

Introduction

Purpose

Selecting Young Adult Literature, Grades 7-9, is designed to complement the two main curriculum documents that describe the prescribed curriculum for English language arts,

- *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*
- *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide, Grades 7-9*

Selecting Young Adult Literature, Grades 7-9 provides annotations and a list of suggested books for wide reading and novel study. There is a comprehensive cross section of fantasy/science fiction, realistic and historical fiction, poetry and informational books, traditional and contemporary literature. Lists of professional literature and web sites are intended to assist teachers in acquiring additional information about young adult literature as well as approaches to teaching and learning.

The *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (1996) states that, “Principals and other school administrators can support learning and teaching English language arts by working with English language arts teachers to ensure that the variety of resources and experiences available meet the needs of all learners” (p. 44). It points out that “Teachers are responsible for ensuring student access to a range of learning resources” (p. 44). *Selecting Young Adult Literature, Grades 7-9* provides valuable assistance to classroom teachers, principals, and resource teachers/librarians as they build quality literature collections within individual classrooms and school resource centres. The suggested titles can help teachers integrate young adult’s literature into various content areas of the grades 7-9 curriculum.

Young Adult Literature and the Grades 7-9 Curriculum

Literature shapes conceptions of the world and is an unlimited resource for insights into what it is to be human. Through literature, young adults experience vicariously times, places, cultures, situations and values vastly different from their own. They take on other roles, lose themselves in other identities, live through strange adventures, wander roads long vanished, and enter worlds that never were. In doing so, young adults are able to see reflections of themselves, their times, their country, their concerns. Reading and responding to young adult’s literature

help give shape to adolescents' own lives as they tell their own stories and participate in conversations about those of others. Such conversations help adolescents to discover, for example, how their own ideas—of friendship, love, hate, jealousy, loyalty, honesty, dishonesty, hope, despair—are similar to or different from those of others. Identifying and assessing the ideas and values inherent in young adult literature helps them to explore, clarify, and defend their own ideas and values. Wide reading of young adult literature provides exemplary models for language development. As students internalize the structures and conventions of particular genres, get ideas for themes and topics, and notice interesting techniques, they are building their ability to read, view, write, and speak.

In English language arts, grades 7-9, students are expected to *select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts*. As well, they are expected to *respond personally and critically to a range of texts, applying their understanding of language, form, and genre*. These general outcomes are the work of all English language arts students. By the end of intermediate (grade 9), for example, students are expected to be able to

- select texts that address their learning needs and range of special interest
- read widely and experience a variety of young adult fiction and literature from different provinces and countries
- demonstrate an understanding that information texts are constructed for particular purposes
- use cueing systems and a variety of strategies to construct meaning in reading and viewing increasingly complex print and media texts
- articulate their own processes and strategies for reading and viewing texts of increasing complexity
- independently access and select specific information to meet personal and learning needs
 - select, from a wide range, sources appropriate to their purposes
 - use the electronic network
 - develop approaches and strategies to conduct their research
- respond to some of the material they read or view by questioning, connecting, evaluating, and extending
 - move beyond initial understanding to more thoughtful interpretations
- express and support points of view about texts and about issues, themes, and situations within texts, citing appropriate evidence

- critically evaluate information presented in print and media texts
 - assess relevance and reliability of available information to answer their questions
- demonstrate that print and media texts are constructed for particular purposes and particular audiences
 - describe how specific text and genre characteristics contribute to meaning and effect
- respond critically to texts of increasing complexity
 - analyze and evaluate a text in terms of its form, structure, and content
 - recognize how their own ideas and perceptions are framed by what they read and view
 - demonstrate an awareness that personal values and points of view influence both the creation of text and the reader's/ viewer's interpretation and response
 - explore and reflect on culture as portrayed in media texts
 - identify the values inherent in a text

These curriculum outcomes demonstrate an emphasis on literature as a means of acquiring vicarious experiences, building reading strategies, and enhancing students' abilities to respond both personally and critically to the books they read and view. As students respond personally and critically to novels and other genre books, they simultaneously turn attention to their curriculum outcomes for speaking, listening, writing, and other ways of representing. In short, reading and responding to young adult literature provides opportunity for students in grades 7-9 to address curriculum outcomes that span all the language arts processes.

