Liars, Lovers, and Thieves: Being Adolescent Readers and Writers in Young Adult Literature and Life

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Liars, Lovers, and Thieves:  
Being Adolescent Readers and Writers in Young Adult Literature and Life

By

Suzanne Mills Crawford

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Chair
Professor Glynda Hull
Professor Donald McQuade

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Liars, Lovers, and Thieves:
Being Adolescent Readers and Writers in Young Adult Literature and Life

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by Suzanne Mills Crawford
Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Chair

Books written for teenagers portray the lives of young people and frequently include depictions of teenagers as readers and writers. From brief mentions of writing to elaborate descriptions of reading, the representations of literacy practices contained in works of young adult literature (YAL) oftentimes bid readers to take notice. This dissertation examines representations of literacy practices in YAL and investigates the meanings that adolescent readers ascribe to them.

Through analyzing a set of forty-seven award-winning texts written specifically for adolescents and through convening a book group with high school students, this two-phase research study brings together literacy, literature, and adolescents. In the first phase of the study, each reference to print included in the set of YAL was coded and used to map the range of literacy practices represented in the books. Four types of representations emerged, each functioning differently in the narratives and each providing different information about reading and writing: (a) mentions are short references to literate activities; (b) descriptions are more elaborated and detailed depictions of literacy practices; (c) constitutive events are portrayals of reading and writing that serve as turning points in the narrative and that bring forth literacy as a part of life; and (d) extended articulations are representations of writing and reading that extend across and throughout texts, driving the stories and animating lives that include literacy.

With these types of representations forming an analytical framework, the study then explored the literate identities of the characters in the books in more depth, attending especially to connections between literacy practices and adolescence. At the transition from childhood to adulthood, the adolescent characters’ many identities are in transition and their literate identities are likewise in flux. Further their identities as readers and writers intersect other identity work that they do. In the second phase of the study, eight teenagers read books from the set of YAL used in the first phase, explicitly focusing on the books’ representations of literacy practices. Drawing from interviews, surveys, and discussions, the research reveals ways in which the participants understood the reading and writing depicted in the books. As the teenagers interpret the
activities of represented readers and writers, they identify with the characters and negotiate and display their own literate identities.
For my students
and
for my teachers
and
for my friends, the books
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It is my hope that the pages that follow carry my gratitude for the support I have received throughout the research and writing of this study. All oversights and errors are my own.
Chapter 1
Introduction: Locating Literacy in Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Lives

Young adult literature (YAL) tells stories of the lives of teenagers. Just like the young people who read them, the adolescent characters wake up, and they go to sleep. They eat and drink, work and play. They love. They fight. They live and die. They also read and write. In Chamber’s Postcards from No-Man’s Land (1999), a young man tells a woman he meets in Amsterdam that his favorite book is The Diary of a Young Girl (Frank, 1967) and that he loves Anne Frank. He quotes the book and reports that he often rereads it, each time highlighting the passages that he likes. She asks him, “You’re a reader, then?,” to which he responds, “A lot” (p. 40-1). In Gantos’ Hole in my Life (2002), a young man is asked to surrender a prison copy of The Brothers Karamozov (Dostoyevsky, 2003), though he wants to take it with him upon his release. He had written his own stories between the lines of the book he pretended to read while incarcerated, in essence lying about the use of the book. “My heart was beating wildly! I had to keep that book. My entire identity as a writer was in that book” (p. 195). And Zusak’s (2006) The Book Thief is the story of a girl who steals books; literacy and literacy practices are at the heart of the narrative. The books’ characters’s identities as lovers, liars, and thieves are interwoven with their identities as readers and writers. In ways big and small, these books written for and read by teenagers depict “lives that include reading” and writing (Sumara, 1996a). What do these representations of literacy offer to the teenagers who read them?

Over the past few decades, adolescents have increasingly become the focus of the work of scholars and policy makers as they attempt to understand and ameliorate what has been termed a crisis among American youth – a teenage population with poor literacy skills (e.g. Rycik & Irvin, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Popular media laments the lagging reading and writing skills of teenagers. Yet at the same time, I have observed vibrant interactions among teenagers that were focused on reading and writing. Bookstores, online communities, libraries buzz with excitement about rereading the Harry Potter books or with anticipation of the next book in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight series. On Facebook, an online social networking site, young people’s profiles boast, “Reading is sexy,” and on Shelfari, another social networking site “for people who love books,” they write enthusiastic recommendations of YAL for each other. In fact, book sales of YAL titles have skyrocketed since the late 1990s, spawning numerous imprints devoted to books written for adolescents (Bean & Moni, 2003). Teenagers who seem to struggle with reading and writing simultaneously carry on lives in which literacy appears to play important social functions.

While the body of adolescent literacy research aimed at understanding the reading and writing that teenagers do continues to grow, the boom in YAL presents a unique opportunity to further understand the literacy practices of young people. YAL books are characterized by (a) protagonists aged twelve to eighteen, roughly the age of the intended reading audience, and (b) plotlines that
in some way explore social issues pertinent to the lives of adolescents (Elliott & Dupuis, 2002). Since these titles depict the lives of teenagers, they offer representations of adolescents as loners and participaters, as rule-breakers and rule-followers, as friends, enemies, and lovers, and as readers and writers. In many of the same ways that literacy plays social functions in the lives of the adolescents who read them, the characters in YAL read and write for varied social purposes.

To examine representations of adolescents as readers and writers in YAL, this study draws from the set of the forty-seven titles recognized by the Young Adult Library Services Association’s (YALSA) (American Library Association, 2012) Michael L. Printz Award committee as “exemplif[y]ing] literary excellence in young adult literature.” As award-winning books recognized by librarians whose expertise is in working with young adult readers, these titles are all but guaranteed addition to public libraries nationwide, are much more likely to be added to school library collections, are given prominent placement in the many stores where books are sold, and may even appear in secondary English classrooms, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will be read by teens. Through analysis of these texts written specifically for adolescents and through reading them with high school students, this dissertation seeks to understand the range of literacy practices depicted in young adult literature, the notions of literacy inherent in them, and the meanings that adolescents make of literary representations of literacy.

Review of the Literature

This study takes as its focus understanding representations of literacy practices in YAL and the meanings that young people ascribe to them. Before exploring the range of ways of reading and writing that are represented in YAL, I turn to the literature to trace the parameters that define this dissertation. What counts as a literacy practice? What do we know about literate lives of adolescents? How is the notion of representation discussed in relation to literature? In order to situate the study, I first offer an examination of the evolution of the notion of literacy practices. I then briefly outline key studies of adolescent literacy that make use of literacy practices to understand meanings and uses that young people ascribe to reading and writing, particularly as they intersect with notions of identity. Finally, I bridge to the work of theorists who explore the ways that readers come to make meaning of representations in literature as a means of imagining the interpretive work that teenage readers do when they encounter YAL.

Locating Literacy as a Social Practice

Before the vast expansion of the field of literacy studies in the 1980’s, scholars in linguistics were analyzing discourse. Austin’s (1962) landmark text, How to Do Things With Words marks a shift in the focus of these analyses, inasmuch as he attends to the words themselves and their use in speech situated in social contexts. This social turn precipitated the emergence in scholarship of
notions of first, the speech act, then the speech event, then the literacy event, and finally the literacy practice, a broadening of focus that situates the meaning and function of language in the contexts in which it is used.

When Austin (1962) suggests that words themselves are tied to the social space in which they are uttered, deriving their functions and meanings from the contexts in which they are used in his speech act, and when Hymes (1974) argues that the utterance and its meaning are intertwined with the activity in which the utterance occurs in his speech event, the stage is set for the literacy event. In his ethnography of speaking, Szwed (1981), similarly addressing reading and writing, argues that studying the social meanings of literacy is central to more fully understanding reading and writing and calls for ethnographic studies of literacy. Despite the omnipresence of literacy in education, he suggests that literacy is under-theorized and incompletely understood. He argues that “definitions of reading and writing...must include social context and function (use) as well as the reader and the text of what is being read and written” (p. 15). In proposing an ethnography of literacy, Szwed offers that the sort of systematic analysis of language use that is inherent in the Hymes’ concept of speech event, analysis that takes into account who is using what text, when, where, how, and for what purpose, would prove useful in the study of the activities of reading and writing. He poses the question, “[W]hat positions do reading and writing hold in the entire communicative economy and what is the range of their social and cultural meanings?” Szwed challenges researchers to investigate the varied uses and meanings within and across cultures to approach an understanding of literacy.

A number of scholars from varied disciplines take up Swzed’s call (e.g. Scribner & Cole, 1981). When Heath (1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1983) studies the unique uses and social meanings of literacy in her ethnography of spoken and written language use among three distinct communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, she makes use of Hymes’ notion of speech event and takes what she terms a literacy event as her unit of analysis. She defines a literacy event as, “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (1982, p. 93). In this way, Heath fronts the people in a literacy event and explicitly explores the connections between written texts, people, and contexts. She offers a depiction of literacy that varies according to the social sphere and cultural context in which it occurs.

In order to emphasize the idea that literacy is situated socially, historically, ideologically, and culturally, Street (1984, 1993, 2000) favors the use of the term literacy practice over literacy event. His use of practice stresses the position of activities that involve print as embedded in other social activities, and thus emphasizes the “social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events [that involve print] and that give meaning to them” (2000: p. 20). Street cautions that while the literacy event has been employed as a effective tool in closely examining the reading and writing done by individuals and groups, it suggests a finite and isolatable occurrence and thus the results of these observations often remain “descriptive” and overlook the “underlying conventions and assumptions about literacy events that make them work” (p.21). Through his fieldwork in Iran, Street articulates the numerous ways in which any
interaction with print is imbued with history, ideology, and culture, all unseen concepts which help to construct the meanings ascribed to literacy. Barton and Hamilton (1998) similarly adopt a broad view of literacy as a social practice highlighting the unseen aspects of any “social practice in which literacy has a role” (p. 6). They contend that “the notion of literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (p. 6). Citing Street (1993), the authors suggest that in working to understand reading and writing in the social contexts in which they occur, they must not only examine the interactions that the adults in Lancaster, England whom they study have with print, but also “the values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships (p. 6)” that are articulated through them, including those about the practices of reading and writing themselves.

Thus the literacy practice as a unit of analysis came to be. Imbued with the echoes of the speech act and an individual’s speaking as intimately connected with the social context in which the speaking occurs and emerging from the literacy event and an attention to the person or people involved in the reading or writing, the literacy practice highlights the social practice of literacy as embedded in other social practices.

**Locating Literacy Practices Among Adolescents**

The notion that the meanings that individuals ascribe to literate activities and their uses of literacy are interconnected finds particular resonance in studies of the literacy practices of young people. Whether articulated as survey responses (e.g. Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007), in interviews (e.g. Reeves, 2004; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), or through ethnographic study (e.g. Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000), adolescents indicate that they participate in literate activities for purposes tied to the meanings they ascribe to the activities. The connection between use and meaning is uniquely visible in adolescents’ unsanctioned literacy practices, those that exist on the periphery of the classroom. Numerous outstanding studies of adolescent literacy take the perspective of the teacher (Hynds, 1997; Mueller, 2001; Wilhelm, 1995) and most closely examine classroom reading and writing, but they incompletely portray what meanings and uses the youth ascribe to literacy. This is attributed to the idea that adolescents negotiate meanings/uses for their interactions with text that often contradict or re-imagine the meanings/uses offered inside school. As such, adolescent literacy researchers such as Finders (1997), Moje (2000), and Wilhelm and Smith (2002), attempt to understand the literate activities of the young people in their studies from their points of view by drawing from extended periods of time with the participants and in school and outside of school contexts.

In the following sections, I explore four metaphors for conceptualizing meanings/uses of literacy that are particularly salient in the literature on adolescent literacy: literacy as/for truth-seeking, literacy as/for belonging, literacy as/for transforming, and literacy as/for feeling. These metaphors do not represent strict categories into which literacy practices can be neatly sorted; rather, they serve as a starting point from which to examine the blurred and
overlapping meanings/uses young people ascribe to their reading and writing activities. Following from Scribner’s (1984) “Literacy in Three Metaphors,” I propose using these metaphors, which arise from existing scholarship on adolescent literacy, to work toward “understanding the great variety of beliefs and aspirations that various people have developed toward literacy in their particular historical and current life circumstances” (17). They do not guide the work of this study, but rather make explicit the most prevalent ways of operationalizing the uses of and meanings that are ascribed to reading and writing. I make use of Finders’ (1997), Moje’s (2000), and Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002) studies to elaborate the positions of the metaphors in the lives of young people because the authors’ emic perspectives are the best available representations of the range of literacy practices in adolescents’ lives in the literature.

**Literacy as/for truth-seeking.** The notion that truth resides within the written and read word is has been propagated for centuries. When Goody and Watt’s 1968 article “The Consequences of Literacy” is often cited as beginning a great multidisciplinary debate about literacy and its relationship to individuals and the groups who make use of the written word as the authors contend that literacy alters cognition. By tracing the history of the use of writing, the authors attend to what they characterize as the development of literacy over time to argue that written language alters human culture and the cognitive processes of individuals. Through this line of argument they ascribe a truth-value to literacy that holds it as superior to other communicative modes and suggest that a culture’s written record allows individuals to distinguish the past as separate from the present and as a result to develop an objective view on this past, a truth. Olson (1977, 1994) furthers this line of thinking by tracing corresponding developments in individuals and cultures that he attributes to the appearance of literacy and argues that the shift from spoken language, what he terms “utterance”, to written language, referred to as “text”, places increased importance on explicitness in literate societies. The text that is “autonomous” (Olson, 1977: 258) can convey its meaning without the social interaction required in spoken language because the author chooses his or her words precisely; therefore, it is a new representation not only of language, but of the intellectual process of composing that language, and it offers its reader a carefully composed truth.

Though highly critiqued for their claims that literacy fundamentally changes cognitive functioning, these authors’ work offer examinations of a still powerful metaphor for literacy in life, literacy as/for truth-seeking. Goody and Watt and Olson suggest that the activities of reading and writing position individuals to encounter an objective reflection of reality through a written text. When Jacob reads *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1967) in *Postcards from No-Man’s Land* (Chambers, 2002), he is transported to Anne’s world of Amsterdam in the 1940’s. Her fears and steadfastness, inscribed by hand in the darkness of the hidden apartment, are replicated in typeface printed and reprinted many decades later. His reading seeks the truth of Anne to find out more about her, to know
her, to be an expert on her. In order to do, so he must uncover the truth of her tragedy and the truth of her hope.

Similarly, the teenage boys whose reading and writing are the focus of Smith and Wilhelm’s work talk of the worlds of cars and wrestling that are the focus of their literate activities (2002). The authors make use of extensive interview, self-evaluation, and reading log data to argue that the boys bring varied attitudes and stances to reading and writing that are intimately tied to their social roles. Smith and Wilhelm’s forty-nine male case studies are in seventh through twelfth grade, have experienced different degrees of school success, and come from diverse racial and socio-economic positions. Focusing on the ways that literacy fit into the lives of the young men both in school and outside of school, the authors find that they hold “different values, interests and goals” that impact their use of reading and writing (p. 183). In spite of the diversity Smith and Wilhelm uncovered, thematic links join the boys’ literacy practices. Many talk of using literacy to find out more about cars and wrestling. The young men use texts to get answers about and gain knowledge of these topics, and in doing, they forged identities as experts in the areas.

**Literacy as/for belonging.** Following from Goody and Watt and Olson, Scribner and Cole (1981) test and critique the attribution of significant differences between societies based solely on having a written language and determine that literacy’s effects are tied to the uses to which literacy is put and its value within particular groups. In their study, Scribner and Cole pair psychological assessment with ethnographic data to explore the literate practices of the Vai in Liberia. Their findings suggest that the Vai use reading and writing to participate in their community’s varied and multilingual activities and in their uses of literacy, the Vai reveal their belonging to a particular group. Importantly, their study offers evidence that any relationship between literacy and thinking is inextricably linked to social activity.

Heath’s (1983) ethnography of literacy in two neighboring communities and their experiences in schooling in town in the Piedmont of the Carolinas also articulates how language use, literacy, and ways of being all simultaneously signal and secure belonging to a particular community. In contrast to Scribner and Cole’s study designed to investigate the consequences of literacy in a culture for whom little written language exists, Heath’s *Ways with Words* delves into the lives of Americans in the newly integrated South, lives and histories that are laced with print. Heath finds that each community has unique ways of reading and writing. Like the Vai, the residents of Roadville and Trackton have their own habits of using written texts that are shared by its members and linked to the activities of the community. Their ways of being with text mark the individuals as belonging to their communities. Heath argues that children are socialized into written and spoken language use and in their learning language also learn “ways of acting, believing, and valuing of those around him” (p. 6). This implies that literacy is embedded in norms and expectations shared by a community. Literacy is “interwoven in different ways with oral uses of language, ways of negotiating meaning, deciding on action, and achieving status” (p. 234). Heath extends the relationship between literacy and cognition that Scribner and Cole hypothesize to
incorporate multiple modes of communication and to situate it within multiple social relationships.

Halfway around the world, Street’s (1984) study of literacy practices in Iranian villages in the 1970s uncovers a similar link between literacy and belonging. Following Heath, Street argues that literacy is “a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes” (p. 97). He delineates “‘maktab’ literacy,” reading and writing practices that have their roots in the ‘maktab’ or Islamic schools, and “‘commercial’ literacy,” those practices tied to rapid economic growth in the area. The Chesmehis with whom Street spent significant time conducting his ethnographic research engage in reading and writing practices for religious purposes and some take on other new literacy practices to participate in trade opportunities. As such, reading text is a religious habit, for instance, defined by the community’s Islamic tradition, which simultaneously, asserts an individual’s belonging to that community, while other literate activities assert the same individual’s membership in other communities like that of business worker. For Street literacy necessarily includes “the ideology and concrete social forms and institutions that give meaning to any particular practice of reading and writing” (p. 121). Increasingly, literacy is seen as nested in the multiple overlapping contexts to which an individual belongs within which practices with written text occur.

Drawing from the work of Scribner and Cole, Heath, and Street, Gee (1996) offers the notion of Discourse to integrate the historical, social, cultural, and political forces that give meaning to language use, both spoken and written:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (p. 131).

Gee sees literacy as used by individuals to actively belong to a community, “to identify oneself as a member”, a somewhat different notion from Heath’s which portrays community members who impart “ways with words” to their young to assure their belonging. Gee demonstrates that individuals first learn “ways of using language” in the home and that this becomes the “base” from which all other Discourses taken on are acquired (p. 141). Like Street, Gee intimates that individuals can exercise choice in learning and using literacy to establish membership in a particular group.

Embedded in the literacy habits of Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002) adolescent boys is this importance of the social and the relationship between literacy and membership in a group. Elaborating the role of the social in the young men’s literacy lives, the authors discuss “how friends and family affected literate interests; the importance of relationships with teachers; their enjoyment of working in groups; and the importance of relationships they cultivated with textual characters, authors, or directors” (p. 142). Many of Smith and Wilhelm’s subjects were enthusiastic fans of wrestling, faithfully following their favorite
characters and identifying with them. They professed to relate strongly to the “villains” because of their abilities to “stretch the boundaries of the acceptable” and the “underdogs” because of a desire “to help the person who needed the most help” (p. 146), both qualities that they admired and wish to emulate. Like Jacob, these young men found companionship with characters and a sense of belonging.

Finders’ (1997) ethnographic study of two small groups of girls in one class at a midwestern middle school offers a view of the ways that they use print to assert their identities as members of peer groups. The “Tough Cookies” and “Social Queens” engage in literacy practices in and out of school that subvert the reading and writing practices valued in their English class, and in doing so form social bonds based on literacy. Across one school year, Finders follows the girls to their classes, interviews them, interviews their mothers, and joins them in social gatherings in their homes. She finds that for the “Social Queens,” “literacy is a social event with same aged peers, literacy is used to mark special status, and literacy is used to sustain social roles” (p. 80). In her analysis of the literacy events in which the “Tough Cookies” participated, Finders determines that for these girls “literacy is a solitary act, literacy is used to deny allegiance, and tensions arise between the needs to protect the private self and the necessity of public performances” (p. 114). The girls’ shared participation in doing reading and writing in these particular ways, albeit without the physical companionship of their peers, still signals the girls’ alliance to each other.

**Literacy as/for transforming.** Writing from the perspective of a Brazilian and an educator, Freire’s (1970; 1987) concept of literacy fronts the political potential in a people armed with knowledge of literacy to transform the world. In the vein of Goody and Watt and writing at approximately the same time, Freire is also interested in the consequences of literacy. Rather than claiming effects in the cognitive abilities of individuals who use literacy, he suggests that certain kinds of literacy can result in certain kinds of social and political consequences. Freire (1970) critiques what he terms “the banking concept of education” in which students learn practices and attitudes that replicate the oppression in society (p. 53). Instead, in order to become “transformers of the world,” students must develop critical consciousness – “[a] deepened consciousness of their situation [which] leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation” (p. 66). In Freire’s view, the task of teachers, then, is to enter into dialogic relationships with individuals so as to teach reading and writing practices in the context of individuals remaking their lives. He sees human activity as “re-creating and transforming” the world (p. 80). Through critical thinking about their worlds, reading and writing can be seen as tools for this transformation.

Freebody and Luke (1990) further emphasize the role of power in considerations of literacy arguing that dynamics of power impact all contexts within which the written word is used in social practice. Literacy as a social practice is necessarily tied up with political, cultural, and social power and capital. “‘Cracking the code,’ ‘constructing meaning,’ ‘participating in literacy events’ -- each involves the use of power and knowledge in social fields “(Luke, 1997). Literacy is always shared and draws upon the resources and dispositions
of the group while carrying the past and future of the individuals. Literacy is seen as active – in motion, in use, in flux. This conception takes into account the proliferation of new media and new technologies and brings to the fore the agency of individuals within societies and the transforming potential within literacy.

Through her ethnographic study of the literacy practices of adolescents who are connected to gangs in Salt Lake City, Moje (2000) offers that young people use literacy as/for transforming to construct identities and to make meaning for themselves, of themselves, and of their worlds. The five youth whom Moje observes and “[hangs] out with” over were urban high school students in Salt Lake City who come from low-income neighborhoods and are “marginalized four times over”: not white, not Mormon, not middle class, members of or affiliated with gangs (p. 660). She suggests that “the literacy and language practices [uncovered in her study] are communicative and transformative in the sense that they were used to make and represent meanings, to change or construct identities, and to gain or maintain social positions in a particular social space” (p. 679). While the tagging that the teenagers do and the gang-related themes that are a part of their written discourse are generally associated with deviance, Moje offers that these practices were in part a critique of larger social forces along with being assertions of These practices were rooted in meaning-making and identity-construction like those of the young people in Finders’ and Smith and Wilhelm’s studies.

**Literacy as/for feeling.** Few would question the idea that the acts of reading and writing are intimately tied to feelings. Writing is regularly seen as cathartic, while reading is seen as an activity wherein one can recognize one’s own emotions in a person who is written into a page. Yet by taking up the metaphor of literacy as/for feeling, I propose that the relationship between emotions and literacy is more complex and more varied as scholars like Solomon (1986) and Besnier (1993) have suggested.

In his 1986 essay, “Literacy and the Education of the Emotions,” the philosopher Solomon argues that inasmuch as literature communicates emotion, it necessarily allows readers to “learn to participate in an emotional culture” (p. 47). He suggests that when we read, we are offered the opportunity not only to recognize and imagine feelings, but also to feel them and to name the feelings that we experience. He references classic literature and popular literature alike, along with film and offers that “[e]very emotion is a way of constructing the world” (p. 44). Emphasizing that emotions are shared across a culture, Solomon explains that “[l]iterature – taken broadly as the shared perspectives and narratives of a culture – actually defines emotions and brings them into being” (p. 49).

Besnier (1993) also takes up the notion that literacy has meanings/uses which are inextricably linked to affect. His ethnographic study of letter-writing among the Nukulaelae islanders in Tuvalu examines the assumption that the spoken word is more emotionally-laden than the written word. Through analysis of the conventions in writing in the numerous kinds of letters the islanders compose, Besnier asserts that “the extent to which members of a speech
community allow affect to surface in a particular register, either spoken or written, is a function of the communicative norms at play in the society, and not an inherent consequence of orality or literacy” (p. 64-65). He uncovers “affective displays” in written correspondence that do not exist in spoken interactions (p.65). In other words, among the Nukulaelae some expressions of feelings are exclusively communicated via the written word. Besnier’s finding that the islanders who live in close proximity to each other on a small atoll have come to define letter-writing as the appropriate context for catharsis, with “emotions referred to more overtly and frequently than in other communicative events” suggests that the connection between affect and literacy is socially constructed. He offers that the role of affect in literacy practices which has been almost exclusively linked to the reading and writing of literature in Western culture should be further studied in other modes of written expression.

In an interview with an eleven year-old young man, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) uncover an emotional connection forged in reading. Liam articulates a strong connection to the characters in A Color Purple (Walker, 1982). He says that he wants “to relate to Celie and the other characters. I want to understand them and help them” (145). His reading causes him to feel in such a way that his empathy inspires a desire for action. Moje’s (2000) and Finders’ (1997) studies make only limited reference to affect in their analyses of literacy practices of the young people they examine. This suggests that the notion of literacy as for feeling warrants further study.

Locating Adolescents’ Literate Identities

Adolescents’ reading and writing have been the focus of much scholarship in recent years. The mismatch between the readers and writers that young people are in and for school and as they participate in other outside of school activities has been the focus of much scholarly work, particularly in the last decade (e.g. Hull & Shultz, 2002). Scholars who study adolescent literacy have found that the reading and writing young people do for themselves is often quite different from the reading and writing they are asked to do in school. Magazine reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007) and instant messaging (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), for example, are cited as teens’ preferred literate activities, activities which are quite dissimilar to writing essays and reading of novels that most often occur in secondary English classrooms. Whether inside or outside of school, in the reading and writing that adolescents do, they construct ideas about what literacy means and is for.

In order to situate this study, I first briefly sketch "the adolescent reader," for whom works of YA literature are written, as understood by the field. Next I review studies of adolescent literacy that explore the ways in which literacy and identity intersect in the lives of young people.

Before turning to notions of identity called forth in the literature on adolescent literacy, the term identity must itself be defined for the context of this study. For the purposes of this study, I make use of the term identity to refer to one of multiple, “important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being” (Holland, Skinner, Lachiotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 5).
Identities are always multiple and always tied to the social world. “Identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice.” By choosing the term identity and its always present plural, identities, I front the agency an individual can take in assuming any particular identity. Unlike notions of subjectivities, which emphasize the external forces that position individuals and groups vis-à-vis social structures, identities front the agency one takes in adopting a new Discourse, a way of being that identifies one as belonging to a group. Participating in a social practice and representing belonging to a particular group by way of that participation signals a choice that is not always available to all identities. Yet for the purposes of this study, I choose the term identities to refer to the selves with and through which the teenage characters and teenage readers in the book group negotiate their social worlds. This choice highlights their struggle to take on new identities and unmake unwanted identities.

Adolescent readers are often described with many of the same terms used to talk about adolescents in general -- resistant, disengaged, and at-risk -- but research suggests that whether identified as struggling readers or competent readers in school, nearly all teenagers read outside of school. Many resist the reading assigned by their teachers, yet they devour texts that relate to their hobbies; many are disengaged with canonical literature, yet they engage with their peers in informal discussions of shared reading; many appear at-risk in reading situations over which they have no control, yet they see themselves as readers when they choose what to read. In other words, for adolescent readers, reading is personal, social, and chosen.

Wilhelm’s (1995) study of the readers in his English Language Arts class explored the personal connections that young people make when reading. Adopting a reader response frame, Wilhelm’s offered his students opportunities to make meaning of a variety of narrative texts. In addition to making their invisible processes of reading "visible" through talk, Wilhelm's students “share[d] ways of reading and being with text” (p. 11). They made personal connections with texts through a variety of modalities including art and drama. Though members of the classroom community of reading, the young people in Wilhelm’s study made the individually unique connections to the texts that they encountered.

Through a series of case studies informed by interviews exploring the nature of students’ disengagement with the reading they were asked to do in school, Reeves (2004) documented the importance of the social in considering adolescents’ reading. Reeves found that the students were open to or resist the reading activities they are offered in school for a variety of reasons, such as comprehension difficulties, but they generally preferred reading texts that meet “social needs” (p. 232). Reeves found that many young people sought connections to their peers and opportunities to think about ideas that mattered to them socially through their reading. Her subjects reported a keen interest in using reading to negotiate relationships between themselves and their peers and also their positions in the world.

Mueller (2001), whose study examined high school readers who were identified as at-risk, suggested that choice is key to adolescent reading. In
listening to the reading histories of the students she calls "lifers," young people who continue to experience difficulty with reading despite receiving extra assistance year after year, Mueller learned that her students' enthusiasm for reading was stifled by increasing required reading in school. When the teenagers in her study were given the opportunity to choose what to read, they were more apt to see themselves as readers.

In reading events, adolescents encounter texts that they choose to read or not read, come to understandings of texts in social interaction, and often make personal connections to texts. In this process, they are constructing and negotiating their literate identities. Finders' (1997) ethnographic study of girls' literacy uses in a middle school classroom offers insights into the connection between literate activities and identity-work. The “Tough Cookies” and “Social Queens,” the two small groups of girls with whom Finders spent time inside and outside of school, formed social bonds based on literacy. She found that the “Social Queens” used literacy to bind them socially, to mark themselves as members of their group, often reading and writing together. In her analysis of the literacy events in which the “Tough Cookies” participated, Finders determined that for these girls, reading and writing served to mark their different-ness from the other girls. In both cases, the girls' literate activities were fundamental to their negotiations of who they were vis-à-vis their peers.

The adolescent boys in Smith and Wilhelm’s (2002) study also used literacy to construct and mark their memberships in groups, but their membership was somewhat different. While for Finders' girls reading and writing tied them to their classmates, several of the young men Smith and Wilhelm interviewed articulated the ways in which their reading and writing allowed them to construct identities as professional wrestling fans and Stephen King fans. The middle and high school aged boys articulated “the importance of relationships they cultivated with textual characters, authors, or directors” (p. 142). These relationships positioned them as wrestling enthusiasts and true Stephen King aficionados, rather than young men who merely watched wrestling or read King’s books. They composed their identities alongside the constructed identities of the wrestlers themselves and the crafted world of King’s fiction.

This notion that identity-work extends beyond one's immediate social sphere and into the space of texts is central to my study. With each utterance spoken in dialogue or whispered into the eye of the reader, ways of making sense of the world are communicated in the pages of books. As Bakhtin (1981) suggests, “[a] particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world” (p. 333). Each speaking person in a novel, therefore, speaks not only her language, but also her very self and her world. Encoded in speech are ideas about our social world such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and literacy itself that position the speaker or speakers in a dialogue vis-à-vis the power ascribed to these categories within a particular social structure.

