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Abstract

Students are reading less, and enjoying reading less. Sticking to the same curriculum year after year in the hope that student attitude will suddenly change, that there will be an awakening in the classroom, and students will read the classics with enthusiasm cannot be done. It is a false hope. But there can be an awakening.

Using young adult literature in the high school English classroom is the solution. It will give new hope to teachers that as students come to enjoy reading, they will be more apt to, not only read more, but eventually come to read the classics. Teachers must provide that new hope to themselves, their students, their schools, and future generations through the use of young adult literature – indeed, a classic way to teach English.

Using Young Adult Literature: A Classic Way to Teach English

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Using Young Adult Literature: A Classic Way to Teach English

Introduction: Why Young Adult Literature?

As a ninth year teacher, I certainly recognize that my experience in the English classroom is not nearly as comprehensive as many others. However, the experiences I have had have led me to my current situation, a situation I believe is as positive as I have had in terms of teaching literature.

In my fourth year of teaching, I had changed schools and was assigned the junior and senior English curriculum. The cupboards in the room were filled with typical English fare: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hamlet*, and so on, as well as textbooks for use with both classes. The junior curriculum, I was told, had an American Literature bent and the textbook for use bore that out with selected short stories, poems, and plays spanning the history of American Literature. In college I had studied *Huck* fairly extensively, and had always hoped for the opportunity to teach Twain's classic. I began planning for the task immediately, excited for the chance to impart wisdom about society versus individual conscience, Twain's satirical, humorous writing, Huck's growth, and further fun (or so I thought) tidbits.

I was so naïve. Some of my brighter students actually read the novel – and some of them even enjoyed it. But to my dismay, the majority found their good friend “Cliff” and his notes to be a much better read. And with the myriad helpers available online, even those without *Cliff Notes* by their side, found *SparkNotes* and other such sources ready and willing to replace the novel. Determined to succeed in my teaching, I made changes each of the next two years in terms of the way I taught the novel including: students reading and preparing to lead the class discussion and/or activity on the reading assignment for the day, pairing *Huck Finn* with some easier reading which we shared aloud (*Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli, though on a much lower

level seemed to add some fun to the study). I paired it with films including *The Man Without a Face*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Swing Kids*. But over the next couple of years, the response from students did not change.

My frustration had risen to a level with which I had never been familiar in any of my year's teaching literature. To that point, I had taught *Beowulf* in a British Literature course each of my six years and kept the students enthused and interested. Burton Raffel's translation is highly accessible and I utilized several techniques to keep it alive including performing an excerpt from John Gardner's *Grendel*, letting students write their version, turning Beowulf into a political candidate, and so on. And so I wondered why I could not achieve similar successes with *Huck Finn*. Ultimately, what I believe was one of the reasons was that the language in *Huck* was so far removed from students. Such a thought is validated by Louise M. Rosenblatt, author of *Literature as Exploration*. Rosenblatt, professor emeriti of New York University, where she taught comparative literature and literary theory while developing a doctoral program in English, has been influential to teachers of all levels of literature for over six decades and she and her ideas are the subject of many works, including two book-length collections: *Transactions with Literature: A Fifty-Year Perspective*, edited by Edmund J. Farrell and James R. Squire for the National Council of Teachers of English in 1990 and *The Experience of Reading: Louise Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Theory*, edited by John Clifford in 1991. She offers the following ideas about the use of literature that is beyond young readers:

Very often in school, children are required to read works that demand a constant effort at comprehension because the vocabulary and sentence structure represent the next stage toward which they are being led. Or they may be required to read works written in an archaic language, very different from the language that they

hear about them or that is used by accepted contemporary writers. Few adults – even college professors! – impose on themselves the task of constantly reading works with a vocabulary that is strange to them or with a complicated style that demands unusual efforts of attention. Only rarely do they undertake such tasks. Most of the time their reading is at the level of their present vocabulary and powers of attention. . . . No wonder that many students . . . do not learn to read.

(205)

Her final words echoed in my mind as I considered what my job as an English teacher truly is. Little did I know the answer was not far off.

In the spring of 2001, the last year that I taught *Huck Finn* to my juniors, I discovered the answer. I was taking a Teaching Writing course at the University of Northern Iowa and began thinking in earnest about my teaching practice. Through the encouragement of the professor and my reading in the course, I knew I would be restructuring the writing portion of the college preparatory writing course I was teaching in order to, I hoped, improve student attitude about writing. (It is worth noting here that the changes made, while not radical, have achieved said goal – both student comments and my experience lend credence to that.) As I thought about what I would be doing with my writing course in the fall, I began thinking about how I could improve student attitude about reading.

I had read a book called *Rats Saw God* by Rob Thomas the previous fall, a story about Steve York, a high school senior who is one English credit short of graduation. He is a frequent user of marijuana, but in previous years demonstrated his capability in school with straight A's as well as being named a National Merit Scholar. Steve is given the chance to earn the English credit by taking summer school or writing a 100 page paper on a topic of his choice. Steve

chooses to write the paper, writing about the changes in his life from his sophomore to senior year. The book becomes the paper and Steve shares his experiences with the readers. When I read it, I thought of it as a “modern day *Catcher in the Rye*” and began thinking about how I might use the book. In thinking about that, I realized I could do more to help my students enjoy reading.

As previously noted, I had been a teacher of – and proponent of teaching – the classics. While I still utilize classic works like *Beowulf* and *Much Ado about Nothing* in the British Literature portion of my senior English class, I have realized that I can still create a challenge for my students and help them enjoy reading more. I believe one of my primary goals as an English teacher is to help students enjoy reading and want to read more – not to just shove a classic down their throats because it is what so many people think “they should be reading.” My notion is that if students come to enjoy reading, then one day, maybe they will read that classic – because they want to, not because their English teacher “made them.” As Rosenblatt says, “People who read for themselves will come to the classics at the point when particular works have particular significance for them” (207). The truth is, even when I did “make” students read the classics, despite my constant efforts at creating connections for students and offering unique ways to study novels, I found a majority of students would either use *Cliff Notes* or something of that nature, or not read at all. Of course, there were top students who read the work anyway, but a majority did not; clearly this did not aid in their development as readers or their enjoyment of reading. I am an English teacher. I had to make a choice: either make a change to help students enjoy reading – or keep doing what I had been doing because so many suggest that is what “should be done” and risk making reading more of a chore than an opportunity for enjoyment. I could not allow the latter to happen. I finally decided that a primary responsibility of an English

teacher is to help students enjoy reading. To make that happen, in courses where it is possible, young adult novels should be used instead of the classics.

Statement of the Problem/Question

To be sure, some English courses necessitate the use of what we might refer to as the classics – the canon of literature. In British, American, and World Literature, and similar such classes, using “great” texts seems natural. In general, English courses in which the course content is more broad, the use of young adult literature is important. This may come to the fore even more naturally in a situation where students are in a required general English course and the range of students is wide – as opposed to a British Literature elective in which the students attending have, by definition, elected to take the course and are therefore likely interested in the subject matter and in reading the material.

One of the great challenges facing educators today is helping students attain the basic skills necessary to achieve at a level that will allow them to participate in society in a productive way. With the advent of No Child Left Behind and other such governmental legislation, educators are faced with the daunting task of insuring all students achieve at a proficient level in reading, math, and science based on standardized test scores. Critics of education and proponents of such legislation suggest that students are not performing at a high enough level and are not attaining the appropriate skills.

In addition, our society today is becoming more driven by technology. Our world is inundated with high-speed Internet, “real life” video games – “rated E for everyone”, cell phones, digital this and digital that, even 30-minute pizza delivery and fast food In the midst of “high-speed,” immediate gratification lifestyles, reading has not only taken a back seat,

but it has been relegated to the trunk. That is not to say people do not read, but children today have so much more at their fingertips that picking up a book and spending hours – maybe minutes – reading is not a top choice. And why not? There is instant messaging to be done, phone calls to make, video games to play, and movies to watch – in a home theater with surround sound.

While the classics are worth reading, students today have a great deal of other “stuff” they would rather be doing. Rosenblatt writes,

Those who try to crowd into the school years everything that ‘ought’ to be read evidently assume that the youth will never read again after school years are over. People who read for themselves will come to the classics at the point when particular works have particular significance for them. To force such works on the young prematurely defeats the long-term goal of educating people to a personal love of literature sufficiently deep to cause them to seek it out for themselves at the appropriate time. (207)

Identifying the “appropriate time” is difficult because all individuals are capable of different things at different times in their lives. Teachers must be aware of their students’ needs in order to provide literature appropriate to those needs. In addition, as previously noted, some courses which students elect to take will afford students an opportunity to read classic literature. Still, Rosenblatt’s point is quite well taken; the key is to consider this notion fully, while still creating a challenge for students through reading. Yet, if students are asked to read material that is distant from their lives and experiences, engaging them will be difficult. Indeed, says Rosenblatt, “Too often . . . the classics are introduced to children at an age when it is impossible for them to feel in any personal way the problems or conflicts treated” (206).

Most educators surely believe that a primary responsibility is to produce strong students. An important part of doing so is making connections with students between what they are learning and how it might be useful. The idea is that teachers should seek to get into the world of students and give them the knowledge and skills necessary to move from their world into ours. Certainly, reading the classics would be a beneficial thing for students to do. However, if they do not read them, we have gained nothing; we won't have made strides in encouraging students to read and we will have likely only turned them off from reading that particular book. Indeed, says Rosenblatt,

Undoubtedly in many English classes today the student functions on two separate and distinct planes. On one plane, he learns the ideas about literature that his teacher or the literary critic presents to him as traditional and accepted by educated people. On the other plane, he reads the literature and reacts to it personally, perhaps never expressing that reaction or even paying attention to it. Only occasionally will there be a correlation of these two planes of activity. . . . When the images and ideas presented by the work have no relevance to the past experiences or emotional needs of the reader, only a vague, feeble, or negative response will occur. (56)

Rather than force feed the classics to students, and evoke a negative response not only to the classics, but to reading in general, young adult literature should be used to engage students in reading. Ultimately, the chain of logic for the use of young adult literature is as follows:

- 1) If students read young adult literature, they will enjoy reading more.
- 2) If students enjoy reading more, they will read more.

- 3) If students read more, they will get better at reading.
- 4) If they get better at reading, their enjoyment level will continue to increase.
- 5) With increased skill and enjoyment, students are more apt to be lifelong readers.

As we examine that chain of logic, some might ask whether a sixth point needs to be offered: If students enjoy reading, read more, and become lifelong readers, will they eventually choose to read higher quality adult literature, including the classics/canon? Such a point could certainly be added and it may be quite plausible; however, the greater goal is helping students become lifelong readers which is why that is the fifth and final point of the chain of logic. What good will reading the classics be if students do not continue reading – other than to hang the title from their mantle of “Books I’ve read”? The assumption could very well be that lifelong readers will, if interested, read classics. In addition, though, lifelong readers may read quality literature not considered part of the “canon.” A recent book, *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown, has found much favor in the public eye. While it may not prove to be the challenge of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, to most readers it is likely more enjoyable and easier to understand; therefore the challenge it offers is more meaningful. Brown does a fine job of challenging many basic Christian principles, but also imparting interesting information. Other authors, similarly, do great things. John Irving’s *A Prayer for Owen Meany* is an extremely powerful story that is intellectually challenging and stimulating, and quite enjoyable. Bill Bryson, though his books are not fiction tales, writes with great intelligence, teaching the reader every step of the way, while at the same time offering humorous insights. His combination of educating and entertaining is wonderful. *A Walk in the Woods* is typical of this style. If students become interested enough in reading because they enjoy it, they will be apt to read books like these – not

part of the canon, but still “great books.” Knowing people are reading is joy; the joy of reading is not contingent upon reading the classics.

Those who challenge this idea might “play” with the chain of logic. For example, they might suppose a child does not like vegetables, but prefers candy, hot dogs, fast food, and so on, making mealtime a struggle. Given the theoretical framework provided, such a challenge might be

- 1) If the child eats candy, s/he will enjoy eating.
- 2) If the child enjoys eating more, s/he will eat more candy.
- 3) If the child eats more candy, s/he will get better at candy-eating.
- 4) If the child gets better at candy-eating, the enjoyment of eating candy will increase.
- 5) With increased skill and enjoyment, s/he will be more apt to be a lifelong candy-eater.

This analogy fails. First, the original theoretical framework provided, does not suggest that students will just keep reading young adult novels, as is suggested here about eating candy. Instead, the suggestion is that by starting with young adult novels, students will grow in their enjoyment of reading. Cynics might suggest that students may just keep reading young adult novels all their lives, but that notion presumes that young adult novels are of low quality and unworthy or adult reading. It also indicates lack of faith in the idea that when people enjoy reading, they seek out books that appeal to them or that they hear recommendations of (whether from other adults, best seller lists. . .). This is what readers do. Creating opportunities for students to enjoy reading is imperative if students are to even have a chance of later choosing classics. If students don’t read or enjoy reading, there is little chance they will do so.

Another challenge might be, “Okay, so let’s start the child with candy. Will she grow in his/her enjoyment of vegetables?” Still, the analogy fails. Candy is void of nutrition. Candy is

filled with fat and sugar. Hot dogs and fast food are similar in terms of being filled with calories, fat, grease, cholesterol, and so on. Vegetables, however, are packed with nutrition and vitamins that our bodies need. young adult literature has similar virtues and elements as the “classics.” Students are reading words, improving vocabulary, experiencing plot twists, character development, themes, conflicts, and so on. Perhaps those things are not as deep as in the classics, but they are present. Junkfood and vegetables do not share similar elements – except calories. The problem is junkfood calories are empty calories. They do nothing to improve the person consuming the junkfood. Reading young adult literature is beneficial.

Some might try to carry the analogy to games and toys, but even then, one would not start children with chess. Checkers might be an appropriate starting point. Certainly, there are prodigies, but if we focused only on the prodigies, we would be leaving many children in the dust. Again, Rosenblatt is emphatic: “People who read for themselves will come to the classics at the point when the particular works have particular significance for them” (207). For this to happen, students must be provided opportunities which help them enjoy reading. Young adult literature provides that opportunity better than classics. If students enjoy reading, they may indeed eventually read the classics; if they do not enjoy reading, they may never read them. Proponents of the classics must ask themselves: why should students read the classics? The author does not suggest that reading the classics is bad. As notes, opportunities should exist for students to read the classics, but where possible, teachers should employ the use of young adult literature. The theoretical framework provided makes the argument for doing so.

Ultimately, those who challenge the theoretical framework must trust the person “feeding” the child. Surely, parents of a child who only likes junkfood do not just feed him/her junkfood, but try a variety of different vegetables. Perhaps s/he liked green beans with butter or

broccoli with cheese – that is a start. S/he might not like cooked carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, peas, or celery, but s/he did eat the beans and broccoli. Providing young adult literature for students is not comparable to “shoving junkfood down their throats.” By contrast, much of it is quite heady and intriguing. Much good young adult literature offers students a challenging, enjoyable reading experience. Rosenblatt writes, “Above all, the adolescent should have a wide range of alternative experiences in works that speak to him as he is now” (199). By using young adult literature, students are not fed “candy, hot dogs, and fast food.” Young adult literature is not “junk food for the teenage mind.” Instead, young adult literature is like a “vegetable” that will not only satisfy students, but also be “nutritious” as well.

