A Masters Research Project Presented to
The Faculty of Gladys W. and David H. Patton
College of Education and Human Services
Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Education

By
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Master’s Research Project:
Should Young Adult and Multicultural Literature Have a
Permanent Place in the Secondary English Classroom?
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May, 2011
This Master’s Research Project has been approved
by the Department of Teacher Education,
The Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education and Human Services

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to discuss the current curriculum standards of the English Language Arts classroom with respect to the types of literature that teachers are currently using in their classrooms; many standard canon pieces are perhaps over-utilized, so much so that many students and a growing number of educators perceive these pieces as antiquated and irrelevant. These perceptions perhaps diminish the long term teaching goal of creating life-long readers and learners. A review of literature exhibits that students would like more variety in the language arts education, as well as displays evidence that there are teachers who are incorporating more contemporary, relevant prose that is of high quality. The review of literature also discusses the need for incorporation of not only Young Adult (YA) literature, but Multicultural (MC) literature as well into the English Language Arts classroom. With the current trends in globalization, students need to develop a broader understanding of the world around them; literature that is based from other ethnic or cultural perspectives can enhance the learning experience for English Language Arts students, increasing global awareness.

The research survey, given to high school seniors, was designed to assess what types of books students have read or haven’t read, inside or out of the classroom, with students rating the books or indicating that they have not read a particular book. Books and literature chosen for the survey were based on current reading trends in the English language arts classroom, as well as based on current books that are aimed at the young adult demographic. Multicultural literature books were added to the survey to assess if students are reading this genre. Based on the results of the survey, a conclusion was developed and discussed.

Keywords: English Language Arts (ELA), Young Adult literature (YA), Multicultural literature (MC)
Dedication:

This project is dedicated to Mrs. Wilma Heath; the first teacher who made learning real for me,

Dr. Paul Yuckman and Dr. Guofang Wan
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Chapter One: Introduction

“There is no Frigate like a Book” - Emily Dickinson

Reading is arguably one of the most important skills that humans can possess. This skill is needed to maneuver in society, find and secure work, help us communicate with others; yet there is a more valuable and clever reason to read: to enlighten ourselves. A book is a passage to another place. It is time travel between pages. A book is potential. Readers can see into the mind’s eye of the authors they read and really understand what the writer is trying to say. There is an intrinsic quality to the construct of reading for pleasure. If a person can read, he or she will seldom be bored. There is power in the ability to read. There are literally millions of books out there just waiting to be discovered. The problem is: are English language arts secondary students getting to read them?

The English language arts classroom is in crisis. Year after year of reading the same old standards seems to be taking a toll on students: “Getting students to read is a common problem in many secondary English language arts classrooms. Many teachers continue to assign only classic literature with novels that have been traditionally used in English language arts classrooms because of the belief in timelessness” (Santoli & Wagner, 2004, p.65). Students must read, as teachers are encouraged to teach them, the same tired pieces year after year. There is this idea that teaching the English canon is the best way for students to learn how to appreciate literature, when students and many teachers feel that the opposite is true. If it is a goal of teachers to create life-long learners, would it not make more sense to include works of literature that are germane to the high school student’s experience? How does reading Beowulf or listening to it in the old
English help students? Does it address who they are and what they need to learn now? Does reading Chaucer or Shakespeare make a better reader? Do students enjoy reading these authors? If given a choice, would students still read these authors?

**The Canon is here to Stay**

The English canon is full of great pieces of literature. British authors began a legacy that is surely a testament to genius and talent. For some, tampering with the English canon is tantamount to literary treason. There are works in the canon that should never be removed. The canon is a standard for cultural literacy; a standard by which other works are measured. But are there works outside of the canon that also have merit and are worth teaching? Certainly. The genres of young adult and multicultural literature offer a multitude of quality reading experiences for the English language arts secondary student. Young Adult literature is literature that is written with young adults, aged from twelve to eighteen, students in junior high and high school, and students who have graduated from high school but are not engaged fully in an adult lifestyle (Nilsen & Donelson, 2009). Multicultural literature is literature that has a focus other than the dominant Euro-centric culture, and in this pluralistic society, it is important to use this genre to allow students to explore themselves and others, and to see themselves in relation to others in order to develop an identity not just as Americans, but as global citizens (Loh, 2009).

The books of these two genres are important to the English language arts secondary student. Young adult literature is one of the fastest growing segments of the literary market. There is a large market for the books of this genre. Visit any bookstore, and witness entire sections of stores dedicated to Young Adult literature. Adolescents are buying up these books and devouring them. According to a writer for *Publisher’s Weekly,*
“There is no shortage of media coverage about boom times in the young adult market…fueled by talented new writers…and a sizzling double edged crossover market involving more adult authors penning YA novels and more adult readers buying YA fare” (Lodge, 2010, p. 22). What English teacher does not want to see students reading? Students who may resist reading canon standards may understand concepts better through this genre, “The right young adult novel can provide teachers with a way to reach an individual student struggling with the standard curriculum” (Stallworth, 2006, p.63). These books can inspire critical thinking, when appropriate context is used; for example, books about young adult individuals who have power and privilege: these novels give students the opportunity to critically examine the lives of these characters that seem to have it all (Glenn, 2008). Books about the environment, such as the Firestorm series by David Klass, talk about environmental concerns in the context of fiction, from the point of view of an adolescent male protagonist. There are books that cover topics such as sexual abuse and self-mutilation: Scars, by Cheryl Rainfield, and multicultural teen focus books such as Sáenz’s Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood, and also by Sáenz, Last Night I Sang to the Monster, a story of a teen boy dealing with addiction. Books with a focus of historical fiction are also arriving in the Young Adult genre, such as Kwasney’s Blue Plate Special, a book that is told from three different perspectives about mothers and daughters (Lodge, 2010).

