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THE EFFECTS OF FICTIONAL LITERATURE ON REAL-WORLD PERCEPTIONS OF
STUDENTS

by
Dylan Dowty

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Approved by

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DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this honors thesis to everyone who has ever made a lasting impact on my life.

To my mom and dad who have taught me many life lessons, helped me through some of my hardest struggles, and helped me become the person I am today.

To my cousin, Cortney, who is always willing to talk to me about books and life while we paint her house, and who has fed my love for literature (particularly Stephen King and YA literature).

To Nana, Papaw, and Billy, who I've always strove to make proud, even in their absence. They have left a lasting impression on my soul and have helped me reach this point in my life.

To all of my remaining family members who have all inspired me to do my best and supported me along my journey.

To Olivia, Madeleine, Mackenzie, Willow, Rebecca, Hali-Ana, and all of my friends who support me, love me, and laugh with me as if they were members of my own family.

Lastly, to the teachers and authors who have affected my perceptions of the real world—without them I would have never written this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

DYLAN DOWTY: The Effects of Fictional Literature on Real-World Perceptions of Students
(Under the direction of Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham)

The ways in which fiction affect the perceptions of high school students' realities are many, and they vary widely depending on the book read. While lessons can be learned from every fictional book, certain types of books are more beneficial and relevant for students. Young adult literature, while often overlooked, is a significant source of students' perspective shifts and metacognition. Every book has a lesson that it can teach students, but contemporary young adult literature deserves to be taught in schools alongside the classics in order for students to make personal connections with the texts they read and take an aesthetic and personally-linked interpretation from them.

Keywords: young adult literature, high school students, real-world perceptions

PREFACE

This project rose from my intrinsic need to ensure that teachers, future teachers, and students were aware that fictional books can teach us about the real-world and can, in turn, shape our realities. Many other researchers like Louise Rosenblatt have looked into this topic as well, and I found a lot of her ideas proved true when applied to my peers in the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program and the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. I chose to write about this for my honors thesis was in effort to make people more aware of the effects that young adult literature has on all of our lives. My adolescence and my adulthood have been shaped by the young adult books that I've read, but these books are usually overlooked when compared to literary giants like Shakespeare plays, *Frankenstein*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. While most YA books may not be nearly as widespread as these classic works, they can still teach us very valuable lessons about the real world, maybe even better than these older literary works can.

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Introduction

High school is a critical time for adolescents as they go through a great number of pivotal developmental periods, such as puberty and Piaget's formal operational stage. Through these periods of development, students begin metacognition—thinking about thinking—and shape the way that they think, thus shaping their identities. Students go about exploring their identities and themselves in many different ways, but researchers like Thomas Bean agree that many adolescents look to fictional literature when shaping their identities.

Fictional literature plays a significant role in the classroom setting as it allows high school students to read relevant books that touch on a plethora of societal issues (Bean, 2003, pg. 638). For example, books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*—while not considered young adult literature—cover tough topics, such as racism, political injustice, and familial issues, all of which are relevant issues for high school students (Bean, 2003, pg. 638). However, the typical fiction read in high school classrooms is young adult, or YA, fiction, which still explores adult issues, but through the lens of a teenage protagonist which can allow students to anchor themselves in the real-world problems presented in the book and shape their ideologies through their readings and interpretations of the text (Daniels, 2006, pg. 78). These books expose students to critical issues, yet by not letting them read relevant literature—such as YA literature—they will be deprived of the opportunity to explore themselves and their identity as an adolescent growing into an adult. It is of utmost importance that teachers expose students to this literature in a manner that allows them to personally connect with the text so that students can discover who they are.

The methods that teachers use to present literature to students are just as essential to how much a student can grow from reading. According to Bean, some teachers simply go through the motions when covering literature and only cover the essentials of the assigned reading (2003, pg. 640). This Cliff's Notes interpretation, as Rosenblatt would describe it, of the text provided by the teacher arguably weakens the relationship between the reader, the text, and the poem, and does not allow students to make meaningful personal connections with the text (1993, pg. 378; 380). However, when students are allowed to personally explore the text, they are able to make their own interpretations of it by exploring their own thoughts. This allows students to personally learn how to navigate through social issues surrounding their age group, as well as change their own viewpoints about the world that surrounds them (Bean, 2003, pg. 638; Wise, 2012).

Whether students read a book for fun or if it's included in an English literature lesson, they learn something new from every book that they read. For this reason, fictional literature is a significant aspect of every student's life, whether they like to read or not. When in Piaget's formal operational stage of development, adolescents learn how to make abstract thoughts that can develop their metacognitive skills (1966, pg. 403). When students read books, they begin to think about thinking as the themes of literary works affect their thought processes and how their perception of the world can change based on the reading of the book and the central ideas and issues contained within (Hacker, 1998, pg. 3). This real-world perception of students that is fostered by literature is a crucial part of their developmental process as it shows abstract thinking, metacognition, and most specifically, hypothetico-deductive reasoning which poses "what if" questions (Piaget, 1966, pg. 403). These "what if" questions allow students to put themselves in the position of a fictional character—particularly the one that they relate to most—

in order to see how they would react in response to a certain situation, which in turn affects their metacognition and, therefore, their perceptions of the real world (Purves & Beach, 1972, pg. 25).

An unfortunate reality of the educational system, however, is that some students are left behind and are not given the chance to catch up. Sometimes, rather, students are given the opportunities they need to catch up, but these are usually not beneficial for the students or the teachers who teach them, as the teacher is usually rushing and giving students extra work to ensure they are on the same level as their peers. Perhaps the teacher works harder during class time to catch students up, taking a step back from the standards that the students should be focused on to reteach something that was not covered very well during the previous year. However, students and teachers can both work smarter rather than harder by allowing students' choices to influence the class environment and what is discussed during class. As Donalyn Miller states, "I discovered it was my job as a teacher to equip the travelers [students], teach them how to read a map, and show them what to do when they get lost, but ultimately, the journey is theirs alone" (Miller, 2009, pg. 16). So long as students are granted the access to the tools they need—like books—they will be able to shape their own realities through metacognitive processes like hypothetico-deductive reasoning and self-assessments (Hacker, 1998, pg. 3; 10).

The effects of fictional literature on students' real-world perceptions are highly visible, especially when they talk about their favorite book. When students have a favorite book, they have usually made many close personal connections with the text and have interpreted it in a way that is relevant to them and their way of thinking; this reader then desires to talk about it with someone in order to compare and contrast readings and interpretations of the text because they feel the need to view it from as many angles as possible (Rosenblatt, 1994, pg. 146). These personal connections and interpretations of the text allow readers to see the text in many

different lenses and grant students new ways to perceive the world around them based on the viewpoints of the characters within the book and their friends' interpretations and perceptions of the book. Thus, in order to determine how students perceive the real world and why they perceive it in the way they do, a researcher must examine the students' favorite fictional books as well as the thoughts and ideas that they take with them from that piece of literature.

Literature Review

The Psychology Behind How Students are Affected by Fiction

In order to understand why reading affects cognition and metacognition—and therefore, students’ perceptions of the world around them—it is imperative to understand the psychology, as well as the development of adolescents. One of the foremost minds in child psychology, Jean Piaget, with Bärbel Inhelder (1966) explain this by stating:

It has long been thought that the affective changes characteristic of adolescences, beginning between the ages of 12 and 15, are to be explained primarily by innate and quasi-instinctive mechanisms...Indeed, the essential difference between formal thought and concrete operations is that the latter are centered on reality, whereas the former grasps the possible transformations and assimilates reality only in terms of imagined or deduced events. The change of perspective is as important for affective as for cognitive development, for the world of values also can remain bound by concrete and perceptible reality, or it can encompass many interpersonal and social possibilities (pg. 403).

The above quote is useful when thinking of metacognition and the effects that fictional literature can have on adolescents, as it states that while the concrete reality is still important in adolescents’ lives, “imagined” events are also just as important for shaping their realities. These so-called imagined events could very well pertain to fictional books, which could have stories framed as if there was reality within them. With adolescence comes a greater understanding of fiction and how fictional novels can affect students’ own thought processes through metacognition.

A significant aspect of reading is that students are able to begin thinking about their thought process—a stage of their development known as metacognition. However, as Douglas Hacker explains:

Metacognitive thoughts do not spring from a person's immediate external reality; rather, their source is tied to the person's own internal mental representations of that reality, which can include what one knows about that internal representation, how it works, and how one feels about it (Hacker, 1998, pg. 3).

Hacker determines that the way people think metacognitively is internalized and influenced by their internal reality rather than the external reality, i.e. what they believe in versus what they know to be complete fact. Students' internal realities can be affected by the books they read and what they experience during their day-to-day lives, causing nearly everyone's internal realities to be different from their external realities. This also means that no two people will have the same internal realities—especially considering cultural differences globally, nationally, and locally—so everyone experiences metacognition in similar ways, but it affects them in different ways, thus highlighting how different people are more affected by different books. This revelation also highlights one topic that has not been discussed yet—students who do not like or want to read. Much like many people have trouble reading, many people also struggle with mathematics:

Many people are convinced they are terrible at solving mathematical word problems. Because they assume that every mathematical word problem will forever evade them, they are little motivated to attempt a solution, and even less motivated to monitor and regulate their attempts... Thus, self-assessments of one's affective states often serve as the gateway to further assessments concerning the task, its demands, the knowledge necessary for its completion, and strategies for its completion (Hacker, 1998, pg. 10).

Students with reading deficiencies, students who dislike reading, and students who are unmotivated to read will have trouble thinking about their thought process and will struggle to think about how reading changes their perceptions of the real world. Although reading will affect their perceptions, it will likely be more difficult for them to realize it and think about how reading does affect them. This is not because reading does not help these students, but rather because teachers may have forced reading on them in ways that were not compatible with the students, either through assigning work to do with every book the students read, not letting students read books above or below their grade level, or encouraging the student to read things that they may not like. However, there is always time for students to learn these self-efficacy strategies, even after they graduate; they might need a bit of help to achieve those goals, but one bad experience with reading may not sour their experience altogether.

Evidence that fiction affects students' thinking and realities is presented in a TedEd video by Jessica Wise titled "How Fiction Can Change Reality" (Wise, 2012). This video details the effects that fiction has on reality and how it does so by exploring a quote by Emily Dickinson which states, "There is no frigate like a book to take us lands away." Wise uses this quote to explain that when people read books they are taken inside their imaginations and are able to view things through the perspectives of the characters and the author. Wise then mentions that researchers in many different fields, including psychology and child development, have acquired evidence that books are able to change people's point of views. These fictional stories have shaped the cultures of many, leading these researchers to learn that many people's beliefs come from fiction rather than fact. Wise then mentions an example of fiction shaping culture by mentioning Samuel Richardson's eighteenth-century novel *Pamela*, which reshaped the ideas of class, gender, and marriage throughout England. This example is evidence of fiction shaping

culture, and Wise says that since the story contained ideas that were groundbreaking and thought-evoking, the old culture was able to be reshaped into a new culture that brought the world into a more modern view of society. Stories such as *Pamela*, however, today are still just as thought-evoking as they were at the time, but as the culture was changed three centuries ago, there aren't any more modern changes available in classic novels such as *Pamela*. Wise states that there are many new groundbreaking stories written every day that can be used to influence and change today's society for a better tomorrow. This video gives evidence that reading can influence society and culture by changing the point of view of readers and allowing them to see the world in new and interesting ways through fictional literature.

