

PREVIEW  
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Introduction **REVIEW**  
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*Young Adult  
Literature*



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**What do you think  
Young Adult Literature (YAL) is?**

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*Young Adult Literature*

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Young adult literature is a category of fiction written for the interest of readers around 12-18 years old.

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## Background

- Teenagers were given their own distinction as a social demographic in the 1940s.
- It wasn't until the 1960s the term "young adult" was coined by the Young Adult Library Services Association to represent the 12-18 age range.
- There are books written before the 60s that are now considered YA although the category was not defined at the time.
- When the genre was created, it referred to any realistic fiction, set in a contemporary world (not an imagined one), that addressed problems and circumstances pertaining only to teenagers.

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## Background

- Because social and cultural issues change with the times, the genre is ever-evolving.
- The issues that young adults were concerned about in the 1940s look different than the issues that are spotlighted in 2020.
- For example, the novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement whereas *A Separate Peace* (1959) by Johnathan Knowles follows the story of a boys' boarding school in New England during World War II.

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## *Evolution* PREVIEW

- The genre was defined as fiction specifically targeted for a young audience, but *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (1950) was not written with teens in mind, that's just who ended up reading and connecting to the book.
- The setting is no longer restricted to the real world.
- Dystopian, utopian, fantasy, and postapocalyptic novels became extremely popular within the YA audience in the 2000s, such as *Twilight* (2005) by Stephanie Meyer and *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins.
- What society has considered a “young” adult has changed.
- Though the category was labeled for ages 12-18, there are readers in their late 20s who enjoy YAL.

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## *Standard Elements*

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- Target audience is from ages 12-18
- The protagonist is a teenager
- Coming of age issues are highlighted
- Literary realism: the attempt to represent subject-matter truthfully
- Bildungsroman: deals with one person's formative years
- Conflicts must be relevant to the young adult

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## *Other Common Characteristics*

- The protagonist faces struggles with morality
- First-person narrative
- Texts are written for and by young adults
- Parents or adults are either absent or have conflicts with the protagonist
- In-the-moment style story telling as opposed to a reflection of the past
- Psychological growth of the protagonist
- Voice of the teenager stays true to the young adult experience
- Candid descriptions of concerns, motivations, and inner thoughts
- Journey of self-discovery
- Conflicts with friendship and/or school
- Deals with the dysfunctional realities of life

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## *Common Themes*

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- Figuring out one's priorities and personal beliefs
- Realizing the people of importance and unimportance
- Discovering one's place in the world
- Eye-opening experiences which lead to acceptance
- Dealing with conflicting feelings and values
- Overcoming adversity
- Challenging choices and crossroads
- Journey from youth to adulthood

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## *Importance of YAL*

- Helps readers identify common ground between themselves and other characters
- Provides comfort for young adults to know they are not alone when dealing with difficult issues
- Makes readers empathize/sympathize with people that are not like them
- Allows readers to understand different adversities people their age go through

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## Popular Titles

- *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier
- *Holes* by Louis Sachar
- *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green
- *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton
- *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart
- *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen
- *It's Kind of a Funny Story* Ned Vizzini
- *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli
- *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman
- *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers
- *All American Boys* by Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon

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## *YA Cross Genre Books*

- *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner: Dystopian, Science fiction
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry: Dystopian, Science fiction
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: Historical fiction
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak: Historical fiction
- *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling: Fantasy
- *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead: Science fiction
- *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs: Fantasy
- *Shadow and Bone* by Leigh Bardugo: Fantasy
- *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell: Romance
- *The Sun Is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon: Romance

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## Controversy

- YAL gives insight to the realities of impending adulthood.
- Many times, YAL touches on dark topics such as: suicide, addiction, self-mutilation, sexual identity, mental health, pregnancy, bullying, violence, terminal illness, etc.
- For example, *Go Ask Alice* by Beatrice Sparks or *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher.
- Should teenagers be exposed to these mature and taboo topics at such a young age? Is it potentially harmful and inappropriate for them to be reading?

**What do you think? Explain.**

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## *Controversy* PREVIEW

- Another controversy with YAL is that it is targeted for readers ages 12-18.
- Many readers outside of this age bracket appreciate YAL.
- People who are older than 18 might enjoy reading YAL for many reasons. For one, it's nostalgic and they feel rejoice in the familiarity of the coming-of-age experience.
- Secondly, the novels are entertaining, relatable, and easy to read.
- Lastly, they tackle real life issues which all people like to stay informed about.

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*Controversy* **PREVIEW**

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Should young adult literature only be for  
young adults?

**What do you think? Why?**

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