Based on the above research evidence on the above research evidence these books are interesting to adolescents. So why not incorporate some of them into the classroom?

Multicultural literature is also an important facet in the English language arts secondary classroom. In the next twenty years or so, the United States will have a very
large multicultural population, given the current trend: “Today’s classrooms are microcosms of the larger society of the United States; a sea of faces representing a plurality of cultures, races, religions and ethnicities” (Stallworth & Gibbons, 2008, p.478). This multicultural, diverse population will certainly help compose the student bodies of schools across America. This is a great opportunity for students from every background to learn about cultures and ethnicities through reading. There are also young adult novels that discuss the lives of students of multiple cultures. Students can learn about themselves while reading about the cultures of other people; it would be especially interesting if students could read about multi-ethnic teens and their experiences in addition to how Beowulf defeated the Grendel instead of literary history solely according to the dominant culture. Stallworth and Gibbons propose that English language arts classrooms can “forge a sense of interconnectedness and community within this diverse community so that the resulting classroom community is an inclusive one pervaded by attitudes of open-mindedness and respect” (p 478).

Social Justice meets Harry Potter

It isn’t that teens don’t love to read. Book sales show that they do read, and read prolifically (Reno, 2008, p.1). The problem is that they do not love to read books that are not interesting to them. How can we remedy this? Should English language arts teachers automatically revolt and overthrow the standards set forth by the government and society? Should the canon or other standards be abandoned completely? No, they should not. There are pieces of English literature that should be read and studied, but students should have more of a say about the things they are reading in their classroom. After all, it is their education, isn’t it? If an English language arts teacher wants to facilitate real
learning, the kind that implements a love of reading and lifelong learning and a commitment to social justice, a teacher should pay attention to what students are trying to say through their apathy: They are perhaps bored and would benefit from a more meaningful literary experience.

**Research Question:**

*Would standardizing the English language arts secondary English literature curriculum to require a specific quantity of selections of popular young adult literature as well as multicultural literature benefit students by increasing their interest and broadening the definition of English literature?*

Do students seek a more meaningful experience in the English language arts classroom? Shouldn’t students’ language arts experience mirror an encompassing array of literary experiences? Would this not contribute to a more thorough education as well as spark interest beyond the humdrum sighs as the class reads yet another classic written by the dominant white cultures of England and America? Would standardizing the English literature curriculum to include selections of popular young adult literature as well as multicultural literature benefit students by increasing their interest? The researcher intends to seek the answers to these questions.

**Significance of Research**

Students need to have a more definitive voice in what they are learning. If the goal is merely to teach students a set number of literary works and then call those students educated, then there seems to be something wrong with our system. Quantity of learning should not supersede the quality of learning. Students who enjoy what they are learning are more likely to learn well and retain that knowledge for future use. There are
important lessons to be learned in literature classes. An enjoyment of reading that lasts throughout an individual’s life should be one of those things. If students can have access to books that are important and meaningful to them as well as receive instruction for those works to help them extrapolate what is important from those works, students’ whole perspective on learning could change. If students could have a measure of self-determinism in what they are learning, the construct of education for education’s sake could be improved considerably. Why shouldn’t students read young adult and multicultural literature in the English language arts classroom, in addition to commonly taught pieces to provide a wide variety of literary experience? Bushman asks poignant questions: “Do Romeo and Juliet, Great Expectations, Julius Caesar, A Tale of Two Cities…and many others found in the English curriculum meet the needs, interests, and abilities of young people in middle and high schools? Do these works help with the emotional and social development of young people?” (Bushman, 1997, p.45). William Shakespeare and Dickens and others represented in current curriculum standards are not the only valuable authors worth reading. This may sound revolutionary, but it is really just good sense: Curriculum should not be so static that it ignores the needs of the population it serves. If students could be reading materials that are interesting and important to them, education would perhaps retain some intrinsic value instead of increasingly seeming to exist primarily as a means to an end. The problem is that what is being taught in the English language arts secondary classroom is not largely interesting to the average student: “It seems to me that throughout the school experience, teachers have their goal to present a knowledge based curriculum, and when they have finished that curriculum, students stop reading…making young people life-long readers is not a part of
the plan” (Bushman, 1997, p.50). It is important to discuss why this trend continues in education, and perhaps more importantly, why many teachers remain resistant to explore the idea that learning should be student driven and not curriculum driven. Creating an environment that fosters a love of reading is not some lofty Utopian goal. Many teachers are already infusing Young Adult literature and Multicultural literature in their classrooms with encouraging results: one teacher, after listening to her students complain about reading *Lilies of the Field* realized that she was creating an environment that did anything but foster learning, so she decided to give students choice; most chose young adult novels. She noticed a change in her classroom environment. Her students had good attitudes and actually wanted to read more, and shared their books with their peers. This teacher realized that this trend was having a good effect on her students; they were choosing literature that was meaningful to them. Many young adult novels deal with the same concepts of more classic fare: love, irony, satire, conflict, as well as other elements; students can become prepared to read more classic works and even appreciate them, or even become lifelong readers (Santoli & Wagner, 2004). Lifelong readers are a worthy pursuit. Should educators ignore the research and the groans of their students? For whose benefit are educators teaching? The significance of the issue of infusing Young Adult literature and Multicultural literature into secondary English language arts classrooms is compelling. Why aren’t teachers teaching to the needs of their students?
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Lifelong learners and Global Citizens: Who am I?