The Role of the Instructor in Changing Student Perceptions

Alan Purves and Richard Beach look very closely at the relationship between the student, the teacher, and the literature in their article "Literature and the Reader: Research in Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature" (Purves & Beach, 1972). One subject that the authors touch on in their article is the idea of "good" and "bad" readers: while the "bad" readers tended to use the exact wording of the poem in their oral responses, the "good" readers used their own words and were able to restructure the meaning of the poem. Despite the differences between these two groups of readers, both groups were able to relate their personal experiences to the poem, even if they didn't like the poem. Another commonality that most, if not all, readers share is that they identify themselves within the characters that are most like them and they tend to judge these characters more favorably than other characters. Furthermore, when discussing favorite literary works, many readers choose their favorite as the work which contains subject matter that is related to the personal experience of the reader. Purves & Beach state, "People tend to get more involved in that which is related to them, and they tend to seek the

work with which they can identify, or the character who resembles them” (1972, p. 25). However, this idea of readers identifying themselves within the characters most like them is somewhat problematic as identification can easily become projection as readers begin to give values to the characters which are not present in the context of the story. One other subject that the authors explore in their article is the methods of teaching and learning literature. The authors mention that any work may be used to teach a literary concept and that the material may be changed without any substantial effects on the learning of students, leading to the idea that students can learn from any and every literary work. However, the method in which this material is taught will substantially affect what students learn from literature. Older literary works benefit from standard lecture-based teaching, while modern literary works benefit more from the discussion. In fact, the students who discussed the literature after reading it did better than those students who did not discuss the book after reading. This article gives a greater context to how every reader is able to have a favorite work that they can make personal connections with and how teaching literature is able to affect students’ abilities to learn from literature.

In Louise Rosenblatt’s article “The Transactional Theory: Against Dualisms”, she talks about both reading and writing, and the emphasis that is and isn’t put on literature (1993). In this article, Rosenblatt discusses the differences between university and high school level literature discussions. She details how at the university level, there is a much greater emphasis on literature and a focus on allowing students to make their own interpretations about a text. When she discusses high school level literature discussions, however, Rosenblatt states:

Reading was taught as a set of disparate skills to be demonstrated largely through answering multiple-choice questions. Stories, and even poems, were often used for that

purpose. Literature at the high school level was taught with the assumption that there is a single ‘correct’ interpretation (1993).

This statement by Rosenblatt parallels a sentiment posed in many articles: that teachers teach fictional literature as if it only has one interpretation. This type of teaching deprives students of the personal connections that they need to interpret literature in their own way so that it will shape their identity and how they perceive the real world around them. Rosenblatt condemns this style of literature discussion by arguing that the intrinsic aesthetic value of literature is caused by personal interpretations rather than traditional teacher interpretation. Rosenblatt argues, “We must indeed forego the wish for a single ‘correct’ or absolute meaning for each text” (1993). She says this because she believes that the reader, the text, and the poem all form a relationship, and if teachers teach a Cliff’s Notes interpretation, as she calls it, of a literary work, this arguably weakens the relationship between the reader, text, and poem, since the reader did not get to make personal connections with the text. Rosenblatt argues that writing can be read in many different ways, and the ways in which students interpret literature and the issues within are based on personal reservoirs of knowledge and experience. Students must draw their interpretations from their own personal reservoirs for literature to truly affect them and the way they interpret the world around them.

In the case of students who have had bad experiences with reading—or even students who have minimal experiences with reading—a teacher needs to give attention to students’ reading habits in the right way, rather than forcing extensive work on the students. Donalyn Miller focuses her attention on preparing her students for independent reading and writing in her book *The Book Whisperer*, in which she discusses the workshop structure of her classroom and

the tools she equips her students with (Miller, 2009, pg. 16-17). Sometimes, encouraging students to read can be simpler than teachers realize. As Miller (2009) states,

The funny thing is that I knew how to inspire readers thirty years ago because I knew what made reading inspirational for me. These days, I share with my students what no literacy expert could ever teach me. Reading changes your life. Reading unlocks worlds unknown or forgotten, taking travelers around the world and through time. Reading helps you escape the confines of school and pursue your own education. Through characters—the saints and sinners, real or imagine—reading shows you how to be a better human being. Now, I accept that I may never arrive at teaching paradise, but as long as I hold on to my love of books and show my students what it really means to live as a reader, I'll be a lot closer than I once was (pg. 18).

So long as teachers remember why books are inspirational and how books inspired them when they were younger, they will always be able to teach a student how to love to read, not through assignments like book reports, but rather through cultivating individuality and freedom through reading. Miller (2009) states that each year, students hope for a new engaging and interesting teaching method—an escape from the old ways of reading instruction and all the assignments that come along with it.

Of course, no matter how hard a teacher tries to make their classroom instruction engaging, there are always certain conditions that must be met in order to cultivate successful learning. Students need to be immersed in the classroom environment, surrounded by books and given the opportunity to read often; they must be shown the features of texts; they must be given high expectations which they will rise to meet; they must have freedom in choosing the books they want to read; they must have time to practice what they are learning; they need to be

encouraged; and they need to be able to discuss their progress (Miller, 2009, pg. 34-6). Above all else, however, the students must be engaged in what they are reading and doing. As Miller (2009) states, “Reading must be an endeavor that has personal value to students... students see themselves as capable of doing... is free from anxiety... [and] is modeled by someone they like, respect, trust, and want to emulate” (pg. 36). If students are only reading because they are being forced to read, they will not grow up to become adults who enjoy reading, and they will not be able to see how reading truly affects their perceptions of their personal realities. They will not be able to think metacognitively about their reality because they were not allowed the chance for personal connections within a text and were only reading because their teacher told them to do so. It is imperative, however, that teachers also share their own reading struggles with their students to show them that they are not alone in thinking that reading can be difficult at times, but that their lives can be shaped by books (Miller, 2009, pg. 110). As Donalyn Miller (2009) states in chapter three of her book:

I know that my life is marked by the road signs of my beloved books, each one symbolizing who I was when I read it, shaping who I have become. The uninitiated might say that I am lost in my books, but I know I am more found than lost... This is what I want for my students, to lose and find themselves in books (pg. 49).

It is of utmost importance that teachers understand this desire, this need, for students to find themselves by getting lost in books and the stories held within that they will make personal connections with.

Student Reactions to Reading: Shaping Their Realities

It is crucial to understand the effect that young adult literature can have on adolescents’ identities and their real-world perceptions. Adolescents today use literature as a way to shape

their identity through critical literacy (Bean 2003, pg. 638). For these students to shape their identity through critical literacy, it is important that they are able to make personal connections with texts and the issues within the text. Students can do this by discussing and analyzing the structural prompts, subject and reader positioning, gaps and silences, and classroom transformations of the text.

In young adult literature, adolescents learn about the world through the lens of a relatable protagonist, often with first-person narration (Bean 2003, pg. 638). These novels cover issues that are typically relevant to adolescents' lives, which allows personal connections with the text and can facilitate unique and personal interpretations of the book. In order to ensure that students can make personal connections with a text, teachers should push students to analyze texts deeper than just the "preferred reading" and encourage students to make their own interpretations of texts based on how they read them. In order to do this successfully, teachers must have a grasp of the deconstruction and reader-response literary theories so that they can effectively deconstruct, discuss, and connect the readings. This article argues that once students make personal connections to a text, they will begin to identify with the text and will learn how to navigate through important social issues revolving around their age group. Some of these issues are familial issues, socioeconomic status, racism, love, and by reading about these, students gain a greater awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding themselves and others. For example, the article mentions Markus Zusak's novel *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, which deals with two teenage boys and their illegal boxing matches while also touching on familial and societal issues within their urban Australian environment. Students in a classroom read this novel and made personal connections with it, then discussed it with the whole class, finding ideas in the novel that challenged and shaped their perspective of the world, as shown when Bean states,

“Perhaps more important, students develop an understanding the worldview represented in a novel is not a ‘natural’ one, and it can be challenged and actively resisted” (2003, pg. 647). Bean then continues to state that these discussions of literature can be changed depending on the genre of literature being considered. This article shows the significant impact of fictional literature on students’ lives, as well as the important issues that young adult fictional literature covers and how literature should and should not be discussed in classrooms.

Furthermore, Cindy Lou Daniels, in her article “Literary Theory and Young Adult Literature: The Open Frontier in Critical Studies” discusses how young adult literature is uncharted territory for literary theorists since it’s mostly disavowed as literature and lumped in with children’s literature (2006, pg. 78). Daniels argues that young adult literature has experienced a surge in popularity since the release of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, but states that many literary theorists ignore this vast genre due to the fact that it is aimed toward younger audiences. Many theorists group young adult literature with children’s literature, stating that it has no value in literary criticism because it doesn’t offer enough substance. Daniels disagrees with this sentiment since many young adult novels cover a wide spread of genres and topics, stating that it is almost foolish not to consider young adult novels as literature. She argues that young adult literature explores a wide variety of adult issues through the lens of teenage protagonists and states that these issues can teach students about the world in a variety of ways and can also be criticized and theorized in many ways, but to do so would require a separation of young adult and children’s literature. Further debunking other theorists’ thoughts about young adult literature not having enough substance, Daniels provides examples of young adult literature that covers real-life issues, such as *The Facts Speak for Themselves* by Brock Cole, which is the first-ever young adult novel to contain a story of sexual molestation and how the main character

deals with this struggle. In this article, Daniels argues for a greater knowledge of young adult literature, since it is not only important for the “intended reader” but also to literary theorists so that they can learn more about young adult issues and differences between individual interpretations of the literature.

While reading a paper that someone has written, a reader may be eager to search for errors, but Hacker (1998) states that there is a difference between reading to determine correctness of text and normal reading. Hacker states, “The purpose of normal reading is to construct meaningful interpretations from text that is assumed to be [coherent, consistent, and written at a level commensurate with the reader’s abilities and knowledge]” (1998, pg. 166). Yet, not all readers may have the same interpretation of the texts they read, but so long as readers are able to create meanings from their interpretations, they will be able to continue reading with ease (Hacker, 1998, pg. 166). While not every interpretation will be the most widely accepted interpretation of a text, students create different meanings of a text based on their own interpretations. Reading is a deeply personal experience which creates personal connections and relies on personal experiences to shape students’ perceptions of the real world. This shaping of the students’ realities is caused by students thinking about their own thought processes and self-evaluation at a metacognitive level. According to Hacker (1998),

In the context of reading, metacognitive models include readers’ understanding of their prior knowledge and their goals for reading and comprehending, understanding of an author’s intent, understanding of text propositions, and understanding of the ways in which knowledge from the text is integrated with their own knowledge (pg. 172).

While reading shapes students’ internal realities, their internal realities also shape the way they approach reading. Everything that students accomplish throughout their lives culminates when

they read—all of their past experiences and prior knowledge comes together and mingles with the new knowledge that they gain from each new text they read. Every time they read, they are granted with a new perspective on life and reality which is ever changing and evolves as they grow as readers. Of course, each reader takes away something different from the text, as “each reader’s internal representation of a text is likely to be constructed somewhat differently, even for very simple texts. People differ in the kinds and amounts of knowledge they have concerning the topic being read” (Hacker, 1998, pg. 175). No two readers have the same pasts—although they may be similar—so what readers take away from texts depends on each reader’s own personal experiences. Understanding that some readers may not be able to learn anything from a particular text is a crucial aspect for teachers to consider, especially in regards to what books the students read. One may argue that in order to ensure that each reader learns something valuable from each book they read, teachers should allow their students to seek out books independently, rather than forcing a book onto them.

Whether it is acknowledged or not, there is a bond between the reader and the text which is being read—Louise Rosenblatt (1994) highlights this in the title of her book *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. The bond between a reader and a text is a strong bond, and it is a two-way bond, because just as the reader acts upon the text, the text also acts upon the reader, much like a transaction—the reader projects themselves and their personal experiences unto the text while the text takes those personal experiences and transforms them into a new reality for the reader. The poem is born out of this transaction and is considered an interpretation or a meaning of a text, rather than an actual poem itself (a poem would be considered a text, but the meaning and interpretation of said poem would be considered a “poem”). As Rosenblatt (1994) states:

The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. So, a poem should not be thought of as an object, an entity, but rather as an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text (pg. 20-21).

The poem is not one concrete aspect of a reading transaction, but rather an abstract interpretation of what readers take away from the author's concrete text based on the readers' personal connections with the text and their past experiences. However, the poem that readers form based on a text also depends on the type of reading that they utilized.

