Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.

2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.

3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

**The Power of Young Adult Fiction**

**Source** NY Times, March 2012

The remarkable [box office success](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/26/movies/hunger-games-breaks-box-office-records.html) of [“The Hunger Games,”](http://www.scholastic.com/thehungergames/) based on the first of a trilogy of books that have sold 23 million copies, demonstrates the power of young adult fiction and its passionate fans. The number of young adult titles published last year was up nearly a third since 2008, to almost 10,000, according to Bowker Books In Print. The genre’s appeal has spread beyond teenage readers. Why has young adult fiction become such a phenomenon — even with older adults?

**Authors Taking Risks Isn’t Kid Stuff**

[*Patricia McCormick*](http://patriciamccormick.com/)*is the author of young adult books that deal with stark topics, including "*[*Sold*](http://www.amazon.com/Sold-Patricia-McCormick/dp/0786851716)*,'' about child sex slavery, and the forthcoming "*[*Never Fall Down*](http://www.amazon.com/Never-Fall-Down-A-Novel/dp/0061730939/)*,'' about growing up under the Khmer Rouge.*

If "Harry Potter" made it safe for grown-ups to read kids’ books, "The Hunger Games" has made it cool.

Why are so many adults reading young adult books? No need to page Dr. Freud. This isn’t about the guilty pleasures of communing with one’s inner child. It doesn’t signify a huge baby boomer regression. It isn’t even about nostalgia.

It’s because adults are discovering one of publishing’s best-kept secrets: that young adult authors are doing some of the most daring work out there. Authors who write for young adults are taking creative risks -- with narrative structure, voice and social commentary -- that you just don’t see as often in the more rarefied world of adult fiction.

Here are a few audacious books you won’t find in the adult section of the library. A [Holocaust memoir narrated by Death](http://www.amazon.com/The-Book-Thief-Markus-Zusak/dp/0375842209/). A novel written entirely in [electronic messages](http://www.amazon.com/Ttyl-Lauren-Myracle/dp/0810987880). A historical novel [in prose poems](http://www.amazon.com/Out-The-Dust-Karen-Hesse/dp/0590371258/). A murder mystery in [screenplay format](http://www.amazon.com/Monster-Walter-Dean-Myers/dp/0064407314). A 550-page novel in pictures and words that may or may not have been [written by an automaton](http://www.amazon.com/Invention-Hugo-Cabret-Brian-Selznick/dp/0439813786/).

For a young adult audience, authors have to be at the top of our game. Were competing with Facebook and smartphones, DVRs and iPods -- not to mention SATs and extracurriculars. We have to capture and hold our readers’ (limited) attention on Page 1 and sustain it until the end. Young adults are willing to accompany an author just about anywhere -- to a dystopian future or the ancient past -- but they will not tolerate anything extraneous or self indulgent.

We may not yet be getting the big advances that our "grown-up" counterparts earn. But our rewards are in our in-boxes: blunt, heartfelt, often misspelled e-mails from kids who tell you exactly what they think.

“U write prtty good violence for a girl,” said one reader. Another: “Keep it up. U r not as lame as some people.”

My favorite e-mail, however, is from an adult.

"Did you know your book is in the children's section?"

**Social Media Has Fed the Fever**

[*Emma Allison*](http://www.shamelessmag.com/blog/2011/01/emma-allison-teen-writer-whos-booking-through-365/)*, a Canadian teenager, writes about young adult fiction on her blog,*[*Booking Through 365*](http://www.bookingthrough365.com/)*.*

If you’ve walked into a bookstore as of late, you’ve been assaulted with a mass of young adult literature. Whether the proof is long lines for a ["Mockingjay"](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/books/24mockingjay.html)midnight book release or huge displays of memorabilia, young adult literature is undeniably popular.

Many ridicule the teen-oriented industry. Others acknowledge its existence only because of its growing financial success. Despite general curiosity, few people pay attention to what has created such a fierce following for the books among young people: the Internet.

Reading used to be the isolated experience of picking up a book, scanning words on the page and thinking a lot of brilliant thoughts about the story without ever voicing them. Now, through the wonders of social media, you can discuss the downfalls of Edward and Bella’s relationship or the brilliant plot arc of "Harry Potter" — regardless of where you live.

This online world holds special value to teenagers, because they understand it in a way readers who don't like young adult fiction can’t. The author [John Green](http://johngreenbooks.com/) and his brother, [Hank](http://nerdfighters.ning.com/profile/HankGreen), are well known for their fantastic relationship with fans through their [YouTube channel](http://www.youtube.com/topic/iuz49ZaFvCQ/vlogbrothers). Their discourse is so effective because the Green brothers are confident of their audience’s intelligence. This kind of trust in the competence of youth is not commonplace in offline adult-teen dynamics. Adolescents know the importance of this dialogue, and authors writing for young adults know we’re capable of it.

Teenagers do not passively love young adult fiction and its authors. The ferocity of our devotion rivals the heartbreak caused by the very same novels. Thanks to the Internet, we can share our thoughts with the people who wrote them. My mother couldn’t have dreamed of talking to [Judy Blume](http://judyblume.com/) when she was my age; my favorite author,[Libba Bray](http://libbabray.com/), follows and talks to me regularly on Twitter. Writers are not just quiet gatekeepers of the human psyche anymore: now, they get to be this generation’s rock stars.

We live in an age when popular novels can be dedicated to the teenagers who love them. We can argue about characterization on Twitter, receive requests to critique whole novels on Facebook, or write a [book blog](http://www.bookingthrough365.com/) that receives a wide monthly following. If that doesn’t show the power of young adult literature, I don’t know what does.

**Why Expect More From Teenagers Than Adults?**

[*Beth Yoke*](http://www.linkedin.com/pub/beth-yoke/3/a08/269)*is executive director of the*[*Young Adult Library Services Association*](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/)*.*

Any librarian will tell you that blockbusters like the "Harry Potter," "Twilight" and "Hunger Games" series have played a significant role in connecting more teenagers to leisure reading. This is good news, because multiple studies show that youth who read for fun are more proficient readers and perform better in school. And let’s face it: today’s teenagers are not reading the likes of "The Canterbury Tales" and "The Brothers Karamazov" for fun. Instead, they often opt for contemporary young adult literature.

Young adult literature has blossomed, with a sharp rise in the number of titles, many of which are recognized by authorities for their literary excellence. The growing depth and breadth of young adult literature cannot come at a better time. Today's American teenagers are one of the most diverse generations ever. They want and need literature that affirms who they are and offers insight into their world. Titles published in the past cannot always achieve this. For example, the number of books for young people that were by or about Africans or African-Americans has risen, according to [Cooperative Children’s Book Center](http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/) at the University of Wisconsin. That organization also estimated that the number of books for young people with gay, lesbian or transgender characters is 10 times what it was a decade ago.

Unfortunately, some adults persist in expecting teenagers to read an exclusive diet of high-brow literature, however that may be defined. But holding teens to a standard that most adults don't adhere is not reasonable or productive, especially when we know that leisure reading is a critical component to academic success (and that a key to leisure reading is personal choice).

The classics will endure and continue to have value in the education of youth. But if we want today’s teenagers to become proficient readers who value reading for fun, it is critical to make room on our physical and virtual shelves for contemporary young adult literature, and popular titles like "The Hunger Games."

**Reflection Ideas:**

**Did you read *The Hunger Games*? Do you know any adults (other than teachers) who enjoyed the series?**

**Do you like young adult fiction? What do you think of so many adults reading it too?**

**If you haven’t read any young adult fiction lately, why not? Do you feel that young adult authors do enough to reach teens like you? What could they do to catch your interest?**