

# *Best Young Adult Novels*

VOCABULARY,  
ACTIVITIES,  
AND TESTS

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This thematic listing of the books covered in this volume indicates difficulty levels: **E = Easy**, **M = Medium**, and **D = Difficult**. (For further explanation of levels, read the section titled "Using the Book.") General topics are also given for each book.

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# Introduction to Young Adult Literature

## *Why Teach Young Adult Literature?*

The challenge to the language arts teacher in today's society is complex. Students exhibit a wide range of basic skills. Some are reading far below grade level, others have the necessary skills but are considered "aliterate" because they choose not to read, and still others are voracious readers. You will find a combination of these levels of readers in almost every classroom.

When you use books that are relevant to teenagers, more students are willing to take risks. They are interested and eager to involve themselves in reading. Higher thinking skills such as critical thinking, interpreting, analyzing, and predicting can be integral in the study of young adult literature. Margaret Early in 1960 summarized the three stages of reading growth as 1) primary (unconscious enjoyment)—infancy through beginning or middle years of elementary school, 2) secondary (egocentric years of adolescence)—late elementary through secondary years, and 3) aesthetic (creative reading). Many students at the secondary level will not read at the aesthetic level until their last years of high school. And a small minority will never reach the aesthetic level, even as adults. Unfortunately, many of our English class curricula are aimed at this level.

What implications does this have for the language arts teacher who has a prescribed curriculum to follow? The task for any teacher, whether in English, language arts, reading, special education, or many of the content areas becomes a question of how to motivate students, how to make them risk-takers, and how to involve them in the reading process. Arthea J. S. Reed in her book *Reaching Adolescents—The Young Adult Book and the School* summarizes this well: "This does not mean 'watering down' the content of the subject area; nor does it mean excluding the 'classics'; nor does it mean eliminating the basics; nor does it mean teaching only what interests the students today. It means bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood so that the content can be taught in a more sophisticated way."

Young adult literature lends itself easily to vocabulary study, characterization, and all levels of critical thinking. Sometimes young adult literature is the *only* bridge students have between problems of adolescence and potential growth, as a student and a human being. P. J. Petersen, author of *Would You Settle for Improbable?* and other young adult novels, said in a talk to teachers in Albuquerque, New Mexico, that the philosophy of reading young adult literature is that, for the young adult, this particular genre of literature provides perspective, comfort, and guidance. These books attract young adults because they tell them: "You are not alone."

The books chosen for this volume all have junior high-age protagonists. This does not mean that the books should or will be taught exclusively at seventh or eighth grade level. Many of these books will work well at high school level, such as *Hatchet* by Gary

Paulsen and *Souder* by William H. Armstrong. Some of the books would work well in the upper elementary grades, such as *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster and *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry.

Young adult literature deserves much more credibility in our homes and classrooms. As in any other genre there are poor choices. But, for the most part, young adult books provide excellent models of literature. Authors such as Katherine Paterson, Irene Hunt, Robert Cormier, and Cynthia Voigt write beautiful literature that is relevant to *all* ages.

From our own personal perspective and classroom experiences (25 years total), our students became interested and more active readers when we introduced young adult books into our curricula. Parents also became more active as students brought home books and talked about them with their families. Conversely, we also heard teachers, administrators, and parents voice their concerns about the absence of the “classics.” To these critics, we can point out that the same issues are discussed, whether it be Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* or John Neufeld’s *Sharelle*. Again, we see the young adult book as a possible bridge to the classics. (A list of classics and their young adult counterparts is given in the Appendix.)

Secondary students who say they’ve never read a book discover that being guided through the study of young adult literature in a classroom, with a book that is relevant to them, brings confidence and can even spark a love of reading.

### ***Evolution of the Young Adult Novel***

It would be difficult to pinpoint the actual beginning of the genre of young adult literature. Whether you would consider *Huckleberry Finn* or *Little Women* a young adult book would depend on your own criteria.

However, in the 1940’s, Maureen Daly introduced a touch of realism in the book *Seventeenth Summer* (still read today). For the most part, though, young adult literature was typified by the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys books. In the 1950’s, books about cars, sports, and romance were popular, with such notables as *Hot Rod* by Henry Gregor Felsen and the Rosamond du Jardin books.

A new element of realism in young adult literature became noticeable in the 1960’s with such books as *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* by Ann Head, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell, and *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte. By the 1970’s, realistic young adult novels were the standard and continue to be so.

As our values and perspectives have changed, young adult literature has reflected those changes. Twenty years ago a teen would have been hard pressed to find a book on divorce or drug abuse. Today, a teen has not one choice, but many. Issues such as pregnancy, cocaine addiction, and even child abuse are topics now available in young adult literature.

