attendance bump with over 8,000 area teens attending and 75 featured writers. By 2017, the attendance had grown to 11,000 youth with 81 authors (including kid and teen favorites such as R. L. Stine, Jason Reynolds, Nicola Yoon, and Veronica Roth), and two days of programming. The 2018 festival proved to be the biggest yet; the attendance was just over 13,000 with a treasure trove of beloved authors (more than 80 total) with reader favorites such as Cassandra Clare, Angie Thomas, Meg Medina, and Dav Pilkey keynoting events.

While the scope of NTTBF is a large, those of you considering creating a youth-centered festival for your community will likely find it to be a tremendously worthwhile endeavor regardless of the scale. To assist, the following is a five-step plan to help you execute your own event. Remember, if you build it well, they will come.

Step 1: Draft a Plan

Though it may seem obvious, organizing and executing a YA book festival takes a tremendous amount of preparation. In our case, planning began almost two years before the actual first festival was executed. The NTTBF steering committee used that time to determine the mission and scope we wanted for our festival.

Step 2: Fund the Festival

After establishing a plan, next is figuring out how to pay for it. In the case of NTTBF, IPL was awarded a \$48,000 grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Also, NTTBF raised \$10,000 through a one-time Kickstarter campaign for expenses not covered by the grant. Assuming there isn't already a grant secured, consider applying for them through local, state, and national literacy agencies, as well as look at other funding sources such as your library system or school district administrators—make a case for why your event matters. Schools across North Texas have garnered support from their administrators for taking students to NTTBF as a literary field trip, and schools recruited teachers and coaches to drive busloads of their students to our festival. Whether you have strong funding or are in need of sponsors, getting your community invested in your festival is essential. For NTTBF, DFW's Forever YA book club jumped in to be supportive in a variety of ways. Look for like-minded individuals and reach out to folks who are invested in service. While what local businesses can offer varies greatly, often donating resources to a kid-centered event is one that they can get behind. NTTBF partnered with DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) for transportation services and promotion, as well a number of small, local businesses to pay for author meals and host other festival-related events.

Step 3: Focus the Festival

If possible, attend other festivals and take notes about what you found successful. For NTTBF, after drafting our plan and determining the budget, securing our venue was next up. Our grant allowed us to utilize the Irving Convention Center. Remember to be realistic about costs and the potential size of your audience, and select your venue accordingly. The next task is securing the talent and books for the

event. For festival startups with limited funding, look locally. While securing well-known authors is always a goal of literary events, today's new author might be a superstar in years to come. Authors often have information about whom to contact for events on their website—use that to inquire about their availability and related costs. Next, arranging book sales is essential. Be sure to select a bookseller that understands the vision for your event.

Step 4: Market the Festival

Besides marketing a well-planned program of author events for the actual festival day through ads and features in the local news media outlets, finding ways to get an audience to the event is critical. NTTBF hosted educator mixers for librarians and teachers where a short presentation about the festival was shared, followed by a question-and-answer session and a group sharing time between school districts. Attendees signed up as festival volunteers and were provided marketing materials, such as posters, bookmarks, T-shirts, and banners to advertise our event in their community. Our festival website hosted reproducible materials, such as author lists by interest level and logos and other media files for printing and distribution. NTTBF countdown videos made by local schools and city employees, such as local police and firefighters, were shared via YouTube and pushed out on social media platforms. A video was made by the city of Irving to help bring awareness and recruit volunteers; it ran regularly on the city TV channel. After each festival an overview video capturing the day was widely distributed. A snapshot of each year's results is also provided to sponsors, publishers, grantees, and others. In addition to creating promo materials, developing an online and social media presence for your festival is essential. NTTBF employs Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and Facebook as pathways to the teens and tweens

we want to see on festival day—use them to find your audience and build enthusiasm for your event.

Step 5: Execute the Festival

After much planning and marketing and even more planning, it's time for the big event! Securing a large number of knowledgeable volunteers to help the program operate as seamlessly as possible is crucial. NTTBF offers pre-festival training to show volunteers how to do a myriad of tasks, from assisting with signing lines to booktalking for our annual "Speed Date with a Book" book giveaway. Our festival utilizes both adult and teen volunteers, and help is recruited from area schools, churches, and "Friends of the Library" groups. At NTTBF18, 431 volunteers contributed 1,793 hours of service. Make sure to also gather accurate attendance data as it comes in handy to make a case for future support. Finally, while it's likely you'll blow up your Fitbit, try to enjoy the day. You built it, they came, and now enjoy the fruits of your labor and service to young adult readers.

**The North Texas Teen Book Festival won ALA's John Cotton Dana Award.

[Professional Organizations with a Young Adult Focus](#)

One of the best ways you can serve teens is to become active in memberships in professional organizations at both your state and the national levels. ALA is a robust, thriving professional organization that helps by offering endless possibilities for service and networking. For students, ALA offers tremendous membership discounts. In many states,

there are state library organizations that function similarly and offer library leadership opportunities for those serving youth. In addition to these library-focused organizations, there are other noteworthy national literacy-focused associations that do great work for young adults and their literature. These are:

YALSA is a division of ALA. Join it and participate or be left behind! This is the most dynamic, fastest-growing division in ALA. To explore the benefits, go to <http://www.ala.org/yalsa>.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) features the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN), an independent assembly. ALAN publishes *The ALAN Review* three times a year, and it can be subscribed to independently of membership in NCTE. For more details about the journal and the assembly go to <http://www.alan-ya.org>.

The International Literacy Association (ILA) offers a Special Interest Group (SIG) for a Network on Adolescent Literature. The SIG offers programs and a journal devoted to the study of adolescent literature and ways of teaching it. Author interviews, presentations, and reviews are featured. For information about receiving the journal visit <https://www.clrsig.org/>

Conclusion

As librarians, the more you know and understand about young adults, the better prepared you will be to serve this special population. It's important to understand their needs and ways to connect and engage them with young adult literature, and it's crucial to provide an up-to-date, diverse book collection to help satisfy their reading needs for leisure reading and curricular assignments. The library profession provides vital assistance through the ALA website and through professional publications.

For much of my adult life, I felt like I was sort of playacting the role of grown up. But I've been adulting pretty hard the last ten years—probably so much so that I have to accept that I've aged out of using adult as a verb! There's no playacting involved anymore. As much as it pains me to say it (and believe me, it hurts) I'm a grown up. I

work full time as a writer, I'm married, I have two kids, I have a mortgage, for a while there, I was on the freaking PTA, and so many of the big questions of my teen years are now answered. I know who I will grow up to be. That realization drove me to want to revisit the feelings when my world was wide open and mysterious. YA allows me to go back and vicariously experience all of life's firsts—first love and first loss—all without any of the angst or, come to think of it, the acne.

—Julie Buxbaum, author of *What to Say Next* and *Tell Me Three Things*

Professional Bibliographies for Book Selection, Reading Promotion, and Library Services

Besides professional review journals, professional bibliographies in book form are valuable selection tools. The sampling that follows includes lists of recommended young adult books for school and public libraries as well as books for reading promotion and library services ideas that are necessarily entwined with book selection.

- Alessio, Amy J., and Katie Lamantia. 2018. *Pop culture inspired programs for tweens, teens, and adults*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
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- Barr, Catherine. 2013. *Best books for middle school and junior high readers, grades 6-9*. 3rd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Bodart, Joni P. 2009. *Radical reads 2: Working with the newest edgy titles for teens*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.

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Assignments in Action: Young Adults and Their Literature

1. Interview a young adult about his or her reading interests.
2. Observe a group of young adults at a mall or another gathering place. Pretend you are an anthropologist describing a group of people you did not know existed. Describe their behavior. How have young adults changed since you were a teen? How have they remained the same?
3. Explore the YALSA Website, (<http://www.ala.org/yalsa>) What features can help you as a university student? What features will help you as a teacher and librarian?

Chapter 2

Book Access through Quick Reads and Audiobooks

I write YA because so much of my inspiration for telling stories in the first place comes from young people. Young people invent and reinvent language, culture, the world, with their actions, and bearing witness to that power, that excitement and energy, is absolutely transformative to the creative process. With my books, I try to honor that liveliness and creativity, and the only way to do that is by listening, truly listening, to what young people have to say, and rendering that truth as honestly as possible.

—*Daniel Jose Older, author of the Shadowshaper Cypher series*

Librarians recognize that young adults make reading choices that are as individualized as young adults themselves. This chapter focuses on book access and the types of materials that have great success in piquing readers' interests. Sometimes referred to as "quick reads," these are materials that are sometimes briefer than traditional novels and informational books. In addition to examining these accessible books in print and e-Book editions, we'll explore how audiobooks work as accessible tools and what role audio plays in the literacy landscape.

Effective Strategies for all Types of Readers

The following strategies are often applied to readers who are defined as "reluctant" but as a practical rule in librarianship, these strategies apply to all readers, regardless of reading labels.

1. Maintain an updated collection of high-interest materials. These include anthologies and story collections, comics, graphic novels, picture books for older readers, illustrated informational books, short novels, and audiobooks covering a wide range of topics.
2. Give readers choices. Display high-interest materials and let them choose. Forcing nonreaders to select a biography or a particular kind of book is counterproductive.
3. Incorporate book-related activities. Library programming should include booktalking, contests, bringing in and connecting with authors, reading aloud, and providing time to read.
4. Get help from professional resources. Choose guides such as *Reaching Reluctant Young Adult Readers: A Handbook for Librarians and Teachers* by Edward T. Sullivan and other resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Most of these selections can be read in a short amount of time but appeal to young adults for a variety of reasons other than their brevity. "Quick reads" appeal to both proficient and less skillful readers. "Light reading," popular culture selections may serve as conduits to more complex reading (Krashen 2004) so be sure not to mistake "quick reads" as suitable only for reluctant readers. Teens of all ages and reading abilities are drawn to comic books, graphic novels, series books, story collections/anthologies, magazines, poetry, and audiobooks.

If you go to a general bookstore of any size, you will frequently stumble over young adults standing or sitting in the comics, manga, and graphic novel aisles—a clear indication of the popularity of this material with at least some portion of the young adult population. Many adults are oblivious to this form of literature, however, and while most of us are familiar with comics from our own youth, we may have misconceptions as to what graphic novels really are.

Comic Books

Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Archie—three superheroes and a teenager who enthralled young adult readers in the Golden Age of comic books (1937 to 1955)—are being "discovered" by new generations of readers. The Silver Age of comic books (1961) began with the publication of Marvel Comics' *Fantastic Four* and the introduction of *Spider-Man* in 1962 (Krashen 2004). The Bronze Age of Comic Books is usually said to run from 1970 to 1985. It follows the Silver Age of Comics, and is followed by the Modern Age of Comic Books. *Watchmen* (1986) is one of the comics considered to signify the beginning of the Modern Age. The Modern Age of Comic Books is a period in the history of American superhero comic books that is generally considered to have begun in the mid-1980s and continues through the present day (Haynes 2013).

These comic book heroes and many more still flourish today because of their devoted readers, both children and adults. Blockbuster movies based on iconic comic book characters have only intensified this interest. "Reboots" for storylines stretching back decades have given fresh life to both the characters and discussions about them. Almost every city has at least one comic book store, general bookstores have a comic book section, and libraries, especially public libraries, have established collections that cater to young adults and adults alike.

For librarians, it's important to consider the benefits of offering comic books to young adults:

1. Reading comic books can help with language development. For example, in a sampling of comic books, a researcher found that *The Amazing Spiderman* #187 had reading levels of 7.4, 3.0, and 2.8 for an average of 4.4. *Superman* #329 revealed reading levels of 7.3, 8.3, and 3.5 for an average of 6.4 (Wright 1979, in Krashen 2004).
2. The combination of text, primarily dialog, with illustration may help reluctant and second-language readers become more proficient

in reading.

3. For visual learners, comic books offer clues to the text and can aid readers in their understanding of the story.
4. For students who are incapable of visualizing what they are reading, comics and graphic novels offer "visual cueing systems" to help interpret the text (Lyga and Lyga 2004).
5. Comic books may be "conduits" to other types of reading (Krashen 2004). A natural transition from the adventures of superheroes is fantasy with its focus on good versus evil.
6. Comic books serve as a transition to more ambitious and more sophisticated graphic novels.
7. Comic books can function as lures to attract young adults to the library. A high school librarian in Kentucky decided to offer comics and graphic novels as a way to inspire students to read more. "Now, she says, 'I can't keep these books in the library. I can hardly check them in before they're checked out. The kids just devour them'" (Grillo 2005, 26).
8. Offering comic books in the library may increase the circulation of other materials. In a junior high library, researchers found that after comic books were made available for reading in the library, circulation of noncomic materials increased by 30% (Dorrell and Carroll 1981).
9. The format of comic books makes them accessible. Comic books measure about 6¾" by 10¼" and are stapled, usually 32 pages in length with a shiny paper cover. They are inexpensive to buy and are easy to carry around.
10. Comic books have special appeal to boys for the fast action, the superheroes, and the visuals combined with narrative. Thus, boys are more inclined to read comic books than girls are (Smith and Wilhelm 2002).
11. Today's young adults are immersed in a visual culture. Movies, television, video-games, web resources are ever-present, and they have become "visually dependent," needing visual aids to

interpreting meaning (Lyga and Lyga 2004). Comic books appeal to them for this very reason (Haynes 2013).

Graphic Novels

Will Eisner coined the term "graphic novel" in 1978 with the publication of *Contract with God* (Weiner 2003). This break-through story was published for adults and, because of mature content, is not recommended for young adults. As with any novels published today, some are appropriate for young adults and some are intended for adults. Librarians must be especially aware of maturity levels and rely on reviews and recommended lists for selecting suitable titles for young adults. Only in the past few years have public and school libraries begun to embrace this popular format and extend their collections and activities to include it. To understand the composition of a graphic novel, think of the marriage of text and illustration. Graphic novels have emerged from traditional comic books, and the term refers to the format, not to content. A graphic novel may be fiction or nonfiction. Usually, graphic novels have sophisticated illustrations and are printed on high-quality paper. Illustrations are either in color or black and white. In graphic novels, as in comics, there is a continuing conversation between text and illustration. A few works meet the other criteria for graphic novels (sequential pictures with more than one per page) but have no text. A prime example of this is Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*. But in most cases, one without the other would not work as a story. Although it may take little time to read a graphic novel, they are meant to be savored and re-read.

Francisca Goldsmith, author of *Graphic Novels Now: Building, Managing, and Marketing a Dynamic Collection*, concisely sums up the attributes of graphic novels:

Unlike the cartoon, comic strip, or comic book, the graphic novel is complete within itself and provides a beginning, a middle, and an end to the story or information it places before the reader. However, it shares the earmarks of sequential art that comic

books incorporate: image and word are bound together in order for the narrative to unfold. (Goldsmith 2005, 25)

The Library of Congress defines graphic novels as follows:

Graphic novels and comic books have the following characteristics: Characters and action are portrayed in a succession of panel drawings. A series of panels advances a fictional narrative line. The dialogue is generally presented in "balloons," or their equivalent. In some cases the narrative is advanced with no dialogue or written material at all, or with written material at the bottom of the panels. (LC Classification and Shelving Guide, Instruction Sheet 565)

For the purposes of this discussion, graphic novels are distinguished from comic books as being longer and with a more permanent type of binding. Some graphic novels will combine several individual issues of a comic book title that cover an overall story arc.

A frequent misconception held by persons not familiar with the graphic novel format is that graphic novels are text novels with detailed descriptions of sex and/or violence. And, indeed, novels fitting that description could be described as "graphic." But the term "graphic novel" is now widely associated with materials combining text and pictures in sequential format as defined earlier. It is also sometimes used for the sake of convenience to include nonfiction titles in the same format, but a more precise term for those is graphic nonfiction.

It should be emphasized that the terms "graphic novels" (GN) and "graphic non-fiction" (GNF) are used to describe a format, not a genre. Graphic novels, especially, encompass many different genres, including general fiction, romance, mystery, science fiction, and fantasy. Graphic nonfiction includes memoir, biography, history, and many other topics. Many of the graphic novels that appeal to teens will fall into the science fiction and fantasy genres, but the other genres are certainly not excluded.

As mentioned earlier, some graphic novels are compilations of multiple issues of comic titles, generally combining issues that cover a particular story arc although multiple story arcs may also be present. But not all graphic novels come from comics: many start life as original works.

Nevertheless, graphic novels have a strong foundation in comics, and the term "comics" may be used in some cases as an overarching term describing the whole sequential picture/text story format (Haynes 2013).

The best way to find a reliable sampling of excellent graphic novels is to consult the Great Graphic Novels for Teens award list, which has been compiled yearly since 2007. This award list is sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and reflects the current popularity of graphic novels. Committee members read graphic novels published within a 16-month period. Recommended graphic novels chosen for the list meet the following criteria:

1. Integration of images and words.
2. Clarity of visual flow on the page.
3. Ability of images to convey necessary meaning.
4. Outstanding quality of the artwork's reproduction.
5. Narrative enhanced by the artwork.
6. Narrative dominated by sequential art component.

For further details of the selection process and an annotated list of winning titles visit <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/great-graphic-novels>.

Popular Categories of Graphic Works

Superheroes

As discussed in the section on comics, many people first associate graphic novels with the superhero genre. DC and Marvel, the two most prominent publishers in this area, have for many years each had their own stable of superhero and superheroine characters, many of them icons such as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, among others. Movie

blockbusters from the past few years centering on Batman, the Avengers, Iron Man, and so on have led to even more interest in the superhero genre. New Superhero titles include *Faith* by Jody Houser (series), *Gotham Academy* by Becky Cloonan (series), *Unbeatable Squirrel Girl* by Ryan North (series), *Legend of Wonder Woman: Origins* by Renae De Liz, and *Miles Morales: Ultimate Spider-Man* (series).

Literary Adaptations

Another category with a long history and a recent resurgence in popularity is that of adaptations of literary works into graphic format. The well-known *Classics Illustrated* comics line began in the 1940s and was published for approximately 30 years. Taking up the mantle have been recent graphic novel publications of such classics as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Frankenstein* as well as adaptations of modern works such as Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, James Patterson's *Maximum Ride: The Manga Series*, Madeleine L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time*, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series, Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and Gail Carriger's *Soulless*. These adaptations can provide scaffolding for challenged readers into literary works but can also provide a forum for discussion among all types of readers about the various ways that a literary work can be adapted and presented, compared, and contrasted. Many teachers and librarians already use movie adaptations of literary works as a part of teaching those works. These graphic adaptations provide yet another discussion point for the story. Related to the literary adaptation are those works that tell fresh stories in an existing print-based universe. An example of this type of graphic novel is Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files: Welcome to the Jungle*.

Fantasy

Graphic novels in the fantasy genre range from Arthurian legend to urban fantasy. The same criteria for what makes a fiction book a fantasy or science fiction (see [Chapter 5](#)) will also apply to graphic novels. Arguably one of the most popular genres with young adults, fantasy and science fiction will have a large place in any collection of graphic novels. A selection of recent popular titles include:

- *The Prince and the Dressmaker* by Jen Wang. Prince Sebastian is looking for a bride—or rather, his parents are looking for one for him. Sebastian is too busy hiding his secret life from everyone. At night he puts on daring dresses and takes Paris by storm as the fabulous Lady Crystallia. Sebastian's secret weapon (and best friend) is the brilliant dressmaker Frances. But Frances dreams of greatness, and being someone's secret weapon means being a secret. Forever. How long can Frances defer her dreams to protect a friend?
- *Nimona* by Noelle Stevenson. Lord Ballister Blackheart seeks to bring down the Institution of Law Enforcement and Heroics with the aid of his new shapeshifting sidekick Nimona.
- *The Nameless City* trilogy by Faith Erin Hicks. Every time it is invaded the City gets a new name, but to the natives it is the Nameless City, and they survive by not letting themselves get involved—but now the fate of the City rests in the hands of Rat, a native, and Kaidu, one of the Dao, the latest occupiers, and the two must somehow work together if the City is to survive.
- *Paper Girls* by Brian K. Vaughan. In the early hours after Halloween of 1988, four 12-year-old newspaper delivery girls uncover the most important story of all time. Suburban drama and otherworldly mysteries collide in this smash-hit series about nostalgia, first jobs, and the last days of childhood.
- *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Yang. This multiple award-winning novel incorporates the Chinese legend of the Monkey King as part of

a complex coming-of-age story.

- *Anya's Ghost*, by Vera Brosgol. A ghost might be the ideal BFF—or maybe not.
- *Avatar the Last Airbender: The Promise*, by Gene Yang and others. A graphic novel continuation of the popular animated television series.
- *Castle Waiting*, by Linda Medley. The inhabitants of Briar Rose's castle discover what Happy Ever After is like.
- *Foiled*, and the sequel. *Curses! Foiled Again*, by Jane Yolen and Mike Cavallero. A high school misfit comes into her own in fencing but sees strange creatures when she puts on her mask.
- *Gunnerkrigg Court*, by Thomas Siddell. After her mother's death Antimony Carver goes to an exceedingly strange boarding school that harbors many secrets. *Gunnerkrigg Court* is a currently ongoing web comic with print collections of earlier entries.
- *Hereville: How Mirka Got Her Sword*, by Barry Deutsch. An orthodox Jewish heroine has aspirations to fight dragons. Fortunately she has an understanding stepmother.
- *The Unwritten*, by Mike Carey and Peter Gross. A real person stars in a best-selling fantasy series—all of it true.

Media Adaptations and Tie-Ins

Media tie-in works are not new, either in the print or in graphic novel world. These types of stories are particularly prevalent in the science fiction genre. Recent publications have included prequels for movies, such as *Star Trek: Countdown to Darkness*, a forerunner to the movie *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. Another recent development is the publication of graphic novels continuing the story line of television shows that have ended. Perhaps the best-known examples of this are the continuations of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, with a series of graphic novels labeled Season Eight and (as of this writing) Season Nine. Similar continuations have been done for *Buffy* spinoff series *Angel*, as

well as *Farscape*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *Star Trek: The Original Series* among others.

Slice-of-Life/School Stories

Stories depicting real-life situations and the perils and traumas of school are always popular with teens. Such stories are reflections of their own lives and problems and can offer fictional support for living with issues that may affect themselves or their friends. Faith Erin Hicks (*Friends with Boys*, *The War at Ellsmere*, *The Nameless City*) and Raina Telgemeier (*Smile*, *Drama*, *Sisters*, *Ghost*, and *Guts*) are examples of authors who have made this category of graphic novels their own. Other recommended titles include:

- *Brave* by Svetlana Chmakova. In his daydreams, Jensen is the biggest hero that ever was, saving the world and his friends on a daily basis. But his middle school reality is very different—math is hard, getting along with friends is hard. Even finding a partner for the class project is a big problem when you always get picked last.
- *Check, Please! #1 Hockey* by Ngozi Ukazu. Coming-of-age story about hockey, bros, and trying to find yourself during the best four years of your life.
- *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina. In the first graphic novel for young readers to focus on police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, as in Hamlet, the dead shall speak—and the living yield even more surprises.
- *Freshman: Tales of 9th Grade Obsessions, Revelations, and Other Nonsense*, by Corinne Mucha. If ninth grade affects the rest of your life, then Annie is in trouble.
- *This One Summer* by Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. It's a summer of secrets, and sorrow, and growing up, and it's a good thing Rose and Windy have each other.

- *The New York Four*, and sequel. *The New York Five*, by Brian Wood and Ryan Kelly. Starting college in New York City.
- *The Plain Janes*, and sequel, *Janes in Love*, by Cecil Castellucci and Jim Rugg. After being forced to move to the suburbs, Jane finds three other girls named Jane and starts an art club.

Nonfiction

Graphic nonfiction provides a forum where many different subjects can be presented with both intelligence and entertainment. Recent graphic nonfiction has included titles on history (*March* trilogy by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin and *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* by Jonathan Fetter-Vorm), evolution (*Evolution: The Story of Life on Earth* by Jay Hosler, Kevin Cannon, and others), economics (*Economix: How Our Economy Works [and Doesn't Work] in Words and Pictures* by Michael Godwin and Dan E. Burr), and genetics (*The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA* by Mark Schultz, Zander Cannon, and Kevin Cannon).

The most prevalent form of graphic nonfiction, however, seems to be memoirs and biography. A selection of recent titles include:

- *Feynman* by Jim Ottaviani, Leland Myrick, and others
- *My Friend Dahmer* by Derf Backderf
- *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* by Lucy Knisley
- *Steve Jobs: Genius by Design* by Jason Quinn and Aimit Tayal

A Selection of Recommended Classic and "Classic" Graphic Novels

A classic book means the book has been in print for at least 20 years, indicating its importance. A "classic" book may have been in

print only a few years but has made a significant impact on its readers and on its particular field of study (e.g., graphic novels).

Eisner, Will. [1978] 2006. *A contract with God*. New York: Norton.

Considered to be the first true graphic novel, this tells the story of Eisner's childhood neighborhood through four interrelated stories.

McLeod, Scott. 1994. *Understanding comics: The invisible art*.

New York: William Morrow. An easy-to-understand history and analysis of the art of comics given in graphic format.

Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. 1995. *Watchmen*. New York: DC

Comics, 1995. A group of disaffected super heroes is stalked by an unknown assassin.

Satrapa, Marjane. 2004. *Persepolis: The story of a childhood*. New

York: Pantheon. A memoir of growing-up in Iran.

Smith, Jeff. 2004. *Bone*. New York: Cartoon Books. (complete in

one volume. Also available in individual volumes from Scholastic). The adventures of the three Bone cousins.

Spiegelman, Art. 1993 *Maus: A survivor's tale*. (vols. 1 and II).

New York: Pantheon. A retelling of the Jewish Holocaust with Hitler as a cat and the Jews as mice.

Tan, Shaun. 2007. *The arrival*. New York: Arthur A. Levine. A

wordless graphic novel set in a slightly fantastical world that gives the reader the sense of what it's like to be an immigrant in a strange land.

Yang, Gene Luen. 2006. *American born Chinese*. New York: First

Second. A boy must come to terms with his ethnic heritage and his American way of life.

[Manga](#)

Another subset of the graphic novels universe is manga (pronounced *mahnga*), or Japanese comics, and its cousin manhwa, Korean comics. Although manga may not be as popular now with teens as it was a few years ago, there are still sizeable numbers of teen readers, and it still circulates well in libraries.

When manga first became popular in the United States, most titles were published in 'flipped' format so that the volume read left-right, front-back in the way Western readers are accustomed to reading. Because of fan criticism, almost all titles are now published unflipped and therefore are read from right to left and start at what we would consider the back of the volume. Almost all manga are published in black and white, as that is the way they were originally published in Japan. Some very popular titles may have a few color pages. Unlike manga, manhwa, or Korean comics, are published in the traditional left-to-right format. Several manhwa titles are licensed.

Manga, like graphic novels in general, is a format, not a genre. Manga titles are published in Japan on a vast variety of subjects and in many different genres, but only a small subset of those titles is actually licensed and translated for publication in the United States. Manga are normally published in weekly or monthly installments in magazines in Japan. Popular titles will then have several installments combined into *tankoubon* volumes, and those volumes are what are published as licensed titles for the U.S. market.

For classification purposes, manga fall into six general categories with a seventh being those titles that cross categories and age ranges. The classification tends to be based on the magazine in which the title was originally published in Japan as well as the audience to which the title appeals. There are general characteristics for each type, but the characteristics overlap and audiences overlap as well.

- Shoujo (or shojo)—Titles that are marketed to teenage girls. Characterized by emphasis on interpersonal relationships, these works usually have a romantic element. The main characters may be

either female or male. Popular examples include *Sailor Moon* (Naoko Takeuchi) and *Kimi Ni Todoke: From Me to You* (Karahō Shiina). *Sailor Moon* centers on a type of character known as "magical girl." Usagi Tsukino is an ordinary girl who transforms into a fighter for good against evil with the help of a magical cat and in the company of other Sailor Senshi. *Kimi ni Todoke* is a school story with a particularly strong theme of female friendship as well as a charming romance.

- Shounen (or shonen)—Titles aimed at teenage boys. Emphasis is on action or sports. Themes may include honor, heroism, determination, and teamwork. Current best sellers in this category include *Naruto* and *Bleach*. *Naruto* (Mashashi Kinomoto) tells the story of a ninja-in-training who harbors a strange power within himself. Ichigo Kurosaki, the main character in *Bleach* (Tite Kubo), has always been able to see ghosts but a chance encounter with soul reaper Rukia involves him with battles both on earth and elsewhere.
- Seinen—Originally published in magazines for adult men. The plots and motivations are more complex and are action-oriented. Some titles have graphic sexual or violent content, but many do not. Examples include *xxxHolic* (CLAMP) and *House of Five Leaves* (Natsume Ono). Watanuki is desperate to rid himself of the ability to see spirits and hires himself out to a wish granter in exchange in *xxxHolic*. *House of Five Leaves*, suitable for older teens, tells the story of Akitsu, a masterless samurai, who goes to work for a group that may be outlaws, but are, nevertheless, special.
- Josei—Published for adult women. Emphasis is on romance or work-related themes. May have graphic sexual content. This category is not as frequently licensed in the United States. Good examples include *Bunny Drop* (Yumi Unita) and *Antique Bakery* (Fumi Yoshinaga). In *Bunny Drop*, Daikichi is raising a little girl who is actually his aunt. *Antique Bakery* (suitable for older teens) revolves around four men who open a bakery and their relationships.

- BL/Boys' Love/Yaoi—Main audience is female. Emphasis is on male/male relationships. May or may not be graphic. Popular with some readers and collections serving more mature teens should have some titles. Recommendations include *FAKE* (Sanami Matoh) and works by Fumi Yoshinaga. *FAKE* deals with the relationship between two New York cops.
- Yuri—Emphasis is on female/female relationships. Not many titles are currently licensed in the United States. One well-known title is *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (Chiho Saito), also the basis for a well-regarded anime series. Utena wants to be a prince and finds herself drawn into duels and intrigue, and she tries to protect another young woman.

Manga artists, or mangaka, have many different artistic styles. However, the shoujo and shounen titles that make up the bulk of the U.S. market tend to be drawn in a very recognizable "manga" style. One of the most defining characteristics is the big eyes that certain characters, usually the hero or heroine, will have. This style was pioneered by Osamu Tezuka, known as the "father of manga" who was heavily influenced by Walt Disney and U.S. comics such as Betty Boop. Because manga is read very quickly by Japanese readers, the characters tend to have distinctive hairstyles and clothes as well as certain characteristics that serve as shorthand identification for fast readers.

Most of the titles mentioned in this chapter are also the basis for anime series available in the United States. If your teen patrons like manga, then anime should also be a part of your collection as the two are very closely linked in Japan and here. Anime also encompasses stand-alone movies, including award-winning titles by Hayao Miyazaki such as *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Teen readers who like manga enjoy the cultural differences, the different ways of telling stories, and the themes and topics found in these stories. Manga readers also tend to be fans of anime (Japanese animation) and involved in fandom activities such as conventions, cosplay (dressing in

costumes based on characters), and writing fanfiction. Not every teen likes or reads manga, but those who do are definite fans.

Recommended Manga

Adachi, Mitsura. 2010-2012. *Cross game*. San Francisco: VIZ media. 8 volumes (complete). Baseball is the center of this story about Ko and a family of four sisters who live down the street.

CLAMP. 2010-2012. *Cardcaptor Sakura; Cardcaptor Sakura, Master of the Clow*. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse. 4 omnibus volumes (complete). Magical girl story. Sakura must find and vanquish the Clow cards that she inadvertently let loose.

CLAMP. 2010. *Chobits*. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse. 2 omnibus volumes (complete). Hideki finds a persocom (computer robot) discarded in an alley and takes it home.

Furudate, Haraichi. 2016-. *Haikyu!* San Francisco: VIZ Media. 28 volumes (ongoing). Despite his short stature, Shoyo Hinata is a volleyball player who has athleticism, ambition, and drive to be the best.

Hatori, Bisco. 2005-2012. *Ou run high school host club*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. 18 volumes (complete). Harahi, a scholarship student, breaks an expensive vase and must work off her debt with the Ouran High School Host Club, composed of six rich guys.

Horikoshi, Kohei. 2016- *My hero academia*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. Midoriya inherits the superpower of the world's greatest hero, but greatness won't come easy.

Inoue, Takehiko. 2008-. *Slam Dunk*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. 28 volumes (ongoing). High school, basketball, and romance. Considered by some to be the best sports manga of all time.

Midorikawa, Yuki. 2010-. *Natusme's book of friends*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. 14 volumes (ongoing). Having a demon's

name written down gives power over him, so Natsume's book is valuable and dangerous.

Mori, Kaora. 2011-. *A bride's story*. New York: Yen Press. 4 volumes (ongoing— hard cover). Historical story of a young girl in Central Asia betrothed to a boy six years her junior. Gorgeous art.

Oda, Eiichiro. 2018-. *One Piece Omnibus*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. Join Monkey D. Luffy and his swashbuckling crew in their search for the ultimate treasure. One Piece.

Takahashi, Rumiko. 2003- *InuYasha*, San Francisco: VIZ Media. 56 volumes (complete), available in omnibus vols, (ongoing). A modern-day school girl falls down a well and finds herself in feudal Japan with a half-demon boy.

Yukino, Sai and Kairi Yura. 2010-2013. *Story of Saiunkoku*. San Francisco: VIZ Media. 9 volumes (complete). Richly illustrated, this historical-feeling manga tells the story of a girl who wants to be an imperial civil servant but is barred because of her gender.

[Electronic Graphic Novels and Manga](#)

Manga graphic novel and manga titles are available in electronic versions, either in e-reader formats or through publisher apps for reading. If your library is circulating e-Books, then you should consider including graphic novels and manga titles in your selection. A number of graphic novels first appeared as webcomics, and these works can be promoted through suggested reading lists or links on your website.

[Graphic Novels and Nonfiction in Action](#)

Graphic novels require an investment on the part of the librarian or teacher in terms of committing resources and time to ensure that these works are used to their best advantage. Many professionals who work with teens are not familiar with this category of literary works and are not comfortable reading in the Western graphic format, let alone manga. Taking the time to read several different graphic novels and manga (not just one or two) will go a long way toward increasing comfort in reading and familiarity with the format. Familiarity with content and subject matter will enable the professional to make recommendations and discuss titles with assurance, enthusiasm, and credibility.

Persons working with young adults also need to realize that, although graphic novels do appeal to many reluctant readers, the audience for them is not limited to that category of teens. As discussed in the section of comics, graphic novels appeal to a generation of readers who are immersed in media, interactive web activities, and nonstop visual stimulation. A number of publications have come out in recent years highlighting the use of graphic novels in libraries and classrooms. The list of resources at the end of this chapter highlights some of these.

Adding graphic novels to a collection also is an investment of resources. Many graphic novels are a part of a series; this is especially true for manga where popular series may run for many volumes. Popular titles may need to have individual volumes replaced, some frequently. Graphic novels also need to be showcased, not hidden away in the shelves where they may or may not be found by readers. Separate shelving, displays, and lively signage can draw attention to your collection. Graphic novels are a draw for young adults and can not only increase circulation but also lead to increased usage of nongraphic novel resources. But this won't happen if young adults can't find them.

Librarians and teachers also need to remember that not all titles are suitable for a given age group so it is important to preview, read reviews, and pay attention to publisher ratings. The adage that a picture is worth a thousand words certainly comes into play with graphic novels. Content that may be glossed over or unremarkable in text becomes startling or even

unacceptable when shown through pictures. For this reason, graphic novels can be a flashpoint for censorship attempts. Librarians need to be prepared for such attempts and armed with resources and reviews to be able to defend not only the content but also the presence of graphic novels in the collection.

[Professional Resources for Graphic Novels and Comic Books](#)

- Brenner, Robin E. 2007. *Understanding manga and anime*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Carter, James Bucky, ed. 2007. *Building literacy connections with graphic novels*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Fagan, Bryan D., and Jody Condit Fagan. 2011. *Comic book collections for libraries*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Fletcher-Spear, Kristin, and Merideth Jenson-Benjamin. 2011. *Library collections for teens: Manga and graphic novels*. New York: E. L. Kurdyla Publishing in association with Neal-Schuman Publishers.
- Gavigan, Karen W., and Minday Tomasevich. *Connecting comics to curriculum: Strategies for grades 6-12*, Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Goldsmith, Francisca. 2005. *Graphic novels now: Building, managing, and marketing a dynamic collection*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- "Good Comics for Kids." *School Library Journal* (blog). <http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/>.
- Great Graphic Novels for Teens*. Young Adult Library Services Association, <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/great-graphic-novels>.
- Kalen, Elizabeth F. S. 2012. *Mostly manga: A genre guide to popular manga, manhwa, manhua, and anime*, Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Kan, Katherine. Graphically Speaking. *Voice of Youth Advocates* (blog). <http://voyamagazine.com/tags/graphically-speaking/>

- Lyga, Allyson A. W. 2004. *Graphic novels in your media, center: A definitive guide*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- McCloud, Scott. 1993. *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: HarperPerennial. (Suitable for high school students.)
- McCloud, Scott. 2006. *Making comics: Storytelling secrets of comics, manga, and graphic novels*. New York: Harper. (Suitable for high school students.)

Librarians in Action: A Manga Club

Pay attention to the students who regularly check out the format, invite those readers to form a manga club that meets regularly, and allow the teens decide what they would like to do. For one activity, show an anime (a movie version of a manga) of *Howl's Moving Castle*, a fantasy adventure novel by Diana Wynne Jones. After seeing the movie, students read the novel and at least one book in the graphic novel series. Possible discussion questions: Does viewing the art change your mind about the novel? Which format do you prefer? Why? Other ideas for activities include:

- Read and pass around manga.
- Learn to draw in manga style. Many print resources are available for this.
- Develop, write, storyboard, draw, and produce an original English language manga.
- Make Japanese food. Invite a Japanese chef to talk to group and demonstrate food preparation.
- Have costuming workshops and hold a contest of "cosplay" (short for "costume play," often used to role-play characters in works of fiction).
- Learn to play games such as Go (featured in the manga series *Hikaru No Go*, among others).
- Learn about Japanese cultural symbols frequently included in manga.

- Produce lists of favorite manga and vote for favorites, giving an annual award to the manga with the most votes.
- "Book club" manga titles. Everyone reads and discusses a given series or standalone title. Recommended titles, depending on the gender makeup of the club, include: *One Piece* (shonen). *Bleach* (shonen), *Naruto* (shonen), *Kimi ni todoke: From Me to You* (shoujo), *Sailor Moon* (shoujo). *Full Metal Alchemist* (shonen), and *Black Butler* (shonen).

Ah, high school. There are so many memories that come flooding back when I think back upon being a teenager: the insecurity, experiencing so many firsts, and figuring out who you are and who you want to be. The future is ahead of you, but for many that can be scary. While, unfortunately, some of these emotions never go away, it's when you're a teenager that you first experience these emotions and everything is so raw. It's rife with possibilities. That is why I write for teens. I write for the teens who want to feel a little less alone. I write for the teens who are so insecure, they need a willful protagonist to help steer them through a heartbreak or family issues. They maybe want to escape or simply explore. Books can be so much to a reader. Teens are an amazing audience to write for because they are a devoted crew who when they love something they LOVE it. I still remember all of the books and movies I was obsessed with as a teen, they left their mark on me. If I can make one teenager feel seen or a bit better about themselves because of my work, then I will have done my job.

—Elizabeth Eulberg, author of *The Lonely Hearts Club*, *Better Off Friends*, and *Prom and Prejudice*

[Fiction Series Books](#)

[Early Series Books: A History](#)

To better understand fiction series books and their impact on young adult reading, a brief look at Edward Stratemeyer's legacy is useful. Horatio Alger, Jr., and Oliver Optic, two early writers of series books, were predecessors of

Edward Stratemeyer, whose fertile mind produced plot lines for boys' and girls' novels at an astonishing rate and whose publishing empire was unrivaled in the business of producing series books for children and adolescents. His story begins simply. After Stratemeyer sold a story for \$75 to a weekly boys' magazine, his future in writing and publishing began in earnest. Stratemeyer's first successful series began with *Under Dewey at Manila; or, The War Fortunes of a Castaway* (1898) about two boys on a battleship. Stratemeyer capitalized on boys' interest in war and continued similar adventures in *The Old Glory* series and in the *Soldiers of Fortune* series (Nilsen and Donelson 2000, 60). Stratemeyer became a "literary machine," a term used in a 1991 *Smithsonian* article (Watson) examining Stratemeyer's literary contribution. From 1890 through 1980 Stratemeyer and his Syndicate created more than 125 original children's series and published over 1,300 books (Plunkett-Powell 1993). Four of his series are still published today in updated form: *The Bobbsey Twins* (begun in 1904), *Tom Swift* (1910), *The Hardy Boys* (1927), and *Nancy Drew* (1930) (Plunkett-Powell 1993).

On Stratemeyer's death in 1930, his daughter Harriet S. Adams took over managing his publishing empire with continued success until 1980 when the Syndicate was purchased by Simon & Schuster. Part of the phenomenal economic success of the Syndicate was due to Stratemeyer's system. He and his daughter wrote plot outlines, hired ghostwriters who were sworn to secrecy, and paid a flat rate for each manuscript. He influenced the writing of modern series through his rigid adherence to three rules. First, each series began with three titles to test their potential popularity. Second, each book ended in a cliffhanger. Third, each book advertised the next book in the series.

Nancy Drew, Stratemeyer's most successful character and series, was written under the name Carolyn Keene. In 1926 Stratemeyer outlined a plot that included a girl superteen as the main character and hired Mildred A. Wirt, a journalist and respected author, to write the first book, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, published in 1930 by Grosset & Dunlap. For 50 years, Wirt's

identification as the original writer of the *Nancy Drew* series was kept secret, yet she wrote 22 of the first 25 titles (Plunkett-Powell 1993).

Through the years, series books have been both praised and maligned. Perhaps you grew up reading *Nancy Drew* mysteries or *Babysitter Club* stories or *Sweet Valley High* romances. For many readers, series books "hook" them on reading. The delight of being totally absorbed in the antics of characters, both good and bad, keeps readers waiting excitedly for the next book in the series. Yet series books haven't always been favored by educators. In 1913 Franklin K. Mathiews, the chief librarian of the Boy Scouts of America, wrote an article comparing the act of reading books such as the *Rover Boys* series to "blowing out the boy's brains." Mathiews closes his article with a letter from a runaway's parent. "He has a good home, and his parents seem quiet but thrifty. The only possible clue I can find is 'cheap reading'" (Watson 1991, 58).

Even today, some librarians question the wisdom of spending book funding on series books. They may ask themselves, "Isn't it better to spend my limited funding on award-winning titles and books that support school curriculum?" If one of your library's goals is to encourage and increase reading among young adults, series books offer enticing plots and characters that appeal to both genders. Cliffhangers at the end of each book compel readers to anticipate sequels. Readers find comfort in the familiar structure of a particular series. Librarians need to respect a young adult's desire to read series books, and parents need to be assured that their children will outgrow this reading stage or at least expand their reading when they are ready.

The key to reading series books is enjoyment. Young adults like the fast-paced plots, the familiar characters in each book, and the anticipation of reading more about characters they enjoy. Young adults like being able to go to a library or book store and select the next book in a series, knowing it's a book they'll want to read. Successful series are frequently set in a high school, a neighborhood, or a fantastic or alternate world. Often, main characters have access to unlimited travel. They may not grow or change much; they typically prevail; and they rarely die. Books in a series generally

have the same reading level, length, and covers to continue the comfort of familiarity found in the series.

