

Assignment 1B  
Krista Belanger

**Module 7:**

*How do you view YA literature? Who reads YA? and when should students read books written for adults? Reference the readings in your response.*

Personally, I view Young Adult (YA) literature as literature which deals with themes not requiring a particular level of knowledge about the “real world”, where there is no requirement of suspension of disbelief, and has no age limit. In my own teaching, many of my more emotionally mature, ‘experienced’, and charismatic grade five students prefer reading YA literature, mostly due to their themes of being misunderstood, romance, and overcoming obstacles. They feel as if they can relate to the text, see parallels in their own lives and the lives of those around them, as well as develop empathy for those who may be struggling.

My own choice reading is primarily YA literature, because not only are the themes universal, but the characters are so well developed and reading the book does not require a significant amount of thought, so reading becomes less taxing on my part and more for pleasure. After a full day of teaching, the last thing I want to read is a non-fiction text about the founder of Starbucks (which I own, but admittedly has collected dust over three moves across three different provinces). My intentions are good when I reach for books which seem exciting, but my mental state is so drained that I want to enjoy escapist literature in which I find YA to be the easiest to execute. I have also found an appeal in YA literature as it becomes more and more popular for movies to be based off of them. In *The Critical Merits of Young Adult Literature: Coming of Age*, Craig Hill writes, “film adaptations of YA novels have become a staple of the movie industry” (2014, pg. 5). From my own perspective, YA literature has just as much to offer as an adult fiction text, and perhaps more, as the characters and themes are more relatable.

According to Hill, “*The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Library Journal*, and other newspapers and magazines have proclaimed that YA literature is not just for teenagers anymore. Adult readers, according to Scholastic, are now a third of its market” (2014, pg. 5). These pieces of literature create a bridge for parents to engage in discussing literature with their sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, as well as grandchildren. These pieces of literature open up opportunities for conversations about difficult topics such as depression, the loss of a loved one, and anxiety. Primarily, I think YA literature provides opportunities for access for a wider audience.

My older sister, a self-proclaimed “non-reader” loves to read YA literature in the form of “beach reads” - she finds typical paperback authors like Danielle Steel to be too boring and convoluted, and appreciates the excitement that comes with YA literature, she finds the content relevant as “more YA titles that are pushing the upper edge of the age designation, following stories of teens the summer after graduation, on into college, and beyond” (Molly Wetta, *Categories Blur as Teen Lit Comes of Age*, 2016). She would never gravitate toward literature requiring historical knowledge, nor intensive analogies or metaphors. She prefers to read for the purpose of joy, which is all she expects literature to accomplish - which I admire.

I feel, as being a former high school English teacher, that we expect novels to accomplish too much, which takes away from the intent of many novels - which is the joy of reading. We often reach for text to escape, to understand ourselves and those around us, and to develop a sense of empathy. None of these reasons are exclusive to childhood or adulthood. According to Wetta, “Just as there isn’t a firm line between childhood and adulthood, the differences and appeal of young adult fiction vs. books published for adult audiences exist on more of a

continuum, in my view, especially as many adults continue to be avid readers of YA” (2016).

There are many times where I go back to read books I enjoyed reading when I was younger - due to their accessibility, their ease, and the nostalgia. In my own classroom, I choose books I liked reading as both a child and as an adult, primarily because they allow me to connect with my students, to say “when I was your age...”, and they create a sense of community.

I appreciate Wetta’s point that “Before there was the term New Adult, there was no shortage of adult books with teen appeal” (2016), likely because the universality of experience, the common themes, and being escapist literature. I think that students should read books written for adults whenever the student feels it to be appropriate. Not all adult literature deals with explicit material, nor does all adult literature contain themes which would be considered inappropriate for children of all ages and experiences. As a future teacher-librarian, I understand the importance of over-censorship in a school library, and hope that if a title were ever to come into question there would be an opportunity through the appropriate channels for the questioner to ask for the title to be reconsidered.

## References

Hill, C. (2016). *The critical merits of young adult literature: Coming of age*. London: Routledge.