Are English language arts secondary students getting their needs met? Are teachers obligated to educate the whole student and not just convey the subject matter at hand? The English language arts curriculum has a tremendous opportunity to help students meet their developmental potential:

What are the special needs and expectations of adolescents? What are the major developmental tasks that confront teenagers? Eric Erickson (1984) suggests that the major task of adolescence is the formulation, or reformulation of personal identity. Middle and high school students are primarily engaged in the task of answering the question, ‘who am I?’ Havighurst (1972) outlines developmental tasks for healthy individuals that include a series of tasks that confront adolescents…the principal needs of adolescence are emotional and social development, rather than intellectual growth. But what is the school experience? Not much attention is given to emotional and social development, but a great deal of attention is given to intellectual development. And what literature is assigned for students to read in the classroom: usually the classics or at least that literature found in the anthology (Bushman 1997, p. 1).

Are ELA secondary students missing out on the opportunity to work on developmental issues? Are their needs being met? “Teachers don’t seem to care if students continue to read or not. They have done what is expected of them (pass along a cultural/literary heritage), and making young people into lifelong readers is not part of the plan” (Bushman 1997, p.6).
When it comes to cultural heritage, what culture(s) are being represented? Should teachers be presenting literature that not only meets the needs of the developing adolescent, but should they also be using material that addresses the global community? There is value in preserving culture, as long as multiple cultures are held as valuable as our own. The trend of globalization has put an onus on education to promote a global mindset. What better way to do this than by including multicultural literature into the ELA secondary classroom? “Langer (1995, 5) puts it this way: Literature…sets the scene for us to explore both ourselves and others, to define and redefine who we are, who we might become, and how the world might be’ (Loh, 2009, p. 288). Students are facing a duality. Ethnocentrism and isolationism are dead ends in this small world, and students need to be exposed to more than the standard canon of primarily white and decidedly antiquated authors. “I argue that in this globalized context, students must learn to envision themselves as both American and global citizens and that the worlds and worldviews in literary texts allow for imaginings and conversations about self and self in relation to the world” (Loh, 2009, p. 288).

**Students are Reading! Young Adult Literature**

Teachers can bemoan the fact that their students are not engaging in their classrooms with reading, but plenty of reading seems to be going on outside the classroom:

Contrary to the depressing proclamation that teens aren’t reading, the surprising truth is that they are reading novels in unprecedented numbers. Young-adult fiction (ages 12-18) is enjoying a bona fide boom with sales up more than 25 percent in the past few years, according to a Children’s Book Council sales
survey. Virtually every major publishing house now has a teen imprint, many bookstores and libraries have created teen reading groups and an infusion of talented new authors has energized the genre (Reno, 2008, p.1).

There is something to this trend. Teachers can complain that authors like Rowling and Meyer do not belong in the ELA secondary classroom, but plenty of students are reading these books. Why shouldn’t teachers capitalize upon these resources and bring books like them into the ELA secondary classroom? Shouldn’t we broaden the curriculum if it accomplishes the end goal of students taking some interest in their educations? “By following English faculty members of a large high school for a year…he found the most successful classrooms for students were led by teachers willing to look beyond the classics…As Applebee noted, these teachers let content determine the material, rather than a list of timeworn books” (Bushman, 1997, p. 7). This seems to be the exception, however, and not the rule: “Schools have failed to choose literature that enables students to become emotionally and cognitively involved in what they read. If students are asked to read literature that is not consistent with their developmental levels, they will not be able to interact fully with that literature” (Bushman, 1997, p. 7). So are teachers teaching the wrong books? What else is out there? The YA lit genre does not seem to be going anywhere. There have been awards developed to honor works in the genre, the Michael L. Printz award, for the best YA book of the year, and YARA, or the Young Australian Reader’s Award, a reader’s choice award (Koss, Teale, 2009, p. 563).

