Re-addressing High School Students’ Novel Needs: Choosing and Using Popular Young Adult Fiction in High School English Classrooms

Amy Hough

University of Alberta

Graduate Advisor: Ingrid Johnston, PhD., Professor Emerita

Second Reader: David Lewkowich, PhD., Assistant Professor

**Abstract**

This project offers designs for lesson plans, based on the popular young adult literature (YAL) and television series *Pretty Little Liars* (*PLL*), by Sara Shepard, in an effort to encourage grade 10 English teachers to use YAL that is popular with their students in their classrooms. The individual lesson plans—which can be used separately or mixed and matched to contribute to a unit plan—are based on positive identity formation, transactional reading, student-centered learning, multiple forms of representation and bidirectional learning between student and teacher. The lessons include: identity development as constructed in literature and high school life; analyzing character through found poetry; examining life (or lack thereof) without technology, an autobiographical challenge; comparing and contrasting literature and television; exploring fan culture and its effects on literature, television and film; and a final project in which students collaborate with the teacher to determine what their final project will be, how learning will be defined and how it will be represented. This masters’ project begins by drawing the reader’s attention to the notion that many texts chosen for study in the English classroom go unread because they fail to engage the students. A literature review follows detailing the classic English canon and studies conducted regarding its use and student engagement as well as the benefits of using YAL in the classroom. The literature review then looks at possible reasons why teachers aren’t bringing YAL into the English classroom, finally turning its focus on two areas of literacy research, silent sustained reading and the connection between literature and identity development. The literature review is followed by a description of the *PLL* books and the TV series, focusing on the differences between the two and the most salient factors in each medium. Reasons for choosing the *PLL* series for this project are explained, such as: pop culture tie-ins enabling students to take the role of experts in classroom; the plotlines offering excellent examples for a study of identity development; the (mis)use of technology; a TV counterpart; numerous allusions; insights into the opposite sex; and the idea that this series was chosen based on the psychology of the teenager rather than trying to guess what teens may find engaging. The type of teacher who may want to teach this unit is described as one who is willing to collaborate with students, is willing to let students develop their own meanings and one who is familiar with the series. It is intended the project will be disseminated via *PLL* fan sites.

**Table of Contents**

**Abstract 2**

**Definition of Young Adult Literature** **8**

**Purpose** **9**

**Literature Review** **11**

YAL and a Call for Change 11

Is Anybody Out There? Why Teachers Aren’t Bringing YAL into the Classroom 13

How About Meeting Us Somewhere in the Middle? 16

What if You’re Really Helping the Kids Grow? 17

**Introduction 19**

What the *PLL* Books Are About 19

Why I Chose These Books in Particular 23

Who May Want to Teach *PLL* 28

**Lesson Plans 29**

Lesson A: Identity Development as Constructed in Literature and High School Life 30

Introduction 30

*Identity as difference metaphor 30*

*Identity as self metaphor 31*

*Identity as narrative metaphor 32*

The lesson’s objectives 33

The lesson and examples 33

**Figure 1.** Identity as Difference Example: Hanna 34

**Figure 2**. Identity as Self Example: Emily 35

**Figure 3.** Identity as Narrative Example: Spencer 37

*The assignment 38*

Lesson B: Analyzing Character with Found Poetry 39

Introduction 39

The lesson’s objectives 41

The lesson and examples 41

*Example one, Hanna, chapter 25 42*

*Example two, Hanna, chapter 25 42*

*Example three, Hanna, chapter 25 43*

Lesson C: Examining Life (or Lack Thereof) Without Technology, an Autobiographical Challenge 45

Introduction 45

The lesson’s objectives 46

The lesson 47

*The assignment 47*

*The assessment 48*

Lesson D: Comparing and Contrasting Literature and Television Interpretations 49

Introduction 49

The lesson’s objectives 50

The lesson 50

*Physical differences 50*

*The age difference 51*

*Girl power 52*

*Mall culture and consumerism 53*

Lesson E: Exploring Fan Culture and Its Effects on Literature, Television and Film 54

Introduction 54

The lesson’s objectives 59

The lesson 59

*Recommended resources 59*

*The assignment 62*

*The assessment 64*

Final Project 65

Introduction 65

How to begin 67

Things to keep in mind 69

Assessment 70

Some starter ideas 71

**Conclusion 73**

**References 79**

**Definition of Young Adult Literature**

There is no single prevailing definition of young adult literature (YAL) but I, like many others who study the topic (Campbell, 2009; Talley, 2011), believe it is most aptly defined by its intended audience, the age of the main characters and the themes that are central to the plot. YAL is written for an audience who has outgrown children’s literature and is ready to handle heavier fare—which relates to YAL’s themes. For marketing reasons booksellers often state the ages 13-18 or 15-21 or any combination in those ranges as being appropriate for a YAL audience—but maturity to understand and process the subject matter is a far better gauge for measuring a reader’s readiness for YAL. The odd cut-off age for a reader of YAL seems to echo society’s notions of the onset of adulthood, but this hasn’t really kept adults away from the YAL genre. Adults also enjoy YAL to varying degrees, although the books were initially intended for a younger audience.

The main characters in YAL are young adults. The world is not explored through the eyes of an older person reflecting back on his/her youth but as a young adult experiencing it for the first time. This is quite important in relation to the themes present in YAL. Subject matter tends to turn darker and harsh realities are brought to the fore. Main characters, like many of the young adults reading the books, are dealing with things like romantic relationships, sex, drugs, taking moral stances, personal autonomy and death for the first time, so the adolescent readers get to explore the experiences vicariously through their fictional mirror images. The main characters aren’t proselytizing from a seat of experience, rather they are taking the journey in tandem with the readers.

The themes in YAL are given a realistic amount of gravitas. Although YAL can run the gamut from absolutely dour to uproariously comedic, subjects that matter to adolescents are given their due respect. Heartbreak is devastating, mean girls and bullies are terrifying, and adults aren’t always there to save you—sometimes they are there to hurt you. YAL honours its audience enough to be realistic about the problems that young adults face and lets them experience them in a fictional environment. In the words of Talley “… contemporary YA writers have largely used literature to advance Western notions of adolescence as a time to question the power structure, rebel, or embrace one’s “individuality,”… ” (2011, p. 232).

**Purpose**

A successful English curriculum would graduate life-long readers. Students would acquire the skills to read with greater depth and understanding; they would be motivated to pursue reading because in books they would have discovered pleasure and wisdom. By this criteria, high school English is largely a failure. The curriculum is a list of books that are assigned but not read. (Auciello, 2003, p. 7)

In his paper Auciello expresses a truth some English teachers would prefer to ignore—many English students do not read their English texts but still manage to pass their courses. This is because teachers are using texts that hold little to no interest for the students. Often, these texts have been taught for so long that students can simply go on the Internet and browse teacher websites or cheat sites, spend ten minutes reading a plot recap or watching a ten minute video and they will know enough about the book to convince their teachers and their diploma examiners they have actually read the texts. There is a solution to this problem—for years there has been a solution to this problem—but implementing this solution has become a real challenge.

For decades researchers have been publishing papers that attest to the benefits of using young adult literature (YAL) in the secondary English classroom, yet other studies also attest to the fact that teachers are still reluctant to use YAL despite all its associated benefits on student learning. Although there has been little research focused on why teachers are unwilling to use YAL, this research gap is most likely caused by barriers put up against such studies rather than researcher willingness to study the problem. So, instead of approaching the problem directly, literacy researchers are now focusing on different avenues that may have the added benefits of inspiring teachers to bring YAL into the English classroom. Whether or not these newer approaches to using YAL will prompt teachers to act has yet to be thoroughly studied but they do hold potential.

The purpose of this project is to reach teachers and encourage them to use YAL in the high school English classroom by providing lesson plans based on Sara Shepard’s popular YAL series and TV series *Pretty Little Liars* (*PLL*). The lesson plans are designed using some of the core elements from silent sustained reading theory (SSR) and key connections between literature and identity formation in teenagers. The lesson plans will be disseminated, for free, on *PLL* fan sites and be available to any teacher interested in using them or simply interested in educating him/herself about YAL in the high school English classroom. The plans will be disseminated with a pertinent literature review, the rationale for choosing the *PLL* series, and the structuring of each lesson and complementary assignment or exercise.

Proposed lessons within the project will focus on: identity development as constructed in literature and high school life; analyzing character through found poetry; examining life (or lack thereof) without technology, an autobiographical challenge; comparing and contrasting literature and television; exploring fan culture and its effects on literature, television and film; and a final project in which students and teacher will be expected to work together in designing their final projects, based on the students’ individual interests and their most favourite forms of expression.

**Literature Review**

**YAL and a Call for Change**

For generations adults have tried to force-feed teens literary materials that teens are not ready to experience, fostering the feeling in millions of adults that literature is a strange, forbidding territory, too obscure to attempt to penetrate. (Auciello, 2003, p. 8)

In secondary school most of us who are native to Canada, our parents and maybe even our grandparents were taught English literature via the works of the English literary canon (colloquially known as the works of dead white men). The canon includes works by Shakespeare, Thackeray, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and its inclusiveness extends to the genteel likes of Austen and Brontë. Because of efforts over the past few decades to include Canadian authors and multicultural authors, students may also get treated to authors such as Margaret Atwood, Mordecai Richler and Toni Morrison. Although these are acclaimed authors, they may not necessarily be the type of authors teenagers naturally gravitate to or want to read.

There is great debate as to when the first young adult novel was written, but under the caveat that this book would have had to be specifically written for teenage readers and dealt with serious teenage issues, most experts agree it was between the late 1960s to the mid-1970s (Campbell, 2010). As soon as YAL proliferated and began to hit the mainstream it became a viable option to the canonical works, and researchers began to study the effects it had on the youth of the day and the classroom.

Bontempo (1995) found that adolescents appreciated YAL over the canonical classics because it had storylines they felt were relatable in terms of their own lives. Skeadas (2008) found a similar result when students expressed the opinion that literature from the canon contained stories that were irrelevant to their lives.

Numerous studies over the years have shown that using YAL in the classroom is a way to engage reluctant readers. To be a reluctant reader means a person has the skills necessary to read at an acceptable level but chooses not to do so—reading holds no interest at all. Gallo (2001), Guthrie and Davis (2003), Jun-Chae (2002), and Lenters (2006) all presented qualitative data that suggested previous reluctant readers were willing to read YAL books and actually enjoyed the reading process. Further support for the ability of YAL to engage students was presented in a study by Santoli and Wagner (2004) that suggested the use of YAL in the classroom increased classroom participation.

Another theme that is prominent in the research that supports the use of YAL in the classroom focuses on when students became reluctant readers. Lenters (2006), Love and Hamston (2003), McKenna (1995), and Strommen and Mates (2004) found that students who became reluctant readers self-reported as liking reading before they entered secondary school. The authors linked this with the introduction of novels not written with their interests in mind and/or their age group (i.e. the introduction of the canonical works).

This great divide between books that are often enjoyable for teens (like YAL) and books that aren’t always enjoyable (books from the canon) has become so ingrained that even students who are considered voracious readers have come to expect that the books they will be taught in school will not be interesting. In a study by Cavazos-Kottke (2006), five grade nine boys who scored high on reading aptitude tests were asked to go through a bookstore and choose books that they would read for pleasure and books that they would read in school. The boys were told that books could belong to both categories, as well. The results showed that even with these gifted readers there was only a slight overlap between the books they would read for pleasure and the books they thought would be taught in school.

In a study by Koss and Teale (2009) the authors coded 59 young adult novels written over a six-year span in order to identify how these books differed from the classics. They found that stylistically there was little difference—in other words, all the literary devices present in the classics were present in the YAL. Where the YAL differed was in terms of: featuring characters on the LGBTQ spectrum, characters with different ethnicities and characters with disabilities; featuring newer forms of communication such as instant messaging, texts and emails; featuring the use of technology such as phones and computers; and bringing up issues important in teens’ lives like bullying. Considering how salient all these factors are in teens’ lives today, it may be easy to see why books that consider these factors hold more sway over teenagers than books that don’t.

Some of the more recent research that focuses specifically on why teens would want to read YAL considers how the genre has specific ties to popular culture. Friese (2008) studied how reading YAL afforded its readers increased cultural capital by making them more aware of what was popular and trending with their peers. It also increased their critical media literacy skills and helped them better evaluate media and social media. Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) also found that reading had a social function by creating topics of conversation and models for behaviour.

**Is Anybody Out There? Why Teachers Aren’t Bringing YAL into the Classroom**

Books upon books have been written extolling the virtues of using YAL in the classroom and little work has come out against its use—which has left researchers scratching their heads in wonderment for decades. In a seminal article by Samuels (1983) she asked English teachers who subscribed to *English Journal* why they were unwilling to use YAL in their classrooms. The responses could be grouped into three main categories: they were not familiar with it; it wasn't challenging enough; and it was their duty to expose students to the classics. At the end of her paper the author slyly suggested that governing bodies should reexamine certification requirements for English teachers—as well as make YAL courses mandatory in teacher training.

