

What Was Read Then, What Is Read Now

Compiled by Jana Fine

This past summer an interesting question was posed over the YALSA-BK electronic discussion list. Someone asked about what people read when they were in high school. In thinking about the Top Ten Teen Reads for 2004, it is interesting to see what was read then and what is read now.

Wow! I'm so old that there really wasn't much for young adult literature when I was a teenager. I was enthralled by Phyllis Whitney and Agatha Christie, but I have to admit, I found my share of prurient interest books as well. I can remember hiding *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* under my bed . . . and then there was this whole *Helter Skelter* fascination that I had.

I spent all of my free time at the public library, and in those days, there were picture books and adult books. Being a voracious reader, I read anything I could get my hands on, and I think I turned out okay.—**Lynn Evarts**, LEvarts@aol.com

I did read some YA when I was in high school, but I was also pretty anxious to move on to the "grown up" books. For YA, I liked Paula Danziger and Judy Blume's YA stuff and Barthe Declements (who was on the way to being dated then, and I'm sure would be waaay out of date now). There was some tacky series fiction in there, too, but I have blocked the titles from my memory. I read all the alienated youth fiction—*Catcher in the Rye*, *The Bell Jar*—and went through a big Oscar Wilde phase and a Southern literature phase (*Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Cold Sassy Tree*). I also liked *A Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *A Room with a View* by E. M. Forster, and Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles.—**Alison Ching**, aching@garlandisd.net

I was nuts about *Star Wars* (episodes four–six) and could quote extensive passages from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Frank Herbert's *Dune*. I spent one summer reading everything Ernest Hemingway had written (fiction and nonfiction) and reread James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* because I couldn't quite get it but knew it was incredibly moving and important to me. Kerouac's *On the Road* led me to the Beat movement and long afternoons of writing really bad poetry. As a theater geek, I read Chekhov and Shakespeare and got in trouble for using a Russian short story for my American lit class final. I read my aunt's gothic romances (loved Barbara Michaels!) and my mom's books on sociology and anthropology (Margaret Mead, *The Leakey Family*).

My eleventh-grade English teacher handed me a book that she thought I would like but apologized that the only copy she could give me had all the profanity blacked out with a magic marker. I told her I'd go home and ask my mom about it. A quick trip to the attic and my mom handed me her copy of *Catcher in the Rye* to read.

The only time I remember my mom being shocked at my reading was when she found a copy of Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* in my schoolbag. A friend had given it to me to read (I suspect to acclimate me to the fact that he was coming out of the closet). Back then it was so far over my head that I didn't complain when she asked me to stop reading it. But she never told me I couldn't read it; just explained that she would prefer I didn't.—**Melissa Bergin**, bergin.m@nisk.k12.ny.us

As a younger teen I read lots of Alistair MacLean and really liked the *The Guns of Navarone*. I also read lots of clas-

sics like *Old Yeller* and *Call of the Wild* and progressed into the James Bond novels by Ian Fleming.—**Rollie Welch**, RWelch@cpl.org

I absolutely loved Paula Danziger and Ellen Conford in my younger high school days and read the Judy Blume stuff, too. Mostly I read a lot of fluffy stuff: Sweet Valley High, Girls of Canby Hall, the 90210 novels, biographies of Mario Lopez and Jason Priestley. I guess if I ever would have asked the librarian, I may have found some better stuff.—**Beth Gaughan**, bethg2@yahoo.com

YA literature was just in its infancy when I was a teen, and I don't think my library had gotten behind the movement. So I didn't read much YA lit as a teen because I didn't have access to that much of it. Once I was allowed into the adult side of my childhood library (it was off limits, at least for check-out purposes, to those under thirteen), I was literally afraid of picking up an inappropriate book. Not so much because I was afraid for myself, but because I was scared as all get-out that the librarian would take one look at the book I handed her and say in loud, scandalized tones, "You can't read THIS!" So I looked for safe reads: Victoria Holt, Phyllis A. Whitney, Helen MacInnes, a series of books about a house in England beginning with "R" that I know others here would recognize if I could remember more about it. I think the raciest thing I read was Jean M. Auel's Clan of the Cave Bear books. (And yeah, there were a couple of pages I kept bookmarked!) And Mary Stewart. This reminds me that my elementary school librarian refused repeatedly to let me read (I don't think she even purchased it) *The First Four Years* by Laura Ingalls Wilder because it had too many sad