In the intermediate English language arts curriculum, students are invited to experience and participate in literature, allowing it to stimulate images, associations, feelings, and thoughts, so that the literature becomes personally significant to them. Literature is offered as a series of experiences that adolescents can enter into and explore, rather than as a fixed body of information about specific texts, authors, and terminology. Meaning is central to literature study. Knowledge of genre, for example, develops from and supports the search for meaning. While exploring the features of various genres, teachers should keep in mind that their purpose is not to teach the technicalities of genre analysis but to bring students and texts together in intellectually and emotionally productive ways. Knowledge about the features of various types of texts becomes important to the degree that such knowledge enables students to recognize the effectiveness of the

use of a particular technique, to deepen their understanding as they think and talk about their interactions with texts, and to grow increasingly confident in their ability to make critical and aesthetic judgements. While it is important that students study some works in detail, a key aspect of the English language arts curriculum, grades 7-9, is that young adults independently select and explore diverse works. They need opportunities to read and reflect on the issues and messages of literature, both to give them pleasure and to extend their understanding. Small-group discussions, such as those that occur within literature circles, can foster students' capacities to respond personally and critically to literature. They should be encouraged to talk to each other about their reading and viewing.

English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide, Grades 7-9 makes clear that reading in all genres of literature as well as exposure to information and media text is essential to the development of a flexible, fluent reader. However, in an age when many texts, particularly media texts, offer more visuals and less print, the novel has an increasingly important place in students' lives. The novel offers an opportunity for sustained reading; it provides an environment that becomes part of the students' experience in a way that shorter selections do not, simply because they are shorter and readers do not live in them very long. The novel offers students extended time to identify with characters and thereby grow in understanding of themselves and others. They can identify with and live through the exploits of fictitious characters. Novels can help them to broaden their horizons, develop their imagination, develop as readers, and enhance the quality of their recreational reading. Through reading and responding to novels, students can become aware of how authors use their talents and skills to create stories. They can note the development of plot and character, discover elements of successful writing (effective words, sentences, conversations, images, organization, etc.), and reflect on the emotions and opinions a novel arouses. Students gain reading power and develop awareness of literary elements through in-depth experiences with novels.

Criteria for Selecting Young Adult Literature

The titles listed in this document have been carefully selected to adhere to the criteria as set forth on page 54 of *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (1996). The selections

- provide motivating and challenging experiences suitable for the learner's age, ability and social maturity
- elicit personal, thoughtful critical responses
- represent a range of styles and literary structures
- have literary merit
- use language effectively and responsibly, and use language that is essential to the work
- broaden students' understanding of social, historical, geographical and cultural diversity
- develop sensitivity and understanding that reflects individual differences such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, class and political/social values

While every book listed in this document has received a careful review according to the criteria listed above, teachers should always exercise particular care in selecting or recommending texts for classroom study and discussion. Teachers are in the best positions to know both their students and the communities in which they live.

The section entitled "Resources" in *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (pp. 54-56) provides further guidance to teachers in the selection and presentation of learning resources. The broad selection of literature listed in this document

- includes prose that deals with issues and ideas related to students' experiences and their evolving understanding of themselves and the world, and texts that they perceive as relevant to their own lives
- balances traditional works with more contemporary ones, including works which bring new or previously neglected voices into the classroom
- allows students to explore their own and others' cultural and literary heritage
- includes works that can be paired or linked to provide for intertextual connections
- provides support to both the independent and the collaborative writing components of the curriculum

Teachers and administrators may continue to refer to *An Annotated Bibliography of Young Adult Literature* for additional assistance when selecting learning resources for their classrooms and school resource centres.