According to Rosenblatt, there are two different types of reading, efferent reading and aesthetic reading—both of which are performed in different ways and focus on different things throughout the reading. Efferent reading is focused on what the reader will take away from the reading: reading to achieve a goal, whether the goal is learning a new recipe, completing an assignment, or learning a new procedure (Rosenblatt, 1994, pg. 24). On the other hand, an aesthetic reading is reading that focuses on the text and poem and the relationship with the text—as Rosenblatt (1994) states, “In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (pg. 25). It is also important to note that texts can be read both efferently as well as aesthetically, and while some students may aesthetically read an assigned text, it is much more likely that students will scan the text with an efferent reading, only searching for that which they need to complete their next assignment. Teachers must encourage their students to read aesthetically so that they can make

personal connections with the text and shift their realities through the transactions that occur between the reader, the text, and the poem.

This brings into question what an aesthetic reading looks like and how readers are affected by aesthetic readings of texts. Rosenblatt agrees with the idea that forming personal connections within a text is key to an aesthetic reading of a text when she states, “It is not the words but the individual reader who has acquired the associations with them, and who pays attention to these associations” (1994, pg. 72). What Rosenblatt means when she explains this is that certain words within a text will carry more weight within a text due to readers’ associations with such words. The example she gives when explaining this is explaining the emotional connotations that come with the words “hypotenuse” and “mother”: while “hypotenuse” may carry some weight with it for people interested in mathematics, “mother” is much more likely to hold a greater emotional value for readers due to their personal associations with the word (Rosenblatt, 1994, pg. 72). Yet, the associations with these words can change based on personal experiences which can in turn change interpretations of texts. Rosenblatt (1994) highlights this idea when she states, “We must recognize that the reader brings to or adds to the nonverbal or socio-physical setting his whole past experience of life and literature” (pg. 81). The cause of the differences of interpretations of texts comes, in part, from the differences in past experiences and personal connections between readers. While some readers may have similar interpretations of texts, they will go about different methods to reach their individual interpretations so that no two interpretations of a text will be exactly the same—although they may be similar—unless the readers are given a “preferred” reading of the text in which their interpretation is one that was spoon-fed to them by a teacher. This leads to a discourse between readers about literary interpretations and what led them to the result that they came up with in their readings which

leads to both readers shifting their perspectives even more as they learn more about the perspectives and opinions of others. Rosenblatt (1994) places special emphasis on this when she states:

Learning what others have made of a text can greatly increase such insight into one's own relationship with it. A reader who has been moved or disturbed by a text often manifests an urge to talk about it...He likes to hear others' views. Through such interchange he can discover how people bringing different temperaments, different literary and life experiences, to the text have engaged in very different transactions with it (pg. 146).

This leads the readers to metacognition as they think about their individual interpretations and thought processes and how they compare to others', thus shifting their thoughts and perspectives of the world around them.

Readers are able to think metacognitively based on what they have read, regardless of whether they read fiction or nonfiction, so long as the reader attempts to read aesthetically. This aesthetic reading of a text will allow readers to make personal connections with a text based on their previous experiences in life and literature and allows readers to reflect back on what they have read in order to shift their perspectives in the present, as well as in the future. This is shown when Rosenblatt (1994) states:

The reader, reflecting on the world of the poem, or play, or novel, as he conceived it and on his responses to that world, can achieve a certain self-awareness, a certain perspective on his own preoccupations, his own system of values (pg. 146).

This quote highlights the importance of an aesthetic reading of a text rather than an efferent reading of a text; with an efferent reading, the transaction made is not based on personal

connections, but is rather based on a need to learn or take something away from a text. An aesthetic reading of a text helps shift readers' perspectives on real-world issues, even without the reader taking part in or being a victim of those issues. An issue occurs, however, in classrooms when teachers spoon-feed young readers a preferred reading of a text which is inherently "correct." This preferred reading of a text stifles personal connections within a text and leads to an efferent reading rather than aesthetic reading. "The solution..." Rosenblatt writes, "lies in rejecting the preoccupation with some illusory unspecifiable absolute or 'correct' reading or ideal reader... The general reader needs to honor his own relationship with the text" (1994, pg. 140). Certainly, the intrinsic value of the text may differ from reader to reader, but that it is also based on prior experiences and that readers who come back to texts later in life may take a different meaning from their updated aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt (1994) touches on this topic and explains:

The intrinsic value of a literary work of art resides in the reader's living through the transaction with the text... The ephemeral personal evocation which is the literary work cannot be held static for later inspection. It cannot be shared directly with anyone else; it cannot be directly evaluated by others (pg. 132).

Even after readers finish reading texts, the poems that are formed as a part of the transaction between reader and text are dynamic and ever-changing—shifting the readers' perceptions of the real-world and the text as the reader experiences more in life. Readers could potentially read the same text twice and drastically change the poem that they formed as part of the transaction with the text during the first reading since the readers will have an updated perspective on life and the real-world when they start their second reading.

When discussing literature, it is crucial to make the distinction between fiction and nonfiction because fiction can affect readers' perspectives as much as nonfiction can. Fiction is a form of perceived reality, a reality that is inherently imaginary, that is created by an author who "has looked at life from a particular angle of vision; he has selected out what he hopes will fulfill his aim...to make you see, to make you hear, to make you feel" (Rosenblatt, 1994, pg. 86). When in this imaginary reality, readers perceive what they see, hear, and feel as true reality, therefore allowing them to shape their realities through the lenses of fiction. While the fictional world and the real world may differ in fundamental ways, there is a great deal of overlap between reality and fiction which can shift readers' perspectives—be it through morality issues, perceptions of people who are different from the readers, etc. Rosenblatt (1994) validates the world of fiction and its effects on reality by stating:

The fictional or imaginary are often considered parasitic on the real world, since the fictional contains many elements drawn from the world of sense experience. Here, again, perhaps too sharp a distinction is being made; philosophers, psychologists, and anthropologists have led us to question how much of what we take to be "reality" has been structured by the human organism and the assumptions of our culture. Our vision of the "real" world often depends on what we bring to it not only from past "reality" but also from the world of fiction or the imagination. Literature especially invites confusion about its relation with reality. (pg. 33).

This quote shows the importance that fiction and imagination hold in the real-world, especially on perceptions of the real-world. Fictional literature is able to shape the world in the same ways that nonfictional literature is able to affect readers' perspectives of the world—by challenging what readers know and forming connections with prior knowledge and experiences to engage

and stimulate readers' minds in such a way that updates their old ways of thinking and allows them to see the world in a different light.

Closure

In regard to the information presented in this literature review, it is evident that reality is affected by fiction and vice versa. Whether it is viewed by the reader as an escape from reality, a commentary on the real world, or a falsehood that is read only for enjoyment then later disavowed, fiction has an impact on readers' perceptions. High school students may not recognize the impact that a book has on their perceptions, but in reality, fictional books allow readers to grow and expand their knowledge and awareness of the world and the issues that adolescents face in the real world on a daily basis. It also seems that the way books are presented to students plays a role in their shifting perspectives. Students who read independently and are encouraged to read independently will likely have greater and more meaningful personal connections with the text—the same goes for students who are allowed to form personal connections and interpretations to an assigned reading during class. On the other hand, students who are taught a “preferred,” or Cliff’s Notes, reading of a text are less likely to take a unique perspective from the text.

Methods

The purpose for the research conducted was to gather evidence that showed how fictional literature affects reality and perceptions of reality through the lens of students' favorite fictional books during high school. To achieve this goal, an anonymous online survey was sent to students of all classifications in the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP) and Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College (SMBHC) at the University of Mississippi. The survey asked participants to name their favorite book when they were in high school, as well as describe the effects that the book had on their perceptions of the real world during high school and the effects, if any, that the book has on their current perception of the real world.

Once the survey was released, eighty-six unique responses were collected over a thirteen-day period. After these responses were collected, they were analyzed to find similarities within the varied responses. First, the responses were analyzed to find commonalities between participants' favorite fictional books. The book responses were marked with indicators that would describe the books: whether the books were adult, young adult, or children's literature; if the books were typically read in a classroom setting; if the books were a part of a series; and the age of the book were all possible descriptors for the participants' favorite books. The responses were then analyzed to find similarities in the ways that participants' favorite books affected their realities. The perception shift responses were marked with descriptors that would indicate: whether there was a shift in perspective; eye-opening readings; readings that inspired awareness of reality, social issues, or disabilities; whether the book was an escape from reality for the participant; whether the book inspired a love for reading; if the participant indicated that they

reread the book after high school; and if the participant found that the book was unrealistic. Once that was completed, the descriptors were then charted to see what correlations existed within the data.

The collection and analysis of this data stemmed from the need to comprehend how students interpret unique fictional literature and how their interpretations affect their perceptions of the world around them. This data, in turn, will show current and future educators the types of fiction that they should recommend to their students in order to heighten their awareness of reality and positively affect their realities. This data will also show that not all readers are alike and that some readers will interpret different things from fiction due to their personal connections with the text itself.

Results

The research resulted in a great variety of discoveries revolving around students' favorite fictional books and the ways that their favorite books affect their perceptions of reality. These discoveries could prove useful to educators and parents hoping to find ways to encourage their students or children to read more.

Book Findings

Table 1 shows that most participants' favorite books were young adult books with forty-one responses, followed by adult books with thirty-seven responses, then finally children's literature with thirteen responses. It is also important to note that a majority of participants' favorite books were published after 2000 with forty-six responses, while books published between 1900 and 2000 were the second most popular with thirty-nine responses, and books published before 1900 were the least popular with six responses. However, there is some overlap between some of these statistics due to seven of the participants naming the *Harry Potter* series as their favorite book—*Harry Potter* started out as children's literature when *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* was published in 1997, but transitioned into contemporary YA in the 2000s as the characters in the books aged. *Table 1* also shows that thirty-one of the individuals' favorite books during high school were books that were part of a series—twenty-four of these responses listed a book that was part of a young adult series and twenty-eight responded with a book that was published as part of a series after the year 2000. Another significant statistic that is shown in the table is that a majority of the adult literature was published between the years of 1900 and 2000, while a majority of the adolescent or YA literature was published after the year 2000.

Table 1*Fictional Book Descriptor Co-Occurrence Chart*

	1900-2000	After 2000	Before 1900	Series	Adult	Children's	YA	Typical Class Reading	Favorite Book
1900 - 2000		7	0	9	24	11	10	13	39
After 2000	7		0	28	8	9	37	2	46
Before 1900	0	0		0	6	0	0	4	6
Series	9	28	0		4	10	24	1	31
Adult	24	8	6	4		0	0	16	37
Children's	11	9	0	10	0		7	0	13
YA	10	37	0	24	0	7		3	41
Typical Class Reading	13	2	4	1	16	0	3		19
Favorite Book	39	46	6	31	37	13	41	19	

By far the most popular type of literature in this study is YA literature published after 2000, also known as contemporary YA literature. Most participants who indicated that their favorite book was YA literature also indicated that it was written after 2000. Yet, of these thirty-seven participants who described this, none of them mentioned reading these books during class in their responses. In fact, during this study, only three participants indicated reading YA books that were taught in the classroom, and only three read books published after 2000 that were taught in the classroom. It is imperative that schools teach relevant and relatable literature to students, especially high school students.

According to the 2013 Mississippi text exemplar list—the list of texts that serves as an example of what texts teachers may teach in the classroom—of the fifty-nine books that could be taught in schools, only four were published after the year 2000, as shown in *Table 2* (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013, pg. 4-6). This exemplar list shows books that were contrary to the results that were found in this research. The exemplar list included a few books—such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies*—that some participants listed as their favorite books, but for the most part, the exemplar list did not include a significant number of YA literature that participants preferred. In fact, only twelve books from the 2013 text exemplars were written for and marketed to young adult readers, while forty-six of the texts were written and marketed as adult literature. Thus, due to the age of the texts as well as the number of adult books, a majority of the texts on the exemplar list that were written and published before 2000 would be considered classics: works by Shakespeare as well as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Pride and Prejudice* are included in this category (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013, pg. 4-6). The inclusion of these pieces of classic literature brings back the points that Wise (2012) mentions in her TedEd talk: while classic literature may have once shaped society and culture, it is no longer as relevant to the problems and issues posed within today’s society and there are many contemporary books that deal with these issues.

