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# Bridging the cultural gap: Using Commonwealth young adult literature in American secondary schools

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Bridging the Cultural Gap

Using Commonwealth Young Adult Literature in American Secondary Schools

(TITLE)

BY

Jennifer Hrejsa-Hudson

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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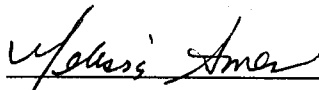
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**Jennifer Hudson**

**Abstract: Bridging the Cultural Gap**  
**Using Commonwealth Young Adult Literature in American Secondary Schools**

Commonwealth Young Adult Literature (CYAL), or YAL written in English speaking countries other than America, can help American secondary students become more globally aware while fulfilling many of the Common Core Standards. CYAL offers a variety of literary and multicultural/intercultural opportunities not always available in Ameri-centric YA. In this thesis, prize winning examples of CYAL and intercultural CYAL are analyzed for what cultural knowledge students can gain from reading them. Also included is a discussion about what is lost when American publishers “translate” CYAL into American vernacular. Finally, specific examples are given of how American secondary school teachers can incorporate CYAL into their curriculum based on mandated Common Core Standards.

### **Introduction: “American People Aren’t English”**

As I began my research into Young Adult Literature, specifically Commonwealth Young Adult Literature (YAL written in English in countries outside the United States, hereafter referred to as CYAL), my plan was to write about how teachers can integrate CYAL into their existing curriculum. Specifically, I thought CYAL would be used to scaffold student understanding so they would have more knowledge prior to embarking on the classics of British literature that are often taught in secondary schools. I thought that CYAL would be a terrific tool to help students make the leap to adult canonical fiction. And of course, it is. However, as I continued to research, I wondered why these books had to only be used as fun introductory tools to the great books already taught rather than as stand-alone primary texts. Instead, I came to believe that an organic progression of texts—one that should include examples of CYAL—to adult texts, when students are developmentally ready for them.

As Karen Coats points out in “Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory,” in elementary school we teach children literature written just for children, and in middle school, students often read works written specifically for them. Suddenly, as freshmen in high school, students are thrust into canonical adult literature. It is problematic that we force students to read about adults and their problems when they are just beginning to figure out who they are and how to solve their own. Often, we ruin these great books for students who are still too young to make important connections with and through these texts, and in the process we discourage reading by making it feel like unproductive work.

We pay attention to developmentally appropriate literature for younger children, but when they are 13, we suddenly pull out adult heavy hitters like *Ethan Frome*, *Silas Marner*, or *The Great Gatsby*. These, of course, are all terrific books, but I certainly didn't see their worth until I had a bit of life experience, and I have always been a reader. Furthermore, in this era of globalization, few *contemporary* world texts are being taught that would help adolescents make sense of their world as it is today.

The deeper into my research I looked, the more disillusioned I became. There is a well-researched problem of a reading gap—that begins about the time students read canonical literature in school. For years, the problem has been blamed on adolescents themselves, that they are rebellious, and have other newly found interests such as sports, the opposite sex, and even learning to drive. The end result is that teachers and researchers believed they just had less time to read, but only recently have researchers looked at the developmentally inappropriate literature we are asking our students to read.

While getting teens to read what teachers assign is getting increasingly more difficult, *The Common Core Standards* are asking us to make them read more. *The Common Core Standards Initiative* articulates the “Anchor Standard for Reading: English Language Arts”:

[t]o build for college and career readiness, students must read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts. Through extensive reading of stories, dramas, poems, and myths from diverse cultures and different time periods, students gain literary and cultural knowledge as well as familiarity with various text structures and elements. (n.p.)



If we unpack this anchor standard, we see that CYAL fulfills many of the parameters of this goal. The key words in this standard include the idea that students should “*build for college and career readiness...[by reading] widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging...texts...from diverse cultures and different time periods [to] gain cultural knowledge*” (“Anchor Standards for Reading: English Language Arts Standards” n.p. emphasis added).

As high school teachers, we must be careful to lead up to college and career readiness with curriculum choices that challenge readers without completely alienating or unduly frustrating them. This frustration is not the fault of the teacher, but instead indicative of the texts in our curriculum that students are just not yet developmentally ready to read.

Janet Alsup addresses the problem of the adult-centered canon in the “Introduction” to her book *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms*. She writes about the fact that the adolescent brain reads very differently than the adult brain.

[B]rain researchers can shed light on what happens during the adolescent reading experience, which might differ from an adult reader’s experience...David S. Miall (1995) writes prolifically about connections between emotional response to reading and the prefrontal cortex of the brain which enables a reader to anticipate the future direction of a narrative and fill in the “gaps” in a text’s meaning...[furthermore,] when the prefrontal cortex is undeveloped (as in teens)...an individual has a more difficult time processing rapidly changing conditions or stimuli and

responding to them appropriately. When reading a novel, processing various subplots, character changes, and developing themes might be more difficult for a teenage reader.” (3-4)

Alsup goes on to relate that a teen’s understanding of a text is intrinsically tied to their emotional attachment to the characters and events in it. In other words, in order for students to get to and get into the study of literature as “craft, historicity, and ideology,” students must first connect on an emotional level with the text (Alsup 4). Often, this lack of connection to the canonical texts used in our classrooms is the stumbling block to greater understanding of such literature and stems, most likely, from the fact that the literature we teach in high school does not follow a developmentally structured progression, but instead starts with adult texts.

Reading “widely and deeply” is another key phrase in the “Anchor Standard.” One possible approach to the “deeply” part of the standard is for teachers to heavily scaffold canonical texts. However, the scaffolding doesn’t solve the problem that students have difficulty relating to and therefore making that important emotional connection to a character who is more like their parents than themselves. CYAL, on the other hand, is usually heavily scaffolded for readers, as I will later show, allowing them to become engaged in important discussions about texts and contexts more quickly than with adult canonical literature.

The “widely” part of the standard must also be addressed. If teachers must spend six weeks on scaffolding, explicating, reading, checking for understanding, and analyzing one difficult adult text, this part of the standard cannot be met. Not only do we sometimes take the joy out of reading the text through lengthy analysis, but this long

process then limits our time to introduce other texts. Again, since CYAL is audience defined and developmentally appropriate for teens, using it in the classroom can help meet this goal. As I will argue, CYAL offers a productive marriage of challenge and accessibility making it pedagogically useful. Whether students are reading CYAL on their own, in a literature circle, or with the entire class, the goal of reading widely is more easily met.

Additionally, CYAL directly addresses concerns within the Anchor Standard, and that is that students must read from “diverse time periods.” If schools only teach the canon, then contemporary literature is neglected. Often, schools shy away from contemporary adult literature because it contains language, themes, violence, and explicit sexual situations that overshoot the PG13 level many schools and parents believe appropriate for their children. Since most canonical literature was written many years ago, it is time tested against censors and is often considered safe to teach. CYAL (and all YAL) does often deal with realistic situations in realistic terms. However, since CYAL is contemporary literature written specifically for a teen audience, the violence, sex, adult themes, and language is often tempered to a YA audience with knowledge of the challenges classroom teachers face. Therefore, it allows for contemporary literature to be read and studied in a *censor-safer* environment.

Cynthia Lewis’ and Jessica Dockter’s essay “Reading Literature in Secondary School: Disciplinary Discourses in Global Times,” addresses the lack of contemporary (YA) literature in secondary schools. The authors argue that what “English is in the context of secondary school and what it could be are strikingly different” (77). It seems things haven’t changed all that much over the years.

As first conceived by the Committee of Ten—a group of scholars that met in 1894 to determine appropriate high school subject preparation—the English of yesterday *and* today is primarily a course in “masterpieces” of literature. Despite the current attention and acclaim given to young adult literature within literary and academic circles—and despite the wide range of genres and diverse literatures represented therein—young adult literature is rarely included in secondary English classrooms. (Lewis and Dockter 77)

After reading *The Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies*, I would have to concur. The 1894 committee calls for studies in masterpieces “from Elizabethan to the present time” (National Education Association 92). It seems we took them literally and often teach literature from their “present time” (Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, George Elliot, Oliver Wendell Holmes, H.G. Wells, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Dickens...), but not much from our own. Furthermore, in today’s global society, where a familiarity with modern cultures and morals, politics and even geography are vital to economic success, the canon, despite its “universal themes” (often cited as a reason to keep canonical literature in the curriculum) is often locked in the past, has little recent and applicable information to provide to our students beyond the fact that they are “masterpieces” and have been read by many for many generations.

American YAL can help American students and teachers meet standards and goals, but I believe there needs to be a balance of American and foreign texts in our

secondary classrooms. As Caroline Hunt so adeptly puts in in her article “Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists”:

Young adult practitioners in the United States have also been handicapped by a sort of myopic nationalism. Though several journals have steadfastly combatted this tendency by publishing quality surveys of YA books from other countries...there is a widespread assumption that YA literature is, somehow, peculiarly "American" (meaning from the United States, as some YA critics seem oddly unaware of the existence of Canada, not to mention Mexico and South America). Books from Britain are underrepresented, and the fact that Chambers, John Rowe Townsend, Josephine Kamm, and others were active in this field very early is not widely known. Peter Hollindale, one of the pioneering academics who fought to make the study of children's and young adult literature acceptable in Britain, recently provided an overview of what he calls the "adolescent novel of ideas," a thoughtful account that balances texts from both sides of the Atlantic, highlighting those by LeGuin and Peter Dickinson. How many YA critics in the U.S. would take a similarly balanced view? How many would have heard of one of Hollindale's examples, Kamm's *Young Mother*, which predates *The Outsiders* by two years? (10)

This “myopic nationalism” has crept into our secondary schools with the advent of high-stakes testing, multicultural literature that focuses only on U.S. racial minorities, and a

back to basics mentality. Unfortunately, this narrow view will not serve our students well as they head out into the world after graduation.

Therefore, what CYAL specifically addresses is a different and broader cultural diversity. Cultural diversity, within the context of the “Anchor Common Core Standards,” refers to not only ethnic and racial diversity within American borders (“diversity” from what I will refer to as an Ameri-centric viewpoint), but global diversity, as evidenced in the words “diverse cultures” that are used to “gain cultural knowledge” (n.p.).

YA literature has in the past been stigmatized as not serious (as, in other words, popular) literature, but it is harder today to argue that the “high-quality” part of the standard is problematic. Karen Coats articulates the need for more serious attention to YAL in her essay “Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory.” She writes “[j]ust as children’s literature is viewed as both an entrée into more sophisticated reading for its intended audience and a viable area of academic study in and of itself, so literature aimed at young adults should be afforded the same dual valuation” (Coats 317). She goes on to address this problem further:

In English Education, young adult literature is often viewed as a gateway drug used to entice readers to try the harder stuff... For teachers as dealers, it’s not a bad scam... Yet, despite this show of support for the value of at least the utility of the literature to teach other things, there remains a sense that YA literature is a house you pass on the way, and not a destination in and of itself. (Coats 317)

Instead of using YA literature as a specific “gateway drug” to what adults assume are better and more important texts, we teachers should use quality YA literature to achieve our most important goals before we move on to adult texts. Commonwealth YA literature (CYAL) is especially helpful in our endeavors to create a more global and understanding society, as it is still literature written just for teens, and it captures social, political, geographical, and inter-textual complexities often found in traditional canonical works, but in a more developmentally appropriate way. Furthermore, CYAL gives teachers opportunities to explore issues involving voice, ethnicity, and culture that reflect today’s global realities. This is something the relative safety of the canon cannot accomplish by itself. In fact, the genres and subgenres available in quality CYAL are quite useful, both in their appeal and accessibility to teen readers, but also in the layers of complexity that make CYAL worthy to be taught not as an appetizer in a British or world literature class, but as a main course, and one that students will much more readily dig into and swallow.

Many of the CYAL books I will discuss later are deeply layered with complex characters, complex situations, and rich inter-textuality, all situated within a specific culture. As Georgia, the main character in *Angus, Thongs, and Full Frontal Snogging* points out on the first page, “American people aren’t English” (or Australian, or New Zealanders, or Welsh, or Irish, or Northern Irish or South African, or Canadian, or Nigerian) and they have something to gain from exposure to great stories written in other countries for teens.

Globalization doesn’t need to mean homogenization, and I argue that it shouldn’t. It should mean that our students are prepared to meet, greet, and work with people who

have different customs, ways of thinking, and cultural identities than theirs, even if they share the umbrella language of “English” in one of its many forms. Because CYAL is audience specific, it allows for productive discussion of these cultural identities and global ideologies because the rest of the text is relatively accessible, unlike many adult texts that give students more difficulties to juggle. Therefore, CYAL is uniquely situated to address common core standards regarding cultural diversity. The best of the CYAL I will discuss in later chapters are carefully and beautifully crafted pieces of literature that tell an engaging story, but also drop hints, leave clues, and in some cases, pull no punches about the differences between US and Commonwealth texts, languages, and cultures.

In chapter one, I address the issue of “high quality” literature more fully and refute concerns about the usefulness of CYAL with an in depth discussion about the complex layers of conflict, theme, characterization, history, and symbolism in Siobhan Dowd’s *Bog Child*, a lovely piece of historical fiction about “The Troubles” in Ireland and Northern Ireland in the early 1980’s. It is a traditionally teachable book that also expands and challenges students’ cultural knowledge about recent Irish history, culture, and geography.

In chapter two, I discuss intercultural literature within CYAL, and analyze criteria for evaluation of intercultural books. Books like *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Abdel- Fattah, *Naughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman, and *The Other Side of Truth* by Beverly Naidoo, all show minority perspectives and characters within Commonwealth countries, perspectives which are vital to global awareness in today’s world.



It is helpful to understand how foreign books for young people get into American teens' hands. In chapter three, I examine how American "translation" of CYAL can eradicate cultural ideologies and markers that are vital to our students' educational experience with literature about other countries. As I will demonstrate, sometimes U.S. publishers Americanize books, hoping they will sell well because the world in the book is less foreign to U.S. readers. But as the examples of *Harry Potter* and other CYAL will illuminate, this process encourages stereotypical views and global homogeneity. I will argue that the homogenization of YAL towards American values, language, and references limits what our students are able to learn about different cultures, and how other cultures tell their stories. Foreign-ness is not a liability, but a strength of CYAL that should be embraced, not "translated" out, as sometimes happens.

Finally, I conclude by providing some pedagogical uses for CYAL in today's classrooms. I do mention pairings with canonical works already taught in the schools as a way to get CYAL introduced into the curriculum. But, I also show how studying CYAL as primary classroom texts provide other benefits including cross-curricular opportunities, and open up multimodal possibilities that allow students to break through the walls of the classroom and move into the global environment.

## Chapter 1: An Issue of Quality

Finding CYAL and then identifying quality CYAL seems like a daunting task. Thankfully, there are numerous foreign awards for YAL and one domestic prize for which both foreign and domestic YA literature published originally in English are eligible. These prize winners are often marketed in the U.S. and commercially available to American students, therefore providing a good place to start. The Carnegie Medal, a UK prize, has very specific criteria that emphasize both literary quality and a satisfying reading experience for youth. The book must have been published in the U.K within the last year, and be specifically published as a young adult or children's text. Librarians across the United Kingdom nominate and vote for the best book for children using these specific guidelines:

[t]he book that wins the Carnegie Medal should be a book of outstanding literary quality. The whole work should provide pleasure, not merely from the surface enjoyment of a good read, but also the deeper subconscious satisfaction of having gone through a vicarious, but at the time of reading, a **real** experience that is retained afterwards. (“The Carnegie Medal: Award Criteria” n.p. emphasis in original)

Other specific Carnegie Medal criteria include a “well-constructed,” “logical” plot that the author controls and makes “definite and positive decisions about the direction events take” and “conclusions” that resolve “credibly” (“The Carnegie Medal: Award Criteria” n. p.). “Characterisation” is also considered; the characters must be “believable and convincing,...well-rounded,... effectively revealed through narration, dialogue, action,

inner dialogue and through the thoughts, reactions and responses of others,” and they must “act consistently” and “interact convincingly” with other characters (“The Carnegie Medal: Award Criteria” n. p.). The style must be “appropriate to the subject and theme,...successfully create a mood appropriate” to the novel, show “effective use of literary techniques and conventions...[conveyed through] author’s use of language, setting, atmosphere, characters, and action,” and present “factual information” accurately and clearly (“The Carnegie Medal: Award Criteria” n.p. ).

The British Costa Book Prize, formerly the Whitbread Award, is a publisher-nominated award, and has a YAL category. The winner in each category takes home a £5000 prize and then competes against the others for the larger grand prize. The Costa Award is the only literary award to pit YA and children’s literature against adult literature for the ultimate £50,000 prize. Other than the rule that the book must originate from the U.K., the criteria are not listed on the website, as a select group of elected judges pick the winner (“Costa Book Awards—FAQ’s” n.p.). The Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) also administers a publisher submitted award which is bestowed on Australian born and published YA authors (“Children’s Book Council of Australia: Home” n.p.).

Other international YA book awards of note include the CLA (Canadian Library Association) Young Adult Book Award. According to their website, the best book is chosen by librarians and:

[the] award recognizes an author of an outstanding English language Canadian book which appeals to young adults between the ages of 13 and 18. To be eligible for consideration, the following must apply: it must be a work of fiction (novel, collection of short stories, or graphic novel)

published [within the award year in English], the title must be a Canadian publication..., and the author must be a Canadian citizen or Permanent Resident. (“CLA Young Adult Book Award” n.p.)

The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature is awarded by the American Library Association and sponsored by its book review journal *Booklist*. This award is open to both U.S. and foreign books originally published in English that are available in the United States. The Printz Committee defines quality in young adult literature in a round-about way:

We know what it is not. We hope the award will have a wide AUDIENCE among readers from 12 to 18 but POPULARITY is not the criterion for this award. Nor is MESSAGE. In accordance with the Library Bill of Rights, CONTROVERSY is not something to avoid. In fact, we want a book that readers will talk about...The book should be self-contained, not dependent on other media for its meaning or pleasure. The book should not be considered in terms of other works by the author but as complete in itself.....What we are looking for, in short, is literary excellence. (“The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature” n.p.)

The Printz committee continues with its list of “suggested guidelines” that they say may not be applicable to all titles and therefore “should in no way be considered absolutes” (“The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature” n.p.). The list is exhaustive and includes “story, voice, style, setting, accuracy, characters, theme, illustration, and design” (“The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult

Literature” n.p.). Furthermore, the rules state that “The ALA press release announcing the winner should stipulate why the title has been chosen for its literary excellence” (“The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature” n.p.).

While these awards focus on the best *nationally* produced YA texts within their country of origin, the notable exception being the international Printz award, their criteria, purposes, and therefore their definitions of literary quality differ greatly. The librarian nominated and judged awards (Printz, CLA, and Carnegie) tend to recognize more pedagogically useful texts. I believe this phenomenon is explained in that a large number of professional school and youth librarians nominate and/or judge the books by specific, publicized criteria. Even though the criteria can be interpreted in many different ways, the sheer number of credentialed librarians voting on the best books gives the awards credibility. The publisher nominated awards (Costa and CBCA) sometimes promote an agenda based on future popularity or texts publishers think will be lucrative. Furthermore, the few anonymous judges’ criteria are less explicitly defined for the public, therefore making their reasons for selecting the winning book less transparent.

As evidenced by the many different awards criteria, “literary excellence” is a difficult term to define. As the Printz committee acknowledges, “we know what it is not.” My criteria involve both the elusive “literary quality” as well as teach-ability. But, in order for a book to be teachable, it first must be available to U.S. schools. For this reason, I tend to rely on award winners as they have been deemed to have literary merit in their home country and/or in the U.S., and are readily available to American students and teachers.

Beyond availability, a piece of CYAL worth teaching in American high school classrooms must be both supportive and challenging. A supportive piece of CYAL must be audience driven with appropriate scaffolding provided for readers with less life experience than adults. These supportive qualities make the literature accessible to young adults. A productively challenging piece of CYAL has a deeply layered story, is character driven, contains cultural relevance to its country of origin, and presents inter-textual and thematic complications that students will want to and need to talk about. A prime example of high quality and pedagogically useful CYAL is the 2009 Carnegie Medal winner *Bog Child* by Siobhan Dowd.

*Bog Child* is a challenging and complex book about the conflicts resulting from rigid borders and border crossings. At the same time, *Bog Child* retains elements of young adult fiction that make it developmentally appropriate literature for readers aged 15 to 18 in that it is effectively scaffolded and deals with both teenage and global contemporary issues. In all its complex layers of family conflict, politics, nationalism, and moral ambiguity, it is still an audience defined book, as I will demonstrate in the following literary analysis of this Irish-British example of quality, teachable CYAL. In addition to its deeply layered exploration of conflicts, rich inter-textuality, and thematically linked cross-curricular references, there are patterns of symbolism and themes of starvation, sacrifice, religion, border crossings, nature, nation, and strife that reach into families during wartime. There are also fully fleshed characters, political and historical references, and a beautiful example of Irish voice that will bring a greater understanding of twentieth century global conflicts to American students, as well as help

students meet the ever growing list of Common Core Standards in English/Language Arts.

