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7. A SOURCE OF SELF

Exploring Identity and Discourse in Young Adult Novels as Meaningful Text

ABSTRACT

Young adult literature can be utilized to assist young people as they search to develop identity and face many challenges of growing into an adult. The literature choices of young adults should be validated to encourage young people to continue to read and to seek out works that speak to their own developing Discourses. The use of YAL and an authentic narrative voice can help young people critique their lived world, but also to engage readers as the novels will resonate with reader's experiences. In addition, YAL is not just for pleasure reading and growth of a reader. When wise selections are made and the work is implemented in the classroom it can be used for critical analysis and growth toward important skills that are fostered in the English Language Arts. This chapter documents several contemporary realistic fiction selections that can be used in the classroom in an effort to engage with young readers in meaningful ways.

INTRODUCTION

Young adult (YA) literature speaks to student experience, and too often the adult world dismisses the genre without first considering the impact of this decision. Young adult literature addresses the contemporary concerns of teens as it is an authentic narrative voice that resonates with students' lived experiences. Although these texts are typically written by adults, it is the reading experience and the characters' voices that make it authentic. As students begin to sort out their own identities and their roles in this world, young adult literature can provide both a mirror to reflect back young peoples' experiences and also provide a window that can let young people look out into the worlds of other cultures and communities. This aspect of the use of YA fiction is particularly important because many young people wrap their lives within a veil of silence. Students are hesitant to share their personal experiences outside of their cadre and hesitant to speak about what often troubles them as they move toward adolescence. This literature speaks to the authentic lives of students and approaches with frank language the issues and concerns facing teens every day. Proponents of YA argue that the literature "assures teenagers that they are not alone in their experiences" (Enriquez, 2006,

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p. 17). In this way, YA literature can often be viewed as an avenue for bibliotherapy, the use of literature to assist individuals as they sort out personal problems. Critical pedagogy can lend itself to the effective use of bibliotherapy as part of the reading process in that students explore identity construction. YA literature can help young people as they search for a developing identity and as they encounter the many challenges faced by teens.

While most people view young adult literature as simple pleasure reading, it also has a valuable place in the classroom as literature that can be read and appreciated with a critical analysis. For young adult novels to be quickly dismissed by adults posits the literature as worthless or foolish, and creates a similar thought process for the young person who enjoys it, making the reader feel similarly worthless or foolish. According to Crowe, "some teachers and parents believe that YAL is little more than cheap, pulp novels" (1998, p. 120). As educators, we need to move beyond this understanding and see the value that YA literature has to offer. YA literature reflects the same themes, motifs and figurative language found in most classic texts. Many YA novels are written with an author's craft that could rival the canon texts used for generations in the middle and high school classroom. The YA novel is a valuable text and can be used by the discerning teacher to act as a bridge between classic and contemporary works. It can also be layered as a text set with nonfiction or other multimodal sources in order to create a robust and rich classroom unit. For instance, the well-known YA text about the Holocaust *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry can easily be paired with primary source documents from the time period and with film representations of related content. It can even be tied to stage performances and to other seminal texts such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Students engage in a multivocal, transliteracy experience as they explore multimodal literacies as connected to a central text. As evidenced by the Lowry example above, the multivocal experience of layering many narrators invites more students to the conversation.

Teachers and other adults in the lives of young people should validate the reading choices that young people make (Lesesne, 2006). These choices in reading selection, once validated, help young people share their own reading voices, develop their own discourses and help to avoid the alliteracy trend that is so common among young readers. Alliteracy, or the refusal to read by individuals that are capable of doing so, is on the rise with middle and high school students. The rise is occurring at younger and younger grade levels and researchers are finding the fastest rise in alliteracy is occurring with tweens – those students between the ages of 10 and 12 (Lesesne, 2006). In this age range, the students are rejecting the picture books they knew as children, but are also still resisting the longer chapter books assigned in classrooms. Carefully selected YA literature that is developmentally appropriate for the tween can help these students continue to evolve as readers as they develop reading skills and fluency. There is YA fiction available that specifically targets the discourse of this age group and should not be confused with the works that are more developmentally appropriate for teens. Not all young adult literature can be lumped into one all-inclusive category and there are subtle differences based on genre, target age range and stylistic approach just as

there are subgenres within adult fiction. It is important to consider the needs of both tweens and teens as teachers select literature for the classroom.