Students who read become students who can think critically. Using meaningful works that students relate to can help them become more involved with the world around them because they are actively manipulating problems through the protagonists of the
books they are reading. Can reading help make sense of the outside world? Philion writes: “I believe that readers have the capacity to use literary discourse and knowledge to generate useful insights on the world. With a variety of reading experts, I believe that readers generate such insights when they are able to create ‘text-to-world-connections,’ or linkages between literary language and messages and prevailing social issues and contexts” (Philion, 2009, p. 47). The YA lit books that are on the market now cover a wide range of topics that students deal with from bullying to drug use to multicultural and sexual identity issues. Teachers may initially shirk from some of these controversial topics, but they may do their students a disservice by doing so. Conversely, many of the themes in more traditional literature are also controversial. Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* deals with the issues of mental retardation and mercy killing. If this piece were written contemporarily, parents might be calling the schools to complain about it. The reluctance of some teachers to stray from the classics indicates that they are steeped in the conventions of what is held as valuable in terms of literature. But teachers who are willing to step outside of their comfort zones have been rewarded with students who actually like to learn and are engaged in the class work: isn’t this the goal?

**A Problem(s) with Young Adult Literature**

One glaring con of the Young Adult literature genre in the ELA secondary classroom is under-representation of culture and ethnicity. Many of the YA lit novels are written from a white European American perspective with little focus on multicultural issues (Koss, Teale, 2009, p. 569). In a study done by Koss and Teale to help teachers understand “current trends in what is published for and read by adolescents,” the authors point out that there are not substantial numbers of Young Adult literature novels that
embrace multiculturalism. But as the tapestry of the United States becomes more intricately woven with people from all over the global community, this trend may change and Young Adult literature will encompass a wider array of ethnic concerns.

Another issue with YA lit is its appropriateness for the classroom. The Meyer *Twilight* series, for example has stirred up a lot of controversy because of its anti-feminist overtones: “Do the books promote retrograde ideas about female submission to male authority? Are the books particularly troubling in the genre of young adult (YA) literature, whose readers might not yet have developed the critical apparatus of the adult reader” (Silver, 2010, p. 122). Silver does go on to point out that “…her lack of authoritarian parents gives her the opportunity to develop her identity along her own inclinations and to cultivate her sense of self without the active intrusion of a mother and father” (Silver, 2010, p. 124). Absent or uninvolved parents are a classic device of the Young Adult literature novel, however. The absence of parents gives young characters a sense of responsibility and the need to work out problems for themselves, a facet of what all individuals must do during the growing-up process. Even if certain Young Adult novels might not be classroom appropriate, teachers should not ignore an entire genre because of a few examples that may not meet classroom criteria in terms of content or length.

**Young Adult Literature and the Construct of Social Justice**

Schools do seem to be slightly more open to the concept of Young Adult literature in the English language arts secondary classroom; at least there does seem to be a response to the demand for fresh literature in the secondary classroom: “…the educational publishers are marketing new course textbooks…to aid in the teaching of the
genre…public school English departments have begun to include more YAL in the curricula…New anthologies of stories and poems geared toward YA’s continue to appear” (Cappella, 2010, p.2). This is encouraging news. Teachers in some schools can utilize the genre to get their students more invested in the English language arts secondary classroom experience. Literature should be interesting and entertaining. But what about social justice? Can teachers also introduce this concept into the secondary class using Young Adult literature? Are students interested in themes like social justice? How do students typically feel about their high school reading experience? When asked why they should read, many students give troubling answers: “Not one student interviewed could articulate a purpose for reading in school other than to ‘get the assignment done,’ ‘Read the textbook,’ or learn a skill. There is no mention of reading for pleasure, reading to stay informed of current events, or reading to shape political, moral, or cultural identities. In other words, they do not see any thematic content in books as a purpose for reading in school” (Wolk, 2009). Some schools and teachers may be building awareness that their students need something more in the English language arts secondary classroom, but it seems that there is a long way to go. When schools and teachers can begin to let go of the antiquated notion that there is a set curricula for English language arts secondary students and that the content should never be altered, perhaps students will begin to see their assignments as something more than just meaningless busywork.

Combining Young Adult literature along with multicultural literature in the secondary classroom to promote social justice is a catalyst for lasting change with respect to the classroom. Imagine students who actually care about what it is a teacher is trying to
teach them. Building an interest in literature is a worthwhile task for the secondary teacher. Giving students something to think about as well as read is important. Students can scaffold themes from stories into their own lives by understanding the lives of the characters they read about. Why aren’t they doing this now? If students could get access to the kinds of works that stimulate their minds to think outside the ubiquitous box, will they begin to care about what they are learning? Wolk contends that “living in a democracy poses specific obligations for reading…a democracy requires that people that do read, read widely, and think and act in response to their reading” (Wolk, 2009, p. 665). He goes on to discuss how students often see their education as a means to the end of getting a job (Wolk, 2009). It is important to consider employment as an end goal of education, but isn’t it more important to consider the end goal of education to be enlightenment? Using Young Adult literature to teach the construct of social justice in the secondary classroom will give students more to think about than plot or theme.