Brooks, Brown, and Hampton (2008) argue "identities of readers [can] be thought of as fluid and multifaceted" (p. 668). Their critical literary analysis of a young adult novel's representations of colorism paired with ethnographic data from discussions of colorism in the book during an after-school book group argues that readers' different identities are negotiated through their reading and
discussion. The researchers explore the understandings and identifications that their subjects, all African American middle school girls, made with the African American female protagonist in the novel. They suggest that the text offers the students the opportunity to consider and construct their identities as African-American females.

Inasmuch as young adult literature tells the stories of adolescents, it portrays their "fluid and multifaceted" identities. Depictions of literacy in literature written for young adults then offer readers an additional social space in which they might make meanings of ways of doing reading and writing and construct literate identities.

**Reading Representations in Literature**

The notion that works of literature, texts that depict human beings involved in the regular activities of their lives, would include representations of reading and writing is not a novel idea. Bakhtin (1981) states that “a character in a novel ...lives and acts in an ideological world of his own (and not in the unitary world of the epic), he has his own perception of the world that is incarnated in his action and in his discourse” (335). According to Sumara (1996b), “the literary fiction has the ability to invoke and condition the imagination of the reader, creating possible worlds that become part of the reader's living experience” (43). Rosenblatt (1991) claims that “reading is always a particular event involving a particular reader at a particular time under particular circumstances” (p. 445). In a reading event, a reader enters into a unique exchange with the text, one that is marked in that moment by the reader's past and present as a reader and a thinker. In Rosenblatt’s (1995; 2005) theory of reading, each reading of a text also creates a unique meaning. She suggests that this meaning is made in the transaction between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt offers that something new is created in this transaction and refers to it as “the poem,” an interpretive representation of the unique reading experience.

Poulet (1969) discusses the blurred line between reader and text: “The extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside” (p. 54). This merging of book and reader illustrates the life a book can have inside a reader. Iser (1972) suggests that “the production of the meaning of literary texts...entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves” (p. 299), and so reading itself has the ability to constitute a literate identity. Similarly, in Bakhtin’s (1981) discussions of the dialogic quality of language, he traces the ways the utterances captured in novels make their ways into the discourses of those who read them, blending the author’s speech with the reader’s speech. He states: “What is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language” (p. 365). Similarly one might argue that the literate identities represented in literature provide a channel through which the literate identities embodied by the reader can come to be known. Whether through idealized or conventional depictions of reading and writing, like the representations of standard and nonstandard dialect that Traughott (1981) explores, the literary teenagers engage in literacy practices that
represent reading and writing that offer opportunities to come to know. In each case, the line between reader and text become blurred and something new is created. As such, new understandings and theories can be born of experience with representations in texts.

Sumara’s (1996a; 1996b; 2002) concept of reading as embodied action as articulated through his analyses of experiences with reading literature makes reading “part of an ever-evolving act of lived interpretation” (p.392). He claims that rather than thinking about reading events as transactions, as Rosenblatt does, we ought to consider that “new knowledge is created and new identities are forged” in reading (p. 396) and by extension, in literacy practices. In his research, Sumara (1996b) takes up a question that permeates much of the work of this study. “[T]he interesting question for me is not, ‘What is reading?’ but, rather, ‘What is the experience of living a life that includes the practice of reading?’” (1). This study of representations of literacy practices in YAL and the understandings that adolescent readers make of these representations is at its core broadly an examination of the question “What is the experience of living a life that includes the practices of reading and writing, whether fictionally rendered or lived?”

**Organization of the Dissertation**

**Research Questions**

Through my research, I aim to understand both the notions of literacy that are represented in young adult literature (YAL) and the meaning that adolescent readers make of these literacy practices. My dissertation focuses on the following questions:

1. What is the range of literacy practices portrayed in award-winning books written for adolescents? How do these practices and the ideologies of literacy inherent in them function in the narratives?

2. What literate identities are afforded through the literacy practices in the books? How do these practices and the identities that they call forth relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth?

3. How are the literacy practices in adolescent literature understood by adolescents? How do the practices and the identities that they call forth, which are depicted in the Printz books, relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth? How are young people’s literate identities manifested and contested in the space of the book group?

**Summary of Chapters**

In Chapter 2, I offer the methods for my study. I describe the research process from data collection through data analysis for both phases of my study – Phase 1: Reading the Printz books (2000-2009) and Phase 2: Reading with Young People.
In Chapter 3, I offer an analytical framework that uncovers the range of literacy practices represented in the books and that illuminates the ways in which the different kinds of representations (mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations) offer different sorts of data about literacy and its functions.

In Chapter 4, I make use of the framework to delve into the relationship between literacy and identity as depicted in the books. I look at the representations of literacy practices in the lives of the teenage characters from a diachronic perspective offering a depiction of the interconnectedness of literate identities and the period of adolescence.

In Chapter 5, I report on findings from a lunchtime book group I convened with adolescents. Drawing from interviews, surveys, and discussions about representations of literacy in the Printz set, I discuss the ways in which the participants understood the reading and writing depicted in the books. I also offer three archetypical literate identities – the reader, the writer, and the non-reader/non-writer – to depict a relationship between the represented teenagers in the Printz books and the teenage participants in the book group.

In Chapter 6, I argue that examination of the representations of literacy in literature offers unique perspectives on literate identity construction and contributes to theory making about literacy. I discuss benefits of broadening notions of literacy to include modalities outside of reading and writing as beneficial to understanding better teenagers’ uses of literacy. I offer that the lives of young people include literacy in myriad ways, and I suggest that young people reading YAL be guided to interrogate these representations.
Chapter 2
Methods: Characters + Teens = Study

With a handful of dog-eared and note-filled Printz award and honor books stacked on my desk, I sought to imagine a study that would allow me to delve into books written for young people in which I had found numerous depictions of reading and writing and to learn how these representations might matter to the teenagers who read them. I take as my starting point the belief that literature written for adolescents is important and worthy of examination. I further accept that young people read works of YAL and make meaning from them. Inspired by and drawing from a menagerie of representations of literacy practices in YAL, this study is designed to answer my study’s broadly conceived question: What can we learn about the reading and writing lives of adolescents, fictional and real, through YAL? This chapter details my research decisions and accounts for the challenges involved in bringing together foci on the adolescent characters depicted in literature written for teenagers and adolescent readers of these books.

Research Design

This dissertation is organized in two parts. The first part is an analysis of the forty-seven books designated as Michael L. Printz Honor and Award books in the award’s first ten years (2000-2009). The second part explores how teenagers read and understand the literacy practices in YAL.

This chapter takes each part of the study separately to describe the methods I utilized in collecting and analyzing the different data associated with each. The sample and site selections, the participants, and the procedures of data collection, the role of the researcher in the second part of the study, and the methods of analysis that I employed are detailed in the sections that follow.

To articulate the research decisions of the study without addressing the struggles inherent in conceiving it would be to only partially reveal the study’s methodological journey. From my experiences as a classroom teacher sharing books with my students and from the very beginning of my graduate career, I knew the meeting of young adults and young adult books to be intriguing. I knew that I wanted to understand some things about reading, but I knew that the questions I had were as much inspired by the young people who read YAL as my own reading of the same books, my reading as a reader and my reading as a literacy teacher. With my dedication to honoring the young people for whom I read works of YAL, I struggled to imagine a study that also honored the teenage characters depicted in these books, who had captured my curiosity and heart. I wrestled with how to carry on an exploration of this intersection.

Though teenagers are the heart of this study, I decided that I must first undertake a careful examination of the representations of literacy practices that are included in works of YAL before inviting living, breathing, writing, and reading young people to explore the books and before attempting to learn from their experiences with the books. I needed to understand what had captured my interest in the books relative to the range of representations in a larger set. I needed to step back from my role as teacher and to assume the role of researcher.

Printz books sample selection. The forty-seven books, whose authors received the Michael L. Printz Award or Honor in its first decade, beginning with the award’s inception in 2000, form the basis of this dissertation. In being designated as Printz books, they have been recognized by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA) (2012) for their excellence. Each year, a committee of nine members of the ALA plus a consultant from the journal Booklist select as many as one Printz Award winner and as many as four honor books. The books from which they make the selections are from all books published in the US during the previous year and designated by their publishers as young adult titles or for readers aged twelve to eighteen. The criteria for the Printz awards is sufficiently open so as to include a range of texts from which to cull notions of literacy. Joining the Newbery and Caldecott awards which have been given since 1922 and 1938 respectively, the Printz awards explicitly seek to honor excellence without delineating a specific excellence; story, style, voice, characters, and design are among the criteria for the award, but the committee is careful to argue that the importance of these criteria will vary from book to book. The criteria also deem “all forms of writing—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, art, and any combination of these, including anthologies—as eligible.” It is also useful to note that while popularity is stated as a non-criterion for the award, many of the titles in the Printz award and honor book set are also recipients of many other awards and designations, including National Book Awards, LA Times Book Awards, and NY Times Best-sellers. Perhaps most interesting is the frequency with which the titles appear on the ALA’s Best Books lists compiled by teenage readers.

In addition to their designation as excellent by the YALSA, the books in the Printz set provide a productive group from which to draw representations of literacy because they have a somewhat higher likelihood of being read by teenagers in school. First, some works of YAL, especially titles in the Printz set, e.g. Speak (Anderson, 1999) and Monster (Myers, 1999), have become regularly used by many teachers as part of the English curriculum (Gibbons, Dail, & Stallworth, 2006). ALA award-winning books are more likely to draw the attention of classroom teachers and also textbook publishers, and they may be read in classrooms in a variety of contexts, from whole-class novel studies to literature circle structures and read-alouds. Books that receive the Printz designation are included in teen sections of public libraries and often added to school libraries, making them available to readers without purchasing them (Yukota, 2011). I chose to work with this set of texts to inform literacy teachers’ work with any texts that they might use in their secondary school classrooms. I see this accessibility of texts as beneficial in two ways. First, because the second part of the study involves reading books with teenage readers, the ideal sample

1 These titles represent those designated as award and honor books since the inception of the award in 2000 through 2009. See Appendix A for the list of books analyzed.
set would include books to which the young people would likely have easy access rather than books they might have trouble locating and reading. Second, because the discussions initiated in the book group are designed so that they might be the sorts of conversations that might well be taken up inside high school classrooms, the ideal set would include books that would be present in high schools.

**Printz books “participants.”** The “participants” for this portion of the study are the characters in the forty-seven books in the Printz set (see Appendix A). Their “participation” in this study is observed through their reading and writing practices and the narrative surrounding these practices within the books. The forty-seven books are a diverse group and their characters’ literacy practices are equally varied. In chapter three I present a broad analysis of the representations of reading and writing depicted in the books that offers a sense of the range of practices in the set.

**Printz books analysis.** I read each Printz book multiple times to collect all instances in the books in which reading or writing were invoked. I included in my consideration only the content of the narrative, but not authors’ notes and not supplementary material. In focusing in this way, I took as my object the storyworlds of the books as depictions adolescent lives in order to answer my first two research questions.

1. What is the range the literacy practices portrayed in (Printz award-winning) books written for adolescents? How do these practices and the ideologies of literacy inherent in them function in the narratives?

2. What literate identities are afforded through the literacy practices in the books? How do these practices and the identities that they call forth relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth?

For phase one, I read and reread the forty-seven books that have been given the Printz Award or designated as honor books. I first simply marked all references to print. In Table 2.1, I present an overview of this portion of the data collection.
Table 2.1: Printz Awards: 1999-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>A/H</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Sample Literacy Practices</th>
<th>Central Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>Monster</td>
<td>Myers</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>writing a screenplay; journal</td>
<td>Steve, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Skellig</td>
<td>Almond</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>poetry-reading; home school reading &amp; writing</td>
<td>Michael, boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Speak</td>
<td>Anderson, LH</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; English teacher; art to speak; multiliteracies</td>
<td>Melinda, 9th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Hard Love</td>
<td>Wittlinger</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>zine writing; school</td>
<td>John (Gio), 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>Kit’s Wilderness</td>
<td>Almond</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>writing stories; art with stories</td>
<td>Kit, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Many Stones</td>
<td>Coman</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>letters</td>
<td>Berry, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>The Body of Christopher Creed</td>
<td>Plum-Ucci</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>writing memoir; journal</td>
<td>Torey, 11th-12th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Angus, Thongs, and Full Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson</td>
<td>Rennison</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; magazines; novel-reading</td>
<td>Georgia, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Stuck in Neutral</td>
<td>Trueman</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>writing poetry; learning to read</td>
<td>Shawn, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>The Ropemaker</td>
<td>Dickinson</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>oral stories</td>
<td>Tilja, adolescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art</td>
<td>Greenberg</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>writing poetry</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Freewill</td>
<td>Lynch</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>Will, 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>True Believer</td>
<td>Wolff</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; writing poetry</td>
<td>LaVaughan, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Comment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>Postcards from No Man's Land</td>
<td>Chambers</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>novel-reading; poetry reading; letters; writing memoir</td>
<td>Jacob, 17; Geertrui, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>The House of the Scorpion</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>reading picture book; school; writing nonfiction</td>
<td>Matteo, 0-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>My Heartbeat</td>
<td>Freymann-Weyr</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; novel-reading</td>
<td>Ellen, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Hole in My Life</td>
<td>Gantos</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; library; novel-reading; writing; writing memoir</td>
<td>Jack, 18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>A Step From Heaven</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; library</td>
<td>Oh, 4-high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>The First Part Last</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; letters</td>
<td>Bobby, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>A Northern Light</td>
<td>Donnelly</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>references to school; word duels; letters; novel-reading; writing poetry</td>
<td>Mattie, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Keesha's House</td>
<td>Frost</td>
<td>novel in verse</td>
<td>school; letters; newspaper</td>
<td>Keesha, Stephie, Harris, Carmen, Dontay, high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Fat Kid Rules the World</td>
<td>Going</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; references to novels</td>
<td>Troy, 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things</td>
<td>Mackler</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; English teacher; email &amp; mining; Woolf; writing in computer lab</td>
<td>Ginny, 10th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>How I Live Now</td>
<td>Rosoff</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>novel-reading; letters</td>
<td>Daisy, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Airborn</td>
<td>Oppel</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>journal; science writing</td>
<td>Matt, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</td>
<td>Schmidt</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>Bible; Darwin; sermons</td>
<td>Turner, 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Student Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>Chanda's Secrets</em></td>
<td>Stratton</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>Chanda, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td><em>Looking for Alaska</em></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>biographies; Marquez; essay</td>
<td>Miles, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>Black Juice</em></td>
<td>Lanagan</td>
<td>short stories</td>
<td>journal</td>
<td><em>various</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>A Wreath for Emmett Till</em></td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>letter; obituary</td>
<td>Emett, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth, a Photographic Biography</em></td>
<td>Partridge</td>
<td>non-fiction</td>
<td>writing lyrics; poetry-reading</td>
<td>John, <em>childhood-adulthood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>I Am the Messenger</em></td>
<td>Zusak</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>letters; reading to old lady; novel-reading</td>
<td>Ed, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td><em>American Born Chinese</em></td>
<td>Yang</td>
<td>graphic novel</td>
<td>school; references to novels</td>
<td>Monkey King; Jin Wang &amp; Danny, high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. 1: The Pox Party</em></td>
<td>Anderson, MT</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>journal; science writing; Bono's book; reading classics; letter-writing; letter-reading</td>
<td>Octavian, <em>adolescent</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>An Abundance of Katherines</em></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>references to books; magazines; anagrams</td>
<td>Colin, 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>Surrender</em></td>
<td>Hartnett</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>newspaper; letter; scratching name</td>
<td>Gabriel, 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td><em>The Book Thief</em></td>
<td>Zusak</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>novel-reading; novel-writing; book destruction; Mein Kampf; reading to neighbor; learning to read</td>
<td>Liesel, 9-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>The White Darkness</td>
<td>McCaughrean</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>Antarctica reading; diary-writing; letter-writing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>One Whole and Perfect Day</td>
<td>Clarke</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>Bronte; magazine-reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Your Own, Sylvia: A Verse Portrait of Sylvia Plath</td>
<td>Hemphill</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>poetry writing; poetry reading; essay writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Repossessed</td>
<td>Jenkins</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>school; novel-reading; references to Dante; some writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Dreamquake: Book Two of the Dreamhunter Duet</td>
<td>Knox</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>letters; letter-writing; newspapers; map-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Award</td>
<td>Jellicoe Road</td>
<td>Marchetta</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>novel/memoir; reading manuscript; rules; book about three groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, v.2: The Kingdom on the Waves</td>
<td>Anderson, MT</td>
<td>journal</td>
<td>journal; science writing; reading classics; letter-writing; letter-reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Tender Morsels</td>
<td>Lanagan</td>
<td>letter-writing</td>
<td>Liga, childhood-adulthood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks</td>
<td>Lockhart</td>
<td>letters</td>
<td>letters; letter-writing; email writing; novel-reading; invitation; society’s book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>Pratchett</td>
<td>invitations</td>
<td>invitations; science writing; ship's log</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mau &amp; Daphne, adolescents</td>
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</table>
The preliminary coding allowed me to quantify the occurrences of literate activity represented in the set of books to present simple quantitative analyses of the presence of literacy practices in the books. I restricted the marking in my initial pass to print-based practices but eventually created sub-coding to explore multimodality in these practices. Multimodality, as defined by the New London Group (1996) in the multiliteracies manifesto, is the co-existence of multiple modes of meaning-making. They suggest that multimodality is ever-present; no written language can exists apart from its materiality, for instance, and is therefore multimodal. In this way, an image alongside a written text or a bodily movement coupled with something read is always an inseparable pair. Likewise, a sung lyric is always an act of literacy.

I also wrote analytic memos as I read and interpreted the texts, focusing on the ways individual characters use literacy practices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Viewing characters as the subjects in my study, I examined their reading and writing as if they were “lived” literacy events, making sense of their literacy practices from their points of view. As I wrote analytic memos for each of the books, I paid close attention to the background of the characters and the environments in which they read and write.

Throughout the data collection, I chose and then transcribed passages of the books that capture richly described or particularly interesting literacy practices for further coding. I applied a framework for considering literacy that draws from Hamilton’s (2000) "literacy elements” (p. 29): participants; setting; artifacts; & activities. The participants are the people who participate, through action or in-action in the activity that involves print. The setting references the place and time in which the reading or writing occurs. The artifacts are any of the material tools and texts with which or in relation to which the literate activity is happening. The activities refer to the action, the doing of the literate activity. My coding was initially derived from these domains. I immediately noticed that the books contained a range of textual accountings of the representations. I found that my memos included some very short references to print and some longer references to print. I discovered that some seemed to be more important to the narratives than others. Across my readings, I began to pay attention to times when the representations of literacy were important to the plot, to the themes of the book, and to the characters, including brief descriptions in my notes. What were marked as brief and extended descriptions at first came later to be marked as four types of representations of literacy practices: (a) mentions are short references to literate activities; (b) descriptions are more elaborated and detailed depictions of literacy practices; (c) constitutive events are portrayals of reading and writing that serve as turning points in the narrative and that bring forth literacy as a part of life; and (d) extended articulations are representations of writing and reading that extend across and throughout texts, driving the stories and animating lives that include literacy. I discuss these concepts at length in the following chapter.

Though I had initially planned to scan all references to print and literate activity in the books so that I might make use of the software-aided analysis tool, inVivo, the sheer number of lines of text involved made the task untenable. Such an analysis would have to have been conducted with techniques employed in
corpus linguistics, and I neither had access to electronic versions of the books with which to do so nor did I believe that the detail such an analysis would have provided would allow me to make more general claims of the kind I wanted to make about literacy representations in YAL. The themes that emerged from my analytic memos needed to be wielded differently. As such, I created a coding checklist that I used for a careful reading of the marked references to literacy in each of the books (Appendix B). The margins of the document and the back were used to include page numbers and brief descriptions of the longer passages that were coded as descriptions and constitutive events. Later these notes were examined alongside the checklists and the analytic memos to elaborate my understanding of the function of mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations in the narratives.

Following trends drawn from these different types of representations of literacy, I transcribed many of the descriptions and constitutive events about which I had made analytically significant notes. Using these transcribed passages, I made additional notes, attending to the sentences, phrases, and words used to depict the reading and writing that the characters were doing. I constructed matrices of portions of these quotations that allowed me to examine descriptions and constitutive events each as examples of each as types of representations and alongside each other. Further matrices were constructed to compare notions of time across texts.

I also drew out themes around identity first using the identity markers in the checklist but later following representations of readers, writers, non-readers, and non-writers and made extensive use of my analytic memos paired with matrices of transcribed passages.

**Part II --- A Book Group With Teenagers: A Case Study of Reading with Young People**

**Book group site selection.** When seeking a site at which to conduct the second part of this dissertation, I considered multiple criteria. First, I was looking for a school at which students read YAL in their English or Reading classes. My rationale for this decision was that such a site would be fruitful for convening a book group to discuss representations of literacy practices in YAL. The students would have likely experienced reading YAL in structured settings. Therefore my use of the texts with a special book group would be less likely to be perceived as unusual; the books we would read would then be like other books read at the school site. Furthermore, I sought a school in which YAL was available to students so that my use of it would be less likely to promote disinterest in reading the same books. In other words, because teachers commonly used books written for teenagers in their classrooms, YAL was not seen as strongly belonging only to the young adult readers. I was familiar with Linkwater High School, a comprehensive high school located in a suburb of a large city in the southeastern United States, and knew that the school offered Scholastic’s READ 180 program to students who are identified as struggling. READ 180 (Scholastic, 2011) combines individualized computerized practice with reading skills alongside extended opportunities to independently read works of
When I learned that the READ 180 teachers at Linkwater High incorporated discussion of independently read books into the program, I was further convinced that the school site would a good one. With its 1700 students, I also knew that there would be a large enough population of eligible students from which to recruit the required sample population.

**Book group participants.** The study population is high school students (ages 14 to 17) who are enrolled in a READ 180 class at the chosen site, Linkwater High School. The course provides extra reading support to ninth through eleventh graders in addition to their regular literature and composition classes. Young adult literature comprises half of the material for the READ 180 course as students read these works independently. There were approximately 60 students who were enrolled in the READ 180 course from which I elicited participants for the study in March 2010. Through speaking to each of the three READ 180 classes about my research study and inviting the students to participate in my study, I recruited seven young people, aged fourteen to seventeen, to volunteer to participate in the book group, which would convene outside of class time, from the pool of students in the READ 180 classes. This number of participants was important to establishing a book group context wherein as many voices as possible could be heard while still providing for the generation of multiple perspectives in the discussion of literature and affording the opportunity to make comparisons across students. The book group was held during lunch to allow as many participants to join the group as possible, but because the lunch hour is an important social opportunity in an otherwise busy academic and extra-curricular day, it was anticipated that some students would choose not to participate. It is important to note that among the general population of students at Linkwater High School, few students were at liberty to stay after school for meetings like the book group because a majority of students counted on the school district’s buses to provide transportation. Because the study was designed to accommodate seven to nine participants, I did not need to select participants and was able to structure the book group meetings to accommodate all interested students. Therefore, though I had planned to make sure (as much as is possible) that the students be selected so that the group might include a variety of achievement-levels as English students, as reported by the teacher, both men and women, and an ethnic makeup roughly representative of the larger school context, I was unable to make sure of such diversity. As I learned upon discussion with the READ 180 teachers, the students who had been identified by the school administration as struggling readers and assigned to the READ 180 class were themselves not a representative sample of the larger school population. A much higher percentage of African American students were in the READ 180 class and most students in the program struggled in other academic areas as well. One additional student, a friend of a participant recruited from the READ 180 class, joined the book group because she wanted to read with the group. Her enthusiasm for reading the books and discussing them, coupled with her experience reading YAL made her addition to the group very productive. In order to accommodate the participants’ schedules, the book group was conducted in two subsets – one set of five students meeting during one lunch period and
another set of three students who met during a later lunch period. I provided lunch for the students to maximize our reading and discussion time and as a gesture of gratitude for their participation.

The first subset included two boys and three girls, while the second subset was all female. Though seven of the eight participants were enrolled in the READ 180 class because standardized assessments had identified them as reading below level and in need of individualized reading support, all participants in the first book group had been recruited from a READ 180 class offered to students who received special education services. The tables below list the students’ pseudonyms, genders, ethnic identification, and reading level according to school records.

Table 2.2: Book Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Group 1</th>
<th>Book Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudonym</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pseudonym</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>m&amp;m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Sunshine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Titi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timmy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuliana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M = male; F = female*
*B = Black; W = White*
*B = Below Grade Level
*A = Above Grade Level*

**Book group data collection.** This study used ethnographic methods of data collection in combination with elicited data collection techniques. All data collection took place over a four-week period during March and April 2010.

Before convening the book group, I planned to collect data to uncover the participants’ uses of and attitudes about literacy. First I gave each of the participants a survey of reading and writing experiences (Appendix C) to complete before our first meeting. The survey asked students to report on their reading and writing preferences and habits. As it happened, none of the participants returned their paperwork giving consent to participate in the study before the first meeting, and so I distributed the surveys at the first meeting. This seemed to have been beneficial to the participants as it allowed them to ask me questions about the survey before working on it. Additionally, I conducted pre-book interviews following a protocol designed to solicit information on the participants’ educational background, uses of reading and writing, and their perceptions of their reading and writing abilities (Appendix C contains a copy of
the interview protocol). Though I had planned for all of these interviews to be one-on-one, only two of the students were able to arrange times to meet individually, and so two were done in pairs and one as a triad. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The book group met nine times over a four-week period to discuss three books from the Printz set: Monster, by Walter Dean Myers (1999), John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth, by Elizabeth Partridge (2005), and The Book Thief, by Markus Zusak (2006). The books were selected to provide a range of reading experiences and to portray a variety of representations of literacy practices. Monster is a work of realistic, contemporary fiction written as a screenplay and a journal. Partridge’s book is a photobiography of John Lennon. The Book Thief is a work of historical fiction that includes some images to capture the illustrated books written and read within the book. The books also provided numerous entry points to readers identified as struggling based on test scores – i.e. through topics, formats, characters, lengths, and images.

The book group was structured around reading and discussion tasks with these works of adolescent literature. I did not include writing tasks because I felt the flow of talk was central to the young people’s investment in the group and their interpretive work and because I feared that including writing would have shifted the work of the group too close to that of their regular English classes. Throughout the data collection, I kept handwritten and typed field notes of students’ participation during small group book group discussions of literature. I kept hand-written notes during the school day, and I composed elaborated and reflective memos at the end of each day.

I also recorded all group meetings with both audio and video and transcribed them for analysis.

Finally, I conducted a post-book group interview following a protocol designed to invite participants to talk about their experiences in the book group discussions of literature (See Appendix D for the protocol for this interview.) These, too, were transcribed for analysis.

Role of the teaching researcher. During the book group meetings, I held the role of teaching researcher. I differentiate this role from teacher researcher because I was not a teacher in the school in which the study was conducted. The participants were aware that I had at one time been a classroom teacher, but my presence at Linkwater High School was in the role of researcher. Still, within the structures of the book group, I explicitly took on the role of teacher at times, particularly as I guided the participants to different representations of literacy practices across the three books. For instance, I provided direct reading instruction about re-reading to support comprehension. When the group was reading the first page of Monster (Myers, 1999) and paused mid-paragraph to consider the names scratched in a jail cell mirror, I explained that we would return to the beginning of the paragraph before continuing to make sure that we were all understanding what was happening in the book. At other times, I deliberately pulled back from the discussions and allowed the participants to talk to each other about their reactions to the reading.
Book club analysis. In order to answer my third research question, I examined the book group participants’ responses to surveys, their talk in discussions and in interviews, and their behaviors and talk in the beginning and end of our book group meetings.

1. How are the literacy practices in adolescent literature understood by adolescents? How do the practices and the identities that they call forth, which are depicted in the Printz books, relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth? How are young people’s literate identities manifested and contested in the space of the book group?

In second part of the study, as I composed my typed fieldnotes at the end of each day on which the book group met, I began my analysis. Since I had already read the books that comprise the first part of my study and since I was convening the book group to consider the representations of literacy in the books, my analysis began from the start. I created content logs for each meeting of the book group. I was able to immediately see that the group took up talk about some representations of literacy in the books for longer periods of time and with more participation than others. I then transcribed all of the book group meetings and using the transcriptions and also drawing from my fieldnotes, I undertook analysis of the trends around the talk about the different types of representations of literacy that the book group explored. I composed analytic memos about the uses of and meanings ascribed to literacy that were referenced in the book group discussions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initially I applied the codes that emerged from the first part of the study to the second part, but also used the analytic memos to follow trends in the set that I had not explored in detail in my analysis of the books. I then augmented the codes to further explore the understandings that the participants made of the representations of literacy practices that we read, tracing explicit identifications that they made with the books and talk around reading and writing relative to their own school experiences. From these trends, I constructed matrices that mapped the modes of literacy to which the subjects refer in their talk about their own literacy practices and literate identities. I later transcribed the interviews and the surveys to trace the ideas about literacy and identities that were generated in the book group into the more individualized data that these sources provided in an attempt to understand the ways in which the literate identities of the young people in the book group were brought forth in our meetings. From these data around literate identities, I selected three representative participants as case studies to depict something of the range of literate identities brought forth in the book group. Selection was based on their articulation of their own identities as readers and writers and their enactment of these identities during the book group meetings. For each of the three, their talk and behaviors evidenced a clear and reflected upon literate identity. Because their reading and writing practices almost seemed exaggerated, much like the literate practices depicted in the books in the first phase of the study, they serve as archetypes in my analysis.
Conclusions

In the chapters that follow, I enter into the worlds of the books of the Printz set to introduce my readers to the teenage readers and writers who people this group of award-winning works of YAL and then to the teenage readers and writers with whom I read the books in the book group. First, I offer a sense of the glittering and shining literate practices that are represented across the Printz set, making use of a metaphor of a constellation. I then offer a reading of a set of representations that construct a sense of adolescent literate identity as articulated in the books. Finally, I follow the flashes of reading and writing in the books into the book group and portray ways in which their readings of representations of literate practices illuminate their understandings of literacy and contribute to their literate identities.
Chapter 3

Toward a Constellation of Representations of Literacy

In this chapter, I analyze representations of literacy practices in YAL as they relate to the works of literature of which they are a part. While every book in the Printz set includes depictions of reading and/or writing, I suggest that the diverse ways in which the representations of literacy operate within the texts dictate varied approaches to examining the notions of literacy brought forth in them. As such, the different kinds of representations offer different affordances for coming to understandings about reading and writing.