*Bog Child* is historical fiction, and concerns the complexities of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland in the early 1980’s. The novel begins and ends in 1981 with Fergus, the main character whom we learn about through a third person omniscient narrator, as he is studying for and taking his A-level exams. As the violence escalates, it is his goal, and his family’s goal for him, to escape Ireland and go to Scotland to become a doctor; for as a Catholic in the North, and a member of a family deeply involved in the IRA, his parents feel he has little opportunity in his homeland and may get unwittingly sucked into the conflict that frames the novel. To help make ends meet, Fergus and his Uncle Tally (Unk) go up the mountain and cross the border to illegally cut turf (peat that is burned to heat homes) to sell in the local store. During their dig, Fergus discovers a body buried in the bog. While he and his uncle originally think the body is that of a newly murdered young girl, she is actually an ancient Iron Age bog person, who suffered from dwarfism and was stabbed and hung, most likely sacrificed. Since Fergus discovered her, and there is controversy over which side of the border will claim her, Fergus is asked to name her. He picks “Mel,” the name of a pop star he liked when he was eleven. Mel “talks” to Fergus in his dreams and while he jogs in the mornings—her voice is always written in italics and is in a first person point of view—as he and the archeologist, Felicity, and her daughter Cora, try to unravel the mystery of how she died.

Juxtaposed against Mel’s mystery are a number of other conflicts. Fergus’ brother Joe is in jail (Long Kesh, to be exact). He is a member of the Provos (Provisional Irish Republican Army) and is on a hunger strike that is slowly killing him and ripping

apart Fergus' once solid family. Meanwhile, Fergus is being blackmailed by Michael Rafters, a suspected member of the Provos, to run packages up the mountain and across the border. In return, Rafters hollowly promises that the IRA will order Joe to stop his hunger strike. Fergus is seriously conflicted. He wants to save his brother's life, but he is concerned that what he is ferrying might be Semtex, a powerful plastic explosive that the IRA (in particular a talented local bomb maker nicknamed Deus) has been using to blow up police (RUC) and British army posts. He grapples with the question of whether saving his brother's life is worth the lives of others.

On his runs, he meets a young Welsh army private, Owain. Fergus and Owain are the same age, and Owain joined the British army in order to escape the Welsh coal mines. During his twelve runs up the mountain, Fergus and Owain become close and Fergus realizes that they are really no different, a perspective on the North's "enemy" his father, an IRA sympathizer, does not share.

Through the alternating voices of Fergus and Mel, the reader gets a picture of Ireland's struggles, both modern and ancient. An important theme in the novel is that "old grudges [leapfrog] over generations and [reappear] in different forms" (Dowd 312). The reader gets alternating images of Mel's sacrifice and Joe's hunger strike. Mel is imprisoned and then sacrificed by the Druids because "as the child time forgot," she is identified as a witch. There is a famine, believed to be the result of an unpunished sin in her clan, so her pagan brethren decide that sacrificing her will appease the gods and end the famine (Dowd 13). In the present, Joe starves himself in jail, hoping his sacrifice will change Iron Lady Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's mind about her decision to treat incarcerated IRA members as common, not political, prisoners. Dowd captures the pain



of self-sacrifice and useless sacrifice, war, and the seemingly unresolvable binary of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, IRA sympathizers and the RUC. Joe sums it up best from jail when he tells Fergus “You are either for us or against us” (79) when Fergus questions the IRA’s tactics.

Things do not end well for all in *Bog Child*. Joe, in a coma, is moved to a hospital bed and fed forcibly through a drip at the request of his family—a decision that just about tears Fergus’ parents apart. Even though Joe is saved from certain death, he will probably never fully recover as he had been starving himself for fifty two days. Owain, the friendly Welsh trombone-playing private, is blown up by a bomb made by Deus, who turns out to be Fergus’ Uncle Tally. Uncle Tally is then shot and killed on the day he is to take Fergus for his driving test. Fergus and Cora, his love interest, are separated as well when her mother forces her to move to Michigan to live with her estranged father.

Fergus does however get his escape, and his family realizes their goal: “a soldier [Joe] and a student [Fergus]” (Dowd 318). Fergus earns B’s on his A-levels, which gives him a university place in Aberdeen. In the last scene of the book, he is on a ferry waving goodbye to his mother and mother country.

*Bog Child* would be a challenging and rewarding text for American students to study in many respects. As an example of CYAL, and an historical fiction piece at that, there are cultural references, historical figures, and political situations that many American students may not have read about before. References to Margaret Thatcher, “The Troubles” and the many acronyms belonging to groups involved with the conflict (including the IRA, RUC, Sinn Fein, Provos, and UDR) provide a plethora of classroom opportunities. Interestingly, the information load is addressed in the book itself by Cora,

who says “I don’t get all these initials,” in response to Fergus’ statement “The band players. They’re all UDR fellows. An IRA target” (Dowd 302). American readers may become a bit overwhelmed by the acronyms as well at this point in the book, even though Dowd does a good job at short and sweet explanations, like the one above, to explain which groups are linked and which are opposed. From Fergus’ information, readers again remember the link between Owain (British army), who was supposed to be there playing the trombone with the band (UDR, a special British Reserves unit), to the British forces and that both groups are targeted by the IRA. It is helpful, and perhaps a bit of a relief, that an “insider” in the book also struggles with the complexities and the subtleties of the conflict

The use of appropriate scaffolding is one YA marker in *Bog Child*, and the acronym scaffolding above is only one of many examples. Dowd carefully scaffolds information throughout the novel by using characters, dialogue and narrative to help a younger, less experienced person understand the complexities of the themes and events in her novel. This scaffolding is what makes *Bog Child* quintessentially YAL.

Felicity, the archeologist, seems to be placed into the story for no other reason than to scaffold knowledge of bog people to readers unfamiliar with them. Often, it is from her voice that readers get important information about the Iron Age, why bog people are so well preserved in the peat, and important historical context that applies to Fergus’ present conflicts. Without Felicity, much of the information would be inaccessible to young readers, making the novel more difficult for them to navigate.

Dowd provides many of these scaffolding examples through interactions between Fergus and Felicity; Fergus asks questions and expert Felicity provides the answers.

Early in the novel, Felicity explains how a body could be mummified in the peat after Fergus asks a question about different colored and textured soil found next to the body: “Sphagnum moss...It’s found in bog-land like this. They used it in the First World War to dress wounds. There’s a quality in it that stops decay...Bodies decompose because of microbes, and this moss stops the microbes” (Dowd 58). More scaffolding appears later when the curious Fergus, as the discoverer of the body, is invited to see the autopsy.

Felicity talks as she works and fills in knowledge gaps:

‘Other bog people have been found hanged like this...If you believe the historians, a cult prevailed across much of northern Europe from the Bronze Age through to the Iron Age, surrounding a goddess called Nerthus.’

‘Nerthus?’ asked Fergus. ‘Who was she?’

‘Mother Earth, if you like. Tacitus describes rituals surrounding her in *Germania*. She is always depicted wearing a neck-ring or torque. Archeologists think the instances of hanged bog people connect with this. The noose could be a symbol—the threshold between life and death....Another interesting pattern with bog people...is the contents of their stomachs. They all seem to have died in the winter.’

‘The winter? How can you tell?’

‘There’s no summer fruit in there, only grain. It’s as if they were given a frugal meal, a kind of porridge, of last year’s grain before being sacrificed. Perhaps to protect next year’s crop.’ (Dowd 146-147)

Dowd writes in her acknowledgements at the end of the novel that much of this information provided to the reader via Felicity came from research, both from a book on bog people called *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved* and a BBC/Open University “inspirational programme” *Timewatch*, “on recent discoveries of bog people in Ireland” (Dowd n.p.).

The hunger strike, a real historical event, is also carefully scaffolded throughout and Dowd begins her novel with an “Author’s Note” to explain the situation.

In 1981, several members of the Provisional IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army in prison in Long Kesh, also known as HMP Maze, went on a hunger strike in an effort to persuade the British authorities that they should be accorded Special Category status as political prisoners. Ten men actually starved themselves to death. By the summer of 1981, partly as a result of an intervention by Prison Chaplain Father Faul, some of the families gave permission for their sons to be removed while unconscious to hospital beds, where they could be drip-fed. Others decided not to intervene. The hunger strike finally ended in October 1981. Some of the demands of the hunger strikers were subsequently met. (Dowd n.p.)

This explanation gives readers important preview information about the political situation in Ireland that is present throughout the novel and isn’t easily explained through dialogue or narration.

Other examples of scaffolding appear in italics that represent Fergus’ inner thoughts. The italics are often Fergus’ memories or dreams that serve as reminders to the character, but as new and personalized information for readers. Dowd has Fergus

remember information he read in a newspaper article about what happens to the body when on a hunger strike: “*You drink four pints of water a day. Every time you drink, you retch. Your stomach cramps up like you’ve poisoned it with bad mushrooms. The water’s cold. You’re freezing. No amount of blankets can keep you warm.*” (Dowd 107). Since Joe is no longer in any condition to speak with his family or have visitors, readers get the information about what he is going through vicariously through remembered newspaper articles. This precise form of informational and emotional scaffolding happens again later in the novel, after Joe has been placed on a feeding drip.

*Fifty-two days of fasting.* He remembered what he’d read back at the start, the courtesy of a gleeful Republican commentator in the *Roscillin Star*:

*For the first three days, the body uses up the glucose in the body.*

*Then it uses up the body-fat. After three weeks, it runs out of body*

*fat. After that, the body literally starts to eat itself.* (Dowd 309)

While the repetitive scaffolding of information laced with visceral images about the hunger strike may seem overtly didactic to adult readers, these images are very important and effective for young adult readers in that they help them visualize the horrors of a hunger strike (with which they may have little or no prior knowledge) and help retain a personal empathy connection with Fergus.

Scaffolding is not only provided through author notes, “expert” characters and interior monologues, but also through dialogue between characters in conflict.

Scaffolding regarding the reasons behind the hunger strike in Long Kesh Prison is presented in the novel as an argument between Mam (Pat) and Da (Malachy).

‘So the hunger strikes’ a tragedy. All over a few old clothes.’

‘It’s not about clothes.’

‘It is about clothes’

‘It’s about what the clothes *mean* Pat. If you don’t wear prison garb, you’re a political prisoner. And if you’re a political, you’re not a petty criminal. And that’s what the Brits make out they are.’

‘What matter is it what they think?’

‘Next you’ll be saying your woman Thatcher over’s right to let them die.’

‘I’d never say that. She should let them wear what they want, if it would stop the insanity.’ (Dowd 29, emphasis in original)

Through this argument between Da and Mam, the reader is reminded about the crux of the problem, earlier stated in the “Author’s Note,” and why the hunger strike is happening. The argument contained within dialogue deftly provides much needed framework and context for readers to understand the problem and why Joe has gone to such extreme measures.

Later, Joe himself adds to the argument and further clarifies what he and the other hunger strikers believe is at stake. Again, it involves an argument with Mam, the counterpoint character, during visiting hours at Long Kesh Prison:

‘It’s not as simple as that. It’s about dignity, Mam. Human dignity. Da understands. We talked about it the last time he came in. It’s about freedom and dignity. Clothes, visits, the right not to muck in with the common prisoners. The right to keep ourselves apart, doing what we want

to do. It's the right to hold our heads up and not be ashamed of what we've done.' (Dowd 79)

After reading these two passages framed in argument, readers have a clear understanding of what is at stake, and the strikers' perspective. Alternatively, they also have arguments against what the hunger strikers are doing in the form of Joe's own mother, who boldly goes against the other mothers who are proud of their sons' sacrifice, by tempting Joe to eat his favorite rhubarb tart. The information allows teens to internalize the conflict in a meaningful way, therefore helping them to form an emotional attachment to Fergus, Joe, and the family, while simultaneously setting them up for the complexities involved in moral decisions about right and wrong, a theme continuously highlighted throughout the novel.

Dowd also cleverly hides scaffolded information within Owain and Fergus' conversations that further explain the wider international conflict.

Owain smiled. 'Normally, we hear nothing of what you locals get up to...one day we're helping out with a bit of archeology, shoulder to shoulder with you lot. Next day we're out escorting the coffins of the hunger strikers and we may as well have been beamed in from another planet. Everyone treats us like freaks. And before you know it, the petrol bombs and stones are flying'

'And the plastic bullets,' said Fergus.

'And plastic bullets.' Owain raised his hands palm upwards. 'And as far as my unit's concerned, you're the taigs. A crew of mad, bad Irish bog-men, straight out of the Stone Age.'

Fergus snorted. ‘That’s us, all right.’ (Dowd 127)

Through this dialogue, readers get a British perspective. We already have an IRA perspective through the voices of Da and Joe, but now Dowd balances and humanizes the other side of the conflict. After discussing their differences, Fergus and Owain begin to discuss their common ground, focused on the bog child, whose body both of them helped excavate and both, like pall bearers, carried to the truck. This information presented as conversation gives readers insight into the real human cost of the conflict.

Later, Dowd uses dialogue again between Owain and Fergus to provide information about the characteristics of Semtex. This scaffolded information is needed later for readers to make a connection between Unk and the bomber Deus. Fergus asks Owain “what’s Semtex like?” and Owain explains. “Semtex comes in different forms. Often greyish, like plasticine. It smells like almonds...It’s hard to combust. Safe to transport” (248). Even though the packages Fergus runs contain only birth control (an explosive product none-the-less in Catholic Ireland), the information provided by Owain about Semtex helps the reader, and Fergus, connect Uncle Tally and Semtex. We learn that Unk’s room in the public house smells of the almond flavored frosting marzipan, a smell Fergus first associates with Christmas, but after his conversation with Owain, knows is the “smell of Semtex” (315).

Scaffolding within the text is not the only YA marker in *Bog Child*. The intertwining stories of first love between Fergus and Cora, and Iron Age Mel and Rur, serve a YA purpose. *Bog Child* is a fairly dark book about a very dark time in Northern Irish history. By introducing the love stories, Dowd has softened the blow a bit and given teens something familiar to grasp in a book of difficult moral themes. While adult



readers may feel the love stories weaken the novel, teen readers need the seemingly sentimental subplots to decompress from the images of starvation, murder, bombs, and family strife. Like the formula for Young's Modulus (Elasticity = tensile stress/tensile strain) that appears as Fergus studies for his Physics A-levels (33), Dowd knows she can only push her young readers so far before they snap. The story of first love serves as a relief valve at the height of Fergus' stress and strain, both for Fergus and for Dowd's maturing readers. While the love story does not end in a permanent relationship (it cannot if Fergus is to grow and move on to fulfill his dream of going to medical school in Scotland), readers can accept it for what it is, and understand the problem of the interfering parent. Even the allusions to sex are relatively safe and inexplicit, thus denoting a novel for a young adult audience. Fergus' first and only sex act in the novel (and Dowd takes pains to assure readers that it is protected sex) is so obscured by nationalistic, nature, and religious symbolism, that readers must truly read between the lines to understand what actually happens.

As she got back under the coverlet, a chaffinch gave out its first hesitant trill of the day. Cora's ribs pressed hard up against his. Then there was no sound or sight, just feeling, a pure toppling free-falling *swooooooooosh*, as of a sparrowhawk swooping down from the sky. He'd to clamp his teeth over his inner lips with the sweet agony of keeping silent. *Suffering Saviour. Dying's like this*, he thought. *Painful. Beautiful. You stretch your hands. You meet it like a lover, on cruise-control to your coffin.* And he heard all the priests of all his mass days intone the familiar words. *In*

*the midst of life, Fergus. In the midst of life we are in death.* (Dowd 201-202, emphasis original)

This carefully written sex scene evokes *Romeo and Juliet* in the bird imagery, given the fact that their love is not sanctioned by either set of parents, and the imagery of death.

Mel and Rur's love story is also a *Romeo and Juliet* trope, although it is more traditionally tragic than Fergus and Cora's story. However, instead of both lovers dying, only Mel dies. She asks Rur to stab her before she is hung, because she is afraid she will not die quickly. While it seems a violent act, Rur's is actually an act of love, and highly symbolic of Mel as a scapegoat and as a religious sacrifice. As the now leader of the clan, he spills her blood to retain control and keep balance within his fracturing and starving clan. This sentimental plotline connects Mel thematically to Fergus, and Mel emotionally to teen readers. By creating the melodrama surrounding Mel's death, Dowd sets the stage, in incremental steps, for the modern sacrifice yet to come. She is emotionally preparing her audience for Owain's death at the hands of Unk.

Putting the main character under incredible stress, but keeping him safe, is another common characteristic of YA literature. Again, while adults may have a harder time believing all the close calls and therefore may call the novel's literary quality into question, these close calls actually serve as developmentally appropriate content for Dowd's target audience. Even though those around Fergus are dying because of bombs or starvation, Fergus is relatively safe. There are times, especially during his epiphanies on the mountain, where the reader fears for his safety or his future, but ultimately he has not been running Semtex for the Provos, and he is not arrested for illegally smuggling birth control. Even though Fergus is under tremendous stress, it is those around him,

Owain, Joe, Cora, and his Uncle, who are in the most danger. The device of danger once removed is important for teen's emotional development. While a contemporary adult novel might tell this story from Joe's perspective as he slowly starves to death in prison, a YA audience gets a realistic but safe vision of the same story from the point of view of a character that they can more easily connect to, the younger brother (Fergus). While readers are sad Joe is dying, we never really find out what he did to earn a ten year prison sentence and we don't see firsthand his starvation (since when things get really bad, Fergus is no longer allowed to visit him) nor do readers get a truly clear vision of his ideology. Unlike many of the other characters in the novel, Fergus makes it out of his "troubles" which allows for a satisfying, if not completely happy, ending for YA readers.

One final important characteristic in YA novels is that young adult readers can relate to the main character. Fergus' everyday worries and experiences help younger readers form an emotional attachment to him because they can relate to similar experiences. In addition to the extraordinary (war, his jailed brother, the bog child), Fergus also has rather ordinary teenage experiences and worries that include getting his driver's license, passing his exams, first love, and getting into college. These typical teen worries cement the emotional attachment readers feel for Fergus because they too experience similar things. While it is unlikely that teens could realistically put themselves in Fergus' place regarding his political prisoner brother, his ideological qualms, and his difficult decisions all revolving around the Troubles in his homeland, readers can and do identify with those details about teenage life that, even though under tremendous other stresses, really matter to Fergus and the teens reading about him.

*Bog Child* fits the YA genre through scaffolding and other characteristics mentioned above, but it is also a novel of very high quality, and one worthy of close literary analysis. The conflicts in *Bog Child* highlight the layers within the text, and many of the conflicts in the novel result in internal epiphanies for Fergus. Doing the right thing is never black and white or north and south in *Bog Child*, and that is probably Dowd's message. Early in the novel, Unk and Fergus argue over what to do about their discovery of the dead girl. Tally is concerned that if they report this discovery of a body, "we're done for the turf-cutting" (Dowd 10). In the end, Fergus prevails, only because he makes a personal connection between his family and the body. "It's a girl like our Theresa or Cath, Unk. We can't just leave her to get mashed up by the JCB. It's easy to miss her" (10). Fergus wins this round and Unk goes down to the Irish side to get the guards and the police while Fergus stays with the body and acts out their cover story.

It is precisely these personal connections that resolve or complicate conflicts for Fergus as the story progresses. Each conflict Fergus encounters leads him to a new epiphany about himself, his family, his heritage, and his beliefs. At the same time, Fergus' conflicts remain highly emblematic of Northern Ireland's Troubles in the 1980's.

The disclosure of the found body also brings up an international conflict. Who will claim her? Neither side wants the responsibility of a messy investigation into the girl's death. There is much discussion about where the girl was found. She is, of course, right on the border in an unmarked part of the map where separation between the Republic and Northern Ireland is unclear. The theme of borders and border conflict is highlighted in chapter three: "More police and more arguments broke out about where the border was, but in reverse. The body of the girl had gone from a serious crime headache

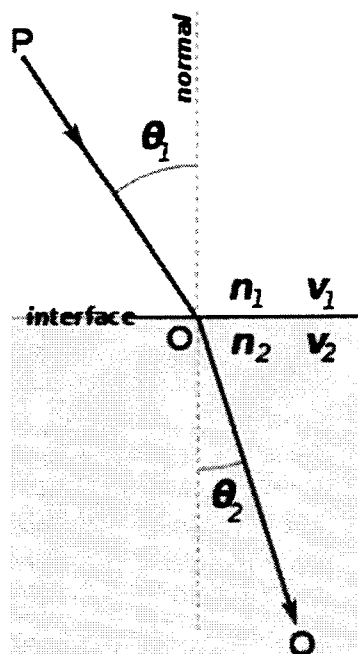
to a valuable find. Everyone laid claim to her” (22). The bog child here becomes emblematic of the land itself. The British lay colonial claim and the Republic makes an historic/nationalistic claim. Her legs have been inadvertently cut off by the professional peat diggers using a JCB (a front end loader) while digging turf. She is truncated, left in pieces, because of the conflict. Like the bone in Mel’s leg, Ireland is a terribly fractured place in this novel.

This international conflict is indicative of the position of Catholic Fergus and his family, who live in the Protestant North, very near the border. Choosing sides is a major theme and is highlighted in various places using conflict, and it is always Fergus who precariously straddles the border. Most of the time, there are nationalistic overtones to choosing sides, and whenever Fergus is forced to choose, he chooses to do what he thinks is right for his family and his friends, not necessarily his country or the cause. His choices often involve an epiphany moment that further entrenches him in the middle. Fergus realizes there are deep and emotional losses on both sides.