On the other hand, the 2020 text exemplars include many more young adult books and books published after 2000 while still including some of the classics like *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby* (Wright, et al., pg. 12-20). As shown in *Table 2*, forty-two of the texts on the 2020 exemplar list were published after 2000 and thirty-nine of the books were considered young adult literature. This exemplar list shows a great improvement in comparison to the 2013 exemplar list, considering the amount of contemporary YA literature which, according to most participants,

had the biggest impact on high school students. In fact, when comparing the number of contemporary YA books on the 2020 and 2013 exemplar lists, it is evident that the 2020 list has much more relevant literature for adolescents with thirty-six YA books published after 2000 compared to two books on the 2013 list, as shown in *Table 2*. The inclusion of this type of literature on the newer exemplar list is significant as it reflects the results shown on *Table 1*. This shows that educators and curriculum creators are realizing how influential YA literature is for students and are, therefore, now beginning to include it in curricula and lessons.

Table 2

Text Exemplar Analysis Chart

	Before 1900	1900-2000	After 2000	Children's	YA	Adult	Post-2000s YA	Number of Texts
2013 Exemplars	24	31	4	1	12	46	2	59
2020 Exemplars	7	16	42	2	39	23	36	64

However, it is important to note that adult literature also affected participants' perceptions of the real world. Of all three of the different types of literature—children's, YA, and adult—adult literature was the most prevalent type of literature that was typically read in a classroom setting. Of the thirty-seven participants who responded with an adult literature book as their favorite book during high school, twelve were taught in a classroom setting, and all twelve were written before 2000—with two books being written before 1900. Responses that stated that their favorite books during high school were adult literature included *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of*

the Flies, and *Pride & Prejudice*. In fact, when comparing participants' responses to the 2013 text exemplar list, sixteen of the participants' favorite books that were typically taught in high school were adult literature while the other three were young adult literature. This raises a few questions: First, did the students who responded with typical classroom readings genuinely read and make personal connections with these books or did their teachers give them a preferred reading? Second, are high school students developmentally ready to read and comprehend adult literature? Finally, how do these adult books affect high school students' perceptions?

When compared to YA and adult literature, children's literature was by far the least popular type of literature during participants' high school years, with only thirteen responses indicating that their favorite book was children's literature—most of which overlapped with YA literature due to the participants indicating that their favorite book was a part of the *Harry Potter* series. One likely reason that children's literature is unpopular among high school students is that the students have matured and grown out of reading children's books. To further this, the text exemplars for both 2013 and 2020 have a minimal amount of children's literature represented on the lists: one and two books respectively. However, a few of the participants noted in their responses that their reasoning behind these books being their favorite books was due to the fact that they had read those books growing up and treasured them as formational parts of their childhood. For example, a majority of participants who said their favorite book was children's literature indicated that the *Harry Potter* series contained their favorite books, and more than one response described that the series was a treasured series that they felt nostalgia for, but nearly all of the responses that indicated that their favorite book was children's literature looked back at those books fondly. This sentiment directly ties back into Rosenblatt's book *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* in which she states that reading is a transactional experience in which the

reader forms a relationship with a text and interprets the text in an active process that grows as the reader does (1994, pg. 20-21). However, this raises another question: Can high school students still learn and shape their realities with children's literature?

While books published after the year 2000 were the most popular books among participants, it is also significant to note that books published between 1900-2000 also had an impact on the participants during high school. However, considering the number of books on the 2013 text exemplars that were published between 1900 and 2000, it is possible that these responses are heavily influenced by the literature that participants read during high school. Indeed, of the eighty-six responses, thirty-nine indicated that their favorite book during high school was published between 1900 and 2000 and of those thirty-nine, thirteen were on the 2013 text exemplar list for Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013, pg. 4-6). This is a stark contrast to the six participants who indicated that their favorite book was published before 1900. A probable hypothesis is that a majority of these participants were heavily influenced by the literature that they covered in class, especially considering that four of the six texts were on the 2013 text exemplar list (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013, pg. 4-6). Considering how few of these texts were represented, and how few pre-1900 texts are on the 2020 exemplar list—only seven—it is probable that students find it hard to make personal connections with older literature and the classics. This claim is supported not only by the results of the survey, but also Wise's claim that she makes in her TedEd video that classics, while they may have been revolutionary when they were written, are no longer relevant in today's society and that students cannot connect with these texts and—in most cases—will not use them to shape their interpretations of today's world.

The final aspect of the results shown in *Table 1* that is singularly significant is the number of participants' favorite books that are part of a series. The most notable example of this occurrence is seen when participants list *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, or *Twilight* as their favorite books during high school. It is important to address the significance of book series, particularly YA series and series published after 2000, as these types of books typically indicate that students are reading and finding reasons to continue reading, even if the reason is something as simple as wanting to finish the series. Educators should encourage their students to read as much and as often as they can, and by including series in their lessons, they may be able to accomplish that goal.

Perception Findings

Table 3 shows the findings that occurred through analysis of the perception responses. This data shows that most of the perception changes were stronger in high school rather than after graduation. This can be shown when comparing that there were fifty-two eye-opening responses in high school perceptions and only thirty-five eye-opening perceptions after high school. However, there were three areas in which participants' current perception responses had greater numbers than their high school perception responses: when participants indicated that they reread their favorite book, when they felt their favorite book was unrealistic, and when there was no shift in perspective. For the most part, though, most statistics remained relatively the same when comparing current perceptions to high school perceptions with participants only noting that their favorite books were more eye-opening during high school than after graduating—this could be due in part to them feeling as if they have learned all that they could from the text. Still, multiple participants noted learning many new things about the world through their reading—whether they became more aware of reality, social issues, or disabilities,

nearly every participant indicated that they learned something from their reading whether they indicated that the book was unrealistic or an escape from reality.

Table 3

Perspective Shift Co-Occurrence Chart

	#Escape"	#Not Realistic"	#Awareness of Disabilities	#Awareness of Social Issues	#Awareness of reality	#Encouraged love of reading	#Eye-opening	#No Shift	#Personal connection	#Rereading	#Current Perception	#High School Perceptions
#Escape"		1	0	0	4	1	4	1	1	0	3	11
#Not Realistic"	1		0	0	4	0	2	2	0	0	5	4
#Awareness of Disabilities	0	0		2	1	0	3	1	1	0	2	3
#Awareness of Social Issues	0	0	2		29	0	27	0	5	0	15	19
#Awareness of Reality	4	4	1	29		0	53	1	8	1	33	36
#Encouraged love of reading	1	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	0	2	3
#Eye-opening	4	2	3	27	53	0		1	9	1	35	52
#No Shift	1	2	1	0	1	0	1		1	0	19	7
#Personal connection	1	0	1	5	8	1	9	1		0	18	23
#Rereading	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0		3	0
#Current Perception	3	5	2	15	33	2	35	19	18	3		
#High School Perceptions	11	4	3	19	36	3	52	7	23	0		

One reason that the “unrealistic” responses could have increased after high school could be due to maturity of the participant level at the time of the reading of the book compared to their current maturity. For example, both Participants 19 and 77 stated that *Twilight* was their favorite book and both stated that they found it unrealistic after graduating high school because it gave them “a false hope” and that “the relationships and love ties were [dramatized] and idealized to extremes.” These participants noted something within their favorite YA book series and when

applying it to their adult notions of the real world, they realized that these books had likely given them some ideas about love and adult life that were not as realistic as they originally thought. Arguably, these participants have learned just as much, if not more from these books as adults than they did as adolescents. They learned from the fictional world of *Twilight* by acknowledging that the ideas and dramatized relationships within the book were unrealistic and using those ideas to adjust their high school notions and shift their perspective so that they could see relationships in a much more realistic way. Although the participants did not find their favorite fictional book realistic and disregarded a few of the ideas that were held within, they were still able to learn from those ideas and shift their perspectives. These responses prove Rosenblatt's (1994) claim that fiction is often considered parasitic on the real world, just as the responses that indicate that their favorite fictional book was an escape from the real world highlights her claim that our vision of the real world depends on our past experiences and what we have taken from the world of the imaginary (pg. 33).

While more participants responded that they felt that their favorite fictional book was an escape during high school rather than after graduation, there were a minority of participants who responded that their favorite book was and still is an escape for them in the present. For example, Participant 15 states:

[*Artemis Fowl*] pushed me to read more during high school. It made me realize how this world has so many stories to offer that are so enjoyable. Fantasy has always been my favorite genre of book, video games, movies, anime, etc. This book showed me a world with secretive magic that blended well with a more realistic world which was interesting... This book made me realize how boring real life is... The world is full of

wonderful things that seem fantastical, but most of them are contrasted by all of the horrible things in this world. I found books like this an escape from this world.

This participant states that reading *Artemis Fowl* granted them an escape from the real world that continues into their present. They recognize that the real world has a variety of issues within it, yet the book remains as an escape for them so that they can shape their real-world perceptions through their adventure throughout their favorite fictional book. Certainly, this sense of fantasy and escape is just as influential on students as realistic and historical fiction. While realistic fiction may address certain issues head-on, fantasy can also address these issues, albeit in a different way. For example, while *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett directly tackles the issue of racism, a book like *Inhuman* by Kat Falls tackles racism in a different and more fictionalized manner. While they both are very different in regards to the world within the story, they both address the same issues in ways that are relevant to different readers. While a sense of escapism may be important for some readers, other readers may crave a realistic story that they are familiar with. For this reason, it is crucial that educators take into account their students' preferences for books so that they can recommend their students books that they will enjoy and want to read.

Yet, some participants who viewed their favorite book as an escape from reality also felt that there was no shift in their real-world perceptions after they graduated high school. Participant 30 felt this way after reading *Percy Jackson*, as they would wonder if events from the book could happen in real life and viewed it as an escape from reality, but realized that this point of view was not realistic and said that the book did not affect their perception of the real-world anymore. This is likely also due to maturity since the participants have grown into new perspectives as they have aged, read more books, and experienced more that life has to offer.

This is not to say, however, that these books that the participants have grown out of are insignificant, but rather the opposite. All books are significant in readers' lives, whether readers read them efferently or aesthetically. Certainly, books are more likely to leave a lasting impact on readers when they are read aesthetically rather than efferently because when a reader efferently reads a book or is taught a book by a teacher, they usually walk away from the book with a Cliff's Notes interpretation of the book rather than a personal interpretation.

It is clear to see how these perception shifts affect each other, especially when regarding realism and fictionality. It is also crucial to note that participants who had personal connections were able to gain awareness about the reality that surrounds them, as well as the social issues that exist within the real world. To demonstrate this, Participant 51 discusses that while they were reading *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, they lost a friend they cared for and that the book was able to bring meaning to that situation. They were able to make sense of their inner and outer feelings and the real world around them through the book because "the real world is a difficult warzone that we have to fight [through] every day." This is a crucial revelation for teachers and future teachers, as they must ensure they find books that students are able to connect with on a personal level. This task is not one that can be easily emulated inside the classroom, but it is possible—all ELA (English Language Arts) educators must ensure that they recommend relevant literature to their students, whether for personal reading or for an independent novel project that students will do for class. These personal connections and personal interpretations of texts lead to a greater interest in reading among students, especially when the book that they read is one that they enjoy.

While the data in *Table 3* regarding which books were typically students' favorites and how students thought of their favorite books is already eye-opening, the combined statistics for

favorite fictional novels during high school and perception changes during high school are likely to lead to even more discoveries. These discoveries can lead to a greater understanding of how high school students view fictional literature and how teachers can tackle teaching these books and encouraging their students to read books that students can personally connect with. In fact, these changes are already beginning to occur as shown in the differences between the 2013 and 2020 text exemplars as shown in *Table 2*—it is up to the teachers, however, to act as the agents of change and ensure that the students are able to connect to these texts and provide age-appropriate and relevant texts that students can use to shift their perceptions of the real world.

