

Leslee B. Farish. A Content Analysis of the Young Adult Library Services Association's Michael L. Printz Award Winners and the Eva H. Perry Regional Public Library's Mock Printz Book Club Winners: What is the Difference Between the Books Young Adults Choose and the Books Adults Choose For Young Adults? A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. November, 2006. 50 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm

This study describes a latent content analysis of eleven young adult novels to answer the question, what are the differences between the books young adults select for themselves as examples of quality literature and the books adults select for them. In examining this question the author analyzed the seven winning books selected by YALSA's Printz Award Selection Committee and compared them to the six books selected by the Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club at the Eva Perry Regional Public Library in Apex, NC.

The findings suggest that YALSA's Printz Selection committee selects novels with a semi-political agenda in mind and with the intention of encouraging advances in the field of young adult publishing. The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club selects novels that meet particular adolescent developmental needs, that share a common theme, (the protagonist's desire to be mothered) and a common grade level readability score, (the 6th grade).

Headings:

Book Clubs

Children's literature/Evaluation

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Young adults reading

Young adults reading/North Carolina

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES
ASSOCIATION'S MICHAEL L. PRINTZ AWARD WINNERS AND THE EVA H.
PERRY REGIONAL PUBLIC LIBRARY'S MOCK PRINTZ BOOK CLUB
WINNERS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BOOKS YOUNG
ADULTS CHOOSE AND THE BOOKS ADULTS CHOOSE FOR YOUNG ADULTS?

by
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Introduction

The Michael L. Printz Award was established in 2000 by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) to honor young adult literature of exemplary literary merit. This paper discusses the author's findings and use of latent content analysis to answer the question, what are the differences between the books young adults select for themselves as examples of quality literature and the books adults select for them. In examining this question the author analyzed the seven award winning books selected by YALSA's Printz Award Selection Committee and compared them to the six books selected by the Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club at the Eva Perry Regional Public Library in Apex, NC. The study focuses on readability using Edward Fry's graph for testing grade level readability and looks for a common theme or themes among the novels.

Literature Review

Mourning the Death of Young Adult Literature?

Young adult literature has long been, in the words of author Robert Cormier in 1996, “a stepchild of children’s literature, often neglected and misunderstood.”¹ As recently as 1990, editors, publishers, and marketing directors within the field of children’s publishing were sounding the death knell for the young adult novel.² Literary critics and academics echoed their concerns, explaining that the death of young adult literature was a result of lack of identity. The rise of the middle school movement in the United States, (which refers to the emphasis placed on books for children under the age of 14 by educators, librarians, publishers and booksellers), further skewed the dynamic between children’s literature and young adult literature, leading Betty Carter to note in her 1994 study that only 32 percent of the titles on the Young Adult Library Services Association’s (YALSA) 1993 Best Books for Young Adults list were recommended for readers over the age of 15, the emphasis placed on the reader 14 and younger.³

The reasons behind the supposed failure of young adult literature were varied; the ever-popular myth that teenagers don’t read frequently absolved publishing houses of the

¹ Michael Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award: A New Book Prize for a New Millennium" Journal of Youth Services in Libraries 12.4 (1999): 30.

² Peter Butts, "The Making of a Printz" Voices of Youth Advocates 25.5 (2002): 341.

³ Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award" 30.

guilt they might otherwise have felt for not attempting to reach older teenage readers.⁴

However, beginning in 1996 the industry experienced a shift. A program, “How Adult is Young Adult?” presented at the American Library Association’s (ALA) Annual Conference focused attention on the need for books aimed at older young adults, teenagers in high school and college. In the mid-1990s the institutional funding that finances children’s publishing, and which had all but disappeared in the 1980s, began flowing again, restoring the traditional market for young adult literature. Almost simultaneously teenagers emerged as the fastest-growing segment of the American population, complete with disposable income of their own, thus promising an expansion of the audience and market for young adult literature.⁵ Also in 1996 the National Book Foundation announced the reestablishment of a National Book Award in the young reader category. Two years later in 1998, for the first time in its nineteen-year history, the Los Angeles Times Book Prizes added a young adult fiction category.⁶ The first award was presented in March 1999 to young adult novelist Joan Bauer for her novel, Rules of the Road.