Unwinnable conflict, right/wrong moral binaries, and borders are further explored through inter-textuality, especially through Fergus’ studies for his A-Level exams. Multiple physics formulas are strewn throughout the text that show Fergus’ scholarly position in the family and symbolize his conflicted feelings about Ireland, his jailed brother, the everyday stress of living on the border, and his growing feelings for Cora, the archeologist’s daughter. The first formula, as I’ve already indicated, is  $E = \frac{\text{tensile stress}}{\text{tensile strain}}$  (33). This is the Young’s Modulus equation, where “[t]he modulus of elasticity (E) defines the properties of a material as it undergoes stress, deforms, and then returns to its original shape after the stress is removed” (“Tensile

Properties” n.p.). A question emerges in the novel about how much Fergus can withstand before the stress causes him irreparable harm. At what point does the stress and strain in his life stretch him until there is no more elasticity and he breaks? Elastic is exactly what Fergus must be. He must stretch his understanding about family loyalty, love, brotherhood, and duty in order to come to terms with both the Troubles and his troubles. The inter-textuality here is important both to Fergus and to readers. Since this is an upper level YA novel, perhaps junior or senior level in the U.S.A, the probability that students will be studying these same formulas in their physics classes is high, and gives the reader a cross-curricular connection.

Fergus is studying refraction too, and drops a pencil in a jug of water to explain it to his mother (more scaffolding). He demonstrates Snell’s Law, “a formula used to describe the relationship between the angles of incidence and refraction, when referring to light or other waves passing through a boundary between two different isotropic media, such as water and glass” (“Snell’s Law” n.p.).



(“Snell’s Law” n.p.).

The refraction caused by crossing the border (air and water in Fergus' example, Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland in Fergus' reality) is brought up again and again in the novel. The major conflicts occur when Fergus crosses the border and then has a different view from the other side. At the interface, his sense of right and wrong refracts; the angle of vision for him changes. It is at these moments where he learns the most about himself and his world.

Refraction is brilliantly portrayed through the Irish landscape as well. Air and water, up the mountain and down, are constantly referenced before an important interface or change for Fergus. When Fergus is running up the mountain, he feels like he can breathe and see clearly. As Fergus gains altitude toward the indecipherable border, the interface where things refract, he can see both sides clearly. Not only can he hear Mel up in the mountain (he can only hear her in his dreams down below), but he processes events that happen to him in a clearer way. He describes being down in Drumleash as being under water, below the refraction and interface. The sinister lough that encircles Drumleash almost becomes a character in and of itself and further highlights the separation of air and water, up the mountain and down: "Running on the spot, he turned round. Drumleash was way below. An arm of the lough curled away into haze. He whooped out loud at the joy of being above it all" (38). He is above the water, and rejoices that he is not weighed down by everything that is below the meniscus. As he runs up the mountain, he crosses one last boundary—a stream. It is a small, surmountable stream, unlike the lough and the trouble below, that up in the mountain air he can hop over and it doesn't affect him. He even takes a drink. Afterwards, he thinks "this is the magic middle of things, where moving felt the same as staying still" (39).

While Dowd is describing Fergus' feeling of freedom when he gets into the zone of running, it is not until he is up and away from the heaviness of the valley that he can get into this zone. Here he is at the boundary, where the air and water meet and the angle of vision refracts.

An excellent example of Fergus' experience with refraction happens when he jogs up the mountain, crosses the nebulous border and befriends Owain, a Welsh member of the British army. On the borderland in the mountains, no one is watching him and Fergus can stop to talk with the "enemy" without fear of retribution from his family and friends.

Fergus remembered that by Drumleash standards, he was fraternizing with the enemy. But up here is the open, wild space it didn't seem to matter.

'You're on one side of the border,' he said, drawing an imaginary line in the air. 'And I'm on the other. And please may I cross?'

*'Red Rover, red rover, I'll let you come over'*

...They'd cut you to ribbons for that below, he thought. Up here on the mountain, the Troubles didn't seem to count. You could talk to whomever you pleased. (Dowd 40-41, emphasis in original)

Fergus seems to have found the sweet spot at the border, the place where refraction occurs, the interface, where the binary doesn't hold. It is here that he learns things, can hear Mel, and makes friends with the enemy. This first non-politically fuelled experience with a British soldier colors Fergus' views about the conflict in general. The other side has been personalized and he realizes that Owain is really no different than himself. In effect, Fergus has met his British doppelgänger at the interface.



Back down the mountain, under the water of the Troubles, Fergus faces a conflict that causes both mental and physical border crossing. It involves Michel Rafter, the suspected Provos, and Fergus' brother Joe. Fergus goes to the swimming pool with his two sisters. While swimming laps, he feels the resistance of the water.

For a few strokes, it was as if the legs and arms worked perfectly together and he glided effortlessly from one end to the other. But when he turned for the next length, the magic left and he felt the strain and the water resisting...the warmth of the water made him drowsy. (45)

He heaves himself out of the pool, and in his half dream state, the boundary between wakefulness and sleep, he hears Mel crying for help in his head. It is not the peaceful, lilting voice he heard on the mountain, but a pleading voice. *"They took me up the mountain and it wasn't fair...Somebody help me. Please help me..."* (Dowd 45, emphasis in original). Then, for the first time in the novel, he sees her, in his mind, fleeing down the mountain. "The little girl's dream voice again, from another place, another time, running in a white shift, down the mountainside. Then, she changed into a creamy white goat-kid" (46). This sacrifice imagery is useful pedagogically, but also is important developmentally. While the sacrifice imagery may seem a bit obvious to an adult reader, teen readers, who can make the scapegoat connections on their own as they read, feel validated in their own reading and ability to do productive literary analysis. In other words, Dowd carefully trains her readers how to read her novel. As more and more layers are peeled back, students feel more and more connected with the text and the characters in it while at the same time being exposed to and learning about history, physics, and Northern Irish, Irish, and British cultures and perspectives.

This sacrifice imagery is juxtaposed against a meeting with Michael Rafters, a suspected Provos member and friend of Joe's, who wakes Fergus from his semi-dream state. Almost nothing good in this book happens in or near the water and Fergus' impromptu meeting with Rafters is no exception. Rafters knows Fergus is desperate to save his brother from his hunger strike so he blackmails Fergus. If he runs packages for him up and down the mountain, he can get the IRA to order Joe to stop his hunger strike. Fergus knows that only two things can stop Joe from starving himself to death: Margaret Thatcher agreeing to the strikers' demands, or the Provos ordering him to stop. He tries to take the noble route and writes a heart wrenching letter to Prime Minister Thatcher, asking her to reconsider and grant the strikers' concessions by appealing to her humanity. He is about to send it when he decides that it won't do any good.

It was as if an older, more seasoned Fergus from twenty years in the future had bent time [refraction] and returned to the brain of his younger self to write this letter...Then he thought of the long corridors of power, of the secretaries screening everything, of mailbags groaning with letters from sincere citizens, the manifold pleas of the kingdom; and the grating, intransigent voice of the woman herself. She would never see it. (Dowd 118)

His letter would never breach the boundary to her desk. Instead, Fergus burns (sacrifices) the letter and agrees to run packages across the border for Rafters.

He is convinced, and by no small inferences from Rafters himself, that he is ferrying Semtex used to blow up police stations, army outposts, and other British targets in Northern Ireland. When he realizes that Rafters cannot get the Provos to ask Joe to

stop, and that the Provos are actually planning hunger striker deaths about ten days apart for maximum impact, Fergus understands his brother has been sacrificed to the cause and cannot be saved. On one of his last runs across the border, Fergus' conscience gets the better of him. He believes that he is contributing to the unnecessary sacrifices after two innocent women, on their way back from a hen party, are inadvertently blown up with one of Deus' bombs. He is convinced that he is responsible for the women's deaths and that he is the one who carried the bomb making materials across the border. He is unable to accept the collateral damage, and he stops at the border crossing, tearfully confesses, and shows Owain the two packages. He has crossed a loyalty border. To those below in the valley, he has committed treason. To Fergus, the line isn't that simple.

He surrenders himself to Owain, convinced that he is going to jail, and the two boys carefully open the packages. One, unsurprisingly, is filled with cash. The other is filled not with Semtex, but with birth control pills and condoms that spill out of the packages and onto the border. In the Republic in the 1980's, many shopkeepers and pharmacies would have been run out of business for selling them, so they didn't (information carefully scaffolded by Dowd). As the packets spill across the ground, Fergus has a second epiphany, that Rafters is not a part of the Provos, but avoiding their mafia-like smuggling taxes by asking him to run contraceptives across the border. Rafters could not have saved his brother even if he wanted to. Owain lets Fergus go, and both are relieved that the package was not deadly plastic explosives. Sadly, this is the last time Fergus sees Owain alive as Unk's bomb kills Owain and three of his comrades that evening on his way to his post on the mountain.

The personal and political conflicts, loyalties and boundary crossings parallel family loyalty boundaries as well in *Bog Child*. While Fergus' internal conflicts about running for Rafter's threaten to tear him apart, Fergus' family are at war about saving Joe. Mam is adamant that he needs to be talked out of his strike and brings Fergus with her to Long Kesh prison because he is persuasive. Da, on the other hand, feels that Joe is dying for a noble cause. He is sad about it, but doesn't want to stand in the way of Joe's statement and believes in his ideological stance. The conflict within the family reflects and parallels the political conflict. Fergus' family is torn apart by ideology and stubbornness. The family constantly puts Fergus in the middle of things. He is, in fact, the interface. His mother asks him to help her argue points against his father's position, and vice versa. At the end of the novel, Da finally realizes that Fergus is right; the consequences of Joe's death will have much greater impact on his personal life than it will on the deepening political conflict, so he crosses his own personal boundary about not interfering in Joe's political statement, and finally calls the jail to have Joe drip fed after he goes into a coma. However, the delay in ordering the drip while Da makes up his mind has probably permanently damaged Joe beyond hope. The novel ends with the reader and Fergus not knowing whether Joe survives, and if he does, if the brain damage suspected by doctors will be permanent.

These internal and external conflicts force Fergus to cross personal and literal boundaries and these border crossings affect others and result in important moral epiphanies. The questions about right and wrong, and personal and political conflict make the novel both high quality and a very teachable text. Not only do Fergus' quandaries personalize a difficult to understand Irish conflict, but also promote themes

that students are already concerned with in their daily lives, namely loyalty and pushing boundaries. The layers of conflict and choices are debated in the text, and are not easily or neatly resolved, like the historical conflict.

While the political fight between the Iron Lady (Thatcher) and the Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein rages on, a fight between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is taking place surrounding the body of a girl from the Iron Age, the bog child. The parallels in both stories are startlingly tight. Felicity pieces Mel's story together by gathering evidence, like examining the knife wound that cut her spine, the noose around her neck, and the meager contents of her stomach. Mel was most likely sacrificed as a scapegoat for a bad winter and poor crop yield. The snippets of her story the reader gets are, interestingly, in Fergus' vernacular, providing readers the interface for the connecting stories. With strong allusions to the Great Potato Famine and the hunger strikers, and emblematic iron references that reflect Ireland's more recent historical experiences with the Iron Lady, as well as historical Iron Age Druid/Celtic culture, Mel's story is told to us through Fergus' omniscient first person experiences, and parallels Fergus' story told through a limited omniscient narrator. We learn that Mel's family emigrated long ago from Scotland because of the bracelet Mel wore when she was buried in the bog. Joe, the IRA's scapegoat, gives Fergus his watch for safekeeping, a gift Fergus returns to his mother before he gets on the ferry to go to Scotland for school. We learn that Mel was in love with Rur, the chieftain Shaughn's oldest son, and that Shaughn oppressed his people for power and money. We learn that Mel, like Joe, accepted her fate and sacrificed herself even though she knew her brother Brennan was the one who killed Boss Shaughn in the lough. Similarly, Joe knows his uncle is the bomber Deus and

cannot come to visit him for fear of being fingerprinted and discovered. Like Mel and the Druids, the IRA makes Joe and the hunger strikers scapegoats, using them for political propaganda to further their agenda. The meta-narration is used as a device to make the readers hyper aware of the multi-layered conflicts that transcend time, that refract like a pencil in water, and that stretch everyone in Fergus' sphere to the breaking point.

A third physics equation appears in the novel: " $F=qv \times B$ ," or the law of electromagnetism (143). This equation specifically relates to Fergus' feelings for his first love Cora, as she sits in the back seat of the car, he in the front seat, on their way to Mel's autopsy:

[W]here  $F$ , force, was Cora, and  $q$  the charged particles in his body and  $v$  the rate at which they were being sucked back towards her.  $B$  was the inside of the Renault, a moving magnetic field, with the sun dappling, the air rushing and Felicity chatting and the white lines of the road flicking past, like heartbeats. (143)

Not only does this paragraph carefully scaffold the equation, but it also relates to intertextuality and the theme of borders woven throughout the book. Just as the laws of electromagnetism are complicated, so is his relationship to Cora. There are boundaries set up here too that push them apart and pull them together. Like in the equation, Cora's proximity to Fergus is directly proportional to the attraction they feel for each other. It is as if they are polar opposites. She is not from Northern Ireland, but Dublin, Ireland, and has little firsthand knowledge of the Troubles. She is Irish Protestant; he is Northern Irish Catholic. When she goes away with her mother for research, Fergus thinks little

about her as he is overwhelmed by other problems in his life. However, when she is next to him, the magnetism of first love pulls them together, resulting in a gently written consummation of their attraction for one another, previously cited. There is an obvious push-pull between them, as outside forces, like in the equation (velocity  $v$  and the ever moving magnetic field  $B$ ), exert their forces on their budding love. Fergus is not allowed to share what his brother is going through with Cora, which keeps him emotionally distant. Later, a physical distance breaks the electromagnetic hold as Cora is sent away, repelled by circumstances of her eating disorder, her parents' divorce, and her forced move to Michigan to live with her estranged father. As in the equation, with distance comes less attraction, and Fergus remembers her fondly, but does not pursue the relationship further.

The breakup is aptly handled for teen readers because no blame is placed on the dissolution of the relationship on either party (Cora or Fergus). It is, ultimately, her parent's decision to move Cora away from her new lover, thus freeing Fergus to continue in his coming of age journey. While readers may feel sad that Cora must go, it makes sense. She is not as emotionally invested in the relationship as is Fergus, nor is she as mature. Neither of them trust each other enough to reveal their deepest problems or secrets, (Fergus' brother in Long Kesh and his family ties to the IRA, Cora's experiences as a runaway, her anorexia, and her anger with her parents) and, like the land, the wealthy Protestant girl from Ireland cannot create a lasting relationship with the lower class Catholic boy from Northern Ireland. Readers realize that they are ultimately a bad fit, and unlike the political drama unfolding around them, the relationship ends quietly and amicably with little remorse on either side.

One final important scene in the novel highlights the multilayered and complicated border conflicts within the novel. Fergus finally makes the connection that his uncle Thaddeus is the bomber Deus and that his Unk is responsible for Owain's brutal death.

The news he'd seen before coming to bed had revealed the names of the ones killed, with one Private Owain Jenkins amongst them. He saw the Land Rover coming up the hill, then down, the awful sound of the explosion, and now the cells of Owain's body, scattered over the mountain, breaking down and changing into something else. (313)

Overwhelmed by the loss, he feels "a need for air" (313) and goes running again one last (thirteenth) time. He makes his epiphany, like all of his others, while on the mountain at the inconclusive border as sits down on the peat bog "gulping air" (314). His epiphany is juxtaposed against Uncle Tally's "murder" by the RUC down below in Drumleash at the public house where he bartends and lives as Fergus runs up the mountain and makes the awful connection, forming the climax of the novel.

He looked down towards the plain, the place where he'd lived all his life. The past rolled out before him. The family trips, the laughs, the squabbles, the afternoons with Uncle Tally. He saw the recent weeks: the packets, exam papers, the counting-off of days as Joe fasted. The condoms and the pills, himself and Cora lying like two question marks, and Mel, the living Mel of his imaginings. And he saw the funeral party around the Sheehan's family plot, the men in balaclavas.



The Provos with the Drumleash slope to their shoulders. The one at the end who reminded him of Joe. And then he knew.

The local bomb-maker, Deus. Thaddeus.

Part of him had known it all along. The smell of Christmas in Uncle Tally's room had been of marzipan, almond-flavoured: the smell of Semtex...The bottom fell out of Fergus' world. Nothing seemed the way it had been before. (Dowd 314-5)

His epiphany shoots him into action and he is determined to set things right. On his thirteenth run, like Judas, he plans to cross a family, political, and personal boundary and betray his uncle. When he gets down the hill, "the police had stolen a march on the day," echoing the first line of the novel (316). They shot and killed his Uncle, and removed a sizable amount of Semtex from the public house. Fergus is spared from the explicit and real danger of betraying his family and the IRA.

After his Uncle is discovered, the community feels conflicted because innocents died in the blasts and Tally was the trusted barkeep for the only pub in town. Furthermore, word has leaked that Joe is being force fed and residents feel Mam and Da have broken an honor code by saving their son instead of letting him die for the greater cause. For these reasons, it is imperative that Fergus leave Drumleash and Northern Ireland until the hostilities cool. He needs a fresh start, so Fergus crosses through one last barrier. He gets on a ferry and leaves his family and the Troubles behind him to attend school in Scotland. Dowd makes it clear that the conflict within Fergus' own family is not yet resolved. His mother takes him to the ferry and goes up to "the barrier where he had to go through and she couldn't" (Dowd 320). Fergus has crossed a border

that both his parents are unable to cross. His Mam can go right up to it, but not cross it, and his father, emotionally unable to even approach the border, doesn't go with to see him off.

*Bog Child* is quintessentially young adult in its scaffolding, and gentle treatment of difficult and often censored subjects, and it keeps the main character safe from harm while putting secondary characters Fergus cares for deeply, Owain, Unk, Joe, Cora, and Mel, in sometimes morally precarious and often physically dangerous situations that do not end well for them. At the same time, this novel offers American students multiple perspectives on the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Irish culture, dialect, history, politics, and geography—perspectives that Ameri-centric YA novels can achieve. Woven in amongst the culturally specific references and language is the universal language of math. The physics formulas sprinkled throughout the novel provide a link to the novel's major themes and symbols, which bring universality to the book and help students relate and connect in multiple ways. This combination of specific Northern Irish and Irish culture and universal themes wrapped in a text written specifically for a YA audience makes *Bog Child* a wonderfully rich, layered, and teachable piece of quality young adult literature suitable for any upper level American high school classroom.

## Chapter 2: The Changing Face of CYAL

### Authenticity and Purpose in Intercultural Literature from the Commonwealth

High school teachers use literature for different purposes. While *Bog Child* is an excellent and deeply layered literary text that provides Irish historical and cultural context, teachers must be careful to include works that highlight other foreign perspectives besides white ones. Multicultural literature from within Commonwealth nations provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to expose high school students to other cultures within cultures. Each of the award winning novels I will discuss, *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, *Naughts and Crosses*, and *The Other Side of Truth*, allows American students to glean information from a contemporary “outsider” teen living in a country outside America. This perspective is valuable and if American educators are truly interested in multiculturalism, then intercultural study of an “other” in another land will give American teens a contemporary, global context that will help them move beyond Ameri-centric notions of their world and break down assumptions and stereotypes they have about cultures less known to them.

There is a different set of goals for this multicultural YAL, so it needs a different name. Instead of the word “multiculturalism,” which Dudek asserts only perpetuates a “rhetoric of tolerance... instead of identification and understanding of the other” (Dudek 156), Short uses the word “interculturalism,” which she defines as “an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum. It is based on a broad understanding of culture [as opposed to a “tourist view”] as ways of living and being in the world that are designs for acting, believing, and valuing” (Short 2).

“Intercultural,” literally between or within cultures, is a more precise term for the literature discussed here as all these books are about a culture within the framework of a national culture that is foreign to American readers. For example, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is about a Muslim-Australian girl. *Naughts and Crosses* is a dystopia and depicts an inverted racial hierarchy in a quasi-British setting. *The Other Side of Truth* is about Nigerian refugees and their struggle to seek asylum within Britain.

One of the major pushes for using American multicultural literature in U.S. schools is so that children of non-white ethnicities and backgrounds can recognize themselves in literature, therefore becoming more inspired to read (Landt 694). Giving minority children books that reflect their situational perspective is very important, and it is important for majority culture readers in America to be exposed to these perspectives. Finally, all children need to read about people who are culturally different from themselves if ideologies and stereotypes are to be truly broken down. As Short says:

students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international, or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer all of us—educators and students—the potential for enriching and transforming lives and our views of the world. (Short 10)

Using contemporary Intercultural CYAL in American high schools can provide a bridge to understanding these intercultural and highlight problematic assumptions about

different cultures. Intercultural CYAL is particularly useful for helping American students to see what assumptions they make about what *the* British, Australian, Canadian, or South African looks like, acts like, and believes. By giving students an intercultural contemporary CYAL text, teachers help to personalize contemporary intercultural issues through a young adult perspective that they can identify with. Similar adult or canonical pieces of intercultural literature may overwhelm students, while at the same time creating a disconnect between the young adult reader and the adult protagonist. Teens reading contemporary CYAL can connect with the text and grapple with both their own and characters' assumptions about intercultural groups. For example, in Randa Abdel-Fattah's intercultural novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, which I will discuss in more detail later, Laura, the white president of the student council, exposes her unexamined assumptions about attitudes of Islam toward violence when she asks Amal, an Australian Muslim, to explain at a school assembly why Islamic terrorists bombed Bali:

“It’ll be really valuable, Amal. I mean, what those Muslims did in Bali was so horrible so if you could explain to everybody why they did it and how Islam justifies it, we could all try to understand” (255-256).

Amal’s response is:

“You’re Christian, right?”

