Utilizing young adult literature in the English Language Arts reading curriculum can offer a solution to the common problem instructors are noticing in the classroom, which is the lack of interest and motivation students have for reading. This reasoning for this issues occurrence may be due to the fact that ELA curriculums tend to consist of only traditional works of literature, which contain minimal amounts of relevancy, diversity, and reading levels. It is the reliance on teaching classical works that have resulted in significant consequences towards student learning and engagement with literature.

Through its broad selection of genres, writing styles, and reading levels, YA literature can help to create instruction that not only sparks student interest and provides appropriate reading material, but helps them grow into knowledgeable, lifelong readers. By utilizing the knowledge and research of other professionals, as well as the thoughts and ideas of other ELA teachers and students, this research has focused on exploring what young adult literature is, important reasons as to why it should be incorporated into the classroom, and effective teaching methods for successful implementation with the intention of creating a stronger, more effective curriculum.

**Young Adult Literature vs. the Literary Canon**

Young Adult Literature

- Category of literature typically written for adolescents between the ages of twelve to eighteen
- Variety of genres, topics, and writing styles
  - Genres: fantasy, romance, historical fiction, nonfiction
  - Topics: race, sexuality, identity, social conflicts
  - Styles: graphic novels, plays, short stories, nonfiction, poetry
- Stories are often the perspective of one or multiple adolescents and are addressing issues relevant to the everyday life of a teenager.
- Diverse stories that center around different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Literary Canon

- Commonly known as the “classics” of literature, which is what most people are familiar with.
- Established by an elite group of scholars, critics, and philosophers who see it as necessary for educational preparation
- Arguably subjective, as it is a list composed by a small group consisting mostly of white, able-bodied men
- lacks diversity in both is narrative elements and readability (Santoli and Wagner, 2004).

### What Are the Benefits of Teaching Young Adult Literature?

1. **An increase of student interest and motivation.** This is because YAL offers a wider selection of books that have relatable characters, stories, settings, and events or issues the characters experience (Hayn et al., 2017). Students are more likely to form a positive relationship with literature when given the opportunity to see the significance and relevancy it brings to their lives and to those around them.

2. **Building a stronger classroom community through participation and connection to the text.** Since YAL typically centers on the lives of adolescents, it provides a sense of self for students. When students are engaged with a text they care about, they are more likely to feel comfortable sharing personal thoughts and ideas among each other, while simultaneously valuing what others have to say (Kent and Simpson, 2020).

3. **Gaining a deeper understanding of and respect for unfamiliar topics, cultures, and experiences that differ from their own.** When students see themselves and others represented in classroom materials, empathy and empowerment flourish while negative stereotypes or prejudice can be decreased (Wopperer, 2011).

4. **Wider range of diverse themes and inclusive reading options.** YAL is powerful in the classroom, its wide range of complex themes involving topics of race, gender, sexuality, and more, inspires growth in students’ abilities through self-reflection and critical thinking. Its selection of texts range in readability, which further encourages growth by appropriately challenging the abilities of all students (those who are HiCap to those that tend to struggle with reading).

### What Methods Are Best For Implementing Young Adult Literature into the Classroom?

- **Engaging student centered learning.** Focus on getting to know students by questioning and discovering their individual reading levels, literacy strengths and room for growth, reading habits, and interests. Uncovering this information will help teachers to format, develop, and modify an efficient reading instruction (Groenke and Scherff, 2010).
- **Assessment of student’s abilities and needs.** After gaining sufficient knowledge about students reading, assessment will provide further aid into understanding how students learn and process the material, highlighting the strengths and areas of growth, and addressing student readiness and interest. Lastly, it showcases the product of student learning.

Examples can include standard tests or essays, but YAL is an access to more creative outlets such as posters, presentations, videos, or other formats that branch away from traditional forms of assessment.

- **Differentiating reading instruction.** Instruction ultimately comes down to learning what student’s need to be successful, and how to meet those needs. Any type of instruction should involve differentiation.

- **With reading instruction of YAL, this can appear in the form of providing alternative text to students who are above or below the reading level of an assigned book, allowing for choice books, using flexible grouping options (individual or groups), open-ended projects, or incorporating a variety of media formats**

### YAL Instruction

English instruction can differ from teacher to teacher, class to class, and student to student. Considering the flexibility needed for instruction, it is vital that all teachers can demonstrate effective teaching practices that support positive learning outcomes. In order to ensure a successful integration of YAL into English instruction and the reading curricula, teachers should…

- **Employ student centered learning.** Focus on getting to know students by questioning and discovering their individual reading levels, literacy strengths and room for growth, reading habits, and interests. Uncovering this information will help teachers to format, develop, and modify an efficient reading instruction (Groenke and Scherff, 2010).

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