Young adult series books may frighten readers through supernatural stories or tease them with wish-fulfillment through romances and adventure. For most series, the average reading level is fifth through seventh grades, making them easy reading for middle school and high school readers (Makowski 1998). Series books offer escape reading, the chance for young adults to immerse themselves in stories and be swept along with characters their same age. While the young adult world is bountiful with best-selling and beloved series, a small curated list of reader favorites (and mine!) includes the *Gallagher Girls* series by Ally Carter, *Diviners* and *Gemma Doyle* series by Libba Bray, the *Arc of the Sythe* and *Skinjacker* series by Neal Shusterman, the *Grisha* series by Leigh Bardugo, *Three Dark Crowns* series by Kendare Blake, *Matched* by Allie Condie, **Ember Quartet* by Sabaa Tahir, *Old Kingdom* series by Garth Nix, *Forest of Hands and Teeth* series by Carrie Ryan, **The Sea of Ink and Gold* by Tracy Chee, *The Raven Cycle* series by Maggie Stiefvater, **Shadow Shaper Cypher* series by Daniel Jose Older, *Chaos Walking* series by Patrick Ness, *Shatter Me* series by Tahereh Mafi, *Iron Fey* by Julie Kagawa, and *Gracel-ing* series by Kristin Cashore, *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld, and the *Seven Realms* series by Cinda Williams Chima.

It may be overwhelming to think about the numbers of titles found in series books. Reviews are generally available for most series or at least for the first title in a series. If you are a librarian who wants to read what young adults are reading, be assured by reading the first title in a series, and you will likely get a strong sense of what the rest of the series will be like. A common reason series books are particularly popular with young adults is that they function much like other types of popular media (television shows and movies series)—there is comfort of already being invested in characters, and the best series books allow the overall story arch to build from book to book.

Authors in Action: The Power of What if by Ally Carter

When I was a kid I loved stories, but I had a tendency to get really bored (and/or distracted) when reading. I'd be following along just fine, but then something would (or wouldn't) happen, and my mind would take off on its own with a million different ideas about where the story might—or should—be heading. And, eventually, if the story on the page wasn't what I was expecting (or better) then I'd want to put down the book in my hand and go back to the one in my head.

Now, this was long before people talked about “reluctant readers.” Instead, people just told me I was lazy. Unfocused. Flighty. But it was something they were never quite able to break me of—that tendency to look at a story and try to make it better by asking the question, “what if . . .”

Well, fast forward a decade or so to one night when I was watching the Jennifer Garner-starring spy show *Alias*. What it was: an episode with flashbacks of when one of the characters was growing up in an orphanage. What I *thought* it was: an episode set in a boarding school for teenage girl spies.

Well, needless to say, after “boarding school for spies” I was hooked. And I was downright bitter when I realized I was wrong. But then the proverbial lightbulb went off and I realized *if they're not going to do boarding school for spies, I can do boarding school for spies!* And just that quickly the Gallagher Academy for Exceptional Young Women was born.

Since that fateful night, it's been my privilege to write 13 novels for young adults (and one nonfiction book, *Dear Ally, How Do You Write a Book?*). It's become my job to let my mind wander down those dark alleys and dive off the crazy cliffs. Most of all, I never have to stop asking “what if.”

What if the president's son and a Secret Service agent's daughter were kidnapped in the Alaskan wilderness? What if you grew up on a street where every house was a different country and if you get in a fight with the neighbors it could start World War III? What if you were the daughter of the world's best thief and all you wanted was to steal a normal life?

People ask me sometimes if I set out to write for reluctant readers, and the answer is not really. Or, at least, not intentionally. What I set out to do is to take our world—this world. The world we know (and may or may not love) and then travel to a part of the world where the stakes are higher and the action is more dangerous and the crushes are more intense and where being a teenager is a fact that is absolutely going to keep people from taking you seriously but which also might be the very fact that's going to allow you to save the day.

I set out to write the kinds of books that lived in my head when I was a teenager but I very, very rarely found written on the page.

Ally Carter is the *New York Times* best-selling author of the *Gallagher Girl* series, *Heist Society* series, *Embassy Row* series, *Not If I Save You First*, and *Dear Ally, How Do You Write a Book?*

[Anthologies and Story Collections](#)

For busy young adults and for librarians who want to share a quick story with young adults, an anthology or story collection offers a quality reading experience in a brief amount of time. Anthologies and story collections are far more than the simple telling of an incident or anecdote. Nonfiction collections are topical, and often diverse perspectives are offered. Anthologies and short story collections for young adults focus on important topics that resonate and are important to teen readers.

Benefits of Anthologies and Story Collections

1. In a brief span of pages the anthology and short story entertains and, hopefully, leaves the reader satisfied with the conclusion.
2. Anthologies and story collections encourage browsing. It's okay for a reader to select only one piece out of an entire collection. A reader doesn't have to read the book cover to cover.
3. Reading an anthology short story encourages young adults to search for other books written by a particular author.

Traditionally, there were two types of anthologies or story collections for young adults: (1) those written by one author and (2) those written by many authors. As young adult literature has had an explosion of anthologies in recent years (many of these new titles being topical), in addition to young adult authors serving as editors, new anthologies are being curated and collected by other book professionals such as librarians and educators. Some of the most popular short story collections are those organized and edited by best-selling young adult author Stephanie Perkins (*My True Love Gave to Me* and *Summer Days and Summer Nights*) and Jessica Spotswood (*A Tyranny of Petticoats: 15 Stories of Belles, Bank Robbers & Other Badass Girls*, *The Radical Element: 12 stories of Daredevils, Debutantes, and Other Dauntless girls*, and *Toil & Trouble: 15 Tales of Women & Witchcraft*).

Diversity in Anthologies and Short Story Collections

Individual anthologies or short story collections may be themed or show a full gamut of topics. Do you work with young adults who don't want to read a 500 plus-page book? These story collections can be read aloud, browsed through, or checked out by teens anytime of the year. Themed collections that follow offer a wide range of topics, including love and romance, hope,

activism, identity, sexual orientation, fantasy, scary stories, and special topics, such as cultural diversity and war.

**Hope Nation: YA Writers Share Personal Stories of Inspiration*, edited by Rose Brock, is a collection of essays and original personal stories by 23 of today's biggest young adult authors such as Angie Thomas, Jason Reynolds, Marie Lu, Gayle Forman, David Levithan, Gayle Forman, Jeff Zentner, Libba Bray, Nic Stone, and Nicola Yoon who speak directly to teens on how to find hope and comfort in today's turbulent society.

**Here We Are*, edited by Kelly Jensen, is a scrapbook-type guide to understanding what it really means to be a feminist. It's packed with essays, lists, poems, comics, and illustrations from a diverse range of voices.

Tyranny of Petticoats, edited by Jessica Spotswood. Criss-cross America—on dogsleds and ships, stagecoaches and trains—from pirate ships off the coast of the Carolinas to the peace, love, and protests of 1960s Chicago. Join 15 of today's most talented young adult writers, from Marissa Meyer to Marie Lu, on a thrill ride with American girls charting their own course.

Welcome Home by Eric Smith collects a number of adoption-themed fictional short stories and brings them together in one anthology from a diverse range of celebrated young adult authors, including Mindy McGinnis, C. J. Redwine, William Ritter, and more.

Meet Cute: Some People Are Destined to Meet, by various authors, is an anthology of original short stories featuring tales of "how they first met" from some of today's most beloved young adult authors, including Nina LaCour, Nicola Yoon, and Dhonielle Clayton.

Three Sides of the Heart: Stories about Love Triangles, edited by Natalie Parker, explores the myriad tragic, frustrating, humorous possibilities of teen love triangles, and it features 15 new stories by authors including Sabaa Tahir, Lamar Giles, and Veronica Roth.

My True Love Gave to Me: Twelve Holiday Stories edited by Stephanie Perkins. 12 holiday stories by 12 best-selling young adult writers, including Rainbow Rowell, Gayle Forman, and Stephanie Perkins. Whether you enjoy celebrating Christmas or Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, or New Year there's something here for everyone.

**All Out: The No-Longer Secret Stories of Queen Teens through the Ages*, edited by Saundra Mitchell, focuses on historical fiction (both realistic and with speculative twists), which is important because too often queer history is lost.

**Don't Call Me Crazy: 33 Voices to Start the Conversation about Mental Health*, edited by Kelly Jensen, asks, "What's 'crazy'?—Where 'crazy' meets culture—The mind-body connection—Beyond stress and sadness—To be okay." An anthology of essays and illustrations that illuminate mental health topics in a straightforward way by 33 actors, athletes, writers, and artists.

**Fresh Ink: An Anthology*, edited by Lamar Giles, is a YA anthology by We Need Diverse Books featuring award-winning diverse authors about diverse characters. Short stories, a graphic novel, and a one-act play explore such topics as gentrification, acceptance, untimely death, coming out, and poverty, and range in genre from contemporary realistic fiction to adventure and romance.

**A Thousand Beginnings and Endings: 15 Retellings of Asian Myths and Legends*, edited by Ellen Oh and Elsie Chapman. Fifteen best-selling and acclaimed authors reimagine the folklore and mythology of East and South Asia in short stories that are enchanting, heartbreaking, romantic, and passionate.

**In Sharon Flake's Who Am I without Him?* teen girls question their self-worth.

Kiss and Curses by various authors from Marissa Meyer to Marie Rutkoski, this anthology includes a mix of original content and popular favorites, and will often feature characters or worlds from existing series like *The Lunar Chronicles* and *The Winner's* trilogy. Extended, personal introductions from each author will make this a must-read for fans as well as a fantastic portal for engaging new readers with their work. With a wide range of genres and subject matter, there will be something here for everyone.

Because You Love to Hate Me, edited by Amerie. In this unique young adult anthology, 13 acclaimed, best-selling authors (including Adam Silvera, Susan Dennard, and Victoria Schwab) team up with 13 influential

BookTubers (from Ameriie to Regan Peruse) to reimagine fairy tales from the oft-misunderstood villains' points of view. These fractured, unconventional spins on classics like "Medusa," Sherlock Holmes, and "Jack and the Beanstalk" provide a behind-the-curtain look at villains' acts of vengeance, defiance, and rage—and the pain, heartbreak, and sorrow that spurned them on.

Slasher Girls and Monster Boys, edited by April Genevieve Tucholke. A host of young adult authors from Nova Ren Suman to Jay Kristoff come together in this collection of scary stories and psychological thrillers. These stories draw from classic tales—sometimes of the horror genre, sometimes not—to inspire something new and fresh and terrifying. From bloody horror to supernatural creatures to unsettling, all-too-possible realism, this collection has something for any reader looking for a thrill.

As with graphic novels, there are shelving options for short story collections. They can be shelved with fiction so that young adults who have a favorite author can easily find all fiction in one location. A disadvantage to shelving the collections in fiction is that quite wonderful collections may be overlooked. The ideal situation is to maintain a story collection near fiction and shelve all story collections in it, but add an additional copy to fiction for those authors who are especially popular. Young adults tend to be unaware of story collections and need to be reminded they exist, where they're located, and the advantages of being able to browse the book for an appealing story.

[Librarians in Action!: Using Student Preferences to Help Curate Teen Book Choices](#)

Angie Mahalik is the librarian at Coppell Middle School West in Coppell, Texas. She has been a librarian for 4 years having previously been a classroom educator for 18 years. Mrs. Mahalik holds a master of library science degree from Sam Houston State University. She is the recipient of the 2018 Dr. Bonnie Thorne Outstanding Service Award from SHSU

Department of Education. Currently, she is serving on the North Texas Teen Book Festival Steering Committee and the Texas Association of School Librarians Media and Virtual Presence Award Committee.

#BookFix: Reaching Reluctant Readers

By Angie Mahalik

Enticing students to read can, at times, be challenging. There are numerous programs and activities that librarians and teachers use to motivate reluctant readers. I have tried many of these and some were successful in reaching students. However, I felt that none reached all of the struggling readers, leaving those students empty handed. I needed a program that could be personalized, reach those readers who are hesitant to try new books, and would target the reluctant readers. These experiences led me to #BookFix.

I developed #BookFix, a spinoff of the very popular StitchFix, to aid in motivating reluctant readers. I started small, sharing this with the campus ESL, dyslexia, and special education classes. To create the reading interest survey, I utilized Google Forms. This was easiest to compile data and is also user friendly for students. I asked a variety of questions, some were open-ended. In the survey, students were able to select genres they prefer, share books they have read and enjoyed in the past, share their TV and movie preferences, discuss their extracurricular activities, and provide other pertinent information that would assist me in making selections. The students completed the reading interest survey using the Google Form with the assistance of their teacher. Next, I reviewed the information submitted in order to guide me in the selection of no more than five books that I felt would capture their attention. I attempted to vary the options I provided students by adding a graphic novel or nonfiction selection to their #BookFix, rather than only fiction novels.

When possible, I chose a series, to entice students to continue reading work by a particular author. Selecting books for students based on their interests, while also reviewing their history to confirm it is not one they have previously checked out, is time consuming. I scheduled a week from the time students completed the survey to the day their class visited the library to pick up their #BookFix selections. To add to the presentation, the selected books were wrapped in butcher paper to appear as a present for the student. When the students come to the library with their class, it is an exciting moment, much like opening birthday gifts. Students spend time sorting through the selected books to choose which books they would like to checkout. They are thrilled to see what others in their class received, and some also trade books that they are interested in reading. Their enthusiasm for #BookFix is contagious!

Feedback from students as well as from teachers has been positive. Students have stated that this is an exciting way to find a new book and have asked when they can do it again. Some have trouble choosing which of the books to read first, which is not a terrible problem to have. I suggest adding all of the options to their "Want to Read" list. Teachers are very excited and appreciative of the personalization that is provided in the selection of each student's #BookFix. Other teachers have requested to have their classes participate, as well. Though there is not a perfect solution to motivating reluctant readers, I feel #BookFix has been a game changer for motivation and combines positive attributes from several programs to entice readers.

Magazines

For many librarians who specialize in teen services, the role of collection development in regard to subscribing to magazines for recreational reading is something that's regularly being evaluated. Until very recently, most

libraries subscribed to a wide variety of print magazines as they offered curriculum connections and a source of pleasure reading for teens who didn't read other types of print willingly.

Regardless of their popularity (demand may vary from library to library as librarians report limited interest and circulation), magazines are in fact "real" reading and are tailored to special interests, such as fashion, sports, games, news, hobbies, music, science, history, and so on or special interest topics. Choosing to subscribe to physical magazines will be a decision to be determined by an interest and needs assessment of your school or library. For digital magazine subscriptions, many public and school libraries offer access through Flipster by EBSCO where readers can access digital content on a personal device of choice.

This answer to why I write YA has evolved for me and it still is. For me, though, it always comes back to the same two things. 1. My young adult years were so formative for me. I can consider everything that really defines me and trace it back to a moment or feeling I experienced, even if it felt inconsequential at the time. 2. The readers. This answer is one that's really changed for me as I've grown as an author and have watched my books trickle out to the public. I would wager that my readers are equal parts adult and teen, but for me that means two really wonderful things. First, I'm given the opportunity to interact with teens and reflect their experiences authentically and second, I'm also able to communicate with adults—many of whom work with or at least know teenagers—and hopefully helping them to reconsider how they interact with the young people in their lives. One of the best reader letters I ever received was from a mother who had read *DUMPLIN'* and told me that it changed the way she talked about her body, especially in front of her daughter.

—Julie Murphy is the #1 *New York Times* best-selling and award-winning author of *Dumplin'*, *Puddin'*, *Ramona Blue*, and *Side Effects May Vary*

Poetry

Due to no fault of its own, historically, poetry has been met with mixed reviews by teens due to the manner in which it is treated in schools where

far more attention is paid to poetic dissection and over-analysis. Thankfully, due to conversations among poetry advocates, as well as a groundswell of engaging and accessible titles, many educators today recognize that poetry has the power to connect and resonate with young adults, and the popularity of the genre for young adults continues to grow. Offerings such as Paul Janeczko's *Poetspeak* (1983) and Mel Glenn's *Class Dismissed!* (1982) signaled a need for poetry that speaks to young people. These authors understood the emotions and crises of being a teenager and translated that understanding into their collections: Janeczko, as a poet and collector of modern poetry; Glenn, as a poet and high school English teacher. Since those beginnings, more and more poetry collections have been published especially for teens. Increased interest in poetry is due to those initial volumes written especially for young adults, and in more recent years, to poetry slams, and to publications of poetry written by young adults. More poetry collections are being published than ever before, and librarians have the luxury of selecting the ones right for their teen population.

In this chapter focusing on easily accessible reading experiences for teens, poetry offers special features.

1. Many poems for teens are short, less than a page in length.
2. Poetry collections offer the browsing feature of anthologies and short story collections.
3. Poetry offers relevancy to teens' lives.
4. Poetry begs to be read aloud by teachers, librarians, and most of all, by teens.
5. Poetry offers exposure to rhyme, rhythm, figurative language, and imagery.
6. Poetry can be humorous or intense, providing emotional outlets through laughter or tears or at least through feelings of empathy.
7. Through the experiences of adult poets, young adults can experience the feelings and emotions of adolescence, learning they are not alone in their feelings. The best poets remember what it was like to be caught in the emotional maelstrom of puberty and early

adulthood, and they have the writing talent to express those feelings.

8. Poetry offers young adults a chance to express themselves by writing their own poetry.

As children transition to becoming teens, their poetry preferences change. In childhood they want clear rhyme and rhythm and silly humor like the poetry of Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, but in adolescence teens are looking for clues to their own behavior and that of their friends and families. They want to express their own confusion and frustration with their world. Poetry is suited perfectly as an outlet to these emotions.

Topical categories of poetry collections published for young adults provide a sampling of the types of collections with teen appeal available today: romantic love; sports; tragedy, angst, and joy; horror; neighborhoods; and humor. Poetry written by young adults, classic poetry, and verse novels complete the offerings.

Poems of Romantic Love

In libraries that serve young adult populations, poetry collections about love hold great appeal to teen patrons. The following titles are highly recommended.

Paul Janeczko's collection, *Blushing: Expressions of Love in Poems & Letters*, would be grabbed right off the shelf in that middle school today—a combination of classic and modern poetry with sections devoted to first love, more mature love, alone in love, and the end of love.

From the perspective of six teens, Ralph Fletcher explores love in *Buried Alive: The Elements of Love*.

Dizzy in Your Eyes: Poems about Love by Pat Mora includes poems of romantic love and others about the love of a pet or a sport or music, and so forth.

Going Over to Your Place: Poems for Each Other, selected by Paul B. Janeczko, includes poems of romantic love as well as poems of other topics and emotions.

Many voices through time and around the world express the passion and agony of love in *Love Is Like the Lion's Tooth: An Anthology of Love Poems*, edited by Frances McCullough.

Partly Cloudy: Poems of Love and Longing by Gary Soto is divided into two sections: "A Girl's Tears, Her Songs" and "A Boy's Body, His Words."

Arnold Adoff's *Slow Dance Heart Break Blues* is a slim volume of brief, down-to-earth, free verse about young love and other mysteries of growing up.

Sports Poems

Teens with an interest in sports can find slim volumes expressing how it feels to play football, soccer, baseball, tennis, and basketball and what it's like to wrestle, run track, perform gymnastics, canoe, golf, and more. The exhilaration of physical activity and the pain of injury are intense in the following sample collections and offer a voice to athletes and vicarious experiences to teens who want to know what it's like to compete. Sports poems have the potential to catch the attention of reluctant poetry readers. It will be a relief to young adults to discover that not all poetry is about flowers and emotional depression.

Arnold Adoff's *The Basket Counts*, illustrated by Michael Weaver, begs to be read aloud, teen to teen. Twenty-eight poems reflect the action and sensation of playing the game.

Lillian Morrison's *Slam Dunk* features basketball poems by well-known writers, such as Richard Peck, Mel Glenn, Jack Prelutsky, Eloise Greenfield, Jerry Spinelli, and Ralph Fletcher. Then there's the bonus of poems about Shaquille O'Neal, Wilt Chamberlain, and other basketball heroes.

Arnold Adoff's *Sports Pages*, a Reading Rainbow Book, combines his signature blank verse poems with Steve Kuzma's pencil drawings showing teens in action running, biking, tackling, stretching, jumping, throwing, and catching. Basketball and illustrations combine in three volumes and will appeal to a wide range of ages.

Compiler and poet Lillian Morrison offers the whole range of sports in *Sprints & Distances: Sports in Poetry and the Poetry in Sport*, including the classic poem "Casey at the Bat."

Poems about Teen Tragedy, Angst, and Joy

For poems that speak to teens about life, most collections are written by adults, but an increasing number of collections include poetry written by teens. All of it is immediately relevant to their lives at school, at home, in their communities, and in the larger world. This type of poetry speaks directly to teens about sadness, abandonment, depression, loneliness, death, running away, and more.

* *Black Girl Magic* by Mahogany Brown presents a poem that looks at the journey of a black American girl from girlhood to womanhood.

Kathi Appelt's *Poems from Homeroom* is at once up-to-date and universal. In the first part of the collection Appelt shares poems that express adolescent longings, evident in individual titles: "In the Nurse's Office," "The Fat Girl," "Cyberlove," and "The Driver's License." In the second part Appelt takes each one of her poems, relates it to teen situations and longings, and gives specific advice to developing writers. For writing starters, she suggests teens describe their test to get a driver's license, begin a poem with a funny line written on a bathroom wall, and write about a secret love.

*Jason Reynold's *For Everyone* inspires young people to remember that dreams take time.

In **Voices in the Air* by Naomi Shihab Nye, she shares 95 poems that pay tribute to essential voices past and present that have the power to provoke

us, lead us, and give us hope.

Ruth Gordon's collection *Pierced by a Ray of Sun: Poems about the Times We Feel Alone* shares sobering experiences from classic poets and poets from many countries, a testimony to difference and sameness.

Poems of Horror

Few poetry collections for young adults focus on horror. With the plethora of novels being written and published in recent years, it should be no surprise that one stunning volume has finally emerged. Ron Koertge's *Lies, Knives and Girls in Red Dresses*, illustrated by Andrea Dezso, is a sometimes gruesome and almost always flippant view of familiar fairy tales. In 23 dark retellings of familiar tales Cinderella is a tease, showing some thigh, and her vengeful birds pluck out her stepsisters' eyes. A single pea is a problem to a delicate princess when a kiss can make her lips bleed and a puppy's lick can leave a scar. A former beast turned handsome man brushes his teeth and with a sigh of longing remembers his *fangs*. Little Red Riding Hood confesses that she kind of wanted to know what it's like to be swallowed whole by a wolf. Edgy, sometimes darkly humorous stories, and mostly free verse, illustrated with cut-paper black-and-white silhouettes, as grotesquely beautiful as the verse, this slender volume goes many steps further in grim imagination than *Trail of Stones* by Gwen Strauss, published in 1990.

Literature in Action: Poetry Slams and Open Mics!

Librarians who want to provide excitement about poetry should try a poetry slam! A poetry slam is a competition giving teens the opportunity to perform their own poems before a live audience. In schools, poetry slams are held in individual classrooms or in the library, during school hours, or even after school or at night. Poetry slams have rules, structure, judges, scoring, time limits, and prizes or certificates. Poetry slams offer

teens the joy of self-expression and the exuberance of competition. Poetry slams can be small, local events at a public library or major events held in cities, such as those organized by the Youth Poetry Slam League in San Francisco and Washington, D. C. and the Urban Word Annual Teen Poetry Slam in New York City. To sample poems being read or recited at slams, read *Slam*, a compilation of classic poems and those written by young adults, edited by Cecily von Ziegesar. For promotional materials borrow “Slammin’ @ Your Library,” a Teen Read Week theme.

In contrast with poetry slams, open mic sessions don’t have rules or judges. They are informal times for sharing poetry written by teens. For a glimpse at how this works, try *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, a National Book Award winner.

Poems about Neighborhoods

To understand young adults from many geographical locations, delve into this group of poems about neighborhoods, each one a special culture, a unique way of viewing the world. Through poetry encourage young adults to visit Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and neighborhoods across the United States: Harlem; Fresno, California; Fredricksbug, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; and many more. Although there are unique voices in these collections, there are universal themes, too. No matter where teens live, they can empathize and sympathize with the emotions expressed in these collections.

In Gary Soto's *Neighborhood Odes* experience the deliciousness of a tortilla ripping with butter and the intimacy of a public library. Poetry in several collections describes the Latino/Latina culture: Lori M. Carlson's *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino/a in the United States*; Gary Soto's *A Fire in My Hands*; and Pat Mora's *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults*. Young and old people share their

voices in Walter Dean Myers's *Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices* and in Naomi Shihab Nye's *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*.

Humorous Poems

While young adults outgrow the humorous poetry they love as children, some young adults will appreciate poetry that makes them laugh. Older and more sophisticated teens may not admit they like reading the poetry of Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, and Judith Viorst, but I have seen teens in the library reading collections from their childhood and privately grinning. Perhaps they read humor from nostalgia for their younger, less-complicated selves, or perhaps they read humor for the sheer fun of it! Humorous poetry collections make good choices for readings and performances in speech classes and contests. A few collections written for young adults include humorous poems, but you have to search for them. *Looking for Your Name: A Collection of Contemporary Poems* selected by Paul B. Janeczko includes "Gone Astray: Little Miss Muffet" by David James and "Help Is on the Way" by Herbert Scott, in which Frankenstein's wife writes to Ann Landers and Ann replies. Surprisingly, there's humor in Carol Ann Duffy's collection, *Stopping for Death: Poems of Death and Loss*, even though the poem by Cynthia Rylant is entitled "When My Grandaddy Died."

Poems Written by Young Adults

If you haven't been privileged to be around teens in the past few years, reading these collections will move you closer to an understanding of their thoughts and the challenges they face. For teens who want to read poetry written by teens there are excellent collections available.

The Rose That Grew from the Concrete is a collection of intimate poems written by rap artist and actor Tupac Shakur at the age of 19 but found after

his death.

In *Movin': Teen Poets Take Voice*, teen poetry was selected from workshops developed in a cooperative effort between Poets House and The New York Public Library.

The Pain Tree and Other Teenage Angst-Ridden Poetry includes brief poems written by both boys and girls. Inspired by his raw emotions in adolescence, Mark Todd collected 25 poems and illustrated the boys' poems, while Esther Pearl Watson illustrated the girls' poems.

In *Paint Me Like I Am*, poetry was written by teens who participated in a national nonprofit organization called WritersCorps. Titles of some of the poems finely express the essence of what it means to be a teen: "You Were Fine Till I Met Your Mind," "Friend-ship," "Diary of an Abusive Stepfather," and "The Spring in Your Voice."

Betsy Franco collected poems and prose written by young women, ages 12 through 18, from across the country in *Things I Have to Tell You: Poems and Writing by Teenage Girls*. They share their feelings about lacking self-confidence, keeping secrets, telling the truth, dressing with style, trying to be perfect, having a bad hair day, and wanting to be love for their flaws and beliefs. The boys' version by Betsy Franco is *You Hear Me? Poems and Writings by Teenage Boys*.

[Classic Poems](#)

Contemporary poetry and poetry written by young adults is more likely to appeal to teens than classic or traditional poetry. Poetry typically taught in English classes carries the stigma of assignments and interpreting poetry rather than pleasure in reading it and hearing it read. Collectors, selectors, and compilers of poetry for young adults have carefully chosen poetry from Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, e. e. cummings, and many others. Poems chosen for relevancy to the lives of young adults and blended into a thematic collection have a better chance of appealing to youth. The

following four collections are examples of classic poetry with appeal to teens: *Earth-Shattering Poems*, edited by Liz Rosenberg; *Step Lightly: Poems for the Journey*, collected by Nancy Willard; *Light-Gathering Poems*, edited by Liz Rosenberg; and Langston Hughes's *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, illustrated by Brian Pinkney.

Verse Novels

Feeding teens' appetites for experiencing poetry and all of its emotional ups and downs is the verse novel. Each one a series of narrative poems, verse novels are most popular with teens. What reader can resist titles like *People Kill People*, *Girls Like Me*, or *The Opposite of Innocent*? Verse novels deal with serious topics: death, suicide, murder, life-threatening illnesses, love and sex, all set within the background of growing up.

Verse novels are a relatively new type of fiction, mostly modern realistic. Three significant verse novels started this popular trend. In 1993, Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make Lemonade* was a groundbreaking novel of 66 short chapters of prose that looked like poetry. Wolff introduces readers to 17-year-old Jolly, an unwed single mother of two young children. Jolly desperately needs help, and she finds it in 14-year-old Verna LaVaughn. The two young women and the two young children become a family of sorts, and Jolly begins to see better possibilities for her life. Mel Glenn's *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale? A Mystery in Poems*, published in 1996, slowly reveals the solution to an English teacher's murder. Written in free verse, individual voices of students, the principal, neighbors, a guidance counselor, and a detective paint a realistic picture of high school life. A third title, Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust*, won the 1998 Newbery Medal. In a series of poems dated by month and year, 14-year-old Billie Jo relates her story of heartbreak in Oklahoma during the Great Depression.

This technique of writing novels by assembling separate poems works remarkably well. Plot moves along, characters are defined, themes flow

through the poetry, setting is clear, tone is set, the style is musical, and the language is eloquent. Verse novels contain more white space than prose novels, adding to appeal, especially for reluctant readers. As you would expect, verse novels are more about emotions than about fast action. Bring all of these elements together in a verse novel, and you have a type of book with great appeal to teens. Other highly recommended young adult verse novels include the following.

Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds shares the story of 15-year-old Will who sets out to avenge his brother Shawn's fatal shooting, meeting seven ghosts who knew Shawn board the elevator and reveal truths Will needs to know.

In *Vanilla* by Billy Merrell, two boys, Van (called Vanilla) and Hunter, tell of their relationship that began before they were teenagers, but begins to crack in high school, mostly because Hunter thinks they should be having sex and Vanilla is not so sure.

In *American Ace* by Marilyn Nelson, 16-year-old Connor tries to help his severely depressed father, who learned upon his mother's death that Nonno was not his biological father, by doing research that reveals Dad's father was probably a Tuskegee Airman. Other poetry selections and verse novels by Nelson include *How I Discovered Poetry*, *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, *Fortune's Bones*, and *Carver: A Life in Poems*.

The Opposite of Innocent by Sonya Sones is a novel in verse that follows the experiences of 14-year-old Lilly, as an innocent flirtation turns into sexual abuse by a friend of her parents, and she is tormented by her abuser's threat to ruin her family and her own desperate need for help. Other verse novels by Sones include *Saving Red*, *One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*, *What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know*, *What My Mother Doesn't Know*, and *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy*.

In *Girls Like Me* by Lola StVil, 15-year-old Shay is trying to cope with being overweight and getting bullied in school, but when she falls in love with mysterious Blake, insecure Shay needs the help of her two best friends to make love prevail.

Rebound, a prequel to *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander, details the summer of 1988 when Chuck Bell is sent to stay with his grandparents where he discovers jazz and basketball and learns more about his family's past.

Bull by David Elliott is a modern twist on the Theseus and Minotaur myth, told in verse.

Blood Water Paint by Joy McCullough is set in Renaissance Italy where Artemisia Gentileschi endures the subjugation of women that allows her father to take credit for her extraordinary paintings, rape and the ensuing trial, and torture, buoyed by her deceased mother's stories of strong women of the Bible.

In Guadalupe Garcia McCall's *Under the Mesquite*, Lupita, the oldest of eight siblings, must help with the children and continue juggling high school after learning the heartbreaking news that her beloved Mami has cancer. Language is emotionally charged and sprinkled with Spanish.

Hideous Love: The Story of the Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein by Stephanie Hemphill is a free-verse novel about the Gothic novelist Mary Shelley, a teenager whose love story led her to write the literary masterpiece, *Frankenstein*.

October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard by Leslea Newman is a masterful poetic exploration of the impact of Matthew Shepard's murder on the world.

The Surrender Tree by Margarita Engle is a collection of poems in which Rosa, a healer, describes her experiences trying to help Cuban peasants who have been forced to leave their farms and villages in 1896 and given eight days to find their way to "reconcentration camps" or be killed. Other verse novels by Engle include *The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist*, *The Poet Slave of Cuba*, *Firefly Letters*, and *The Lightning Dream*.

Loving vs. Virginia: A Documentary Novel of the Landmark Civil Rights Case by Patricia Hruby Powell shares the story of Mildred Loving, an African American girl, and Richard Loving, a Caucasian boy, who challenge the Virginia law forbidding interracial marriages in the 1950s.

People Kill People by Ellen Hopkins follows six teenagers as they are brought into close contact over the course of one tense week, in a town with political and personal tensions that build until one fires a fatal gunshot. Other verse novels by Hopkins include *Crank*, *Glass*, *Fallout*, *Rumble*, *Traffick*, *Burned*, *Smoke*, and *Tilt*.

Ronit & Jamil by Pamela Laskin is a retelling of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" that transports the star-crossed lovers to the modern-day Israel-Palestine conflict.

In *Free Verse* by Sarah Dooley, when her brother dies in a fire, Sasha Harless has no one left, and nowhere to turn. After her father died in the mines and her mother ran off, he was her last caretaker. Now she's in foster care, feeling more stuck and broken than ever. After Sasha discovers family she didn't know she had, she finally has something to hold on to, especially sweet little Mikey, who's just as broken as she is. Sasha is slowly learning to cope with her brother's death through writing poetry, finding a new way to express herself when spoken words just won't do.

[Author in Action: Sonya Sones](#)

Why I Write for Young Adults

By Sonya Sones

Friedrich Nietzsche once said: "We have art so that we may not die of reality." And Lord knows, no one's reality is more excruciating than a teenager's. I don't have to enumerate the many hideous reasons for this, because every one of you reading these words *was* a teenager once. And thank goodness it was *only* once, right?

So if we accept Nietzsche's theory, that art saves us from dying of reality, then surely the teenager's need for art is greater than anyone else's. Which is one of the reasons I've chosen to write for them—so that

they'll feel less alone in their struggles, whatever those struggles might be.

I didn't set out to write for teens, but that turned out to be the voice that came most naturally to me. Maybe this is because in many ways, I still *am* a teen—riddled with free floating angst, tormented by the insecurities that are constantly swirling around in my gut like clothes in an overheated dryer.

My novels are written in verse—a series of poems which, when read all in order, tell a story. There are very few words on each page, and as a result, I'm sometimes lucky enough to receive e-mails like this one:

I know this is going to sound funny, but you changed my life. Okay, well, I'm dyslexic and I have huge problems with ADD and I really hated reading. I failed my classes and didn't care at all because I didn't want to read.

So then one day, when I was in my 8th grade reading class, my teacher said, "Tyler, I think I have a book you might like." This was not really a big deal to me because she said this every day. But she handed me your book, *Stop Pretending*, so I tried it out and I was like, *Holy crap! I love this book!*

See I used to secretly be really suicidal so I understood the feelings. I had never loved reading that much before, and my teacher was so proud. Now your books are the ones she tells *other* kids like me about.

I write for teens because they are the most adoring, supportive, awesome fans an author could ever hope to have:

Hi. I'm Janel and I HATE reading. A lot. I hate it soooo much that every year since the 3rd grade, (I'm in the 9thgrade now) on the test to see if we get to move up to the next grade, I just guess on the reading part, just so I don't have to read a few paragraphs.

But your books make me wanna read. The one I just finished is *One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*. OMG. That book made me cry like 239 million times. And I don't cry. *Ever*. It was like a secret that I never told anyone. It made me feel free. And like I could smile. So thanks for making someone feel *normal* for once.

Why do I write for teens? Because I love them.

Verse novels by Sonya Sones include *The Opposite of Innocent*, *Saving Red*, *One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*, *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Baby Sister Went Crazy*, *To Be Perfectly Honest: A Novel Based on an Untrue Story*, *What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know*, and *What My Mother Doesn't Know*.

Visit her at <http://www.sonyasones.com>.

The Case for Audiobooks: Examining and Expanding Teen Reading Through Listening

For many young adult readers, experiencing a well-told story is satisfying on many levels. Librarians and educators who work with children and teens dedicate a great deal of time attempting to make the right match between reader and book, and while the right pairing can be a richly rewarding experience, for some, traditional reading of print can be both difficult and unsatisfying. For youth who have access to them, audiobooks can be seen as an appealing, alternative format to printed books. Audiobooks provide a favorable option while promoting literacy by focusing on the art of listening as a means to engage with and experience stories and the world at large. As Cardillo et al. offer, "Learning is most effective when it is a multisensory experience" (2007, 43).

An important question worth considering is, what part do librarians play in offering tools and materials that develop and promote literacy? Within the context of the larger literacy landscape, the role played by librarians is essential; as former U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe offers, "What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks about education" (1967, 28).

With this in mind, how do librarians promote the development of listening in the context of supporting literacy for the population they serve? In particular, when it comes to providing access to audiobooks for youth, librarians are the gatekeepers of those library collections that may be the sole access point for patrons. The role of librarians in library collection development is profound; their knowledge of the value and importance of multiple media guides their choices, decisions, and programming, so having a clear understanding of the value of audiobooks as tools of literacy is essential in order to provide robust and relevant audiobook collections for youth.

[Audiobooks as Tools of Literacy](#)

For years in educational circles, an ongoing debate raged on as to whether listening to audiobooks "counted" as real reading for students, especially in regard to audiobooks having a valued place in classroom instruction and as general tools of learning. While this very topic continues to be considered by some, recent headlines have heralded the benefits of audiobooks, including *New York Magazine's* August 2016 selection, "As Far as Your Brain Is Concerned, Audiobooks Are Not Cheating." *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNN*, and a number of other global media outlets have joined in to sing praises of the benefits of audiobooks. While this current wave of audiobook affection is encouraging and technology has afforded listeners of all ages ease of access to spoken word books, how does this discussion translate to instructional practice in the literacy landscape at large? Though the "listening to audiobooks as reading is cheating" myth appears to be dispelled, what does that mean for those charged with language and literacy influence and instruction, as well as library collection development? Can they help teens benefit from reading instruction and practice that engages in listening? The answer is resoundingly a loud yes.

For emerging readers, audiobooks offer particular assistance, an audio scaffold between the spoken and written word. Audiobook reading enables unskilled readers to gain far greater exposure to print text than is possible by traditional reading methods.

In addition to enhancing literacy skills by expanding comprehension capabilities, building vocabulary, providing models for fluent reading, and encouraging independence, audiobooks offers opportunities to develop critically important listening skills. As Tompkins and Hoskisson assert, listening remains the most frequently used communication form at all levels of education (2001). Listening is fundamental to learning all the other competencies within the language arts: reading, writing, and speaking.

The benefits of listening are many; listening plays a vital role in communication; in fact, it is the first language skill to be acquired (Wolvin 2000). It is a highly complex, interactive process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind. Why is listening so important? The U.S. Department of Labor established a commission to identify what critical skills were essential for high school graduates to function effectively in the workplace. The basic skills of mathematics, reading, writing, speaking, and listening were determined to be at the core of preparation of graduates (ACT 2000, 167). These skill sets are vital for success in the workplace, and in the larger picture, life in general. Audiobooks help young people develop listening skills such as:

- processing auditory information
- expanding attention spans
- understanding the correct pronunciation of English, dialects, and non-English words
- guiding interpretation of paralinguistic features (vocal qualities). (Serafini 2004; Vardell 2005; Wolf son 228)

Research also suggests audiobooks aid in reading comprehension, and those studies have shown that audiobooks make the participants focus on listening that strengthens their processing of auditory information and lengthens their attention spans. Audiobooks provide good reading role

models, and through this model of fluid phrasing and cadence, listeners will be assisted in their comprehension. In addition to the development of listening skills, audiobooks offer a multitude of instructional benefits including:

- options for meeting individual interests
- a level playing field for a wide range of learners and abilities, including alternative sensory modalities for children with visual impairments
- practice for students in using simple technology
- the human factor, a personal connection, a sense of intimacy
- providing an appreciation of fluent (even professional) models of oral reading
- help with developing higher level and critical thinking, interpretation, and imagination
- motivation, interest, and winning over "aspiring aliterates"
- exposure to a variety of genres. (Serafini 2004; Vardell 2005; Wolfson 2008)

Audiobooks Connect Cultures

An important additional benefit of audiobooks is the opportunity to use them to authentically connect and represent culture. A frequent challenge for librarians and educators working with teens is finding and sharing literature that is culturally sensitive and authentic, and audiobooks can be just the right tool as well-produced audiobooks help build bridges between cultures, adding definition and resonance to stories with authentic voices and affecting drama, as well as being used as powerful tools of literacy. Oral storytelling is a powerful means of connection because it fosters empathy and expands the imagination of listeners. The audiobook medium provides meaningful opportunities for authentic, multicultural experiences with literature complete with exposure to precise language, distinct dialects, and accurate characterization of people.

Multicultural stories on audio also help enrich the listeners' experience and make it easier to appreciate cultures different from their own. As Tom Barthelmess, librarian and advocate for the Hear Diversity campaign, shares,

"Just as young people need to see themselves in the stories they consume, they need to hear themselves as well. The conscientious casting of talented, representative narrators ensures that what kids hear through the audiobook experience reflects what they hear in their real lives" (2018). The best audiobook producers are keenly aware of this opportunity, too. Audiobook producer Dan Zitt from Penguin Random Audio offers, "We have had a long history of casting audiobooks by trying to find the most authentic first person voice for each book we publish. Because of this tradition, the diversity of our acting pool has become increasingly more important to the growth of our publishing program, and how well we serve our authors' vision" (2018). When audiobook producers and representative narrators work closely together (often with significant feedback from the author), the opportunity to create stories that enhance the telling of diverse stories is hugely impactful for listeners of all ages as teens need and deserve to hear authentic representations of people from their own communities and people they have yet to meet. This representation is not just important; it's essential, and the best audiobooks offer listeners ways to feel connected to their own experiences and the world at large. While audiobooks have demonstrated audience appeal, pedagogical value, and their ability to effectively and accurately channel and connect listeners to culture, it is still important to highlight research that has focused on their effectiveness as tools of literacy.

Studies of Audiobooks as Tools of Reading Motivation

The effectiveness of audiobooks as a means of reading motivation has also been the subject of a number of studies. In an analysis by Franklin (2006), reluctant readers were shown to be more willing to listen to an audiobook alone or had an audiobook listening experience paired with the printed text than reading the print alone. In some cases, students who had the necessary skills but lacked reading motivation were often motivated to read ahead of the accompanying audiobook. In "They Want Their MP3" Minkel (2004)

describes the increases in motivation of students in the classroom of Duane Ban, a reading teacher in Grand Ronde, Oregon. Ban reported increased interest in listening to audiobooks on MP3 players, as well as a marked improvement on Oregon's standardized reading test. Beers (1998) found that teachers play a critical role in making audiobooks a successful part of instruction in their classrooms. Using audiobooks as a motivational tool to connect students largely was dependent on the strategies employed by the teacher. Those who used them to make connections and build scaffolding with reading, writing, and thinking were the most successful.

Readers may follow the text while listening to an accompanying audio recording of that text; by tracking the text, the reader is involved in the process of visual word recognition through the support of the continuous audio prompt. Silent reading is simulated and the burden of decoding words, recalling them, and reading them aloud is removed so that the pleasure of reading for meaning can be experienced (Byrom 1998).

Audiobooks provide equity in access to the reading experience as limitations due to the challenges of the work of reading are minimized and often, the reading experience can be one of pleasure. While it's a process, for struggling readers, "reading with your ears" allows those who struggle with decoding or comprehension a genuine opportunity to simply enjoy and engage with a story; while they meet the needs of busy people, audiobooks play on one of our most basic desires to aurally process information.

Audiobook listening can also serve as a gateway for youth into reading with their eyes. As classroom teacher Pernille Ripp (2018, 1) shares, "Often times, my developing readers harbor enormous hesitancy when it comes to veering out of their known text. They are quick to dismiss, abandon and feign disinterest, all in the interest of saving face and saving them from yet another reading disappointment. However, students finding success within the audio-book world are building their courage, their stamina, and their desire to pick up print texts." Given the body of data that demonstrates the value of audio-books as tools of literacy, it is important that those charged with collecting and selecting resources for instruction include audiobooks in their collections.

