

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping, textured shapes in shades of green, purple, teal, and yellow. In the center, an open book with glowing white pages sits on a dark wooden surface. From the pages, a stream of white, ribbon-like shapes rises, resembling birds in flight or falling leaves, set against a dark, starry background. The title is centered in a white serif font within a semi-transparent dark rectangular box.

Teaching YA Lit

through Differentiated Instruction

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Foreword

ALAN SITOMER, *California's Teacher of the Year, 2007*

Wow, do I agree with—and *love*—the central premise of this book! To me, it's a no-brainer. Young adult literature needs to be, as the authors boldly claim, "at the *heart* of the English curriculum."

Truly, if I have achieved any success at all in the English classroom as a teacher of teens, it is due to YA lit. (Of this I have no doubt.) There are a few prominent reasons why.

First off, the core curriculum English standards are not text specific. Essentially, this means that our academic objectives as laid out by all the big kahunas at the state and national level do not mandate the teaching of any particular book or text. Therefore, whether I am using Jane Austen, the Holt Reinhart textbook, or Walter Dean Myers in the classroom is of no direct import; what matters is whether I am teaching my students core academic English content-area standards such as figurative language, theme, tone, and so on.

But if you don't think that there's a difference to the wi-fi, hip-hop teen of today when it comes to book selection, you probably don't know the difference between a text message and a telegram. (Or, to get all pun-ny, you're probably living in the Twilight of a Brave Old World.)

See, using contemporary YA lit empowers teachers such as myself to tap into the great power lying within modern-day books. It also recognizes something spectacularly self-evident about today's classroom world: teens today are reading almost in spite of school, not because of it.

Ouch, I know. The truth hurts.

And in a way, I gotta say, who can blame them? I mean, the language arts textbooks are so watered down, so flavorless, so oversized, overweight, and overpriced that it's the rare teens indeed who will buy into the idea that there is absolutely something riveting on page 1127 of the _____ Language Arts Textbook. (You fill in the blank; they are all pretty much egregiously equal in pandering to a one-size-fits all mentality.)

Yet almost every English classroom in America is outfitted with these anthological monstrosities as if they are “the great answer,” the holy “we must buy this product” solution to all the challenges of improving modern-day student achievement and literacy.

Hogwash. Kids love real books. They love the variety of authors, they love the variety of titles, and they love the variety of subject areas about which today’s YA novelists are writing. Young adult literature has literally exploded this decade . . . and there are no signs of it slowing down. Talk to any publishing executives in the book industry right now, and they will tell you that there is no area hotter than YA literature—and no area poised for more growth over the course of the next decade as well.

And yet, schools, as usual, are the last to recognize and adapt accordingly. I mean, I have heard stories that you would not believe. Stories about how some school districts are even banning the use of novels all together. That’s right, they are banning the use of real books in English classrooms. (You just can’t make this up.) And why is that?

Because essentially, people who do not work with real kids day in and day out do not understand how real kids work. Today’s students love real books. Therefore, as an English teacher, should I not be providing these for them in order to better achieve my educational aspirations?

Don’t answer—it’s a rhetorical question.

Textbooks are oh-so-twentieth century. The classics, I love them; and when students have the capacity to navigate some of history’s most sophisticated and thoughtful texts, they often take great joy from reading these as well. (Trust me, I love the canon, and this book respects its role in the spectrum of the modern-day English classroom—yet that role is no longer exclusive.) However, real books—with real stories, real journeys, and real adventures—are what teens want and are where the world is headed.

Plus, you know what? All the best teachers I know use real books in their classrooms. All of ‘em! Almost each and every excellent English teacher I know uses some form of YA lit in their classroom today. Care to guess why?

Well, the text you are about to read will tell you why. It provides the research. It provides the data. It also provides anecdotes, stories, and the strong, confident voice of two literacy experts who certainly make a case that I find to be almost irrefutable. From “how to choose the right books” to addressing “what teachers can do with young adult novels in whole class instruction,” this text you are about to read is rich with ideas and insight.

We must bring YA literature into the classroom. By the time you finish *Teaching YA Lit through Differentiated Instruction*, you will certainly see why.

Happy reading!

Introduction

Why We're Fans of Young Adult Literature

Susan's Story

Most people don't believe me when I say I was a C-/borderline D student in my high school English classes. I was an angry, bitter teen—my parents divorced when I was in middle school, my mom later remarried, and I didn't like my new stepfather. As a result, I ran away from home my sophomore year and showed up on my dad's doorstep (his new girlfriend was not amused).