Which Books Affect Real-World Perception in Students?

Table 3 shows which books affected particular areas of participants' perceptions. For example, the table shows that thirty of the eye-opening responses occurred when participants' favorite book was written after the year 2000—another set of thirty were adult novels. This table also shows that, in some cases, adult novels had a greater effect on participants' perceptions than YA novels did, perhaps due to the fact that adult literature was the type of literature most taught in Mississippi schools according to the 2013 text exemplars as shown in *Table 2*. Another interesting metric shown by the table is that no classroom reading resulted in a love for reading among students—therefore showing that perhaps the 2013 text exemplars were outdated and no longer had an impact on students, which could be shifting as teachers begin teaching according to the 2020 text exemplars. Furthermore, adult novels outranked YA and children's literature in nearly every category with the exception of: using the book as an escape, finding the book unrealistic, gaining an awareness of disabilities from their reading, and encouraging a love for reading. While the realism-escapism issue within literature has been discussed within these results, awareness and encouraging a love for reading have not and it is crucial that ELA

educators understand the effects of these results on participants so that they can use these results to inform their future lessons and ensure that they're teaching to their full potential.

Table 4

Book & Perception Shift Co-Occurrence Chart

	☑ "Escape"	☑ "Not Realistic"	☑ Awareness of Disabilities	☑ Awareness of Social Issues	☑ Awareness of reality	☑ Encouraged love of reading	☑ Eye-opening	☑ No Shift	☑ Personal connection	☑ Rereading
☑ 1900-2000	4	2	0	13	24	2	27	8	16	2
☑ After 2000	9	5	3	11	21	2	30	14	15	1
☑ Before 1900	1	1	0	3	3	1	5	1	4	0
☑ Series	10	6	1	4	10	2	14	12	5	1
☑ Adult	1	2	0	15	26	1	30	6	17	2
☑ Children's	4	1	1	4	4	2	8	3	5	0
☑ YA	9	5	2	8	18	2	24	13	12	1
☑ Classroom Reading	0	0	0	7	9	0	9	1	5	1

A shocking discovery that was made from this research as shown in *Table 1* is that very little YA literature or literature published after the year 2000 was taught in a classroom setting. Could this perhaps be due to the literature being too new, irrelevant to classroom discussion, an outdated educational system or something different? It is also possible that YA literature is being taught in high school classrooms, but that students' favorite YA books were read independently rather than in the classroom. Yet still, with forty-one participants stating that their favorite book was YA literature, forty-six stating that their favorite book was published after 2000, and thirty-seven stating that their favorite book was a YA book published after 2000, it would be expected that at least one of those books would be taught in the classroom. These results echo the assertion

that many literary theorists do not consider YA literature to be valuable because of its so-called lack of substance (Daniels, 2006, pg. 28). Yet, the results of this study and the participants' deep insight revolving around these books tell a different tale—a tale worth telling—that shows how much of an impact YA literature can have on high school students' perceptions during high school, as well as after high school. For example, Participant 18 named *Inhuman*—a YA novel published in 2013—by Kat Falls as their favorite fictional book and said:

[In high school] [*Inhuman* by Kat Falls] opened my eyes to who we consider people. There are people in this world we dehumanize because of their background or race or illness. Those people are still people and they deserve to be treated as such. Everyone has the right [to] an equal opportunity. We need to stop seeing differences as issues. It also showed me I need to not be so willing to trust and to examine the people around me more closely. Not everyone around me that shows me kindness is looking out for my wellbeing. People are selfish and wicked. [There] are few [people] that care and share kindness for the good of others out of love. [Now] I read [*Inhuman*] almost every other year. It reminds [me] of [the ideas I had during high school] and sometimes points out to me my own prejudices.

This novel shifted Participant 18's perceptions of reality and their perspective on social issues. Through reading this book, they are able to point out their prejudices and see that every person has the right to a fair opportunity. That is a powerful revelation for a high school student to have and they are able to look at social issues through a lens that is specifically targeted to someone in high school. Certainly, books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* can give insight on social issues like racism, sexism, feminism, etc. but they are not aimed toward young adults and are likely too advanced for some high school students to

understand. On the other hand, YA novels present these adult issues through a different lens than adult novels. For example, comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Inhuman* leads to a discussion of realistic and fantasy fiction. While *The Handmaid's Tale* shows a more realistic point of view of social issues at play and how sexism and women's rights matter in society, *Inhuman* shows a fictionalized group of people who face discrimination which leads to students making the connection from the fictional world to the real world and thinking metacognitively about their own views of the real world.

However, this is not to say that adult literature cannot be taught in a classroom because it is "too real" or "not fictional enough". Rather, adult literature has just as much to offer metacognitively as YA literature, but educators should attempt to focus on YA literature in the classroom because high school students can relate more with YA books due to the reader being able to relate to characters who are the same age and going through similar situations. In fact, according to *Table 4*, adult novels had more of an effect on participants' perspective shifts than YA literature did. While this may be due, in part, to a majority of 2013 text exemplars for Mississippi being adult literature published between 1900-2000, these results are still important to note because some students may prefer adult literature over YA literature because they may be more mature than their classmates. For example, Participant 86 states:

I would say that the most influential parts of [*The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver] really occurred in the classroom. What I mean by that is my classmate's reactions to some of the content really solidified that their views [were not] the right ones, and the lessons from the book fell on deaf ears.

When this participant talks about their classroom discussion of *The Poisonwood Bible*, they mention that "the lessons from the book fell on deaf ears." This could be caused by many

different factors in those students' lives, including an unwillingness to learn, a low level of enjoyment from reading, or a lack of maturity necessary to think about the book metacognitively. Of course, some students in high school may be developmentally prepared for adult literature or classical literature, but not every student can grasp Shakespeare or *The Poisonwood Bible*, as was the case with the peers of Participant 86. This does not make these students any less valuable as readers, but rather it emphasizes the need for differentiated lessons that highlight all types and scopes of literature so that students can figure out what type of literature they enjoy. If teachers provide relatable and enjoyable books to students, students will be encouraged to read and will begin to read more outside of the classroom. However, when looking at the data in *Table 4*, no adult books ignited a love for reading in the students; rather, participants who read YA and children's literature learned how to love to read.

While adult novels may have had an impact on participants' perceptions and perspectives on the real world, if they are not encouraging high school students to read—the one thing that nearly every ELA teacher wants for their students—are the books truly doing their job? Is it up to teachers to encourage their students to love to read? Rather, it is a mixture of both of these ideas: ELA teachers must provide relevant, relatable, and enjoyable literature to students and actively encourage students to read books that they find enjoyable in order to encourage reading among students. Of course, this is not to say that adult literature is not enjoyable and that no one can learn to love to read because of these books, but rather that high school students are much better suited to learn to love to read from YA books. Young adult literature contains, for the most part, the same ideas and issues that adult literature has, but it is overlooked because it is aimed at a younger audience and teachers think that teaching the classics holds much more value than teaching YA literature. This notion is blatantly erroneous; the classics are now so outdated that

while some lessons may still be learned from reading them, the lessons are no longer relevant to today's adolescents and the world that they live in. A teenager today is much more likely to learn a lesson from *Percy Jackson* or *Harry Potter* than they are to learn a lesson from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. While it is still important that students are aware of Shakespeare, there is nearly nothing new that they can learn from his plays, especially since a better and fuller interpretation of the text requires the original—or as close to the original as possible—text rather than a modern translation which is diluted, especially when it comes to figurative language and double meanings, but easier to read.

In fact, when analyzing books that were eye-opening for participants and caused a greater awareness of reality, social issues, and disabilities, only books that were published after 2000 caused a greater awareness in all three areas, while more books published between 1900 and 2000 caused awareness of reality and social issues than books published after 2000. Once again, this may be caused by the majority of books on the 2013 Mississippi text exemplar list being published between 1900 and 2000, as shown in *Table 2*. One specific example that fits this description is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. This book was one of the most popular books among the participants, all of whom mentioned an awareness of reality and social issues after reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* during class. Some learned from this book both during and after high school, first learning about racial inequalities during high school, then learning that the book is a “white savior novel” and that Atticus is “a white savior” as Participants 17 and 78 noted in their responses. This novel, while still educational and perspective-shifting, is no longer as relevant or relatable to readers because the book is outdated—readers would much rather read a book like *Dear Martin* or *The Hate U Give*, both of which are on the 2020 Mississippi text exemplar list, to learn about racial injustices. Not only are contemporary YA literature books

more relatable to today's adolescents, they also have a more modern view on today's issues. While *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Hate U Give* both cover the topic of racial injustice, they were written fifty-seven years apart. Therefore, it is probable, if not guaranteed, that today's readers would have a much easier time relating to *The Hate U Give*—the more modern of the two texts.

In short, adult literature, books published between the years 1900 and 2000, and classical literature all have their benefits in the classroom as well as on readers' perspectives and perceptions of the real-world. In some cases, when adult literature or the classics are taught in a classroom setting, they may be the superior choice of all the books available to read, but the teacher must allow personal connections with a text, which can be difficult to do. Classics can also be extremely difficult to read, and interpretations can be muddied with modern translations. However, contemporary young adult literature solves all of the problems that can arise when dealing with adult literature and the classics: contemporary YA books are relatively new and therefore easily understood, they are relatable and relevant, and high school students are their target audience. The benefits of reading YA novels in class are many and educators have finally begun to see that, especially with the inclusion of much more contemporary YA literature on the 2020 Mississippi text exemplars. Now, all that is left for educators to do is teach the books in class, encourage the students to read these books that are targeted at them, and recommend their students books based on their interests. If educators can do that, more students will read, make personal connections to books, and learn how to love to read; that can and will shape the world around them as they think metacognitively about the relevant literature that they are reading and apply those thought processes to their daily lives.

Conclusion

This research has proven to be eye-opening, specifically in regard to the importance of contemporary young adult literature in the lives of students. While some participants noted that their perspective still shifted after reading adult literature, that is the function of all literature. Every book that every person reads affects their reality in some way, shape, or form. Even if the students were not developmentally ready to read adult literature, their perception of the real world would still change. However, it is much more beneficial to provide students with books that they are mature enough to read. That allows students exposure to texts that are targeted at them, easily read by them, and relevant to them that they can form a personal bond with. This personal bond changes the book inside the readers' minds—they no longer see the text as a text, nor do they see the text as an unwritten transaction as Rosenblatt (1994, pg. 31) states, rather, they see the text as their favorite book that will affect them for many years to come, even in adulthood. It is now time for YA literature to stop being overlooked and to make its way into the classroom so that the students can learn from relevant and personal literature, and it is up to educators to facilitate that.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Responses

What was your favorite fictional book during high school?	How did this book affect your perception of the world around you during your high school career?	Does this book continue to affect your perception of the real world? If yes, how so?
Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief	Since all the main characters have ADHD and dyslexia, I become more aware of those and the impacts of them. It also taught me a lot about Greek mythology!	Not so much in a new way, but the knowledge of learning disabilities that I learned reading has remained with me still.
The Future of Us by Jay Asher and Carolyn Mackler	It made me think about how every decision I make can change my future and made me be more conscientious of how my actions affect others.	Yes, I often think about my big decisions will impact my life, such as whether or not I should go to grad school and where I should go.
Red Rising	It taught me a lot about class relations and how one might go about fighting against discrimination. Also that not every side is totally good or evil but rather a mix of good and bad morals.	Yes, seeing what's going on a lot of the response reminds me of what happens in the book.
Hunger games	While it was obviously fiction, I think that it made me think about our own government and the corruption that is within its walls. It's not at all the same corruption that the nation of Panem faces, but we have our issues in our own way. I think it also made me look at the world around us and see that while they aren't having kids participate in the "hunger games" there are some countries that have issues that might as well be up there with this awful practices.	Not really. I still love it, but since high school I've had so many other books that have impacted my perception of the world that it has been overshadowed.
Unwind by Neal Shusterman	The Unwind Dystology addresses many heavy themes throughout the series, including that of a corrupt higher authority/establishment. After reading this series and researching some of the bigger topics that come up, I began to question what was being taught in schools, the media, etc. and made a point of doing outside research rather than just accepting whatever information was given as true	This book absolutely continues to affect my perception of the real world. I didn't attribute this series to my lack of trust in the "establishment" until later, but I still to this day go out of my way to look deeper into current events, history, etc. than the basics that are presented in education and the media.
A Court of Mist and Fury	This book taught me that looks can be deceiving, and to not always trust those around you until you really know who they are as a person. It also taught me to look at the world with new eyes, and to find the beauty in simple things.	Yes. I've learn that you can't judge people based of just the first few encounters and to really get to know the people around me.