Making a Case for Audiobooks and Instruction

As audiobook expert and middle school librarian Mary Burkey explains, "Children and teens live in a world where literature is being transformed into new and engaging formats. As the very definitions of *reading* and *book* are rewritten, new digital formats allow a reinterpretation of literacy. The ability to shift seamlessly from image to text to sound will be part of every young person's transliterate education" (2012, 76). With many youth and teens having their own smart technology, and the increase of 1:1 technology device school programs becoming more common place across the globe, the occasions for learners to have opportunities to listen to learn easily are growing, and educators and librarians are wise to be aware of these benefits and take advantage. Streaming audiobooks for youth can be found in a variety of places, including school libraries, public libraries, and digital audio service providers, assuming educators are open to the medium.

In particular, when it comes to providing access to audiobooks, librarians and classroom teachers are also often the gatekeepers for students, choosing or denying the opportunity to utilize audiobooks in direct classroom instruction and offering students listening engagement opportunities during Free Voluntary Reading or Silent Sustained Reading classroom time. Attitudes about utilizing audiobooks for instructional practices vary, but both the national Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and reading and the U.S. Department of Labor determined that listening is a critical skill, worthy of development. Given that listening has been indicated to be a vital part of learning and career readiness, literacy teachers need to promote the development of listening in the context of supporting learning for the student population they serve.

As previously noted, the benefits to incorporating audiobooks in libraries and listening in classroom instructional time are many; for listeners, audiobooks build and enhance vital literacy skills such as fluency, vocabulary, language acquisition, pronunciation, phonemic awareness, and comprehension—skills that often boost reading scores. For emerging readers,

audiobooks offer particular assistance, an audio scaffold between the spoken and written word. Audiobook reading enables unskilled readers to gain far greater exposure to print text than is possible by traditional reading methods. Using audiobooks in the classroom is a sound instructional practice as listening together offers opportunities for students for shared literary experiences and a springboard for conversation about a book. Equally important, an audiobook can help learners develop critical thinking and active listening skills, and listening together allows students to become collectively engaged in a shared story in a manner that promotes a sense of intimacy and human connection.

[A Brief History of Audiobooks](#)

Though most audiobooks were initially introduced to consumers as accessibility tools for the impaired, their history dates back to the Victorian era. Discussions of the earliest "talking book" % appeared in 1878, when Thomas Edison (in "The Phonograph and Its Future") remarked, "The advantages of [talking] books over those printed are too readily seen to need mention. Such books would be listened to where now none are read. They would preserve more than the mental emanations of the brain of the author; and, as a bequest to future generations, they would be unequaled" (in Camlot 2003, 147). The National Recording Registry recognizes a phonograph recording of the poet Dylan Thomas reading his work in a 1952 session with Caedmon Records as the project that kick-started the audiobook business. Much like the history in the United States, the history of audiobooks in United Kingdom began with services for the blind. In 1935, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon*, and *The Gospel According to St. John* were recorded and distributed. For two decades the focus on spoken word recordings remained on serving those with visual impairments, but in 1960, a "talking book player" was introduced in the United Kingdom that brought audiobooks to a larger audience the

world over. Over the past 50 years, the audiobook industry has continued to flourish, and due to the continued evolution of the audiobook format (from LPs to cassettes to CDs to downloadable files) allowing for greater ease of access, reporting annual audiobook sales in the United States show it to be currently over a 1.7 billion-dollar annual industry (Audio Publishers Association 2016).

As audiobook production has evolved, the celebration of the best in audiobooks has been marked by the creation of a number of awards that recognize the best in audiobooks for children and teens. These include awards bestowed by the ALA, audiobook publishers, and the recording industry.

Audiobooks Awards

Odyssey Award

A number of awards specifically evaluate and recognize the quality of audiobook production for children and teens. In the United States, ALA's Odyssey Award is an annual award given to the producer of the best audiobook produced for children and/or young adults, available in English in the United States. Established in 2008, the Odyssey Award is jointly given and administered by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and YALSA, divisions of ALA, and is sponsored by *Booklist* Magazine. In addition to choosing a winner, the selection committee selects honor titles. As part of the rationale given for the creation of the Odyssey Award, the ALA offered,

Listening is an important skill to be both taught and learned. Children of this century live in a world where media is a dominant form of communication (25 million iPods sold last year), and imagination's greatest champion in this technological realm is the

spoken word. Through the years our cultures have been nurtured and our customs passed on by storytellers—audiobooks carry on that tradition. In addition, with all of the audiobooks available today, and with the increasing number being produced, we believe it is essential for ALSC and YALSA to provide the same level of support for this nonprint format that they have historically provided for print materials, by creating an annual award for the best audiobooks in the field. We believe that by doing so, ALSC and YALSA can not only assist their members to better serve their library patrons, but also raise the profile and standards of audiobooks by having those honored serve as models toward which all audio producers can aspire. (Odyssey Award, ALA 2018)

Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults

In addition to the Odyssey Award, a "best" list of audiobooks for teens is published by ALA each year. YALSA offers a list entitled "Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults." Established in 1999, YALSA's Amazing Audiobooks committee selects and annotates an annual list of notable audio recordings significant to young adults from those released in the past two years.

The Audie

Since 1996, the Audio Publishers Association (APA) has sponsored the Audie Awards (Audies) bestowed annually for outstanding audiobooks in 30 categories, including three separate award categories for children and youth (for children ages 0 to age 8, children ages 8-12, and teens) (APA 2018). Other Audie Awards bestowed by the APA do not specifically highlight audiobooks for children and teens, but rather they relate to types of writing, including abridged and unabridged fiction and nonfiction, and such genres as romance and mystery; additional Audie Awards recognize excellence in different styles of narration and production, such as multivoiced performance and production values. Over the years, both the structure and the categories of the awards have occasionally changed, but excellence in

production of audiobooks for children and youth continues to be highlighted by this organization.

[Audiobook Resources](#)

A number of resources help provide those who work with youth the tools they need to incorporate audiobooks into their instructional practice or simply highlight the benefits of audiobooks for their patrons. The following list features publications that offer reviews of audiobooks and audiobook focused programs that serve teens, as well.

Regular reviews that evaluate audiobooks for youth are offered in library trade journals and magazines such as *School Library Journal*, *Booklist Magazine*, *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)*, and *AudioFile* magazine. *AudioFile* is a print and online magazine dedicated entirely to the audiobook format. The mission of this publication is to recommend and review audiobooks, original audio programs, commentary, and dramatizations of the spoken word format, as well as profile audiobook narrators and authors. *AudioFile* selects and publishes "best" lists as well as awards the Earphone Awards to truly exceptional titles that excel in narrative voice and style, characterizations, suitability to audio, and enhancement of the text.

In addition to these periodicals, educator and librarian Mary Burkey, an audiobook authority, writes about audiobooks at <https://www.booklistonline.com/Voices-in-My-Head-We-Need-Diverse-Audiobooks-Mary-Burkey/pid=8228315>. In addition, Burkey's book, *Audiobooks for Youth: A Practical Guide to Sound Literature* (2012), and the book collaboration by Sharon Grover and Lizette Hannegan entitled *Listening to Learn: Audiobooks Supporting Literacy* (2011) are outstanding selections for those wanting trade resources about audiobook and young people. Also, British audiobook historian Matthew Rubery's comprehensive contribution *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (2016) provides a wealth of fascinating history of audio-recorded literature as it traces the path of

innovation from Edison's recitation of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" for his tinfoil phonograph in 1877 to the first novel-length talking books made for blinded World War I veterans, to today's billion-dollar audiobook industry. Rubery's work also focuses on the social impact of audiobooks, including how "reading" is defined.

In addition to these fine resources and publications about audiobooks, three other tools are particularly noteworthy for those working with teens.

[Sound Learning Project](#)

The Audio Publishers Association offers the *Sound Learning* Toolkit (<https://www.audiopub.org/sound-learning>) that provides a wealth of curricular resources to help guide librarians and teachers into developing effective listening lessons, as well as providing promotional ideas using audiobooks for reading incentive programs and managing summer reading expectations. The website hosts a wide variety of materials for educators, including videos of teachers engaged in audiobook lessons with students, student testimonials about why audiobooks are their chosen method of reading, and reproducible worksheets and classroom activities with listening focus.

[Sync](#)

AudioFile magazine sponsors SYNC—a free summer audiobook program for teens 13+. Each week SYNC gives away two complete audiobook downloads with the pairs being high-interest titles based on themes. In the summer of 2018, 26 titles were given away to listeners. SYNC is dedicated to introducing the listening experience to a teen audience and highlights that required summer reading for schools can be completed by listening. Visit SYNC at: <https://www.audiobooksync.com/>.

Guys Read/Listen

Jon Scieszka, an American children's book author, and the 2008 U.S. Library of Congress Ambassador for Young People's Literature, includes audiobooks in his national literacy initiative, Guys Read/Guys Listen. The focus of Scieszka's Guys Listen program is to highlight the role that audiobooks have in motivating youth as readers through the art of listening. Over the past decade, much has been written about boys and literacy. Educators, librarians, researchers, and parents are concerned about the reading habits of boys, and national attention has been given to many studies where the findings consistently confirm that young males lag behind their female counterparts in reading. After gathering feedback from boys across the United States, Scieszka was inspired to create the Guys Read/Guys Listen project. His mission is clear: he wants to entice and motivate youth of all ages to become readers by letting them choose what they want to read and expanding the traditional definition of reading to also include audiobooks. Scieszka believes that by allowing listeners to "plug in" to experience great stories, it will motivate them to enjoy novels and literature they may have been unwilling to try out before. Visit Guys Listen here: www.guyslisten.com.

Audiobooks Publishers You Need to Know

As the audiobook industry is diverse, it's helpful to know publishers that specialize in producing and publishing audiobooks for young people. While a number of print publishing houses successfully produce audio versions of their releasing titles, companies such as Listening Library, Recorded Books, Full Cast Audio, and even Audible specialize in only producing audiobooks. When looking to develop your audiobook collection for your library or classroom collection, the following audiobook publishers are excellent resources:

Bolinda Audio
Brilliance Audio
Cinco Puntos Productions
Crabtree Publishing
Findaway World
Full Cast Audio
Hachette Audio Books
Harper Audio
Listen & Live Audio
Listening Library
Live Oak Media
Macmillan Audio
Recorded Books
Scholastic Audio
Simon and Schuster Audio
Smithsonian Books
Sourcebooks
Spoken Arts
Tantor Audiobooks
Weston Woods

Recommended YA Audiobooks

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

War Cross by Marie Lu

The Dangerous Art of Blending In by Angelo Surmelis

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas

The Diviners by Libba Bray

Illuminae: The Illuminae Files_01 by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff

Simon and the Homosapien Agenda by Becky Albertalli

Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi

Once and for All by Sarah Dessen

Anger Is a Gift by Mark Oshiro

The Inexplicable Logic of My Life by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven
Salt to the Sea by Ruta Sepetys
Dear Martin by Nic Stone
Solo by Kwame Alexander
Monday's Not Coming by Tiffany Jackson
The Memory of Light by Francisco X. Stork
I'll Give You the Sun by Jandy Nelson
Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights
Undefeated by Steve Sheinkin
Anna and the Swallow Man by Gavriel Savit
Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell
Scowler by Daniel Kraus

Given that audiobooks provide a favorite option for many while promoting literacy and an authentic way to connect with and experience stories, librarians and those who work with youth in educational settings have an opportunity to develop and support audiobook collections and programs to promote learning and literacy. If you haven't tried incorporating audiobooks into your library's collection, now is the time for both sound learning and happy listening!

Conclusion

You can help young adults of all ages find reading pleasure in quick reads: comic books, graphic novels, manga, series books, magazines, anthologies and story collections, poetry, and audiobooks. These genres and formats offer accessibility through brevity, illustration, extra white space, currency, relevancy, emotional punch, and reading entertainment. Encouraging and

engaging young adults in reading and listening can be accomplished by helping them have access to audiobooks, reading short stories and poetry aloud, forming manga clubs, collaborating with teachers to virtually conference or Skype with an author, and offering poetry slams and writing contests.

I came to young adult literature late as a reader. I'd always written poetry and had gone to Vermont College of Fine Arts to study picture books. It was there I discovered the YA verse novel. Who knew verse novels were even being published? I got really excited and decided to try to write one. I began reading a lot of YA in preparation and couldn't believe how vital the storytelling was. I'd always been drawn to novels that were voice-y and had a lot of voltage and these books I was reading were just teeming with voice, with immediacy, with rawness, with emotional intimacy. Now, a decade later after writing two YA novels, what appeals to me is exploring the world through my young narrators who are experiencing so much for the first time. It's kinetic, urgent, and wildly emotional and I adore that. I also love that there's a real openness in the YA literature community about experimenting with form and storytelling, about taking artistic risks. Lastly, it's a true honor to get to meet so many passionate teen readers along the way.

—Jandy Nelson, author of Printz Award Winner, *I'll Give You the Sun* and *The Sky Is Everywhere* xxxx

[Assignments in Action: Quick Reads for Discussion](#)

1. Literary Graphic Novel. *Hey Kiddo* by Jarrett K. Krosoczka. Explain your personal response to this nonfiction memoir graphic novel in both format and content. Give a specific example of a part of the story that moved you in some way. Was this graphic novel easy reading for you? Did you find the book disturbing or inspiring? Compare the format to a manga, a comic book, and a picture book. What are the differences and similarities? Speculate on the reasons format, style, genre, and topic of *Hey Kiddo* might interest young adults.

2. Manga. *Fruits Basket* by Natsuki Takaya. Choose any book in the series. Was this manga difficult for you to read? Why or why not? Why do you think manga is so popular with middle school students?
3. Series Book. Choose a series and read the first book. What makes you want to keep reading? What specifically will young adults like about the series you chose?
4. Story Collection/Anthology. *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Personal Moments of Inspiration*, edited by Rose Brock. After reading through this collection, what are some ways you can think of to use this anthology with teens? How does getting insight into the personal lives and experience of writers draw the reader in, and in what ways can this collection be a springboard for teens to examine their own lives?
5. Poetry. The *Poet. X* by Elizabeth Acevedo. To understand more about this verse novel and Elizabeth, visit her website at <http://www.acevedowrites.com/>. Then answer these questions: Where did Elizabeth get the idea for writing *PoetX*? Discuss poetry slams; what makes the performance piece of sharing poetry important? What is the appeal to teens of this verse novel, considering both content and format?
6. Sketchnoting: Visual Note Taking from Listening—Sketchnoting, in its purest form, is creating a personal visual story as one is listening to a speaker or reading a text. As you play an audiobook selection for listeners, have them listen to for key details and illustrate symbols, sayings, or favorite details that stick out in their mind. As they listen, periodically pause the audio to allow them to share their notes.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

When I think about my teen years, I think about urgency. Everything felt urgent at that time. Fights with your parents. Breakups. Getting into college. Growing up is about gaining perspective, and while it's important to realize that your parents weren't actually trying to ruin your life, and that your ex wasn't actually the star-crossed love of your life . . . well, let's just say that growing up is a double-edged sword. Because sometimes, growing up strips us of our youthful optimism. Sometimes, growing up neuters hope. I write YA because I want to keep that hopeful spirit alive. It sounds kind of selfish, doesn't it? A more noble writer might talk about how their books help teenagers see themselves, get through difficult challenges, elevate underrepresented voices. And I really do hope my books accomplish all of those things. But more than that, I want them to feel urgent, because I hope that my life, your life, and the world those lives inhabit never stop feeling urgent to any of us.

—Arvin Ahmadi, *author of Down and Across*

Contemporary realistic fiction consists of stories that could happen and are stories that reflect a wide variety of experiences by young adults; they are stories that reflect society of the times—novels that recognize what happens in small towns and cities, to boys and girls, and to families, friends, and enemies. Characters have different values, different ethnic backgrounds, different religions, and different sexual orientations. Plots and characters can be humorous, romantic, mysterious, adventurous, and sometimes even violent. Realistic novels may contain both lighthearted and dark elements, typical of many well-written stories; yet, some stories are completely funny, and others are completely sobering.

Because of the complexity of this category, in this chapter, realistic fiction is loosely organized into groups that are topical and contain multiple subgenres. Just like the readers themselves, young adult realistic fiction is a diverse, multifaceted category, and the books being written for teens are

topical—this is the world in which young adults live and one they are eager to see embraced in the stories they choose to read.

Interview with Nicola Yoon

Nicola Yoon is a Coretta Scott King New Talent Award winner and author of the National Book Award Finalist and Michael L. Printz Honor Book *The Sun Is Also a Star* and the #1 *New York Times* best seller and feature film *Everything, Everything*.

In your opinion, what's the best thing about writing for teens?

Teenagers are naturally philosophical people. Because they're on the cusp of adulthood, they're still trying to figure out the world and their place in it. They're asking themselves the big, important questions: What is the meaning of life? Who am I? Who do I want to be? Does God exist? Are human beings naturally good, or bad, or something else? Can I make myself a good citizen of the world? Can I love better? Can I *be* better?

I think we should *all* be asking ourselves these types of questions all the time. But the truth is, as we grow older, our lives get busy. We have jobs and responsibilities and practicalities to contend with. And we then we tend to let go of all our questioning.

I write for teenagers because I'm a philosophical person. I love thinking about the big questions. Obviously, I don't have the answers, but I think it's this questioning that's important. I love engaging with teenagers because they're still asking these big questions. I find it such a joy and privilege that I get to be a part of a conversation with them. I love showing them different ways of thinking and different ways of being. It's my hope that my books inspire them to think broadly and to question themselves and the world around them. It's my hope that my books inspire them to keep trying to become the best version of themselves.

Characteristics of Contemporary Realistic Young Adult Novels

The following characteristics are believed to be commonly found in the best contemporary realistic fiction for young adult novels:

1. The protagonist is a teenager and the narrator of the story. Parents and other adults fade into the background as the young people control events.
2. Characters are engaging, well-rounded, and true-to-life.
3. The depiction is without stereotypes and an accurate reflection of contemporary life that offers a realistic portrayal of the human condition.
4. Sensitivity is shown to all people regardless of sexual orientation, age, religion, race, socioeconomic level, and culture.
5. The setting is believable.
6. The language accurately reflects the characters and the social class, educational status, and culture in which they identify.
7. The story asks young people to consider their own values and beliefs without talking down to them or being preachy.
8. A message is there for readers, but it's an integral part of the story.
9. The ending is optimistic and hopeful even if there are tragic events.
10. Some novels tackle difficult and disturbing societal issues.

I write Young Adult because young adulthood is an intense period of time, where kids are getting their first terrifying (and exciting) glimpse around the corner from the cozy streets of child into the dizzying boulevards of adulthood. It's a time when kids are wondering not just what they will become when they grow up, but also what kind of person is even worth becoming to begin with. It's an awesome time of formulating and debating ideals. As young adults turn into adults, many of them may find their ideals compromised by all the pointy barbs in the world—work, politics, racism, injustice—but they will never stop trying to figure out what kind of person they want to become. We never stop becoming. Even when adults get stuck in their ruts, they are always aware of paths they could be following, or should have followed, or lie waiting to be discovered. I write YA not just because it reminds me of this awareness of becoming, but also because it reminds me that we are always becoming, no matter how old we get.

—David Yoon, author of *Frankly in Love*

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

While a wide range of subjects are featured in contemporary realistic fiction, including a search for identity and coming of age, stories may also focus on friendships, families, schools, community, sports, or a variety of other topics. Contemporary realistic fiction may be humorous, mysterious, romantic, adventurous, or even outlandish. It's tricky to try to place young adult novels into specific subgenres or topics, but for the purpose of presenting excellent examples, broad categories have been used; be aware that many featured titles could fit into several categories at once.

For each category that follows, in addition to positive reviews from trade review sources, recommended books fit the following criteria; they have been featured on recommended "best" lists or are award-winning titles. As with all titles featured throughout this textbook, recommended title selections are examples of excellent young adult fiction for that genre; while curated, suggested lists are not exhaustive and, in some cases, books may also work well in another category. Selections that also fit the "Own Voices" distinction are labeled with a *.

Humor and Identity through Friendships, Family, and Communities

What do teens think is funny, and how do we know what they think is funny? One way to determine what amuses teens in the books they read is paying attention to the other kinds of humor with which they seem to connect. We do know that teens actively choose books with humor; funny is, in fact, funny, and a dose of humor is good for everyone. Sarcasm, teasing, grossness, lewd jokes, exaggeration, word play, plus humor at the expense of adults are staples of humor for young people. In the last years of high school teens begin to appreciate satire and parody. Some authors engage every

literary element to make laugh-out-loud humor. Situational humor, characters whose thoughts and speech are funny, writing style full of figurative language and imagery, a lighthearted tone, even setting and theme may be humorous. Other authors include enough humorous elements to alleviate the weight of tragic or serious circumstances.

Historically, humor that had broad appeal to women and girls was coined as "chick lit" in the mid-1990s. Chick lit burst upon the adult literary scene with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Alderdice 2004). Over time, teen chick lit morphed into something different with a few similarities. Early standout humorous novels given this distinction include Louise Rennison's *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*, Meg Cabot's *Princess Diaries*, and Ann Brashares's *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (Adams 2004). Unlike adult chick lit, young adult novels were not about careers but about the hilarity and tragedy of being a teenaged girl. The gender stereotyping/trappings of female preoccupations with clothes and boys, cellphones and computers, parties and ladies' rooms, lots of crying, and the color pink frequently and persistently showed up in the pages of teen chick lit.

Patty Campbell, author of "The Sand in the Oyster" column for *The Horn Book Magazine*, argues that that "chick-lit novels are dramas of social class, not love stories" (Campbell 2006, 489). As young adult literature has progressed, the trappings of the chick lit label have worn away, but thankfully, some of the best humor and satire for readers still are available.

A favorite example of outrageously delivered humor is Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens*. Picture 50 beauty contestants trapped on a desert island. It's a slapstick version of *Lord of the Flies* with a perfect blend of hilarity and ripe with commentary on social conventions and societal expectations.

Preston Norton's * *Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe* offers the heartbreaking, often laugh-out-loud story of Cliff, commonly referred to as "Neanderthal" by his classmates who grapples with his brother's suicide when he is recruited to make life better for folks at Happy Valley High School by the school's quarterback (who also happens to be Cliff's nemesis) after getting a vision from God.

Jaclyn Moriarty's *The Year of Secret Assignments* offers an almost epistolary tale where letters and e-mails between three girls and three boys in rival Australian high schools are shared. At once funny and sad, their correspondence affords them the joy and strife of friendship with a mystery about the identity of Matthew.

Also, noteworthy for its humor and romance is Sandhya Menon's * *When Dimple Met Rishi*. When Dimple Shah and Rishi Patel meet at a Stanford University summer program, Dimple is busy avoiding her parents' obsession with "marriage prospects" as Rishi hopes to woo her into accepting the arranged marriage with him. This hilarious and heartfelt rom-com about two Indian American teens whose parents conspire to arrange their marriage is swoon worthy and laugh-out-loud funny.

In *Down and Across* by Arvin Ahmadi, Scott Ferdowsi has a track record of quitting. Writing the Great American Novel? Three chapters. His summer internship? One week. With college applications looming, Scott's parents pressure him to get serious and settle on a career path like engineering or medicine. Desperate for help, he sneaks off to Washington, D.C., to seek guidance from a famous professor who specializes in grit, the psychology of success. As his adventures unfold, Scott has the time of his life and opens his eyes to the fundamental truths about who he is and who he wants to be.

The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue by Mackenzie Lee shares the tale of a young bisexual British lord who embarks upon an unforgettable grand tour of Europe with his best friend/secret crush. Witty, dazzling, and intriguing at every turn, it's an irresistible romp that explores the undeniably fine lines between friendship and love.

[Interview with Adi Alsaid](#)

Adi Alsaid was born and raised in Mexico City, where he now lives, writes, and spills hot sauce on things. He's the author of several YA novels, including *Let's Get Lost*, *Never Always Sometimes*, *North of Happy*, and *A Brief Chronicle of Another Stupid Heartbreak*. *Let's Get Lost* was selected as a YALSA Teens' Top Ten Nominee in 2015.

What are the best things about writing realistic fiction for teens, and what are the greatest challenges?

Teen readers are by far the most passionate. They throw themselves into books, reading them voraciously, becoming completely immersed in them. There's nothing more satisfying for an author than to have readers who will wholeheartedly dive into the world you've created for them.

The challenges come from the exact same reason: teens care deeply about the stories they read. If they sense feigned or forced relatability, they'll say so, sometimes directly to you on social media. We all like to think we know exactly what it's like to be a teen just because we've been there, but the truth is that we forget, and no amount of current pop culture references or slang will convince our readers that we understand them. Teens see right through us, and that can be intimidating when we sit down to write. Thankfully, if we get it right, we're rewarded with their unbridled and incomparable enthusiasm.

Did you always know this was an audience you'd choose to write for as you began writing or did that happen more organically while you were creating?

I've always written stories with a coming-of-age bend, and I feel my writing voice lends itself well to realistic YA, but when I started writing, I wasn't very familiar with books for teens. It was only a couple of years into my foray into publishing that I discovered the wealth of books available for teens. As I started to read more and more of them, not only did I fall in love with the books, but I started seeing a clear match for my writing style. LET'S GET LOST was my first attempt at writing YA, and because of that fit, I'm not surprised that it was my first published book.

What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature?

There is a wealth of young adult literature out there. There are books that will turn reluctant readers into eager ones (not to toot my own horn, but I've received several messages saying such about my

books, though I wouldn't necessarily describe them as books that would change reading habits), books that will change someone's perceptions about fantasy (*An Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir changed my own reluctance to it), or about contemporary fiction. Or even about what YA literature looks like (*The Strange Fascinations of Noah Hypnotik* by David Arnold, *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, *I Crawl through It* by A. S King all come to mind) and who can or should read it.

YA is not a genre, not easily defined or categorized. It contains multitudes. I think that if librarians and future librarians (and, let's be honest, the whole world) would better serve young people by keeping in mind the breadth and wealth of literature written with them in mind.

[Coming of Age, Friendships, Family, and Communities](#)

Well-crafted realistic fiction mirrors life; it offers readers stories that deal with complex relationships, including those focused on discovering oneself, as well as dealing with friendships, families, and even communities within their stories. The best young adult writers offer realistic, objective writing that doesn't dictate ethical beliefs or specific moral code. These books challenge readers to continue the story and draw their own conclusions; regardless of the questions they may pose to the reader or the discomfort they are left with from grappling with the events of a novel, readers of contemporary YA should be given the space to examine their own beliefs while using the story's messages to grow in personal ways.

Like the diversity of the characters and situations in these notable books, these stories transpire in a variety of settings—from rural communities to modern urban life and many feature school life as a backdrop. Another commonality is that these stories offer readers a way to witness growth

toward adulthood, and coming of age is a hallmark of the selections and titles that fall into this category.

Jeff Zentner's award-winning novel, *The Serpent King*, is a fine example of these qualities; it's the story of Dill, the son of a Pentecostal preacher who faces his personal demons as he and his two outcast friends try to make it through their senior year of high school in rural Forestville, Tennessee, without letting the small-town culture destroy their creative spirits and sense of self.

*In *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas, 16-year-old Bri dreams of becoming a great rapper like her father, but after her first song goes viral for all the wrong reasons, Bri must decide whether to sell out or face eviction with her widowed mother. Thomas's insightful ode to hip hop is the story of fighting for your dreams, even as the odds are stacked against you.

In I. W. Gregorio's *None of the Above*, homecoming queen Kristin Lattimer has a hard enough time dealing with her body, but her visit to the doctor reveals a difficult truth; Kristin is intersex, which means that though she looks like a girl, she has male chromosomes, not to mention boy "parts" and after her diagnosis is leaked to the whole school, her identity is thrown into question.

In *S. K. Ali's *Saints and Misfits*, 15-year-old Janna Yusuf, a Flannery O'Connor-obsessed book nerd and the daughter of the only divorced mother at their mosque, tries to make sense of the events that follow when her best friend's cousin—a holy star in the Muslim community—attempts to assault her at the end of sophomore year.

In *Better Off Friends* by Elizabeth Eulberg, Macallan and Levi are best friends from the first day they meet in seventh grade, but over the years their close friendship keeps interfering with their dating life because everyone else regards them as a couple.

* *Little & Lion: A Novel* by Brandy Colbert shares the story of Suzette, who returns home to Los Angeles from boarding school and grapples with her bisexual identity when she and her brother Lionel fall in love with the same girl, pushing Lionel's bipolar disorder to spin out of control and forcing Suzette to confront her own demons.

* *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi is the story of Fabiola Toussaint, a young Haitian immigrant to the United States, who must navigate her life, school and relationships, while dealing with her loud cousins after her mother is detained by the U.S. immigration department.

In *Far from the Tree* by Robin Benway, being the middle child has its ups and downs, but for Grace, an only child who was adopted at birth, discovering that she is a middle child is a different ride altogether. After putting her own baby up for adoption, she goes looking for her biological family, including Maya, her loudmouthed younger biological sister, who has a lot to say about their newfound family ties.

In **The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson, Bobby's carefree teenage life changes forever when he becomes a father and must care for his adored baby daughter. With powerful language and keen insight, Johnson looks at the male side of teen pregnancy as she delves into one young man's struggle to figure out what "the right thing" is and then to do it. No matter what the cost.

* *The Fall of Innocence* by Jenny Torres Sanchez. Imagine *The Lovely Bones* meets *Thirteen Reasons Why* in this gorgeous, haunting, and tragic novel that examines the crippling—and far-reaching—effects of one person's trauma on her family, her community, and herself.

* *Girl in Pieces* by Kathleen Glasgow is the story of Charlie, a cutter and an artist who lands in Tucson after she has to leave rehab. Alone, insecure, and scared, she gets a job where she finds both supportive and destructive relationships. In spite of bad decisions, disappointments, and backsliding, she doggedly struggles to find herself and her place.

Matthew Quick's *Every Exquisite Thing* is the story about Nanette—a teen girl who has a nice normal life of friends, high school, and soccer, but after she discovers a cult classic novel, "nice and normal" becomes instantly unappealing. Ditching everyday life for the book's reclusive author and another obsessive teenage fan, Nanette explores her rebellious nonconformist side and the risks that come with it.

In * *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* by Tahereh Mafi, it's 2002, a year after 9/11. It's an extremely turbulent time politically, but especially so for

someone like Shirin, a 16-year-old Muslim girl who's tired of being stereotyped. Never surprised by how horrible people can be and the hate she endures as a result of her race, her religion, and the hijab she wears every day, she's built up protective walls and refuses to let anyone close enough to hurt her. Instead, she drowns her frustrations in music and spends her afternoons break-dancing with her brother. But then she meets Ocean James. He's the first person in forever who really seems to want to get to know Shirin. Shirin has had her guard up for so long that she's not sure she'll ever be able to let it down.

* *A Girl Like That* by Tanaz Bhathena. In Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 16-year-old half-Hindu/half-Parsi Zarin Wadia is the class troublemaker and top subject for the school rumor blogs, regularly leaving class to smoke cigarettes in cars with boys, but she also desperately wants to grow up and move out of her aunt and uncle's house, perhaps realizing too late that Porus, another non-Muslim Indian who risks deportation but remains devoted to Zarin, could help her escape.

Julie Halpern's *Into the Wild Nerd* is the story of Julie, a high school sophomore, who feeling used by her two best friends decides to go in search of new friends. But will she be able to survive being branded a nerd?

Fat Kid Rules the World by E. L. Going shares the story of Troy Billings, 17 years, 296 pounds, friendless, utterly miserable, and about to step off a New York subway platform in front of an oncoming train until he meets Curt MacCrae, an emaciated, semi-homeless, high school dropout guitar genius. Soon, Curt's recruited Troy as his new drummer—even though Troy can't play the drums. Together, Curt and Troy will change the world of punk, and Troy's own life, forever.

In *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily M. Danforth, Cameron, orphaned and gay, is sent by her grandmother and aunt to God's Promises, a religious conversion camp supposed to "cure" her homosexuality.

**Hearts Unbroken* by Cynthia Leitich Smith. When Louise Wolfe's boyfriend mocks and disrespects Native people in front of her, she breaks things off and dumps him over e-mail. After being paired with a new journalist, the two find themselves with a major story to cover: the school

musical director's inclusive approach to casting *The Wizard of Oz* has been provoking backlash in town. As tensions mount at school, so does a romance between Lou and Joey. But "dating while Native" can be difficult. In trying to protect her own heart, will Lou break Joey's?

In **Not the Girls You're Looking For* by Aminah Mae Safi, Lulu Saad doesn't take your advice; she's got her three best friends and nothing can stop her from conquering the known world. Sure, she thought she'd nearly drowned a cute guy at a party, but he was totally faking it. And yes, she caused a scene during Ramadan. It's all under control. Except maybe this time she's done a little more damage than she realizes. And if Lulu can't find her way out of this mess soon, she'll have to do more than repair friendships, family alliances, and wet clothing. She'll have to go looking for herself.

In **The Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi, after their home in Syria is bombed, Tareq, his father, and his younger sister seek refuge, first with extended family in Raqqa, a stronghold for the militant group, Daesh, and then abroad. This is a story of resilience in the face of darkness, and of one boy's courage in desperate circumstances. But it is also the story of all wars, of all tragedy, and of all strife. With Destiny as a narrator offering perspective and context, readers see that this conflict in Syria is part of a long chain of wars throughout time—and that, throughout all of those wars, there have also been heroes, small and large, who prove that humanity is ultimately inclined toward good.

In **Highly Illogical Behavior* by John Corey Whaley, 16-year-old Solomon is agoraphobic. He hasn't left the house in three years, which is fine by him. Ambitious Lisa desperately wants to get into the second-best psychology program for college (she's being realistic). But how can she prove she deserves a spot there? Solomon is the answer. Determined to "fix" Sol, Lisa thrusts herself into his life, sitting through *Star Trek* marathons with him and introducing him to her charming boyfriend Clark. Soon, all three teens are far closer than they thought they'd be, and when their walls fall down, their friendships threaten to collapse, as well.

Darker Contemporary Realistic Fiction

As with the other categories of realistic fiction, darker contemporary realistic fiction tells stories that could happen and do happen in the lives of teens or in the world at large; young adult writers are quick to stay abreast of the major events happening, and novel topics often feel like they may have been plucked from the headlines. These novels integrate social issues that matter to teens, controversial topics, and previous taboos into well-written, well-developed stories. These novels are disturbing, sometimes shocking, but they reflect the lives of today's teens—not the lives of every teen but of enough teens for the stories to be authentic.

Today's dark fiction centers often on different types of violence and the fight for social justice. Topics include stories of sexual abuse, suicide, school shootings, bullying—the list could be taken from continually running news programs; by sharing these types of young adult novels, librarians have opportunities to discuss issues involved in bullying and related violence and to explore avenues of aid and alternative ways for students to be heard. Novels about sexual assault and rape culture are also important additions to this category of young adult literature. While seemingly less violent, books about drug abuse, homelessness, and incarceration are also critical for teens in seeking out realistic portrayals of the challenges faced in the real world. While such novels often make adults uncomfortable because of the content of these books, the best examples of darker contemporary fiction do so in a manner that is genuine and honest, respecting teen readers and their ability to appropriately process these stories.

In **The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, 16-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed. Soon afterward, his death is a national headline. And the only person alive who

can answer what really happened is Starr. But what Starr does—or does not—say could upend her community. It could also endanger her life.

Tradition by Brendan Kiely. At Fullbrook Academy, where tradition reigns supreme, James Baxter and Jules Devereux take on privilege, sexism, and the importance of consent.

Amy Reed's *The Nowhere Girls* is the story of three misfits that come together to avenge the rape of a fellow classmate and in the process trigger a change in the misogynist culture at their high school transforming the lives of everyone around them in this searing and timely story.

Told in short, fierce staccato narrative verse,* *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds is an electrifying novel that takes place in 60 potent seconds—the time it takes for Will to decide whether or not he's going to murder the guy who killed his brother.

In *After the Fall* by Kate Hart, told from two viewpoints, 17-year-old Raychel relies on the support of her overachieving best friend Matt while secretly sleeping with his brother Andrew, and Matt tries to play hero and hide how much he loves her.

**Watched* by Marina Budhos. Far from the "model teen," Naeem moves fast to outrun the eyes of his hardworking Bangladeshi parents, their gossipy neighbors, and the other forms of surveillance in his immigrant neighborhood in Queens, but when his mistakes catch up with him and the police offer a dark deal, will Naeem be a hero or a traitor?

*In *Give Me Some Truth* by Eric Gansworth, life is hard on the Tuscarora Reservation in upstate New York, and most of the teenagers feel like they are going nowhere: Carson Mastick dreams of forming a rock band, and Maggi Bokoni longs to create her own conceptual artwork instead of the traditional beadwork that her family sells to tourists—but tensions are rising between the reservation and the surrounding communities, and somehow in the confusion of politics and growing up, Carson and Maggi have to make a place for themselves.

In *The Way I Used to Be* by Amber Smith, Eden was always good at being good. Starting high school didn't change who she was. But the night her brother's best friend rapes her, Eden's world capsizes. Told in four parts—

freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year—this story reveals the deep cuts of trauma. But it also demonstrates one young woman's strength as she navigates the aftermath and learns to embrace a power of survival she never knew she had hidden within. This is a powerful look at the fact that the effects of rape are long-lasting and complex.

That's Not What Happened by Kody Kepplinger. In the three years since the Virgil County High School Massacre, a story has grown up around one of the victims, Sarah McHale, that says she died proclaiming her Christian faith—but Leanne Bauer was there, and knows what happened, and she has a choice: stay silent and let people believe in Sarah's martyrdom, or tell the truth.

Rightfully considered a modern classic and published 20 years ago, Laurie Halse Anderson's poignant and powerful novel *Speak* is the story of Melinda, a rape survivor who becomes a social pariah at school and then she goes mute. She gets justice by writing messages in the blank pages of Judy Blume's *Forever* about Andy, the student who raped her, and through a final confrontation.

In Chris Lynch's *Inexcusable* Keir, a senior, date rapes his girlfriend but denies it. The viewpoint of a rapist is an unusual but effective one as readers get to know Keir but understand that he's being dishonest with himself. Keir must finally come to terms with his actions in the equally powerful sequel *Irreversible*.

In *Now We Return to Regular Life* by Martin Wilson, this ripped-from-the-headlines novel that explores the power of being an ally—and a friend—when a kidnapped boy returns to his hometown.

In Barry Lyga's *Boy Toy*, Josh, a seventh grader, is seduced and sexually abused by his beautiful history teacher. The novel, shocking in details yet skillfully written, is chillingly uncomfortable to read.

In *Piecing Me Together* by Renee Watson, Jade believes she must get out of her poor neighborhood if she's ever going to succeed. Her mother tells her to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way. And Jade has, but some *opportunities* she doesn't really welcome. Inside of being singled out as someone who needs help, Jade wants to speak, to create, to express.

Maybe there are some things she could show other women about understanding the world and finding ways to be real, to make a difference.

Maria Padian's **Wrecked: A Novel* offers a kaleidoscopic view of a sexual assault on a college campus that will leave readers thinking about how memory and identity, what's at stake, and who sits in judgment shape what we all decide to believe about the truth.

In *This Is Where It Ends* by Marieke Nijkamp, minutes after the principal of Opportunity High School in Alabama finishes her speech welcoming the student body to a new semester, they discover that the auditorium doors will not open and someone starts shooting as four teens, each with a personal reason to fear the shooter, tell the tale from separate perspectives.

In ** Dear Martin* by Nic Stone, 17-year-old college-bound Justyce McAllister writes letters to the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as he struggles to face the reality of race relations today and how they are shaping him.

[Love and Loss in Contemporary Realistic Fiction](#)

[Interview with Stephanie Perkins](#)

Stephanie Perkins is a *New York Times* and internationally best-selling author of *Anna and the French Kiss*, *Lola and the Boy Next Door*, and *Isla and the Happily Ever After*—and the editor of two anthologies, *My True Love Gave to Me* and *Summer Days and Summer Night*.

As a creator, what's the best thing about writing romance for young people and what are the greatest challenges? Did you always know this was a genre you'd choose as you began writing or did that happen more organically while you were creating? What was it like switching to writing suspense/ horror?

My first three novels—*Anna and the French Kiss*, *Lola and the Boy Next Door*, *Isla and the Happily Ever After*—as well the anthologies that I edited—*My True Love Gave To Me* and *Summer Days and Summer Nights*—are all romantic. And, might I add, boldly so! The genre is clear from the titles, and I take pleasure in being unapologetic about it.

The greatest challenge of writing romance is the attitude that surrounds enjoying romance. There's a lot of shame. It's the most popular genre in the world, yet it's still seen as being largely for women and, therefore, of being something lesser. People often read romance novels in secret. They don't want to be thought of as being something lesser, too. It's grossly unfair for girls and deeply damaging for boys, so I'm grateful for any opportunity to be loud and proud. Shame is the most dangerous human emotion, and it feeds in silence.

I read and write romance because it's fun and escapist, in the same way that fantasy is. Love is the closest thing we have to real-life magic. And it makes sense that I wrote for a young adult audience first because I met (and married!) my husband when I was a teenager. My love for him was immediate, profound, and *adult*. Adults often breeze over the "adult" half of the phrase "young adult." But the emotions that teenagers feel are equally complex and valid—they're often just experiencing them for the first time, so they don't have all of the tools to deal with them yet. That's exciting territory for an author.

My fourth novel, *There's Someone Inside Your House*, seemed like a big leap because it's a gory teen slasher. But what has always attracted me to the genre actually has a lot in common with romance—an emphasis on dialogue, humor, and setting. Plus, slashers usually have making out and sex! Ha! (There's just also, you know, blood and murder.) So, the departure didn't feel as extreme to me as I'm sure it appeared. The book still has a happy ending. It's difficult for me to imagine writing a book that doesn't end with hope.

What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature?

Keep an open mind. If you enjoy teen movies like *Clueless*, *The Breakfast Club*, or *Mean Girls*, then you'll probably enjoy teen literature, too. Talk to other librarians who are already passionate about it and ask them for recommendations. The range of genres, voices, and linguistic styles that are available in adult and middle-grade fiction is equally represented in YA—and YA fiction is often ahead of the curve in terms of diversity.

You've been publishing young adult fiction for several years. Are there any ways in which have you seen YA evolve? Is there anything you find surprising or particularly exciting about those changes? What do you wish you knew as you were starting that you feel like you've learned along the course of your career?

While it still has a long way to go, it appears that YA literature is becoming less white, heterosexual, middle class, and able-bodied faster than the rest of literature. More stories are being told. It's partly because the bulk of our readership—actual teenagers—are so vocal online, and many of us authors are right there listening. Teenagers are great at demanding and receiving change. It's always been their superpower. They've always been the ones burdened with saving and enlightening the rest of society.

I wish that I'd had their insights earlier in my life, not just in my career. I wish that I hadn't been so stuck inside my own self. Because that's the power of books, isn't it? A good book will place you inside the mind of somebody else, which helps build empathy for experiences that are not your own. That's why the diverse books and own voices movements are crucial and need continued support.

[Love Stories](#)

Hearts and roses, longing gazes, and lingering kisses are signs of first love, of young emerging love, which is an almost-universal experience. Young adult

literature mirrors a joyful, painful, complex time in young people's lives. Like the other topics in realistic fiction, rarely are books one thing or another; like the young people they portray in their stories, they are complex, and while romance and searching for love may be at the forefront of these highlighted titles, they also are narratives where the characters are on a journey in search of a sense of self, and they explore their place in the wider world while navigating their relationship with family and friends.

LGBTQAI+ Experiences

Since the publication of Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind*, young adult fiction has slowly embraced novels featuring gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and those questioning their own sexual identity. Possibly "twenty percent of all teenagers have some degree of same-sex orientation" (Whelan 2006, 46). With a population that large, school and public libraries need to include LGBTQAI+ fiction and nonfiction books in their collections if they are intent on serving all young adults. According to Debra Lau Whelan's article, "Out and Ignored," young adults find identity, safety, and comfort in reading about characters with similar sexual orientation. Whelan recommends steps for building a strong LGBTQAI+ themed collection, including advice for avoiding or preparing for book challenges. Book censorship, the freedom to read, and tips on how to handle challenges are also covered in [Chapter 7](#).