In the eleventh-grade high school English class at my new high school, I just couldn't get motivated to read and discuss "Young Goodman Brown" or *The Scarlet Letter*. My teacher made frequent phone calls home, telling Dad about incomplete work and suspicious absences. He was confused: at home, I read all the time, anything I could get my hands on, from V. C. Andrews's gothic novels, to biographies on Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, to Dad's banjo magazines. I was different at school, though. I didn't feel connected to anything there, especially the teachers who didn't seem interested in getting to know me. They thought I was "too quiet," said I needed to "participate more in class." I perceived this to mean I was dumb—I must be, right? To not like (or "get") the literature I was supposed to appreciate in high school—despite the fact that my world had been turned upside down and I was pissed off!

By twelfth grade, I was just coasting through with Cs, making more effort to at least look attentive during lectures on *Beowulf* and Chaucer (Dad's warnings heeded). By sheer luck (and good grades in a summer art program in New York), I got into a local college and floundered around as "Undecided" until I got excited about a creative writing class in the English department. The writing professor told me I had talent (me?), and that one day he would "see [me] in print." I didn't feel so stupid in this class, and I went on to take other English classes and excelled in those, too. I finally decided to major in English and became an A student, wondering what my eleventh-grade English teacher would think of that.

(I sometimes dream about showing up on her doorstep, singing Toby Keith’s “How Do You Like Me Now?”)

Toward the end of my undergraduate career, as most English majors do, I began thinking about what I would do with an English major after college. I began to think about teaching, wondered if I could do things a little differently than my own English teachers had done. I took a few general education courses and, once hooked, enrolled in a teaching program at the college. There I took an English methods course and read my first young adult novel, Mildred Taylor’s (1976) *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Then I read another, and another, and wondered why I’d never heard of the genre before.

I wondered why my own teachers hadn’t used young adult literature in high school—it featured teenagers, dealing with life on their own terms as best they could. It honored teens’ lives and their experiences, showed teens as capable, smart, and multidimensional. I thought maybe if my eleventh- and twelfth-grade teachers had used young adult literature, my own experience during those two years—both in and out of the classroom—might have been better. One thing I did know: when I got the chance, I would use young adult literature to make connections with students, to find out about them—not overlook them—and make them feel important and listened to in my classroom.

Over the course of my fifteen-year teaching career, I have made many connections with students through young adult literature. There was Latanya, my first African American student, who I connected with through Rita Williams-Garcia’s (1998) *Like Sisters on the Homefront*. In another classroom, in another time and place, I made another connection with Brett, an angry teen who wrote about drug use in his journal, with Melvin Burgess’s (1999) *Smack* and *Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous, 1972). In a college young adult literature course, I made a connection with a lesbian student who had come out in high school through such novels as M. E. Kerr’s (1995) *Deliver Us from Evie* and Nancy Garden’s (1992) *Annie on My Mind*. This student became a teacher, and we keep in touch to this day.

As a teacher, I knew these connections were important and necessary if I was to engage these students in class. Only when the students felt their lives and voices mattered did they begin to notice and listen to me. In this way, young adult literature can be a powerful, motivational tool in the English classroom.

Lisa’s Story

My story parallels Susan’s somewhat: most people would be shocked to connect me, the “professor,” with me, the suicidal (yet 4.0 GPA) teenager who later

became a lackluster English education student, then finally gained confidence to enter the profession after my master's thesis adviser told me I was indeed a good teacher. (See what the encouragement from just one conscientious teacher can do?)

While I taught high school English for six years, and struggled to engage students with canonical works (the only books in the book room), it is a recent return to the classroom that exemplifies why I continue to be a fan of young adult literature. From January through May of 2010, I returned to a ninth-grade high school English classroom to co-teach with two interns and the classroom teacher. My goal in returning to the secondary classroom was threefold: to get a better sense of teaching in today's "test-crazed" climate in order to improve how I prepare English teachers; to go beyond the one intern/one teacher model, especially in "struggling" schools; and to provide a classroom teacher with three more sets of hands and eyes. Going into the project, I left my rose-colored glasses at home. I had returned once before to the high school classroom, in 2004, and had been a high school English teacher as recently as 2002. However, all of my past classroom experiences did not prepare me for some of the hurdles I would face, including the intense, tunnel vision focus on test preparation and the lack of resources necessary to teach equitably (books, technology, unlimited photocopies, etc.). Nonetheless, one key pedagogical tenet became a thread throughout the semester-long project: listening to students and using students' backgrounds and interests to engage them with the curriculum was absolutely necessary to fostering positive attitudes toward reading.

During my first week in the classroom, two male students refused to select library books and read during independent reading time. I realized this would be the tipping point for the rest of the semester. How I handled this situation would set the tone for the remaining time I was there. Rather than force the students to read something from the library, allow them to do nothing, or send them out of the room, I engaged them in one-on-one conversations. It took some prodding, but I managed to learn that one of the students liked to write rap lyrics. I was almost certain that if I brought in Tupac Shakur's (2009) *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* I would score some points (for listening), and he might read. Turns out I was right on both accounts. This student soon became the most prolific reader in the class, reading three to four novels per week! He read a range of titles, too, from R. A. Nelson's (2005) *Teach Me* to Coe Booth's (2007) *Tyrell* and (2008) *Kendra* to *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (2005) by Luis J. Rodriguez, which he later said was his favorite book.