When used appropriately in the classroom, young adult literature is interactive and transactive. Transactive reading is a process in which the readers are consistently encouraged to engage with the text making connections between text to text, text to self and text to world. The reading becomes both etic (viewing the text as from outside one's own culture and experience) and emic (viewing the text as reflected from within one's own culture and experience). The words on the page begin to have meaning once they pass through the eyes of the reader and the reader creates meaning as reflected by the reader's experiences. Rosenblatt's transactive theory of reading speaks directly to the etic and emic reading process. Moss summarizes the process of the theory as a focus on the nature of readers' responses to unfolding texts, and her transactional theory of reading provides a

> framework for exploring a reader's responses to literature. According to Rosenblatt, reading is a "transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (1982, p. 268). The nature of this transaction is determined by the reader's stance or "mental set," which is related to a reader's expectations and the way he or she approaches the text. Rosenblatt uses the term aesthetic to refer to a stance that allows a reader to focus on the "lived through" experience of reading. She argues that the most effective way to read fiction and poetry is from an aesthetic stance. (2005, p. 4)

While many young adult novels are award winners, identifying a novel for the classroom should not hinge on this as a need for identifying quality literature. The best novels are a natural fit with the context of the classroom and school. The novel that meets the needs of the students and will engage students in essential questions about identity and the reader's lived worlds is the best option as it explores the spaces in which adolescents may experience dissonance and may struggle with conflicting discourses. Essential questions are open ended and broad questions that ask the students to look at the big picture. The book becomes the lens through which the world may be examined.

DISCOURSE, TRANSACTIONAL READING AND CRITICAL LITERACY

A large part of life as a tween (ages 10 to 12) or teen (13 to19) is the development of identity. Students are sorting out who they are and who they want to be. Their lives are marked by transitions and transience (Lesesne, 2006, p. 11). A large part of this identity formation can be guided through literature. Gee (2001), literacy specialist and critical literacy theorist argues that this identity formation creates Discourses, with a capital D – not to be confused with discourse (language use). Discourse, as he indicates, is a complete identity package. Individuals can have multiple Discourses and each one can be applied to different situations. A student can affirm or challenge one's personal Discourses through the reading of YA literature because the author's use of a teen protagonist voice in an authentic and

plausible storyline will resonate with the lived worlds of tweens and teens. Pedagogy that is grounded in critical literacy theory builds an interaction with the reading in which the students examine what they have learned first about the self as the literature reaffirms or denies their lived experiences and then asks students to use this knowledge to examine the community and larger world. Critical literacy applications when coupled with YA literature asks students to examine the normative behaviors of society reflected in the novel and question their own role as they either are complicit with or resistant to those normative behaviors. It is this disruption of "normative readings" (Luke & Freebody, 1997) that requires students to examine the unwritten sociocultural rules of their world. A critical literacy framework for literature analysis requires that the goal be development of a critical consciousness. Cervetti, Pardales and Damico (2001) examine the differences between critical reading and critical literacy pointing out that as opposed to critical reading in which reality is knowable, in critical literacy reality is not definitively known in large part because each reader creates his or her own knowing based on the Discourse background brought to the current reading of the text. As Gee (1996) explains, "a text is meaningful only within the pattern (or social configuration) it forms at a specific time and place … within a specific Discourse or at the intersection of several Discourses" (p. 149). It is important to note that not only does the space and time component change because of the reader's situatedness, but also the space in social time in which the text is read. As Wacquant (1992) notes Bourdieu's understanding of the social world posits that, "social laws are temporally and spatially bound regularities that hold as long as the institutional conditions that underpin them are allowed to endure" (Wacquant & Bourdieu, p. 52). If the normative rules change over time, so does the reading of the text by new readers of a new generation. Discourses are also shaped by the period of history in which they are developed. Once students understand those Discourses that ground their reading of text they can begin to disrupt the rules normativity which silence or marginalize.

Primary Discourses are those created and significantly defined in early childhood before the reader comes into contact with YA novels, as young adult novels typically aim for readers no younger than 12 years old. It can be explained to students as those Discourses which one does not always have a choice in participating. Primary Discourses include aspects such as religion, socioeconomic status, location (rural, urban) and so on. These are the Discourses of our circumstances. A Primary Discourse can easily be developed or strengthened through young adult literature as a means of youth exploration. These Discourses often are something as simple as "daughter," "friend" or "student," but often even these simple Discourses may be further developed through YA literature. A student reading the novel *Luna,* by Julie Anne Peters that explores a character transitioning from male to female, may find that he or she identifies with a gender that may not match their biological sex; a student reading *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson may begin to understand the importance of a Primary Discourse of "daughter," as a defining role with expectations. In each case, these Discourses may be challenged or reaffirmed by the author's use of authentic voice.

