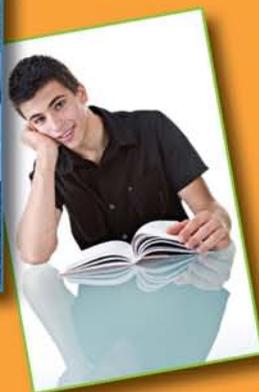
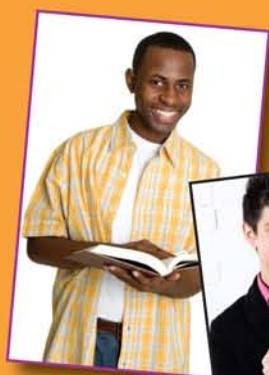




# QUICK and POPULAR READS for TEENS



edited by PAM SPENCER HOLLEY  
for the YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY  
SERVICES ASSOCIATION

# QUICK AND POPULAR READS FOR TEENS

*Edited by Pam Spencer Holley  
for the Young Adult Library Services Association*

American Library Association  
Chicago 2009

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Additional material can be found on the book's companion website at [www.ala.org/editions/extras/holley35774](http://www.ala.org/editions/extras/holley35774).



# PREFACE

**F**or more than fifty years, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) has been the leader in book selection for all types of readers. The Best Books for Young Adults list is the oldest of the division's lists, but more selection lists have been added to respond to observed needs and changes in teen interests. For example, there are now selection lists featuring graphic novels, audiobooks, films, debut works, and nonfiction.

With the recognition and acceptance that not all teens like to read, members of the Young Adult Services Division (YASD), YALSA's predecessor, first presented the idea for a High Interest/Low Literacy Committee in the mid-1970s. By the early 1980s, YASD had formed a committee to select titles of a lower reading level that were of interest to teens. From that initial committee came the list first titled Recommended Books for the Reluctant Young Adult Reader, which is now known as Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (QP). The yearly QP list consists of titles published in the previous year which, according to the professional opinion of librarians and input from teens, are surefire hits with teens.

The Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (PPYA) Committee was established after a trial in which YALSA and Baker and Taylor developed genre lists of paperbacks to fill display dumps. Although Baker and Taylor eventually ended its partnership with YALSA, it was obvious that these thematic lists were popular with teens and librarians, and YALSA needed to continue offering them. The PPYA committee now selects four themes each year, and then, with no limitation on copyright dates, chooses paperbacks popular with teens to fit those themes.

In this book, you will first find an introductory chapter about teen readers and then two chapters reviewing the origin, history, and selection processes for

both the QP and PPYA committees, as written by former committee members. A chapter on programming, also by a former QP committee member, offers suggestions for using the lists in your library, as well as further readings. The next two chapters, covering fiction and nonfiction, contain the annotated listings of the titles selected by the QP and PPYA committees from 1999 to 2008—a decade’s worth of titles for each list. The annotations have all been rewritten to offer more descriptive help for librarians as they provide readers’ advisory service to teens or develop their collections. The original annotations, written by committee members with the teen reader in mind, are available at [www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/). In addition, a collection of thematically organized booklists in the final chapter will help with developing displays, producing bookmarks, and selecting titles to share with teens.

The purpose of this work is to provide school and public librarians, teachers, professors, authors, students, or anyone else interested in literature for teens a reference to “quick and popular” titles. It is hoped that users will not stop with the lists available here but add to them on the basis of their own library collections and the interests of the teens they serve. If users attend an ALA midwinter meeting or annual conference, they can stop and observe a QP or PPYA meeting to hear the level of discussion, learn about many new titles, and perhaps even volunteer to serve on one of the committees.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several knowledgeable YALSA members contributed chapters to this book, and their experience on the committee for either Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers or Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults added that touch of insider information to their writings: Paula Brehm-Heeger served on the PPYA committee for the 2004, 2005, and 2006 lists; Stacy Creel was a member of the QP committee for the 2005, 2006, and 2007 lists; and Jamie Watson was a member of the QP committee for the 2004, 2005, and 2006 lists, chair for the 2006 list, and administrative assistant for the 2007 list. In addition to their committee experience, these authors bring to their chapters insight garnered from their careers as librarians working with teens to understand and promote their reading interests.