And once he started reading, other students followed suit.

I began to bring in title after title from my personal young adult novel library and, at least in my opinion, daily silent reading became the students' favorite

part of the class. Students who did little or no work any other time during class were reading book after book during class, ignoring all other instructional activities. (This was one of those moments where the classroom teacher and I had to decide whether to let them continue reading or make them put their books down—we went for option one. Some may not agree with our decision, but we learned that if they put the books down, their heads would soon follow.)

Two female students read their way through Sarah Dessen’s entire collection. Another student read the *Make Lemonade* trilogy by Virginia Euwer Wolff (in addition to ten other novels). Suzanne Collins’s (2008) *Hunger Games* and its sequel, *Catching Fire* (2009), became favorites, crossing gender, race, cultural, and socioeconomic lines. So, too, did Paul Volponi’s books (*Rikers High* [2010], *The Rooftop* [2007], *Hurricane Song* [2008], and *Black and White* [2006]). I have seen what young adult literature can do in the classroom—it can motivate even the most reluctant readers to read, and it can help to build important interpersonal bridges between teachers and their students.

Rationale for This Book

Our stories serve as testament to our belief that when adolescents have the opportunity to make choices about what they read, access to young adult literature, and time to read, *they will read*. So we certainly value the importance of independent reading time in the classroom, and much has been written about using young adult literature in this way (see Teri Lesesne’s [2003] *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time* and Janet Allen’s [1995] *It’s Never Too Late: Leading Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy*). But, beyond individual connection making and independent reading, less has been written about using young adult novels in whole-class instruction.

It’s time to move young adult literature to the center of high school English instruction. The quality of much young adult literature published today will surprise English teachers who continue to pooh-poo the genre. The genre deserves careful literary study. Thus, this book serves as a guide for choosing young adult literature for whole-class instruction and teaching it through differentiated reading instruction. We hope it will inspire English teachers to see young adult literature—and adolescents—with new eyes. Young adult literature is not just for independent reading anymore.

Centering Young Adult Literature in the High School English Curriculum through Differentiated Instruction

Young adult literature has come of age in the twenty-first century. Sales of young adult novels are up (despite claims that teens aren't reading), and some say the genre is experiencing a second golden age (Reno, 2008). Young adult novels now top annual best book lists and win prestigious awards. Yet the genre continues to have “stepchild” status in the high school English classroom, due partly to misconceptions about it.

One misconception is that young adult literature is for struggling, reluctant readers *only*, rather than sophisticated, already-motivated readers. Books like Janet Allen's (1995) *It's Never Too Late* and Marilyn Reynolds's (2004) *I Won't Read and You Can't Make Me: Reaching Reluctant Teen Readers* reinforce this idea. In addition, many English teachers do not consider young adult literature “good literature” and see its use as “lowering the bar” and accommodating students' desires for entertainment and quick consumption. NCTE president Carol Jago (2004) has suggested that young adult literature is useful only when entertainment and pleasure—rather than careful literary study—are instructional goals (p. 4).

Due to these misconceptions, when young adult literature can be found in schools, it is usually in remedial reading classes, in the school library, or on teachers' personal classroom library shelves, where students can check young adult novels out for independent, silent reading. Some teachers use excerpts from young adult novels as a bridge or “complement” to the classics (Kaywell, 1993), but rarely is a contemporary young adult novel centered as a core text for whole-class instruction.

Research shows that the novels high school English teachers currently use for whole-class instruction are the same classic, canonical works they used more than a decade ago—texts like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Great Gatsby* (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). As Applebee (1993) explains, “These are the texts at the heart of the English curriculum and

thus [they] receive the most time and attention . . . [and] other selections are often organized and introduced [around them]" (p. 234).

We're fans of classic texts, and believe *all* students—and not just those in honors or advanced placement (AP) classes—should have opportunities to read them. But we also believe, as Teri Lesesne (2008) exhorts in her "Young Adult Reader's Bill of Rights," that adolescents have the "right to demand changes in the literary canon for the 21st century." Respecting this right means today's English teachers should consider centering high-quality young adult literature at the *heart* of the English curriculum, as we know the following from decades of classroom-based reading research:

- Adolescent engagement with reading and motivation to read *increases* when adolescents read young adult novels (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999).
- Adolescent literature has the potential to broaden adolescents' vision of self and the world, providing an avenue for reflection and a means for personal development (Bean & Harper, 2006; Glasgow, 2001; Landt, 2006).
- Adolescents choose to read adolescent novels over more canonical works when given opportunities to choose (Cole, 2009).