Secondary Discourses are connected to the choices that individuals make. These would include peer groups, habits and those activities that may define identity. One single person may have multiple Secondary Discourses, which can be influenced dramatically by literature. For instance, a young person could have a Secondary Discourse (one that is created through later socialization as opposed to primary socialization which would occur in the early home). Literature that reflects back the lived experience validates the adolescent's chosen identity structure. Literature may also challenge this belief structure and ask students to question their belief systems. Students will be able to participate in "decentering the margins as spaces that offer the opportunity for other voices to be spoken and heard" (Giroux, 1993, p.376) including those not even present in the text as they are completely silent. A critical consciousness is developed in the student and students become active participants in reading their world through the lens of the literature.

This Discourse does not simply reflect a hobby such as skateboarding, but rather a larger more inclusive identity which would impact not only the hobby, but also dress, language use, how one carries the body such as mannerisms and even how one interacts with others. This student that now identifies as "skater" (skateboarder) may not use this Discourse at all times, but rather may be able to code switch to another Discourse more appropriate to each contextual situation. This border crossing allows the student to participate in multiple arenas while maintaining a spectrum of Discourses. In addition, multiple dimensions of identity can be developed and defined both "internally by self and externally by others" (Deaux as cited in Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 406). Thus, the reflections that others impose on an individual must also be considered.

Each Discourse must be considered when reading any text. Because readers encounter texts through their own eyes, each reading becomes unique based on the lens of situatedness (Greene, 1988) at that time. The lens of situatedness considers every Discourse at play as well as all life events experienced by the reader. Thus, each reading becomes a new reading in many ways as individuals continue to grow and mature and as new life experiences change and shape how one views the world. The student then does not just bring in the Secondary Discourse to interpret the text, but also all other aspects of one's life. Returning to the Discourses of the "skater" student, when allowed the freedom to apply the multiple Discourses at play within one's construction, this student may find that the Primary Discourse of "rural" is more at play with a particular literature. Or perhaps, the student finds a multivocal reflection while bringing in an ethnic heritage and the "skater" understandings of music as text best help to interpret the novel.

Rosenblatt (2005) can be credited with developing a Reader Response, transactional view of interpreting text. As she states, "the literary work is a particular and personal event: the electric current of his mind and personality lighting up the pattern of symbols on the printed page. Or perhaps we should say that the symbols take meaning from the intellectual and emotional context the reader provides" (p. 63). Teachers of young adult literature can use this literature to speak to the life experiences of every student when structured well in a way that allows room for this connection to develop. Overly prescriptive analysis provided

in a top down approach by teachers limits the use of the literature in the classroom and the ability for the literature to become transactional for students. This methodology can be a detriment to the reading experience as students engage with young adult literature. The reader should encounter the work without predetermined and limiting gates to knowledge and meaning making. By creating these limits, we as teachers do not allow students the ability to bring in multiple Discourses and they are limited to only those Discourses which the student views as most appropriate for school. Students by being victim to these superficial limits find that they "play school" rather than really experience literature. Young adult literature allows teachers the opportunity to guide students in developing their own meaning making without confining that interpretation to the most common responses. Young adult literature is not an exception to all other literature interpretations in that a top down approach to teaching limits the extent of student engagement.

The transactional view of interpreting text allows for each of the possibilities to play out and the possibilities will be a different configuration from day to day depending on the contextualized experiences of that student in that particular moment. In addition, this relationship between reader and text becomes reciprocal in that the meaning of the text is changed by the student's current interpretation and the text may impact the student's current view of self-identity. By allowing the reader to begin to define the critical interpretation of the text, the teacher opens the doors for much possibility in terms of analysis, but also allows for more potential growth as students engage with the text. The transactional use of young adult literature helps students develop their emic and etic understandings and may also help stave off alliteracy. A plurality develops in interpretation that can lead to engaging and robust classroom discussion as students in a safe environment explore the literature and relations to self.

The transactional view of interpreting text is beneficial when tied directly to critical literacy skills. All literacy is social and malleable. As socially constructed, literacy and literature analysis must consider the socially constructed normative behaviors that impact a readers' interpretation of text. As such, "all models of literacy are predicated on and prescriptive of particular social logics" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 5). Each reading of text must also consider the sociocultural environment in which it is both written and read. Teachers must encourage students under this interpretive lens to ask questions such as *how am I being positioned as a reader, what is the author trying to "sell" me* and *who is being marginalized or silenced*? Often it is the adolescent voice which is ignored or discredited. It is important to note that all texts converse with the reader and are dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981). The readers brings all one's subjectivities to the text including thoughts, feelings, attitudes, memories, and social mores. Critical literacy allows the reader to both understand why a reading is interpreted in the personal and also how it can help the reader challenge the normative knowledge and rewrite the messages of the text. In this way, YA literature and the teen voice must be valued. An extension of this can be evidenced with the novel *Speak* for instance in that the narrator is both literally and figuratively silenced as she reacts to cultural norms surrounding rape.