Locating a Constellation among Mentions, Descriptions, Constitutive Events, and Extended Articulations

Since YAL is most often identified as such based on its focus on teenage characters, it is unsurprising that the books of the Printz set depict the lives of adolescents. Nevertheless, the number of references made to literacy in connection with the represented lives of young people in the books is remarkable. Across the set of 47 books, I coded more than 3,500 representations of literacy practices. Some of these representations are ordinary and others are extraordinary, but the moments in the lives of the characters reflect a storyworld that includes reading and writing prominently. In the case of many of the representations, there is something uniquely engaging about the particular kind of reading and/or writing that these fictional and once-living teenagers do, in part because these depictions of literacy events are often elaborated in the narrative. In addition to the very doing of the literacy practices, the books include how the young people understand the practice of reading or writing, how they make sense of it, how they talk about what they do with it.

The thousands of representations of literacy initially seemed to lend themselves to a sort of taxonomy on their own. Might one find different analytical value in Georgia’s reading of a fashion magazine in *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* (Rennison, 2000) when examined alongside John’s richly described writing process as he composes an autobiographical poem for self-publication in *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 1999)? As such, I undertook what seemed a worthy scholarly task and attempted to develop an orderly classification of the sorts of literacy representations in the texts of the Printz set. Yet as I came to work with the data more closely, I found myself troubled by the hierarchy inherent in taxonomies. The email- and letter-writing that Frankie does in *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* (Lockhart, 2008) disrupt the functioning of her school and prove significant events in the plot, so these representations of literacy have importance to the narrative. Yet the scene in *Surrender* (Hartnett, 2006) in which Gabriel heard his father “turning the pages of yesterday’s paper” (p. 178), though it was only a moment, stuck in my memory long after having first read it. I have come to see that the different representations afford different data for analysis and different moments for contemplation.
I now find that a constellation is a more apt metaphor. Constellation implies something of the taxonomy’s orderliness, its steadfastness. In a constellation, the components of the set fit together, but a constellation is less rigid than a taxonomy; the stars that make Orion loosely cooperate to form his belt, with the viewer sketching lines between stars. A constellation conjures a unified picture, but one that is in motion, one that expands or contracts, one that shifts, sometimes imperceptibly, from day to day, from season to season, from lifetime to lifetime. Most especially, a constellation implies a story. The stars are read as an image from a narrative that offers an understanding of the world. In the case of the representations of literacy contained in the Printz set, the reader is the maker of a story about literacy, drawing from the representations of reading and writing within the pages of books.

Much like the sky full of stars, YA books are hosts to moments of reading and writing on which readers might gaze. A reader may encounter a literacy practice and not notice it because it doesn’t intersect with her response to the literature; it may be background to her involvement with the text. A reader may not notice a representation of literacy because it meets his expectation of reading and writing and therefore reinforces that expectation. She may notice it because it intersects with her response to the literature, or he may notice it because it fails to meet his expectation of reading and writing and therefore contradicts that expectation. In this way, reading is negotiated and understandings are created; from moment to moment, from day to day, from season to season, from lifetime to lifetime, a reader may understand the literacy practices differently. The reading and writing that the characters do are suspended in the narratives, much like stars in the sky. Sometimes the reading and writing shine brightly, and other times they flicker dimly. Across different readings or across a book, the representations tell a story about the reading and writing that teenage characters do. They tell stories about how the characters understand the reading and writing that they do and how their lives go on around and even through the literacy practices. And so, I argue that the representations of literacy contained in literature be seen as a constellation. My work is, therefore, like that of an astronomer, observing, listing, following, tracing. I isolate the representations and catalogue them and then explore patterns among them.

In mapping the constellation, I delineate four kinds of representations of literacy that occur in the Printz set: mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations. Mentions are short references to literate activities that occur with little or no additional exposition about their nature or context. I identify some representations of literacy as descriptions because the narrative imbues these with details about such things as the participants and setting that more fully illuminate the notions about literacy that are inherent in them. Constitutive events are differentiated from descriptions by their unique significance to the character(s) or the narrative itself; they are like descriptions in form but their function is essential to their interpretation as they serve as turning points in the narrative and reveal a sense of the importance of literacy in life. Finally in some of the texts, reading or writing are woven throughout the texts and are essentially at their hearts, providing a crucial component of and oftentimes propelling the narrative. I term these extended articulations.
In the following sections, I take each kind of representation individually to analyze its role in the narratives. I illustrate key examples, as well as counter-examples, of each kind of representation’s appearance in the texts and posit interpretations of the literacy theories enacted in its depiction of reading and/or writing. Afterwards, I draw possible lines between the mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations in an effort to map a constellation, a constellation of representations of literacy practices that might be read across texts.

Mapping the Constellation

Mentions: An Inventory of Literacy Practices

In the rationale for their study of representations of literacy in film, Williams and Zenger (2007) suggest:

“Though often portrayed as incidental to main narratives in individual films, when taken across a number of different films, representations of literacy practices construct and contest submerged narratives and counter-narratives about literacy. Yet scenes showing reading and writing on film go largely unnoticed, even by literacy scholars, despite the fact that these images recreate and reinforce pervasive concepts and perceptions of literacy, perceptions that inevitably influence both how we teach reading and writing and how our students respond to print literacy and to writing classes” (p. 5)

This “unnoticed”-ness of representations of literacy practices, which inevitably also occurs in print texts, both in the set of book in my study and in texts that students encounter in English classes, for instance, provides the basis for the cut of data I refer to as mentions. In their seeming innocuousness, these glimpses, glances, and brief references would seem to “reinforce” some of the most commonly held notions of literacy. A great number do this, but in attending more closely to some of these fleeting mentions of reading and writing, I argue that evidence of re-creation of ideas about literacy can be seen.

An examination of the mentions in the set of books affords an inventory of the literacy practices that are represented in the texts. Across the set of 47 books, I coded more than 3,000 mentions of literate activity. For this cut of the data, I excluded references to reading and writing that included any substantive or evaluative description of the activity. All of the books include at least one mention of literacy. Even the books that included very few references to literacy because of their economy of language, such as poetic texts, or because of their genre, such as fantasy texts, still made mentions that are included with this kind of representation of literacy practices.

Looking at the set of mentions offers a catalogue of literacy practices. Because of the sheer number of mentions, they provide a useful source from which to report on the set of literacy practices broadly. Across the set, reading was represented more frequently than writing; approximately 60% of the
mentions refer to reading, 20% refer to reading and writing, 25% refer to writing, and 5% refer to not reading and/or not writing. 98% of the mentions of literacy appear in the forty-six novels, with only 2% being found in the other genres. Nearly all of the remaining mentions were in the non-fiction title, John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth, by Elizabeth Partridge (2005), with only a few mentions being found in the three works of poetry and the single graphic novel.

This simple quantification of the literacy practices in the books invites a host of questions, including why is reading represented more frequently? A look at the artifacts utilized in the mentions offers some ideas. In figure 1, I list the many and varied artifacts that the teenage characters use in the representations of literacy practices in the Printz books. Not surprisingly, books rank high in the tally, as do diaries/journals and email; when we think of young people reading and writing, these artifacts are often considered as most popular. Yet the number of mentions that invoke signs is quite high, and there are multiple references to clothing, suggesting that the written word we encounter in the world is a prominent articulation of literacy that we may often overlook. The unexpected artifacts, such as menus in restaurants and annotations made on maps, reference the parts of the characters’ adolescent lives that exist outside of the expectations we have for them. And the bizarre artifacts invoked in mentions like a name shaven into a person’s head convey the malleability of literacy and hint at the possible innovation always inherent in the use of reading and writing.

Further examination of the mentions suggests that this notion of unexpected/expected is useful in considering these brief representations of literacy practices. For instance, in Fat Kid Rules the World (Going, 2003), Troy uses the comics from the newspaper to decorate his room when his friend, Curt, comes over to his house. “We cut up last week’s comic strips and glue them into a big square around the Saturday Night Live poster” (p. 52). The mention invokes Troy as a reader of the comics in the newspaper and is therefore expected. But the mention also portrays the two young men as working together to mix words and images for an aesthetic effect. First reading, or at minimum, working with the newspaper’s comic section is a shared activity. While manipulating the comics, the young men may find humor in the so-called funny pages, but this isn’t what is represented in the mention. Rather, the two collaborate and select strips to frame the poster, possibly making choices around the content of the comics or the visual aesthetic. In “Red Nose Day,” a short story in Lanaghan’s fantasy collection entitled Black Juice (2005), Jelly, a sniper, pauses after shooting two men to write. “Jelly wrote the two names carefully in the book. He had quite a list already” (p. 46). Though the practice of keeping a list in a journal seems commonplace, the nature of the list is very unusual; it is a record of clowns that he and his fellow assassin have killed from their perch above the city. By writing down the names of their victims, the men have a record, but the record also ties them to the crime they are committing.

When considering the interpretations that adolescent readers might make of the mentions of literacy practices in the Printz book, it is useful to delineate various interactions that a reader might have with the representation. A reader may not pause at a mention simply because it fulfills her expectations about the practice. Similarly, a mention may be overlooked because its unexpectedness
renders it implausible or incomprehensible. Yet if a *mention* does give a reader pause, perhaps because it is anticipated or because it is surprising, an opportunity for rethinking arises. *Mentions*, when taken as a focus, offer an interpretive space wherein expectations can be examined and reconsidered. And so in *mentions*, the potential exists for ideas about literacy to be re-created.

**Descriptions: Following Trends**

*Descriptions* invite further examination than *mentions* do because they are elaborated representations of literacy practices. To elaborate something is to add detail to it, and the almost three hundred *descriptions* of literacy practices in the Printz set bring forth intricate depictions of reading and writing. Through examining these *descriptions* of literacy practices, trends around the intersection between literacy and identity can be traced through the books in the set. In addition, the *descriptions* can guide us to patterns about literacy more generally.

In this section, I begin by offering a discussion of the analytical unit of a *description* itself. I then briefly trace connections between literacy and identity markers, such as gender and ethnicity to offer a glimpse at the many ways in which the set affords opportunities for analysis. Finally, I make use of *descriptions* to show a range of ways that literacy practices are represented as malleable and constituted in the practices themselves. To this end, I portray varied representations of characters’ journal-reading and -writing and of their use of multiple modalities alongside other reading and writing that are depicted in the set.

In a *description*, a representation of reading and/or writing is accompanied by elaborating text. Unlike a *mention* which is captured in a word or short series of words, a *description* extends across a series of words, phrases, or sentences. In the accompanying text, the literacy practice is imbued with additional meaning. In some cases, a *mention* is followed by a reflective passage in which a character remarks on the reading or writing itself. In other cases, a literate practice is described in detail in such a way as to bring the participants, context, and artifacts to life. In still others, characters’ motivations for writing and reading tie their engagements with the literacies they use in identity construction.

To illustrate the unit I have termed a *description*, I offer a sequence of three *descriptions* contained in one of the books in the Printz set. By drawing three examples from one book, I portray something of the range of *descriptions* found across the set and highlight the way in which a single text may include a variety of *descriptions*. Daisy, the fifteen year-old New York native who narrates Rosoff’s (2004) *how i live now*, is sent by her father and stepmother to live with her aunt and cousins in the idyllic English countryside for the summer.

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1 For the purposes of this section of this chapter, I make use of the concept of identity in only the most simplistic fashion. I offer trends around such identity markers as gender and socio-economic status. In the next chapter I take up identity more broadly and in more detail making use of *mentions*, *descriptions*, *constitutive events*, and *extended articulations* in concert.
there, her life and the lives of her cousins are upturned when an unidentified group begins initiating terrorist attacks on the country. At first, Daisy receives letters from home, and almost two pages are devoted to this literacy event wherein she reads mail from her father and her friend. “The good old Royal Mail didn’t seem to have any clue that there was a war starting and that day there was a letter from my dad, and one from Leah [her friend]” (32). In my analysis, this sentence is a mention of writing and reading, for the text references the composition of a letter and, based on its receipt, implies that it will be read. In the two paragraphs that follow, Daisy recounts the content of the two letters in a description that includes additional information. She characterizes her father’s letter as perfunctory – “Dad yammered on a lot about Davina the D [Daisy’s stepmother]” and “There was a little something stuck on at the end of the letter about missing me” (32) – and Leah’s letter as serving to keep Daisy up-to-date on what she is missing at school – “Leah’s letter was much more entertaining, with reports that Ms. Cool Herself, Melissa Banner, was going around telling everyone that she and Lyle Hershberg were Hooking Up” (32). The description of the letters provides hints about the characters’ practices of letter-writing, their conventions and their uses. Daisy sees the letter from her father as empty talk when he inquires about her health and safety: “blah blah blah,” (32) and she is uninterested in his recounting of what is happening at home with him and her stepmother. By contrast, she is “entertained” by Leah’s recounting of relationships at school. In either case, there is a clear convention around describing the activities that the absent recipient of the letter is missing. Implicit, too, in the subsequent description is the conversational use of correspondence through letters. After reading her friend’s letter, Daisy says, “I wanted to talk all this through with Leah right then and there.... [s]o I sat down and wrote back all about Edmond and Piper and Isaac [her cousins] and the animals and the house and the war” (33). She composes a response that matches the convention by recounting the activities and people around her. Yet, in the words and sentences that follow, Daisy reflects on what the writing of the letter has done for her. “[A]nd I made it sound even better than it actually was, and by the time I finished the letter I’d convinced myself that This Was the Life oh yes and Boy Had I Lucked Out” (33). In exaggerating her description of life in England, she “convincs” herself that she is quite happy there and fortunate to have been sent. The author’s use of capitalization reinforces the notion that these sentiments are divergent from her initial assessment of her circumstances. The description suggests that in writing a person might rewrite his or her self and situation to make a situation more bearable, even temporarily, as is the case for Daisy who says that truly changing her opinion of her situation is “easier said than done” (33).

Unlike the description of Daisy’s letter reading and writing, a later description in which she steals a map is quite brief and still adds details to a literacy practice. Following a mention in which she finds a road map of the British Isles, the actions she takes are described:
It’s probably best to say up front that maps are not what I’m good at. So I did what every other sensible New Yorker has been doing for years in the Public Library, I tore the page out and hid it in my underwear. And from then on I always kept it with me just in case (78).

The description portrays Daisy as inept at reading maps. She is presumably unable to easily find her bearings or memorize the map, and so she tears the map out of the book and keeps it on her person. This suggests that Daisy perceives map-reading to be a literacy practice that is done quickly, efficiently, and purposefully. She circumvents her inability to read the map in this way by removing the map so that she can read and likely re-read it later. By invoking New York and the city’s public library, she identifies herself as a native of the city and also aligns herself with readers who may be visiting the library in New York City, halfway around the world from the English countryside where she is. But by doing so with regard to removing a page from a library book, she suggests that an unsanctioned and yet commonplace way of interacting with books binds her to those readers. The matter-of-factness of the reference stands in contrast to the stiff, rule-abiding personas that are often associated with library patronage. A reader might well wonder if the practice is unique to New York or if library users aren’t all stereotypical nerdy, bookworms. As such, the description, though only fifty-seven words long, provides a window into the character’s sense of herself as a reader and the literacy practice of using a library.

Finally, in one of the book’s last chapters, Daisy returns to New York City and resumes her life there in spite of the war and summarizes what she does while “waiting” to return to England. “I waited yes, but I also took a job, read books, spent days in air-raid shelters, filled out rationing papers, wrote letters, stayed alive” (170). The description places as parallels working, reading, seeking shelter, writing, and “staying alive.” Daisy is cast as a reader and writer, though the prior chapters have not particularly portrayed her as such. The list of superficially incongruous items applies a sense of necessity to literate activity while it simultaneously suggests that the activities in sum reflect a life rhythm.

These three descriptions from how i live now offer a detailed picture of some of the characters’ reading and writing that occur within the pages of the book. They are embellished with reflections, evaluations, and commentary; Daisy deems her father’s letter to be merely obligatory, and she pronounces herself an unskilled reader of maps. The descriptions suggest that these practices are connected to other social practices; Daisy craves a conversation following her reading of Leah’s letter. The reading and writing are tied to circumstances and do not remain constant across the narrative or across a represented life; her waiting life is made of food, shelter, and literate activity. And so a description can illuminate a particular moment of reading and/or writing, inviting a reader to consider the emotional components of literacy, offering a pause to examine one’s own reading and writing alongside the activities represented in the book, submitting an illustration of a life that includes literate activities.

When isolating the portions of the texts wherein elaborated representations of literacy such as these are found, patterns emerge. Among the more than three hundred descriptions, more female characters engage in literate
activity than male characters, though the books feature three male central characters for every one female central character. The few Asian American characters that appear in the set generally read and write in ways very much tied to their school success. The affluent characters have conversations with their parents about the books they read and the things they are writing for school. Sexual orientation also figures into the literacy practices represented in the books as nearly all of the small number of gay and lesbian characters in the set are depicted as very passionate and capable readers and writers. And the majority of characters who are successful in school are also avid readers.

Each of these trends is worthy of examination in isolation; they and each of the countless other threads that could be pulled from the corpus of descriptions invite contemplation, for they provide an opportunity to consider the represented literate activities of the adolescents in the books alongside the reading and writing that teenagers do. But for the purposes of this chapter, I take a different path; instead, I offer three trends from the data that reflect characters’ manipulation of reading and writing in creative ways. I do so to make the reading and/or writing the focus of the discussion and to emphasize the characters’ construction of the practices themselves as they engage in literate activities. In addition, this decision attempts to provoke a consideration of the usefulness of the description as an analytic unit. In the sections that follow, I trace the use of journals, the representation of mixing modalities, and the re-appropriation of school literacy practices for personal use across the set. I make this choice to draw attention to the ways in which descriptions allow for the analysis of unconventional reading and writing.

**Journals.** In seventeen of the forty-seven books, characters write journals. By looking across the subset, ideas about purpose and privacy are asserted in relation to these writing practices. Though I coded some of these representations as mentions, an examination of the descriptions provides an expanded sense of the literacy practices. In the coding, journals refer to representations that include bound books kept by characters over time in which writing is added in increments (Table 3.1). Some of the characters keep their journals to themselves; others share them; others compose them for themselves at times but share them at other times. The journals are sometimes used to capture feelings and emotions, and other times, they are spaces for fictional writing or informational cataloguing. These books take a number of names and are used by the characters in varied ways.
Table 3.1: Journal Use in the Printz Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Composer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Airborn</em></td>
<td>Log</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Sketches</td>
<td>Describing &amp; sketching winged creatures</td>
<td>Benjamin Molloy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>An Abundance of Katherines</em></td>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Calculations</td>
<td>Attempts to produce a mathematical theorem for predicting a relationship &amp; reflections on relationships</td>
<td>Colin Singleton (narrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging</em></td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Experiences &amp; feelings of year in 14 year-old’s life</td>
<td>Georgia Nicolson (narrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Black Juice</em></td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>List of hits</td>
<td>Jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hole in my Life</em></td>
<td>Log; Journal</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Ship’s log; Experiences &amp; feelings &amp; stories of childhood while in prison</td>
<td>Jack Gantos (narrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jellicoe Road</em></td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Maps</td>
<td>Record of rules and events in war games between three groups of teenagers</td>
<td>Various leaders of the Townies, Cadets, &amp; Jellicoe School over about twenty years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth</em></td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Sketches &amp; Music</td>
<td>Invented &amp; absurd newspaper entries, caricatures, &amp; cartoons; poetry, lyrics, &amp; chords</td>
<td>John Lennon &amp; Paul McCartney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monster</strong></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Screenplay &amp; expression of feelings around experience of being on trial and in jail</td>
<td>Steve Harmon (narrator)</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nation</strong></td>
<td>Log</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Ship’s log</td>
<td>Captain Roberts of the <em>Sweet Judy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postcards from No-Man’s Land</strong></td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Experiences &amp; feelings &amp; stories of childhood while in hiding during the Holocaust</td>
<td>Anne Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repossessed</strong></td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Feelings, dreams, and wishes</td>
<td>Lane Henneberger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skellig</strong></td>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Sketches</td>
<td>Poetry &amp; sketches of birds in yard for homeschooling</td>
<td>Mina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. I: The Pox Party</strong></td>
<td>Catalogue of Fashions</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Images</td>
<td>Clippings from newspapers of slavery-related horrors</td>
<td>Pro Bono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. II: The Kingdom on the Waves</strong></td>
<td>Itinerarium</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Experiences &amp; feelings as a member of Lord Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment</td>
<td>Octavian Nothing (narrator)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In spite of its fantastic storyline, the book *Repossessed* (Jenkins, 2007) offers a description of a teenager’s journal use that is quite ordinary and expected: Lane Henneberger writes in her diary about a boy on whom she has a crush. The book is the story of Kiriel, a fallen angel, who inhabits the body of Shaun, a teenager, and attempts to experience as much of life in the flesh as he can. He looks for a female with whom to have sexual intercourse and decides that Lane is a likely candidate based on her diary.

Her name was Lane. Lane Henneberger. She’d had a crush on Shaun for some time. She wrote things like “Mrs. Shaun Simmons” in her diary, which she kept locked and hidden under her mattress. According to her writings, she also worried that she was the only virgin left in her high school—although she wasn’t, not by far—and she’d had vague dreams of Shaun letting her know that he’d secretly been in love with her for some time. After which exchange of information they’d make tender love and Lane would lose her dreaded virginity, thus making her—or so she imagined—like all the other girls who were wanted and desired (56).

This description depicts the reported contents of entries in a teenage girl’s diary and elaborates the sort of writing that the girl does. Lane’s diary is “locked and hidden under her mattress,” keeping her writing private, except from the eyes of a fallen angel. The nested privacy of the diary being in her room, under her mattress, and locked suggests the very private nature of the book’s contents. Though the act of locking the diary indicates a need to insure safety, the layered protections and the perceived protection that the space of her room afford, along with the soul-baring nature the act of writing in the diary offers her, combine to portray a writing practice that is fortified for safety. She uses the diary to “imagine” herself like “the other girls” in her school. Lane then writes to construct a different self, a self she perceives as more like her peers. She writes her worries and dreams, and she inscribes a future for herself as “Mrs. Shaun Simmons.” This description of Lane’s diary is an isolated one; elsewhere in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Body of Christopher Creed</em></td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Fictional events &amp; wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks</em></td>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Record of misdeeds of secret society at boarding school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>White Darkness</em></td>
<td>Diaries; Notebook</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Experiences &amp; feelings on expedition to South Pole; Log for horse feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Various members of the Bassetts over a period of more than twenty years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Titus Oates</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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This description depicts the reported contents of entries in a teenage girl’s diary and elaborates the sort of writing that the girl does. Lane’s diary is “locked and hidden under her mattress,” keeping her writing private, except from the eyes of a fallen angel. The nested privacy of the diary being in her room, under her mattress, and locked suggests the very private nature of the book’s contents. Though the act of locking the diary indicates a need to insure safety, the layered protections and the perceived protection that the space of her room afford, along with the soul-baring nature the act of writing in the diary offers her, combine to portray a writing practice that is fortified for safety. She uses the diary to “imagine” herself like “the other girls” in her school. Lane then writes to construct a different self, a self she perceives as more like her peers. She writes her worries and dreams, and she inscribes a future for herself as “Mrs. Shaun Simmons.” This description of Lane’s diary is an isolated one; elsewhere in the
book, the diary is only referenced in *mentions*. Lane is not a central character in the narrative and though the diary figures into Kiriel’s strategy to experience intercourse by making use of his knowledge of Lane’s most private writings, there is nowhere else a descriptive reference to the diary.

Benjamin Molloy’s log is also kept private in Oppel’s (2004) *Airborn*, but it is read and hidden not by its writer, but by his granddaughter and her friend. Matt Cruse is a young man working on a zeppelin in a vaguely early 20th century alternate reality, who is befriended by a young passenger named Kate. Her grandfather had been following mysterious flying animals in the area where their airship is traveling, and he documented them in his log, with the hope of discovering a new species of winged creature. When Kate first gives the log to Matt to read, there is a short *description* of the “small but fat leatherbound notebook, held together with a ribbon” (102). The book is “small,” “fat,” and “leatherbound.” These descriptors suggest that Benjamin Molloy could easily carry it with him as he explored the skies looking for the winged creatures. It would have many pages on which to record his notes. And the binding would provide some measure of protection from the elements while also signifying the writing as a formal practice. Likewise, Kate is able to conceal the book so as not to be caught reading it by her chaperone because of its size. She knows that she will not be permitted to hunt for the winged creatures as she is a proper young lady, so she must keep her reading of the book clandestine and entrust it to her friend Matt. Because Molloy was a solo passenger in a hot air balloon, his log did not need to be kept private; but out of his hands, Kate actively keeps the book a secret, much like Lane does with her diary. Kate’s protectiveness is born of both curiosity about the creatures and fear that the book will be confiscated. She believes that other adults, including her parents, would discredit her grandfather’s findings based on his reputation as being eccentric.

As Matt takes the book to his room after being entrusted with it by Kate, he remembers holding it after having encountered it a year earlier when he helped to attempt to rescue Molloy from his damaged hot-air balloon. “It seemed strange to be holding it now in my hands, wind-warped and rain-swollen.... The pages were all scabby, as if the book had been soaked by rain and then baked in the sun.” (103). With this *description*, the circumstances in which Benjamin Molloy kept the writing are evidenced; the book bears the marks of his time in the balloon observing and documenting the winged creatures, writing and sketching in spite of wind and rain. It suggests that he was devoted to recording the things he saw so that he or someone else could return to them.

With these two representations, similarities and differences can be seen. Both books are kept secret, though the nature of the secrecy is quite different. Lane’s private thoughts and dreams are for her and not intended to be shared, a quality commonly associated with diaries. Kate decides to keep Molloy’s journal a secret until she and Matt can confirm the existence of the winged creatures. They do this to protect the discovery for Molloy, to guard his reputation after his death, but also to ensure that the scientific community will recognize the new species. As such, the journal, a personal document, assumes a public voice, providing evidence of the existence of the winged creatures.
Similarly, the two journals in Gantos’ *Hole in my Life* (2002), suggest that the writing and reading of journals can be multidimensional and is necessarily situational. The two texts meet the criteria of being bound books kept by characters over time in which writing is added in increments, but one is a log of a ship’s voyage and the other is a journal filled with stories of people. *Hole in my Life* is a memoir of Gantos’ young adulthood culminating in his involvement in a drug-smuggling operation and his subsequent incarceration. As he and a Brit named Hamilton sail a boat carrying narcotics from the Caribbean up the Eastern seaboard to New York, Gantos makes entries in the log of the ship. His discovery of the log is captured in a *description*:

After we loaded the hash...I began snooping around the boat just to see what I could find. I lifted the cushioned lid of a galley bench and inside were all sorts of sailing gear: flags for half a dozen countries, a rusty flare gun, a fire extinguisher, rainslickers, and a book the size of a dictionary. It was clothbound in green linen, and embossed in gold on the cover was the name of the ship. I set it on the galley table and opened the cover. It was blank. Dozens of pages had been ripped out. The remaining pages were wrinkled and stained from water damage. It smelled salty, and a bit like diesel fuel. I loved it, and immediately thought it was up to me to record my boat’s history, like so many other sea writers had done. I turned the page, smoothed it out with my hand, and got started (81).

Like Lane’s diary, the ship’s log is out of view. It is not alongside maps and tools used for navigation, but rather stored away with materials used only in emergencies. The log’s linen and gold suggest a formality similar to the leather binding of Molloy’s book, but its pages indicate that it has not been treated reverently. Unlike the dutiful quality of the composition of the ship’s log in Pratchett’s *Nation* (2009), the writing Gantos envisages for himself aligns him with writers rather than captains: “It was not lost on me that so many writers had gone to sea, and for them, setting off across the water was the same as setting down to fill the pages with their adventures (76)”. He is inspired by his discovery of the log and uses it to further his plans to become an author.

The third chapter of the book is composed of actual entries from the log that Gantos wrote beginning on July 15 and ending on August 6 and includes a number of other *descriptions*. The sixteen pages include some perfunctory details – “July 16: Dead calm today. Hot (82),” “July 29: Another night without a breeze (88),” “August 3 and 4: Storm (95),” but they are largely filled with accounts of interactions with Hamilton and with Gantos’ writerly thoughts and observations. For instance, the July 16th entry continues, “The sails hanging limply from the gaffs like sleeping bats (82).” On July 27 he writes, “All the bread is old. Furry with medallions of blue mold.” Though a ship’s log is generally used to recount the specifics of a voyage, Gantos uses the pages to find his writing voice. He captures dialogue between Hamilton and him, and he describes feeling restless, high, embarrassed, and scared, lending the entries themselves a dramatic, novel-like quality. In addition, the chapter is laced with *descriptions* of his reading. “Started reading *Heart of Darkness*. Already thinking that Kurtz is
waiting for me in New York along with his gang of savages—and a deep mystery about the evil in the soul of man that I can’t solve until I get there (83).” This description suggests the interconnected nature of his reading of Conrad’s (1993) water-journey and Gantos’s own sea-voyage. In fact, Gantos boards the ship with a number of sea-worthy books to read, including Defoe’s (1998) *Robinson Crusoe* and London’s (1957) *Martin Eden*. But the description also externalizes through its inclusion in the ship’s log, the identification that Gantos makes with the central character in *Heart of Darkness*; he imagines himself in the narrative and takes on the contemplation of “a deep mystery about the evil in the soul of man.” Later, Gantos makes a similar identification with another character from a book.

“July 30: Of all the sea books I have been reading, the book that has taken me over is Jack London’s *Martin Eden*. Just as Holden sees phonies everywhere, those same phonies can’t recognize Eden’s talent and they run him down. He was a man trying to create greatness, and the phonies were too ignorant to recognize anything beyond their own limitations.

On my night shift I’ve begun to act out the final scene, where Martin Eden pushes himself through a porthole and dives into the dark water and intentionally drowns himself... I don’t really want to kill myself so I tie the end of our yellow toeline in a tight knot around my ankle before diving in.” (90)

In this description, his reading of *Martin Eden* has “taken [Gantos] over,” and he enters the story. Though he makes a distinction between his disinterest in killing himself and Eden’s suicide, he embodies the character by swimming at night and by experiencing the pull of the water. He finds connections between the title character’s worldview and his own, also making connections to Salinger’s (1951) *Catcher in the Rye*. Holden Caulfield is invoked as a contemporary of Eden’s and Gantos’. In this way, Gantos’ writing of the log, his reading of the books, and his contemplation of the characters in *Martin Eden* and *Catcher in the Rye* are intertwined and suggest that he is figuring out who he is and who he can be.