The following list offers a selected group of well-reviewed love and romance titles, including novels that explore LGBTQAI relationships. For more lists of recommended titles, visit the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table website at <http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/>.

Simon and the Homosapien Agenda by Becky Albertalli is the story of 16-year-old and not-so-openly gay Simon Spier who prefers to save his drama for the school musical. But when an e-mail falls into the wrong hands, his

secret is at risk of being thrust into the spotlight. Now Simon is actually being blackmailed: if he doesn't play wingman for class clown Martin, his sexual identity will become everyone's business. Worse, the privacy of Blue, the pen name of the boy he's been e-mailing, will be compromised. With some messy dynamics emerging in his once tight-knit group of friends, and his e-mail correspondence with Blue growing more flirtatious every day, Simon's junior year has suddenly gotten complicated. Now, change-averse Simon has to find a way to step out of his comfort zone before he's pushed out—without alienating his friends, compromising himself, or fumbling a shot at happiness with the most confusing adorable guy he's never met.

In * *Odd One Out* by Nic Stone, in this exploration of old friendships, new crushes, and the path to self-discovery, told in three voices, high school juniors and best friends Courtney and Jupe, and new sophomore Rae, explore their sexuality and their budding attractions for one another.

* *The Sun Is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon tells the story of Natasha, a girl who believes in science and facts. Not fate. Not destiny. Or dreams that will never come true. She's not about love at first sight, especially hours before her family is being deported to Jamaica. It's also the story of Daniel who's always been the good son, the good student, living up to his parents' high expectations. Something about Natasha and Daniel makes them think that fate has something much more extraordinary in store—for the two of them.

The Truth about Forever by Sarah Dessen captures Macy's story in the summer following her father's death where her plans include working at the library and waiting for her brainy boyfriend to return from camp; instead, she goes to work at a catering business where she makes new friends and finally faces her grief while finding love where she least expected it.

In *Let's Get Lost* by Adi Alsaid, during her cross-country adventures following the tragic death of her family, Leila touches the lives of four strangers—Hudson, Bree, Elliot, and Sonia. While forever changing the lives of these four, Leila also discovers an important truth about herself.

In *Anna and the French Kiss* by Stephanie Perkins, Anna, a high school senior, is ripped away from her friends in Atlanta and plopped down in a Paris boarding school by her rich, novelist father. Her room is smaller than

her suitcase! The only French word she knows is *oui*! She is *not* happy. But then she meets smart, charming, gorgeous Etienne St. Clair. And it is Paris, the most romantic city in the world.

In *Moxie* by Jennifer Mathieu, Vivian Carter is fed up. Fed up with an administration at her high school that thinks the football team can do no wrong. Fed up with sexist dress codes, hallway harassment, and gross comments from guys during class. But most of all, Viv Carter is fed up with always following the rules. Viv's mom was a tough-as-nails, punk rock Riot Grrrl in the '90s, and now Viv takes a page from her mother's past and creates a feminist zine that she distributes anonymously to her classmates. She's just blowing off steam, but other girls respond. As Viv forges friendships with other young women across the divides of cliques and popularity rankings, she realizes that what she has started is nothing short of a girl revolution.

Nick and Norah's Playlist by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan. At a Manhattan bar Nick grabs Norah and asks her to be his girlfriend for five minutes to provoke a recent ex-girlfriend. A night neither will forget results.

* *One Man Guy* by Michael Barakiva. When Alek's high-achieving, Armenian American parents send him to summer school, he thinks his summer is ruined. But then he meets Ethan, who opens his world in a series of truly unexpected ways.

In *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell there's *Eleanor*. . . Red hair, wrong clothes. Standing behind him until he turns his head. Lying beside him until he wakes up. Making everyone else seem drabber and flatter and never good enough . . . Eleanor. *Park*. . . He knows she'll love a song before he plays it for her. He laughs at her jokes before she ever gets to the punch line. There's a place on his chest, just below his throat, that makes her want to keep promises . . . Park. Set over the course of one school year, this is the story of two star-crossed 16-year-olds—smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try.

In **Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy, self-proclaimed fat girl, Willowdean Dickson has always been at home in her own skin. Her thoughts on having the ultimate bikini body? Put a bikini on your body. With her all-American

beauty best friend, Ellen, by her side, things have always worked . . . until Will takes a job at Harpy's, the local fast-food joint. There she meets Private School Bo, a hot former jock. Will isn't surprised to find herself attracted to Bo. But she is surprised when he seems to like her back. Instead of finding new heights of self-assurance in her relationship with Bo, Will starts to doubt herself. So she sets out to take back her confidence by doing the most horrifying thing she can imagine: entering the Miss Clover City beauty pageant—along with several other unlikely candidates—to show the world that she deserves to be up there as much as any twiggy girl does. Along the way, she'll shock the hell out of Clover City—and maybe herself most of all.

In *The Sky Is Everywhere* by Jandy Nelson, adrift after her sister Bailey's sudden death, Lennie finds herself torn between quiet, seductive Toby—Bailey's boyfriend who shares her grief—and Joe, the new boy in town who bursts with life and musical genius. Each offers Lennie something she desperately needs . . . though she knows if the two of them collide, her whole world will explode.

*In *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* by Jenny Han, 16-year-old Lara Jean Song keeps her love letters in a hatbox her mother gave her. They aren't love letters that anyone else wrote for her; these are ones she's written. One for every boy she's ever loved—five in all. When she writes, she pours out her heart and soul and says all the things she would never say in real life, because her letters are for her eyes only. Until the day her secret letters are mailed, and suddenly, Lara Jean's love life goes from imaginary to out of control.

In * *If I Was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo, Amanda Hardy only wants to fit in at her new school, but she is keeping a big secret, so when she falls for Grant, guarded Amanda finds herself yearning to share with him everything about herself, including her previous life as Andrew.

In **Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram, clinically depressed Darius Kellner, a high school sophomore, travels to Iran to meet his grandparents, but it is their next-door neighbor, Sohrab, who changes his life.

In *The Statistical Probability of Love at First Sight* by Jennifer E. Smith, today should be one of the worst days of 17-year-old Hadley Sullivan's life. Having missed her flight, she's stuck at JFK airport and late to her father's second wedding, which is taking place in London and involves a soon-to-be stepmother Hadley's never even met. Then she meets the perfect boy in the airport's cramped waiting area. His name is Oliver, he's British, and he's sitting in her row. A long night on the plane passes in the blink of an eye, and Hadley and Oliver lose track of each other in the airport chaos upon arrival. Can fate intervene to bring them together once more?

**If You Could Be Mine* by Sara Farizan. In Iran, where homosexuality is punishable by death, 17-year-olds Sahar and Nasrin love each other in secret until Nasrin's parents announce their daughter's arranged marriage and Sahar proposes a drastic solution.

**Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Saenz. Fifteen-year-old Ari Mendoza is an angry loner with a brother in prison, but when he meets Dante and they become friends, Ari starts to ask questions about himself, his parents, and his family that he has never asked before.

**Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan. Charming, surreal, and upbeat aptly describe this novel about a high school gay sophomore in a contemporary world of tolerance.

Luna by Julie Anne Peters. Regan supports her transgender brother as he pursues his desire to be a girl.

In *Just One Day* by Gayle Forman, when sheltered American good girl Allyson "LuLu" Healey first meets laid-back Dutch actor Willem De Ruiter at an underground performance of *Twelfth Night* in England, there's an undeniable spark. After just one day together, that spark bursts into a flame, or so it seems to Allyson, until the following morning, when she wakes up after a whirlwind day in Paris to discover that Willem has left. Over the next year, Allyson embarks on a journey to come to terms with the narrow confines of her life, and through Shakespeare, travel, and a quest for her almost-true-love, to break free of those confines.

In **Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger, John Galardi and Marisol become friends and bond over issues of zines, while Marisol explores her identity as a lesbian, inevitably disappointing John as he becomes more and more enamored with her.

In *Kissing in America* by Margo Rabb, in the two years since her father died, 16-year-old Eva has found comfort in reading romance novels—118 of them, to be exact—to dull the pain of her loss that's still so present. Her romantic fantasies become a reality when she meets Will, who can relate to Eva's grief. Unfortunately, after Eva falls head-over-heels for him, he picks up and moves to California with barely any warning. Not wanting to lose the only person who has been able to pull her out of sadness—and, perhaps, her first shot at real love—Eva and her best friend, Annie, concoct a plan to travel to the West Coast. As they road trip across America, Eva and Annie confront the complex truth about love.

In **Emergency Contact* by Mary H K Choi, when Sam and Penny cross paths it's less meet-cute and more a collision of unbearable awkwardness. Still, they swap numbers and stay in touch—via text—and soon become digitally inseparable, sharing their deepest anxieties and secret dreams without the humiliating weirdness of having to see each other.

**Frankly in Love* by David Yoon is a fresh and relatable take on identity and race as seen through the eyes of a Korean American teen caught between his parents' traditional expectations and his own Southern California upbringing.

**We Are Okay* by Nina La Cour is the story of Marin, who hasn't spoken to anyone from her old life, since the day she left everything behind. No one knows the truth about those final weeks. Not even her best friend, Mabel. Now Mabel is coming to visit, and Marin will be forced to face everything that's been left unsaid and finally confront the loneliness that has made a home in her heart.

[Author Interview with Nina LaCour](#)

Nina LaCour is the author of *We Are Okay*, winner of the 2018 Michael L. Printz Award, a TODAY Show Must-Read Book, a *Boston Globe* Best Book of the Year, a *Seventeen* Best Book of the Year, a *News & Observer* Best Book of the Year, a *Booklist* Editors' Choice selection, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, a *Bustle* Best Book of the Year, a New York Public Library Best Book of the Year. She is also the author of the widely acclaimed novels *Hold Still*, *The Disenchantments*, and *Everything Leads to You* and coauthor of *You Know Me Well* with David Levithan.

Though the audience for your body of work is broad (your books are beloved by teens and adults alike), what are the best things about writing for teens and what are the greatest challenges? Did you always know this was an audience you'd choose to write for or did that happen more organically while you were creating?

I did not always know that I would write for teens, but as soon as I started a YA novel in graduate school, I was certain that it felt right to me. The best thing about writing for teens is that when they find something they love, they *really* love it. The love makes the thing bigger and more meaningful. It becomes a part of who they are. I often think of that passion I felt for books and films and music when I was a teenager and wish I could have it back.

As for the challenges, I know from my years of teaching high school that if a writer is not writing as authentically as she can, teenagers will see right through her. I remember so well how easily my students would be turned off by a book if they felt in any way condescended to or judged or trivialized. So when I write for a young adult audience, I make sure to also write for myself—to explore the deepest truths that I can by positioning the situations and questions I'm grappling with in my adult life in a teen experience. Love is love. Grief is grief. There is a universality to human experience that can't be categorized as either strictly teen or strictly adult, and that's the space where I like to exist in my storytelling.

Though we have made strides, there continues to be resistance to acknowledging teenage sexuality. What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature, especially in regard to LGBTQ+ books?

Here is a story I like to tell: When *Everything Leads to You* came out, which is a love story between two girls set in Los Angeles, I looked for it in the general YA section at my local Barnes and Noble. I couldn't find it and was surprised and a little concerned, because the chain had carried my other books and I didn't know why they would not carry that one. Then, on my way out of the teen area, I noticed the YA Romance section, and there it was! I hadn't even thought to check there, but it absolutely is a romance, and that's where it belonged. It was surrounded by books about boys and girls falling in love.

Once in a while I'll get an e-mail from a straight teen reader telling me that *Everything Leads to You* was the first LGBTQ novel they'd ever read and telling me how much they enjoyed it. Often these e-mails say something like, "I didn't know if I'd be able to relate to it but I did!" And so that's my hope for librarians—that they will not only match their young LGBTQ patrons with books with LGBTQ content, but that they'll put LGBTQ books into *all* of their patrons' hands. These are novels with content that everyone can relate to—friendships and family dynamics and first crushes and young love—and by exposing teens to literature about all kinds of people we are telling them that various sexual identities are worthy of our time and attention and respect.

Loss

Loss is part of the human condition, and whether it's coping with the loss of a loved one, a friendship, or loss of part of one's expectations for themselves

or others, young adult contemporary realistic fiction offers thought-provoking selections where readers can gain insight through the lens of the characters they encounter through the novels they read.

**Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sanchez shows readers that perfect Mexican daughters do not go away to college. And they do not move out of their parents' house after high school graduation. Perfect Mexican daughters never abandon their family. But Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter. That was Olga's role. Then a tragic accident on the busiest street in Chicago leaves Olga dead, and Julia left behind to reassemble the shattered pieces of her family. And no one seems to acknowledge that Julia is broken, too.

**The Astonishing Color of After* by Emily X. R. Pan. Leigh Chen Sanders is absolutely certain about one thing: When her mother died by suicide, she turned into a bird. Leigh travels to Taiwan to meet her maternal grandparents for the first time. There, she is determined to find her mother, the bird. In her search, she winds up chasing after ghosts, uncovering family secrets, and forging a new relationship with her grandparents. And as she grieves, she must try to reconcile the fact that on the same day she kissed her secret crush, Axel, her mother was taking her own life.

In *Kids of Appetite* by David Arnold, Vic's father died two years ago. Unable to accept his mother's new relationship, he flees with his father's urn. An unlikely gang of misfits brings Vic into their fold, helping him fulfill his dad's final instructions regarding disposal of the ashes. It's a triumphant celebration of the many kinds of family.

In *Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews, Andrews beautifully balances friendship, humor, and loss. It is a universally acknowledged truth that high school sucks. But on the first day of his senior year, Greg Gaines thinks he's figured it out. His strategy: remain at the periphery at all times. Keep an insanely low profile. Make mediocre films with the one person who is even sort of his friend, Earl. This plan works for exactly eight hours. Then Greg's mom forces him to become friends with a girl who has cancer. This brings about the destruction of Greg's entire life.

In **All That Remains* by Ashley Woodfolk, Autumn always knew exactly who she was: a talented artist and a loyal friend. Shay was defined by two things: her bond with her twin sister, Sasha, and her love of music. And Logan always turned to writing love songs when his love life was a little less than perfect. But when tragedy strikes each of them, somehow music is no longer enough. Now Logan can't stop watching vlogs of his dead ex-boyfriend. Shay is a music blogger struggling to keep it together. And Autumn sends messages that she knows can never be answered.

In Julie Buxbaum's *Tell Me Three Things*, 16-year old Jessie, still grieving over her mother's death, must move from Chicago to "The Valley," with a new stepfamily but no new friends until an anonymous fellow student e-mails and offers to help her navigate the school's treacherous social waters. Equal parts funny and heartbreaking, it's a powerhouse of a story.

In Jeff Zentner's *Goodbye Days*, 17-year-old Carver Briggs feels responsible for the deaths of his best friends and must deal with his own life, now forever altered. "Where are you guys? Text me back," Carver texted his friend Mars, who replied, or at least started to, as proven by the half-composed text found on Mars's phone at the crash site. Carver feels responsible, but is he responsible? Carver must navigate through the guilt and pain by celebrating their lives—and ultimately learning to forgive himself.

John Green's *Looking for Alaska* is the story of friends at an Alabama boarding school who are fascinated with Alaska Young, a confident, provocative feminist. Sixteen-year-old Miles is mesmerized by her, even as she indulges in self-destructive behavior. Tragically, she ends her life after drinking and crashing her car into a police cruiser, killing her instantly. In this powerful coming-of-age novel, the grieving process is acted out with questions about suicide hovering in the background.

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven is told in alternating voices. When Theodore Finch and Violet Markey meet on the ledge of the bell tower at school, both teetering on the edge, it's the beginning of an unlikely relationship, a journey to discover the "natural wonders" of the state of Indiana, and two teens' desperate desire to heal and save one another.

In *The Sidekicks* by Will Kostakis, Ryan, Harley and Miles are very different people—the swimmer, the rebel, and the nerd. All they've ever had in common is Isaac, their shared best friend. When Isaac dies unexpectedly, the three boys must come to terms with their grief and the impact Isaac had on each of their lives. In his absence, Ryan, Harley and Miles discover things about one another they never saw before, and realize there may be more tying them together than just Isaac.

Getting In on the Action: Sports, Adventure, and Survival

Sports Stories

The popularity of sports in the United States continues to expand and to encompass an impressive variety, from traditionally popular ones like football and baseball to newer extreme sports, such as snowboarding and off-roading. Sports stories are often coming-of-age stories that are suspenseful with physical challenges and risks. The best sports stories incorporate significant themes and well-developed characters who grow, learn, and have the potential of improving their lives. No one manages this dynamic combination better than distinguished young adult author Chris Crutcher. For more than 30 years, his knowledge of psychology and his experience counseling disturbed young adults has prepared him to bring characters to life, characters with serious problems. Readers of Crutcher's books come away understanding their own lives better than they did before delving into his books. Crutcher's books are much more than sports fiction, of course. It could be argued that his novels fit better under the category of "dark realistic fiction," but at their heart, sports always play a critical role in the stories he tells. With the understanding that within Crutcher's books human emotions are brewing—anger, racism, abuse, grief, revenge, and

prejudice for starters—adults and young adult readers will be caught in the maelstrom and spit out a bit dazed but knowing more about life than before they read the opening lines. Here is a list of his books and the featured sport: *Deadline* (football), *Running Loose* (football, track), *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* (baseball), *Chinese Handcuffs* (basketball), *Stotan!*, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, *Whale Talk*, and *Loser's Bracket* (swimming), and *Ironman* (triathlon).

Sports stories have a history of popularity with readers. Journalist and sports announcer John R. Tunis was one of the early writers who captured the imaginations of young people with an extensive list of novels. His earliest one was *All-American*, published in 1942, and featured professional football players. Writers in the past few decades have produced more sophisticated stories with fully developed characters, integrated themes, and enough details for the flavor of the sport without long, tedious descriptions. Popular sports writers include Kwame Alexander, Bruce Brooks, Carl Deuker, Thomas J. Dygard, David Klass, Robert Lipsyte, Chris Lynch, Mike Lupica, John Ritter, Will Weaver, and more. Not surprisingly, few girls were the heroines of sports fiction in the early days of the genre. That situation is improving with the publication of books like *Bittersweet* by Sarah Ockler (ice skating); *The Dairy Queen* trilogy by Catherine Murdock (football); *The Girl Who Threw Butterflies* (baseball) by Mick Cochrane; *Going for the Record* (swimming) by Julie A. Swanson; *In Lane Three, Alex Archer* (swimming) by Tessa Duder; *The Running Dream* (track) by Wendelin Van Draanen; and *Shut Out* (soccer) by Brendan Halpin; respect for the athletic abilities of girls is evident in these positive stories. To better understand the versatility of sports fiction, the following novels will have particular appeal to young adults.

In *Game Changer* by Joseph Monninger, 17-year-old Zeb Holloway is happy to work in his uncle's auto repair shop and cruise through school without much effort. He's a quarterback (QB) on his high school's undefeated football team, but he never plays. That is, until the star player is injured a week before the state championships. As Zeb assumes the role of QB and team leader, the entire town is watching him. And when a college recruiter

says Zeb could have a future beyond his small New Hampshire town, he realizes there's a bigger life out there for him. Can one game really change everything? Fate and football collide in this moving sports novel.

In Randy Ribay's *After the Shot Drops*, Bunny and Nasir have been best friends forever, but when Bunny accepts an athletic scholarship across town, Nasir feels betrayed. While Bunny tries to fit in with his new, privileged peers, Nasir spends more time with his cousin, Wallace, who is being evicted. Nasir can't help but wonder why the neighborhood is falling over itself to help Bunny when Wallace is in trouble. When Wallace makes a bet against Bunny, Nasir is faced with an impossible decision—maybe a dangerous one. A heart-pounding story about the responsibilities of great talent and the importance of compassion.

**Ball Don't Lie* by Matt De La Pena is the story of 17-year-old Sticky. He lives to play basketball at school and at Lincoln Rec Center in Los Angeles and is headed for the pros, but he is unaware of the many dangers—including his own past—that threaten his dream.

Girls Can't Hit by Tom Easton. After not being allowed to take a boxing class at her school because she is a girl, Fleur deals with bullying and disapproval in her quest to set things right and ensure equal opportunity for all students

In Geoff Herback's *Hooper*, for Adam Reed, basketball is a passport. Adam's basketball skills have taken him from an orphanage in Poland to a loving adoptive mother in Minnesota. When he's tapped to play on a select AAU team along with some of the best players in the state, it just confirms that basketball is his ticket to the good life: to new friendships, to the girl of his dreams, to a better future. But life is more complicated off the court. When an incident with the police threatens to break apart the bonds Adam's finally formed after a lifetime of struggle, he must make an impossible choice between his new family and the sport that's given him everything.

Catherine Alene's *The Sky between You and Me*. After the death of her mother, Raesha becomes obsessed with winning the Nationals in horse racing above all else, but at what cost? This is moving and powerful storytelling.

**Swing* by Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hess. Noah and his best friend Walt want to become cool, make the baseball team, and win over Sam, the girl Noah has loved for years. When Noah finds old love letters, Walt hatches a plan to woo Sam. But as Noah's love life and Walt's baseball career begin, the letters alter everything

In *The Football Gal* by Thatcher Heldring, it's the summer before high school, and Tessa's decision to play football, instead of running cross-country, affects her blossoming romance with football prospect Caleb, her relationship with best friends Marina and Lexie, who are counting on Tessa to try out for cross-country, and her home life with her politically ambitious mother.

[Adventure/Survival Stories](#)

Another favorite group of stories that falls under the umbrella of realistic fiction are adventure and survival stories. Think of Robinson Crusoe, a man stranded on an island for many years. Will he survive? How does he survive? What adventures does he have? Written in 1719 by Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* is based on the true story of Alexander Selkirk, a sailor who lived on an uninhabited island from 1704 to 1709. Defoe's elaborate story is considered a forerunner of adventure/survival stories. Crusoe's tale is preachy and racist but intrigued young readers for his ability to create his own world. Spinoffs of Defoe's story are termed "robinsonnades." Gary Paulsen's classic *Hatchet* is an excellent example of a novel closely following Crusoe's basic concept. Brian, the protagonist of *Hatchet*, is stranded in the Canadian wilderness and must learn to find his own food and build his own shelter. *Hatchet* became so popular that Paulsen wrote several sequels to satisfy his readers' requests to learn more about Brian. He reappeared in *The River*, *Brian's Winter*, and *Brian's Return*.

Stories of surviving hardships in the wilderness share characteristics that appeal to young adults. These stories are peopled with heroes who survive on their own against great odds, or they save someone else's life at great risk to their own life. Heroes exhibit admirable qualities of loyalty, courage, honor, faith, and sacrifice. They are self-reliant, independent problem-solvers who may have to spend long periods of time alone. They face physical hardships from weather, starvation, and injuries.

In *Not If I Save You First* by Ally Carter, six years ago, Maddie lived in Washington, D.C., with her father, a Secret Service agent assigned to the president's family, and her best friend was Logan, the president's son. After her father was wounded in an attempted kidnapping, the two of them moved to a remote cabin in Alaska and Logan never replied to her letters; but now he has suddenly turned up on her doorstep, and, while she has no intention of forgiving him for his silence, she soon realizes that first she has to save him from the winter wilderness and the men who are pursuing him. Smart and full of action, it's a thrilling read.

In *The Raft* by S. A. Bodeen, after Robie becomes frightened while staying alone in her aunt's apartment, she impulsively decides to fly home from Honolulu to Midway Atoll where she lives with her parents. Disaster strikes when the plane goes down in the ocean and sinks, leaving Robie alone on a raft with an injured copilot. At first she appears to be doomed to a slow death but manages to overcome one obstacle after another. *The Raft* is a fast read and one particularly suited to reluctant readers.

In *Notes from My Captivity* by Kathy Parks, Adrienne Cahill cares about three things: getting into a great college; becoming a revered journalist like her idol, Sydney Decay; and making her late father proud of her so when Adrienne is offered the chance to write an article that will get her into her dream school and debunk her foolish stepfather's belief that a legendary family of hermits is living in the Siberian wilderness, there's no question that she's going to fly across the world, but the Russian terrain is even less forgiving than Adrienne. And when disaster strikes, none of their extensive preparations seem to matter. Now Adrienne's being held captive by the

family she was convinced didn't exist, and her best hope for escape is to act like she cares about them, even if it means wooing the youngest son.

Feral Youth, edited by Shaun David Hutchinson. In this multiauthored novel, 10 teens are left alone in the wilderness during a three-day survival test.

In *The Upside of Falling Down* by Rebekah Crane, for Clementine Haas, finding herself is more than a nice idea. Ever since she woke up in an Irish hospital with complete amnesia, self-discovery has become her mission. They tell her she's the lone survivor of a plane crash. They tell her she's lucky to be alive. But she doesn't feel lucky. She feels . . . lost. With the relentless Irish press bearing down on her, and a father she may not even recognize on his way from America to take her home, Clementine assumes a new identity and enlists a blue-eyed Irish stranger, Kieran O'Connell, to help her escape her forgotten life . . . and start a new one.

Michael Northrop's *Trapped* extreme weather places seven high school students in mortal danger. A blizzard dumps snow on their school trapping them inside with no heat, frozen pipes, and a roof that shudders. Whether they want to or not, the teens have to make life or death choices.

**Damselfly: A Novel* by Chandra Prasad is the story of Indian American teenager Samantha Mishra, her best friend Mel Sharpe, and the other members of the Drake Rosemont Academy fencing team who are on their way to Tokyo when their plane crashes on a jungle-choked island, so while they hope for rescue, the teens will need to use all their ingenuity to survive the jungle, the old man who is stalking them—and each other.

In *I Am Still Alive* by Kate Alice Marshall, Jess hadn't seen her survivalist, off-the-grid dad in over a decade. But after a car crash killed her mother and left her injured, she was forced to move to his cabin in the remote Canadian wilderness. Just as Jess was beginning to get to know him, a secret from his past paid them a visit, leaving her father dead and Jess stranded. With only her father's dog for company, Jess must forage and hunt for food, build shelter, and keep herself warm. Some days it feels like the wild is out to destroy her, but she's stronger than she ever imagined. Jess will survive. She has to. She knows who killed her father . . . and she wants revenge.

Authors in Action: Finding My Voice by Jeff Zentner

If I were asked to name the single most important element in writing contemporary young adult novels, I wouldn't have to think very hard: voice. Why voice, as opposed to anything else, you might ask. It comes down to what voice is. Voice expresses a viewpoint. It's an attitude. It's a singular way of looking at the world. So much of young adulthood is about attitude, and viewpoint, and learning how you approach, observe, and move through the world. The voice of a book reflects all of that. It encapsulates a viewpoint, an attitude, a way of existing. In a real sense, a book's voice is its soul. It's the way a whole book speaks, above and beyond the sum total of the words on its pages.

Voice is notoriously difficult to pin down, because it can be such an ephemeral thing. This makes it difficult to teach and learn. Let me offer a way of thinking about voice: voice is choice. Voice is the creature born of every individual choice a creator makes in his or her work. For a filmmaker, this will include the lighting, the color palette, the musical cues, the camera angles, and the way actors deliver their lines. A good rule of thumb to decide if a movie director has a voice is if his or her style is easy to parody. It means that across their body of work, they're making clearly defined and consistent choices that give rise to a unique voice. The same is true of novelists.

This is why voice is so difficult to teach. You can't teach someone which choices to make at every turn in their writing. What you can do is teach someone to make choices. A good way to understand the concept of voice is to try on new voices for size. An exercise I sometimes have students do is to rewrite a passage I give them in the style of one of their favorite writers. That puts them in the choice making driver's seat. It teaches them that voice comes from zigging where most writers might zag. They see that some of the greatest writers are making choices in virtually every sentence and rarely taking the path of least resistance.

Voice is difficult—if not impossible—to go back and add to a book. Think of it like building a house. If you build a house and forget to dig a basement, it's very difficult to go back and add one later. Before I sit down to write, I ask myself a couple of questions: what do I want this book to say, and how do I want this book to say it? I won't start a book until I can hear its voice; until I know what it *is*. Once I know the unified set of choices I need to make as I'm writing a book, then I'm in a position to begin.

Jeff Zentner is the author of *New York Times*'s notable book *The Serpent King* as well as *Goodbye Days* and *Rayne & Delilah's Midnite Matinee*. He is the winner of the William C. Morris Award, the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, the International Literacy Association Award, and the Westchester Fiction Award. His books have been nominated and longlisted for the Carnegie Medal, and he has been a finalist for the Indies Choice Award and the Southern Book Prize, and been named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start.

Mysteries and Thrillers

It's clear that books and characters such as Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and the Hardy Boys paved the way to modern mysteries with fast-paced action and scary moments. As amateur crime solvers, they showed youth how to be brave, clever, and self-confident. Today's well-written dark fiction is also not to be confused with the typical "problem novel" of the 1960s. Typically, those novels "focused on one social issue and how it complicated the protagonist's life" (Hart 2004, 40). S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* is an example of this classic type of novel. The Socs, a gang of rich kids, continually push and challenge a group of "greasers." Ponyboy, one of the greasers, is a likeable protagonist who becomes fully engaged in the battles between the two groups with tragic results. While Hinton's work was groundbreaking for its time, young adult fiction has matured. It's better written, more

sophisticated, and more intense than those early novels. Other authors who were the earliest writers of young adult literature in the 1970s that often fell into this category include Robert Cormier, Paul Zindel, and M. E. Kerr. These authors wrote novels "with complex characters and rich, layered plots—key ingredients in any serious piece of literature—and they included social issues pertinent to the era" (Hart 2004, 39).

Contemporary mysteries that are well plotted and well written will grab young adults at the beginning and not let them go until the mystery is solved and, typically, every detail is worked out. Mysteries for young adults integrate meaningful themes and realistic concerns of teens into the stories. Author Joan Lowery Nixon, one of the earliest writers of young adult mysteries for young people, explained that the plot of a mystery should have two levels:

the main character's personal problem, which she must solve; and the mystery, which she must also solve. Both of these elements use suspense to keep readers in doubt, but it's the mystery itself in which writers can pull out all stops and create scenes so nerve-racking and compelling that teenagers must keep reading to find out what happens next. (Nixon 1991, 2)

In mysteries, readers want a catchy title, an initial hook, fast action, plenty of suspense, lots of details to help solve the crime, and a clear-cut conclusion. Part of the fun of reading a mystery is the challenge of unraveling a puzzle. Predictable plots and revelation of a killer half-way through the novel will lose readers faster than you can ask, "What do you like to read?"

Terror, suspense, sociopaths, and psychopaths are often hallmarks of psychological thrillers, and murder may or may not be an element of this type of mystery. Starting in the 1970s, psychological thrillers written by young adult writing legends such as Robert Cormier and Lois Duncan set the stage for the genre, and though it took great artistic license in adapting the story, Duncan's *I Know What You Did Last Summer* was ultimately made into a feature film that brought a new generation of readership to Duncan's classic tale. Robert Cormier's mastery of this type of thriller shows in his

novel *Tenderness* that tantalizes readers through the use of the viewpoint of two characters: Eric Poole, 18, who has killed his mother and stepfather and is preying on young women; Lori, 15, a runaway who is fascinated with Eric, even after she knows he's a killer. Cormier's telling is masterful, understated, and terrifying. In Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin*, readers know who killed Mr. Griffin, an English teacher. A group of high school seniors want revenge for his meanness to them, and they decide to teach him a lesson. After kidnapping him and leaving him alone all night, they return to find that he has died. The most intriguing parts of this psychological thriller are the discovery of the leader's past and the possibilities for lively discussions about the consequences of the teens involved. Though those classic dark stories may have less appeal to contemporary readers, today, fans of contemporary psychological mysteries and thrillers have a wide range of intriguing novels; a sampling of recommended titles is listed here.

Genuine Fraud by Emily Lockhart is the story of a young woman whose diabolical smarts are her ticket into a charmed life. But how many times can someone reinvent themselves? You be the judge.

In **Allegedly* by Tiffany Jackson, when she was nine years old, Mary Addison killed a little girl—*allegedly*. She never told her side of the story, and now, years later and living in a group home for troubled youth, she may finally have a reason to clear her name. Smart, intense, and with an ending you won't see coming, it's a story not to be missed.

In *Sadie* by Courtney Summers, Sadie hasn't had an easy life. Growing up on her own, she's been raising her sister Mattie in an isolated small town, but when Mattie is found dead, Sadie's entire world crumbles. After a somewhat botched police investigation, Sadie is determined to bring her sister's killer to justice and hits the road following a few meager clues to find him.

In *I Am Princess X* by Cherie Priest, once upon a time, two best friends created a princess together. Libby drew the pictures, and May wrote the tales. A few years later Libby passed away, and Princess X died with her. Now May is 16 and lonely, wandering the streets of Seattle, when she sees a sticker slapped in a corner window. When May looks around, she sees

Princess X everywhere: Stickers. Patches. Graffiti. There's an entire underground culture, focused around a webcomic at IAmPrincessX.com. The more May explores the webcomic, the more she sees disturbing similarities between Libby's story and Princess X online. And that means that only one person could have started this phenomenon—her best friend, Libby, who must be alive, but where is she and what has happened to her?

In * *Spin* by Lamar Giles, when rising star Paris Secord (aka DJ ParSec) is found dead on her turntables, it sends the local music scene reeling. No one is feeling that grief more than her shunned pre-fame best friend, Kya, and ParSec's chief groupie, Fuse—two sworn enemies who happened to be the ones who discovered her body.

In Justine Larbalestier's *My Sister Rosa*, Che and his 10-year-old sister Rosa are nearly inseparable. Is that because they move frequently with their parents? Or is it because Che is convinced Rosa is a psychopath and is terrified of what she will do if he isn't watching? Read this one to undercover the answer.

*In *Shadow Girl* by Liana Lu, Mei, hoping to escape her own family drama, begins tutoring a rich man's daughter, but when she develops feelings for her student's brother, the complications grow. Along with strange noises in the house, she can't shake the fear that there is danger lurking amid this beautiful mansion, but what is it?

The Fixer, the first in a duology, by Jennifer Lynn Barnes is a slick story about political intrigue and personal stakes. After moving in with her older sister Ivy, a "fixer" who solves problems for the elite in Washington, D.C., Tess begins to do the same for her new classmates and her private school. All is well until Tess stumbles upon a mystery where the stakes are at an all-time high—it's a page turner.

In *One of Us Is Lying* by Karen M. McManus five teenagers with little or nothing in common are forced to serve detention together after school, but only four of them survive the experience. It's a brilliant setup— *The Breakfast Club* with a murderous twist.

In Caleb Roehrig's **White Rabbit*, Rufus Holt is having the worst night of his life. It begins with the reappearance of his ex-boyfriend, Sebastian.

Things couldn't get much worse, right? But then Rufus gets a call from his sister April, begging for help. And then he and Sebastian find her, drenched in blood and holding a knife, beside the dead body of her boyfriend, Fox Whitney. April swears she didn't kill Fox—but Rufus knows her too well to believe she's telling him the whole truth.

In *A Study in Charlotte* by Brittany Cavallaro, Sherringford is home to Charlotte Holmes, the famous detective's great-great-great-granddaughter, who has inherited not only Sherlock's genius but also his volatile temperament. From everything Jamie has heard about Charlotte, it seems safer to admire her from afar. But when a Sherringford student dies under suspicious circumstances, Jamie can no longer afford to keep his distance. Jamie and Charlotte are being framed for murder, and only Charlotte can clear their names.

In **How It Went Down* by Kekla Magoon, when 16-year-old Tariq Johnson dies from two gunshot wounds, his community is thrown into an uproar. Tariq was black. The shooter, Jack Franklin, is white. In the aftermath of Tariq's death, everyone has something to say, but no two accounts of the events line up. Tariq's friends, family, and community struggle to make sense of the tragedy. In their own words, they grapple for a way to say with certainty: This is how it went down.

[Authors in Action: On Writing YA by E. Lockhart](#)

People often ask me why I write about young adults. One of the reasons is that when you go to high school, you are stuck there. People are cruel, but no matter if someone hit you yesterday, stomped on your heart, stole your best friend, talked trash about you, threatened you—you have to show up and probably sit next to that person in math class. You are legally obligated to attend. Not true of most adult situations. High school also filled with badly behaving and inexperienced humanity. Young adults are just figuring out sex, adult responsibilities, driving, money, their independence from their families of origin, their values and

identities. They're having love relationships for the first time. In this way, young adults are more interesting than most other people. They are reinventing themselves. Stuff is new. Everything matters.

—E. Lockhart, *New York Times* best-selling author of *We Were Liars*, *Genuine Fraud*, *Fly on the Wall*, *The Boyfriend List*, *The Boy Book*, *Dramarama*, *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*, *How to Be Bad*, *The Treasure Map of Boys*, and *Real Live Boyfriends*.

Librarians in Action!: Building Readers Through Relationships

Alicia Montgomery knew she was destined to be a teacher from an early age. After playing school with her sister for years, she graduated from Concordia University in 2003 with an education degree and began teaching seventh-grade English in Wichita Falls, Texas, at Kirby Junior High. After three years, she moved and continued teaching in Coppell, Texas, at Coppell Middle School East. She loved her time in the classroom teaching English for seven years and realized being a librarian would allow her to work with all the teachers and students instead of just her own. She graduated with her masters in library science degree from the University of North Texas in 2010 and began her librarian career at Town Center Elementary in Coppell, Texas, in 2012. In 2016 she joined the staff of Argyle High School in Argyle, Texas, where she is currently the librarian. She is passionate about connecting students with the books they need, collaborating with teachers to extend the library into the classroom, and making the library a place where all students feel welcome.

Connecting Teens to Books through Service and Relationships

By Alicia Montgomery

When I consider the success of my library program, two words come to mind: service and relationships. My job is to provide a service to my teachers and my students. It is my job to make sure they have the materials and resources they need to do their best work and be successful. Whether that be a collection of websites, a curated list of articles, a new digital tool, a textbook, a YA title they can find themselves in, help troubleshooting an issue with a Chromebook, or just assistance printing, that's where I come in. Being ready to help at point-of-need means I have to be flexible and ready for just about anything.

In order to be the one that students and teachers think of to help them with their needs, it is also my job, likely my most important job, to have a positive relationship with all my patrons. I learned about the power of relationships from a former principal of mine. She worked hard to build an incredible school culture around the belief that relationships were the number one most important factor to student success. It was evident in everything we did inside and outside of the classroom: listening to students, making sure they knew we cared for them, asking them about their interests, giving them a safe space to share their opinions, and teaching them some content along the way. When those students knew they were cared for, they worked hard, and it showed. I witnessed the power of relationships and brought that experience with me into the library. It is a priority for me to have a library that students want to be in and teachers want to use. If I am not able to get students through the doors, I cannot get books in their hands. If I cannot get teachers to reach out for assistance, I miss out on helping their students.

Because service and relationships are so vital, I am deliberate about what I do in the library. Before school starts the library is open for

students. Students choose to do what they like: homework, read, visit with friends, play checkers (a favorite in our library), use the computers, work on a jigsaw puzzle (another favorite), watch videos on their phones, or chat with me. The same can be said of lunchtime and after school. Most days, we operate on a unique schedule that allows for an extended lunch period where students attend clubs, tutorials, and enjoy extra time with friends. Many of those students choose to be in the library during that time, and it is a great opportunity for me to visit with them. I walk around the library with the intent to monitor students, but I also ask them about their day, the game they played in yesterday, the book they're reading. I use that time as a chance to build up those relationships. The better I know my students and their interests, the more likely I am to be able to get a book in their hands. With few exceptions, if I am on campus, the library is open because I want students to know I am always here for them.

Even small positive interactions help build positive relationships. I have candy jars on the circulation desk, and the students love it. When they stop by for something sweet, it not only promotes a positive experience in the library, but it also provides an easy conversation starter and an opportunity for me to chat with them. I do my best to have something fun they can do at the desk, like a jigsaw puzzle, coloring poster, and students have loved the sticker mosaics hanging in the library as well. They have had fun putting those together and seeing what picture emerges. Those small details give the library an open, fun personality for students.

Our weekly book club meetings have been another powerful way to help grow the library and my relationships with students. We meet one day a week during that extended lunch time and chat about all things books. These students are the first to see new books that arrive (and claim the first checkout); they are the ones who often share ideas for creative displays, and they also accompany me each spring to a local book festival where we all get excited about meeting our favorite young adult authors. One of my book club goals is to provide the group at least

two books each year that we all read together and use for conversations. I choose a few titles that I think will appeal to the majority of the group; I share those with the students through a booktalk, and they vote on their first choice. This has worked well and always sparks discussion about the books even before we start reading. I also encourage student book suggestions and keep a notebook at the circulation desk for just that. If a student requests a book or gives me a title he or she thinks we need to have, I ask them to write it down. When I am working on a book order, I make sure to pull out that notebook and add the titles I feel are appropriate. It is such a great way for me to show students that they have a say in what we offer, their voices matter a great deal, and they can trust me to listen to them. That has gone far in building relationships with students.

Our campus has built a reputation in the North Texas area of being strong in sports and academics. The students involved in those areas have a great deal to be proud of, but that does not include all students on campus. Some young people struggle to find their place in an extracurricular activity, and some of these have found their way into the library and made it their place. Seeing students, who didn't otherwise have a connection, light up when they talk about books or find something in common with another student is incredibly rewarding. This is how I know my library's services are successful.

[Booktalking](#)

What is a booktalk? Simply stated, it's a teaser, a bit of advertising to intrigue readers, like a movie trailer. A booktalk is an effective and inexpensive way to encourage young adults to check out books and read! It can be daunting to teens to enter a library filled with thousands of books and try to choose something "good" to read. In schools they may have limited time to do so. By booktalking frequently and briefly, librarians give

teens places to start looking. Hearing booktalks helps teens determine what they might like to read. Booktalks offer the opportunity to build a relationship between a teen and a librarian.

The content of a basic booktalk can be expressed by answering the following questions:

1. What's the title?
2. Who's the author?
3. What's the basic plot?
4. Who's the main character?
5. What's the problem faced by the character?
6. What's an intriguing way to end the booktalk?

Once those questions are answered, you have an outline of your booktalk. Next write a draft of your booktalk keeping the following steps in mind:

1. Show enthusiasm for the book.
2. Make eye contact with individuals in the audience.
3. Describe a fascinating character, setting, event, or conversation.
4. Read a few sentences or a paragraph from the book.
5. Reflect the tone of the book in everything that you say.
6. Make a concluding comment or transition to another book.

A Checklist to Successful Booktalking

What should you, the librarian, do to make sure your booktalks are successful and have potential readers clamoring for books?

- _____ Read the book, the whole book!
- _____ Read reviews of the book.
- _____ Love the books you booktalk! Skip those you personally don't like.
- _____ Introduce and end each booktalk with the title and the author's name.
- _____ Don't tell about events past a third to a half of the book. Leave some surprises for the readers.
- _____ If you read a section from the book, choose a short one.
- _____ Keep it brief—three to five minutes for each book.

- _____ Don't deliver a review of the book! Literary criticism isn't the point of a booktalk.
- _____ Practice your booktalk so that you are confident.
- _____ Choose a variety of genres, including poetry and informational books.
- _____ Be sure you have books that have broad appeal.
- _____ If you booktalk several books, use a general theme, such as "Survival," "New Books," "Creepy Books," or "Tough Decisions" to loosely tie the books together.
- _____ Develop smooth transitions between books. A general theme can help with this.
- _____ Include both lighthearted and serious books.
- _____ Stay true to the viewpoint of the book. If it's a serious story, let your audience know by the selections you choose and the way you talk about the book.
- _____ Keep a record of your booktalks so you can use them with the same grades another year if appropriate.
- _____ Consider creating a digital version of your booktalk that can be shared with readers via digital school or library sources or on the social media platforms they use.
- _____ Check Young Adults' Choices Awards lists for titles popular with teens at <http://www.reading.org>.
- _____ Peruse Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults annual lists for quirky topical lists online at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/poppaper/>.

