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Advocating for Adolescent Literature

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Abstract: We advocate building an extensive adolescent literature library to offer our pre-service teachers access to diverse texts, more text choices, and more opportunities for self-selected reading. In addition, we suggest using a faculty and student book club to model reading, write about literature, and discuss adolescent literature across disciplines.

Keywords: adolescent literature, diversity, book club

Introduction

At the University of South Carolina Aiken, our pre-service teachers are required to take several stand-alone literacy courses that align with Read to Succeed competencies and requirements. In addition, every middle level education major is required to take an adolescent literature class during the spring semester of their junior year. The purpose of that class is to broaden preservice teachers' understandings of contemporary literature from a variety of genres and reading levels representing diverse perspectives. We are currently working on a project to expand an adolescent literature library and implement a book club for middle level education majors and faculty members across disciplines. Our ideas are undergirded by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement (2017) which advocates for expansion of classroom libraries. Our plans for the library expansion project are supported by decades of literacy research (Allington, 2002, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Krashen, 2011; Nystrand, 2006; Wu & Samuels, 2004) which suggest myriad benefits for literacy rich classrooms. As such, we will follow Fisher and Frey's (2018) four-pronged approach to: increase access to a wide variety of texts; offer students many choices of books; facilitate class discussions about texts; and offer book talk opportunities.

The Peter Effect

As teacher educators and former classroom teachers, we understand what it means to "be called upon to inspire their students with a love of reading" (Applegate et al., 2018, p.190). Yet studies indicate that too many preservice and practicing teachers are not enthusiastic readers (Applegate et al., 2018; Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Nathanson, Pruslow,

& Levitt, 2008).

Describing this phenomenon as "the Peter Effect," Applegate & Applegate (2014) suggest that teachers cannot give students that which they themselves do not have. In other words, reluctant readers will likely have difficulty inspiring others to read. To help mitigate the Peter Effect, we are implementing a project to build a diverse library, create a community of readers, and promote positive reading habits among our middle level pre-service teachers, faculty, and staff. In doing so, we hope to improve reading skills, develop routine reading habits, and deepen teacher candidates' enthusiasm for reading. In turn, they will be better positioned to influence their own students to become enthusiastic readers.

Diverse Texts

In the article *Elements of a Literacy Rich Classroom Environment*, Erin Lynch (2021) advises giving students access to "a library that includes a wide variety of books at various levels and incorporates many genres" (Element 6, para 1). We contend that pre-service teachers need access to books that reflect the backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their future (and increasingly diverse) students. These books should "embrace diversity, honor culture and individuality" (Brunow, 2016, p. 63). They will also help broaden the perspectives of monocultural students and faculty who have had limited experience with people who do not look like them. It is essential to offer experiences "that embrace diversity, honor culture and individuality, and promote the growth of individual students in a classroom community environment" (Brunow, 2016, p. 64).

To build this library, we consulted colleagues, spoke with librarians, and examined American Library Association award winners to develop a diverse list of texts (see Appendix) which represent a wide range of genres (see Table 1). Final selections were made based on diversity and representation including, but not limited to, genres, genders, races, cultures, places, and subjects. These book selections are just a start, as we plan to expand the library with a compendium of books over time.

Table 1

Genres of Selected Books

Adventure
Biography, autobiography, and memoir
Contemporary realistic fiction
Graphic novels
Historical fiction

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Horror, suspense, mystery, thriller
 Humor
 Nonfiction
 Romance
 Science fiction, fantasy, dystopian literature
 Self-help, inspirational
 Sports
 Verse novels

Self-Selected Texts

The research on self-selected reading is robust and conclusive (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Bertschi-Kaufmann & Graber, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Gambrell, 1996; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Students read more, understand more, and are more likely to continue reading when they have the opportunity to choose what they read. In the article *Authentic Literacy Experiences in the Secondary Classroom*, Valerie Brunow (2016) urges, “We must honor students as unique individuals in the process of learning - it is essential to understand that every student is diverse and comes equipped with a diverse literacy background” (p. 63). We argue that this applies to college students as well. Every student has an individual reading level and reading rate. As such, we recommend a move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and a single list of required texts and, instead, offer choices from a balance of texts.