We know adolescents like young adult novels because, unlike classical, canonical works, these novels have been written *about* adolescents, *with adolescent readers in mind*. It is these books that teachers should use in the classroom if today's adolescents are to see school as relevant to their lives and experiences.

Speaking at the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE conference at the 2007 NCTE Annual Convention, young adult author Chris Crutcher said that when we omit young adult literature from our classrooms, we say to students that the kids in those books—and their lives—don't matter. Teenagers' reading habits and their out-of-school lives *must* matter in today's classrooms if we don't want to further students' disengagement with school. Until young adult novels become the "curriculum heart" of secondary English programs, the genre—like adolescents' lives and adolescent literacies—will continue to remain at the margins of school curricula (Cole, 2009).

We're fortunate because much of the young adult literature being published today is high-quality literature that deserves teachers' attention and consideration for whole-class instruction—for struggling and advanced readers alike. In *Classics in the Classroom*, Carol Jago (2004) insists that "good" literature is literature requiring careful study, often guided by a teacher, and we think quality young adult literature fits this description. The best young adult literature possesses

themes that merit and reward examination and commentary, and most standardized test and curriculum requirements about literary elements and devices can be taught with a young adult novel.

Choosing young adult novels for whole-class instruction can be difficult, though, because while high-quality books for young adults abound, so, too, do those that promote quick indulgence and gratuitously portray some of the most troubling representations of adolescence circulating in popular culture today—promiscuous sex, drug and alcohol abuse, indifference to adults and society’s ills, to name a few.

Cecily von Ziegesar’s (2001) *Gossip Girl* series serves as example. The novels that constitute this series—twelve at last count—have sold in the millions, predominantly to teenage girls. The books are sold in large retail bookstores, as well as retail chains like Target and Wal-Mart. A *Gossip Girl* website (www.gossipgirl.net) exists, and in fall 2007, the *Gossip Girl* TV series premiered on the CW, a broadcast network owned by Warner Brothers and CBS (<http://www.cwtv.com/thecw/about-the-cw>). Despite their popularity, however, the novel series and TV show have been challenged by teachers and parents for their portrayals of drug and alcohol abuse, sexual content, and offensive language.

In our work with preservice and classroom teachers, and as teachers of young adult literature courses, we stay away from judging young adult literature as simply “good” or “bad,” because we know readers read for multiple reasons and purposes, and even our most sophisticated readers may choose to read novels like *Gossip Girl* independently. We also know that reading serial novels helps develop fluency and prediction skills in struggling readers. Some reading researchers say serial novels appeal to teens because of the “comfort of the familiar” and readers’ desires to “be a part of a community of readers who share delight in particular stories, characters, or language” (McGill-Franzen, 2009, p. 57). Ross (1995) explains reading is more often than not a “social activity” and “series books have the cachet of something precious, to be collected, hoarded, and discussed” (p. 226).

In addition, even though we don’t like books like *Gossip Girl* because they contribute to the misconception that all young adult literature is “low-brow fluff” (among other reasons), we don’t think it’s a bad idea to use *Gossip Girl* in the high school classroom *if* instructional goals include helping adolescents navigate the popular culture discourses on teenage sexuality and consumption present in the work, and skilled facilitators are present (see Ashcraft, 2006; Glenn, 2008; Groenke, 2007).

What we’re trying to say is we believe every young adult novel has its place in the high school English classroom, which marks the usefulness and versatility of the genre. Some young adult novels are better served in silent, sustained

independent reading, while others should be considered for whole-class instruction. But which ones? How can teachers make the distinction among young adult novels to use for whole-class instruction versus independent reading?

Choosing High-Quality Young Adult Literature for Whole-Class Instruction

The *ALAN Review* coeditor Steven Bickmore (2008) explains, “Choosing YA literature does not have to mean providing a text of inferior quality, but it does mean that more of us should explain the craftsmanship in these novels” (p. 77). We couldn’t agree more. Thus, one objective of this book is to provide secondary teachers with some criteria they can use to select high-quality young adult novels for whole-class instruction versus novels that might be better suited for independent reading.

In *Classics in the Classroom* (2004) Carol Jago writes, “There is an art to choosing books for students. First I look for literary merit. Without this, the novel will not stand up to close scrutiny or be worth the investment of classroom time” (p. 47). She goes on to list six additional criteria she considers before selecting a text for whole-class study. Such works:

1. are written in language that is perfectly suited to the author’s purpose;
2. expose readers to complex human dilemmas;
3. include compelling, disconcerting characters;
4. explore universal themes that combine different periods and cultures;
5. challenge readers to reexamine their beliefs; and
6. tell a good story with places for laughing and places for crying. (p. 47)

While Jago is referring to the use of classic texts (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Odyssey*, *My Ántonia*), these same criteria can and, in our view, *should be* applied when choosing young adult novels for whole-class study. Because we want to emphasize the literary merit of many of the young adult novels published today, and because we believe young adult literature deserves careful attention and study from students and their teachers, we have applied Jago’s criteria to the selection and evaluation of the young adult titles we describe and feature in this book.

