

ENGAGING SECONDARY STUDENTS: THE BENEFICIAL INTERSECTION OF YOUNG
ADULT AND CLASSIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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By

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The positive attributes of both classic and young adult (YA) literature are significant, even when read separately. However, the benefits of pairing classic and YA literature together are even greater; yet, teachers often avoid integrating YA literature for a variety of reasons (Velazquez). Both administrators and the parents of students may question the use of YA literature, but that doesn't mean educators should give up on using it as an instructional tool. Many of those in opposition to using YA literature would still agree that students struggle to find motivation to read classic literature. Students often have difficulty comprehending the classics in comparison to YA literature, which they read with ease. In *Using Young Adult Literature to Increase Student Success and Using Young Adult Literature to Increase Student Success and Teach Multiculturalism* Kirsten Toscano discusses classic literature, stating, "these texts are difficult for students to relate to and therefore engage in meaningful and purposeful reading of" (2). As a way to increase student motivation and comprehension of the classics, teachers should find a YA novel that has a similar theme or plot and teach them side by side, or one after the other. In turn, students' motivation and comprehension of the YA novel will also improve when paired with a classic text (Velazquez). The two forms of literature will build up and strengthen one another, making pairing classic and YA literature an extremely effective educational method.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the future of literature. Through studying our past we may better understand our future. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my parents. Without their help and support, I wouldn't be where I am today.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of secondary education today, many educators hold strong opinions when it comes to the use of classic or canonical literature. Some insist on keeping a firm grasp on the past, solely teaching literature that is considered to be classic. Educators who feel this way often dismiss anything else, such as YA literature, as being worthless outside of entertainment, or as inappropriate, and would never consider it material for a classroom. As a high school English teacher, I've experienced such pushback when I first started teaching after being asked to remove certain YA literature from my curriculum. Other educators feel that education should move away from the classics and blow up the canon. The choice is seemingly black and white, either for or against the use of classic literature and/or YA literature in the classroom.

However in life nothing is as simple as yes or no, black or white. Why choose at all? Can one not strengthen the other? Classic literature is required material in many classrooms around the country. Rather than pushing back against teaching classic or canonical texts, educators should find ways to blend these texts with something to which students will be intrinsically drawn, such as young adult literature.

Students often struggle to find the motivation to read classic literature such as *The Old Man and the Sea* or *Romeo and Juliet*. This is often due to a lack of interest, ability to connect to the story, and complexity of the text. Deanna Velazquez conducted a survey of 9th grade students in Seminole County, Florida, titled *Using Young Adult Literature to Teach the Classics*. In the study, which looks at high school students' use of YA literature, she states that, "The classics are certainly works that could potentially teach us a thing or two, however the reality is that students

and young people are reading those classics less and less” (5). Part of the reason students push back against reading classic literature is due to text complexity, as some may struggle to fully grasp the classic text. An education and learning resource from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) contains facts about text complexity in an article simply titled, “Text Complexity.” The HMH article explores factors that should be considered when examining the complexity of a text. The article suggests, “In addition to word difficulty, sentence length, and sentence structure, the genre and structure of the text can also affect the readability of a passage” (“Text Complexity”). While these issues may result in students struggling to read a classic text at first, educators need to look at the text complexity of classic literature as an opportunity for student growth rather than a barrier to be avoided.

Rather than just abandoning the classics, educators should find ways to interest and engage their students in the reading (Velazquez). One way to improve student motivation is by pairing classic works with young adult literature. This concept is further explored in a study titled *Pairing Young Adult and Classic Literature in the High School English Curriculum* by Anne Miller. Miller did a qualitative case study of one high school teacher and her 11th grade students in an American literature classroom in rural Maine. Miller found that, “The teacher perceived increased engagement by the students as a result of the young adult/classic pairing, as well as stronger comprehension and analysis” (61). Essentially both are strengthened by one another as the benefits of each type of literature become magnified. I reference Miller’s case frequently in this thesis due to the similarity of the rural communities in which we teach; moreover, her study focused on an educator who paired a classic text with YA literature in a secondary English classroom.

YA literature isn't used enough in secondary education classrooms across America. Velazquez states, "Educators are not using young adult literature as often as they should in the classrooms as a tool, due to strict curricula" (iii). School administration plays a large role in which literature can be taught in the classroom; often educators struggle to convince their administration to allow them to purchase and teach YA literature because administration and parents alike are concentrated on what students need to do in order to get into college (Velazquez). When I first started teaching at the high school level, almost all of the literature given to me to teach was from the canon. Velazquez suggests, "Colleges and universities expect high schools to teach certain works. Students should be familiar with a list of classics before entering college" (24). However, most administrators could also acknowledge that many students struggle to find motivation to read the classics. If educators take the approach that pairing YA literature with classic literature can improve a growing lack of motivation to read in young adults, administrators may allow YA literature to be taught.

The pairing of YA literature with classic literature can be used to motivate students to read and connect to the classics. Without such pairings, students may struggle to read the required classics. This problem was identified in the HMH article "Text Complexity", which states, "The Common Core State Standards require that all students read grade-level, complex texts, but many readers are not able to do so independently" ("Text Complexity"). Pairing classic and YA literature will give students the motivation to explore themes and concepts they may have struggled to understand if they were reading the classic independently. Miller confirms this in her case study when she notes, "that more students read the classic work in entirety than was typical. She noticed that class discussions were richer because students were able to cite textual evidence and to make connections between characters and themes" (128). Not only were students

motivated to read, they were able to comprehend complex texts when the classics were paired with YA literature.

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills for students to build, and being able to draw connections between to different texts will allow students to have a more complete understanding of each text. Not only will it motivate students, such pairings meet common core state standards in literacy as well. The standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 for 9th and 10th grade English students requires that students, “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare)” (CCSS ELA). An example pairing of classic and YA literature that meets this requirement is pairing *The Odyssey* by Homer with a YA novel such as *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, as many aspects of the YA novel mirror that of the classic. Using pairings as a source of motivation is an approach that any educator could implement successfully if given the proper tools.

This thesis will explore how pairing classic and YA literature in the secondary classroom provides students with a better understanding of complex texts, exposure to new people and cultures, and an increased motivation to read.

Why pair Classic and YA Literature? Grounding in Rural Theory

The purpose of exploring the potential benefits of pairing classic and YA literature in this thesis is to eventually take everything I've encountered in my research and apply it in my classroom. The high school where I teach is located in a rural city with a population of under 6,500 people and produces around 75 graduates each year. Living in a rural community, my students have very little exposure to diverse cultures, which is why pairing classic and YA literature is important. Students can be introduced to diverse cultures through classic and YA literature as both offer equal opportunities for meaningful engagement with unique characters, settings and plots. Written by a professor and eighth grade teacher, Jean Ketter and Diana Buter, "Transcending Spaces: Exploring Identity in a Rural American Middle School" is a study that investigates the need to expose rural students to diverse cultures through literature. Ketter and Buter state, "we believe thinking critically about race, class, and gender is particularly important with our white, rural students, who have had limited exposure to other cultures and ethnic groups except for what they have seen on television or in movies" (47). Why is it important for students to think critically about race through such exposure, and what can it achieve? Ketter and Buter suggest that such literature will allow students to, "connect with characters whose lives and experiences differed vastly from theirs and to see how their own race, class, and gender shaped their understanding of the world" (47). By connecting with these diverse characters, and becoming aware of their own world views, the way in which students perceive the world around them may change for the better.

Ultimately the key lies in how diverse the material provided to the students is, so it falls on the educator to find material worthy of study. In Naomi Watkins and J. Ostenson's article titled

“Navigating the Text Selection Gauntlet: Exploring Factors that Influence English Teachers’ Choice,” they suggest,

Teachers are often forced to choose the “lesser of the evils” from the texts that are already available to them—either based on the titles on a district-approved list or from those texts that are physically in English department closets or on classroom shelves.

These lists, while they understandably address community concerns about the content of instructional materials, do restrict teachers’ autonomy and their ability to find the best match between text and student. (264)

It doesn’t matter the type of literature, classic, YA, or other; the importance lies in the lesson the literature has to offer the student. In a study by Robin Moeller and Kim Becnel titled “You Are What You Read: Young Adult Literacy and Identity in Rural America,” they suggest, “rural young adults in America saw themselves reflected in reading materials marketed to their age group. These reading materials could be digital or paper, visual or textual, fiction or nonfiction” (2). However, YA literature can be considered a significant source of culturally relevant material because it is specifically marketed to young adults. Culturally relevant YA literature is defined by Elsie Lindy Olan and Kia Jane Richmond in “Disrupting the Dominant Narrative: Beginning English Teachers’ Use of Young Adult Literature and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy” as “texts written specifically for young adults that connect to and bring insight into students’ diverse cultural and personal realities and identities in and outside the classroom” (2-3).

When planning their study, Ketter and Buter hypothesized that “young adult literature could help students connect to characters with unfamiliar experiences and unlearn stereotypes

created from lack of experience” (48). Why is reading YA literature so important? The answer is simply that when students read YA literature and experience other cultures through the text, they may come to realize stereotypes they’ve had engrained in them since childhood as a result of a lack of exposure are untrue and unfair. In her case study, Miller found, “The students demonstrated a greater capacity to empathize with characters in the classic novel after reading the young adult work” (128). As students come to these realizations, they will find the *motivation* to continue to read other similar forms of literature, which is why pairing YA literature with classic literature is the central focus of my thesis. The exposure YA literature provides will be mirrored with the classics, leading students to find the motivation to read classic literature when it’s paired with YA literature.

Unfortunately many of my students don’t plan to take the traditional path after high school and they, and their parents, don’t place any real value on education. In their study of rural students Moeller and Becnel suggest that, “Many of them live in communities that do not prioritize literacy, reading, and education. The offerings in the school and public libraries are slim and unappealing, making teens feel that they have no one who can help them seek out material that they might find appealing and useful” (6). The challenge becomes how to motivate rural students to read literature that will expose them to new experiences? One potential answer: pairing classic literature with YA literature.