Leading by Example

Brunow (2016) asserts that leading by example is a powerful tool. She advocates having teachers model their own reading and the decisions they make as a reader. For this reason, we will ask middle level education faculty to participate in an adolescent literature book club. Professors will model reading, participating in book club discussions, and keeping a reading journal. We agree with Brunow (2016) that writing about reading is as important as reading itself (p. 68). One way to help students define themselves as readers is to model the reading journey. By modeling reading and purposefully engaging with a text, educators can help students see what this should look and feel like. In the article *Six Literacy Experiences Children Should Have Every Day*, Vicki Urquhart and Dana Frazee (2012) recommend that students read something that they choose and write about reading that is personally meaningful.

We believe a book club approach will encourage middle level education colleagues to create a literacy-rich classroom environment for themselves and their students across disciplines. Brunow (2016) emphasizes that readers should be working in reading partnerships. Readers thrive with opportunities to reflect on their ideas and engage in book talks. An additional advantage of engaging faculty in a book club is the potential for the content of these texts to “spill over” into the science, social studies, and mathematics methods courses – thereby linking other content areas with USC Aiken’s literacy courses.

This project addresses Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction in the South Carolina Literacy Competencies for Middle and High School Content Area Teachers. Specifically, teachers use instructional approaches, materials, and an integrated, comprehensive, balanced curriculum to support student learning in reading and writing. They use foundational knowledge to design or implement an integrated, comprehensive, and balanced curriculum. Teachers understand that high engagement during reading requires access to texts, time to read, reading success to promote agency, and a supportive literacy community. They provide students with time to read self-selected texts to construct knowledge about topics being researched and ensure that students consistently experience success with texts, so they develop a positive identity as a reader (South Carolina State Department, 2021).

Conclusion

The new adolescent literature library will offer diverse texts, more text choices, and more opportunities for self-selected reading. In addition, middle level faculty will model reading, writing about, and discussing adolescent literature texts with students using a book club approach. We plan to evaluate the success of this project through a reading inventory assessment; data tracked on the Goodreads app; and narratives from participants’ reading journals. Over a 3-year period, we will look for evidence of 1) increased number of books read each year; 2) increased interest in different topics and genres; and 3) written reflections that demonstrate the ability to identify important ideas in the readings, articulate the complexity of issues, and recognize different points of view.

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Appendix: Recommended Contemporary Texts for an Adolescent Literature Library