Thanks to Louisa Storer, a former graduate assistant at Queens College, for preparing some of the annotations for recent QP lists. In the YALSA office, Stevie Kuenn was invaluable in jump-starting this project and then keeping us on task. People I had never met in ALA Editions kindly answered all my questions about bibliographic details and other rookie questions: I am grateful for the help I received from Eugenia Chun and Christine Schwab. Though I was saddened when my good friend Stephanie Zvirin left *Booklist*, what a treat to discover we were working together on this project. Thanks also to Beth Yoke, executive director of YALSA, who conceived the idea for this book and then submitted an application for a Carnegie Grant. When YALSA received the grant, the funding needed to hire an editor and contributors was available and writing began. A large share of the acknowledgments must go to the teens, both those who read avidly and those who read reluctantly, for it is their comments, enthusiasm, and suggestions that ultimately determine which books land on selection lists and which committees YALSA creates to help both librarians and teens.



# INTRODUCTION

## YALSA, Teens, and Reading

*Paula Brehm-Heeger and Stacy Creel*

**T**he mission of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) is to advocate, promote, and strengthen service to young adults as part of the continuum of total library service and to support those who provide service to this population. YALSA has identified several activities and concerns as essential in fulfilling this vital mission. Among this list of compelling concerns, none ranks higher than evaluating and promoting materials of interest to adolescents through special services, programs, and publications. The annual Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (QP) and Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (PPYA) lists clearly fall under the “evaluating and promoting materials of interest to adolescents” umbrella. But why is the selection of titles for these lists, put together by dedicated and knowledgeable library professionals, such an essential activity for YALSA? Why should all librarians, educators, and adults concerned with the health and well-being of teenagers spend their valuable and increasingly limited time, resources, and energy learning about and utilizing the QP and PPYA lists for the benefit of the teenagers with whom they work? A brief examination of reading habits among teenagers ages 12–18, both past and present, provides insight into just why these lists are vital for strengthening service to all young adults in the nation’s libraries.

Today’s librarians face many challenges, including getting teens not only into their libraries but also into reading. This concern is widely acknowledged,

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but opinions differ on why these challenges exist and also on the state of teens and reading in America. Are teens reading or not? Which teens are reading more, and which teens are reading less? Are they reading what they say they are reading? And what counts as reading (Aronson 2006; Gardner and Dillon 2005; National Endowment for the Arts 2007)? The pendulum of public opinion swings between the idea that young adults are not reading at all and what Aronson calls “hand-wringing over what a concerned parent fears they might be reading too avidly” (Aronson 2005). So what is the reality behind these seemingly contradictory ideas regarding teens and reading?

A good place to start unraveling the mystery about teens and their reading habits is with a look at the origins of the concept of *reluctant readers*. A common, long-standing perception about why teens are not reading or are reluctant to read is associated with reading skill. When reading is difficult for them, they do not like to do it. This belief about why teens are reluctant readers is not a new concept. In 1952, the Executive Committee of Capital Area School Development Association recognized the needs of low-level teen readers and produced *Fare for the Reluctant Reader*—an annotated list of teen-tested titles divided by grade level and category (Bush and Dunn 1952). The idea that teens do not read because they lack the skills to do so has remained popular over the years and has led to such ideas as connecting teens to reading through hi/lo books—books deemed to have high interest but requiring low reading skills (LiBretto 1985; Williams 1987).