“Yeah...What’s that got to do with anything?”

“OK, well, I’ll give the speech if you give a speech about the Klu Klux Klan...and while we’re at it, maybe somebody else could talk about the IRA. Remember we covered a bit of it in Legal Studies last

semester? I'm just *dying* to understand how the Bible could allow people to throw bombs and still go to church." (Abdel-Fattah 256, emphasis original)

Laura learns the lesson Amal teaches. After Laura apologizes, Amal continues. "Muslim is just a label for them [terrorists]. In the end, they're nutcases who exploded bombs and killed people. It's politics. How can any religion preach something so horrific?" (Abdel-Fattah 257). Eventually, Laura and Amal part as friends. Amal made her point and Laura leaves with a better understanding about the dangers of assumptions, as do Abdel-Fattah's readers. Abdel-Fattah makes it very clear throughout her novel that there isn't just one Islamic culture, just as there isn't one Christian, or Jewish, or Australian culture. Geography, education, and politics, which may or may not be supported by religious texts, all play a part.

Contemporary intercultural literature is particularly important because the face of Commonwealth countries is changing. It is not as "white" as some may believe it to be. According to the British Council website, London alone is very diverse:

about 35% of the population [is] from non-white groups. The largest minority groups are Asian [immigrants from the Asian continent, including India and the Middle East] or Asian British (14%) [citizens of the U.K.], and then Black British (12%). Half of the 1.2 million pupils that attend schools in London are from minority ethnic groups. It is estimated that over 300 languages are spoken in London." ("The Diversity of the U.K.")

Australia's multicultural population is also growing. According to "The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy," issued by the Australian Government on February 16, 2011,

Australia is a multicultural nation... Today, one in four of Australia's 22 million people were born overseas, 44 per cent were born overseas or have a parent who was and four million speak a language other than English. We speak over 260 languages and identify with more than 270 ancestries.

(2)

The stereotypical image of the white face of Commonwealth countries is inaccurate; the actual population is much more ethnically and culturally diverse. While there are indigenous peoples in Commonwealth nations (whose literature still remains mostly unavailable in the U.S.), and colonizing cultures dominate the imported literary landscape, there are some important multicultural and immigrant voices in CYAL crossing U.S. borders. Intercultural CYAL is important because it helps challenge assumptions young adults make about different cultures that they think they "know" and gives them a more contemporary and realistic experience with other cultures within cultures.

Finding and then evaluating international intercultural literature can be challenging for U.S. teachers. Intercultural YAL is plentiful in the U.K., South Africa, and Australia, but availability in the U.S. is limited. Most books U.S. teens tend to get from Commonwealth nations are written by white authors about white teens, so teachers must search out intercultural literature. The Carnegie Award and the CBCA Award for older children are particularly useful places to start. Kathy Short addresses availability

and evaluation in “Critically Reading the Word and the World: Building Intercultural Understanding through Literature”:

The availability of authentic literature from a range of global cultures varies dramatically from country to country. Even when the books are increasingly available, many educators are not familiar with the books and are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. ( 2)

Authenticity is a criterion that many literary scholars use to judge the merit of a piece of multicultural or intercultural literature. Assessing authenticity involves consideration of who gets to write about which groups and analysis of ways in which ethnic groups are authentically presented or stereotypically represented in world literature. Often, if the book is written by an “insider” of the culture, the book is considered more authentic than if the author is writing about the culture from another (often white) perspective.

Susan Landt provides some additional helpful criteria in her 2006 article “Multicultural Literature and Young Adolescents: A Kaleidoscope of Opportunity”:

1. The accurate portrayal of the culture or cultures depicted in the book includes not only physical characteristics such as clothing and food, but relationships among people within the cultures and with people of different cultures
2. There is diversity within the culture; characters are unique individuals, not stereotypical representatives.
3. Dialogue is culturally authentic, with characters using speech that accurately represents their oral traditions. Non-English words are spelled and used correctly



4. Realistic social issues and problems are depicted frankly and accurately without oversimplification.
5. Minority characters are shown as leaders within their community able to solve their own problems. Cultural minorities do not play a supporting or subservient role while whites are seen as possessing all the power. (Landt 695)

These criteria provide a good start to evaluate books for authenticity. However, as we will see, sometimes authenticity is not adequately measured by these criteria, especially since they do not necessarily apply to genres other than contemporary realism. Some intercultural CYAL books highlight problematic ideologies about cultures and cultural stereotypes in a more formal way, as analysis of Blackman's *Naughts and Crosses* will demonstrate. Therefore, it is important to take into account each work's message and approach when evaluating multicultural CYAL for classroom use. But the first intercultural CYAL novel I will analyze in detail is an Australian work of contemporary realism that works through Landt's criteria in an exemplary way.

Intercultural CYAL in Australia is plentiful, but again, while white authors such as Marcus Zusak (*Bookthief* and *I Am the Messenger*) are relatively easy to find in America, intercultural works are less common, and indigenous literature is especially difficult. *Njunjul the Sun*, a highly acclaimed novel about an Aboriginal boy by Meme McDonald and Boori Monty Pryor, is widely available in Australia, and many scholars reference it as a culturally authentic and pedagogically useful book. Clare Bradford, an Australian YA scholar and advocate for diversity from a post-colonial perspective, writes extensively about *Njunjul the Sun* as an authentic representation of Aboriginal teens. She

places it next to other liminal indigenous texts such as Native American author Sherman Alexie's *Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* and Canadian First Nation author Lee Maracle's *Will's Garden* as exemplary indigenous texts for YA readers in "Reading Indigeneity: The Ethics of Interpretation and Representation." However, despite all that has been written about *Njunjul the Sun* and its large readership in Australia, it remains stubbornly unavailable in the States, as does *Will's Garden*.

But one pedagogically useful and authentic piece of intercultural Australian YA is readily available to American educators: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah. Abdel-Fattah is an Australian-- born Muslim of Egyptian and Palestinian heritage ("Biography: Randal Abdel-Fattah" n.p.). She has an International Baccalaureate from an Islamic Secondary College and an Arts/Law degree from Melbourne University. In addition to being a human rights activist and litigation lawyer, she also frequently writes for newspapers and "engages with media institutions about their representations of Muslims and Islam" ("Biography: Randa Abdel-Fattah" n.p.).

Of her seven novels, her first, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* has received the most awards, is most widely available in the States, and is the most widely written about in current YA scholarship. Abdel-Fattah's purpose is to break down some boundaries. Her intended audience is not just Muslim teenagers—though she undoubtedly hopes that they will appreciate a book that mirrors their cultural selves—but all teenagers; her purpose is to create common ground and connection, to point out and explain some important cultural and religious practices, and to promote understanding by showing these unique Muslim practices as less "other" by juxtaposing them against other orthodox religions, all while giving readers this information through a first person present tense

narrator with a sense of humor. It is also important to note that Abdel-Fattah does not frame Amal's story as a terrible escape from abuse, poverty, or an oppressive cultural ideology. Instead, she is comfortable with her identity and stands up for herself when bullied, often through practiced, witty comebacks, a consequence of being the star member of her school's debate team. Abdel-Fattah doesn't paint Amal as a victim because of her Muslim-ness and Palestinian-ness, but as a strong, capable Muslim girl with great faith who feels the pressures of the secular/western society in which she lives.

*Does My Head Look Big in This?* is about sixteen year old Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim and her personal decision to wear the hijab on the first day back to school after the Christmas Holiday break. Amal's story is told in a humorous *Bridget Jones Diary* "chick lit" style, but at the same time remains an authentic portrayal of Amal's journey of self-discovery in her upper class mostly white private school world.

Amal faces pushback not only from her classmates, but also from her principal, Mrs. Walsh, who fears Amal is being forced by her parents to "cover herself up" (Abdel-Fattah 39). When she realizes Amal has made the decision herself, she takes Amal to task as "presumptuous ... to alter it [the school uniform] without permission" (Abdel-Fattah 40) and becomes more concerned about her "reputable educational establishment" and "more than one hundred years of proud history" (Abdel-Fattah 39) than what Amal believes to be a very personal and spiritual choice. Mrs. Walsh says:

"Why didn't you at least approach me when you were thinking about it [wearing the hijab]? You should have consulted me first."

It takes me a full minute to realize my jaw is hanging down.

"Er...it was personal..."

“Well, obviously not. It’s rather public, don’t you think? Personal is something tucked under your shirt. Personal is rosary beads in your pocket. I would suggest, Amal, that your veil is not, of all things, personal. Now don’t get me wrong, I respect your religion. We live in a multicultural society and we should accept and tolerate people no matter what their creed, race, or color. But you must understand that I have an educational institution to run and there are certain guidelines. I’m sure your parents will appreciate that.” (Abdel-Fattah 40-1)

Mrs. Walsh views Amal’s hijab not as a personal and religious symbol, but as a political one and as a subversive attempt to undermine her authority and the school’s traditions. Amal views her decision as a personal choice between her and Allah, one that makes her feel more connected to him and her faith, not as a statement to others. Mrs. Walsh seems to believe that religion should be hidden from others, “tucked under your shirt,” not in plain view, and “tolerated” instead of understood. This exchange between Amal and Mrs. Walsh serves to show Mrs. Walsh’s misperceptions about Islam as well as her white/majority culture belief that somehow a girl wearing a hijab will undermine tradition and her authority at the ironically named McClean’s Preparatory School.

Even though Amal’s mother wears the hijab, she is worried about what such a public symbol of faith in Australia will do for her daughter’s future chances for success, like getting into college and getting a job. These worries play out immediately in Amal’s relationships with her classmates once she begins wearing the veil. On her first day back at school, only her two very best friends, Simone and Eileen, who were warned before that she was going “full time” with her hijab, speak with her (Abdel-Fattah 19). The rest

of her classmates whisper about how it is unfair that Amal's parents force her to wear the veil and about how she is oppressed. Amal comments in a first person journal-like voice on how others now perceive her and her struggles to overcome their incorrect assumptions about her:

There seems to be something almost X-Men-like about this piece of material on my head. Too many people look at it as though it has bizarre powers sewn into its microfibers. Powers that transform Muslim girls into UCOs (Unidentified Covered Objects), which turn Muslim girls from an 'us' into a 'them.' (Abdel-Fattah 38)

The teen narrational perspective in the novel personalizes both Amal and Islam, in turn creating connection and understanding, in a way that a book written in third person could not do. The reader hears Amal's voice talk directly to them in this passage. It is as if Amal is a friend and is confiding in her reader. The voice is also humorous, and at the same time didactic. Amal gives readers a personal look into the life of a teenage Muslim that helps to both teach and demystify herself as a veiled Muslim girl. Amal's voice works to break down the "us-them" dualism.

Amal is not alone with her identity struggles in this novel. She has an extensive intercultural support system to help her adjust to her new perceived identity, which she takes pains to explain is not really new, but now physically manifested in her "shawling up" (Abdel-Fattah 6). Besides her friend Eileen, a second generation Japanese-Australian, and Simone, a white girl who constantly worries about her weight, she also has an extensive and diverse network of Muslim friends, none of whom attend McCleans

Preparatory School. Her Muslim friends are from her old Islamic school *Hidaya* which, due to funding shortfalls, could not provide an education past the tenth grade.

Amal misses *Hidaya* because she felt that there, she “could deal with puberty and the teenage angst thing and have crushes and go on diets without being a prefix to terrorism, extremism, radicalism, any ism” (Abdel-Fattah 12-13). Abdel-Fattah reiterates that Amal is an “us” and not a “them.” She goes through all the normal teenage things everyone else does, and at *Hidaya* life was easier because she didn’t feel like she had to explain herself as a member of the Islamic community on top of dealing with growing up. At her prep school, she is the only Muslim and is looked at suspiciously once she begins wearing the hijab.

Abdel-Fattah is careful to offer a diverse cross-section of Muslim characters in her novel, thereby avoiding the problem of portraying “the” Muslim character. Amal and her family are portrayed as devout but moderate, and they seem very comfortable with themselves, their faith, and their situation in life. Both Amal’s parents are medical professionals. Her mother is a “full-timer” who wears the veil when out in public or in front of non-family members, but did not expect her very westernized daughter to make the decision to wear the hijab at sixteen. Her and her husband’s response to Amal’s decision is a mixture of concern and pride.

Amal’s friend Leila is portrayed as exceptionally intelligent, and also moderate, but has the unfortunate circumstance of being born into the fundamentalist type of Muslim family westerners fear. Leila’s mother is constantly trying to arrange a marriage for her sixteen year old daughter, constantly worries Leila will shame them and so will not let her go out after dark without a male family member, and expects Leila to serve her

wild older brother, learn to cook and clean, and quit school after she finds a suitable husband so she can have children.

The family of Amal's friend Yasmeen is interracial and therefore challenges Muslim stereotypes. Her mother Cassandra, a blond and blue eyed Brit from a "staunch Christian" family, converted to Islam when she married Yasmeen's father, a Pakistani man (Abdel-Fattah 135). She is therefore a double outsider (British and Muslim) in Australia. Instead of a traditional headscarf, Cassandra cut her hair into a short bob and wears a beani as her hijab. She volunteers at a hospital, and is described as wearing "hippie clothes" (Abdel-Fattah 132). Yasmeen's family follows traditional Islamic customs of prayer and holy days, but Yasmeen does not wear the veil or a beani. Instead, Yasmeen is quite vain and proud of her long hair. Numerous funny passages refer to the great lengths Yasmeen goes to in order to keep her hair smooth and frizz free.

Samantha, Amal's cousin, provides yet another possibility of what it is like to be female and Muslim in Australia. She is depicted as completely westernized. Her parents go to extremes to be perceived by others as 100% "Aussie." Unlike Leila's parents who cling to their home culture, Joe and Mandy, who changed their names to appear more Australian, reject their culture in order to assimilate into Australian culture. They purposely eat pork in front of Muslim and non-Muslim friends, avoid the mosque, dye their hair blonde, and speak in exaggerated Aussie-isms that evoke pop culture stereotypes. Their house is covered with Australian flags and knick knacks and is described by Amal as "a holy shrine for those craving fairdinkumness and identity salvation" (Abdel-Fattah187). Uncle Joe believes that

“multiculturalism is a joke. We need to mix more. Make friends outside the community. Look at my family. We are not stuck in Palestinian or Egyptian or Turkish ghettos. We’re part of the wider community. Our friends, our colleagues, they’re all average Australians.”

(Abdel-Fattah 185)

Throughout the book, their misunderstanding of Australian culture is highlighted by Abdel-Fattah and cleverly used as a foil to Australian misunderstanding of Islam, especially when Joe and Mandy make assumptions about what it means to be Australian that don’t hold true, including using Australian slang to hilarious results. They often invite “real” Australians to dinner in order to prove how Aussie they are and to receive validation of their new Australian identity. Abdel-Fattah reveals the hypocrisy of Joe and Mandy’s created world when their daughter Samantha is caught in a bar kissing her boyfriend and is punished. Samantha says that since her parents think she is now sexually active, her dad

“springs this cultural theory on me! He kept going on about how it’s not part of our culture...I mean, he can’t just use the culture argument whenever it suits him. For two decades we get the ‘we must be assimilated’ crap lecture and then in a minute we’ve suddenly got *Arabic roots* and *cultural expectations*...this is coming from the man who thinks the word *foreign* is the f-word of our times. All our lives George and me get crammed down our throats that we’re supposed to forget our culture and live as Aussies, whatever that means.” (Abdel-Fattah 106, emphasis in original)



Through all these different portrayals of Muslim families, Abdel-Fattah sets forth to tell what it means to have a Muslim identity in a non-Muslim country, that it is complicated and that there is no “one” stereotypical Muslim identity.

Despite her diverse and extensive Muslim support system, Amal suffers angst about wearing the hijab full time. Readers get realistic examples of racism. Amal worries about being called a “towel head” (7), but also recognizes that she is proud of who she is and what she believes. On the one year anniversary of September 11, 2001, Amal must deal with a racist bus driver, and when the Bali bombings happen, she is forced to set the record straight that Islam promotes peace and not murder. Once Amal puts on the hijab, she is forced to become a mouthpiece for Islam in all its forms at McClean’s Prep, a position she is neither comfortable with nor entirely prepared for. But by including many other examples of Muslim girls within her novel, Abdel-Fattah avoids making Amal *the* representation of a Muslim girl to her readers, therefore making it easier for readers to correct their assumptions and see diverse examples of Amal’s Muslim community.

Foreign words and Muslim customs, Landt’s third cultural authenticity maker, are also important to Amal’s cultural identity and Abdel-Fattah shares these to scaffold knowledge about Islam. All the Arabic words are italicized and then directly explained for readers or explained through dialogue between characters. Chapter 15 is almost entirely dedicated to explaining the end of Ramadan, or “*Eid al-Fitr* (Festival of Breaking the Fast)” (Abdel-Fattah 353). Amal describes how she and her family “go to the mosque for *Eid* prayers” (Abdel-Fattah 354). She describes that as they approach the building, “they get stopped every five yards by friends wrapping us in huge hugs and

greetings of peace and *Kola Sana Winta Bikhair*, ‘May every year bring you happiness’ ...and *’Eid Mubarak*, (another version of Haapy *Eid*)” (Abdel-Fattah 355). Then Amal takes readers inside the mosque where men and women each go to their own section. They “take a seat on the carpet” as a collection is taken up (Abel-Fattah 354): “Then the call to prayer starts to sound through the loudspeakers, preparing us for the communal prayer where we thank God for the food we have after a month of fasting [*Ramadan*] and pray for those without. It’s a haunting, beautiful reminder that the time has come to stand humble before God” (Abdel-Fattah 355). Islamic customs, religious beliefs, and important cultural words are peppered throughout the novel in order to teach readers important cultural lessons.

This book is sometimes heavily didactic and has a definite agenda, normalizing Islam and Muslims, but it does something that other adult and teen popular novels with Muslim main characters do not often do. Abdel-Fattah shows a successful Muslim-Australian family dealing with every day issues within the context of Islam without making them victims. There are stereotypical misogynistic characters (Hakam, Leila’s brother) and some stereotypical gender issues, especially involving Leila, who runs away to a women’s shelter in order to escape a potential arranged marriage. However, this is not Leila’s story, it is Amal’s. Leila is used as a device for Abdel-Fattah to persuade readers, through discussions between Amal and her mother, that Leila’s family is the exception, not the rule. Abdel-Fattah emphatically reminds her readers that Leila’s mother Gulchin is not the representative Muslim. Instead, the oppressive ideologies in force are explained as coming from Gulchin’s village customs. Leila’s mother is illiterate and therefore she has never read the Koran (spelled this way in the novel), does not speak

English well, and as a girl from a small Lebanese village, she had no choice but to marry young and bear children. Abdel-Fattah makes it clear to her readers over and over again that Leila's situation and her family's beliefs are not Islamic beliefs and that because of her ignorance Gulchin is a misrepresentation of the Muslim faith.

Abdul-Fattah is also careful to bring in other orthodox religions, ones that readers might be more familiar with than Islam, as a touchstone for understanding. By doing this, Abdel-Fattah scaffolds her point that Muslims are not the only people with unique religious customs. Amal develops a relationship with the elderly Mrs. Vaselli, a Greek Orthodox widow (she had a happy arranged marriage in Athens before immigrating to Australia), who lives next door and has disowned her son for divorcing his arranged Orthodox wife and marrying a Jehovah's Witness. In the beginning of the book, Mrs. Vaselli believes that because Amal isn't Christian, she can't have salvation. In the end, Mrs. Vaselli says in her broken English "No one should telling no one what to do when come to God. You no have salvation but you laugh a lot. Maybe Jesus let you in" (Abdel-Fattah 209).

Orthodox Jews are also presented as having distinct and unusual customs. Josh, one of Amal's friends, is Jewish, and his sister is marrying an Orthodox Jew. Through Josh, the reader learns that married Orthodox Jewish women wear a wig called the *sheital* and that Orthodox Jews observe the Sabbath (Saturday) by giving up electricity and driving; they also tear toilet paper the day before in order to follow their orthodox beliefs about avoiding work on the Sabbath.

By juxtaposing Orthodox Jewish and Greek Orthodox Christian religious practices in the novel, Abdel-Fattah does two things. First, she draws attention to

religions other than Islam that have similar, or similarly alien, religious practices. Second, she makes comparisons to Islam using religions that may be more familiar to her readers. Therefore, she attempts to normalize Islam within the context of other religions. By giving other religious examples in the novel and framing the book within a multicultural, intercultural, and multi-religious context, Abdel-Fattah places Islamic beliefs in a more realistically central, and less stereotypically fanatical, place in the minds of her readers.

While an accessible, popular novel like *Does My Head Look Big in This?* might not seem, at first, as pedagogically useful as a Carnegie Award winning literary work like *Bog Child*, it is a novel that has some important intercultural lessons to teach American students. First, it builds up and then breaks stereotypes by presenting an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian girl as the protagonist. As Amal says early on in the novel, "I'm an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. That means I was born with some seriously confusing identity hyphens" (Abdel-Fattah 6). Amal deals with everyday teenage issues within a Muslim context. Her teen angst includes bullies, first crushes, groundings, and the search for identity. But Amal's search is carefully and didactically framed from an Australian Muslim teenage perspective.