Later, when he is imprisoned at the New York State penitentiary, he continues writing. Gantos surmises that the warden at the prison “probably didn’t want the level of violence and sex among both prisoners and guards to be documented,” so journals were not allowed to be kept. Gantos found a way to circumvent this rule with a library book from the prison that he was given by a staff member of the infirmary. “My secret journal was an old hardback copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky (1950), in which I spent hours writing in a tiny script between the tightly printed lines. I kept the book like a Gideons’ Bible on top of my locker and, as far as I know, its true purpose was never discovered (7-8).” When Gantos is being discharged from prison and presents his belongings to the guard, he must offer *The Brothers Karamazov* for inspection. The guard notes that it is a prison library book and does not allow Gantos to take it. The description that follows details Gantos’ reaction.
I couldn’t say anything. The prison seal was stamped in blue ink for both of us to see. My heart was beating wildly. I had to keep that book. My entire identity as a writer was in that book. Everything I had written was squeezed between Dostoyevsky’s great lines, as if my words were his discards. But they were all I had.

The thought of losing his journal causes his heart to “beat wildly,” yet Gantos is powerless to claim the book and his written words. He suggests that in that moment, his written words themselves constitute his identity as a writer and without them, he has nothing to define him as such, despite his assessment that his “words were [Dostoyevsky’s] discards.” This distinction, that his externalized yet secret record of his writing in his journal makes him a writer, is interesting in that the practice of writing is insufficient to construct this identity. After the guard drops the book in the return bin for the library, Gantos articulates the significance of the loss of his writing: “I knew I’d always have my memories, but my heart was in that book” (196). This description in conjunction with the previous one portrays the intertwined nature of this act of writing for Gantos, his words recorded in his journal, and his status as a writer. For him, the practice, the artifact, and the identity are mutually constituted and dependent upon one another. The presence of Dostoyevsky’s words invokes his practice and identity, thereby conjuring the famous author as a participant in the literacy events. Later, Gantos reflects on his journaling practice and imagines others joining their words to his in the way that he wrote with Dostoyevsky.

The Karamazov journal is gone. It is the biggest loss of writing I’ve ever suffered. Since then I have never lost a journal. Now I wonder if that volume is still on the prison library shelf. I hope so. That thought sustains me. I imagine some prisoner checking it out and reading my book within that book. And maybe he will add his thoughts to it, and maybe others will, too. Maybe the library will become filled with books with the trapped world of prisoners’ thoughts concealed between the lines (200).

This description conjures a sense of literacy as multiplicative; Gantos imagines that a prisoner might read his words and be inspired to add his words, and so on. It suggests the blurred line between private and public, for the words hiding within the books in the library will have been composed intimately, yet cast into the shared shelves of the prison. And it hints at a relationship between private journal writing and other writing meant for public consumption; Gantos has never lost a journal since the Karamazov journal and has sustained a successful career as a writer of books for children and young adults, suggesting the importance of the practice of writing in a variety of forms for supporting the practice.

One of the books, Rennison’s (1999) Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson is the story of a year in the life of a fourteen year-old girl told entirely through her diary. From the first entry in which she imagines announcing, “I am bursting with womanhood, I wear a bra!” (1) in response to her uncle’s childish jokes, to the final entry in which she writes
“Sacre bloody bleu and merde!!!” (234) in response to her mother’s announcement that the family will move from England to New Zealand, Georgia’s hilarious writing captures activity and dialogue along with her responses to them. The text includes dates and times for entries and her thoughts and feelings, which are expected content for a teenage girls’ diary, but it also includes passages predominated by dialogue, punctuated in such a way as to suggest that Georgia is remembering conversations as they happened rather than just summarizing them. This device allows the other characters in the book to be present in the narrative, though always included in Georgia’s diary by her hand and thusly portrayed as she sees them. Even with these rhetorical tools, the narrative lacks reflective commentary on Georgia’s writing itself; rather, she just writes. Nobody finds her diary, though her younger sister regularly wanders into her room without permission, and nobody, including Georgia reads her diary. Therefore, though the book as a whole offers opportunities to consider the practice of diary-writing, it contained no descriptions of the practice and was instead coded as an extended articulation.

When considered together, this subset of descriptions of journal use in the books offers a sense of the ways in which the characters engage in the practice. Though the particular uses vary, each portrays the unique purposes and importance that the practice of writing and/or reading a journal has for the teenage characters. Lane’s diary in Repossessed (Jenkins, 2007) and Gantos’ (2002) prison journal in A Hole in my Life allow them to write new identities for themselves as a teenage girl like her peers and as a writer, respectively. When Matt and Kate conceal her grandfather’s records of winged creatures (Oppel, 2004) they negotiate the line between private and public, awaiting the opportunity to validate his discoveries and simultaneously protect his good name. Similarly, the accounts that Gantos keeps of his voyage on the boat carrying narcotics are used to substantiate the claims of the crimes in which he has participated. Though Gantos was writing the ship’s log for himself, it becomes a public record. The character’s motivations for reading and writing are set out in these descriptions, rendering them examinable as a set. In this way, the malleability of the journal and the creativity of its users are highlighted.

Mixing modalities. Kate’s grandfather’s journal in Airborn (2004) also provides a window into composing in multiple modes. For the characters in the Printz set, reading and writing are activities that frequently occur alongside or in concert with other modes of communication. Writing and reading function as tools to come to understandings that are quite similar to ways that creating or experiencing art and music offer the characters opportunities to gain insight. The characters may choose to read, to write, to paint, and to drum², but across the works of YA literature in the Printz set, a sense of that decision is portrayed.

² Because this study takes a literacy practice, limited to an activity wherein writing and/or reading are a part, as its unit of analysis, I only take up representations of non-traditional literacies when paired with traditional literacies. As a result, several noteworthy passages of text are excluded from analysis. For instance, Troy in Fat Kid Rules the World (Going, 2003) uses
Molloy’s journal records his attempt to circumvent the world via hot air balloon and begins with “small neat lines of ink: date, position, wind speed, altitude, observations” in Airborn (Oppel, 2004). The mention suggests that the text that he composes provides a sufficient account of his journey at first, but when he discovers the winged creatures he has been observing are not birds, a shift occurs in the journal. He records, “Their wings are not feathered. I was mistaken about their beaks; they have none” (108). He continues describing the creatures’ features and their movements in prose and ends the written part of the entry by asking “An undiscovered species?” (108). Immediately following this, Molloy draws one of the creatures he observes as it circles his balloon. Because this is the first time Molloy makes use of drawing to account for his observations, it offers an opportunity to pause. Yet its significance is made clear in descriptions of this part of the journal being read. When the cabin boy, Matt, reads this entry from September 2 at 18:02, “Not birds”, it “send[s] a tingle through [him] and he ha[s] to look up from the book” (107). Matt’s anxiety about what Molloy is discovering as he writes his journal is palpable and he must pause before continuing reading. He begins to imagine Molloy observing the sky and then resumes as the explorer describes the unfeathered wings. When he then turns the page, he reacts similarly to the drawing Molloy has done of the creature. “I turned the page and there was a picture, a pencil sketch. Just looking at it made my heart flutter, and I had to sit up and catch my breath” (109). It is the sketch that makes Matt’s heart “flutter.” “He’d put the rim of the basket [of the hot air balloon] in the foreground, and the silhouette of the island in the background to give a sense of the scale. The creature’s wingspan was huge…. It was the strangest-looking thing, half bird, half panther” (109). This description brings forth the explorer’s and the reader’s construction of the observation as occurring through text and image. With a visual representation of the creature, in relation to the balloon’s basket and the island, Molloy offers a rendering of his discovery that suggests objectivity and that inspires a dramatic response to Matt’s reading of it. The description points to the importance of the sketch to Matt’s understanding of the mysterious and, without the image, likely unimaginable creatures.

In The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. 1: The Pox Party (Anderson, 2006), a young man’s enlightening encounter with a multimodal text is also depicted. The book’s eponymous character, Octavian, is an African slave kept for study by the gentleman of the fictional Novanglian College of Lucidity in New England during the time just before the American Revolutionary War. The professors of the college teach him classical literature and composition, classical languages and music in an endeavor to explore the Negro “species”. Throughout the first part of the book, Octavian is not aware that he is a slave, but he comes to understand his status and the significance of his status across a series of interactions with other slaves of the college. One of these drumming and Bobby in The First Part Last (Johnson, 2003) uses tagging to write themselves and their worlds. I take up the opportunity for analysis that these representations offer and argue for an expanded notion of literacy in my final chapter.
occurs when Octavian encounters a multimodal text composed by a fellow slave whom he calls Bono, short for Pro Bono. Bono, who has also been taught to read for the benefit of his position as valet to the head of the college, collects texts and images from reading material that his master is finished with. “Bono began to peruse the gazettes and papers when Mr. Gitney was quit of them; and he would tear out certain articles and paste them onto paper, making, after some six months, a sizeable book” (163). This mention of the book is followed by a description of Octavian’s reading of it. He expects to see “a catalogue of fashion (164),” as Bono reports when asked about its contents by Mr. Sharpe, the college’s benefactor, but he finds that it is something quite different.

It was a catalogue of horrors. Page after page of Negroes in bridles, strapped to walls, advertisements for shackles, reports of hangings of slaves for thefts or insubordination. He had, for those many months, been collecting offers for children sold cheap, requests for aid in running down families who had fled their masters. For the first time, I saw masks of iron with metal mouth-bits for the slave to suck to enforce absolute silence. I saw razored necklaces, collars of spikes that supported the head. I saw women chained in coffles, bent over on the wharves. (164-5)

Octavian is met with image after image of violence against slaves, encountering visually the horrific treatment his fellow Africans endure that contrasts sharply with his early upbringing wherein a violin was at his neck. In spite of Mr. Gitney’s attempt to “rid” them of the “noisome object” (165) by burning it, Octavian is marked by his reading of the book. “But I could not rid myself of it. It was the common property of all of us” (165). Octavian asserts that the book belongs to “all of us,” a claim that allows for a number of interpretations. Perhaps the book belongs to Bono, Octavian, Mr. Sharpe, and Mr. Gitney, or perhaps it belongs to all descendents of Africa who are enslaved in America. In any case, the book carries a powerful message. It is articulated with words through “advertisements,” “reports of hangings,” “offers for children,” and “requests for aid,” but the images of “horrors” conjure vividly its contents through detail -- “masks of iron with metal mouth-bits” and “razored necklaces, collars of spikes.” Even without the images included in the text of Octavian Nothing3, the

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3 Elsewhere in the Printz set, authors do include images alongside the text of their books. Images and text combine to tell the story of Emmett Till in A Wreath for Emmett Till (Nelson, 2005) and to portray a dialogue between art and word in Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art (Greenberg, 2001). But these books were not coded as descriptions. In Hard Love (Wittlinger, 1999), a book about zine writing, five of the pieces that the central character, John, reads are accompanied by images, but for only one of them are the images discussed in the exposition and this was coded as a mention. The Book Thief (Zusak, 2005) includes two books written by the characters, but I reserve my discussion of this book for the section describing extended articulations.
description invites a reaction, much like Octavian’s own reaction and Matt’s reaction to Molloy’s journal in *Airborn*.

In these two examples of the multimodal nature of many literacy practices, the *descriptions* call forth an experience of making meaning from text and images. They offer depictions of ways that young people engage in reading and/or writing in multiple modes and portray what they do with literacy and what literacy does to them. Matt’s reaction to Molloy’s sketches of winged creatures is rendered bodily; his breathing, his heart, and his whole body are affected – “heart flutter,” “catch my breath” (109), and “tingle though my entire body” (107). Octavian’s reading makes such an impression on him that he cannot “rid [him]self of it” (165); the memory and the resultant understandings of the atrocities in Bono’s book are inescapable. Gantos’ heart “beats wildly” (195). These *descriptions* invite consideration of the ways in which literacy practices, and meaning-making practices more generally, intersect with identity, I topic I take up at length in the next chapter.

*Descriptions*, then, offer elaborated representations of reading and/or writing, in which the literacy practice is the subject of additional exposition. Though the nature, quality, and size of the extra narrative attention vary, a *description* invites a moment of pause; the elaboration of a reading or writing moment suggests that the representation of a literacy practice is more than a mere *mention*. A *description* might illuminate a character’s motivations for taking up a pen or typing a message. It could provide a *description* of a young person’s emotional reaction to a written text. In a few sentences, a *description* might conjure a clandestine and hopeful scrawl in a diary, or a series of paragraphs might render the receipt of an email and the dramatic prank that it inspires for its reader. A *description*, then, can be seen to invite readers to consider practices of reading and writing as malleable, for it explicitly depicts literacy as socially constructed. That is, in a *description*, a character’s reading and/or writing is imbued with a social world complete with such things as purposes, settings, and participants. A *description* is a *mention* brought to life.

**Constitutive Events: How Literacy is Significant in Adolescent Lives**

When a representation articulates a reading or writing practice that has significance for the character or for a narrative, it warrants special attention. A *constitutive event* is the term I offer to designate representations of literacy practices that are like *descriptions* in form but function to significantly impact the narrative and/or the characters. To be a *constitutive event*, the description must be a part of a turning point in the narrative. In the literacy practice, a change must occur in the plot or in the character. The use of the word event is key in that it conjures Heath’s (1983) notion of a literacy event. My use of the term invokes Heath and suggests that boundaries can be drawn around the reading and/or writing for analytical purposes, though they are practices that tie the participant(s) to larger social worlds. While writing in a diary is a literacy practice that occurs across many books in the set, it may be useful to examine a particular depiction of diary writing to better understand its significance to a narrative. The weight of the language used around a *constitutive event* suggests
that it is important and that it functions as a turning point in the narrative. When Gantos surrenders the copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he has been using as a journal during his incarceration, to the prison guard upon his release, as I offered in the previous section, the *description* captures the tremendous loss he feels. The event proves significant in that it shapes his identity as a writer and influences his writing practices into the future. Because of this significance, the *description* is also a *constitutive event*. In the sections that follow, I explore two pairs of *constitutive events* to define the characteristics of the analytical unit and to demonstrate the nature of its potential for contemplation.

**Learning to read.** In a number of books in the Printz set, characters reflect on their beginning experiences with reading. For Matt in *House of the Scorpion* (Farmer, 2002), his early reading experiences introduce him to Peter Rabbit read by his caregiver and lead to his confusion when he meets a man named Mr. McGregor who is not a farmer. Taylor, the central character in Markham’s (2008) *Jellicoe Road*, associates reading with security as she recalls being read to in bed while snuggled between Hannah and a man she can’t remember. These two *descriptions* offer rich details for consideration, but do not meet the criteria of a *constitutive event*. In contrast, for Shawn in *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000) and Berry in *Many Stones* (Coman, 2000), experiences of learning to read prove significant to the narratives.

In *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000), Shawn, a fourteen year-old who has cerebral palsy, remembers a significant childhood event, learning to read from his sister, Cindy. Though he is unable to communicate, he describes sitting in his wheelchair while his older sister played school with him. “She’d point to letters and sound them out, show me simple sentences, reading the words slowly, like her teacher must have once read them to her. When I’d flip around and vocalize and do my retard number, she’d scold me and then repeat her lessons. Cindy was playing. I was learning” (Trueman, 2000, p. 8). In this *description* of reading, Shawn recalls a bit of the process through which he learned to read, highlighting the tools and relationships that comprise the literacy event. Cindy presents him with letters, sounds, words, and sentences. It is just the two of them engaged in the “lesson,” though Cindy’s teacher is also invoked; Shawn sees Cindy’s teacher as having modeled the teaching she does with him. The literate activity is conducted in such a way that Cindy introduces Shawn to the sounds and words “slowly” and repetitively. Reading, then, involves text (phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, words, and sentences), participants (teacher and student), and practice (simplicity, slowness, and repetition). This representation of reading is further elaborated immediately after in another *description* as Shawn more fully articulates the work of sound-letter correspondence.

I picked up reading from Cindy playing school with me, and through remembering sounds, and listening to words spoken as I saw them written down, like on LV screens, video credits, and in real life, from signs of every type, like MOTEL, which taught me m-o-t-e-l, to STOP, which taught me s-t-o-p. Reading is easy once you catch on that every letter just stands for a
sound. Once you get that, then the letters on magazine covers and billboards and those just floating across the sky pulled by an airplane or flashing from the Goodyear blimp all turn into sounds. Sounds to letters, letters to words, words to sentences – reading. (p. 8-9)

Shawn, who has previously reported his IQ score as 1.2 – “mental age 3 to 4 (that’s months, not years)” (p. 5), declares, “reading is easy” and marries the practices of listening, looking, and remembering to reading. He catalogues a number of sources of print in our world that provide opportunities to make the connection between sound, letters, words, and sentences.

While these descriptions offer a simultaneously succinct and vivid account of the act of reading, their significance is manifested in the paragraph that follows it.

You’d be surprised how much stuff you can learn and remember when you haven’t got anything else to do with your time. My main teachers in life are the TV; the car radio; listening to Paul and his friends and Cindy and her friends; eavesdropping on one side of every phone conversation anybody in my family ever has; reading bits and pieces of newspapers, magazines, and books left open on nearby on tables, chairs, or couches; catching glimpses of readerboards, billboards, and a thousand other pieces of written, spoken, seen, heard info from the world. Maybe for somebody who doesn’t remember every sound they ever hear, all these things wouldn’t mean that much. But I do remember everything; nothing that ever comes into my head ever gets out again. I’m pretty smart. (p. 9-10)

In this constitutive event, Shawn is cast as an intelligent young man, and his ability to read the world around him, including print, and his status as a reader is central to his sense of his own intelligence. He suggests that his memory is very strong and that even bits of written text contribute to his understanding of the world. Though he is perceived by the world as incapable of thought, Shawn’s narrative offers a view of himself that joins his identity as reader with that of rememberer and sense-maker, thereby making plausible his claim that his father might be contemplating taking Shawn’s life, the problem that drives the novel, amplifying the literacy event’s constitutive quality.

In Many Stones (Coman, 2000), Berry’s mother is a reading tutor who “teaches kids who think they can’t learn to read to read” (18). Her mother is a devoted teacher and Berry has observed her working with many kids over time.

My mother loves her work. It’s almost like she climbs inside it to sit beside some kid who she knows is going to read. I’ve heard her so many times, moving sounds and letters around, into kids’ heads, kid after kid after kid. She has done this for years and years. Sound it out, take a guess, good! (20).

This description captures a similar sense of the magic of learning to read that Shawn’s account captures. But since Berry is an observer rather than a participant and because her mother’s students are able to communicate with her
mother, her account provides a perspective quite different from Shawn’s. Unlike Cindy, who scolds Shawn, Berry’s mother is so invested in the reading of her students that she is subsumed by her work.

Later, Berry recalls the moments of learning to read in which her mother participated when she visits the prison where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, South Africa. She travels with her father to the country where her sister worked as a Peace Corps volunteer before her murder to participate in a memorial service for her. Prior to the trip and throughout the first part of the trip, Berry is in mourning; she is numb and apathetic, feels disconnected from her family, and stacks stones she began collecting at her sister’s funeral on her chest to ground herself, “like I am paper and they are the paperweight and they keep me from flying off, right out the window” (9). But seated inside the prison, Berry becomes present in a new way through a constitutive event.

We sit on benches in a big room inside the prison where the prisoners did their studying, had classes, where some of them learned to read. Some of the guards learned to read in this room, too – the prisoners taught them, and kept watch so the other guards wouldn’t catch them being taught by the prisoners. I think about telling Mom this story, how much she’ll love it. And I swear I can feel it, that people have learned to read here – as if patience and trying can get soaked up into the walls of places. Mom should be here, I think. Laura was here. And here I am! (111)

In this description, the circumstances that allowed for both guards and prisoners to learn to read are offered, but Berry’s reaction suggests that it is a constitutive event. When she “feels” the teachers’ and learners’ “patience and trying” in the space, a shift is signaled for Berry. She is emotionally present and is mindful of both the absence of her mother and the past presence of her sister in this room of reading. The final exclamation point signals an enthusiasm for being there in South Africa that is new and a hint at the way in which she later embraces her sister’s memory and her own position in continuing her legacy.

These two constitutive events suggest that the milestone of learning to read is more than a step on a learning path. Rather the event conjures activities, dispositions, and something magical that come together in learning to read. The two point to the importance of practice and repetition, along with trial and error in beginning to read.

Writing letters. Letter writing is represented in 20 of the 47 books in the Printz set. Though letters are coded as mentions in a handful of the books, most are included in descriptions; the letter-writing and/or reading is elaborated with details, much like the letters that Daisy reads written by her father and friend in how i live now (Rosoff, 2004). Yet in Many Stones (Coman, 2000) and Northern Light (Donnelly, 2003), the letter-reading and -writing that the characters do are turning points in the books.

During the tour of the prison, Berry also learns that the guards at the prison “cut out any information they wanted to” before delivering letters to the prisoners (Coman, 2000, p. 110). The tour guide, who had been a political
prisoner at Robben Island talks about the experience of receiving a censored letter, and Berry remembers the last letter she received from her sister.

He says what a hard thing it is to have news from the people you love taken away from you. ‘You have to have stories,’ he says. He says it so fiercely I hold my breath....

But the last letter she wrote I read over and over and over, as if every word held the biggest secret in the world. It arrived a week after she was killed – her ghost letter.

.... It was almost impossible not to hope, and so I made myself say it, again, that she was still dead, and then I opened the letter and read it, every word, devoured it like it was breath and I hadn’t been breathing for a week.

Michael has moved our group along.... I am still back at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at the most hated part of the prison, and thinking that what the guards did with the letters was torture. (110-1)

In this constitutive event, the thought of receiving and reading a letter that has had its “stories” removed prompts Berry to remember her reading of her sister’s last letter to her. Though her sister has been dead for a week, the letter arrives to Berry and she “breathes” the life of her sister as if it is her own. In her reading of the letter her grief is embodied. Prior to this, her grief is articulated only through the image of the stones, but through this event, it is tangible, her desperation, palpable. Her characterization of the guards’ actions as “torture” suggests that she understands the necessity of one’s loved one’s stories.

In Northern Light (Donnelly, 2003), Mattie, a young woman working in a hotel on upstate New York in the early 1900’s, receives a bundle of letters from a hotel guest who had been crying with the request that she burn them. Though Mattie attempts to say that she cannot, Grace Brown’s insists that she burn the letters. “‘Burn them. Please,’ she whispered. ‘Promise me you will. No one can ever see them. Please! And then she pressed them into my hands, and her eyes were so wild that they scared me, and I quickly nodded yes” (41-2). The description depicts a sad woman desperate to be rid of a bundle of letters. Her “wild eyes” and her insistence that “no one can ever see them” suggest that the contents of the letters are inflammatory in some way. This moment draws Mattie into the drama of Grace Brown, whose letters thread through the book, and therefore is a constitutive event. Though Mattie carries the letters around for quite a while, even as Miss Brown’s body is recovered from the lake, she eventually reads them and uncovers a story of betrayal in their contents. She chooses to betray the promise she made to Grace in order for justice to be done to her murderer, and she takes up the journey to a new life that Grace wrote of beginning, by traveling to New York City to attend college.

Both constitutive events portray the significance that letters have in the lives of two fictionalized young women. Berry and Mattie both read letters and their reactions and their actions inspired by the letters evidence the power the
written words have in their lives. The letters carry life in them as they carry the stories of two other women who are no longer living. When taken as a set, the descriptions in the three books of learning to read and letter-reading and – writing make suggestions about the literacy practices they portray, but function more importantly to propel the narratives as constitutive events. This distinction is important. The representations that can be identified as constitutive events lend themselves to consideration as components of the narratives of which they are a part; descriptions in general invite analysis of trends across a set and can be isolated from the text more easily.

**Extended Articulations: Adolescent Lives Happening Around Literacy**

In twelve of the books in the set, the lives of adolescents are portrayed in such a way that literacy is itself articulated across the narrative. In these cases, the reading and the writing that the characters permeate the texts and become themselves worthy objects of analysis. Some are written in the genres that they explore, i.e., *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* (Rennison, 2000), written as a journal, and *Your Own, Sylvia: A Verse Portrait of Sylvia Plath* (Hemphill, 2007), composed in poetry in the style of and inspired by the works of Plath. Some pair two narratives, a fictional narrative written by a character and an accompanying narrative, i.e. *The Body of Christopher Creed* (Plum-Ucci, 2000) and *Postcards from No Man’s Land* (Chambers, 2002). Still others tell the story of the life of a teenage reader or writer, i.e. *The White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2007) and *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 1999).

Zusak’s (2006) *The Book Thief* is an epitomic text for considering extended articulations. The story of a young girl whose childhood is punctuated by incidents around literacy provides a historical narrative rich in mentions, descriptions, and constitutive events. Though the book’s hundreds of representations of literacy practices could be the subject of their own study, I offer this brief overview of examples of the book’s mentions, descriptions, and constitutive events to portray the characteristics of and potential in an extended articulation as a unit of analysis.

The story, set in Germany during the Holocaust, is a grand articulation of life happening around literacy and with literacy. Liesel Meminger is a girl of nine when she steals her first book. The constitutive event that first earns her the eponymous name begins with a mention: “When [the grave digger] walked a way, after a few dozen paces, a black book fell innocuously from his coat pocket without his knowledge” (23). It is a simple enough reference to a book, lacking any sort of detail aside from its color, yet the fallen book presents an opportunity for Liesel to harness the written word, a struggles that weaves through the book. The book signals “the beginning of an illustrious career” (29), according to the narrator, Death, and therefore can be seen as a constitutive event; when Liesel steals the first book, she is positioned to steal another book and thus the title of the book is invoked. Though Liesel cannot read, she takes the black book from the snow where her younger brother is buried. A description elaborates the physical appearance of the book and Liesel’s acquiring of it: “There was something black and rectangular/ lodged in the snow./ Only the girl saw it./ She
bent down and picked it up and held it firmly in her fingers. The book had silver writing on it” (24). Without discussion of her reasons for taking the book or for her attachment to the book or even the title of the book, its size suggests that it is a pocket-sized book, perhaps a reference for the gravedigger or a book he might read for pleasure or a record-keeping book of some kind; it is the perfect size for pilfering. Later the book is revealed to be a handbook for gravediggers and it is the book Liesel’s foster father, Hans Hubermann, uses to teach her to read.

Shortly after Liesel arrives at the Hubermann’s home to live, Hans discovers that Liesel has a book hidden under her bed, and he uses the book to teach her to read. In another constitutive event, Liesel reflects on the experience of learning to read with Hans. “You wouldn’t think it, she wrote, but it was not so much the school who helped me to read. It was Papa” (54). Liesel makes reference to the attempts her school made to teach her to read that were unsuccessful and indicates that Hans was a better teacher for her in this description. Her unhappy school reading experiences are also included in the text and are also descriptions.

Having followed the thread that the first theft offers, namely the stolen book’s connection to Liesel’s history as something to hold in the chaos of her entry into foster care, its presence under her bed as a reminder of her brother although she is unable to read it, and its function as a teaching text as she learns to read, I now turn to two intertwined, significant, and unexpected literacy representations in the book to portray the potential in an extended articulation. In the political context of the story, the book, Mein Kampf (Hitler, 1943) functions uniquely. Max Vandenburg, the son of an army comrade of Hans, is hiding in a storeroom when a friend gives him a copy of Mein Kampf with a train ticket, map, and a key tucked inside it from Hans Hubermann. With the book, Max travels from Stuttgart to Munich to the Hubermann’s home, so that he can hide in their basement in an attempt to escape death at the hands of the Nazis. The book is simultaneously his executioner and his savior; its text calls for Max’s death because he is Jewish, yet by holding it for his journey, he is able to travel unquestioned, yet not unafraid as this description captures:

For most of the journey, he made his way through the book, trying never to look up. The words lolled about in his mouth as he read them. Strangely, as he turned the pages and progressed through the chapters, it was only two words he ever tasted. Mein Kampf. My struggle – The title, over and over again, as the train prattled on, from one German town to the next. Mein Kampf. Of all the things to save him.

Max’s fear propels his reading of the book for it provides protection from questioning travelers, but he does not take the words of the book into his own mouth. Instead he rolls them around only reappropriating the title’s meaning for himself as he struggles to find safety with the Hubermanns.

The Standover Man (224-36) is a book within The Book Thief that Max makes for Liesel to tell his story and to thank her for her friendship. He again repurposes Hitler’s manifesto by painting over the book’s pages to create blank
pages on which paint words and images. “[H]e formulated words in his head till he could recount them without error. Only then, on the paper that had bubbled and humped under the stress of drying paint, did he begin to write the story” (223). This description conjures the care that Max brought to his writing practice. He rehearsed the story in his mind. He gives the book to Liesel who reads it. “There were the erased pages of Mein Kampf, gagging, suffocating under the paint as they turned.... Liesel read and viewed Max Vandenburg’s gift three times, noticing a different brush line or word with each one.” While these descriptions bring forth vivid images of the book that Max creates, within the pages of The Book Thief, Max’s text and paintings in the book are rendered, complete with the words of Mein Kampf bleeding through the paint he uses to cover them. The images of the book itself provide a powerful articulation of the literacy practice that it represents, as it also animates Max’s struggle and the larger struggle against the Nazi movement.

The narrator of The Book Thief, Death, also offers that he learns Liesel’s story from her own book detailing her life. With this, the intertwined literacy practices that run through the book are further nested in a written text composed by Liesel and read by Death. This book and many of the other books that can be identified as extended articulations include layered literacies, that is multiple readings, multiple writings, and reading-writing interactions. Because of this multiplicity, a system of literacy is offered in an extended articulation. The reading and writing that characters do in these books are rendered in social worlds wherein literacy is central. Therefore, in an extended articulation lives are depicted that include literacy. Additionally, because these texts deliberately and explicitly take up literacy, the reading and writing that the characters do essentially demand attention. For instance, a book entitled The Book Thief calls for reader to consider when, why, and how a book might be stolen. These texts invite special analytical focus based on the number and nature of the representations included in them.

Discussion

With mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations from the Printz set on view like heavenly bodies in the night sky, constellations of literacy that they call forth are rendered visible. When Liesel learns to read the manual stolen from a gravedigger alongside her foster father in The Book Thief (Zusak, 2006), a line connects the practice to Cindy playing school and reading to Shawn in Stuck in Neutral (Trueman, 2000) and to Berry’s mother and the kids she tutors in Many Stones (Coman, 2000). Literacy here brings expert and novice together and marks a milestone toward independence. When Max paints himself as a bird to conjure the image of himself that Liesel offers him, his illustrations connect him to the zine writers in Hard Love (Wittlinger, 1999) who write themselves in their words and illustrations. When Troy and Curt repurpose newspaper clippings as decorations in Troy’s room in Fat Kid Rules the World (Going, 2003), they take up a similar mixing of modalities that the zine writers use and that binds them to Molloy and his winged creatures in Airborn (Oppel, 2004) and to Bono and his catalogue of horrors in
The connections outline notions of literacy that are situational, social, malleable, and observable, allowing for readers to draw their own lines and to see their own stories. In the next chapter I further explore the affordances of mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations from the Printz set as the adolescent characters’ identities are constructed through reading and writing.
Chapter Four
Characters as Readers and Writers

Following from the previous chapter, wherein I offered an analytical structure for examining the representations of literacy in works of young adult literature, this chapter makes use of the analytic units of descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations to illustrate the range of literate identities portrayed in the Printz books. I argue that the reading and the writing that the characters do imply that literacy and identity are intimately intertwined. Though this implication is all but a truism (particularly in scholarship on literacy), these fictionalized representations of literate practices portray literacy alive in adolescent lives. The books afford an elaborated picture of the activities of reading and writing, complete with the thinking and feeling that accompany them and the social relationships within which they occur across time.