In 1989, Applebee conducted a nationwide survey of schools in the United States to determine what novels were being taught to grades 7-12. Applebee found very little variation throughout the country and he found that the great majority of the books being taught were from the English canon. Almost 10 years later Mackey, Johnston and Altmann (1998) did a study of literature being used in grade 10 classes in Edmonton, Alberta schools and also found great similarity between schools with a heavy emphasis on the canonical classics. A follow-up study by Mackey, Vermeer, Storie and DeBlois (2012) found much the same results with a small improvement in adding new literature. A study comparing the literature choices of Canadian and American secondary schools (Skerrett, 2010) shows both countries still choosing to teach not only canonical literature but the *same* canonical literature.

Now, thirty years since Samuels (1986) first published her article on why teachers were unwilling to use YAL, a plethora of research has been published extolling the virtues of YAL but there is a huge gap in the literature trying to identify why teachers are so unwilling to use YAL. Sarigianides (2012) tried to get to the crux of the matter by talking to practicing and preservice teachers who took her young adult literature course. Some of the concerns about using YAL in the classroom were: the immoral behaviour exhibited by characters in the books may encourage the students to behave in immoral ways; it might appear that the teacher is endorsing the untoward behaviour of the characters in the books; if a teacher is lucky enough to have a job, why would s/he risk it by using questionable material in the classroom?; experienced teachers feel they are losing some of their authority if they bring YAL into the classroom; and new teachers are more interested in safe texts and classroom management techniques. These are very difficult issues to address and research—morality, battles with administration, classroom authority—perhaps there are valid reasons researchers are staying away from this vein of research.

Because the gap in research in this area is so large, researchers may be encountering barriers if they attempt to approach the problem at a school level. In Alberta, Canada a barrier might even be the governing provincial body. A look at Alberta Education’s[[1]](#footnote-1) most recently published “English Language Arts, Grades 10-12: Alberta Authorized Resource List” (2004) provides a list of anthologies, teacher resources, plays and books. What is so perplexing about the document is that it places starbursts with “NEW” printed in the centre beside listed books that were published in the 1990s. New editions of Shakespeare plays are even emblazoned with the “NEW” starburst. Any teacher worth his/her salt is not going to consider *Romeo and Juliet* a new play, starburst or not.

Another document put forth by the same institution, “English Language Arts, 10-1: Authorized Novels and Nonfiction Annotated List” (2005) lists 23 books with the most recent being a nonfiction book about environmental conservation written in 2000—perhaps not the most appealing fare for reluctant readers? Of the 23 books 6 are canonical classics, 6 are by Canadian writers, 4 could be considered multicultural literature and the other 7 are exemplars of specific genres (e.g. science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy). An argument could be made for a few of the titles being YAL, but it would be a hard-won argument. Just upon examination of these documents alone (and the fact that they haven’t been updated in 11 years), one could make inferences about where this governmental body places the importance of getting YAL, let alone new YAL, into English classrooms and, perhaps, why researchers have failed to make headway studying the problem.

**How About Meeting Us Somewhere in the Middle?**

For the teacher who doesn’t want to take on the commitment of teaching YAL but still wants to reap some of the benefits associated with YAL, literacy researchers are again advocating silent sustained reading (SSR) which can include the use of YAL novels, but does not necessarily require the teacher to stand in front of the class and “teach” the novel. The standard approach to teaching literature in the secondary English classroom has been to select one novel for the entire class and engage in an intense critical dissection of that novel that usually lasts a month or more. Yet if teachers wish to engage all students in the class, as well as foster a desire to read for pleasure, they must be more selective in their choice of novel or turn to different methods of approaching the novel study.

Although it has been effectively used in elementary school and junior high, SSR is usually completely eliminated in high school. Some earlier attempts at implementing SSR in secondary school showed very little success (Reed, 1978), but more modern undertakings have shown that simply by engaging in SSR students’ reading levels increase dramatically and it encourages a desire to read for pleasure (Chua, 2008; Cone, 1994; Fisher, 2004).

A significant part of SSR has always been the concept of non-accountability—that is, the student would never have to write an exam or paper on their chosen book. But if properly implemented in the English classroom the students would need to be accountable for at least some of the books they read. In her own qualitative classroom studies, English teacher Cone (1994), described her success at getting students to write essays, lead class discussions and give book talks. She hypothesized that this was because they truly were engaged with their self-selected books and were eager to let others know about their experiences. The responses she received were thoughtful and unique.

Although using SSR in the classroom is a way for teachers to be able to start introducing different types of texts into their classroom, more research still needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of using it as a method of novel study at the secondary level. As mentioned previously, little to no accountability has often been the hallmark of SSR in the past.

**What if You’re Really Helping the Kids Grow?**

Urban teens navigate through shopping malls, train stations, airports, freeways, and the Internet. These fluid spaces are disorienting, disrupting a fixed sense of place, and this spills over into teens' interior worlds. Instead of clear anchors in family, community, and institutions like schools to forge a coherent identity, these fluid spaces engender feelings of disconnection and alienation (Mansfield, 2000). Identity in a mall culture is constructed through consumption of goods, with selfhood vested in things. Because this is ephemeral, feelings of panic and anxiety flow into teens' lives. Given these postmodern, fluid conditions, how do contemporary teens construct their identities? (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 640)

Another area of research that has implications for the use of YAL is found in the connection between literacy and identity formation. According to identity theorist Erikson (1968) adolescence is a time when teens actively seek out an identity. They are constantly searching for an answer to the question “Who am I?” They try on identities looking for confirmation from their peers, and researchers such as Koss and Teale (2009) suggest that YAL plays an important part in this process. The researchers believe that by living vicariously through the books, teens are able to safely explore new identities and learn from the mistakes of characters their own age.

In a study by Park (2013) she examined the techniques preservice English teachers believed were most important when approaching literature. The second most common technique mentioned was exploring the self and the world. This closely ties in with identity formation—especially when the students are adolescents. By exploring how a student interprets a text in comparison to his/her classmates, the student gets to explore his/her identity. And it is more likely the student will have a response to offer when it comes to classroom discussions if s/he is familiar with the subject matter (which is most often true when YAL is used).

Work by Moje and Luke (2009) has focused on historical metaphors for identity that could be used in literature studies to help English students with their own identity formation. All metaphors represent themes that are rife in YAL (e.g. stereotyping, unrealistic expectations and gossip) and are also very problematic because they can label people in very harmful ways—something adolescents in search of an identity should know.

Although this area of study is just recently gaining traction, Moje and Luke (2009) eloquently state the importance of the research:

…the social turn in literacy theory and research (Gee, 1994) over the last three decades has generated close, in-depth research on the literary practices of actual people, a move that has turned researchers’ and theorists’ attentions to the roles of texts and literary practices as tools or media for constructing, narrating, mediating, enacting, performing, enlisting, or exploring identities. In other words, recognizing literacy practices as social has led many theorists to recognize that people’s identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write and talk about… (p. 416)

Perhaps if teachers were to choose the literature they teach with this consideration in mind, they may begin to focus on novels with relatable, pertinent content over government-approved purple prose.

Although the research that attests to the benefits of using YAL in the secondary English classroom could fill journal after journal, teachers are still not using it at a level one would expect. Little research has focused on why teachers are not using YAL but the lack of research in this area may be due to barriers that range from the teachers to the governing bodies. Researchers are now turning their efforts to approaches like SSR and literacy and identity formation theories to get teachers to rethink the literature they bring into the classroom. Although basically untested at the high school English level these avenues of research may, in the future, offer YAL more opportunities to be incorporated into the secondary English classroom.

**Introduction**

**What the *PLL* Books Are About**

Four 13 year-old girls consider themselves lucky when they are plucked from teenage obscurity and thrust into the heady heights of popularity by golden girl Alison DiLaurentis who, uncharacteristically, chooses them to be her new best friends. After a year as Rosewood Day’s most envied seventh graders, group leader Alison has disappeared. Fast forward three years and the girls are now 16 and have drifted apart, yet each one starts receiving text messages from someone who reveals him/herself only as A. A knows intimate things about each girl. Things only Alison knew. Things A is willing to tell everyone. Things that will ruin their families, their hopes of getting into good colleges, their social standings.

As the story unravels it is revealed, through flashbacks, that Alison was not quite as beloved as the reader was first led to believe. In fact she was a bully—cruel and manipulative. She was well-nigh psychopathic. At 13, she lived a life more suited to a promiscuous grifter. As she insinuated herself into her new, and quite innocent, friends’ lives, she began to pry secrets out of them and mercilessly used them to taunt and torture. So, it is slowly unveiled that maybe the girls weren’t actually that heartbroken when their dear friend Alison went missing.

Although the mystery of what happened to Alison, and the identity of the mysterious A, is always present, it can be argued that one of the most ominous threats in the books is technology. Whoever A may be, s/he is very tech savvy. Like many teens, and adults, the girls cannot be separated from their phones—it seems they have become unable to function without them. They use them to talk to their friends; their parents demand they have them on them at all times so they can be reached at all hours; they act as their GPS; their platform for music; and their on-the-go Internet access. It seems they simply can’t not answer their phones or read every text they get. It also quickly becomes apparent to the girls that they are constantly being monitored. When the girls become aware that they are being watched and how they are being watched, it is almost as if they have to start fracturing their identities. They have identities they wear in public when they know A is most likely watching; there’s the identities they wear when they feel they are completely safe from A; and there are the identities they put on when they are around their parents.

The books also put mall culture and consumerism under heavy scrutiny. Each girl is not only defined by the brands and types of clothes she wears but also by the type of phone she carries. In fact, anything that holds cachet through branding—cars, jewelry, running shoes, perfume, cologne, food—is mentioned, *by brand*, in the book. It is presented as a way of categorizing and defining character (e.g. the younger, picked on, Mona is often seen wheeling around in the background on a Razor scooter while the older, very popular, Mona is often seen running things over in her Hummer).

The main premise of the books and the TV series is the same but the books take more risks than the TV series. In the TV series the girls first become friends with Alison when they are 15, not 13. This makes the sexual liaisons Alison has, the drug and alcohol use, the blackmail and the threats a lot easier for the viewing audience to digest. By having Alison doing these things at age 13 (and younger) her role as antagonist is not really clear, yet at 15 it is easier to judge Alison (e.g. can a 13 year old be held to standards of sexual morality or is she entirely a victim of sexual abuse?). In the television series it is very hard to work up sympathy for Alison but in the books the reader senses that something very wrong has happened to Alison to make her the way she is at so tender an age. Although there is only two years difference, those two years do affect how the reader/viewer perceives the character of Alison.

Characters who were dispatched in the books became audience favourites so they stayed on the television series. Characters, such as Ezra Fitz, the English teacher who has an affair with main character Aria is written in the books as a rather selfish and stupid man (as one would expect) but in the television series his character is treated much more tenderly, and instead of breaking up—as they do in the books—the couple have had the longest relationship in the series. Producers and writers of the show have said that they comb the message boards for audience feedback (Horizon Scripted Television, 2014) and that they do sometimes guide their shows in response but the books do not do this. Because of this, the plotlines of the two series have now diverged almost completely.

Another major difference between the books and the television series is the bond of friendship between the girls. By the end of the first episode of the TV series the girls are fast on their way to becoming best friends again. And that is the major theme of the television series—the strength and power of female friendship. Often the girls’ friendship is so strong it comes to the detriment of other relationships in their lives. This isn’t quite so in the books. In the books it takes a very long time for the girls to start trusting each other. And although they do begin to bond again, they’ve been through so much that they are quick to distrust each other. In the books, much of the "girl power” message is gone and the characters are really quite psychologically damaged—a realistic outcome for young women who have been emotionally tortured.

At the heart of *PLL* are themes that dominate the westernized teenagers’ lives: technology, privacy, consumer culture, social media and relationships. These themes are all present but nothing is directly written or said about them. Readers and viewers have to deduce what the author and all the people who create the television series are trying to say about teens and these subjects—and whether or not they feel the *PLL* creators are expressing valid, honest views on the lives of teenagers.

**Why I Chose These Books in Particular**

My vision for a truly functional English classroom is one in which students are engaged and offering authentic responses. The best way I can communicate my conception of an authentic response is a response based on one’s honest opinion. A response someone feels confident giving because s/he has enough experience with the subject matter to offer his/her true insight. Students don’t have to worry if the views they espouse are contrary to their teacher’s beliefs because there’s a collaboration at work between the students and the teacher—one that maintains the whole class needs to work together to explore the greater meanings of the texts and topics in the English classroom. And by using a series like *PLL*, the teacher is putting the students in the roles of youth-culture experts. They are the ones experiencing a world dominated by the same themes as those in *PLL*, therefore they are the experts. The teacher is a guide who urges the students to question the text in front of them and to ask themselves the hard questions. And isn’t this what we want of our English students—to partake in critical thinking while engaging with text, video or whatever medium we bring to them in class?

While taking a course on theories of personality development I was introduced to the offerings of Erik Erikson. His ideas seemed so intuitive to me—especially when it came to the personality development of adolescents. According to Erikson (1968), between the approximate ages of 12-18, adolescents’ main focus is on social relationships as they try to develop a sense of self and personal identity. This period is called a psychosocial moratorium and can be defined as such:

A moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time. By psychosocial moratorium, then, we mean a delay of adult commitments, and yet it is not only a delay. It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of the youth, and yet it also often leads to deep, if often transitory, commitment on the part of youth… (Erikson, 1968, p. 157).