<p>Dinotopia: A Land Apart From Time by James Gurney</p>	<p>This is a lifelong favourite of mine. It's technically maybe a children's books, since it's a richly illustrated speculative fiction story about dinosaurs, but it's also written as a series of journal entries as a scientist slowly explores this island and absorbs it's language and culture and the unique ecosystems of the island. So when I was small it was simply a collection of gorgeous pictures, and as I got older and older it made more sense bit by bit, until I was in highschool reading the intricate descriptions of the ecosystems, and the political systems of the island, and learning the language. When you cut into the meat of the story, it's ultimately a pretty hard sci-fi that revels in the minute details of every day life in this imagined country.</p> <p>This sparked a lifelong love of this exact sort of slow, intricately detailed science fiction and fantasy stories that are less stories and more an exploration of their world. It was my enjoyment of this book that spurred me to read a lot of other things, just in the hopes that they would be like this one. Very few really scratched that itch, but as a result a read a lot of books hunting for this one very specific feeling. To this day it's my favourite way to consume fiction still.</p> <p>In the absence of titles that can do what this book did, I took to struggling to write my own. In highschool I wrote around three admittedly not very good speculative fiction stories that were intimately researched and detailed, and just as in love with their world and slowly exploring it as Dinotopia was. This took hours upon hours of work and research, all in pursuit of my passion for this one book. It's still my favourite book, and I think it always will be. I remember being wary of telling people that my favourite book was a picture book in highschool, but these days I am all too eager to tell people about it. I've lent out my copy to more people than I can count, and read it aloud to children who are just old enough to understand the simpler parts, but not yet to grasp the rest of it.</p>	<p>The endless pursuit of a book like this one has carried on long into my adult life. It really whet my appetite for xenofiction, and other such hard sci-fi. Yesterday I befriended a stranger, and by the end of the conversation had sent them off to their local library to get a copy of this book. Some of my favourite shows to this day one of the first things I'll say I liked about it was that it reminded me of Dinotopia. The endless hours of research I did in my attempts to make a similar type of story contributed massively to my knowledge of our world, and will probably stick with me forever. Seeing as I haven't yet accomplished that goal to my satisfaction, it's likely that I will try again some day.</p> <p>My political views have also been impacted. The book takes a rather in depth look at the society of the island and how it functions, on something I would tentatively describe as anarchoprimitivism, but that might not quite be an accurate description. While there is a governmental structure, it is largely unenforced, and unpoliced. It's built largely along the lines of supplying basic rights and education to the citizens, without imposing official laws. Communities in turn have their own "laws" which individual communities enforce for themselves. I have found myself quite smitten with a few of these ideas, and a lot of my political beliefs are aligned with those depicted in this book that defined so much of my development.</p>
<p>Divergent</p>	<p>I felt like I needed to toughen up since the main character was so tough. Like, if she can get stabbed in the arm with a knife, then I should be able to get a shot at the doctors.</p>	<p>Yes, but only in ways that it makes me day dream or fantasize what our world would be like now if the circumstances were similar to the book.</p>
<p>The Awakening by Kate Chopin</p>	<p>It really opened my eyes to the whole idea and movement of feminism. It made me realize the power that I have innately to follow my passions and be the person I want to be.</p>	<p>Yes, it has not only made me want to read other pieces of feminist literature, but I still think about and relate to the main characters.</p>

The Great Gatsby	It made me consider privilege and power in a new way. The vanity and lack of accessible depth of the wealthy character help me understand the effects of our countries cast system on a cast of which I am not a part.	Yes; I still think of people as gatsbys and daisys and while I try not to stereotype people I do meet girls and guys in college and think “unless something life altering happens to them they are headed for great unhappiness.”
Between Shades of Gray	It opened my eyes to some of the injustices that people faced.	Yes, i still think about it all the time and the horrible things that those people had to go through.
Hunger Games	In high school, I did not think too much about it. It was just a novel that I thought was well written and popular.	Yes I often catch myself thinking that our political world is turning into the one that Suzanne Collins warned us about through writing her series. I see trends of power hungry people and manipulation through the capital and the rebellion in the book and get concerned when looking at our government today. It opened my eyes to the evil and selfishness of those in power.
Of mice and men	It just reminded me not to judge people based on looks.	I guess it still reminds me of that.
The Handmaid's Tale	I read this book my senior year of high school. At that time, I was applying for colleges, trying to find a summer job, and preparing for AP exams. After reading it, I had a newfound appreciation for the rights we all have in America, but especially women. As a young woman, I was free to choose my job, my college, and which tests I would take (unlike the women in Gilead, who are maids or breeders).	This book has given me insight into dystopian worlds. I fully believe we are living in a dystopia right now (crazy election, deadly virus, high poverty and unemployment rates, global warming, etc). All of these factors played into the US turning into Gilead. I don't think we're actually going to turn into a Gilead-like situation, but it's still spooky how all the stars are aligning for a major dystopian society to form.
Artemis Fowl	This book pushed me to read more during high school. It made me realize how this world has so many stories to offer that are so enjoyable. Fantasy has always been my favorite genre of book, video games, movies, anime, etc. This book showed me a a world with secretive magic that blended well with a more realistic world which was interesting.	It does; as most fantasy stories tend to this book made me realize how boring real life is. There is no magic, no fairies, nor a 13yr old genius like Artemis. The world is full of wonderful things that seem fantastical, but most of them are contrasted by all of the horrible things in this world. I found books like this an escape from this world.
To Kill A Mockingbird	I believe I was taught to acknowledge and respect when people did the right thing, even when it was the unpopular thing to do. It showed me that my heritage as a southern white girl was full of faults. I never romanticized the past of the south, I always knew it was detrimentally stained. The book also taught me not to lean too heavily on my first impressions of people because there was often much more in their background.	Yes, I still read this book about once a year. I am learning to question the motives and intentions of Harper Lee in writing it and the possible biases she might have portrayed in the story.

To Kill a Mockingbird	I know this is a white savior novel and I don't necessarily like that I enjoyed this book the most, but it made me more proactive and passionate in my high school career. Instead of waiting for something to happen or for someone to ask me for help, I would try to identify situations that could possibly become an issue and help as many people as I could. It also made me realize choosing the side of the majority or of my friends is not necessarily always the right thing to do. I became more independent and more confident and firm in my beliefs.	I do think it continues to affect my perception. I'm still aware, and constantly checking myself, that I'm doing what is right and not what is popular or wanted of me.
Inhuman by Kat Falls	It opened my eyes to who we consider people. There are people in this world we dehumanize because of their background or race or illness. Those people are still people and they deserve to be treated as such. Everyone has the right an equal opportunity. We need to stop seeing differences as issues. It also showed me I need to not be so willing to trust and to examine the people around me more closely. Not everyone around me that shows me kindness is looking out for my wellbeing. People are selfish and wicked. There are few that care and share kindness for the good of others out of love.	I read it almost every other year. It reminds of those ideas and sometimes points out to me my own prejudices. It sticks with me because the story is so great.
Twilight (series)	I will say it probably gave me a false hope in some ways, but it positively gave me a love for literature in general. Being somewhat introverted, it gave me an exit from the real world (which can be nice); however, too much can give you high expectations which in the end only get crushed (speaking more generally...I have a long list of favorite fictional books).	No, I would say that's due to maturity, but at the same time, I never chose a career in literature or as a writer because of the false hope and twisted view of the world I knew it would probably give me, which would make this answer to this question different if that were the case. So plain and simple as of now no ha.
The Princess Bride	This book taught me not to "believe" everything I read. The author of the book is not in fact the real author. It's a fake author to draw in even more fantasy to the story. The book claims to be abridged even though it's the only version. It kinda teaches you that you can break the rules of typical writing.	This book taught me to go against the norm. At first glance, the book seems normal: written by an author and abridged to get straight to the story. In reality, it's a real life fantasy.
Out of my Mind	It gave me a different perspective of what it is actually like to live with a disability. It served as a remind to have an open mind. Just because you look different on the outside, doesn't mean you think or feel different on the inside.	Yes. Like I said, it's reminder to keep an open mind.

The Iliad	Reading the Iliad in high school opened up many different levels of perception. The first is just the understanding of how old the text is- what I was reading is thousands of years old, yet it still tells a human story. After thousands of years, it's a book that holds up, and that alone is impressive. It was also fascinating to get into the Greek mindset and see the tragedy play out, to understand the cultural context of Gods and heroes.	It adds a layer of context to my life. Having understood something so ancient, it puts my own life and daily struggles into perspective. It is proof that the human condition doesn't change, and I'm still reminded of that.
Pride and Prejudice	Pride and Prejudice made me consider the inequality of men and women in our world through its satire. It's ridiculous that the Bennett sisters could not stay in their own home just because they were not members of the male sex. Mr. Collins did nothing to deserve Longbourn except possessing a Y chromosome. Pride and Prejudice made me perceive the world as more patriarchal and inspired me to take a more active stance on feminism. I also think Pride and Prejudice affected my standards for men, and I came under the perception that no man that I would meet would ever be as good as Mr. Darcy, as ridiculous as that sounds.	It does, unfortunately, because I have yet to meet a man of Mr. Darcy's caliber. Perhaps they do not exist, and Pride and Prejudice has made me perceive the vast majority of men to be inadequate partners.
The Scarlet Letter	It made me more aware of social constructions that were not necessarily beneficial to society and can exclude people. Social things such as religious biases against homosexuality or dress codes that exclude people based on wealth.	I would say I do not have any new revelations, but I sometimes think about the ideas I previously mentioned.
The Dark Forest	It gave me a sense of awe to just how little humanity has scratched the surface of what there is to explore in space. It also gave me a sense of smallness in how powerless that I really am in the grand scale of everything.	The small sense of nihilism that it instilled within me kind of pushes me to do things that I normally would be embarrassed to do normally, as in a few thousand years, no one is going to really remember how awkward or out of place I looked.
The Sea of Tranquility by Katja Millay	This book made me quite aware of the way that others may perceive me, and the way that I perceive other people. Questions like, "How do other people think of me? What are the people around me really like? What is lurking beneath the surface of them?" began to cross my thoughts more often. It also made me realize that tragedies you see on the news go on in private when you aren't watching, and that they ripple to affect everyone involved. It made me realize that bad things don't just happen at night, in the dark, tucked away where nobody can see them.	Yes, I am always reminding myself that bad things can happen to me in broad daylight and to not let myself get too comfortable.
Game of Thrones	It made me want to be strong and beautiful and honorable and ruthless and cunning.	Yes, I still want to be like the characters
Junie B Jones	It didn't really	No