Wetta, M. (2016). Categories Blur as Teen Lit Comes of Age. *School Library Journal*. Retrieved

March 11, 2019, from

<https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=categories-blur-as-teen-lit-comes-of-age>

**Module 8:*****What can you as a teacher do to promote the reading and use of information books in the classroom?***

Independently, and without persuasion, I offer a variety of non-fiction books in my classroom because I use it as an opportunity to discuss how reading does not need to be a start-to-finish, laborious, or time-consuming period of time. I do not use the word ‘task’ in this case (as I might with colleagues), because my primary agenda is to foster the joy of reading more than anything else. I like to use non-fiction and information books in my classroom to show how easily we can look to books for answering questions we might have, to see how we do not need to invest copious amounts of time to reading for information purposes, and to show how our vocabulary, experiences, and knowledge can expand in a shorter amount of time. Each year, I work with my class and read through informational books thematically according to our units of study. After reading each piece, they go on the bookshelf in our classroom library and many students read them throughout the following weeks and later on in the year. In the article *The Classroom Library: A Place for Nonfiction, Nonfiction in its Place*, the authors indicate that

“Small specialized text sets of books should have a special place in the classroom library. These can be books related to a topic of study in the classroom, current events, or an area of great interest to individuals or groups of students. These text sets should include books from a variety of genres including picture books, realistic and/or historical fiction, biography, information titles, poetry, and perhaps traditional literature” (Young, Moss, and Cornwell, 2007, pg. 6).

To say that I have a sufficient amount of informational books in my classroom would be an inaccurate statement. As indicated by Young, Moss, and Cornwell, “students [are] actually choosing twice as many information books as novels from their school library, but that access to such books [is] limited in their classroom libraries” (pg. 3). Personally, I think that this is partially due to the expense of informational books versus fiction books, as well as the publicity and availability from local stores.

In the next town over from where I live, there is one bookstore and it is minimal in size. Their non-fiction section for children at my grade level is so small I nearly pass it every time I go in there. There is the availability to purchase titles online, but often with informational books, there is a lot more that goes into choosing the title than a blurb on Amazon. It is also time-consuming to make the purchase online, wait for the delivery, look at the book, and then return it. This process can take anywhere from a week to a few months. In a class I am currently taking about non-fiction titles, I studied a *Scholastic* text which I was suggesting needed to be replaced with an online database. The text itself is wonderful, with the exception of a number of inaccuracies. We discussed in that class that the currency of informational books is incredibly important, and that these types of books should be replaced within three to five years due to their information becoming irrelevant (Reidling, *Reference Skills for the School Librarian: Tools and Tips*, 2013, pg. 38). When I looked at the currency of the book I had in hand, it was nearly eight years old. Replacing the text (and every other informational book in my classroom and school library, as no one has purchased a significant number of informational books since I have started teaching there) would be thousands of dollars. I think that this is another hesitancy some teachers have to including a significant amount of informational literature in their classrooms.

The authors of *The Classroom Library: A Place for Nonfiction, Nonfiction in its Place*, offer a persuasive stance that non-fiction books can (and should) be used in a school classroom or school library learning commons (SLLC). Their list of suggestions to foster a sense of importance for non-fiction to be made more readily available to students “[to] invite browsing, spark curiosity, and promote inquiry . . . [to] motivate reluctant readers by engaging them with visual supports and attractive formats . . . [and to] combine reading for pleasure with reading for information” (pg. 2). I appreciate the author's stance on their assertion that informational literature should be brought forward in classrooms. Too often, we (teachers) look to fiction text to teach about kindness, empathy, and other larger issues. We tend to focus on building social-emotional skills with our students through literature and nearly abandon informational text with the exception of using it to teach curriculum. Even then, many teachers use fiction texts in the form of picture books to teach curriculum. In one of my posts on the discussion board, I was frustrated with the push from another teacher (whom I trust) to use *Knots on a Counting Rope* by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault, as an informational text in Social Studies to demonstrate Indigenous oral storytelling. The inaccuracies in the text made it so that I could not justify using the text in my classroom, nor could I recommend it to other teachers. Confronting that teacher to ensure they were not spreading misinformation was the most stress I have ever felt in this profession. I did not want to confront her on a public forum to say that the recommendation should perhaps be reconsidered, nor did I want to warn others. What I ultimately decided to do was send the teacher a private message and suggest that they comment on their original post and indicate their mistake and how the book should perhaps not be used for informational purposes but for pleasure with the note that it is not an accurate representation of Indigenous peoples.

That being said, I think that it is incredibly important for our students to learn how to read informational text outside of a particular subject area. Reading text to make connections is much more difficult to do with a piece of informational text than a work of fiction. Even so, according to *The Classroom Library: A Place for Nonfiction, Nonfiction in its Place*, “[informational text reading will account for] 84% of adult, real world text” (pg. 2). To not teach decoding, text features, to make connections, to enjoy reading about things that interest us is doing our students a disservice. It is imperative that we (teachers) provide a variety of texts to our students to learn from and enjoy over their school careers. How we can foster a love of reading in informational literature is to show our students that we love to read informational literature, why we love it, and how it makes us better people from having read informational literature. When students see the teacher modeling a love of reading, including both informational and fiction literature, students are more likely to choose complimentary titles and re-read texts used in class.