**Multicultural Literature: Breaking the Stereotypes**

There is a problem when presenting other cultures in schools. The focus is often on the foods and clothing and celebrations of a given culture. This can lead to stereotyping of cultures (Glasgow & Rice, 2007). Should multicultural literature be read because it is multicultural, or because it is good literature with enduring themes that are appealing to a number of readers? Educators do need to begin to recognize that the global community is at our door. In the smallest communities, students from different ethnic backgrounds are appearing more and more. Educators need to recognize this diversity and capitalize on it as an opportunity to teach all students. Young Adult literature can be a force in this:
“The growing body of young adult literature with multicultural themes opens up bold opportunities to engage students in exploring issues of culture and prejudice (Landt, 2006; Singer & Shagoury, 2005)” (Wolk, 2009, p. 669). It is important to build global awareness while at the same time help students identify with the fact that people in other cultures deal with the same struggles and that many themes are universal. Young Adult literature with a multicultural focus can help students not only learn about the world outside of their own, but also: “Good books, either as part of a literature curriculum or integrated into the social sciences, help to humanize other countries and cultures for young Americans and connect across oceans” (Wolk, 2009, p. 669).

Other Stumbling Blocks for Multicultural Literature

Often the barrier to effective use of multicultural literature is teachers. Some may find this topic well out of the comfort zone of the standard English language arts secondary curriculum:

Most senior lead teachers were educated according to the melting pot theory that espouses the commonalities of human beings by blurring ethnicity and emphasizing the assimilation of immigrants. Western white males defined this homogenized America to their readers. As students, these teachers were also indoctrinated in the timeless validity and intellectual achievement of the canon selections. As teachers then, they tend to perpetuate the values on which they were raised (Alexander, 1994, p. 2).

This mindset feeds into the dominant white culture’s basic disregard for any culture other than its own because other cultures have been blended into the dominant culture. This attitude simply does not work anymore. America is no longer compared to a melting
pot, but a salad bowl, implying a mix of elements rather than a blend (Alexander, 1994).

This idea has some teachers stymied because it is obviously easier to go with the mainstream and teach what has historically defined this country in terms of literature. The path of least resistance is often the one taken by teachers who may be unprepared to talk about subjects like race and ethnicity.

Fear may well be a factor. As the dominant culture, the White European mindset has prevailed for some time. And humans fear change:

Many teachers feel that their own mythology and values, rooted in the Renaissance of Western Europe, are being challenged by multicultural texts. To the western European reader, the figurative language and allusions are often unfamiliar and the order of the narrative disjointed. The pedagogical western mind is unsettled and either responds appreciatively and enthusiastically to the challenge or hides under a fearful mask of scorn (Alexander, 1994, p. 3).

The following research survey aims to demonstrate whether students would like a larger voice in what they are learning and whether if changing up the curriculum to include Young Adult and Multicultural literature would benefit students in the long run so that they might become life-long readers and learners.
Chapter Three: Research Design

This research project was designed to assay the idea of the English Language Arts classroom of incorporating young adult and multicultural literature. For this research project a survey was developed that listed twenty-four of works of literature. Twenty-four books were chosen, ranging in variety including canon and other standards as well as contemporary young adult fiction and multicultural literature pieces. The survey asked students to rate these books from strongly dislike, dislike, like or strongly like.

If a student hadn’t read a particular work, the choice of have not read was also available. There are some open-ended questions that give students the opportunity to list books that were not on the survey, distinguishing whether or not the books listed were liked or disliked. Students were also given the option to give opinions about the books they have read in their English classes, if they enjoyed them and why or why not.

Participants

The survey was distributed among fifty-five high school seniors attending school in rural Ohio. Participants were anonymous and completed the survey voluntarily. Fifty surveys were chosen to compile quantitative data. Five were excluded because of respondents omitting multiple responses. Many, but not all of the respondents wrote commentary. The quantitative information was compiled into a spread sheet listing percentages of the participants’ shared information about their reading experiences. Fifty of the fifty-five completed surveys were used for the quantitative analysis and discourse purposes of this research project. The same fifty surveys were used to compile qualitative data: students’ comments about their reading preferences and opinions about their
English language arts experience. Not every survey respondent supplied written comments.

Procedure

To gain more insight about the types of books students have read and their opinions about those books and other books students might have read or would want to read, the survey results were measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. High school seniors in a rural school setting were invited to complete the survey, anonymously and outside of the presence of the researcher. Participants were informed of the nature of the research and their consent were obtained prior to taking the survey. The survey with twenty four literature selections and three open-ended questions took about five to seven minutes to complete. See Appendix A.

Limitations

The survey contained twenty-four titles in the interest of making the survey user-friendly. A more comprehensive survey with a larger list of titles might have been utilized, but it would have also made the survey too lengthy and perhaps less likely to be completed authentically; this was the rationale for providing an option for qualitative responses. However, not all respondents responded with written responses.
Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

The quantitative survey: The quantitative survey contained twenty four titles of literature from several different genres. The data compiled resulted in percentages of students’ preferences ranging from strongly dislike, dislike, like, strongly like, and have not read. Fifty students’ surveys were utilized to compile this data. The table on Pages 26 and 27 shows the results of the quantitative analysis.