In order to determine “who am I?” or “who am I going to be?” adolescents must put forth a sustained effort through interacting with peers, trying on different roles and combining all the experiences of one's past, present and possible future. And because society is aware that adolescents are trying to build an identity that represents what they value and captures the essences of their humanness, it is traditionally more lenient with the “phases” teens cycle through and the myriad of things they gravitate to and away from. Yet exploring new identities and trying new things can be risky. Adolescents have to take chances if they are going to ask out a girl, defy authority, sing in front of the school or join a new social group.

Now, this is where YAL and youth or pop culture in the classroom would become especially important. If teens are reading YAL, it offers them a safe way of seeing how their peers act, what their interests are and how they perceive the world around them—in turn, allowing them to shape their identities by modelling them on characters they admire. (How did the main character attract the quirky girl’s attention? What were the consequences when the student flipped his desk in class? What happened when the class president was booed off the stage at the talent show? How accepting were the goths of the new student?) Just reading about these experiences help students live vicariously through the characters as well as process the possible outcomes of scenarios they might want to engage in. Also, by understanding what engages their peers, adolescents gain insight in how to interact with them and what may be good topics of conversation.

The issue of providing adolescents of secondary school age with a safe way to explore identities is especially important considering that at their age they are most susceptible to negative self-evaluation in comparison to college-age young adults or adults, in general (Berzonsky, 1995). What this could mean is if an adolescent tries a new experience, fails miserably, and blames his/her inadequacies for the failure, s/he will be unlikely to try the experience again and will label him/herself as incapable of being successful in that situation. Whereas if the same adolescent reads about a character who fails but tries again, the adolescent may be able to process the experience of failure in a way that doesn’t reflect negatively on him/herself and give the experience another try if s/he feels it is important.

Also the diversity reflected in YAL allows students to find their literary reflections. YAL has characters of all races, genders and religions—something that cannot be found in the standard English canon. Because during this stage adolescents are putting forth a sustained effort to seek out their own personal identities, it makes sense that they would actually want to read YAL—especially over some dusty old classic. And the more relevant the YAL is to their personal journeys, the probability they will read it should increase.

In a paper by Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris (2008) the authors conducted a mixed-methods study that attempted to define what students read for pleasure, how often they read and why they read. They discerned that students chose to read for pleasure as a form of dissecting their own social world—whether it be learning about one’s own culture, becoming knowledgeable about things that will offer social cachet, learning about relationships and sexuality, improving one’s self and helping define one’s character and beliefs. The authors concluded that because the motivation to read literature is so caught up in social needs, English educators who wish to engage their students need to be more selective with their choices of classroom texts. They need to understand their students’ social worlds and needs and make choices to use texts relevant to them at these stages in their lives.

Now, the authors weren’t referring just specifically to YAL, though it did play a part in their findings, but what I want to draw attention to are certain findings that would definitely have implications for teaching *PLL*.

The motivation to read a book… after seeing a movie based on a book was mentioned time and time again by young people in the sample, as was reading the manga that were directly connected to anime they watched on television. (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008, p. 137)

This is great news for teaching *PLL* because it is also a highly successful television series, halfway through its sixth season, with reruns available on Netflix. But it’s not as if the students can come into class having seen the series and feel they can get away without reading the book, either. Beyond some broad plotlines, the book and the TV show are quite different. But to know that this phenomenon might be in play to further boost the likelihood that students will read the book is very hopeful.

… young people’s interest in elements of popular culture (e.g., music, artists, actors, video games) can result in thematic reading across genres. For example based on their interest in a particular music artist, students would read biographies, look up artist’s lyrics, and visit the artist’s web page. (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008, p. 137-138)

The pop culture tie-ins in the books and the TV series are numerous. The actresses have graced the covers of many teen and adult magazines. The books are rife with references to musicians, artists and clothing designers. There is no reason why a teacher couldn’t work with a student on the final project that somehow connects the book with the pop culture reference they feel passionate about.

As far as an adolescent’s interest in romantic relationships goes, the following should be encouraging: “… students read texts that allowed them to explore relationships with the opposite sex.” (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008, p.141). With four main characters (one who tends to slide up and down the gender scale) and 18 volumes, the girls are looking for love in all the wrong places—which should interest any teen with romance on the mind. But what these books also focus on are friendships and navigating relationships with parents. (I do want to make it clear that I would never expect all 18 books to be taught in class. But what if students did enjoy the first book? Then they would already be set for 17 more books to read for pleasure. Or perhaps voracious readers would prefer to do a project on a different volume or compare the growth of characters between volumes.)

Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris also found that “… youth described seeing texts as providing examples of negative behaviors from which they could learn vicariously, or through which they could process actual experiences.” (2008, p.143). These books are about secrets and lies, so there’s a lot of fall out and everyone makes mistakes. They’re the perfect books to get the students to ask themselves, “What would I have done differently?” Really, the main characters’ moralities are tested at every turn.

So, if adolescents really are in search of an identity at this stage in their lives, YAL infused with popular culture does seem to be the kinds of books that they may actually want to read in the English classroom. And once the actual reading happens, the authentic learning begins.

As Birr Moje stated in McCarthey and Birr Moje (2002):

A number of youth I worked with in past studies rejected the readings that teachers had chosen for them because they could not identify with the people in the stories. In some cases the teachers had chosen literature they thought would connect with the students’ experiences, in particular, ethnic backgrounds, but the youth felt that the experiences and backgrounds of the characters in the texts were too different or distant. (p. 229)

When choosing *PLL*, I did not choose the books based on ethnic, racial, gender-based or other preconceptions I may have about a classroom of students. I chose the books because of the psychology of the adolescent—the commonalities that exist, in some measure, to most westernized teens. This would include the interest they have in creating identities, pop culture, social media and technology. By casting this wide net, I hope to empower students to feel their contributions are wanted, welcomed and valued in the English classroom.

**Who May Want to Teach *PLL***

Although, I’ve discussed how the *PLL* series could be made attractive to most students, I don’t think every teacher could/should teach it. The teacher would have to be familiar with the entire book and TV series, s/he would have to be comfortable talking about teen issues and s/he would have to be open to letting the students develop their own meanings rather than supplying all the answers. For this series to truly work at its full potential, I would strongly encourage teachers to use the final project design included with the lesson plans—this would involve teachers working with students to develop personalized assignments. Teachers would have to be willing to assess each assignment with equal vigour. If a student wants to compare the first book with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a teacher must bone up on Harper Lee. If a student wants to use the artist’s work mentioned in book 14 (Chuck Close) as a metaphor for how near the main characters are to discovering the identity of their tormentor, then the teacher should spend some time on the Internet looking through the artist’s work. It’s extra work but it can be fun work.

**Lesson Plans**

The following lesson plans can be mixed and matched to suit a range of classes and students’ learning needs. They were originally designed for grade 10 students. I have left plenty of room for teachers and students to manipulate and work with the ideas and truly make them their own. I have not stated specific amounts of time for each lesson. Some lessons could be completed in one class and others will take several classes. Depending on how vocal students are or how invested they are in certain issues, teachers may want to extend a lesson beyond what was originally planned. Because these lessons often require class discussions, teachers need to be flexible with letting the conversations unfold and evolve without any prior assumptions asserting themselves and guiding the discussions—which means teachers have to be a bit more flexible with time management, as well.

I do not assume that any teacher would have time to complete all the lesson plans with one class because some are fairly intensive and classroom time is limited. It is expected that teachers will supplement these major lesson plans with mini lessons of their own that could deal with any of the other myriad of themes present in the books. Any suggestions for assessment are merely that—suggestions. Classroom teachers know their students much better than any outsider does, so I believe it should be up to the teachers to ultimately decide what type of feedback their students will find most valuable.

**Lesson A: Identity Development as Constructed in Literature and High School Life**

**Introduction.**

It is my firm belief that adolescence is a time when teens actively work on creating an identity (Erikson, 1968). The identity marks them as individuals separate from their parents and having ideas, traits, likes and dislikes they feel are combined in a unique manner. Reading books written for teens and about teens (YAL) allows adolescents to vicariously try on new identities, and to learn from the mistakes and successes of their fictional counterparts (Moje & Luke, 2009). If the themes in *PLL* are discussed through authentic responses and these nascent ideas are developed through insightful and engaging projects, the English classroom can be a place where students are fully engaged as they explore their own personality development. Assuming this is true, it seems important that English students be aware of how literature can manipulate how we view a character’s and even our own identities. Using three of the historical identity metaphors posited by Moje and Luke (2009), students can use these conceptions of identity formation to reflect on how much influence these factors have in forming the personalities of the characters in *PLL*—and how much, in turn, they could influence their own identity development.

***Identity as difference metaphor.***

In this metaphor, identity is formed by the groups to which we belong and the groups to which we don’t belong. In *PLL* the girls have some choices about which categories they belong to (Emily’s a swimmer, Hanna’s a fashionista) but others they do not (ethnicity, socioeconomic class). And some categories they get unfairly thrust into by others (liars, publicity seekers). In fact, Alison may have been killed because of the labels she unfairly put on others and the impact that had on their lives.

An identity focused on difference rarely focuses on how the individual differs within the group but rather focuses on how that individual’s group differs from other groups. Although Alison was definitely the ringleader when the girls were together, the mere fact that the girls were friends with her and were aware of her bullying ways made them all appear complicit (and weren’t they?). Although *Pretty Little Liars*, the first novel in the *PLL* series, focuses on the girls apart from Alison, we still get glimpses into what they were like when they were members of Alison’s gang. As the series carries on we get even more information about just how devastating that gang could be and how others may not have viewed them as five separate thirteen year old girls but, rather, as one very threatening entity.

***Identity as self metaphor.***

In this metaphor, identity is seen as something that is being consciously constructed by the individual. In other words, the individual is working toward becoming the person that s/he wants to be. Although a person may be able to envision the kind of person s/he wants to be, it doesn’t mean that outside forces aren’t influencing or affecting his/her choices. Spencer is overworked and overstressed because she wants to go to an ivy-league school. She professes this is what she wants and even she seems to believe it—but this doesn’t really sit well with the reader/viewer. Spencer’s decision of who to be and how to go about being that person seem more like a ritualistic family upbringing than any real attempt at choice. *PLL* is the perfect series to show how outside forces can stop even the most determined of us from becoming who we want to be. Whether it be the manipulations of others (A meddling in the girls’ lives), family issues (Hanna’s absent and neglectful father), or even fighting your own hidden desires (Emily’s questioning sexuality), becoming the person you think you really want to be may never be an attainable goal.

***Identity as narrative metaphor.***

In this metaphor, our identities are formed by the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories others tell about us. Any teen who has walked the halls of a high school (a known hotbed of gossip) will find this concept problematic. There are people we would like to tell stories about us and people we would not. In the *PLL* world Emily may tell stories about a kind and creative Aria, but A may tell stories about how Aria slept with her English teacher. Emily’s stories may strike closer to the core of Aria’s identity but A’s stories also represent a facet of her character. How does a reader know whose narratives to trust? Do certain narratives get more weight than others?

It is also important to know that perhaps none of these narratives are true. Sometimes people construct their own narratives because they just so badly want them to be true. They create an image for themselves and do everything they can do to maintain it—no matter how well it actually suits them. Hanna believes her father rejected her because she was not thin enough, pretty enough or savvy enough rather than seeing the truth and believing her father is a careless, selfish man. Because Hanna believes she is wanting, she is struggling to form an identity that is popular, desired and envied to negate the story she tells herself about the flaws she alone perceives. She has transformed herself into the perfect “it girl”—and people are believing it and telling their own narratives about her social superiority. So the narratives are telling the same thing about Hanna, but Hanna’s inner voice (her own narrative) is filled with self-doubt. Her inner dialogue is telling her she has nothing while the other narratives are saying she has it all.

Not one of these identity metaphors can explain the entirety of identity formation on their own. Think of them as being some of the factors that contribute to a person’s identity, all working in concert to create the complicated, multi-layered and musical dimensions that create our unique self.

**The lesson’s objectives.**

Learning how literature and, indeed, life manipulate how we view others and ourselves is an important lesson. And because high school adolescents are at the age when they are seeking out answers as to what kind of person they want to be and how they will become that person this topic should be of great interest to them. In this lesson students will break down how the author is representing the characters based on the three identity metaphors, and how characterizing an identity based on any one metaphor alone can be problematic. A great extension to this lesson would be a personal essay.

**The lesson and examples.**

With the class explain the concept of identity formation and the three identity metaphors that will be explored: identity as difference, identity as self, and identity as narrative. Either continuing on with a class discussion or breaking the class into smaller groups take each of the four main characters and look at how their identity is defined by the identity as difference metaphor. (Warning: Aria is going to be the most complex character throughout this entire exercise because she is actively struggling the most with her identity development. Remember this when assigning her to a particular group or, perhaps, leave her to do with the entire class.) Make sure that groups have poster paper or that there is a lot of board space to write students’ ideas down—visuals will be important for follow-up questions.