Another example of the evolution of young adult literature is seen in the science fiction/fantasy categories. Thirty years ago science fiction fans had a steady diet of

Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert Heinlein. Today, teens can enjoy Madeleine L'Engle, William Sleator, and Ursula Le Guin as well as the popular adult writers. In fact, a fantasy such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis can be a wonderful introduction into the world of fantasy/science fiction and can entice even the most reluctant reader.

Young adult novels can be the catalyst for many topical units in the classroom. On an individual basis, these books can sometimes be cathartic. Issues in today's YA books can be highly relevant and correspond to the realistic needs and concerns of this age group.

### ***Criteria for Choosing Young Adult Literature***

Basically, all of the books included in this teaching guide follow three guidelines:

1. Written for the young adult audience.
2. A young adult is the protagonist.
3. Topics are aimed at the needs of young adults.

For reluctant or poor readers, we include some other cautionary criteria:

1. No time shifts.
2. Modern time setting.
3. No more than four to five main characters.
4. Lots of dialogue and action.
5. Able to be read within four weeks.

One important guideline for you to remember if you will teach a book to an entire class is to *like the book yourself*. If you specifically want to do a novel concerning changes in the family unit, for example, be sure to find one that you feel comfortable with and are excited about.

Teachers should also be risk-takers, however. A book that just seems "right" will minimize most of our cautions. For example, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis does not meet the listed criteria; however, this novel has been successfully used in secondary classrooms. Another example is *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls. The beauty of such books is enough to sustain interest, no matter what guidelines the novel follows.

You might want to start your young adult book approach with students with a mystery. Especially with reluctant readers, the ones who complain they've never read a book (and seem to challenge anyone to make them), teenage mysteries such as *Killing Mr. Griffin* and *The Third Eye* by Lois Duncan can capture the attention of even the most recalcitrant.

# A Night Without Stars

by James Howe

## Synopsis

Not only does 11-year-old Maria need heart surgery, she needs someone to explain what to expect from the surgical experience. Her questions are answered by Donald, an unlikely new friend the other kids call Monster Man. As an abused child, Donald was badly burned and permanently disfigured. But Donald's current problems are his negative attitude and isolation. Maria's and Donald's personalities balance each other, and together they earn a strong and enduring friendship.

---

## Vocabulary

### CHAPTER 1

1. brazenness
2. boisterous
3. maniacally
4. crimson
5. genetic
6. transplant
7. saint

### CHAPTER 2

1. assumed
2. impassive
3. invalid
4. Madonna

### CHAPTER 3

1. cardiac
2. pediatrics
3. disembodied
4. cherub
5. asymptomatic
6. manifesting
7. intern
8. recruits
9. mallets

### CHAPTER 4

1. monitoring
2. distorted
3. transfixed
4. threshold
5. contemptuous
6. accolade
7. rosary

### CHAPTER 5

1. pondering
2. complied
3. tentatively

### CHAPTER 6

1. precautions
2. implanted
3. maneuvering
4. void

### CHAPTER 7

1. cherished
2. contagious
3. avail
4. timid
5. meditation
6. macrame
7. inspired
8. mannequin
9. shrouded
10. cascaded
11. atrium
12. ventricle
13. partition

### CHAPTER 8

1. affixed
2. retreated
3. fortress
4. averting
5. betrayed

### CHAPTER 9

1. perilously
2. proclaimed
3. grotesque
4. dowry
5. diminish

### CHAPTER 10

1. blanched
2. obligingly

### CHAPTER 11

1. squeamishly
2. appalled
3. persevered
4. surreptitiously



### A Night Without Stars—Chapters 1–6

**Vocabulary:** Fill in the blanks correctly with vocabulary words taken from the list below.

- |           |              |            |
|-----------|--------------|------------|
| intern    | assumed      | rosary     |
| distorted | Madonna      | boisterous |
| cherub    | asymptomatic | recruits   |
| defect    | crimson      | genetic    |
| threshold | precautions  | accolade   |

