

Stuck in Adultus

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to complete the first 30 pages of a middle-grade novel, *Stuck in Adultus*, in addition to a critical introduction. Broadly, I will look at the question: What does it mean to grow up in middle-grade literature? In the critical introduction, I will focus specifically on how several middle grade novels approach the increased agency that comes with growing up and use these to analyze how agency is depicted in middle-grade novels as a whole.

In my novel, three children – Jessie, Vivian, and Noah – find a portal to a world called Adultus where everyone is adults and there are no children. At first, Jessie, Vivian, and Noah think it is fun to have all the freedom to do as they please. Then they find out they're stuck in Adultus and must learn to grow up and live as adults until they can find a way to get back home. I will use my findings in the critical introduction to inform how I write my novel and how I depict the decisions the characters will have to face.

Project Importance: Children and teenagers face the challenges of growing up every day. They live in a world where certain things are expected of them, some of which they can learn in principle while others they can only learn through trial and error. Many youth find solace in reading stories about children and teenagers like them who are facing similar challenges. Teenagers tend to carry with them the stereotype that they just want to rebel against all authority and find their own ways through the process of growing up. Yet, society seems to believe they learn much from characters and situations in the books they read, so authors use their novels to share their own ideas of growing up and how they feel teenagers can be successful at doing so. Many parents also encourage their children to read certain novels, hoping their children will learn something and hopefully become better people in doing so. Certain books are often banned

from schools or libraries for teaching the wrong kind of message, which implies that other books must teach the right kind of message. I will be using a youth-lens to look at how the theme of growing up shows up in middle-grade literature and how the authors of these novels address this ever-important theme. I will also be looking at critical theories about young adult literature since they are generic enough to apply to middle-grade novels as well. I will use these theories to analyze whether or how various societal expectations influence how authors write about their characters. I will use my findings within my own novel as I strive to write characters who are relatable to my intended middle-grade audience and who portray the aspects of growing up that I've chosen to focus on.

Project Overview: I have already gathered a few secondary sources about the theme of growing up in young adult literature. I have read about the youth-lens, which is a critical theory based on young adults and which applies equally to middle-grade novels. In “The *Youth Lens: Analyzing Adolescence/ts in Literary Texts*”, the author state that there are two specific questions which are critical to looking at texts through a youth lens. These are: How does the text represent adolescence/ts, and what role does the text play in reinforcing and/or subverting dominant ideas about adolescence? I will ask these two questions and use this article in addition to other sources as I read some of the most popular middle-grade novels to discover how different authors face the idea of increased agency while growing up. I will look for any consistencies between novels as well as any inconsistencies as I ask these two questions. I will look at how these different novels all play a role in the current conversation and then use my findings and ask these same two questions as I write my own novel. I will look at how my own novel either continues with or goes against the ideas in other novels about how young adults should deal with their increased

agency and use the youth lens as I strive to write as if through the young adults' eyes rather than through the eyes of an adult as so many young adult and middle-grade novels tend to do.

In order to find the most popular novels, I have asked several librarians for the most checked out middle-grade novels in order to find out what older children and teenagers are reading today. I went through these lists and found grade and age levels associated with each book as I strove to select books which would be aimed at middle-grade readers around the age I will be writing for with my own novel. I then selected ten novels which were more popular and likely to include the theme of agency while growing up to ensure their relevancy to my topic. While many of these books were published many years ago, they are still being widely read today, which could mean that their content was suited to the audience and is being widely accepted. I also made sure to include a variety of styles of novels to include ones that would be read more by girls, boys, or both. I did not, however, include graphic novels, or heavily illustrated novels, as these such novels portray their messages more with images, and I wish to look more at how the words portray any message.

To ensure my novel is well-written, I will have many people read my writing as I go, and I will ask for feedback in order to see how other people see my writing and how it would be received. I will also be attending the young adult novelist conference held at BYU where I will learn more about the generics of writing a novel and where I will have one-on-one sessions with a creative writing graduate student.

I hope to contribute to the implicit conversations that are found in middle-grade novels, specifically the conversations of growing up and the agency involved in growing up in these novels. Through this thesis, I will show that I am aware of the current conversations and that I have thought critically about them. I will use this knowledge to ensure that my own work is

relevant and adds to the conversations of published authors and especially to the youth of today, my intended audience.

Sources:

“History and Meaning of Sunflowers”. ProFlowers, <https://www.proflowers.com/blog/history-and-meaning-of-sunflowers#>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

Cart, Michael. “The Value of Young Adult Literature”. Young Adult Library Services Association, <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

Klein, Hugh. “Adolescence, Youth, and Young Adulthood: Rethinking Current Conceptualizations of Life Stage.” *Youth and Society*, Vo. 21, no. 4, 1990, pp. 446-71.

Lesko, Nancy. “Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations.” *Youth and Society*, Vol. 28, no. 2, 1996, pp. 139-61.

Petrone, Robert, Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, and Mark A. Lewis. “The *Youth Lens*: Analyzing Adolescence/ts in Literary Texts.” *Journal of Literacy Research*, Vol. 46, no. 4, 2015, pp. 506-33.