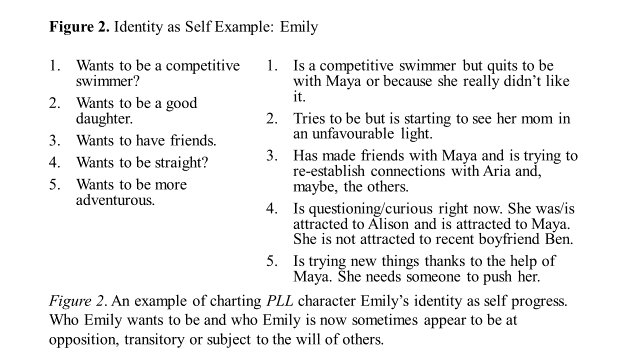
**Figure 1.** Identity as Difference Example: Hanna

Hanna

*Figure 1.* An example of a possible diagram for *PLL* character Hanna based on the identity as difference metaphor. Once diagrammed in such a manner, it becomes clearer that an identity based on group affiliation tells little about the individual and would be based largely on stereotypes.

After each character’s identity as difference diagrams are completed, make sure all are displayed, and consider the following jumping-off questions to get a class discussion started. Based on the diagrams, what is problematic with building an identity based on difference? How well do we get to know the person based on this knowledge? How well would you get to know yourself if you based your identity on group affiliation? Does belonging to certain groups mean more than belonging to others? Does membership in some groups contradict membership in other groups? Is it possible to truly belong to different groups that, on first glance, appear to be contradictory in nature (e.g. death metal enthusiast and classical cellist, or religious zealot and thief)?

Next move on to the identity as self metaphor. Create a chart with two columns for each character. On one side write down descriptors of who the character wants to be and on the other side write down who they actually are at that moment. Look at many aspects of the character’s life.



After the identity as self charts are made and shown, consider the following questions to jumpstart the class discussion. What influences the person we want to be? Are we allowed to change the type of person we want to be or should we stay the course? When do we know if we’ve made a change for the better or a change for the worse when developing our identity? What happens when we try to be something that goes against our deeper instincts? How much of becoming the person we want to be depends on us and how much depends on others?

Next move on to the identity as narrative metaphor. In point form write down six different narratives for each main character. One narrative has to be the character’s own, one has to be A’s, and one has to be the reader’s (whether in groups or in a class setting, there’s not going to be a consensus on this narrative). The other three narratives will be from any other characters in the book. These narratives should be as varied as possible. It is acceptable for students to make suppositions about certain narratives based on ideas they have after reading the book (some characters aren’t fully fleshed out enough by the end of the first book to be without-a-doubt certain about their narratives but there are certainly many clues about their thoughts and actions). Just have the students list some supporting details that lend credence to their suppositions.

**Figure 3.** Identity as Narrative Example: Spencer

Andrew: Spencer is smart, interesting and exciting. (Although he bests Spencer academically he shows avid interest in her and enjoys the competition. He genuinely cares about her but knows enough about her to give her space when she needs it.)

Spencer’s Narratives

A: Spencer is a hormonal hotbox who will do anything to best her older sister—especially try to steal her boyfriends.

Parents: Spencer works hard and will go far. She will follow in her family’s footsteps and make her family proud. If she falters she has to win back their trust. Her membership in their family is a privilege not a right.

Emily: Spencer is brilliant, hard-working and won’t be pushed around by anyone. She is rich and beautiful and has it all.

Reader: Spencer is goal driven and a hard worker—although her goals seem to be her parents’ rather than her own. She loves to win and yearns for acceptance from everyone. She is very jealous of her older sister and is thrilled when Melissa’s boyfriends pay attention to her—although she does encourage them. Her hormones do get the better of her and she is often ashamed of her behaviour after the fact.

*Figure 3.* An example of *PLL* character Spencer’s self as narrative narratives from six different viewpoints. Some narratives overlap but not always with the same insight.

After the identity as narrative exercise is over propose some of the following questions to the class: Which character’s narrative is most close to the reader’s narrative? Do some narratives misrepresent the identity? Are all narratives valid? Should our own self narrative be the closest to our true identity? Can others see ourselves better than we can? How many narratives do we need to get an accurate picture of a person’s identity?

***The assignment.***

This is the type of topic that students could talk about for classes, so if participation is high and all students are engaged, students can be assessed on group diagrams and participation, but this topic does lend itself very well to a personal essay. For a standard five-paragraph essay, students can take one of the metaphors and relate how that metaphor helps define their own identity (or the identity of a character in a work of literature they admire, if they feel the topic is too personal). In the identity as difference metaphor students can write about three groups they belong to that define their identity, and explain how they do and why these groups are important to their identity formation. In the identity as self metaphor students can write about three qualities they want to have, where they are in the process of attaining those qualities and how they plan on acquiring them. In the identity as narrative metaphor students can write about three different narratives people would tell about them and how each narrative reveals something different and important about their identities. For a longer, more advanced essay students could write about how each metaphor reveals something about their identity, further illustrating their arguments with personal examples.

**Lesson B: Analyzing Character with Found Poetry**

**Introduction.**

Some students and some teachers naturally gravitate toward writing poetry. The rules of prose do not constrain their writing and they are able to transcend genres and create magnificent works in poetic form. I’m afraid I was never that student and am not that teacher. Although I can certainly appreciate good poetry, my ability to write it is… lacking. I created this lesson for teachers and students, who may have not had much experience or fun writing poetry in the past, to experience the genre in a low-risk, non-intimidating manner. Students who do excel at poetry will also enjoy this lesson because it offers them an opportunity to manipulate others’ words to their own poetic effect.

Writing poetry can be a stressful experience for some students—especially when they are asked to create poetry about themes that affect them personally. Add to that the pressure of having to possibly share one’s work with the class and it’s easy to imagine the anxiety in the high school English classroom reaching heightened levels. Teaching how to create poetry can also be anxiety riddled for teachers who don’t feel proficient at the art—much like I do. To ease the all-around tension of writing poetry in the classroom I like to let the students have some choice in the subject matter, and I have no qualms telling students that although I have studied poetry that doesn’t mean I’m good at creating it—and that I’m actually expecting many of them to come up with better pieces than my examples. (I believe that teachers should shine in areas in which they have great expertise but they should also be honest when their skills are lacking. This way when students do excel and outshine the teacher, their achievements can be recognized as outstanding as they are, and the whole class can celebrate their victory. How often do students get to best their teacher? It’s fun! And I’ve often found that the students who create the best poetry aren’t the usual same classroom high achievers—there’s often some great unexpected contenders.)

When it actually comes to teaching the process of creating poetry, I have found that one of the least stressful and most approachable techniques is via found poetry. Found poetry involves using phrases, sentences, clauses, and pieces of text from other sources and rearranging them to create poetry. The Academy of American Poets (2004) describes found poetry thusly:

Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems.

A pure found poem consists exclusively of outside texts: the words of the poem remain as they were found, with few additions or omissions. Decisions of form, such as where to break a line, are left to the poet. (Poetic Form: Found Poem section, paras. 1 & 2)

Because students are working with others’ words, the pressure to pen the perfect sentence is taken off their shoulders and their major focus is now on piecing together another person’s well-crafted words to articulate their own visions. And because the students are limited to using fragments of sentences and partial pieces of communication, there is no expectation that the end result will be perfect, smoothly lyrical pieces of poetry, but more likely something raw and untamed.

Found poetry is one of the least intimidating approaches to writing poetry, but it is also used as a method of inquiry in some qualitative research and can be used as a means of encapsulating main themes and imagery from transcripts, notes and other data sources in a condensed yet powerful form (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014). It is suggested that approaching data with the mindset to create found poetry gives the creators the ability to approach the data in a different way than they would if they were summarizing it in a more traditional manner (Butler-Kisber, 2002).

**The lesson’s objectives.**

Students will focus on a miniature character analysis that can then be drawn out into group or class discussions. Not only will students be engaged in the act of creating poetry, but the following exercise will allow for what Rosenblatt (1994) imagined a transactional reading experience, at its best, would be: the students will be bringing their past experiences and knowledge into their interpretations and readings of the book, but they must also be able to use the text as a means to support their views. In this case, the textual support for their interpretations will come from the sentence fragments they choose to use in their found poetry. Just like the practitioners who are using found poetry as a means of collecting nuggets of truth in their qualitative research, students can learn that there are different methods of recapturing, retelling or analyzing information that may work very effectively for expressing their points of view.

**The lesson and examples.**

The *PLL* books are all similarly formatted with the introductory chapter, the A chapter and the rotating chapters that focus on one particular character at a time. In a character chapter the reader gets insight into that character’s inner world and secrets—so these are the chapters in which the reader gets the most honest view of how the character feels about herself. After explaining the method for creating found poetry, get students to pick one main character and one of her chapters, and create a found poem about her character or an important aspect of her character using text only from that one chapter.

An intriguing thing about this exercise is that the poems are going to differ greatly because of the students’ varied reader responses, because of the nature of found poetry, and because of the students’ varied aptitudes for handling this poetic form—which should make for interesting group or classroom discussions. For example, consider the following three found poems all written from sentence fragments found in chapter 25 of *Pretty Little Liars*, the first book in the *PLL* series. In this chapter Hanna, who desperately clings to her cool-girl image but suffers from low self-esteem on so many levels, has recently been humiliated and dumped by her boyfriend so, in retaliation, she gets drunk, steals his car and takes it for a joyride.

***Example one, Hanna, chapter 25.***

Example one represents an author who believes Hanna is conflicted—still trying to impress and maintain an illusion of perfection when she’s not fooling anyone. Hanna’s a ball of tense energy who has a sense of uneasy recklessness about her.

“You love it?”

“… speechless.”

dirty hair, crooked dress, and tear-stained face

the best bass money could buy

An uneasy feeling washed over her.

feeling drunk, hyped, and completely invincible.

***Example two, Hanna, chapter 25.***

Example two represents an author who is unsympathetic to Hanna as she screams off into the night in a drunken haze. She is represented as someone who causes intense destruction and simply laughs, or giggles, it off.

*beautiful. . . . Whatever*.

double lines quadrupling in her vision

HELLS YEAH

Driving this fast felt better than stealing, *super-baked bitch.*

spinning, splintering, crumpled into a telephone pole

Hanna giggled.

***Example three, Hanna, chapter 25.***

The author of example three sees Hanna as a pitiable creature who is needy and empty—more a victim than an active agent in her own life.

*It’s not gonna be you.*

Slammed, spinning, jerked away

empty except for grubby, tear-stained dirt

*Even Daddy doesn’t love you best!*

(such barren losers)

smearing thick tears from the corners of her eyes

Hanna smiled gratefully and glowed vacantly

Although all three poems are written from the seven pages that comprise chapter 25, I tried to write them from three different viewpoints. All interpretations are very different but all are equally valid reader responses and found poems. A great thing about using a series book in an English class is that the major characters’ growth is continual and we, as readers, cannot come up with final summations about who characters are at the cores of their beings until the series comes to an end, and even then we may be divided—but the possibility that we may change our mind about that character or that the character will do something to confirm our first nascent impressions exists. There is no right or wrong answers about characters because the story hasn’t been completely told yet—the case hasn’t been closed, one can say. All possibilities, set within the boundaries erected by the author, still exist. The thing is: readers get to know these characters in their own time and on their own terms—without an English teacher pushing certain academically-certified beliefs about a character onto a student. So, based on the first book in the *PLL* series, the imagined authors of examples one, two and three can all be correct about Hanna. In chapter 25 Hanna is all things implied in the three poems and by the end of the book we can’t rule out any of these interpretations because the story is ongoing. There is value in being able to have, support and assert one’s own opinion without fear of having one’s English teacher scrawl in red pen across one’s neatly penned poem, *No true understanding of character.*

As previously suggested, once students are finished writing their poems they should be given the opportunity to share them. Students should feel safe sharing this poetry because it represents opinions about fictional characters and the students are working with found words. Students can share with the entire class or in small groups based on characters chosen or chapters chosen. The following discussion should, of course, centre on the devices that make certain poems powerful but it should also focus on how differing opinions can all be valid if they can be supported by the text.

A further enhancement to this exercise can involve playing with different spacing, font sizes and visual effects to make the found poem more impactful.

**Lesson C: Examining Life (or Lack Thereof) Without Technology, an Autobiographical Challenge**

**Introduction.**

Technology plays a substantial role in *PLL*’s main characters’ lives. It may even be said to be the conduit to their collective downfall. Add a phone with video capabilities, and toss it into the *sturm und drang* of adolescence and little good will arise. While reading or watching *PLL* I often think of my teenage life and am very glad that none of it was documented and immediately uploaded onto the Internet. I can’t imagine what kind of pressure that must be for today’s teens—but perhaps it is the only reality they know? This would be a fascinating area of discussion with students. They would be the experts because only an extremely young teacher would have memories of being sent off to elementary school with a cell phone in his/her backpack. It truly offers a chance for the teacher to learn from the students’ experiences.