things happen in it!—Miriam Neiman, Neiman@glasct.org

Okay, I can't resist, even though it's from the Dark Ages. In high school I read all of H. G. Wells (although I was puzzled by the socialist stuff), all of the Sherlock Holmes stories two or three times, *The Sword in the Stone* by T. H. White, *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck, *Marjorie Morningstar*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, all of Dickens, *Green Mansions*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway, everything by Robert Benchley and James Thurber—and the Oz books.—Patty Campbell, Shorecam@aol.com

I can't remember if there was a YA section, but I was just having this conversation with a co-worker. I loved the Harlequin line of teen romances (remember those?!), but I also devoured classics like *Jane Eyre*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huck Finn* (by my own choice—not school related). I remember getting introduced to Sidney Sheldon by a friend in eleventh grade (*Master of the Game* is still one of my favorites). Of course, Judy Blume, Paula Danziger, and Francine Pascal (before the SV series, I LOVED *Hangin' Out with Cici*) were among my favorites, too.—Kris Buker, bukerk@hclibrary.org

I read Anne McCaffrey starting when I was fourteen—that was when *Dragonflight* first came out. My best friend had been subscribing to *Analog* (science fiction magazine) for several years, and she brought over the issue with a Pern story (the first ever published) and made me read it right then—while she waited. It blew me away, and when I found the paperback in the Base Exchange, I ran home for my money (half a mile) and ran back to buy it. I bought the next books as soon as they came out and I could find them, and I read them over and over again all through high school and into college.—Kat Kan, teenlibn@hotmail.com

I don't really remember reading any YA in high school other than *The Pigman* (read for school) and *A Separate Peace*. I would read almost anything that my big

sister (eight years older) said was good. That's how I ended up reading *Lonesome Dove* in ninth grade and reading *Watership Down* about five times by the time I was a senior. My big favorites were Stephen King, Piers Anthony, and Robert A. Heinlein.—Sarajo Wentling, tater-toes1@yahoo.com

First I have to admit, I didn't read much in high school (1985–1989) after I was FORCED to read *Great Expectations* in ninth grade. I figured if that was the kind of reading I was going to have to do, I didn't want any part of it! I used to buy romances at the grocery store. 1980s romances were plentiful for teenage girls. I didn't go to the library much, and we were not encouraged to check out books from the school library. My guess is there wasn't much there I'd want anyway. I'd love to go back and look it over now.

Oddly enough I read a lot of biographies: Albert Einstein, Terry Bradshaw (I don't know why), Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Jefferson, Emily Dickenson . . . and an odd assortment of people who had nothing to do with each other. I still love biographies and biographical shows. If someone had been giving me the books I give to kids now, I would have been the happiest teenager alive!—Jessica Mize, jmize@westervillelibrary.org

My whole family read Anne McCaffrey constantly. My dad used to read *Dragonflight* out loud to me, but he would attempt to edit out the naughtiness (“And then F’lar gave Lessa a big kiss . . . um . . . because he was very happy.”) My older brothers found the Pern books in their elementary school library, where someone had donated them. They brought them home, and the whole family got hooked. One day the guy who cleaned our house saw one of the books lying around and told my parents, shocked, that those books had S-E-X in them!

Mercedes Lackey is a name that conjures high school memories. Her books were almost a cult for me and my friends for that brief, fabulous period in high school where Mercedes Lackey is exactly what you need. I can't look back

on that period without a certain embarrassment though. Yes, we gave people feathers. (Sigh.)