Many of these titles—all published since 2000—have won prestigious awards, are featured on “Best of” lists (e.g., Nilsen & Donelson, 2009), and, perhaps most important, are popular with teen readers, if teen polls like the ones published

annually by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* are any indication. Many of these titles we teach in our young adult literature courses. Some have been recommended by long-time teachers and former students. Some we have found by attending librarian and teacher conferences (e.g., NCTE, ALAN, ALA), frequenting local bookstores, and reading young adult book lovers' blogs (thank you, Teri Lesesne, aka Goddess of YA Lit!). Some we discovered by sheer luck. All of them, we think, merit teachers' attention and consideration for whole-class instruction.

But we understand selecting titles for instruction is only part of teachers' work. What can teachers do with young adult novels in whole-class instruction? How can teachers use young adult novels in whole-class instruction to address the needs of diverse readers in the classroom?

Teaching Young Adult Novels to the Whole Class through Differentiated Reading Instruction

Differentiated reading instruction is an excellent way to teach young adult literature to a whole class of mixed-ability learners. The high-quality young adult novel lends itself well to differentiated instruction as it has broad appeal and allows for various levels of interpretations in line with the various levels of students' abilities in the high school English classroom. A second objective of this book, then, is to provide teaching strategies for whole-class, differentiated reading instruction of the young adult novels featured in this work. We know that all classrooms—even honors and AP classes—are populated by readers at various perceived ability levels, with varying reading interests and habits. Katie Dredger, a former high school AP English teacher, suggests that instead of asking if students are in the “correct placement” when we recognize reading differences, we should instead ask, “What circumstances will be the most effective catalyst for this student's development?” (2008, p. 30).

In this book, we take very seriously the latest research numbers that tell us only 3 percent of all eighth graders read at the advanced level and nearly one-third of all ninth graders are two or more years behind the average level of reading achievement and need extra help (Balfanz, McPartland, & Shaw, 2002; Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). We also consider what current reading research has to say about adolescents' reading development and provide differentiation strategies for helping all the readers in your classroom engage in meaningful ways with characters in stories, develop prosody (or reading with expression) fluency skills, and develop inference and prediction-making skills. We also provide ideas for matching theme-related books with different levels of readers. We

have used differentiated reading instruction (DRI) successfully with both striving and sophisticated readers, and we can attest to the high student engagement and motivation that occur with all students when their individual reading abilities and needs are attended to in the high school English classroom.

Differentiated Reading Instruction Defined

Defining differentiated reading instruction is not a simple task, but there *is* one simple principle that constitutes our understanding and use of DRI in the secondary English classroom: *the belief in the potential of every student to become a capable, confident, engaged, skillful reader*. DRI honors this potential by identifying and acting upon adolescent readers' readiness, interests, and learning styles. Key to this process are the following additional integrated principles of DRI.

Proactive, Recursive, Student-Centered Learning

DRI begins with individual students. What are individual students' reading levels when they enter our classrooms? What are their entry-level reading skills? What literacy strengths, abilities, and resources do our students bring to our classrooms? What weaknesses? Are our students voluntary readers outside of school? If not, why not? What do our students like to read? What are they currently reading? What have their past experiences with reading been? Teachers who practice DRI begin with these questions and, once they get answers, begin developing or modifying reading instruction accordingly. With DRI, curricular goals come first, but DRI is an ongoing, recursive process, always anticipating and responding to students' needs. This anticipation and responsiveness result in differentiation of *curricular content, learning process, or assessment product* for individual students so they can achieve curricular goals.

Ongoing Pre- and Post-Assessment

Central to centering student learning in DRI is ongoing pre- and post-assessment. At the simplest level, differentiating reading instruction requires English teachers to acknowledge that all students do not read and comprehend texts in the same way, and then to plan and deliver instruction accordingly. As Barbara King-Shaver and Alyce Hunter (2003) explain in their book *Differentiated Instruction in the English Classroom: Content, Process, Product, and Assessment*: "Recognizing that one size doesn't fit all, differentiated instruction asks that each learner and his or her uniqueness be considered, embraced, and celebrated. Differentiated

instruction asks teachers to diagnose students as well as analyze content and skills, to know their needs, interests, and learning styles, and to relate to students with a cognitive empathy” (p. 2).