As the concept was developed more fully, the reasons some teens fall into this category became more complex. The thought that teens are not reading simply because they lack the skill gave way to more nuanced discussions. By 1969, the term *reluctant reader* had expanded to include readers “who have the ability to read without mechanical problems but have little or no inclination to read except what is required for work or normal everyday life” (Chambers 1969, 4). This view included a list of reasons that youth ages 11–17 were not reading—a list that probably sounds familiar to many of today’s librarians: the dislike of stories, the lack of time, the fact that teens like group activities, and the influx of technology replacing reading as a leisure time activity. In her 1996 *School Library Journal* article “No Time, No Interest, No Way: The 3 Voices of Aliteracy,” Kylene Beers demonstrates the further evolution of the reluctant teen reader concept, with reluctant readers now classified into three categories: dormant, uncommitted, and unmotivated. The dormant reader has a positive view of reading but does not commit the time to read or lacks the free time for pleasure reading. The uncommitted reader views reading as a skill but does not have necessarily negative feelings about the skill. The unmotivated reader has a negative view of reading and readers. Stacy Creel, who worked with youth for ten years in a public library setting and spent three years on the QP committee, formulated the following categories:

*The A+ Student.* This group of teens reads frequently for school assignments but not for pleasure. If it is not important for their college application,

they may not have time, or see the need, to read. They have so much academic reading that even pleasure reading can seem like a chore or an assignment.

*The Athlete.* These teens may struggle with academics or reading, but not necessarily. Often their lack of recreational reading comes from their hectic schedule; practices, pep rallies, games, and studying to keep their grades up may not leave much time for recreational reading. Additionally, the stereotypical image of the athlete puts pressure on this group to look and act a certain way, an image that may not include being a reader.

*The Average Joe/Jane.* These teens can take reading or leave it. They may be enticed to read when presented with the “right” book but do not seek out reading on their own. They may come in for assigned open-choice reading, get a book, read it and enjoy it, but not check out another book until the next semester.

*The English as Second Language.* This group of teens may or may not participate in recreational reading in their native language if materials are available. Reading in English may be a struggle, and finding high-interest recreational books at the appropriate level can be a challenge that keeps them from reading. Additionally, they may perceive that there is a stigma to carrying around a “baby” book or books below level.

*The “I Only Read . . .”* This is a controversial category. If teens read only one type of book, are they “reluctant”? Some librarians may say, “No, they’re reading on their own for pleasure,” and others may say, “Yes, if they have read all the vampire fiction in the library and won’t read anything else, then they aren’t reading.”

*The Incarcerated.* This group of teens may be most closely related to the historical version of the reluctant reader. They often have diagnosed learning or emotional disabilities (34 percent) and have a poor academic record including low achievement, low literacy skills, trancies, being held back, and suspensions (Harris et al. 2006).

*The Low Skill Level.* This group of teens fits the historical view of reluctant readers who are “poor readers or those teenagers unable to read materials written for their grade level” (Nelson 1998).

*The Popular.* These teens may be leaders in their schools; they are on the prom committee, in clubs, and have large social groups of friends. Socially accepted, they have many outside interests. Recreational reading may not be an accepted part of their image and may not fit into their schedule of activities.

*The Outsiders.* This group includes goths, skateboarders, and many other teens who consider themselves alternative. These teens may frequent

the library to use technology but may not be aware that libraries have books that would interest them, or they may feel that reading does not fit their image.

*The Turned Off.* These teens most likely had a negative reading experience somewhere along their educational journey. They may have struggled with reading in class or found an assigned reading to be painful or boring; they then associate that negative experience with reading in general.

What about those teens who really do (or would) like to read but are in desperate need of help in discovering books and literature they actually would enjoy—yes, *enjoy*—reading? Recent reports such as the NEA’s “Reading at Risk” and the 2006 Yankelovich Scholastic survey certainly paint a picture of declining leisure reading among teenagers, with the Scholastic survey stating that only 16 percent of 15–17-year-olds read for pleasure every day (Cart 2007). Many teens do not seem to have the slightest idea where to find “fun” books or, more likely, do not know that such books even exist. This lack of awareness of enticing books designed specifically for teens, the very audience to which these books are targeted, has not been helped by the fact that “years of bad marketing have made it difficult to convince teens that there are young adult titles worth reading” (Morris and Eaton 1999).