Sherazae Emmambokus writes in her article "Dissolving Cultural Boundaries" about the importance of novels like *Does My Head Look Big in This?*: "These novels examine the negotiation of hybrid cultural identities by looking at cultural boundaries that exist between the protagonist and their 'home' and 'homeland' cultures" (Emmambokus 11). She goes on to say that good novels in this genre "do not explicitly resolve the conflicts associated with cultural identity and negotiation" and that novels like these "can

offer their readers a service: readers who empathize with the situations and conflicts they present are offered a form of bibliotherapy, since readers may find the stories and their resolutions comforting and reassuring” (Emmambokus 12). I would agree, but I would also push it farther, as I think Abdel-Fattah does in her novel. Intercultural books like *Does My Head Look Big in This?* also demystify those boundaries for readers who are not of the same cultural identities as the main character, thus creating a new understanding of an “other” culture. In other words, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is not necessarily *only* meant to give Muslim girls living in western cultures a book that features a character just like themselves (the bibliotherapy angle), but *also* to reach that broader western audience in order to challenge Muslim stereotypes. Amal’s plight throughout the book is to do just that after she decides to wear her hijab to school, where readers experience through Amal’s first person narration being bullied and misunderstood, and are shown supportive behaviors by Amal’s multicultural friends, who also have outsider status within the tightly controlled social strata of McCleans Prep.

Amal’s narrational voice is likely to appeal to a western audience. Amal’s snarky, funny, first person narrative voice mirrors that of Bridget Jones and allows Abdel-Fattah to thinly veil her important cultural education agenda. While Amal is Australian and many references to Australian culture are made, she is easy to relate to for other western or westernized readers. She gets angry when things aren’t fair, she has realistic conversations with friends about boys, clothes, makeup and friendships, all while dealing with her very personal decision to wear a symbol of her faith every day. Her hijab is turned into a political statement by others who don’t understand Islam. Amal

(Abdel-Fattah) feels her job is to set the record straight and she does so in an authentic, Muslim teenage voice.

In addition to Landt's list of markers for culturally authentic literature, Niseerem Kamal Anati suggests additional themes specific to Arabic young adult literature that mark a piece of Arabic literature as culturally authentic. Themes include "Religious beliefs and behaviors," "oppressive rulers or authority figures/colonizers," "Middle Eastern Conflicts and wars," "supernatural elements that shape human behavior," "heroism," "culturally appropriate gender roles," "family and community," and "adjustment, homesickness and assimilation" (Anati 67-71). Anati believes these characteristics and themes give teachers who are unfamiliar with Arabic YAL jumping off points that go beyond what Short describes as a "tourist" look at a culture. *Does My Head Look Big in This?* has most of these themes. As we have seen, the religious beliefs and behaviors are carefully scaffolded throughout the book. Readers get an inside look at how Amal prays, when she prays, and her beliefs and her intimate relationship with Allah. Her experience with wearing her hijab is explained as an important connection to Allah and to other Muslim women. One oppressive ruler/authority figure/colonizer is Gulchin, Leila's mother. She represents, in Abdel-Fattah's mind, everything that is wrong with Islam and how it is portrayed in the media. Mrs. Walsh also represents an oppressive authority figure. While "tolerant" of Amal's headscarf, she is the one who gives her permission to wear it after careful consideration for her (white) school rules and traditions. Middle Eastern conflicts and war also play a part. When Amal says a prayer asking Allah that Mrs. Walsh lets her wear her hijab, she petitions for other changes that reflect her concerns:

[that] Leila's parents grow some brain cells...that Simone's next diet works...that Adam and [she] become best friends...that Palestinians are granted the same rights and freedom and dignity that the Israelis enjoy and that the streets fill with Israelis and Palestinians walking side by side in peace...and that [her] class stops their silent treatment. (Abdel-Fattah 54)

Embedded in Amal's prayer is a statement about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. The conflict is mentioned again later in a humorous way when Josh, a secular Jew, is seen by his more religious cousin talking to Amal. She yells after him "[w]e'll continue our discussion about Israel's secret operations in the West Bank on Monday, and you can finish leaking info about the PLO! Have a great weekend!" (Abdel-Fattah 123). Finally, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is more subtly referenced when Amal is talking about the September 11 anniversary. She relates that she and her mother stayed up all night watching the towers fall and crying, but that often, when bad things happen in other countries on the news, she turns her head and turns the channel, and remarks that "it was a terrible thing to realize that I don't sit through the night crying when such horrors happen all the time" (Abdel-Fattah 159).

Amal is heroic in that she sticks up for Leila, she wins the school debate, and she makes the brave and personal decision to wear her hijab in a relatively hostile environment of her expensive, private school. Culturally appropriate gender roles are brought up within Amal and Adam's relationship. Family and community are represented in Amal's large Muslim support system, and the assimilation theme is provided by, among others, Uncle Joe and Aunt Mandy.

*Does My Head Look Big in This?* is not as complexly layered a novel as *Bog Child*. It is contemporary, it uses a diary format, and the protagonist talks about boy troubles and reads *Cosmopolitan* magazine. However, these are the things that provide the point of connection with readers when cultural connections may not exist, therefore giving readers an authentic Arabic voice within a format that readers are already familiar. Abdel-Fattah takes her readers beyond what Katherine Short calls a “tourist” understanding of a culture, and instead delves deep into difficult issues of identity while providing readers unfamiliar with Muslim cultures context and issues to think deeply about. She provides a “Cultural X-ray” into the complexities of diaspora Muslim cultures, specifically within Australia (Short 5). Short expands on the importance and value of intercultural books for young people:

The value of an in-depth cross-cultural study is that students look deeply to understand the complexity within a culture and so go beyond the surface-level explorations that characterize this type of study. Not only can these studies provide a window on a culture, but they can also encourage insights into students’ cultural identities...Cross-cultural studies thus provide both a mirror and a window for children as they look out on ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light.” (Short 6)

It is as both “window” and “mirror” that Abdel-Fattah succeeds with in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* She expertly provides a window into several Muslim families and Islamic religious customs, but she also provides a mirror through a diverse set of western characters and different reactions to Amal and her head scarf. Students can find where



they fit in this novel, and see themselves and others in a new light, all while gaining important cultural knowledge that will hopefully lead to more understanding and accepting attitudes. This book makes readers think in new ways, which is what “good” literature should do.

Pedagogically, *Does My Head Look Big in This* meets many goals. The novel provides a perspective that goes beyond asking for tolerance, and instead demands intercultural understanding by making Amal’s experience at McCleans personal to the reader. Readers find they can identify with Amal, and learn from her when she explains things directly about her Muslim faith. Abdel-Fattah brilliantly weaves in western pop culture references like the T.V. show *Friends*, universal teenage issues such as bullying, runaways, and fitting in, as well as issues about identity and puts these familiar concepts within a Muslim framework. American teens reading *Does My Head Look Big in This?* get a true contemporary international and intercultural perspective. They get a taste of Australia and a heavy dose of education about Muslim cultures. At the same time, they are directly shown a myriad of cultural possibilities within the Muslim umbrella. There is no “the” Muslim in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* and perhaps that is the true pedagogical value of Abdel-Fattah’s novel.

### **Fantastic Intercultural CYAL**

*Naughts and Crosses* by Black-British author Malorie Blackman is not an example of contemporary realism, but a contemporary dystopia and Blackman depicts characters as more representative than Adel-Fattah does in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* While *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is very specific in its didactic purpose,

place (Australia), time (the present), and how racist ideologies surface in this place and time, *Naughts and Crosses* is non-specific. It is set in a fictionalized Britain-like place that also has similarities to America during the Civil Rights Movement. *Naughts and Crosses* does not contain the diversity of cultures within cultures that *Does My Head Look Big in This?* includes. Instead, the narrative is driven by a flipped binary: the black people have all the power and the white people have little. Blackman's depiction of race and privilege is designed to highlight hidden and explicit ideologies about race.

*Naughts and Crosses*, according to an interview with Blackman, is named for the British version of the children's game tic tac toe, because once children learn how to play, it always ends in a stalemate, and according to Blackman, it is a good analogy for racism because "ultimately, no one wins" (Dempsey n.p.). Blackman's novel doesn't fit the realistic fiction genre that Landt's criteria were based upon, but it is still a pedagogically useful intercultural book that achieves its purpose. Unlike Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This*, where the author's purpose is to *explain* something to the reader, Blackman sets out with *Naughts and Crosses* to *do* something to the reader.

Blackman's book is quite useful to break apart assumptions about race, privilege, and difference. Blackman doesn't use a didactic character who is in the cultural know to set misunderstandings right. Instead, she uses culturally ingrained symbols and forces readers to look at them differently, and to great effect. *Naughts and Crosses* takes the theme of walking in someone else's shoes to a new extreme. Conventionally, symbolism involving white images evokes goodness, hopefulness, purity, and power while black or dark images evoke terror, evil, sin, or savagery. Blackman flips these culturally engrained symbols on their head in *Naughts and Crosses*, deconstructing readers' socially

constructed perceptions of race. The naughts, the white people, are considered a lesser race, symbolized by their society's reading of the fact that they have no color to their skin. The derogatory slang term for a naught is "blanker." The lighter the naught, the lesser person he or she is. The darker a Cross, the higher their status is in society. Readers will notice the word "naughts" is never capitalized in the book and "Crosses" is always capitalized, further emphasizing the imbalance of power and privilege.

Blackman's novel is loosely set in an alternate U.K. universe, and is told through alternating chapters featuring the racialized perspectives of the Cross Sephy and the naught Callum, who have fallen in love. In the world of *Naughts and Crosses*, it is scandalous for a naught and a Cross to have a relationship, and those who cross racial boundaries pay very dearly for it. While the basic plot has many *Romeo and Juliet* themes, the book becomes a mind-bending explosion of the binary, and one that readers of all races are likely to struggle with, thus exposing engrained ideology, stereotypes and misconceptions about race, authority, and privilege.

*Naughts and Crosses* also contains specific echoes of the southern United States during the American Civil Rights Movement, therefore giving American readers a fascinating insight into our history from a Black-British perspective. For example, when Callum and three other naughts have been allowed to go to a Cross school, "Heathcroft High School," they must be escorted by police through an angry throng of Crosses screaming "NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL" and "BLANKERS OUT," and the mob hurts one of the naught girls (Blackman 44). The obvious reference is to the Little Rock Nine in 1957. Also, the activities of the naught Liberation Militia, a group whose aim it is to flip the balance of power, echo those of the Black Panthers. However, the book

doesn't just represent the American Civil Rights Movement or South African apartheid; the nationality of the reader influences the reader's experience. In an article published in *The Guardian*, Blackman is quoted as saying that she received more feedback from *Naughts and Crosses* than from any other of her fifty books:

I've had a number of letters from Ireland where people are saying 'you're talking about the Protestant/Catholic situation, aren't you?' Obviously people get what is relevant to their own life from it. I've had a couple from different people in Spain saying 'are you talking about the situation with the Separatists', and from Israel saying 'are you talking about the Palestine situation?' It's really interesting to me, because I kind of thought it was obvious I was doing the black and white thing—but that said, I mention colour very, very rarely. (Flood n.p.)

The fact that she mentions “colour very, very rarely” makes *Naughts and Crosses* a challenging, but important book for readers of all ethnic backgrounds, so much so that *Naughts and Crosses* was the only novel by a black writer to be included in the BBC's “Big Read,” which in 2003 sought to discover the top 100 favorite books of the British people, and her important books have earned her an OBE (Flood n.p.).

Even though she rarely mentions color, it is obvious that whiteness, for the characters in this book, is not glorified, but demonized. Crosses enjoy “black privilege” that mimics the invisible privileges whites enjoy as explained by Peggy McIntosh in her article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” McIntosh's lengthy list includes things like “I am never asked to speak for all the people of my race...I can choose blemish cover or bandages in ‘flesh’ color and have them more or less match my

skin,” and “I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” (McIntosh 31). The power of Blackman’s book is that she makes these invisible privileges very visible. For example, when Callum goes to Heathcroft High on his first day, he is told he is representing “all of us naughts” so he had to be “on [his] best behavior” to “show them they’re wrong about us” (Blackman 29). Callum replies with “[w]hy did I have to represent all the naughts? Why couldn’t I just represent myself?” (Blackman 2). In Callum’s world, when a naught needs a bandage, all that are available are flesh colored, which in his world means black skin. When a Cross Sephy mentions to a naught girl Shania that a Band Aid is noticeable, the reply is “they don’t sell pink Band Aids. Only dark brown ones” (Blackman 61). In history class, Mr. Jason, a light skinned Cross who has nothing but contempt for Callum, teaches about important inventors. He asks the class and calls on Callum for the answers: Garret Morgan, the inventor of the traffic light, Dr. Charles Drew, the pioneer of blood banks, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, the first to perform open heart surgery, and Matthew Henson, the first pioneer to reach the North Pole (Blackman 114). Callum is then made to explain to the class of Crosses, who do not see the connection Mr. Jason is trying to make, that these important people are “all Crosses” (Blackman 115). It is as if Blackman went down McIntosh’s list and twisted the perspective, breaking apart assumptions by making the effects of institutional racism visible to all readers.

*Naughts and Crosses* is written by a Black-British woman, so in that way the book meets what many believe to be an important authenticity marker. But for a long time Blackman resisted writing from an overtly Black perspective. In an interview with Allison Flood, Blackman said “I hate being labeled [as a black children’s

author]...Through my whole writing career it seems people have always been criticising me for not tackling racism ... as if it's the only thing I'm qualified to write about" (Flood n.p.). When she did finally write about racism she did so in an alternative space where she could highlight the intercultural relationships between black people and white people without reproducing them. She didn't write the typical work of contemporary realism about racism, where a black person is shown as victimized by white people and coping with white oppression, a story arc that might further entrench victim stereotypes, engrain white privilege ideologies in white readers, and pigeonhole her as a writer by her race, something she did not want. Instead, she wrote a book that squarely places her focus on making racism visible by making privilege visible. By switching races and privilege, and therefore the binary unfortunately still in force in many societies today, Blackman seeks to directly address racist ideologies, both hidden and overt. She shows black readers and white readers a new perspective of themselves through the switched binary.

It is the black and white binary and specifically making whiteness visible that Morrison wrote about in her 1992 collection of essays *Playing in the Dark*. Morrison discusses the importance of recognizing both black and white images for what they are in stories our American children read and carefully analyzes classic canonical American literature for white or light and black or dark imagery. While Morrison speaks specifically about American literature in her groundbreaking book, her ideas can be readily applied to Commonwealth literature, and specifically intercultural CYAL.

Morrison writes:

I use [Africanism] as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that Africa peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of

views, assumptions, readings, and misreading that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little restraint has been attached to its uses. As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American Education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power and meditations on ethics and accountability. (Morrison14)

It is precisely because of these embedded tropes of blackness and whiteness that Morrison brings to the fore that American secondary schools might need to step out from behind the Ameri-centric canonical literature still taught in American high schools today, twenty years after *Playing in the Dark* was published. At that time, Morrison herself acknowledged that the U.S. was behind European countries “in critiquing racialized discourse” (Morrison 14).

South America, England, France, Germany, Spain—the cultures of all these countries have participated in and contributed to some aspect of the “invented Africa.” None have been able to persuade itself for long that criteria and knowledge could emerge outside the categories of domination...the literature of all these countries, however, is now subject to sustained critiques of its racialized discourse. The United States is the curious exception.” (14)

CYAL is one way to supplement Ameri-centric canonical works taught in secondary schools today with accessible foreign intercultural YA texts that engage American students in a global conversation about the many different facets of culture, race, and

color. Morrison points out that the black/white symbolism inherent in much of American canonical literature can produce and encourage white perspectives about race without intention. By adding authentic intercultural literature, specifically modern intercultural CYAL like *Naughts and Crosses*, teachers can counter some of these often invisible, yet engrained racist ideologies.

Blackman's book forces readers of all races to notice whiteness as "other" in the way that racist ideology conditions us to notice blackness as "other." Everyone in the novel notices when a white naught enters a newly desegregated school. Everyone notices the white naught when he is seen with the black Cross girl. Everyone calls for the white naught's lynching when he impregnates the black Cross Sephy. Whiteness is completely visible in Blackman's novel. The complicating factor is that since Blackman seldom mentions color, readers must constantly *remind* themselves that the binary is switched. It is exactly this meta-awareness of the socially constructed binary that makes *Naughts and Crosses* such a challenging and disturbing read, both literally and ideologically. Readers of all races must constantly keep reminding themselves that Callum is white and Sephy is black, and not the other way around. Because in Blackman's U.K. black privilege is the norm, reader's ideologies are challenged and questioned in the act of reading the novel, not just as a result of the actual events in it. This forced questioning, hyper-awareness, and constant adjustment back to this created world's binary creates an effect that achieves Blackman's purpose. She makes readers think about whiteness, white symbolism, and white privilege in a visceral way.

The first criterion on Landt's authenticity list, "the accurate portrayal of the culture or cultures" does not work as a measure of this novel's value as intercultural



literature. The cultures in the novel are not meant to be accurately portrayed as cultures, but instead, force the reader to look at the black/white binary and racist ideologies through a new lens. Readers see white characters stripped of white privilege and black characters given majority power and privilege. Switched stereotypes are heightened and magnified in order for her to drive home her point. White naughts are depicted as servants, nannies, drivers, and gardeners whose precarious jobs depend on the whims and fancies of the Crosses. For example, Callum's mother is fired from her nanny position in Sephy's house for not knowing enough to cover for her mistresses' lies to her husband. She is unwittingly used to catch her employer's wife in an affair and then dismissed for not reading her mistress' mind.

The racial groups are lumped into a distinct hierarchy; there are rich Crosses, poor ignorant Crosses, and then naughts. Relationships are particularly tense between the naughts and the poor crosses at the border between black and white. While the super-rich Crosses worry about hiring and firing drivers, infidelity, running for political office, and hiding their alcoholism, poorer Crosses worry about naughts taking their jobs now that integration is being tested. Naughts worry about how to put food on the table if their Cross employers suddenly decide to fire them without cause. While class and race are exposed by financial and more purely social problems, the vernacular, both for the Cross and the naught characters, is very British. There is little discernible difference between the naught and the Cross dialects or speech patterns, except language etiquette used to further engrain the hierarchy. Cross employers insist on being called Mr. or Mrs., and Miss or Mr. for Cross children, while Crosses almost always use naughts' first names.

“Realistic social issues and problems” are found throughout Blackman’s novel. However, they are purposely oversimplified and then complicated again by reversing the distribution of hegemonic power. And, while “realistic” in the sense that racial segregation, stereotyping and discrimination do still exist in society today, this book shows the perpetrators of this racial intolerance as black, thus complicating the issue for readers.

Finally, “minority characters are shown as leaders within their community” but in *Naughts and Crosses* this is treated with irony. Callum, the naught teen who tries to change the world with his Cross love interest Sephy, ultimately fails, as he dies at the end of the book. He is hung for impregnating Sephy, even though the sex was consensual and he helped her escape Liberation Militia kidnappers. Sephy is forced to choose between aborting her baby and hanging Callum. She makes the decision. “Callum’s life or our baby’s? That was the choice. Oh Callum, what should I do? What would *you* do? And just like that, there was no choice. I had my answer” (Blackman 375). Sephy believes that Callum would choose the baby over his own life, but in the next chapter, written in Callum’s voice, he repeats “I don’t want to die...*Please God, don’t let me die*” over and over again as he is led to the scaffolding and the noose put around his neck (Blackman 384). The last words Callum hears are “I LOVE YOU CALLUM!” from Sephy as the trapdoor falls and his neck breaks (Blackman 385). Callum, the white problem, is discarded while the baby, named Callie Rose, takes Sephy’s father’s last name (McGregor), is not told of her heritage in the later book in the series, and grows up a Cross with Cross privilege until her secret is later revealed.

Blackman breaks most of these conventional “rules” for evaluating authentic or sensitive multicultural literature intentionally. Because the work’s purpose is to force people to see race and racism in a new way, it achieves its aim. By reversing the usual approach to intercultural YAL, she created an effective, powerful, and pedagogically useful novel.

### **Refugee Literature and Intercultural CYAL**

Another example of intercultural CYAL fiction that problematizes issues of authenticity and authority is *The Other Side of Truth* by South African author Beverley Naidoo. Set in both Nigeria and in London, this novel focuses on political upheaval in Nigeria, the problems inherent in seeking political asylum in Britain, as well the British foster care and refugee detention systems. When it won the British Carnegie Medal in 2000, it was the first winner to contain African main characters (Naidoo, “ Author: Imagining Change” n.p.). This book has much to offer to American readers, though again, it does not neatly fulfill Landt’s criteria.

According to a biography published on the “British Council: Literature” website, Naidoo was involved in the anti-apartheid movement in 1963, which led to her imprisonment. At twenty one years old, she was subjected to eight weeks of solitary confinement for her activism. After her release, she was exiled from South Africa and moved to England, where she became a teacher. She taught for 18 years, and then earned her PhD in English from the University of Southampton. She then became the Adviser for Cultural Diversity and English. She published her first book for young people, *Journey to Jo 'Burg*, in 1985. Because this book dealt directly with the political and

social evils of South African apartheid, it was banned in South Africa until 1991 (“Writers: Beverly Naidoo” n.p.). Naidoo is a white South African.