High school wasn't too long ago for me, and there must have been lots of good YA fiction around, but my high school library had almost nothing, and the public libraries I went to didn't really have anything for YA. I read my children's book faves over and over again along with a smorgasbord of literary fiction and things I pulled off the shelf at random. Towards the end of high school a friend introduced me to Francesca Lia Block—another author who attained cult status in my social circle. I wish we could have had Laurie Halse Anderson, David Levithan, Rob Thomas, Stephen Chbosky, and Sonya Sones when I was in high school.—Jen Webb, JWebb@minlib.net

I was blessed as a teen to be in a city that had excellent teen services, with a YA librarian at most every branch with desk hours in the YA area each day after school. Then every other Saturday we had YAAC (Young Adult Advisory Committee) from 9 A.M. to noon, where we shared and reviewed preview copies, and generally ranted about what we were reading. It was a great environment to develop in as a reader. I joined in eighth grade and stayed in all through high school. While some readers did favor classics or adult science fiction titles, a large amount of the books shared were YA. We even had our own YA book award, the Golden Pen, which featured one author a year, and different genre books we considered tops. I was delighted to find a few copies of this when I took up residence at my current branch (across the state and years).

Things to read that I recall particularly fondly from my teen years include: Piers Anthony's Xanth books (although I got sick of bad puns and sexist jokes after about nine books) and his *Incarnations of Immortality*, M. E. Kerr, the graphic novel *When the Wind Blows* by Raymond Briggs and any other post-nuclear holocaust books I could get my hands on, Judy Blume, *The Little Girl Who Lived Down the Lane* (an extremely creepy book recommended for my young morbid tastes),

Edward Gorey, *The Weekly World News* (I have this in my TeenZone to promote both humor and skepticism), and of course, *The Princess Bride*.—**Dawn Rutherford**, drutherf@kcls.org

What I read: um, oh jeepers . . . the *Dear Abby* book my parents had from the sixties or something with wacky cartoons, Tolkien, the Narnia books, the *World's Best Fantasy and Science Fiction* compilations, Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, lots of Andre Norton (spent first through ninth grades in Winter Park, Florida, not far from where she lived, so our library had a LOT of her stuff!), Pern series (I liked the Harper Hall Trilogy much better, but read *Dragonriders* anyway), Jean M. Auel, Victoria Holt/Jean Plaidy, Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, The Brontës, Austen, Shakespeare, dark Irish playwrights (my parents had a collection), had a mad pash for Eugene O'Neill for a while (*A Moon for the Misbegotten*), ditto Dylan Thomas (*Under Milk Wood*), *Masters' Spoon River Anthology*, Whitman, Dickinson, various anthologized modern poets, adored the Dicey's Song/Homecoming series, thought the world of *Watership Down*, stayed up way too late with Leon Garfield (*The Sound of Coaches*, I think, was one long night with the night-light), *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, all the Pollyanna books (and others of that era—and would have loved *A Girl of the Limberlost* but only just discovered that recently), Helen Cresswell (*Bongleweed* and *Bagthorpes*), Joan Aiken (even adult stuff, including horror/thriller and continuations of classics—didn't she do an Emma sequel?), *Bridge to Terabithia*, and many others I can't remember now. The book I hated most was *Rumble Fish*. I bought it, read it, and practically threw it into the next book swap sale at school.

The only book I remember my parents suggesting I hold off on for a while (and then quietly removing to their bedroom) was *The Thorn Birds*. So, of course, I snuck in and tried it way too young, and couldn't see why anyone would bother, such heavy, dull stuff!—**Melissa Running**, mrunning@mathforum.org

I read everything. I loved King and Rice most of all as well as classics. Twain

was probably my favorite around that time in my life. Joyal Pittman was the children's librarian—and my childhood hero, and she introduced me to so many fabulous books. She'd often tell me when new YA books came in and keep them behind the desk for me. I must admit, though, that I had this strange obsession with Choose Your Own Adventure (and, to a lesser degree, because they were never as good, the clones of them) books.—**Barb Huff**, fbahuff@adelphia.net