Part 1 – What is considered Young Adult Literature and why is it needed?

Young Adult, or YA, literature is often overlooked in the traditional classroom, however the benefits of incorporating it into lesson plans is limitless. But what exactly is considered YA literature? Herz and Gallo (2005) list some of the characteristics of YA literature, which include:

- The main characters are teenagers.
- Length averages about 200 pages although many are much longer.
- Point of view is typically first person, and a teen character speaks in a teen voice rather than an adult looking back.
- Language is contemporary and vocabulary is accessible to readers of average ability.
- Setting is most often contemporary but also can be historical, futuristic, or imaginative depending on genre.
- The stories contain characters and issues that are familiar and relevant to teenagers.
- Parents often play a minor role; they may be emotionally absent or may be “the enemy.”
- Plot and literary style are typically “uncomplicated but never simplistic.” Nevertheless, many complex works exist.
- Traditional literary elements are present. (10-11)

The simplest definition of YA literature is that it is literature that was written for young adults. While young adults aren't the only people that enjoy such novels, the target audience are those considered young adults. Attempting to place YA literature into a specific age group, such

as 14-18, is flawed. The term *young* is a general term and doesn't refer to a specific age, and in the same way neither does *young adult* (Merriam-Webster). That being said, the most common target for YA literature is students that are in middle school or high school.

Dialogue and language are also key identifiers in defining YA literature. In her aforementioned article, Deanna Velazquez states, "The language young adults use in their daily lives and the issues that they discuss are the same ones that are found in young adult literature" (8). Similar language is the first step in building a connection between the reader and the characters in the novel. For example, while designing a unit plan (See Appendix A) for this thesis which uses *The Odyssey* to *The Lightning Thief*, I had to consider that while some students may struggle with the language used in Homer's epic. Due to the similarity in language, reading *The Lightning Thief* would be much easier for students to understand and would help them form a connection between themselves and the two forms of literature.

YA literature has many benefits that classic literature cannot offer. Toscano explores the uses for YA literature in her article when she states, "Teachers that hope to promote social and racial justice through culturally relevant teaching can do so through the use of young adult literature" (3). Classic literature cannot be culturally relevant by its very definition. In their article, Elsie Olan and Kia Jane Richmond suggest "YAL can help beginning teachers create culturally responsive connections with their students, which provides relief from the dominant narrative" (21). Classic literature doesn't always offer a storyline that every student can connect to; depending on the book, there may not be any students that are able to feel the novel is relatable. A novel that only has Caucasian characters wouldn't be as relatable in a culturally diverse classroom. YA literature gives far more opportunity for variety (Toscano).

Additional perspective as to why YA literature is so effective at building culturally responsive connections can be seen in a study titled “Engagement With Young Adult Literature: Outcomes and Processes” by Gay Ivey and Peter H. Johnston. The article suggests, “Features of contemporary texts, such as multiple narrators, shifting perspectives, and multimodalities, invite readers to consider varied viewpoints on personal and social problems, including those normally under represented” (257). Even if a text doesn’t obviously contain a specific cultural reference, if it contains *multiple narrators* and *shifting perspectives* it still teaches an important lesson. These writing techniques encourage students to see things from more than just one side, which can achieve the same goal as having students read literature with specific cultural references because they both help to build empathy and understanding (Ivey and Johnston). Culturally responsive connections are just one of the many benefits of utilizing YA literature in the classroom.

Another reason as to why YA literature gives students a feeling of connection is because such texts are emotionally relatable. Olan and Richmond argue, “YAL provides a way to meet the emotional needs of students in both settings because for many of their students, there is more opportunity for tapping into characters’ emotions through YAL” (21). Many of the reasons an emotional connection is possible are really the same as listed above by Herz and Gallo, such as similarity in age, vocabulary the characters use, or even the perspective in which the novel is written. The beauty of YA literature is that it provides a wide variety of topics and storylines, meaning there is the potential to form an emotional connection for every student.

Most importantly, YA literature motivates students. To successfully study literature, students need to have a *desire* to read the text. Toscano suggests that, “One way to create interest in reading with adolescent students is with the use of young adult literature” (2). From this interest in reading springs forth motivation. The idea of reading YA literature in place of a more

traditional text sparks the student's interest and once they start reading, it then falls on the story itself to motivate the students to finish the text (Toscano). Sparked by YA literature, students begin to find a desire to read, and that desire becomes contagious when it comes to reading other types of texts, such as classic literature.

The most important aspect of YA literature which helps to foster a desire to read is relatability. In their study, Ivey and Johnston found that, "opportunities to select young adult literature, typically situated in the social networks with which adolescents identify, would foster engaged reading" (257). When students read about a world that contains the *social network* with which they identify they are able to stay engaged with the text and find the desire to read it without complaint. Students fall into different social networks based on their interests, skills, friends and family. For example, a student whose family is in the military and plans to join when he/her turns 18 may not find the motivation to read traditional texts, but would be far more engaged with YA literature that pertains to war.

Often the literature required for certain classes isn't as relatable to students as YA literature. For example, an American Literature 11th grade course requires literature from different eras in America's past. So rather than mandate students read entire works of Henry David Thoreau, such as *Walden* or *Civil Disobedience*, they can read a novel that contains excerpts from these excellent embodiments of American literature. A perfect example of this can be seen in novel *Into the Wild*, which is the true story of a young adult who attempts to live the transcendental lifestyle. Each chapter begins with a quote from Thoreau, or another American author, and ties in directly to what the chapter is about, offering just enough of the classics to meet any requirements yet still managing to keep the students interested.

It's critically important students are engaged and motivated to read any literature they study. In her study, Miller states, "Whether used as the primary literature available to students in school or used to support or supplement canonical literature, YAL advocates argue that it may be at least as effective, if not more so, than canonical literature in engaging students in classroom instruction because of its contemporaneity and relevance to teens' lives" (37). Like anyone, high school students like to read about things that matter to their own lives, and classic literature doesn't always fulfill that desire. YA literature is about the lives of young adults and is therefore more relevant to students that are of the same age. Learning about contemporary and relevant characters, settings, and plot allows students to find the motivation to read YA literature.

The results of Ivey and Johnston's study were that students were so engaged in reading YA literature it started to take away from other class time. They stated, "We often observed students continuing to read as teachers moved on to other activities" (261). These results shows the students *enjoyed* reading, a feat rarely accomplished when teaching other forms of literature. The study interviewed students on how much they enjoyed YA literature and found they also read outside of class, sometimes even in place of watching television (Ivey and Johnston). One of the students in Ivey and Johnston's study said that, "I'll go home, and I'll get engaged in a book instead of just get on the computer and watch TV and stuff like that" (261). Even more impressive was the fact the students noticed this trend in each other, "I see my friend Edward reading a lot. He's always talking about how he's reading at home and, like, reading more than playing video games" (261). Students engaging in discussion of a text outside of class is further proof that YA literature provides students with the motivation to read.

One of the most telling quotes in Ivey and Johnston's study came from a student named Lacey. She stated that, "Before this year, we kind of had to read books they assigned to us, so I'd

pretend to read it, and I just wouldn't care about books at all. But now they give us a choice if we want to read it, where we get to pick the book that we read. I actually read it instead of pretending to read it” (261). Avoiding reading assigned texts isn't uncommon for young adults (Ivey and Johnston). The fact she was given the opportunity to choose a book is what pushed her to pick it up first place and the fact she was able to connect to the YA literature she chose inspired her to finish the novel.

A final quote from a student in Ivey and Johnston's study provides deep insight into the positive psychological effects of reading YA literature, as discussed previously. This particular student, Maya, was having personal struggles and was able to relate to the main character, something she may not have been able to do had she not been reading YA literature (Ivey and Johnston). Maya said she related to the character, “Cause right now she's having problems of her own... It's like I'm helping her with her problems, as well as she's helping me” (261). Maya was able to work her way through her own issues as she read about a character working through their own problems. YA literature won't just have a positive influence on a student's grade, it can help improve their mental health as well (Ivey and Johnston).

Students need to be encouraged to think positively about the important things in their life. YA literature can help to ground students and build them up as it builds up the characters in the novels. Toscano states that, “Young adult literature provides self-affirmation for readers when it conveys characters like themselves” (17). When students read about positive things happening to characters that are just like them, they are able to picture those same positive things happening to themselves (Toscano).

While classic literature has certain benefits that YA literature will never have, the potential of YA literature is no less significant. Classics are classic for a reason and as Velazquez suggests, “Those works withstood the test of time. They were called timeless, and the appeal was made to their universality” (3). However, some may argue the lessons YA literature has to offer are even more important than that of any other kind of literature (Miller). While it’s true that YA literature and classic literature are very different, different doesn’t need to mean bad.

Part 2 – What is considered Classic Literature and why is it needed?

While using YA literature in the classroom is an effective way to motivate students to read, that doesn't mean it should be the only form of literature students encounter. The resources presented in this section will show that classic literature is a necessary part of every curriculum and crucial for student's development in the language arts. While YA literature aids in students' motivation, classic literature provides a greater challenge and therefore offers greater opportunities for students to improve in other areas like comprehension and vocabulary (Balci). The more difficult a challenge is, the more opportunity for improvement. Weight lifters intentionally lift the heaviest weight they can manage as it provides the most physical gains. In the same way, because it is more challenging students will gain more from classic literature as opposed to YA literature, provided they have the motivation to read what most students would consider to be a more boring story. YA literature provides motivation to read, while classic literature provides greater learning opportunities (Miller). Miller found, "The students participating in the case study demonstrated a willingness to persevere with unfamiliar elements in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937/1994) after reading a young adult work that prepared them for major theme ideas in the classic text" (125). It is this very reason that pairing the two has the potential to be so effective. Before examining the limitless benefits of pairing YA and classic literature a question must be answered; what do we consider 'classic literature'?