Although the laments about technology ruining the next generation’s ability to learn and socialize ring far and wide through fear-mongering media, educators are now accepting that technology is not going anywhere and today’s youth need to know how to learn and socialize more effectively with it (Strom & Strom, 2012a). Not only does technology keep teens in touch with their friends, it plays a big role in them making new friends. In a large scale University of Southern California study, the majority of people surveyed stated that they felt as strongly about their online communities as they did about their real-life communities (Strom & Strom, 2012b). Of course there are the risks of being exposed to predators online but the benefits of online friendships can be great for teens—especially if they live in more rural settings. The online teen can: meet people from all over the world; vicariously explore new cultures and ideas; talk to others with similar viewpoints; express their ideas in an environment they feel has fewer risks than a comparable real-life one.

Although the main characters in *PLL* are most often tormented via text, the girls seem unable to put their phones down (with the exception of season 1, episode 4: “Can You Hear Me Now?”)—a scenario that mimics the tragic cyberbullying cases that reach the media today. In many bullying scenarios, the victims don’t change their privacy settings or shut down their social media accounts and they still answer calls and read texts from unknown numbers. Although this doesn’t make sense from an adult point of view it does seem to make sense from a teen’s perspective. By not answering the phone, you may not get a phone call from that person who makes your life hell but you may also miss a call from the person who makes your life livable—or from a parent who may be quite upset that you didn’t bother to pick up his/her call. Again an excellent discussion for teens to have. Could they tune out? Would they want to? Would the demands of their daily lives even let them?

**The lesson’s objectives.**

This lesson will let students assess their relationship with technology while practicing first person diary-/journal-style writing. The end product will be a three-five page journal assessed mainly on the depth of exploration of the topic.

**The lesson.**

Start the class with this question: Could A still torment the girls effectively without technology? The class may go either way on this question. Prompt them with follow up questions such as: How would A leak their secrets? How could the girls catch A if technology is not in play? The point is: technology definitely makes it easier for A to have access to the girls and all their information. It also makes it easier for A to leak all their secrets to everyone they know at a touch of a button, and it makes it harder to catch A. But *PLL* is a fictional world, so let’s get to the students’ worlds.

List the advantages and disadvantages of technology and social media as the students experience them. Once a good list has been made and discussed pose these questions: If blocking all unknown numbers and staying off of social media would keep A off your back would you do it? Could you do it? The discussions should be interesting—don’t let anyone just say s/he is not afraid of A. Make sure all the students know that A has information on them that is absolutely devastating!

***The assignment.***

Challenge your students to go 24, 48 or 72 hours without using a smartphone, computer, video games or texting—if you really want to go for it eliminate TV as well! (You may have to get parents and other teachers to ally with you to help the students succeed with their challenge. This would involve sending out a parental consent form as well as reaching out to fellow teachers and asking for their support.) I suggest doing this during the school week with a proviso that computers may be used in specific classes if necessary. Keep your fingers crossed that computers will not be required for other homework but, if so, cross that bridge when you come to it. You may barter some contract details with students—such as unlimited phone calls—but stay firm on no social media, texting or person-to-person communication via computer or gaming console. If your students like a little competition, offer a token prize or reward for those who manage to hold out for the entire allotted time. For those of your students who need a little more rallying to become excited about this challenge, consider describing it as similar to a post-apocalyptic challenge—how well would your students fare when the grid went down? (There’s no denying that post-apocalyptic YAL is huge right now, and some students may be more easily persuaded to engage with the concept under this guise. Either way the results will be the same and the lesson’s objectives will be met.)

In order for your students to gauge their connections with technology and social media instruct them to keep a journal between three and five pages detailing their struggle or lack of struggle. Honesty is a must in this exercise—if they give in to technology they have to explore why they did and why it was important to them. Students must also try to get back on the wagon (so to speak) and continue with the challenge no matter how many times they fail. The students should be exploring how technology fits in their lives, and what emotional hold it may have on them, and any revelations thereafter.

***The assessment.***

The journals should also be decorated or illustrated—and, of course, they must be done in hand. A suggestion for assessing the journals would be to weigh most of the grade (60%) on how well the student explored his/her relationship with technology. The reader should be able to understand what role technology plays in the student’s life and what that student’s techno-persona is like. The remainder of the assessment should be divided between stylistics (15%), matters of correctness (10%), and creativity (15%).

**Lesson D: Comparing and Contrasting Literature and Television Interpretations**

**Introduction.**

There is something enthralling about the experience of having a book you enjoyed made into a film or television show. There’s the excitement over hearing which actors will play what roles. The concern that storylines may not be depicted how you imagined them and that your beloved book may be treated unfairly. And then there’s the gear up to the day you’ll finally get to see it on the screen that makes you vibrate with a delightful undercurrent of anticipation.

When it premiered in 2010, three and a half years after the first book was published, the *PLL* television series came right out of the gate challenging expectations—it was very different from the books. The plotlines diverged radically as both series progressed but differences were quite apparent after just reading the first book and viewing the first episode. Yet fans of the book, and viewers who had never read the books, turned up in droves to watch the series (TV by the Numbers, 2010). The television series took *PLL* to the next level and weaved it into the social fabric as a cultural phenomenon.

The television show and its actors have won or been nominated for a Banff Television Festival Award, GLAAD awards, People’s Choice awards and Teen Choice awards. Shay Mitchell, who plays main character Emily, has become a role model and ally in the LGBTQ community due to her portrayal of someone who at first struggled with her sexuality before coming out as lesbian. The show has had a clothing tie-in with retailer Aéropostale and the main actors are often featured in *Cosmopolitan*, *Teen Vogue* and *Seventeen*.

The show has succeeded in grabbing the imagination of its viewers, and there has been little, if any, clamour from book purists about why certain events and characters were changed. But it is fascinating to contemplate why some changes were made and what assumptions the television creators were making about their intended audience when they made those changes.

**The lesson’s objectives.**

This lesson will reinforce students’ understanding that artistic choices are made for a reason (that sometimes has less to do with art and more to do with the bottom line).Students will also explore the notion that creators often make assumptions about their audience that may or may not be accurate. These concepts will be examined via class discussion.

**The lesson.**

Begin the lesson by getting students to take five minutes to list three major differences between the book and the television show. What interpretation did they like best and why? The rest of the lesson will be a class discussion. The topics that follow are differences students may have noticed followed by some background information and some possible discussion prompts.

***Physical differences.***

In the books the main characters are all very… white. This isn’t representative of society but it’s quite realistic based on the books’ setting—the Philadelphia Main Line. This section of suburban Philadelphia is known for its old and very storied money. It is an area that isn’t known for being entirely inclusive, and the private schools easily outnumber the public ones. The television series seems to make a token effort at racial diversity—Emily and Mona are of mixed heritage (whereas in the books these characters represent the fairest of the fair with red hair and white-blond hair, respectively).

Which is more important: realism or diversity? Or does the television show even make a real attempt at diversity? Does it matter how closely characters in the television show match their literary counterparts? Are the actors in the show too good looking? Would the show be as popular if they weren’t (think of both male and female actors)? What assumptions are the television creators making about the audience that the book creators are not?

***The age difference.***

The book begins when the girls are 13 and the television show when the girls are 15. The implications for this choice aren’t as immediately far-reaching as they will be as the books progress—it will be discovered that Alison is quite precocious when it comes to sex, drug and alcohol use, manipulation and various forms of grift—but some viewers may find watching 13 year old girls drink, be mean to each other and try to seduce older boys just a bit too unpalatable, whereas it seems a lot easier to digest when they are 15. Yet why did the books go in this direction and the television show does not? If your students did not do the fan culture lesson it is recommended that you read [“The Gossip Mill”](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/19/the-gossip-mill) (Mead, 2009) so you can give them background about how Alloy Entertainment created *PLL*. Alloy Entertainment’s focus on providing the material its young readers want to read versus what adults believe they should read may be a large reason for the age difference but there is also the difference in what a person can tolerate reading and what a person can tolerate watching. There is also the simple matter of logistics. It is easy to flash back in a book to when all the characters were 13 but how do you do that consistently, over years, on television? Actors grow older and need to be replaced if they are to realistically portray a 13 year old.

If it is acceptable to write about 13 year olds perpetrating cruel acts, drinking and being sexual with inappropriately older men why can’t it be portrayed on television? Why is it acceptable to portray these behaviours if a character is 15 instead of 13? Beyond moral reasons for making the main characters 15 during the television flashbacks, are there any financial reasons the producers may have wanted the flashbacks to feature the girls at 15?

***Girl power.***

Another major difference between the books and the television series is the bond of friendship between the girls. By the end of the first episode of the television series the girls are fast on their way to becoming best friends again. And that is the major theme of the television series—the strength and power of female friendship. Often the girls’ friendship is so strong it comes to the detriment of other relationships in their lives. This isn’t quite so in the books. In the books it takes a very long time for the girls to start trusting each other. And although they do begin to bond again, Alison’s previous frenemy-like behaviour, the past three years apart, and the ominous anonymous A text messages have made them quick to distrust each other. In the books, much of the "girl power” message is abandoned. This difference could be, in large part, attributed to trends in youth culture (e.g. less interest in mean girl-type narratives and more interest in girl power-type narratives).

In the television series the girls start to bond much quicker than they do in the books—why might the television producers have done this? Can girl power be a trend (consider Taylor Swift’s girl squad)? Would today’s youth be more interested in a show about strong female relationships or frenemies? Are there examples of both types of shows on today’s television landscape? Does the shift in focus date the book and the television show, or does it just make for a different type of story?

***Mall culture and consumerism.***

The books also put mall culture and consumerism under the focus of a high power lens. Each main character is constantly defined by the brand-name products that surround her—in fact, the entire Rosewood community is defined by the brand-name products it consumes. If a product’s brand has strong connotations the author mentions that product by brand name to reinforce the notion that the *particular* products a person consumes are important and further define a person’s character (e.g. It’s important to know that Spencer’s towels are Ralph Lauren, her car is a Mercedes, her sports bra is Champion, her bikini is Eres, she wears a Tiffany’s Elsa Peretti heart ring, etc.). Throughout the book series each of the main characters has amassed an enormous metaphorical product dossier and, it could be argued, can be defined in large part by the marketable qualities advocated by the brands she consumes (or doesn’t consume).

Although the girls are always fashionably presented, branding is not a part of the *PLL* television series. Labels are not shown. If a brand name is mentioned it is usually done so as part of a clever Hanna Marin line—never to describe something on screen. Marketing and logistics probably have a lot to do with this. Having *everything* branded is a feat that even a well-marketed James Bond movie is incapable of, let alone a weekly television show. Besides, many luxury brands would probably not want their name associated with teenagers. Porsche is probably not jumping at the opportunity of having its product driven by an actress portraying a drunk teenage girl. Prada and Versace heels clicking down a high school hallway? That’s just not good marketing. But keep the girls dressed well—but not luxury-label well—and a cross promotion to develop a line of *PLL*-inspired clothing for Aéropostale is certainly possible. Also, if the television show used branding certain advertisers may feel left out or that they should be owed special placement in episodes.

Why does the author mention so many goods by name? What does this say about the power these goods have? Do brands have power in your life? Why might the television producers not want to use so many brands in the show? Why might the brands not want to be in the show if it is free advertising? What does this say about how these brands view the show, its viewers or adolescents? Should adolescents covet brands that don’t want anything to do with them?

**Lesson E: Exploring Fan Culture and Its Effects on Literature, Television and Film**

**Introduction.**

More than ever this is the age of the fan. Thousands of fans will storm comic conventions nationwide where they will spend hours in line waiting to see a movie trailer or get a picture with a beloved actor or author. They will pay handsomely for the privilege and be ecstatic they did. Innumerable websites abound where fans can upload pictures of their art, poetry or story devotionals about their favourite television/movie/literary characters. People are becoming so invested in their roles as fans that events are starting to take place that are changing the way we view and read. Fans want to be heard and the smart money seems to be on the creators who are listening. This symbiotic relationship is not only lucrative but it’s also inspired whole new mediums of entertainment that would never have been possible without the input of the fans. Take, for example, the mainstream cable show *Talking Dead.*

In 2011, *Talking Dead* aired directly after the second season premiere of *The* *Walking Dead*, an hour-long television show about life during the zombie apocalypse, based on the popular eponymous Robert Kirkman graphic novels. *Talking Dead* brought to cable television what was basically a super fan’s idealized after-show podcast. It featured an interactive platform and was filmed live so the audience could call in, tweet, play real-time quizzes and decompress after an episode as experts from the show, and non-expert fans, gave their opinions on any range of *The Walking Dead* topics. Fans were also rewarded with sneak peeks into next week’s episode, actor interviews and behind-the-scenes insights. The formula proved itself successful and the same television network produced *Talking Bad* a similar follow-up fan show for the last eight episodes of *Breaking Bad* as that incredibly popular series ended.

As fans become more invested in what they watch, read, buy, listen to—in general, consume—it seems they are putting more pressure on producers to supply exactly what they demand. A recent groundbreaking display of fan power and persuasion occurred when the fans of *Veronica Mars*, a much lauded but under-watched teen detective television show, donated over five million dollars to fund a movie follow up of the series seven years after it went off the air. The ability for this movie to get made fueled by fan power and fan money has offered filmmakers an alternative to the big Hollywood approach to filmmaking that has been criticized for being overly focused on the bottom line (and seldom swayed with the more sentimental notion of fan faithfulness).