Review of the Literature

Baker, Marianne I. “Reading Resistance in Middle School: What Can be Done?” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 45 (Feb. 2002): 364-366.

Motivated by an interview with a middle school student, Baker sought to determine how to help engage middle school students in reading. She mentions Stanovich’s *Matthew Effects* (1986) as being played out with many middle schoolers: those who are not good readers and are not engaged in reading, will not read, and will get worse at reading; those who are good at reading and are engaged in reading, will read, and will continue to get better at reading. Baker acknowledges that teachers are bound by mandated curriculum, budgets, schedules, and often by student resistance and apathy, but states that the issue of unengaged, resistant readers must be addressed. She cites Ivey and Broaddus (2000) who found that in middle school, the reading habits of students change and students may develop a negative attitude toward reading. They suggest that because middle school students have a wide array of habits, abilities, interests, and

needs, reading instruction can and should be catered to individuals. Baker focuses on the issues of choice, time, and the classroom to demonstrate how that can be done. She cites the authors of *Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement* (1999), who support reading choice for literacy growth, stating, “Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read” (366). A greater variety of classroom materials, notes Baker, may increase engagement of today’s middle schoolers. In addition to having a choice in finding books that connect to their lives, Baker believes students should have ample class time for conferences, discussion, response, and recommendation which will facilitate growth in reading and writing. The value of reading, writing, and responding, she contends, is “evident in the allocation of class time to do so” (366). In terms of the classroom, Baker again cites the authors of *Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement* (1999): “Adolescents deserve teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics” (366). Perhaps, she asserts, with choice, time, and an inviting classroom environment, students will be more likely to engage in reading.

Bushman, John H. “Young Adult Literature in the Classroom – Or Is It?” *English Journal* 86 (March 1997). Rpt. in *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 7-12. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

Bushman begins by stating that a number of writers have noted the importance of providing adolescents with literature that speaks directly to their lives – and that classical literature (the canon) is written primarily for adults and does not provide what young adults need. He offers thorough discussion of his reading questionnaire given to a random sample of close to 400 students grades 6-12. In general, his findings suggest that students would prefer to read different

books than those assigned in class; yet, he does note some students who say they do not have time for outside reading due to assigned reading. Bushman cites statistics from the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey that indicate students are not carrying the reading habit into adulthood. The survey scored nearly half of all American readers in the lower two of five reading levels. Indeed, he says, "It seems that schools have accomplished just the opposite of what they intend to do: they have turned students off from reading rather than making them lifelong readers" (10). Bushman believes young adult novels should be used with students because not only can adolescents better relate to the characters and plot, but they keep young people reading.

Bushman, John H., and Kay Parks Bushman. *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993.

The Bushmans are strong proponents of the use of young adult literature in English classrooms. While they believe that young adult literature can stand on its own merits, they assert that one of its best uses is as a bridge to the classics: "Our suggestion asks teachers to precede the classics with selected young adult literature that is similar in theme or focus to the classics. . . . The young adult novel may provide readers with the needed tools in literature study that may help when they are faced with reading adult literature" (131). They offer several examples of pairings for teachers, looking at such classics as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Walden*. Though the Bushmans do offer this as an alternative to teaching the classics in isolation, they make clear that the classics are not a good pairing with young adults. What students are being asked to read in schools, they say, is far removed from their experiences and interests and so students do not enjoy reading or keep reading. The Bushmans do offer reasons that teachers use

classics: anthologies are purchased for use in classrooms and offer many works, some believe universities want them taught, classics have stood the test of time, and out of guilt they “should” teach them. The Bushmans, however, argue against these notions. They find it difficult to recommend the use of anthologies when teaching a diverse set of students. They ask if the classics have stood the test of time because they are great literature or because they are required reading in college English classes or because they are “read” by students in anthologies in high school (and read again in college). They note that many university professors prefer that students come to college with competent writing, discussion, and literary analysis skills rather than having read books in high school that they will read again in college. They believe teachers should be willing to take a stand about what is taught rather than teach out of guilt. Two of the main problems the Bushmans note about the classics are that the classics “were really not intended to be read by young people . . . in addition, the classics are written in a style, syntax, and vocabulary that are often quite foreign to young adult [and adult] readers” (128). They believe that the “enjoyment of reading must be an integral part of the classroom to foster the positive attitude toward literature that is necessary for life-long reading” (27). They provide an extensive discussion about the attributes of young adult literature focusing on plot, characters, setting, theme, point of view, and style. Further, they provide a number of strategies for using young adult literature in the classroom as well as an array of titles of young adult novels and resources to aid in teaching them.

Copeland, Jeffrey S. "A Refreshing Breeze in Young Adult Literature." *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 4-6. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

In this piece, Copeland discusses how far young adult literature has come over the years. He notes, however, **that** beginning in the 1970s, when young adult literature really hit a peak, teachers began **what** Copeland calls "our first mistake . . . the convenient classifying of books" (5). However, he **suggests** that recent trends point to teachers and librarians and students selecting books **not** because they are about something but because they are about people. Such focus, Copeland **states**, allows the reader to become more personally involved with literature, to interact and **develop** empathy. According to Copeland, young adult literature needs – and is getting more – "**believable** characters whose beliefs, feelings, and attitudes are developed as they learn about and **grow** through exposure to" subjects like ethnicity, drugs, sex, ecology, family relationships, and **so** on (6). If this continues, he believes we will be able to help students better understand themselves and their world which in turn may well "produce mature readers capable of making **intelligent** and realistic choices" (6).

Crowe, Chris. "*De Facto* YA Literature and False Expectations." *English Journal* 91 (March 2002): 100-101.

In this piece, Crowe discusses the fact that much of what has been taught in English classes over the years has not **changed**. The works are turned to as a form of "de facto" young adult literature – viewed as such **because** it is what teens are required to read. Crowe says that this literature will likely be their **only** exposure to literature and reading and will not provide motivation to read once they have **moved** beyond school. He acknowledges that "class lists" vary, but that certain

works appear and reappear throughout high school English curriculum. Elective reading, he notes, based on reports about what young adults read varies more widely with some “classics” alongside contemporary adult fiction like Grisham, King, Crichton, Andrews, Steel, and so on. Crowe writes, “It’s natural and good that teenagers are reading – by choice and by requirement – a wide variety of adult books, but I worry about how these students, especially those who are now reluctant readers, will learn about YA literature when they’re adults” (101). Crowe is concerned about this because he wants to ensure that future generations of young adults know about young adult literature. To do so – to help young adult literature survive – he says that today’s young adults must read it in high school so that they know about it as adults. He suggests, “Their encounters with quality YA books will be good for them now and good for our schools later” (101). As such, he notes, it would be nice if one day instead of the “de facto” young adult literature of today, schools included real young adult books by the many “current masters of literature for teenagers” (101). It is up to English teachers and librarians, he says, to introduce the best young adult literature to all their students.

----- “The Problem with YA Literature.” *English Journal* 90 (Jan. 2001): 146-149.

Crowe addresses the objections to young adult literature. He states that most objections to young adult books fall into two categories: they are not the classics and they corrupt the young. Though he agrees that some young adult novels fall short of the depth of the classics and that some can have a negative effect on certain teens, he contends young adult novels lure readers because of great writing, engaging stories, and memorable characters. He suggests, though, that some problems do exist that make it difficult to infuse young adult literature into the mainstream and into classrooms. What to call it is one issue; using the term “young adult” connotes that teens

are not adult. Though true, teens want to be viewed as adults, so any term contrary to that repulses them. Quality is viewed as a problem in the eyes of some. Crowe notes that because of a few “bad YA apples, the entire field has come under fire” (146). He reminds readers that the range of quality in young adult literature – as with adult literature – is broad. Because critics of young adult literature are most familiar with the poor quality literature, they are unaware of the wealth of high quality young adult novels. The third problem Crowe recognizes is that young adult novels have not been around long enough to find their place in the canon. In terms of it being difficult for some to put young adult novels in the same league as classics, Crowe cites critics who state that young adult novels are teachers’ ways of capitulating to an entertainment driven society. Crowe’s response to this criticism is just because something is entertaining does not mean it is not of high quality. In the same way, such logic would lead one to suppose that though the classics are “inherently unpleasant” they are “ultimately good for you” (147). On the other hand, Crowe believes that some advocates of young adult literature create trouble for it, citing David Laubach in an issue of *California English*, who writes, ““In their desire to push young adult literature, these (NCTE) authors make the classics villains”” – even though, as Crowe notes, teachers would not suggest that classics should be completely replaced by young adult novels. But this does put critics of young adult novels in a defensive position. Crowe returns to a discussion of the generalizations about young adult novels; the media hype around bleak (i.e. low quality) young adult novels has “obscured the many other fine YA books being published each year” (148). He reminds readers that there are some “bleak classics,” but that does not mean all classics are bleak; the same is true of young adult literature. The overly negative perception of young adult novels, Crowe says, is a big problem; he argues that one way to solve it is for teachers to guide students to books most suitable to them.

Fisher, Jan. "Affirming the Use of Young Adult Literature in the Classroom – A Little Psychology of Reading." *EricEd245211*. June 1984. Rpt. in *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 71-78. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

Fisher begins her article by noting Robert Penn Warren's list of why people enjoy reading fiction. Despite the many reasons, she notes the vast number of young adults who do not read; she suggests we have taught students how to read, but have not instilled in them the desire to read. She provides a discussion of the five objectives of teaching reading in secondary schools: 1) to instill a genuine appreciation of literature, 2) to enable students to gain from reading in such a way as to better deal with society, 3) to gain deeper understanding of the literary art form, 4) to view literature as a comfortable expansion of their peer group, and 5) to attain a better grasp of the mechanics of writing. Appreciating literature is imperative to gaining in other areas, but an appreciation of literature must be experienced, not taught. Fisher cites several "definitions" of classic literature, including books that stand the test of time or books that have high stylistic prestige. Opponents of the use of young adult literature point to these characteristics, supposedly unattainable for young adult literature. However, Fisher asserts that much young adult literature is not given the chance to stand the test of time, but those that are, do so. In terms of stylistic prestige, she writes that classics were not written with the adolescent reader in mind, but were written for an adult audience. Fisher discusses this further by focusing on why many teachers do not teach young adult literature. The three main reasons are that teachers are not familiar with young adult literature, teachers do not see it as challenging enough, and because they believe students should be exposed to the classics. Fisher's response to these reasons is that, first,

teachers being unfamiliar with young adult literature is sad and detrimental to teachers and students; moreover, she writes, “The fact of the matter is one cannot always correlate reading level and literary sophistication” (74). Fisher also lists ten developmental tasks identified by Donelson and Nilsen that all adolescents must handle. The tasks are 1) Achieving new and more mature relations with agemates of both sexes, 2) Achieving a masculine or feminine social role, 3) Accepting one’s physique and using the body effectively, 4) Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults, 5) Achieving assurance and economic independence, 6) Selecting and preparing for an occupation, 7) Preparing for marriage and family life, 8) Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic responsibility, 9) Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior, and 10) Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior. Utilizing young adult literature, she says, makes sense because students can associate it with their own experience – rather than reading the classics which becomes more an exercise in decoding. Finally, she asserts that, though some people worry that reading for pleasure takes away from the supposed “fact-finding” mission in education, young adult literature is an “experiential process which prepares students to face real-life issues” (76). Indeed, she contends we must capitalize on students’ strengths and experiences.

Foster, Harold M. *Crossing Over: Whole Language for Secondary English Teachers*. Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994.

Foster’s focus in this book is on helping teachers create whole language classrooms; however, within that focus is a discussion about how to bring the major areas of English instruction to life for students. Included is the notion that classics can indeed be taught within a whole language framework. Foster begins by defining whole language and presenting the principles of whole

language instruction. From there, he moves to questions teachers can ask to reflect on their teaching to determine if what they are doing in their classroom is proving successful. Foster does acknowledge that young adult literature has helped make a “positive dent in the decline of reading in this country because [it] offer[s] students powerful reading experiences about subjects important to them” (16). Subjects dealt with include family and friend relationships, drug use and abuse, sex abuse, violence, and so on. Young adult books are appealing to readers, he says, because they are thematically relevant to young people, they provide a bridge between children’s books and adult books, many of them are of very high quality in terms of writing and context, and students enjoy them. He writes, “These books succeed because they are contemporary” (17). However, he does not dismiss the classics. The classics, notes Foster, form the “literary core of the secondary English classroom” and the list of books is relatively unchanged over the years (17). According to Foster, though in some classes the classics have made reading a dull experience for students, “many excellent English teachers use the ‘classics’ with great success in a student-centered, meaningful way. . . . Classics can work if taught well and in the spirit of whole language. Eliminating them from the secondary curriculum is not recommended” (19). Instead of eliminating the classics from the classroom, Foster suggests that the curriculum be expanded to reflect the diversity of students and the literature available to them. After presenting the introduction, Foster then presents a chapter-by-chapter look at different issues in real whole language classrooms. Focus is given to key methods in such classrooms: reading workshop, different types of discussion, the writing process, publishing writing, and assessment, for example. Coverage of Shakespeare is given attention in one chapter. Foster notes that even with a traditional text such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, students can learn how to read a difficult work, be given confidence in handling difficult material, gain understanding about such a work,

come to enjoy Shakespeare, and gain greater skill in reading, writing, and oral presentation – presuming the teacher puts activities, discussion, and assignments to use that allow for those things. Foster presents an example of a classroom where it does work. A chapter is also devoted to teaching classic novels. *The Great Gatsby* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are the two novels given attention here. Again, Foster uses a real classroom to serve as an example. Though using classics for a whole class read is noted as perhaps the “most difficult and potentially least rewarding literary teaching experience,” that is not to say the classics should not be taught (139). Foster’s recommendation via the classroom used is that books must be carefully chosen and teachers must be willing to address difficult issues and deal openly with students’ confusion and uncertainty about the books. By doing so, “students feel more confident as readers” (139). Finally, Foster offers a focus on a teacher who learned about becoming a whole language teacher through experiences with a veteran of whole language teaching. At the close of each chapter, Foster includes questions for teacher reflection, not only about the chapter read, but about how the ideas might be implemented. The primary focus of Foster’s book is on using whole language instruction in the English classroom, but his focus on two things merits discussion here: young adult literature has made a difference in English classrooms and the lives of young adult readers; classics should remain in the curriculum and can be used successfully if whole language teaching techniques are put to use.

Gallo, Donald R. “How Classics Create an Aliterate Society.” *English Journal* 90 (Jan. 2001): 33-39.