In Miller's study, she suggests the dictionary definition of classic literature is a good starting point when looking at why the classics are still studied. Miller states that, "A basic definition of 'classic' from Merriam-Webster's Dictionary online (2015) is a useful starting point. Used as an adjective, as in 'classic novel,' it means, *judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind*. Used as a noun, a classic is "a work of art of

recognized and established value;” also, “a thing that is memorable and a very good example of its kind” (11). Classics are often the highest quality literature, are widely recognized for their educational value, and have been so for a significant portion of time. While the term could be seen as subjective, it remains fairly easy to identify classic literature.

Miller suggests that, “Closely related to the term “classic literature” is the “literary canon” or “canonical literature” (13). The difference between them is irrelevant and for the purpose of this thesis the terms will be considered interchangeable.

A significant reason students need to read and study classic literature is because it can be used as a form of SAT or ACT preparation. Most school districts ask their secondary educators to have a strong focus on preparing students to take the SAT/ACT. This focus is sometimes due to funding but more often than not is simply done for the benefit of the students. Most of the test is focused around English, which is why preparing for the tests in secondary English classes is necessary. It is also often required by the administration. As a high school English teacher, I was approached by my principal and was asked to devote one day of the week to SAT preparation using the resource called Khan Academy, which requires students to complete practice SAT questions. I’ve since had to devote roughly twenty percent of my class time in my English 11 class to SAT preparation. I do this for a large portion of the school year. Every year during test time, the administration puts together charts that compare the SAT scores of our students to the surrounding schools in our conference. We’re expected to be on top of the list, but after being towards the bottom multiple years in a row, the administration pushed all of the staff, English teachers most of all, to teach to the test.

Whether educators like or dislike standardized tests is completely irrelevant because students need them to get into college and to succeed in life. It's the job of secondary teachers to prepare students for life after high school. Taking this first step won't be possible for some students without proper preparation. Studying more complex texts, such as classic literature provides students with ample opportunities to prepare for standardized tests. In her article "Teaching Literature in an Age of Text Complexity," Janet Alsup found, "Recent research at Michigan State University by Natalie Phillips has demonstrated, through MRI technology, that reading and engaging in close reading of Jane Austen's novels results in thinking as complex and rigorous as that associated with doing math problems or studying (Reading the Classics, 2012)" (184). There will be more opportunity for student growth when studying challenging and complex classic texts.

The official SAT preparation source (collegeboard.org) provides evidence that studying classic literature will be far more effective in preparing students to take standardized tests. On one of their official college readiness documents it states, "All of the passages on the Reading Test come from previously published, high-quality sources." The Reading Test always includes:

- One passage from a classic or contemporary work of U.S. or world literature.
- One passage or a pair of passages from either a U.S. founding document (such as an essay by James Madison) or a text in the Great Global Conversation (such as a speech by Nelson Mandela).
- One passage on a social science topic from a field such as economics, psychology, or sociology. (45)

Preparing for the SAT/ACT is one of the most significant reasons that support the need for students to read and study classic literature but there are many other reasons as well. While some argue that classic literature is no longer relevant, others suggest the opposite is true. In a study of the classic novel *Of Mice and Men* titled *Classic Literature in the Modern Classroom*, author Fatma Balci explores the pedagogical benefits of using classic literature. She looks at why classic literature such as *Of Mice and Men* is “significant to the modern student” (2). While the study looks mainly at only one classic novel, the concepts she discusses can be applied to nearly all classic literature taught in high school classrooms around the United States.

While it’s been established that students are motivated to read literature which they can relate to, the question still remains as to what is considered relatable. Balci’s study of *Of Mice and Men* found that, “the issues raised in the story (gender, age and race discrimination, psychological instability and an overall generalization of human beings) are issues which still exist today” (2). She argues that this, inevitably, means students will find a connection to the text. Balci suggests the reasons classics are still so widely read is that they contain these elements which all students have the ability to connect with.

Another example of classic literature that contains these elements is the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare was able to illuminate elements of human nature that will forever be a part of who we are, and will always contain an element of relatability, no matter how many years ago it was written. For this reason, classic literature needs to continue to be taught in high school classrooms. Alsup suggests, “Teens are emotionally and cognitively figuring out how to have their own identity and simultaneously make decisions that do not harm themselves or others. It’s possible that reading narratives, coupled with discussion and writing, has the potential to build the prefrontal cortex and deepen emotional response along with nuanced, nimble thinking” (183).

This is especially relevant when studying *Romeo and Juliet* and the potential benefits from reading such classics are significant because it may aid them in making, as Alsup suggests, “decisions that do not harm themselves or others” (183).

Balci also argues that today’s society, which is dependent on technology and in which students have consequently grown apart from reading, classic literature offers a solution. Balci states that, “As teachers it is our responsibility to once again reunify our students with the literary world and rebuild the gradually diminishing bond” (4). As technology becomes a greater part of young adult’s lives, the literary world becomes less relevant. She warns that, “Young men and women are looking for new and faster ways to entertain themselves that does not require as much effort” (4). While she is referring to television and other forms of technology, this could easily be applied to YA literature as well. While classic literature requires more effort and may not be as fast or entertaining, that may actually be a good thing because the extra effort may lead to significant educational gains.

An additional benefit that classic literature contains could be its historical significance and history lessons (Balci). An example of this can be seen as Balci examines *Of Mice and Men*; “By reading such stories the students gain an insight into the issues caused by the Great Depression and its impact on America as well as the whole world” (5). Reading classic texts with historical significance is like killing two birds with one stone; if the birds were *English* and *History* and the stone was a classic text. For example, while reading about the holocaust in a history book is important, it may not be as emotionally impactful as reading a first-hand account, like in the memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel.

Being able to witness other diverse perspectives is vitally important for high school students whose world view is still in the developmental stage. However, diversity doesn't just apply to culture, it also applies to lifestyle – the way in which one lives. Ultimately, the lifestyle of many of the characters in classic literature has the potential to be far more diverse than that of YA literature due to the time period it was written and/or displays (Balci). Here again, *Of Mice and Men* offers a perfect example. When looking at reasons to choose to teach classic literature, Balci states that, “Another reason for the choice of *Of Mice and Men* is because it tells the story of the struggling working-class citizens in America during the Depression” (5). The unique perspective in the novel gives students the chance to witness a lifestyle far different from their own. Those individuals capable of giving us such insight have since died and one way to witness it is through the classic literature they left behind.

A need for unique perspectives, time periods, societies and cultures is especially relevant in rural communities such as those in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan because the students lack exposure to them in their everyday lives. In “Secondary Teachers Should Expose Rural Readers To Books That Are Culturally Different Than The Student's Personal Choice” Sarah Roiger suggests that, “secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than the student's personal choice” (12). If given a choice, students may avoid reading a book that contains a world view different than what they're accustomed to experiencing in their own lives; for this reason educators need to take it upon themselves to teach both classic and YA literature. Rural communities are especially in need of such exposure because, as Roiger suggests, “students at the more rural schools have less exposure to different cultures than larger schools because of their community and location” (12).

Due to the amount of subject matter I need to cover with my 9th grade students, I only have time to teach one novel as a class. I chose to keep a classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. I did this because it offers many significant experiences that differ from the lives of my students. Living in the rural Upper Peninsula, my students don't have as much exposure to Southern culture or African American culture as they would, say, growing up in a metropolitan area or in a Southern American city. While reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students are introduced to a time period in which they can never experience for themselves. Harper Lee was the same age as the narrator in 1933, and although the book is fictional, the setting and culture present in the book are not. Many of my students have never, and may never, visit the South. By reading the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird* they learn about the past, Great Depression Era, the south, and most importantly the dangers of racism and discrimination in previous centuries and in the current millennium. As the students follow the plight of Tom Robinson, an African American in the novel, they can't help but feel anger towards the injustices that occur. Students can also learn about dialects and code-switching between dialects while reading about one of the characters in chapter 12 code-switching in the story. While students may not have picked up *To Kill a Mockingbird* to read on their own, as they would have with YA literature, after I require them to read it, I often have students come back, sometimes years later, and tell me that it's their favorite book.

The literary value of classic texts is undeniable; however, that doesn't mean it should be the only kind of text utilized in the high school classroom. Educators should strive to find ways to incorporate both classic and YA literature into their lessons. Often classic literature is the only text being used. This discrepancy in education is addressed by Toscano when she states, "Many high school English teachers would find it difficult to adopt young adult literature in the

classroom because of the perceptions of its literary value. Canonical texts are believed to be the only ones of literary merit and therefore the only works used in most curriculums” (2). Rather than worrying about which is better, classic or YA literature, it’s better to accept that they both have something to offer students. However, whether it’s classic or YA literature, students need to be able to find the motivation to read.

Part 3 – A decline in student motivation to read

Why do students struggle to find the motivation to read? One misconception suggests a lack of motivation comes solely from an inability to read well, but this is not the case. In *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* Judith Hayn suggests, “One thing is clear – being a competent reader does not necessarily equate to being an engaged reader” (67). Part of the reason students struggle to read the classics is due to an inability to connect to the author and/or characters. (Hayn) A study done by Hayn found that “students preferred characters their own age” (70). While some of the classics contain younger protagonists, this is obviously far more common in YA literature. This same study found another reason for a lack of motivation comes from a lack of interest, leading researchers to consider what garnered interest in reading. Hayn found that “students did not want to wait to see what exciting things might happen; they wanted the books to grab them right away” (71). Students today are often too impatient to read an entire book, especially one that doesn’t offer immediate gratification (Hayn).