As she is not a part of the racial group that she writes about, some may question her authority for writing fiction about political and social problems for Blacks in Africa and Europe (particularly the U.K.) from the perspective of a young Nigerian. Even though her novels address racial issues in culturally specific and sensitive ways, she is still writing from her perspective as a cultural outsider and a bearer of white privilege. However, while *The Other Side of Truth* is an imagined account of what might really happen in Britain and Nigeria, Naidoo does have an experiential connection to issues related to seeking asylum in Britain, since that is something Naidoo did after she left South Africa. The problems she portrays in Nigeria and some of the political figures discussed by characters in the novel are real. In the “Author’s Note” at the end of the novel, Naidoo tells readers that:

The characters in this story are all fictional. However, we hear about three political figures who were real people. *Ken Saro-Wiwa* was a well-known Nigerian writer. He protested that Ogoniland, his birthplace, had been polluted and robbed by multinational oil companies and the military government. He was hung with eight others in November 1995. (Naidoo 249)

The other historical figures mentioned in the book are the Nigerian dictator *General Abacha* and Somalian *President Barre* (Naidoo 249 italics original).

In *The Other Side of Truth*, Sade (pronounced *Shad-DEH*) and her younger brother Femi witness their mother’s murder at the hands of Nigeria’s military

government. The target is actually their father, a journalist who has been publishing exposés about the political “truth” in Nigeria. After their mother’s death, their father goes into hiding and the family pays child smugglers to traffic Sade and Femi to London, the plan being that they will make contact with their Uncle Dele. Instead, they are promptly dumped on a London street with no contacts, no food, no warm clothes, and no money. For a while they are homeless, and since they do not know that as soon as they arrived in the country they needed to claim asylum, mayhem ensues. They are put into the U.K. foster care system. At the end of the book the children are reunited with their father and their uncle, but only after their father was imprisoned in Britain for entering the country with a false passport, the only way he could safely leave Nigeria. He didn’t claim asylum immediately upon arrival because he was desperate to begin a search for his missing children. Instead, he kept quiet about the false passport, was caught, and sent to prison to await deportation. The title of the novel refers to all sorts of ethical complications that occur when telling “the” truth.

These complications extend to Naidoo’s authority to write about black refugees from Nigeria. While Naidoo is white and now resides in England, many of her other books are set in her home country of South Africa. She acknowledges on her website ([beverleynaidoo.com](http://beverleynaidoo.com)) that she had to do a lot of research to write *The Other Side of Truth*. She seems to have been very careful in her presentation of her Nigerian characters. She includes a glossary to help readers, both British and foreign, understand political references, *Yoruba* words and phrases, as well as Nigerian Pidgin English phrases that appear in italics throughout the novel, such as *Okó* —Yoruba for husband, and “*you think sey I de play*”—Nigerian Pidgin for “Do you think I am playing?”

(Naidoo 251-252). Her portrayal of asylum seekers from their point of view is engrossing. A particularly poignant scene appears toward the end of the novel when the children are allowed to see their father in Heathlands Detention Center for the first time since their ordeal. In order to stay in the news and have any chance of getting a good lawyer to delay deportation, their father has embarked on a hunger strike, and the children notice he is thinner and do not want to leave him when it is time to go: “She shut her eyes to all the words around her until gradually she felt Papa’s strong fingers very gently prizing her away. The same fingers that a while ago had been pressing her close. It was too much to bear. She let go and ran headlong toward the glass door, her sight blurred with tears, her head throbbing” (Naidoo 172). Naidoo uses this chapter, “Territory of the Eyes,” to scaffold all that went wrong with their attempt to claim asylum and why their father might be deported, which would result in his execution by the Nigerian military government.

Her minority characters are also portrayed as strong, even though they are dumped into London and as children and are helpless. There are “white helpers,” particularly the foster parent Mrs. Graham, who is described as “a short, plump white woman,” but as a stop gap foster parent, she does little but comfort the lost children and give them a bed to sleep in (Naidoo 76). The social worker, whom the children refer to as Iyawo Jenny (wife Jenny), discovers they are from Nigeria and are refugees. *The Other Side of Truth* does fit the “social conscience novel” model described by Sims as a work that “[reflects] the social concerns current at the time of its creation” (Sims 17) and are not “culturally conscious” in the way that a text by a cultural insiders would be, as Naidoo acknowledges on her website:

I was brought up accepting the way things were. As a child I never questioned why I could live with my parents in a comfortable home, go to school, play in the park and do all sorts of things black children were not free to do. My upbringing led me to believe that white people were superior and it was natural for them to have the best of everything. But when I realised how false this was, I became very angry at all the injustice around me— and how I was part of it. I had been brought up with blinkers. Later, when I began to write, I wanted to write stories that would challenge narrow ways of seeing. (Naidoo, “Frequently Asked Questions” n.p.)

The purpose of her novel is admirable, to “challenge narrow ways of seeing,” specifically in regard to refugees in Britain, and the story is engaging and well researched.

*The Other Side of Truth* is, at its core, a political commentary on the process of claiming refugee status in Britain that seeks to make visible for readers the racist perceptions and misconceptions about people seeking asylum, specifically those from Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigerian refugees were a particular concern in the early 2000’s in Britain, and the book provides a valuable look at the importance of understanding and empathy for those who enter a country, in this case the U.K., because their lives are in danger in their home country. With attention to its global contexts and concerns, *The Other Side of Truth* would provide valuable pedagogical opportunities for American teens and pre-teens.

The books *Does My Head Look Big in This*, *Naughts and Crosses*, and *The Other Side of Truth* are all good examples of what Short calls intercultural texts. While on the surface, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* appears to be fluffy chick lit, Abdel-Fattah cleverly uses the diary format to reveal her important message about Islam and Muslim girls living in a westernized country (Australia). *Naughts and Crosses*, which is also from the perspective of a cultural insider, forces readers to wrestle with ideologies about race and white privilege in a metacognitive way not seen in realistic YA literature. *The Other Side of Truth* is problem novel and adventure story about black African children in England; written by a white African in exile, it highlights the problematic and convoluted process of claiming asylum in the U.K as understood by an author with some firsthand knowledge of the difficulties. Each of these novels allows American students to glean information from an “outsider” in a country outside America, thus building a bridge from their American experiences and understandings of the world to a more multinational and multi-racial perspective of the world.



### **Chapter 3: Problems with Translation: English Languages Made American**

Using helpfully scaffolded contemporary YA texts from foreign English speaking countries opens a gateway to the global world for American teens. But foreign texts become less useful for these purposes when Americanized by publishers. This relatively common practice in American publishing is often done without the input of the author and sometimes amounts to censorship. Cherie L. Givens in her article “Hidden Forms of Censorship and Their Impact” calls editorial censorship “pre-censorship,” which she defines as “censorship that occurs prior to publication, often in an attempt to avoid post-publication censorship” (23). I argue that translation from other Englishes to American English by publishers also constitutes pre-censorship and that the scrubbing of foreign language and other cultural references from texts and paratexts is a form of gatekeeping that has a profound effect on American teen readers’ experience with a book.

Often pre-censorship like this is done to make the book more relatable or accessible to American teens. Marketers, publishers and editors call it “translating.” They equate Americanizing foreign books with making more money and American publishers often do not see the monetary benefit in leaving a text alone. Their stealthy alterations create a problematic disconnect between publisher goals of making money and the goals of the literary awards and teachers that value authentic portrayals of cultural groups. The YA prize for the best translated book, The Batchelder Award, stipulates that the text may not be “unduly Americanized” (“About the (Mildred L.) Batchelder Award” n.p.). The Batchelder award is concerned with loss of the integrity and foreign-ness of

the book. Since winning a Batchelder Award is potentially lucrative to publishers, they are less motivated to “unduly Americanize” potentially award-winning foreign language texts, but often Americanize those from the English speaking world, especially those they believe will be blockbusters. Both keeping the foreign-ness of a text intact for the Batchelder Award and “translating” a text written in a non-American English vernacular are decisions made in deference to marketing and sales. By Americanizing books, publishers are changing the text in ways that subtly or overtly alter foreign texts’ meanings and ideologies while at the same time removing valuable cultural knowledge opportunities for American readers. Pre-censorship “translation” is done in two ways: changing foreign words into American vernacular, and changing paratextual elements of a text—visual aspects like covers, layouts, illustrations, and titles—in ways that change how Americans (versus the citizens of the country of origin) “read” those texts. This cultural scrubbing fogs the literary window into foreign cultures for American teens, a window that is valuable and necessary in today’s globalized world. The danger is that children see only similarities between English speaking countries and are not challenged by or informed of differences. In this chapter, I will give examples of translated texts, show why it is important to be aware of such translations, and give teachers routes around translations in order to make these texts once again useful, authentic cultural artifacts for classroom study.

I will discuss a variety of changes that have been made to specific works of CYAL, but focus most of my attention on the most famous, or infamous, example of such cultural cleansing, the first Harry Potter Book: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (British edition), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (American edition). This

example is useful for teachers because since both the American and British editions are relatively easy to procure, students can see first-hand through comparative analysis what is lost through such “translation,” allowing for discussion about how Americans perceive cross cultural similarities and differences. Such comparative analysis is supported by Common Core Standard RL.9-10.6.

A particularly obvious, significant, and culturally insensitive change between the two editions is the title. A classic example of pre-censorship, the title change altered how Americans read the book. First, the allusion to alchemy is completely lost. The title, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, alludes to the metaphysical process of turning base metal into gold. Symbolically, Harry’s journey on the train changes him into “gold” from “base metal.” When he lived in a cupboard under the stairs at the Dursley’s, he is treated as an embarrassment to the family; after receiving his Hogwarts acceptance letter, he is transformed in his new community to the boy who singlehandedly defeated Voldermort. The title cleverly evokes the class system in Britain, a theme that resonates throughout the book. Harry goes from lowly orphan to revered student at a prestigious boarding school for wizards and witches.

In the novel, Nicholas Flamel is a fictional alchemist who found the secret formula for the Philosopher’s Stone (called the “Sorcerer’s Stone” in the American version). The Philosopher’s Stone, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “a mythical solid substance, supposed to change any metal into gold or silver and (according to some) to cure all wounds and diseases and prolong life indefinitely” (OED Online). The OED shows historical written references to the search for the Philosopher’s Stone or literature referencing the Philosopher’s Stone reaching as far back as John Gower in 1393

AD. By changing “Philosopher” to “Sorcerer” in the American text, the allusion to the legendary stone is wiped clean, as is a lesson in literary history for our American readers.

The words “Sorcerer” and “Philosopher” also have different connotations. Arthur Levine, the American editor for Scholastic’s *Harry Potter* series, apparently made the change because he thought American children would be more interested in sorcerers than philosophers, and did not see the value of this cultural reference when preparing for the American market a British book for which he paid \$105,000. In one fell swoop, the intellectual searching implicit in the term “*Philosopher*” was wiped out and the more magical and presumably more salable “*Sorcerer*” was ushered in.

Ironically, this title change may have inadvertently led to the censorship firestorm in America where the book became, in conservative American’s minds, about witchcraft, spell casting, and the occult. The word “sorcerer” has connotations of evil for conservative Christians that philosopher does not. The Harry Potter books are one of the most censored and challenged books in America today (DeMitchell and Carney 160): “[American] parents who have been told that Christianity must be kept out of schools due to the ‘separation of church and state,’ are now trying to protect their children from classroom discussions about paganism and the occult...the Eagle Forum claims that ‘Harry Potter promotes the religion of witchcraft, or Wicca, during the school day’” (DeMitchell and Carney160). Some of this controversy is a cultural disconnect made worse through the Americanizing of the text.

Since the “Philosopher’s Stone” is legendary, like the Fountain of Youth or Excalibur, there might not have been the immediate backlash in America to this title. While this is all conjecture, it is interesting to note that in Britain there are only two

known objections to the book, and both of those were squashed when Bishop Stephen Sykes, the chair of the Church of England's doctrine commission, responded to the [challenges] by saying, "The Church's position is that magic and sorcery are contrary to the Christian religion...but my feeling is that children are capable of interpreting what they read. Children who are capable of reading *Harry Potter* could be told not to take witchcraft seriously, or might even realize that for themselves" (qtd. in Stephens 52). While the British objections or challenges number only two, American challenges of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* number too many to count.

More than the titles, however, were changed. Much was made about the changes on blogs, websites, and in the newspapers, but only a few scholars delved into the differences. Phillip Nel in "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O'? Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language" argues that the title change and the numerous textual changes from a British vernacular to an American one are significant and result in nothing less than "cultural imperialism" (Nel 263). Nel further argues that "any act of translation bears within it the cultural assumptions of the translator, and these assumptions will distort the original in ways that the translator may not fully realize" (Nel 284). It is exactly the breaking of these cultural assumptions that makes CYAL so useful in the first place, and as we have already seen looking only at the title change, serious distortion did occur.

Daniel Radosh, an Emmy winning writer for *The Daily Show*, freelance journalist, blogger, and author, interviewed Arthur Levine, American editor of *Harry Potter*, for his blog Radosh.net. Levine's responses are illuminating in that they show quite clearly how little he understood the cultural assumptions he made when

“translating” *Harry Potter*. When confronted with an accusation of “Americanizing” the text, Levine replied

“I wasn’t trying to, quote, Americanize them... What I was trying to do is translate, which I think is different. I wanted to make sure that an American child reading the books would have the same literary experience that a British kid would have. A kid should be confused or challenged when the author wants the kid to be confused or challenged and not because of a difference in language.” (Radosh n.p.)

An editor deciding how readers are to be “confused and challenged” by a text is problematic and Levine’s decisions perpetuated Ameri-centric ideology because he directly and systematically scrubbed British cultural references and words out and replaced them with American words he thought were *like* British words so American readers would understand more easily. By translating, Levine in fact did significantly change the American reading experience from the British reading experience because he made *Harry Potter* into an American book. These changes were made for purely commercial purposes. Writers in other countries noticed how Levine altered the text and were angered by the changes designed to make it more marketable in the States, noting that American books are not changed into British, Irish, Australian, Indian, or Canadian vernacular. Nel cites an article published in a Malaysian newspaper that “blamed ‘the global arrogance of the American’ for this act of ‘cultural reappropriation’ that, were it done to a ‘non-privileged’ culture (such as Hindi) would be roundly criticized” (qtd. in Nel 261). Americanizing texts, whether Hindi or British, destroys cultural authenticity

and cultural differences that American students need to see in order to become global citizens.

Levine's "translation" loses a lot of the British "flavour" of the books and the changes made because he thought American children might struggle with a term are often counterproductive. Peter Gleik, author of "Harry Potter Minus a Certain Flavour," argues that "[b]y protecting our children from an occasional misunderstanding or a trip to the dictionary, we are pretending that other cultures are, or should be, the same as ours. By insisting that everything be Americanized, we dumb down our own society rather than enrich it" (Gleick 19). If one agrees that an enriched understanding of the greater world outside the U.S. is what American students need, one will agree that this is made more difficult with translations like Levine's.

When Radosh asked Levine why all the British-isms were not translated out, like the words "crumpets" and "chipolatas," Levine replies, "[w]e weren't trying to make it McDonald's" (Radosh n.p.). Levine's intention was "to craft a vernacular that would sound authentically British without being 'incomprehensible or unnecessarily distracting' to young Americans" (Radosh n.p.). This comment shows Levine's Ameri-centric world view in that he knowingly altered the novel from a *real* British vernacular to a false one that *seemed* British to his American audience. Ironically, Levine's own defense for why he changed *Harry Potter* provides the best evidence for why such translations should cease. Nel picks up on Levine's assertion that *Sorcerer's Stone* replaced real British vernacular with "what Americans *think of* as British vernacular" and he rightfully argues that such changes "diminish] the novel's realism" (Nel 267, emphasis added). It also changes, or reinforces, a false view of British vernacular and culture.

According to Nel, Rowling was quite aware of class, cultural and national differences between and among her characters in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, but these differences are not evident in the American Scholastic version of the text. Nel shows just how scrubbed of foreign nuance the *Sorcerer's Stone* became:

The almost total disappearance of the word “Mum” is a case in point, illustrating how acts of translation efface cultural specificity. Although Hagrid still says “Mum” in the Scholastic edition, the Weasleys’ and others’ “Mum” changes to “Mom” and Seamus Finnegan’s “Mam” becomes “Mom” as well. This inconsistent substitution distorts the dialect and, in doing so, the cultural differences and similarities that characterize the words of these characters. As a child of Irish descent, Seamus should be allowed to tell American readers, “Me dad’s a Muggle. Mam didn’t tell him she was a witch ‘til after they were married’ (*Philosopher’s Stone* 125).” (Nel 269)

As Nel argues, “Mam” is an important Irish cultural marker in the book, one British readers are allowed to see, but is hidden from the American reader. These simple vernacular changes result in character homogenization. In changing “Mam” to “Mom,” Seamus is no longer specifically identified as Irish. Removing the dialect results in Seamus being identified as a member of the same cultural heritage as Harry, Ron, Hermione, and, since they all say “Mom,” American readers.

Perhaps a more sinister effect of the “mum” to “mom” changes is that the word suddenly marks an “us-them” divide. As Nel says, “Hagrid still says ‘Mum’” (269). Dialect has often been used in American literature to mark difference, and is often



reserved as a marker of racial difference. Characters whose speech is presented more phonetically or as a grammatically non-standard dialect contrast with characters whose speech is standardized. Since Hagrid is the *only* character marked with dialect in the American *Sorcerer's Stone*, and the only one to say "Mum," dialect and difference mark him as uneducated or slow. He is like the stereotypical "comic darky" in early twentieth century children's literature, an adult who needs a child's help like Rad Sampson or Koku in the *Tom Swift* series books. He is associated with animals and is particularly singled out as "savage" by Draco Malfoy, and because he speaks differently than literally everyone else in the book, the savage label sticks (*Sorcerer's Stone* 78, *Philosopher's Stone* 60). Because there are no other dialects to denote culture and class differences in *Sorcerer's Stone*, Hagrid particularly sticks out as different and marked as "other." The American translation creates a very different reading of Hagrid in the absence of other dialects and even other uses of "Mum." Having only one "othered" by speech and race (Hagrid is half giant and half human) reinforces a canonical stereotype of the noble savage instead of denoting both the cultural and class structures originally set purposefully within Rowling's text. This is a problem created by the American translation.

Nel also voices concern about the branding that appears in *Sorcerer's Stone* that does not appear in *Philosopher's Stone*. One would think the simple change from "jelly" to "Jell-O" is not such a big deal. After all, they both denote a wiggly gelatin dessert. However, as Nel points out, "Jell-O" is a branded name, unlike "jelly" (272). The branding amounts to no less than product placement in the U.S version. Nel argues that even when no specific branding or brand name exists, the American version "is more

likely to capitalize the name, an alteration which suggests a brand name instead of just a generic, commonplace item” (272). He gives the examples of “Grow-Your- Own-Warts kit (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 204) versus “grow-your-own warts kit” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 150) and notes that such capitalization “emphasizes [the product] as a status product” (Nel 272). Such changes show a consumerist mentality that echoes the reason the books were Americanized in the first place: profit. The effect is that *Sorcerer’s Stone* reflects and perpetuates U.S. capitalist ideology that is not present in the British text.

Whitehead, a British author, in her article “This is NOT What I Wrote,” breaks down the key issues related to “translation” into three distinct and important points. First, “in spite of lip service to multiculturalism, American children are being overprotected from exposure to different cultures” (Whitehead n.p.). British or Irish or Australian or Canadian are not kept separated from American culture, nor included as distinct cultures worthy of study in their own right. Not only do Americanized texts, from a teaching perspective, lose cultural authenticity and value as examples of other Englishes, but such translation reinforces the idea that foreigners are just like Americans in the way they speak and think. American translation reduces important differences in cultural ideology and identity. As Nel points out “the distortions evident in translations of British children’s books into American English prove that American definitions of multiculturalism do not include Great Britain” (268). Nel argues that this lack of cultural sensitivity to U.K. cultures “enacts a kind of stealthy vandalism on the source texts” and misleads children about what it means to be British” ( 268). In effect, Americanizing CYAL is not only highly chauvinistic—and is seen that way by foreign authors, thereby

further damaging America's reputation—but also leaves American children with a false sense that foreigners are just like them.

Whitehead's second major point is that “booksellers and publishers collude to present shorter, simpler texts to American children than are available to their peers in Britain and the rest of Europe” (n.p.). This dumbing down of foreign texts for the American market is problematic as it perpetuates dismissive attitudes about the abilities of American children. These attitudes ultimately limit availability of challenging books for U.S. children. Gretchen Schwarz agrees. She argues “[t]here is some indication that foreign YA literature is more demanding in its use of language” (Schwarz 3). She cites Ho Liana, author of “American Teen Books Easier than British Ones,” who argues “[t]he main difference is the simplicity of the language in U.S. books [in comparison to British], not only in vocabulary but in sentence length, narrative style, and simpler, shorter plots” (qtd. in Schwarz 3). If CYAL is Americanized, more is lost than just culture, since the non-translated texts are more challenging texts.

It is interesting to note that changes that affect readability create significant differences in the presumed age of the implied reader age for British and U.S. versions of the same text. A test often used in American schools to determine readability and grade level appropriateness of books for young people is the Lexile measurement:

A Lexile text measure is based on two strong predictors of how difficult a text is to comprehend: word frequency and sentence length. Many other factors affect the relationship between a reader and a book, including its content, the age and interests of the reader, and the design of the actual book. The Lexile text measure is a good starting point in the book-

selection process, with these other factors then being considered. (“What is a Lexile Measurement?” n.p.)