Diagnosing students’ reading abilities involves ongoing, formative assessment with which teachers identify students’ strengths and areas of need so they can assess students where they are and help them move forward. Knowing students’ needs, interests, and learning styles requires that teachers acknowledge and embrace the diversity that exists among our students in their levels of experience and expertise with texts. But how do we assess our students? How do we know “where they are” when they come to us?

Carol Tomlinson (1999)—considered by many the “inventor” of differentiated instruction—suggests the first step in differentiating reading instruction is to assess a student’s individual *readiness*, or capabilities as a reader; *interests/attitudes*, or how a student feels about reading, and what a student likes to read; and *reading habits*, or how a student reads. This is a crucial first step in the differentiation process, because if teachers don’t know who their readers are and what their needs are, differentiated curriculum may end up looking like “dumbed-down” work for some and “more work” for others. This is not authentic differentiated instruction. A variety of resources is available to assess who your students are as readers when they come to your classroom. We list some of our favorite resources for assessing student reading readiness, their reading attitudes and interests, and their reading habits at the end of this chapter.

Tomlinson explains that understanding these three things about individual students as readers can help teachers make decisions about differentiating reading instruction in three ways: by *content*, or what a student is to learn (e.g., literary terms; understanding of character’s motives); *process*, how a student is to learn the content (e.g., whole-class instruction; small group reading); and *product*, or how a student displays what he or she has learned (e.g., tests; skits). In this book, we show teachers how to differentiate for *content*, *process*, or *product* depending on readers’ needs.

Appropriate, Blended Instruction

As King-Shaver and Hunter (2009) explain in *Adolescent Literacy and Differentiated Instruction*, the teacher’s role in DRI is matching individual learners to appropriate instruction. Thus, rather than solely a “teacher-in-the-front-of-the-class” model of instruction, DRI requires that teachers use varying and various instructional strategies to differentiate learning by *content*, *process*, or *product* for individual learners. To differentiate content, teachers may use classic differentiation strategies such as “jigsaw,” in which students work in small groups on a

reading activity (groups designated by student readiness and interest) and then reassemble in a second, larger group to share content and skills learned during the first group task. Or teachers may use another classic differentiation strategy called “tiered assignments.” Tiered assignments cluster students according to pre-assessed readiness levels to complete a task designed for a certain level of content and skill understanding (more on this later). While students work in such arrangements, the teacher moves from group to group or works one-on-one with various students.

Tomlinson explains that in DRI “everyone gets some of [the teacher] in some configuration smaller than the class-as-a whole” (in King-Shaver & Hunter, 2009, p. vii). In addition to small-group work and independent study, the DRI teacher might also blend instructional styles and strategies, calling students together at various times for whole-class instruction and skills practice. Tomlinson likens differentiated instruction to a “flow” process that moves back and forth among whole-class exploration of topics and concepts, independent skills practice and study, and small-group work (2001, p. 6).

Appropriate Texts

We believe the teacher’s role in DRI is also matching individual learners to appropriate texts. We know in many secondary English classrooms, student reading readiness can stretch from first grade to college level. We also know students’ reading interests vary widely. Some students may be avid online fan fiction or e-book readers but never pick up a book. Others may love nonfiction or how-to manuals, while still others can’t get enough vampire lore. While we believe—like Delia DeCourcy, Lyn Fairchild, and Robin Follet, authors of *Teaching Romeo and Juliet: A Differentiated Approach* (2007)—that “all students should have access to Shakespeare” (p. 1), we also know that the esoteric language, need for intensive teacher guidance and explanation, and seeming lack of relevance to today’s popular culture are reasons why adolescent readers struggle to engage with classic texts.

We also know young adult authors such as Alan Gratz, Caroline Cooney, Lisa Klein, Sharon Draper, and Walter Dean Myers provide contemporary, relevant updates on classic texts. Choice is key here. When teachers teach thematically in DRI, they can give the student who loves or wants the challenge of Shakespeare a Shakespearean play or sonnet to read, but give other students other options. Not all the time—we understand. Good DRI honors the integration of self-selected books with whole-class instruction of teacher-selected texts.

Let us say a bit more about the importance of choice in DRI. NCTE’s 2007 Policy Research Brief explains that “meaningful choice” in the classroom is a

powerful motivator for adolescents. Teachers who practice DRI build choice into reading assignments because they know DRI is about promoting independent, lifelong reading. This means our students have to learn to read without us, and therefore they have to know there are books (and other texts) out there that they like to—and can—read. This doesn't mean the teacher becomes obsolete—the teacher must work hard in DRI, both behind the scenes and front and center to (1) pre-assess student readiness and skill levels; (2) find appropriate book options that match learner interests and readiness levels; (3) plan and implement whole-class, small-group, and independent instruction; (4) structure class time to accommodate differentiated instruction; and (5) manage student behavior.