A lack of motivation only grows as students do. High school students in particular seem to have a distaste for reading at times. In “Factors that Influence Students' Motivation to Read Across Grade Levels” Kathrine Torres states, “Research shows that students start off motivated and very eager to learn but this motivation towards reading slowly decreases as they get older because of environmental and social factors” (17). Some of the social and environment factors Torres is referring to include an increased homework load, access to friends, vehicles, use of social media, and peer pressure to name a few (Torres). However, while it may not initially be apparent, often a lack of motivation to read is implanted at an early age. In her study Torres found that, “children with lower reading levels had a lower motivation to read, when increasing the children’s reading skills there was not an increase in motivation” (16). While it certainly isn’t

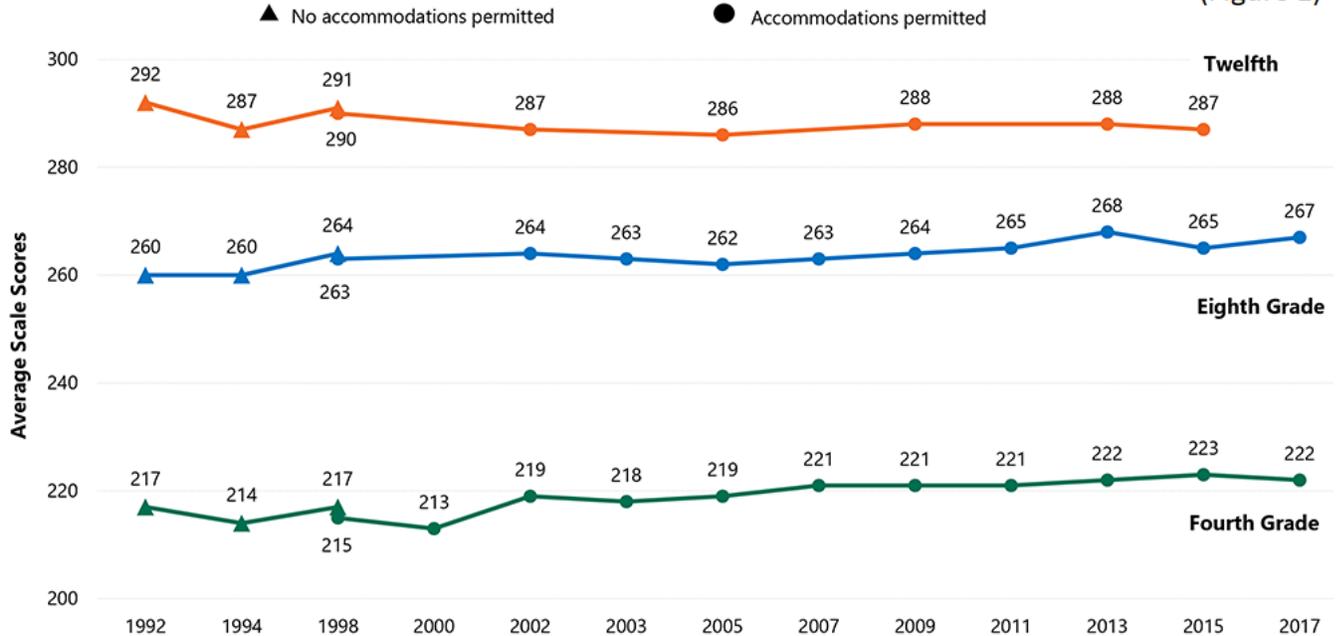
surprising that students “with lower reading levels had a lower motivation to read” (16), the fact this motivation can’t be increased, even when the student becomes a proficient reader, is surprising. It falls on educators to identify these students early and find ways to motivate them and foster a love of reading, before reading is ruined for them long term.

Both age and reading level can be overcome with the help of a good educator; however, parental involvement is also crucial (Torres). Especially from a young age, one would assume parents can help students find the motivation to enjoy reading, but is that really the case? Torres found evidence on both sides of the theory, some suggesting parental involvement helps while other suggesting it actually causes a decrease in student motivation to read. (Torres) Adolescents often have an innate desire to do the opposite of what they are told, especially when pushed too hard. After extensive research into both sides of the issue she found that, “while there has been research that showed a negative correlation between the two, parents should not take this as an indicator that they should not be involved in their child’s education, since more research has shown the positive impact of parental involvement” (22). Torres suggests that a possible solution to students’ lack of motivation starts with parental involvement from a young age, despite what some studies have shown.

A decrease in student’s motivation to read becomes clear when examining the lack of improvement for secondary reading scores over the past few years. The *National Center for Education Statistics*, or NAEP, created the following graph to show trends in reading proficiency from 1992-2017. The goal of education is improvement, and while improvement in reading proficiency is occurring in the lower grade levels, in secondary education the scores have decreased over the years (fig. 1).

Trends in NAEP Reading Scale Scores, by Grade: 1992-2017

(Figure 1)



Note: In 1996, NAEP began transitioning toward allowing testing accommodations for students with disabilities and for limited English proficient students. Between 1996 and 2002, scores were reported for samples with and without testing accommodations, while a new baseline was being established. Beginning in 2002, all NAEP assessments allow accommodations. Accommodations may include extra time, one-on-one administration, use of magnifying equipment, translation of assessments, or the use of bilingual dictionaries and are determined by state and district policies.
 Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Reading Assessments. Accessed through the NAEP Data Explorer at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

childtrends.org

Fig. 1. “Trends in NAEP Reading Scale Scores, by Grade: 1992-2017”

The decrease in reading proficiency is directly correlated to a decrease in motivation to read. As seen in the graph above, students in lower grade levels improved over the years as expected while the older students’ scores fell (fig. 1). With the ever growing quantity of distractions available to young adults, finding ways to give them motivation to read becomes a challenge. For some reason younger students have been able to find the motivation to keep improving their reading scores while young adults have struggled to do so. The burden of providing the motivation to read and improve student’s reading scores fall on their educators. YA literature offers a possible solution.

The decline in reading proficiency could also be tied to the decline in efficiency as they both follow a similar pattern over the years, even going as far back as the 1960's. A study by Alexandra N. Spichtig titled "The Decline of Comprehension-Based Silent Reading Efficiency in the United States" found results similar to those found in the previous graph. The 2016 study found that, "The results of the current study suggest that present-day students are less efficient readers than their 1960 counterparts. The data on reading rate and eye movement patterns suggest the strong likelihood of a decline in word recognition automaticity" (252). The study doesn't just identify the issue but offers of few possible explanations as to why this decline has occurred as well.

Spichtig's study found students today are slower readers and that they, "read less efficiently, persisting in word identification and systematic decoding of text rather than reading holistically and with automaticity" (253). As mentioned above, it falls on the educators to first identify and then attempt to address these discrepancies. The study also directly addresses the flaws of our current education system by suggesting that, "plausible contributing factors, including a less than optimally calibrated approach to text complexity and insufficient silent reading practice" (253). The *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts* states that students should, "By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently" (CCSS ELA). By recalibrating how educators approach text complexity they can help to improve reading proficiency (Spichtig). Instead of solely teaching the classics, YA literature offers a recalibrated look at text complexity that could lead to student improvement through both an increase in motivation to read and comprehension of the text. Fixing the issue of "insufficient silent reading practice" can be done with YA literature as well. To be able to sit and

read a book silently, students need to have the desire and motivation to read. YA literature is the ideal source of motivation to address both flaws of our current education system. The results of Miller's study were similar. She states, "Young adult literature, written with a teen audience in mind and portraying teen characters and their lives, is designed to appeal to high school students by meeting them at the level of their development as readers and human beings" (125).

Many high schools across the United States require that English teachers use classic literature in their lessons (Balci). The issues listed in the study above become the most prominent when classic literature is the only literature being taught. This narrow view of education is one of the main reasons for a decline in student motivation to read. While classic literature offers a plethora of educational opportunities and challenges, it also has significant flaws. Miller notes some of these flaws when she states, "Archaic language, unfamiliar settings, and mature, complex themes that are beyond the life experiences of teens pose problems for young adult readers" (19). It becomes a challenge for students to become motivated to read literature they can't relate to or have a difficult time understanding (Miller).

Students develop reading skills at their own pace. This pace often differs drastically, even among students in the same grade or age group. Miller notes that, "When teachers ignore the developmental stages of their students as people and readers and continually expect them "to respond . . . at an aesthetic level to adult-oriented literature" (Herz & Gallo, 2005, p. 19), students may become overwhelmed and disengaged" (20). While some students may find success with more difficult texts, others will struggle, which is why providing a wide variety of texts is important. It's the educator's responsibility to figure out which literature works or doesn't work for their students so they avoid becoming "overwhelmed and disengaged" (Miller).

When students don't feel overwhelmed and are engaged in the reading, they are able to find the motivation to read beyond simply doing it for a grade.

Students need to be able to find motivation for themselves. If educators want their students to continue to read outside of school or after they graduate, they need to motivate and inspire them to *love* reading. Miller states that, "Requiring teens to read literature that they have little or no connection to may meet the needs of the curriculum by addressing the short term goal of complex literary analysis, but not the needs of the student readers" (22). This doesn't mean that meeting the needs of the curriculum isn't important, as an educator it is part of the job, but it doesn't need to be the entire job. A good educator finds balance in everything they teach; literature is no different. Classic literature meets "the needs of the curriculum" while YA literature meets "the needs of the student readers" (Miller). The key to preventing the decline in student motivation to read could lie in pairing classic and YA literature.

Part 4 – Pairing YA Literature with Classic Literature

Until recently, major gaps have existed in the secondary education classroom when it comes to teaching/pairing YA literature with classic literature. In the past, there has been a limited amount of scholarly work available on YA literature according to Miller, who notes that “Hayn et al. (2011) searched three prominent academic databases for research studies about YAL, finding only twenty-seven articles between 2000-2010. I replicated the database search of Hayn et al. for the years 2011-2017 and found eleven articles about YAL” (Miller 16). While recently the exploration into the use of YA literature in conjunction with classic literature has grown, most literary works that discuss classic and young adult literature revolve around the concept that canonical literature needs to be substituted with YA literature because, “the American high school English curriculum is dominated by a narrow list of classics, virtually unchanged since the late 19th century” (Miller 19).