Pratt, Non. “No taboo should be off limits when writing for teenagers”. The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/jan/05/censorship-taboos-limits-teen-ya-books>. Accessed 16 March 2018.

Roxburgh, Stephen. “The Art of the Young Adult Novel.” *The ALAN Review*, 2005, pp. 4-10.

Books I will be reading:

Cass, Kiera. *The Selection*. New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2012.

America Singer wanted nothing to do with the Selection in the first place, but when she is selected to be one of the girls vying for Prince Maxon's love, she must decide what she truly wants and who she truly wants. This novel goes follows America as she makes decisions which will alter her life forever.

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

When children reach the age of 16 in this society, they must decide which faction to join. Beatrice faces a hard decision, but ultimately decides to join the dauntless faction, those who value bravery. This novel follows Beatrice, newly named Tris, as she makes decisions both good and bad which will help hide her dangerous secret and help improve her society.

Boyne, John. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. New York, David Fickling Books, 2006.

When Bruno moves to a new home with no friends, he decides to become the explorer he's always longed to be. Eventually he discovers a new friend who lives in very different circumstances. Bruno must learn to make hard decisions as he gets to learn more about his new friend and the circumstances surrounding him.

Lewis, Gill. *One White Dolphin*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2012

Kara loves the ocean and finds solace in it. One day, she finds an albino dolphin washed ashore and trapped in a net. This novel follows her and her unlikely friend, Felix, as they try to save the dolphin and reunite it with its mother. They must make decisions which will not only affect them but the dolphin as well.

Hesse, Monica. *Girl in the Blue Coat*. New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2016.

Hanneke deals in the black market, searching for and delivering hard to find objects.

When she gets an odd request, however, she must make a difficult decision. Should she take on this dangerous job? As the novel progresses, Hanneke must continue making difficult situations as she learns more about the Nazis and those who resist them.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Among the Hidden*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Luke is a third child, something that's forbidden. He must live his life in the shadows and pretend not to exist. When he learns of the existence of another 'shadow child', he must decide if he's willing to risk giving away his own. This novel follows Luke's decisions as he learns more about the other 'shadow children' and what he can do to help them come out of the shadows.

Rundell, Katherine. *The Wolf Wilder*. New York, Bloomsbury Children's, 2015.

Feodora is a wolf wilder in training. She's learning to help domesticated animals relearn how to live in the wild and fend for themselves. When she's threatened by the hostility of the Russian Army, she must run for her life. She must make important decisions throughout the novel in order to survive and learns the importance of standing up for things she loves and of fighting back.

Evans, Richard Paul. *Michael Vey: The Prisoner of cell 25*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Michael Vey is a fourteen-year old with Tourette's syndrome. Few know, however, that he also has electrical powers. When he discovers another student in school who has the same powers, he must work together with her and his friend to discover why they have this power. A powerful group soon discovers them and wishes to control them. Michael and his friends must learn to work together to survive.

Nix, Garth. *Mister Monday*. New York, Scholastic Press, 2003

Arthur Penhaligon has an interesting start at his new school when a man named Mister Monday gives him a magical clock hand but then orders his gang to get it back from Arthur. When Arthur discovers a deadly virus is spreading around town, he decides to enter a strange house to stop it. He soon learns that he is the heir to the house but must get the other part of the clock hand to stop Mister Monday. He faces many challenges as he makes decisions and faces enemies.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York, Scholastic Press 2008

Katniss doubted she would be selected to compete in the hunger games let alone her younger sister, Primrose, who had even less of a chance. When Prim gets selected, however, Katniss is thrown into a whirlwind of dangerous decisions often of life or death, starting with her decision to volunteer in tribute in place of her sister. This novel follows Katniss as she tries to make decisions which would allow her to survive the hunger games all while trying to keep those she cares about safe.

Thesis Committee:

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jon Ostenson is an English professor at BYU. He has a doctorate in Teaching and Learning and is interested in adolescent literature. He was recommended to me as an advisor by Dr. Chris Crowe. Dr. Ostenson is an avid reader of young adult literature and has much knowledge on the subject. He has taught courses on young adult literature and has published pieces on young adult literature and the ways it is used to communicate expectations and ideals about adolescence and adulthood.

Faculty Reader: Dr. Dawaan Coombs was also recommended to me by Dr. Crowe. She is an English Professor at BYU and an avid reader and student of young adult literature. Dr. Coombs teaches young adult literature classes for GE students as well as children's and young adult literature classes for the CITES program for practicing teachers. Formerly, she taught high school English and reading. She also conducts research and publishes articles about the use of young adult literature in the classroom.

Honors Coordinator: Dr. John Talbot

Project Timeline:

June: Submit Thesis Proposal

June-September: Work on and edit bulk of thesis

July 15: have half the books read and analyzed, 20 pages of novel written

September 1: have all the books read and analyzed, 30 pages of novel written

September 15: Complete 1st rough draft

October 4: Second rough draft

October 2019: Submit Preliminary Draft of Thesis

January 2020: Submit Defensible Draft

February 2020: Thesis Defense