The qualitative portion of the survey asked respondents to name in writing any other books or stories that they liked, strongly liked, or would like to read as well as name in writing any books or stories that they disliked, strongly disliked, or would not like to read. Finally, respondents were asked to give their opinions on the books and stories that they have read in their secondary school experience, did they enjoy the selections, and why they did or did not like the stories. Together with the 24 titles listed in the quantitative section of the survey, it is hoped that the study will potentially collect more authentic data. Respondents replied in writing for more than half of the surveys completed, and some of the comments were very telling.
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<th>Strongly Dislike</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Haven’t Read</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Strongly Like</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Table One: Quantitive Research Survey Results
Quantitative Survey Discussion: Significant Findings

The significant research findings are as follows: Students indicated that they have read many of the standard canon pieces in their high school experience. Also, according to the data collected, a large percentage of students surveyed have not read many of the contemporary Young Adult literature titles in the survey. Students reported in large percentages reading certain standard pieces such as Beowulf, (94%), Hamlet, (82%), and The Crucible, (94%), as well as The Lord of the Flies (48%). Students also heavily read the S.E. Hinton classic The Outsiders (82%), as well as To Kill a Mockingbird, (92%).

Contemporary titles such as the Twilight and Harry Potter series were more frequently read (74% and 72%, respectively) compared to other contemporary titles. Many students had not read contemporary titles such as The Hunger Games, (70%) Firestorm: the Caretaker Series, (92%), or the Cirque du Freak Vampire Series, (78%), or The Princess Diaries (76%).

The poorest representations in terms of the selection Have Not Read in the data collected are the Multicultural literature titles, with Chinese Cinderella and Homeless Bird at ninety-two and ninety-four percent noted respectively as Have Not Read. Ciscernos’ The House on Mango Street was indicated as Have Not Read by eighty-eight percent. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry was noted as Have Not Read by fifty-four percent of students surveyed, and The Diary of Anne Frank scored similarly with fifty-eight percent of students marking Have Not Read.

Responses from students regarding more commonly assigned literary pieces that were not read by students in higher percentages include titles such as The Scarlet Letter,
which was read by thirty percent of respondents. *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Catcher in the Rye* were only read by twenty-eight and thirty percent of respondents, respectively. Tolkein’s *The Hobbit* was read by thirty-six percent of respondents. Steinbeck’s *The Red Pony* was only read by twelve percent of respondents, and Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery* was only read by four percent of respondents.

**Qualitative Survey Questions: Significant Findings**

Students surveyed listed several works under the comment: “Please list any other books you like or strongly like or would like to read.” Some traditional titles included: *The Odyssey*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *War of the Worlds*, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, *Moby Dick*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Contemporary titles students listed included *The Book Thief*, *Z is for Zechariah*, *Redwall*, *Ender’s Game and Ender’s Shadow*, *The Fever Series*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Heat*, *Lone Survivor*, *Fallen Angels*, *Jake Reinvented*, *Hatchet*, *Dragon Bait*, *The Dark Portal*, *Lone Survivor*, *Less than Zero*, *Go Ask Alice*, and *The Giver*. Several of these titles were listed by multiple survey respondents: *The Picture of Dorian Grey* was listed four times; *War of the Worlds* twice, *Ender’s Game* twice, and *Z is for Zechariah* also twice.

Under the comment “Please list any books you dislike or strongly dislike or would not like to read,” The following titles were listed: *The Awakening*, *Tenth Circle*, *Black Boy*, *1984*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Macbeth*, *All the King’s Men*, *Heart of Darkness*, *A Handmaid’s Tale*, and *The Sun Also Rises*. The selections *The Awakening*, *Black Boy*, and *Huckleberry Finn* were listed by multiple respondents also.
The last comment on the survey invited respondents to “provide your opinion on the books and stories you have read for your English classes in high school. Did you enjoy them? Why or Why not?” Student comments were collected from the survey responses and most are included here: “Most of the books we read have no excitement and are very boring.” “I didn’t enjoy most of them except for Of Mice and Men.” “I wish that more books were interesting in school.” “No, ‘cause I have to read them.” “I haven’t read many of them; however, I liked most of the ones I did read until senior year.” “No. They were not very interesting to me.” “I think most of the books I read in English are stupid. I enjoyed some of them, but most of them are old.” “Books are dumb. Reading is for them smart kids.” “Some of them were OK, but most I didn’t like to read or the book just didn’t look that good.” “Did not enjoy them. Too old. Not current. Boring.” “I usually like the books that we read in class but sometimes it is boring. Usually I read the books in class and try to appreciate the writing and the fact that it has survived so long. But I do think that we should read the Harry Potter series.” “@ English Teachers: Your literature was better off sleeping with the dinos.”

**Discussion of Results of Survey/ Significant Findings**

The results of the fifty-five total respondents (fifty individuals for the quantitative survey) indicate that while some standard titles were rated favorably by respondents, many of the Young Adult literature and Multicultural literature titles were highly rated as unread. If students had access to the titles that they marked as Have Not Read, they may also have liked those titles and rated them favorably. Up to half or more of respondents who had read the multicultural titles such as Romiette and Julio, and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry rated those titles very favorably, at twenty eight and thirty percent
(combined like and strongly like indications) respectively. Similar percentages are listed for the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* series. Adolescents are reading these titles and rating them favorably. Would it not be a good idea to get more students to like reading by using these titles or similar titles in the classroom? It is no secret that stories that students can identify with in some way are more popular than stories that students cannot relate with favorably.