Rather than working against each other, YA literature can be paired to work in tandem with classic literature. Without the classics, the young adult literature being produced today wouldn't exist. There is also a gap in how most educators approach teaching classic literature, often stemming from where the focus is directed: the authors. This split can be bridged by directing focus to the pairing of the texts. By examining what the classic text and YA text have in common such as theme and plot, the focus can be removed from the authors. The value of a text doesn't always lie in the author's intent but in what the reader is able to take away.

In a text on teaching the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts titled “Responding to Young Adult Literature: A Motivational Perspective,” Maureen McLaughlin and Alexandria Gibb-Lucas state that, “Motivated learners believe they can be successful and are

willing to try to read more challenging texts” (78). The first step is building confidence by providing a text that students will have a greater desire to read. YA literature will help to build this confidence and belief in themselves, a confidence the students can carry over when attempting to study more challenging classic texts (McLaughlin and Gibb-Lucas). Motivation is the key to success and YA literature is the key to motivating students to read.

The same article by McLaughlin and Gibb-Lucas contains a list of reasons students are motivated to read:

- the tasks in which they engage are relevant and the materials they read represent various genre and reading levels;
- they make choices about what they read and how they engage in literacy tasks;
- they engage in sustained silent reading;
- they interact with others about their reading and receive positive feedback from teachers. (78)

The list above can be applied to both classic and YA literature. Finding “relevant” material which the students choose and then having them “engage in sustained silent reading” while they also “interact with others about their reading” is the basis of literature study (McLaughlin and Gibb-Lucas). While the list above can apply to both classic and YA literature, when it comes to “making a choice,” YA literature is the front-runner as students will almost always choose to read YA literature over anything else. It’s this reason that pairing required classic literature with content that isn’t required, like YA literature, is an effective teaching method.

While classic literature can often provide a greater challenge, YA literature can give students a path forward when attempting to read a challenging text. YA literature provides both motivation and aids in understanding texts with more difficult text complexity. In some ways YA literature could be seen as a stepping stone for young adults to “read widely and deeply from a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts” (CCSS ELA). Miller suggests that, “Young adult novels can provide an excellent means of teaching the elements of literature and its conventions, paving the way for the study of more complex works” (32). In the same way a sturdy house must have a strong foundation, young adults must have a solid base of literary knowledge to build upon. In order to achieve this task students must first be motivated to read.

As previously stated, both classic and YA literature have their benefits. Rather than teach them separately or perhaps not at all, it is far more useful to teach them in tandem. Miller points to the benefits of both forms of literature when she states that, “canonical texts are recognized as having literary value and lasting quality. Young adult literature appeals to teens because of its contemporary and diverse characters and situations” (34). Teaching both, rather than one or the other, allows educators the chance to meet both the literary and motivational needs of their students.

While identifying all the benefits of pairing YA literature and classic literature may not be possible because there are so many, one additional benefit relates to student confidence. Students need to be confident in reading a difficult classic text, such as *Romeo and Juliet*. If students first become familiar with a similar story in YA literature form, such as *Warm Bodies*, they will be more confident when reading the real thing. The idea of using pairings to build confidence is echoed by Velazquez, who states, “Reading the young adult novels before or after

reading the classics may help students be more confident and independent readers” (24). Students will feel more comfortable reading challenging classic literature independently if they’re already familiar with a similar story (Velazquez). To a lesser extent movies can play a similar role in building confidence.

Another significant benefit students receive from pairing YA literature with classic literature is that they can relate to what they’re reading. While students may struggle to connect to classic literature, YA literature provides a bridge between today’s students and classic literature. Velazquez suggests that, “Reading a young adult book with similar themes, symbols, plot, and characters allows for the young adult to better relate to and understand the classic work” (25). Due to the setting and language of classic literature often being so different from what students are accustomed to reading, they often struggle to find the motivation to read. If students first read a YA literature book that has “similar themes, symbols, plot, and characters”, yet also contains a setting and language the students are familiar with, they will be able to “relate to and understand the classic work” (Velazquez).

YA literature provides more opportunity for teachers to implement scaffolding into their approach to teaching a novel (Miller). While students may be lost from the start when trying to read classic literature, YA literature ramps up slowly in difficulty. Teachers can start out with concepts that are far easier for students to grasp and work their way up to more challenging lessons. Miller states that, “Less experienced readers benefit from the scaffolding that is provided through a text that contains characters or themes that are relevant and familiar to the reader” (43). The content of YA literature is such that it allows students to gradually develop skills like critical thinking and reading (Miller). Not only can teachers easily scaffold YA literature by itself, the scaffolding is able to continue to build, leading students into the more

challenging classic literature. Miller suggests that YA literature can scaffold classic literature, “by providing students with recognizable characters and situations with which to grapple, preparing them to consider similar themes that arise in less recognizable ways in the classic text” (81-82). The scaffolding of such a pairing not only makes the classic easier for students to comprehend, but more enjoyable to read as well.

Miller conducted a case study, pairing classic and YA literature. She found that, “pairing a YA novel with a classic novel would engage the students and make the classic novel more accessible to them, improving comprehension and supporting a more positive view of the classics and reading in general” (68). Not only are students more interested in reading the classics, they are better able to comprehend what they read. The classic novel *Of Mice and Men* was used in the case study and paired with a YA novel titled *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. She found that students were more engaged with reading the classic this time compared to her previous classes (Miller). Miller suggests that the increased engagement with the classic was due in part to “using the young adult novel first as an introduction to the themes in the classic novel” (77). Using classic and YA literature pairings that have similar themes will allow students to make thematic connections for themselves and in doing so, increase their engagement with both texts. The effectiveness of pairing YA and classic literature is undeniable, as Miller found, “Students in the case study class demonstrated greater interest in the classic novel than the teacher had perceived with previous classes that had not read the young adult text” (126).

Miller’s study also found ways to overcome obstacles in pairing classic and YA literature, such as pushback from administrators. She even found that, “The pairing of novels also effectively supported students in demonstrating proficiency in one of the school’s graduation standards” (81). While these standards may not be as important to the teachers and

students, the administrators will be far more likely to allow such pairings if they are helping students meet “the school’s graduations standards” (Miller). The case study Miller performed provides strong evidence that pairing classic and YA literature is an effective educational method that should be adopted across schools nationwide.

Clearly, the benefits of pairing classic and YA literature are numerous. Examples of texts that would benefit from being paired together are nearly limitless. A few potential pairings of classic and YA literature I plan to one day explore, and potentially utilize, include: *Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway) and *Unbroken* (Hillenbrand); *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare) and *Warm Bodies* (Marion); *The Odyssey* (Homer) and *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan); *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee) and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (Schmidt); and *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury) and *The Hunger Games* (Collins). Many of these texts can be found in the Common Core State Standards ELA list of exemplar texts, including, *The Odyssey*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (CCSS ELA).

One of the most challenging classics on the list above, *The Odyssey* by Homer, is one of the easiest to pair with YA literature. *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan uses Greek mythology as its inspiration, including myths from *The Odyssey*. Truthfully *The Odyssey* could be paired up with any novel from the series about Greek mythology by Rick Riordan; however, *The Lightning Thief* is the book the students will be most familiar with and therefore the most interested to read. The fact that *The Lightning Thief* is a partial retelling of the original Greek myth creates the perfect opportunity to draw connections between the two texts, which is the main goal of any literary pairing.

While the previous retelling is a little more straight-forward, the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare is retold in a very unique way in the novel *Warm Bodies* by Isaac Marion. The main characters in *Warm Bodies* are named 'R' and Julie, and represent Romeo and Juliet from the original Shakespearean play. *R* is a zombie while Julie is not, and much like the original characters they are based on, their love is forbidden; yet the ending is much different. As students read a novel about forbidden love, their intrigue will grow for the play as well. They will want to understand the origin story of such a unique book and will become motivated to read the original *Romeo and Juliet*. There are significant opportunities I developed for lessons, such as creating a comparison chart that looks at the relationship between Juliet and Julie and 'R' and Romeo, which will help students understand what goes into character building and how such characters are universally relatable.

While any retelling of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* might be inadequate, there are certainly examples of YA literature that can work in tandem with the classic. The novel *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Gary Schmidt has many of the same features as the timeless classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both are historical fiction, based in the early 1900's, and both deal with the issue of race. However, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* was written for young adults and is a less complex text; this is also due in part to the fact it was published more recently, in 2004. Students will better understand the issues of poverty and race in *To Kill a Mockingbird* if they also read *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. At the same time, *To Kill a Mockingbird* will provide additional literary value while *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* has greater entertainment value and will provide motivation for students to read both books.

Another example of a pairing that isn't necessarily a retelling, but is equally as effective, is the classic *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. *The*

Hunger Games could be considered the epitome of YA literature. Unlike the previous pairings mentioned above, these novels have very different plots, yet the underlying dystopian theme is very similar. Both books present corrupt dystopian governments that subjugate the societies in unique methods. While somewhat similar, the differences are such that the pairing of *The Hunger Games* and *Fahrenheit 451* provides the perfect opportunity for a comparison essay. Starting with a side-by-side comparison chart, students would look at the similarities and differences between the two governments and societies. They would then translate their findings into an essay that analyzes specific textual evidence showing these comparisons. While some form of comparison chart and writing assignment would be effective for any pairing of classic and YA literature, it would be particularly effective in this case due to the unique thematic connections.