Conclusion

The best modern realistic fiction has the ability to draw readers into situations that are so real that readers will think the events have actually taken place. Those written in first person point of view make the characters easy for young adults to identify with, as if the characters are real friends or foes. Whether it's the story of families and friendships, love and sexuality, sports, action adventures or something darker and more intense, realistic fiction serves teen readers well as it encompasses such a wide variety of genres and topics that most readers can find a type of book or a title that will resonant with them long after reading the final page.

I write YA because teenagers are real, actual people with lives that matter and that deserve to be explored. I write YA because as a high school English teacher I know that teenagers are far smarter and more aware than we give them credit for, and they deserve nuanced, complex stories that tackle tough issues and complex problems. I write YA because teenage readers are some of the most passionate, enthusiastic readers a writer could ever have. It is an honor to write for them.

—Jennifer Mathieu, author of *Moxie* and *The Truth about Alice*

Assignments in Action: Realistic Fiction for Discussion

1. How realistic is realistic fiction? Does it matter if it's realistic? Can it be too real for youthful readers?
2. Do young athletes read sports fiction? Interview or survey a basketball team or a football team. If ball players and other athletes don't read sports fiction, who does?
3. How does humor for adults differ from humor for young adults? Why does knowing the difference matter to librarians?
4. What do young adults who have lost a loved one want to read? Are they comforted by reading fiction about grieving teens, or do they want to read something totally different to escape their own situation? How can a librarian find out?
5. Are dark realistic books published today a reflection of our society, or do they influence society?
6. Why are young adults attracted to mysteries and psychological thrillers?
7. What were your favorite realistic novels when you were a young adult? Why?

Chapter 4

Historical Fiction

I write for teens because they are simply awesome! I love this time in a person's life because everything seems possible and there are many paths that their lives can take. I truly believe that our young people will make the world better. I also think historical fiction is important for teen readers because it gives them an understanding of the past and insight into current and future events when faced with similar circumstances. When I am writing a historical novel I often feel like a detective who is trying to discover all the details that will transport the reader back in time. This means doing research . . . lots of it! I will read primary and secondary sources, visit the actual locations (if possible), speak to people who have knowledge of the events, and envision myself as living through those times. I want to try and learn about the smallest details of my characters' lives . . . even if those details sometimes don't even make it into the book.

—*Christina Diaz Gonzalez is the award-winning author of The Red Umbrella, A Thunderous Whisper, Moving Target, and many other beloved books for young readers*

What exactly is historical fiction? Though the definition likely varies depending on the expert asked, in simplest terms, historical fiction is fiction that takes readers to the past through settings, events, and characters that clearly evoke a time from the past. Historical fiction typically consists of novels set in a period before the author's lifetime (though there are notable exceptions), and it's a genre that tells fictional stories while weaving in historical facts, people, and places. What timeline qualifies as historical fiction also varies by definition, but most scholars agree that a story is set at least 20 years in the past. These stories allow readers often tasked with learning the important dates and events in history with the opportunity to better understand the magnitude of these events by connecting with characters whose personal stories provide a way to explore and personalize that event in history. Though applied in a slightly different context, the best historical fiction allows for what Dr. Rudine Bishop refers to as a "windows"

experience— glimpse into a life unlike the reader's experiences, at least in terms of setting (2015).

For some teens, reading about the past may seem initially unappealing; often, due to both negative experiences with textbooks and the teachable nature of the genre, young adults are often assigned historical fiction for required reading that may result in a lack of great enthusiasm for the genre. The lesson to be learned from this is that while young people may learn from fiction about history, the emphasis of introducing historical young adult novels to readers should be on the pleasure of the story. Since historical fiction can be a hard sell to teen readers, it's critical to connect them and their teachers (if you work in a school) with the very best historical fiction available.

Librarians should also strongly consider conducting a diversity audit (described in [Chapter 1](#)) on their existing collections to be certain that a wide variety of points of view, experiences, and representations within a historical fiction collection are present as older titles in the genre may be ripe with racial and cultural stereotypes. Even older award-winning titles may be problematic, and data from a diversity audit will also allow for more targeted collection development to ensure historically and culturally accurate choices that have wide appeal to readers are selected.

Characteristics of the Best Historical Fiction

It's expected that the best historical fiction will have those qualities of any "good" story: well-developed characters and plot, a believable setting, a readable and exciting style, and a worthwhile underlying theme. In historical fiction settings, characters, and events are especially vital to developing the feeling that readers are experiencing the past. Setting should be steeped in accurate details of place and time. Significant events establish

a story in a particular time and place. Characters personalize history by showing how societal conditions affect their lives.

Those same elements of setting, characters, and events can become traps for poor writing. Setting can fail to thoroughly integrate the historical scene into other story elements. Characters may be stereotypes of a particular period; the emphasis may be on teaching history rather than on storytelling. Mistakes or anachronisms may occur, incorrectly assigning certain values or technology to a time period (Donelson and Nilsen 2009). Like the other genres featured, historical fiction does not exist in a vacuum; it dramatizes and humanizes the past, offering readers a window into the past or even a virtual experience of living in another time.

[Interview with Jennifer L. Holm](#)

Jennifer L. Holm is the *New York Times* best-selling author and three-time Newbery Honor-winner author of the historical fiction trilogy, *Boston Jane*. She's also the author of *Our Only May Amelia*, *Penny from Heaven*, *Turtle from Paradise*, *The Fourteenth Goldfish*, and many other beloved books for young people. Her novel *Full of Beans* won the 2017 Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction.

Though the audience for your body of work is broad (your books are beloved by young people of all ages), what are the best things about writing historical fiction for young people, and what are the greatest challenges? Did you always know this was an audience you'd choose to write for as you began writing or did that happen more organically while you were creating?

It happened very organically. I started writing my first historical fiction book, *Our Only May Amelia*, as a way to learn more about my father's family history. He was the son of Finnish immigrants. Along the way, I got sucked into all the crazy stories. From how they tried to re-create their version of Finnish life here in America by building saunas on their farms to the heartache of losing a baby.

The hardest part is to not get bogged down in what I call the "rabbit hole." You can get almost *too* excited and obsessively research bits of history that ends up not adding to the story. The story has to come first always.

What's it like looking for untold stories in history? Does that make your research process feel like detective work? Can you share briefly about that process and the obligations that are married to this kind of writing?

That's the best part of writing historical fiction for me: discovering bits of neglected history. Certain things get a lot of play—ars, royalty, big discoveries. But there were lots of really interesting events that you never hear about.

For example, my father's family settled in southwest Washington in the 1800s. They were very involved in the oyster industry. The oyster craze was just like the gold rush and made people rich. I found it fascinating.

Also, I'm generally more interested in the things that touched the everyday life of children or teens. For the Boston Jane trilogy, I had to immerse myself in all things 1850s. What would a teen wear? What was school like? What were everyday concerns? Because life was really, really different. Doing laundry was a multi-day event for a family. It really makes me grateful for all the conveniences we have today!

What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature?

Historical fiction is a great hook to get kids, especially many boys who prefer non-fiction excited about reading. Some of my biggest fans are boys. They can recite to me details in my books by heart.

Selecting Historical Fiction

Unless you are a historical scholar or expert, it may be difficult to evaluate the accuracy of a historical novel. While historical accuracy is not everything, it is important for the author to understand what history to include and what can be omitted. It's almost impossible for any writer to not be influenced by their own biases; historical fiction is a reflection of the time in which it was written and the time it portrays, and whether intentional or not, an author's experiences and personal thoughts on politics, and religious, social, economic, and political beliefs will likely come into the story. In addition to using collection development resources and awards and notable book lists while building a library collection, the following considerations for selection of historical young adult literature will help guide your book acquisitions. Ask yourself:

- Are the historical events accurate and authentic?
- Do the events, attitudes, and behaviors reflect the values and spirit of the time?
- Is the plot interesting and enjoyable, and are the events and situations historically possible and plausible?
- Is the dialogue realistic and conversational in tone?
- Are various points of view represented?
- Are the characters and situations believable?
- Do the themes provide insights into contemporary issues and problems?

Novels about War and Conflicts

Historical fiction often focuses on stories of conflict; in times of great moral crisis, what we consider personal history is made through the actions or reactions to events happening in our lives; this is no different from the motivations or call to action of characters in historical fiction. Though the topics are complex and often dark, inevitably, many historical novels focus on times of conflict or even war. For young adult readers, stories of conflicts and war offer the opportunity for great drama, excitement, heroism, tragedy, and even hope. One of the earliest historical fiction selections for young people was Esther Forbes's Newbery Medal winner, *Johnny Tremain*. This

novel was taught for many years in classrooms across the United States, but in recent years, it's replaced by other titles focused on American history. Today, Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Chains*, a National Book Award finalist, is one of selections utilized widely for instruction. The story is set at the outbreak of the American Revolution where 13-year-old Isabel, a slave, fights for her own personal freedom.

Another teen favorite historical fiction novel is Walter Dean Myers's **Fallen Angels*, which offers readers another quality experience in historical fiction with a realistic depiction of the Vietnam War told through the view of Perry, a Harlem teenager. Perry and his comrades face the terrible violence of war through combat on the front lines. Readers can't avoid being caught up in the riveting action and the fate of this group of young black men. In an interview with Meyers, he reminds himself when writing "to keep my focus on the characters," and to ask himself, "How do my characters react to what's going on around them?" (Miller and Parker 2007, 688). Like Anderson and Myers' novels, young adults are often fascinated with the darker side of the past; they are drawn to it with curiosity and a sense of intrigue. A topical favorite of teens are books that depict personal stories set during World War II and the Holocaust. The book recommendations that follow showcase other well-reviewed and award-winning historical fiction titles that focus on conflicts around the world and in the United States. Selections that also fit the "Own Voices" distinction are labeled with a*.

In **What the Night Sings* by Vesper Stamper, after losing her family and everything she knew in the Nazi concentration camps, Gerta is finally liberated, only to find herself completely alone. Without her Papa, her music, or even her true identity, she must move past the task of surviving and onto living her life. Now, in the displaced persons camp, Gerta must choose how to build a new future.

**Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys. It's 1941 and 15-year-old Lina, her mother, and her brother are pulled from their Lithuanian home by Soviet guards and sent to Siberia, where her father is sentenced to death in a prison camp. While she fights for her life, she vows to honor her family and the thousands like hers by burying her story in a jar on Lithuanian soil.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak. In Nazi Germany, Liesl steals books and learns of cruelty and kindness as Death tells the story and releases souls from their misery.

Code Name Verity by Elizabeth Wein. In 1943, a British fighter plane crashes in Nazi-occupied France, and the survivor tells a tale of friendship, war, espionage, and great courage as she relates what she must do to survive while keeping secret all that she can.

**A Thunderous Whisper* by Christina Diaz Gonzalez. Ani believes she is just an insignificant whisper of a 12-year-old girl in a loud world. Then she meets Mathias. His family has just moved to Guernica. Ani thinks Mathias is more like lightning— boy of action. Mathias' father is part of a spy network, and soon Ani finds herself helping him deliver messages to other members of the underground. After her town Guernica is destroyed by Nazi bombers, she and Mathias make plans to fight back in their own unique way.

**Anna and the Swallow Man* by Gavriel Savit. When her university professor father is sent by the Gestapo to a concentration camp, seven-year-old Anna travels the Polish countryside with the mysterious Swallow Man during World War II.

Girl in the Blue Coat by Monica Hess. In 1943 in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, Hanneke helps her family survive by procuring and distributing blackmarket goods for customers, one of whom is hiding a Jewish girl. When the girl vanishes mysteriously, Hanneke takes up the case, unwittingly joining the Resistance as her eyes are opened to the war's horrors.

**Salt to the Sea* by Ruta Sepetys. Winter 1945. World War II. Four refugees. Four stories. Each one born of a different home. Each one hunted, and haunted, by tragedy, lies, war. As thousands desperately flock to the coast in the midst of a Soviet advance, four paths converge, vying for passage aboard the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a ship that promises safety and freedom. But not all promises can be kept.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne. Bruno's family moves to a new house far away from his previous home. Nearby he decides to explore the area around the long fence and finds a boy his age on the other side.

Recommended for high school-age readers, the ending is shocking and devastating.

**Once* by Morris Gleitzman follows the journey of Felix, a Jewish boy in Poland who continually hides from the Nazis and who witnesses horrific killings.

Rose under Fire by Elizabeth Wein. When young American pilot Rose Justice is captured by Nazis and sent to Ravensbrück, the notorious women's concentration camp, she finds hope in the impossible through the loyalty, bravery, and friendship of her fellow prisoners.

**Mare's War* by Tanita S. Davis. Teens Octavia and Tali learn about strength, independence, and courage when they are forced to take a car trip with their grandmother, who tells about growing up black in 1940s Alabama and serving in Europe during World War II as a member of the Women's Army Corps.

**Code Talker: A Novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two* by Joseph Bruchac. After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay and other Navajo men are recruited by the Marines to become Code Talkers sending messages during World War II in their native tongue.

In **FlyGirl* by Sherri Smith, all Ida Mae Jones wants to do is fly. Her daddy was a pilot, and years after his death she feels closest to him when she's in the air. But as a young black woman in 1940s Louisiana, she knows the sky is off limits to her, until America enters World War II, and the army forms the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Ida has a chance to fulfill her dream if she's willing to use her light skin to pass as a white girl. She wants to fly more than anything, but Ida soon learns that denying one's self and family is a heavy burden and ultimately, it's not what you do but who you are that's most important.

**The War Outside* by Monica Hesse. It's 1944, and World War II is raging across Europe and the Pacific. The war seemed far away from Margot in Iowa and Haruko in Colorado until they were uprooted to dusty Texas, all because of the places their parents once called home: Germany and Japan. Haruko and Margot meet at the high school in Crystal City, a "family

internment camp" for those accused of colluding with the enemy. With everything around them falling apart, Margot and Haruko find solace in their growing, secret friendship. But in a prison the government has deemed full of spies, can they trust anyone—even each other?

Other Historical Eras in the United States

Of course, historical fiction is far more about stories than about wars and conflicts. The following recommended young historical fiction novels offer insight into a sampling of important events throughout American history.

In *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, V.I.: The Pox Party* by M. T. Anderson, various diaries, letters, and other manuscripts chronicle the experiences of Octavian, a young African American, from birth to age 16, as he is brought up as part of a science experiment in the years leading up to and during the Revolutionary War.

**The Downstairs Girl* by Stacey Lee. Set in the New South, by day, 17-year-old Jo Kuan works as a lady's maid for the cruel daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Atlanta. But by night, Jo moonlights as the pseudonymous author of a newspaper advice column for the genteel Southern lady, "Dear Miss Sweetie." When her column becomes wildly popular, she uses the power of the pen to address some of society's ills, but she's not prepared for the backlash that follows when her column challenges fixed ideas about race and gender as while her opponents clamor to uncover the secret identity of Miss Sweetie, a mysterious letter sets Jo off on a search for her own past and the parents who abandoned her as a baby. But when her efforts put her in the crosshairs of Atlanta's most notorious criminal, Jo must decide whether she, a girl who used to live in the shadows, is ready to step into the light.

In *Boston Jane: An Adventure* by Jennifer L. Holm, it's 1855. The unknown wilds of the Pacific Northwest— land not yet tamed, and certainly not fitting for a proper young lady! Yet that's just where Miss Jane Peck finds

herself. After a tumultuous childhood on the wrong side of Philadelphia high society, Jane is trying to put aside her reckless ways and be accepted as a proper young lady. And so, when handsome William Baldt proposes, she joyfully accepts and prepares to join him in a world away from her home in Washington Territory. But Miss Hepplewhite's straitlaced finishing school was hardly preparation for the treacherous months at sea it takes to get there, the haunting loss she'll face on the way, or the colorful characters and challenging life that await her on the frontier.

In *The Red Umbrella* by Christina Diaz Gonzalez, in 1961 after Castro has come to power in Cuba, 14-year-old Lucia and her 7-year-old brother are sent to the United States when her parents, who are not in favor of the new regime, fear that the children will be taken away from them as others have been.

In *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly, 16-year-old Mattie, determined to attend college and be a writer against the wishes of her father and boyfriend, takes a job at a hotel in 1906 where the death of a guest renews her determination to live her own life.

Out of Darkness by Ashley Hope Perez. Loosely based on a school explosion that took place in New London, Texas, in 1937, this is the story of two teenagers—Naomi, who is Mexican, and Wash, who is black—and their dealings with race, segregation, love, and the forces that destroy people.

What I Saw and How I Lied by Judy Blundell. In 1947, with her jovial stepfather, Joe, back from the war and family life returning to normal, teenage Evie, smitten by the handsome young ex-GI who seems to have a secret hold on Joe, finds herself caught in a complicated web of lies whose devastating outcomes change her life and that of her family forever.

**Burn Baby Burn* by Meg Medina. Nora Lopez is 17 during the infamous New York summer of 1977, when the city is besieged by arson, a massive blackout, and a serial killer named Son of Sam who shoots young women on the streets. Nora's family life isn't going so well either: her bullying brother, Hector, is growing more threatening by the day, her mother is helpless and falling behind on the rent, and her father calls only on holidays. All Nora wants is to turn 18 and be on her own. And while there is a cute new guy

who started working with her at the deli, is dating even worth the risk when the killer likes picking off couples who stay out too late?

**The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* by Sonia Manzano. It is 1969 in Spanish Harlem, and 14-year-old Evelyn Serrano is trying hard to break free from her conservative Puerto Rican surroundings; but when her activist grandmother comes to stay and the neighborhood protests start, things get a lot more complicated—and dangerous.

Out of the Easy by Ruta Sepetys. Josie, the 17-year-old daughter of a French Quarter prostitute, is striving to escape 1950 New Orleans and enroll at prestigious Smith College when she becomes entangled in a murder investigation.

In **Under the Painted Sky* by Stacy Lee, all Samantha wanted was to move back to New York and pursue her music, which was difficult enough being a Chinese girl in Missouri in 1849. Then her fate takes a turn for the worse after a tragic accident leaves her with nothing and she breaks the law in self-defense. With Annamae, a runaway slave she met at the scene of her crime, the two flee town for the unknown frontier. But life on the Oregon trail is unsafe for two girls, and with the law closing in on them and new setbacks each day, the girls quickly learn there are not many places one can hide on the open trail.

Three Rivers Rising by Jame Richards. Sixteen-year-old Celestia is a wealthy member of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, where she meets and falls in love with Peter, a hired hand who lives in the valley below. By the time of the torrential rains that lead to the disastrous Johnstown flood of 1889, she has been disowned by her family and is staying with him in Johnstown.

**Willow* by Tonya Cherie Hegamin. In 1848 Willow, a 15-year-old educated slave girl, faces an inconceivable choice—between bondage and freedom, family and love—a free-born, 17-year-old Cato, a black man, takes it upon himself to sneak as many fugitive slaves to freedom as he can on the Mason-Dixon Line.

The Fire Horse Girl by Kay Honeyman. When Jade Moon, born in the unlucky year of the Fire Horse, and her father immigrate to America in 1923

and are detained at Angel Island Immigration Station. Jade Moon is determined to find a way through and prove that she is not cursed.

In **If I Ever Get Out of Here* by Eric L Gansworth, Lewis "Shoe" Blake from the Tuscarora Reservation has a new friend, George Haddonfield from the local Air Force base, but in 1975 upstate New York there is a lot of tension and hatred between Native Americans and whites; and Lewis is not sure that he can rely on friendship.

[Capturing Stories from the Past from around the World](#)

My Lady Jane by Cynthia Hand, Brodi Ashton, Jodi Meadows. This historical version of the story of the teenage Lady Jane Grey, England's queen for nine days, is given a fantastical twist and a much happier ending for all involved.

Bloody Jack by L. A. Meyer. Reduced to begging and thievery in the streets of London, a 13-year-old orphan disguises herself as a boy and connives her way onto a British warship set for high sea adventure in search of pirates.

The Betrayal of Maggie Blair by Elizabeth Laird. In 17th-century Scotland, Maggie has to run for her life after her grandmother is accused of witchcraft.

In Philip Pullman's *Ruby in the Smoke*, Sally is searching desperately for the murderer of her father. Set in Victorian London, Sally encounters scalawags, opium dens, a legendary ruby, and the mysterious "seven blessings." Two sequels follow for those who want to find out what happens to Sally next: *The Shadow in the North* and *The Tiger in the Well*.

In *Revolution*, Jennifer Donnelly artfully weaves two girls' stories into one unforgettable account of life, loss, and enduring love set in modern and historical Paris. When Andi, angry at everything in her life, finds a centuries-old diary, the ghosts begin to walk off the page. Alexandrine, the owner of the journal, lived during the French Revolution. until, on a midnight journey through the catacombs, words transcend paper and time,

an until, on a midnight journey through the catacombs, words transcend paper and time, and the past becomes terrifyingly present.

A Skinful of Shadows by Frances Hardinge. Set in the early part of the English Civil War, Makepeace is an illegitimate daughter of the aristocratic Fellmotte family, and as such shares their unique hereditary gift: the capacity to be possessed by ghosts. Reluctant to accept her appointed destiny as vessel for a coterie of her ancestors, she escapes. As she flees the pursuing Fellmottes across war-torn England, she accumulates a motley crew of her own allies—utcasts, misfits, criminals, and one extremely angry dead bear.

**The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist* by Margarita Engle. In free verse, she evokes the voice of Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, a book-loving writer, feminist, and abolitionist who courageously fought injustice in 19th-century Cuba. The title includes historical notes, excerpts from her writings, biographical information, and source notes.

Wildthorn by Jane Eagland. Seventeen-year-old Louisa Cosgrove has never enjoyed the life of the pampered, protected life girls of wealth were expected to follow in 19th-century England. It was too confining. She would have much rather been like her older brother, allowed to play marbles, go to school, become a doctor. But little does she know how far her family would go to kill her dreams and desires until one day she finds herself locked away in an insane asylum. Everyone, including the doctors and nurses, insists on calling her Lucy Childs, not Louisa Cosgrove. Stripped of her identity, Louisa is left to wonder and try to figure out who has tried to destroy her life.

**Climbing the Stairs* by Padma Venkatraman. In India, in 1941, when her father becomes brain-damaged in a nonviolent protest march, 15-year-old Vidya and her family are forced to move in with her father's extended family and become accustomed to a totally different way of life.

Anahita's Woven Riddle by Meghan Nuttall Sayres. In Iran, more than 100 years ago, a young girl with three suitors gets permission from her father and a holy man to weave into her wedding rug a riddle to be solved by her future husband, which will ensure that he has wit to match hers.

**Daughter of Xanadu* by Dori Jones Yang. Emmajin, the 16-year-old eldest granddaughter of Khublai Khan, becomes a warrior and falls in love with explorer Marco Polo in 13th-century China.

The Passion of Dolssa by Julie Berry. In 13th-century Provence, Dolssa, branded a heretic after claiming to speak with God, flees her hometown. She's rescued by Botille, a matchmaker who runs a tavern with her sisters. Their lives become inexorably linked when Dolssa's gifts as a healer and miracle worker bring the church's wrath to the village.

Wolf by Wolf by Ryan Graudin. The first book in a duology about an alternate version of 1956 where the Axis powers won World War II and hold an annual motorcycle race across their conjoined continents to commemorate their victory.

In Aisha Saeed's **Amal Unbound*, in Pakistan, Amal holds on to her dream of being a teacher even after becoming an indentured servant to pay off her family's debt to the wealthy and corrupt Khan family.

**In Darkness* by Nick Lake. In the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake, Shorty, a poor, 15-year-old gang member from the slums of Site Soleil, is trapped in the rubble of a hospital and as he grows weaker, he has visions and memories of his life of violence, of his lost twin sister, and of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who liberated Haiti from French rule in 1804.

In **The Night Diary* by Veera Hiranandani, Nisha, forced to flee her home with her Hindu family during the 1947 partition of India, tries to find her voice and make sense of the world falling apart around her by writing to her deceased Muslim mother in the pages of her diary.

[Authors in Action: On Writing Historical Fiction by Ruta Sepetys](#)

I always knew that I wanted to write for teens. Young readers are deep thinkers and deep feelers; they read books with a pure sense of emotional truth and have a strong sense of justice. Also, books we read as teens stay with us for our entire lives. I think everyone can remember

a book we read at 14 that swept us away or made a profound impression. Those books remain in our “reader psyche” into adulthood, while books we read as adults can’t seem to elbow their way in with the same impact. I’ll never forget reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* for the first time. The experience and feelings are still “with” me.

Since I’m writing about underrepresented periods of history, I want to share the stories with young people because they’re the ones who will carry our fading stories into the future. Because teens are an extremely honest audience, one of the greatest challenges for me personally is writing about a topic in a way that will have equal appeal to male and female young readers.

When I was young, I loved Nancy Drew and I think that’s actually part of what drew me to historical fiction. Writing historical fiction is like being a detective. I love discovering secret details, tracking down hidden facts, and hidden heroes. Sometimes history can be perceived as boring. But through characters and story, historical statistics become human and suddenly we care for people we’ve never met, we can find their country on a map, and then—the history matters. Giving voice to those who will never have a chance to tell their story is inspiring.

As a writer of historical fiction, I feel a sense of responsibility to research as thoroughly as possible in order for the story to feel authentic. If there are survivors or witnesses who are still alive, I will travel great distances to meet with them. I’m writing about events that I didn’t experience so witness testimony, even through old journals and archival material, is essential. Time period detail, emotional detail, sensory detail, and visual detail help immerse the reader in the scene and setting. My goal is always to honor the history and those who experienced it, but without perpetuating anger of the past. It’s important for me to show multiple sides or viewpoints.

I’m considered a “crossover” author as my novels are read by both teens and adults. While the YA category doesn’t necessarily keep me grounded, constant interaction with young readers does. I spend a lot of time visiting schools and the students don’t hold back. Prior to a recent

presentation a student leaned over to me and said, “You don’t have to try so hard. We already like you because you got us out of class.” When I’m considering a topic for a new novel, I always run the idea by teens first. They ask probing questions about the potential plot that helps me think critically about the history I’m considering. That keeps me grounded and informs the approach I should take.

I’d like to thank librarians profusely for even considering historical fiction for their young adult collection; historical fiction wraps its arms around many genres and therefore can satisfy many different teen readers, not just those who enjoy history. There are historical thrillers, historical romance, historical fantasy, and recently someone described my novel *Between Shades of Gray* as “hystopian.” Historical is a broad genre and sits on the shoulders of truth, so if the reader enjoys the story there is always more for him or her to research, discover, and uncover. But most of all, I’d ask librarians to think about this—When history remains hidden in the shadows, those who experienced that time period or history (and those related to them) feel isolated and forgotten. When we acknowledge someone’s story or sacrifice, we take a step toward restoring human dignity. So each historical novel on their library shelf honors historical memory. It validates a human being, or a family, a community, or perhaps even an entire country. That is work of enduring consequence. That is the work of librarians and that’s one of the reasons librarians are heroes!

~ Ruta Sepetys is an internationally acclaimed author of historical fiction published in over 50 countries and 36 languages. Sepetys is considered a “crossover” novelist as her books are read by both students and adults worldwide. Her novels *Between Shades of Gray* and *Out of the Easy* are both *New York Times* best sellers and international best sellers. Her latest novel, *Salt to the Sea*, is a number 1 *New York Times* best seller and winner of the Carnegie Medal. Her books have won or been shortlisted for over 40 book prizes, are included on over 20 state reading lists, and are currently in development for film and television.

Awards for Historical Fiction

Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction

In 1982, historical fiction writer and Newbery-winning author Scott O'Dell established the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction to encourage other writers to focus on historical fiction. The annual award of \$5,000 goes to an author for a meritorious book published in the previous year for children or young adults. In this way, Scott O'Dell hoped to increase the interest of young readers in the historical background that has helped to shape their country and their world. To be eligible, a book must be published by a U.S. publisher; the setting must be the "New World" (South, Central, or North America), and the author must be a U.S. citizen. Award details and past winners can be found at: <https://scottodell.com/the-scott-odell-award>.

Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People

For a helpful list of books focused on social studies that regularly includes historical fiction selections, search for the annual annotated book list, "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People," created by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in cooperation with the Children's Book Council (CBC). The list is published annually at <https://www.socialstudies.org/publications/notables>.

Jane Addams Children's Book Award

The Jane Addams Children's Book Award annually recognizes Children's books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in

thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people. A national committee of members with passion for and expertise in Children's literature and social justice is responsible for making the choices each year. Criteria for the award state that the book should:

- exemplify literary, visual, and aesthetic excellence and
- invite dialogue, passionate response, purposeful reflection, and deep questioning.

Additional award criteria can be found at <http://www.janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org/>.

National Book Award for Young People's Literature

The National Book Award for Young People's Literature is one of four annual National Book Awards, which are given by the National Book Foundation to recognize outstanding literary work by U.S. citizens. The category "Young People's Literature" was established in 1996. A panel of judges selects a long list of 10 titles per category, which is then narrowed to five finalists, and a winner is announced at the awards ceremony in the fall. Additional National Book Award categories and information are listed at its website: <http://www.nationalbook.org/>.

Librarians in Action!: Exploring the World through Books

Jill Bellomy, the librarian at Highland Park Middle School and lead librarian at Highland Park ISD in Dallas, Texas, earned her masters of library science (MLS) at the University of North Texas. She has served as chair of the Texas Lone Star Reading List Committee, team leader for the Young Adults Choices' Reading List, and member of the 2016 Caldecott Award Selection Committee.

One World, Many Stories: Reading to Learn, Understand, and Connect

By Jill Bellomy

Reading a story about a place, culture, or event brings it to life in the way a textbook blurb or list of facts never can. Struggling alongside Nisha through the letters of *The Night Diary* by Veera Hiranandani provides readers an unforgettable view into turbulent India in 1947. Or, trying desperately to find hope with Joana, Emilia, and Florian in Ruta Sepety's *Salt to the Sea* adds humanity to one of the world's greatest tragedies. These are just two examples of the kinds of books I want to ensure my students are including in their reading choices. Books that expand their worldview encourage them to see beyond their own experiences, challenge their thinking, and inspire them to make change in the world.

As a middle school librarian, I filled my library shelves with excellent books such as these and recommended them to my students. Some read and enjoyed them. But, many of the titles were continually overlooked and the stories went unread. Then Asiya Roland, a new world studies teacher in our building, approached me. She described how she used books in her classes to enrich their studies of countries and world cultures. In the year ahead, she planned to give her students time in class each week to read, to talk about their books, and to discuss what they were learning about the world. She asked if we might label the books in the library that were set in different continents to make them easier for the students to find. Of course, I jumped at this opportunity! It was just the kind of initiative we needed to encourage our students to expand their reading choices and to explore more of the world through books.

We got to work right away. I created a color key for each continent and ordered dots to add to the book spines. With the help of my library staff, we labeled the fiction and biography books set in different

continents around the world. We later labeled the nonfiction titles as well. I named the program *One World, Many Stories* and printed keys to post around the library. Ms. Roland and I also made bookmarks with the color key and prompts to consider while reading that encouraged thinking, questioning, and connecting.

Once the initial setup was complete, Asiya scheduled a day to bring her classes for a *One World, Many Stories* book browse. We filled tables with a sampling of titles from each continent. The students spent a few minutes at each table, browsing the books and building a reading list. The readers were then equipped to begin “traveling” around the world!

The *One World, Many Stories* initiative has now been a part of our library program for over two years. It has been a successful collaboration from the start and continues to expand. Two more world studies teachers have embraced the initiative and are also encouraging students to read and discuss the books in class. All of these teachers begin the year with book browses in the library, and the students’ reading lists continue to grow as books are discussed in class. We also set up displays in the library to give the students new ideas throughout the year.

Our circulation of books set around the world has increased greatly. The books that were once overlooked are now some of the most circulated in the library. Additionally, our overall circulation has increased since more teachers are encouraging reading every week.

But the most significant impact has been on the students. When asked about the program, one said, “I liked the *One World, Many Stories* program, because normally I don’t really read books outside the US, but with [this] program I am now reading books from all over the world. Bizarre as it is, I learned from the *fictional* books about the *true* countries’ cultures.” Another said, “I enjoyed [the program] because it helped me understand and feel what it is like for people in other countries in a way I never could understand before.” One more reflected, “It has helped me this year because I learned how to make connections. This helps me answer questions in *all* my classes.”

As the initiative grows, our students will continue to read more widely and reap lasting benefits. Asiya Roland sums up the power of the program perfectly: “This program is a constant reminder that when you give a child the opportunity to learn about our world, you also give them the opportunity to change it for the better.”

Conclusion

Young adult literature that is well written has the opportunity to add a personal dimension to history; young adult historical fiction that is engaging offers readers an opportunity to connect with the past and its people. Through well-developed characters, a setting that is believable, and readable and compelling stories, historical fiction readers discover timeless narratives that connect them to the world at large. By providing a lens that captures the past hardships and struggles of others, as well as their triumphs, teen readers of historical fiction discover that there is more to history than dates and facts; rather, history is about lives lived, and that which makes our collective story so important.

I write YA because books help us through life, especially in those crucial teen years. I love writing historical fiction in particular because it gives me a chance to bring to light the stories of those who've fallen into the cracks. If I can make you care about someone with whom you think you have nothing in common, I've done my job.

—tacey Lee, author of the *The Downstairs Girl*, *Under A Painted Sky*, and *Outrun the Moon*

Assignments in Action: Historical Fiction for Discussion

1. Why is historical fiction so important to share with young adults?
2. In your opinion, what are some of the best ways to connect teen readers with historical fiction?
3. Can you see a way to implement "Exploring the World through Books" lesson shared in the "Librarians in Action" example?
4. Consider the idea that libraries have to remain vigilant in their assessment of the portrayal of history in their collection —, do you agree that it's important? In what ways is that challenging?
5. Given the historical fiction you've discovered in this examination, can you think of a way to help a teacher incorporate it into an established lesson?

Chapter 5

Fantastic Fiction

I was a lonely kid who loved magic and hoped there was more out there in the world. Writing was my way of figuring out how to step out of that loneliness, to create worlds I wanted to see but didn't exist. I write for the kid that I was and the kids that are out there now, hoping one of my stories clicks with the right people.

—Zoraida Córdova, author of *The Brooklyn Brujas series*

In fantastic fiction, imagination rules. In any fiction, authors use their imagination to create characters and events and to describe settings, of course. Imagination is at the core of writing. In fantastic fiction, the author has the freedom to take bold leaps into the bizarre, the strange, and the otherworldly, and the imagination is unleashed to entertain and to mesmerize readers. Classic novels have taught readers to embrace the unusual, to savor oddity, and to want to read more. Such milestones as Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1938, rev. 1951) have created fans of science fiction and fantasy for decades and even centuries. Fantastic fiction encompasses two major genres: fantasy and science fiction. Included in those major genres are a variety of types: animal fantasy, dystopias, fairy tales, high fantasy, horror, magic realism, paranormal romance, supernatural, time travel, and many more.

Fantasy

Characteristics of High Fantasy

When fantasy is discussed, often high fantasy is what comes to mind, and there are certain distinct characteristics that define this longtime popular subgenre.

1. A complete world is created with specific and consistent rules. The world may be bizarre, usually with elements of the supernatural, but in that bizarre world what happens must make sense.
2. Closely related to the first characteristic, readers should be so thoroughly convinced of the logistics of the created world that they can suspend their disbelief enough to be drawn into the story, but there must still be a basis in reality. Grounding the story in reality by beginning and ending the story in a real world or by using dates and events from the real world or even fake newspaper articles that give the sense of reality helps readers in their journey through a world spun from the imagination of a writer's fertile mind. From her website, readers can see Ursula Le Guin's "Plausibility in Fantasy to Alexei Mutovkin: An Open Letter": "The more realistic, exact, "factual" detail in a fantasy story, the more sensually things and acts are imagined and described, the more plausible the world will be. After all, it is a world made entirely of words. Exact and vivid words make an exact and vivid world." For more information about her writing, visit www.ursulakleguin.com.
3. There is always a quest and a hero or heroine who must complete the quest no matter the dangers or the impossibility of the tasks set before him or her.
4. Good, in the guise of the hero, and evil, in the guise of an anti-hero or villain, must engage in battle, usually back and forth throughout the story until the hero wins.
5. There must be plenty of suspense to propel the story forward and compel the reader to keep turning pages.
6. Fantasy often features a character or a creature to add humor and relieve tension or despair.

[American Fantasy and Science Fiction Awards](#)

A number of awards celebrate fantastic fiction in the United States. These include the Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy and Nebula Award.

Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy

Started in 2005, the Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy is an annual award presented by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) to the author of the best young adult or middle-grade science fiction or fantasy book published in the United States in the preceding year. It is named to honor prolific science fiction and fantasy author Andre Norton. Any published young adult or middle-grade science fiction or fantasy novel is eligible for the prize, including graphic novels. The award is presented along with the Nebula Awards and follows the same rules for nominations and voting; as the awards are separate, works may be simultaneously nominated for both the Andre Norton Award and a Nebula Award. Visit <https://nebulas.sfwaworld.org/award/andre-norton-award/> for details.

Nebula Award

The Nebula Awards annually recognize the best works of science fiction or fantasy published in the United States. The awards are organized and awarded by the SFWA, a nonprofit association of professional science fiction and fantasy writers. More information about the awards and criteria can be found at: <https://nebulas.sfwaworld.org/>.

British Literature Awards for Youth

British awards for youth include books of a variety of genres, but they also include many fantasy books. Two British awards that include titles for young adults are the Carnegie Medal and the Costa Book Awards.

The Carnegie Medal

The Carnegie Medal has been awarded annually by the Library Association since 1936 in memory of Andrew Carnegie, Scottish-born philanthropist. A self-made industrialist, Carnegie made a fortune in steel in the United States. According to the website, the (CILIP) Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards, "His experience of using a library as a child led him to resolve that 'if ever wealth came to me that it should be used to establish free libraries.'" The award is sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. The Carnegie Medal is awarded to an outstanding book for children, including books for young adults. For complete lists of winning titles, visit <http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk>.

The Costa Book Awards

The Costa Book Awards, formerly known as the Whitbread Literary Awards, the most prestigious book prize in the United Kingdom, have been awarded annually since 1971 in five categories: first novel, novel, biography, poetry, children's book. Since 1985 there has also been a Book of the Year chosen. In 2001 Philip Pullman's *Amber Spyglass* was the first children's book to win a Book of the Year Award. Interestingly, in 2006 Costa Coffee, makers of the leading brand of coffee in the United Kingdom, took over the sponsorship of the award. The company offers large cash prizes to the winning author in each category. For complete lists of the winning titles, visit <http://www.costabookawards.com>.

Authors of High Fantasy Classics

Many British and American authors, writing for children and young adults such as J. K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien, share their expansive imaginations through high fantasy. Contemporary and historical high fantasy authors who are well known and loved are:

- **Lloyd Alexander**—Best known for *Chronicles of Prydain*. Awarded a Newbery Medal for *The High King*.
- **T. A. Barron**—Best known for *Lost Years of Merlin* series: *The Lost Years of Merlin*, *The Seven Songs of Merlin*, *The Fires of Merlin*, *The Mirror of Merlin*, *The Wings of Merlin*.
- **Susan Cooper**—Best known for *The Dark Is Rising* series set in and around England and Wales: *Over Sea, Under Stone*; *The Dark Is Rising*; *Greenwitch*, *The Grey King*; and *Silver on the Tree*. Awarded the 1976 Newbery Medal for *The Grey King*. Awarded the 2012 Margaret A. Edwards Award.
- **Diane Wynne Jones**—Best known for *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, and *Year of the Griffin*. Awarded the 2004 Phoenix Award for *Howl's Moving Castle*.
- **Ursula Le Guin**—Best known for her four books of Earthsea: *Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, and *Tehanu*. Awarded the 2004 Margaret A. Edwards Award.
- **C. S. Lewis**—Best known for *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *The Magician's Nephew*, *The Last Battle*.
- **Robin McKinley**—Best known for her novels based on fairy tales and legends. Awarded a Newbery Medal for *The Hero and the Crown* and a Newbery Honor for *The Blue Sword*.
- **Garth Nix**—Best known for his books of *The Old Kingdom: Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen* and the *Seventh Tower* series: *The Fall*, *Castle Aenir*, *Above the Veil*, *Into Battle*, and *The Violet Keystone*.
- **Tamora Pierce**—Best known for her *Protector of the Small* quartet and *Song of the Lioness* series. Awarded the 2013 Margaret A. Edwards Award.
- **Terry Pratchett**—Known in England as a prolific fantasy writer, he's best known in the United States for a few children's/young adult novels: *Wee Free Men*, *A Hat Full of Sky*, and *Wintersmith*. Awarded the 2001 Carnegie Medal for best children's novel: *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents*. Awarded the 2011 Margaret A. Edwards Award.

- **Phillip Pullman**—Best known for *His Dark Materials: The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, *The Amber Spyglass*. Awarded the 1995 Carnegie Medal for *Northern. Lights* (titled *The Golden Compass* in the United States); the 2001 Whitbread Prize and the 2002 Whitbread Book of the Year for *The Amber Spyglass*.

I write YA because young people need stories. Everyone in that time between childhood and adulthood is traveling through the unknown—physically, emotionally, intellectually—and everyone of them is looking for signs they're on the right path, or that the path their carving won't lead them off a cliff. Stories are the best breadcrumbs our cultures have invented for helping young people find their way. They can show someone who feels alone that they are not alone. They can show someone that other people have hopes and fears, desires and dreams just as valid as their own. They can let jocks root for drama kids, and boys become space princesses. They can collapse labels and accelerate empathy, and at their simplest, they can give some entertaining relief from the onslaught of the work of growing up. If this all sounds grandiose, that's because it is. As a young adult, books saved my life. In books, I saw that I was not the only queer teen ever to have existed. In books I got to abandon my assumptions about kids the local news tried to make me fear. In books I got to laugh like I was still ten; I got to save the world like I was already grown up, and I got to do it all with a library card. You can build a house without power tools and you can grow up well without books, but both make the process a hell of a lot better. As a YA writer, I consider myself a tool maker, and I can't even imagine the lives my readers will build with the tools I make for them.

—Alex London, author of *Black Wings Beating* and the *Proxy* series

Supernatural Stories

The world of the supernatural shares elements with high fantasy. Ghosts, witches, and mythical creatures such as elves, trolls, giants, dragons, vampires, and werewolves are popular characters. Be aware that supernatural stories have different levels of scariness and creepiness. Take the advice given in *School Library Journal*: "If students request a scary story, find out what they mean by scary. Remember, horror is a subjective term; what sends shivers down one person's spine may not make another even

blink. Kids enjoy different degrees and types of 'scary,' and you'll want to make sure you recommend books that match their interests and expectations" (Luedtke, Wenting, and Wurt 2006, 36).

Witches and wizards also figure prominently in fantasy. Of course, everyone in the world knows about the Hogwart's School of Wizardry in the *Harry Potter* books, but there are other types of books featuring witches. Stories of young women and men who have paranormal abilities cause accusations of witchcraft and stories about women who acknowledge they are witches. Some are kind and well-intentioned; others are evil or at least mean-spirited. Then there are stories of Wiccans. Wicca is a modern religion based on pagan beliefs that is practiced throughout the world. It entails the practice of magic, a pentagram spirited within a circle (a pentacle) as a symbol of faith, secrecy for its rituals, and organization into covens.

Why write YA? Because so much of history was written by people who aggressively ignored voices I want to hear. YA fiction is a way of creating and telling those stories.

