

WE LOVE YA GALLEY/TEENS' TOP TEN BOOKS: One High School's Experience

Nadean Meyer and Heather Acres

Students at Medical Lake High School in Medical Lake, Washington, are in the second year of their two-year term as an official Teens' Top Ten (TTT) voting group in the YA Galley Project. In 2003, our students were among the first teens nationwide who made their own choices of "best" new books through this project run by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association (ALA), with the corporate sponsorship of **Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)**. To examine some of the many facets of the YA Galley experience, here are two viewpoints: one from Nadean, the school librarian, and another from Heather, a junior who served as the library's YA Galley student organizer.

Getting Involved

Nadean: In December 2001, I read a news item in **VOYA** about the 2001 Teens' Top Ten (TTT) Books. I noticed that several books on the list were very popular in our school. Eoin Colfer's **Artemis Fowl** and the *Daughters of the Moon* series by Lynn Ewing had been "word-of-mouth hits," but I had not seen them on the usual Best Books lists. The last sentence invited other libraries to become involved in this pilot experiment. I e-mailed my interest and when YALSA officially adopted the YA Galley/Teens' Top Ten Books Project in the summer of 2002, I received a response about the application process.

Applying for the YA Galley Project seemed to be a great next step for our reading club at school. Since 1998, we have encouraged students who like to read to get together. The MLHS Booktalkers Club—an official Associated Student Body (ASB) club—has presented at public and school librarian conferences and workshops for public library staff. They have made game shows to promote reading for the middle

school, and they have given booktalks to staff, area librarians, and students at other schools in our district. We look for reasons to talk books. In Fall 2002, we were overjoyed to be selected as one of the five teen book groups that for the next two years would read, nominate, and vote on the Teens' Top Ten Books of the year and receive free galleys (uncorrected proof copies) from participating publishers.

Books

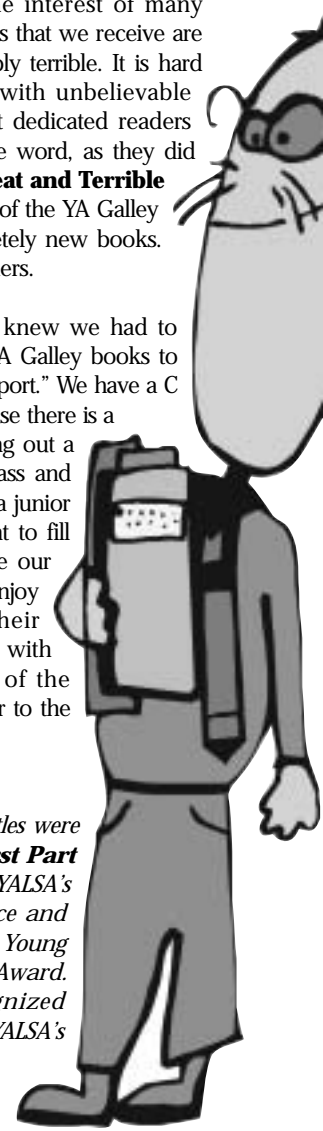
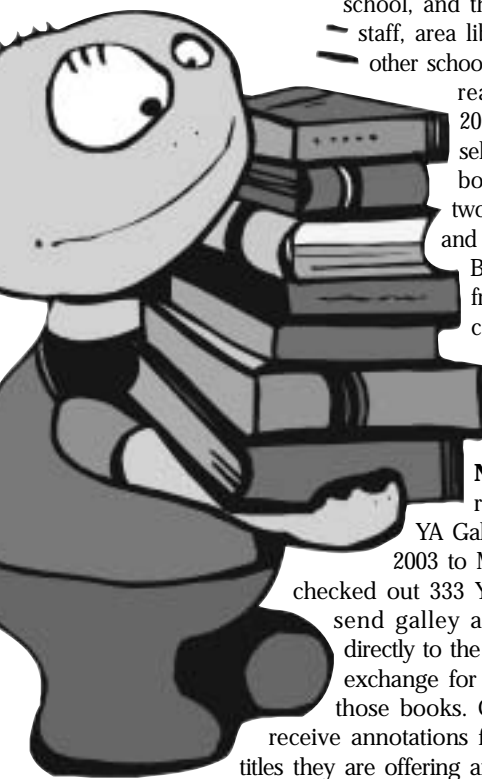
Nadean: Books are the main reason that students like the YA Galley Project. From September 2003 to March 2004, 122 MLHS teens checked out 333 YA Galley books. Publishers send galley and newly published titles directly to the school in multiple copies, in exchange for our students' evaluations of those books. On the YA Galley listserv, I receive annotations from publishers about what titles they are offering and I e-mail back how many

copies (up to five of each) we want. At first, we asked for five of everything, but my readers quickly discovered that some titles were for a middle-school audience. After several students spoke of taking books home for their younger sisters, I started to order two copies of younger titles. Any newly published book can be nominated for Teens' Top Ten Books. YA Galley provides only some of the year's books, so we quickly fell behind when other teen groups nominated titles that we did not have. When school ended in June, there were three nominated titles that we did not have at school, which the local public library had not yet purchased. I left some funds this year, therefore, for last-minute purchases to keep up with the nomination lists.

