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Dickens and 'Divergent': Engaging Students Through Use of Young Adult Literature as Supplemental Texts

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Abstract

Despite the importance of reading to any curriculum – particularly the curriculum of the English/Language Arts classroom, there is a startling trend of students reading less the older they get (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012; Daniel & Steres, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Researchers are concerned with the declining rates of student reading for pleasure, and trace the problem to two different trouble spots: Lack of motivation to read and lack of student comprehension of texts. Research on student motivation determine that students are more likely to be motivated by choice and efficacy in the classroom (Brooks & Young, 2012; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013), while research on reading comprehension favors either individualized methods for improving reading comprehension (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012; Yeh, McTigue, & Joshi, 2012) or expanding the base materials of reading (Schiefele et. al, 2012).

Some scholars, however, suggest that adding young adult literature to the curriculum would engage students and improve reading comprehension, due to a startling amount of text complexity using a triangulating theory to determine complexity (Glaus, 2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). This study used young adult literature as supplemental text in an English classroom to determine if students would learn more through the incorporating of a text with a higher degree of relatability to them than the current canonical literature. While the test group using young adult literature in the classroom scored lower grades on assignments than the control group, data indicates that, over the course of the study, students gained more positive opinions on young adult literature and the possibility of having it incorporated in a text.

Reading is the most integral part of any language arts or English classroom, particularly as students move to the higher grades of schooling. In middle and high school, learning the simple mechanics of reading gives way to learning to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate texts of a greater complexity than the texts of the younger years. The students are expected, as they move to middle and high school, to engage in more reading than they did in their years in elementary school. However, recent trends suggest that students are reading less, not more, the older they grow (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012). As students move to higher grades, Cuevas, Russell, and Irving (2012) argue, they are reading less than they were as younger students.

Why are students reading less? It is understood that most of the time in the English classroom is spent engaged in reading. The students, while expected to read, however, are not always taking on the task, even when it is assigned. It was noted that "students continued to do little textbook reading either in school or at home, which corresponds with the anecdotal reports of teachers who contend that many students will not read academic material" (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012, p. 446). Though students may engage in some personal reading, many students choose not to engage in reading at all. Some of the problem with getting students engaged in their academic readings stems from the students having difficulties with the reading material itself. Often, students are asked to sit and read the materials quietly, which leaves them unengaged with the text (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012). When a student is not engaged with the text, the student misses out on some of what the text has to offer.

While there are students who genuinely struggle with the comprehension of the actual materials of the text, there are also many students who struggle with the text simply because they are not engaged in the material. So how can students become more engaged with the reading material? Reeve, Deci, and Ryan suggest that self-determination theory may have something to

do with it. They argue that students who are intrinsically motivated are the students who have a sense of choice and, thereby, personal control (as cited by Brooks & Young, 2011). Students have the potential for greater engagement in an English classroom if the literature appeals to them on a more personal level. While students are capable of finding some engagement with the traditional literary texts of the English classroom, not all students can find that engagement. Some students need a text that they can relate to on a personal level – and that is where young adult literature comes in.

Young adult literature is an up-and-coming genre offering a variety of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, to a large base of readers. The original age range of the young adult novel is considered to be between the ages of twelve and nineteen; the genre is aimed towards the adolescents, who are developing their identities and discovering their place in the world. Recent successes of books such as Stephenie Meyer's vampire romance *Twilight*, Veronica Roth's dystopian thriller *Divergent*, Suzanne Collins's revolutionary reader *The Hunger Games*, and John Green's teen tragedies *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska*, and *Paper Towns*, have made the genre accessible for those outside of the scope of young adult literature. Older children, teenagers, and adults alike have come to enjoy this up-and-coming body of literary works, especially with the recent successful adaptation of several of these texts – such as *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and even James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, among others – into movies. Adolescents have the motivation to read their favorite works of young adult literature. However, it seems that, when it comes time to open up their textbooks in English class, that same desire to read evaporates.

What is it about young adult literature that makes it seem so appealing to adolescent students? While the characters of the genre still rate low in diversity, the themes of the genre are

rapidly changing to themes that adolescents find some familiarity with (Koss & Teale, 2009). Recent trends suggest that young adult novels are moving away from the theme of coming-of-age and instead focusing more on discovering one's identity, something that many adolescents can identify with as they, too, search for their own identities and try to discover who they are (Koss & Teale, 2009). Though some argue that young adult literature is not rigorous enough to stand against traditional texts used in the English classroom, Ivey and Johnson state that "young adult literature is potentially a useful tool for engaged reading among adolescents" (2013, p. 257), due to the familiar narrators and relatable themes found in the literature. Other researchers, meanwhile, argue that, by using the triangulating technique of determining literary complexity – by examining a text qualitatively, quantitatively, and for reader engagement to task – that some young adult literature books can stand alongside canonical texts in the English classroom (Glaus, 2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). There is much potential to be found in the genre of young adult literature.

With such a vast and diverse body of literature, it could be assumed that at least some of the literature has been put to use in the modern English or Language Arts classroom. However, there has been limited engagement with young adult literature and the classroom until recent years, and studies on the subject are limited, particularly where the secondary grades (6-12) are concerned. The impact of incorporating such literature into an English classroom alongside canonical classics has the potential to make a difference to some struggling readers. By analyzing existing research on the subject, searching for gaps in study areas, and conducting my own research project, I will be able to determine the worth of young adult literature as supplemental curriculum literature in the English classroom.

Literature Review

This literature review looks into the research involving important reading skills and young adult literature as it is currently known as a genre. Many of the sources looked at were studies, including case studies conducted on a variety of students in the secondary (6-12) grades on determining what techniques affect and increase student motivation in the classroom and how educators can boost reading comprehension. A few theoretical pieces about young adult literature – in particular, young adult literature and the rigorous curriculums of the twenty-first century – were also included for more contextual information on young adult literature. Many databases were searched to obtain these studies and articles, including JSTOR, Education Full Text, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar.

The following literature review will start by examining the history of the young adult genre in literature, including differentiating between what is considered children's literature and what is considered young adult literature, and a discussion about the possibility of two canonical texts being defined as the very first pieces of young adult literature. Second, the review will examine two commonly-found issues in the literature classroom: Student motivation and text comprehension. The review will look at a variety of studies conducted involving students and self-determination theory, as well as students and varying reading comprehension improvement modules. Finally, the literature review will examine young adult literature in the context of a classroom setting, including looking at literature of today, educational standards, and classroom and case studies.

History of Young Adult Literature

The precise history of young adult literature is unclear, as what is considered to be "young adult literature" is hazy. The term "YA Literature," short for "young adult literature" was first coined in 1937 (Morano, n.d.). Many cite the 1960s as the definitive start of the genre of young adult literature (Morano, n.d.; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012), with the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1968), a text about three young brothers struggling to understand the world around them and the effects of socioeconomic inequality on their reputations. There are others, however, who will argue that young adult literature goes farther back than that. In her article on the rite of passage of young adult literature and its characters, Katherine Proukou cites Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* as an initial text of the young adult genre (2005*). Little Women*'s four protagonists range from ages twelve to sixteen as the book starts, and are followed as they mature from girls to women and move forward in their lives with events such marriage and starting families of their own. Proukou also cites Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as an early young adult novel; in fact, she cites *Huckleberry Finn* as "an icon of the potentialities of transformation and regeneration" (2005, p. 63). While Morano and others may classify these texts as part of the classical canon instead of young adult literature, their themes, Proukou argues, of growing up and discovering personal identify pick them out as young adult literature. Thus, identifying the first "young adult" book can be difficult, as many offer different speculations as to what is and what is not a young adult novel.

