

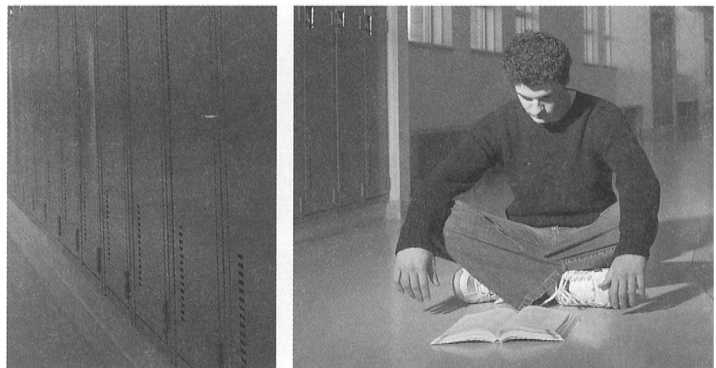
irony of all this is that in our society, which is aggressively youth-oriented – full of people trying to look, act, and think younger and where movies, music, clothes, and television are all aimed at teenagers – authors are often squeamishly hesitant to market their novels to this huge and influential market segment for everything *besides* books.

It is obvious that just as bad adult fiction manages to get published, so does bad young adult fiction. If only the pulp didn't sell – but it does – and sometimes alarmingly well. In the young adult world of literature, it is easy to find the equivalent of the adult romance, for example, novels bought and read by teenage girls who want to believe that fairytales still exist, that “good” girls – typically willowy, blonde,

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these traits hold true, as they do for *The Giver*, *Speak*, *Buried Onions*, and a large number of other books currently in favor with young people and their teachers.

As a university professor who teaches a young adult literature course to future high school teachers, I am always looking for new “adult” titles that fit these criteria to use with young people – especially those teens on the cusp of moving to adult fiction and who may be in need of transition literature. Since these readers demand mature topics while teachers fear the explicit nature of much of the adult fiction available, it is a challenging task to find appropriate books that have relevant connections to adolescent life and can lead to good discussions. In particular, I try to find books with female protagonists, since so many novels



and clear-faced – find “princes” and live perfect lives. Sometimes these girls even solve crimes. Little can be done about books like these – the ones written either for adults or for teens – except not to encourage their reading and to offer better books for teens to read, written by authors of substance and style, with themes that are both relevant to young adults and universal to all human beings.

According to Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen, authors of the genre-shaping textbook *Literature for Today's Young Adult*, the best young adult novels have certain things in common; for example, they come from the point of view of a young adult, parental figures are usually missing (so that the young adult has to learn to survive on his/her own), they contain powerful ideas and messages with ultimately an optimistic perspective, and the protagonists possess (or learn to possess) a sense of worthiness about the role of young adults in our world (24-51). I would add to these characteristics that these good books contain convincing characters, powerful language, and ideas about what matters to humans of all ages. Looking back at the “classics” listed earlier, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Life of Pi*, it is clear that

taught in high schools have male leads: *Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, *A Separate Peace*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Chosen*, *The Great Gatsby*, 1984 – the list goes on and on. The exceptions include *To Kill a Mockingbird* (where the girl is actually a tomboy with a boy's name), *The Awakening*, and *The Scarlet Letter* (both of which feature adulteresses – and while I consider both Edna Pontellier and Hester Prynne heroic, students should be exposed to female characters whose strength arises from characteristics other than infidelity). Of course, there's also Alice (of Wonderland) and Dorothy (of Oz), but both of these girls have adventures that turn out to be only figments of their imagination, and as every child knows, what Dorothy learns from her experience is that she should never have looked farther than her own backyard for her heart's desire. (Of course, the books by L. Frank Baum show a different experience for Dorothy, but since most people know only the MGM film, that version has become accepted as the culturally recognized story.)

It is for this reason that I like to include Jill McCorkle's *Ferris Beach* in my young adult literature class. *Ferris Beach* is the coming-of-age tale of a young