But convince them we must. If teens are to develop a lifelong reading habit, the importance of pleasure reading during the teen years cannot be underestimated. These days there is a “growing recognition that reading skills need to be nurtured well into adolescence” (McGrath 2005). Combine this with a new perspective from the publishing world on marketing and publishing for teenagers indicating that “YA publishing [has never] been healthier” (McGrath 2005), and it is clear that this is the perfect moment for librarians, teachers, and parents to grab the reins and lead teens straight to the entertaining, popular fare that can help them appreciate the enjoyment that comes from reading. There has never been a better time to convince teens that reading for pleasure is more than okay—it can actually be a heck of a good time!

This brings us to the two reading lists created by committees of YALSA that are the focus of this book. These lists are essential tools for successfully meeting the challenge of encouraging all teens to read for pleasure. These are not only especially appropriate lists for use with reluctant readers but also valuable for leading any teen to a book he or she might like. Before now, these two helpful resources had not been available in one book.

The first is the Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers. The list was inaugurated by a committee that started in 1982, the High Interest/Low Literacy Level Materials Evaluation Committee. The committee produced an annual list titled High-Interest Low Reading Level Booklist. In 1988, the list came to be known as Recommended Books for the Reluctant Young Adult Reader, and in 1995 the committee and its list became Quick Picks for Reluctant Young

Adult Readers (QP). The QP charge is “to prepare an annual annotated list of recommended books appropriate for reluctant young adult readers” with the purpose of reaching “young adults (ages 12–18) who, for whatever reasons, do not like to read. The purpose of this list is to identify titles for recreational reading, not for curricular or remedial use” ([www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks/](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks/)).

The second is the Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (PPYA), born out of collaboration with YALSA and Baker and Taylor in the late 1980s. Originally, the list focused on five genres, with corresponding paperback dumps sold to fit the books and the theme. When Baker and Taylor stopped supporting the project in 1995, a new committee formed to “annually prepare one to five annotated list(s) of at least ten and no more than twenty-five recommended paperback titles, selected from popular genres, topics or themes.” The purpose of the PPYA list is “to encourage young adults to read for pleasure by presenting to them lists of popular or topical titles that are widely available in paperback and represent a broad variety of accessible themes and genres” ([www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/poppaper/](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/poppaper/)).

This book highlights a decade’s worth of these two annual lists’ recommendations, books that can be used with young adults who are not avid readers. Although the lists are not new, librarians and other practitioners may not remember them as first options when doing readers’ advisory or looking for themes. This book is most appropriate for young adult librarians, library media specialists working in middle and high schools, English teachers, and students and faculty in graduate schools of library and information science, but teens, non-youth librarians, parents, and others who work with young adults may also find it useful.

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# QUICK PICKS FOR RELUCTANT READERS

Origin, History, and Committee Processes

*Jamie Watson*

In 1930, the Young Adult Services Division (YASD, YALSA's predecessor) began the first selection list for young adults. Although originally focusing on adult books for teens, the list went through various versions until 1966, when it became Best Books for Young Adults, better known as BBYA. For the next ten years, BBYA was the recognized selection tool for librarians to use for collection development or readers' advisory work with teens. The BBYA list was formulated on the premise that teens wanted and liked to read and that a list of best books was all the stimulus and direction they needed to enjoy reading. In the mid-1970s, however, librarians acknowledged that not all teens enjoyed reading; many teens associated it with schoolwork or tasks to be done. With the growth of the two-income family, many more teens became latchkey kids who spent after-school hours in the library because it was a safe place. Realizing that many of these teens were not interested in reading, librarians searched for ways to reach out to this segment of their users.