An even greater gap between two novels that are being paired together can be found when pairing *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway with the YA novel *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand. Here again, however, the differences in these two stories provides an opportunity for important educational lessons. *The Old Man and the Sea* follows the fishing journey of an old man while *Unbroken* is about running, endurance, and ultimately war. While students may need to work harder to find the connections, that doesn't mean they aren't there. By having to work harder to achieve the comparison, they'll learn to look deeper to draw connections. Some of the previously mentioned pairings had obvious connections, and while that can be an effective educational tool, so can challenging students to look deeper for a connection. That doesn't mean there aren't obvious connections however, as both stories deal with the open ocean and shark attacks. When looking deeper, students will find connections between the endurance of long distance running, the intense story that takes place in *Unbroken* and the reason

that the old man goes fishing in *The Old Man and the Sea*. While the plots are not really similar, the lessons taught by both the classic and YA literature are nearly identical and when paired together will effectively strengthen the student's understanding of both books. An assignment that would push students to explore the connection between these two different forms of literature starts with having them tell their own story. Students would display their understanding of the deeper connections present within the two texts by writing a short story that shares the same lessons and themes as *Unbroken* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, but has a completely unique plot. They could write about overcoming adversity, perseverance, and belief in themselves.

While some of the above pairing are retellings and some simply contain thematic connections, both contain the possibility for educational growth. The five pairings of classic and YA literature listed above only scratch the surface of potential educational opportunities that are possible when students are asked to think outside the box and draw connections between two different forms of literature. There are no examples of classic literature currently being taught in schools that can't be paired with at least one YA novel. Classic literature has many literary benefits, as well as challenges, and therefore needs to be taught in classrooms (Balci). YA literature provides significant motivation, entertainment, and diversity and also needs to be taught in classrooms (Miller). As Miller found in her case study, "The students agreed that reading the young adult novel first supported and enriched their comprehension of the classic work. By carefully selecting engaging, high quality young adult literature to pair with certain classic works, we can enliven the high school English curriculum, engage students in reading more often and more deeply, and preserve what is most effective from the high school canon of classics" (126). Rather than attempt to choose one or the other, educators' use of literature will

be most effective if they are open to the possibility that each form of literature offers its own important aspect of education. Even more importantly, if classic and YA literature are paired together they strengthen one another, allowing students to get the most out of each opportunity.

Part 5 – Obstacles

There are many obstacles educators could face when attempting to pair YA literature with classic literature. The first obstacle is quite simply being allowed to teach YA literature in the first place. Administrations around the country often have strict curriculums and restrictions dictating what educators can and cannot teach in their classrooms (Velazquez). Convincing a principal or other administration to purchase and allow YA literature to be taught will almost certainly be a challenge for any educator, but that doesn't mean it isn't a battle worth fighting. This obstacle is acknowledged by Velazquez when she states, "With the curriculums so strict in school districts today, just reading a young adult book in class when there are plenty of classic works that could be focused on is rare. However, teachers need to be aware that young adult literature is beneficial, regardless how it is used" (26). In the case of YA literature, the rewards outweigh the risks, and all educators should pursue utilizing it within their classrooms.

Some administrations may be hesitant to change in general, which is why selling them on the benefits of pairing YA literature with the classics is so crucial. While they may not be willing to listen to a teacher who wants to teach a YA novel by itself, administrators may be more accepting if they realize it is being used to strengthen the approach to teaching classic literature that the school already requires/possesses. In Miller's study she found that, "Remarkably, high school English reading lists have changed only slightly since the turn of the 19th century" (3). This stagnation of literature in education will only be reversed if teachers are willing to take the necessary steps. While it may not be easy, if a teacher takes the correct approach to how they plan to use YA literature, then they can take the first step in convincing the administration to purchase texts, or at least allow them to be used in the classroom.

Another significant challenge comes in the form of funding. Funding is especially difficult in rural communities, such as the one I teach in. As Roiger suggest, “Money is something that is hard to come by, especially when limited resources are available” (16). As a high school English teacher, this is a challenge I face often. Roiger states that, “If students are affected by money issues, then their education can be affected, leaving them with less opportunity for resources to help them further their knowledge” (16). If an administration allows teachers to use YA literature in their classrooms that doesn’t guarantee the administration will pay for it; in fact, they probably won’t. However, there are still ways to obtain the funds to buy a classroom set of YA literature books. Applying for grants is a common method used to obtain classroom sets of books, like the MEEMIC grants available in Michigan and Wisconsin. Crowdfunding via social media is another way this can be done. Sharing crowdfunding sites like donorschoose.org or gofundme.com on Facebook and Twitter is a common way teachers are able to reach others and raise money to buy books. Often people will help out with whatever they can afford when they see it’s for a good cause. Sharing the crowdfunding link to specific local pages is effective because people will give back to help out if they attended the school or have family members that attend the school. Often students’ parents will give back to the school their child attends; however, parents aren’t always allies in an educator’s attempt to pair classic and YA literature together.

Students’ parents provide challenges in just about every facet of education. This is particularly true when it comes to teaching YA literature. Some parents may not want their child’s school time to be *wasted* on YA literature because they feel such literature should only be used for entertainment (Miller). Pressure from both parents and society limits what administrators are willing to allow as well. Miller states that, “It is now expected that all children

will complete at least a K-12 education” (3). These expectations can vary district to district but all parents want the best for their children, and society often demands students have a minimum of a high school diploma to make a livable wage. Often parental anger or mistrust of YA literature is misplaced due to ignorance. Teachers need to realize they should be educating both students and parents alike when it comes to the benefits of YA literature in the classroom.

Inevitably, some parents may not feel comfortable with a text that is being read in class. For example, at a rural high school located in the Upper Peninsula, an educator received pushback from parents for teaching a YA novel. This teacher taught the book *13 Reasons Why* his first year teaching and used it as an opportunity to discuss important topics that are relevant to teens, such as bullying and suicide. Some of these topics were also present in a play the students had read, *Romeo and Juliet*. However, due to some of the sexual content and language in the book, parents complained to the superintendent; therefore, the teacher was told not to teach the book anymore, even though he had a classroom set. Problems such as this one often have no solution without teachers putting their careers in jeopardy.

Parental dislike and mistrust of YA literature is mirrored by others in society (Miller). The overall view of YA literature is that it isn't worthy of study. Miller states that, “Other contributing factors may be a general conception of YAL as a subgenre of children's literature, and/or publisher's marketing tactics that promote titles not necessarily recognized by reviewers or other experts as high quality works; thus, YAL may not be widely recognized in the literacy field as worthy of research” (43). While it's true that YA literature may often be marketed to young adults for entertainment purposes, that doesn't mean it doesn't contain anything of literary value “worthy of research” (Miller).

There are also logistical challenges involved in pairing YA literature with classic literature. The amount of time it takes to read two full length novels back to back is extensive and would give even the most experienced teacher a challenge. Many teachers break up the novels they teach and rarely have units that last the amount of time it would take to read two novels. However, there often isn't a rule that says the novels need to be read in a set amount of time, and as long as teachers remind themselves to take the necessary time, such pairings can still be effective.

Literature circles provide another possible solution to the problem of limited time. Literature circles allow small groups of students reading the same book to discuss what they read in a small group setting. In "What's the Next Big Thing with Literature Circles," Harvey Daniels suggests that "literature circles have been a valuable addition to many kids' school experience, helping to grow more self-sustaining, lifelong readers" (10). Students could read the YA literature book on Fridays in literature circles while the students read the classic as a class. Reading excerpts from either the YA or classic literature is also an option.

No matter the obstacle, there is always a solution. Teachers are no strangers to adversity, and while pairing YA literature with classic literature has significant challenges, the potential benefits are worth facing any adversity.

Part 6 – Primary Research

While there are a number of wide ranging theories about the use of YA and classic literature, facts are few and far between. This is due in part to the numerous obstacles listed in the previous section. Anne Miller suggests that, “While many literacy experts advocate for pairing YAL and classics, the field is lacking in evidence about the literacy learning outcomes that result when adolescents read a young adult work in preparation for a challenging classic text” (17). One of the reasons for writing this thesis is to start to bridge this gap in education.

The best solution to overcome many of the obstacles preventing pairing YA literature with the classics involves doing research on a smaller, controlled scale. Rather than attempt to obtain and teach two full length novels, I feel pairing poetry and short stories can offer insight into the real thing, while simultaneously being an effective educational method itself.

I first came up with the idea of pairing classic literature with YA literature while teaching poetry last year. I pair poems by classic poets such as Langston Hughes with rap lyrics by rappers like Tupac Shakur. I saw firsthand the powerful affect pairings can have on student motivation as my students often came back and told me how much they enjoyed my poetry unit. I tried a similar unit this year with the intent of comparing these *poetry pairings* to teaching full length *novel pairings*. While poems and novels are vastly different and lyrics aren’t necessarily considered YA literature, the principle behind pairing them together remains the same. Determining the meaning of words is required by the CCSS ELA under the standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, which states students should be able to, “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings;

analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices” (CCSS ELA). The best way to ensure student comprehension of poetry is to pair classics with contemporary work.

While doing my research, I paired “Harlem: A Dream Deferred” (1951) by Langston Hughes with “Juicy” (1994) by Notorious B.I.G. in my freshmen English 9 class. Most of the students were familiar with the song, but none of them had heard of Hughes. I used this pairing in a lesson about imagery as both poem and song contain imagery in just about every line. The meaning behind the two is vastly different, but the motivation to read both remained steady. When asked which they preferred, the lyrics or the poem, roughly 85% of the students raised their hand to say they preferred the lyrics. However, when asked which was more powerful, around 95% responded with Hughes. While there is significant value in teaching Hughes, some of that value would be lost if not paired with something to motivate and draw the interest of the students. This was especially true during the class discussion of the meaning behind “Harlem: A Dream Deferred.” While the analysis of the rap lyrics may have been unnecessary, it opened the door for an important discussion about the meaning of the poem. Students were given a worksheet titled “Illuminating Imagery” which required them to see how Hughes poem demonstrated imagery by appealing to each of the 5 senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, sound). Each line in the poem appealed to a different sense. Students also analyzed the meaning of the poem and attempted to answer the question, “What is the unspoken message the speaker is telling the reader about going after their own dreams?”