Author, Year, Book Title, Publisher	ISBN
Abdel-Fattah, R. (2017). <i>The lines we cross</i> . Scholastic.	978-1338282054
Acevedo, E. (2020). <i>Clap when you land</i> . Quill Tree Books.	978-0062882769
Adeyemi, T. (2018). <i>Children of blood and bone</i> . Henry Holt and Co.	978-1250170972
Albertalli, B. (2015). <i>Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062348685
Alexander, K. (2020). <i>King and the dragonflies</i> . Scholastic Press.	978-0702302817
Altebrando, T. (2016). <i>The leaving</i> . Bloomsbury Publishing.	978-1681194035
Angleberger, T. (2010). <i>The strange case of Origami Yoda</i> . Amulet Books, Scholastic.	978-1419715174
Arce, J. (2018). <i>Someone like me: How one undocumented girl fought for her American dream</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316481700
Baker, K. (2020). <i>The water bears</i> . Yearling.	978-1984852236
Barson, K. (2014). <i>45 pounds (more or less)</i> . Speak.	978-0142422656
Bell, C. (2014). <i>El Deafo</i> . Harry N. Abrams.	978-1419748318
Berrier, R. (2010). <i>If trouble don't kill me</i> . Crown.	978-0307463067
Boulley, A. (2021). <i>Firekeeper's daughter</i> . Henry Holt and Co.	978-1250766564
Boyne, J. (2007). <i>The boy in the striped pajamas</i> . David Fickling Books.	978-0385751537
Bracken, A. (2021). <i>Lore</i> . Disney-Hyperion.	978-1484778203
Callendar, K. (2019). <i>Hurricane Child</i> . Scholastic Press.	978-1338129311
Carpenter, N. (Ed.) (2022). <i>Rural voices: 15 authors challenge assumptions about small-town America</i> . Candlewick.	978-1536226065
Colbert, B. (2021). <i>The only black girls in town</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316456401
Collins, S. (2008). <i>The hunger games</i> (series). Scholastic.	978-0545670319
Condie, A. (2012). <i>Matched</i> (trilogy). Dutton Books.	978-0525426264
Courtney, N. J. (2019). <i>All-American Muslim girl</i> . Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books for Young Readers/Macmillan.	978-0374309527
Craft, J. (2019). <i>New kid</i> . Quill Tree Books.	978-0062691200
Dashner, J. (2017). <i>The maze runner (5-book series)</i> . Delacorte Press.	978-1524771034
Draper, S. M. (2012). <i>Out of my mind</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1416971719
Draper, S. M. (2015). <i>Stella by starlight</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1442494978
Draper, S. M. (2020). <i>Blended</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1442495012
Duany, G. (2020). <i>Walk toward the rising sun: From child soldier to ambassador of peace</i> . Make Me a World.	978-1524719401
Engle, M. (2006). <i>The poet slave of Cuba: A biography of Juan Francisco Manzano</i> . Henry Holt Books for Young Readers.	978-0805077063
Forman, G. (2014). <i>If I stay</i> (2 book series). Dutton Books for Young Readers.	978-0147515025
Forna, N. (2021). <i>The gilded ones</i> . Delacorte Press.	978-1984848697
Giles, L. (2020). <i>The last last-day-of-summer</i> . Versify.	978-0358244417
Giles, L. (2021). <i>The last mirror on the left</i> . Versify.	978-0358613329
Gratz, A. (2017). <i>Refugee</i> . Scholastic.	978-0545880831
Green, J. (2012). <i>The fault in our stars</i> . Dutton Books.	978-0142424179
Green, J. (2019). <i>Turtles all the way down</i> . Dutton Books.	978-0525555377
Guerrero, D. (2019). <i>My family divided: One girl's journey of home, loss, and hope</i> . Square Fish.	978-1250308788
Hagan, E. (2021). <i>Reckless, glorious, girl</i> . Bloomsbury Children's Books.	978-1547604609
Hale, S. & Pham, L. (2017). <i>Real friends</i> . First Second.	978-1626727854
Hamilton, B. (2006). <i>Soul surfer</i> . MTV Books.	978-1416503460
Johnson, K. (2020). <i>This Is my America</i> . Random House Books for Young Readers.	978-0593118764
Johnson, V. (2019). <i>The Parker inheritance</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	978-0545952781
Kinney, J. (2011). <i>Diary of a wimpy kid</i> . (set of 4). Scholastic.	978-0141341415
LaCour, N. (2020). <i>Watch over me</i> . Dutton Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House.	978-0593108970