During the 1980s, however, Morano (n.d.) claims the market dried up, not to experience another great surge until the late 1990s and early 2000s with the release of a new wave of young adult literature, partially spurred by the publication of adolescent authors such as Christopher Paolini and Amelia Atwater Rhodes. However, in this time, Morano claims there was a rise in children's literature – but what is the difference between children's literature and young adult

literature? Cindy Lou Daniels (2006), in her report for the *ALAN Review*, states young adult

literature is "often grouped as a sub-division within the category of children's literature" and, as

a result, is said that is "isn't worth much attention because it doesn't offer enough substance to

be included within the traditional literary canon" (Daniels, 2006, p. 78). Generally, however,

what differentiates young adult literature from children's literature are the characters and the

themes explored. Often, the characters in young adult literature are not children but adolescents,

while children's literature features protagonists of a young age – such as Barbara Park's *Junie B.*

Jones books, a children's short-novel series focused on the trials and times of the kindergarten-

aged protagonist. Additionally, the themes in young adult literature are often more mature than

that of children's literature, and may feature such things as domestic violence, sexual assault,

bullying, and mental and physical illness, to name a few. These differences create a distinct

separation into what can be considered children's literature and what can be considered young

adult literature.

Reading Difficulties in the English Classroom

There has been a notable decline in voluntary student reading as students reach the upper

grades (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012; Daniel & Steres, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013) – and

researchers are concerned by this fact. There are two factors that feed into this startling trend of

declined reading rates: Motivation and reading comprehension. In an English classroom, reading

comprehension is a necessary skill, and data suggests that almost seventy-five percent of eighth

grade students only have "basic" reading comprehension skills (Yeh, McTigue, & Joshi, 2012).

Before reading comprehension can be focused on, however, the issue of motivation has to be

addressed first, as motivation to read starting from an early age can have a long-term impact in a

student's inclinations to read as they get older. It is to be noted that "students self-efficacy for

reading/English in grade four predicted their selection of English courses in grade 10" (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013, p. 10). Therefore, motivation has a significant impact on students as they grow in their academic careers – and, in fact, has a strong hand-in-hand relationship with reading comprehension, as well.

       Student motivation. Motivation has been a long-standing concern in the secondary classroom. A student's level of motivation and engagement has been described by Pintrich and Schunk (2002) as "…an important precursor to learning, and therefore, is a meaningful aspect of any successful classroom experience" (as cited in Brooks & Young, 2011, p. 48). Regardless of the type of classroom, the student needs to be engaged and motivated for any type of learning to take place. Brooks and Young, as well as Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho state in their study that much of a student's motivation stems from the theory of self-determination (2011, p. 49; 2013, p. 10). According to the theory of self-determination, as stated by E.L. Deci and R.M. Ryan's 1985 book *Intrinsic Motivation and Self Determination in Human Behavior*, self-determined people see themselves as having a level of control and autonomy over their actions given their choices in a given activity (2011, p. 49). While Brooks and Young (2011) were focused more on students on the college level, who would have a higher degree of autonomy in the classroom, it is important to note what they say about giving autonomy to students even outside of the college classroom. Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013), meanwhile, focus their study on a population of seventh-grade students in order to determine how much their autonomy affects their success in the classroom.

       Brooks and Young (2011) call self-determination "a distinct feature of higher education, one that differentiates it from elementary levels of schooling" (2011, p. 48). By giving the students more responsibility for their learning, they believe that students will become more

engaged in their learning. In fact, in their study, Brooks and Young found that students felt more

motivated intrinsically when they felt more empowered in the classroom – that is, when they are

allowed more self-determination (2011, p. 55). The researchers, however, are not suggesting that

students be given absolute free reign – such a feat would be impossible in a given high school

classroom. Their study additionally found that students need consistency in the amount of self-

determination they have on classroom policies, and that helps encourage motivation just as much

as choice does (Brooks & Young, 2011, p. 55). This is also demonstrated in Guthrie, Klauda, and

Ho's (2013) study; in their study using the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) plan,

students are allowed choice in reading materials, input into topics or sequences of topics, and

partner selection (2013, p. 14), which they noted increased student motivation to some degree

because student efficacy was increased. Both researchers found that giving students more choice

in the classroom will motivate them (Brooks & Young, 2011; Gutherie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013) –

however, as Brooks and Young (2011) noted, the amount of choice has to be consistent across

the board in order to maximize the potential to motivate.

Daniels and Steres (2011) follow a similar vein to Brooks and Young (2011) where

choice is concerned. Daniels and Steres (2011) state that "Existing research suggested that

students must feel motivated about their learning to be successful academically" (2011, p. 1). In

a more narrow scope than Brooks and Young, Daniels and Steres's (2011) aim is motivating

students to read. In their study, they implemented a school-wide reading program, to encourage

students to read more. Much like Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013), they discuss self-

determination theory in the context of middle school – specifically, both research teams

concluded that middle schoolers were more likely to complete their work if they felt they had

some degree of both choice and autonomy, and felt that they and their work were valued by the

teachers (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). As such, in Daniel and Stere's

(2011) study, the students were given free choice in their reading materials for the school-wide

reading program, and only were given guidelines of the teacher expectations. One student was

reported as saying "This is the first year when I really felt that I was in charge. My teacher even

told me I could drop a book I didn't like" (Daniels & Steres, 2011, p. 8). It's the "in charge"

aspect that is important – the student felt that there was some autonomy in the choice of

assignment – in this case, the reading material – and, as such, was more motivated to read. While

choice reading has often been implemented in classrooms, in forms of reading logs or extra-

curricular reading with subsequent projects, there is a possibility for incorporating more choice

in the curricular literature as a whole that has the potential to impact student engagement.

Comprehension of materials. Once the problem of motivating the students has been

tackled, another issue quickly arises: Comprehension. Many students struggle with

comprehension of materials, and without the comprehension of the materials, the students are

missing the overall purpose of the literature. How can a teacher make sure their students

comprehend the materials they are reading? Surprisingly, much of the research supports that

comprehension and motivation go hand-in-hand; the higher levels of engagement that come from

students being interested in the texts they are reading foster improved comprehension of the

material because the students are more determined to understand what they are reading (Cuevas,

Russell, & Irving, 2012; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, Wigfield,

Nolan, and Baker, 2012). The researchers have found, however, that there are multiple ways in

which to improve student comprehension of materials.

When seeking to improve reading comprehension, two teams of researchers tackling the

issue of reading comprehension both determined that reading comprehension is not an issue to be

solved with a "one size fits all" method, but with programs allowing a degree of individualization to the students (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012; Yeh, McTigue, & Joshi, 2012). Cuevas, Russell, & Irving look to forms of self-sustained reading (SSR) to help improve comprehension, citing that scaffolding can be incorporated into SSR and ISR programs to make them more effective (2012, p. 447). They determined through their study that computer-based ISR programs for the students yielded the most effective results, with the students showing improved comprehension of the materials they were reading and even an increased motivation to read. Yeh, McTigue, and Joshi (2012), on the other hand, used a case study to foster individualized reading comprehension strategies. In their case study with a sixth-grade student they called "Steve," Yeh, McTigue, and Joshi (2012) sought to improve his reading comprehension skills by using leveled learning, starting with the most base level of comprehension – individual word comprehension through vocabulary exercises – to phrases and eventually full sentences. At the end of the course study, they noted "there was substantial evidence of Steve's progress with inferential thinking" (Yeh, McTigue, & Joshi, 2012, p. 138). They also note that, in addition to performing better in reading comprehension, Steve was more confident in his reading abilities, and, as a result, felt more motivated to read (Yeh, McTigue, & Joshi, 2012). While their case study was limited to one struggling student, Steve is not alone, nor is his case unique to only him. Troubling trends over the last few decades show that students are not spending as much time engaged in reading (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012) and, as such, are not as strong in comprehension. Using an individualized basis, a case study such as Steve's could be replicated on a larger basis to benefit a group of struggling readers in the area of reading comprehension.

Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, Wigfield, Nolan, and Baker (2012), however, take a different approach to improving reading comprehension. Instead of arguing for individualization of reading comprehension methods, they advocate, instead, for a diversified base of reading materials. In their meta-analysis of the relationship between dimensions of motivation and reading comprehension, Schiefele et. al (2012) state that "Motivation is assumed to increase individuals' competence by facilitating the persistence and intensity of performing activities being conducive to gains in competence" (2012, p. 437). Thus, their conclusion was that a diversified bank of reading materials would improve comprehension as it would appeal to a wider range of students and, as they stated, be "conducive to gains in competence" (Schiefele et. al, 2012, p. 437). While having a broader interest base is effective to increasing motivation, the diversification of literature in the standard classroom would not be just about appealing to a broader range of interests. What Schiefele et. al (2012) fail to touch upon is the potential for finding more relatable narrators than can be traditionally found in the canon literature. Young adult texts, featuring a base of characters who are racially, ethnically, biologically, religiously, and sexually diverse would allow for an broad range of appeal and relatability to the modern, culturally diverse classroom

Young Adult Literature and the Classroom

There are many different ways to look at young adult literature in the context of a classroom setting. This section of the literature review will break down the readings on young adult literature in the classroom into three different categories: Literature of today, educational standards, and classroom and case studies.

Literature of today. Before looking into reading young adult literature with a class, first, it has to be determined what the students are reading today. Through a few studies conducted, it has been concluded that much of today's young adult literature shows the adolescent struggle to determine identity (Bean & Moni, 2003; Koss & Teale, 2009) Concerned by the "little explicit examination of the body of literature published for today's teens" (2009, p. 563), Koss and Teale conducted a thorough analysis of trends in young adult literature over the past few years. While their main research was to determine what themes were most prevalent in modern young adult literature, they also sought to determine rising trends in other characteristics, such as genre, race/gender/ethnicity/sexuality of characters, and representation of diverse racial, ethnic, sexual, and disabled groups. They determined that the rising trends favored – and showed favorable response to – contemporary realistic fiction. While most of the literature featured predominantly white characters, Koss and Teale noted that, "surprising to us was the high incidence of books with international settings" (2009, p. 566). They also noted roughly ten percent of the books they collected represented characters on what they note as the GLBTQ spectrum, but found a higher frequency of characters with disabilities or disorders of some kind. In the end, Koss and Teale (2009) concluded that much of the young adult literature of today has changed in a way to reflect the lives of young adults today, contributing to the genre's relatability amongst the teenage population.

Educational standards. One of the arguments made in the case of young adult literature in the classroom is the complexity of the texts. Though there have been arguments that young adult literature cannot keep up in rigor with the canonical texts of the English classroom, there are those that feel that text complexity is not strictly to be determined by Lexile scores. In fact, using the triangulating practice of text complexity – in which qualitative measures, quantitative

measures, and measures of reader and task are used to determine text complexity – some

researchers have found young adult literature to be just as complex as canonical texts (Glaus,

2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). In her article on text complexity, Marci Glaus argues that

"complexity means many things, creating space for new and exciting conversations about texts"

(2014, p. 408). She states that English teachers do not assign books at random, but instead select

the books they choose to create a space for critical thinking and engagement in the classroom

(Glaus, 2014) – a task that cannot be accomplished if the text that is selected is too difficult for

the students to engage with adequately. Glaus also argues that young adult literature, in addition

to having a higher level of engagement and offering the same textual complexity as canon

classics, offers the unique advantage of being more sensitive to the shifting culture of the modern

world, as young adult texts were written more recently than many of the canon classics valued in

school.

Ostenson and Wadham, similarly, argue that young adult literature is rigorous enough to

stand with the typical canon, even in the face of multi-state adapted curriculums such as the

Common Core. In their theoretical article, Ostenson and Wadham argue that "young adult

literature can provide the familiar, less alienating literature that Rosenblatt called for while also

meeting the standards of quality that are often ascribed to the classics" (2012, p. 6). The

triangulating textual theory that Glaus examined in her article on textual complexity returns,

identified by the authors of the Common Core as a guide which teachers should use to determine

appropriate literature for their classes. Despite unusual settings or characters, the authors argue,

young adult literature has an element that adolescents need to be best engaged in their reading: A

measure of relatability to the characters. The themes and conflicts that the characters encounter,

as well as the emotions that arise from these, allow students to access their own life experiences

to improve their engagement and understanding with the text (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012, p. 10). The genre, with its textually complex literature and its modern, mature but relatable themes is proven by Glaus and Ostenson and Wadham to be able to stand with the canonical texts in the heat of the rigors of educational standards.

      Classroom and case studies. Despite the access to young adult literature and the variety within the genre, there has been little engagement with the genre itself in the English classroom. Both Ivey and Johnson and Park look at uses of the literature within an educational environment; Park, however, observes her subjects in an after-school setting. In writing on reader response to young adult literature, Park created a case study where she observed three different book clubs with twenty-three seventh and eighth grade girls, where the students selected the texts they would read as a group, many of which were young adult novels of some degree of popularity, such as Tamora Pierce's *Alanna: The First Adventure* or Stephenie Meyers's *The Host*. Park's focus with the book clubs was to build reader response – to encourage the girls to read the texts thoroughly, be able to grapple with the difficult issues presented in the texts, and to relate what they were reading to other texts (2012). She found that, following the book clubs, "the adolescent girls, through reading communally, gained deeper understanding of the written text, and also encountered different ways of looking at themselves and others" (Park, 2012, p. 191). Park had successfully engaged the girls in the literature, as well as made use of young adult literature in an academic setting.

      But what about in a classroom setting? While Park's use of book clubs for young adult literature did bring about better reader response from her subjects, the book clubs met outside of a classroom setting. They were also exclusively female, leaving out an important demographic – particularly important as boys, not girls, are often cited as being the ones who struggle more with

reading. Both Bean and Moni (2003) and Ivey and Johnston (2013) took young adult literature into the classroom to discover how students would interact with the works and seeking to improve reader engagement. Instead of reading a canonical work of literature class-wide, the subjects in Ivey and Johnson's study read self-selected works of young adult fiction dealing with a variety of issues; many of the works selected were described as being "…primarily edgy, contemporary young adult fiction" (Ivey & Johnson, 2013, p. 258). They noted, from the interviews at the end of the study, that many students had begun to prioritize reading even above social activities, such as time spent on the computer (Ivey & Johnson, 2013). They also noted positive changes in student relationships and efficacy – the students felt that they had more agency by selecting their own books, and, as such, they were less reluctant to read and participate. Bean and Moni (2003), using a study on students reading the Australian young adult novel *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, discovered that students were not only able to discuss the theme and the characters in the novel more objectively, but, using the novel as fodder, were able to transfer it into an even more personal and relatable setting – such as the student who was able to make a personal connection by suggesting the story be set in a small town in rural Utah (Bean & Moni, 2003). Both studies show an improvement in reader comprehension of the text, and, more remarkably, a level of engagement with the text much higher than if the students were reading canonical text that had a less personal level of relatability. Ivey and Johnston's study even found an increase in students passing the end-of-year tests in English between years with the implication of the engaged reading curriculum featuring the young adult texts. As such, both teams of researchers demonstrated that a classroom could be made even more successful by implementing use of a literature genre that was easier for students to engage with.