The making of the *Veronica Mars* movie also provided the perfect vehicle for the series creator, and YAL author, Rob Thomas as well as many series cast members to thank fans for their continued devotion long after the series had run its course. The Kickstarter campaign to raise the required money to film the movie featured cast members vowing their devotion to the project and offering various prizes for people who donated above a certain amount. Kristen Bell, the actor who portrayed Veronica Mars, had become very successful since the series was made but was at the front of the rallying charge to get the movie filmed and even offered to record outgoing phone messages for top donors as a thank you.

At first glance these new symbiotic relationships between creators and fans seems quite nurturing and respectful but as with all new relationships guidelines are going to have to be drawn at some point or problems are going to arise. Although fans of *Veronica Mars* were generally pleased with the movie some critics thought it pandered so much to fans that it creatively missed the mark (McMillan, 2014; Travers, 2014). This worry that fans may have so much influence over the creative process that they actually block the creator’s ability is an interesting one. It assumes that the creator’s original process has a destiny that will not be fulfilled to its potential because of fan interference—that the art will suffer because the creator is too concerned with pleasing the fans. Such concern is highly understandable. As a fan of many varying iconic pieces of work I would gladly make little changes to them for my own pleasure thus ruining them and the author/creator’s vision. For example, Harry Potter forever would remain a teenager and his adventures would continue with new books coming out every two years; the little match girl doesn’t freeze to death but gets adopted by a really nice, really rich family; Buffy, the vampire slayer, would obliterate the vampire plague and get her happy ending; and Jane Eyre would never return to Mr. Rochester and he would bemoan the fact that he locked his first wife up in the attic for the rest of his days. All changes would make me a little happier but they would probably make the art suffer in the process.

There are also moral and ethical implications when creating art for demanding fans who are minors. There’s the stuff they want to consume—which may be considered too violent, too sexual, too mature—versus the stuff their parents, teachers and society-at-large want them to consume—which minors may find completely uninteresting. Do creators of material for adolescents simply walk a fine line of catering to fans while trying not to tweak whatever nerve will outrage adults? Do creators of adolescent material have any ethical obligation to provide material for the moral betterment of adolescent fans if adolescent fans don’t want it? Take for example the case of the *PLL* character Ezra Fitz as portrayed in the books and on the television series.

Ezra Fitz is introduced as *PLL* main character Aria’s love interest and English teacher. In the books he is exactly what you’d expect a predatory statutory rapist to be: selfish and immature. The allure of a pseudo-adult lover soon loses its lustre in the *PLL* literary world and the character flees town after he is caught with his underage paramour, but on the *PLL* television series the Ezra/Aria dynamic has far outlasted the book creator’s vision. On the television series the characters represent the show’s longest-sustained romance. The couple has weathered all sorts of deterrents to the relationship such as angry parents, suspicious school administration and people who question the age difference, but not one person has asked: what is the matter with Ezra? Why is he such a backward creep that he needs to be in a relationship with a 16 year old girl? In real life Ezra would not be looked upon kindly, but in fan life he’s adored. The television series producers and writers allude to the fans as being an inspiration for guiding storylines (Horizon Scripted Television, 2014), and one need only peruse *PLL* message boards under the tag Ezria (a combination moniker of the two lovers’ names) to read about the love fans have for this couple. It isn’t hard to understand why Ezra Fitz is still on the television show if fans don’t want to let him go, and it’s easy to understand why fans don’t want to let him go if the majority of them holding on are underage. To a younger viewer a romance with the experienced, smart and handsome Mr. Fitz may seem like the stuff of fairytales but to an adult (especially an educator) the whole thing is morally off-putting.

Should creators cater to the fans or police them? According to Alloy Entertainment, the creators of both the *PLL* books and television series, you give the audience what they want. In her article, Mead (2009) explored the idea factory responsible for so many young adult book and television successes such as *Gossip Girl*, *The 100*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. When talking to an associate publisher at Alloy Entertainment she quoted the following: “’Editors and publishers can get hung up on what’s good for kids,’” Howard told me. “’At Alloy, they always think first about what kids want to read.’” (2009). It’s Alloy Entertainment’s unique inner workings that let it trip happily over this moral morass. When book concepts are created, ideas are brainstormed until a winning one is hit upon. A writer or writers are chosen and plotlines are further hashed out through meetings and more brainstorming sessions. Packaging is developed and the first 10 book chapters are written. The book, in its infant state, is then shopped around to different publishers. (Since acquired by Warner Bros. Television in 2012, all of Alloy Entertainment’s television and movie concepts are created for that media studio alone.) Eliminate the sole author slaving away to realize his/her artistic vision, institute an assembly line process of creating a book, insert a degree of separation between whose name is on the book versus who actually created the book (HarperCollins versus Alloy Entertainment) and the responsibility to take a moral stand becomes diffused over so many shoulders that it holds no weight at all.

Because fan culture, at this level, is relatively new, we’ve yet to see the possibilities of all the marvelous collaborations yet to come. We also have yet to see the extent to which greedy creators can exploit fans (although the prices to partake in some conventions or even get an autograph already can seem to border on fraud to a nonfan) or how a creator’s art can be exploited by fan demands. So far the world of fan culture is running free and pretty much unpoliced. The world is a happy, hedonistic one—idyllic, in ways. Any murmur of discontent is still nothing but a quiet noise in the distance.

**The lesson’s objectives.**

This lesson lets students take a more critical look at fan culture (a culture they probably already take part in to some degree) and its effect on literature, television and film. Emphases will be placed on: the new possibilities arising from fan/creator collaborations; the possible negative side-effects of fan-driven creative endeavors; and whether or not creators have a moral responsibility to protect and guide fans who are underage. Students will get experience watching and reading several different pieces of media to learn about these aspects of fan culture. Students will also get an opportunity to source message boards and fan sites to find opinions to support their chosen argument for a group-delivered oral report.

**The lesson.**

***Recommended resources.***

* [“’Veronica Mars’ Says ‘Screw Hollywood.’ Gives Fans What They Want”](http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/videos/veronica-mars-says-screw-hollywood-gives-fans-what-they-want-20140313) (Travers, 2014).
* Compilation of YouTube videos about the [*Veronica Mars* Kickstarter campaign](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgLN0983nr0) (Mech, 2013).
* [“Rob Thomas on his $5M *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter and the Future of Fan-Funded Film”](http://www.wired.com/2013/04/rob-thomas-interview-veronica-mars-kickstarter/) (Hudson, 2013).
* [“How *Veronica Mars* Fans Ruined the Movie Reboot for Everyone Else”](http://www.wired.com/2014/03/veronica-mars-fans/) (McMillan, 2014).
* [“Did ‘Pretty Little Liars’ Screw Up Its Teacher-Student Love Storyline?”](http://flavorwire.com/446419/did-pretty-little-liars-screw-up-its-teacher-student-love-storyline) (Berman, 2014).
* [“The Gossip Mill”](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/19/the-gossip-mill) (Mead, 2009).

Begin the lesson by talking about fan culture. Are there any specific people/books/graphic novels/shows/music/films the students are fans of? Do they go on message boards or fan sites? Do they attend conventions/concerts/festivals? Do they buy souvenir products? Does being a fan of whomever or whatever help define who they are? Is there a sense of community in being a fan? Do fans have any influence over the product they love?

Next will be the introduction to the making of the *Veronica Mars* movie. I suggest starting out by showing the Travers (2014) video essay which does a great job of explaining what the original series was about, why the studios wouldn’t originally make the movie, and what the fans and original creators did to get the movie made. Next show the Mech (2013) collection of YouTube videos which monitor the Kickstarter campaign starting with a pledge video. Then read the Hudson (2013) article that features an interview with Rob Thomas, the creator of *Veronica Mars*, who talks about how he thinks fan-funded enterprises may change the face of film. At this point get students to brainstorm how else films may change if fans become responsible for funding. (If you need to seed the discussion to get it started ask the students to think about the kinds of things they would like to see in movies or what about movies would they like to change.) Some responses may be along the lines of: fan-favourite actors who aren’t part of the Hollywood blockbuster stable would get more opportunities to work; fans could support projects that reflected character diversity; cult-favourite works that may be out of print could be produced; all sorts of works may find new generations of fans; and films would become more representative of their viewers. Some students may start to brainstorm more negative effects—such as loss of creative control—which will be explored next.

Next read the McMillan article which is part review, part opinion piece. It suggests that the *Veronica Mars* movie creatively suffered because it tried too hard to please its fans. Discuss this notion with the students. How can getting exactly what you want in a film, book or television show ruin it? (At this point, break students into groups and play a quick game of Ruin It by Making It Better. In this game students have 15 minutes to come up with five works of art they would ruin by making better. Students will choose a work of art, state what they would do to “make it better,” and surmise exactly how that would ruin it. For example: painting the Statue of Liberty in beautiful life-like shades will probably have the effect of terrifying all visitors to New York City, insulting the French and abolishing any historical gravitas it holds. Rewriting *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* so when Harry kills Voldemort everyone who died at Voldemort’s hands automatically comes back to life will end up making any lessons Harry or the readers learned about grief and death absolutely moot.)

The next part of the discussion is going to focus on *PLL* and the relationship between Aria and her English teacher Ezra Fitz. If you haven’t discussed this relationship in class yet here’s your chance. Ask students what they think of this relationship. Is it romantic or creepy? Who may find it romantic and who may find it creepy? Now tell students that this is a minor spoiler (to be polite) but that the relationship doesn’t last that long in the books but it does go on up until midseason six in the television series (when time jumps fast forward five years). To understand why the Aria/Ezra relationship has lasted so long on television the *PLL* fan culture needs to be explored. This can be done with a homework, library or computer lab assignment in which students spend 30 minutes looking at various *PLL* fan sites, message boards, blogs, fan-fiction sites and fan-art sites to get an idea of how invested fans are in this series. If there is extra time, get students to comb the message boards for fans’ opinions of the relationship between Aria and Ezra (Ezria is an invaluable search term). It’s important that students make the connection that the relationship between Aria and Ezra may have lasted so long because the couple is a fan favourite.

Follow with a reading of the Berman (2014) article (some teachers may want to cut out certain parts of this article as it does have several season four television spoilers). Ask the students how they think the television creators of *PLL* should handle/have handled the Aria/Ezra relationship? Because the creators are making a show that attracts younger viewers, do they owe it to their audience to provide moral examples? Are moral examples representative of real life? Are moral examples entertaining?

Next introduce the Mead (2009) article. Although written in 2009 and Alloy Entertainment has since been acquired by Warner Bros. Television, its president, Leslie Morgenstein, is still at the helm and the book division is still going strong. This article was chosen because of the glib manner in which the editors come up with book ideas, and their lack of concern about the appropriateness of subject matter. This article will give most students an insight into who exactly is creating some of the product they are consuming. The point is not to condemn *PLL* but to make students aware of how the books are made. Ask students if this insight into how the books are made makes them feel any differently about the series. How are the various people involved with the books represented? Should these people be taking more responsibility for producing better moral examples in their books and television shows? Would you watch or read them if they did?

***The assignment.***

Students will work in groups to present a five-minute oral argument defending one of three stances. All three stances are quite different but they are not exactly in opposition—so groups are not in competition with one another. Students will research ideas to support their arguments on message boards and fan sites—basically their arguments will be supplemented by the public opinion of fans (this will also provide teachers with a great opportunity to reinforce when it is fine to generalize and when it is necessary to reference another person’s ideas). The specifications of the presentations is up to the teacher. The presentations can be simple oral presentations or they can include dramatic theatrical elements such as nightly news anchor-style delivery, or what if this happened-style scenarios. The presentations could include an AV (audio visual) or IT (information technology) component—which could include original filmed pieces, video clips to support the argument, or computer presentation formats (e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi). The time allotted for preparation should be extended the more complicated the presentation. For a basic oral presentation with no required AV or IT components, allow two days for research and preparation.

The three stances are:

1. Creators should be completely unimpeded by the needs of their fans or society when creating their art.
2. Fan input inspires creators to produce better work.
3. Creators must (or must not—choose which side your class is most passionate about) take a moral stand for the fans’/society’s own good.

Be open to the possibility that students may have some insight into fan culture that you aren’t privy to. If they have a good idea for another stance that suits the topic and can be researched via fan sites give them the opportunity to teach you something. The mandatory elements of this oral presentation are similar to that of an essay in oral form. Students must introduce their stance. Students must present three strong arguments for their stance. Each argument must be accompanied by at least one example. The end of the presentation must be formally concluded. How students wish to incorporate all elements is up to them. Creativity is encouraged.

***The assessment.***

The following is a possible guide for assessment. If there are mandatory AV or IT components they will need to be included in the assessment. I suggest an anonymous peer review for effort. (Each student will get a list with each of his/her group members printed on it with a scale of numbers between 0 and 10. The student will rate each group member, including him/herself. The teacher will collect the papers and average each student’s score to get their effort grade based on peer review.)