We understand why Tomlinson's description of differentiated instruction as a "flow" process can oftentimes feel like an oncoming flood for teachers—overwhelming and out of control. But DRI doesn't have to happen every day, in every class. We understand DRI takes a lot of time and energy, but we also believe in its potential and success to help all adolescents become confident, engaged readers.

We highly recommend Kathie F. Nunley's (2005) book *Differentiating the High School Classroom: Solution Strategies for 18 Common Obstacles* if you are new to differentiated instruction or are trying to help other teachers new to the concept consider its implementation in the classroom. Nunley suggests that for teachers new to differentiated instruction, the easiest place to start is with independent seatwork. In other words, teachers can divide a class period into two sections: one that includes some type of whole-class instruction and another that involves some type of independent seatwork. Allow some variety and choice in the seatwork. For example, offer a choice to work solo or in a group. Offer a choice between reading silently or listening to a book on tape, or reading with a partner (or teacher). This, in essence, is differentiating *content* and *process*. Add an accountability piece (the *product*), and you're on your way to differentiating! We provide more specific how-to information for differentiating reading instruction with young adult literature in this book.

Reading Is Tied to Identity

Another key principle underlying DRI is the understanding that students are different kinds of readers in different contexts, and students' reading practices in school can be performances of identities they may wish others to see in them (Jones, Clarke, & Enriquez, 2010). We see identity play out every day in the classroom when we look out at the sea of faces (and clothes, and gadgets) and see "goths" in one corner, while the "slackers" or "preps" or "jocks" or (insert your own term here) congregate in others. We also see identity at work when the boys in class pick up only books that have footballs or baseballs on the covers, while the

girls' picks tend to have what Susan calls "cocktail-colored" covers or the words *boyfriend* and *girlfriend* or *summer love* in them.

We must be careful, though, because adolescent identities are usually in flux. As readers, adolescents probably cross multiple categories in terms of what they like to (and can) read, and how they read. We must keep in mind, too, that today's adolescents inhabit multiple and varied textual and social worlds, and thus "read" and comprehend texts in cyberspace and the popular media (e.g., TV, film) all the time. While your students may not seem to be good readers in your classrooms, their out-of-school reading skills may surprise you. If we get to know what these out-of-school interests and skills are, we can find ways to capitalize on them in the classroom.

Finally, as Jones, Clarke, and Enriquez (2010) suggest, we must pay attention to who we call "good" or "struggling" readers in our classrooms and must not make assumptions about students as readers. In doing so, we can work to reposition students who might be on the margins of reading "success." Differentiated reading instruction is thus also a way to help adolescents construct positive reading identities.

Everyone Improves

The goal for each reader in a differentiated classroom is the same: everyone improves.

It is unrealistic to think we can make every reader a *strong, sophisticated* reader. Remember, the first and foremost premise underlying differentiated reading instruction is to create *capable, confident, engaged, skillful readers*. We can help weaker and average readers become capable, confident, skilled readers, but this does not mean they will be the best readers in class at year's or semester's end (or who knows—maybe they will be!). The goal here is to remember that every reader can get better and more skilled. Everyone, regardless of ability, works toward the same goal: improvement.

Organization of This Book

Each chapter that follows opens with an introduction to and description of a different, popular genre or award category of young adult literature (e.g., realistic teen fiction, nonfiction, etc.). Chapters 2 through 4 focus on realistic teen issues, historical fiction, and the verse novel, a new trend in young adult literature. In Chapter 5 we focus on memoir and reader response, and then move from

reader response to critical literacy with multicultural young adult literature in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 focuses on the graphic novel, a popular genre with today's teens. The last two chapters, 8 and 9, focus on what reading researchers deem the two most popular genres with today's adolescents, adventure/mystery and science fiction/fantasy and the supernatural, respectively.

In each chapter, we describe young adult novels published since 2000 that we would use in differentiated whole-class reading instruction. In some chapters, we use Jago's criteria to describe both a book we would use in whole-class instruction and one we'd put on the shelf for independent reading. In other chapters, we use Jago's criteria to describe several books we'd use in whole-class, small-group literature circle activities. In still other chapters, we provide lists of books we've measured against Jago's criteria and recommend that teachers seek out on their own. We then present differentiated instructional activities to use with the novel(s) we profile in each chapter. Effective instructional activities used in differentiated instruction include whole-class instruction and small-group work, and lots of student choice. You'll see examples of this throughout the book.