1. Her mother cried and held her \_\_\_\_\_ beads in her hand while Maria was in surgery.
2. The girls were so impressed with Carlo that Maria called them new \_\_\_\_\_ for his fan club.
3. Until recently, Maria’s heart problem was \_\_\_\_\_ but now she gets tired easily with exercise.
4. The hole in her heart was a \_\_\_\_\_ she had since birth.
5. The family always \_\_\_\_\_ that Father had had a hard day at work.
6. Joni blushed bright \_\_\_\_\_ when Tina teased her about Carlo.
7. Sometimes heart problems are \_\_\_\_\_ and therefore, are present at birth.
8. The doctor had features like a \_\_\_\_\_, all round, pink, and innocent.
9. Sarah said she wasn’t a doctor yet, just a very tired \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Maria stood on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the playroom, seeing Donald for the first time.
11. “So neat” was Linda’s highest \_\_\_\_\_.
12. The IV and other tubes were used as \_\_\_\_\_ to monitor bodily functions.
13. In the moonlight her mother looked like a \_\_\_\_\_ in a painting.
14. Tina and Joni’s laughter got so \_\_\_\_\_ that the jungle gym started to rock.
15. At first it seemed to Maria that Donald’s face was a puffy, \_\_\_\_\_ monster mask.

**Trivia Busters:** Fill in the blanks with the correct details from the book.

1. Carlo wants to name their car \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Maria’s father works as a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The initials for Maria’s heart condition are \_\_\_\_\_.
4. One of the most important things for Maria to do after surgery is \_\_\_\_\_.



## ***A Night Without Stars—*Chapters 7-11**

**Vocabulary:** Fill in the blanks correctly with vocabulary words taken from the list below.

atrium	avail	grotesque
contagious	betrayed	averting
surreptitiously	partition	appalled
blanched	ventricle	shrouded

1. The happy spirits Bonnie and Linda brought to the playground seemed \_\_\_\_\_ to the other children.
2. Maria \_\_\_\_\_ looked at the driver of the car out of the corner of her eye.
3. Donald was \_\_\_\_\_ his eyes so he wouldn't have to see the unasked questions in Joey's eyes.
4. The upper part of a human heart is called an \_\_\_\_\_ .
5. The lower part of the heart is called a \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. Donald drew a picture of an astronaut, then \_\_\_\_\_ the figure in heavy black lines.
7. Until Maria came, Lorna had made many different efforts with Donald, all to no \_\_\_\_\_ .
8. Donald's happiness \_\_\_\_\_ the usual look in his eyes.
9. The \_\_\_\_\_ picture in the advertisement did indeed resemble Donald.
10. Maria was \_\_\_\_\_ and fascinated, at the same time, that her friends had discussed what to wear to her funeral.
11. Donald's face had \_\_\_\_\_ to the color of white clay when he heard that Maria was going home.
12. Septum is the \_\_\_\_\_ or wall between the two ventricles of the heart.

**Trivia Busters:** Fill in the blanks with the correct details from the book.

1. Maria's favorite kind of ice cream was chocolate granola \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. Donald called his foster parents Mother and Father \_\_\_\_\_ .
3. The gift Carlo gave Maria in the hospital was a \_\_\_\_\_ .
4. The happy poem Donald wrote was about a \_\_\_\_\_ .



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Test**  
***A Night Without Stars***

**Character Identification:** Write the character's name in the blank next to each description of that character. You may use a name more than once.

Maria  
Carlo  
Mrs. Tirone

Mr. Tirone  
Joe  
Anna

Bonnie  
Marlene  
Lorna

Donald  
Gotta Lotta

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Talks to the children like people, not germs under a microscope.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Got hit by a car and broke her leg.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Knew a lot of jokes from staying in the hospital.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Favorite book was *Charlotte's Web*.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Told his mom he wanted to be a priest.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Gave Maria a gray stuffed mouse.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Asked if she needed to "widdle."
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Monster Man.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Bought an old Chevy convertible.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Gave a satin heart-shaped pillow.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Nurse.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Looked like John Travolta.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Plans to take Spanish lessons.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Wouldn't wear a wig.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Mom died believing his lies.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Kept the rosary close by.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Explained to the Tirone family exactly what happened in surgery.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Loved poetry.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ Looked like a Madonna in the moonlight.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Was shivering with cold after the fire.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Said the operation was really a transplant.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ Changed from a nice baby to a nonstop screaming machine.

**Short Answer:** Answer the following in one or two complete sentences.

Describe Mother and Father Schultz.