Gallo’s closing paragraph is not to be missed in this piece: he does not want readers to conclude he is opposed to reading and teaching the classics, “but knowing that the traditional classical

literature curricula have done more harm than good to so many students over the years,” he urges readers to consider using some of the “wonderful contemporary books that are available to meet the reading needs and interests of today’s students” (38-39). What leads up to this closing paragraph is a discussion of why young adult literature, rather than the classics, is the most appropriate choice for students to read. Gallo believes students, in general, are not ready for the classics during their teen years. He writes, “*The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns!* They are about ADULT issues. Moreover, they were written for EDUCATED adults who had the LEISURE time to read them. They were also, not incidentally, written to be ENJOYED – not DISSECTED, not ANALYZED, and certainly not TESTED” (34 – author’s emphases). He discusses the notion that the negative experiences with literature that students have had – and their resulting attitudes – have created an aliterate society where children are taught how to read in the early years, then forced to read works they dislike so much they have no desire to read as adults. He yearns to see “the love of reading” as the top goal of the English curriculum in all grades in all schools; he believes advocates of teaching the classics make loving and appreciating literature their main goal, but the opposite has been true. Gallo reminds us that teens, like most readers, want to be entertained by what they read. Older, more advanced readers, he says, can handle the classics, but even the most advanced teens are still teens and a classics-only curriculum does not meet their needs. Those who are concerned about the challenge offered by young adult literature are cautioned that “there are also some superb novels in this genre that are more complex – sophisticated enough for even AP readers” (36). Students can enjoy their reading and learn the skills taught with the classics. Gallo writes,

It bothers me a great deal when high school English teachers or university professors condemn young adult books because they believe they are shallow and

poorly written. Those people are ignorant elitists who haven't done their homework, haven't read even an adequate sampling of the novels, short stories, nonfiction, and poetry for teens that is available for classroom use and independent reading. (37)

He then provides myriad examples of authors and books that provide teens an enjoyable, quality literature experience. Finally, before he closes, Gallo offers suggestions to teachers of how to add young adult literature to their classrooms.

Gibbs, Nancy. "The Real Magic of Harry Potter." *Time*. 23 June 2003: 60-67.

Though *Time* is not an academic journal, this piece is included because Gibbs makes clear the pervasive nature of young adult literature in society today. Gibbs reports that J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is in print in 200 countries, in 55 languages, in Braille, in 200 million volumes. The printing of the fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix* was the largest first printing ever at 8.5 million copies. The fact is children – and adults – are flocking to these books, an indication of what books relevant to their experience can do for children. Indeed, says Gibbs, "Why are children around the world so eager for the next installment of a story about a boy wizard? Maybe it's because they see themselves in him" (61). Still, the *Harry Potter* series, like young adult literature, has critics. Gibbs reports that Yale professor Harold Bloom, "keeper of keys to the literary kingdom," dismissed the first *Harry Potter* book as "thin and derivative," has since refused to read the sequels, and suggests that "in another generation or so Harry Potter will be in the dustbins everywhere" (64). But Maurice Sendak, author and illustrator of 80 children's books believes Rowling is a "terrific writer. . . She has taken some of the best English literature and cooked up her own stew. It's brilliant"

(64). Still others fall somewhere in the middle like Gail Hackett, an elementary school librarian: “I don’t know that it is literature like *The Grapes of Wrath*, but it’s not *Captain Underpants* either” (64). Indeed, the *Harry Potter* series is an enjoyable challenge for readers of most levels.

Glasgow, Jacqueline. *Using Young Adult Literature: Thematic Activities Based on Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences*. Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 2002.

Glasgow begins with a focus on her realization that her “mission in teaching secondary English classes was not merely to meet the needs of future English majors, but particularly to convince the average student – given all the other interesting things in life – to engage in literary texts” (xxiii). Thus, she abandoned traditional methods and books, noting the resistance she encountered to “reading and formalistic analysis of classics” and instead put alternative texts to use to meet student needs (xxiii). The body of literature from which she garnered those texts is young adult literature. Through the use of young adult literature, Glasgow states, her students have become passionate about reading and even reluctant readers have done so, often going beyond the requirements. Glasgow then presents background on Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory. Briefly, Gardner has identified nine areas of intelligence that individuals possess; each individual has natural inclinations toward a certain intelligence or two, but has the capacity to develop and use the rest. Glasgow suggests that in addition to the four stages of reading literature put forth in 1993 by Milner and Milner (reader response, interpretive community, formal analysis, and critical synthesis), schools must teach for understanding; teachers must help students “so that they truly understand and can apply what they have learned”

(14). To do so, Glasgow discusses the responsibility that English and language arts teachers have to tap into the intelligences of their students. She notes that such teachers are, by nature, experts in the verbal/linguistic intelligence; however, if teachers confine curriculum and instruction to just that intelligence – common in schools in general, but especially in English classrooms – teachers will tend to reach those students who also prefer the intelligence. Yet, Glasgow contends, if “we allow students to learn and make-meaning in the intelligences of their strengths, their linguistic intelligence is more likely to develop” (15). This does not mean all teachers must utilize all nine of the intelligences every step of the way. Ultimately, teaching for understanding means “engaging students in meaningful experiences where they are asked to explore their intelligences and relate learning to real life situations . . . we must know our students in new ways and think about curriculum, instruction and assessment differently from traditional practice” (14). Using young adult literature and the multiple intelligences makes doing so most plausible. Following this thorough introduction, Glasgow includes 11 chapters written by different authors on different themes using young adult pieces as the vehicles for studying those themes; often a major piece is used as the centerpiece for the study in conjunction with other works. Within the studies, students participate in activities and do assignments that encourage the use and development of the multiple intelligences. For example, Joyce Rowland uses the theme “Building Tolerance and Empathy Toward Others” with the *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Linda Rice employs the use of Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* to deal with the issue of “Conformity vs. Individuality.” Allison Baer uses S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* for the thematic study of “Living in an Outsider Society.” Within each chapter, the author introduces the theme and book followed by ways to implement Gardner’s multiple

intelligences. Glasgow contends if teachers use such techniques, students will be engaged in meaningful experiences and will be helped in relating their learning to real life situations.

Ivey, Gay, and Karen Broaddus. “‘Just Plain Reading’: A Survey of What Makes Students Want to Read in Middle School Classrooms.” *Reading Research Quarterly* 36 (Oct/Nov/Dec. 2001): 350-371.

Though middle school students are often characterized in studies as disinterested and disengaged in reading, Ivey and Broaddus discovered that middle school students are interested in reading when given choices and opportunities to read books connected to their lives and interests. They also discovered that when it comes to offering such opportunities, middle schools may be missing the mark. They surveyed 1,765 sixth graders in 23 diverse schools in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States to learn about middle school student engagement in reading. The authors believe that the lack of engagement in readers has much to do with “the mismatch between what students need and the instruction they likely receive” (353). This mismatch, they suggest, is based on three primary issues: typical reading demands in schools rarely take into account student developmental and personal differences; there is a mismatch between what students want to learn and the content requirements of the schools; students may not be able to make connections between what they read in school with their out-of-school reading. They contend the “challenge for students to become more proficient and engaged readers and writers . . . may be further complicated by subject matter that is uninteresting, difficult to understand, or both” (353-354). Ivey and Broaddus cite a growing body of research which points to several ways to combat this. Hynds (1997) states that teachers who respond to students’ needs – cultural, social, personal – can help engage students in reading. Atwell (1998) suggests that

giving students ownership for their literacy growth by honoring their voices and their need for self-expression can lead, as Oldfather (1993) notes, to “personal investment in literacy activities (354). Finally, the authors believe that adolescents who are able to connect literacy to “real-life-out-of-school issues and personal interests indicate more positive feelings about reading and writing in school” (354). These beliefs guided the authors’ research; they focused their energy on hearing from students about reading. Ultimately, they believe student voices must be present in the classroom. They cite Nieto (1994), who proposed that “student voices must be included in discussions of school reform if we are ever going to make any real changes” (369). The authors continue,

What we learned from asking students critical questions is that both instruction and curriculum goals need to be evaluated in response to what students need. Our purpose is not to override or diminish the importance of teachers’ judgment in favor of what students say they want. On the contrary, we believe that understanding students’ perspectives will help teachers make good instructional decisions” (369).

Their findings indicate that high-engagement reading and language arts classrooms include time to read, time to listen to teachers read, and access to personally interesting materials. If this is the case in such classrooms, students will be more apt to read and enjoy reading

Jago, Carol. *Classics in the Classroom*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2004.

Jago presents a thorough discussion about teaching the classics in English classrooms. She includes chapters on teaching classic poetry, as well as classic novels like Shelley’s

Frankenstein, London’s *The Call of the Wild*, Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Shakespeare’s

Julius Caesar, and offers a substantial chapter focused on a lesson design for classical literature, using Homer's *Odyssey* as a model. She also provides lengthy lists of classic texts she believes are appropriate to particular grade levels. Though this information is included and may prove useful to teachers – especially those who use the works included – she spends a good deal of time dealing with the issue of whether classics should or should not be taught. She begins with an anecdote about teaching *The Grapes of Wrath*, being frustrated by students reading *Cliff Notes* or *SparkNotes*, about students not keeping up, about student attitude, and then being reminded that it “doesn’t matter whether or not sixteen-year-olds say they ‘like’ a book. What matters is that they read it” (xi). She goes on to state that most teenagers do not want their lives shaped by authors and books not of their choosing; thus, she says, teachers should not always give young readers a choice. Jago believes that instead of finding ways to get through class days without student complaints, teachers should develop lessons for teaching classic literature that help students grow as readers and build on their prior knowledge and experiences. However, she warns teachers not to confuse reading for pleasure with the study of literature. She discusses her “love/hate” relationship with young adult literature. Though she says she adores the books in the genre, she believes that if these are the only kinds of books students read, they simply have not studied literature. Jago writes, “With so many students hardly reading anything at all, it seems preferable to have them read something rather than nothing. While this point is well taken, I would argue that classical literature possesses qualities that popular fiction does not” (4-5). As such, she believes students’ reading worlds should consist of two kinds of books: mirror books which reflect their lives and experiences and window books which open their eyes to other worlds, times, and cultures. She notes that many well-intentioned teachers have “abandoned the classics in favor what they think will be more user-friendly titles” and suggests that is a mistake;

just because “students can’t read a book on their own doesn’t mean that, with help, they can’t and shouldn’t read it” (7). Jago cites Arthur Applebee’s 1989 study which showed that the most frequently taught texts in grades 7-12 were virtually unchanged during the previous 25 years; Jago believes that is cause for celebration not lamentation. In terms of choosing books for the classroom, Jago discusses the criteria for doing so and states that “many good books that students love to read and should read do not belong on a course syllabus” (47). Rather than such books, Jago argues for the use of “great” literature, noting that teenagers want to have deep experiences, heightened sensibilities, and maturity in judgment, but they do not realize reading books can provide opportunities for that. Teachers have a responsibility, she says, to make connections between the classic literature and students’ worlds. Jago asserts that this task is made easier with the use of difficult, challenging texts which “offer young readers insight into the wider world than the one they inhabit” (65). If teachers determine the text is too difficult, she believes such teachers shortchange their students; students may not be able to read the books without teacher help, but providing critical attention to the elemental literature, students can handle the books. Ultimately, Jago contends “literature lessons must recognize and confront the challenges that classics pose for young readers. . . . Playing games with the classics accomplishes nothing” (160).

Lesesne, Teri S. "Developing Lifetime Readers: Suggestions from Fifty Years of Research."

English Journal 80 (October 1991). Rpt. in *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 47-50. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

Lesesne's primary goal here is to name ways to help teachers develop students into lifetime readers. She identifies five key points to do so: 1) Lifetime readers are made not born, 2) Children and young adults need role models to emulate, 3) Children and young adults need time in school to read for pleasure, 4) Free reading can be used to develop lifetime readers, and 5) A curriculum rich in response will aid in the development of lifetime readers. One study Lesesne points to within the discussion is one she did with 500 middle school students. She discovered that 75% of the students read less than one hour a day and 20% read only one book in the last six months. Further, she reminds us that reading competes with TV, video games, music, computers, and so on, and that students spent an average of 3-6 hours watching TV. Though several of the key ideas presented point to the likely use of young adult literature – typically chosen by students for free and pleasure reading, Lesesne does not exclude traditional English materials. She writes, "We do not have to choose between what students want to read and what the curriculum says they should read; we don't have to decide between response and analysis in the classroom" (49). She suggests that if we keep searching for answers to the question of how to develop lifelong readers, we will encourage students to develop habits that will lead them to become lifelong readers.

Milburn, Michael. "Lighting the Flame: Teaching High School Students to Love, Not Loathe, Literature." *English Journal* 91 (Nov. 2001): 90-95.

Milburn is a proponent of using some traditional novels that connect to young adults like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *A Separate Peace*. He also believes teachers should make an effort to infuse contemporary books into the curriculum. His discussion here is centered on an article titled "I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read: How American High School Students Learn to Loathe Literature" by novelist and journalist Francine Prose. Prose is critical of the sameness of English curriculum in classrooms throughout the United States over the years. She dismissed *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a "sentimental, middle-brow favorite" (90). She claims that much of this "trash and semi-trash" is being taught with "dreariness" (90). Ultimately, Prose accuses English teachers, says Milburn, of assigning simplistic, badly written books that "breed incompetent writers and readers who loathe literature" (91). She blames them for the dreadful writing and inability to analyze literature that students bring with them to college. However, Milburn, who has taught high school and college, suggests students continue to learn how to write through constant writing and rewriting under the tutelage of a teacher. And as for literary analysis, Milburn asserts that most authors likely did not write their work for such a reason; moreover, he states that such analysis is more appropriate to English majors already passionate about literary studies than it is for high school students. Milburn points out that Prose's remedy is for high school teachers to choose texts for their literary sophistication and discuss style not content and issues. But, says Milburn, Prose's arguments are focused on blaming English teachers for the ills of students; English teachers are an easy target, yet the bulls-eye is much larger than that. In addition, he notes that Prose did not bother to study students and teachers to determine what they think about the literature they read and how it

affects them. She instead makes generalizations and draws conclusions without substantial research findings. Another critic Milburn quotes is Harold Bloom who, in an interview, commented on the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series, stating, “That’s not reading because there’s nothing there to be read. . . . People tell me ‘well at least the child is reading,’ to which my answer is, no, the child isn’t reading” (94). Bloom believes what should be taught is the “best that has been written ever, the best that has been thought ever.” In response, Milburn writes, “I have come to harbor no delusions about which constitute great literature and which don’t, which reward close study and which serve best as jumping off points” (94). Further, he says that he has learned that teachers must often lead students to great literature by starting them with ordinary – “not bad or frivolous, just ordinary” – writing (94). This is what he calls, “lighting the flame” and will, as he suggests in his title, help students love, not loathe, literature (94).

