



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
August 1, 2003

“Space isn’t remote at all. It’s only an hour’s drive away if your car could go straight upwards.”

-Sir Fred Hoyle, 1919-2001

The first night my daughter’s Japanese college friend was at our house, she asked me for some book recommendations. She had decided to buy lots of English language books, because they are so expensive in Japan – and she wanted to know if I could suggest some young adult titles. Young adult books, she explained, are perfect for her level of English, are interesting, and usually not too long.

I was, of course, happy to oblige and found myself listing title after title, each one leading to another idea. I was surprised to realize how many young adult novels I’ve read over the almost five years I’ve been a young adult librarian and it reminded me of my first BAYA (Bay Area Young Adult Librarians) meeting, where – apropos to nothing – I stood up and presented a monologue on the wonderful characteristics of the young adult novel. I remember the silence when I stopped talking – I still wonder

what everyone was thinking – before they proceeded to the next agenda item.

Since it also made me think again about the mystery of what exactly a young adult novel is, I decided to do a little research on the Internet. The first article I found was written by Paul Many and called “Writing for Young Adult Audiences: Tips and Hints.” In defining young adult, Mr. Many says: “A behavioral definition of a YA novel would be any novel that people in this age range read. This could include books that range from *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen to *The Stranger* by Albert Camus...”

Another site – write4kids.com – has a piece by Laura Backes called “The Difference Between Middle Grade & Young Adult.” Her main concept revolves around the idea of “internal change,” where a protagonist struggles with a particular issue, as he or she also is trying to find a place in the world.

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I agree with both of these writers. Even though we have a genre just for them, teenagers actually read as wide a range of literature as adults. And yes, many of them deal with life problems - alcoholism, eating disorders, drug abuse, abandonment, self-mutilation - it's all there. In fact, the teenage world could look pretty bleak if you only looked at the literature representing it.

Fortunately, though, many of these are excellent books, not matter whom the intended audience, and are worthy of being in any library collection. I have recommended them to adults and I know one of our regular library patrons recently told me how much she enjoyed Iain Lawrence's *Ghost Boy*, a book that was already one of my favorites. And a 13-year-old introduced me to one of my very favorite books of any genre: *Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis.

Other young adult books

I particularly like are Sarah Dessen's *Keeping the Moon*, *Someone Like You* and *This Lullaby*; Ben Mikaelson's *Petey*; Neal Shusterman's *Downsiders*; Paul Fleischman's *Whirligig*; Louis Sachar's *Holes*; Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy*; Deborah Savage's *Summer Hawk*; and Jeanette Farrell's *Invisible Enemies: Stories of Infection*. I also suggest taking a look in the young adult section at your local library and finding some of your own. You won't be disappointed.

Colette reviewed today's book *The Universe*, edited by Byron Preiss and Andrew Fraknoi. Colette says this book is “a compilation of scientific essays about astronomy paired with science fiction stories about the same thing.” The essays are “not too scientific” and she recommends it because “it's educational in an extremely entertaining way.”