She is first silenced by her attacker and then later selects to self silence as a rape survivor reflecting the silence projected by society on rape victims. Critical literacy interpretations can rewrite this message by putting focus on the act of gaining voice and reflecting on the social norms that reinforce a culture of silence and shame around rape incidents.

The "skater" student from earlier may come to a text asking questions about who is left out of the narrative and question why a particular population is marginalized by a text. That same student may see his or her own voice as missing and may question the authority of the text. Perhaps, the student as he or she is reading may notice that the Discourses of all the female characters are submissive and may reflect that interpretation back to the community in which the student lives. When examining the hegemonic discourse of a text, perhaps the student notices that the language of the text alienates or is inclusive of particular populations. Each reading may become multilayered once again. The possibilities become endless. Not only has the student now interacted with a text and made meaning, but that meaning is examined with a broader perspective related to social justice. Literacy and the reading of young adult novels becomes powerful in this context and, "literacy in this sense is not just a skill or knowledge, but an emerging act of consciousness and resistance" (Giroux, 1993, p. 367). While critical literacy can be applied to any text, often it is not applied to young adult literature because these novels are simply read on a surface level and not considered "serious" literature by adults. The interrogation of the text allows one to explore the voice of an adolescent as undervalued in contemporary culture.

Teachers may find it beneficial to first construct Discourse maps (see Figure 1 and following teaching plan) with students before applying the method of analysis to literature. In this way, students first come to know themselves and the different Discourses at play in their identity before examining a text. The Discourse maps (VanSlyke-Briggs, 2006, p. 44) begin with a brainstorming regarding labels that students may attribute to their identity. A guided brainstorming will allow students to begin to identify their Discourses. This could begin with showing students samples from popular contemporary films that display stereotyped Discourses. As students begin their own brainstorming these labels may begin simplistically with obvious selections such as *high school student, teen* or hobby linked activities such as *basketball player*. Once students explore these, the teacher can then guide students to a more inclusive examination by looking at other Discourses at play such as those that reflect upbringing, cultural impacts and community impacts. After brainstorming, students can select imagery to reflect the key Discourses and create a visual representation or map to help explain the grounding identities through which a textual interpretation will be filtered. Discourses can also reflect elements of a student's identity that they may not be comfortable sharing such as addictions, body image or aspects the student would prefer to keep hidden. While it is not in the best interest of the student to share these publically, a space should still be created to allow the students to take these into consideration as they will impact the reading of a text.

Figure 1. Student sample discourse map: front and back.

Discourse maps can be used not only to examine the Discourses at play within a student that would impact a reading, but also the Discourses that apply to characters within young adult literature and the overlaps between reader and character. These overlaps or areas in which there is a clear divide can be an entry point for analysis utilizing reader response theory and critical literacy applications. For instance, Melinda in the novel *Speak*, by Halse Anderson exhibits multiple Discourses. Within her Primary Discourses, those Discourses that she is born into, she can include daughter, young woman, student, middle class and white. Her Secondary Discourses or those that are shaped by experiences include rape survivor, developing artist, friend and high school student. A student's artistic portrayal of Melinda's Discourse map can be developed like a Venn diagram in order to display overlaps and differences with the character. It is this understanding of one's Discourses that allows a student to develop what Maxine Greene (1978) calls "wide-awakeness" and the ability to be active rather than passive as students view the world. She draws a connection between this to the idea of social imagination (Greene 1995), which is important in critical literacy. We must first understand ourselves, then become wide awake as we view the world before we imagine what can be done to resolve those places we find social injustice.

CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION AND AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE

Contemporary realistic fiction refers to texts that take place in a window of time within recent past or current time spans. The action within the novels, though fiction, are representations of "real world" events. For young adult novels, contemporary realistic fiction often has a focus on life events such as first loves, losses of family or friends, coming of age, and the discovery of personal identity, be it sexuality, gender, race, and so on. These profound moments in the teen experience are described throughout fiction in the range of bildungsroman (coming of age) texts over the course of generations and the theme has continued to be popular for contemporary young readers coming into their own identities. This genre of young adult fiction is "written with the purpose of connecting to their young readers by offering settings and events that are comparable to the ones that tweens and teens experience in the course of their daily lives" (Sprague & Keeling, 2007, p. 51). Several examples of this are discussed below and can include well known YA novels such as *Speak* by Halse Anderson, *House on Mango Street* by Cisneros and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Chbosky.