Consider the S.E. Hinton book, *The Outsiders*. This book is set in a decade that most adolescent readers’ grandparents lived in, yet it endures. Compared to many works used in classrooms, Hinton’s book is contemporary, written in 1974, set in the late fifties. Students rated this book more highly (42% like, 38% strongly like) than any book in the survey. Why? The content is germane to the adolescent experience; it seems that the coming-of age themes in the novel are themes that teens tend to gravitate toward. In the survey, only two percent did not like the story. Eighteen percent marked Have Not Read. Forty-two percent circled Like, and thirty-eight percent marked Strongly Like. In the remarks section, *The Outsiders* was mentioned by one respondent very favorably: “I liked *The Outsiders* a lot. I liked the story, characters, everything. It was a book that I wanted to come back to.”

Clearly, books or stories that engage the reader in a way which with the reader can evidently identify, such as being an adolescent, trying to fit into the crowd, or dealing with the conflicts that occur when that does not happen, are all likely interesting to the secondary English language arts reader. *The Outsiders* is usually read in a middle school or freshman English class, and the respondents to this survey were all eighteen year old high school seniors, and they still indicated a positive reading experience with this book,
even after four or more years. Surely this is a strong argument for including works of literature in the classroom that engage a young person where he or she is developmentally and psychosocially. Teachers teach students, not material. If a teacher can reach out to students in the classroom with works of literature that are meaningful to the learner, it seems that the learner is more likely not only to learn, but retain what is taught, and a good book can help students do it: “…the role of good literature is to explore the complexities of difficult issues…it can be said that sophisticated thinking and analytical skills are enhanced and developed through consistent reading of literature” (Owen, 2003, p.15). Is this not a goal of teaching? The promotion of creating life-long readers and learners who view the world as one more classroom to navigate is worthy goal. Building students’ awareness of themselves and the world around them should also be a primary goal of any teacher. These goals are consistent with the developmental stages that all individuals must go through. Havighurst’s developmental tasks that adolescents must navigate are often thematic fare for Young Adult literature. (Bushman 1997). The relationships and conflicts that characters have with their peers in the aforementioned Hinton novel *The Outsiders* may contribute to its mass appeal. Adolescents are trying to figure out their identities. Many books in the Young Adult and Multicultural literature genres deal with these issues. The English language arts teacher has an ideal niche for linking students with works that not only improve their critical thinking skills, but also help adolescents navigate the path to adulthood. Additionally, a love of reading can be fostered. What teacher would not mind accomplishing this? Literature is important not only for the transference and preservation of cultural literacy, but it is also a clever way
to teach students themes like growing up, making correct decisions even when it is not beneficial to do so, and the construct of social justice:

Moral development is also addressed in quality young adult literature and is certainly appropriate for discussion and study by adolescents. Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) suggests that development moves along a line from self-centeredness, unable to consider the interests and claims of others doing right to avoid punishment to adopting principles for moral reasoning and action, recognizing that these moral principles occasionally conflict with social rules…at the top level, decisions are made on what is considered the right thing to do, rather than doing something to avoid punishment (Bushman, 1997, 8).

Not giving students a nurturing environment for learning about all aspects of themselves is a disservice to students and to the profession. Teachers should not abandon certain standard works, but teachers should also be able to incorporate more works that encourage students to become invested in reading. The research of this survey points to this conclusion.
Chapter Five: Conclusion: Young Adult and Multicultural Literature

In the Classroom

The research survey conducted for this process answers the research question. Students’ quantitative results indicated that canon and standard pieces are still widely read while Young Adult and Multicultural literature pieces are not as commonly read. Of the pieces of Young Adult and Multicultural literature that were read by respondents, most of these were indicated favorably. While there were standards that were favorably rated, non-standard pieces that had been read were also rated favorably. Table One on page twenty-five and page twenty-six display the percentages read by respondents.

Despite the stumbling blocks to incorporating materials that students would like to read, to including material that should be introduced to into the classroom, Bushman, 1997, shows that there are proactive solutions teachers can utilize and plenty of reasons to do so. Teachers who have started using these genres are likely seeing positive results Koss, 2009. Students seem more interested in learning if the materials are interesting to them and the topics germane to the adolescent experience, and have a more positive attitude about reading, even becoming enthusiastic Santoli & Wagner, 2004. Students who may feel out of place in the context of literature that is written primarily by the dominant culture can likely benefit from a change in English language arts curriculum to include works that have a greater world view and encompass the needs of the pluralistic society Loh, 2009.

The review of literature supports findings of the research. The articles compiled for this project represent a wide range of researchers Stallworth, 2006, Owen, 2003, Bushman, 1997, Loh, 20099, Nilsen and Donelson, 2009, Glasgow & Rice, 2009,
(Koss & Teale), (Santoli & Wagner, 2004), (Wolk, 2009), (Philion, 2009), (Lodge, 2010), (Glenn, 2008), and (Silver, 2010), who have demonstrated that incorporating the genres of Young Adult and Multicultural literature have been beneficial to learners when used in classrooms in conjunction with more standardized literature pieces. Santoli & Wagner (2004) demonstrates the fact that students who are actively engaged in their own learning processes are more likely to have a more positive outcome, and that the end goal of promoting life-long readers and learners is more likely to remain intact if teachers are willing to widen the curriculum a bit to make room for these genres.