Drawing from the constellation mapped in the previous chapter, I chart representations of literacy practices to tell a story of the relationship between literacy and identity for the adolescent characters. I occasionally include mentions, brief references to literate activity with little or no elaborating exposition, but they are not the analytical focus of this chapter. Rather I draw from descriptions of literacy as they are more lengthy and detailed depictions of the participants and settings with and within which the reading or writing occurs in the books, constitutive events because these accounts of literacy illuminate a unique significance to the character(s) or the narrative itself, and extended articulations as these representations of literacy weave throughout the narratives and thus propel the stories. Additionally, in offering examples of the representations of literacy I found across the books, I am careful to include a variety of depictions (mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations) to demonstrate the usefulness of the analytical units to bring forth different notions about literacy. In this chapter, I use the analytical units to answer the following questions: What literate identities are afforded through the literacy practices in the books? How do these practices and the identities that they call forth relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth? I trace the connections between literate activities and identities, focusing chiefly on the characters’ literate identities, that is, their identities as readers and writers. I also explore parallel uses of multiliteracies that characters take up to do similar identity work. In doing so, my goal is to offer insight into the nature, function, and uses of literacy in the lives of the books’ fictional youth.

Literacy Practices as Identity Work

Because adolescence is a time of transition from childhood to adulthood, it is hardly surprising that the adolescent characters in the Printz set are engaged in explicit identity work. “Who am I?” could be a line in nearly all fiction written for

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4 I do not include Sylvia Plath, Emmitt Till, and John Lennon, the three historical figures whose teenaged selves live in the pages of three books in the Printz set. I do, however, include them in my discussion of the characters as a group.
teenagers. Just as teenagers are negotiating burgeoning independence, representations of teenagers in young adult literature (YAL) are doing the same. YAL is very often characterized by themes of self-discovery and identity. In adolescence, children become adults and in doing so, participate in becoming new selves. What was less expected was the extent to which the teenage characters in the Printz set do this identity work, this process of becoming a new self, with and through reading and writing. Many characters use reading and/or writing in crafting selves through examining their pasts, presents, and futures. The characters are depicted reflecting on how they have changed, figuring out who they are, and imagining who they will become in the Printz books, and in doing so, they engage in literate practices that constitute identity work.

Looking to the Past

In numerous books in the set, characters construct literate identities through looking back at reading and writing that occurred in the past. Some of the youth remember significant events from their childhoods, while others examine historical events. For still others, a look back at their families’ stories proves important in constructing their literate identities. In each case, a reflective stance as represented in these works of YAL provides a tool for constructing a sense of self as reader or writer.

In the previous chapter I explored the constitutive event wherein Shawn, the fourteen year-old boy who has cerebral palsy in Trueman’s (2000) Stuck in Neutral (2000) remembers learning to read from his sister, Cindy and claims his identity as an intelligent person, in spite of his inability to communicate or even control his body and its functions5. His memories of learning to read are quite vivid; he recalls specific techniques and portrays Cindy as a model teacher. “She’d point to letters and sound them out, show me simple sentences, reading the words slowly” (8). And though Shawn cannot respond to Cindy’s instruction outside of his own mind, he internalizes the process of learning to read: “Sounds to letters, letters to words, words to sentences – reading” (8-9). Shawn offers that the books and other written material he encounters are his “teachers” (10). In a constitutive event, he offers a list of all the ways that he has learned, which includes reading sources such as books, newspapers, and billboards, and reports that he can “remember everything” (10). His reflective turn allows for his claim of being “smart” (10) to be accepted as plausible. In other words, the detail with which he remembers his early reading and the myriad ways he has learned from his world constitute his identity as a thinking person, a “smart” person. He learns to read despite his physical and social limitations, a feat that is a result of his determination, his resourcefulness, and his intellect. Though he cannot harness the strength of his body, his mind is forever collecting pieces of information, from written and spoken texts, to make his mind strong. His status as reader is also tied to his description of himself as “stuck in neutral” (p. 11) in that he can make sense of print and the world, but he is unable to communicate his understandings to the world.

5 See page 34 for discussion of a description and page 48 for a constitutive event.
In *Keesha’s House* (Frost, 2003), a novel in poems, Carmen also looks back to her childhood; she writes about fairytales she remembers after abandoning letter-writing while incarcerated. The almost sixteen year-old is locked inside “white walls” (26) as she awaits trial for driving under the influence while on probation. She wishes she were home, “Grandmama’s house – what I call home” (10). While in custody, she feels alone having not been visited by her grandmother. “I started a letter: *Dear Grandmama,/ get me outta here . . .* But then I stopped/ And ripped it up.” She recognizes that she should have made different decisions and “know[s] everything Grandmama/ would say about [her situation]” (27). In this mention of writing, Carmen begins to compose a text wherein she can articulate her frustration but sees the activity as futile. The letter then functions only to open and then close an imagined dialogue with her grandmother because she knows that her grandmother would say that her actions resulted in her consequence.

Yet in Carmen’s next poem entitled “My Inside Self,” a markedly different writing activity is depicted. Contemplating what “keeps [her] alive in [the custody of police],” Carmen remarks that the many measures that are taken to keep those who are “locked up” from committing suicide -- “I could fill a hundred sheets/ of paper if I wrote down everything/ they do to keep us in control, awake or sleepin’” (52) – aren’t it. She can see only a bit of a tree branch from her window and watches light reflecting off it on an icy day. The ice brings to mind Cinderella’s glass slipper and Carmen says that stories keep her alive in a description of writing.

You know how in that story, everything turns out okay when she comes out from her corner and that glass slipper fits her? Sometimes I stay alive by thinkin’ of those stories. Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty... I know they all just stories. I sure ain’t got no glass shoes, or any prince to find me in a corner, get me out. It’s just that sometimes, everything in here makes me feel dead, and everything alive is someplace else. Instead of sleepin’ off the hours and days, I find some corner of my mind to keep alive. They give us two sheets of paper, once a week, for letters, and I treat them like new shoes to take me where I want to go. I write things down to keep my inside self alive. (pp. 52-3)

Without finding false hope in fairytales, Carmen uses the stories to hold onto her “inside self.” She reassures herself that while there are no “glass slippers” or “prince[s]” in the world, things can “turn out okay.” Taking on the identity of writer, she uses the precious paper she receives not to write letters, but instead she writes to capture pieces of her self that live in spite of the death of the place where she is imprisoned. Though the poetic text does not explicitly reveal what Carmen writes down, it is plausible that she might write the stories of the
fairytales she remembers or incorporate other looks to the past into her compositions. In any case, her writing reflects back to her childhood and crafts a self, living and hopeful, until she is able to go home.

Shawn’s and Carmen’s reading and writing events from their childhoods influence their present literate selves. Both use literacy to cradle a self that is separate from the other selves that they project or are imposed on them by the world. Carmen’s writing keeps alive her hopeful, childlike self in a way that is not unlike Shawn’s living and hidden reading self that he is unable to communicate to the world. For both, the turn to the past sustains them in the present.

Unlike Shawn and Carmen who recollect literacy events in their own lives, a number of characters look to others’ pasts and in doing so construct their identities as readers and writers. Melinda in *Speak* (Anderson, 1999) uses a writing assignment for her history class to explore finding a voice. Melinda, a high school freshman, does a report on the suffragettes for her history class articulating the rights women were denied.

“They were dolls, with no thoughts, or opinions, or voices of their own. Then the suffragettes marched in, full of loud, in-your-face ideas. They got arrested and thrown in jail, but nothing shut them up. They fought and fought until they earned the rights they should have had all along. I write the best report ever. Anything I copy from a book, I put in quotes and footnotes (feetnote?). I use books, magazines, and a video tape.” (pp. 154-5)

She chooses to write about “loud” women who fight. She reads to learn about how women stood up for themselves with their voices. Silent Melinda has told no one that she was raped and seeks out the struggle of “loud women” to find her own voice. In composing the report, she uses writing to bring forth the suffragettes as speaking women quite unlike herself. This writing identity then fronts a construction of other through text that stands in for Melinda’s idealized self. She reads and writes to name a speaking identity for which she strives.

This description parallels another voicing of Melinda’s pain that is represented in the book. Though she is unable to speak of the rape that occurred just before the start of the school year, Melinda uses both writing and art to construct a speaking identity. While she does not reveal that she was raped, her art speaks of the pain she is enduring. Her art teacher comments that her artwork “has meaning. Pain” (p. 65). But when “[t]he bell rings[,] [s]he leave[s] before he can say more” (65). In spite of her silence, Melinda’s art speaks for her and helps her find a “loud” voice like the suffragettes.

Similarly, parent-less Taylor Markham in *Jellicoe Road* (Marchetta, 2006) uses reading to understand her own history and shifts her identity as reader. She reads about the lives of five young people in a manuscript written by her caretaker, Hannah, at Jellicoe School, a state-run boarding school educating a number of wards of the state in the bush of Australia. Hannah, Taylor learns, is writing the manuscript to sort out her own story, but Taylor reads it as a story. Unbeknownst to Taylor, the story includes her absentee mother and unknown father. From the first mention of the book, Taylor is a reader who carries the
young people depicted within Hannah’s manuscript in her consciousness and
makes them and her reading of them the topic of conversation. She mentions
telling a boy about whom she daydreams: “And I tell him about Hannah, who
lives in the unfinished house by the river at the edge of the Jellicoe School, and of
the manuscript of hers I’ve read, with its car wreck” (Marchetta, p. 5). Taylor is
introduced as a reader from the beginning and is shown to engage with reading in
such a way that the text she is reading becomes the topic of conversation for her.
She later says that she “love[s] reading about the kids in the eighties, even though
[she] can’t make head or tail of the story” (p. 24). For her, the enjoyable
experience she has reading the characters overrides the difficulty she has
comprehending the story as a whole. In contrast to the factual retention of text
that characterizes Shawn’s reading, emotional connections to characters propel
Taylor’s reading. In articulating her use of reading to combat the “sadness” that
she fears will become “all-consuming,” Taylor offers a description of her reading
of the characters in Hannah’s manuscript. “I’m frightened that one morning
there will not be enough to keep me going. Except maybe the pages I’m holding in
my hands. They comfort me, these characters, like they’re my best friends, too”
(p. 122). Reading in this description is for comfort and the characters provide
almost tangible companionship for Taylor as she holds the pages.

But later, Taylor’s engagement with the manuscript shifts when she
discovers that it is her story as well as Hannah’s. Taylor learns that three of the
teenage kids in the manuscript are her uncle, her mother, and her father, whose
tragic and early death causes great emotional distress to the others. “So I go back
to the stories I’ve read about the five and I try to make sense of their lives because
in making sense of theirs, I may understand mine” (p. 145). This representation
of reading, though brief, proves to be a constitutive event, in that Taylor uses
reading to come to crucial understandings. It suggests that her re-reading is an
activity that simultaneously requires sense-making of the text and sense-making
of connections between the text and the outside world. In this way, Taylor’s
reading joins her comprehension of the manuscript as a story and her
relationship to the characters within it, thereby offering her a way of making
sense of herself and her world.

Table 4.1: Looking to the Past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Representations of Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td><em>Stuck in Neutral</em></td>
<td>-- Recalls learning to read from his sister who played school with him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trueman (2000)</td>
<td>-- Reads and remembers texts verbatim suggesting that his low IQ score is inaccurate because he has cerebral palsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td><em>Keesha’s House</em></td>
<td>-- Remembers reading fairytales as a child with her grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frost (2003)</td>
<td>-- Holds onto these memories to hold onto her dreams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Melinda | *Speak*  
Anderson (1999) | -- Writes about the suffragette movement for a school assignment  
-- Reflects on the struggle the women faced to help her in her own struggles

Taylor | *Jellicoe Road*  
Marchetta (2006) | -- Reads a manuscript of a story about a group of young people her age  
-- Rereads to find herself in the story as she learns that it is the story of her caregiver and her parents

Across the four characters, the use of reading and writing to bring a sense of understanding from the past to the present is key. Shawn, Carmen, Melinda, and Taylor have all stepped outside of childhood and can now revisit past events to glean new information and to come to new understandings about the events and about their selves. The *descriptions* and *constitutive event* involving Shawn’s learning to read and his reading of all the print around him provides evidence to support his claim of intelligence in spite of his IQ score. Because he is an adolescent, he can reflect on these literacy events and they can demonstrate that he “is pretty smart” (Trueman, 2000, p. 10). When Carmen remembers fairytales and uses writing, she says that both keep her self “alive” (Frost, 2003, p. 52-3). The *description* suggests that literacy events from her childhood are both important to her then and continue to influence her now. The *description* of Melinda’s reading and writing about suffragettes implies a study of a group of women who successfully made their voices heard. In this way, she gains a perspective on the struggle and its rewards to steel her in her own struggle to speak about her rape. Because it is a historical event, she can reflect on the suffragettes’ cause over time seeing that they “fought and fought until they earned the rights they should have had all along” (Anderson, 1999, p. 155). In the *constitutive event* that depicts Taylor’s reading and rereading of Hannah’s manuscript, the affordance it offers her is in the recursive nature of the reading. “So I go back to the stories I’ve read about the five and I try to make sense of their lives because in making sense of theirs, I may understand mine” (Marchetta, 2006, p. 145); in her rereading she gains a new perspective. Looking back with the newfound status as adolescent offers a reflective space from which all of the characters draw strength.

**Connecting in the Present**

Many of the central characters in the Printz set read and/or write to make connections to others, particularly to other adolescents. They read and write emails when separated, as in *The Earth, my Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003), as I catalogued in the previous chapter. They recommend and share books with each other, as in *Repossessed* (Jenkins, 2007). They even form intense relationships with people whom they meet in the pages of the texts they read, as *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 2001) and *The White Darkness* (McCaughearan, 2005). The literate activities represented in the set show a purposeful use of reading and writing to form bonds of friendship and even affection and love with
others that is strongly tied to the characters’ present lives and also to the period of adolescence.

The mentions of email writing in books in the Printz set provide a useful illustration of the importance of the present time in the literate lives of the adolescents represented in the books. Virginia and her best friend, Shannon, exchange emails when Shannon moves away from New York City to Washington in *The Earth, my Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003). These mentions of literacy suggest the ways in which the communication is key to their adolescent identities. Several email exchanges that are included in the book include time stamps that reference an immediate response. Shannon, goddess_shannon, writes to Virginia, citigurl13, in an email dated “Wednesday, October 9, 5:38 P.M.” and Virginia’s reply is stamped “Wednesday, October 9, 5:47 P.M.” (p. 88-89). A possible interpretation of the quick response is that Virginia was awaiting Shannon’s email. The friends’ communication is of such great importance to Virginia that she is sitting at the computer, which has been described previously as located in her bedroom, so that she can read a reply as soon as it is delivered. Alternatively, it might be read as a reflection of the position that technology occupies in facilitating speedy communication; the girls can sustain a dialogue via writing in spite of their physical separation through the Internet. But in the same representation of a literacy event, the mention intertwines the writing practice with their adolescent identities as the girls write to each other. Shannon begins by apologizing for not writing sooner and explains her “absence” from their electronic dialogue.

“I’m soooooo sorry for my absence. I hope you’re not mad at me. I’ve been on House Arrest. For the past ten days, Liam and Nina have not allowed me to talk on the phone, watch TV, or do e-mail. Death by denial of technology” (p. 88).

Shannon’s punishment is equated with “death” as she is prohibited from communicating with Virginia. She is hopeful that their lack of communication has not caused her friend to be angry, suggesting that regular communication is key to their friendship. Virginia’s response reinforces this notion and offers a view of the relationship between being writers and being friends. “Good to hear from you. I was about to file a Missing Persons report. I’m not mad, but I wish you’d found a way to tell me what was up, like snail mail” (p. 89). Virginia articulates her alarm at Shannon’s delay in writing back to her by invoking a “Missing Persons Report” and offers that writing a letter, “snail mail,” would have fulfilled the expectation she has about their communication without violating the punishment Shannon’s parents imposed. The exchange places high importance on immediate communication and with it focus on the now, as if the present is essential to their friendship. The fact that the girls have been friends for a long time is not mentioned nor is a future time referenced. Their writing identities are tied to their immediate friendship.

*Repossessed* (Jenkins, 2007) is the story of Kiriel, a fallen angel who usually resides in Hell but who “hijack[s]” (p. 3) the body of Shaun, a “middle-class suburban American teenager” (p. 2), just before his death and experiences
life for the first time. Kiriel capitalizes on his knowledge that Shaun is the object of affection for a young woman, Lane, and attempts to experience “the feeling” of “the sexual act” (p. 55) by beginning a relationship with her. Kiriel, as Shaun, arranges a study date with Lane at his friend Bailey’s house and observes Bailey and Lane form a connection over their shared interest in reading.

“Bailey,” Lane said, getting up, “are all those your books?”
“Yeah....”
She went to stand in front of the same shelves I’d perused yesterday. She didn’t look at the scattered objects but bent over, looking at the book titles.
“You like Desolation Object?” she asked Bailey without turning around.
“Yeah.” Always the same easygoing tone with Bailey. “Not as much as, say, Tansukai,” he added, “but it’s pretty good.”
Lane straightened. “Tansukai? Do you watch the anime?”
“Yeah.”
“Which do you like better, the anime or the manga?”
“Anime. You watch it?”
“Yeah. I like the manga better, though. They censor the anime too much. Plus the English voices sound like California surfers.” (pp. 145-6)

This description of a literacy event joins dialogue about books with establishing a common interest with a new acquaintance. Lane examines the book titles, noting a series she recognizes, and uses it to open a conversation about books. The two offer evaluative comments about the books and their animated counterparts and which they “like better,” bringing together the literate practice of reading, through invoking manga, with viewing film, through invoking anime. They then continue talking about their reasons for liking their favorite characters.

[Bailey] said nothing further, but when Lane turned back to his books, he continued to watch her. It seemed to me that his pert, buxom manga girls might be paling in comparison to a flesh-and-blood share-your-interests Lane Henneberger, right here in his room....
“Let me know if you see anything you want to borrow,” Bailey told Lane.
As far as I knew, Bailey had never offered to let anyone borrow any of his books. He guarded them jealously.
Lane gave him a brief glance over her shoulder. “Actually, I was just thinking I wouldn’t mind trying the ‘Dead Man Rising’ series.”
“Go ahead and take a couple of them with you, then.” (p. 147)

Kiriel suggests that Bailey has an interest in the “pert, buxom manga girls” in the books and suggests a belonging to him by using the first person possessive pronoun, “his.” But Kiriel also implies that this connection between reader and character might be eclipsed in the presence of a real young woman who shares his
interest in manga. Though Kiriel has planned the study date so that he can make advances at Lane, it is Bailey with whom she finds a connection in this description. Significantly, Lane’s interest in reading is what precipitates what Kiriel perceives to be an important change in Bailey’s attachment to his books as he casually directs Lane to “take” books that he had “guarded...jealously.” In this representation of talk about reading, literacy and attraction become intertwined over the course of a short interaction between two acquaintances. The description suggests that this coming together is a result of the characters “flesh-and-blood” meeting in the present, a present constructed around a specifically adolescent event of a study date.

In Wittlinger’s *Hard Love* (2001), *descriptions* of writing and reading zines, generally a self-published works of original text and artwork, similarly depict an urgency that ties reading and writing identities to the present time and adolescence. John Galardi, the narrator, is a high school senior and a novice zine writer. He uses writing to “get the words down on paper, in print” (p. 7). The first piece of John’s writing in the book is a fictionalized interview with his mother’s boyfriend for the position of stepfather. In it, John voices the man’s disinterest in being a father. Though the tone of the piece is generally sarcastic and farcical including plays on words, John articulates his own needs – “I guess I just need a firm but loving hand” (p. 5) – and his opinion of himself – “I’m a reproduction of the old bore [John’s father]: selfish and full of shit” (p. 6). He “realize[s]” upon reading what he’s written: “That’s really true; I believe that” (7). He uses the practice of writing to externalize his beliefs and in doing so to make sense of them. In this way, he writes to craft a self that is examinable in his zine, *Bananafish*.

In order to prepare *Bananafish*, John reads a number of zines and is impressed by and later enamored of Marisol, the author of *Escape Velocity*. Marisol “claims to be seventeen, but she sounds too cool to still be in high school” (p. 8). The description of John’s reading of his favorite piece of Marisol’s writing points to an intense connection.

> “God! When you read something like that you can’t help but believe it. I mean, it’s not just some smartass trying to impress you with some baloney. I really have to admire the way Marisol just lays her life out for people to see, like she loves the weird way she is, and if you had any sense you would, too. Every time I read that over, I feel like I’m looking down through layer after layer of her, until I’m looking more deeply inside this person than I’ve ever looked inside myself. I wanna write like that too. Maybe I even want to be like that. And I sure as hell want to meet her” (p. 10).

John finds an openness in Marisol’s writing that he admires and that he’d like to emulate. For him, writing reveals something in Marisol that is usually hidden behind layers, perhaps something that is “really true.” But significantly, he not only wants to write in this way, he wants to “be” like Marisol. In other words, he suggests that he will learn to “lay [his] life out” in writing, but he also implies that he would like to “love the weird way [he]” is. In this way, John uses his reading
of Marisol to inspire a change in the way he thinks and feels about himself, both as a young person and as a writer and reader. Finally, Marisol’s writing reveals a person whom he likes knowing through her writing, but whom he would also like to meet in person. This suggests that for John the connection forged through reading is so meaningful that he intends to forge a more intimate relationship with her by connecting face-to-face. His “sure as hell” suggests enthusiasm, confidence, and urgency. Following his reading of Escape Velocity, John, whose pen name is Giovanni, arranges to run into Marisol at the record store where they leave their zines to be picked up by interested readers. Since writing and reading zines are central to the narrative of Hard Love, the representations of literate practices constitute an extended articulation. Across the book, the two form a friendship around their writing. Marisol, a “Puerto Rican Cuban Yankee lesbian writer” (p. 23) mentors John in his zine writing. Over time, he learns to find new truth in his writing as Marisol pushes him to confront his feelings about his parents’ divorce. Gradually, though, he falls in love with her, and their relationship changes as she sees his profession of love as a betrayal. In the end, together they attend a retreat for zine writers hosted by another zine author, Diana, whose work he has read and enjoyed and with whom John had been exchanging letters, and the connection he has with Marisol is again around writing and a platonic friendship.

The depiction of the interconnection between the lived present in the book and the characters’ literacy practices is particularly interesting in that it follows a romantic relationship, a common narrative path in YA literature. But what is unexpected is the way that reading and writing function to bond the characters. Their relationships are very much grounded in what could be called the teenage world – they visit a record store, hang out at the park, go to the prom, and listen music together. But all of these activities are laced with representations of literacy. When John goes to Tower Records, he hangs out by the stacks of zines left in the entryway.

“One of the clerks behind the counter kept giving me suspicious looks. I considered sitting down and reading one of the other zines stacked around me so I looked like I was doing something useful, but what if I got absorbed in an article and Marisol came in, dropped off the new Escape Velocitys and took off before I realized it?” (p. 16).

The description includes shared writing and “absorbed” reading, such that John might be completely unaware of people moving around him, along with a clerk “suspicious” of a loitering teenager. John, who is also known as Gio, his nom de plume, meets Marisol and her friend, Birdie, in a park and in discussing what it’s like to be gay, John references the poet John Berryman. Birdie responds, “For God’s sake, Gio, don’t emulate Berryman. The poems are wonderful, of course, but the guy killed himself” (p. 53). The mention points to the struggles around sexual identities often experienced in adolescence, but it also suggests identification with and emulation of persons in works of literature to mediate the struggles. When Marisol and John attend his senior prom and first dance together, she quotes a poem she has written for him. “This is the
“initial mystery,” Gio, she said softly” (p. 160) and John reads her invocation of the poem as a signal that she is interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with him. Though this constitutive event evidences a misreading of Marisol’s feelings by John who believes that though she professes to be a lesbian, she loves him, significantly the poem is the catalyst for a dramatic scene wherein Marisol loudly outs herself and John chases her from the prom. Finally when John and Diana meet at the writing retreat, she sings a song to which he feels a strong personal connection. He has exchanged letters with Diana and appreciated her writing and its accompanying illustrations in her zine, but when John listens to the lyrics and reads his own experiences in them, he feels as if she knows him.

“Amazing. I would almost have thought Diana knew what was going on between Marisol and me, knew about my whole life, because the song seemed like it was written just for me” (p. 212). He interprets Diana’s choice of song as evidence of a connection between Diana and him, an interpretation that proves accurate: “I played it for you!” (p. 217). Throughout the book, lives of adolescents are represented as grounded firmly in the present and inseparable from the youth’s literacy practices.

Though John and Marisol’s relationship develops around literacy practices in which they each and both engage, other representations, like the description of Bailey’s connection to the women depicted in manga in Repossessed (Jenkins, 2007), illustrate a relationship between a reader and a character. Sym and Captain Lawrence “Titus” Oates are the central characters in White Darkness (McCaughrean, 2007), but Titus is a historical figure whom Sym only knows through studying his journey to the South Pole as part of Captain Robert Falcon Scott’s 1911 expedition. The book begins, “I have been in love with Titus Oates for quite a while now – which is ridiculous, since he’s been dead for ninety years” (McCaughrean, 2007, p. 1). From the very first sentence, the present time is conjured in the aliveness of Titus; “Besides, he isn’t dead inside my head. We talk about all kinds of things” (p. 1). Sym acknowledges that his presence in her life is implausible, her classmates tease, “Symone has a pretend friend! Symone has a pretend friend!” (p. 4), yet the dyad’s conversations and relationship form the basis of the narrative. Because of her love for Titus, Sym travels with “Uncle” Victor from England to Paris and ultimately the eponymous southernmost landmass, Antarctica, and throughout the book he is her companion and guide in an extended articulation. When she first tells Titus of her impending trip to Paris, he speaks to her and in doing so refers to details about him she has learned from reading about him. He says, “I’ll come,” said Titus brightly.... ‘My adoring mother fled the English winters’ --- and he gave his low, ironic laugh. ‘Thought the cold might be the death of me....’/I cheered up instantly, knowing that he would be there in Paris” (p. 13). The representations of literacy that weave throughout the narratives and thus propel the story are established in an early constitutive event. Sym remembers when and how Titus became real to her. “I remember the day Titus arrived in my head – not when I first heard of him, I don’t mean, but the day he arrived, like some distant cousin you’ve heard of but who suddenly comes to visit” (p. 17). Though she knows about expeditions to the South Pole from reading about them with her father and “Uncle” Victor who
themselves are fascinated by the explorations, Sym’s relationship with Titus is born of seeing him on film.

I knew this story – thought it held no surprises for me. But I was seeing people that I’d read about, so already I felt I knew them. I was like one of those relatives on the dockside waving the men good-bye, minding about whether or not they came home again. (p. 18)

The representation suggests that Sym sees reading as offering her the opportunity to “[know]” the people about whom one reads. The practice of reading then brings a person in a written text into the present moment as a living person who can be known. But Sym’s experience seeing Titus in a dramatization of the expedition to the South Pole on film causes her relationship with the person she “[knows]” through reading to change.

And then it became real…./

I knew this story – it shouldn’t have held any surprises for me. Five men trekked to the South Pole…. And there, at the heart of it, was Captain Oates: so sublimely beautiful that his image passed clean through my retina and scorched itself on my brain…. He was perfect – as I’ve always known he would be if ever the blurred photographs, the expedition portraits, were to come to life (pp. 18-9).

In seeing Titus embodied, albeit by an actor in a film, Sym claims that he becomes “real.” She invokes the primary source materials she has read by referencing the “photographs” and “portraits” that she has seen of Titus and the rest of the expedition, thereby marrying the representation she has read to the representation she sees. The intensity of this constitutive event brings forth Sym’s companion throughout the novel; her life happens alongside Titus giving him a presence in the now as she asks him for advice, remembers lines from his journal, and experiences the debilitating temperatures of Antarctica like he did. In a climactic scene near the end of the book, Sym is lost in the snow and talks to Titus about his last moments. She reflects on her love for him. “It’s not dying or bravery or The Ice that makes him wonderful – indispensable. It’s not the dagger of ice in his heart but the sliver of India’s sunshine. It’s being lousy at spelling, and crying for joy when his horse won a race, and thinking he could sail a yacht because his grandfather was an admiral, and chasing his own motorbike down a mud-baked road, and keeping a deer in the coal store” (p. 327). For Sym, Titus became real when she saw him on film, but the reasons for which he is “indispensable” are all things she learned about him by reading his journals and everything other written text she could about him and his journey: “The bookshelves over my bed are full of books about the North and South Poles. Icebound almost. A glacial cliff face teetering over my bed” (p. 3). The details she has gleaned from her reading – his sailing and horseracing – form the closeness she feels to him. Even her attention to his “lousy spelling” brings together her reading of his journals with the affectionate and “real” relationship she has with him in the present.
Table 4.2: Connecting in the Present

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<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Representations of Literacy</th>
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| Virginia & Lane     | *My Butt, the Earth, and Other Large Round Things* Mackler (2003) | -- Use email to connect to each other in spite of a great geographic distance  
-- Expect immediate written responses to confirm friendship |
| Bailey & Lane       | *Repossessed* Jenkins (2007)                              | -- Discuss manga and anime  
-- Share books and sharing ways of reading to form connection |
| John & Marisol & Diana | *Hard Love* Wittlinger (2001)                           | -- Write zines for themselves and others  
-- Make connections to each other around their writing practices and products |
| Sym & Titus         | *The White Darkness* McCaughrean (2005)                  | -- Reads about and writing done by Titus to learn about the South Pole  
-- Develops a relationship with him, a person whom she has only met in books and who died decades before |

The notion of the present time that is articulated in these representations of literacy in *The Earth, my Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003), *Repossessed* (Jenkins, 2007), *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 2001), and *The White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2005) offer a sense of how much the teenage characters’ attention to the now is tied to their literacy practices and forms important connections to others. The *description* in which Virginia and Shannon urgently email each other to check in and to make sure of their friendship reflects this. Shannon inquires and Virginia reassures her that she is not “mad at her” (Mackler, 2003, p. 88) merging their writing identities with their status as friends. Shannon’s parents leverage this fact to encourage Shannon to change her behavior by denying her access to her friend by revoking her email access in her “House Arrest” (p. 88). Similarly being readers brings Bailey and Lane together as they discuss and share manga. The *description*, wherein Lane says that she “was just thinking [she] wouldn’t mind trying the ‘Dead Man Rising’ series” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 147) and Bailey directs her to borrow them, conjures the relationship between the present and reading. He lends the books willingly suggesting that he understands her interest in reading the books – and not just one of them as he tells her to take more than one referencing the way he reads these books. He sees the act of sharing them in the present time as connecting the two of them. The *extended articulations* that propel the narratives *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 2001) and *The White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2005) illuminate an expanded sense of the everydayness and nowness of the literacy practices of John and Sym. Each uses literate practices to make connections to others in ways that read as particularly teenaged and tied to the present. Without assuming a writing identity, John has no relationship to Marisol who across the
novel is a mysterious individual whom he’d like to know, then a writing mentor and confidante, then a friend whom he feels he may love, and ultimately a platonic friend. Even Diana’s performance of the song signals the immediate connection that the young people find with and through meaning-making. Without assuming a reading identity, Sym has no Titus who is her sounding board, friend, and love. Taken as a whole, the descriptions and constitutive events in the two books become extended articulations of the literate practices of adolescents whose lives “include reading” and writing (Sumara, 1996b) and thus represent ways that these practices are ways of being adolescents, chiefly around making connections to others.