Monseau, Virginia R. “From the Editor.” *English Journal* 90 (Jan. 2001): 16-17.

Monseau writes, “Young adult literature is here to stay, and English teachers owe it to themselves and their students to become familiar with the genre” (17). Though she believes this, it is not necessarily the case. She discusses the fact that young adult literature truly took flight in the 1960s and 1970s with the novels *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel, and *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier; adolescents began reading with interest and enthusiasm. Still, young adult literature did not find its way into the curriculum. Monseau cites several reasons for this and addresses such criticisms. Some believe young adult novels are not substantive enough for literary study, students can read the books on their own and do not need a teacher’s support, the curriculum is full enough as it is, the books are depressing with no adult

role models, and the books invite censorship. In response, Monseau notes that “anyone who has read widely in the genre of young adult literature knows that there’s plenty to study” (17). She is adamant that students being able to read on their own is a plus not a minus; she suggests that wise teachers know how to integrate material into their classes; she reminds us that young adult literature effectively mirrors the difficulties presented by adolescence. She acknowledges that “English studies have a history of resisting new literature . . . and new genres . . . so the reluctance of the profession to embrace the no-longer-new genre of young adult literature is not unusual,” but, says Monseau, the time has come (17).

Nilsen, Alleen Pace, and Kenneth L. Donelson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001.

In this book, Nilsen and Donelson deal extensively with young adult literature and the issues surrounding it. The main purpose of their book, they say, is to help readers gain understanding about how to use and promote young adult literature and how to deal with critics of young adult literature. They define young adult literature as “any book freely chosen for reading by someone [ages 12-18]” (xvi). They provide quite a thorough discussion of the background of young adult literature and authors, spending significant time with the history of adolescent literature. Here, they focus on the different types of books, the development of the genre over time, the kinds of books popular with kids, and the rise of criticism. They cite Dwight L. Burton, who, in 1951, wrote the first critique of young adult novels:

The good novel for the adolescent reader has attributes no different from any good novel. It must be technically masterful, and it must present a significant synthesis of human experiences. Because of the nature of adolescence itself, the

good novel for the adolescent should be full in true invention and imagination. . . .

The novel for the adolescent presents a ready field for the mature artist. (73)

Other early proponents are cited, but it is also noted that biting criticism was not far behind.

Still, the authors present several characteristics of what makes for the best young adult novels – and they include an extensive list of the “best” young adult books by year, beginning with 1967.

The characteristics of the best books, they contend, are as follows: 1) young adult authors write from the viewpoint of young adults, 2) the characters solve problems without parents, 3) the books are fast-paced, 4) young adult literature includes a variety of genres and subjects, 5) the body of work is multicultural, 6) the books are basically optimistic and the characters make worthy accomplishments, and 7) successful novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults. Following their discussion of these characteristics, Nilsen and Donelson discuss the stages of literature appreciation from pleasure to aesthetic appreciation. Ultimately, the important points to take from these stages is that teachers, librarians, and parents “should meet young people where they are and help them feel comfortable” in their particular stage (41). This is imperative, they suggest, because each level is built on the one below it. They write, “People do not go *through* these stages of development; instead they *add on* so that at each level they have all that they had before plus a new way to gain pleasure and understanding” (35). One issue that all English teachers must deal with is the pervasive amount of mass media in the lives of students today. The authors contend that studying mass media is important for teachers to determine what appeals to students. They note that, generally, heavy computer users are readers. And they conclude that the influence of mass media did not occur overnight – and it will continue to have an influence. As such, they state that teachers should “encourage young people to read and to develop skills in literary appreciation” and to think about how the mass media

affect what they do (107). One reason the authors contend young adult literature can so well reach students and encourage further reading is because “good young adult authors treat candidly and with respect problems that belong specifically to young adults in today’s world” (125). The problems dealt with in young adult literature include family relationships, friends and society, living in a multicultural world, body and self, and sex. Problems in such areas will continue to exist so the clear connections between young adult literature and the real world of young adults will remain. In addition to dealing with the real problems of young adults, young adult literature exposes students to a variety of types of literature: romance, adventure, western, sports, religion, supernatural, fantasy, science fiction, humor, historical fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and so on. Though “formula” books are criticized by some, the authors note that such stories do often match the particular stage of life in which students find themselves. Because of that, the authors suggest such books are likely to continue to remain “among the most popular for young adult leisure time reading” (172). In general, though, when it comes to much of what appears in young adult literature, teachers should promote the idea that “reading for pleasure is a worthy activity and goal, in and of itself. If we, or our students, gain something more than pleasure, we should be grateful that serendipity is still at work in today’s complex world” (175). Because of the vast amount of books in the young adult literature genre, Nilsen and Donelson recommend that teachers keep track of what they read and promote it through writing, doing book talks, and creating displays. Despite the amount of quality books available, critics continue to suggest that because the books are not part of the canon, they should not be used. However, the authors cite Katha Pollitt, contributing editor of *The Nation*, who writes, “In a country of real readers a debate like the current one over the canon would not be taking place” (322). Pollitt, Nilsen, and Donelson concur, noting that the alternative would be “millions of readers freely choosing

millions of books, each book becoming just a tiny part of a lifetime of reading” (323). The authors focus on putting young adult books to use in the classroom. Nilsen and Donelson believe the best young adult literature will reach all students – including (and, perhaps, especially) reluctant readers – because of the following key reasons: 1) it is written specifically to be interesting to teens, 2) it is usually shorter and more simply written than typical adult books, yet it is not written in a condescending fashion, 3) there is so much of it that individuals have a good chance of finding something interesting, 4) they are written by good contemporary authors, so the stories are more dramatic, better written, and easier to get involved in than some of the controlled curriculum, and 5) the language used is similar to the language students are accustomed to hearing. The authors also contend that guided reading of such books will keep students engaged in reading, will prevent the “drop-off in reading that usually occurs when students begin high school,” and will thereby do what so many schools want: improve test scores (347). The authors offer five principles for English teachers about the teaching of literature: 1) literature must be entertaining and challenging, 2) a wide range of literature should be read by teachers, 3) teachers should be adept at reading aloud to students to interest and intrigue students, 4) teachers must remember the “distance in education and sophistication between them and their children,” and 5) teachers should only teach and use literature they enjoy (357-58). With these principles in mind, young adult literature deserves a place in the classroom. However, Nilsen and Donelson are aware of the major criticisms of young adult literature and provide teachers with counterarguments for ten of the most common. Such counterarguments suggest that critics read some of the best young adult novels, determine if what is considered the “greatest” literature is “great” for high school students, and recognize that many students do not find reading enjoyable, but young adult literature may reach them. Nilsen and Donelson’s work is an

extremely comprehensive study of young adult literature, and the authors are frequently cited in related work.

Petersen, Sue A. "A Love Affair with American Literature." *English Journal* 89 (Nov. 1999): 40-47.

Petersen writes from the perspective of starting her teaching career as a lover of teaching the classics – and she did so. After six years in the classroom, she realized that even the “good” students, who dutifully did the assignments and fed back the material on quizzes and tests, did not enjoy reading the literature. The epiphany in her teaching life was the recognition that she “didn’t want to become the same phony English teacher [she] was before, acting like the study of great literature was exciting but feeling like it was something [her classes] had to ‘get through’” (41). She believes English teachers have a genuine desire to help students love reading and literature, but passing that love on to students is difficult under the constraints of typical curriculum and classroom libraries. So, after an experience with another teacher, she put what she learned to use, beginning with the idea that students love to read when they have a choice. However, she acknowledges that students do not always make good choices. She also decided not to pair the more contemporary literature she was going to use with traditional literature. She cites Arthur Applebee as saying that ““these noncanonical materials, almost by definition, do not fit well into traditional analyses of historical periods, literary devices, major genres, or even familiar themes”” (41-42). Petersen then discusses how she put her ideas into practice: a seminar approach in which students select American Literature seminars like “A Woman’s Place,” “All the Americas,” “First America,” “African America,” “Coming of Age in America,” and even “The Canon.” Students then read contemporary works – often with young adult characters – that

fit into these themed seminars. “The Canon” is set up for those students who are ready for and/or interested in reading classic works. She offers thorough discussion about the types of works used in each seminar as well as assessment practices. Though she has colleagues who criticize her approach to teaching American literature as “lacking rigor and who find fault with [her] for not teaching what [she is] ‘supposed’ to teach,” she is glad her course does not fit the dictionary definition of rigor (harsh, severe, inflexible) and chooses to help students discover books they enjoy and want to discuss so she can help students become lifelong readers (46). She writes,

The purpose of literature in our classrooms should not be to create junior literary scholars but rather to help students make sense of the world. English majors and teachers who love literary criticism and theory were first lovers of books, and before many of our students can appreciate scholarly analysis, they, too, need to discover their own reason for reading. (46)

Petersen believes her transformation as a teacher of literature has helped transform students who “for the first time see reading as something they want to do” (47).

Reading Study Survey. Administered to junior English students. Hudson High School. Hudson, Iowa. May 2002 and 2003.

The author surveyed his own students for two years before and after using young adult novels as the primary texts in his classroom to determine the effectiveness of doing so. Before and after reading young adult literature, students were asked to consider their ability as readers, their attitude about reading, their enjoyment of reading, their knowledge of works relevant to their lives, and, following the use of young adult literature, students were asked to consider whether

reading young adult literature improved ability, attitude, level of enjoyment, and time spent reading. Surveys were anonymous. Specific discussion related to this study is offered in the section on analysis of research findings. Surveys are found on Appendix A.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature as Exploration*. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1995.

Because Rosenblatt's book serves as the springboard for this work, additional focus will be provided herein. Rosenblatt's book is directed to current and future educators; she provides discussion of ways to help students explore literature and respond in thorough positive ways. Within this discussion, she points to the importance of adolescents encountering "literature for which [they possess] the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment" (25) to connect to their own situation and engage in reading. Not only does Rosenblatt afford educators an opportunity to think about ways to improve instruction, she discusses the important issue of what students bring to their literature experience. As such, she reminds us that adolescent students come to the experience of literature – indeed, the classroom in general – "out of a mass of absorbing and conflicting influences . . . physical changes . . . [and] a heightened self-consciousness and curiosity about the self" (79). Rosenblatt suggests that teachers often tend to evade or gloss over such issues, but that "in any teaching situation an awareness of the student's preoccupations and emotional needs should constantly be brought to bear on the problem of ensuring that the student has responded to what is actually offered by the text" (104). Considering that, Rosenblatt offers much discussion about the importance of offering students literature opportunities connected to their lives. Young adult literature, though not advocated for, seems the natural choice based on her discussion. She writes, "Frequently literature is the

means by which the youth discovers that his inner life reflects a common experience of others in his society” (194) and contends that, “above all, the adolescent should have a wide range of alternative experiences in works that speak to him as he is now” (199). Clearly, young adult literature fits this prescription. In addition, her discussion of the classics emphasizes such notions:

Many of the great classics have elements of vivid action, strong emotion, and suspense that may provide an incentive for the more mature or the more secure student to clear away the obscurities due to unfamiliar language or literary forms. Too often, however, the classics are introduced to children at an age when it is impossible for them to feel in any personal way the problems or conflicts treated. For the great majority it would probably be much wiser to postpone such reading and to gradually build linguistic flexibility through the use of more familiar materials. When the students are more mature, more experienced, they will then be able to apprehend enough of what the great classics offer to be willing and eager to clarify any linguistic obscurities. (206-207)

Rosenblatt does not suggest that classics should not be read, but she does make clear that other literature opportunities will likely best serve students. Indeed, she asserts,

Those who try to crowd into the school years everything that ‘ought’ to be read evidently assume that the youth will never read again after school years are over. People who read for themselves will come to the classics at the point when particular works have particular significance for them. To force such works on the young prematurely defeats the long-term goal of educating people to a

personal love of literature sufficiently deep to cause them to seek it out for themselves at the appropriate time. (207)

Rosenblatt's book deserves such careful discussion because of her thorough focus on creating positive opportunities for student interactions with literature. Moreover, her reputation in the English field demands the time spent here.

Samuels, Barbara G. "Creating Lifetime Readers: A Novel Idea." *Into Focus: Understanding and Creating Middle School Readers*. Eds. G. Kylene Beers, Kylene Beers, and Barbara G. Samuels. Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1996. 347-360.

Samuels offers a discussion of her experience as a child, growing up to love reading, noting that books helped her to define herself and to expand her understanding of the world. When she became an English teacher, Samuels was concerned about the role of secondary schools in creating lifelong readers. Because she had not had any classes in adolescent literature, she surveyed teachers to determine their knowledge about and attitude toward young adult literature. She discovered that the primary reason teachers did not use it in their classrooms was because they were not familiar with it. Those who have not read young adult literature, she says, "are missing the opportunity to draw their students into literature, to help them savor the joys of losing themselves in a book" (351). On the other hand, she says, "Teachers who are enthusiastic readers of books that connect with teens and who share their excitement about the variety of excellent novels available to their students are rewarded" (351). Samuels proposes that teachers use young adult novels to help develop lifelong readers. She believes that once students discover that reading novels can be meaningful, "they can be led to apply what they have learned about the novel form to the reading of the classics" (354).

Small, Robert C., Jr. "Some of My Favorite Books Are by Young Adult Authors and Some Are by Jane Austen." *English Journal* 75 (April 1996). Rpt. in *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 111-114. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

Small details his early experience as a teacher when he was a proponent of teaching the classics and had not read any young adult literature. But in looking back, he acknowledges that he should never have condemned what he knew nothing about – something that seems to continue to happen to young adult literature. He writes that the better young adult novels satisfy him more fully as serious works of literature than most contemporary adult novels. Small notes that authors of novels (over time) have not written for young adults and that until the 1960s there were not many books read and enjoyed by young adults and adults. When that started happening, the problem, he says, was that publishers would categorize the books as young adult literature which was motivation enough for adults not to read them. Small names a number of authors who now write for both adults and adolescents. He writes, "What these novelists do marvelously well is to use shortness and simplicity to achieve directness and honesty. They use the struggles of teenage life to give readers, adolescent and adult, insights into their own lives" (113). He goes on to say that such works of literature "have serious intent, careful craftsmanship, effective expression, and other qualities that make literature literature" (113).

----- "The Literary Value of the Young Adult Novel." *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries (Top of the News)*. 5. Rpt. in *Young Adult Literature: A Contemporary Reader*. 39-42. Ed. Jeffrey S. Copeland. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 1997.