# Answer Key

## ***A Night Without Stars*** (Worksheet, Chapters 1–6)

### **Vocabulary**

- |                 |               |                 |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. rosary       | 6. crimson    | 11. accolade    |
| 2. recruits     | 7. genetic    | 12. precautions |
| 3. asymptomatic | 8. cherub     | 13. Madonna     |
| 4. defect       | 9. intern     | 14. boisterous  |
| 5. assumed      | 10. threshold | 15. distorted   |

### **Trivia Busters**

1. Easy Goin'
2. subway conductor
3. VSD
4. cough

## ***A Night Without Stars*** (Worksheet, Chapters 7–11)

### **Vocabulary**

- |                    |              |               |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. contagious      | 5. ventricle | 9. grotesque  |
| 2. surreptitiously | 6. shrouded  | 10. appalled  |
| 3. averting        | 7. avail     | 11. blanched  |
| 4. atrium          | 8. betrayed  | 12. partition |

### **Trivia Busters**

1. ripple
2. Schultz
3. gold car charm
4. frog

## ***Final Test***

### **Character Identification**

- |               |                 |                 |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Lorna      | 7. Gotta Lotta  | 13. Lorna       | 19. Mrs. Tirone |
| 2. Bonnie     | 8. Donald       | 14. Donald      | 20. Donald      |
| 3. Donald     | 9. Carlo        | 15. Mr. Tirone  | 21. Marlene     |
| 4. Donald     | 10. Mr. Tirone  | 16. Mrs. Tirone | 22. Anna        |
| 5. Mr. Tirone | 11. Gotta Lotta | 17. Maria       |                 |
| 6. Joey       | 12. Carlo       | 18. Donald      |                 |

### **Short Answer**

They are Donald's current foster parents. They are strict and more like grandparents than parents. Donald likes them because they don't hit. They play Gin Rummy with Donald.

# Extension Activities

## A Night Without Stars

### Discussion

#### CHAPTER 1

1. How well informed is Maria about her operation?
2. How do Maria's friends react to her news?

#### CHAPTER 2

1. How is Maria's father treated at home?
2. How does Maria's mother respond when Maria asks questions about the operation?
3. What is Maria afraid will happen?

#### CHAPTER 3

1. What is Maria's theory about doctors' shots?
2. What is Maria's reaction to the description of the Monster Man?

#### CHAPTER 4

1. What is Maria's first impression of Donald?
2. How would you describe Lorna's job?

#### CHAPTER 5

1. How is the book's title explained in this chapter?
2. What kind of childhood did Donald have?

#### CHAPTER 6

1. What were Maria's family members told to expect after the surgery?
2. How do you think hospitals today work with young patients and their families?

#### CHAPTER 7

1. What questions did Maria have after the operation?
2. How did Donald help Maria?

#### CHAPTER 8

1. How did Donald change his "tough-guy" image?

#### CHAPTER 9

1. How does Carlo explain God's role in Donald's life?
2. What two things are different about Donald's poem?

#### CHAPTER 10

1. What promise did Carlo make?

#### CHAPTER 11

1. How would you explain the poem in this chapter?

### Reading

1. James Howe has written many diverse books. Students who enjoyed this book may enjoy reading these books by the same author.

#### The Sebastian Barth Mysteries

*Eat Your Poison, Dear  
What Eric Knew  
Stage Fright*

*Morgan's Zoo  
Scared Silly*

#### The Bunnacula books

*Bunnacula: A Rabbit Tale of Mystery*  
(written by James and Deborah Howe)  
*The Celery Stalks at Midnight*  
*Howliday Inn*  
*Nighty-Nightmare*  
*The Fright Before Christmas*

(continued)

## **A Night Without Stars (continued)**

2. Other young adult books that deal with the issue of child abuse are *The Lottery Rose* by Irene Hunt, *Mary Jane Harper Cried Last Night* by Joanna Lee and T. S. Cook, and *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars. The latter is covered in this volume.
3. Another good young adult book about hospital experiences is *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* by Cynthia Voight. Because of a car accident, the young, popular cheerleader has to have her leg amputated. This book is covered in Volume III of this series.

### **Writing**

1. Write a short story about a personal experience in the hospital.
2. Write an epilogue for this book. Do Maria and Donald remain friends? What ultimately happens to Donald?
3. Imagine you can make new policies and programs for the pediatric surgery ward of DeWitte Hospital. How would you structure the programs?
4. Write a poem about Maria and Donald's new friendship.

### **Research**

Students interested in gaining further information about topics in this book could research:

- (a) New hospital programs and policies regarding pediatric patients. (Interviews would be very informative.)
- (b) Information regarding genetic heart defects such as VSD.
- (c) Information on cardiopulmonary by-pass (the heart-lung machine). What does it do? How does it work? Who invented it?
- (d) The Human Heart.

### **Art**

Illustrate a real human heart. What did Maria's heart look like? How would you decorate your own heart to show the "real" you?

### **Video**

The 1985 film *Mask* is the story of a teenage boy dealing with his disfiguring disease. It is rated PG-13, is 120 minutes long, and is available for commercial purchase or rental.