The same Lexile website says the American *Sorcerer’s Stone*, [“the first Harry Potter book”] measures 880L. I randomly chose two different sections from the British version *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and submitted them individually for diagnostic analysis. In order to make the analysis fair, I registered my nationality as “United Kingdom,” thinking that programmers might take into account cultural differences. In their analysis of these two 302 word sections of the British *Philosopher’s Stone*, the Lexile measurement jumps 250 to 255 points to 1130L and 1135L. (I used page 126 beginning at “Perhaps it was because he...” and page 150 beginning with “When Harry finally left the table...”). A grade level conversion chart indicates a significant difference when this is correlated with grade level readability. The 880 calculated for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by MetaMetrics (creators of the Lexile measurement system) corresponds to a fifth to seventh grade reading level while 1130 and 1135 levels calculated for the British *Philosopher’s Stone’s* reflect a ninth to eleventh grade reading level (“Lexile-to-Grade Correspondence” n.p.). It is obvious, based on even this limited sample, that the American version was altered to be an easier read. It seems American publishers are working hard to ensure that American children do not have to work hard while reading. Whether the publisher’s attention to the perceived needs of American readers shows a patronizing attitude toward American children or reflects a truth about American reading culture, the effect of these choices is equally problematic. If American children are not given increasingly challenging texts to read because difficulties are edited out, then it becomes difficult for American children to become better readers.

American beliefs about children's reading abilities are not, however, staying within America, but affecting foreign authors who want to sell their book in America. Whitehead points out that "[w]ith the growing economic necessity for transatlantic co-editions, British authors worry about pressure to conform to the needs of the mighty U.S. market" (Whitehead n.p.). Because the U.S. market already dominates the global publishing market (if the book sells in America, it makes money), foreign authors feel pressure to conform to American standards for youth literature; thus foreign pieces sacrifice literary value to American YA publishers' preferences in both "translated" and home grown literature. The implication here is that in order to fit within American publishing parameters, all texts must be dumbed down, creating a slippery slope for literary quality that is highly valued in American (and world) schools.

Changes were also made to the paratexts of *Sorcerer's Stone* and *Philosopher's Stone*. The visuals that frame the story are strikingly different in the American and British versions of *Harry Potter*. First, the typefaces and margins are different. In *Sorcerer's Stone*, the typeface is larger, as are the margins. This makes the book much longer (309 pages versus 223 pages), but easier to read; in other words, the typeface was made more palatable to a young American reader. As a result, the number of words on a page decreased dramatically. By my count, the average in *Sorcerer's Stone* is about 270 words per page and *Philosopher's Stone* contains, on average, a whopping 380 words per page. The books are the same size within a ¼ inch, but the font and the margins in the British edition are markedly smaller (1/2 inch on all sides versus the American edition's margins of ¾ top, and sides, 1 inch bottom). By making these changes, Scholastic

stretched the age range of the implied reader, thus making the book accessible to younger as well as older readers and creating a larger market for the book.

There are also illustrations in the American text at the beginning of each chapter, and each illustration gives a clue to what the text will be about. Chapter One, “The Boy Who Lived,” has a picture of a sleeping infant (1). Chapter 2, “The Vanishing Glass,” has a picture of a fat and petulant Dudley Dursely lying among his many birthday presents (18), Chapter Three, “The Letters From No One,” shows a multitude of letters spewing from the fireplace (31). All of these illustrations preview the text. The British version has no illustrations beyond the front and back covers. In addition, there are font differences in the headers and little stars printed in the corners of every page in the American text. These are absent in the British text. All of these paratextual elements within the American book—the large margins, larger font, illustrations, and decorative elements—symbolically signal to American readers that this book is meant for children, and in practical terms make it an easy read. While these stylistic changes that scaffold the text may have been a key to its success in creating readers in America, the changes demonstrate another way that the American texts were “dumbed down.”

Another important paratextual change made to the Harry Potter Books for the U.S. market is the cover art. The British cover art is much more subdued, showing only one pivotal scene from early in the book when Harry must get on the train and travel to Hogwarts from platform 9 and 3/4 (Chapter 6). *Philosopher’s Stone* has a watercolor of a confused Harry standing in front of an old fashioned steam train billowing smoke. The only allusions to magic on the cover are the stars emitting from the train’s smokestack. The British edition’s font is block lettering for “*Harry Potter*”: the words “*and the*

*Philosopher's Stone* are in smaller, neat script. The primary colors are reds, greens, yellows, and oranges. The American cover is much flashier and immediately shows the magical aspects of the story as well as events that happen toward the middle and end of the novel. On the *Sorcerer's Stone* cover, Harry is flying on a broomstick with his cape billowing behind him (chapter 9). He flies between an arched window supported by two columns and he is reaching for a small winged golden ball (the snitch from chapter 11). In the background on the right is a castle on a hill, presumably Hogwarts, eerily backlit by the setting sun in the valley below him, and on the left is the "Forbidden Forest." In the left hand bottom corner is a white unicorn, running as if being chased by some evil force (chapter 15). Etched in stone in the bottom right corner is "Fluffy" the three headed dog (chapter 16). Instead of plain block and script print, the lettering on the American cover is the iconic Harry Potter script (now trademarked by Time Warner), complete with lightning-bolt-scar jagged edges, embossed in gold. The rest of the words, "*and The Sorcerer's Stone*," look as if they have been chiseled into the marble of the archway. The dominant colors are much darker than the British cover. Browns, purples, pinks, greys, golds, and reds compete for the eye and suggest the battle with evil found within the novel. While both covers accurately portray what is inside the text, the British cover is much more subdued and leaves more to reader imagination. The American cover seems to serve as a "where's Waldo" of plot twists and gives clues to the actual storyline of the book. Instead of focusing on Harry's journey into the new wizarding world from platform 9 and  $\frac{3}{4}$ , where he is on the cusp of change, the American cover shows him already ensconced in the wizarding world, catching the snitch and defying gravity.

The American cover sets up different expectations of the book and acts more like a movie trailer than a book cover. As Yampell writes in her article “Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature,” “[t]he paratext *is* the text. Literary merit becomes irrelevant if the book does not, or cannot, reach the reader...the cover of the book is often the reader’s first interaction with it—the consumer’s initial reading of the text” (Yampell 348). If this is the case, and I agree with Yampell, then an American person’s first “reading” of the text will be a very different experience than a British person’s, which is contrary to Levine’s stated goal in “translating” the text to make them equivalent. The British cover suggests a boy confused about where he is going while the American cover shows a boy confidently reaching for the snitch, and highlights purely magical themes, leaving clues to adventures to come (Quiddich, flying lessons, unicorns, and three headed dogs). Changes to the cover suggest that marketers considered that American children would not catch the allusions so they needed to make the magic component obvious in order to build interest in it. Overall, the elaborate cover art on the American *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* is an apt representation of “dumbing down” of the book by the removal of British references. The American cover screams magic and fantasy, while the King’s Cross train station on the British edition locates it squarely in the U.K.

While *Harry Potter* is the most famous example of cultural scrubbing and cover changing, it is not the only title to fall victim to American marketers and editors. The Australian Printz Honor Book *The Messenger*, like *Harry Potter*, experienced a title change that simplified the text for American readers. Published as *I Am the Messenger* in



the U.S, and with a different cover as well, the title leads the American reader more directly to an understanding of the postmodern, meta-fictional ending than does the Australian version. In the American version, the title *I Am the Messenger* is centered right above the name of the author, Marcus Zusak. And at the end of the novel it is revealed that Zusak himself *is* the messenger in the book; the title change specifically previews the ending for American readers. The cover and title of the Australian text, *The Messenger*, allows the mystery to remain and leaves readers to come to their own conclusion in their own good time about the identity of the messenger at the end of the novel. American teens are presumed to need more help understanding the nuanced ending and are given the answer on the cover.

Other covers were changed to meet the perceived demands of the American market. The Australian book *Liar* by Justine Larbalestier caused quite a stir because Bloomsbury put a white girl with long hair, not a mixed race girl “with nappy hair” on the American cover of the hardback edition (“My Protags Aren’t White: Ain’t That a Shame [Updated]”). Bloomsbury’s justification was that books with black people on covers don’t sell. Larbalestier, in an attempt to salvage her own ethos following her publisher’s insensitivity, is quoted on her website as saying she “strongly objected” to the cover, “but lost” the fight with the American marketers (“My Protags Aren’t White: Ain’t That a Shame [Updated]”). The text’s Australian counterpart, originally published by Allen and Unwin, was more accurate in the portrayal of the character Micah, featuring a black girl, albeit in shadow. After pressure from gatekeepers and the reading public in the form of online discussions, reviews, and blogs, the cover for the newly released paperback was changed to a picture of a girl who is much more representative of the

character in the book. If left unquestioned, insensitive and racist “translations” like Bloomsbury’s, done in the name of capitalism, contribute to the institutionalization of racism. However, this controversy shows that diligent American readers, librarians, and educators who were made aware of the “translation” challenged the institution. Contrary to U.S. publisher beliefs, perhaps American readers do not need so much translating after all.

The sorts of changes being made to foreign books suggest that the powers that be have little faith in the abilities of American teen readers and highlight the priority publishers place on making money over cultural or literary considerations. Daniel Hade addresses the money problem in his 2002 article “Storyselling: Are Publishers changing the Way Children Read?” when he notes that “[t]he mass marketplace selects which books will survive, and thus the children’s book becomes less a cultural and intellectual object and more an entertainment looking for mass appeal” (Hade 511). He points out that “[i]n the 1960s and 1970s...public school libraries were the major market for children’s books. Trained professionals committed to selecting high-quality literature did the purchasing” (Hade 511). With cuts in federal and state funding, this is no longer the case. Many children purchase their own books or have choices in what books are purchased for them. This alone is not necessarily a bad thing. The problem is that the large box bookstores, like Barnes and Noble and Amazon, “[employ] a single buyer for each of its categories of children’s books. Whereas before, hundreds of independent bookstore owners would each decide which books to stock, now one person decides which [YA books] Barnes and Noble will stock in its hundreds of stores” (Hade 511). The shrinking number of bookstores results in the growing power of the marketing

department as the surviving bookstores compete for market share. Patricia Lee Gauch says that “[t]oday, the marketing departments of major [children’s] publishers have grown in number and importance, as have their adult counterparts, to rival in significance and power the editorial departments themselves, the very source of children’s and young adult books” (133). She elaborates that it is all to “serve the trade” and bemoans the limitations inherent in allowing the market to dictate art (Gauch 133): “[m]arketing,” once a “service group,” has become “a leviathan in its own right, becoming so big and multitasked that even the power of what book to buy or sell began in some companies to be influenced by directors in the Marketing and Sales departments” (Gauch 134). When foreign texts are competing with American texts in this cutthroat environment, many editors value “translation” and “accessibility” over challenge and new insight. Hence, many Commonwealth texts are “translated.”

So what are teachers to do if many CYAL books are translated into “American” English? First, teachers must be aware of the problem. If teachers understand that a text may not be culturally authentic due to Americanized words and other changes, then those changes can and should be talked about in the classroom. Once teens know that marketers are changing foreign texts, they are more likely to read with a critical eye, or even search out the original text. This happened, famously, with the Harry Potter books. *The New York Times* published an article about how, too anxious to wait for the second book, children learned that they could order *The Chamber of Secrets* from Britain where it was already released through Amazon.co.uk, thereby getting the original and unaltered version in the process (Carvajal n.p.). This unprecedented Internet phenomenon caused a copyright crisis for Scholastic, which had bought the U.S. rights to the book, as thousands

of American children ordered the U.K. version and liked it. Scholastic eventually addressed the copyright issue by making sure the American release dates for all ensuing sequels were the same as the British Bloomsbury editions.

Despite Scholastic's attempts to block U.K. edition sales in the U.S., British editions of all the *Harry Potter* books are easily obtainable today. While teachers cannot stop American publishers from "translating" foreign English texts, there are some simple things they can do to help American students reading such texts. By putting the American and foreign editions side by side, and reading a bit from each, teachers can draw attention to the representations of cultural differences and nuances, and talk about why the changes may have been made. Teens and pre-teens then can get a sense of what an Americanized text perceives as British (or Australian or Canadian, etc.). Students can see what actually is *an* example (not *the* example) of a foreign English vernacular as well as look at specific American substitutions that were made and analyze them. In fact, these activities meet Common Core Standards, particularly RL.9-10.6, which asks students to analyze a text from a particular cultural point of view, and Key Ideas and Details 9, which asks students to analyze how two texts take different approaches to similar themes or topics ("English Language Arts Standards" n.p.).

Gleick argues for a more revolutionary response; in order to circumvent these translated texts, American consumers should, like the anxious *Harry Potter* fans, buy their books directly from the foreign source when possible, and maybe then American publishers will stop translating (Nel 283). Nel suggests that if we follow Gleick's advice and order from foreign publishers,

perhaps others, too, will come to realize that we cannot trust American publishers to deliver a copy of the book that the author wrote... American readers should have access to the same text of British books that a British reader does. And, more than that, awareness of national and cultural differences expands the reader's knowledge of the world. To know that a "trolley"—another word changed by Scholastic—denotes "cart" may be a small addition to a person's linguistic repertoire, but it is worth knowing. Learning different words for the same object enriches our understanding of language; to suggest otherwise is to insult the intelligence of children and young adults. Indeed, learning from our differences is one of the premises upon which multicultural curricula are based. (Nel 283)

If our students are to get important global knowledge from CYAL, cultural scrubbing, otherwise known as "translating," must cease, or at the very least be revealed for what it is to our children so that they can also have an authentic response to an authentic foreign text. So much literary quality and cultural gold is lost in CYAL when American publishers play "Father Knows Best" by sanitizing foreign words, ideologies and even titles and book covers. As a result, our children get a tepid, watered down version of the original laced with a strong dose of American marketing. While *Harry Potter* was extremely successful in the States and got many children interested in reading, an opportunity was missed. We got a baser metal when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was translated by Levine, who seemed to have sacrificed much of the authentic British flavour of the text in order to ensure bigger sales.

Fortunately, not all foreign texts available in the United States are heavily Americanized. *Bog Child*, discussed at length in chapter two, is one of the award winning books that is not meddled with. The title, the cover, and the text are all original to the version published in the U.K. Since *Bog Child* wasn't expected to be a blockbuster success—more than likely this book was imported because it was believed to be a contender for the Printz Award—and its Irish-ness is absolutely central to the plot, it wasn't changed. The terms in the book, especially acronyms (JCB, IRA, RUC) and dialect, even punctuation (the use of a single quotation mark instead of the double quotation marks for dialogue, as well as comma placement) are just as they were published in the U.K. and Ireland. These terms and Irish-isms are included in the text as if everyone understands them, presenting a valuable learning tool for teachers using the novel in their secondary classrooms.

The book *Angus, Thongs and Full Frontal Snogging* by Louise Rennison, a Printz Honor Book *and* a commercial success, is slightly altered, but in a way that makes the very British vernacular authentically accessible to American readers. Not only is there a “note” to American readers explaining that Americans and British people speak a different form of English, but there is also a glossary of terms in the back of the book, written in the voice of Georgia, the first person narrator, complete with humor and information for the unsuspecting American who does not know the meaning of “nuddypants,” “bin,” “agony aunt,” “on the dole,” or “nappy.” Georgia’s glossary includes British slang, terminology and acronyms important to British culture. For example, “naff” is explained as “unbearably and embarrassingly out of fashion and nerdy. Naff things are parents dancing to ‘modern’ music, culottes, blue eyeshadow, blokes who

wear socks with sandals, pigtails. You know what I mean” (Rennison 143). She also includes an entry for “O-levels:”

‘Ordinary’ level exams that perfectly nice teenagers were made to take when they were about fifteen. Now called GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education). These exams are of course sadistically timed for the summer months by teachers, etc. who have no life and therefore want to spoil it for everyone else.” (Rennison 243)

Instead of scrubbing these texts of their foreign-ness, the publishers of these two award-winning books decided that American readers would, rightfully, have something to gain from the original vernacular and titles of these books, and that their foreign-ness was vital to the meaning and reading experience. Therefore, they were not changed, or in the case of *Angus*, additions were made that kept the reading experience authentically British and even *enhanced* the American reader’s cultural experience with the novel.

If America really does have multiculturalism as a goal, then we must be aware when literature from cultures perceived as close to ours, yet meaningfully different, is changed to make reading easier for us. Our teens deserve more credit than American publishers and editors often give them. To truly be children of the world, and not just children of America, they must be allowed to enter a foreign world through a foreign book without an American editor holding their hand. In order for our teens to become global citizens and teachers to create bridges for understanding world cultures, then students need to experience authentic, contemporary literature from other countries that has not been translated or homogenized.

**Conclusion: Successfully Incorporating CYAL in the High School Curriculum**

As I discussed in my introduction, many examples of CYAL meet the Anchor Standard for “English Language Arts” *Common Core Standards Initiative*. In order for CYAL to be adopted into any curriculum, a case must be made that it is worthy of study based on these Common Core Standards, and teachers must have ideas about how CYAL can be used in their classrooms. I will address these issues first by pointing out that in addition to the “Anchor Standards,” CYAL also meets important specific grade level core standards that show not just *why* it should be used, but also suggest pedagogical approaches to *how* it could be used in the English Language Arts classroom.

The specific standards I will discuss in relation to CYAL are as follows:

- RL9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g. how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)
- RL9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- RL11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g. where a story is set,



how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)

- R.L11-12.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (“English Language Arts Standards<< Reading: Literature <<Grade 9-10”).

*Bog Child*, *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, *The Other Side of Truth* and *Naughts and Crosses*, among others I will discuss briefly, including *The Graveyard Book*, and *White Darkness*, all meet at least one of these, if not more standards that open up pedagogically sound ways to use these texts in a classroom.

As evidenced in chapter 1, *Bog Child* meets standard RL9-10.6 in that it gives students a number of voices, perspectives, and views of cultural experiences from outside the U.S. There is Fergus’ voice, and there is Mel’s voice. However, there are many other perspectives and points of view that convey distinct cultural experiences and particularize each character’s experience with Irish culture. To meet this standard using *Bog Child*, students could analyze Da’s and Mam’s unique and differing perspectives on the Troubles and the hunger strike. Cora provides an interesting and naïve perspective related to her cultural experiences as a Dubliner that would provide opportunities for analysis. For example, she tells Fergus that she thinks living in Belfast would be fun. Fergus knows that at the time of the novel, Belfast is anything but fun; it is dangerous. Students could analyze Cora’s romanticizing of the conflict and her limited

understanding of it in relation to Fergus' very real and unromantic first-hand experience with the Troubles. An analysis of Joe's perspective, as a revolutionary sacrificing for his country, would add something valuable to the classroom conversation. By asking students to think about how the book might be similar and different if told from Joe's perspective, or Cora's perspective, or Unk's perspective, or even Owain's perspective, useful discussion about culture, point of view, and choices the author made to move the story forward would all meet standard R.9-10.6.

*Bog Child* also fulfills standard RL11-12.3. Dowd's choice to tell Fergus' story in a series of real and dream-state sequences, as well as specifically setting her novel in "Drumleash," a fictional town on the very real border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, creates the tensions and boundary crossings needed for Fergus to make his physical and mental journeys. The specific settings on the lough and on the mountain are also important to the novel's action, and the flashbacks, both of Mel's and of Fergus' stories, gives layers to the novel that are thematically important and that students can discover and unpack through careful analysis.

While *Angus, Thongs and Full Frontal Snogging* and *The Other Side of Truth* provide excellent examples in the form of glossaries that prove helpful in meeting standards RL 9-10.4 and RL11-12.4, *Bog Child* leaves the foreign words unexplained, and gives teachers an opportunity to ask students to create a glossary, either as a creative piece in the voice of Fergus or Mel, or a more objective and factual glossary such as the one Naidoo provides.

Another example of CYAL that provides glossary and other linguistic project and discussion opportunities is *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman. *The Graveyard Book* is

a Dickens-like tale of an orphan who is targeted for murder by the Convocation of Jacks. These “Jacks” in the novel represent the many incarnations of characters named Jack in British literature and folklore. Jack Frost, Spring Heeled Jack, Jack Tar, and Jack the Ripper all put in an appearance. These and other cultural references can be researched by students through web quests or scavenger hunts to bring a clearer understanding to the many British allusions in the novel.

As the book opens, “the Man Jack” murders an entire family to prevent a prophecy that one in this family will destroy his secret organization of Jacks. Unfortunately for him, the two year old boy climbs out of his crib and toddles out the door into a graveyard before Jack can kill him. The ghosts in the graveyard give the baby “the Freedom of the Graveyard,” meaning that he lives half in the living world and half in the dead world, in order to protect him from his would be assassins (Gaiman 23). Named Nobody Owens by the graveyard residents (ghosts Mr. and Mistress Owens adopt him), he is raised by a community of ghosts from various historical time periods, with the help of the graveyard guardian Silas (a vampire). Nobody, or “Bod” as he is called, grows up with a highly unorthodox education, learning his alphabet and Latin from the old gravestones, learning to “fade” so no one can see him, and learning about the humors of the body from long dead graveyard residents. He also learns from his nearly disastrous outings beyond the graveyard, such as escaping from ghouls who abduct him, thwarting a greedy man who wants to give him to Jack for money, making a human friend Scarlet, and defending himself against the Sleer in the Anglo Saxon burial mound, all of which prepare him for his final confrontation with the Jacks.

*The Graveyard Book* meets RL9-10.6 because Gaiman includes many cultural references to historical Britain through “dead” characters who lived during various time periods. But this novel also meets RL9-10.6 and RL11-12.4 that address linguistic, connotative, and tonal analysis. There are myriad dialects, tones, and examples of formal and informal language that illuminate each character and the character’s purpose in the novel. Gaiman gives each of his graveyard characters a different voice, based not just on personality, but also time period and social class, and students can analyze what this does for the text as a whole.