The publishing houses that emerged from the gloom and doom of the early 1990s still producing young adult literature were publishing books the likes of which had never been seen before. Gone was the stereotypical YA problem novel with its cathartic “you’re not alone” message. Appearing in its place were novels with a far wider range of themes including religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and concern for the future, each with a

⁴ Marc Aronson, “The Myths of Teenage Readers” Publishing Research Quarterly 16.3 (2000): 5.

⁵ Cart, “Creating the Michael L. Printz Award” 30.

⁶ Cart, “Creating the Michael L. Printz Award” 31.

recognizable young adult voice.⁷ Beyond subject matter, these young adult novels had a new tone. Authors now had the permission from their publishers to be humorous, to tell their stories in differing forms (like blank verse), and to take risks in their writing. It was hoped that a new award for young adult publishing would further encourage these changes and generate a greater appreciation of young adult literature beyond the universe of schools, publishing houses, and public libraries.⁸

⁷ Butts 341.

⁸ Butts 342.

The Making of a Printz

In the midst of this resurgence, Michael Cart, then president of YALSA, appointed a nine-member task force to examine the feasibility of establishing an annual award for the best young adult book of the year to be presented by YALSA.⁹ Young adult literature is a paradox, unique unto itself while at the same time overlapping with every other literary genre, from books for very young children to books for much older adults.¹⁰ In occupying this hazy in-between region, young adult literature never quite achieves the recognition of either its younger or older counterparts. It is in part out of this desire for recognition that the Michael L. Printz award was created, to encourage further creativity and risk-taking among young adult authors and publishers while at the same time celebrating the field's survival and Lazarus-like escape from the grave. The task force agreed that "best" in the context of the award would mean books of exemplary literary merit not necessarily of immense popularity. They also decided that a young adult would mean a person between the ages of twelve and eighteen. A young adult book would be a book published expressly for young adult readership, thus eliminating books published for adults that might appeal to a teenage audience. The task force believed an award for literary merit in the field of young adult literature to be essential as an acknowledgement that "some of the most risk-taking, artful, and creatively stimulating work in publishing is happening in the field of young adult literature" and also as evidence of the fact that teenagers need books created with their unique needs and interests in mind.¹¹ The task

⁹ Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award" 31.

¹⁰ Marc Aronson, "The YA Phenomenon in America: Books that Match Teenage Experience and Inspire Discovery" *Logos* 10.2 (1999) 111.

¹¹ Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award" 31.

force voted unanimously to name the award in honor of the late Mike Printz, a Grolier Award-winning librarian at Topeka West High School in Topeka, Kansas.¹² This award became the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature.

¹² Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award" 32.

The Printz Selection Process

Each year a winner and up to four honor books are selected by a committee of 10-11 members consisting of a committee chair, eight members, a consultant from the staff of *Booklist Magazine* and an optional administrative assistant. The chair and four members are appointed by the Vice President/President-Elect of YALSA and the remaining members will be elected by the membership. Members serve two year terms. The administrative assistant and *Booklist* consultant are not voting members of the committee.

Eligible books may be fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or anthology. They must have been published between January 1 and December 31 of the year preceding the announcement of the award and they must have been designated by their publisher as being either a book for young adults or one published for the age range that YALSA defines as young adult, (12-18). Books published for adults are not eligible. Works of joint authorship are eligible as are works published in another country assuming an American edition was published during the period of eligibility. If no title is deemed sufficiently meritorious, no award will be given for that year.¹³

There is no formal avenue for young adult reader input into the Printz selection process; the decision is made entirely by the members of the Printz selection committee. The lack of reader-input has led to some controversy in recent years. It seems counterintuitive that while YALSA's official Youth Participation (YP) policy is part of all proceedings, including the annual Best Books for Young Adults lists, the association

¹³ "Michael L. Printz Award," American Library Association, YALSA Booklists & Book Awards Page, 2005, 10 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz>>.

has established an award in which teen appeal is excluded as a criterion.¹⁴ Don't Printz committee members care what actual young adults think of the books being named best of the year for their genre? Apparently not as current wisdom seems to dictate that popularity and literary quality exist at opposite ends of the literary criticism spectrum. In fact, the Printz's award criteria and policy statement on the YALSA website explicitly states, "...popularity is not the criterion for this award..."¹⁵ And when addressing this point in his 2003 Booklist column, Michael Cart, the former president of YALSA who helped to establish the Printz's selection criteria elegantly wrote, "Well, duh! The whole point of the Printz is to recognize literary merit—not popularity."¹⁶ A particular work's accessibility to young adult readers, as evidenced by popularity and reader response, is taken into account, not in and of itself but mainly as a way to gauge Printz committee members' reading and responses.¹⁷ However, can a book be considered excellent or even a legitimate example of young adult literature if it doesn't appeal to its intended audience?¹⁸

¹⁴Cathi Dunn MacRae, "Frogs and Printzes: Our Evolving Book Award" Voice of Youth Advocates 25.5 (2002): 333.