## References

- Martin, B., Archambault, J., & Rand, T. (2012). *Knots on a counting rope*. New York, NY: Square Fish / Henry Holt and Company.
- Riedling, A. M., Shake, L., & Houston, C. (2013). *Reference skills for the school librarian: Tools and tips*. Santa Barbara, CA: Linworth.
- Young, T. A., Moss, B., & Cornwell, L. (2007). The Classroom Library: A Place for Nonfiction, Nonfiction in its Place. *Reading Horizons*, 48(1), 1-18. Retrieved March 12, 2019, from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1071&context=reading\\_horizons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1071&context=reading_horizons)

Module 10:

Consider and discuss the salient points of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk: *the danger of a single story* and make parallels to our current contexts.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk, *The danger of a single story*, had a number of salient points. To do her talk justice, I have listed the points below and quoted her talk extensively under each point. Within those quotes, I have discussed what I believe to be parallels to my current context.

**Point 1: Similar context and imagery makes a story more relatable.**

*"I wrote exactly the kind of stories I was reading, they were white and blue eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun was out . . . but I lived in Nigeria."*

In my own classroom, I do my best to introduce books to my students with male, female, and ungendered protagonists. It does not do my students any good to serve them with only one perspective, and to show them books where they do not see themselves as represented. My students find literature where they see parallels to their lives and situations to be easier to relate to than those where they do not see themselves represented. I do think that we (as teachers) do need to include literature which does not represent our students, but we must be careful to show a variety of perspectives there as well. For example, I will not be using Thomas King as the sole author of Indigenous literature, because his own experience is limited.

*“[It is remarkable] how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of literature.”*

Reading literature, but also writing literature forces us to take off the mask we use daily to be as authentic as possible. There are so many ways our students connect to literature that they are easily moved. While completing a read-aloud in my classroom, both myself and my students have been brought to tears on a number of occasions, which brings us together and gives us a stronger connection. Reading together also brings about a sense of community, which is something I strive for in my own classroom.

**Point 2: What we think we know is not always reliable. We often miss context.**

*“I realized that people like me... could also exist in literature . . . I started to write about things I could recognize.”*

Making the connection that you can be represented in literature is a powerful thing, and sometimes, in order for ourselves to feel like we are represented, we have to be the ones making that representation happen, by being the author ourselves. In order for us to be authentic and unapologetic, we have to be humble and know that there is more we do not know, and we are constantly missing context.

*“It had not occurred to me that anyone in his [Frafî] family could make anything . . . all I heard was how poor they were, so all I could see was that they were poor. Poverty was my single story of them.”*

In my opinion, we (teachers) see our students so easily in one way - we see or meet their parents and that frames our perception of the child, we base our knowledge off of a previous sibling we taught, we judge our students based on what they wear, how they talk, what they choose to read. We are so full of judgement that we are not humble in our own work because we are “the expert in the room” and sometimes, that takes over. In my own classroom, I have a student who I know I can be very tough on, and have to be mindful of how I speak and approach her. She has been overexposed and (here my judgments go again) given far too much responsibility in her young life, but with all of that, she comes into the classroom with a lot to offer, makes some very good points in class discussions, and is incredibly well spoken. However, the negative things that cause me to be tough on her I will not mention, because those judgments are not mine to make, nor should they be. She will ultimately write the narrative of her own life. Her story is so much more complex than a single word, but if I can be mindful of all of the wonderful things she brings to our class, I can perhaps approach her in a light that will allow her to flourish positively.

**Point 3: Other people force ourselves into identification, even if we do not agree with their suggestions.**

*“I did not identify as African”*

In my classroom, I have two girls who truly struggle with Math. They both talk about themselves as being dumb when it comes to Math, and they do their best to understand. They choose to sit at the front (we do not have a seating plan), and I often check in with them during math class. They have such a negative perception that we often discuss that trying is important

but being successful with every single question may not be something attainable for them. They do not identify as being smart, but they know how to do two-digit multiplication, which is one of the hardest parts of our curriculum in grade 5 math. I am forcing myself to acknowledge them and identify them as hard workers, because being persistent and not giving up will serve them better than giving up and admitting defeat. They may not identify in the same way, but in this case, I need to keep telling them they are.