* Strength of argument one (5 marks)
* Strength of example one (5 marks)
* Strength of argument two (5 marks)
* Strength of example two (5 marks)
* Strength of argument three (5 marks)
* Strength of example three (5 marks)
* Effectiveness of presentation (10 marks)—this has to do more with tone than argument. Are the students persuasive? Do they exhibit confidence? Do you believe what they are saying?
* Creativeness of presentation (10 marks)—what extra elements do the students employ to keep their audience engaged?
* Peer-reviewed effort (10 marks)
* Total (60 marks)

**Final Project**

**Introduction.**

I advocate the use of popular YAL in the high school English classroom on the suggested evidence that students will find it more relatable than the canonical literature that is often still taught today. The hypothesis is that students will be able to find ways to make connections with the literature that would be unimaginable, or tenuous at best, with literature written for adults and probably written long ago. Using *PLL* as a base text, students can explore any of the many literary, musical, artistic, sartorial or film allusions present in the books, but they are also linked to a television series, websites, soundtracks, blogs, fan fiction and fan communities. The *PLL* world has become a living organism that has spread its neurons into many aspects of life that a teen is familiar with—so finding a connection to *PLL* that a student finds interesting (or feels passionate about) should be possible.

The final project for the *PLL* unit is a collaboration between teacher and student. Students will use their knowledge of *PLL* combined with their own talents and interests to design their final projects. How you and your students define learning will be decided in collaboration. If you and your students are willing to engage with the experience, working on this project can open insights into their own personality development and shed light on some new topics of interest they didn’t even know were options for in-depth study (e.g. modern lyrics, graphic novels, deconstructing sartorial styling). The creative ideas students come up with can inspire teachers, and the projects will let the students’ individuality shine through in a way a five-paragraph essay never could.

Although I believe this assignment holds the most potential for fun and high enthusiasm on the students’ parts, it can definitely be daunting for teachers. It involves collaborating, one-on-one, with students to design a final project in which they define what learning will be taking place and how they will represent it. This means that each project will be different, the way the teacher and the students usually work may be different and the way assessments are done may be different. This type of student-designed project requires teachers to adopt a student-centered approach to teaching that may be new to them.

Student-centered teaching/learning puts the responsibility for learning on the student. It maintains that learning: is constructed by the student rather than created by the teacher and transmitted to the student; will be more meaningful and will persist in the memory; focuses on skills that are purposeful and relevant to students and the matter at hand. It is important these skills have transferability to other aspects of students’ lives. It usually involves “hands-on” types of exercises that further cement concepts or skills. Student-centered teaching isn’t much talked about in the research in regard to high school English courses. This may be due to: the sheer amount of content and media an English teacher is required to cover throughout the year in so little time; the school’s/society’s focus on results obtained through standardized exams; the confusion over how to equally assess different projects for every student; or maybe because English teachers have such a hard time getting students to read the required texts that imagining them designing their own English assignment fills teachers with dread. No matter the reason for the dearth of research in this arena, research in the areas of higher education have yielded very positive results.

Researchers found that students’ academic performance improved when they were allowed to design their own final group projects and that students liked the idea that they had to find answers on their own and that answers weren’t already predetermined (Kelley, Sumrall & Sumrall, 2015). In post-secondary musical programs, the act of creating personal practice contracts, collaborated on by the teacher and the student, helped to develop a rapport between the collaborators, reinforced student commitment to the program and, it was surmised, might even help to fight feelings of alienation in the students (Andrews, 2004). When asked to list the attributes of their most significant positive learning experiences, many research participants recalled details that relate to the tenets of student-centered learning, such as student responsibility for learning, learning through direct experience, and responsive instructors (Brackenbury, 2012).

**How to begin.**

* At the beginning of your *PLL* unit tell students that they will be designing their own final project in relation to *PLL*. Explain that they should be thinking big. What are their interests (music, fashion, reading, film, dance, art, writing, theatre)? What themes do they find interesting (friendship, love, hate, secrets, adolescence, transformations, popularity, cruelty, kindness)? Tell them to take note of any subject that comes up during class that sparks their interest. Any combination of these things has the potential of coming together to help build the design of their projects. Throughout the unit students should be thinking about what their projects will be about. It’s important to begin the collaboration process before the end of the unit because developing a topic for the project will take time. Make sure to supply students with many creative examples of potential projects, as well as reminding them to keep their project class appropriate and manageable within the given time frame.
* When beginning the collaboration with students to talk over their project ideas you can do it many ways, though time management will become a concern if your class is big and you expect to do it during class time. I suggest you ask students to submit a one-paragraph email detailing how they envision their projects—what they’ll be about and how they’ll represent or present them. Start an email dialogue with any student who needs to refine his/her topic. If you feel most topics are appropriate start scheduling appointments. Tell students to have answers to the following questions prepared: what do you want to accomplish/learn? How will you accomplish/learn it? How does your project apply to your life now or your imagined future life?
* During your first collaborations make sure the students can answer their three questions to everyone’s satisfaction and are ready to proceed. The first question represents the project goals. The second question gives the student ideas about how to proceed with the project. And the third question allows students to look at the project as being more than just an English project, but as something that also relates to their lives as they are living them or hope to live them. (Students’ answers to this question will vary and not all of them will be of resounding philosophical import. A student may answer that his/her project involves drawing because this is something s/he does well. Just as long as the student tries to draw a personal connection between him/herself and the project s/he will be answering the question correctly.) Remember, this is their one-on-one time with you so ask them questions about their projects, and give them your feedback and advice.
* As students are working on their projects schedule one or two status updates. This will remind students to stay on pace and give them the chance to ask you for advice. Ask students to bring samples of their work and be accountable for their progress. If you need to adjust any project goals, this is the time to do it.

**Things to keep in mind.**

* Some of your students will have greater familiarity with the *PLL* world than others. Some students will be up-to-date with the television series but will only have read the first book in English class. Others will only know the book and the episodes that were shown or assigned in class. Make sure you know how familiar a particular student is with *PLL* before collaborating on the design of his/her project. To make sure all students are on an even playing field projects should not be based on any criteria where *PLL* die-hards get an extra advantage over their classmates. They may have more options—such as basing their projects on the final book in the series or the film noir episode, “Shadow Play”—but it’s important to remember the project is about gaining new skills and knowledge.
* Research suggests that “low achievers” (*sic*) require more structure and detailed instructions when in their learning environments (Tai, Sadler & Maltese, 2007)—which means that some students may need a little more help developing their topics than others, especially if they have never encountered student-centered learning before (Doyle, 2008). Some students may need your help in narrowing down their projects into more manageable options.
* The students’ and your expectations for the projects will determine how much time you want to allow for preparation and presentations. Although you will not know who will be presenting their projects in advance, you can set a specific amount of time aside for the completion of projects—this will give students a clearer idea about how grand to make the scope of their projects.
* All projects must be of similar perceived difficulty and appropriate for the English curriculum/program of studies—while still being learner-centered. Sometimes English teachers get so bogged down by the numerous types of literature and visual media they are required to teach that they don’t always have time to sit and ponder all the ways the goals of our various and extensive (in Canada) program of studies could be met. There is so much room for creativity! If the level of difficulty of a student’s project is too difficult or too easy in relation to the class objectives, work together to remove or add elements to the project without ruining its integrity.
* I suggest you keep notes on each student’s project, his/her goals, and each status update. Your students will appreciate the professionalism.
* If class sizes are so large that working with students one-on-one is prohibitive, or if students are new to the concept of designing their own projects and you would like to initiate them gently, there is the option of having students do their final projects in pairs or groups of three.

**Assessment.**

It has been suggested that when students choose to design their own projects their interest and sense of ownership in them increases (Kelley, Sumrall, & Sumrall, 2015), therefore the quality and type of constructive criticism you give them is extremely important. After the collaborating and the status updates you are going to have a strong sense about what parts of creating this project each student values most. Make sure to pay special attention to those parts and give feedback. That being said, there are the critiques your students will value and then there are the grades your English department/school board/parents/higher education/society most likely demands.

Assigning numerical grades must be done in a manner that is fair for all students and values the potential of each project equally. Any potential rubric should be brought up with the students and discussed. Depending on the types of projects being made you may need to adjust your assessment criteria (e.g. if all students are submitting written work of some sort, you may want to add grading for syntax, grammar, etc.). The following are factors that can be used to fairly assess all students at the same level.

* Effort—did the student use this project as an opportunity to learn? Was the time given used to work on the project? Did the student attempt to learn something new or gain a greater understanding of the subject matter?
* Attainment of goals—did the student attain the goal s/he set out to reach? If you use this factor to evaluate students work, make sure that the project goals are clearly set during your one-on-one collaborations. If it is necessary to revise the goals do this during your status updates.
* Effectiveness—how well did the student demonstrate his/her learning? Did the final project have the effect that was intended?
* You may also want to assess the students during their one-on-one collaborations and status updates. Factors to consider during these sessions may be preparedness, willingness to work with others, and effort.

**Some starter ideas.**

* The soundtrack is used to reinforce character in the first *PLL* television episode. Research music typical to a certain era or genre. Choose music from that era or genre to define each of the main characters. Submit your research and reasoning via an electronic document complete with audio files to support your argument.
* Are you a fan of Shakespeare? Take a chapter from a *PLL* book and rewrite it as a Shakespearean soliloquy—in iambic pentameter. Perform the soliloquy.
* Conduct a presentation on how high school life, as depicted in *PLL*, can be compared to court life in *Game of Thrones*.
* You think *PLL* is stupid? Excellent! Create a pitch for television producers about a new show that wouldn’t be “stupid.” Who would be the audience? What elements would it have? Are there other shows on the market like this?
* Create a piece of *PLL* fan fiction surrounding a dominant theme.
* Create a piece of fan fiction (the world is your oyster) surrounding a dominant *PLL* theme.
* Take the male perspective. Are there significant roles for men in the *PLL* books or television series? Present a 10-minute documentary on this topic.
* Even though the younger Hanna Marin had a “weight issue” her television counterpart doesn’t appear dramatically, if at all, overweight. Write a news editorial, using researched information and interviews, about teens and body image, and how books like *PLL* either educate people or exploit the issue.
* Create a small illustrated work that reimagines events in *PLL*.
* Design a board game that encapsulates the main themes at play in the first *PLL* book.
* Develop the perfect soundtrack for three different chapters in the book. Present one song per chapter with an accompanying piece of art to further reinforce the mood you are trying to project.
* Choreograph and present a piece that represents the tension Allison created in one of the main characters’ lives. Prepare a brief artist statement as well.
* Does *PLL* erode teen morality or reflect life as it is? Create a series of pamphlets or 30-second public service announcements stating your case.
* The television show and the books have many, many literary, cinematic, musical and artistic allusions. If some students are well-versed in the *PLL* world, they may want to read one of the alluded to books or watch one of the alluded to films and centre their projects on one of those.
* If you had to represent each character by a different fashion house’s clothing which house would it be and why? Create dossiers on each fashion house and the characters you are styling. Illustrate your answers with at least 10 pictures from each house’s collections.

**Conclusion**

Unlike a lot of friends I have made in the teaching profession, I was not a natural-born teacher. I didn’t like playing pretend school, and I certainly never thought I would ever become a teacher. I didn’t start my teaching degree until I was 27. I already had two other degrees and had been making a living writing magazine articles and editing. I was always taking courses and considering a third degree when I landed on teaching. At that time in my life this decision was prefaced more on my need to make use of all of the information I had stored in my brain, rather than any fond remembrances of my own education. It was almost as if my brain needed a cathartic release of knowledge so as not to explode. Sadly, the role potential students played in my becoming a teacher was absolutely nil. This isn’t easy for me to write—especially as someone finishing her MEd project. But it is important to remember this is where I started not where I am now.

As a child I was always quite mature in my reading choices. This had to do with being the youngest in a family of ravenous readers. I would basically just read whatever was lying around. I have clear memories of often being quizzed by my grade seven homeroom teacher during reading period about the books I chose to bring in for free reading. I remember, to my extreme consternation, that my reading Thomas Harris’ *Red Dragon—*which featured the first appearance of the coldest and coolest super villain of all time, Hannibal Lecter—caused him to flutter about in such an agitated manner that I was sure I was going to be sent to the principal’s office (where I certainly had never been before). Whereas reading William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride* elicited from him much encouragement and expressions of delight. At the time I just thought he was over sensitive or from a very strict religious sect. I never bothered to look around at what the other students were reading, I was too focused on my own amazing books.

High school English was not a problem for me. I loved having reading assigned for homework—I really thought it was a treat. I remember my friends not always getting their reading done and asking me to fill them in. I would and I wouldn’t give it a second thought. One thing I certainly don’t remember, though, is that there were different levels of English classes. I went to a very big school and I just thought everyone in the same grade took the same English class. And as for students being my age and not being able to read or write at grade level? I was sure cases like that were very rare and mainly occurred in the United States where, I had heard from *60 Minutes* and other American television programs of the same ilk, the education system could be frightful.

So, when I started my teaching degree these were some of the preconceptions I had about English students and teaching English: everyone loves a good story, so when assigned a good story (as ultimately determined by me), students will read it; students read what they are assigned; most people try to read during their down time; any students who have not developed proficient reading and writing skills are taught by special needs teachers; and most important, a job teaching English would involve having spirited discussions about literature.