—Kiersten White, *New York Times* best-selling author of the *And I Darken* trilogy, the *Paranormalcy* trilogy, *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, *Slayer*, and many other novels

[Harry Potter, a Wizard Hero](#)

He began as a sad, orphaned boy and emerged seven books later as a teenaged hero. In between the first and the last books he battled the evil Voldemort again and again, barely escaping death, knowing his grip on triumph was tenuous at least until J. K. Rowling resolved everything in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Twenty years ago, Rowling started a publishing phenomenon. In Scotland, out of work, a single mother, almost destitute, she slipped her writing onto the top of an editor's stack of manuscripts in a café and anxiously waited. Immediately, he loved the book, making her a household name and beloved and celebrated author. Despite the length, children and teens worldwide craved these books. *Harry Potter*

and the Half-Blood Prince with 652 pages? Not a problem. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* with 734 pages? And, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the thickest one of all at 870 pages, confirmed that Americans are readers, and thick books won't keep them from reading if the story is exciting enough. After reading six books, American youth were willing to read 759 more pages to know the final ending of Harry's adventures in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. With the popularity of a wizard hero, not only are young adults reading lengthier books, but they're also reading more fantasy. They ask for books similar to Rowling's to quench their thirst for adventure in between Potter books.

In addition to fantastic stories about witchcraft and wizards, dragons are consistently popular in literature for youth. Perhaps it's partly due to wishful thinking. What teen wouldn't love to be a dragon rider and have command of such a magnificent creature as the one described in Margaret Weis's *Dragonvarld* trilogy? Dragons possess terrifying beauty, intelligence, deadliness, and sometimes great humor. And imagine the rush of flying through the air and going anywhere you wanted to anytime. Dragons symbolize absolute power and freedom. Anne McCaffrey, honored with a Margaret A. Edwards Award for her outstanding contributions to young adult literature, set a high standard for novels about dragons. Her award was for the following titles about dragons: *Dragonflight*, *Dragonquest*, *White Dragon*, and the *Harper Hall* trilogy—*Dragonsong*, *Dragonsinger*, and *Dragondrums*. McCaffrey's books are set on the planet of Pern, which gives it a crossover to science fiction label. Though the author has suggested she sees her books as science fiction due to the setting being away from Earth, for this textbook's purpose, these books are included in the discussion of fantasy because of the overwhelming focus on dragons, considered mythical creatures.

Young adult literature, especially fantastic fiction, continues to evolve and change. There has always been what seems to be, at first glance, a thin line between fantasy and science fiction. In recent years, the lines between traditional genres have blurred even more with no end in sight. Fantasy may include fairy tales, supernatural stories, historical fantasy, witches and

wizards, or paranormal romance; as with contemporary realistic fictions, like other young adult literature titles, fantastic fiction can be difficult to label because the best stories often can be identified in multiple ways; a well-known example of this would be considering Suzanne Collin's beloved and best-selling *The Hunger Games* trilogy. While the series is definitely fantastical (it's classified as science fiction/dystopian), Katniss's story is of survival, too. It's also a story rooted in the importance of family, and there's also a romantic thread throughout the story that keeps readers hooked as they witness Katniss trying to come to terms with which young man truly has her heart—Gale or Peeta. Though it's one of the most beloved stories of the past decade, Katniss's story is certainly not unique in its ability to straddle the genre line.

Like *The Hunger Games*, many of the following fantastic recommendations could also be classified in other genres or subgenres of fantastic fiction. What all these highlighted titles that follow have in common is they are excellent examples of young adult literature that will have high appeal to teen readers in search of a variety of fantasy titles. Selections that also fit the "Own Voices" distinction are labeled with a*.

**Seafire* by Natalie Parker follows Caledonia Styx, captain of her own ship, the Mors Navis, and its all-female crew as they strive to defeat the powerful fleet of Aric Athair, the vicious warlord who has taken their homes and families.

In **Black Wings Beating* by Alex London, the people of Uztar have long looked to the sky with hope and wonder. Nothing in their world is more revered than the birds of prey, and no one is more honored than the falconers who call them to their fists. Brysen strives to be a great falconer—while his twin sister, Kylee, rejects her ancient gifts for the sport and wishes to be free of falconry. She's nearly made it out, too, but a war is rolling toward their home in the Six Villages, and no bird or falconer will be safe. Together the twins must journey into the treacherous mountains to trap the Ghost Eagle, the greatest of the Uztari birds and a solitary killer. Brysen goes for the boy he loves and the glory he's long craved, and Kylee to atone for

her past and to protect her brother's future. But both are hunted by those who seek one thing: power.

**Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor. Sunny was born in New York City, lives in Nigeria, is an athlete and an albino, and doesn't seem to fit in anywhere; yet she and her friends are asked to track down a serial killer.

In *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein* by Kiersten White, the events of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* unfold from the perspective of Elizabeth Lavenza, who is adopted as a child by the Frankensteins as a companion for their volatile son Victor.

**The Star-Touched Queen* by Roshani Chokshi. Treated with scorn and fear in her father's kingdom because of a formidable horoscope, 16-year-old Maya commits herself to her education only to land in an arranged marriage that culminates in her sudden elevation to the throne, a situation that is threatened by dark secrets and Otherworldly magic.

In *The Near Witch* by Victoria Schwab, children begin disappearing from Lexi's village near the moor, and their disappearance is blamed on a mysterious boy.

**For a Muse of Fire* by Heidi Heilig is the story of Jetta, a teen who possesses secret, forbidden powers, that must gain access to a hidden spring and negotiate a world roiling with intrigue and the beginnings of war.

The Diviners by Libba Bray. Evie O'Neill has been exiled from her boring old hometown and shipped off to the bustling streets of New York City. It's 1926, and New York is filled with speakeasies, Ziegfeld girls, and rakish pickpockets. The only catch is that she has to live with her uncle Will and his unhealthy obsession with the occult. Evie worries he'll discover her darkest secret: a supernatural power that has brought her only trouble so far. But when the police find a murdered girl branded with a cryptic symbol and Will is called to the scene, Evie realizes her gift could help catch a serial killer.

In **The Reader* by Traci Chee, Sefia lives her life on the run. After her father is viciously murdered, she flees to the forest with her aunt Nin, the only person left she can trust. But when Nin is kidnapped, Sefia is suddenly on her own, with no way to know who's taken Nin or where she is. Her only

clue is a strange rectangular object that once belonged to her father left behind, something she comes to realize is a book. With no time to lose, and the unexpected help of swashbuckling pirates and an enigmatic stranger, Sefia sets out on a dangerous journey to rescue her aunt, using the book as her guide.

**The Belles* by Dhonielle Clayton is the story of the opulent world of Orleans Belles who are revered for they control Beauty, the commodity coveted above all else. In Orleans, the people are born damned and only with the help of a Belle, can they be made beautiful. But it's not enough for Camellia to be just a Belle; she wants to be the "favourite" of the queen of Orleans. But behind the gilded palace walls live dark secrets, and Camellia soon learns that the very essence of her existence is a lie, that her powers are far greater and could be more dangerous, than she ever imagined.

In **Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir, Laia is a scholar living under the iron-fisted rule of the Martial Empire. When her brother is arrested for treason, Laia goes undercover as a slave at the empire's greatest military academy in exchange for assistance from rebel scholars who claim that they will help to save her brother from execution.

In **Six of Crows* by Leigh Bardugo, imagine six dangerous teen outcasts and one impossible heist. Kaz's crew is the only thing that might stand between the world and destruction—if they don't kill each other first.

**In Labyrinth Lost* by Zoraida Cordova, Alex is a bruja and the most powerful witch in her family, but she's hated magic ever since it made her father disappear into thin air. So, while most girls celebrate their Quinceanera, Alex prepares for Death Day, the most important day in a bruja's life and her only opportunity to rid herself of magic. But the curse she performs during the ceremony backfires and her family vanishes, forcing Alex to absorb all of the magic from her family line. Left alone, Alex seeks help from Nova, a brujo with ambitions of his own. To get her family back they must travel to Los Lagos, a land in-between, as dark as Limbo and as strange as Wonderland.

In *Caravel* by Stephanie Garber, two sisters, Scarlett and Tella, leave their cruel father to attend Caraval—a faraway once-a-year performance where

the audience participates in the show; and, along the way, Tella is kidnapped. Scarlett is aided by a mysterious sailor and finds herself enmeshed in a game of love, heartbreak, and magic.

The Wrath and the Dawn by Renée Adhieh is a reimagining of *The Arabian Nights*. Shahrzad plans to avenge the death of her dearest friend by volunteering to marry the murderous boy-king of Khorasan but discovers not all is as it appears within the palace.

In *Walk on Earth a Stranger* by Rae Carson, Lee Westfall, a young woman with the magical ability to sense the presence of gold, must flee her home to avoid people who would abuse her powers. When her best friend Jefferson heads out across Gold Rush-era America to stake his claim, she disguises herself as a boy and sets out on her own dangerous journey.

In *Born Wicked* by Jessica Spotswood, in an alternate New England of 1900 where the Brotherhood dominates and controls society, 16-year-old Cate Cahill has struggled since her mother's death to keep secret that she and her younger sisters are witches, but when a governess arrives from the Sisterhood, everything changes.

Half Bad by Sally Green. In modern-day England, where witches live alongside humans, Nathan, son of a white witch and the most powerful black witch, must escape captivity before his 17th birthday and receive the gifts that will determine his future.

Leigh Bardugo's *Shadow and Bone*. Orphaned by the Border Wars, Alina Starkov is taken from obscurity and her only friend, Mal, to become the protégé of the mysterious Darkling, who trains her to join the magical elite in the belief that she is the Sun Summoner, who can destroy the monsters of the Fold.

In *Rebel Belle* by Rachel Hawkins, 17-year-old Harper Price's charmed life is turned upside down when she discovers she's been given magical powers in order to protect her school nemesis David Stark, who's an Oracle.

**Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi is the story of Amari, daughter of maji-persecuting King Saran, who has stolen a magical scroll, which awakens divnner Zilie's latent maji power to command the dead.

Joined by Zilie's brother Tzain and pursued by Amari's brother Inan, the young women set out to restore magic to the kingdom of Orosha.

Strange the Dreamer by Laini Taylor. In the aftermath of a war between gods and men, a hero, a librarian, and a girl must battle the fantastical elements of a mysterious city stripped of its name.

In **Forest of a Thousand Lanterns* by Julie C. Dao, beautiful 18-year-old Xifeng, raised by a cruel aunt who says the stars destine her to be the empress of Feng Lu, chooses to spurn the man who loves her and exploit the dark magic that can make her dream real.

In *The Traitor Prince* by C. J. Redwine, Javan Najafai, crown prince of Akram, has spent the last 10 years at an elite boarding school, far away from his kingdom. But his eagerly awaited return home is cut short when a mysterious impostor takes his place; and no one believes Javan is the true prince. The only way to gain an audience with the king and reveal Javan's identity is to fight in Maqbara's yearly tournament. The only person who can help him is Sajda, who has been enslaved by Maqbara's warden since she was a child, and whose guarded demeanor and powerful right hook keep the prisoners in check. Working with Sajda might be the only way Javan can escape alive, but she has dangerous secrets.

In Tehlor Kay Mejia's **We Set the Dark on Fire*, at the Medio School for Girls, distinguished young women are trained for one of two roles in their polarized society—either to one day run a husband's household or to raise his children. Both paths promise a life of comfort and luxury, far from the frequent political uprisings of the lower class. Daniela Vargas is the school's top student, but her pedigree is a lie. She must keep the truth hidden or be sent back to the fringes of society. After being recruited by rebel spies, Dani has a great awakening and must decide if she'll cling to the privilege her parents fought to win for her or pursue a free Medio and a chance at forbidden love.

In *The Kiss of Deception* by Mary E. Pearson, on the morning of her wedding, Princess Lia flees to a distant village. She settles into a new life, intrigued when two mysterious and handsome strangers arrive, and she is unaware that one is the jilted prince and the other an assassin sent to kill

her. Deception abounds, and Lia finds herself on the brink of unlocking perilous secrets—even as she finds herself falling in love.

Graceling by Kristen Cashore. In a world where some people are born with extreme and often-feared skills called Graces, Katsa struggles for redemption from her own horrifying Grace of killing and teams up with another young fighter to save their land from a corrupt king.

In *The Hazelwood* by Melissa Albert, when the scary, magical world in her grand-mother's book of dark feminist fairy tales becomes real, 17-year-old Alice, partnered with Ellery, an obsessed fan of the fairy tales, must enter the world to rescue Alice's kidnapped mother.

In **We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsah Faizsl, set in a rich world inspired by ancient Arabia, Zafira is the hunter, disguising herself as a man to brave the cursed forest of the Arz to feed her people. Nasir is the prince of death, assassinating those foolish enough to defy his autocratic father, the king. If Zafira was exposed as a girl, her achievements would be rejected; if Nasir displayed compassion, his father would brutally punish him. War is brewing in Arawiya, and when Zafira embarks on a quest to uncover an artifact that can restore magic and stop the Arz, Nasir is sent by the king on a similar mission: retrieve the artifact and kill the hunter. But an ancient evil stirs—and the prize they seek poses a threat greater than either can imagine.

In *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs, 16-year-old Jacob, having traveled to a remote island after a family tragedy, discovers an abandoned orphanage, and, after some investigating, he learns the children who lived there may have been dangerous and quarantined and may also still be alive.

In **Want* by Cindy Pon, Jason Zhou is trying to survive in Taipei, a city plagued by pollution and viruses, but when he discovers the elite are using their wealth to evade the deadly effects, he knows he must do whatever is necessary to fight the corruption and save his city.

In *The Cruel Prince* by Holly Black, Jude, 17 and mortal, gets tangled in palace intrigues while trying to win a place in the treacherous High Court of Faerie, where she and her sisters have lived for a decade.

**Ash* by Malinda Lo is a variation on the Cinderella story in which a girl named Ash grows up believing in the fairy realm that the king and his philosophers have sought to suppress, until one day she must choose between a handsome fairy cursed to love her and the King's Huntress, whom she loves.

The Beautiful by Renee Ahdieh is the story of 1872 New Orleans, a city ruled by the dead. New Orleans provides 17-year-old Celine Rousseau a refuge after she's forced to flee her life as a dressmaker in Paris. Taken in by the sisters of the Ursuline Convent along with six other girls, while the city tries to deal with what is believed to be the work of a serial killer, Celine uncovers something even more shocking: an age-old feud from the darkest creatures of the underworld reveals a truth about Celine she always suspected simmered just beneath the surface.

In *Scorched* by Mari Mancusi, 16-year-old Trinity Foxx does not believe her grand-father's latest treasure is a real dragon's egg until soldiers invade trying to steal it; a strange boy tells her she must work with him to stop an impending dragon war, and the dragon inside the egg begins telling her what to do.

Seraphina by Rachel Hartman features a kingdom where dragons and humans exist under a peace treaty. Sixteen-year-old Seraphina is a talented musician and half-dragon. Just imagine: Seraphina has a band of silvery scales running from the inside of her left wrist to the outside of her elbow; a broader band of those silvery scales encircle her waist like a girdle. She is mortified to be half-dragon and is in constant fear that people will find out her terrible secret.

Dealing with Dragons by Patricia Wrede. The first book in the *Enchanted Forest* series Wrede's books have a whimsical touch as the main character, Cimorene, relinquishes being a princess and becomes a dragon's librarian and chief cook.

Eragon by Christopher Paolini. In Aagaesia, a 15-year-old boy of unknown lineage called Eragon finds a mysterious stone that weaves his life into an intricate tapestry of destiny, magic, and power, peopled with dragons, elves, and monsters.

In **Dread Nation* by Justina Ireland, Jane McKeene was born two days before the dead began to walk the battlefields of Gettysburg and Chancellorsville derailing the War between the States and changing America forever.

Red Queen by Victoria Aveyard. In a world divided by blood: those with common, Red blood serve the Silver-blooded elite who are gifted with superhuman abilities, 17-year-old Mare, a Red, discovers she has an ability of her own.

I write YA for the past version of myself that wanted these books growing up. I write YA because we are never not evolving, falling in love, adjusting to the world, battling our demons, and those tales are ageless. I write YA because stories of hope and wonder are always in need of replenishing.

—Roshani Chokshi, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Star-Touched Queen*, *A Crown of Wishes*, and *The Guilded Wolves*

Authors in Action: On World Building by Neal Shusterman

I've often said that world-building is like brain surgery, both figuratively and literally. First of all, you're messing with people's heads when you give them a world they've never seen before. Second, like brain surgery, it's one of the most difficult things to accomplish—because not only are you attempting to tell a powerful story with relatable characters, but you're trying to do it in an entirely new environment. That being the case, it's not surprising that there's an awful lot of botched surgeries in the literary world. This I can say from experience, because my first novel (which was never published, and never should be) was an exercise in truly bad world building.

My first attempts at world-building were clumsy, confusing, inconsistent, and worst of all, they were derivative.

Don't get me wrong—I think there are plenty of good stories that use tried and true tropes like dragons or fairies or an apocalypse. The trick is

being additive rather than derivative. Bringing something to the table that hasn't been seen before. In well-traveled territory, there needs to be a fundamental uniqueness to the vision that opens up readers' minds to possibilities they hadn't considered before.

The most challenging kind of world building, however, doesn't rely on familiarity, but tries to blaze a new trail, and create a fresh mythology that shatters the reader's preconceived notions. As an author, that's what I'm always trying to do. When I wrote *Scythe* for instance, I wanted to upend dystopia. Instead of writing about a world gone wrong, I set out to write about the world gone right. What happens when we achieve all the things for humanity that we truly want to achieve? What are the real-world consequences of that? I ended up with a world where all disease had been cured, death had been conquered, and, as a consequence, passion had been lost. I discovered that if artificial intelligence does what we hope it will do, then it would be god-like in its benevolence and power, which would then cause people to become increasingly docile and dependent on it.

Consequences of our choices. That's what makes good world-building. Worlds just don't spring up out of nowhere. Even stories with a basic conceit such as magic aren't pre-existing. It's all about what people have done with the building blocks of their world.

Let's say Magic is real. What are the actual consequences of that? Do magical people separate themselves from the non-magical? Do they feel themselves superior? How do they learn how to use their magic effectively? And what happens to human nature when magical powers are thrown into the mix? These are tough questions, but you have to ask them . . . and when you've asked enough of them, you end up with Harry Potter.

But most importantly, a world, no matter how far from our experience that world is, has to reflect our own. It needs to allow us to see our reality, our lives, our *selves* in a fresh perspective. It must resonate as deeply as the characters that inhabit it . . . otherwise, why in the world build worlds at all?

Neal Shusterman is the *New York Times* best-selling author of more than 30 award-winning books for children, teens, and adults, including *The Unwind Dystology*, *The Skinjacker* trilogy, *Downsiders*, and *Challenger Deep*, which won the National Book Award. *Scythe*, the first book in his newest series *Arc of a Scythe*, is a Michael L. Printz Honor Book.

Science Fiction

The *Read/Write/Think* Joint Project of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Literacy Organization define science fiction as "a genre of fiction in which the stories often tell about science and technology of the future" (2018). Their definition extends to note that for a work to be science fiction, it has to have a relationship with the principles of science—these stories involve partially true and partially fictitious laws or theories of science. Believability is an important factor as any fantastical work that is completely unbelievable is given a "fantasy" label rather than one of science fiction. Human elements are also a hallmark of science fiction explaining what effect new discoveries, happenings, and scientific developments will have on us in the future. A science fiction plot creates situations different from those of both the present day and the known past. Setting is also a key component in science fiction as "scifi" texts are often set in the future, in space, on a different world, or in a different universe or dimension (2018). Labeling categories within the genre can be particularly difficult, as science fiction specialist Dr. Karin Perry offers, "Science fiction is a complex category in fiction. In fact, it is almost impossible to capture everything in one definition" (2015).

Considered pioneers of the genre, the best-known early writers of the science fiction genre are H. G. Wells (*The War of the Worlds*) and Jules Verne (*20,000 Leagues under the Sea*). Some well-known 20th-century science

fiction texts include *1984* by George Orwell, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand. In addition, the four most-popular and well-recognized 20th-century science fiction authors are Isaac Asimov, author of the *Foundation* trilogy and his robot series, Arthur C. Clarke famous for *2001, a Space Odyssey*; Ray Bradbury, known for his *Martian Chronicles*; and Robert Heinlein, author of *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. Until recently, most of the science fiction titles used in schools were ones that were actually published for adults; however, books like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams have historically been equally embraced as favorites by young adults as well.

Over the past 50 years, science fiction stories written for a younger audience have exploded on the literary scene. Today, young science fiction readers can't imagine a world without Meg, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Whatsit introduced in Madeleine L'Engle's groundbreaking *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962). Since then, readers of literature written for young people have celebrated the work of authors such as Anne McCaffrey (*The Dragonriders of Pern*), Lois Lowry (*The Giver*), and M. T. Anderson (*Feed*).

Categories of young adult science fiction are offered in broad strokes and include some of the following subgenres with genre features:

- Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic—Fiction that deals with the "end of civilization," traditionally from a catastrophe such as a nuclear attack, pandemic, or natural disaster. Post-apocalyptic fiction features stories that take place after such a disaster but set either immediately post the event or several years into the future.
- Cyberpunk and Steampunk—Cyberpunk fiction includes stories about advanced technologies combined with social breakdown or unrest. Many times they include hackers, artificial intelligence, or corrupt mega-corporations. Steampunk is typically set in an alternative history: 19th-century British Victorian era or the American "Wild West." Steampunk fiction features retro-futuristic, steam-powered machinery.
- Dystopia—A fictional world where people live under a highly controlled, totalitarian system of government.
- Extra-Sensory Perception—Books where characters have extrasensory perceptions such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis.

- Artificial Intelligence (Including Robots/Androids/Cyborgs)—Artificial intelligence sometimes abbreviated "AI" is a popular feature of science fiction novels. Artificial intelligence can be represented in varied levels of ability and believability. Robots, being nonbiological entities, would probably be considered the lowest level. No one would ever be fooled into thinking robots were "real." Androids, on the other hand, are designed to look and act like humans going so far as the synthetic, yet flesh like resemblance. Cyborgs are a mixture of the two: synthetic/mechanical and biological components combined.
- Extraterrestrials/Aliens—Stories where the alien has encounters with humans either on Earth or in space.
- Time Travel/Parallel Universes—A time slip is a plot device used in fantasy and science fiction in which a person or group of people seem to travel through time by unknown means for a period of time. A parallel universe is a hypothetical self-contained reality coexisting with one's own.
- Virtual Reality/Gaming—Virtual reality is computer-simulated environment that virtually places the participant in a real or imagined world. Visual and audio experiences increase the experience by flooding the individual's senses with stimuli (Perry 2015).

Contemporary Science Fiction Written for Young Adult Readers

The explosion of the young adult science fiction market has led to much variety within the category. Much like the fantasy titles highlighted, suggested titles may fall into one or more of the subgenres of science fiction, and often individual science fiction titles are part of a larger story arc so that recommended titles are the first in the series, if applicable. Selections that also fit the "Own Voices" distinction are labeled with a*.

In **Killer of Enemies* by Joseph Bruchac, there is a world that has barely survived an apocalypse that leaves it with pre-20th-century technology. Lozen is a monster hunter for four tyrants who are holding her family hostage.

In **Proxy* by Alex London, privileged Syd and his proxy, Knox, are thrown together to overthrow the system.

In *Scythe*, Neal Shusterman offers a world where disease has been eliminated; the only way to die is to be randomly killed, "gleaned," by professional reapers, "scythes." Two teens must compete with each other to become a scythe, a position neither of them wants. The one who becomes a scythe must kill the one who doesn't.

In *Noggin* by John Corey Whaley, after dying at age 16, Travis Coates's head was removed and frozen for five years before being attached to another body, and now the old Travis and the new must find a way to coexist while figuring out changes in his relationships.

In *Ship Breaker* by Paolo Bacigalupi, this futuristic world finds teenaged Nailer scavenging copper wiring from grounded oil tankers for a living. When he finds a beached clipper ship with a girl in the wreckage, he has to decide if he should strip the ship for its wealth or rescue the girl.

In *More Happy Than Not* by Adam Silvera, after enduring his father's suicide, his own suicide attempt, broken friendships, and more in the Bronx projects, Aaron Soto, 16, is already considering the Leteo Institute's memory-alteration procedure when his new friendship with Thomas turns to unrequited love.

In *Warcross* by Marie Lu, teenage coder Emika Chen hacks her way into the opening tournament of the Warcross Championships. She glitches herself into the game as well as a sinister plot with major consequences for the entire Warcross empire.

In *The Darkest Minds* by Alex Bracken, 16-year-old Ruby breaks out of a government-run "rehabilitation camp" for teens who acquired dangerous powers after surviving a virus that wiped out most American children.

In *Pretties* by Scott Westerfeld, Tally is faced with a difficult choice when her new friend, Shay, decides to risk life on the outside rather than submit to the forced operation that turns 16-year-old girls into gorgeous beauties, and realizes that there is a whole new side to the pretty world that she doesn't like.

Monument 14 by Emmy Laybourne is the story of 14 kids who are trapped inside a superstore after the spillage of disastrous chemical weapons leads to frightening changes in the survivors left outside.

In *Rot & Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry, it's been 14 years since First Night and the dead came back to life. Benny Imura must learn to survive outside the safety of the fences he's lived behind most of his life if he is going to fight the zombies like his brother, Tom.

In *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer, Matteo Alacrán was not born; he was harvested. His DNA came from El Patrón, lord of a country called Opium, a strip of poppy fields lying between the United States and what was once called Mexico. Matt's first cell split and divided inside a petri dish. Then he was placed in the womb of a cow, where he continued the miraculous journey from embryo to fetus to baby. He is a boy now, but most consider him a monster except for El Patrón. El Patrón loves Matt as he loves himself, because Matt is himself.

In *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, 16-year-old Thomas wakes up with no memory in the middle of a maze and realizes he must work with the community in which he finds himself if he is to escape.

In **Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor, Binti is the first of the Himba people ever to be offered a place at Oomza University, the finest institution of higher learning in the galaxy. But to accept the offer will mean giving up her place in her family to travel between the stars among strangers who do not share her ways or respect her customs. Knowledge comes at a cost, one that Binti is willing to pay, but her journey will not be easy and she has to make it there alive.

In *The Enemy* by Charlie Higson, after a virus turns everyone over 16 into flesh-eating zombies, a group of children must make their way across London to the safety of Buckingham Palace.

In *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* by Carrie Ryan, Mary's curiosities about what lies beyond the fences of her town and the Unconsecrated that wander the forest make it difficult to find a place in her community.

In *Zodiac* by Romina Russell, a violent blast strikes the moons of Cancer, sending its ocean planet off-kilter and killing thousands of citizens; Rhoma Grace, a 16-year-old student from House Cancer, must convince 12 worlds to unite as one Zodiac against Ophiuchus, the exiled 13th Guardian of Zodiac legend, who has returned to exact his revenge across the Galaxy.

In *Life As We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer, a meteor hits the moon, causing worldwide disasters. Miranda struggles to survive with her family in Pennsylvania while watching civilization crumble around her.

Etiquette & Espionage by Gail Carriger. At Mademoiselle Geraldine's Finishing Academy, Sophronia learns there is more to being a proper lady than simply knowing how to curtsy.

In *Fever Crumb* by Philip Reeve, Fever is the only female ever accepted into the Order of Engineers. Her belief in rational thought is pushed to the limit when she takes her first job in the city.

Caragh M. O'Brien's *Birthmarked* tells the story of Gaia, who is forced to question the loyalty her village shows to the Enclave after her parents are arrested by Enclave authorities.

Delirium by Lauren Oliver. In a world where love is considered a disease, Lena looks forward to the day of her cure and her predictable, happy life—until she meets Alex.

In *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, Beatrice has reached the age for her to choose which faction to align herself with for the rest of her life. After choosing to leave her parents to join Dauntless, the faction known for its fearlessness, she is plunged into a world she never knew existed.

The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness offers a world where there is always Noise; Todd is shocked to discover silence in the woods. What he finds puts his life in danger and changes the way he'll look at the world forever.

In *Legend* by Marie Lu. June, a prodigy soldier, and Day, a famous criminal, meet under the worst possible circumstances, but join forces to fight their common enemy.

Little Brother by Cory Doctorow depicts the story of what happens after a major terrorist attack when San Francisco turns into a police state.

Something Strange and Deadly by Susan Dennard is the story of an alternative 19th-century Philadelphia where Eleanor gets caught up in a battle against zombies while searching for her missing brother.

In *Matched* by Ally Condie, Cassia always trusted in the Society to know what's best for her. But then there was a glitch at her matching ceremony. If

the Society was wrong about that, what else could they be wrong about?

In *The Testing* by Joelle Charbonneau, Cia, like most other 16-year-olds in the United Commonwealth, hopes her school performance is good enough to be called for the Testing. Cia's enthusiasm quickly turns to fear when she sees how devious the tests are designed to be and failing doesn't mean you get to go home.

In *Under the Never Sky* by Veronica Rossi, when Aria is left to die outside the safety of her sheltered community, she must learn to trust Perry, a "savage," in order to survive in the dangerous world and attempt to find her mother.

In *Bruiser* by Neal Shusterman, Twins Tennyson and Bronte notice something strange as they get closer to Brewster "Bruiser" Rawlins. They feel better, emotionally and physically, when they are around him while Bruiser's state seems to deteriorate.

In *Mind Games* by Kiersten White, sisters, Fia and Annie, both have extraordinary gifts. They were invited to a special school under false pretenses and now are trapped. The school uses girls with extraordinary powers as tools for corporate espionage. The safety of one is held over the head of the other in order to force them to comply with orders. Fia is constantly on the lookout for a way out—if not for her, at least for Annie.

In *Spirit and Dust* by Rosemary Clement-Moore, Daisy speaks to the dead. Occasionally she even helps the police solve crimes, but when the FBI interrupts her school day to take her to a kidnapping/murder scene she is shocked. This case puts Daisy in more trouble than she has ever been in before. She might turn out to be the next victim in the crime she is trying to solve.

Wake by Lisa McMann. Janie must learn to use her power to influence people's dreams in order to find out who is behind a recent string of crimes.

In the new classic, *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* by Mary E. Pearson, after a terrible car accident Jenna wakes up to find that she has been in a coma for almost a year. She will have to learn everything again. In order to learn about the life she once lived, she watches videos of her life from the moment

she was born until shortly before the accident. What she discovers about herself is frightening.

In *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer, this unique retelling of Cinderella, Cinder is an orphan. She lost her parents when she was 11, and she and her family were in a fatal hover accident. She survived the crash, but barely. In order to save Cinder, scientists had to add a metal hand and a metal leg turning her into a cyborg. Luckily, a man adopted her shortly after her surgery and took her to the Eastern Commonwealth to live with him, his wife, and two daughters. Not so luckily, the man died of the plague soon after he brought her home. Ever since, she has had to live with a step-mother who never wanted her in the first place.

In *Girl Parts* by John Cusick, David's school counselor becomes worried about the amount of time he spends isolating himself with technology and suggests to his parents they buy him a Companion from Sakora Industries, a robot meant to encourage healthy bonds to treat dissociative disorder.

In *The 5th Wave* by Rick Yancey, aliens have set their sights on Earth. First they disabled the power, next they sent in tidal waves, third they sent a plague, and lastly, the Silencers, people who have been implanted with alien genes while still in the mother's womb. These Silencers are programmed to kill humans. The scary part is that they look just like everyone else so our main character, Cass, can't trust anyone. Cass is trying to survive and rescue her younger brother while staying away from Them. The horror isn't over though, because the 5th wave is about to begin.

In *Across the Universe* by Beth Revis, Godspeed is an amazing technological development. It is a vast spaceship able to sustain the life of thousands of people for 300 years. Amy, along with her parents and others from Sol Earth, was cryogenically frozen, expecting to wake up when the Godspeed arrived on a new planet 300 years later. When Amy's cryogenic chamber is unplugged and she nearly dies, she worries that her parents are going to be next. While trying to get used to the strange way of life on Godspeed, she befriends Elder, the next in line to be Captain. Together they uncover dark secrets that have been hidden from the people of Godspeed for a very long time.

In **Adaptation* by Malinda Lo, a terrible disaster shuts down all air transportation. Reese and David, her debate partner, are forced to drive from Arizona to San Francisco to get home. On a long, dark stretch of road a bird flies into their headlights causing them to crash. When Reese wakes up, she is in a military hospital and no one will tell her what happened. It turns out that she has been there for 27 days and, ever since she woke up, she can tell she is different.

In *Black Hole Sun* by David Macinnis Gill, Durango is a disgraced Regulator who takes a mercenary job on Mars to get by. When a Martian mining crew hires him and his crew to protect them from the evil Draeu (cannibals) it turns out the job is a lot more than he bargained for.

In *These Broken Stars* by Amy Kaufman and Meagan Spooner, Lilac is the daughter of the wealthiest man in the galaxy. Tarver is a war hero enjoying some R & R. They are both on the Icarus, a massive luxury spaceliner, and are thrown together when the ship is pulled out of hyperspace and falls to the nearest planet. Lilac and Tarver are the only two survivors. With no sign of rescue, they attempt to make do with the supplies from their escape pod and locate a safe place to camp. Soon they realize not everything is as it seems on the island, and Lilac's father has a lot to do with that.

In *Ruby Red* by Kerstin Gier and Anthea Bell, Gwyneth has spent her life watching her cousin prepare for the day she first time travels. She isn't expecting it when in the middle of one of her classes she travels to a different era. Once she lands, she must find out why her mother lied to her about having the gift while brushing up on history at the same time.

In *Tandem* by Anna Jarzab, Sasha has always enjoyed her grandfather's stories about parallel universes, but she never believed them to be true until she is pulled into a different world and forced to stand in for her double. If she can fool everyone for a little while, she'll be sent home. If she fails, she'll be trapped in the alternate world forever.

Epic by Conor Kostick asks the question—what if the quality of your life depended on how well you played a MMORPG? What's a MMORPG you ask? It is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. Well, on New Earth that is exactly the way life is.

For the Win by Cory Doctorow. In this alternate world millions of people are engrossed in multiplayer online games. They are determined to win virtual gold, jewels, and other artifacts. There are also people willing to buy those virtual winnings for real money in order to skip ahead in the game. This has created a corrupt system, and there are people out there willing to do anything to crash the system completely.

In *Insignia* by S. J. Kincaid, the earth is in the middle of World War III and Tom Raines, a short 14-year-old with bad skin, might be the only one who can win. His virtual reality gaming skills make him stand out behind the controls of the battle drones. Suddenly, his life has changed. He has the opportunity to get everything he's ever dreamed of, but everything comes with a price.

In *More Than This* by Patrick Ness, Seth is alone in the final moments of his life. As his body is bashed against the rocks and waves he can only think of the things he's lost. He doesn't expect to wake up. He doesn't expect to wake up in the attic of a house he hasn't lived in for several years. He doesn't expect to wake up completely alone as in no one else in the neighborhood or town. He can't remember what happened to his family.

In *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, Wade, in order to escape the terrible world around him, jacks in to OASIS, a virtual utopia that lets you be whatever you want to be. It is rumored that the creator of the game, James Halliday, has hidden a series of difficult puzzles and promises remarkable power to whoever can unlock them. Wade can't believe it when he stumbles upon the first puzzle. Maybe the rumors are true.

In *Carve the Mark* by Veronica Roth, a planet where violence and vengeance rule, in a galaxy where some are favored by fate, everyone develops a currentgift, a unique power meant to shape the future. While most benefit from their currentgifts, Akos and Cyra do not. Their gifts make them vulnerable to others' control. Can they reclaim their gifts, their fates, and their lives, and reset the balance of power in this world?

In **Exo* by Fonda Lee, for a century now, Earth has been a peaceful colony of an alien race, and Donovan Reyes is a loyal member of the security forces, while his father is the Prime Liaison. When a routine search and

seizure goes bad, Donovan finds himself a captive of the human revolutionary group, Sapience, who are terrorists who seem to prefer war to alien rule, and killing Donovan just might be the incident they are looking for.

Author in Action: Interview with Veronica Roth

Veronica Roth is the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of the *Divergent* series and *Carve the Mark*. She was born in a Chicago suburb, and studied creative writing at Northwestern University. She and her husband and dog currently live in Chicago.

As a creator, what's the best thing about writing sci-fi for young people and what are the greatest challenges? Did you always know this was a genre you'd choose as you began writing or did that happen more organically while you were creating?

The best thing is just taking young readers on an adventure in another world. I was an anxious kid, and I needed that escape to help me with my stress, so giving that to a young person is a big deal to me. And the biggest challenge is to provoke thought with my ideas and world-building—science fiction is all about exploring big ideas through exaggeration (a prime example from the non-YA sphere: propaganda and government surveillance in 1984), so putting enough care into my work that young people might have that experience, sometimes for the first time, is a priority of mine.

I always loved science fiction, even when I was a child, so it's not a surprise that I ended up writing it. But I resisted it for a long time because of some disdainful attitudes about genre fiction (as well as writing for young people!) that I encountered in school. When I let all that go and leaned toward what I love instead of away from it, that's when the YA sci-fi happened.

Do you find that writing YA keeps you grounded as a writer and if so, in what ways?

Absolutely. Sometimes people talk about teen readers to me like they're easier to please than adult readers, but I don't think that's the case at all. They might appreciate different things about a book, but they can tell right away when you're talking down to them, or manipulating them, so they keep me honest. They tell you exactly what they think about your work *to your face*, so they have a way of keeping you humble. They also have less patience for slow books, given all that is warring for their attention and their time, so I have to keep my pacing as tight as possible, which is a great exercise for any writer.

Are there any ways in which have you seen YA evolve? Is there anything you find surprising or particularly exciting about those changes? What do you wish you knew as you were starting that you feel like you've learned along the course of your career?

YA has evolved a lot since I first started writing it. Back then it was all trend-focused—paranormal romance of the Twilight era was finishing, and dystopian was getting headway, which was very good timing for me and *Divergent*. But now, trends don't rule YA as much as they used to. There are a lot of books out there and there's no telling what will resonate with readers next. Readers, too, seem to embrace the variety in YA. I'll ask them what they're reading after *Divergent* or *Carve the Mark*, both sci-fi, and it's often contemporary romance, or high fantasy—they don't always want the same kind of book every time, they have complex interests. I am excited by that, because it means they are not defining themselves as narrowly. They've realized they might like a lot of different things, and to see that kind of breadth in young people is wonderful to me.

What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature?

Make as few assumptions about your young readers—or yourself!—as possible. A good book can win you over to a particular genre or type of story you didn't think you were interested in—you just have to give it a chance, and you have to convince your readers to give it a

chance, too. I find this is particularly the case with young men. They don't need "boy books"; they need to not feel ashamed of reading about engaging female characters (who, by the way, are often tough, adventurous, bold, and funny—what's gender specific about that?). Young people don't always need to find characters who look like them or come from the same kind of background in order to identify with them. And encountering those characters will help develop their empathy toward people different from them in real life. These challenges start on the page, but they don't stop there. Let's all leave our assumptions at the door and read widely.

[Librarians in Action!: Empowering Readers' Choices](#)

Renee Dyer, the librarian, webmaster, and social media manager at Weslaco East High School in Weslaco, Texas, earned her master of library science (MLS) and is currently working on her Ed.D. in information systems design and technology at Sam Houston State University. In addition to leading innovative instructional technology professional learning sessions around the state of Texas, Renee has served as the chair of the Texas Association of School Librarians, TLA Young Adult Round Table Chair, and the TAYSHAS High School Reading List Chair. Additionally, she created YART's Texas Tea-speed dating with YA Authors event at the TLA's annual conference, is a cocreator of the TLA Maverick Graphic Novels Reading List, and the TLA Spirit of Texas High School and Middle School Reading Programs.

Student Agency: Student Voice and Choice in the
Library Learning Commons

By Renee Dyer

Students entering our high school learning commons have rarely experienced voice and choice in school, let alone in their school library learning commons. Their elementary school libraries were likely *school-centered*, shuffling students through the library as part of the electives classes rotation. Their middle school libraries may have been *library-centered*, allowing flexible access to the library, independent of the school's bell schedule, but it didn't necessarily seek their input about what would happen in the library throughout the school year. Our library learning commons strives to be different; we aim to provide a *personalized patron-centered*, patron-driven environment that honors the unique experiences each of our patrons brings with them while simultaneously encouraging our patrons' voice and choice to guide the learning commons programs throughout the entire year.

How do We Empower Our Students' Voice and Choice?

For our library learning commons, it all starts about a month before National Library Week; at that time we begin the conversation about next year's library learning commons theme with all of our book club, manga club, tech club, and student library helpers. These groups hold discussions and debates about potential themes until they narrow it down to three themes for the next school year. Our students have selected Star Wars, Dr. Who, DC Comics, Harry Potter, and Mythology from Around the World as themes in recent years. After the top three themes are selected, we make the selection of library learning commons theme for the following year part of our annual National Library Week celebrations. All students are allowed to vote on the final theme, and while it can be stressful at times (we almost had a Pepe the Frog Meme theme one year), I genuinely believe when librarians open their libraries to student voice and choice, a unique window into what our patrons think, feel, and value opens up to us in reciprocation because we show

our patrons that their opinions and perspectives are valued and appreciated.

What Type of Programming Do the Students Organize?

Once the theme for the following year is selected, the real fun begins. Our students scour websites, social media, Pinterest, and more to:

Determine library decorations

Students decide if we need to repaint, paint a mural, print posters, make decorations, order decorations, and so on.

Find information or infographics that will tell users more about our theme

Students find or create infographics to display throughout the year that provide passive learning opportunities about our theme for all visitors.

Create monthly Makerspace activities

Students find ideas on the Internet for monthly makerspace activities to accompany with our theme. During our Harry Potter year, we made trunks to Hogwarts, wands, golden snitches, Hogwarts house buttons, potions, baby mandrakes, T-shirts, and more.

Develop activities to have during National Library Week, Teen Read Week, Banned Books Week, Teen Tech Week that correlate with their theme

Students create activities, games, trivia, and advertisements for five days' worth of events for library promotional week,

Research the best traditional and manga books for our clubs to read that align with our theme

Manga books are über alles (above all else) at our school and the selection of which nine or ten manga books we read during the upcoming school year is spearheaded by our most passionate Manga/Anime Club members. They correlate the book subject.

Analyze which authors are available for online and in-person visits

Students make lists of authors they would like to talk to either online or in person. We then work together to contact the authors via social media to inquire about a virtual or IRL (in real life) school visit.

Investigate what movies to watch that relate to our theme during Film Fest Fridays

Students select AND preview, for appropriateness, films to accompany our theme to be played during our Film Fest Fridays. Some years that selection is quite easy; we watch all the DC animated and live-action films we could. Other years, like Mythology from Around the World, have required a little more research and movie culling to find just the right films for weekly Film Fests.

Create library spaces that are unique to the theme

Students helped create and manage Aphrodite's Beauty station during our Mythology from Around the World year. How? They saw a need: students at our school begin arriving at school around 6:30 AM, an hour and a half before school starts, and many of them come and finish their hair and makeup in the library after the bus drops them off. Then they developed a solution: designated library space complete with YouTube hair and makeup tutorials, makeup supplies, hair styling supplies, and enhanced lighting.

Collaborate with our feeder middle schools for special events

Students collaborate with each other and their middle school librarians to invite them and their book clubs to special library events throughout the year. The students at these middle schools will eventually come to our school, and we want to make them feel as welcome as possible as early as we possibly can.

Select the outfits that library staff and library helpers will wear during special library events

Yes, outfits. On Film Fest Fridays not only do we show movies that relate to our theme during lunch, but we also dress up. Over the past few years the Dr. Who, DC Comics, Harry Potter, and Star Wars costumes

have been amazing. The most unique outfits we've ever created were the hand-drawn Jocasta Nu, the chief librarian of the Jedi Archives during the clone wars. Several students and I even learned to sew to create these costumes.

This isn't an exhaustive list of how our library strives to increase student agency, it is a place for you to start, to get some ideas, and to start thinking about how your library can help students develop higher-order thinking skills that meet their individual learning interests and styles while simultaneously advancing their abilities to collaborate in real-world activities.