## PHASE I: THE HIGH INTEREST/LOW LITERACY LEVEL COMMITTEE

In 1976, conversations between staff at *Booklist*, the review journal of the American Library Association, and YASD produced a new committee, the High Interest/Low Literacy Level Committee, chaired by Ellen LiBretto. The committee was charged with exploring the possibility of having a High/Low

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### **My Reluctant Reader's Story, by Stacy Creel**

I grew up in a house where my parents did everything right to create readers. My dad read the Sunday funnies to us and both parents read us stories at night. We saw them reading and my mom took us to the library. My older sister was an avid reader, but my brother and I were reluctant, to say the least. In first grade, I remember being in the low group in reading and, even though they called us the daisies, we knew that we were the “bad” readers struggling through *Dick and Jane* while the other flower groups read much more exciting things about going to the park and sailing. Through all of elementary and middle school, I remember finishing only one book; it was something I chose to read for a book report about a girl in Ireland during the potato famine. Thank goodness my teachers read the classics out loud, or I would have never been exposed to *Freckle Juice*, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, *Treasure Island*, or *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

My hatred of reading grew as I struggled through assigned classics like *The Red Badge of Courage*, which held little appeal for me, and I quickly labeled reading a geek activity. I started high school still not reading for pleasure and hardly ever for school. In ninth grade, I had to do an oral report on a classic. I picked my book the way any good reluctant reader does—by the skinny size. I read *Of Mice and Men* and was so moved by the book that I cried and became hysterical during my oral report. I was, of course, horrified and actually had to leave the room, but it was a turning point. I began reading some of the other assigned books (but not all) instead of just reading the first, middle, and last chapters or the Cliffs Notes, and I actually began to read some books for pleasure, even though I hid it from my friends. For a couple of years, my leisure reading consisted only of Harlequin romances, but my parents were just glad I was reading and didn't push me; eventually, I did move on to other genres and a PhD in library and information science.

Whatever happened to my brother—the other reluctant reader? He still isn't a reader and openly detests reading. Throughout high school and college, he hid our books, causing my mother to have to pay for numerous library books and fines. He made it through high school and college without ever reading an entire book, which is one of his favorite things to torture me and my sister (another PhD) with. At 28, he read his first book for pleasure in its entirety—a John Grisham title—while working at a dry cleaning business that had a box of used books for sale. Although he has never to my knowledge read another book for pleasure, he has a son who is wild about reading, so he reads lots of board books and other children's stories. I can only hope that he'll discover the children's and teens' classics he missed and other wonderful books that come as his son finds them.

preconference at the 1978 ALA annual conference and determining how the committee could work with *Booklist* to publish quarterly booklists of hi/lo materials, which could also be sold as pamphlets.

During initial conversations, the preconference convenors assumed that teens' low reading levels made them reluctant to attempt reading. Thus, the committee decided that any books considered for a hi/lo list had to rank below a sixth-grade reading level on a readability test and were to be of general, rather than curricular, interest. For these initial tests, the Fry Readability Scale was used. The directions for "Frying" a book are as follows:

- Select three 100-word passages from near the beginning, middle, and end of the book.
- Skip all proper nouns.
- Count the number of sentences in each 100-word passage, estimating to the nearest tenth of a sentence.
- Count the total number of syllables in each 100-word sample. It may be most convenient to count every syllable over one in each word and add 100. Average the number of syllables for the three samples.
- Plot the average number of syllables and sentences on a graph. Where the plots fall on the graph determines the readability. (Download the Fry readability graph from <http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/fry/fry2.html>.)

Though librarians could determine reading level using such tedious methods, there was no formula to measure teen taste in books. Even as the committee developed criteria, Timothy Standal's article in the March 1978 *Reading Teacher* stated that reading levels were great starting points but that

not all the factors that should be weighed can be weighed, and the ones that can be weighed don't always provide the most useful information. Therefore, readability formulas don't—can't really—include some factors that are potentially powerful predictors. That is why teachers occasionally find a child with a strong interest in some area who can read about that topic in materials that nearly any readability formula would suggest are beyond his or her level. . . . And, of course, a total lack of experience with or interest in some subject on the part of one child may render material about that subject unreadable even though the child should, according to the formula used, breeze through it. . . . A teacher who regards the formulas as guides and who is aware of the experiences, interests, and aspirations of the various children in her/his charge almost automatically overcomes the previously stated deficits of readability formulas. The various formulas cannot take interest and previous experience into consideration, but the teacher can—and should.