Some young adult literature, including Paul Zindel and M. E. Kerr, in middle school, but mostly Danielle Steel (cringe) and Agatha Christie. In high school, we were mostly reading *Flowers in the Attic* and its sequels, and Mary Higgins Clark. I was a theater person (Nerd!), so I also read a lot of plays, with Tennessee Williams and Shakespeare being my favorites. They gave me ability for dialogue and a taste for pathos.—**Alexandra Flinn**, Alexwrites@aol.com

We passed around copies of *Rosemary's Baby* and *Valley of the Dolls*. I, of course, got caught by a friend's mom with *Valley of the Dolls* and was told I was a bad influence on her daughter! Read Michener's *Hawaii* at least twice between seventh and twelfth grade. Loved Shakespeare's poetry and used some of it for Forensics. Loved *Gone with the Wind* and read everything Mary Stewart ever wrote. Also devoured the *Enquirer* and other rags my mom would get from one of the relatives. I always snagged her copy of *True Story* when she was done with it. We also got the *Grit* newspaper at home, and I read that along with the local town newspaper. Got caught up in the *Dark Shadows* soap opera and then bought all of the paperbacks that went along with it. I read pretty much whatever I could get my hands on!—**Ruth Cox Clark**, ruthellen1201@yahoo.com

My library did have a young adult section. I saw the sign in the distance when I was a teen (back in the late sixties) and figured young adults were people in their twenties. I NEVER investigated that area of about six shelves

and never knew what young adult fiction was until library school. I NEVER considered asking a librarian for help at the public library—never thought that was a possibility. As for my reading, I was fortunate to have two parents who read—my father read SF and so I was introduced to Heinlein and the Lensman series by E. E. "Doc" Smith. Those were great space operas! I inherited my father's collection when he died. At his funeral, I read the last page from *Earth Abides* by George Stewart. It was a book we both read and discussed—my first book where the hero dies at the end and I was shocked and upset. My father told me that the hero had had a long and full life, and it was his time. It was a comfort to remember that when he died within a week of being diagnosed with cancer. I found Andre Norton on my own, along with Mary Stewart and Victoria Holt. My mother's taste ran to mysteries and I read A. A. Fair and Erle Stanley Gardner titles, plus others. To this day, my personal library concentrates on romance, mystery, and SF/fantasy.—**Jill Patterson**, jkpatterson@ocpl.org

Here's what I can remember: *Travels with Charley* (I found it on my brother's bookshelf and thought I should read it. Even though I found it incredibly dry, I plowed through it anyway!), Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy, *The Godfather* (there was a great sex scene, the page number of which I had memorized!), books by Carlos Castaneda, Kurt Vonnegut, Agatha Christie, Langston Hughes's poetry and short stories, *Native Son*, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Sammy Davis's autobiography *Yes I Can* (after which I met him, he was rude to me, and I was totally disillusioned), *Soul on Ice*, *Go Ask Alice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Gone with the Wind* (read this one at summer camp between sixth and seventh grades as it was on a recommended reading list, and I was looking for the fattest books on the list), the Narnia books repeatedly, and *Johnny Tremain* repeatedly. I don't remember there being a YA section in my library either. I do remember getting in trouble in fifth grade for doing a book report on a book that my teacher found scandalous that had been given to me by

my great aunt and was about a girl that was almost date raped. This was probably a teen book but I have no idea of the title.—**Betsy Levine**, blevine@sfpl.org

By high school, I was sneaking down to the mall thirty minutes away from my small Texas town to secretly purchase gay romance fiction by Gordon Merrick. These were similar to Deveraux, Sandra Brown, and others for women—all books my mother brought home and I read before she did while I was in junior high. Teens are lucky these days to have excellent YA fiction that may deal with or address gay characters. Even though I was reading these books and enjoying them in high school, I still did not come out and feel it was acceptable until well after college.