Philion, (2009) discusses that literature and stories that help students develop a sense of identity and the ability to grapple with issues in their lives and development process can be greatly augmented by the use of Young Adult literature in the English secondary classroom. Students are able to read about individuals who may be dealing with similar issues within the context of prose. This safe environment may allow students to develop a broader understanding of their own experiences. Coming-of-age novels and other novels that reflect the young adult experience may be beneficial to students’ developmental and psychosocial process (Bushman, 1997). While books are not meant to take the place of parenting or mentors, they can provide a contextual existence for students to begin to think about their own experiences and decision making processes.

Santoli and Wagner, (2004) and Stallworth (2006), also demonstrate that despite teachers’ reservations and inclinations to cling to the status quo with respect to types of literature currently utilized in the classrooms that there are innovative teachers who are willing to teach these genres and have done so successfully. (Alexander, 1994), also indicates, however that there are still stumbling blocks with teaching these genres,
especially multicultural literature. The dominant culture still tends to view the American population as a melting pot as opposed to a salad bowl. This indicates that there are still barriers that must be broken with respect to incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom, but (Wolk, 2009) demonstrates that with the increasing trend toward globalization, teachers in the United States would do their students a great service by incorporating more Multicultural literature into the English language arts secondary classroom.

The qualitative research compiled points overwhelmingly to dissatisfaction with respect to the English language arts learning experience with a number of compelling statements. The books students listed that they liked or would like to read in class favors a fresh approach to the literature classroom. Books that the students rated unfavorably, or that they would not want to read in class tended to mirror more standard literary fare.

Considering the results of all of the data compiled, it is the contention of the researcher that the research question has been proven as true. However, this study is only representative of a small population of rural, primarily White, eighteen year-old high school seniors. More research encompassing a wider demographic would be beneficial to give strength to the validity of the research question.
Chapter Six: Suggestions and Strategies for Teachers/ Educator Implications

Based on the results of this survey and the review of literature, teachers might improve the quality of their students’ learning by doing a few simple strategies. First, a teacher might want to listen to what students are interested in reading. A simple poll or survey at the beginning of the school year might give teachers some valuable insight as to what students might want to read in addition to the pieces that teachers are already teaching. Eliminating canon and standard pieces is not what is suggested here, but rather augmenting those pieces that teachers find most beneficial to students’ learning experiences with more contemporary Young Adult and Multicultural literature.

Secondly, teachers might benefit from reading some of the selections their students are interested in reading. Not every Young Adult literature book or Multicultural literature book may be appropriate in terms of content or length, but there are good, quality titles that are worth investigating. Teachers might also want to join YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) or a similar group that caters to these genres. There are frequent articles and seminars for YALSA members and YALSA frequently reviews Young Adult literature. If English language arts secondary teachers can become more proactive about incorporating these genres into their classrooms, they might be pleasantly surprised; students may become active participants who are interested and engaged and even enthusiastic about literature; ultimately developing a genuine interest in reading for pleasure, which may turn into a life-long pastime.

Lastly, teachers might want to consider multicultural pieces that might mirror the nationality or ethnicity of students other than White who might be in their classrooms. It would be interesting for all students; those students who are of different ethnicities would
not only be engaged as learners, but also be able to add insight as an “authority” on that culture. This would add contextual layers that build interest and add a personal angle that students would likely remember more than simply using literature that was reflective of the dominant culture. Even if a teacher’s classroom is dominated by one ethnicity, it is important for the teacher to increase students’ awareness that the world around them is bigger than just the United States. Teachers are educating global citizens and students’ educations should reflect this reality.

These strategies and suggestions are only the beginning. Teachers could also use the platform of social justice through Young Adult and Multicultural literature to connect across the curriculum to subjects such as history, social studies, or other humanities. Since reading is a core skill that is used in all subjects, cross curricular learning utilizing these genres is likely to enhance the learning experience for students; It is a worthy pursuit to educate the whole child, so why shouldn’t teachers do so?
References:


Cart, M. (2007). Oh, those golden oldies... *Young Adult Library Services, 4*–6.


Appendix A: Survey of Literature

Survey for Research Project:

*Should Young Adult and Multicultural Literature have a Permanent Place in the ELA Secondary Curriculum?*

Please Rate the Following:

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# Appendix A: Survey of Literature

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*Cirque du Freak Vampire series*

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## Appendix A: Survey of Literature

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Appendix A: Survey of Literature

Please list any other books you like or strongly like or would like to read

Please list any other books you dislike or strongly dislike or would not like to read

Please, in the space below provide your opinion on the books and stories you have read for your English classes in high school. Did you enjoy them? Why or Why not?
Appendix B: Investigational Review Board Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2. Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

Project Title: Should Young Adult and Multicultural Literature have a Permanent Place in the ELA Secondary Curriculum?

Primary Investigator: Laurel Enman-Budeiri

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Guofang Wan

Department: College of Education

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

Date: 04/13/2011

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.