Although my time in teacher education taught me about the different levels of English classes and the types of learners I would encounter, I think I still believed most students would be more like I was as a youth. Needless to say, getting out in the field and actually teaching was a big shock for me. Perhaps my most stunning failure occurred when I chose to teach the following novel and film to a lower-level high school English class: the book *Bad Boy* by Diana Wieler, about a hockey-playing teen who discovers his best friend is gay, and a Canadian art house film *The Hanging Garden*, about a gay man who returns home after running away 15 years earlier only to be haunted by memories of his life as an obese, abused teen. Not all teachers would object to these materials being taught nowadays but teaching them to a class composed mainly of boys 17 years ago was the perfect example of pushing one’s own liberal values and completely failing to read a classroom correctly. These students, who didn’t feel comfortable in an English classroom in the first place, were asked to read, view and talk about the topic of homosexuality—a subject much of society wasn’t even comfortable talking about 17 years ago. The only students that weren’t uncomfortable were the few girls in the class—which made the boys feel even worse.

It didn’t take me long to learn that I knew absolutely nothing about how most students experience English class—my own experience was abnormal and shouldn’t be expected of any student. So from that point on, I was on a mission to observe and adapt. Some great observations came from substitute teaching. It was during these times that I realized very few students actually did their assigned English reading. Students will tell a substitute teacher things they won’t tell their English teacher for fear of hurting his or her feelings. Students would tell me that they would skim the chapters if they were to have a test, or they would read the chapter synopses in Coles Notes or on various cheat sites like SparkNotes. The students would express a general distaste for the books they were studying, even the students who did say they read the whole books didn’t seem to like them. The majority of books that were being studied were canonical classics—which always gave me such a dreary sense of déjà vu. Dreary because they seemed so old fashioned and miserable when compared to these students who were interesting, funny and engaging. These books had the ability of stripping all the colour and life out of a classroom—no matter the grade or the level. Students would bend their heads over worksheets and plod on with their work as I was ironically reminded of some miserable Dickensian work house. Trying to discuss the books in any depth was almost impossible because the students really had no opinions about them. Whether they didn’t care or didn’t understand what was going on I was unsure, but I was sure there had to be some way of engaging the students that made them want to read and learn about the books they’ve read.

It wasn’t until I started teaching my own lower academic classes that I realized how much learning was affected by students’ heightened interest. It seemed the more I tailored a lesson to the interests of my students, the more effort they put into their assignments and the better their work. Lessons on the techniques horror movie directors use to evoke fear in their audience resulted in the best essays I ever received from one class. A lesson on how to debunk urban myths sent one class on a reading frenzy as they all tried to find the best (meaning worst) urban legend in an attempt to outdo their classmates. Reading and writing album reviews also offered a venue for students to enthusiastically show off their knowledge and practice their writing skills.

This isn’t to say that my failures were behind me. Some things worked better than others, but I was getting better at judging how to adapt my teaching practice so the students benefitted the most. Yet I was always hesitant to mess with the old formula of teaching classic novels to the students in the mainstream English classes. After all, these were the students who were most likely preparing for post-secondary school—wouldn’t they need to be familiar with reading and interpreting classics? But if they definitely weren’t reading them and were looking to the teacher to provide the answers was any real learning actually taking place?

After much studying and much pondering it is now my firm belief that students need to be engaged in the subject matter for learning to take place. Spending a big block of the school year doing a novel study about a book written for adults that students can’t relate to or formulate their own opinions on, isn’t teaching anyone anything of importance. There is so much evidence out there that supports the notion that YAL is the better alternative for reaching and teaching students, yet not enough teachers feel secure enough to use it in their own classrooms.

This project was created to show teachers the kinds of thoughtful lessons that can be developed around popular YAL. It even goes as far as to suggest that some very important lessons concerning identity development, fan culture and teen culture are best dissected through the lens of popular, current YAL. It is also supposed to act as a gentle urging for English teachers to consider letting students design their own final projects (whatever the unit may be).

People who love literature as ardently as most of us English teachers do tend to sentimentalize the classics. We grew up reading them, we studied them (often over and over again—first in high school and then in different university classes), we’ve had in-depth talks over them, we’ve made friends discussing them, we’ve decided not to make friends with people after discussing them, and we continue to return to them—basically these classic books have woven themselves into the fabric of our lives. But that is *our* lives. The lives of English teachers and academics. Just because they have meant so much in our lives does not mean they *have* to mean the same things to other people. We can’t *make* these books have relevance for today’s teens. That is not to say that there aren’t teens who will adore these classics—there are, and there always will be—but when it comes right down to it the study of canonical classics is actually quite esoteric.

There is no longer room for a proper classical education in today’s k-12 school system. What worked 50 or more years ago we no longer have time to indulge considering all the other scholastic requirements teachers must fulfil. If high school teachers do one novel study a year, is it of vital importance that novel be a classic? Will students somehow lose out if they don’t pretend to have read three or four Salinger, Steinbeck, Austen or Hemingway novels? Or is it more important they engage with literature in a manner that lets them formulate their own opinions, discuss themes that relate to modern life and adolescence, and explore the various media that produces and provides the content they consume? It’s simply time English teachers stop being sentimental and start being practical—for their students’ sakes.

**References**

Academy of American Poets. (2004, September 14). *Poetic form: Found poem*. Retrieved from: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/poetic-form-found-poem

Alberta Learning. (2004). *English language arts, grades 10-12: Alberta authorized resource list.* [Edmonton], Canada: Alberta Learning.

Alberta Learning. (2005). *English language arts, 10-1: Authorized novels and nonfiction annotated list.* [Edmonton], Canada: Alberta Learning.

Andrews, B. W. (2004). Musical contracts: Fostering student participation in the instructional process. *International Journal of Music Education, 22*(3), 219-229.

Applebee, A. N. (1989). *A study of book-length works taught in high school English courses. Report series 1.2.* Albany, NY: Center for the Learning & Teaching of Literature.

Auciello, J. (2003). Students and reading: A difficult balance. *English Quarterly, 35*(3/4), 7-10.

Bean, T. W., & Moni, K. (2003). Developing students' critical literacy: Exploring identity construction in young adult fiction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*(8), 638-648.

Berman, J. (2014, March 24). Did ‘Pretty Little Liars’ screw up its teacher-student love storyline? *Flavorwire*. Retrieved from http://flavorwire.com/446419/did-pretty-little-liars-screw-up-its-teacher-student-love-storyline

Berzonsky, M. D. (1995). Public self-presentations and self-conceptions: The moderating role of identity status. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 135*(6), 737-745.

Bontempo, B. T. (1995). Exploring prejudice in young adult literature through drama and role play. *ALAN Review 22*(3), 31-33.

Brackenbury, T. (2012). A qualitative examination of connections between learner-centered teaching and past significant learning experiences. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 12*(4), 12-28.

Butler-Kisber, L. (2002). Artful portrayals in qualitative inquiry: The road to found poetry and beyond. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 48*(3).

Campbell, P. (2010). *Campbell's scoop: Reflections on young adult literature*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Cavazos-Kottke, S. (2006). Five readers browsing: The reading interests of talented middle school boys. *The Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(2), 132-147.

Chua, S. P. (2008). The effects of the sustained silent reading program on cultivating students' habits and attitudes in reading books for leisure. *The Clearing House, 81*(4), 180-184.

Cone, J. K. (1994). Appearing acts: Creating readers in a high-school English class. *Harvard Educational Review, 64*(4), 450.

Doyle, T. (2008). *Helping students learn in a learner-centered environment: A guide to facilitating learning in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: Norton.

Fisher, D. (2004). Setting the "opportunity to read" standard: Resuscitating the SSR program in an urban high school. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48*(2), 138-150.

Friese, E. E. G. (2008). Popular culture in the school library: Enhancing literacies traditional and new. *School Libraries Worldwide, 14*(2), 68-82.

Gallo, D. R. (2001). How classics create an aliterate society. *English Journal, 90*(3), 33-39.

Guthrie, J. T., & Davis, M. H. (2003). Motivating struggling readers in middle school through an engagement model of classroom practice. *Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties, 19*(1), 59-85.

Horizon Scripted Television. (2014). We love you to deAth [Television series episode]. In N. Bordson (Executive producer), *Pretty Little Liars*. Worldwide: Warner Horizon Television.

Hudson, L. (2013, April 12). Rob Thomas on his $5M *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter and the future of fan-funded film. *Wired*. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/2013/04/rob-thomas-interview-veronica-mars-kickstarter/

Jun-Chae, Y. (2002). Three decades of sustained silent reading: A meta-analytic review of the effects of SSR on attitude toward reading. *Reading Improvement, 39*(4), 186-195.

Kelley, D. F., Sumrall, J. L., & Sumrall, J. B. (2015). Student-designed mapping project as part of a geology field camp. *Journal of Geoscience Education, 63*(3), 198-209.

Koss, M. D., & Teale, W. H. (2009). What's happening in YA literature? Trends in books for adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 52*(7), 563-572.

Lenters, K. (2006). Resistance, struggle, and the adolescent reader. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 50*(2), 136-146.

Love, K., & Hamston, J. (2003). Teenage boys' leisure reading dispositions: Juggling male youth culture and family cultural capital. *Educational Review, 55*(2), 161-177.

Mackey, M., Johnston, I., & Altmann, A. (1998). Curriculum decisions about literature in contemporary classrooms: A preliminary analysis of a survey of materials used in Edmonton grade 10 English courses. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 44*(2), 208.

Mackey, M., Vermeer, L., Storie, D., & DeBlois, E. (2012). The constancy of the school "canon": A survey of texts used in grade 10 English language arts in 2006 and 1996. *Language and Literacy, 14*(1), 26-n/a.

McCarthey, S. J., & Birr Moje, E. (2002). Identity matters. *Reading Research Quarterly, 37*(2), 228-238.

McKenna, M. C. (1995). Children's attitudes toward reading: A national survey. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(4).

McMillan, G. (2014, March 19). How *Veronica Mars* fans ruined the movie reboot for everyone else. *Wired*. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/2014/03/veronica-mars-fans/

Mead, R. (2009, October 19). The gossip mill. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/19/the-gossip-mill

Mech, S. [Soshi MECH]. (2013, July 23). *Veronica Mars movie Kickstarter in chronological order* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgLN0983nr0

Moje, E. B., & Luke, A. (2009). Literacy and identity: Examining the metaphors in history and contemporary research. *Reading Research Quarterly, 44*(4), 415-437.

Moje, E. B., Overby, M., Tysvaer, N., & Morris, K. (2008). The complex world of adolescent literacy: Myths, motivations, and mysteries. *Harvard Educational Review, 78*(1), 107-154, 278-280.

Park, J. Y. (2013). All the ways of reading literature: Preservice English teachers' perspectives on disciplinary literacy. *English Education, 45*(4), 361-384.

Pithouse-Morgan, K., Naicker, I., Chikoko, V., Pillay, D., Morojele, P., & Hlao, T. (2014). Entering an ambiguous space: Evoking polyvocality in educational research through collective poetic inquiry. *Perspectives in Education, 32*(4), 149-170.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of literary work* (2nd ed.). Southern Illinois, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Samuels, B. G. (1983). Young adult novels in the classroom? *English Journal, 72*(4), 86-88.

Santoli, S. P., & Wagner, M. E. (2004). Promoting young adult literature: The other "real" literature. *American Secondary Education, 33*(1), 65-75.

Sarigianides, S. T. (2012). Tensions in teaching adolescents: Analyzing resistances in young adult literature course. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56*(3), 222-230.

Shepard, S. (2006). *Pretty little liars*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Skeadas, K. A. (2008). *Why "school sucks": A qualitative study inside the mind of the middle schooler.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3316430)

Skerrett, A. (2010). Of literary import: A case of cross-national similarities in the secondary English curriculum in the United States and Canada. *Research in the Teaching of English, 45*(1), 36-58.

Strom, P., & Strom, R. (2012a). Growing up with social networks and online communities. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, 78*(1), 48-51.

Strom, P., & Strom, R. (2012b). The benefits and limitations of social networking. *The Education Digest, 78*(2), 53-56.

Strommen, L. T., & Mates, B. F. (2004). Learning to love reading: Interviews with older children and teens. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 48*(3), 188-200.

Tai, R. H., Sadler, P. M., & Maltese, A. V. (2007). A study of the association of autonomy and achievement on performance. *Science Educator, 16*(1), 22-28.

Talley, L. A. (2011). Young adult. In L. Paul & P. Nel (Eds.), *Keywords for Children's Literature* (228-232). New York, NY: NYU Press.

Travers, P. (2014, March 14). ‘*Veronica Mars*’ says ‘screw Hollywood.’ Give fans what they want [Video file]. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/videos/veronica-mars-says-screw-hollywood-gives-fans-what-they-want-20140313

TV by the Numbers. (2010, June 9). *Tuesday cable: Justified finale & Law & Order: CI flat, plus Deadliest Catch, The Hills, WWE NXT & more.* Retrieved from http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2010/06/09/tuesday-cable-justified-finale-law-orderci-flat-plus-deadliest-catch-the-hills-wwe-nxt-more/53637/

1. These documents are actually copyrighted under the name Alberta Learning because they were written before the institution changed its name. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)