Imagining a Future

The adolescents represented in the Printz set often engage in literate practices that offer them opportunities to look toward their futures. As they contemplate moving into adulthood, they work to shape the possibilities that will be available to them as they mature. They envision changing a world that they are realizing is imperfect. In these depictions of young people reading and writing for their futures, their literate identities help distance them from their childhood selves and contribute to their identities as people with agency.

Mattie in Northern Light (Donnelly, 2004) is a reader and writer who dreams of, because she is initially too afraid to make such plans, becoming a published author someday and escaping the woods of upstate New York in favor of the New York City of 1906. Her struggle to further her education is tied to the historical era in which the story is set and a reflection of her socio-economic status. In the book’s first mention of literacy, Mattie confesses trouble in choosing words though she claims to “have read most every [word] in the Webster’s International Dictionary of the English Language” (Donnelly, 2004, p. 2), a feat that proves plausible as the book continues – Mattie’s words of the day that she randomly selects from her dictionary provide the headings for alternating chapters, and she and her friend, Weaver wield vocabulary deftly in their word duels, games wherein the two alternate synonyms until one admits defeat. The mention casts Mattie as simply interested in words, but subsequent descriptions and constitutive events suggest that reading and writing are practices she loves. Even when she is without materials with which to write and is working long hours helping her widowed father care for her sisters and their farm, Mattie continues to engage in literate practices. Weaver and their friend, Minnie, ask her about her writing, and she responds, “I’ve no time. No paper, either. I used up every page in my composition book. But I’m reading a lot. And learning my word of the day” (p. 34). In spite of a lack of time and materials for writing, Mattie sustains her writing identity by “reading” and studying words. The description suggests that Mattie is working toward a future time at which she will be able to fully assume the status of writer; she does so by continuing her reading practices. In order for Mattie to become a published writer in adulthood, she knows she must leave the Adirondacks and pursue a degree in literature. Her teacher, Miss Wilcox, sends writing samples to Barnard College because she feels Mattie has “[a] true gift.... A rare one” (p. 38). In the constitutive event in which
she receives her admission letter, Mattie articulates the connection between her identity as a writer and as an adolescent imagining her future.

_It says they want me, I thought. Barnard College wants me – Mattie Gokey from the Uncas Road in Eagle Bay. It says that the dean herself likes my stories and doesn’t think they are morbid and dispiriting. And that professors, real professors with long black gowns and all sorts of fancy degrees, will teach me. It says I am smart, even if I can’t make Pleasant mind and didn’t salt the pork right. It says I can be something if I choose. Something more than a know-nothing farm girl with shit on her shoes._ (p. 65)

Mattie reads approval in the letter and a prediction of the future; she “can be something” if she chooses to. The letter from the dean invokes a host of professors who can teach her and help her to become “more” than she is.

After reading women authors including Emily Brontë, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, and Emily Dickinson, Mattie considers who she might be as a published writer. She recognizes that Bronte doesn’t “tell the truth about babies” when she helps her friend Minnie at the birth of her twins (p. 93). Later she tells Miss Wilcox, “Well, it seems to me that there are books that tell stories, and then there are books that tell truths” (p. 201). “The first kind makes you cheerful and contented, but the second kind shakes you up” (p. 202), Mattie continues. She elaborates on the truths she finds missing in books, such as “what cancer smells like” (p. 202), something she knows from the death of her mother. Though truths may make a person uncomfortable or impassioned, they make a reader feel. Mattie reads seeking this experience in the present and wants to offer it in her own writing in the future. Miss Wilcox pushes Mattie to imagine her future as a published writer as one in which she “make[s] [her readers] care” about her stories of life in Eagle Bay. Her reading of women authors and her contemplation of the work of writing come together when Mattie considers a marriage proposal from Royal, a young man whose family’s farm is next to her own.

_“Why didn’t Emily Dickinson leave her father’s house? Why didn’t she marry? I wondered…. Miss Willa Cather…Miss Sarah Orne Jewett. Why hadn’t Jane Austen married? Or Emily Brontë? Or Louisa May Alcott? Was it because no one wanted bookish girls, like my aunt Josie said? Mary Shelley married and Edith Wharton, too, but Miss Wilcox said both marriages were disasters.”_ (p. 267)

Mattie catalogues a number of women writers who are unmarried and wonders at how her future as a writer would be impacted if she were to accept Royal’s proposal of marriage. She is unsure about why women writers are unmarried or unhappy in marriage until a few pages later. After spending time with her newlywed friend, Minnie, a description reveals her thinking about having identities as writer and wife.
“I knew in my bones that Emily Dickinson wouldn’t have written even one poem if she’d had two howling babies, a husband bent on jamming another one into her, a house to run, a garden to tend, three cows to milk, twenty chickens to feed, and four hired hands to cook for…. I didn’t want to give up my words. I didn’t want to choose one over the other.” (p. 274)

Mattie could see that being a wife would leave her no time to be a writer if she married Royal. And though she is not keen “to give up her words”’ she is unready to choose a future as a writer over that of a wife.

In a constitutive event, Royal gives Mattie a book for her birthday. She immediately recognizes the wrapped package as a book and feels delighted when Royal proclaims “I know you like books” (p. 334). This book eventually helps her to make a choice. With “fingers tremb[ling]” she unwraps the package anticipating an “Austen or Brontë” but uncovers a “Farmer”; Royal gives her a Fanny Farmer cookbook. Though she is gracious and sees that Royal had tried to choose a special gift for her, Mattie’s possible future as a wife is foreshadowed in the representation. His thoughtfulness only makes Mattie see how much she wishes for a different reading and writing life for herself. She has stories to tell that have not been told, and the telling of these stories is tied to the future she chooses for herself, a future that lays ahead of her down the railroad tracks that will take her to Barnard in the book’s final scene.

Similarly, LaVaughn in True Believer (Woolf, 2001) Chanda in Chanda’s Secrets (Stratton, 2004) take up reading and writing to forge their futures. Unlike A Northern Light, however, these books have modern settings and thus the contingencies that impact the futures of the teens represented in the books are different. Although Chanda grows up in a fictionalized country in Sub-Saharan Africa while LaVaughan lives in the inner city of a large American metropolis, the two girls use reading and writing at their schools to help them transcend the futures generally offered to girls in their positions.

When Chanda asks “hard questions” of her English teacher, Mr. Selalame, he finds the answers and reports back to her “not only with the answer but with a book he thinks I’d like…. I read them as fast as I can so he’ll lend me another” (Stratton, 2004, p. 12). This description of reading offers Mr. Selalame as a literacy sponsor and portrays Chanda’s commitment to his sponsorship in that she reads the books he gives her “fast” so that she can read more. Chanda reports, “[He] says if I keep at my studies I could win an overseas scholarship and see the world. The way his eyes light up, I think he really believes it” (p. 13). With her teacher and her mother’s belief in her, Chanda can almost believe in herself. Though poverty and AIDS have had devastating effects on the lives of her friends and families, she can almost imagine a future wherein she might “become a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher” (p. 13), a dreamed future made tangible through reading.

LaVaughan’s future is dependent upon what her mother calls her “college plans” (Woolf, 2001, p. 7) and, therefore, similarly contingent upon her success in school in True Believer. In a constitutive event early in the free verse narrative that comprises the five pages of chapter thirteen, LaVaughan lays out her plans and portrays the connection between her literate identities and her adolescence.
as she gazes toward the future. The chapter begins with LaVaughan reflecting on her plans for the future that were formed when she was “a littler girl” (p. 42).

Well, my plan from before
looks so little scrimpy now.
It looked so big when I was a littler girl.
It was I was going to go to college
and get a job, get out of here
and not live with garbage and stink on my street
and nasty criminals in the neighborhood,
shooting. And also get married someday
and later have a pretty baby.

But that was like that little kid’s drawing: You know?
A lopsided head and big long arms ‘
reaching out to you don’t know where?
Now there are good parts added. (p. 42)

LaVaughan looks back to her childhood view of her future and sees it as distorted, “lopsided” and out of proportion. She saw college as one of a number of things she would do, including moving, getting a job, and having a baby. It is a list of steps without “good parts added,” the parts of her present life that enlarge the “plan from before” and give her something concrete assist her in “reaching out” toward college. The very next lines proceed to show one way in which LaVaughan has added a “good part” to the plan: “In my room my school books are all lined up/ on the bookcase I had for years,/ since the time I first thought about going to college,/ way back in fifth grade” (p. 42). For LaVaughan, the books are some of the “good parts” that can help her get to college. She has had them for years and they become hers in conjunction with her college plan. She has been collecting books since that time “and the books in [the bookshelf] are crowded now” (p. 43). LaVaughan’s identity as reader is tied to her future goal of going to college. Additionally, she says, “And in my plan is the Grammar class now too” (p. 44). LaVaughan decides to go to Grammar Build-Up, an after school tutorial, aimed at providing intense language practice to boost students test scores and their sense of themselves. The reading, writing, and speaking that she does in Dr. Rose’s class are explicitly and concretely preparing LaVaughan to go to college and further connect her literate identities to her position as adolescent and to her future.

And I found a good dictionary at the Goodwill
and only 3 pages are torn
and it doesn’t even smell like mildew or any other bad thing.
It says “Collegiate” on it
and I look at that word “Collegiate”
on the cover before I go to sleep
and I put my whole hands up in the air and I say YES! (p. 46)
LaVaughan’s dictionary spells out its place in her plans: through literacy, she can envision herself as “collegiate.”

In *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (Schmidt, 2004), books form the basis of imagining the future for Lizzie and Turner, but it is not just their immediate and personal futures at stake. The book offers an extended articulation in which reading Darwin’s (1937) *The Origin of the Species* is the catalyst for Turner Buckminster, the son of the town preacher who stands up to racism. Turner and his family move to Phippsburg, Maine, a coastal town whose financial future looks bleak except for the proposed construction of a resort on the shore. The project hinges on the removal of buildings and their residents from Malaga Island, a refuge for former slaves and home of Turner’s only friend, Lizzie Bright. After mornings filled with studies – Turner’s father is supplementing his education with “classics” like *The Aeneid*, he runs to the seashore to play with Lizzie. Turner’s father begins to read *The Origin of the Species* with him and this proves to be a constitutive event for Turner, transforming his perspective such that he becomes an agent for social justice in Phippsburg.

“Turner,” he said, “books can be fire, you know.”
“Fire?”
“Fire. Books can ignite fires in your mind, because they carry ideas for kindling, and art for matches.” He handed the book to Turner.
“The Origin of the Species,” he read aloud. “Is this fire?”
His father laughed…. “It is a conflagration,” he said….
Turner felt as if the world was suddenly a more mysterious place. He had never before thought that there were things he ought to be doing that might cause, well, fire. When he opened the book and began to read, he was Jim Hawkins at the captain’s chest, Sinbad opening his eyes in the Valley of Rubies, Huck himself waking up to a brand-new bend in the Mississippi.

And it wasn’t long before he knew that what he was reading was fire, all right.  (Schmidt, 2004, pp. 129-30)

Reverend Buckminster suggests that some books offer their readers “ideas “that are incendiary. Though he and Turner have been sharing books for some time, Darwin’s words in the reverend’s view have the potential to burn in Turner’s mind, changing his views and impacting his future. When Turner compares his reaction to Darwin’s words to the fictional characters of Jim Hawkins, Sinbad, and Huckleberry Finn, he is portrayed as a reader who makes connections to the characters, as one who uses the story to do identity work, and who uses his reading experiences to envision what he might do with his new view of his world.

With this reading identity, Darwin’s text is “kindling” and “matches” which smolder in Turner’s mind as he begins to comprehend the unjust actions of the people of Phippsburg toward the people of Malaga. As he comes to understand the injustice, he is inspired to change things and to rewrite the futures available to the former slaves and their families. Drawing strength from Aeneas and insight from Darwin, Turner, only a boy and now fatherless stands in defiant...
opposition to the town’s leaders who institutionalize Lizzie and other Malaga residents in order to seize their homes to make way for the resort, yet he is helpless to make it stop. Then Turner recalls finishing his reading of The Origin of the Species and the forward-looking response of his father with whom he read:

He had come to the last heady page of The Origin of the Species, had felt a thrill crawling up his back and into his gut with the closing sentence of praise and wonder: ‘From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved. His father had looked up as he closed the book, and he had smiled. ‘Who knows where these ideas will take us,’ he had said. ‘But won’t it be exciting to find out’” (p. 188).

He remembers that the fire of Darwin’s words inspires a journey. He recalls that “forms are being evolved” and so the future is always happening. In remembering his father’s response to the books last line, Turner takes to heart the future that his father predicts for him. Darwin’s “ideas will take” Turner into his future, a future of “exciting” discoveries. As the book ends, Turner seeks the beauty and wonder that Darwin, the naturalist, describes in spite of the ugliness of the injustice that Turner has witnessed. He carries the final sentence of Origin of the Species with him until he finds its incarnation face to face with a whale.

Table 4.3: Imagining a Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Representations of Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mattie</td>
<td>A Northern Light</td>
<td>-- Must find a life for herself in which she can read and write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donnelly (2004)</td>
<td>-- Plans for a future in college and away from her family’s farm through her literacy practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanda</td>
<td>Chanda’s Secrets</td>
<td>-- Reads books at her teacher’s suggestion to help her to dream of a future in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stratton (2004)</td>
<td>-- Almost believes in her dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaVaughan</td>
<td>True Believer</td>
<td>-- Collects books as part of her dreams of college plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woolf (2001)</td>
<td>-- Attends class to make her college plans tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</td>
<td>-- Reads Origin of the Species and sees injustice in his town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schmidt (2004)</td>
<td>-- Finds inspiration through the book for struggling to make a better future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these representations of literacy, the practices of reading and writing are used to shape the future. Mattie cannot imagine a future wherein she doesn’t
write – “I didn’t want to give up my words” (Donnelly, 2004, p. 274) – and is offered admission to college because of her identity as a writer. For Chanda and LaVaughan, their literacy practices are the keys to their futures and they see the use of reading and writing as part of a path to college. Chanda calls them “[d]reams, dreams, dreams” (Stratton, 2004, p. 13), a line repeated as the very last sentence of the book when she looks toward a different future. Chanda no longer dreams of college; she instead dreams of establishing “The Lilian Kabelo Friendship Project,” a space where the injustice of the stigma of AIDS and HIV can be erased (p. 193). LaVaughan takes up the reading and writing of Grammar Buildup to “struggle/ and be exalted in [her] learning,” (p. 40) as Dr. Rose puts it, and to work toward her “college plans” (Woolf, 2001, p. 7). Turner uses the understandings he gains from reading and discovers the truth in his father’s claim that “[b]ooks can ignite fires in your mind, because they carry ideas for kindling, and art for matches” (Schmidt, 2004, p. 129); he is inspired to change the future as a result of his literate practices. The set of characters use reading and writing for change and to overturn injustice. The stories reflect the unfairness that exists in the world and from which they were in some ways protected from as children. As adolescents, their literate practices provide a path toward a future in the adult world.

Discussion

The lives of the adolescent characters in the Printz set include literacy, and the reading and writing they do are tools in their identity work. Whether the young people in the books are looking to the past, examining the now, or envisioning a future, they make use of pens, computers, or books, reflectively, collaboratively, and innovatively. The representations then depict young people who are living adolescent lives that include literacy. Their reading and writing are most often not occasions that yield substantial transformations for them; rather they are moments mundane, activities ordinary that when taken as a part of the narrative make suggestions about literacy.
The identity work done by the young people who are depicted in the Printz books brings forth the notion that reading and writing extend across a life that includes literacy. Reading and writing intersect memories of childhood. Literacy weaves into interactions with peers allowing the teenage characters to form connections. Writing and reading propel the youth toward futures and dreams. The representations of literacy in the set suggest that the period of adolescence, as young people move away from childhood and prepare for adulthood, is ripe for forming varied identities, including literate identities. When the young people write emails to each other to assess the status of their relationship, for instance, their identities as friends are co-constituted with their identities as writers and readers. In the varied representations of literacy in the Printz set, young people are readers and writers in ways and with purposes that are especially connected to their adolescent identities and so they reflect the ways in which their identities as readers and writers are in formation. Being a writer or being a reader is embodied in myriad practices across a variety of settings and in collaboration with numerous others. Though the reading and writing that the characters do are different in different contexts and have varied purposes, a diachronic perspective affords the opportunity to see the ways in which their use of literacy changes over time. In this way literacy itself can be seen as changing and evolving in much the same way that the adolescents’ literate identities are also changing.

In examining representations of literate practices of the young people in the set and in adopting a diachronic perspective to do so, I have taken as my focus the identity work that the characters do through reading and writing. However, the interconnection between reading and writing words and reading...
and composing other texts such as images and music are also noteworthy. At
significant moments in many of the narratives, the young people depicted in the
Printz set use multiple modes of communication to do very similar identity work.
Returning to the constitutive event in The White Darkness (McCaughrean, 2005)
wherein Sym suggests that Titus “became real” (p. 18), his reality is manifested
for her in the coming together of her reading experience and his moving image as
re-enacted on film. When she recalls seeing an actor playing Titus, she
comments, “He was perfect – as I’ve always known he would be if ever the
blurred photographs, the expedition portraits, were to come to life” (p. 19). Sym’s
reading of books about the expedition to the South Pole of which Captain “Titus”
Oates was a part offers her images of him in “photographs” and “portraits” (p.
19). Her reading of the images along with her reading of written text combine
with her reading of the depiction of Titus on film to produce this constitutive
event; the multiple modes of communication are intertwined. Sym’s reading is
much like Shawn’s memories of reading images in the Stuck in Neutral
(Trueman, 2000) in that his understanding of the world in spite of his cerebral
palsy comes about through the integration of multiple modes of communication.
When Bailey and Lane discuss manga in Repossessed (Jenkins, 2007), they
compare the experiences of reading books and film. Their talk reveals an
interpretation of the strengths of each and a synthesis of the manga and anime
genres. In Hard Love (Wittlinger, 2001), John comes to know and feel known by
Diana through reading her writing in her letters and zine, interpreting the images
that she includes in her zine, and listening to the song that she sings for him. The
three modes combine to offer John the sense that he is connected to Diana. The
characters’ literate practices are conjoined with meaning-making that occurs
through other modalities. Their reading and writing identities are therefore
constituted with their multiliterate identities, too.

When examined further, these multimodal representations of literacy make suggestions about the use of multiliteracies forging connections in the
present. Though Shawn recalls learning to read words and images in the past,
most characters in the set make use of modes of communication other than
reading and writing in the present. The examples suggest that there is a certain
immediacy that is tied to the literate and multiliterate practices of the teenage
characters. When John is reading images in zines or listening to songs, he wants
to understand Diana, he wants her to be present with him right then. This desire
for immediate connection is also demonstrated in Sym’s relationship with Titus;
he is her constant companion in the present though his pastness is always a part
of their relationship. Even when Melinda leaves her art class after her teacher
reads “pain” in her sculpture in Speak (Anderson, 1999), her departure suggests
the same importance of urgency in the present time. The period of adolescence is
itself so fleeting and much identity work is being done. The young people in the
books seem to make use of all available practices to understand themselves and
their worlds.

In the next chapter, I discuss the understandings of and connections to
these representations of literacy practices that a group of young people make
when reading. Making use of mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and
extended articulations, I explore the ways in which they think about reading and
writing as prompted by depictions of literacy in books in the Printz set. I also examine the ways in which their own literate identities are tied to their pasts, presents, and futures.
Chapter Five
Teenagers as Readers and Writers

--- I sit in the bend of the horseshoe, eying the sharp black ticks on the clock and listening to its second hand scratch past. The three tidy stacks of books sitting in front of me hammer the four rectangular tables into a lopsided “U,” outside of which sit the expectant chairs. It isn’t a circle; the single video camera won’t allow it. And they aren’t the world’s most comfortable chairs, not the worn but cushioned ones that a group of kids like the ones I’m expecting could fall into to talk about books at the Barnes and Noble down the road.

But they aren’t desks, and the table is set for a pizza feast. It could work. “We might be a book group,” I think, just as the bell sounds and the shuffles and grunts and squeals and slams of Linkwater High build to a crescendo and round the open door of the conference room. ---

And so began the second part of my study. The hallways of Linkwater High School might have been the ones of Merryweather High in Speak (Anderson, 1999) or Oliphant High in American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006) and the bodies pushing through them might have been Christopher Creed’s (Plum-Ucci, 2000) or Frankie Landau-Banks’ (Lockhart, 2008); many of the Printz books invited such comparisons. In March and April of 2010, I convened a group of adolescent readers to discuss representations of literacy practices depicted in books in the Printz set with me during their lunch hour. I offered them opportunities to interrogate the portrayals of reading and writing in the books, and I worked to construct for them and with them a reflective space in which they might compare the literate lives of the fictional teenagers in the books to their own. In this chapter, I report on findings from the seventeen book group meetings I held with my eight high school participants. The following research questions informed my work with the participants and guided my analysis of the data collected: How are the literacy practices in adolescent literature understood by adolescents who read them? How do the practices and the identities that they call forth, which are depicted in the Printz books, relate to ideas about the literate lives of youth? How are young people’s literate identities manifested and contested in the space of the book group?

The heart of this chapter is the youth with whom I read. After the previous two chapters, which considered the characters in the books in the Printz set as representations of living, writing, and reading teenagers, this chapter introduces young people whose lives include literacy. It explores both what meanings they make from the reading that we do in the book group and what the reading invites them to make of themselves. That is, the book group affords a sense of how the young people understand the reading and writing that characters do in books,

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Nearly half of the books in the Printz set take place, at least in part, at a school (21 of 47) and all but four (one in which poetry and art are paired, one a collection of fantasy short stories, one a fantasy, and one a fairy tale) make significant reference to school. This commonality is not unexpected as works of YA Literature oftentimes take high school as their settings.
while simultaneously creating a space wherein their own literate identities are on display and explicitly invoked. These reading teenagers are central to the study; without them, the characters run the risk of being merely caricatures. In many cases, the characters in the Printz set are the read-y-est of readers, the write-y-est of writers – Torey is “full of regrets, which [he] tried to get over by writing more” (314) in Plum-Ucci’s (2000) *The Body of Christopher Creed*; Alaska’s stacks of books in her dorm room form her “Life’s Library” (20), which Miles fears will topple and “engulf [him, the Colonel, and Alaska] in an asphyxiating mass of literature” (15) in Green’s *Looking for Alaska*. These characters are perhaps exaggerated, larger than life readers and writers, but this doesn’t make them inaccessible to the teenagers who read them. And the awesomeness of their literary lives isn’t only theirs, as the teenagers in the book group showed me.

To begin, I offer a picture of the book group participants to convey a sense of the teenage readers who examine representations of literacy with me. I focus on who the members are, bringing to the fore, the rhythm of our book group meetings. Drawing from this overview, I then discuss three threads that weave through the reading done in the book group: identification as key to the young people’s reading of the representations of literacy, extended discussion as central to the ideas about literacy that the book group brought forth, and adolescence as a space for reflection on living a life that includes literacy. The *mentions*, *descriptions*, *constitutive events*, and *extended articulations* of which I made use in the previous chapters guide each of these threads, suggesting ways in which the young people and I take up these different sorts of representations of literacy practices. I then present descriptions of three participants and their literate identities to portray something of the range of practices and ways of being that the young people enact around reading and writing and the meaning-making inherent in them. In doing so, I set up three archetypical adolescent literate identities: the reader, the writer, and the non-reader/non-writer. Across the literature on adolescent literacy, these identifiers have great significance; much of the work of teachers at the secondary level and researchers in adolescent literacy is concerned with making readers and writers of non-readers/non-writers. Within the context of my study, however, these labels take on a somewhat different importance. Since the teenagers with whom I read in the book group were recruited for the study from a READ 180 class, they all have been identified as readers in need of additional support and practice with reading based on their test-scores. Therefore, it was particularly noteworthy when individuals within the group took up these literate identities and articulated their senses of themselves through reading and writing.

Throughout the chapter I experiment with capturing something of the lived book group by writing in the style of a work of young adult fiction. In these passages, identified in italics, I draw from my fieldnotes and assume the voice of a first person narrator, like many of the books in the Printz set, describing the book group as I experienced it and articulating my pedagogical decisions. This rhetorical device attempts to preserve my role as teacher, for though I was neither a teacher of the book group participants nor a teacher at Linkwater High School, in the book group I explicitly guided the participants to respond to the representations of literacy within the texts read, thereby assuming a teacher
stance rather than that of a participant or an observer. In addition, the decision to adopt a literary voice attempts to conjure the genre of young adult literature my study uses as its foundation.

Meeting the Book Group

--- It’s after midnight when I upload the photos. iPhoto creates a new event for me, and then there they are, gathered on my lap as if circled at a party. As I look at the people grouped at our lunch and talking-about-books event, it occurs to me that it’s a diverse group. There are similarities and differences among these teenaged book group participants that the photos capture, and there are similarities and differences that are invisible. Aside from Timmy’s faint grimace at having her picture taken at all, they’re all grinning with happy eyes. Maybe it is the delivered pizza they’d gobbled up instead of the cafeteria’s mediocre offerings, or maybe they just like being together, but either way, it binds them, and they are bound around reading books and talking about them. Were it not for our group, they might have been in the cafeteria hunched in any of dozens of packs of kids, but here they are smiling back at me. The tall ones bend to hug the shorter ones, or at least to stand alongside each other. It’s impossible to tell who’s fourteen, who’s sixteen, who’s seventeen. There is one native Spanish speaker among the native speakers of English. There are Southerners there and a New Yorker and a kid from the Bay Area, their skin colors varied. Nothing in the photos suggests that seven of the eight kids struggle with reading. ---

Since the participants in the book group were recruited from a READ 180 class, a course designed to provide individualized support to high school students whose test scores identified them as in need of support in reading in addition to their regular English classes, all but one of the young people who joined me for lunch each book group meeting know that Linkwater high school believes them to be struggling readers. Nevertheless, Bob, Nicole, Ryan, Timmy, Yuliana, m&m, and Titi walk into our meeting room and pick up the three books I have selected for us to read as a group with excitement that differed not from Sunshine’s. Myers’ (1999) Monster, Partridge’s (2005) John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth: A Biography, and Zusak’s (2005) The Book Thief are three quite different books, and their diversity of genre, format, and characters seem to provide multiple entry points for the book group participants. Beginning with their first meeting of Myers’ (1999) Monster, the young people demonstrate an interest in and curiosity about books. Ryan says he’d read Monster in READ 180, proudly, while Timmy offers critically, “I don’t like the way they did the ending on that book [Monster].” In between bites of spicy sesame chicken and gulps of Sprite, the teenagers consider the image on the cover of Partridge’s (2005) John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth: A Biography and m&m predicts, “He is probably a writer.”

---

7 Sunshine asked to join the book group on the second meeting after hearing her friend, Titi talk about it. She was older than the other girls, and she and Titi reported that she was in an advanced English class.
When they first flip through Zusak’s (2005) *The Book Thief*, Yuliana hesitantly comments, “This cover looks a little scary. I think when they make the movies they make the pictures, make them so scary.”

The behaviors with books of the different young people in the group, from choosing to take their books home so that they could keep reading after school to bringing in a big of books to share with a friend, suggest that there are teenagers whose lives include reading even without our meetings among our group. There are proclamations of love for every kind of reading and statements of distaste for doing it independently that are echoed in the ways they engage in the book group. Many groan when the bell rang informing us that lunch is over and that we will end our meeting, and others simply pack up to move on. They allow me to guide them, suggesting that their accompanied voyage into the books is at least comfortable, and they willingly take up the questions I pose to elicit their thoughts about the representations of literacy practices in the books. Though in interviews and surveys, they confess to be “bad readers” or report hating writing about “stuff [they] read,” preferring to write about topics of their own choosing, their ways with literacy within the book group reveal them to be readers and writers, growing, innovating, sharing, and reflecting.

**Making Meanings from the Reading**

In the following sections, I turn to three interactions with text in the book group that portray ways in which different representations of literacy practices are taken up by the group. Framed by three of the kinds of representations that I offered in chapter three, I explore the fluidity of identification, the importance of talk, and the perspective of adolescence in the book group’s reading of *Monster* (Myers, 1999), *John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth: A Biography* (Partridge, 2005), and *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2005).

**Identification**

--- Though it was years ago when I was but a new teacher, I still remember first reading Monster (Myers, 1999). It was the winter of 2000, and I was perched on my teacher chair in the front corner of the room during our sustained reading time. I hunched, shoulders tensed and breath held as Steve invited me to imagine the life of a teenager in jail. It seemed unfathomable, except I knew so much of what Steve was feeling. I gave that book to student after student whose curiosity was piqued by the black face on the cover, the partial dust jacket obscuring fingerprints, Myers’ name, my intense reading of it, or our talk about it being the first recipient of the new Michael L. Printz award. And student after student talked about Steve – how they felt sorry for him, liked him, did not trust him. As I stacked the paperback copies I would be giving to our newly formed book group, I was anxious to watch and listen as the young people joining me met Steve. ---

Literature written for adolescents, books generally populated with characters roughly the same age as their intended readers, provides opportunities
for readers to consider the characters and their lives in relation to themselves. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the young people represented in the books often use reading and writing to make connections to others, including connections with characters in books, in which their status as adolescents is key. Even without forming attachments to characters, adolescent readers meet characters like and unlike themselves in the pages of YAL and are invited to imagine themselves in the adolescent characters’ lives.