Conclusion

For fans of fantastic fiction the biggest problem for young adults will be finding time to read all of the books they want to read. The librarian's pleasurable job is to guide them to their favorite genres. What will it be? Fantasy like Tolkein's or Rowling's? Blurred genres? Supernatural stories? Paranormal romances? Stories about dragons, witches, vampires, or zombies? Classic science fiction, such as Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*? Or, recent young adult science fiction, such as Marie Lu's *War Cross*; a dragon story like Rachel Hartman's epic series *Seraphina*; or a science fiction/fairy tale like Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles* series? No matter which type of fantastic fiction young adults choose, they'll find imaginative writing at its best—books to take them to places they've never been.

I immigrated from Taiwan when I was six years old, so English is my second language. I remember going into my first day of first grade, mid-semester, and Mrs. Bristol had to write my name on the board; I didn't know the alphabet. At that age—when I'd just gotten a better grasp of my language and communicating—to be thrust into a new country where I didn't understand one word made an impression. To this day, even though I sound like a total Cali girl, I still identify as ESL. I remember staying in after

school while my mom went over English words with me and how to spell them: yellow, slide, swing, and friend. I remember watching the neighborhood kids play outside while I studied. And magically, it seemed, I was ordering Scholastic books in third grade and devouring all the stories. To delve in, to make sense of the words on the page, and be taken to faraway lands felt like literal magic to me. I started writing my first novel, *Silver Phoenix*, in 2006. Around that same time, I happened upon Lisa Yee's *Millicent Min, Girl Genius* in my local bookstore. I picked up the book, marveling over it, realizing that was the first time I'd ever seen an Asian girl on a children's book cover. I was in my thirties. Since then, I've made a conscious choice to feature Asian casts in all of my young adult novels. I'm writing for the younger Cindy who loved to read so much, but never got to see a heroine who looked like herself in all the stories she'd read.

—Cindy Pon, author of *Want*, *Serpentine*, and *Silver Phoenix*

Assignments in Action: Fantastic Fiction for Discussion

1. Why are young adults attracted to supernatural and paranormal?
2. What are the benefits to reading fantasy and science fiction?
3. Describe novels from other genres featuring heroes on quests.
4. Which author of fantastic fiction would you like to learn more about? What resources would you use?
5. After reading about the wide range of fantasy and science fiction titles, which novels do you think you would like to read? Why?
6. Which fantastic fiction titles do you think would appeal to teens you work with?
7. Which titles would you consider booktalking? Why?
8. How could a public librarian and a school librarian collaborate on promoting fantastic fiction?

Chapter 6

Informational Books

I write YA nonfiction because it allows me to be a nerdy detective for a living. I spend entire days finding true stories, digging for details, and figuring out how to put the pieces together to make a fast-paced story. It's no good telling teens that history is cool; you have to *prove* it. That's the goal, and it's a worthwhile and exciting challenge.

—*Steve Sheinkin, author of* *Undeclared: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team* *and* *Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon*, *Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*. *Sheinkin is a multi-time winner of the Boston Globe Horn Book Nonfiction Award and a National Book Award finalist.*

Biography, autobiography, memoirs, science, history, facts, self-help, true crime, true survival, true stories, atlases, dictionaries, encyclopedias—informational books read by young adults are a wonderful hodgepodge of popular and classic categories, subgenres, formats, and topics. In 1876, Melvil Dewey organized it all into his famous Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC), selecting 10 major classes and introducing them to the world. According to the *Abridged Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index, Edition 14*, the 10 classes are as follows:

- 000—Computer science, information & general works
- 100—Philosophy & psychology
- 200—Religion
- 300—Social sciences
- 400—Language
- 500—Pure science
- 600—Technology
- 700—Arts & recreation
- 800—Literature
- 900—History and geography

Skip most of the 810-899 (poetry and fiction), 398s (folklore), and 741.5 (cartoon fiction and fictional graphic novels), and what's left is an astonishing range of informational books. Topics are published and arranged for every individual taste, whether a student is seeking informational reading or pleasure reading. The informational collection in the library typically relates directly to the school curriculum. Though it varies by individual needs, in many cases, roughly half of the library book budget and half of the book shelves are devoted to informational books. This chapter groups types of informational books young adults typically want to read. It examines quality informational books, providing a few titles and topics as examples within the framework of the DDC system.

For more than a century, nonfiction was relegated to purpose-driven, curriculum-related subjects (Cart 2016). Fortunately, today, titles used as examples of popular interest, quality writing and book design, and worthwhile curricular-related materials are chosen from book awards and award-winning lists. These are primarily the Robert F. Sibert Award, sponsored by the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC); the Young Adult Services Association Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults, sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA); and the Orbis Pictus Award, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

[Interview with Kenneth C. Davis](#)

Kenneth C. Davis is the author of many award-winning books including *Don't Know Much about® History*, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, and *More Deadly Than War*.

What inspired you to focus on creating nonfiction books, especially those often focused little-known facts about history?

Some people fondly recall a favorite pet or doll as the icon of their childhood. I remember books: piles of Golden Books (*Mickey Mouse Delivers the Christmas Mail!*) at the foot of my bed; a collection of

Minute Biographies I devoured until the book fell apart; the Grosset & Dunlap series of famous people when they were young; a series of "We Were There" books about turning points in history. In other words, I can't remember a time when books were not central to my life.

As a boy and young adult, these books—along with my ritual trips to the public library or Bookmobile—shaped me as a reader, a writer, and I think, as a person. I loved fiction and nonfiction both. And yes, I loved comic books. True confession: I first read Dickens in a Classic Comic. As a teenager, I was certainly transformed by books—both fiction and nonfiction—that changed my perceptions of the world: *Hiroshima*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Jungle*, and *Death Be Not Proud*.

Maybe that's how and why I became a writer. More than 30 years ago, I began my career writing for adults, moving from *Don't Know Much about® History* to other subjects I thought were important but had been poorly taught to most Americans. I never imagined that schoolteachers would discover and adopt my books and assign them to students.

Given your success as a writer of nonfiction for adults, why shift to writing informational books for teens?

A few years ago, I began to speak directly to some of those students through classroom Skype visits about the Civil War, America's presidents, and the role of slavery in American history. Contrary to media reports and widespread presumptions, the students I engaged with were curious, open, and excited to learn. They had a lot on their minds. They energized me in a way I found both refreshing and inspiring.

I became so excited about connecting with these young people that I decided to write directly for young adults in much the same way I write for older adults: tell real stories about real people, connect the past to the present, and eliminate the myths and misconceptions that cloud the truth. I write nonfiction for young adults because books change lives. They touch us and form us. I want to share my own

passion for history and what we can learn from it. But in a larger sense, I believe it is more critical than ever to help shape young adults who are like sponges that can absorb so much or clay waiting to be molded. I would like to help them to understand that the past is more than part of who we are—that we can learn to avoid the mistakes that have been made. To keep asking hard questions. And most of all, to think for themselves.

History in Action: First Newbery Medal

In 1922, the first John Newbery Medal was awarded. The creation and implementation of this award had a huge impact on literature for youth; it was the first award for children's literature in the world, and it recognized and encouraged quality writing in children's books. Also remarkable about this award was the first chosen winner was an informational book entitled *The Story of Mankind* by Hendrik Willem van Loon, a professor at Antioch College (1882-1944). This history of the world has been updated three times: in 1972, 1984, and 1998. It was last updated by Professor John Merriman of Yale University when pen-and-ink illustrations were added by Adam Simon. At 674 pages in length, it includes an "Animated Timeline" and a detailed index. Also, to emphasize the uniqueness of this winner, in the intervening years only six biographies have won a Newbery Medal:

Invincible Louisa: The Story of the Author of "Little Women" by Cornelia Meigs (1934)

Daniel Boone by James H. Daugherty (1940)

Amos Fortune, Free Man by Elizabeth Yates (1951)

Carry On, Mr. Bowditch by Jean Lee Latham (1956)

I, Juan de Pareja by Elizabeth Borten de Trevino (1966)

Lincoln: A Photobiography by Russell Freedman (1988)

While there are a number of awards that consider nonfiction in their selections, few look specifically at this genre of writing for teens as part of their criteria for designating excellence in informational writing for readers. The Robert F. Sibert Award, YALSA's Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults, and the Orbis Pictus Award are uniquely dedicated to excellence in informational books, excluding textbooks, historical fiction, folk literature, and poetry.

Robert F. Sibert Award

The Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award honors the long-time president of Bound to Stay Bound Books, Inc. of Jacksonville, Illinois. The award was established by ALSC, is sponsored by Bound to Stay Bound, and continued to be administered by ALSC. Like the Orbis Pictus Award, the Sibert Award recognizes informational books only, excluding poetry and traditional literature, such as folktales. To be eligible for a Sibert Award, a book should be distinguished for its significant contribution to children's literature appropriate for young people, birth through age 14. Again, similar to the Orbis Pictus Award, many titles are appropriate for middle school students, and some for high school students. Books eligible for a Sibert Award must be published in English in the previous year of the announced award. According to the ALSC website, criteria for the award are the following "important elements and qualities":

1. excellent, engaging, and distinctive use of language
 2. excellent, engaging, and distinctive visual presentation
 3. appropriate organization and documentation
 4. clear, accurate, and stimulating presentation of facts, concepts, and ideas
 5. appropriate style of presentation for subject and intended audience
 6. supportive features (index, table of contents, maps, timelines, etc.)
 7. respectful and of interest to children.
- (<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/sibertmedal>)

YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults

Sponsored by YALSA a committee of nine members is charged with selecting the best nonfiction book written in English and published in the United States for ages 12-18 during one publishing year. Five books are chosen as finalists; one book receives the award. The first award was given in 2010. The purpose of the award is to:

1. Recognize the best in the field of nonfiction books (at this time, only books will be considered for the award) and materials for young adults
2. Promote the growing number of nonfiction books published for young adults
3. Inspire wider readership in the genre
4. Give recognition to the importance of the genre
5. Position YALSA as an authority in the field of nonfiction for young adults (<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/bookawards/nonfiction/policies>)

The Orbis Pictus Award

Sponsored by the NCTE, the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children was first awarded in 1990 to Jean Fritz's *The Great Little Madison*. The name of the award honors Johannes Amos Comenius for his illustrated informational book, *Orbis Pictus: The World in Pictures* (1657), considered the first picture book for children. According to the NCTE website, the award recognizes "excellence in the writing of nonfiction for children." Five honor books may be awarded in addition to the winner, and beginning the second year of the award (1991) recommended book titles are available as a useful extension. As with many awards, one year of publications are scrutinized by a committee and then the award carries the next year's date. Since the award is intended for children in kindergarten through eighth grade, not all books are suitable for young adults although most are appropriate for middle school students. According to Award

Criteria on the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus>, each nomination should meet the following literary criteria:

Accuracy—facts current and complete, balance of fact and theory, varying point of view, stereotypes avoided, author's qualifications adequate, appropriate scope, authenticity of detail

Organization—logical development, clear sequence, interrelationships indicated, patterns provided (general-to-specific, simple-to-complex, etc.)

Design—attractive, readable, illustrations complement text, placement of illustrative material appropriate and complementary, appropriate media, format, type

Style—writing is interesting, stimulating, reveals author's enthusiasm for subject, curiosity and wonder encouraged, appropriate terminology, rich language.

More information about the Orbus Pictus can be found here: <http://www2.ncte.org/awards/orbis-pictus-award-nonfiction-for-children/>.

Biographies and Autobiographies

Biographies and autobiographies written for young adults have the potential to benefit readers by:

1. Providing role models.
2. Helping young adults get to know people different from themselves.
3. Demonstrating how decisions, opportunities, and changes influence one's life.
4. Encouraging young adults to enter into the thought processes of people who have made an impact on society.
5. Supplying information on specialized topics for personal interest or for school research.
6. Offering a research model.
7. Offering a pleasurable reading experience.

A modern, well-written biography for youth is a life history, presenting a person's life from birth to death with an effort at interpreting the meaning of the person's life (Holman and Holman 1992, 54). Deborah Heiligman's *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers* is an example of a well-written,

well-designed biography. It was awarded the YALSA Nonfiction Award, was a Printz Honor Book, a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award winner, a SCBWI Golden Kite winner, and the Cybils Senior High Nonfiction Award winner, as well being the recipient of nine starred reviews. Using the criteria of the YALSA Nonfiction Award to evaluate this volume, it's easy to understand the accolades.

Clearly written without sensationalizing Vincent's eccentricities, Heiligman has created a biography appropriate for middle school and high school students. Meticulously researched, drawing on the 658 letters Vincent wrote to Theo during his lifetime, Deborah Heiligman weaves a tale of two lives intertwined and the extraordinary love of the Van Gogh brothers. After vividly setting the stage with brief sections that introduce Vincent and Theo near the end of their lives, Heiligman takes readers back to their beginnings. We learn of other siblings and of supportive parents; we gain a sense of their childhoods in their father's parsonage. Structured as a walk through an art museum, the book proceeds through the years, each section a gallery: "Gallery Two: Dangers (1873-1875)"; "Gallery Three: Missteps, Stumbles (1875-1879)." Heiligman mostly employs a present-tense, purposely staccato narration that effectively heightens the brothers' emotional intensity, their sufferings and pleasures (physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual), and, most of all, Vincent's wild and original art. The layout, which incorporates sketches, subheads, and a generous use of white space, is a calming counterpoint to the turbulent narrative. Documenting the author's research involving visits to sites, along with academic and primary sources, the extensive back matter includes a list of significant people, a timeline, a bibliography, thorough citations, and an author's note. *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers* is a complete biographical package well suited to the needs of young adult readers.

[Other Biographical Choices](#)

Still other biographical choices include collected biography, illustrated biographies, and graphic novels. First, in the same way that story collections encourage readers to browse through a book and choose stories that interest them, collected biographies offer the same desirable feature. Selections that also fit the "Own Voices" distinction are labeled with a*.

In Andrea Davis Pinkeye's **Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters* readers can choose between Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, or Rosa Parks or read about all of the women in any order they choose. In Tonya Bolden's **Pathfinders: The Journeys of 16 Extraordinary Black Souls*, Bolden's s collective biography focuses on the important contributions of 16 less-known diverse American men and women of African descent who made their mark on American history in the 18th to 20th centuries. *How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous* by Georgia Bragg, illustrated by Kevin O'Malley, features brief, humorous pieces about the life and death of 19 famous men and women. For many years Diane Stanley has been writing and illustrating biographies about some of the most fascinating people in the history of the world. Her beautifully illustrated, well-researched, well-designed, and well-written biographies are most appropriate for middle school students but may have appeal to high school students because of the excellent presentation of material. Stanley's subjects include Michelangelo, Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Leonardo da Vinci, and more. Finally, the increasing popularity of graphic novels (described in [Chapter 2: Quick Reads](#)) extends to autobiography with Art Spiegelman's **Maus I* and *Maus II* and *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel* by Siena Cherson Siegel with artwork by Mark Siegel.

[Autobiography](#)

Similar to a biography, an autobiography is a "narrative of the author's life, with some stress on introspection" (Holman and Harmon 1992, 41). In

literature for youth, there are few autobiographies of a person's entire life. The closest genre is a memoir. In a memoir, sometimes a writer's entire life is reviewed, but more often there are only slices presented. For instance, in a dramatic account beginning with his late teen years, in *Hole in My Life*, Jack Gantos describes how he became a drug user and a smuggler, was arrested, and went to prison as a young adult. Later, he attended college and finally became a beloved writer of children's books. Gantos won a Printz Honor for *Hole in My Life*. In contrast to Gantos's sobering view of his teen years, Chris Crutcher reminisces about his years growing up in Cascade, Idaho. *King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography* is filled with Crutcher's irreverent sense of humor.

A special type of autobiography is the memoir. Instead of a complete history of a person's life, a memoir captures one or more events through the eyes and words of the writer. The best memoirs are judged favorably by seven criteria used in honoring a Robert F. Sibert Award.

**How Dare the Sun Rise* is a profoundly moving memoir that shares the remarkable and inspiring true story of Sandra Uwiringiyimana, a girl from the Democratic Republic of Congo who shares her experiences of surviving a massacre, immigrating to America, and overcoming her trauma through art and activism.

Jacqueline Woodson, one of today's finest writers, tells the moving story of her childhood in mesmerizing verse in **Brown Girl Dreaming*, winner of the National Book Award . Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the civil rights movement. Touching and powerful, each poem is both accessible and emotionally charged, each line a glimpse into a child's soul as she searches for her place in the world. Her love of stories inspired her and stayed with her, creating the first sparks of the gifted writer she was to become.

A classic memoir that is often required reading for teens is **Night* by Elie Wiesel. Wiesel's memoir of surviving the evil of the Holocaust but

questioning his belief in God is riveting.

Another excellent memoir that will resonate with teen readers is Chessy Prout's *I Have a Right To: A High School Survivor's Story of Sexual Assault, Justice, and Hope*. This gut-wrenching memoir presents this young survivor's searing, visceral story of sexual assault, justice, and healing. Readers may be shocked to learn the staggering statistics: nearly one in five girls ages 14 to 17 have been the victim of a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault. This is the true story of one of those girls.

Admirable Men and Women of Influence

Notable autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs for middle school and high school students include the following excellent titles about admirable men and women of influence:

- Abraham Lincoln & Frederick Douglass* by Russell Freedman
- Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream* by Tonya Lee Stone
- Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart* by Candace Fleming
- Andy Warhol: Prince of Pop* by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan
- Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith* by Deborah Heiligman
- Charles Dickens and the Street Children of London* by Andrea Warren
- Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice* by Philip Hoose
- Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery* by Russell Freedman
- *Facing Frederick: The Life of Frederick Douglas, a Monumental American Man* by Tonya Bolden
- FDR and the American Crisis* by Albert Marrin
- Feynman* by Jim Ottaviani, illustrated by Leland Myrick (a graphic novel)

First Girl Scout: The Life of Juliette Gordon Low by Ginger Wadsworth
Florence Nightingale: The Courageous Life of the Legendary Nurse by Catherine Reef
Hillary Rodham Clinton: A Woman Living History by Karen Blumenthal
Janis Joplin: Rise Up Singing by Ann Angel
Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil by Deborah Rodriguez
Langston Hughes by Melvin Meltzer
Lincoln: A Photobiography by Russell Freedman
Mary's Monster; Love, Madness and How Mary Shelley Created Frankenstein by Lita Judge
Music Was It: Young Leonard Bernstein by Susan Goldman Ruben
Savion: My Life in Tap by Savion Glover and Bruce Weber
Steve Jobs, the Man Who Thought Different by Karen Blumenthal
Steve Jobs, Thinking Differently: A Biography by Patricia Lakin
Temple Grandin: How the Girl Who Loved Cows Embraced Autism and Changed the World by Sy Montgomery
The Bronte Sisters: The Brief Lives of Charlotte, Emily, and Ann by Catherine Reef
Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature by George Sullivan
Victoria: A Portrait of a Queen by Catherine Reef
Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom (With a Few Flat Tires along the Way) by Sue Macy

[Organizing Biographies and Autobiographies](#)

Biographies and memoirs allow young adult readers to vicariously experience other people's lives and historical periods. Those experiences can add another dimension to their understanding of human nature and human history. What is the best way to organize these human experiences and make them easily accessible in the school or public library? In most cases, biographies and autobiographies are shelved in a special section simply labeled "biography" and shelved by the last name of the person the book is about. This arrangement can create a huge section of books all labeled with a "B." Imagine a fan of baseball or a young artist faced with this section yet wanting to read about a real-life athlete or artist. There are, of course, online catalogs, but a student interested in baseball or art and browsing shelves of books to see what's interesting is more likely to find biographies in a related Dewey number. Instead of a biography section, shelving biographies and autobiographies in Dewey classes automatically groups related materials. This arrangement allows for optimal browsing for both pleasure and curricular purposes. A student wanting to report on music and musicians could find both topics in the 780s. A biography of Dian Fossey, a researcher who worked for many years with the mountain gorillas in the rain forests of Rwanda, would be found in the 590s with books about the behavior of gorillas.

Authors in Action: On Writing Nonfiction by Karen Blumenthal

As a young teen in the early 1970s, I was drawn into the daily headlines: Watergate, the women's movement, school desegregation, the Vietnam War . . . and football.

After a long career in journalism, I now write for young people because I remember the feeling of discovering that bigger, more interesting world. I remember wanting to know more about it, but failing to find many helpful resources.

I write nonfiction for young people because I believe the world is a messy place and true stories can help give us context for our complicated world.

But it can't be just any true story. It can't just be something that's "interesting." It has to be something more:

Is it a great story that would appeal to kids?

This is subjective, admittedly. But I do think some nonfiction for kids is more interesting to adults than to younger readers.

Writing *Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different* for teens was obviously an easy choice. Who hasn't been wowed by Apple's technology? Besides, Jobs is an icon and hoo boy, is he interesting!

But when an editor asked me if there was a book to do about the Second Amendment, I paused. I didn't even want to *read* a book about the Second Amendment! Yet guns and the gun debate in America are fascinating. It's a divisive subject that many young people likely hear about at home or at school, and most viewpoints are decidedly one-sided.

Surely there was a way to tell both sides of the story—but I struggled to find it. There were several false starts before I remembered the impact of the Thompson submachine gun. This was a weapon created for war that moved to the streets. (Hmm, that sounded familiar.) The Tommy gun captured the attention of the U.S. Congress, but it also was the weapon of Capone and Dillinger. With those elements, I had the core of *Tommy: The Gun That Changed America*.

Are there layers of stories to tell?

A fair bit of children's nonfiction falls into what I jokingly call the *snot, barf, poop* genre. It's appealing, absolutely. But there's not a lot you want to chew on when you're done.

I want to offer readers multiple themes to think about. For instance, *Six Days in October: The Stock Market Crash of 1929* is about a pretty dramatic turning point in American history. But it's also about the mixed prosperity of the 1920s and the impact of the Great Depression.

It's about how markets work. And even more, it's about the corrupting power of greed.

Hillary Rodham Clinton: A Woman Living History is a straightforward biography of someone you've probably heard about. But it also turned out to be something of a review of American history for the past 50 years, and also an up-close look at both politics and how contemporary women's lives have changed over the years.

Is there something new to say?

This is especially important. Hopefully, I've taken an angle that helps a reader see a subject in a fresh way and that provides much more than Google. Millions of words were written about Title IX, girls, and sports, but there was no straight history—for kids or adults—until *Let Me Play* was published.

Similarly, much has been written about Bonnie and Clyde. But rather than simply chronicle their escapades, I wanted my latest book, *Bonnie and Clyde: The Making of a Legend*, to explain why these notorious criminals are so famous. What would that tell us about celebrity in an era of social media and reality TV?

Once I have a subject and an angle, I research like crazy. I seek out oral histories, original press coverage, personal papers, government documents, and expert sources. Good storytelling requires color and anecdotes—and everything must be absolutely true. This book may be the first (or only) exposure a young person may have to the subject.

As a visual person, I also love the way strong images elevate narrative nonfiction. I look for compelling photos and what the fancy-pants academics call ephemera—campaign buttons, wanted flyers, editorial cartoons, and personal letters—to help bring a true tale to life.

Hopefully, the result is a story that is just as fun and satisfying and meaningful to read as any book of fiction. Hopefully, like good fiction, it will take you places you didn't expect to go. And—this is sappy, I admit—hopefully young people who read compelling nonfiction will grow up to better understand and be better citizens of our big, complicated, and messy world.

Karen Blumenthal is an award-winning author of nonfiction for young people, including *Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different* and *Bootleg: Murder, Moonshine, and the Lawless Years of Prohibition*. Her books have received a Sibert Honor and a Jane Addams Children's Book Award and have been a finalist three times for the YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Award. Her most recent book is *Bonnie and Clyde: The Making of a Legend*.

Author biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and interviews can satisfy young adults' curiosity about their favorite authors and may encourage them to read more of the authors' books. The following list is a sampling.

**Bad Boy: A Memoir* by Walter Dean Myers. His personal story growing up in Harlem in the 1950s reflects his turbulent adolescence and eventual path to respected writer. A versatile author, Myers has written both fiction (*Monster*, the first Printz Award winner—2000; *Fallen Angels*) and nonfiction (*Greatest: Muhammad Ali*; *Amistad: A Long Road to Freedom*; *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary*).

Jane Austen: A Life Revealed by Catherine Reef offers an examination of the true nature of Jan Austen, another popular author of classic literature read by young adults, and provides insights into her life and six of her published novels.

Told in graphic novel format, *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett Krosoczka is a profoundly important memoir about growing up in a family grappling with addiction, and finding the art that helped him survive.

[Creative Ways to Engage Readers with Informational Books](#)

Informational books offer librarians multiple opportunities to collaborate and function as an instructional partner with colleagues; one possible

opportunity is combining research and fun in a collaborative activity between an art teacher and a reading or language arts or English teacher.

Follow these basic steps:

1. Students choose an author to research.
2. A language arts teacher explains note-taking and writing processes.
3. A librarian helps students locate biographical resources in print and online and reviews research processes and proper citation formats and parenthetical references.
4. An art teacher shows both historical and contemporary caricatures and teaches the basics of drawing a caricature with an emphasis on the importance of knowing details about the author before beginning to draw.
5. Students self-evaluate for assessment; the language arts teacher evaluates students' writing; the art teacher evaluates their caricatures; and the school library media specialist displays writing and art in a secure display cabinet.

See Jean M. Crane's article, detailing the activity for students in "Art/Reading/Language Arts: Biographies and Caricatures with Young Adults" in *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, 2005.

Another opportunity to focus on informational books is by planning and executing a book blitz with teen readers. A book blitz is a basic book previewing activity; but with nonfiction informational texts, it can be especially useful as a means to expose teen readers to the wide variety of appealing books that fall under the nonfiction umbrella. Book previewing activities can be executed in a number of ways, but one simple way is to pull sample books from each Dewey classification and place them in varied piles on tables. Book blitz participants can be given a limited amount of time to select a book from the piles and preview it; after the quick preview, they can pair up with a table partner to engage in a "Think, Pair, Share" reflection. After each round, allow participants to share the books they found most interesting and why they think they or someone else might want to give a book a further investigation or read.

[Interview with Candace Fleming](#)

Candace Fleming is the versatile and award-winning author of *The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion, and the Fall of the Russian Empire*. The title won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the Robert F. Sibert Nonfiction Honor Award, and YALSA's Excellence Nonfiction Finalist, and was the winner of NCTE's Orbus Pictus Award. Fleming's other books have received a number of other distinctions and honors including the biography, *The Lincolns*, which was the winner of The *Boston Globe/Horn Book* Award.

What's your greatest motivation to focus on creating nonfiction books, especially those often focused on the roles of women throughout history?

I went to high school in the 1970s, and it was clear—even to a 14-year-old freshman—that the football coach had more power and privilege than the home economics teacher. And the boys had more prerogatives than the girls. I didn't want to try out for the cheerleading squad. I wanted to be on the basketball team. But it wasn't possible, and no one could give me a reason that made sense, so I was left with a big "why?" That's probably the reason I pursued nonfiction writing, that "why." It opens field after field of inquiry. In my case, the questions are about the dynamics of power—between men and women, haves and have-nots, the strong and the weak, the citizen and the state.

Though you could choose to write primarily for an adult audience, what's the best part of helping teen readers find the "truth" in history?

I write about these things for teenage readers because I know they have big "whys," too. Teenagers are curious. They are seekers of truth, and firm believers in justice. And they have built-in B.S. meters. They know alternative perspectives exist, and there are parts of humanity that the culture wants to silence. They're aware that traditional versions of history often skirt the truth. By writing YA nonfiction, I'm responding to their thirst for the sometimes unsettling, often bitter, but always crucial truth. And in the process, I hope I'm helping teens grow more compassionate, more ethical, alert, and active. Nonfiction gives them a sense that there were real, pulsing people out there in history;

that we're all part of a web of humanity. It shows them that the things they are dealing with today—issues of who they are, who they want to be, what they should and shouldn't do—are ones people have wrestled with since the dawn of time. We are all connected, after all, even across centuries. And when one of my books resonates with teenagers? They respond more intensely and gratefully than any other group. And that, perhaps, is the most compelling reason for writing YA nonfiction. I mean, who wouldn't want to write for readers like that?

Other Informational Books

Certainly, biographies and autobiographies are informational books. They inform readers with details of the lives of people of interest. Other informational books may include human stories, but the emphasis is not on a single person but on a topic, such as a period in history, a social issue, or a scientific finding or phenomenon. In comparing and contrasting fiction and informational books, we expect fiction to entertain readers and informational books to inform readers. This is an oversimplification of the differences in the two types of books. Readers can learn from fiction about their options in life, such as ways to handle emotional situations. Readers of informational book can gain facts about the world, but for some, maybe many readers, learning information about the world is entertainment as well. The intent of informational books is to provide true and accurate information, but to many young adults it also brings reading pleasure (Carter and Abrahamson 1990).

Format of Informational Books

For the purpose of understanding the format of informational books better, it's important to note that as information books have evolved, so have the formats. In the past, book formats could usually be divided into two basic groups: those that were dominated by text and those that were dominated by illustration. Today, the formats of these new nonfiction young adult titles vary from book to book; in some cases, books have limited narrative, relying on captions and sidebars to provide readers pertinent information. Informational books of this design typically have an abundance of photographs or art, though again, this is not a hard-and-fast rule. Other young adult nonfiction titles may have a wealth of narrative text, in addition to other elements like photos and back matter to support the book's research. Informational books dominated by text, either expository or narrative writing, lack illustrations or have few illustrations.

Authors choose the most appropriate style and format for their work. Sometimes a work demands illustrations; sometimes illustrations are either not available or would not be appropriate. In other cases, photoessay books such as Russell Freedman's Newbery Medal winner *Lincoln: A Photobiography* rely on their imagery and design to capture the interest of readers. In looking back at the evolution of book formats, Freedman's work set the stage for DK's revolutionary *Eyewitness Books*, which followed a lexigraphic approach, breaking up the solid pages of gray type and replacing it with bite-size nuggets of information and imagery. Today, informational books may employ a variety of these design styles in their formats (Cart 2016). Instead of being overly concerned with a precise term for formats of informational books, a more useful approach is to understand the many elements that can make a wonderful book.

[Reference Sources and Research](#)

In school and public libraries basic print reference sources for information are encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, and almanacs. In the past, these were

large works in print shelved in a separate section of the library. With the infusion of technology in today's libraries the way young adults search has changed dramatically. Students still need and want the type of information offered by standards works, but they are finding their information online through databases on the Internet. If a library has enough funding to subscribe to online versions of standard reference works and enough computers available, then the need for reference works in print is drastically reduced. Print sources are declining, and e-reference is rapidly replacing print sources. E-reference appeals to today's generation of young adults who take laptops, tablets, and cellphones for granted (Polanka 2008). It's all about the technology available in libraries, meaning it's all about funding. Databases can be double the cost of print sources, but they do allow libraries to serve patrons well by broadening availability and access to digital materials.

Whether a library's reference sources are print or electronic, there are two major reasons for supplying reference sources in schools. First, reference should support curricular-related lessons and activities. For example, high school students who are writing a research paper on Africa could use the *Encyclopedia of the Atlantic World, 1400-1900: Europe, Africa, and the Americas in an Age of Exploration, Trade, and Empires* (ABC CLIO, 2018); a two-volume set, along with *Africa* (Greenhaven, 2011), a title in the popular *Opposing Viewpoints* series. They could search databases such as JSTOR (<https://www.jstor.org/>), ProQuest (<http://www.umi.com>), EBSCO (<https://www.ebsco.com/>), and Gale (<https://www.gale.com/databases>).

Second, reference should support hobbies and other interests of young adults. Current popular nonfiction interests are reflected in popular magazine topics, such as anime and comics, crafts, entertainment, ethnicity, occultism, teen issues, and trivia. Recent print reference sources that support at least two of these topics are *Encyclopedia of American Indian History*, *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*, and *African Americans in the Media Today: An Encyclopedia*. For reviews of reference sources, librarians can rely on the same recommended selection tools they use for fiction and

informational books: *Booklist*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, and *VOYA*.

A Research Process

Librarians and classroom teachers need to direct students in a research process that enables students to go beyond the simple gathering of information. The ultimate goal of a research project is to "learn how to learn" (Carey 2003, 28).

Ten Classes of Dewey: Sample Titles

To sample useful and entertaining informational books for young adults, it seems helpful to librarians to consider topics organized into 10 main classes by Melvil Dewey. Librarians want to find the best combination of excellent features with the subjects that address curricular needs and interests of the young adults they serve. Informational books written and published for young adults reflect current societal concerns of adults and especially those of young adults. The following 10 major classification descriptions contain brief samples of book titles published for young adults, including a few published for adults but read by young adults. Lists of topics are not intended to be comprehensive nor are topics taken from a standard subject list, such as *Sears List of Subject Headings*. Lists offer a sample of popular and curricular topics, both specific and general, understanding that new topics capture the imagination of society (and writers) daily. In other words, these are popular topics of popular, well-written books for young adults that provide insight into available reading selections. Each major class describes a few recommended titles.

000—Computer Science, Information & General Works

Girl Code: Gaming, Going Viral, and Getting It Done by Andrea Gonzales and Sophie Houser is the story of two teenage tech phenoms who met at Girls Who Code summer camp, teamed up to create a viral video game, and ended up becoming world famous. They share their knowledge of gaming, programming, and the tech industry, and provide advice on getting into the field of computer programming.

A favorite title found in this class is *The Guinness Book of World Records*, published annually, and popular with teens. Although general encyclopedias are classified in the 000s, they are usually shelved in a reference section. Topics include books about aliens, computer technology, the Internet, and miscellaneous facts.

100—Philosophy & Psychology

Topics in the 100s include animal rights, astrology, brain power, dreams, ethics, euthanasia, paranormal, supernatural, teen survival, success, and inspiration. Suggested titles include:

Popular: Vintage Wisdom for a Modern Geek written by Maya Van Wagenen presents a memoir of a one-year social experiment in which teen author Maya Van Wagenen followed a 1950s popularity guide, written by former teen model Betty Cornell.

In *Ignite Your Spark, Discovering Who You Are from the Inside Out* Patricia Wooster crafts an interactive guide for teens filled with quizzes and activities to help them forge their path and engage their passions on a journey to self-discovery.

Ed Young's visually beautiful **Voices of the Heart* presents 26 emotions with their Chinese characters. Each emotion, such as rudeness, grace, and aspiration, occupies a full-page illustration with a quick explanation.

Witches! The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem by Rosalyn Schanzer tells the true story of what happened when mass hysteria struck in Massachusetts.

200—Religion

This is a small, narrowly focused class. Various editions of *The Bible* along with descriptions of religions of the world are considered staples. *Bullfinch's Mythology*, a basic work, is an essential choice for this class. *No god but God: The Origins and Evolution of Islam* by Reza Aslan contains much-needed information for young people.

300—Social Sciences

The social sciences include folk literature, but since they are traditional stories and not informational books, they are not included in this list of topics. Topics in this classification are varied and numerous. In alphabetical order they include child abuse, civil rights, environment, etiquette, fast-food industry, gangs, holidays, homelessness, immigrant stories, law, murder, prison, rape, sexual abuse, substance abuse, slavery, spies, teen rights, vampire myths, and weapons.

This Land Is Our Land: A History of American Immigration by Linda Barrett Osborne focuses primarily on developments since 1850; this large-format book looks at American immigration practices and the political, economic, and social concerns that have influenced them.

Bootleg: Murder, Moonshine, and the Lawless Years of Prohibition by Karen Blumenthal is a fascinating story that reads much like a suspenseful novel while providing details about nearly 14 years of prohibition in America.

In *57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives*, Dashka Slater handles the sensitive subject matter of adolescence, hate crimes, the juvenile justice system, and the intersection of race and class with exemplary grace and emotional connection.

**Americanized: Rebel without a Green Card* by Sara Saedi is a hilarious, poignant, and true story of one teen's experience growing up in America as an undocumented immigrant from the Middle East.

Blood, Bullets, and Bones: The Story of Forensic Science from Sherlock Holmes to DNA by Bridget Heos provides young readers with a fresh and fascinating look

at the ever-evolving science of forensics.

Bonnie and Clyde: The Making of a Legend by Karen Blumenthal traces the footsteps of Bonnie and Clyde, unearthing new information and debunking many persistent myths. The result is an impeccably researched, breathtaking nonfiction tale of love, car chases, kidnappings, and murder set against the backdrop of the Great Depression.

Doing It! by Hannah Witton works as an introduction to sex as well as a guidebook for those who are already sexually active, with insight into topics such as healthy relationships, porn, contraception, sex shaming, and more. Approachable and empowering, this is a go-to resource for all things s-e-x.

Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case by Chris Crowe is a sobering and insightful account of the 1955 Mississippi murder trial of two white men for the killing of a 14-year-old black boy from Chicago.

In *Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know about Fast Food*, authors Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson are on a mission to expose gruesome details of feedlots and poultry farms that supply fast-food restaurants. Carefully documented information combined with a history of the industry will be eye-opening to most readers.

Russell Freedman's *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott* has a similar theme. Once Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat for a white person, events escalated into a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which ended bus segregation and was a major victory for the civil rights movement.

Miles to Go for Freedom: Segregation and Civil Rights in the Jim Crow Years by Linda Barrett Osborne provides insights into the lives of children and teens and is designed for accessibility with large photos and large print.

In *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories* (interviews and photographs by S. Beth Atkin) nine children tell what it is like to live as Latino/Latina American migrant workers. They are frank about the hardships and prejudice but also about progress and their pride in their heritage. Black-and-white photographs effectively complement their stories.

[400—Language](#)

This class is another small and narrowly focused one. It contains English language and foreign language dictionaries plus a few topics related to

language. Books about sign language are especially popular with young adults. Suggested titles include:

Lottie L. Riekehof's *The Joy of Signing* offers a history, terminology, and description of signing before presenting drawings of words divided by categories, such as family relationships, sports and recreation, and religion. An index of words makes it easy for readers to find directions for the particular words they want to learn.

A Quick & Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns by Archie Bongiovanni offers a quick, easy, and important educational comic guide to using gender-neutral pronouns.

In *Every Word Is a Bird We Teach to Sing: Encounters with the Mysteries and Meanings of Language*, Daniel Tammet offers a collection of essays that explores language and how it shapes reality, covering the art of translation, the lyricism of sign language, the numeric language of the author's autistic childhood, and more.

[500—Pure Science](#)

Topics in this class are more predictable than in the 300s. As you might expect, books about animals are particularly popular for leisure reading and for research projects. Topics include books about all animals and insects, astronomy, dinosaurs, earthquakes, mathematics, physics, time travel, veterinarians, and volcanoes. Suggested titles include:

Radioactive!: How Irene Curie & Lise Meitner Revolutionized Science and Changed the World by Winifred Conkling shares the fascinating, little-known story of how two brilliant female physicists' groundbreaking discoveries led to the creation of the atomic bomb.

Black Gold: The Story of Oil in Our Lives by Albert Marrin explores the important role oil plays in United States and the world; explains what oil is; and describes how oil has affected history, politics, society, and the economy.

The Disappearing Spoon: And Other True Tales of Rivalry, Adventure, and the History of the World from the Periodic Table of the Elements by Sam Kean. The periodic table is a crowning scientific achievement, but it's also a treasure trove of adventure, greed, betrayal, and obsession. The fascinating tales in *The*

Disappearing Spoon follow elements on the table as they play out their parts in human history, finance, mythology, conflict, the arts, medicine, and the lives of the (frequently) mad scientists who discovered them. *Beastly Brains: Exploring How Animals Think, Talk, and Feel* by Nancy F. Castaldo reveals just what's going on inside the minds of animals, and through understanding animal intelligence we discover more about ourselves, including far more similarities than one might expect. Humans may have the biggest brains, but intelligence is not a quality exclusive only to us.

De-extinction: The Science of Bringing Lost Species Back to Life by Rebecca Hirsch explores the pros and cons of bringing animals like the passenger pigeon or the woolly mammoth back from extinction and discusses the cutting-edge science that makes it possible.

[600—Technology](#)

This class contains a surprisingly diverse number of topics. The list that follows reflects that variety: astronauts, automobiles, babysitting, beautiful bodies, cooking, depression, diseases, eating disorders, inventions, modeling, obesity, pets, plagues, pregnancy, sexuality, suicide, and vegetarians. Suggested titles include:

Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America by Susan Campbell Bartoletti asks, what was it like to be a servant, an immigrant, a woman in the early 20th century? Bartoletti weaves the answers into the beginning of "Typhoid Mary" Mallon's story, using Mary as a lens to view a wider swath of American society, then covers epidemiologist George Soper's cat-and-mouse game of tracking Mary down. Excellent nonfiction with a novelistic trim size and narrative.

Steve Sheinkin's *Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon* reads like a fictional thriller and examines the history of the atomic bomb, discussing the discovery of the behavior of uranium when placed next to radioactive material, the race to build a bomb, and the impact of the weapon on societies around the world.

In *Very, Very, Very Dreadful: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918* by Albert Marrin comes a fascinating look at the history and science of the deadly 1918 flu pandemic and the chances for another worldwide pandemic. In this powerful

book, filled with black-and-white photographs, nonfiction master Albert Marrin examines the history, science, and impact of this great scourge and the possibility for another worldwide pandemic today.

Castle, a classic work by David Macaulay, details through text and pen-and-ink illustration the construction of a 13th-century castle in Wales (Caldecott Honor 1978). Other similarly rendered books of his are *Cathedral*, *City*, *Pyramid*, and *Underground*.

In *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*, Robie Harris presents a frank but lighthearted view of sex, complete with informative drawings by Michael Emberley.

This sweeping book is not a simple story of sugar. *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science* by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos is more about the impact of sugar on society and history.

The Bridge: How the Roeblings Connected Brooklyn to New York by Peter Tomasi and illustrated by Sara DuVall offers a graphic novel format that looks at the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. More than 130 years after its completion, the Brooklyn Bridge remains one of the most extraordinary landmarks and symbols of Brooklyn and New York City, and the story behind this architectural marvel is just as extraordinary.

This Moment Is Your Life (and So Is This One): A Fun and Easy Guide to Mindfulness, Meditation, and Yoga for Teens and Tweens by Mariam Gates and illustrated by Libby VanderPloeg is an engaging guide, packed with simple exercises and endearing full-color artwork that provides readers a handy starting point for bringing mindfulness into your daily life.

[700–Arts & Recreation](#)

Books in the 700s address all games, all sports, mountain climbing, skateboarding, architecture, all kinds of art, calligraphy, dance, drawing manga, knitting, music, photography, tattooing, and much more. Suggested titles include:

Comics Confidential: Thirteen Graphic Novelists Talk Story, Craft, and Life Outside the Box is compiled and edited by Leonard Marcus. A must-have collection for comics fans and creators everywhere, packed with interviews and original comics by today's foremost graphic novelists.

Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad by M. T. Anderson is an account of the Siege of Leningrad that reveals the role played by Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich and his Leningrad Symphony in rallying and commemorating their fellow citizens.

In Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*, Krakauer, a journalist, witnesses the 1996 tragedy when climbers are caught in a blizzard. He wrote this account for adults although it has great appeal to young adults as well.

The Beatles: All Our Yesterdays by Jason Quinn is a graphic novel exploration of the life of the rock band the Beatles with emphasis on the beginning of their career.

**Becoming Maria* by Sonia Manzano, set in the 1950s in the Bronx, is the story of a girl with a dream. Emmy Award-winning actress and writer Sonia Manzano plunges us into the daily lives of a Latino family that is loving and troubled.