Though young adult literature was not recognized until recently as a viable genre of literature, let alone a genre that can be used in a classroom, YA has potential classroom uses and applications for many students. Often, students are unable to connect to such characters as Willy Loman, a drunkard middle aged man with a wife and children, from *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, but have an easier time connecting to such characters as Melinda from *Speak.* This can be in part to multiple reasons, but mainly can be attributed to the fact that Melinda, unlike Willy Loman, is within the same life stage as the student reader. Whereas Loman may be dealing with the struggles of adult life, within *Speak* lies a world that the young reader can relate to on a personal level, be it the discovery of self, the competition within towns of the haves and the have-nots, or perhaps even just figuring out where one belongs in a family or social group in which all must have a specific role or set of roles to become important. Here is where the divide for young adult literature becomes apparent, and the need to be present in the classroom becomes stronger.

These qualifications for determining a young adult novel include the following: "the novel must be written for and marketed for young adult readers, contains a young adult protagonist, limited number of characters, a compressed time span, familiar settings, current slang, detailed descriptions of appearance and dress, positive resolution, few, if any, subplots, and a length of no more than 250 pages" (Niday, 2000, n.p.). These outlining factors do have a bit of flexibility, as some YA literature novels do run more than 250 pages or have a not-so-positive resolution, but on the whole, these are the specifics that all YA literature must meet. Therefore, using this criteria, it is easy to see how exactly these novels attract a different crowd of readers than for instance a traditional Russian existentialist novel.

Much of the young adult literature that is popular now can also be explored using sociocultural theory and situated learning as described by Vygotsky. The

zone of proximal development as developed by Vygotsky has embedded within it "a 'cultural' interpretation [which] construes the zone of proximal development as the distance between the cultural knowledge provided by the sociohistorical context – usually made accessible through instruction – and the everyday experiences of the individuals (Lave & Wegner, 1991, p. 48). Rather than sorting through literature in an isolated context, for "neo-Vygotskians the construction of conceptual knowledge in students always appears as a guided construction" (Kozulin, 2003, p. 34). There can be guidance from a significant other, such as a teacher or a parent, or the guidance can come from literature, such as young adult novels. Young adults are drawn to novels that can guide them in one direction or another. Using their interests, identified gender, age, and other background information, young adults select novels that not only entertain, but also that guide this young person in the ways of life, and through the intimidating maze that is adolescence. In addition, this guidance is often also a form of communication that teens do not receive elsewhere (Scott & Palincsar, 2009, n.p.). Teachers can aid in that guidance as they suggest particular works that may act in a bibliotherapeutic manner for students and allow students to explore identity construction and textual interpretation through each new situated reading. As students develop their understanding of the text, the teacher can act as a guide to help students question the text and the sociocultural constructions reflected in the text. The use of transmediation (the process of moving meaning from one sign system to another) such as by having students create Discourse maps of characters can help students move beyond simplistic or initial interpretations and may help students begin to dig deeper in meaning making connected to critical literacy. It may also make students feel more confident in the role of someone who critiques dominant cultural norms. The act of the critique becomes an act of social resistance and the Discourse map becomes the foundation for the critique.

Realistic teen fiction speaks to many students that do not typically see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Students at risk, such as alliterate students, students that do not fully engage in schooling and those that are members of historically silenced populations, for instance may find that YA literature better connects to their own life experiences in contrast to the traditional novels of instruction found in schools. In addition, many young adults find YA fiction to be fiction that validates the tween and teen experience as being a young adult when life is confusing, and much of one's time is spent trying to not only figure out personal identity, but also how one fits into society as a whole especially when given the variety of constructs that may impact one's development such as instances of marginalization. Students need to draw on their social knowledge and personal experiences to make sense of text. A teacher driven, top down model as opposed to a transactive and critical model continues to "marginalize students as passive consumers of teacher-made interpretation" (Miller, 2003, p. 17) and closes off the opportunity to explore Discourse and identity development. Young adult literature addresses this gap in the standard curriculum of canon texts and teacher as filter for interpretation and allows students an outlet in literature in which they see themselves reflected in a way that is conducive to learning, as well as in a way

that is safe to explore and learn as they critique their world. The sociocultural approach to analysis and the use of the teacher as a guide rather than an authority of only one interpretation allows for growth for the student. In his text, *Psychology of Art* (1971) Vygotsky applies this idea to the teaching of literature, "where he argues that the affects of literature excite the individual aesthetically" and that the teacher "must aim, further, to form reflective consciousness through 'intelligent social activity' that extends the 'narrow sphere of individual perception'" (Miller, 2003, p. 290). In this case, strategies such as literature circles and Socratic seminars based on open ended and multiple perspective essential questions generated by both teacher and student will guide students out of a single lens of interpretation, either by the self or the teacher and instead will capitalize on the group construction of knowledge and insight. Essential questions allow students to converse using not only textual evidence to support claims, but also connections to the self and other texts. The big questions are open ended to allow for multiple interpretations and for multiple access points for entry into that interpretation. It also allows for multiple truths to exist side by side. Each student can find empowerment through the discovery of their own subjective truths and exploration of how these interact with the truth other students experience. For instance, in reading *Speak,* an essential question could include, *who defines what it means to be an outsider and how does it impact voice?* There is no one set truth as each student is influenced by their lived experiences. This ties together Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory with critical literacy analysis.