Small discusses the issue of quality with regard to young adult literature. To begin, he offers some historical context, noting especially the change in content of young adult literature throughout the years. Early in its development, authors focused on the societal prescriptions of virtuous teens being rewarded, doing what society hoped teens might do, rather than what they did do. Eventually, authors began writing with a more realistic bent, but the literary quality of young adult novels was viewed as suspect. However, Small makes the case that young adult literature merits being viewed as quality literature. He cites one critic who suggests that "We cannot submit to the dismissal of classical literature with the cry 'boring' so often delivered before the work is even begun" and that young adult literature would be appropriate for out of class reading, but would not serve students as classical literature (40). In response, Small discusses the characteristics of young adult novels and then discusses the fact that if critical standards are applied to young adult literature in the same way as they are to adult novels, young adult literature quite clearly deserves to be termed quality literature. For example, though young adult novels are characteristically not much more than 200 pages, the length is tied to the vital importance of economy; "wasted space and wasted opportunities are more disastrous in the young adult novel than in longer forms, where more opportunities are available" (42). Another example is point of view. Small states that young adult novels are frequently first-person narratives, but when the third-person is used, the novel is usually told from the perspective of and centers around one main adolescent character. He writes, "Young adult novels should therefore not be condemned, as they often have been, for giving only one point of view or for not

giving an omniscient perspective. Skillful use of the chosen point of view is a requirement of all novels” (42). He notes that there is no requirement that novels of a certain subgenre use a wide variety of viewpoints or provide the perspectives of a wide variety of ages, only that the point of view and narrator be chosen wisely. Thus, applying similar standards to adult and young adult novels demonstrates that young adult novelists do indeed meet such standards.

Zipperer, Freya M. J., et al. “Literacy Education and Reading Programs in the Secondary School: Status, Problems, and Solutions.” *National Association of Secondary Schools Bulletin*:86 (September 2000).

The authors examine the status of literary education, identifying current problems and possible solutions. They surveyed 46 principals from a large school district in Georgia about their reading programs and analyzed those findings. The authors state that literacy skills in secondary schools are poorer today than they once were. They cite Goodlad (1984) who suggested that there is a lack of time devoted to reading, maintaining that reading occupies only 2% of class time in high school. They cite others who share the view; Donahue et al (1999) report that one-third of grade 12 students read fewer than five pages each day. Horkay (1999) pointed out that students who read for fun daily scored higher on national reading tests than those who read for fun less, noting also that there was no significant change in the amount of pleasure reading done by teens between 1992 and 2000. The authors suggest that television may be the problem; Donahue et al reported that 69% of high school seniors reported watching two or more hours of television each day. According to the authors, schools should demonstrate that “reading is viewed as an important aspect of the curriculum as well as the nonacademic program.” They propose that, since we tend to make time for skills that we value, teachers and administrators

must make clear they value reading as an important skill. Providing inservice opportunities for teachers to learn about instructional strategies for reading is a key starting point, and was cited by the principals in the survey. Learning to make reading meaningful rather than viewing it as an isolated skill is imperative for teachers. The authors suggest “principals can make literacy skills a priority by creating a climate that says to teachers (in professional ways) and students (in practical ways) that ‘we value reading in this school.’”

Analysis of Research Findings

The primary arguments against using young adult literature focus on the fact that classic literature can be connected to the lives of students. Indeed, Foster writes, “Classics can work if taught well and in the spirit of whole language. Eliminating them from the secondary curriculum is not recommended” (19). Milburn asserts that traditional novels can be used if they connect to the lives of young adults. He names *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *A Separate Peace* as books that fit the bill.

Other opponents of the use of young adult literature believe students need to be exposed to the classics, noting it does not matter if they do not like them because they need to read them. Jago states that many challenging texts “offer young readers insight into the wider world than the one they inhabit” (65).

Quality of literature is another issue raised by those opposed to the use of young adult literature. Jago notes that “classical literature possesses qualities that popular fiction does not” (4-5) and goes on to say that “many good books that students love to read and should read do not belong on a course syllabus” (47).

The arguments in favor of the use of young adult literature deal largely with the importance of using novels that relate to young adults. Using novels that contain characters, plots, and themes that connect to the lives of students will encourage students to read more and will help students enjoy reading more. Fisher believes using young adult literature makes sense because students can associate it with their own experience – rather than reading the classics which becomes more an exercise in decoding. Gibbs, when writing about the popularity of the Harry Potter series, suggests “children around the world [are] so eager” for it “because they see themselves in him” (61). And Ivey and Broaddus bring to focus the import of making connections: adolescents who are able to connect literacy to “real-life-out-of-school issues and personal interests indicate more positive feelings about reading and writing in school” (354).

In addition, students will likely become more mature readers if they read more and enjoy it; the use of young adult literature increases the chance that students will become lifelong readers. Petersen believes all English teachers desire to help students love reading and literature, but using the constraints of a typical curriculum filled with the classics makes doing so quite difficult. She contends that the purpose of literature in classrooms is not to create “junior literary scholars” but to help them become lifelong readers and lovers of books (46). The Bushmans state that using young adult literature will help students enjoy reading and that the “enjoyment of reading must be an integral part of the classroom to foster the positive attitude toward literature that is necessary for life-long reading” (27). Moreover, reading young adult literature will provide a foundation for students to move on to classics and adult literature. They also assert that young adult literature will serve as a bridge to the classics and will “help them when they are faced with reading adult literature” (131). The more students read, the more they will grow in their enjoyment of reading.

Proponents of young adult literature also point to the fact that many young adult novels are of high quality and prove challenging even to advanced placement readers. Small believes that teachers should not be afraid to use young adult literature because it is quality literature; the best works available “have serious intent, careful craftsmanship, effective expression, and other qualities that make literature literature” (“Some of My . . .” 113). Chris Crowe, young adult literature aficionado and young adult literature columnist for *English Journal* writes about the negative perception. He suggests that because critics are most familiar with the poor quality young adult literature, they are unaware of the wealth of high quality young adult novels. He reminds us that the range of quality in young adult literature – as with adult literature – is broad. Indeed, he says, there are some “bleak classics” but that does not mean all classics are bleak; the same is true of young adult literature. Gallo suggests that, indeed, there are “some superb novels in this genre that are more complex – sophisticated enough for even AP readers” (36). Those who have read in the field of young adult literature know that, as Monseau notes, “in the genre of young adult literature . . . there’s plenty to study” (17).

As the arguments surrounding the use of young adult literature are examined, certain strengths and weaknesses come to the fore with regard to both sides of the issue. A major strength of the arguments for the use of classics is that using the classics maintains what many believe to be high quality staples in the curriculum. Jago points to Applebee’s 1989 study which showed that the most frequently taught titles have remained the same over 25 years. Jago states that “with so many students hardly reading anything at all, it seems preferable to have them read something rather than nothing . . . [but] would argue that classical literature possesses qualities that popular fiction does not” (4-5).

Beyond this issue, is the acknowledgement that the classics can connect to the lives of students. Glasgow believes that if teachers adjust their way of thinking and use Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, classics can be taught and connected to students' real life situations. She even offers a thematic study of "The Canon." Similarly, Foster advocates for a whole language approach to help connect the classics to the lives of students. Jago helps teachers fight the seeming disconnect between the classics and the lives of students; she recognizes teens do not want their lives shaped by books and authors not of their choosing, but says teachers should not always give young readers a choice. Instead, she suggests teachers develop lesson plans for teaching classic literature that helps students grow as readers and build on their experiences. The argument for the use of the classics is strong if teachers can find ways to do what these authors suggest.

Finally, advocates of using the classics contend reading the classics helps create a shared cultural bedrock. What books fall into the "classic" genre is generally accepted and identifying these for readers is easily done. Thus, proponents suggest using the classics will have cultural and societal benefits for readers.

While there are strengths to the argument for the classics, the weaknesses of the argument are more prevalent. The issue of quality is a point that bears little weight. As has been noted, many young adult novels are of a high quality, worthy of literature study; similarly, not all classic novels merit being termed high in quality. Quality or not, there is no guarantee that students will enjoy, let alone, read classic literature. In fact, the advocates for the use of the classics indicate that teachers must do more than normal to have a chance to engage students. In two cases (Glasgow's argument for Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory, and Foster's argument for whole language instruction), this would require teacher training for them to infuse

such techniques. Though not a bad thing by any means, the classics are clearly not as accessible to young adult readers. Further, Foster's solution to use whole language instruction brings a completely new issue to the table as many educators have an aversion to whole language, and whole language has been the target of much criticism in the education field.

The Bushmans note that the classics "were really not intended to be read by young people . . . in addition, the classics are written in a style, syntax, and vocabulary that are often quite foreign to young adult (and adult) readers" (128). Gallo concurs, writing, "The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns! They are about ADULT issues. Moreover, they were written for EDUCATED adults who had the LEISURE time to read them. They were also, not incidentally, written to be ENJOYED – not DISSECTED, not ANALYZED, and certainly not TESTED" (34 – author's emphases). Similarly, Petersen contends that "the purpose of literature in our classrooms should not be to create junior literary scholars" (46). Further, the advocates of classic literature recognize the strengths of young adult literature and believe students should be exposed to them. Jago, perhaps the strongest proponent of the classics, even admits to adoring young adult novels.

Ultimately, proponents of using young adult literature would not disagree that there are benefits to using the classics. However, creating a shared cultural bedrock can still occur without having young adults read them. If young adults do not enjoy reading, they may never read the classics, but if they first enjoy reading, they may well come to read them. In addition, suggesting common reading experiences with the classics creates a shared cultural bedrock is also to suggest there is one set of books people should read. The question of how such a "list" comes to be created must be asked.

Like the arguments for the classics, the arguments for the use of young adult novels have strengths and weaknesses. There are three weaknesses that stand out in dealing with the arguments surrounding young adult novels. Three of the sources presented in the review of literature have a middle school bent. Because the author is advocating for the use of young adult novels in the high school English classroom, these sources may make it seem more plausible for them to be used with middle school age students. Second, regardless of the age with which young adult novels are used, there is no guarantee that students will eventually read the classics, which proponents suggest is likely to occur. And, finally, the notion of connecting to the lives of students is called into question. Jago states that it “doesn’t matter whether or not sixteen-year-olds say they ‘like’ a book. What matters is that they read it” (xi).

The strengths of the arguments for the use of young adult novels outweigh the potential weaknesses. Indeed, three sources reviewed are geared toward middle school students; however, the information provided is not to be dismissed. Baker cites Stanovich’s 1986 study in which he identifies what is termed the Matthew Effect: students who are not good readers and are not engaged in reading will not read, and will get worse at reading; those who are good at reading, and are engaged in reading, will read, and will continue to get better at reading. This notion can easily be connected to high school readers. The other authors (Ivey and Broaddus and Lesesne) focused on the connections young adult novels have to students’ lives and the potential they have for developing lifelong readers. These same issues are used as arguments for the use of young adult novels with high school students.

Though there is no guarantee students will come to read the classics, several authors discuss ways to use young adult literature to bring students to the classics. Milburn suggests that some novels, considered classic literature, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *A*

Separate Peace fit into the young adult genre. Here, students would not only be able to find connections to the novels studied, but also be exposed to classic literature. Even if such novels are not used, if students do not enjoy reading, they will likely not ever read the classics; however, if students can be helped to enjoy reading through the use of young adult literature, they may, as Rosenblatt suggests, come to the classics when they are ready. While the classics are worthy of study, high school students are not the best audience for them. Again, the Bushmans remind us they “were really not intended to be read by young people . . . in addition, the classics are written in a style, syntax, and vocabulary that are often quite foreign to young adult (and adult) readers” (128). Gallo suggests that because of negative experiences students have had with the classics, they do not enjoy reading. However, if they read young adult literature as teens, when they are older, more advanced readers, they can handle the classics. The issue is that a classics-only curriculum does not meet the needs of young adults. Like Gallo, Petersen contends, as previously noted, that “the purpose of literature in our classrooms should not be to create junior literary scholars but rather to help students make sense of the world” (46). Even the advocates of classics recognize the problems of using them. Foster, who believes classics should not be eliminated from the curriculum suggests that using the classics as a whole class read is perhaps the “most difficult and potentially least rewarding teaching experience” (139). Glasgow, who believes the classics can be taught well if connected to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory, asserts that young adult literature has greater potential for “engaging students in meaningful experiences” (14).

The quality of young adult literature has been called into question; however, the proponents of using young adult literature make clear that quality need not be an issue. Gallo believes that critics are not aware of the substantial amount of quality within the field of young

adult literature. He states that those who condemn young adult literature for being shallow and poorly written are “ignorant elitists who haven’t done their homework, haven’t read even an adequate sampling of the novels, short stories, nonfiction, and poetry for teens that is available for classroom use and independent reading” (37). Samuels concurs, noting that those who have not read young adult literature “are missing the opportunity to draw their students into literature, to help them savor the joys of losing themselves in a book” (351). Moreover, Small and Nilsen and Donelson are adamant about the quality available in the field. To the doubters, Nilsen and Donelson remind us that many of the books are written by good contemporary authors, so the stories are more dramatic, better written, and easier to get involved in than some of the controlled curriculum. Further, Small states that many authors today are writing for young adults and adults and works in the young adult literature field “have serious content, careful craftsmanship, effective expression, and other qualities that make literature literature” (113). In addition, Foster, who advocates for the continued inclusion of the classics recognizes that many young adult books are of very high quality in terms of writing and context.

Finally, when it comes to young adult literature, teachers can employ the use of such novels without having to resort to additional techniques with the hope students will be engaged. If such techniques are utilized, the chance of students enjoying the literature is even greater. Glasgow suggests that using young adult literature with Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory provides the greatest opportunity for students to succeed as readers and have positive experiences with literature. Foster’s suggestion to use whole language to help bring the classics to life, but acknowledges the appeal of young adult books because of their appeal to readers, thematic relevance to young people, and the bridge they provide between children’s and adult books. When teachers are able to provide books to students that they enjoy and want to read,

there is a greater chance that students will read more and continue reading beyond school, becoming lifelong readers. Using additional teaching techniques may help do that, but are not necessary as with the classics.

As the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments are examined, the preponderance of information points to the use of young adult novels in the classroom. Clearly, young adult novels are more easily connected to the lives of young adults than are classics, they have greater potential for leading students to become lifelong readers, and they are of high quality. However, opponents of the use of young adult novels likely remain concerned about quality and the dismissal of classics from the curriculum. The author does not advocate for the complete elimination of classic literature. Issues to be considered when determining what novels to use with students include individual needs and interests, exposing students to a wide range of literature, and how to use the classics.

Some students may be more ready for classic novels than others. However, using the classics as a whole class read, as has been pointed out by Foster, is potentially the most difficult teaching task. Teachers must provide students with a wide range of literature, accessible to their students. Meeting the needs of all students is necessary. Young adult novels provide the most plausible option for doing so. Baker cites the authors of *Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement* as saying “Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read” (366). In addition to allowing for student choice in the classroom, several authors believe that any books used in the classroom should be connected to teens and their lives and interests. Even Jago, a classics proponent, believes this should occur.