Lai, T. (2011). <i>Inside out and back again</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0061962783
Lee, L. (2020). <i>I'll be the one</i> . Katherine Tegen Books/HarperCollins.	978-0062936929
Levine, K. (2016). <i>Hana's suitcase: The quest to solve a Holocaust mystery</i> . Crown Books for Young Readers.	978-1101933497
Lord, K. (2010). <i>Redemption in Indigo</i> . Small Beer Press.	978-1931520669
Magoon, K. (2019). <i>The season of Styx Malone</i> . Yearling.	978-1524715984
Mbalia, K. (2019). <i>Tristan Strong punches a hole in the sky</i> . Rick Riordan Presents.	978-1368039932
McDunn, G. (2020). <i>Caterpillar Summer</i> . Bloomsbury Children's Books.	978-1547603145
Mendoza, P. & Sher, A. (2020). <i>Sanctuary</i> . G.P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Random House.	978-1984815736
Na, A. (2016). <i>A step from heaven</i> . Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books.	978-1481442367
Newman, L. (2020). <i>October mourning: A song for Matthew Shephard</i> . Candlewick.	978-1536215779
O'Brien, S. (2014). <i>Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella</i> . Lee & Low Books.	978-1885008411
O'Connor, B. (2017). <i>Wish</i> . Square Fish.	978-1250144058
Palacio, R.J., (2017). <i>Wonder</i> . Alfred A. Knopf.	978-0375869020
Patterson, J. & Tebbetts, C. (2016). <i>Middle school, the worst years of my life</i> . Little, Brown and Company.	978-0316276917
Pride, C. & Piazza, J. (2021). <i>We are not like them</i> . Atria Books.	978-1982181031
Prince, L. (2014). <i>Tomboy: A graphic memoir</i> . Zest Books.	978-1936976553
Reynolds, J. (2017). <i>As brave as you</i> . Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books.	978-1481415910
Rhodes, J. P. (2016). <i>Bayou Magic</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316224857
Riordan, R. (2006). <i>The lightning thief</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0786838653
Roanhorse, R. (2018). <i>Trail of lightning</i> . Gallery/Saga Press.	978-1534413504
Roth, V. (2016). <i>Divergent</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062387240
Sanchez, J. T. (2021). <i>We are not from here</i> . Philomel Books/Penguin Random House.	978-1984812285
Smith, S. L. (2010). <i>Flygirl</i> . Penguin Books.	978-0142417256
Stevens, C. (2018). <i>Dress codes for small towns</i> . Harper Teen.	978-0062398529
Thomas, A. (2018). <i>The hate U give</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062498533
Thomas, A. (2021). <i>Concrete rose</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062846716
Thomas, A. (2020). <i>Cemetery boys</i> . Swoon Reads/Macmillan.	978-1250250469
Thrash, M. (2017). <i>Honor girl</i> . Candlewick.	978-0763687557
Tingle, T. (2014). <i>House of purple cedar</i> . Cinco Puntos Press.	978-1935955245
Tyre, L. L. (2015). <i>Last in a long line of rebels</i> . Nancy Paulsen Books.	978-0399168383
Tyre, L. L. (2019). <i>Hope in the Holler</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0399546327
Vawter, V. (2014). <i>Paperboy</i> . Yearling.	978-0307931511
Vermette, K. (2018). <i>A girl called Echo</i> . HighWater Press.	978-1553796787
Watson, R. (2017). <i>Piecing me together</i> . Bloomsbury.	978-1681191072
Watson, R. (2019). <i>What Momma left me</i> . Bloomsbury.	978-1681199498
Wein, E. (2021). <i>The enigma game</i> . Little, Brown Books for Young Readers/Hachette.	978-0759557628
Williams-Garcia, R. (2015). <i>Gone crazy in Alabama</i> . Quill Trill Books.	978-0062215895
Woodson, J. (2016). <i>Brown girl dreaming</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0147515827
Yang, G. L. (2021). <i>American born Chinese</i> . First Second.	978-1250811899
Yoon, N. (2019). <i>The sun is also a star</i> . Delacorte Press.	978-0553496710
Youngblood, L. (2021). <i>Forever this summer</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0759555204
Yousafzai, M. (2013). <i>I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban</i> . Little, Brown & Co.	978-0316322409
Zusak, M. (2007). <i>The book thief</i> . Alfred A. Knopf.	978-0375842207