Heather: YA Galley publishers send us a great variety of books, from historical fiction to teen drama. Our students, particularly the regular readers, really enjoy the fantasy stories such as Herbie Brennan's **Faerie Wars**, ranked as the number one TTT 2003 title. **The First Part Last** by Angela Johnson, number four on the TTT list, was a "real life" book that attracted the interest of many occasional readers.* Quite honestly, many books that we receive are below our reading level—or the plots are simply terrible. It is hard for busy students to weed through novels with unbelievable characters or weak plot lines. When our most dedicated readers discover a good book, they quickly spread the word, as they did this year with **Pirates!** by Celia Rees and **A Great and Terrible Beauty** by Libba Bray. The most enjoyable part of the YA Galley Project is being among the first to read completely new books. This aspect draws most of our new and old readers.

Nadean: We received so many books that I knew we had to reach students beyond our club, so we offer YA Galley books to all students. I view it as the "high school book sport." We have a C squad of many students who take a book because there is a relaxed checkout system, their friend is checking out a book, or because it was introduced to their class and the teacher offered extra credit. Then we have a junior varsity team. They read books but do not want to fill out forms or discuss the books. Then we have our varsity readers. They read many books, they enjoy comparing titles, they are articulate in their viewpoints, and they write the review forms with enthusiasm. These are our core members of the Booktalkers. Each group has something to offer to the project.

[Editor's Note: After Teens' Top Ten 2003 titles were announced around Teen Read Week, **The First Part Last swept ALA's 2004 book awards, winning YALSA's Michael L. Printz Award for literary excellence and placing fourth among the top ten Best Books for Young Adults. It also won ALA's Coretta Scott King Award. The fact that this book was already recognized nationally by teens testifies to the credibility of YALSA's first-ever teen-selected booklist.]*



Often teens who are not voracious readers will share with me their enjoyment of a book such as Terry Trueman's **Inside Out**. My varsity squad is quite adept at discussing why a book had unrealistic characters or the plot was not convincing. They expect new writers to compete with their favorite books of all time, and since they are reading many classic stories in their classes, often the new books do not measure up. Their discussions have been very insightful, however, and students have learned a lot about the role of publishers, reviewers, and librarians in creating an interesting collection for their reading selection. Sometimes a book is sitting on our shelf, and then another teen group will nominate it for Teens' Top Ten, which causes our readers to give it a serious look.

I am continually reminded about the range of reactions to a book by readers of high-school age, and why their need for new books in multiple copies is so important. The sharing is often just as important as the reading, so my past habit of purchasing lots of single copies has been replaced by quickly buying multiple copies of the hits.

Promoting the Project

Heather: I have been greatly involved in the YA Galley Project. This year as the library's student organizer of the project, I process all the new copies, send off completed reviews to the publishers, fax Top Ten nomination forms to the project coordinator, and send out reminders to students who keep the books out for more than two months. I have noticed that our readers tend to return review forms on books that they enjoyed, and that they do not fill out forms on every book. For the 333 books checked out, we have received only 40 student reviews back. We have tried several ways to attract readers to the YA Galley books. We created brochures with local students' comments, made posters, and put notes in the school's daily bulletins. We hold meetings in the early evening with snacks, where students discuss books and encourage each other to try books.

Nadean: At first, we approached teachers and classes, but we have been most successful with a visible display on a book truck in the fiction reading area. The casual checkout system is just a clipboard; you sign your name when you take a book and cross it off when you return the book. Our monthly evening discussions, called "Food with Conversation," have become a relaxed, fun way to share our ideas and titles—and we even met each month last summer! My reading ideas are accepted along with everyone else's. Our discussion naturally brings up differences, and we each state why we feel that way. So far, we have not all read the same book at the same time, but each of us leaves with a big armful of books that others have suggested.

The new-looking books are the best advertisement. The books also provide a way to talk with teachers and other adults working with students, and the multiple copies really make a difference in getting teens to read and talk about a book. We can add published copies to our collection, but not the unpublished galley versions. At

the end of our voting period, we give those galley copies to our reading classroom and the middle school classes. Most of the books go to the regional juvenile detention center, which has appreciated these donations that get more books in good condition to teens.

Why We Love YA Galley

Heather: It's a great program that encourages people to read. It attracts new readers, it opens up young minds to a variety of novels, and it allows students to state their opinions directly to the publishers.

Nadean: YA Galley has provided a fresh batch of books on a regular basis. It has been a fun way to talk with students, who quickly realize that the project is designed around their viewpoints. Students feel confident in expressing their opinions, and they discover fellow readers within the school in all grades. This project has students organizing, planning, reading, writing, and presenting to a real audience. I only regret that our two years is almost done, but I wish the best to the next lucky librarians and teens. They will learn so much about each other during this project.**

****[Editor's Note: Applications are closed for new 2005–2006 YA Galley teen book groups, but any individual teen or group may participate in the national vote for Teens' Top Ten Books every October during Teen Read Week. Urge your teens to spend the summer reading the 2004 teen nominations to be ready to vote online for their own favorites from October 17–23, 2004. Find the nominations on YALSA's Web site at <http://www.ala.org/teenread>; click Teen's Top Ten. Check the same location for online voting instructions this October.]**

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Heather
Acres and YA
Galley books.

PHOTO CREDIT:
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Heather Acres is an honors student in the junior class at Medical Lake High School in Medical Lake, Washington. She is very active in drama and the Booktalkers Club, while working as the library's Student Reader and Organizer of the YA Galley Project.

Nadean Meyer is active in the Washington Library Media Association and has been the library media specialist at MLHS for the past eight years. Her 2003 student YA Galley organizer, Ashley Lewan, appeared on the cover of **VOYA's** December 2003 issue.