Much has been made here of the issue of whether classics are appropriate for use with young adults. If students read literature that is connected to them and are given the chance to

read high quality young adult literature, they will not only develop as readers, but will very likely eventually do what many traditionalists and critics of young adult literature want students to do: read the classics. Petersen believes English teachers have a genuine desire to help students come to love reading. Moreover, she says, those same English teachers “who love literary criticism and theory were first lovers of books” (46). As such, “before many of our students can appreciate scholarly analysis, they, too, need to discover their own reason for reading” (46). It certainly is not the case that the classics are bad for students. These authors are recognizing the need to first help students love reading. Rosenblatt, in fact, suggests that many of the great classics may be appropriate for the more mature student; “too often, however, the classics are introduced to children at an age when it is impossible for them to feel in any personal way the problems or conflicts treated” (206). She suggests that for most students it would be best to postpone the reading of classics and build student readers with more familiar materials. As students become more mature and more experienced, she believes they will be better able to handle what the classics have to offer. Indeed, she asserts, “People who read for themselves will come to the classics at the point when particular works have particular significance for them” (207). If the classics are to be used, however, teachers should consider the suggestion offered by the Bushmans and “precede the classics with selected young adult literature that is similar in theme or focus to the classics” (131). The other way to provide students with exposure to the classics is to do so in classes where that is appropriate; elective classes like British or American Literature would be examples of such classes. Students will have elected to be in such classes and will expect the curriculum to fit the titles. In classes where the curriculum is more flexible, young adult literature should be used. Using young adult literature affords students the best chance for success in leading students to enjoy reading and become lifelong readers.

Nilsen and Donelson contend that guiding students to young adult literature will keep students engaged in reading and will prevent the “drop-off in reading that usually occurs when students begin high school” (347). In turn, schools will not only have helped create lifelong readers, but will do what all schools are being asked to do: improve test scores. Though this is not the primary goal of using young adult literature, it is an outgrowth of it and will satisfy school administrators and the government.

Ultimately, most of the literature – offered by proponents and opponents of young adult literature – would suggest that the curriculum be expanded. The opinions range from eliminating the classics to using only the classics, but most authors fall somewhere in the middle; they believe classics can eventually be read by students, but that, first and foremost, students must be given the opportunity to read books that connect to them so that they enjoy reading and develop as readers. If opponents of young adult literature expand their horizons to realize the quality available in the field, they may be more likely to bring young adult novels into the curriculum, and achieve the success so clearly possible by using them.

In addition to the work of others discussed here, determining whether the program instituted in the author’s classroom worked is important. Though the author was confident his students would not only enjoy the literature, but would be challenged by it and achieve academically because of it, the author could initially only base that on student reading responses and personal observations. The author believed his assessments were strong and served the students well, while meeting school curriculum guidelines. Still, echoing in the author’s ears is a question posed him about students gaining from certain curriculum by a workshop presenter: “How do you know?” The author decided to find out.

Beginning in the 2001-02 school year, I ordered five books: *Rats Saw God* by Rob Thomas, *Chinese Handcuffs* by Chris Crutcher, *Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. (I have since added *Say Goodnight, Gracie* by Julie Reece Deaver, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Crutcher and *Slave Day* by Thomas to my library of classroom sets.) To retain a challenging atmosphere in my classroom and afford students an opportunity to read a great deal, I set this up as a reader-response situation. Students had approximately six weeks to read a selected number of books. To earn an A, my honors juniors would read and respond to four books, for a B, three books, for a C, two books, and for a D, one book. All students were required to read *The Catcher in the Rye* because, while I believe it has wonderful connections to young adults, it is also considered a classic which would satisfy anyone concerned about students not reading classics. In addition to the above requirements, students could not choose more than one book by an author. In the regular junior class (with a wide range of students and few at an honors level), the numbers were reduced by one book, the time was extended to eight weeks.

The job of students was to respond to the books in a personal way (see Appendix B). Though this would be the only major writing turned in all year without being typed, getting the students to respond "from the gut" was important to me. I wanted to know how they felt as they read, what they liked, did not like, how they connected to the characters, the events. I wanted to know if the books were leaving a mark on my students. Rosenblatt writes,

The adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment. He, too, must draw on his past experience with life and language as the raw materials out of which to shape

the new experience symbolized on the page. The teacher of literature, then, seeks to help specific human beings discover the satisfactions of literature. (25)

Creating a meaningful experience from which my students would derive satisfaction was important to me. I wanted them to be challenged, but I wanted them to enjoy what they were doing. Each book is approximately 200 pages, most surpass that length. For each book, students were to write one page of response for every 50 pages read and provide cover pages with pertinent information including recommendations, lessons learned, main character information, and so on. There is no question in my mind, after reading their responses, that they have read the books. Each response is unique and centers on different points, issues, events, and the like in each book. If I presented students with the idea that they would be writing four, 4-page papers, they would surely grumble. Students in my writing class grumble at such notions – even if the paper is a short 2-pager. But the students reading these books lose themselves so completely in the study that nary a grumble is heard. This is the third year I will use this idea; at the beginning of this term, a student in my honors class, Charlie, observed, “This is when we get to read 4 books in, like, a month, isn’t it?” Though I let the students know it would be six weeks, not a month, I was most struck by Charlie’s observation that they “get” to read 4 books rather than “have” to read 4 books. This is the kind of attitude I want to create. Students know when they are in my classroom that I have high expectations, but that I will strive to create unique learning opportunities for them. In the forefront of my mind is the notion of setting students up for success not only in the classroom, but beyond the classroom (college, technical school, work, and so on). Using content that is enjoyable and challenging – like young adult novels – is imperative to helping students achieve success.

While reading and responding to the books takes the majority of the time in our study, we spend another several weeks working on culminating projects. Depending on how much time we have, I like to have individuals write an essay about a chosen book and connect it to a certain audience for a certain purpose (see Appendix C). Whether or not that is included, one final element is included: a formal group presentation in which students address a selected “audience” about a chosen book (see Appendix D). These Performance Assessment Tasks provide an alternative, yet traditional, way of assessing student knowledge and connections. The authentic nature of these assessments further adds to the import of our study. Students present to a “real audience” and deal with issues directly related to our school. Using real audiences and issues encourages students to take more stock in their learning; the tasks are not separate from their experience. Thus, not only do they provide a challenge, but the students recognize a direct link to their lives and school. In the course of our study, 21 of the 23 benchmarks established for junior and senior English students by the Mid-Iowa School Improvement Consortium are satisfied (see p.74 and Appendix E). In a matter of two months, students achieve great things in their eyes, my eyes, and even the government’s eyes.

Most important to me is how much the students enjoy reading the novels and the likelihood that they will continue reading. They devour the books. There have been several occasions when students have read all the novels, continuing even after the study is complete. Each of the years I have introduced this study to my students, the majority of them aim to earn an A. I will never be bothered if 100% of my students strive for this goal; if all of my students read 4 books in six weeks, I will be more than content knowing they have read so much. I am confident this experience has made reading a more enjoyable part of my students’ lives and they will be more positive about reading in the future. My observations and interactions with students

– in combination with the aforementioned surveys make this quite clear. Reading experiences such as the one just described will not only lead students to read more, but will improve their skill as readers in the short term.

To determine if students did gain in the way the author suggests, surveys were developed to give to students prior to beginning the reading study and at the completion of the reading study (see Appendix A). What follows is a breakdown of student responses to the surveys. Possible responses were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). To insure that students make a decision about the statements on the survey, neutral responses were not accepted. Moreover, some students disagreed with statements like “Reading young adult novels made me enjoy reading more” because they already enjoyed reading. Students were asked to make a note on their surveys if that was the case. An asterisk will be placed next to those statements where this is the case. The total number of respondents was 78 (48 from 2001-02 and 30 from 2002-03). The percentage of respondents to each area follows in parentheses after the number.

Before the Reading Study

	SA	A	D	SD
1. I am a good reader.	16(20.5)	43(55.1)	19(24.4)	0
2. I enjoy reading.	24(30.8)	33(42.3)	16(20.5)	5(6.4)
3. I read regularly for pleasure outside of school.	12(15.4)	26(33.3)	26(33.3)	14(17.9)
4. I know there are books to which I connect.	23(29.5)	41(52.6)	11(14.1)	3(3.8)
5. Reading is an important tool for my success in school, work, the world . . .	25(32.1)	42(53.9)	9(11.5)	2(2.6)

After the Reading Study

	SA	A	D	SD
1. I am a good reader.	14(17.9)	52(66.7)	12(15.4)	0
2. I am a better reader than I was before our reading study.	12(15.4)	50(64.1)	*15(19.2)	*1 (1.3)
3. I enjoy reading.	27(34.6)	37(47.4)	13(16.7)	1(1.3)
4. I read for pleasure outside of school.	21(26.9)	26(33.3)	27(34.6)	4(5.1)
5. I know there are books to which I connect.	34(43.6)	42(53.9)	2(2.6)	0
6. Reading is an important tool for my success in school, work, the world . . .	34(43.6)	40(51.3)	4(5.1)	0
7. Reading young adult novels has improved my attitude about reading.	13(16.7)	40(51.3)	*24(30.8)	*1 (1.3)
8. Reading young adult novels has helped me enjoy reading more.	12(15.4)	41(52.6)	*23(29.5)	*2(2.6)
9. I intend to read more now that I have been exposed to young adult novels.	17(21.8)	22(28.2)	*37(47.4)	*2(2.6)

Comparing the before and after results of the survey is imperative. Prior to beginning this reading study, 59 students (75.6%) believed they were good readers. After the reading study, 66 students (84.6%) believed they were good readers. In addition, those who did not believe they were good readers declined from 19 students (24.4%) to 12 students (15.4%).

Results indicate 62 students (79.5%) believed they were better readers after this reading study. Therefore, even though a majority of the students believed they were good readers before the study, nearly 80% believed they were even better after the study. Moreover, of the 16 students (20.5%) who did not believe they were better readers after the study, 11 said they were already good readers.

The number of students who enjoy reading was also high prior to beginning the study, with 57 (73.1%) saying they enjoy reading. After the study, 64 (82%) said they enjoy reading. Further, the number of students who did not enjoy reading declined from 21 (26.9%) to 14 (18%). And of those, only one student strongly disagreed with the statement "I enjoy reading" after the reading study, as opposed to five prior to the reading study.

More students indicated they read for pleasure after the reading study. Before the reading study, 38 students (48.7%) said they read for pleasure, but after the reading study, 47 students (60.2%) said they read for pleasure. Prior to the study, 40 students (51.2%) did not read for pleasure, while after the study, only 31 (39.7%) did not read for pleasure. Again, there was a marked decline in those responding "strongly disagree" to the statement "I read regularly for pleasure outside of school." Prior to the study, 14 students (17.9%) strongly disagreed with that, while only 4 students (5.1%) strongly disagreed with that statement after the reading study.

More students recognized there are books to which they can connect. Prior to the reading study, a large number – 64 (82.1%) knew there were books to which they connected. After the

reading study, 76 students (97.5%) knew there were books to which they connected. Prior to the study 14 students (17.9%) did not know about such books. After the reading study, only 2 students (2.6%) still didn't feel like they knew there were books to which they connected. In addition, prior to the reading study, 3 students (3.8%) strongly disagreed that there were books to which they could connect. No students strongly disagreed with that notion after the reading study.

Reading was also seen more as a tool for success. Prior to the study, 67 students (86%) saw reading as such. After the reading study, 74 students (94.9%) saw reading as an important tool for their success. Further, prior to the reading study, 2 students (2.6%) strongly disagreed that reading was an important tool to their success, while no students strongly disagreed with that notion after the reading study.

The final three areas to look at were only focused on after the reading study. In response to the statement, "Reading young adult novels improved my attitude about reading," 53 students (68%) agreed or strongly agreed. Of the 25 students (32.1%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed, 22 indicated either they already had a good attitude or their attitude did not change.

In response to the statement, "Reading young adult novels helped me enjoy reading more," 53 students (68%) agreed or strongly agreed. Of the 25 students (32.1%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed, 19 indicated they either already enjoyed reading or they did not change. Prior to the reading study 5 students strongly disagreed with the statement, "I enjoy reading." One of those students indicated that s/he strongly agrees that reading young adult novels helped him/her enjoy reading more.

In response to the statement, "I intend to read more now that I have been exposed to young adult novels," 39 students (50%) said they did. Of the 39 students (50%) who said they did not intend to, 9 of them indicated they already read regularly.

As the findings are considered, two things stand out: 1) Students enjoy reading. 2) Students do not read for pleasure regularly outside of school. Indeed, only 47 students (60%) said they would begin reading more regularly for pleasure outside of school. That leaves 31 students (40%) who say they will not. With this information in mind, we must wonder about students who do not have the opportunity to read books like the students in this study did. Indeed, by the end of the study 97.5% of students reported knowing there were books to which they could connect – an increase of 15.4% from the beginning of the study. All students deserve this opportunity. The survey results indicate that reading young adult novels was clearly beneficial to students: students believed they were better readers, enjoyed reading more, read more regularly for pleasure outside of school, knew more about books to which they connect, saw reading as more important to their success in school, work, and the world, improved their attitude about reading, and they intend to read more. Ultimately, though the survey may not be "proof" per se, it does clearly lend support to the theoretical framework provided herein.

In their article "Literacy Education and Reading Programs in the Secondary School: Status, Problems, and Solutions," in the September 2002 edition of the *National Association of Secondary Schools Bulletin*, Freya M. J. Zipperer, et al report that

Horkay (1999) pointed out that students who read for fun daily scored higher on national reading tests than their peers who read for fun less frequently. Horkay also stated that there was no significant change between 1992 and 2000 in the percentage of students reading for fun on a daily basis. Students appear to have

insufficient time in school to do independent reading, which adversely affects poor readers who may not read independently outside of school.

There are several studies which indicate students need time in school to read for pleasure. For whatever reason – TV, computers, jobs, extracurriculars – reports suggest students do not read for pleasure outside of school. Giving them this opportunity in school is something we cannot afford not to do. Based on information in academic journals, books, and so on, as well as the data provided from the author's study, it is clear students will read books if given the time to read and the opportunity to find books they enjoy. Programs like Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) should be supported in schools throughout our nation. Such a program should support book reading not newspaper and magazine reading. Students will have time in their lives for newspapers and magazines, but making time for books is not something people do. In 1999, the United States Department of Education reported that only half of all adults 25 and older read regularly (defined as reading one newspaper once a week, one magazine regularly, and one book in the past six months). Bushman has noted that students are not carrying a love of reading with them into adulthood. This needs to change. We should support our students with better programs. We should support ourselves with better programs. The literature available about young adult literature and the author's study with the use of young adult novels in the English classroom help make that quite clear. Though we must consider the limitations of self-reporting surveys, student responses suggest clearly that after completing the young adult literature study, the students in the author's English classes are better readers, enjoy reading more, and see the connection to and importance of reading in their lives. Rosenblatt notes, "Few teachers of English today would deny that the individual's ability to read and enjoy literature is the primary aim of literature study. In practice, however, this tends to be overshadowed by preoccupation

with whatever can systematically be taught and tested” (62). While educators are faced with having to prepare students to attain proficiency on standardized tests, teaching directly to the test cannot be the focus of their teaching. When it comes to reading, English teachers should be focused on providing opportunities for students to engage in, enjoy, and become better readers. In the author’s class, students read and enjoy literature – and because of that, they will be ready for “the test.”