Myers’ (1999) Monster is the story of Steve Harmon, a sixteen-year old accused of being an accomplice to murder told through his journal and his film script of the trial. The book opens with a paragraph in which Steve talks about crying in jail, portraying the violence surrounding him, his emotional fragility, and his work to navigate safely through his new environment. The paragraph that follows includes by the book’s first representation of literacy, a mention of writing. It begins, “There is a mirror over the steel sink in my cell. It’s six inches high, and scratched with the names of some guys who were here before me. When I look into the rectangle, I see a face looking back, but I don’t recognize it” (1).

Seated around the tables, the book group’s adolescents meet Steve. Ryan and Timmy talk with me at the first lunch period and Titi joins me during the third lunch. And their induction into considering the representations of literacy depicted in YAL begins with names scratched into a mirror. When the book group reads and considers this mention, their responses reveal much about their thoughts on Steve and their consideration of his position as an inmate. Ryan begins our talk by confidently interpreting the names as signaling a reason for being permanently inscribed in the mirror. “So it’s saying people were there so long that they probably died there.” Ryan’s response conjures a medieval prison wherein men were held until death, a likely reference to The Book of Five Rings by the samurai, Musashi (Miyamoto, 1982), which he had only just minutes before offered as an example of an outstanding book during our talk about the Printz awards. No one immediately offers a response, and so I ask the book group to take a step back and consider why someone would write his name there. Again, Ryan speaks up. “Cause they wanted to be known that they were here.” His answer begins a five-minute discussion of the practice of inscribing one’s name places.

Timmy: I don’t see why anyone would mark their name in a mirror in a jail cell.

R: So maybe they’re wrong

SMC: You’re not sure why someone would mark their name in a mirror in a jail cell <R: Well, I’m thinking about it> because (to Ryan) Hold on a second, you’re next. Timmy, you’re like why would they put it there?

T: Why would you do that?

SMC: Why are you thinking that?

T: Maybe they were bored.
SMC: Maybe they were bored. What makes you question it?

T: I don’t know. Just, why would you want somebody knowing you were there? I don’t know.

SMC: Why would you even want someone to know you were there?

T: Yeah. (laughs)

SMC: Uh-huh. What were you going to say, Ryan dear.

R: I was gonna say that maybe they were wrongly imprisoned, so <SMC: Hmm> And say somebody returns to find them, and they catch people that did it, they’ll want to know that we were here. <SMC: The record saying I was here.> And they can’t say no one was here. Their name’s sketched in there. <SMC: Mm-hm.>

Timmy immediately questions a person’s choice to reveal publicly and permanently that he had been in prison. She seems to strongly feel a sense of shame about being incarcerated. Ryan, however, offers a reason for which a record is useful; he suggests that a false imprisonment might be kept secret and that evidence of it might be important at some time. In spite of my intervention aimed at guiding our new discussants to listen to each other and take turns speaking, the two book group participants manage to articulate their initial readings of this very brief mention of literacy. Their comments suggest different approaches to understanding this brief moment in the text. Ryan’s consideration of the names scratched in the mirror seems to be tied to his comprehension of the larger story. He seems to map the prison scene in Monster onto his prior reading experience involving a prison cell in The Book of Five Rings, which he recommended to our group. By drawing from his reading of the samurai character held in prison, he creates a dramatic scenario of false imprisonment. Timmy’s response is a much more personal reading of the representation. She remarks on her inability to identify with someone making permanent his status a prisoner.

The discussion continues with talk about the use of inmate numbers instead of names inspired by the images of mug shots on the front cover of Monster, until I ask the participants, “Are there times when people do things like that outside of prison? Put their names places?”

R: Well, it’s like me and my friends if we’re like in a park, and there’s one big tree that everyone signs into,

T: Yeah.

R: We’ll always pull out a knife and carve our names into it.

SMC: Yeah, why? I mean not, I’m saying it genuinely, curiously (T laughs) I’m not saying it judgmentally, I wanna make sure you know that my voice
saying it like “why” isn’t like you shouldn’t, it’s I’m genuinely curious. (T
laughs) I wanna know like, you do it, you say you’ve done it, why?

R: Just to be known you were there. So the next time you come you’re like
oh, I was here a long time ago.

T: Yeah I did that when I first moved into my house. I carved my name
<SMC: Uh-huh.> I think it was in my closet, like at the top. <SMC: So
writing kind of says, permanent.> T: I was here.

Both Timmy and Ryan identify with the writing practice; they have each carved
their names places. They write themselves into the places that they have been,
marking their presence even in their absence. Their talk suggest that time is
important to the writing – “a long time ago” and “when I first moved into my
house” – and the two invoke the expression written into many of the desks at
which I have sat across my lifetime of schooling: “I was here.” Ryan suggests that
such a writing practice might also have a social aspect by invoking his friends, a
thread continued in the exchange that follows.

SMC: Other times that you can think of when other people do things like
that? Like put their mark or their name someplace.

R: Maybe if they’re trying to show someone they are serious about
something, they’ll leave their mark behind saying I was serious about this.

SMC: Such as?

R: Almost like a gang.

T: I was gonna say that.

R: They’ll mark their park. <T: ::Everything.> Their territory or

SMC: They’re not using their words to say that, right? They’re using...

T: Their actions. Because they’re saying...

SMC: They’re saying what by doing that?

R: Leaving a note behind. They would use fake names, like we’re using
now (referring to pseudonyms for research study) and sign it off that that.

SMC: It’s still them, both protecting and owning, “I was here.”

T: In the bathroom. A lot of writing. A lot of words on the walls.

R: So what’s up with that?

T: I don’t know. (Voice suggests really thinking.)
R: You can more, like, sometimes you can reference a book to another book by what happens in it, though. Like, *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), remember, when they’re in the bathroom they’re writing stuff about it. That’s the same thing as this one, really. Except they’re writing names and probably little notes under ‘em. They were really there and they were this person, as you guys suggested.

By extending the identification to young people involved in gangs, Ryan and Timmy brings forth the “serious” quality that writing can have and times when writing is illicit. Ryan likens a gang’s markings to “leaving a note behind,” and thereby invokes the reading that can occur after the writing is done. When the discussion brings the writing on the bathroom walls at Linkwater High to mind for Timmy, Ryan makes a connection to *Speak*, coincidentally another Printz book, and to the writing that the vicious writing that the characters do. He tidily summarizes the discussion saying that the act of writing a person’s name somewhere in a permanent fashion articulates that “they were really there and they were this person.”

Titi mentions many of the same things in her talk about the names scratched in the mirror, but her use of a first person personal pronoun suggests a stronger identification with Steve. When I ask her what comes to mind after reading the mention of names scratched into Steve’s cell’s mirror, she responds, “I guess they want to show their reputation or them being there. Like for people to know I was here, I was in this jail cell. And I think he’s scared, really scared.” Titi’s repeated “I” in reference to the name writers points to her identification with the men whose names were in the cell before Steve, in that she voices their reasons for writing their names. She follows this with an emotional assessment of Steve’s position, further revealing her connection to the characters in the book. Though she is clear that she would not write her name in a jail cell — “It depends on where you go, like if you go somewhere fun, I like to put something there to remember that I was there. But not jail. I wouldn’t write my name there.” — Titi’s talk also takes up the notions of time and permanence. She wants to “remember” that she was in a fun place.

In spite of the short length of the mention of writing that begins *Monster*, the book group participants articulate a trend that extends across the discussions; identification with the characters in the book yields insights about the participants’ reading of the books’ representations of literacy practices and their own literate lives. Even a short reference to writing, when made the subject of discussion, affords a sense that writing matters in the book and in the lives of the characters, and that similar writing that teenagers, including the book group participants, do also matters. The young people in the book group use

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8 Because *Speak* is a title included in the READ 180 program and because it is accompanied by an audio-recording offered to support the program participants’ reading of the book, Ryan likely read the book in the context of READ 180. His difficulties with reading and reading comprehension were supported by making extensive use of his listening comprehension as dictated in his IEP. I was, however, unable to confirm this.
identification to enter the story, to understand the characters and to orient themselves to the narrative. In the sections that follow, the importance of identification recurs, both as the participants make use of it to connect to characters and to understand the texts, but also a way of initiating discussion leveraged by me.

**Talk**

--- For all of their talk about books – books they think I should read, books they remember reading – these kids really surprised me today with their bubbling chatter about music. Sure, we’re reading a book about a musician, but they were energetically discussing many more components of music making and music experiencing than I expected. It was fascinating. More voices, more back and forth, more curiosity, more… – just more. They were Curt and Troy talking about records in Fat Kid Rules the World (Going, 2003). They were John and Marisol talking about Ani DiFranco in Hard Love (Wittlinger, 1999). Talking about books is one thing, but talking about music seems to be something else, even if it’s inspired by the music of a dead guy with tiny round glasses. ---

Partridge’s (2005) *John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth* is a photobiography of the Beatles guitarist’s life, including some accounts of his adolescent literate life. Packed with photographs and artifacts, the text provides a multimodal portrayal of a young man who wrote silly verse in a self-published newspaper he called the Daily Howl, sketched caricatures of his teachers, read books for pleasure outside of school, and was regularly in trouble inside school. From their first meeting of the book, *John Lennon* invites discussion and the book group participants – Timmy, Nicole, Bob, and Yuliana in the first group and Titi, m&m, and Sunshine in the second – willingly oblige.

After determining that Lennon is best known as a singer and songwriter, the book group participants animatedly talk about if and how reading and writing might come up in this book. Bob hypothesizes, “Maybe he’s writing about his biography about being in the band.” Timmy offers that people in bands “have to write songs,” to which Nicole responds, “I don’t know how people write songs.” Yuliana chimes in, “They sing songs, reading, like the sounds, the rhythm, how it sounds,” which I clarify is a consideration of the work of choosing words to go with music. There is energy in their voices, as the participants jump into the conversation. They seem excited about this book, fingers zipping and flipping through the pages, quickly reading the books images. They’re unanimously sure that they won’t have things in common with John Lennon since he was born in 1940, but as we read about the pranks he did in school and his punishments, their careful inspection of the school photographs and quick grins, punctuated by Nicole’s infectious giggles, suggest that they are intrigued. “Which one is he.” Nicole asks, “because all of [the boys in his school photograph] look so innocent?” Unlike at other times in the book group, the participants turn to each other to whisper about “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” and Michael Jackson’s acquisition of the rights to Beatles songs. They have a lot to say. Similarly, *John Lennon* inspires talk among the book group participants when Titi, m&m, and
Sunshine first meet the book. Sunshine likes “the way the book feels” and they are excited that it’s a hardcover book. “He looks like Austin Powers sideways,” comments m&m. “He looks weird,” says Titi. Sunshine remarks, “He looks cute here.” Talking over each other as they take in all of the different John Lennons in the book, they notice he looks “like a hippie,” “old,” and “crazy.” They talk about Marvin Gaye’s, Tupac Shakur’s, and Biggie Small’s deaths. Titi comments, “Every musician has a story.” In both groups, they respond to me when I ask an occasional question, but I stay out of the way for much of their first meeting of the book. Their contagious commenting and animated responses reflect the importance of unfettered talk to these loquacious teenagers, and I am invited into a different part of their reading lives. They scan the images and read the captions aloud and lean across the table to check out a photo at which they have not yet looked. The speed with which they are able to orient themselves to the book is matched by the speed of their talk.

In addition to the talk that accompanied the participants’ first impressions of the book, the first book group, comprised of Timmy, Nicole, Yuliana, and Bob on this day, read a description of John’s Aunt Mimi’s books and began a discussion of the kinds of people about whom they like to read.

Though he rarely read what was assigned in class, he devoured everything Mimi had on her shelves, from her Book of the Month Club selections to Balzac and Fitzgerald. Mimi, strict, sensible, and orderly, would never have wanted bizarre people around the house, but she loved to read about artistic people like Oscar Wilde and Vincent Van Gogh. (p. 19)

I initiated a discussion by asking, “What do you guys think about that idea? Of reading about people who aren’t exactly the people that you would normally hang with?

T: I think that’s weird.

N: I don’t think so because I would probably do the same thing. I wouldn’t like somebody to chop off their ear and then come over to my house.

SMC: No you probably wouldn’t want that, no, no. But do you ever read about people who are totally different from the kind of people you’d like to hang out with and still enjoy it?

N: Yeah.

Y: Kind of.

Timmy and Nicole are quick to offer their opinions about the sorts of people about which they read. The girls all communicate that they have read about characters with whom they would not choose to be friends, but when I push them to consider specific examples of characters like this, they reveal a willingness to meet the characters, as opposed to just read about them.
SMC: So, in a book like *Monster*, Steve, is he a person you might be friends with, for instance?

N: Yeah.

T: Yeah, I would.

SMC: But the time he’s in prison and stuff like that, the people he’s hanging around with,

N: Not the people he hangs around with, but him

SMC: Yeah.

T: It depends to me, though, because if it’s a person who kills people, just for the fun of it, I wouldn’t read about them.

SMC: Yeah, fair enough. Yeah. But do you have another example of another person that’s not like you that you still might like to read about?

T: Ummm

SMC: It doesn’t have to be like a real person it could be like a fictional character. Or have you read a book where you thought

T: Harry Potter – he was a witch and he did some bad things, too, but I would read about him.

SMC: Yeah. It would be a little uncomfortable, like if you invited him to your house maybe, and he got mad

T: He might make a mistake and break something and yeah.

Timmy’s and Nicole’s articulations of loyalty to Steve and Timmy’s mention of Harry Potter imply an openness to making reading connections with characters in spite of their different-ness. Their talk suggests that they become familiar enough with characters in books that they are able to parse the “bad things” that the characters do from who they are. This is especially noteworthy given the pedagogical emphasis placed on identification, simply conceived as matching readers with characters like them so that they might become engaged in reading about someone with whom they can identify. In spite of the brevity of this exchange, our discussion of the books on Mimi’s shelves is taken up again on two other occasions. Nicole raises questions about Vincent Van Gogh twice, pondering the story that I told about his ear, and she seems to marry his eccentricities to John Lennon’s quirks thereby making the prospect of reading *John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth* more appealing; she is curious about their oddities.

In the second book group, another description inspires Titi’s, m&m’s, and Sunshine’s extended personal talk about imagination and reading. After learning
that Lennon was both frequently in trouble in school and a voracious reader at home, Titi proclaims, “He don’t seem like he would read a ton, but you can’t judge people.” The girls seem to embrace this challenge as they read about Lennon’s experiences reading children’s literature. The description begins, “He drew all of the characters in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, and wrote poems styled after ‘Jabberwocky’” (p. 14). m&m responds immediately.

**m&m:** Wow, like how does he picture all this stuff?

**S:** People always picture stuff when they’re reading ‘cause I do that. I like to put the scene with the words.

**m&m:** I feel like I’m really there when I do that, it’s like, my mom, she’ll call my name like five times and I won’t hear her. <S: I know:::> I promise; I don’t hear her. And then my brother come in there like, “Mom wants you.” <T & S laugh> “Little girl, I called you about five times.”

**SMC:** Because what’s happening as you’re reading?

**m&m:** I don’t know.

**T:** Like daydreaming.

**m&m:** It’s like I’m really into it.

**m&m**’s exclamation, “Wow!” launches the girls’ discussion of how a reader might use his or her imagination when reading, hinting at the energy in the talk. The girls speak quickly and lean forward in their seats. Though she initially asks, “How could [Lennon] picture all that stuff?,” but when challenged by Sunshine, she reports the same sort of reading orientation. Her account of being called inspires laughter in Titi and Sunshine. When Titi likens this sort of reading to “daydreaming,” a benefit of talk is revealed; each girl articulates a somewhat different way of describing her reading experiences and a range of notions of engagement are offered. Sunshine suggests visualizing is something she and others always do. m&m talks about a particularly intense and seemingly positive experience wherein she is engrossed in her reading and doesn’t hear her mom speaking to her. And Titi offers a comparison to daydreaming, a practice whose connotation suggests that it might be detrimental to one’s reading.

When we return to the book, the description of Lennon’s childhood reading continues: “Entranced by the Just William stories, he wrote his own versions, putting himself in William’s place. Fed by books and radio, his extraordinary talent to imagine poured out of him. ‘I used to live Alice and Just William,’ he said later” (p. 14). m&m replies, “I did that one time. It was the Night Series written by L.J. Smith. I was a vampire. I’m serious.” Though m&m seems to sense that Titi and Sunshine will not believe her, they do not discredit her claim. Rather, Sunshine adds, “I only did that one time when a book related to me. I thought of myself as her.” Again, the girls use talk to freely share their
experiences as readers, perhaps emboldened by the literacy practices represented in the text or perhaps nested in the smallness and knownness of our book group.

The freedom with talk that the book group affords the participants is also part of their group exit interview. When I ask them, “Was there a time in the book group where you thought you understood something new, about maybe reading or writing or just about people, about learning or anything?” Ryan begins by explaining why it’s “easier,” in the book group, presumably than in an English class.

R: Well like in the book group it’s easier ‘cause you don’t have like a class of 30, <N: Yeah, yeah.> like 20 or 30 cause you can actually say what you want to say right out.

N: Yeah, ‘cause only like 5 of us, so yeah.

R: And plus it made it like more interesting to have food.

N: We don’t have to hold back what we want to say, we can just say it.

The ideas of “actually” saying what a person wants to say and not “hold[ing] back” suggest that during the reading of books in other contexts, likely school contexts, the participants do not feel able to speak freely. When Ryan remarks that “it” is easier in the book group, he might refer to understanding the books, to learning new things, or to reading more generally. In any case, the importance of talk is key. It might well be that the buzz of conversation and the freedom that it offers are markers of a shared reading.

Adolescence

--- I’m snuggled in bed with all of my stuff for tomorrow’s book group meeting meticulously placed around me, like I used to strategically position my stuffed animals. Back when my bedtime was 8:30, my black bear would be a sentinel facing the window and my bunny puppet would snuggle next to me for warmth. It’s long past that bedtime now, but I’ve still got The Book Thief and post-it notes and my digital voice recorder and my fieldnotes right where they need to be. When and how did things change so much and still stay so much the same? I’m a bit nervous, I guess, which is why I can’t quite keep my focus on making detailed plans about the book group tomorrow. I’ve got Liesel on my mind, as I recall my childhood bedtime rituals. I’m just not sure exactly how to make sure our book group reads her gently, and I’m not sure that it’s even my job to do so. I mean, I’m gonna guide them to read her at her most vulnerable – awake in the dark of night, having wet her bed; exposing her stolen book to Papa; revealing her inability to read. I want to trust that the teenagers who felt compassion for Steve and who made identifications with John Lennon will empathize with Liesel. I know this is what teenagers can do; they can look kindly back and recall their own vulnerability and see its echo in their adolescent lives. And the voices in that recorder are telling me that Nicole will and Titi will and, what am I worrying about? ---
The Book Thief (Zusak, 2005), itself an extended articulation, is the story of a young girl’s literary thievery. Packed with representations of reading and writing, the book traces Liesel’s childhood with her foster parents against the backdrop of Nazi Germany. With its 552 page-length, dark cover art, and narrator, Death, the book is daunting to the book group participants, and they are initially wary – Timmy says, “I don’t think I want to read this book anymore.” Nicole threatens, “I won’t be coming back.” But when I dramatically shout my exaggerated disappointment, “AH!!!,” she replies, “Just kidding, I will.”

After discussing the first book Liesel steals, we skip ahead to a constitutive event wherein Liesel’s foster father, whom she calls Papa, teaches her to read. She awakens in the middle of a nightmare in soiled sheets, and Papa comes to care for her. As he removes the bedding, a book falls from the bed, a manual for gravediggers that she took possession of after her brother’s burial. Liesel must explain that she has stolen it and that she, at ten and after numerous failed attempts, wants to learn to read. Her written reflections on learning to read are quoted in the text, and they begin our discussion of the constitutive event. “‘You wouldn’t think it,’ she wrote, ‘but it was not so much the school who helped me to read. It was Papa’” (64). I ask Yuliana, Nicole, Timmy, Ryan, and Bob what they think of Liesel learning to read from Papa, and Nicole and Yuliana respond quickly and nearly simultaneously with their undecipherable and impassioned answers.

SMC: (paraphrasing N) She probably didn’t have anyone to relate to at school. (paraphrasing Y) Maybe she was scared to read at school.

Y: Alright.

T: Who said it? Her (pointing to indicate Yuliana)? She probably was too scared to read at school and he probably just, you know, put her in the room and just helped her read one at a time, I guess.

SMC: Mm-hm. Does this seem reasonable? That she would have a different experience in school than <T: Yeah> she would with someone

N: Who she’s comfortable with.

R: The difference between school is like teachers, they have...

SMC: Someone she’s comfortable with.

R: They have so many students in there so they’re used to saying if one student can’t read or something, they’re used to saying do this, do this and this. But they’re not used to accommodating to that student’s issues.

T: To be with him more than the teachers in school.

SMC: She’s with him more than she is with the teachers?
T: Yeah.

Y: Be shy to reading to teachers and students

R: She’s afraid that people are gonna judge her.

SMC: Especially because she’s 10, right? I mean do you think the other kids at her school who are 10 are...

Y: Good read?

SMC: Good readers or able to read perhaps better than she is? And so

T: And she probably just scared that she don’t know what...

Y: Or they might laugh to her.

T: Somebody might laugh.

SMC: Laugh. Mm-hmm.

The teenage readers in the book group recognize Liesel’s position as a learner and offer a number of reasons for which learning to read with Papa is better than learning to read at school. They speak with confidence, invoking “comfort” and safety from “judgement.” When Ryan suggests that teachers are “not used to accommodating to that student’s issues,” he does not volunteer that he has experience with teachers of this sort, though he and the other participants in the first book group have “issues” that are protected by Individualized Education Plans [IEP]. In fact, none of the readers invoke themselves at all, in spite of their participation in the READ 180 program. Instead, the range of responses that they offer seem to come from a reflective space much like that from which Liesel wrote attributing her learning to read to her Papa. They are able to imagine the perspective of a young girl struggling to read at school and learning to read in her room with her foster father. Perhaps their distance from childhood and their position as adolescents allows them to consider struggles of a child learning to read and to empathize with the experiences of the young character.

The constitutive event continues with Papa’s admission of his own reading abilities. “To tell the truth,” Papa explained upfront, “I am not such a great reader myself” (p. 65). Timmy pipes up, “So I guess they helped each other,” and introduces the notion of learning as shared. We continue reading.

But it didn’t matter that he read slowly. If anything, it might have helped that his own reading pace was slower than average. Perhaps it would cause less frustration in coping with the girl’s lack of ability. (p. 65)

I ask Yuliana, Nicole, Timmy, Ryan, and Bob for their thoughts saying, “What do you think of that? Maybe because he wasn’t an expert, expert, expert reader, he read more slowly and word by word, it helped her?” Ryan is unable to wait for me
to finish asking the question and describes an image of learning that calls to mind a vaguely Vygotskian interaction.

R: When people are getting, when people are experts at something, and they meet someone that can’t do it, they get like frustrated about it, I think. They can’t do it after a while. But if you meet someone that can barely do it, then you can barely do that, it’s easier for you to cope with that and teach them what you know and they teach you what they know.

SMC: Mmm/(whispered) You guys are so smart.

T: And I think it, um, people do read slow, ‘cause it helps you and you could like know each word. ‘Cause when people read fast, then they mess up and they got to start over at the sentence.

In Ryan’s scenario, a dyad, comprised of learners whose abilities are only modestly different, mutually benefit one another. He explains that “cop[ing]” with the struggles of learning something new is easier. Moreover, he proposes that they teach each other, a suggestion that, while clearly recognizable as a realistic learning interaction, seems foreign as we sit inside the walls of a traditional American high school. Timmy adds that the pace of reading also benefits both teacher and learner because the learner can “know each word” and the teacher can avoid “mess[ing] up.” Again, the expected image of teacher is cast aside as Timmy conjures an inexpert teacher. Later Ryan elaborates saying, “[Papa] feels the same way she does at this moment.” I reply in question, “What does that do?” and he responds, “Kind of puts him on the same level ground there.” Ryan’s egalitarian response, highlighting the emotional similarities between Papa and Liesel as they read, is reflective of the space of adolescence, for he is not a child and not an adult and he can see their shared dispositions and bring the two together. Even without invoking themselves, the book group participants interpret a literacy practice through views of the learning interaction that differ greatly from the teacher-student relationships within which they themselves have been schooled and are schooled.

The participants in the second book group, comprised of Titi and Sunshine, also reference the experience of being an outsider in school. Titi empathizes, “Yeah, you don’t want to raise your hand and say, ‘What’s this word?’ when everybody else already knows that word.” By contrast, both girls invoke their own learning struggles and working in dyadic relationships with their mothers. Though Titi claims that her mother was unable to help her with her work – “My mama do not know these works these days” – Sunshine recounts working on her homework with her mother and eventually learning to do the work independently.

S: That’s how I learned to do my homework. My teacher would tell me to do it, but I really wouldn’t like pay attention. And my mom would like sit down like you have to do this blah blah blah. That was when I was little.
though. My mom used to do my homework for me, but then I had to realize, no, I had to do it myself. So she taught me.

Sunshine’s mother in the role of teacher breaks down the components of the work her daughter’s teacher has told her to do. By helping Sunshine realize that she “had to do [her homework herself],” her mother “taught” her. By allowing her the space to “realize” that she needed to be responsible for her own learning, her mother played the role of teacher. Titi remembers assuming the role of teacher herself in teaching her cousin how to read new words.

T: It remind me of when I was teaching my little cousin how, she had this little book with a whole bunch of words in it she don’t know, I was trying to teach her, make her look at pictures, guess what it is a little bit. It looks easy for her ‘cause I was helping her a lot.

Titi’s perspective, much like Sunshine’s, allows her to see the work of the teacher in guiding the learner. Upon considering Papa’s inexpert reading abilities, Titi remarks, “T: I think it’s okay if somebody teaches you something. At least they know a little bit about it,” suggesting an appreciation of the act of teaching.

The participants’ readings of this constitutive event suggest that the adolescents in the book group understand the significance of the experience of learning to read, an understanding likely influenced by their status as adolescents. Because they are no longer children, they can look back at their pasts, including their literate pasts, and make reflective observations. The struggles that most of the book group members have almost certainly had with learning to read and improving their reading inform their responses to Liesel and their interpretations of her learning experience. They have learned new things in myriad contexts including various teacher-learner configurations, and so the book group participants have likely come to see that there are many notions of what counts as a constituting a more knowledgeable other.

Across the books, each of the different kinds of representations of literacy practices depicted in them presents different opportunities for contemplation. By attending to different representations of literacy, the book group offers different access points to the literature and to contemplation of literacy itself. From the mention of writing in a mirror, which begins Monster, to the extended talk about book choice and engagement with reading in John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth, to the shared literacy memory of learning to read in The Book Thief, the book group participants’ discussions of the reading and writing in the books bring to the fore the role of interpretation; their talk makes manifest the work they are doing to make sense of the literacy practices depicted in the books. The talk renders their understanding socially. Further, their identification with the characters affords a window into the ways they positions themselves vis-à-vis the characters, especially those of similar age, and the ways they use this identification to interrogate the reading and writing that are portrayed. Their status as adolescents offers both a temporal distance from which to examine writing and reading done in childhood and a corollary against which to check the adolescent literacy practices conjured in the books. In the next section, I offer a
sense of the ways in which the book group also revealed and at times constituted the participants as readers and writers much like the narratives of the books brought forth the represented adolescent characters and their literate lives. In doing so, I aim to portray the ways in which the book group co-constructed the characters and the participants as living lives that include literacy.

Using Reading in the Book Club to Make Meanings of Selves

Throughout my analysis of the young people represented in the Printz set, I pondered the realness of the writing and reading and non-writing and non-reading teenagers about whom I read. Though these categories of reader and writer could be applied to nearly all of the characters in the books, the grandness of the literacy practices in the books gave me pause. Were these super readers and super writers anything like real teenagers? My time with the book group has led me to conclude that the answer could absolutely be yes. In the three sections that follow, I animate three archetypical literate teenagers – the reader, the writer, and the non-reader/non-writer – through portraying in greater detail three participants in the book group. The writing and reading done by these three individuals were not necessarily unique to them, even among the participants in the book group. Indeed, many of the practices that I include in the sections that follow were reported as engaged in by others. Instead I present these descriptions to bring forth the bigness of the literacy practices that suggest the various and shifting literate identities that all teenagers assume.

The Reader

--- m&m drops her black canvas bag in the chair where she always chooses to sit and a thud echoes in the tiny conference room. The bag is packed with at least six hard-cover books and seems as if it might give up its toting duties just about the time m&m is running to catch her bus later this afternoon. But she is unconcerned. She has brought a series of vampire books to share with a classmate, someone who is willing to take her up on her offer to borrow a book. Her small frame seems hardly up to the task of transporting the bag loaded with books and her notebook containing her precious book lists. As she shakes her tired arm, the fourteen year-old looks at the copies of Monster that I have set out for us to read with book group. There is a delighted sparkle in her eye. The books, the lists, the sparkle. I think to myself; this girl is a reader. ---

m&m’s bag of books is an outward sign of her status as reader. She carries it through the hallways in spite of its weight, and she is undaunted by the prospect of navigating the flow of her fellow students, many of whom carry just a pen or a notebook. Inside her bag she carries further, more personal evidence of her reading identity – her book lists. The pages of a composition style notebook are filled with lists of books she has read and plans to read. Organized first by series and then followed by author, leaving individual titles for the end, m&m lists dozens of books. For the ones she has read, there is a tidy check mark next to the title; the others are a wish list of sorts, books she hopes to buy at Barnes
and Noble or to find at the school library and then devour. m&m shows me the lists and tells me about her love of reading books in a series in order, her frustration at authors when they take too long to write another book, and her pride in keeping track of the reading she has done. In order to make sure she maintains her reading identity, she says, “The easiest thing is books that I have on a list I’ve written so I won’t fall out on reading again” (survey). M&M suggests that she has had times when she has not been as avid a reader as she is now, and so though she uses the lists to remember the books she has read and books she will read, she also uses her lists strategically to sustain her interest in the practice of reading.

For m&m, reading is a daily activity: “I loved to read in second grade, but after a couple of years I couldn’t go a day without reading” (survey). She names second grade as the time at which she really enjoyed reading, but implies that her passion for reading grew after she had been reading for a while. She speaks of a need to read, such that she must read every single day. She talks about reading the books for her READ 180 class and other books simultaneously, finding the experience of reading different texts at the same time appealing because “they’re just different stories” (book group). Though she finds vampire books to be highly appealing during the time of the book group, she is skilled at finding things to like about a wide variety of texts, including non-fiction titles in READ 180 and readings assigned in her English class. She suggests that her classmates in READ 180 would like a book she is reading because it is about a family and includes drama (fieldnotes). Her diverse reading palate likely contributes to her ability to recommend books to friends and classmates. “I label myself a reader, because people say, ‘Everytime I see her, she’s got a book in her hand.’” It is her peers who embolden m&m to call herself a reader.