I also remember *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Beowulf* in high school, but I really loved reading them. I still remember the junior high librarian calling home and asking my mother if I could read the novel *Jaws*. A teacher had read it and found it inappropriate for the junior high school library. The librarian wanted my opinion. Oh, the Kent Family Chronicles—I forgot those. My sister, a year and a half younger, and my mother and I fought over those.—**Ty Burns**, TY.BURNS@cfisd.net

Like many current librarians, I worked as a page in high school and had easy access to all sorts of stuff, but I limited myself to reading Danielle Steel and dozens of those “bodice-busters” about sexy pirates and their unwilling brides. I also read some YA—Ellen Conford was a favorite and so was Paul Zindel and Judy Blume (I read her non-YA book *Wifey* nine times, however).

Mostly I wanted to read anything that had some sex in it—and my parents, bless their hearts, never said a word. I thank them for letting me read, read, read. I think reading whatever I felt like and not having “classics” foisted on me while I was younger taught me to love, love, love books. In college, I started reading more literary stuff.—**Cathy Belben**, CBelben@be.wednet.edu

The summer I was going into tenth grade, my camp mates left me in a “last

What Is Read Now . . .

So what are teens reading these days? YALSA asked teens to vote for their favorite book. The vote took place during Teen Read Week, October 17–23, 2004, and gave teens an opportunity to voice their choice of the best new young adult books.

Teens' Top Ten (TTT) is a part of YALSA's YA Galley Project, which facilitates access to advance copies of young adult books to national teen voting groups. Five teen voting groups, appointed by YALSA's YA Galley Committee as official Teens' Top Ten readers, evaluated books that were published from November 2003 to October 2004, and created a list of forty-four nominations for the best new books for young adults. Teen voters across the country then cast ballots for their three favorites, creating 2004 Teens' Top Ten booklist of the best new books for young adults.

Teens were encouraged to vote for their favorite young adult books during Teen Read Week, from the official nomination list posted online at the Teens' Top Ten site. More than two thousand online ballots were cast and the results, combined with the results of a separate vote of the TTT groups, determined the final ranking of the top ten books of the year, as selected by teen readers.

With the fifth Harry Potter novel topping the list, the 2004 TTT includes:

1. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 2003) Fantasy.
2. *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini (Knopf, 2003) Fantasy.
3. *Pirates!* by Celia Rees (Bloomsbury, 2003) Historical Fiction.
4. *Trickster's Choice* by Tamora Pierce (Random House, 2003) Fantasy.
5. *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke (Chicken House/Scholastic, 2003) Fantasy.
6. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* by Libba Bray (Delacorte, 2004) Supernatural.
7. *The Goose Girl* by Shannon Hale (Bloomsbury, 2003) Fantasy.
8. *Princess in Pink* by Meg Cabot (HarperCollins, 2004) Realistic.
9. *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* by Carolyn Mackler (Candlewick, 2003) Realistic.
10. *Curse of the Blue Tattoo* by L.A. Meyer (Harcourt, 2004) Historical Fiction.

For more information, visit www.ala.org/teenstopten.

will and testament” a Danielle Steel novel, because that’s all I was reading. On the other hand, I only discovered Ann Rinaldi as a junior and continued to devour her books in my junior and senior year. So I fluctuated a lot between YA and adult books.—**Esther Lewenstein**, famous99@verizon.net or elewens@nycboe.net

I vividly remember reading various series books by V. C. Andrews. Having read *Flowers in the Attic* was an instant step up the social ladder. The strange part: I borrowed the books from my grandmother! I read everything I could find by Paul Zindel and M. E. Kerr on the YA shelves at our public library (and from the second-hand book store). From them, I learned about drugs and abortion and AIDS and Nazi war criminals and all

kinds of other things that shocked me (and kept me reading).

In tenth grade, I read a lot of Jude Deveraux romance novels. The girl who sat behind me in geometry class owned every one of them and would bring them in for me to read! I still have a fond place in my heart for *A Knight in Shining Armor*.

Later in high school, I moved on to adult fiction authors, like John Steinbeck and Edward Rutherford, who remain two of my favorite writers. I remember actually voluntarily going in to the dank, sunless high school library to check these out.—**Gretchen Ipock**, grrllibrarian@yahoo.com ●

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