*“[John Locke] begins the tradition of telling African stories in the West . . . of [and Rudyard Kipling described later] half-devil, half-child.”*

Teachers in my school (and the previous school I taught in) often meet at the end of the current school year or the beginning of the next with the previous teacher to discuss behaviours, academics, and familial support. This tradition is fairly important in many schools as it can help for planning over the summer, especially when an individualized education plan is to be implemented. The previous teacher, then, describes the narrative in which the student will be viewed from at the beginning of the year. While I sometimes do not agree with the tradition of these meetings, they are truly helpful for those who need it. The important part I need to be mindful of is to ensure the meeting is done quickly and does not enter into the category of gossip. In my meeting last year, where I was explaining my previous class to the new teacher, I was explaining how I was trying to get a reader for assessments for one of the students, but the parents refused to allow her to have a reader. I was very hurt by this, because I knew that the child had difficulty reading and severely below grade level, as did the parents. This hurt translated into the meeting and it was incredibly difficult for me to frame the conversation in

such a way that I did not sway the new teacher or cause them to be biased in any way (I do not think I was successful in that). Those before us, in these types of meetings, are considered trustworthy, with their biases, experiences, and human nature.

**Point 4: Power defines stories.**

*“[It is important to recognize that creating stories is complex and we need to remind ourselves] how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependant upon power”*

I think in the education field, there is always a power struggle, no matter where you teach, which position you are in, who is in your class, or what your environment is like. For example, there is always a power struggle going on in a class as there are needs that are simply not being met within our classrooms. In my own classroom, I have had a difficult time with one student whose mother has been putting him on and off medication and not giving him the medication he needs to last him a full school day. Consequently, by 11:00, his medication has worn off and he becomes violent with other students. When I had him call his mom and tell her he needed his medication, she said he would start taking it at school after spring break. I have been advocating for this student because I know it's just a medicine issue that causes him to have an outburst, but it makes it difficult when there are other students learning these same behaviours and modeling the same things he is doing, but they do not have a diagnosis requiring medical help. In this student's household, the school or the teacher is not viewed as being the people in authority or advocating for the child, so one of the parents does what they want, when they want (which often means sending the child to school without any help).

In terms of literature and the literature we put in front of our students, we need to be mindful of the context, the purpose, and the intended audience. When John Locke wrote about going to Africa, his intention was not purely to inform, it was persuasive. Some writers have a natural “slant” to their writing which makes it more argumentative or persuasive, which tells the reader how they should be feeling, or gives an impression. We need to ensure that we are careful about bringing books into the classroom which contain bias and only one viewpoint. We need to offer up other suggestions and read simultaneously.

*“[When I heard that] writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done to me.”*

*“All of these stories make me who I am, but to focus only on these negative stories, is to flatten my experience and overlook the other stories [which make us who we are].”*

I have combined these two quotes because they are quite similar. We do our students an injustice when we focus on dark literature, with people who have had negative experiences. When I taught high school literature, I would often give my students Sylvia Plath to read and dissect, because I personally loved her work. However, I was doing my students a disservice by not providing a more upbeat poet to compare her to. If we focus our thoughts on the negative in our lives, we do ourselves a disservice also, because we can too easily become overrun with thoughts of how we need to desperately change. Not all writers come from places of darkness, but all writers have had lives which are complex, which allow them to write more descriptively and with more authenticity.

### **Point 5: Stereotypes make a single story the only story**

*“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete”*

In education, we often find our students coming to us with the biases and stereotypes taught to them by their parents. I currently live in a community which does not have a significant number of Indigenous people or perspectives, so teaching my students about the Indigenous ways of knowing and their culture is important to both me and in the curriculum. It is my job to break the stereotypes they have inherited and help them form their own thoughts and opinions. In teaching Social Studies, we use different texts from different perspectives to tell the same story, we often discuss that there are three sides to any story: one side, the other side, and what really happened. My job is to teach my students that not only are there multiple perspectives about any given situation, but there are also pieces missing that make up those stereotypes and misconceptions about a group of people.

*“Stories matter, many stories matter . . . stories can be used to empower . . . stories can repair broken dignity”*

In teaching about Indigenous people with accurate and vetted texts, we can begin to repair the broken perspective many Canadians have about Indigenous people. When I taught in a community with a significant number of Indigenous students, I opted to choose texts written by people in their community and people who could identify with them. Given that, in grade 10, we always discussed the book *April Raintree*, as the author (Beatrice Culleton) wrote it as a fiction text but used her own experience as a springboard for telling the story. I had her come into my

classroom as a student teacher and talk about her book, and my class was the most engaged they had been all term. She spoke with a voice of authority and promoted the idea that stories ought to be shared, as the only way others can learn is to make our stories known to others.

## References

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. (2009). The danger of a single story. [online] YouTube. Available at:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?)