Conclusion

While there has been a lot of criticism about young adult literature, as a genre there is a literary merit to it that has not been fully developed and researched. Young adult literature, while still up-and-coming as a genre and while still behind as far as racial and sexual diversity, has made itself easily accessible to teenagers through the young characters and the struggles that they face – struggles that the readers may find themselves intimately familiar with. The genre has also made itself unique in its ability to entice readers outside of the intended age range. It has also made itself of note with its complexity, some texts showing the ability to even stand against the canonical classics that have dominated English classrooms for so long.

There are many pieces of theoretical evidence to support young adult literature having the rigor to be used in classrooms, including critical examinations of the themes and complexities of novels against standards for multi-state curriculums such as the Common Core. These bodies of literature argue that the current trends in young adult literature allow for higher rates of engagement between the readers and the text, while triangulating approach to text complexity used by several researchers determined that the literature can be as complex as standard works used in English classrooms across the country for generations at a time.

However, there are quite a few gaps to be found in the literature. There are few studies conducted within a classroom setting, and most of the studies to be found that have been conducted in classrooms have been conducted with children of elementary-school age, and usually involve more children's literature than young adult literature. There are few studies conducted with middle and high school students, but many of these have been conducted outside of the classroom setting, used as book clubs, etc. Of all the literature I examined, only one was a study conducted within a classroom, observed over the course of the year with the students. Another gap in the literature is that the implications from both the theoretical literature and the

actual studies suggest completely replacing the literature, as in removing what it canon and

substituting it with new and upcoming literature. There is no literature to suggest the possibility

of using one genre to supplement the other and keeping both the canon and the new literature in

the classroom, so that students have an even broader literary base. The present study aims to

satisfy whether or not using a new genre of literature to add to and expand on traditional literary

readings will foster a higher level of engagement from students that merely using the traditional

texts alone.

Methods

In order to determine whether student reading comprehension and motivation to read can be influenced by uses of differing genres of texts than is typically used, I implemented the following action research. The research question guiding this research is as follows: What are the effects of supplementing traditional literary texts with similarly-themed young adult literature on motivation and reading comprehension in students? In any English classroom, reading is the primary focus, and yet, students continue to show a decline in reading merely for pleasure (Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012). With the recent rise in popularity of the young adult literature genre, however, there is a new genre which can be use as supplemental and instructional material in the classroom. Despite the protests of some, young adult literature has proven to be as rigorous and complex as the classic novels that are considered canonical literature for the English classroom (Glaus, 2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). This present study sought to determine the merit of using young adult literature as a supplement to canonical literature in the context of both inside and outside of the classroom setting.

Site and Participants

The study was conducted at a high school in a suburban county in northern Virginia. The large county is home to nearly five hundred thousand people, according to the United States Census Bureau, and is one of the largest counties in the state of Virginia. The population density of the school is reflected in all the high schools across the district; the high school where the study was carried out has a current population of twenty-four hundred students. The school has generally performed well on standardized testing, and is home to a wide diversity of students

enrolled in various levels of classes and specialty programs, including Advanced Placement (AP) classes for a variety of subjects.

Out of a possible population of about 90 students, the set size for the study is a total of 61 students. The gender breakdown is about even between males and females, and the set of students contains a diverse array of ethnicities, backgrounds, and abilities, including one special education student and one English Language Learner. The set size was further broken down into three groups; the groups were not randomized, but instead sorted by which of the three eleventh-grade English classes the students belonged in. The final set sizes were 17 students, 24 students, and 20 students for the three different classes.

Data Collection

The data was collected in my time as student teacher, operating within a schedule of alternating days (A/B days). The period of study took place over a four to five week time frame and was conducted alongside other teaching duties. Data was collected from three different class periods over the course of the study. Student work was collected, analyzed, and graded for quantitative data, while student surveys and interviews was collected and analyzed for qualitative data. The classes are fairly homogenous in nature, however, while the assignment to the classes was randomly done, the assignment to data groups was not randomized, as the classes were broken into one data group each.

Research Design

This study was a mixed-methods design, with a focus on qualitative assessment. The data collected from the interviews, surveys, written assignments, and quizzes on the reading material was analyzed for a variety of information. Primarily, the surveys and interviews will be

examined for descriptive statistics – how do the students feel about reading, about the materials they have presented with, etc. Data from the written assignments and reading quizzes was examined more for signs of improvement over the course of the study, as well as seeking to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the control group and the experimental groups.

Procedures

In order to collect data to accurately reflect both academic growth and any changes in emotional responses to literature, a variety of teaching methods was used with both the canonical literature and, for the two experimental groups, the supplemental literature. While Cuevas, Russell, and Irving advocate for use of computerized reading comprehension activities (2012), access to a computer lab was not viable given the time of the year and the need of use of the computer lab by other classes. Most work was done within the classroom, with a focus on aspects of reading comprehension – vocabulary, passage comprehension, etc. – and reading strategies – making inferences, comparing texts, etc.

Interviews. In order to gather qualitative data from the students, I conducted interviews with three students from each of the three class periods to determine their opinions on reading in general, the reading they do in the classroom, and, for the two variable groups, on the supplemental literature. In the interviews, which were hand-transcribed, I asked the students what kind of literature they like to read, what their thoughts are on the kind of literature they read in the English classroom, why they think certain literature is included over other types, and what they think should be replaced/taken out/supplemented, if anything. Additionally, I interviewed the teacher about the kind of literature that is read in the classroom, and her views on how

difficult the students find it and whether she believes them to be engaged or not. Finally, I interviewed one of the librarians to inquire about the types of literature she has noticed students reading more of, the types of books they see the students as finding the most engaging, and their thoughts on the trends in young adult literature.

Student surveys. At the beginning of the study, a survey was administered to the students. The student surveys used a five-point scale similar to a Likert scale, asking students questions about how they feel about reading, about the material we read, and how well they think they know it. For the two variable groups, the survey questions also asked them for their thoughts on the supplemental text as well. At the conclusion of the study, the same survey was administered again, to determine if the students' responses had changed at all over the course of the study.

Written assignments. Over the course of the study, students were asked to complete a variety of tasks in correlation to the readings, such as reading response questions, exit slips, and an exercise in which they wrote a poem as guided by the work of an author that was read in class. In their responses, students were encouraged to think critically about the texts and make connections to other texts they had read, including the supplemental literature in the two classes where there was access to the supplemental text. Student responses were analyzed primarily for student comprehension of canonical text, but also for student ability to reference and incorporate other literary works, and to compare, contrast, or link multiple texts.

Reading quizzes. During the study, a reading quiz was administered to the students based upon the texts that have been read during the unit. The reading quiz was short-answer based, to give students a better opportunity to express their thoughts and thoroughly demonstrate

their comprehension skills and memory of the texts and class discussions. The quiz was used as diagnostic data, to determine how well the students understand what they are reading, as well as to determine if there is a difference between how well the students without the supplemental text understand the literature versus how well the students with the supplemental text understand the literature.

Data Analysis

Responses from the interviews were coded into a style similar to a Likert scale, in order to determine whether a student is "generally positive" or "generally negative" about reading, the literature they read at school, and how well they understand the literature they read in school. These codes were used to determine approximately how much motivation students feel about the reading in their classroom. Additionally, those students who identify that they feel "generally negative" about how well they understand what they read were further questioned, to determine why they feel negative about their understanding of the text. These responses were coded for purposes of reading comprehension.

The surveys administered to the students both at the beginning and at the end of the study used a Likert scale style to assess general feelings about the reading they do and how comfortable the students feel with the reading. These answers were used to determine overall engagement and motivation levels in the students, and were compared by question for before and after the study to determine if there had been a significant improvement in student motivation following the study.