Implications for Practice

Clearly, using young adult literature in the high school English classroom affords teachers a way to challenge students while at the same time helping students see the relevance of books to them and helping them enjoy reading more. While some may suggest this is possible by using classics, the research and discussion provided here makes abundantly clear that young adult literature does for students in the English classroom much of what the classics are purported to do. Moreover, students are more apt to read and enjoy young adult novels than they are the classics – this makes using young adult novels a better choice than using classics.

Expanding the curriculum to include young adult literature is an important step for teachers to take. Though some authors, like Milburn, Foster, and Glasgow contend that teachers can use traditional texts, but that young adult literature might also be part of the curriculum. For these authors, however, teachers must be careful about the way traditional texts are taught. Milburn believes traditional texts can be used if they connect to young adults. He would suggest teachers use books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *A Separate Peace* – viewed as part of the canon, but affording easy opportunities for young adults to connect. Foster goes as far as to say the classics should not be eliminated, but he believes that if the classics are going to

be used, they must be shrouded in appropriate teaching methods. He asserts that the best way to teach the classics – and all literature for that matter – is via a whole language approach.

Glasgow, too, finds teaching the classics to be viable in English classrooms, but suggests teachers do so by combining literature study with instructional techniques grounded in Gardner's multiple intelligences. Like Foster, she believes young adult literature lends itself more nicely to the instructional techniques offered.

Clearly, there is some argument to be made for the use of the classics; however, several authors contend that young adult literature only should be used. The Bushmans do not believe the arguments for teaching the classics stand up to criticism. Teachers often say they teach the classics because of one or more of the following: anthologies are purchased for use in classrooms and offer many such works, some believe universities want them taught, the classics have stood the test of time, and they feel guilty if they do not teach them. The Bushmans find it difficult to recommend the use of anthologies when teaching a diverse set of students. They ask if the classics have stood the test of time because they are great literature or because they are required reading in college English classes – or because they are “read” by students in anthologies in high school (and read again in college). Additionally, Crowe and Fisher note that much young adult literature has not been given the chance to stand the test of time and the books that have been given the chance, have done so. The Bushmans note that many university professors prefer that students come to college with competent writing, discussion, and literary analysis skills rather than having read books in high school that they will read again in college. They also believe teachers should be willing to take a stand about what is taught rather than teach out of guilt. They note that the classics were not “intended to be read by young people” (128).

Gallo, as noted above, is also adamant about the fact that classics are not intended for young adults. It should be noted that Gallo is not opposed to the teaching and reading of the classics, but claims they have done more harm than good; he urges teachers to put to use the many great young adult novels available from contemporary authors. And Crowe states his frustration with the use of what he terms “de facto” literature – the same books taught year after year. Instead he believes it would be nice if schools included real young adult books by the many “current masters of literature for teenagers” (101). Monseau acknowledges that convincing the masses that using young adult literature is acceptable and effective because “English studies have a history of resisting new literature . . . and new genres . . . so the reluctance of the profession to embrace the no-longer-new genre of young adult literature is not unusual,” but, she says, the time has come (17).

Nilsen and Donelson push for the use of young adult literature over the classics. They cite Dwight L. Burton’s 1951 critique of young adult novels, who wrote, “The good novel for the adolescent reader has attributes no different from any good novel” (73). They believe young adult literature has a greater chance of reaching all readers, including reluctant readers, than do the classics. They contend that young adult novels are not only written specifically for teens, but that they are written by good contemporary authors, so the stories are more dramatic, better written, and easier to get involved in than some of the controlled curriculum.

Samuels also encourages teachers to use young adult literature in the English classrooms, and notes that in a survey of teachers, she discovered the primary reason teachers did not use it in their classrooms was because they were not familiar with it. She states that teachers who do not use it, are missing the opportunity to draw their students into literature. Small concurs, suggesting that young adult literature should not be dismissed. Instead, like Burton in 1951,

Small states that good young adult literature has “serious intent, careful craftsmanship, effective expression, and other qualities that make literature literature” (113).

Ultimately, based on all the discussion provided here, the implication for teachers is to find ways to connect to their students and develop lifelong readers. If developing lifelong readers – students who enjoy reading and want to keep reading – is not the goal of an English teacher, such a teacher should reconsider being part of the teaching profession. Indeed, in their “Position Statement on Reading,” The National Council of Teachers of English states that all individuals should “have access to the personal pleasures and intellectual benefits of full literacy.” As has been shown through the information provided herein, students are more likely to find pleasure in reading young adult literature; moreover, high quality young adult literature provides ample challenge, “sophisticated enough for even AP readers” (Gallo 36). Though some contend that goal can be achieved using the classics, much of the literature presented makes clear that using young adult literature provides teachers the best opportunity for doing so. There are a substantial number of quality works available in the field; teachers should not be concerned about reduced quality. And, because of the ease of connecting with students, teachers would do well to use the best of what young adult literature has to offer. Certainly, that may include some traditional works, like those offered by Milburn, but there is a plethora of good novels in the field that teachers can put to use.

Teachers should be mindful of the counsel offered by authors like the Bushmans, Petersen, Rosenblatt, and Samuels who suggest that reading young adult literature can lead students to the classics when they are ready. Though they believe young adult literature should form the foundation in the English classroom, the Bushmans assert that young adult literature can be used as a bridge to the classics: “Our suggestion asks teachers to precede the classics with

selected young adult literature that is similar in theme or focus to the classics” (131). They believe young adult literature can stand on its own merits, but if teachers insist on using the classics, teachers should precede them with a strong young adult novel pairing.

Teachers should also embrace Petersen’s reminder that “English majors and teachers who love literary criticism and theory were first lovers of books” (46). In the same way, she says, “Before many of our students can appreciate scholarly analysis, they, too, need to discover their own reason for reading” (46). Using young adult literature can help do what Petersen says: help transform students who “for the first time see reading as something they want to do” (47). Indeed, using young adult literature can, as Samuels says, help students “savor the joys of losing themselves in a book” (351). Further, those who do not use young adult literature are missing this opportunity. If students are given this opportunity, they will be more likely to take on other reading – including, perhaps, the classics – as they mature and develop as readers.

Rosenblatt, cited extensively throughout, merits consideration here, as well. She does not argue openly for the use of young adult literature, but she does argue for the postponement of the classics. She states that too often, “the classics are introduced to children at an age when it is impossible for them to feel in any personal way the problems or conflicts treated” (206). It would be much wiser, she contends, “to postpone such reading and to gradually build linguistic flexibility through the use of more familiar materials. When the students are more mature, more experienced, they will then be able to apprehend enough of what the great classics offer” (207). Rosenblatt states that forcing the classics on students too early defeats the long-term goal of educating people to a personal love of literature; those who try to crowd into the lives of students everything they “ought” to read, “evidently assume that the youth will never read again after school years are over” (207). Indeed, her aforementioned argument holds true: “People who read

for themselves will come to the classics at the point when particular works have particular significance for them” (207).

The implication not to be missed by teachers is that young adult literature must be used in the English classroom. Teachers, then, must be familiar with the works available. For teachers to be unfamiliar with young adult literature is sad and detrimental to teachers and students (Fisher 74). Avoiding the potentially detrimental effects on students is imperative; teachers must become familiar with young adult literature. Monseau, editor of *English Journal*, writes, “Young adult literature is here to stay and English teachers owe it to themselves and their students to become familiar with the genre” (17). The key issue here is teachers should be in teaching for the students – not themselves. Even if teachers disagree with a model of teaching, if it is good for students, they should work to employ the model. Becoming familiar with young adult literature is vital to helping students enjoy reading and become lifelong readers. Gallo’s words may be harsh, but they resound with force: “high school English teachers or university professors [who] condemn young adult books because they believe they are shallow and poorly written . . . are ignorant elitists who haven’t done their homework, haven’t read even an adequate sampling” of the young adult works available for classroom use and independent reading (37). Certainly, his words may ring an offensive tone, but his argument cannot be ignored: those who condemn young adult literature have not done their homework in an objective enough fashion to discover the quality available in young adult literature. Students deserve teachers who take seriously the responsibility of being a professional educator and maintaining currency in their field.

Once teachers do become familiar with young adult literature – or for those who already are familiar with it – the implication, state Nilsen and Donelson, is that teachers should promote

the literature. Teachers should take it upon themselves to become acquainted with the array of good young adult works available and promote them through the use of writing, doing book talks, and creating displays.

If teachers put said implications to use, they will be rewarded with students who love to read, who develop and mature as readers, and who read beyond their school lives. Ultimately they will have achieved the aforementioned goal that all English teachers should have as their focus: producing students who are lifelong readers: students who love to read and want to keep reading.

Demonstrating how these implications can be taken into account is necessary. The author's efforts have already been discussed, but elements still imperative to discuss are how the literature chosen is of high quality and appropriate to high school age students, as well as how it meets curricular standards and, at the same time, helps students come to enjoy reading.

As previously discussed, a concern of some is that young adult literature is not of high enough quality to warrant its use in the classroom. One such piece worth considering for use in a high school classroom such as the author's is a young adult novel titled *Big Mouth, Ugly Girl* by Joyce Carol Oates. According to the New York State Writers Institute, Oates is one of the United States' "most prolific and versatile contemporary writers." Her writing career spans 25 years, and she has written more than 70 books including novels, short story collections, poetry volumes, plays, literary criticism and essays. She has earned a number of awards for her writing, including the National Book Award for her novel *them* (1969), the Rosenthal Award from the American Academy Institute of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the O'Henry Prize for Continued Achievement in the Short Story, the Elmer Holmes Bobst Lifetime Achievement Award in Fiction, the Rea Award for the Short Story, and in 1978, membership in the American

Academy Institute. She is the Roger S. Berlind Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Princeton University. Oates has also has been nominated twice for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The fact that Oates, an author of notable stature in the world of contemporary literature, has delved into the genre of young adult literature suggests that, indeed, young adult literature is not “junkfood,” but is highly “nutritious.” The fact that Oates is part of the genre should suggest something about the quality available.

In choosing the novels I did, considering quality was necessary. I did not want to choose random young adult books and hope that my students would like them. I made sure I read them first. I spent time with our school librarian, Jane, who has Master’s Degrees in English and Library Science. I learned about Rob Thomas from her and heard that his books were growing in popularity. Crutcher was offered to me in a college class. Cormier’s stature in the world of young adult literature is unparalleled. Greene’s *Summer of My German Soldier* is a riveting piece of historical fiction, and provides a female protagonist as opposed to the main focus on young men in the others. Deaver offers another female protagonist, and, though potentially “lighter” reading due to length, the potential to be highly effective in teaching about the dangers of drunk driving and dealing with depression. Finally, Salinger’s masterpiece is not only a classic, but also quite possibly the turning point in young adult literature. Written in 1951, it turned the face of young adult literature upside down, no longer glorying in the virtues of society, but paring the life of a young adult down to its roots. Though it may be the target of occasional censorship, the same could be said of many other classics – and books in general, for that matter.

I considered the issues being tackled by the authors. I wanted them to be real for my students; I did not want my students to read these and not believe the events could happen. I

wanted the books to include characters who had depth, who were not static, and who the students could sense as “one of them.” I wanted the books to challenge what my students thought and believed. I wanted to find books that deal with important issues, worthy of discussion, but which my students could now face in a book, rather than have a teacher lecture about them: abuse, drugs, alcohol, sex, peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, parent-child relationships, hating school, finding balance, and so on. I wanted to find books that provided strong plot and character development, positive messages, and good writing – and I wanted my students to be able to discover these things, again, without having a teacher lecture about them. And I did.

The beautiful thing about these books is they go beyond what so many view as young adult literature: R.L. Stine, Christopher Pike, V.C. Andrews and the like. Such authors churn out books like Thomas Kincaid churns out lithographed paintings. The formulaic style, see-through characters, and predictable plot lines are the reason that too many people do not take young adult literature seriously. The likes of Thomas, Crutcher, Cormier, Greene, Deaver, and Salinger do not belong in such company. Though the target audience may be young adults, adults can read and enjoy these novels. Thomas’ *Rats Saw God* has drawn favorable comparisons to *The Catcher in the Rye*. Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* uses T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” as a primary piece of inspiration. Greene’s *Summer of My German Soldier* evokes connections to Twain’s *Huck Finn*, though she employs the use of a young girl and a Nazi soldier in place of Huck and Jim. Such books are not “remakes.” This is not a case of *West Side Story* and *Romeo and Juliet*. But forming connections between these young adult novels and some “classics” is quite plausible. What makes them different is their accessibility to high school students.

In classes where doing so is possible, such books should be used in place of the classics. And as students read and enjoy such books, teachers can feel content knowing their students are reading, enjoying reading, and reading more. The chances of students later reading the classics are increased if we first help students see reading as enjoyable. Placing in their hands books they enjoy is a grand first step.

In addition to my efforts to present quality literature to my students, I also intended to work very hard to assess the established standards and benchmarks for our English department. Though the standards and benchmarks have in the past year been revised to mesh with the Mid-Iowa School Improvement Consortium (MISIC), the young adult literature study in my classes still meets 21 of the 23 benchmarks for juniors and seniors established for my school's English department (see Appendix E). Though the standards and benchmarks designed by MISIC are meant to coincide with the standardized test called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), teachers are expected to use them in their assessment of students in the classroom. The creation of the aforementioned Performance Assessment Tasks was done to do just that. What I have in place is an opportunity for students to read, enjoy reading, likely read more, and meet nearly all of the standards and benchmarks set forth for the English department. This should, indubitably, be termed a success.

Moreover, though the juniors and seniors I see may not be those to whom the NCLB legislation is directed, using young adult literature in the lower grades would benefit students to the point that their reading scores would likely go up – despite my belief that standardized tests and using them as a measure of learning is a problem. Still, that is an issue with which educators are faced. Educators would do well to infuse materials into the curriculum that will enable

students to succeed in as many areas as possible. In the case of English classrooms, using young adult literature would behoove teachers and students.

Clearly, if chosen and used carefully, young adult literature can serve students well. They will come to more fully enjoy reading and likely read more because of it. They will recognize that there is quality literature that has relevance to them. They will learn, be challenged, discover joy in reading, and have fun. Teachers yearn to create such opportunities for students. Thus, teachers would do well to use young adult literature as they strive to do so. Though the classroom experience discussed herein is not the only way for that to happen, it should certainly serve as a working model.

Conclusion

The information is clear: students are reading less, and enjoying reading less. Sticking to the same curriculum year after year in the hope that student attitude will suddenly change, that there will be an awakening in the classroom, and students will read the classics with enthusiasm cannot be done. It is a false hope. But there can be an awakening; situations can be created in which students read with enthusiasm. Indeed there can be a new hope among English teachers. For that to happen, teachers must change the way things have traditionally been done.