[800–Literature](#)

This classification was the primary location for fiction before librarians decided to create a special section. Now it's a prime location for poetry and in some libraries for story collections. Poetry is considered nonfiction but not informational. Books on the following topics may be found in a young adult collection: comedy, fantasy worlds and characters, books about the *Harry Potter* collection, literary criticism, biographies of poets and other writers, and essays written by teens. Suggested titles include:

1968: Today's Authors Explore a Year of Rebellion, Revolution, and Change. Authors Marc Aronson and Susan Campbell Bartoletti welcome readers to 1968, a revolution in a book. Essays, memoirs, and more by 14 award-winning authors offer unique perspectives on one of the world's most tumultuous years and *Get Lit Rising: Words Ignite. Claim Your Poem. Claim Your Life* by Diane Luby. Use this volume to get to know the Get Lit Players, a group of teens who use poetry to take on the world. They use the power of poetry to pursue lives of promise and to reach out to friends, families, and communities. Each chapter offers questions, writing prompts, and how-tos for readers to set their own inner poet free.

900–History & Geography

As you would expect, books in the 900s are about countries, people, and histories of the world. Because it's such a broad category, it's often one of the largest collections within nonfiction/informational books. Topics include war stories, Holocaust survivors and the history of the Holocaust, real adventure/survival stories, and travel. Suggested titles include:

Boots on the Ground: America's War in Vietnam by Elizabeth Partridge is a powerful exploration of the Vietnam War from many different perspectives including an American soldier's, a nurse's, and a Vietnamese refugee's. With more than 100 photographs, award-winning author Elizabeth Partridge's unflinching book captures the intensity, frustration, and lasting impacts of one of the most tumultuous periods of American history.

Courage & Defiance: Stories of Spies, Saboteurs, and Survivors in World War II Denmark by Deborah Hopkinson brings us remarkable stories from the Danish resistance and the rescue of over 7,000 Jews during World War II.

In the Shadow of Liberty: The Hidden History of Slavery, Four Presidents, and Five Black Lives by Kenneth C. Davis examines American slavery through the true stories of five enslaved people who were considered the property of some of our best-known presidents.

Alexander Hamilton, Revolutionary by Martha Brockenbough offers a complex, passionate, brilliant, flawed man. Hamilton comes alive in this exciting biography.

**How to Build a Museum: Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture* by Tonya Bolden relates the story of the creation of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, covering 100 years of hoping, planning, constructing the building, and assembling its collections.

Dive!: World War II Stories of Sailors & Submarines in the Pacific by Deborah Hopkinson is the fascinating story of America's little-known war-within-a war, that of the "silent service," U.S. submarine warfare during World War II.

American Is under Attack: September 11, 2001: The Day the Towers Fell by Don Brown is a straightforward account of the tragedy, written in simple prose and matched with gently rendered watercolor illustrations.

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti is the account of children who were forced to participate in the Third Reich's youth

program and those who resisted; this story is fascinating but heartbreaking. Stories of the complete dedication of individual young people who followed Hitler and what the organization demanded of them are chilling.

**Maus I, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman and *Maus II: Here My Troubles Began* also by Art Spiegelman. These two black-and-white graphic novels won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for their stunning view of triumph and tragedy of a Holocaust survivor.

In **Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans*, Kadir Nelson's richly painted large-format illustrations accompany a brief but inspirational history of African Americans: Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, A. Philip Randolph, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack H. Obama II.

In *They Called Themselves the K. K. K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group*, Susan Campbell Bartoletti uses archival photographs and other primary sources to document the history of the Ku Klux Klan.

Claiming My Place: Coming of Age in the Shadow of the Holocaust by Planaria Price chronicles the life of Barbara Riechmann, once known as Gucia Gomolinska, who grew up as a Jew in the predominantly Catholic Poland during the 1920s and 1930s. It explores how she survived after the Nazis invaded Poland and her immigration to America until her death.

Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans by Don Brown is a graphic novel account of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in November 2005 when the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, and surrounding areas were flooded and more than 1,400 people lost their lives.

Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War by Steve Sheinkin is a tense, narrative nonfiction account of what the *New York Times* deemed "the greatest story of the century": how whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg transformed from obscure government analyst into "the most dangerous man in America," and risked everything to expose years of government lies during the Nixon/Cold War era.

The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion & the Fall of Imperial Russia by Candace Fleming is the tumultuous, heartrending, true story of the Romanovs, at once an intimate portrait of Russia's last royal family and a gripping account of its undoing.

Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickles, America's First Black Paratroopers by Tanya Lee Stone tells the unknown story of America's first black paratroopers during World War II.

Pure Grit: How American World War II Nurses Survived Battle and Prison Camp in the Pacific by Mary Cronk Farrell chronicles the experiences of American

nurses who served in the Philippines during World War II.

**#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women* edited by Mary Beth Leatherdale and Lisa Charleyboy is an eclectic collection of poems, essays, interviews, and art that combine to express the experience of being a Native woman. Stories of abuse, humiliation, and stereotyping are countered by the voices of passionate women making themselves heard and demanding change.

Pairing Informational Books with Fiction

To catch the interest of young adults who primarily enjoy reading fiction but avoid informational books, entice readers with novels and then show them how an informational book can deepen their understanding of the novel. If readers are only interested in informational books, show them how they can read a historical novel and be a detective by checking the facts of the story. Novels and informational books on one topic can be displayed in the library and book talked. Librarians can recommend this strategy to history and science teachers. Historical novels pair well with informational books about historical events, especially war. In science classes, it's easy to pair science books with science fiction or with books about diseases.

Conclusion

Informational books have come a long way in more than 50 years and continue to evolve. Some are written in a narrative style; some are part biography, part informational. In others, text interacts with archival photographs, high-quality photographs, and facsimile photographs. Some informational books that appeal to young adults are universal in their appeal; some appeal to children of all ages, and some books were written and published for adults but captured the young adult audience as well. Some books, like *Most Dangerous*, are as thrilling to read as an action-

packed adventure story. Such rich offerings in quality, topic, format, and design allow librarians to recommend print books, audiobooks, and e-Books that offer informational and pleasurable reading opportunities.

I love to uncover stories that have been hidden or lost. It's exhilarating to plunge back in time and research someone's life in the middle of a dynamic time of social change. I'm fascinated by personal courage—it can be the courage of a photographer, artist, or musician to bear witness and speak out, the courage of children to risk imprisonment for their beliefs, the courage of soldiers and refugees caught in devastating political struggles. I love to dig deep into gray zones, areas of nuance, where complex issues need to be carefully weighed out. Above all, I write to make sense of the world today, for myself and readers. How can we know where we are going if we don't know where we have been?

—Elizabeth Partridge, a National Book Award finalist, Printz Honor winner, and the author of several books for children, including *Boots on the Ground: America's War in Vietnam*, *Marching for Freedom: Walk Together, Children*, and *Don't Grow Weary, John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth*, and *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life and Songs of Woody Guthrie*

Assignments in Action: Informational Books for Discussion

1. So many informational books today are designed to include photographs, lessening the amount of written material. Does that practice discourage reading, or does it add to the appeal of the book?
2. Informational books written for children may also appeal to young adults. Why is that? Is this a positive trend in literature for youth?
3. In your opinion, are there any topics that shouldn't be featured in informational books for young adults? Explain.

Chapter 7

The Freedom to Read

In many ways, a book is a message in a bottle. So it's an enormous privilege to send mine—which I try to fill with hope and heart and inspiration—to the very people who will one day save the world: teens.

—Jennifer E. Smith, author of *Windfall* and *The Statistical Probability of Love at First Sight*

Introduction

Supporting intellectual freedom is a cornerstone of the professional work done by librarians. The American Library Association (ALA) defines intellectual freedom as "the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored." For librarians who work with teens, this can be one of the most difficult but important professional tasks of the profession. Historically, content appropriateness in young adult books is frequently subject to challenge. The graphic novelist Jarrett J. Krosoczka, in a *Washington Post* essay entitled "What's Appropriate for Kids to Read: There's Value in Exposing Them to the Tough Stuff," states,

There are books for young people that hold difficult truths, and we gatekeepers—writers, parents, teachers, librarians—often find ourselves trying to sort out just what is appropriate for our kids to read about. When I was writing and illustrating *Hey, Kiddo: How I Lost My Mother, Found My Father, and Dealt with Family Addiction*," a graphic memoir aimed at readers 12 and up, I didn't pull any punches because of one simple

realization: There are difficult truths in our books because there are difficult truths in children's lives. (2018)

We know that the freedom to read is a right granted to citizens of the United States through the freedoms of the First Amendment to the Constitution. That freedom is granted to children and teenagers, articulated in "Students' Right to Read" by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and in "Library Bill of Rights," adopted by the ALA. In this chapter, information about intellectual freedom and the right to read is centered on basic definitions of intellectual freedom, major stages for handling book challenges, and ideas for celebrating banned books. In addition, I'll offer an anecdote that shares my personal experiences regarding how book challenges are reshaped by understanding the role of intellectual freedom and how I approached and prepared the teens with whom I worked to better understand the diversity of a young adult book collection.

Definitions of Intellectual Freedom Terms

Before delving into freedom to read issues especially related to young adults and their reading, definitions of basic actions should help set the stage.

Intellectual Freedom. According to the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* by the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the ALA:

Intellectual freedom can exist only where two essential conditions are met: first, that all individuals have the right to hold any belief on any subject and to convey their ideas in any form they deem appropriate, and second, that society makes an equal commitment to the right of unrestricted access to information and ideas regardless of the communication medium used, the content of the work, and the viewpoints of both the author and the receiver of information. Freedom to express oneself through a chosen mode of communication, including the Internet, becomes virtually meaningless if access to that information is not protected. Intellectual freedom implies a circle, and that circle is broken if either freedom of expression or access to ideas is stifled. (2015, xvii)

Think of the term "intellectual freedom" as a large umbrella. Underneath that umbrella we find both negative actions (censoring, banning, challenging, labeling, and reconsideration) and positive actions (selecting, reading freely). Each of these actions has a direct relationship to books published, written, and read by young adults. Each action is defined in terms relating to a librarian who works with young adults.

Censoring a book or other library materials means a person or group of people, censors, intend to remove or have removed specific materials from library shelves. It's an all-encompassing term.

Banning a book or other library materials means a person or group of people (censors) are keeping one or more items from being circulated to anyone who attends a particular school or patronizes a particular public library.

Challenging a book or other library materials means a potential censor has complained about the contents of an item available in a particular library. It may mean that the person wants the book removed from the library shelves or it may mean that the person simply wants to talk with the librarian about its suitability for students or patrons. This could be a verbal or written challenge or complaint.

Labeling a book or other library materials is an attempt to restrict particular items from use. For instance, librarians in a school might house books about sex education on a shelf behind the circulation desk and require students to bring a note from a parent to gain permission to check out one of the books. This is considered "labeling" because it prevents the free circulation of materials.

Reconsidering can be a positive action, reinforcing selection procedures and allowing for the voices of tax payers to be heard. Once a formal complaint is made to a school district or library system, a committee examines the selection process to determine if the book being challenged was selected according to a materials selection policy.

Selecting is a positive, inclusive action. Books, movies, audios, and other library materials are purchased because they have something positive to contribute to patrons and students.

Reading freely allows young adults to read or listen to any books in their school libraries, classrooms, or public libraries without restrictions on age, according to "The Library Bill of Rights."

Interview with David Levithan

David Levithan is the *New York Times* best-selling author of many novels including *Every Day*, *Another Day*, *Some Day*, *Two Boys Kissing*, *The Lover's Dictionary*, *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* (and other collaborations with Rachel Cohn), and *Will Grayson*, *Will Grayson* (with John Green). He won the Lambda Literary Award for his debut novel *Boy Meets Boy* and is the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award from the American Library Association, which honors an author, as well as a specific body of his or her work, for significant and lasting contribution to young adult literature.

Though the audience for your body of work is broad (your books are beloved by teens and adults alike), what are the best things about writing for teens and what are the greatest challenges? Did you always know this was an audience you'd choose to write for or did that happen more organically while you were creating?

Teen readers in particular want their stories to have an emotional truth to them—even when the setup is fantastical (like in my book *EVERY DAY*, or in *Harry Potter*), they still want to recognize the humanity of the characters and relate to it. Since this is at the heart of why I write, it's natural to create those kinds of stories for the readers who are looking for them. But the challenge, of course, is that the readers will be able to spot inauthenticity a mile away—so not only do you have to write the story, but you have to get it right.

As for choosing the audience—because I had a decade of editing in the YA and middle-grade space before turning to write novels, I was certainly deliberate in choosing what I wanted to write when I wrote my first YA novel, *BOY MEETS BOY*. I saw a hole on the shelves and

wanted to fill in. With the bonus being that I knew that even though I was writing about teens, both teens and adults would read it. Which is exactly what happened.

Though we have made strides, there continues to be resistance to acknowledging teenage sexuality. What's the best advice you can offer librarians and librarians in training in regard to approaching young adult literature, especially in regard to LGBTQ+ books?

I've sometimes heard people say, "Well, there's so much information out there now—novels don't have to break the silences anymore, do they?" In other words, we're not in the era of Judy Blume, where reading FOREVER might be the only type of access a reader had to sex ed. Which is true. But I think that novels are still essential to a reader's sexual education, but in a different way. True, we no longer have to impart information. But we absolutely have to provide CONTEXT for the barrage of information that young people are receiving. Especially for LGBTQ+ kids, a novel is a safe space to explore not just the mechanics of sexual involvement, but also the emotional components. And it is our job—as writers, as educators, as librarians—to provide that safe space.

Do you find that writing YA keeps you grounded as a writer and if so, in what ways?

It keeps me truthful. And it certainly helps motivate me, because I have seen so many times what the right book at the right time can do for a teenager's sense of self and sense of the world.

You've been writing and publishing young adult fiction for well over a decade; from your experiences, in what ways has YA evolved? Is there anything you find surprising or particularly exciting about those changes? What do you wish you knew as you were starting to publish that you feel like you've learned along the course of your career?

I think it's the most exciting space to be writing in, because all different stories and voices are embraced. We've largely dismantled the

fear we've had about embracing all stories and voices, and our literature is richer for that. You have to understand—when *BOY MEETS BOY* was published in 2003, there were still people who were deeply afraid of having a gay book (with a gay title!) in the YA space. There was a hesitation, and that hesitation was overcome. Now that hesitation is gone, and there's a full embrace, as well as the understanding that there isn't just one gay story that needs to be told, but there are many, many of them, from all different angles and intersections. Most editors I know are activist in trying to broaden the stories we tell and the voices who tell them. That's exciting, although not surprising, given the people involved.

As for what I wish I knew at the start—honestly, I was really lucky in my path, and instinctively knew the things that I now warn authors about (i.e., don't listen to the haters online, don't measure your worth by book sales). Although, really, what I really wish I could tell my younger self to GET MY BOOK AUTOGRAPHED when J.K. Rowling came to Scholastic for the first *Harry Potter* book launch.

History in Action: Classic Challenges

Challenges to books that young adults read are not new, nor are they limited to recently published books. Each year the Office for Intellectual Freedom compiles a list of the most challenged books that have been reported to the ALA. These lists continue to include classic titles that are typically read and studied in schools:

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1884)

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (1965)

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger (1951)

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle (1962)

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960)
The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton (1967)
The Pigman by Paul Zindel (1968)
Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keyes (1966)
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (1932)
Lord of the Flies by William Golding (1954)
Native Son by Richard Wright (1940)
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain (1894)

Major Stages in Handling Book Challenges

The four major actions to take in handling book challenges in libraries are: be informed, be prepared, understand the levels of complaints, and inform the learning community.

Be Informed

Before materials in your library are challenged, take steps to be informed about intellectual freedom. *First*, keeping a copy of the most recent edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* in your professional collection and another copy in your student book collection is a great start to being informed. The eighth edition of the publication of ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom contains the following six parts:

- Part I: Intellectual Freedom and Libraries: An Overview
- Part II: Library Bill of Rights (interpretations and history)
- Part III: Protecting the Freedom to Read (policy statements, history, and guidelines)
- Part IV: Code of Ethics of the American Library Association
- Part V: Intellectual Freedom and the Law
- Part VI: Preserving, Protecting, and Working for Intellectual Freedom

The work contains interpretations that are particularly relevant to youth:

"Access for Children and Young Adults to Nonprint Materials"
"Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program"
"Free Access to Libraries for Minors"
"Minors' First Amendment Rights to Access Information"

Second, for unique perspectives on school libraries and censorship, read Nancy Kravitz's *Censorship and the School Library Media Center* (2002), or at least have a copy on hand. Chapters include the "Who and Why [of challenges]," "Historical Perspectives," "Cases in Law," "Challenged Material," "Policies and Procedures," "Today's Issues," and "In Defense of Intellectual Freedom." Appendices include basic documents: The Library Bill of Rights and the following interpretations:

Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program
Free Access to Libraries for Minors
Restricted Access to Library Materials
Access for Children and Young People to Videotapes and Other Nonprint Formats
Challenged Materials
Statement on Intellectual Freedom
National Council of Teachers of English Students' Right to Read

Third, use an essential source of information, ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom, accessible online at www.ala.org/offices/oif. According to the website, the Office for Intellectual Freedom

is charged with implementing ALA policies concerning the concept of intellectual freedom as embodied in the Library Bill of Rights, the Association's basic policy on free access to libraries and library materials. The goal of the office is to educate librarians and the general public about the nature and importance of intellectual freedom in libraries.

Take time to explore the website for basic information as well as up-to-the-minute news about challenges and current issues. Visit this site repeatedly to view recent headlines and to take advantage of the Office of Intellectual Freedom Blog. Major topics of particular interest to librarians who work with young adults are Code of Ethics, Censorship in Schools, Intellectual

Freedom Toolkits, Resources for Librarians, Banned Books Week, Social Networking (Twitter and Facebook), and much more.

Fourth, take time for a quick search online for articles, editorials, and news items that discuss intellectual freedom for young adults. This strategy will keep you up to date on what's being challenged and why, and may provide you with information you can use immediately in your library. For instance, Doug Johnson's article entitled "Don't Defend That Book" reminds librarians that their job is to "know your selection policy, select from authoritative reviews, insist on due process if a book is challenged, and make children responsible for their own choices" (Johnson 2007, 98). That last one about making children responsible for their own choices means that professional librarians "cannot act in place of parents (in loco parentis) to restrict access to materials to individuals" (Johnson 2007, 98). Being informed about which young adult books are being challenged is not an invitation to avoid including these books in a library collection, but rather an opportunity to be aware of what is controversial and to read and collect professional reviews of the books in the event that there is a complaint. As Krosoczka offers,

It certainly isn't up to me to tell parents what their child should and shouldn't read, but I do know this: There are some very difficult and inconvenient topics our children are going to face in real life. I so hope that our young people can experience and learn about these difficult truths for the first time on the page and not in real life. The windows that books provide may give them warning and steer them in a positive direction. (Krosoczka 2018)

Be Prepared

Once you have accumulated tools to inform you about intellectual freedom, you are ready to ask this vital question: Is there an approved materials selection policy available in the school district or library district? If your answer is "yes!" you are fortunate and will need to familiarize yourself with the policy. In schools the policy should be approved by the school board and

included with other board policies. In public libraries the policy should be approved by the library board. Keep at least one copy in the library for your reference and for parents and other patrons who want information about the library's selection process.

If there isn't a materials selection policy for the library (or the school), begin researching the possibilities right away! A materials selection policy is a guide to the process of selecting books and other materials for young adults. It should contain the following:

- District's philosophy of the library
- Selection objectives
- Responsibility for selection
- Criteria for selection
- Criteria for gifts and unsolicited materials
- Procedures for selection
- Position on intellectual freedom
- Policy and procedures for handling challenged material

(Kravitz 2002, 192-195)

Censorship and the School Library Media Center describes a materials selection policy and provides an example of one used in the School District of Philadelphia.

[Understand the Levels of Complaints and Challenges](#)

One way to understand the process of complaints and challenges is through hypothetical scenarios based on real experiences. To understand the possibilities three scenarios are presented based on school library situations: a casual inquiry, a complaint, and a formal challenge.

A casual inquiry

It's Wednesday morning in a middle school, and classes have begun with announcements. You, the librarian, are at your desk reviewing your schedule of activities for the day. As soon as announcements end, an eighth-grade English class will enter the library for a booktalking session on new books. A woman appears at the door of your office and asks if you are the librarian. She identifies herself as Mrs. Smith, the mom of an eighth-grade boy. You recognize his name but can't match a face to the name. She asks if she can visit with you a minute about a book he checked out. At first you think that the student has lost a book, and his mother has come to pay for it. Then she says, "He checked out *The Hate U Give*, and his father and I don't talk like that." Of course, you are familiar with Angie Thomas's acclaimed novel. Because the book has become a modern classic, you know it well. It does contain profanity and situational violence. That's what may disturb this boy's parents.

Here's what you do:

- Listen politely to what this concerned mother has to say.
- Share the selection process with her.
- Using your selection tool of choice (e.g., Follett's Titlewave online system) pull up and print out the reviews of the book, sharing all the awards and accolades this title has received and is recommended for junior high and senior high students.
- Recommend that she share her concerns about profanity with her son, although she has probably already done that.
- Offer for her to contact you anytime she has a concern about a library book.
- Thank Mrs. Smith for coming to visit you in person.

Fortunately, this mom just wanted to know that someone professional and knowledgeable was in charge of selecting books. She wanted to express her dismay at the language in the book. She didn't want it removed from the shelves, nor did she want you to monitor her son's reading choices in the future. This type of conversation can improve public relations and allow you to get to know students' parents better. Be sure to let your principal know that you have had a friendly visit with a parent about *Fallen Angels The Hate U Give*.

A complaint

You may be surprised to learn that Mrs. Smith's husband made an appointment with your principal shortly after her visit with you. Your principal requests that you attend the meeting and bring reviews of the book and information about your selection

process. You assemble three folders with identical information for your principal, Mr. Smith, and yourself. Each folder contains copies of the following documents:

- Reviews of *The Hate U Give*
- A copy of the district's materials selection policy, including the reconsideration process
- A copy of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights
- A copy of Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
- A copy of NCTE's The Freedom to Read

At the meeting in the principal's office you describe the selection process and how *The Hate U Give* fits into the district's policy. You listen to Mr. Smith's concerns about the book, and you answer questions from Mr. Smith.

After all the listening and explaining, Mr. Smith tells you and your principal that *Hate U Give* is not appropriate for anyone in the eighth grade and should not be available on the library's shelves. At this point your principal says, "Let me be sure I understand what you're saying, Mr. Smith. You don't believe any students in the school should have access to the book; you think it should be removed from the shelves?"

At Mr. Smith's affirmative answer, you remind him of the materials selection policy and the role of the reconsideration form. If he believes the book doesn't belong on the shelves, he must fill out a reconsideration form and return it to the principal or submit it to the superintendent. You remind Mr. Smith that the book continues to circulate until the reconsideration process has concluded. This scenario is a standard one with each person responding politely as the district policy and process is being followed.

A formal challenge

Sometimes the reconsideration form is never completed and never returned to the principal or submitted to the superintendent. In this scenario, Mr. Smith reads *The Hate U Give*, completes the form, and submits it to the superintendent. If a materials selection policy is in place, a district committee is convened as soon as possible. Ideally, this is a committee that has its membership established each fall in a school district; in public libraries it is a continuing committee with members changing as needed. It's best to have the committee already in place in the fall so that if challenges are filed, there's no scrambling to identify committee members. In a school district membership consists of school administrators, librarians, teachers, parents, and students. The makeup of the

committee is articulated in the reconsideration process approved by the school board. The librarian and principal where the challenge is initiated should not be on the committee. This helps avoid involving school personalities at a particular campus. While the committee meets, *The Hate U Give*, the book in question, remains in circulation. Once the committee makes a decision, the school board and the superintendent are notified. They can decide to uphold the decision or not. In this scenario *Hate U Give* remained on the shelves in all middle schools and high schools in the district, and that was the end of the challenge. The reconsideration committee, the school board, and the superintendent agreed it was an appropriate selection according to the school district's selection policy.

Inform Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Parents (The Learning Community)

A task of the school librarian is to inform students and other members of the learning community about intellectual freedom and what it means. For teachers and administrators this can be handled through staff development sessions led by the librarian or invited guests with expertise in intellectual freedom. For students, lessons, displays, and activities should be offered as part of the annual library programming or by collaborating with history and English teachers. Banned Books Week, celebrated annually in the fall and promoted by the OIF, is an excellent device for raising important questions about the freedom to read. A parent-student book club that begins with a forum highlighting intellectual freedom can inform parents of the book selection process and build positive community relationships at the same time.

At the Banned and Challenged Book's website for the ALA's OIF, each year the ALA compiles and publishes its Top 10 Most Frequently Challenged Books. To see this year's listing, as well as find other resources, visit: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/NLW-Top10>.

On its "Banned Spotlight" Banned Books, the ALA's OIF Banned Books page predicts that *The Hate U Give* will be included in the 2018 list of most frequently challenged materials. An overview of the censorship issues

already faced for *The Hate U Give* can be found here: <https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-the-hate-u-give/>.

In a public response on Twitter to learning that her novel was removed from the school district by Katy ISD's superintendent in Katy, Texas, Thomas remarked, "I'm saddened to hear that a school district in Texas banned #TheHateUGive but I'm also empowered—you're basically telling the kids of the Garden Heights of the world that their stories shouldn't be told. Well, I'm going to tell them even louder. Thanks for igniting the fire" (2018).

Q and A with Angie Thomas

Angie Thomas is the author of *The Hate U Give*, *On the Come Up*, and a contributor to *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Moments of Inspiration*. *The Hate U Give* has claimed the #1 spot on the *New York Times* best sellers list for almost over 100 weeks and is available in over 20 countries. Angie was the inaugural winner of the Walter Dean Myers Grant 2015, awarded by We Need Diverse Books. In addition to starred reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *School Library Journal*, *Horn Book Magazine*, and more, *The Hate You Give* won the Coretta Scott King Honor, Michael L. Printz Honor, and William C. Morris Award; it was long-listed for the National Book Award, and a cinematic adaptation of the book was released in late 2018.

When considering his place as both a reader and writer, Jason Reynolds has said, "It's hard to be what you can't see." What does that mean to you?

As a teenager I hated reading, and if I were to tell teenage Angie that, "Surprise, you became an author not a rapper." She'd be like, "No, that's impossible." What I love about being able to write books is that I get to say more than I ever could in 16 bars in a song. When I was a teen, there were two big books, but I connected with neither. I remember as a teenager I'd go in the bookstore, in the library, and I'm looking at the books and it's always another white girl in distress. I'm like, "How many problems do you have?" I have stuff that I'm going through. Where are the books for me, you know? So yes, I'm very

surprised that I was able to write a book about a black girl who loved sneakers, a book that's based on something that Tupac Shakur said, and it's now becoming this big Y.A. book and movie and there are no vampires involved.

Though frequently challenged, for readers of YA, *The Hate U Give* has become a seminal work, one that has changed the landscape of what YA has been, is, and can be? What does that mean to you?

The Hate U Give may be one of the scariest things I will ever publish. I put a lot of my own emotions into that book, and sharing those feelings with the world is scary. Even more than that, I was terrified of what the reception to the book would be. It's inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, and if you say "Black Lives Matter" to three different people, you're likely to get 30 different responses. For some people like me, those words are a rallying cry, asking for a system that places value on black lives. For some, it dismisses the value of all other lives, causing them to say things like, "All Lives Matter" or "Blue Lives Matter." For others, the movement and the organization are hateful or antiwhite. I hoped that my book would help people truly understand why we say "Black Lives Matter," and why we feel as if we have to constantly remind this country of the value of our lives. Yes, all lives should indeed matter, but we have a systemic problem in this country in which black lives don't matter enough. So black lives matter, too.

The love I've received from *The Hate U Give* has stunned me. By the time my book tour was over, I'd heard so many stories and witnessed so many things that gave me some light in the darkness. However, it was an e-mail that seemed to top even all of those incidents.

I used to dread checking my e-mail. I just knew that at some point, a bigot would get a hold of it and send me hate mail or threats because of my book. One day, I received an e-mail with the subject line "Thank you." Simple, yet I was cautious. Subject lines can be deceiving and on purpose. I opened the e-mail. The writer started it out by telling me

that she was raised by a white supremacist. Honestly, I tensed up, waiting for the vitriol.

Instead, she poured her heart out to me.

She told me about her father and some of the things he had said and done over the years, and how it shaped her view of the world and black people in particular. The n word was a regular part of his vocabulary, among other things. As she got older, she started to second guess the things he'd told her and began to realize that it was rooted in hatred—she wanted to change. Books allowed her to do that. Professor Rudine Sims Bishop once described books as being mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. For this woman who wrote me, books gave her a window that helped her humanize people that she was once taught were beneath her. How powerful is that?

Recently, someone told her to read my book. According to her, it opened her eyes even more. She now understood a little more why we say Black Lives Matter. Even more than that, she had a better understanding that black lives do indeed matter. By stepping into Starr's shoes for four-hundred plus pages, she gained insight. More importantly, she developed empathy. It made her look at the Starrs and the Khalils of the world in a whole different light.

I'm honored to know that my words did that.

[Celebrating Banned Books Week](#)

To some educators it may seem odd to celebrate books that are controversial, but the idea is to celebrate young adults' freedom to read. By focusing on books that have been challenged or have been banned from school or public libraries, we encourage the defense of young adults' right to read. Challenged books are controversial for a wide range of reasons. Challenged books may include profanity, sexual references, drug abuse, violence,

antireligious messages, and controversial ideas. Books published for young adults contain elements to offend everyone.

My observation has been that high school students in particular get excited learning about banned books. Sometimes it's the first time they have heard or really understood that in America books can be taken off of library shelves by censors. In a high school in Kansas after hearing booktalks on banned books, a group of students vowed to read every one of the titles on the list available in their school library, not because they wanted to read four-letter words, but because they wanted to understand why these books were considered dangerous.

The following activities can increase awareness of censorship and can encourage young adults to read:

1. Booktalk a dozen frequently challenged books.
2. Design bookmarks to distribute during Banned Books Week.
3. Display challenged books using provocative wording, such as "Dangerous Books!" "Don't read these books!" "Censored!"
4. Use ALA slogans developed for bookmarks and posters from previous Banned Books Weeks for designing your own promotional materials, slogans such as "Read Banned Books: They're Your Ticket to Freedom" and "Celebrate the Right to Read."
5. Distribute ALA's current list of frequently challenged books, including titles for children, young adults, and adults.
6. Post quotes on the First Amendment throughout the library.
7. Collaborate with a history teacher for a discussion on First Amendment rights.
8. Collaborate with an English teacher for a class reading of a banned or challenged book.
9. Invite an author whose books have been challenged to speak about the experience, either in person or through Skype.
10. Visit Banned Books Weeks website at <http://www.bbww.org> for more ideas to intrigue young adults about intellectual freedom.

**Librarians in Action!: Supporting Reading Rights and
Other Reader Advocacy**

Jaime LeRoy began her career as a high school English teacher after graduating with a bachelor's degree in English/education from the University of Texas at Austin. Her love of reading led her to pursue a master of library science from Texas Woman's University. Jaime has worked as an elementary, intermediate, middle, and now, high school librarian. She currently works as the librarian at Northwest High School in Justin, Texas. Her passion is finding books that turn non-readers into readers. When she is not reading young adult novels, she is at home with her four-legged babies or watching her Longhorn football team. A self-proclaimed *Harry Potter* fanatic, Jaime attends any *Harry Potter* event she can find, be it near or far. It is because of her *Harry Potter* obsession that the *Harry Potter* books continue to be the most checked out books in her library, only proving that our passion of books can be contagious to our students.

Getting Kids in the Door

By Jaime LeRoy

The most important thing I've learned in my 10 years as a librarian is getting kids in the door is half the battle. Once they are in, we have the ability to build relationships with them, talk to them about books, and give them a safe place to read and learn.

As a librarian, an important thing to me is the promotion of Banned Books Week. I am a vocal advocate for freedom to read and so once a year when Banned Books Week comes around, we go all out. We constructed banners out of old discarded books and burned the edges to make them noticeable. We put books on display and on each book is a bright stop sign that explains why the books were banned. When the kids read the reasons for them being banned, they are almost always checked out. It is our job as librarians to make sure our libraries have a diverse collection. This means we must have books with all colors, religions, sexual preferences, and sexual identities. It means we must have books with difficult topics such as rape and racism. Every student should be able to read a book they can identify with and it is up to us as librarians to make sure they do. We must protect their right to read!

A library club is another great way to garner help from students to advocate for the library. When I was in the middle school, we had the SLACkers (Student Library Advisory Committee) and in the high school, we have the Battle of the Books club. I had over a hundred students in my SLACkers club; it was, in fact, the largest club on campus. The SLACkers did library displays, booktalks/trailers, helped with book fair, talked books, and at the end of each year we would go to the North Texas Book Festival together. Last year at Cross Timbers, we had 73 SLACkers attend the festival. That is 73 kids who CHOSE to spend an entire Saturday with authors and other book lovers! My Battle of the Books is not nearly as large, but my group is dedicated and determined to win. We read our books, quiz each other on them, and at the end of the year, we compete against 19 other high school teams for the championship.

One of the most popular promotion tools I have discovered is the Bathroom Book Blurbs. Every student, whether they love reading or hate reading, has to use the restroom, so why not use it to my advantage? Over every stall and urinal in the school, students see a Bathroom Book Blurb advertising one of 20 books that I thought my students would love. Each Bathroom Book Blurb has an enticing “blurb” (you can usually find good ones on Goodreads) and the book cover displayed on the page. It is also helpful to print in color so as to draw their attention. After hanging them up, I had at least one kid per period ask if I had a book they “read about in the bathroom.” I ended up having to buy additional copies of the books just to keep up with the demand!

Last year, I bought two work bikes for my library. These are simply stationary bikes that come with a desk attached. When I first purchased them, I was thinking of students with ADHD, but they have been popular with all my students. The idea is that students can read their books, work on their computers, or listen to an audiobook while burning a little energy (and calories). The students have latched on to the idea and we are about to begin a Read & Ride program. Students will keep track of their miles and minutes read (not pages because it is important

to include both slow and fast readers) and they can earn prizes for having the highest numbers. I am excited to see how many miles we can ride as a school!

Ways Librarians Can Help in the Fight against Censorship

Every day, books and other materials are being challenged. Some are removed permanently from library shelves and from classroom libraries. Often just the threat of a challenge is sufficient for some school officials to pull a book from the shelves or even from the curriculum. It is every librarian's duty to deal with challenges and to fight censorship and maintain the integrity of his or her collections. Be sure to:

- Report challenges to your state library association and to ALA's OIF.
- Post copies of the Freedom to Read Statement from ALA found here: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/freedomreadstatement> as well as the Library Bill of Rights found here: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.
- Get involved. There are organizations that support the right to read freely. Join them!

In addition to the ALA's OIF, resources can be found at the following:

- The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) has resources and suggestions for dealing with challenges here: <http://ncac.org/>; the NCTE also has a host of statements about censorship here: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/censorship>.

Censorship: My Experiences

Before I began teaching at Sam Houston State University, I spent 13 years as a school librarian in the Dallas area, and over those years,

combating censorship of young adult materials in the library was a regular part of my job. Each year, I dealt with at least one book challenge. My first informal challenge happened my very first year as a librarian, and though it was pretty uncomfortable, it ultimately was resolved without the parent seeking for formal reconsideration—mostly, she wanted to focus on situational issues that she had concerns with regarding a book her sixth grader had checked out. The conversation was respectful, and we were even able to examine what "teachable moments" the novel her offered her daughter (the protagonist made poor choices in regard to drinking). After she left, I remember being incredibly relieved and even a bit cocky about how well I handled the situation. As luck would have it, it was only a matter of time before the next well-intended, would-be censor arrived at my library's doors. In fact, each year I worked as the librarian at that school, I had at least one time during the year where a parent came to me unhappy about the content of a book, but it wasn't until year four that I was involved in a full-blown formal reconsideration that had big repercussions. That experience was devastating—though the board policy and process (the school board [EFA] local policy) was followed so that the district committee charged with examining the book read it, and all members voted to keep the challenged book in the middle school collection for the entire district, the parent chose to seek for the superintendent to overrule that decision, and he did—breaking board policy himself in a number of ways.

The next step in that battle involved my colleagues and me attempting to take on the superintendent by appealing to the school board to overturn his decision—the short version of that story was that things ended badly (after making the local news and meeting with district attorneys where threats were handed out). I ultimately left the school district, hoping to start over in a neighboring district with dreams of less drama.

As luck would have it, I was on my new campus in that new school district less than two months when my first formal challenge was filed,

and once again, I was right back where I had started. Unfortunately, with that challenge, the reconsideration committee voted to move the book out of middle school (though reviews placed it firmly there), and it was placed up at the high school.

I ultimately didn't leave that job, and I spent nine years there and had three other challenges. I discovered a few things along this journey; first, it's incredibly important that you are proactive in preparing for book challenges; they will come. So what does being proactive mean? If you work in a school, it's calling a meeting with campus administrators before there are any challenges to discuss materials selection and the district's EFA local policies (administrators are generally painfully unaware of how books get selected, and they rarely know much about the policy and procedures section written into most school board policies). It's having a tough conversation about what their job is when a parent catches them at a ballgame or in the front office and wants to complain about the content of a book. Their job is simple: they are to listen quietly, without agreeing, and explain to the parent that you handle these issues so they should make an appointment with you right away to discuss their concerns. Also, understand that administrators may have their own opinions about what should or shouldn't be held in a school's collection; it's up to you to help them better understand what the library does. Obviously, this applies to public schools; if you are in a private or special school, your collection will likely be built within a different framework.

Also, what I've learned from these experiences is that you really don't know what is going to be the hot-button issue that will set a parent off in regard to book content so, as a professional, don't try to create a "safe" collection; there is no such thing, and you aren't doing your job well if you do. For evidence of this, simply look at ALA's list of the Top 100 Challenged Books, and the rationales behind those challenges. Your best bet is to know your collection well, and more importantly, know your district policies and follow them carefully. At

all costs, avoid self-censorship (or anti-selection), but at the same time, be mindful that there isn't one right book for all kids.

One of the best, proactive things I finally figured out to do as a librarian was to prepare new students to better understand the diversity of the library's collection. During orientation at the beginning of each school year, I spent a great deal of time talking to my new to middle school sixth graders about the diversity of the books. We'd discuss that the collection was developed so that it would serve them well for three years, and, while there were definitely books in the collection I wouldn't necessarily recommend to them as sixth graders, many of the young adult book choices might be just the right book for an eighth grader. I'd begin the orientation with a simple question, "Considering the last three years, how much have you changed?" By focusing on their growth over the course of the three years in elementary before they moved up to middle school, it helped students understand that more changes were coming. Typically, students would tell me they were smarter, bigger, more mature, and through those conversations, I'd remind them that over the next three years, they would continue to change in those very same ways. Books that might not be right for them today might be perfect for them in two or three years (or possibly not). Did I label my books or segregate them into specific collections? NO! Rather, I reminded them that they, the individual students, were the best barometers of what they are emotionally ready to read. I told them that if they start reading something and thought, "This makes me uncomfortable," or "I'm giggling, but I don't know that it's supposed to be funny" or "My mom REALLY wouldn't be happy knowing I'm reading this," then those were indicators that perhaps it wasn't the best choice for them right now. I also reminded them of the vast nature of the library's collection (we had almost 20,000 titles), and there was always something that would be just right for them—there was no fanfare necessary to returning the wrong book (in my middle school, the young adult collection was integrated with the middle-grade titles so there was a wide range).

I also reminded those students and their teachers that ALL books in the collection met the district policy for selection. In my case, the district policy stated that at least one positive review needed to place the book at the age range of students at the school; but the intended audience for that same book might be a slightly older student or simply not them, based on their maturity or needs. Again, individual emotional reading readiness is important, and really, the reader is best at determining what's really right for him or her. In the end, what was most important for me was to serve them well by doing reader's advisory and asking questions to help them find what might be the right book for that moment.

Over the years, employing this technique had a profound difference in the number of books that had issues. Will this keep you from ever dealing with a challenge? Absolutely not, but doing so has made a HUGE difference in the volume of issues I dealt with along my journey as a school librarian.

Conclusion

Librarians who work with young adults have the privilege of protecting their freedom to read freely. By following a materials selection policy and being knowledgeable about intellectual freedom, librarians will be ready to handle complaints and challenges to specific titles. Celebrating the freedom to read and teaching the learning community about intellectual freedom can result in a stronger community.

The teenage years are an age of drama and emotion and reversal, where good days are transcendent, and the bad days feel like the end of the world. It's the age at which most people have their first kiss, their first crush, their first love. It's when they suffer or commit their first real betrayal, tell their first meaningful lie, cast their first vote, and

drink their first beer. It's also the first time that most of us make out first choices that really matter. Seems like there might be some pretty interesting stories in there.

—Scott Westerfeld, author of *Imposters*, a new novel in the world of the *New York Times* best-selling series, *Uglies*

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Assignments in Action: The Freedom to Read for Discussion

1. Do librarians self-censor? "Essentially the goal of censorship is to remove or eliminate particular materials whereas the goal of professional guidelines is to provide criteria for selection, using both standards for literary quality and knowledge of child development" (McClure 1995, 19). When librarians read reviews and realize that a book contains controversial topics, do they tend to avoid purchasing those titles? If so, this is self-censorship. Do you know librarians who regularly self-censor? NCTE helps clarify differences between censorship and selection through a five-level chart found on the NCTE website. Based on the NCTE chart, the following are four examples of titles that might be censored but should be selected by a librarian.

- Exclusion of specific materials. John Green's *Looking for Alaska* might be censored for its unhappy ending, but it should be *selected* for providing a realistic view of life.
- Negative elements versus positive elements. Alexie Sherman's *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* could be challenged for its stereotypical view of Native Americans, but it should be *selected* for its honest portrayal of the contemporary dilemmas of Native Americans.
- Limited access to ideas and information. Robie Harris's *It's Perfectly Normal* could be challenged for its graphic and frank depiction of sex, but it should be *selected* for its honest and clearly presented information.
- Isolated parts of a work. Walter Dean Myers's *Fallen Angels* might be censored for its profanity, but it should be *selected* for its accurate portrayal of soldiers under the stress of war.

What young adult books that you have read might be tempting for librarians to self-censor?

2. Sometimes reading novels about book burnings and censoring can help young adults understand the impact of censorship better than a "lesson" about censorship. These novels tend to be didactic, carrying a heavy message from the author about the dangers of censoring books. Still, they can provoke spirited discussions and can lead to research about the history of banning books. Read one of these novels and speculate on its potential impact on a teen. How might it help the understanding of a student's right to read?

- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak—Death narrates this World War II-era Holocaust story of Liesel, a young girl who loves books and steals them from the mayor's wife.
- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury—In this classic adult novel, firemen burn books, but one fireman hides books and is turned in by his wife. He flees and joins a group of outlaw scholars who hold the contents of books in their heads.
- *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book* by Nat Hentoff—Teaching Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* causes a furor at George Mason High School. Some students and parents think the novel is racist, sexist, and immoral. Can its censorship be stopped?
- *The Last Book in the Universe* by Rodman Philbrick—In this dystopian novel, an orphan boy struggles to survive in a chaotic world accompanied by an old man who is writing a book for whom there are no readers.
- *The Last Safe Place on Earth* by Richard Peck—Using a dysfunctional family, Peck dramatizes the dangers of

censorship in a story that's at once didactic yet witty.

- *Sledding Hill* by Chris Cratcher—Heavy lessons about book banning and a protagonist who speaks from the afterlife take aim at censors in this odd but enjoyable novel.
- *The Year They Burned the Books* by Nancy Garden—Outrage involving sexual orientation, censorship, and prejudice is interwoven with the lives of high school students.

3. Interview a group of young adults about intellectual freedom. How do middle school and high school students respond to the following questions?

- Are you old enough or mature enough to have access to the same information available to adults?
- Is there information or images that you think people your age should not be allowed to access? What about young people five years younger than you?
- Who do you think should decide what information you have access to?
- Do your parents have the right to know what you are reading or viewing online?

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