On the whole, much of what classifies a novel as being a young adult novel is that it pertains to the idea of identity and discovery of self for a tween or teen. The search for self is often constructed in a coming of age, bildungsroman framework as opposed to other adult novels that may engage in a discussion of identity, but is limited to adult protagonists. Many young adult novels do broach the topic of identity, either as the main theme or as a lesser focus that still plays an important side role in the development of the text. This aspect is also what draws many young readers to these books; the validation of experience that young people look for in each other, and that they crave to find. By seeking this validation in a novel where all things are possible, it allows the young person to experience life events by proxy, so that they may discover themselves.

WHAT TO READ?

While there are numerous quality reads to select from for the classroom, below are four sample novels that would be good instructional sources for the typical middle school or high school classroom. The field of YA literature grows at an extraordinary rate and a high number of new, high quality novels hits the market every year.

Playground by 50 Cent, 2011

Playground, by famed hiphop vocalist Curtis Jackson known as 50 Cent, is the very frank and honest book about 13 year old protagonist Butterball and his role as a bully. Butterball is the nickname given to and embraced by the central character, Burton. Butterball plays the role of a bully and attacks a peer on his playground. This role continues to follow him as he searches for his identity, enters mandated counseling in order to stay in school and explores the art of film making.

While this novel does include some graphic language, it is still aimed at young readers grades 7 to 9. Bullying is a topic that deserves consideration in the classroom and it is pervasive in schools beyond the watchful eyes of teachers and staff. In examining what makes a bully, the novel attempts to dismantle some of the myths around the archetype and the roles that students play as they attempt to shape an identity.

The language in this novel is authentic. The author writes from his own personal experiences and he is in a unique position as a person who is in touch with not only the current slang and cultural cache of teens, but as someone who helps to shape this culture as a music celebrity. Of particular note is the use of dysphemistic swearing, which serves to signal closeness or as a group marker for those looking to adopt the Discourse. As Butterball seeks inclusion with a peer group, his language shifts to a discourse that becomes appropriate for the situation. The peer group uses slang and discusses topics such as violence and posturing in a way that forces Butterball to play a part rather than stay true to his authentic self if he wishes to seek inclusion.

For instance, in one scene the young men are on the basketball court playing when they ask Butterball about his relationship with a young woman named Nia that he has a crush on. They discuss a party that they are all planning to attend and they expect another boy named Terrence to show up. Terrance is known for "stealing" a girl and the boys warn Butterball about him. Character Bobby states that he is glad Terrance isn't around because, "I'd kill that mofo dead if I had to see his face every day" (p. 59). As the scene progresses, the boys suggest that Butterball bring his batteries (loaded in a sock – the weapon he used in his original bullying act) to attack Terrance. Butterball is slow to acknowledge the violence and the use of language, but the chapter ends with him saying, "show her who's boss. Yeah, I get you" (p. 62). Butterball's language shifts throughout the novel to display the Discourse role he is currently participating in and shifts as his identity emerges.

Going Bovine by Libba Bray, 2009

Going Bovine (2010 ALA Printz Award Winner) tells the story of 16 year old high school student Cameron. Cameron begins to have hallucinations and after one public incident is sent to counseling for drugs. It is not his occasional marijuana use however that causes his hallucinations, but rather the "Mad Cow" disease which is slowly killing him. He is hospitalized as his health fails and his

hallucinations become more and more a part of his daily life. The story takes a turn when he "escapes" from the hospital in search of a cure and along the way takes his hospital room mate, encounters a punk angel that serves as his guide and a talking lawn gnome.

Although a fanciful and bizarre tale, the novel is a quest story and mimics all of the literary analysis one would expect to find in any quest. While the novel borders the edge of classification as contemporary realistic fiction, it is his hallucinations which give the novel the fantasy element. Used as a plot device, the hallucinations provide a scene of instruction. These scenes of instruction can be used to examine the quest structure as Cameron's adventures to seek a cure parallel the key stages of a quest. Each element of a quest is evident in this novel including hero, sidekick, guide, the call to action, and the challenge. As students embark on the quest with Cameron, they can examine their own call to action and when they too may have explored a quest throughout the development of their many Discourses. In this way, the teen narrative becomes more authentic rather than a stale archetype.