Women's Murder Club	Almost everything is a puzzle that can be solved. When some people are like puzzles, it helped me read them and understand what they were thinking or feeling and what they were going through.	Yes! This book made me look closer at things and become more observant. It helps me interact with people and read people very well.
Percy Jackson Series	It made me think outside the box because you never know who could be a demigod living amongst mortals.	Not so much as I've realized that it is not a very realistic way to go about life.
Ender's Game	I was very aware of how social media could sway political opinions, and it was interesting watching many of the fictional technologies and events in the book become reality over time. Thanks to this book I was very involved in some social media platforms when they first came out, and in one case operated two social media accounts on opposite sides of the political spectrum.	Yes. I think that since this book includes examples of human 'mob mentality' over the internet I am especially aware and cautious of the role social media plays these days.
The Chronicles of Narnia. All of them.	The series gave me a very grave perspective on the whole ordeal. I went into high school as a very serious, introspective person who was always looking for the symbolism in life. But there is not a lot of meaningful symbolism in high school. I was always watching out for ways to get further out of reality and closer to Narnia, which is super unhealthy, and that lead partially to my own social isolation and dissociative tendencies. It did lead to me forging a couple of incredibly strong relationships, making me more hopeful for the future outside of my small town.	Absolutely yes. The Chronicles of Narnia didn't necessarily change me fundamentally, but it did make me feel seen as a relatively somber, deeply emotionally child. The perspective I gained when I read the series will definitely stay with me my whole life. Whenever I feel out of place, I pull my volume off the shelf and read a few chapters and suddenly I'm more comfortable with myself. It definitely caused me to constantly compare the evils of our world to the nobility and honor of Narnia, which is not entirely fair to our world, but it gives me hope. After all, the most endearing and heroic characters in Narnia are humans just like us.
Hunger Games	Helped me connect to my peers	It gave me a glimpse of what privilege is like, and the difference in livelihood based on that privilege.
Harry Potter	It's been my favorite series for as long as I can remember. The lessons in it can be applied to every aspect of life. I made a lot of friends through our mutual love for it as well.	Yes, it influences my worldview especially through politics because it depicts a corrupt government and it has many parallels to real life even if it is about a fictional world.
The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver	Reading The Poisonwood Bible was the first time I ever heard about the Congo Crisis in the 1960s, and it invited me to think more deeply about what I was and wasn't being taught in my high school history classes. In addition, the way Kingsolver treats even her most unlikable characters with some amount of grace challenged me to do the same with the more unlikable characters in my life, and the way she plays with language and biblical references inspired me in my own writing.	This book and the research I did after reading it gave me a deep distrust of anyone who views American and European imperialism with an uncomplicated or yes-complicated-but-still-largely-positive lens. It also continues to challenge me to think deeply about what I was raised to believe about faith and religion and to critically consider any interpretation of scriptures that claims to be the only capital-T-Truth. There is also something to be said about the way the book makes it clear that white women are just as involved in systems of oppression as white men, whether by active participation or silent complicity, which continues to poke at me as I reckon with my own place in the world.

Harry Potter	I don't think it changed my perspective on the world during my high school career. If anything, the series was an escape from the world around me.	No. It's just a treasured series at this point.
Crime and Punishment	<p>The main character, Raskolnikov, endures through a process of ideological transitions throughout the novel, resulting in a drastically different view of not only the world but also of himself. He begins as your typical arrogant, pessimistic college student in 19th century St. Petersburg who thinks that he must make something great of himself, that he should not be like most ordinary men but instead strive to be a Napoleon, a world-changer who thinks not for himself but for the greater good of humanity. He believes that in order to be as such he must continually make sacrifices in the name of the greater good, a mindset which leads him to brutally axe-murder an old landlord lady that everybody in the neighborhood hates. The authorities cannot find who murdered her, however, and Raskolnikov lives a continual life of fear while his personal identity drowns in his ideological sense of self-importance, causing him to push away his personal relationships with his mother, his sister, and his lover Sonya. The cops eventually find him and he gets sentenced to Siberia, but there he has a great emotional revelation and admits he was wrong all along; the book ends on a happy note. During high school I was much like Raskolnikov, believing that the world is divided between a majority of ignorant commoners and a minority of exceptional leaders. This of course is a very grim view of the world, and this mindset made me view many of my friends and family in a negative light, especially if they had a political or philosophical opinion that was different from my own. But after reading Crime and Punishment, I realized that viewing others with contempt as "ignorant plebeians" simply because they don't agree with you and believing that your ideas make you special and deserving of some sort of authority is, in fact, an extremely unhealthy path. Although I maintain my own ideas—and of course believe that mine are better than most people's—I don't see myself as more superior or intelligent than other people, just different.</p>	<p>After having applied the book's lessons to myself, I now see the warning signs in other people, especially those who are politically active. It does not matter what your opinion is; anyone can fall into the trap of seeing themselves as smarter or superior to other people. Some ideas are "better" for the world than others, yes, but that does not make the subscriber a "better" human being than a non-subscriber. What I like most about the book is that it deconstructs the illusion of ideology in general, framing far-out ideas as deceptive, divisive, and indoctrinating, while portraying human emotions and relationships as concrete and universal no matter what one's beliefs may be. For instance, I personally identify as an anarchist, and some of my best friends are conservative; yet, we rarely ever talk about politics and have more in common than not. Some ideologies are great, but if you do terrible things in the name of them—like Raskolnikov—you risk sacrificing the universal connections and relationships with other people that make us human.</p>
Harry Potter	Harry Potter made me wish I had a magic school instead of high school.	I still wish I had gone to a magic school.
Rage of Angels	It didn't affect much of my perception around the world.	No

The Great Gatsby	The grass is not always greener on the other side, and love doesn't always live across the bay. It doesn't necessarily matter what you do for someone, some things are just never good enough. Some people are never going to be satisfied in life, like Daisy and Tom, and it does not matter what you do, they will never see the true potential in something or someone until it is too late, Jay and Daisy's relationship.	The Great Gatsby taught me that everyone deals with problems, and while they may not necessarily be on the same level, or perceived as equal, everyone goes through issues regardless of the status of wealth, job, or relationship. The novel also teaches that observation can kill just as much as participation while being a blessing at the same time, Nick. There needs to be a fine in your involvement in people's lives, and shows just how important it is to be very picky about who you chose to let into your life.
Mornings in Jenin	Mornings in Jenin allowed me to look past desensitized statistics expressed by the media. It showed me that there are people--mothers, fathers, husbands, daughters, sons behind every crisis in the world. It also changed my perception of the media by giving light to the Palestinian side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one that is often overlooked. This led me to lose greater respect for world leaders and to always look at both sides of an issue.	Yes--I no longer look towards large news media outlets as my sole source of information regarding crises or genocides, such as that of the Palestinians. I look for first hand accounts of events--articles that show the people behind the statistic. I've also learned that taking a side is necessary sometimes. As Desmond Tutu once said, "if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."
A Room with a View by E.M. Forster	It made me realize that I had a choice in the world I live in, that social expectations are shouldn't get to decide who I was going to be, and that the world was mine for the taking.	Yes, I've reread it a dozen times, and love to revisit quotes and passages to feel the freedom that accompanies nostalgia. I still admire the protagonist, and I still use it like a compass to guide me towards adventure, wonder, and a life worth living. The book has transformed from a shiny beacon of hope for the future into an old friend that I feel walks with me in this a little more grown up phase of life.
George Orwell's 1984	This book opened my eyes to dystopian novels. Never before had I thought of such a detailed existence of our possible future. I took on a more fanciful image of the present. It also gave me a new perspective of love and relationships. Would I go against an entire society's morals to be with a lover? These questions still entertain my thoughts.	This book gave me a new perspective of government's role (or other ruling being) in our lives. The fact that Big Brother replaced the same speck of dust on Winston's journal proves my point. Life is crazy.
The Rangers Apprentice	It made me idolize medieval culture! Absolutely loved the series. Also made me respect hunting (archery in particular).	Unsure today. I still think medieval culture is very cool!
Harry Potter	During most of High School, I read non fiction books. However, when I did read fiction books, I liked to read books in other languages. I choose to read Harry Potter in French because I knew the story in English so I could easily follow along with what French I knew. I liked learning about the differences in the English version and the differences in the French version. This did lead me to see how different parts of the world work in different ways.	This has continued to impact my perception of the world because now I am beginning to read the book again in German. This time I have three different languages and three different cultures that I can use to compare and contrast.

Harry Potter series	I thought getting good grades like Hermione was of utmost importance	i still think academic achievement is very important. Now that i'm almost done with academia i'm not sure what i'll do now.
Hunger Games	Put matters into my own hands!	Yes, if I want to make a change or see change happen in the real world, I know I have to be the change and contribute toward the effort
Far From the Tree by Robin Benway	It introduced me to realistic characters going through real-world issues that I had both experienced (divorced parents, sibling altercations, the struggles and triumphs of the LGBTQ+ community) and not experienced (foster care, adoption, teen pregnancy). Its three main characters are high school-aged, so I felt a sort of connection to them in that way, as well.	Yes; the issues it discussed will always be pertinent, and the inspiring yet realistic ways the characters dealt with their life circumstances will stick with me throughout my life.
Unearthly	It got me to think more about religions and the spiritual world.	Not much.
The giver	It didn't	No it just makes me think a little more
A Separate Peace by John Knowles	"A Separate Peace" really helped me bring to meaning what I was going through in my life. I had at the time lost a friend who I had deeply cared about and felt a lot of guilt over this. In the book, the main character also does something terrible condemning his friend and he is forced to live with this guilt. Not only is the book about a broken friendship, but it is about exploring the darker side of one's self as you grow up. Not to say that people are inherently bad, but more to show that as you are growing up everyone makes mistakes and does some things that we regret. Getting through high school I used this book as a road map to analyze ways that I was acting, characters of the people around me, and my relationships with people. Getting through adolescence was hard enough alone and this book really helped me understand that everyone is going through the same hardships with growing up more or less.	This book continues to affect my perception of the real world every day because I recognize everyone's loss of innocence and selfish motives. The book is about accepting your loss of innocence and being able to live with that. Every day, especially at college I am reminded that we are not kids anymore and that life is not fun and games. The real world is a difficult warzone that we have to fight every day.
The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery	I tried not to lose my childhood to "adulthood." We should never forget what it's like to be a child.	Yes. This world seems big, yet it is so small. Our world is so small compared to the larger perspective that exists. Nothing is permanent and everything deserves love.
The Mortal Instruments series	It gave me an escape outside of everyday life.	The fantasy world and friendships are really well done so it kind of makes the world seem a little more magical.

Strange the Dreamer by Lani Taylor	It confused me as to why things change suddenly and unexpectedly. In the book, the main character, Lazlo, completely forgets the name of a hidden city he idolizes when he is a child. He comes to find out that other people no longer remembers the city, and proceeds to spend years collecting information to understand the mystery of the place. It shocked me at first due to the way that author shows the grief of Lazlo over a lost word and how it could affect him so much. I guess that was one of the first times I saw such an attachment and immediately empathize with the person.	Yes, it does. I now keep in mind that I may never completely understand the world, just like how Lazlo comes to terms with this in his own world. However, just like him, we need to keep trying and perhaps we will find out in the future.
To Kill a Mockingbird	While my family is from Mississippi, I did the majority of my growing up in a predominantly White, Republican, middle class neighborhood in Ohio. As a person of color, I knew of the harms of racism, but my parents sheltered me and I thought that I had never experienced it myself. Now I understand I was dealing with microaggressions the entirety of my childhood. I think this book was the turning point where I started to understand that there are different forms of prejudice and showed me how much work is still to be done regarding social justice and equality.	I think since that turning point I don't reference back to the book. But I think my perception of the world is the way it is because of me reading To Kill a Mockingbird.
The Fountainhead (Ayn Rand)	Ayn Rand and her novel immensely impacted my perception of subjective reality during high school. Rand valorized individualism in her novel, and at the time Howard Roark seemed to me to be the very epitome of humanity itself. Roark valued his art over everything, and I was infatuated by Rand's prose. The novel encouraged me to believe in my self above all else.	Since high school, I have also read Rand's novel Atlas Shrugged, but my perception of the world has certainly changed since high school and has shifted away from Rand's entire reliance upon the individual.
what we talk about when we talk about love	it helped me realize how different people express love and that the idea of love is very abstract	yes, the same way it did in high school
Slaughterhouse Five	It put the world into perspective. Things happen, good and bad, and most of the time you don't have control. "So it goes."	Yes, it does continue to affect my perception of the real world. Even though I don't believe in plunger shaped aliens or that Billy Pilgrim was able to experience time in a linear form, the book taught me a lot about how I see life. I take things as they are, still always hoping for the best, but being realistic as well. Time is a gift, personal choice is a gift, and war is pointless. Three basic principles I live by.
Catcher in the Rye	This book really changed how I looked at things morally during high school because I identified with Hold Caulfield's character so much and his perception of the world.	No because I realized the pitfalls of taking his point of view as I got older.
Harry Potter	It changed the way I perceived the world because in the books Harry goes through a lot of trials and tribulations, but he is overall a positive person. I tried to put that sort of positive attitude and making the best out of the worst situations in my own life.	Yes, I still try to make the best of the worst situations just like my favorite characters from the books.