The text-based assignments and the reading quiz were analyzed more for student comprehension of materials. I charted student growth in the text-based assignments over the

course of the study, and included the reading quiz to determine student mastery of skills. At the

end, I averaged the grades of the assignments together for each class. I then compared the class

averages to determine if there was a difference between the classes that had access to the

supplemental materials and the classes that did not. Additionally, I determined if there was a

difference between the class in which the supplemental material was addressed in class and the

class in which the supplemental material was used as outside-of-class reading material.

Results

To create a mixed group, the opportunity to read and analyze the young adult literary text of choice – Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* – was offered as an extra credit opportunity, originally for both classes where the text was not the focus, as it was in the test group. In one class, everyone refused the extra-credit opportunity, creating an ideal control group, where there was no exposure to the secondary text at all. In the other class, a small group of students selected to take the extra-credit opportunity, resulting in a mixed group, where some but not all students had exposure to the literature.

Due to standardized testing mandated for all students taking eleventh-grade English as well as cancellations from inclement weather, time for the study was compressed slightly, and, as such, the students did not have time to read the entirety of *The Hunger Games* as a class. Instead, students were broken into groups of two or three, where each group had two to three chapters of the text to read and analyze. The students then presented their chapters to the rest of the class, including a summary of the chapters, one to two main ideas from the chapters, any traits or themes in the book they noticed that were similar to the unit being studied in the class – the American romanticism movement – and if they could relate anything in the chapters to any of the class readings that had taken place.

Text-Based Assignments

The students completed four text-based assignments whose information was taken for data over the course of the study. The first assignment taken for data was a worksheet on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee," and included vocabulary, reading comprehension questions, personal opinion questions with textual support components, and a section connecting

the poems to additional media (a song and an audio reading). The second assignment was an exit

slip asking them to identify a line from either "The Raven" or "Annabel Lee" that stood out to

them and why, which was graded based on student responses – the higher the grade indicating

elevated responses in which the student went above and beyond the literal meaning and basic

purpose of the line to make literary connections or even speculations. The third assignment was a

student-created poetic piece about their own lives, based on Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

and using traits of romanticism learned about in the unit. Finally, the last piece taken for data

was a packet of critical reading questions based on the four transcendentalist pieces read in class.

All students in all classes completed the four assignments listed above. In addition to

these assignments, the test group read *The Hunger Games* and worked in pairs and as a class to

connect *The Hunger Games* to the texts they had been reading in class. A breakdown of the

grades the students in the test group received, as well as the scores the students received on their

reading quizzes, can be found in Figure 1 (below).

Fig. 1 – Assignment Score Breakdown, Test Group

	E.A. Poe Poetry Assignment	Exit Slip: Poem Analysis	"Song of Myself" Assignment	Transcendentalism Packet	Reading Quiz
Student 1	0 *	69	64	75	29
Student 2	52	79	0*	72	25
Student 3	100	89	88	100	91
Student 4	94	79	84	100	69
Student 5	88	89	84	49	76
Student 6	98	89	92	82	86
Student 7	0 *	89	0*	19	29
Student 8	92	69	80	79	29

Student 9	90	59	56	66	25
Student 10	0 *	79	52	0*	71
Student 11	100	59	96	70	54
Student 12	84	89	64	61	70
Student 13	44	89	0*	0*	59
Student 14	98	89	92	100	76
Student 15	92	79	88	94	69
Student 16	72	79	70	82	69
Student 17	100	79	96	91	81

* Indicates failure to hand in assignment

At twenty-four students, the control group was the largest group of students. These students were initially offered an opportunity to read *The Hunger Games* and to fill a chart summarizing the text and relating it to the unit of romanticism the students were studying at the time. However, none of the students took up this opportunity, leaving a control group in which no students had exposure to *The Hunger Games* at the same time that they were reading the classroom literature. A breakdown of the grades the students in the control group received on their assignments, as well as the scores the students received on their reading quizzes, can be found in Figure 2 (below).

Fig. 2 – Assignment Score Breakdown, Control Group

	E.A. Poe Poetry Assignment	Exit Slip: Poem Analysis	"Song of Myself" Assignment	Transcendentalism Packet	Reading Quiz
Student 1	96	89	72	76	63
Student 2	98	89	0*	63	45
Student 3	0 *	69	76	43	15
Student 4	100	79	100	91	86

Student 5	86	89	76	60	47
Student 6	88	89	0*	0*	89
Student 7	100	89	88	94	91
Student 8	96	89	100	70	85
Student 9	88	89	68	85	74
Student 10	0 *	69	72	87	66
Student 11	92	69	76	54	30
Student 12	96	69	51	97	74
Student 13	100	89	58	60	50
Student 14	92	89	92	97	70
Student 15	94	79	84	88	61
Student 16	98	79	84	97	82
Student 17	100	100	84	97	91
Student 18	72	89	88	79	27
Student 19	92	59	84	79	49
Student 20	90	59	88	90	82
Student 21	100	89	67	76	79
Student 22	94	79	0*	0*	64
Student 23	90	89	68	85	79
Student 24	96	89	0*	64	91

*Indicates failure to hand in assignment
Student is identified as having IEP and/or 504 accommodations

Finally, there was the mixed group, which consisted of twenty students. This group, like

the control group, was offered the chance to read The Hunger Games in conjunction with the

texts on Romanticism and fill out the chart summarizing the book and relating it to the unit being

studied. Unlike the control group, a handful of students took the opportunity, at least one of

whom was part of the study. A breakdown of the grades the students in the mixed group received

on their assignments, as well as the scores the students received on their reading quizzes, can be

found in Figure 3 (below).

Fig. 3 – Assignment Score Breakdown, Mixed Group

	E.A. Poe Poetry Assignment	Exit Slip: Poem Analysis	"Song of Myself" Assignment	Transcendentalism Packet	Reading Quiz
Student 1	96	89	96	100	95
Student 2	82	79	64	64	76
Student 3	92	100	80	100	81
Student 4	100	100	96	100	89
Student 5	94	89	96	94	79
Student 6	92	89	92	70	84
Student 7	0 *	79	0*	64	25
Student 8	96	89	58	73	49
Student 9	98	89	88	85	51
Student 10	98	89	88	82	78
Student 11	80	89	92	70	75
Student 12	86	79	84	90	72
Student 13	100	79	0*	28	54
Student 14	94	79	84	88	74
Student 15	100	79	88	70	62
Student 16	96	89	92	94	60
Student 17	98	89	96	73	86
Student 18	94	79	68	70	15
Student 19	70	69	51	28	17
Student 20	90	89	88	85	68

*Indicates failure to hand in assignment
Student is identified as ELL

Having collected these grades from the students and examined them on a whole-class

spectrum, the grades on these assignments were then averaged and compared between the three

classes, to determine which class had the higher average score on these assignments. The results

of the comparison can be found in Figure 4 (below).

Fig. 4 – Class Averages on Assignments, Comparison

	E.A. Poe Poetry Assignment	Exit Slip: Poetry Analysis	"Song of Myself" Assignment	Transcendentalism Packet	Reading Quiz
Control	85.8	81.9	65.7	72.2	66.3
Mixed	78.1	85.6	75.1	76.5	64.5
Test	70.8	79.6	62	67.1	59.3

Reading Quiz

Near the end of the study, a reading quiz was administered to all three groups. This quiz

consisted of ten free-response questions, asking about the readings that the students had done to

that point, covering four major authors of the American Romanticism unit: Edgar Allan Poe,

Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Robert Frost. In addition to covering works

by these four authors, the quiz tested students on their knowledge of themes of romanticism and

skills such as how to support claims with textual evidence. The quiz was graded with each

question counting for ten points each; however, partial credit was given dependent on student

answers, as many of the questions on the reading quiz involved more than one component to

them, such as an explanation, or making a list. If a student was able to satisfy part of the

components for the answer, partial credit was given to them. The scores from these tests were

broken down by class (see Fig. 1, 2, 3, above), and then, class scores were averaged and

compared by class (see Fig. 4, above).