It is our hope that this book can serve as a resource for English teachers who are strapped for time to find good young adult novels, and who need help understanding and seeing what differentiated reading instruction can look like with older adolescent readers. It is also our hope to provide "research-based" evidence for the instructional strategies we describe in this book. An early reviewer of this book said that much of the language and tone of what we write here is too "academic" and not suited for classroom teachers, who would appreciate a more narrative, readable style. We know teachers are increasingly pressured to use "research-based" strategies to raise students' academic reading achievement, but this research base does not always include the voices of researchers, teachers, and teacher-researchers who examine or teach adolescents in classroom settings. All of the researchers, academics, and classroom teachers we draw on throughout this text are people who care about adolescents and their learning, and who spend lots of time in classrooms trying to understand how adolescents read and comprehend texts, and how best to help them develop as readers. We trust the researchers, academics, and classroom teachers we cite throughout this text, and we hope that teachers will follow up on some of the research on their own and add their voices to the research they rely on when making instructional decisions. At the very least, we hope this book serves teachers in their own professional development as they continue to look for ways to help adolescents become the skilled, capable, and confident readers we know they can be.

Resource Guide for Chapter 1

Next, we list some of our favorite resources for assessing students' reading readiness, determining their reading attitudes and interests, and discovering their reading habits.

Determining Students' Reading Readiness

- Ekwall Informal Reading Inventory (in Shanker & Ekwall, 2000). Diagnostic assessments that provide information about students' independent, instructional, and frustrational reading levels.
- Metacognitive Reading Awareness Inventories (Miholic, 1994; Schmitt, 1990). Examine students' understanding of themselves as strategic readers.
- Ask students to read to you. See Allington (2006) for ideas on three-finger rule, informal accuracy records, and recall summaries—all quick, informal assessments teachers can use to gauge accuracy and fluency while students read to them.
- Informal, low-stakes writing (journal entry written in response to reading).
- Standardized test scores; Stanford 9 reading assessment.
- Observe kids reading independently in your classroom.

Janet Allen (1995) offers tips for recognizing disengaged, reluctant, frustrated, or struggling readers in the classroom. These readers may exhibit the following behaviors:

- Have trouble finding ways to respond to what they've read.
- Not like to talk about or share ideas or information about a book.
- Not attempt to try new authors, titles, genres.
- Have difficulty selecting books for independent reading.
- Look up frequently when reading alone.
- Try to disrupt others during reading time.
- Ask to go to the bathroom during reading time.
- Write notes or do other things during reading time.
- Hold a book close to the face.

- Lip read; subvocalize; finger-stab.
- Turn page infrequently, if at all.
- Check the clock often.
- Frequently change books for new books.

Determining Students' Reading Attitudes and Interests

- Activity ranking sheet (in *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Asks students to rank-order specific activities, such as reading or watching TV, from the most favorite to least favorite activity.
- Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (Pitcher et al., 2007).
- Informal reading survey (in *In the Middle*, Atwell, 1998).
- "Who Are You?" questionnaire (in *Fires in the Bathroom*, Cushman, 2003).
- "Things That Make Me Want to/Not Want to Read" T-chart (in *It's Never Too Late*, Allen, 1995).

Discovering Students' Reading Habits

- Reading survey: What, Why, How, and When Do You Read? (in *Reading Reminders*, Burke, 2000).
- Reading inventories (Atwell, 1998).
- Learning styles inventories: Memletics Learning Styles Questionnaire (free, online at <http://www.learning-styles-online.com/inventory/questions.asp?cookieset=y>). Includes learning styles descriptions and overview.
- Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (free, online at <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>).
- Career interest survey (lots of free ones online).

Finally, we recommend Laura Robb's (2009) *Assessments for Differentiating Reading Instruction*, as it provides teachers with tools to assess students' reading comprehension and to monitor students' reading, among other assessments, with all forms provided on the CD included with the book.

Sales of young adult literature are stronger than ever. When we pay attention to what teens are reading outside of the classroom, we see that young adult novels are the books teens buy with their allowance money, pass around to their friends, and write about in their blogs or on fan fiction sites. These are the books that tell teens their lives matter and that their own life stories are important.

Authors Susan L. Groenke and Lisa Scherff offer suggestions for incorporating YA lit into the high school curriculum by focusing on a few key questions:

- Which works of YA literature work better for whole-class instruction and which are more suitable for independent reading and/or small-group activities?
- What can teachers do with YA lit in whole-class instruction?
- How can teachers use YA novels to address the needs of diverse readers in mixed-ability classrooms?

Each chapter opens with an introduction to and description of a different popular genre or award category of YA lit—science fiction, realistic teen fiction, graphic novels, Pura Belpré award winners, nonfiction texts, poetry, historical YA fiction—and then offers suggestions within that genre for whole-class instruction juxtaposed with a young adult novel more suited for independent reading or small-group activities. Groenke and Scherff present a variety of activities for differentiated instruction for the novel they've chosen for whole-class study, and provide an appendix of titles, by genre, that interest adolescent readers.

This book helps English teachers address the different reading needs and strengths adolescents bring to our classrooms. Highlighting some of the best young adult literature published since 2000, this book shows that YA lit is for *all* students and deserves a more central place in secondary literature instruction.

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