¹⁵"Michael L. Printz Award," American Library Association, YALSA Booklists & Book Awards Page, 2005, 10 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz>>.

¹⁶Cart, "Second-Guessing the Committees (Carte Blanche)" *Booklist* (March 15, 2003): 1370.

¹⁷Butts 345.

¹⁸Patty Campbell, "The Sand in the Oyster: Prizes and Paradoxes" Hornbook 79.4 (2003): 502.

Literary Merit vs. Teen Appeal: Who Decides?

In 2005 Joanne Ujiie and Stephen Krashen reexamined a 1980 analysis performed by Nilson, Peterson, and Searfoss which attempted to discern whether children's literature that was considered to be of high literary merit by adults was also appealing to the children for whom it was written. Nilson, Peterson, and Searfoss assembled lists of books of literary merit, ("highly acclaimed by critics"), and combined them with lists of books selected by a librarian that were "known to be well-liked" by the children in her school library. Popularity rankings were determined by ten children's librarians in Phoenix, AZ. In their secondary analysis, Ujiie and Krashen employed statistical tests to quantify the difference between the two groups of books and to determine whether or to what extent the acclaimed and well-liked books differed in popularity. They found, in 24 out of 25 years that the well-liked books were considered more popular than the acclaimed books, confirming Nilson, Peterson, and Searfoss' results that the criteria used for declaring a book to have literary merit and the criteria a child employs when selecting a book are not the same.¹⁹ To date, a similar study has not been published examining the popularity of young adult literature's award winners, although the Nilson study does include a young adult title, Judy Blume's Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret. (Blume's novel was on the list of "well-liked" rather than "highly acclaimed" books.) There is no official teen input into the Printz award, although readers can nominate titles to be considered for the award through the YALSA website.²⁰ (This "nomination"

¹⁹Joanne Ujiie and Stephen Krashen, "Is Acclaimed Children's Literature Popular Among Children? A Secondary Analysis of Nilson, Peterson, and Searfoss" Knowledge Quest 34.1 (2005): 39-40.

²⁰ "Printz, Michael L. Award: Nomination Form." American Library Association, YALSA Booklists & Book Awards Page 2005. 20 Oct. 2006
<<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward/nominationform/nominationform.htm>>.

activity seems like an exercise in redundancy as all titles published for young adults in the year of eligibility are up for consideration by the Printz selection committee. However, the act of nomination at least allows committee members to see which books are generating the most buzz among those teen readers willing to nominate on the website.) Teen appeal has implicitly if not yet explicitly been excluded from the Printz committee's deliberations by their stated charge to select the best young adult book of the year, defining best solely in terms of literary merit.²¹ Would including reader input in the selections process inevitably taint the discussion of literary merit with popularity or would it allow committee members a better idea of how readers might receive possible award winners?²² In the case of the Printz award, adults do the picking and "thousands of children will be doomed to read" the results of their labors.²³

Young adults are finding ways around their disenfranchisement. Schools and public libraries across the nation have mock Newbery and Printz book clubs and elections in which young adults place their picks up against the experts' as the best books of the year. ALA has even started creating mock election kits to help this process along.²⁴ The students who participate in these activities are volunteering for the daunting task of critically reading and examining up to 25 books, (more in the case of the Eva Perry Club) in a four month period and evaluating them by assessing excellence in writing style and

²¹ Campbell 501.

²²Claire Horne, "'Beautiful'...'Fresh'...'Distinguished' Books: Teen Readers Take on the 2002 Printz Awards" Voices of Youth Advocates 25.5 (2002): 348-349.

²³Horne 351.

²⁴ Paulette Goodman, Jill Brooks, and Jane Hester, "Give Us a Voice, We'll Give You Newbery! Teens Becomes Newbery Reviewers" Library Media Connection 24.5 (2006): 18-19.

potential reception by their fellow students.²⁵ These students demonstrate their ability to engage and interact with literature on a personal level as well as an intellectual level, disconnecting from what they personally like or dislike and looking critically at the author's style and intent.