Survey

At both the beginning and end of the study, a survey was administered to all students, asking them a series of questions about such topics their reading habits, their thoughts on curriculum readings for English class, and their feelings about young adult literature. The students were asked to respond with a series of Likert-scale style answers, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on a question.

Pre-study survey. The student responses to the pre-survey questions varied dependent on category, of which there are three definable categories: Reading preferences and habits, personal thoughts and feelings on curriculum readings, and feelings about young adult literature. As far as reading habits and preferences, the response was generally more positive than negative or neutral; of the 61 students, 38 responded with either "agree" or "strongly agree" to the statement of "I like to read." Additionally, responses for subsequent questions in regards to reading preferences and habits were generally positive – the only response that received a more negative response was the statement "I would still do the reading my teachers have me do even if it wasn't mandatory." On the second category, personal thoughts on curriculum reading, the responses tended to vary by statement. Many students did not, in fact, feel that they read too much in English class, or though that the material was boring or hard to understand, which suggests a degree of comprehension to the material and some level of engagement with the text. However, when given the statement "I wish we could change what we read in English class," 31 students indicated agreement with that statement, as opposed to 5 that indicated disagreement and 23 who were neutral on the subject, which indicates the possibility for increased motivation to read with a changing of curriculum texts. Finally, on the third category, which was feelings about young adult literature, the answers to questions tended towards positive responses, indicating a positive student response to young adult literature.

Post-study survey. Having administered the same survey to the students as was

administered at the beginning of the study, there was only a small amount of change noted in the

responses. Again, the questions were broken down into three categories: Reading preferences

and habits, personal thoughts and feelings on curriculum readings, and feelings about young

adult literature. In the category of reading preferences and habits, most answers were generally

positive, as in the pre-study survey; however, more students indicated on the post-study survey

that they were generally negative in regards to the question of "I would still do the reading my

teachers have me do even if it wasn't mandatory" – here, 21 students noted they either disagreed

or strongly disagreed with the statement, as opposed to the 20 on the pre-study survey. There was

also a bit of a shift in opinions on two of the questions in the category of thoughts and feelings

on curriculum. Following the unit that took place during the study, a unit of the American

romanticism and transcendentalism movement, more students indicated less of an understanding

of the curriculum material and more of a disinterest in the literature. While these responses came

in the form of more people answering that they were of a neutral opinion on both statements,

there was, in fact, a move towards disinterest and misunderstanding. There was, however, also a

shift towards more positive feelings about young adult literature following the study, as well as a

shift towards the positive as to students' opinions on young adult literature and the relatability of

the characters, indicating that more students showed an enjoyment of some sort in young adult

literature and its characters.

Interviews

A total of nine students, three from each class, were selected for one-to-one interviews.

The students were each selected based on their answers to the survey administered in class; of

each group, one student indicated they read often on their own time, one student indicated they

did not read often on their own time, and one student from each group indicated they were

neutral about whether or not they read on their own time. Despite their indications as to whether

or not they read a lot on their own time, six of the students, when asked if they enjoyed reading,

responded that they enjoyed reading. They cited a variety of reasons, such as enjoying being

transported to "different places," or enjoying the universe established by the work. However, the

other three students did not admit that they disliked reading, simply that it was not as enjoyable

to them as it was to other students. One student, Ishmael, stated "I do like to read, but it has to be

specific likes." Another student said "I don't really like to read. Books aren't always for me."

　　　After discussing student interest in reading and types of literature that interested the

students, the interviews shifted to discuss the literature used in the classroom. Of the nine, only

two said they did not enjoy the literature at all, and only three indicated a particular enjoyment of

the text; the other four took a middle ground position that tended to indicate that the type of text

determined whether or not they enjoyed the particular text. Interestingly enough, when asked if

they would change the texts read in a typical English classroom, most students – including the

ones who were on the fence about their enjoyment of the literature – indicated they would not

change the literature. One student claimed they most likely would not change the literature

because they "might not be able to experience the full range of literature" if they were to change

the literature of the classroom. Other students claimed that they wouldn't change it because the

literature chosen was important to history, or that it was good to read literature outside of their

comfort zone. Most of the students who claimed that they would not change the literature stated

that they would not change it because they were just students, and did not know enough about

other books to make that kind of decision. Interestingly enough, however, two students did

indicate they would absolutely change what they read – and one of them, Daria, had even

indicated that she liked the curriculum readings because they were educational, and prepared students for state-wide testing.

Finally, a question was posed to each of the nine students: *Do you think the students should have more say as to what books they read for English class? Why or why not?* While five of the students responded that yes, they believed that students should have more say as to their literature, four of the five qualified their answer with such statements as "only to a certain extent" or "only if what they choose is appropriate for school." Additionally, a sixth student stated that she wasn't sure – to her, the answer to the question depended largely on not just the students, but the lesson as well. Three of the students, however, stated that they believed the students should not have more say in the curriculum reading. Tris, a student from the test group who identified herself as an avid reader, said "The students probably shouldn't have more say in what they read in class, because they would read stuff that not's helpful or relevant." Despite the three that dissent, the general agreement was that, with some caution and guidelines, the students should have more say in what they are reading in class.

In addition to interviewing the students, interviews were also conducted with the mentoring teacher and the lead librarian, who was previously an English teacher with the school. For them, the questions were focused more on the noticed reading habits of students and on the curriculum literature. While there was no "set" curriculum for literature in the county the study was conducted in, most teachers on all levels taught the same texts; decisions about what to teach and when to teach it were generally agreed upon in PLC meetings conducted amongst the teachers. The mentoring teacher commented that, after getting through all the historical documents, students generally enjoyed the literature of the eleventh-grade curriculum – she cited taking American literature and American history at the same time as the likely reason for the

disinterest in the historical documents, and proposed that they were not as necessary for the curriculum. The librarian, meanwhile, stated that she would advise caution on adding what she described as "pop literature" – literature made popular by an overwhelming presence in the media – to a curriculum, and advocated for making sure the literature of the curriculum built a good foundation for the students in the years to come. Both the mentoring teacher and the librarian, however, had positive opinions on young adult literature. In addition to encouraging students to read more, there were other benefits cited by both. The mentoring teacher stated that young adult literature built a good bridge to the classics by alluding to them, and believed that, if a student could understand these allusions in the context of a young adult novel, it would pave the way to them understanding the material in the context of the canon work. The librarian, meanwhile, saw young adult literature as a good source of background knowledge for educators. To the librarian, reading young adult literature and monitoring trends in the literature could help educators to determine what the students are interested in, what they want to know more about, and what they might have trouble with understanding – or even what sort of problems they might be facing in their personal lives.

Discussion

Overall, the quantitative data suggests that the use of young adult literature in the classroom does not help student performance. In fact, the test group, which incorporated *The Hunger Games* into the unit on American romanticism, had the lowest scores across the board on their assignments, suggesting that there was a decreased level of reading comprehension. The mixed group – where only a few students had read The Hunger Games in conjunction to the unit – tended to score higher on activities with more freedom in the responses, such as the exit slip on Poe's poems, or the "Song of Myself" activity. In conjunction, the test group, which had no exposure to the young adult literature whatsoever, tended to score higher on activities requiring recollection of details from the texts, such as the worksheet on Poe or the reading quiz. The control group, however, scored lower on the transcendentalism packet – which was a combination of text recall and personal conjecture and explanation – than the mixed group did.

