
Preface

This book, like most, has been years in the making. I began my career teaching English in a rural school in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia in the 1980s. What I enjoyed most, then and now, about teaching was learning from my students. They taught me how to use a computer. They taught me that it was okay to sit on the classroom floor and read a good book or sit on the baseball field and write or wander around in the graveyard behind the school building searching for some thread of inspiration for a poem or short story.

While I was passionate about learning from my students' experiences, I was also ardent about the classics. I realized in no time that many of my students couldn't comprehend the classics and, therefore, couldn't connect with them. That lack of connection created an "I could care less" attitude. Their I could care less attitude quickly became *my* I could care less attitude. If they couldn't read the literature and understand it, what was the point? What was I to do?

It was during this time that I began my own explorations into young adult literature. The first young adult novel I brought into the classroom was S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*. Magic occurred with that book. Few students in my class had ever read a complete novel; several read this book in one night. They wanted to discuss it, see the movie, and talk about the broken places in their own lives. The story spoke to the hearts and minds of every student in my 10th grade class. My students were outsiders. They were poor; some were repeating the 10th grade. All of them considered themselves to be on a fast track to nowhere; every single one felt marginalized. To this day, I have no doubt that every student in that class read *The Outsiders* from cover to cover. I also believe that one or two chose to "tough out" high school instead of dropping out as a result of reading and talking about that one story.

I didn't need a graduate degree to realize the power young adult literature had to elevate, excite, engage, and educate young minds. I knew I had found the right tool, so we finished the year out with Richard Peck's *The Pigman* and Robert Newton Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die*.

What's in Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century?

Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century places in the hands of teachers a wealth of up-to-date resources that will excite and motivate teens. Unlike other young adult literature texts I've read, this text recognizes a wide range

of reading interests and abilities. Thus, titles presented include traditional young adult literature (both new titles and classics), adult books for mature readers, and traditional canonical texts. It also places an emphasis on young adult literature for the content area classroom and picture books appropriate for teens.

Comprehensive Genre Coverage Plus Sound Pedagogical Approaches

I've taught young adult literature for years and, while I've used a variety of textbooks, I've never found one that did what I needed it to do: cover the genres thoroughly *and* provide instructional strategies for teaching reading. I have written a book that bridges that divide, introducing teacher candidates to reading methods for building comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary strategies and introducing teachers to the world of young adult literature *without* sacrificing genre coverage. Through such an approach, English education majors can discuss, analyze, and write about the literature and authors in English class, and they can also explore and practice methods for teaching reading. A quick survey of the chapters will show that most are twofold: they begin by surveying and discussing the genre and close with strategies for teaching three dimensions of reading: comprehension skills, vocabulary, and fluency.¹

Contributions from Rising and Established Voices in the Young Adult Literature Field

In much the same way that my students have taught me to be a better teacher, I believed I'd be a better author if I listened to the voices of other young adult authors and experts who have created this genre. I reached out to them and received a wonderful set of wise and insightful responses. Author essays provide factual information—describing the challenges of writing within particular genres, addressing the issues facing young adult literature (and young adults) today—and they provide stories that both inspire and teach. Chapter 1 consists entirely of these stories. In describing a defining moment in their own adolescence, 30 authors tell raw and poignant stories about their own life experiences, which mirror the experiences of today's teens. These brief vignettes are indicative of why teens connect with young adult literature.

Young adult novelist and family therapist Chris Crutcher provided a wealth of information and feedback throughout this book and gave generously of his time to write the foreword. His contributions on censorship in Chapter 3 are invaluable. James Blasingame from Arizona State University, co-editor of *The Alan Review*, contributed a chapter on young adult literature and writing (Chapter 13). This chapter demonstrates the interconnectedness of reading and writing and the power young adult literature has to motivate

¹National Reading Panel identifies five dimensions of reading. Not covered in this text are phonics and phonemic awareness. Motivation is often identified as a sixth dimension.

students to think, feel, and write. It also illustrates links between in-school and out-of-school literacies.

In addition, several young adult experts contributed their voices to this effort: Marc Aronson, young adult expert and historian; Patty Campbell, noted young adult literature critic, author, teacher, and librarian; Don Gallo (professor emeritus), Central Connecticut University; Joan Kaywell, University of South Florida; Aaron Levy, Kennesaw State University; and Connie Zitlow (professor emerita), Ohio Wesleyan University.

Extensive Coverage of New and Emerging Genres

Today's young adult literature is evolving with ever-changing technologies and popular culture. Although much of this text covers traditional genres, discussing classic books and traditional text forms, the book also emphasizes emerging genres (e.g., verse novels, multigenre texts). Chapter 12, written by Faith H. Wallace from Kennesaw State University, is dedicated to the influence, and possibilities, of emerging new genres such as fanfiction, manga, graphic novels, and interactive books. Faith's research in environmental literacy, gaming, and out-of-school reading provided a strong framework for a chapter that speaks to the digital age and the influence technology has had on young adult literature. The chapter provides a wealth of resources for incorporating out-of-school reading interests into the traditional curriculum. Clearly, literature reflects an era and our classrooms should as well.

Up-to-Date Annotated Bibliographies

Once a limited genre, young adult literature has grown exponentially since the late 1960s. For the young adult literature novice, studying young adult literature can be akin to walking into a wallpaper store—choices and categories are endless. Teachers need and want guidance. What books work best for middle grades readers? Secondary readers? What are popular themes? Dozens of annotated bibliographies help direct readers to areas of interest. From Shakespeare in Young Adult Literature to Popular Culture and Content Area Learning, abundant bibliographies provide specific, current, and helpful suggestions for further readings.

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