Using young adult literature in the high school English classroom is the solution, the new hope. Using young adult literature will give new hope to teachers that students will develop as readers and find joy in books. Using young adult literature will give new hope to teachers that books read for enjoyment can, at the same time, be books of quality. Using young adult literature will give new hope to teachers that as students come to enjoy reading, they will be more apt to, not only read more, but eventually come to read the classics. Using young adult

literature will give new hope to teachers that they can reach students with books in an enjoyable, quality way, and will achieve the goal of sending students forth from their classrooms who will have gained from the curriculum, and who care about what they gained and put to use what they have gained throughout their lives. Teachers must provide that new hope to themselves, their students, their schools, and future generations through the use of young adult literature – indeed, a classic way to teach English.

Appendix A

Below is a brief survey regarding your beliefs about reading. Please take the time to complete the survey honestly. The results will be helpful in a research project regarding the use of young adult novels in high school English classes. Your help is very much appreciated. Use the following scale: SA = Strong Agree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

I am a good reader.	SA	A	D	SD
I enjoy reading.	SA	A	D	SD
I read for pleasure outside of school.	SA	A	D	SD
I know there are books to which I connect.	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is an important tool for my success in school, work, the world . . .	SA	A	D	SD

Please feel free to offer any comments regarding your thoughts about reading and how you feel about it. If you are willing to have your comments used in the research project, please sign and print your name below your comments. Thank you.

Note: The author recognizes the potential limitations to self-reporting surveys. Such limitations include:

- No control group by which to compare results.
- Potential for respondents to anticipate what the researcher wants to hear.
- Potential for statements to influence respondents to show themselves in a good light.
- Potential for statements to seek information from respondents that they may not know about themselves.

Below is a brief survey regarding your beliefs about reading. Please take the time to complete the survey honestly. The results will be helpful in a research project regarding the use of young adult novels in high school English classes. Your help is very much appreciated. Use the following scale: SA = Strong Agree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

I am a good reader.	SA	A	D	SD
I am a better reader than I was before our reading study.	SA	A	D	SD
I enjoy reading.	SA	A	D	SD
I read for pleasure outside of school.	SA	A	D	SD
I know there are books to which I connect.	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is an important tool for my success in school, work, the world . . .	SA	A	D	SD
Reading young adult novels has improved my attitude about reading.	SA	A	D	SD
Reading young adult novels has helped me enjoy reading more.	SA	A	D	SD
I intend to read more now that I have been exposed to young adult novels.	SA	A	D	SD

If you have any comments regarding the use of young adult novels in high school English classes or about your particular experience with the reading study in English III, please feel free to offer them below. If you are willing to have your comments used in the research project, please sign and print your name below your comments. Thank you.

Note: The author recognizes the potential limitations to self-reporting surveys. Such limitations include:

- No control group by which to compare results.
- Potential for respondents to anticipate what the researcher wants to hear.
- Potential for statements to influence respondents to show themselves in a good light.
- Potential for statements to seek information from respondents that they may not know about themselves.

Appendix B

Honors English III: Individual Reading and Reading Response

Reading: One of my goals as an English teacher is to help you find joy in reading. I know some of you already enjoy reading, but I also know some of you don't enjoy it as much. I have discovered if one finds a book or author s/he enjoys, s/he will endeavor to discover similar books or books by the same author. I also recognize the need to provide reading options to you that are relevant to your experiences, that you will enjoy, and that will teach a lesson at the same time. I have selected six books for this portion of our time together.

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier
Chinese Handcuffs by Chris Crutcher
Say Goodnight, Gracie by Julie Reece Deaver
Summer of My German Soldier by Bette Greene
The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
Rats Saw God by Rob Thomas

With the exception of the beginning of class when we will either discuss briefly what we are reading or when I will read to you, each class day will be devoted to reading. However, several class periods will be devoted to viewing films. Class time will not be available for reading at that time. Please refer to the reading day guidelines provided to you.

Response: For each book, you should produce one page of written response for every fifty pages read. Most of the books are around 200 pages in length; be sure to extend your response accordingly for a book when it exceeds 200 pages (responses to The Chocolate War should be at least five pages).

You should avoid retelling the story. Instead, your response should include your predictions, questions, analysis, connections, and thoughts regarding characters and events. Offering things you like and don't like about certain characters, events, or the way the author tells the story would also be appropriate. You should strive to make this response a "first response" type of writing. That is, offer your initial reaction; don't worry so much about writing conventions.

Further items of note: On the front page (NOT considered one of the response pages), include your name, the title of the book you read, the author of the book, the names of the main characters of the book, one or two sentences regarding what the book has to teach its readers, and one or two sentences in which you offer a basic recommendation (e.g. highly recommend, recommend, don't recommend). You should wrap up your reading response with a paragraph in which you offer your overall opinion about the book. Be sure to provide some reasoning for how you feel.

If your handwriting is exceptionally big or small we may need to discuss how to make this system work for you. Further, the way you fill the paper will be taken into account. I suggest using loose leaf, college ruled paper.

Assessment: Assuming reading responses meet the criteria above, you will be assessed in the following way:

Read and respond to four books = 90-100

Read and respond to three books = 80-89

Read and respond to two books = 70-79

Read and respond to one book = 60-69

All students must read and respond to The Catcher in the Rye.

Your exact score will be determined based on your providing a focused discussion based on the criteria put forth above. If the criteria are not met, I may return your reading response asking for further discussion.

Please take special care to note the due dates for each response. Due dates will not be extended.

(Author's Note: Due dates are given for each book, based on students who read and respond to four books. Therefore, if students miss the first due date, the maximum number of responses a student can turn in is three.)

Appendix C

Individual Writing Project for Reading Study

For the individual portion of this project, please complete one of the following:

- You are a counselor. Your book is a picture of your client's life.
 - * What do you say to him/her regarding his/her life and discovering who s/he is?
 - or * What do you say to him/her about how his/her story can help others deal with their lives?
 - or * Create a dialogue between you and the character in which the focus is him/her learning about him/herself and discovering who s/he is.

- You are a high school English teacher. You've chosen to teach your book to your junior English class.
 - * How do you convince your students that this book will aid them in exploring and understanding their own lives?
 - or * Why is the main character important to discuss? What good can come of a discussion of this character's life and discovery about his/her life?

- You have been chosen as the keynote speaker for "Youth and Identity," a national conference for high school youth who want to "find themselves." You've chosen this book as your discussion focus.
 - * What do you tell the students about this book? How will it help them? Why should they read it? What will they take from it?

- A group of parents is upset that this book is being taught in a high school classroom (let alone that it is on the shelf in the library). You have been chosen as the leader of a student group to convince the parents that the book is worth reading.
 - * What do you say to the parents about the importance of dealing with identity as a high school student? How will this book help students come to an understanding of their lives? What can possibly be learned from this book that makes it worth being on the shelves and being taught?

- Your English teacher wants to know if there is anything you've learned from this book relative to your life.
 - * How does the book speak to learning about yourself and living in a positive way?
 - * How do you connect to it? Does it connect to you?

(Author's Note: Assessment for this writing project is the same as other written work in class; students are made aware of assessment criteria at the beginning of the term.)

Appendix D

Group Reading Project

Once groups are determined, your group is responsible to work with the selected books and one of the following options:

- The school board of a local school district is concerned that the high school youth have “lost their way” – that they have little sense of identity, have little understanding of right/wrong, have little direction, and will be “lost” when they graduate. They have chosen your group as a committee to justify the use of your books for the whole student body as they struggle with this “lost identity” issue. Think about questions such as
 - * Why are these books important?
 - * Why should they be read by students?
 - * What can students learn from them?
 - * How might they improve attitude, direction, moral correctness, and self-understanding of the students at the school?

- A set of learner performance goals has been identified by your school as necessary for all students to achieve. The school faculty have selected your group to demonstrate how your books can help students reach those goals. Think about questions such as
 - * Why are the books important?
 - * What learner performance goals do they address?
 - * How do they address those learner performance goals?
 - * If students read these books, will they better understand how learner performance goals connect to their life?
 - * How does any of that translate to students achieving those goals?

(Author’s Note: In the author’s school, Learner Performance Goals have been created; students are expected to meet them and create a final “Senior Celebration” in which they demonstrate they have done so.)

- Your school has adopted a reading initiative in which all students are to read once a week for 20 minutes. However, many students complain about this time, saying they don’t like to read, they have nothing to read, they think reading is a waste of time, and so on Your job is to convince them that studying these materials will make them think otherwise.

Think about questions such as

- * Why should students study these books?
- * Why would students like these books?
- * How will these books help students understand life, themselves, and others better?
- * How will these books encourage students to read more after finishing them?

(Author’s Note: This program is in place in the author’s school. The author and others are pushing to create a 20 minute reading time every day.)

In dealing with one of the above issues, you should create a 30 minute presentation; your classmates will serve as the audience. After the presentation, there may be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions (we'll discuss this more later). You should build your argument based on solid reasoning and support; I encourage the use of text to prove points in addition to library resources which may speak to the issue at hand (again we'll discuss this further if needed). Anticipate potential questions and difficulties. Group members should strive to share equal responsibility for putting the presentation together and presenting as well. You will evaluate group members at the close of our study. You will be assessed using the assessment sheet provided in the areas of support, effective communication, use of text, and overall effect.

Group Reading Project Assessment Sheet

Group Members:

Support

To earn high marks here, you must convince the audience that your book addresses and alleviates the concern. The audience consists of me and your classmates. You will be rated as follows:

_____ (18-20) I am convinced the book the committee discussed addressed my concern in an appropriate manner. I am convinced I need not be concerned with this issue any longer.

_____ (16-17.5) I am convinced the book the committee discussed addressed my concern and I am fairly certain I need to be concerned no longer. However, I believe the committee could have dealt with this issue in a more in depth fashion.

_____ (14-15.5) I am convinced the book the committee discussed could address my concern; however, I need more information before I withdraw my concern.

_____ (Below 14) The committee clearly did not do enough to address or alleviate my concern.

Effective Communication

To earn high marks here, you must not only earn marks equivalent to or higher in Support, but you must meet the following criteria:

_____ (9-10) Volume, rate, enunciation, and tone are strong, expressive, and varied as needed. Minimal use of fillers ("um" "ah" "tss"). Strong eye contact. Poised with professional posture. Information is presented with confidence, and is not read.

_____ (7.5-8.5) Verbal areas are strong, but could be improved. Occasional use of fillers. Eye contact is demonstrated, but should be more constant. Poise and posture are not always professional. Nervous energy was not handled well. Reading of information takes place more than is necessary.

_____ (6-7) Weaknesses are evident in verbal and nonverbal areas. Information is primarily read.

_____ (Below 6) Clearly, little to no time was spent in preparation for the presentation.

Use of Text

_____ (18-20) The purpose of the text is identified using evidence from the text. The message being sent to the reader is offered and is taken seriously by the committee. Material has clearly been analyzed as specific references to text are regularly used to address and alleviate the concern of the audience.

_____ (16-17.5) The purpose of the text is identified, and some evidence may be used. The message being sent to the reader is offered, but clearly the committee could have sought to ascertain a more in depth message. Some references to text are made to address and alleviate the concern of the audience.

_____ (14-15.5) A purpose of the text is identified. A message being sent to the reader is offered. Few references to text are made to address and alleviate the concern of the audience.

_____ (Below 14) Little to no discussion or use of text is offered.

Overall Effect

_____ (9-10) The presentation is put together in an organized fashion. A definite thread ties the presentation together. The discussion offered is insightful, enlightening, and thorough. The committee is clearly well prepared with responsibilities of presenting shared between committee members. If questions are asked, the committee is prepared to answer them smoothly.

_____ (7.5-8.5) The presentation is fairly well organized. The thread tying the presentation together is present, but could be stronger. The discussion offered is insightful, but fairly basic. The committee is prepared enough to get by; responsibilities could be more equally distributed. If questions are asked, the committee handles them, though it may not be smooth (e.g. have to spend time searching for the answer, the same people answer . . .)

_____ (6-7) The presentation seems disjointed and lacks direction. The discussion offered is very basic. The committee should clearly have spent more time preparing. If questions are asked, the committee has difficulty answering them.

_____ (Below 6) The presentation is haphazardly put together. Preparation is not evident.

Total Score

Appendix E

Hudson High School Language Arts/Reading Standards/Benchmarks (from MISIC): Grades 11-12

Standard 1: Use the general skills and strategies of the writing process to write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

11-12.1.1 Produce a research paper utilizing correct format and documentation.

11-12.1.2 Write compositions that are focused for a specific audience and purpose.*

11-12.1.3 Write compositions that use a variety of writing techniques (e.g., transitional devices, literary devices, sentence variety) to exhibit a clear personal style and voice.*

11-12.1.4 Demonstrate competence in writing different types of compositions.*

Standard 2: Use the grammatical and mechanical conventions of the written language.

11-12.2.1 Use convention of written composition (colon, semi-colon, apostrophe, italics, hyphens, dashes, quotation marks, commas).*

11-12.2.2 Write compositions with no significant errors in the spelling of frequently used words.*

11-12.2.3 Write compositions with a variety of sentence structure and length (sentence combining, parallel structure).*

Standard 3: Use a variety of print and non-print sources to locate and gather information.

11-12.3.1 Determine the validity, credibility, and reliability, and appropriateness of sources.*

11-12.3.2 Summarize a variety of information for research purposes.*

Standard 4: Use the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

(No benchmarks from MISIC listed for 11-12 under Standard 4.)

Standard 5: Read, interpret, and respond to a variety of literary and informational texts.

11-12.5.1 Read a variety of literary and non-literary texts.*

11-12.5.2 Understand the effectiveness of techniques used to convey author's purpose and viewpoint.*

11-12.5.3 Understand elements used in literary texts (structure, style, mood, tone, imagery).*

11-12.5.4 Understand figurative language in literary texts (metaphor, simile, foreshadowing).*

11-12.5.5 Understand connections among (literary) works based on theme.*

11-12.5.6 Understand historical and cultural influence on a literary selection.*

11-12.5.7 Use text features to support inferences.*

11-12.5.8 Understand the effectiveness of complex elements of plots.*

Standard 6: Use speaking and listening strategies for a variety of purposes.

11-12.6.1 Perform advanced-level speeches.*

11-12.6.2 Analyze factors that commonly affect language usage (gender, culture, geographical location, etc.).*

11-12.6.3 Make informative and well-organized formal presentation.*

11-12.6.4 Make effective use of various techniques for effective presentation (modulation of voice, inflection, tempo, enunciation, non-verbal gestures).*

11-12.6.5.a Critique and analyze presentations.

11-12.6.5.b Ask questions to broaden and enrich learning and classroom discussions.*

* indicates benchmarks utilized in the young adult literature study developed by the author.

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