When asked about additional benefits of the lesson, some students noted they would look at lyrics in a different way. The interest in both the poem and lyrics was increased, and while the rap lyrics may have held the students interest, the classic poem contained the opportunity for a more meaningful and effective lesson. Hughes poem allowed for discussion about where the

poem came from and why his use of imagery had such a powerful impact on the reader.

Teaching one without the other would either have been boring or ineffective, yet by pairing them together, the lesson became both entertaining and effective.

I've seen how effective such pairings are on a small scale, which suggests it could be equally effective with full length novels. This first-hand research, along with many of the ideas and resources explored throughout this thesis, clearly show that when YA literature is paired with classic literature student motivation will improve.

While I didn't use any classroom sets of YA literature, I still had both my English 9 and English 11 students read different YA books of their choosing to meet the CCSS ELA standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10, which states students should be able to, "By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems" (CCSS ELA). Not all of the students chose to read YA literature, but that was part of the experiment. I told the students they would be reading a book of their choosing every Friday, for 30 minutes, for the remainder of the semester (9 hours a semester), and possibly the school year. Using a method known as *Sustained Silent Reading* or SSR, the students would read silently over a prolonged period of time. SSR is defined by Steve Gardiner in "Building Student Literacy Through Sustained Silent Reading" as, "a time during which a class, or in some cases an entire school, reads quietly together" (Gardiner). I also had the students write a brief summary of what they had been reading every third Friday to keep track of their progress. There were no page requirements per week or books per semester. To receive credit the students simply needed to read silently for the last 30 minutes of class every Friday, as well as write the summary responses. I had them write down the title of the book and the pages they had read over the

previous few weeks. However, the true value lies in the act of reading. As long as students were actively reading during the designated times, they received credit for participation.

As mentioned previously, the definition for YA literature is subjective, which I kept in mind during my research. While it's generally accepted that YA literature contains a young protagonist, contemporary language, and a plot relevant to lives of young adults, it often depends how one interprets these elements of literature that helps to define what is considered to be YA literature. The purpose of this exercise was to see how motivated students were to read YA literature compared to other forms of literature. The first Friday of SSR, I took each of my classes to the school library to check out a book. The book they chose was completely up to them; I didn't put any parameters on their book choices (as long as it wasn't a magazine). I wanted to see how many students would select YA literature if given the option. It should be noted that the library in the high school I teach at has a wide variety of YA literature, but it also has other options as well including classic literature, contemporary adult fiction, memoirs, and nonfiction texts.

While I had a few students state they would only read nonfiction, almost all of the fiction readers selected YA literature. I tallied the numbers after returning to the classroom; the results are represented in the following bar graph (fig. 2):

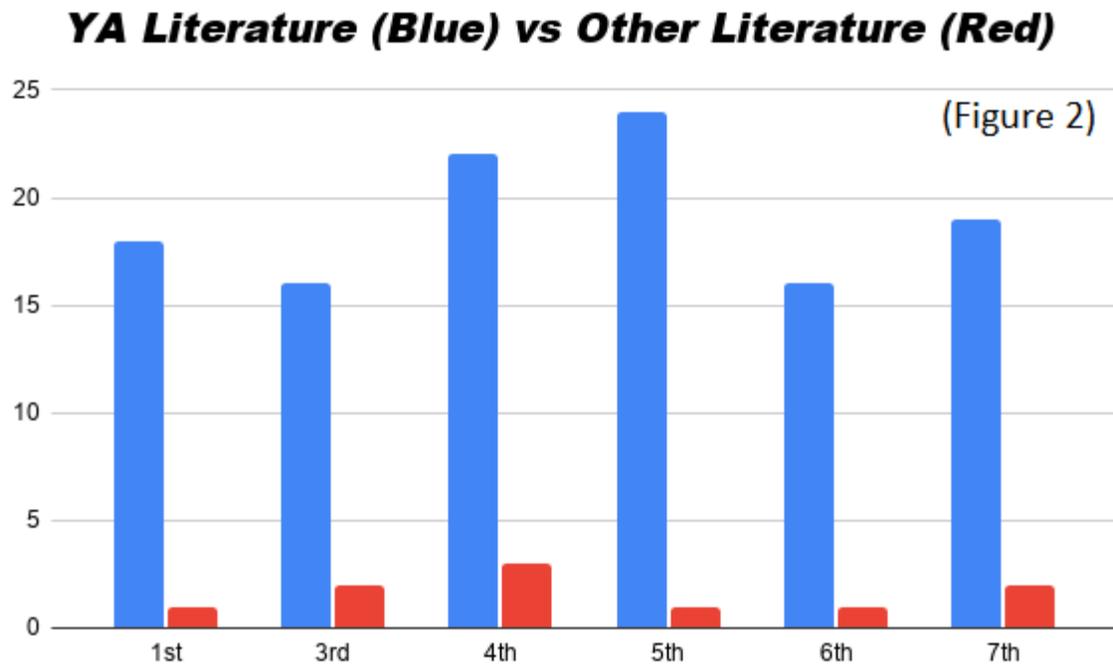


Fig. 2. “YA Literature (Blue) vs Other Literature (Red)”

In first period (11th grade), 18 students selected YA literature and 1 chose another type of text. In third period (11th grade), 16 students read YA literature and 2 read something else. In fourth period (9th grade), 22 of 25 students selected YA literature. My fifth period class (9th grade) included 24 of 25 students who selected YA literature. Sixth period students (9th grade) selected YA texts as well, at a rate of 16:1. Finally, in seventh period (9th grade), 19 students chose to read YA literature and 2 chose other texts. Overall, 115 of 125 students (92%) selected YA literature when given the option. The 10 students who read other texts typically selected nonfiction. (fig. 2) The most common book chosen was *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, perhaps because students were familiar with a television show based on the book. The fact the book was controversial also drew in some of the students. The limited nonfiction chosen was often related to war/military, such as *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand.

The trends in the numbers above were surprising when I first started to tally the results. While it's important to keep in mind that I was very liberal when deciding what to classify as YA literature, 92% is quite a high percentage regardless. Tallying the results of this informal study helped fortify the theory that YA literature is intrinsically linked to a students' motivation to read. When given the choice, students are motivated to read YA literature. YA literature is, by its very nature, motivation for students to read.

A month after student checked out their books from the library (four 30-minute sessions of reading), I asked the students if they had read their books at home or outside of class. I tallied all of the students and found that 88 out of 125, (just over 70%) had read their SSR books outside of class. While it's not guaranteed that all of the students that read at home were reading YA literature, based on the statistics in the previous paragraphs, it can be assumed that the majority were reading YA literature since there were few with any other type of literature. The fact that 70% of students were reading outside of class when it wasn't required seems to support the argument that students are self-motivated to read YA literature.

Another way I've attempted to explore the idea of teaching YA literature and classic literature side by side is with the use of the book *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer. When I first started teaching, I needed to incorporate American literary texts into English 11; therefore, I obtained a classroom set of *Into the Wild*, a nonfiction book that fits with Herz and Gallo's list of YA literature elements. The high school at which I teach doesn't offer an American Literature course for juniors as many school districts in Michigan do, so the administration asked me to incorporate some of the same literature that would be taught in an American Literature class in my English 11 class. The students that sign up for my English 11 class do so rather than taking a college English class and are only taking my class because it's required for graduation. In fact

it's usually one of their only core classes as many of them spend most of their time in automotive or shop classes. A majority of these students are male. It's especially challenging to motivate these students to read, even though they realize the class is required if they want to graduate. *Into the Wild* provides the perfect opportunity for motivating such challenging students. In a way it also tricks them into reading, and more importantly enjoying, classic literature.

The majority of these students don't plan to take the traditional path after school, like going to college and getting a degree, which is what the book is all about. Finding a character that is relatable is, in my opinion, the most significant reason YA literature motivates students to read. *Into the Wild* follows the journey of a young adult that drops out of school, burns the cash he has on his person, and travels the country on foot before ending up in Alaska and trying to survive in the wilderness. While the book is based on a true story, I would still consider it YA literature as it meets the other criteria listed previously in this thesis, such as age of character, contemporary setting, seeing parents as the enemy, and the length of the novel. In fact, because the story is based on something truthful it becomes even more relatable for certain students.

Into the Wild is the perfect representation of pairing classic literature with a relatable, current story. The author starts every chapter with an excerpt from some of the greats in American Literature, such as Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Jack London. The quotes always relate to whatever is happening in the following chapter. This technique provides a seamless transition between the classics and YA literature. Rather than read an entire work by one of the authors mentioned above, students receive an introduction to American literature while reading a story that is far more relatable and one they are more motivated to read. This motivation to read the story of the protagonist leads them to be motivated to read everything else within the book, including the excerpts of American Literature. *Into the*

Wild is essentially YA literature that has classics automatically paired with it, working in tandem as one builds off of and strengthens the other.

The type of pairing present in the novel has multiple educational benefits. While student's motivation to read comes from the YA literature side of *Into the Wild*, the excerpts from the classics offer an opportunity for important, and also required, lessons. The ability to draw connections between the two sides is also a crucial skill students can obtain from studying the book as they attempt to figure out why certain excerpts are placed at the beginning of specific chapters. While American literature is a required course in most high schools, administrations and state standards are often not overly specific with the classics that need to be taught. *Into the Wild* provides educators with a loophole for teaching the classics, or at least excerpts of the classics, by pairing them with YA literature chapter by chapter.

There are numerous opportunities for lessons that utilizes the combination of the classic literature present in *Into the Wild* and the story of Chris McCandless. I've had my students look at setting and character building by comparing quotes from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. The quotes were actual quotes that had been highlighted in McCandless's personal copy of the book. Looking at these quotes, alongside Robert Service's (1874-1958) poem "The Spell of the Yukon," students got into groups of three. Next, they created a person, first giving them a name, and then listing the many characteristics describing someone who would want to attempt the type of self-sufficient lifestyle described in the different texts. The groups then wrote a monologue for their character, imaging what they would sound like and what kind of things they would say. When they finished a member of the group shared the name, characteristics, and a quote from the monologue with the rest of the class.