The novel provides the opportunity to explore several essential questions with students. These questions when used in a Socratic seminar approach enable students the space to connect to the novels and their personal lives as well as to a critical literacy analysis. These can include questions such as:

- What is the value of life?
- What role does faith and religion play in our constructions of life?
- How does our society view illness?
- Who has a voice that is silenced or marginalized in this text?
- What Discourses are evident for the narrator? How do any of his Discourses rupture or get redefined throughout the course of the novel?
- How can the story be rewritten to respond to those experiences that should be challenged?

Crank by Ellen Hopkins, 2004

Crank, a poetic novel written in free verse, has won multiple awards. This novel tells the story of a young woman named Kristina, who quickly delves into drugs while on summer vacation to visit her father for three weeks. Kristina, in her drug usage, picks up other unhealthy habits, such as dealing drugs and wanton sex with next-to-strangers. In order to cope with the feelings she is having and her inability to manage her cognitive dissonance of being in essence two people in one body, she develops a personality that she names Bree. As Bree, Kristina is able to act and think how she wants, without fear of repercussion in her perfect Kristina life. However, as the novel progresses, Bree's choices begin to affect Kristina and her family, as soon she finds herself addicted to methamphetamine, in juvenile hall, and pregnant. Along with Adam (her new Reno boyfriend), Bree finds herself in situations that seem so outrageous that they could be true in alternative universe where teens run free to make bad decisions without any adult influence; the attempted suicide of Adam's *other* girlfriend, an attempted rape of Bree by three

older biker men, and the constant usage of "crank" in the back room of the bowling alley where her father works.

Acting as a cautionary tale, *Crank* is an example of pointing young adult novels towards the grittier sides of adolescence that deal with drugs and sex. One such passage that uses an authentic adolescent voice in dealing with "adult" situations such as these is titled "I Wasn't Scared – Yet," and deals with the scene in which Kristina has been brought into custody for attempting to hitchhike (in a desperate attempt to score drugs). Kristina, desperate and unwilling to admit her secrets to her parents, calls up her new boyfriend Chase, and claims to be "Bree – your sister" (Hopkins, 2004, p. 456). Chase, however, is able to get her out of holding, as it must be the parents or guardian of the person in custody to bail her out. In this small vignette, Kristina comes face to face with the repercussions of her dealing with drugs and bad people. In holding, she shares a cell with three other women, all dangerous in their own rights and yet, Kristina is barely scared at all. In fact, one of the women who she meets in holding introduces her to a man who elevates Kristina to a drug dealer.

This scene is paralleled in many others within *Crank*; Bree constantly makes bad choices all in an effort to get high. She neglects family and friends, is abused multiple times by boys who she trusts, and ultimately ends up pregnant. However, as over-exaggerated as this novel may seem there are definite elements of truth within. However, these elements of truth are also those that isolate this novel to a specific audience; the mature content found within may stand to confuse or isolate younger readers; as it is, the topics may isolate some older readers, as many teens do not often experience hard drug addiction, rape and pregnancy. However, the novel allows older young adults a view through a window of Kristina's choices and her subsequent life events.

Jerk, California by Jonathan Friesen, 2008

This award winning novel delves into the adolescent world of abilities and inabilities that all young people deal with; in specific, the main character, Sam, who has Tourette's Syndrome. Sam also battles an abusive step-father, a dead biological father, and a mother who is mistreated. Suddenly, Sam's world is turned upside-down when he finds that his image of his father, the image instilled by his step-father, is completely wrong, and he embarks on a cross-country trip with the girl of his dreams to find his birthright. Sam and Naomi, his travel companion and maybe girlfriend, meet challenges of all sorts, mainly dealing with Sam's inability to control his most basic self and actions.

Jerk, California deals with the difficult world of physical and mental health issues for all young adults, mainly in Sam's Tourette's Syndrome. His journey and his tics seem to stem from the same issues. He faces issues that young adults can identify with on multiple levels, whether literal or metaphorical. As Sam, the reader is able jump into the skin of a young person against whom the odds are stacked, and yet who takes it upon him/her self to discover personal lineage, pride, and individuality as discovered, rather than being directly told who or what a

person is. Sam finds out through his journey that his entire image of his biological father had been a lie, and in fact that he is much more similar to his father than he had ever hoped to be. He discovers who he is.

This novel also deals with the idea of inability, a world that many young adults have experienced, in one way or another. Sam is able to rise above these complicated issues, and allows the reader hope that they too may do the same. However, Sam is no perfect character. He is fallible, frustrated, angry and confused; in essence, a realistic young adult. The characters he meets, especially Naomi (or Nae), all seem to have their individual struggles as well. All of the characters have their individual battles, though many are not as visible as Sam's. Nae struggles to live up to her mother's ideals, George struggles with his health, and Sam's mother and step-father struggle to stay together for their baby Lane. No one character has the ability to be perfect, though they all strive to obtain this level.