There is the Indigo Man, a pagan who resides in an Anglo Saxon burial mound that is also inhabited by the Sleer, a hissing genie-like being forever looking for a master. There is the very pompous, self-important Caius Pompeius, an ancient Roman, who was buried in the graveyard 2000 years ago and is all about rhetoric and admiration for roads. Liza Hempstock is a witch, who was burned *and* drowned in the Dark Ages and resides in the unconsecrated part of the graveyard. She speaks in a particularly antiquated vernacular—“Good morrow, young lummoX”—and describes her date of death as “Willyum the Conker ten sixty-six” (Gaiman 117). The Romantic poet Nehemiah Trot speaks formally and is always composing odes hoping that his death will make him famous, only his poetry was buried with him. In one particularly funny scene, Mr. Trot is giving Bod advice about love. “Oh! You must go to her and implore her. You must call her your Terpsichore, your Echo, your Clytemnestra. You must write poems for her, mighty odes—I shall help you write them—and thus—and only thus—shall you win your true love’s heart” (Gaiman 232). Mr. and Mistress Owens, Bod’s graveyard parents, hail from Pre-Victorian Britain. Mr. Owens was a cabinet maker, and neither he nor his wife

are particularly well educated. Their speech reflects this fact: “He dun’t look like nobody’s family, that one” (Gaiman 14). Finally, the ghouls who attempt to steal Bod away speak in a Fagin-like affected tone meant to hide their true nature. They call themselves important sounding names like “The Duke of Westminster, the Honorable Archibald Fitzhugh, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells” and are named for the first dead bodies they consumed, but they wear “raggedy clothes, all a-tatter” and constantly fight with one another, saying things like “[i]f your Grace has any more blooming idea of where we is than us do, I’d be grateful if he’d say so. Otherwise, he should keep his big offal-hole shut” (Gaiman 74). The words the characters say and the way they say them are markers for their time and place in which they lived, as well as their social class, giving students ample fodder for research and linguistic analysis for figurative and connotative meanings, as well as tone analysis, all specifically mentioned in standards R9-10.4 and RL11-12.4.

### **Real World Multimodal Opportunities**

CYAL texts often offer unique multimodal opportunities to meet RL9-10.6 and expand horizons by experiencing other cultures first hand through the use of technology in the classroom. For instance, *The Year of Secret Assignments* by Jaclyn Moriarty is an Australian book about a pen pal assignment for an English class between two schools of very different social status and class. Two classrooms reading this text, one American and one Australian, could easily communicate through email, podcasts, and/or blogs, making the text come alive in a literal way through an international reading group. While *The Year of Secret Assignments* contains themes of differences bridged through contact

with those who are different, any of the award-winning CYAL mentioned in this thesis would lend itself well to an international project of this sort, and literature could be negotiated between the teachers. Today, making contact with another internationally minded teacher is relatively easily achieved through an internet school search and a few teacher to teacher emails. While this sounds daunting and does entail some extra work for the teacher, the internet makes this type of classroom project a realistic option.

### **Useful Pairings**

In addition to the specific grade level standards mentioned above, CYAL also lends itself to other core standards. “Key Ideas and Details 9” asks students to “[a]nalyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take” (“English Language Arts Standards” n.p.). CYAL often pairs quite well with canonical literature already taught in secondary classrooms, and with other CYAL books, making it an excellent choice for inter-textual analysis advocated by Key Ideas and Details 9. Many books have been written about pairing American YAL with canonical works and provide helpful lists and thematic units. Some examples of resources like these include *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics*, written by Sarah Herz and Donald Gallo, and the three volumes of *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, edited by Joan Kaywell. However, none of these books address foreign YA literature.

As mentioned earlier, *The Graveyard Book* would pair exceedingly well with *Oliver Twist*. Oliver and Bod are both orphans, they both are running from ne'er do wells (Oliver from Monks and Fagin and his gang, Bod from the Jacks, the ghouls who abduct

him, and a greedy miser Abanazer Bolger). Social class is highlighted throughout both novels. While Oliver suffers horrible mistreatment from his caregivers, however, Bod, is lovingly cared for, to the best of their ability, by ghosts who are often more concerned with themselves and telling stories of their past lives. Pairing these two novels would make for fascinating and highly productive inter-textual conversations about common tropes in both modern British YAL and British canonical novels.

Another useful and interesting pair is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with Geraldine McCaughrean's *White Darkness*. *White Darkness*, the 2005 Printz winner, is a disturbing adventure story of fourteen year old Symone (called Sym and named after hollow earth theorist John Cleves Symmes, Jr.) who is groomed with disturbing effectiveness by her uncle Victor for a dangerous trip to Antarctica in order to prove his insane idea that Symmes Hole, a mythical entrance to a mythical underworld similar to the one found in Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, really exists. His plan takes years to come to fruition. Like the computer sim that can be created and molded to one's liking in a computer game (the Mii's on the Wii, for an example) Sym is experimented on, exploited, molded, and manipulated into Victor's vision for her. An outcast at school due to the disabilities caused by Victor's antibiotics experiments (she has lost her hearing and is falsely told she is mentally retarded), Victor sets out to create a superhuman able to both survive in the extreme weather in the Antarctica and in the Underworld by feeding her knowledge about the continent until it become an obsession for Sym as well. Sym's brainwashing goes so far that she rejects the real world for her imagined ice world. When her father dies (poisoned by Victor to ensure continued access to Sym and his experiments), Titus Oates, of the infamous failed Scott Polar Expedition, lives in her

head. She develops a crush on her imaginary Titus, and they have conversations (much like Fergus and Mel in *Bog Child*). In times of great stress, Sym imagines Titus and sees him very clearly before her as they talk things out. All along, the manipulative Victor feeds her lies that her parents do not love her in order to further isolate her and then lure her away. Sym believes everything Victor tells her until she realizes, on an ice shelf in Antarctica as he is trying to force her down an ice chimney, that he is insane. Victor perishes as he falls through the ice, but Sym must make it out of the frozen world. Titus' italicized voice plays a large part in her ability to survive alone on "The Ice."

Both Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Geraldine McCaughrean's *White Darkness* deal with distinct settings, albeit at opposite poles (*Frankenstein* at the North Pole and *White Darkness* at the South Pole). However, the similarities extend beyond cold and ice. There are plot points that are strikingly similar. Like the monster, Sym has unknowingly been subjected to secret, obsessive, mad scientist experiments by Victor. Uncle Victor uses her as a guinea pig to create a germ free human who will not infect the beings in the Underworld with human diseases when he discovers and colonizes them:

Uncle Victor experimented with ways of ridding the human organism of every contagion. A course of antibiotics—strong enough to exterminate the sludge in the drain let alone streptococci and scarlet fever...I could remember it, of course: swallowing huge numbers of little, chalky sweets suspended in spoonfuls of honey. (McCaughrean 304)

The numerous experiments intended to cleanse Sym instead made her lose her hearing and caused other, more detrimental codependent mental side effects that would last until Victor's death. Victor, in his insane science experiments on Sym, attempts to make her



into something else and instead makes her into something damaged. The moment she realizes that she has been created for Victor's obsessive and insane belief in discovering Hollow Earth is a heartbreaking moment in the novel that for Sym is long overdue. She discovers his insanity in Antarctica, alone with him, but needing him for survival. As usual, she confesses this to her imaginary Titus Oates.

“I thought Uncle Victor loved me. But he only wants to drop me in a hole in the ground—sacrifice me to the great god Symmes. Even the books he gave me—even all my lovely books—the books where I read about you! They were just Victor *educating me* for all this stuff. Even my name...even my name was a part of it—part of his great Obsession.”

(McCaughrean 277)

The similarities to Victor Frankenstein and his creation are striking. Both Victors are obsessed with creation, and both “creations” rebel against and betray their makers, the true monsters, at the end of the novels.

Other important similarities include the procuring of a mate for the creations. While Dr. Frankenstein makes a mate, and then kills her after he sees lust in his monster's face, Uncle Victor creates a mate for Sym by kidnapping Sigurd, a boy a bit older than Sym, whose job it is, in his obsessed and twisted mind, to mate with Sym and produce offspring in order to populate the underworld with his own apprentices. His horrifying intentions are slowly revealed on their trek through the ice fields. After spying on Sigurd and Sym stealing a kiss (her first) in the back of the van Victor says: ‘That’s good. That’s grand...you and the boy get to know each other! I mean really...get to it.

No rules out here, lass. Drop the niceties! You have fun, the two of you. Mek the most of it” (McCaughrean 180). When Sym, embarrassed and thinking he is teasing asks to sit in the front seat, Victor replies ““Nay. Be told, lass. You and Sigurd stay in t’ back. Get properly acquainted up close, manner of thing.’ And he actually winked so that I could be left with no doubt as to his meaning” (McCaughrean 181). Later, however, after Sym has learned to care about Sigurd, Victor changes his mind and believes bringing him was a mistake. He leaves him alone in the broken down all-terrain vehicle to freeze to death while he forces Sym to go on to search for Symme’s Hole. His plan, however, doesn’t quite work, as Sigurd is rescued later by an icebreaker, along with Sym, who no longer wants anything to do with him.

Finally, there is an epistolary component to each of the novels. In *Frankenstein*, Captain Robert Walton (a polar explorer) writes letters to his sister. In *White Darkness*, Sym (also a polar explorer) occasionally writes letters about her ordeal to her school friend Nikki. While *Frankenstein* is a story framed in multiple perspectives, Sym’s story is told in past tense through a very naïve first person narrator. However, readers see different perspectives in that we see Uncle Victor’s lies (his tell when he is lying is “say again?”) and manipulations, as well as ominous bouts of foreshadowing through the imaginary voice of Titus. These differences make for interesting analysis of multiple voices and perspectives.

Pairing *White Darkness* and *Frankenstein* opens these texts to high school students in ways that reading them as separate texts alone does not. When read together, students can see how two apparently different novels actually contain thought-provoking inter-textual connections and direct allusions. These commonalities allow for deeper and

more fruitful discussions, and allow students to make connections they might not otherwise make. These two books complement each other and would make for interesting and engaging classroom discussion and analysis.

There are many other useful pairings of *CYAL* with canonical texts, including *Naughts and Crosses* with *Romeo and Juliet*. While the star crossed lovers plot is important in both pieces, the more interesting comparison is the conflict between Shakespeare's feuding families and Blackman's feuding races. Neither the Montagues nor the Capulets want anything to do with one another. In Blackman's book, both Naughts and Crosses argue for continued segregation at some point. Callum's mother has nothing good to say about Cross families and believe that everyone is happier if they remain separate. It is made clear in the novel that her view is widely held within the Naught community. She even speaks against Callum attending the all Cross school, which directly stems from her admitted hate of Crosses and her worries for her son's safety. Crosses believe the races should not mix either, but for different reasons, and build their homes far away from Naught ghettos. If not for Sephy and Callum's relationship, two races would not be symbolically united in the birth of a mixed race child. Similarly, the Montague and the Capulet families do not mix, and if not for Romeo and Juliet's love, would have remained separate and feuding.

Other interesting plot elements to explore include the violent characters in the play and novel (Juliet's cousin Tybalt and Callum's brother Jude), as well as the different endings. Of course, in Shakespeare's play, both lovers die, but the families unite in friendship. In *Naughts and Crosses*, a different sacrifice is made. Sephy agrees to Callum's execution in order to save their child from a forced abortion, but nothing

changes in the relationships between Naughts and Crosses as a result at the end of the first novel in the series.

Perhaps an even better pair for *Naughts and Crosses* is Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The theme of walking in someone else's shoes portrayed throughout Lee's text is also apparent through the switched binary in Blackman's *Naughts and Crosses* in that it forces a new perspective on readers. Readers must actually take a walk in another's shoes to successfully navigate the novel. There are also parallels between Tom Robinson and Callum. Both are arrested for allegedly raping a girl of another race and neither is guilty of the crime. Sephy's voice often reads much like Scout's, and in the absence of an Atticus to defend the accused, Callum is quickly convicted and hung in a public execution, while Tom is shot in an attempted escape. There are also startling thematic similarities in class hierarchies (high society Crosses, poor uneducated Crosses, and Naughts) that also appear often in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Mrs. Dubose, the Ewells, the Robinsons).

Short stories and poems already taught in U.S. schools would also make interesting pairings with CYAL. Liam O'Flaherty's short story "The Sniper" could be used as an introductory and companion text to *Bog Child*, since both address brotherhood within an IRA context. Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" would pair well with *The Graveyard Book*, which has many Gothic themes, and both end with a man being imprisoned in an underground catacomb. Fortunado is bricked into a wall in Poe's story, and Jack Frost is lured into the Sleer's tomb and imprisoned within the wall by the Sleer in Gaiman's tale. *The Graveyard Book* would also pair well with Christina Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market*, as both portray ghouls/goblins trying to steal humans

through trickery and temptation, but both the ghouls and the goblins are outsmarted.

*Does My Head Look Big in This* by Abdel-Fattah and the novella *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros would provide interesting comparative discussions in that both contain a strong female second generation immigrant voice, both describe complicated and varied immigrant people, both involve coming of age in a place where they are unfairly judged, and both directly address assimilation issues, one within Australia, and one within the United States. McCaughreen's *White Darkness* and London's "To Build a Fire" both explore survival tactics in frozen wildernesses.

Finally, even pairing specific examples of CYAL with others provide valuable inter-textual connections that meet the Key Standard 9. *Naughts and Crosses* could be paired with *Bog Child* in that they both contain ideas of self-sacrifice. *Bog Child* and *White Darkness* could be paired and the italicized voices in the main characters' heads, both of historical dead people, could be analyzed and compared. *Angus, Thongs, and Full Frontal Snogging* and *Does My Head Look Big in This* could be paired and the use of humor, a diary voice, pop culture references, and treatment of "foreign" terms (Georgia's glossary versus Amal's in-text explanations) could be explored. All these pairs would provide useful and productive discussion while meeting Key Standard 9 and introducing American teens to global voices.

### **Cross-Curricular Opportunities**

In addition to the mandate to fulfill common core standards, English teachers are often asked to make cross-curricular connections in the classroom. *Bog Child* is an example that offers multiple cross-curricular opportunities. Geography and the study of

maps of Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as geographical research into bogs would be helpful in understanding the plot and in expanding American perspectives of the world. The physics equations sprinkled throughout the novel and then metaphorically extrapolated throughout the text can facilitate a better understanding of those equations and the text. The historical context of Ireland in the 1980's as well as the many references to the Iron Age (and Thatcher as the Iron woman) and bog people create a bridge to understanding some important Irish history.

*White Darkness* also helps bridge several subjects. The novel has a serious sense of place and history that students do not often get from other texts. The geography of Antarctica is beautifully described so that students get a true sense of the place: "The Devil's Ballroom" is described as a "drumskin" plate of ice that covers a canyon (306). Antarctic landscape features such as "Sastrugi" explained as deep and tall "wrinkles" in the landscape that are "molded by the wind out of ice and snow," and the sheer vastness of nothingness that tricks the eyes into seeing mirages are beautifully and carefully described for readers (McCaughrean 76). Sym also provides readers with important big ideas about the frozen continent.

I tried to convince myself that I was standing on land—on the shore of the sea. But it was impossible. The Ice doesn't differentiate between land and water; it just smothers the whole continent, from the middle outward, then keeps spreading outward over the sea, roofing over huge sea inlets for a thousand miles. This was the ice tray in God's fridge, three thousand feet thick. (McCaughrean 77)

These descriptions of Antarctica become more sinister and deadly as the story progresses.

For example, Victor has made Sym and Sigurd walk ahead of the Haggulund (an all-terrain vehicle) in order to check for hidden fissures so they aren't all swallowed up by a crevasse. Sym and Sigurd fall into one, but since they are tied to the vehicle, they do not fall to their deaths. The scene describes what snow that covers a crevasse looks like ("a slightly different color") and what it might be like to fall through one of the thousands of crevasses that split the ice shelf.

We didn't go straight through, mind. Like snowy quicksand, the loose crystals swallowed first our boots, then our legs. A slightly different color, yes, I thought. Then, like sand through the neck of an hourglass, obeying gravity, the snow under our feet fell away, and we fell with it. A crust of snow had masked a crack in the ice: face powder over a scar. Now, with a peculiar brittle sigh, the snow crust subsided into the fissure. We fell like hanged men through the scaffold trap, feet first, perfectly vertical, out of the blinding brightness and into a gloom as blue as deep water or Death." (McCaughrean 234)

Other less romanticized geographical references include the "Ross Ice Shelf."

The Shelf isn't beautiful. It isn't anything. It's like a carpet warehouse where you can go to buy Nothing by the square foot. Broadloom nothingness. But Nothing was so much better than what was coming that I started to think of the Shelf as beautiful—a beautiful vacant antechamber to tomorrow, with nothing to do but sleep and eat and imagine. (McCaughrean 170)

What Sym is dreading is the “Shear,” described as the point of no return, past where help can easily reach them, and as a minefield of fissures and hidden dangers where any mistake would be fatal. Victor insists that in order to find Symme’s Hole, they must cross the “Shear” that leads up to the glacier, towards his coordinates where he is sure he discover a new world under the ice.

The physical geography is layered with scientific information about ice shelves and the moving ice pack. For example, after Victor has fallen to his death through an ice chimney, Sym is ready to give up and die as well since she is alone on “The Ice.” She romantically thinks that Titus’ body is not too far away, and in her cold, addled brain, decides that it would be nice to die and stay forever with him. But Titus, in his italicized voice, speaks up and sets her straight.

*“I’M NOT HERE!...THE ICE SHELF IS MOVING, YOU FOOL!”*

shouts Titus. *“The surface is moving! All the time! New stuff welling up in the center, pushing the old ice outward! Only a few miles a year but never stopping—on and on and on! Carrying everything with it: Bill and Birdie and the Owner wrapped in their tent. Taffy Evans under his bits of cairn: all carried along inside a river of ice—all the time sinking lower, like dead fish. Sinking through the ice, the saltwater gnawing the ice from under them...In the end, the Shelf spits everything into the sea! To wash about in the sea! Lawrence Oates hasn’t been in Antarctica for years, Sym! Twenty years ago his body dropped out of the bottom of the ice shelf and into the sea! OATES IS GONE! His body was food for the leopard seals and the crabs!”* (McCaughrean 330-1, emphasis original).



Since Sym's greatest fear is drowning, she picks herself up and heads out in search of shelter and rescue.

It is in Sym's desperate survival journey that readers learn about biological effects of cold on the human body. In order to prevent snow blindness, Sym puts tape on her goggles until there is only a pinprick opening left. Otherwise, the bright light would burn her retinas and she would experience white darkness, where the eye can no longer distinguish anything but the reflected light off the snow, and can be permanent (McCaughrean 298).

Sym is also injured on her survival adventure, cut by a piece of ice as she falls through another crevasse. The cut is deep, and she doesn't feel it. Sym explains:

In Antarctica, wounds don't heal, they reopen. It's Nature in reverse.

After South Africa, the bullet wound in Titus's leg healed and left nothing but a long, ragged scar in his upper thigh. But in the Antarctic it would have opened up again, flesh parting from flesh, laying bare the bone.

Healing in reverse. (McCaughrean248)

Sym's wounded leg constantly reopens and, besides the cold, is her greatest survival threat, but not because of infection: "[b]acteria could not survive here, so it could not be infection. Here even the common cold germ is put to flight by the uncommon cold" (McCaughrean 109). Readers learn that even hair cannot remain intact in the cold; "[i]t's a casualty of cold weather and not enough food and having to wear your hat all the time, even in bed: Your hair starts to fall out. Mine is" (McCaughrean 257-8). Readers also get a description of what happens to unprotected skin that is, ironically, scorched by the sun in Antarctica. Sym must constantly wear sunblock to keep her skin from blistering and

peeling off, and even with the sunblock, her face still suffers from the intense U.V. rays. All of these bits of information, fed to readers throughout the book, add up to quite an education about Antarctica, survival, and geography, offering many cross-curricular components and opportunities in the high school classroom.

### **Conclusion**

CYAL offers teachers a global window for their students, and this thesis is meant to raise the sash. Commonwealth Young Adult Literature can be an important addition to American secondary school curriculum. When placed alongside classics, both foreign and domestic, as well as homegrown YA titles, students get a more balanced and less Ameri-centric view of the world. If our efforts in American education are to create truly global citizens of the world, as recent educational buzz words within *The Common Core Standards Initiative* suggest, then including contemporary CYAL is one avenue to help reach this goal.

I was recently reminded of how important a broader world view is to American high school students and how truly narrow that world view can be as I lunched with a high school senior who was job shadowing professors and graduate students for a day. She asked what my thesis was about and I told her that I was researching foreign YA literature written originally in English. She asked about the countries the literature I studied originated from. I began listing, and when I got to Ireland, she stopped me, and earnestly said “I didn’t know Irish people spoke English.” I was stunned and dismayed. This young lady was in the top 20% of her graduating class and had taken numerous honors and dual credit courses, yet it was obvious she had very little knowledge about our

global community. It saddened me that graduating American seniors might not know that Irish people speak English. This is not meant to criticize her for not knowing, but to place emphasis on how truly Ameri-centric and isolationist our educational system can be. CYAL is not the only answer to closing this knowledge gap, but it is one important and available avenue to bridging it. CYAL has much to offer our students, and secondary English teachers can give the gift of increased global awareness and understanding by including some CYAL in the school curriculum.

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