While my first-hand experience with pairing classic and YA literature is limited due to many of the obstacles listed in the previous section, that doesn't mean I was unable to explore its limitless potential in education. My students were able to find the motivation to read and interact with classic works when they were paired with more entertaining and interesting works. When given the option, my students chose to read YA literature both in and out of class through intrinsic motivation. The students were also able to understand elements of classic works when filtered through the lens of modern works. The informal classroom study of my students' self-selected choice texts and the pairing of a YA literature book with classic literary pieces has motivated me to construct a unit plan to pair *The Odyssey* with *The Lightning Thief* for 9th grade English (See Appendix A).

CONCLUSION

Pairing young adult literature with classic literature could provide students with the necessary motivation to read the classics, rather than simply glossing over or removing the literary cannon from the curriculum. In Miller's study of pairing YA and classic texts, she found, "The students welcomed the complexity of the issues posed in both the young adult and the classic works. They talked with friends about the novels outside of class, expressed strong emotions such as anger and heartache about characters and situations, and at times found themselves losing track of time as they read" (125). Although complex, the students were motivated to read the classic text, and even discuss both books outside of class, as a result of pairing YA and classic literature.

As seen in Miller's study, the greatest benefit that YA literature provides is motivation. She found, "feeling comfortable and successful with the young adult work gave the struggling readers more confidence to tackle the classic novel" (126). While YA literature also contains numerous opportunities for lessons, classic literature usually provides the greatest challenge due to text complexity and therefore the most opportunity for growth. However, motivation is far more important than any lesson because without it such lessons and opportunities are lost. YA literature provides the opportunity for students to receive the necessary motivation to read. In her study, Deanna Velazquez suggests that, "Young adult literature is beneficial in the classroom for many reasons. However, perhaps the most important reason for incorporating young adult literature into the school curriculum is because students will actually read it" (8). The reason "students will actually read it" (8) is because they are able to find the motivation to read it through connecting to a relatable story. Students can see themselves within the text and reflect on their own lives, bringing in a personal and motivational connection. In the future I plan to

continue to use YA literature every Friday during sustained silent reading as well as tie it into some of the classic literature I teach, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Using both classic and YA literature in the classroom is a concept that had been gaining traction in the education community lately. As more educators recognize the benefits of both forms of literature, the endless possibilities are continuing to be explored. To support the timeliness and relevance of pairing YA literature and classic texts, educators can look to publications such as *Young Adult and Canonical Literature: Pairing and Teaching*, published in 2021. In their abstract, editors Paula Greathouse and Victor Malo-Juvera state,

In the last decade alone, the world has changed in seismic ways as marriage equality has been ruled on by the supreme court, social justice issues such as #metoo and BlackLivesMatter have arisen, and issues of immigration and deportation have come to the forefront of politics across the globe. Thus, there is a need for an updated text that shares strategies for combining canonical and young adult literature that reflects the changes society has – and continues to – experience. (Greathouse and Malo-Juvera)

As society changes and grows, so to must our approach to teaching literature. Teachers across the country witness what's happening and recognize the need to change with society by introducing students to both classic and YA literature. This exposure to the combinations of both forms of literature doesn't just present students with these societal changes, but allows them to find the motivation to change themselves as well, which is especially relevant in my district and other rural schools.

Pairing classic and YA literature allows students to find purpose, connection, and most importantly pleasure while reading both forms of literature. By presenting the information

contained in this thesis, it is my hope that any educator will be able to include YA literature in their classroom curriculum, despite any pushback they may receive from parents or administration. YA literature provides a desire to read, student enjoyment, and exposure to culturally responsive literature. Classic literature provides students with challenging text complexity and meets a wide variety of standards and requirements. By exploring the pairing of classic and YA literature, students will strengthen their ability to draw thematic connections while the positive qualities each form of literature contain will be magnified and shared.

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APPENDIX A

9th Grade English – *The Odyssey* and *The Lightning Thief* Unit, “The Hero’s Journey”

Overview: Students will analyze, read and write about *The Odyssey* by Homer and *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan (2005).

Using McDougal Littell’s *Language of Literature: Student Edition Grade 9 2006*, students will read the epic *The Odyssey* by Homer (translated by Robert Fitzgerald). The textbook only has a few of the books from the epic, including books 9, 10, and 12. And from “The Homecoming” portion of *The Odyssey*, books 21, 22, 23. They will read *The Lightning Thief* in its entirety.

Objectives: The objectives of this lesson are centered on motivating students to read *The Odyssey* by first introducing *The Lightning Thief*. Students will learn about the Hero’s journey. They will be required to think critically about the thematic connection between the classic and the YA novel. Students will be exposed to new cultures, themes, as well as the concept of mythology.

The 10th grade English teacher starts the year with a mythology unit, which is why I end the year with one. It acts as transition from 9th to 10th grade English.

Materials: Books (*The Odyssey* and *The Lightning Thief*), computers, notebooks, pencils, projector

Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. (Key ideas and details)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. (Key ideas and details)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. (Key ideas and details)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. (Craft and Structure)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus). (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. (Range of Reading and Text Complexity)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. (Research to Build and Present Knowledge)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A

Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]"). (Research to Build and Present Knowledge)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Comprehension and Collaboration)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source. (Comprehension and Collaboration)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. (Conventions of Standard English)

Day-By-Day Activates and Methods:

Each Friday for the first 6 weeks: Introduce Mythology - Six weeks before starting the unit for *The Odyssey*, I will tell the students we will be discontinuing Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and will be using Fridays to read *The Lightning Thief* both on their own and in literature circles. While in lit circles students will take turns reading and/or read silently while also dedicating some class time to discuss the reading, often answering a prompt from the teacher. By starting the YA literature novel before I introduce the epic, not only will I have a point of reference, but it will also allow the students to finish both works around the same time. They will fill out a close reading study guide as they read and do brief, two paragraph think-pair-share activities every 2-3 weeks.

Monday: The Lightning Thief – For the first day, we’ll read as a class. They will also fill out a close reading study guide as they read. They will take notes on “The Hero’s Journey” during a short lecture.

Tuesday: The Odyssey – Introduction to mythology unit. Students will view an informational PowerPoint about Greek mythology before we start reading *The Odyssey*.

Wednesday: The Odyssey – Students will read and complete a handout (close reading study guide) which will include questions about characters, plot, theme, setting, author’s purpose, and point of view.

Thursday: The Odyssey – Students will read and complete a worksheet on theme and mythology terminology.

Friday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read with lit circles. For the last 20 min of class we will have a class discussion on mythology and the connections between the two texts.

Monday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read in literature circles and discuss “The Hero’s Journey” when they finish.

Tuesday: The Odyssey – Students will read and then summarize the reading with exit ticket.

Wednesday: The Odyssey – As a class, we will read and then go over the study guides before the quiz on Thursday.

Thursday: The Odyssey – Students will take a quiz and then read.

Friday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read with lit circles and also complete a 2 paragraph ‘Think-Pair-Share’ activity. The prompt will be: “How do both Percy and Odysseus follow “The Hero’s Journey” so far in the each text? What are the similarities and differences between each journey?”

Monday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read in lit circles for the last time in the unit. They will be allowed to bring snacks.

Tuesday: The Odyssey – We will read the “Cyclops” part of the epic and then watch the “Cyclops” scene from movie.

Wednesday: The Odyssey – Students will read out loud as a class.

Thursday: The Odyssey – Students will read on their own and then do a 2 Paragraph Writing Prompt.

Friday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read.

Monday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read and then as a class we’ll discuss thematic connections before summarizing the reading with an exit ticket.

Tuesday: The Odyssey – Students will partner read.

Wednesday: The Odyssey – Students will read before studying for the quiz by reviewing the study guides.

Thursday: The Odyssey – Students will take the quiz and then read.

Friday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read and then do a Think-Pair-Share on the progress of “The Hero’s Journey” for both Percy and Odysseus in both books.

Monday: The Lightning Thief – Students will read and have a class discussion on connections to *The Odyssey*.

Tuesday: The Odyssey – Students will read and do some Persona Writing by writing a letter to Penelope, as Odysseus, from Calypso's island.

Wednesday: The Odyssey – Students will read and finish the letter they started the day before.

Thursday: The Odyssey – Students will finish the last book we’ll be reading.

Friday: The Lightning Thief – Students will finish the book.

Monday: The Lightning Thief – Students will have 25 minutes to complete any reading or study guides they have not yet done. They can also use this time to quiz each other. The questions from both study guides are based mainly on the content of the texts. For the last 30 minutes of class we will play Jeopardy to review for the test. Many of the test questions will be used in the game.

Tuesday: Test – I will introduce the final ‘Hero’s Journey’ comparison essay and provide example quotes they can use and examples of comparisons they can make as they write. The essay will build on what students have been writing about and discussing the entire unit. They will build from the prompt: “How do both Percy and Odysseus follow “The Hero’s Journey” so far in the each text? What are the similarities and differences between each journey?”

Wednesday: Students will work on the final essay.

Thursday: Students will work on the final essay.

Friday: The final essay will be due Monday so students will try to finish it in class. It will be homework if they don’t finish it. Students will be graded based on their comprehension of thematic connection between the two texts as well as basic grammar, spelling and format.

References:

Miller, Anne V., *Pairing Young Adult and Classic Literature in the High School English*

Curriculum (2017). The University of Maine, May 2017,

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Velazquez, Deanna L. *Using Young Adult Literature to Teach the Classics a Study on Pairing*

Young Adult Novels with the Classic Works in Secondary English Classrooms. 2011.

University of Central Florida. HIM 1990-2015. 1189.

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(* I used the works of both Miller and Velazquez as inspiration when designing this lesson plan.)