When I ask the group, “When I say reading, just reading, what comes into your mind?,” m&m answers “new vocabulary” and “like how many books can I read in a month.” It is possible to imagine her room being filled with stacks of books like Alaska’s dorm in *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005). During our discussion of the John Lennon book, she recounts getting lost in reading – “It’s like I’m really into it” – and a particularly intense reading experience in which she becomes a vampire – “I’m serious.” She is like Mattie in *A Northern Light* (Donnelly, 2003), so consumed by her reading that the world around her slips away. She reports reading multiple books “while stuck in the country” over Spring Break. She and Daisy in *how i live now* (Rogoff, 2004) use reading to pass the time in unpleasant situations. Even when she must miss the last two book group meetings because she receives a punishment of in-school suspension, she writes me notes about missing our “talks about books,” and expresses regret about her absence. When I go to visit her, to giver her the copy of *The Book Thief* that she will be able to keep, she sits at an isolated desk with her black bag of books next to her. As I approach, she doesn’t see me; her glasses aren’t even visible behind the vampire book she is devouring. She is happy to see me and even happier to tell me that she is going to read *The Book Thief* as soon as she finishes the book in her hand. As I leave, I look back over my shoulder and her nose is right back in the book.
The Writer

--- Titi shakes her head in dramatic yet amused disbelief as she talks about her godfather and his writing tasks. She tells us that he sends her articles to read after which she must compose written responses. The other girls' raised eyebrows and stiffened bodies echo my teacherly incredulity. “Somebody actually gives a writing assignment to a teenager outside of the classroom? She actually does it?” I just can’t get my head around the preposterousness of the arrangement. Her tisks and tight grin betray her enjoyment of the ritual. It’s just how her godfather who lives in New York and is in a fraternity is. And this girl, who never produced a journal to show me like Timmy and Nicole did, who never revealed any of this writing life in her survey or interview, is some kind of writer. ---

In spite of the fact that the book group was a reading gathering, I witness multiple embodiments of writing identities during the tenure of my study. One day, Timmy and Nicole show me their journals, which they happen to have in their backpacks one day. Timmy tells me about how her mother fills journals with writing, prompting Nicole to share that her mom gave her the journal she has, just like Timmy’s mom did. Sunshine talks about the journals she keeps and how she rereads them to edit them. But Titi’s talk about her writing practices, though brief, extend across the data and reflect unexpected literate practices that call for exploration.

There is simply not as much data for her as there is for m&m; had this been a writing group, I suspect I would have learned more about Titi as a writer. But lots of the settling talk at the beginnings of sessions and updating talks after breaks in our meetings brings forth lots of talk about writing from Titi. She shares the story of how her godfather sends articles from magazines like Time for her to read and to which she writes responses at his request. He sends her “stuff” and says, “You’re gonna read it and write about it and you’re gonna email it to me. Like he get on my nerves.” Though she mentions telling him that she forgot her password so she can’t email him, she acknowledges that she does write the responses, at least sometimes. He is aggravating, but she participates in what is generally a writing practice reserved for school with her godfather. In the same discussion of writing that she does in her life, Titi also reflects that it would be a good idea to write out her breakups with boyfriends to plan what she’ll say.

For Titi, thinking precedes writing. “You think before you write. You can’t just write something down without thinking about it.” So when we discuss Steve’s disinterest in writing about the robbery in Monster, she comments, “So he don’t want to think about what happened because it wasn’t a good experience.” As the group continues discussing the relationship between writing and memory, Titi makes reference to her great-grandfather’s death. I ask, “Does writing something down from your memory do anything to that memory? Yeah, you keep on thinking about it. Like sometimes, like if you write about something that happened like two years ago right now, you’re gonna start thinking about it again.” Titi suggests that the act of writing about a memory resurrects the feelings associated with that memory as if no time has passed. “It’s like when my
mom’s, my great-grandpa died, I didn’t get to go to his funeral, but when I went to Jamaica, and then I went to the house and he wasn’t there, I started crying ‘cause I didn’t get to see him."

In much the same way that m&m takes on the mantle of reader through the comments of her peers, Titi, too, outs herself as a writer and Sunshine’s reaction to her writing practice cinches her status. When I ask, “How do you think that people see themselves as writers?,” Titi is the first to answer in a string of examples. “Present it to other people, they do it a lot, people like it, people support them.” m&m and Sunshine each add another item to the list, but immediately after, Titi offers an image of herself getting ready to write at home alone. “I have to have a book near me if I’m gonna start writing. Like if I’m sitting at home bored, I’ll see a book and be like, maybe I should just write something. I have my iPod, so I use my iPod and I’m talking and I be like recording myself talking.” Sunshine laughs and calls Titi weird multiple times, but Titi just laughs with her; she is cool with what she does.

Even her reflection on herself as a writer suggests that she is aware of her growth and her weaknesses. “I write better now, I just need to read it over more instead of like just keep going. Read over my writing. Cause I usually, I’ll read it over, but I don’t know, I just skip through the mistakes. Like I’ll think it’s right. Like I’ll write “One day,” but I’ll forget the word day and just skip to the other words. I don’t know why I do that.” Titi talks candidly about her investment in improving her writing. She is keen to hear an idea I offer about proofreading that might help her catch missed words. She is like Gio in *Hard Love* (Wittlinger 1999) talking about his writing with Marisol. With her sleuthing out of plagiarized professions of love posted by boys on her Facebook page, she uses her writing skills to foil young men like Frankie in *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* (Lockhart, 2008). As she packs up our book group books for the last time to head to her next class, I wonder if she will record herself this afternoon and what stories she will tell.

**The Non-Reader/Non-Writer**

--- Ryan’s chair tips back as I sit down at the table and pick up Zusak’s story of a book-stealing little girl. As he stretches his more than six-foot tall and lanky frame, his wallet’s metal chain makes a clink against the chair’s similarly thin and long legs. With intonation and eyebrows that suggest doubt, he inquires as to whether I read the books he brought for me to read. My “yes” delights him and he wants to know what I think. His chair returns to the ground as he reaches for another piece of the buffalo chicken pizza he’s been devouring since leaving his Resource teacher’s classroom and arriving to the conference room for our book group. I answer honestly saying that the text that his book-writing partner has meticulously typed is a lot bloodier than the stories I usually read. He accepts this and then carefully removes a piece of cardstock from his backpack on which he’s drawn a rendering for the book. He lays it in front of me tenderly and awaits my response. I know that by reading the stories and looking at his art I am receiving a gift. ---
Ryan presentation of his artwork is a presentation of his non-reader/non-writer identity. He is an artist. He manages to make it through the first several classes of his high school schedule because, as he says, “I get to go to Art!” (field notes) He enthusiastically draws and paints and interprets images. He pictures the meanings he makes instead of reading them; he sketches his understandings rather than writing them. Ryan does not read or write.

When I first began this part of the study and I visited READ 180 classes to recruit participants, Ryan was the first person to express interest in joining the book group after I spoke to Ms. Jones’ class. He took an envelope of release forms, and I received a call from his dad that night. His father wanted to check in with me to make sure that the book group would be a safe place for Ryan. He told me that Ryan didn’t read or write and that at school, everything was read to him and all of his assessments and compositions were conducted orally per his Individualized Education Plan (IEP). His father had hopes that his reading and writing would improve, but he knew that the work Ryan encountered in school rendered him a non-reader/non-writer. As I had learned from Ms. Jones after Ryan took the release forms, he always sits alongside his teachers or aids and is guided in reading or has his ideas transcribed.

Ryan makes an impression on me immediately; he is outgoing, chatty, and interested in food. He is upfront about his disinterest in reading and writing from our first meeting. On that day, I read the questions from the reading and writing survey to the group, and Ryan and others announce their answers. I first ask about their earliest memories of writing. “Well, instead of writing, I don’t really like to write <SMC: Um-hm> I’ve never really ever been a fan of writing. <SMC: Right.> So I actually draw more than I write.” He answers similarly when I ask about reading memories. “R: I’ve never been a fan of reading either <laughing> SMC: That’s okay. R: You couldn’t force me to read; I’m not a reader, so.”

So it surprises me greatly when, over the course of our meetings, he mentions numerous books in relation to the books we read. Some books he has read in school, quite possibly having been read to by a teacher in middle school or by an instructional aid or in a resource during high school. Ryan helps me to better understand him as a non-reader and non-writer when he responds to questions about reading and writing. “Well, most times if I don’t like a book, I usually zone out by then. The first few pages, I’m like gone, whatever. This is what I usually do when they’re reading books is draw.” Though Ryan professes to “be gone,” I am given the hint that his drawing my well be helping him to understand, to make sense of, and to remember the books being read to him. He even offers that seeing books in movies gets piques his interest in them. “If I’m watching a movie, and I see them reading a certain book or like you know what it is, it’s like it makes you want to read it more like it makes it more interesting.” I am unable to ascertain if and how he reads any of the books that catch his eye in film, yet his interest in film and curiosity about the books speaks to an openness to story that intersects in a unique writing practice that he shares with a friend.

When Ryan brings a copy of a book he’s been working on to school for me to borrow and read, I am initially confused. I am anxious to hear more, but he is bustling off in an attempt to avoid an assignment for a class he has later in the
day. We cannot really talk about the stack of papers I hold in my hand. They’ve clearly been meticulously and lovingly assembled with a tidy series of staples extending the length of the paper on the left side. “The Dark Stranger” is typed in all caps across the top and the hand-drawn and -shaded image on the cover is framed by a large printed rectangle. I take the book home and slowly and tentatively make my way through a violent and bloody story of assassins. It’s not the sort of thing I usually read, and as I am only able to steal reading moments just before I fall asleep, I proceed with great trepidation. But the words, tightly packed on each of the nine pages with no paragraphing and stretched into thickly descriptive sentences, and the images, very lightly inserted and pressed into the printer paper in taut and shadowy strokes, intrigue me. I am desperate to know how this book came to be.

R: We talk about like, we probably talk for like six hours or something

SMC: About the stories?

R: Yeah

SMC: And then you illustrate them?

R: Yeah

SMC: Based on what he tells you and what you imagine?

R: Like I do sketches and I work on ‘em and I show ‘em to him every so often. Like it took a month to do the sketches for that book

SMC: It took a month for that?

R: Just to do the cover alone, all together longer

SMC: Okay

R: And he tells me stuff he would want in there and I tell him and we’ll work on it together. I would add what he wants in there, but if I didn’t like it, I’d slip it in there and then take everything I didn’t like out of there.

The book, a labor of friendship and craft, represents a literate life that defies the labels of reader and writer, non-reader and non-writer. Ryan is like Jacob in A Postcard from No-Man’s Land (Chambers, 2002), being a reader in a way that seems very much outside of the norm. He is writing his writerly identity in a way not unlike Jack Gantos (2002) does in his memoir, Hole in my Life. His status as non-reader/non-writer is simultaneously accurate and inaccurate. His literate life invites critique of the structures through which the identities of reader and writer are constituted. His ways of making meanings and participating in literate activities begs for a reconsideration of what counts as reading and writing.
Discussion

While the book group participants give a picture of understandings that can be made of representations of literacy practices depicted in works of YAL, their reading provides much more than a simple check of the accuracy and validity of these depictions. In their interpretation, they conjure the characters of the books they read as real teenagers living literate lives. In animating these book-bound teens, through identification and talk and from the perspective of adolescence, the book group participants also constitute themselves as readers and writers.
Chapter Six
Reading Characters and Theorizing Literacy

After reading and re-reading the books of the Printz set, I carry with me dozens of reading and writing characters. Their stories of love, lies, and theft interwoven with literacy have marked me. I write this very text, “so [my] words won’t fly away” and “so [my words] will fly one day” (p. 20), as Hemphill (2007) portrays Sylvia Plath doing in Your Own Sylvia. I sit among the books, my notes, and the transcripts of the book group meetings and interviews, and like Liesel in the mayor’s library in Zusak’s (2007) The Book Thief, I can “almost taste the words as they [stack] up around [me]” (p. 288). The young people with whom I read in the book group speak to me, too, with words of encouragement saying, “I’m gonna read these books,” like Timmy did when I told her that she would keep Meyers’ (1999) Monster and Zusak’s (2007) The Book Thief. Inspired by Timmy and other teenagers, I have read these books intently and purposefully, both independently and in collaboration with others; I do not presume that such an experience would prove as enjoyable to many others as it has been to me. Yet the findings of this study suggest that the literacy practices in YAL afford an opportunity to understand literacy lives of adolescents. Further, the study implies that with careful attention to the depictions of reading and writing contained in works of YAL and in conjunction with teenage readers, insights about literate identity construction and theory-making about literacy can be brought forth. These depictions of writing and reading invite consideration of the multimodality of literacy. They portray lives of young people that include literacy in myriad ways suggesting that literacy is malleable. The findings put forward the notion that young people reading YAL can be guided to interrogate these representations.

This concluding chapter draws attention to a number of ideas about the coming together of literature, literacy, and adolescents. The chapter highlights the following potentialities: YAL can be (a) a site for questioning, critiquing, and re-making notions of literacy; (b) a literary window into literate identities enacted; (c) an invitation to explore literacy in the lives of fictional and living teenagers.

YAL as a Site for Theory-Making about Literacy

From the tiniest references to print to the seemingly exaggerated portrayals of teenagers as the read-y-est readers and the write-y-est of writers, representations of literacy practices in YAL can matter. By attending to mentions, brief references to reading or writing with little or no additional exposition, a sense of the range of practices that puncture everyday existence is put forth. As barometers of the noticed and unnoticed around literacy, mentions can illuminate expectations around reading and writing and invite consideration of what counts as literacy. Descriptions, representations of literacy practices wherein the setting, participants, and/or artifacts are embellished with descriptive details, provide elaborated depictions of notions of literacy. Because they oftentimes are comprised of multiple sentences and even multiple
paragraphs, descriptions allow the reading and/or writing that a character does to linger with the reader. Constitutive events, representations of literacy practices that serve as turning points in the narrative because of their special significance to the character(s) or the narrative, reflect the importance that writing and reading can have in life. Through their depiction, constitutive events vividly invoke the thinking and feeling person or people in the literacy practice. And when reading and/or writing are woven throughout texts as is the case in extended articulations, the very heart of the narrative is the living of a literate life; the reading and writing matter alongside the struggling and the loving and the breathing of a life.

Though different kinds of representations matter differently, when considered as a group, like stars in a constellation, a story of literacy is born. It is a story of the reader’s making, and it is a story of what literacy is, what it can do, what can be done with it, and how it matters in the mind of the reader. The writing of the story is then theory-making about literacy. Representations of literacy practices within and across texts chart a canopy of multifaceted writing and reading. These representations render literacy observable, for the teenage characters in the texts are simultaneously paused and playing with print. They render literacy situational, for the reading and writing that the characters do are conjured in context, whether as foreground or background. They render literacy social, for the characters may use writing and reading to connect to, to distance from, or to mark their position vis-à-vis others. And the representations render literacy malleable, for the reading and writing that the adolescents do within the pages of the books are done with creativity and innovation and often make and remake literacy through their doings. Literacy theory-making, then, can occur in the reading and interpretation of these representations of writing and reading.

**Literary Perspectives on Literate Identity Construction**

The findings from my work with these books suggest that reading and writing matter to adolescents for reasons that seem uniquely tied to the period of adolescence. The characters reflect on their pasts, make connections in the present, and imagine their futures in and through the practices of reading and writing. In their adolescence, the young people who are represented in the books take on varied and multiple identities within the pages of the books, among these are that of reader and writer. By taking a diachronic perspective, the representations of literacy practices in the books can be seen as reflecting the ways in which reading and writing weave through a lifetime. And at the transition from childhood to adulthood, when the identities available for a person may seem limitless and ripe for experimentations, literacy and literate identities can be seen as threading the past to the present and future.

The notion that no act of literacy is ever unimodal is repeatedly articulated in the representations of literacy practices in the Printz set. As the characters write and read, they use any and all available modalities. Colin melds journaling about his feelings after breakups with mathematical calculations and graphs to come to understand the dumper-dumpee relationship in Green’s (2007) *An Abundance of Katherines*. Curt and Troy mix images from the newspaper and
text in the form of a poster to decorate Troy’s walls in Going’s (2004) Fat Kid Rules the World. Even the letters scratched into and then erased from the body of Lara’s sandman in Knox’s fantasy (2008) Dreamquake: Book Two of the Dreamhunter Duet, are as much about the materials with which the writing and erasing is done as the letters themselves. In these ways, the adolescent characters in the books seem to be at liberty to use varied modes of meaning-making alongside and with reading and writing and thereby construct multiliterate identities.

Finding Literacy in Literature and in Adolescents’ Lives

The moments wherein the characters in the Printz books interact with print, in the times when they read words scratched into mirrors and turn to journals to capture their deepest fears, when they play with words to invoke humor and read to find validation in the company of eccentric characters, when they stumble across unfamiliar sounds and words in a challenging book and smother the words of hate with white paint to write and draw one’s own story, they invite teenage readers to contemplate literacy. The findings from the book group highlight the ways in which the representations in the books did just this. Through their talk about and their identification and dis-identification with the reading and writing that the characters do in works of YAL, the adolescent readers came to think critically about literacy. When the young people of the book group read and interpreted representations of literacy in the texts, they, too, constructed personal theories of literacy.

The books’ vividly rendered depictions of writers and readers are indeed sometimes almost fantastic, but the findings from the book group suggest that even in a sample of eight young people, amazing and grand acts of reading and writing occur with or without great fanfare in the teenage participants’ lives. Being a reader or a writer is but one identity of many that the young people in the book group took on, were given by others, or rejected flatly, and the teenagers assumed and composed these literate identities in ways much like the characters in the Printz set. For the book group participants, literacy, too, was social, malleable, and situational, if not always observable.

Implications for Future Research

This study of representations of literacy practices in YAL and the understanding that young people might make of them invites a number of lines of future inquiry. First, the findings from the first part of the study suggest that attending to the representations of literacy in any text will bring forth a host of notions about literacy enmeshed in the narrative. This seems to be especially important in circumstances wherein readers make identifications with a text. Mapping the responses of the book group to the characters in the three books they read onto the larger set of reading and writing characters represented in the Printz set, one can only imagine the meaning that could be made of the menagerie of literacy practices. More studies of more young people reading more works of YAL can only provide greater insights. Investigations into large group
readings of YAL, in English classrooms, for instance, and guided examinations of representations of literacy practices depicted therein could elaborate understandings of the personal theories of literacy that young people hold.

And though this study takes as its subject YAL, books populated by teenagers living lives that include reading and writing, these examinations of representations of literacy practices need not be reserved for YAL. The same structures might well be applied to other texts, including the texts used inside classrooms in multiple disciplines. The findings of this study call for other studies wherein teenage readers respond to the representations of literacy practices within books without prompting and/or over the course of the reading of whole texts. Given the continuing enthusiasm among teenagers for YAL, it would be helpful to know how the representations of literacy in various genres and sets of YAL and non-YAL read by teens compare to each other. One might explore how reading and writing are represented in popular titles, like the Twilight and Hunger Games series and in canonical texts used in English classrooms; graphic novels versus realistic, contemporary fiction; street lit versus fantasy. Further, non-print texts featuring adolescents, such as films, television, and music, would surely offer interesting insights if this inquiry into representations of literacy were extended beyond books. A study of exploring representations of literacy across a year’s study of literature would likely prove informative if this work were to inform the ways that literacy itself might be considered critically inside classrooms.

**Implications for Pedagogy**

Though this study does not take as its project locating or generating ways in which YAL might be included in literacy education for adolescents, my heart and mind brought me to this work with books and teenagers because of my interest in honoring the literate lives of youth and my passion for teaching adolescents. Each time I read a teenage character in the Printz books reading or writing, I wondered how these representations of literacy might be understood within the structures of an English classroom. And though I explored reading representations of reading and writing with teenagers through the book group, I consider the implications for pedagogy from this study to be invitations to teachers and young people to take up the work of critically interrogating literacy in much the same way in which teachers of critical literacy question representations of race and gender.

I can imagine a teacher including Printz books in his classroom, books packed with young people reading and writing in ways expected and unexpected, everyday and spectacular. I can imagine a young person recalling as Titi did that a teacher read Monster to her and saying “I just remember that she used to always read books with the little gold stamp thingys on them,” and noticing the designations that other texts that he or she may encounter may or may not have received and pausing to think about what counts as award-worthy. I can imagine a teacher stacking works of YAL books on the corner of her desk, an invitation, much like the one that Miss Klister gave to my 11th grade American Literature class, to spend more time with books like the one we were reading as a whole
class and inviting her students to continue the inquiries of the classroom into their own lives.

How might a teacher make use of *mentions, descriptions, constitutive events, and extended articulations* to initiate critical discussions of literacy? I can imagine a teacher who is asking students to read newspaper articles about current events pushing students to critically consider the function of newspapers in a democratic society, for instance, and using Nelson’s (2006) *A Wreath for Emmitt Till* to invoke Emmitt’s mother’s decision to make his autopsy photo available to newspapers. The uses are limitless, but explicit attention should be paid to reading and writing represented in literature, for to leave literacy unexamined is to render it a neutral technology.

For the adolescent characters in YAL and for the adolescents who read them, writing and reading are situational, malleable, and social. To explore the representations of literacy in books that young people read is to honor adolescent literacy and YAL and to validate the theory-making about literacy involved in interpreting the depictions. The findings of this study suggest great potential exists for better understanding adolescent literacy with and through the reading and writing depicted in these books. Attentive examination of the representations of literacy in literature can offer unique perspectives on literate identity construction and may contribute to theory-making about literacy.
References


References to Literature

Appendix A: Printz Award Books (1999-2009)

MICHAEL L. PRINTZ AWARD AND HONOR BOOKS
Michael L. Printz Award for excellence in literature written for young adults

* 2009
Jellicoe Road, Melina Marchetta

Honors
The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. II: The Kingdom on the Waves, M. T. Anderson
The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks, E. Lockhart
Nation, Terry Pratchett
Tender Morsels, Margo Lanagan

* 2008
The White Darkness, Geraldine McCaughrean

Honors
Dreamquake: Book Two of the Dreamhunter Duet, Elizabeth Knox
One Whole and Perfect Day, Judith Clarke
Repossessed, A. M. Jenkins
Your Own, Sylvia: A Verse Portrait of Sylvia Plath, Stephanie Hemphill

* 2007
American Born Chinese, Gene Luen Yang

Honors
The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. I: The Pox Party, M. T. Anderson
An Abundance of Katherines, John Green
Surrender, Sonya Hartnett
The Book Thief, Markus Zusak

* 2006
Looking for Alaska, John Green

Honors
Black Juice, Margo Lanagan
I Am the Messenger, Markus Zusak
John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth, a Photographic Biography, Elizabeth Partridge
A Wreath for Emmett Till, Marilyn Nelson
* **2005**
  * how i live now, Meg Rosoff

  Honors
  * Airborne, Kenneth Oppel
  * Chanda’s Secrets, Allan Stratton
  * Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy, Gary D. Schmidt

* **2004**
  * The First Part Last, Angela Johnson

  Honors
  * A Northern Light, Jennifer Donnelly
  * Keesha’s House, Helen Frost
  * Fat Kid Rules the World, K. L. Going
  * The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things, Carolyn Mackler

* **2003**
  * Postcards from No Man’s Land, Aidan Chambers

  Honors
  * The House of the Scorpion, Nancy Farmer
  * My Heartbeat, Garret Freymann-Weyr
  * Hole in My Life, Jack Gantos

* **2002**
  * A Step From Heaven, An Na

  Honors
  * The Ropemaker, Peter Dickinson
  * Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art, Jan Greenberg
  * Freewill, Chris Lynch
  * True Believer, Virginia Euwer Wolff
* **2001**
*Kit's Wilderness*, David Almond

Honors
*Many Stones*, Carolyn Coman
*The Body of Christopher Creed*, Carol Plum-Ucci
*Angus, Thongs, and Full Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*, Louise Rennison
*Stuck in Neutral*, Terry Trueman

* **2000**
*Monster*, Walter Dean Myers

Honors
*Skellig*, David Almond
*Speak*, Laurie Halse Anderson
*Hard Love*, Ellen Wittlinger
### Appendix B: Coding Checklist for References to Literacy

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#### Literacy Representation
- Mentions
- Descriptions
- Constitutive Events
- Extended Articulations

#### Activities
- Reading
- Writing
- Reading/Writing
- Not Reading
- Not Writing
- Not Reading/Writing

#### Participants

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School Success
High Achieving ________________________________
Average Achieving __________________________
Low Achieving ______________________________
Unspecified ________________________________

Setting
Continent
N Am ________________________________
S Am ________________________________
Europe ______________________________
Africa ________________________________
Asia ________________________________
Antarctica __________________________

Location
Home ________________________________
School ______________________________
Community __________________________
World ________________________________

Sphere
Private ________________________________
Public ________________________________

Time
Past ________________________________
Present ______________________________
Future ________________________________

Artifact
Book Fiction ______________________________
Book Non-Fiction _________________________
Book Poetry ____________________________
Book Screenplay _________________________
Magazine ______________________________
Diary _________________________________
Zine _________________________________
Newspaper ____________________________
Poetry ________________________________
Songs ________________________________
Email ________________________________
IM _________________________________
Letters ______________________________
Notes ________________________________
Computer ______________________________
Graffiti ______________________________
Posters ______________________________
Menus ________________________________
Maps ________________________________

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Appendix C: Book Group Literacy Survey

A Writing and Reading Inventory*

This exercise provides you with the opportunity to reflect on and document your own attitudes toward writing and reading in general and, more specifically, toward each aspect of these intellectual activities that enable you to do thinking.

The questions are divided into four sections. Please think carefully about each question and then respond in writing to each of the following questions — with as much detail as possible. If you don’t understand a part of a question, just answer the parts that you do understand.

The first section, questions 1-6, asks you to think about yourself as a reader and a writer.

1. What are your earliest memories of writing?
2. What are your earliest memories of reading?
3. Have any members of your family, teachers, or anyone else encouraged you to read? If so, explain how that happened.
4. Have any members of your family, teachers, or anyone else encouraged you to write? If so, explain how that happened.
5. How would you describe / characterize yourself as a writer? What metaphor(s) would you use?
6. How would you describe / characterize yourself as a reader? What metaphor(s) would you use?

In the second section, questions 7-11, you’ll give more information about yourself as a reader.

7. What is the easiest thing for you to do when you read for school?
8. What is the easiest thing for you to do when you read something other than what you are required to read for school?
9. What is the most difficult part of reading for you?
10. If someone walked into your room and observed you reading, what would this person see?
11. Describe the environment that is best for you as reader?
In the third section, questions 12-16, you'll give more information about yourself as a writer.

12. What is the easiest thing for you to do when you write for school?

13. What is the easiest thing for you to do when you write something other than what you are required to write for school?

14. What is the most difficult part of writing for you?

15. If someone walked into your room and observed writing, what would this person see?

16. Describe the environment that is best for you as a writer?

The last section, questions 17-22, asks questions about both writing and reading.

17. Do you try to avoid reading? Do you try to avoid writing? If so, what do you do to avoid it?

18. What special habits do you have as a writer? As a reader?

19. What do you like about reading? About writing?

20. What do you like least about writing? About reading?

21. What have you learned about writing as a result of your reading? What have you learned about reading as a result of your writing?

22. Please add any comments or clarifications that you think would add helpful information to your answers to these questions.

* Adapted from A Writing, Reading and Research Inventory authored by Professor Donald A. McQuade, UC Berkeley, for ENG 136.
Appendix D: Book Group Interview Protocol I

Pre-Book Club Interview Protocol

The PI will invite the participant to give his/her chosen pseudonym, age, and grade to begin the interview.

In this interview we’ll talk about your experiences as a reader and a writer both in school and outside of school. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking forward to hearing what you have to say. Some of the questions are similar to what you were asked in the survey. The interview will be in three parts and last about thirty minutes. We’ll start with some pretty short questions about your general thoughts about reading and writing. In the second part, I’ll ask you to think back to times when you wrote and read when you were younger. In the last section, I’ll ask questions about the reading and writing that you do now. You can take your time to answer. If you want to take a break at any time, just let me know. Are you ready to get started?

Part 1: General Ideas about Reading and Writing
1. When you think about reading, what comes to your mind?
2. When you think about writing, what comes to your mind?
3. Why do people write?
4. Why do people read?

Part 2: Writing and Reading History
5. What’s your earliest memory of reading?
6. What’s your earliest memory of writing?
7. Has there been a time when you didn’t feel like a reader or writer?
8. When was a time you felt really proud of yourself as a writer?
9. When was a time you felt really proud of yourself as a reader?
10. What is your favorite thing you have read so far? Why is it your favorite?
11. What is your favorite thing you have written so far? Why is it your favorite?

Part 3: Reading and Writing Present
12. How would you describe yourself as a writer right now?
13. How would you describe yourself as a reader right now?
14. How do you think it happens that people see themselves as readers?
15. How do you think it happens that people see themselves as writers?
16. Why did you decide to be a part of the book club?
Appendix E: Book Group Interview Protocol II

Post-Book Club Interview Protocol

The PI will invite the participant to give his/her chosen pseudonym, age, and grade to begin the interview.

In this interview we’ll talk about your experiences in the book club. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking forward to hearing what you have to say. Some of the questions are similar to what I asked you in the last interview. The interview will be in three parts and last about thirty minutes. We’ll start with some pretty short questions about your general thoughts about the book club. In the second part, I’ll ask you to specific moments in the book club. In the last section, I’ll ask questions about what you think of the books we read. You can take your time to answer. If you want to take a break at any time, just let me know. Are you ready to get started?

Part 1: General Ideas about Book Club
1. When you think about the book club, what comes to your mind?
2. Why do you think people read books in a book club setting?
3. What did you like about the book club?
4. What do you wish had been different in the book club?

Part 2: Specific Moments in the Book Club
5. What do you think you remember best about the stories that we read in book club?
6. What do you remember about the characters of the books?
7. What did you think of the characters in the books? Did you like them or not? Why?
8. What did you think of what happened in the books? Did you like what happened or not? Why?
9. When was a time in book club when you thought you understood something new about reading or writing or people?
10. How do you think the book club has affected you?

Part 3: Ideas about the Book Club Books
11. What did you think of the books that we read for book club?
12. Do you think you’ll read more of them?
13. Who do you think might like to read them?
14. Why did you decide to be a part of the book club?