However, it is inevitable that teen and adult tastes will differ on the subject of selecting quality literature for young adults. Adults in the business of writing for and working with young adults should be able to accurately choose books that will be of interest to teens; this niche is adequately filled by the Best Books of the Year and the Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers lists. This is not the Printz's goal. The Printz is not trying to pick books that will be of interest to teens, it is trying to pick the *best* book of the year written and published for teens. It is inevitable that in choosing books solely on the basis of literary merit and taking little to no reader input the Printz committee will, from time to time, select books that are more popular with adults than with young adults.²⁶ How will prize winners selected for their literary merit by adults be assessed over time by their real audience?

²⁵Goodman, Brooks, and Hester 18.

²⁶Horne 350.

The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club

The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club in Apex, NC held its first meeting in 2000, only a few months after the first Printz was awarded to Walter Dean Myers' 1999 novel, Monster. The librarians at Eva Perry were comfortable with the mock election format as they'd had a fairly successful Mock Newbery Club for years. The club's members range in age from 14-17. Beginning in the spring club members and librarians begin compiling a list of titles that they feel might meet the criteria for literary merit.²⁷ They trade first impressions of the book and check reviews to aid in their decision of what should stay, what should be removed, and what new books should be added to their list. As a group the teens trim down this initial list to approximately fifty contenders. It is from this smaller list that the final selection is made. By December the group will have narrowed their finalists down to a list of ten to twelve. All members must read each final candidate in order to prepare for the awards debate, which takes place in January not long before the actual Printz winner is announced. At the awards debate the Eva Perry group meets to debate the book that they feel best meets the goal of the award. They choose a winner and several honor books. Like the actual committee they must come to a consensus on their selections. The group's goal is "not to predict and choose what the committee will choose" rather to say, "now we've chosen ours, let's see if the real committee gets it right!"²⁸

²⁷ Horne 350.

²⁸ Horne 350.

Research Question

In studying the Michael L. Printz Award for excellence in young adult literature one quickly becomes aware of the controversy surrounding the lack of youth input in the selection process. Literary awards have a long history of controversy.²⁹ In this, the Printz is no different. What makes the controversy surrounding the Printz so interesting is that the young adult genre is such that it begs the question, can a book be considered a legitimate, let alone excellent, example of young adult literature if it doesn't appeal to its intended audience?³⁰ The tug-of-war between teen appeal and literary merit in which the Printz Selection Committee has found itself caught leads to the question at the heart of this discussion: what is the difference between the books that young adults choose and the books adults choose for young adults?

²⁹ Amy Meeker, "Do Awards Sell Books?" Publishers Weekly 236 (1989): 32-36.

³⁰ Campbell 502.

Materials and Methods

Introduction:

This was a qualitative study drawing on the previously described descriptive research question. The method of research used was content analysis.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis is the study of recorded communication.³¹ (Recorded communication refers, in the context of this study, to Young Adult novels.) It may be defined as referring to any technique for which the classification of x relies almost exclusively upon the judgment of an analyst or group of analysts as to what category x falls into, on the basis of explicitly defined rules, and provided that the analyst's judgments are regarded as the reports of a scientific observer.³² The most meaningful content analysis results from manifest content analysis, which uses word count to uncover the "visible, surface content" of the studied communication.³³ Manifest content analysis is also considered to have high reliability and specificity but low validity when compared to latent content analysis. I was not concerned with the "visible surface content" of the young adult novels I researched; rather, I was interested in attempting to

³¹ Earl Babbie, The Practice of Social Research, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004: 314.

³² Ole R. Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969: 2-3.

³³ Babbie 319.

examine the underlying meaning or latent content of the text.³⁴ Analysis of the latent content of a section of text is considered to be more valid but not as reliable or specific as compared to manifest content analysis.³⁵ The content I chose to analyze would probably be more correctly termed “projected latent content” as it focuses almost exclusively on my “interpretation of the meanings of the content.”³⁶ I examined the latent content of eleven young adult novels to attempt to determine the difference between the books the Printz Committee selected as the best young adult books of the past seven years and the books the Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club selected as best.