<p>Hurt Go Happy</p>	<p>I believe that this book has had a large impact on my level of empathy and understanding of people who have conditions impacting such a large portion of how they live their life. The book is centered around the story of a girl who is deaf who starts out just reading people's lips but eventually learns sign language along with her pet monkey who learns to communicate with her.</p>	<p>Absolutely. This book to this day helps me remember to be empathetic and understanding of people who are deaf or blind. It also just aids in my overall levels of empathy in general. Lastly, it has impacted my views toward animal experimentation and the idea of animals have a conscious which, due to my major of pharmacy, has been quite interesting to research and debate.</p>
<p>The Name of the Wind</p>	<p>IT made me realize that not all stories can be taken at face value. Every person is writing their own life. They just don't know it. It showed me what hard work can do. It also made me wish I lived in a more fantasy-based world.</p>	<p>It Is still a major conversation piece of mine and something I like to share with others. I feel it shows the kind of thinker I am. Also, the story continues to make me think about the different perspectives that an event can be seen through.</p>
<p>To Kill a Mockingbird</p>	<p>In high school, I felt like I was ignorant of a lot that was occurring around me. If it wasn't within my scope of school, religion, extracurriculars, etc., it often did not take precedence in my mind. I read To Kill a Mockingbird during my junior year of high school, and that year ending up being a very formative time in my life. As I read Harper Lee's novel, I enjoyed getting to know the tough, determined, and often irrepressible Scout and the ever-so-serious yet caring, fearless, and ethical Atticus. But beyond this, I noticed how although Lee's book was published in 1960, we still see the same divisive mindsets today. To most Maycomb residents, it didn't matter that Tom could not have physically committed what he had been accused for. It didn't matter that the alleged "victim's" father was about as reliable of a source as Donald Trump's twitter. It wasn't a case of right and wrong, guilty or innocent, truth or fiction... It was white versus black with the latter always being deemed "guilty." So, as I read this book, it kind of brought to my attention how prevalent these small-minded, irrational beliefs still are. No matter what the case, we still see so many instances in which the color of one's skin, the name listed on a document, and so forth provoke feelings and ideas of hatred, inferiority, danger, and more within individuals' minds. Clearly, the times have changed immensely since the '60s, but it begs the question, have they changed enough?</p>	<p>To answer my previous question--no. We see that today, especially as of this summer when so many instances of racial injustice plagued the country (and they still do!). As a country, we're finally drawing our attention to combating social injustice, but there's still so much more work to be done. And just as in Lee's novel, we find ourselves facing difficulties as we are met with individuals that hinder racial and social equality. This is essentially one long answer, but I hope the point is clear. Lee was forward thinking, and her refusal to silence these thoughts (that I'm sure many weren't looking to hear) has resulted in a profoundly impactful novel for myself and countless others!</p>
<p>The Help</p>	<p>It broadened my perspective and helped me recognize how privileged I am. I live in the same neighborhood as Hilly Holbrook, the racist antagonist in the novel. I owe my connection with this novel in a large part to its setting.</p>	<p>Yes! It heightened my ability to recognize discrimination and prejudice. I'm not safe from bigotry even in my hometown, and I may hav even unknowingly played a part in it.</p>

Harry Potter	The themes present in Harry Potter about not accepting the way things are and not being afraid to stand up for what you think is right really resonated with me. I think this is probably best summed up by the fact that I lead a walkout at my school in the after math of the Parkland shooting.	I think the series will always have an impact on me since I was exposed to it as such a young age. I saw the movies when I was pretty young, years before I actually read the books, and when I actually read them, the story that I had already loved became more nuanced and developed. I identified with Hermione because I also loved school, and she showed me that it was good to embrace that. And those underlying themes of changing what you cannot accept resonate with me even more as a I get older, especially in this political climate that we are currently in.
Starship Troopers	It made me appreciate duty and disdain politics and lazy/entitled people.	Yes; it has given me a great appreciation for the military and its members.
I'll Give You The Sun by Jandy Nelson	This book made me feel validated. I had never read a book with any characters that thought in a similar way as I do, and this book is from the perspective of two characters who both think like I do and who have their own issues and their own toxic mentalities. Seeing them overcome their own minds made me believe that I could too, and reading their journey's allowed me to feel prepared to handle any challenge thrown my way.	Yes, for sure. It doesn't change my thinking process- rather, it stops me from feeling like I need to conform my own thoughts to more 'properly' match the rest of the world.
Catcher In the Rye	I had this idea that I was alone and fighting a battle that no one else would understand, as more teenagers do. This coming-of-age story about a rebel resonated with everything I was feeling.	Yes. I feel like I am facing these complicated trials along with the regular stuff (ie school).
Fight Club	I read Fight Club during my senior year, so while I was not around quite long enough to let my perspective fully affect how I saw my school environment, I began to see the world I lived in in a much more cynical view. I started seeing most of the restaurants I'd gone to since childhood as bland, unoriginal chain establishments before places I held memories of. I especially began to have much less patience for people acting toxically masculine when I was around, and generally thought less of people who I viewed as having no real direction in life besides going to the soonest party with alcohol and women, even though I did not know most of these people personally.	Yes, I have been working on getting rid of my judgemental attitude's sharp edge, but it continues to cut through my want to live and let live; when I see people I consider to be poor examples of the male variety, I can't help but acknowledge this fact inwardly, though I would never say so outwardly. I don't enjoy being such a downer about the world, I will be living in it for the next very long while, after all, but I can't shake the feelings I acquired from reading Fight Club.
Fault in Our Stars	This book affected the way I viewed life and relationships. I didn't really have relationships in high school because I wanted something meaningful.	Yes because I still don't want an average love.
Percy Jackson	It was a mythical book, so I feel that it didn't influence my perception too much.	no.

<p>The Story of the Land and Sea by Katy Simpson Smith</p>	<p>The book is historical fiction, but the main characters went through such universal things that ascended time period. Some of the main characters were women who were trying to make their own way through the world and they just always stuck out to me in highschool that we do have influence in our lives, not everything is chalked up to chance.</p>	<p>I definitely still think about the book a lot, but I wouldn't say it had altered my perception of the real world. I read the book already in the mindset I think the book was in, so it mainly just solidified my beliefs for me.</p>
<p>Hunger Games Series</p>	<p>As a young girl in high school, I loved the idea of Katniss Everdeen for many reasons. Throughout the series, she was always so strong and loyal. She sacrificed herself for her family, and never wavered in her loyalty to the districts (even when the capital was offering her a much better life). This was very empowering to me because I was not the most popular or wealthy student at my private high school. It is stories like these about Katniss that keep me from chasing wealth, but rather, choosing a path for my future that makes me happy even if it means I won't end up outrageously wealthy.</p>	<p>It absolutely affects my perception of the real world. Besides the idea of remaining true to who I am when it comes to career choice, there is also such a deeper meaning to the love triangle that the media wants to praise this series for. It is true that Katniss has love interests, but that is such a minuscule part of the story that it could be told without the love interests. The series is truly about a young girl who makes sacrifices and learns who she is on her own. She does not need a love interest to fulfill her (she even ends up being the one to save their lives). It is this sort of idea that I see in the real world as I try to come to college as a freshman and leave my boyfriend back home. I am learning that I do not need anyone but myself to become successful and find out who I really am.</p>
<p>The Book Thief</p>	<p>I never thought about it back then, but it probably made me more aware of the world outside of my community at the time since it described a completely different society and time.</p>	<p>Yes, I think so. I still think about it sometimes and how there are so many different worlds around me.</p>
<p>Harry Potter, specifically Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</p>	<p>It encouraged me to look for the good in everything and try to see my life as whimsical</p>	<p>It affects my interactions with my peers sometimes, especially those who also enjoy the book, but I'm not sure if affects how I see the world in any different way than it did in high school.</p>
<p>Take the Key and Lock Her Up</p>	<p>I wouldn't necessarily say that this book affected my perception in any way, other than maybe exposing the fact that often times those in power have baggage that we don't see. Other than that, this book was just a thriller from beginning to end with lots of twists and turns which is why I enjoyed it so much.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>The Twilight Saga</p>	<p>I believed in all-consuming love, and saw it as healthy rather than unstable.</p>	<p>Not as much, now I see it as quite childish when I re-read it. Aside from the fictional beings, the relationships and love ties were dramatized and idealized to extremes.</p>

To Kill A Mockingbird, by Harper Lee	I read this book in 7th grade, but it continued to be my favorite throughout high school. I think reading it at that age was important, because it helped to establish a foundation of unlearning racism that is present in society. Atticus receives a lot of negative attention for helping Tom, but he continues to do it because he knows it is right.	It does, but in a much different way. As I grew, I learned more about social justice, all inspired by the book. That is when I realized Atticus is not the social justice hero I made him out to be. He is a white savior. However, through this book, I was able to recognize them to be able to give more recognition to books that highlight black people without a white savior.
To Kill a Mockingbird	It caused me to question the world around me, and namely, the South, in order to evaluate the ways in which we treat others and how we have made progress since the 1920s, although we will always have work to do.	Before I came to Ole Miss, I'd never seen a courthouse square in real life. Being in Oxford, a town that has one, has been a neat experience and has sometimes allowed me to consider how the world we live in and the world of TKAM are not that different.
The Selection by Kiera Cass	It did not.	No
Lord of the Flies	I would like to say that I had a few other favorite books but I think Lord of the Flies was the most impactful for me personally. It made me realize that people aren't born inherently good OR evil.	I mean I think about this book at least once a week in reference to what's happening now in the world (covid-19, protests, etc)... Not that I'm trying to analyze literature in reference to daily life. I usually hear something and think "man that's straight out of Lord of the Flies... or 1982." I'm realizing how much FEAR can make us change our behavior; people tend to fall into a 'group-think'.
The Selection Series	I think this book helped me to understand that standing out and being different is okay. The main character, America, always acted on situations she felt was unjust. The series is excellent for anyone to read. It also explains that uncertainty about your future is okay. Life can be exciting if you want it to be.	I think this book does impact me even today. This book/series encourages me to go after my dreams, even when difficulties arise.
Jherig	Shifted my view away from people being either "good" or "bad."	Yes, it makes me think about how even people I despise have values.
Wuthering Heights	After reading this book in AP English in high school, I was infatuated. This book, however, made me more cynical especially when it came to love.	I feel as though this book still affects how I see the world, the aesthetics I like, the books I read and the cynical nature of my opinion of love.
City of Bones by Cassandra Claire	It made me feel like my life was super boring.	No.

<p>The Poisonwood Bible</p>	<p>Having attended a predominantly white, Christian school, it was refreshing for me to see the various ways that the main characters grew or reduced their religious beliefs throughout their lives, after having been permanent missionaries in the African Congo. This book featured the perspectives of every main character, allowing the reader to look into the mind of each, this writing style allows readers a chance to really get to know the characters, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. I would say that the most influential parts of this book really occurred in the classroom. What I mean by that is my classmate's reactions to some of the content really solidified that their views weren't the right ones, and the lessons from the book fell on deaf ears. They were team Nathan, and no one should be team Nathan.</p>	<p>Absolutely. One of the prevalent themes of this story is perspective, namely how each daughter grew up in the same environment but came out completely different. I think about this a lot when it comes to my future classroom. Students can receive equitable materials and instruction, but what they do with what they're given is up to them. There are numerous other lessons that can be learned from this story, that I still carry with me such as cultural arrogance from the West, religious choice, the impossibility of justice, and the versatility of language. This book will always hold a special place in my heart for supplying me with one of the best stories I've ever read and providing me with lifelong lessons.</p>
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