Throughout the novel, Sam loses his cool, makes copious mistakes, lets his fear make decisions, and even uses a version of English that is closer to stream of consciousness than standard academic English. In one scene, Sam has a heart to heart conversation with an old friend of his father's, turned employer. This man, George, asks Sam what he knows about his father. In response, Sam says, "where to start. Dug ditches. Dumb and lazy. Ran off with some woman and wrapped his car around a telephone pole. Old Bill's told me more, but those are the lowlights" (Friesen, 2008, p. 133). Here, Sam begins to delve into the identity that he believes his father owned, and the identity that he feels he too will fall into. However, Sam soon begins to eclipse this idea and grows into a man who takes responsibility for himself, and begins to fashion an identity greater than he could have imagined. In essence, Sam is any young adult reader. They are beginning to grow into individual who are responsible for their actions, afraid of the world outside of what they know, and trying desperately to belong somewhere. Sam is able to challenge these ideas, and in a way, the reader too reaches a cathartic moment where he or she knows that the world is scary, but that it may also lead him or her to find where he or she truly belongs. In fact, a line that George says to Sam rings true as a definite theme of the novel; "Knowin' where you're from ain't just optional" (p. 133).

CLOSING

Young adult novels are a valuable aspect in all English education classrooms, and yet the genre is often one of the most neglected forms of literature by traditional education for its target age. Not only does YA prove to be a source of literature that attracts young readers due to the content and writing style, but it authenticates the young adult experience of growing up, or learning who one is, and of discovering what it means to be a person in society. YA novels allow the reader to delve into a parallel world where the reader can experiment and learn with the main character in a risk-free arena.

The windows and mirror application of literature is especially pertinent to young adult readers, who are in the midst of discovering their identities. By using these literary windows and mirrors, a youth is able to discover which roles and

Discourses he or she fits into, which they desire to reject, and how exactly a person is able to manage life in a way that is most fitting to the individual.

The novel selections above illustrate different identities and social contrasts allowing students to explore worlds both similar and different from their own lived experiences. Depending on the student and the sociocultural understanding the student brings to the novel, the novel may be seen as realistic or outlandish. The student can become engaged in critique of the Discourses and experiences of the characters in order to examine the larger world that the student may know in terms of power and identity. This exploration using both Reader Response and critical literacy allows students to challenge the status quo and teachers to help foster the social imagination of students so that they may engage in revisioning their worlds for change of social injustices.

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TEACHING PLAN – DISCOURSE, IDENTITY AND YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Connecting students initially to a challenging concept such as Discourse can be difficult. The following lesson structure connects a writing activity with a Discourse analysis and is generic enough to be applied to the Young Adult novel of choice.

Objective	1. By the end of the lesson, the student will be able to identify those Discourses that apply to the self and to the main character of the novel. 2. Students will be able to explain how Discourse impacts decision making and will be able to examine the principal character of the novel through a Discourse analysis.
Anticipatory Set	Introduce students to a brief film clip from the film, *Mean Girls* or use the trailer to *Not Another Teen Movie.* While students are watching the brief clip(s) ask students to jot down stereotypes portrayed. At the conclusion of the clip ask students to pair/share what they wrote and to respond to the question, what do these stereotypes and expectations associated with them do to teen identity and how they complicate interpretations of the world. After a brief 5 min discussion, pull the class back together to discuss stereotype and identity formation. Note: *Not Another Teen Movie* trailer is not appropriate for younger students. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAOmTMCtGkI http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdF6AfeBlH0

Input	Explain the concept of Discourse and normative behavior to students and examine a sample Discourse map. 10 mins
Model	Creating a Discourse analysis chart with the class, the teacher should outline several Discourses at play for the teacher. As a class, discuss how to represent those Discourses through imagery. 10 to 15 mins
Checks for Understanding	Ask the students to each select and share one Discourse at play in their identity. Share and check for understanding. 5 mins
Guided Practice	Have students develop and share their own Discourse maps. Discuss how these Discourses are shaped by society and how normative behavior expectations shape how students fulfill social roles. 15 mins.
Closure	Ask students to share one Discourse they see connected to the main character of the Young Adult novel. In small groups, students will discuss how this Discourse influences the character's actions. 10 min
Independent practice	Create a Discourse map for the main character of the novel. On the back of your page write 3 to 5 paragraphs explaining how these Discourses impact character behavior. Ask students to reflect on how these Discourses are silenced or enabled. Which voices have power and what is that power utilized for within the text? An extension question could be to ask students to reinvision the story line of the character in light of the Discourses examined in order to empower character to enact social change within the text.