However, the qualitative data suggests that not all hope is lost on the use of young adult literature in the classroom. Data taken from the student surveys indicate that, while more students indicated trouble with understanding the texts read in the classroom and less students indicated an interest in the texts read in the classroom, more students in the post-study survey also indicated more of an interest in young adult literature following the study, including indicating that more of them would be interested in seeing more young adult literature in the classroom. Their responses give credence to the theory that student engagement in text would be improved by use of high-interest texts, as suggested by researchers such as Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013).

Additionally, the responses from the student interviews spoke volumes about what might

increase student motivation in a classroom. While some students indicated that they only liked

specific works, their needs could be satisfied by young adult literature, as the genre continues to

grow and expands in works as years progress. However, something that came up during

interviews that I felt was worth noting was that many of the students interviewed believed that

students should have more say in the curriculum literature, albeit with teacher guidance. Again,

this lends credence to the theory of increasing student involvement by allowing students more

efficacy, as proposed by Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) and even Daniels and Steres (2011).

Therefore, the possibility remains that using more young adult literature in the classroom may

increase student motivation to read.

Limitations

As with any study, there were limitations to this study, as well. One of the biggest

limitations was the weather. Thanks to school closings from inclement weather, quite a few

instructional days were lost. This compromised the original scheduled timeline of the study, as it

pressed reviews for the state-mandated standards testing for eleventh grade English into March,

when the romanticism unit – and, as such, the study – was scheduled to start. Additionally,

review for the state-mandated testing was extended because of the snow days, so as to ensure the

students would not forget vital information due to not being in school for days at a time.

The standardized testing was another limitation to the study. The test group alone lost

two instructional days to testing, due to the fact that their test began at the same time that their

class would usually begin. The students in the control group and the mixed group, who had class

later in the day, did not lose as much instructional time as the test group did, as they took their

test prior to class. However, test time did take away from classroom instruction to some extent.

Additionally, time spent reviewing for the standardized testing took away from time that could

have been spent on other instruction. Almost a month was spent on review and preparation for

the standardized testing, taking away from time that could have been spent expanding upon the

romanticism unit. The preparation time for the standardized testing also may have had an impact

on the students, making them mentally "burnt out" and not as fresh and ready to explore a

challenging unit such as Romanticism.

The challenges of the unit are also another limitation. Due to its highly philosophical

nature and complex themes and subgenres, Romanticism is considered one of the more complex

and challenging units in the eleventh-grade curriculum. Students were offered many resources,

including guided notes presented with an in-depth presentation at the beginning of the unit, and

were also prepared for some of the more elevated language found in Romanticism texts with a

short unit on speech devices prior to the start of the Romanticism unit. However, some of the

students proved to still lack the basic understanding of the texts that was necessary for them to

succeed, including the students who felt uncomfortable with asking for instructor assistance, or

those who insisted on "figuring it out" on their own.

Finally, the fourth limitation of this study is one that may have had an impact on the test

group. The original plan of the study involved a full-class, full-text reading of *The Hunger

Games*, meaning that, as a class, the students would read and engage with the text. However, due

to some of the limitations above – namely, the weather and standardized testing – time for a full-

class reading was lacking. Instead, students were paired into groups of two or three, with each

group being assigned two or three chapters to read, analyze, and then present to the class, with

the first two chapters being done together as a class. Because of this, not all students were fully

introduced to the entire work of literature. While many students may already be familiar with

The Hunger Games owing to the release of the 2013 movie version, the fact that the students did

not get to read the entire text as a class could have affected the students, as they were presented

most of the text as interpreted by their classmates. If the students had had the opportunity to read

the entire text as a class, some students may have had different insights than that of those who

read and presented the chapters, and those insights may have helped the students gain a deeper

understanding and make a better connection to the literature of the curriculum than just having

the chapters presented to them would have.

Implications

There are some possible implications for having young adult literature in the classroom in

the future, despite the lack of success with the test group in using young adult literature to

improve their comprehension of the texts. The students in the test group were engaged in the

activity and excited by the prospect of reading young adult literature in class, which shows an

increase in motivation, even if it is just a small increase.

That being said, however, there are some caveats to incorporating young adult literature

into a classroom. Previous literature suggests replacing canonical texts completely with young

adult literature, but this is not the right move. Students still need the canonical body of literature

present, to build a strong literary background. That is not to say that young adult literature cannot

be incorporated into a classroom whatsoever; young adult literature, added as a supplemental text

to canonical literature, provides new insights and avenues for consideration for students.

However, before deciding to incorporate young adult literature into the classroom as

supplemental text, an educator should consider the material that is being covered at a given time.

For more rigorous units, such as a unit on American romanticism, it would prove more beneficial

for the students to have more time and attention devoted to comprehending the literature, and

adding supplemental material could potentially confuse or bog down students who are having

trouble comprehending the base materials.

　　　　Additionally, there is the idea of whole-class, whole-text reading versus paired and

grouped readings and summarization. The students of the study read *The Hunger Games* as

groups and provided summarizations of the text, which was based on what they deemed to be the

most important parts of the chapter. This does allow for some bias from the students, as what is

important to one student may not necessarily be as important to another. While group readings

work well for a situation where time is short and a book needs to be covered in a short amount of

time, there is the concern that things are being left out. Ideally, using young adult literature as a

supplemental text should be conducted during a unit in which there is enough time to read and

comprehend the canonical text and do a full-class reading of the supplemental text, to allow for

multiple student insights on different parts of the story.

Conclusion

Young adult literature is a vast and quickly-growing genre of literature, whose books have opened more opportunities for reading not only to teenagers, but to an entire body of people who otherwise felt that reading was "boring" or "difficult." In a world with an English curriculum that has remained full of much the same type of literature for decades, this new body of literature seems like the breath of fresh air that is needed to revive student interest and stop the trend of students not understanding what they are reading.

There is a possibility for a future where young adult literature is featured as part of the curriculum in the English classroom. However, it is not as simple as taking out the old to make way for the new. The old literature, the works considered canonical, should stay, and, instead of being replaced, should be supplemented by the newer works, which can add insight to an event within the text, or to present the text's argument or story from another perspective, adding an extra layer of depth to the text. Students have indicated that they would like to see a difference in what they read in the English classroom – and some have even indicated they would like to see more young adult literature. Their desire to see some change in their curriculum – and their willingness to admit and ask for this change – shows that students would be more motivated to read if the texts were something they enjoyed more.

This is a process that should be taken with caution, however. The ability to understand and discuss what is being read should not be sacrificed in the interest of getting the students to read more. Before deciding to supplement the canonical texts with the newer literature, an educator should consider their curriculum, the texts that ask for higher levels of thinking and processing from the students. For the texts that are more complex in nature, it would prove more

beneficial to take more of the time to engage with the literature itself, to make sure there is

comprehension from all students, instead of further complicating things by adding a

supplemental work. With careful considerations, however, young adult literature can be a body

of literature to be enjoyed both outside and inside the English classroom.

Appendix A

Student Survey

To be administered at beginning and conclusion of study.

Name: _____   Date: _____

Directions: Read each statement carefully. After you read the statement, circle whether you strongly agree with, agree with, disagree with, or strong disagree with the statement. If you neither agree nor disagree with the statement, circle the "neutral" option.

1. I like to read.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. I read a lot outside of school.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. I always read what my teachers assign me to read.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4. I would still do the reading my teachers have me even if it wasn't mandatory.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. I think we read too much stuff in English class.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. I think there's a good reason the teacher picks out what we read in English class.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7. I think the stuff we read in English class is boring.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. I don't understand what we read in English class a lot of the time.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. I wish we could change what we read in English class.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. I like reading young adult literature.

      Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. I think young adult literature is easier to read than what we read in English class.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

12. I wish we read newer books in English class.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

13. I feel like I can identify with or relate to characters in young adult novels.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

14. I like reading books with teenage characters in them better.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

15. I would like to read more young adult literature in English.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions

A. For Students

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

2. What do you like to read?

3. How do you feel about what we read in English class? Why?

4. Why do you think we read what we read in English?

5. Do you think some books are more important for us to read than others? What books? Why?

6. If you could change what we read in English class, would you? Why?

7. What would you like to see more of in English class, as far as what we read?

8. Why do you think the teacher picks the books that they pick for class reading?

9. Do you think the students should have more say as to what books they read for English class? Why or why not?

B. For the Mentor Teacher

1. What books do you usually have your students read?

2. Why do you select the books that you chose for the class to read?

3. Do you think any of these books are outdated or irrelevant to the curriculum?

4. Are there any books you would add to the curriculum, if you could? Which books, and why?

5. Are there any books you would take off the curriculum, if you could? Which books, and why?

6. Do you think the students enjoy what they read in English class? Why or why not?

7. How do you feel about young adult literature?

C. For the Librarians

1. What kind of books do you enjoy reading? Do you have a particular kind you enjoy?

2. What kind of books do the students seem to enjoy the most?

3. What books to do you think the students should be reading more of?

4. Are there any books you would add to the curriculum, if you could? Which books, and why?

5. Are there any books you would take off the curriculum, if you could? Which books, and why?

6. How do you feel about young adult literature?

Appendix C

Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Hello, my name is Kelsey Wheaton. As some of you might recall from previous letters or interactions, I am currently working with your child in their 11th grade English classroom. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, working towards my Masters in Secondary Education. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducted an action research study related to English literature. *I am inviting your child to participate in my research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, so you have the option to consent to your child participating in the study or not. I am now going to explain the study to you.*

I am interested in discovering whether or not incorporating young adult literature into a classroom setting as a supplemental text has an effect on student learning. Research suggests that broader ranges of texts, and texts that students are more engaged in and find easier to relate to may help improve student comprehension and may also create more motivation for students to read. Over a period of approximately four to five weeks, I will be working with the students using varying degrees of incorporating young adult literature as a supplemental text to the main classroom texts, as well as gauging their responses to reading in general, to particular types of literature, and to the literature we are engaging with. Work assigned will typically be part of classwork, though some readings may be assigned outside of class.

I am requesting permission to use information I collect from your child, including responses to surveys, written responses, and quiz grades, as part of my study. While some material from your child, such as written responses, may be discussed in class, student names will be kept confidential in all reports on the project. *Additionally, I may select your child to interview and am requesting permission to interview your child; if your child is interviewed, their responses will be hand-transcribed*. All notes about your child will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study, while all material such as responses and quizzes will be returned to your child. Participation in this project will not affect your child's grade in any way. Your child's participation in the study is voluntary, and you have the right to decline their participation in the study. Additionally, your child is free to stop participating in the study at any time. Your child will still participate in the classroom activities, but data for the research study will not be collected from him or her.

The benefit of this study is that I will determine whether or not literature meant for adolescents has an effect on their learning when used along with classic texts of the English classroom.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Antonio Causarano (acausara@umw.edu) or myself (kwheato2@mail.umw.edu). Please return this form by January 30, 2015. I look forward to working with you and your student!
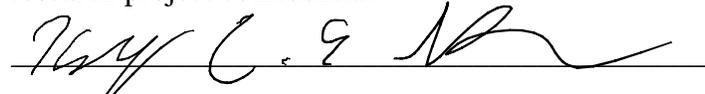
Thank you,

Kelsey Wheaton

I have read the above letter and give my child _____
permission to participate in this project.

_____   _____

(Parent/Guardian Signature)   (Date)

I, ___Kelsey Wheaton_____, agree to keep all information and data collected during this
research project confidential.

_____   _____

(Researcher Signature)   (Date)

Appendix D

Consent Letter for Adult Responders

Dear Participant,

Hello, my name is Kelsey Wheaton. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, working towards my Masters in Secondary Education. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducted an action research study related to English literature. I am inviting you to participate in my research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, so you have the option to consent to your participation in the study or not. I am now going to explain the study to you.

I am interested in discovering whether or not incorporating young adult literature into a classroom setting as a supplemental text has an effect on student learning. Research suggests that broader ranges of texts, and texts that students are more engaged in and find easier to relate to may help improve student comprehension and may also create more motivation for students to read. Over a period of approximately four to five weeks, I will be working with the students using varying degrees of incorporating young adult literature as a supplemental text to the main classroom texts, as well as gauging their responses to reading in general, to particular types of literature, and to the literature we are engaging with. Work assigned will typically be part of classwork, though some readings may be assigned outside of class.

I am requesting permission to interview you about your thoughts on literature in the English classroom, student reading, and young adult literature. All responses to interviews will be hand-transcribed, and your name will be kept confidential in the final report. At the conclusion of the study, your responses to the interview questions will be destroyed. You have the option to opt out of the interviewing process at any time, or to decline to participate entirely.

The benefit of this study is that I will determine whether or not literature meant for adolescents has an effect on their learning when used along with classic texts of the English classroom.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Antonio Causarano (acausara@umw.edu) or myself (kwheato2@mail.umw.edu). Please return this form by January 30, 2015. I look forward to working with you!

Thank you,

Kelsey Wheaton

I have read the above letter, all my questions have been answered, and I consent to be interviewed for this study.

_____   _____

(Signature)   (Date)

I, __Kelsey Wheaton_____, agree to keep all information and data collected during this research project confidential.

_____   _____

(Researcher Signature)   (Date)

Appendix E

Student Assent Letter

Dear Student,

I am very excited to be your teacher for the spring semester! For part of our third quarter, we will be using a young adult text as supplemental material to our usual class readings. Some classes will read the additional text in class, some will read the additional text outside of class, and some will not read the text at all.

Throughout the course of reading our text(s), we will have a series of reading quizzes. These quizzes are for me to determine how well you understand the text(s) we will be reading. Additionally, there will be a few written assignments given asking you to discuss the text(s) that we are reading in class. Prior to the reading of the text(s), as well as at the end of the text(s), you will complete a survey asking you how you feel about reading and about what we read here in the English classroom. Some of you, I may ask to interview you to better understand what you as a student feel about this class and the materials we cover in it. Finally, I will be taking notes on the class as we read the texts. You will not be graded based on your participation in the study.

In addition to receiving this letter, you will get a letter to give to your parents to give their permission for you to participate in this study. If you parents do not give permission for you to participate in this study, you will not participate. If your parents do give their permission for you to participate, however, I strongly encourage you to participate in this study.

Your participation in this study is not required. Neither you nor your grade will be affected badly if you chose to not take part in this study. You will still participate in the reading of the texts, as well as quizzes, written prompts, and surveys, but your data will not be collected and used in the study. You may choose to stop participating at any time. You may ask questions about the study.

If you decide to participate in the study, your information will be kept confidential. This means that I will not use your name or the name of the school in anything I write, and I will not reveal any personal information about you in the research project.

Signing this form means that you have read it or have had it read to you, and that you are willing to be in this study. If at any point you have any questions, please ask me!

Thanks,

Ms. Wheaton

I have read the above letter, all my questions have been answered, and I agree to participate in this project.

_____   _____

(Student Signature)   (Date)

I agree to let Ms. Wheaton interview me and keep a written log of my responses.

_____   _____

(Student Signature)   (Date)

I, _____Ms. Wheaton_____, will keep your names and information about you
confidential.

_____   _____

(Student Teacher/Researcher Signature)   (Date)

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