Sample:

The sample consists of eleven Young Adult novels, defined here as a novel written, published and distributed for children ages 12-18. These specific novels were chosen either because they had won the Michael L. Printz award between the years 2000 and 2006, (as is the case in seven of the eleven novels), or because they were selected by the Mock Printz Book Club at the Eva Perry Regional Public Library in Apex, NC between the years 2001 and 2006.³⁷

The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club’s selections were chosen over other clubs throughout the state of North Carolina for two main reasons. The first is that because of Eva Perry’s physical location in relation to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I was able to visit the library and meet the librarians in charge of the club. The

³⁴ Holsti 14.

³⁵ Babbie 319.

³⁶ Kimberly A. Neuendorf, The Content Analysis Guidebook, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003: 139.

³⁷ “Perry, Eva: Mock Printz Book Club.” Eva H. Perry Regional Public Library Mock Printz Book Club Home Page, 2006. 10 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.geocities.com/mockprintzbookclub/index.htm>>.

second is that the club has been in operation since 2001, only one year less than the actual award, and is one of the oldest mock Printz clubs in existence. Their longevity provided more data than most other mock Printz clubs in the state of North Carolina.

The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club's selections agreed with the Printz committee's selections in 2001 and 2006, (Kit's Wilderness and Looking for Alaska, respectively) so special attention was paid to those books to determine what characteristics make them both award-winning and accessible to a teen audience. I also looked into whether the Mock Printz Book Club's selections for the years of non-agreement made it onto the Printz committee's Honor lists and vice-versa. (It should be noted that this was the case for only one title, 2002's Printz winner A Step from Heaven was also selected as one of Eva Perry's Honor Books for that year.) Due to time limitations I did not include the Honor lists of either group in this study, choosing to limit my sample to titles selected either by the Printz committee or the Eva Perry Mock Printz club as winners.

Based on the selection criteria, the following titles were examined (the novels are listed with their author and year of publication; they were awarded their Printz or Mock Printz in January of the following year):

1. Myers, Walter Dean, Monster (1999)
2. Almond, David, Kit's Wilderness (2000)
3. Na, An, Step from Heaven (2001)
4. Chambers, Aidan, Postcards from No Man's Land (2002)
5. Johnson, Angela, The First Part Last (2003)
6. Rosoff, Meg, How I Live Now (2004)

7. Green, John, Looking for Alaska (2005)
8. Klass, David, You Don't Know Me (2001)
9. Frank, E.R., America (2002)
10. Stone, Miriam R., At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir (2003)
11. Marchetta, Melina, Saving Francesca (2004)

After my first reading of the novels I chose to focus on two elements: readability and common theme(s).

Readability

It is often useful to check the readability of a piece of writing, especially when that piece of writing is being recommended to children by teachers, librarians, and publishers. Edward Fry, formerly of the Rutgers University Reading Center, created one of the most widely used and easy-to-use readability graphs for educators.³⁸ I chose to use the Fry Readability graph to estimate the approximate grade level readability for each of the Printz award-winning novels and the Eva Perry Mock Printz selections. I wanted to examine and compare grade level readability among the Printz novels, the Mock Printz novels, and across the two groups in order to ascertain if there was a pattern among winners in either group. Grade level readability was selected as a method to quantify “accessibility.”

In estimating grade level readability one must first randomly select three 100-word passages from the item being examined, in this case the young adult novels. The next step is to plot the average number of syllables and the average number of sentences per

³⁸ “Schrock, Kathy: Guide for Educators.” Discovery Channel, 2006. 10 Oct. 2006
<<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html>>.

100 words on the graph (Appendix A) to determine the grade level of the material. If all goes well, the grade level is determined at this point by averaging the three scores. If great variability is observed one should choose additional passages per book and repeat the process before concluding that the book has uneven readability.³⁹

Common Theme(s)

Combining the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms with Cuddon's Dictionary of Literary Terms, theme is a central idea or statement that unifies and controls an entire literary work.⁴⁰ My goal in examining the Printz Award winners and Mock Printz Book Club selections was to identify the various themes in each novel in order to determine whether or not there was one theme in common among the eleven.

Method

Each novel in the sample was read three times. In the first reading I read for content, avoiding taking notes except to mark sections that I found particularly well-written or noting commonalities in theme or voice. I alternated the order of the novels so that I followed each Printz title with a Mock Printz title. I also made sure not to read the books in the order in which they won. I place particular emphasis on the order in which I read the novels because I wanted to avoid bias by reading the novels either grouped according

³⁹ Edward Fry, Elementary Reading Instruction, New York: McGraw Hill, 1977: 217.

⁴⁰ Chris Baldick, Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990: 225.

J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 3rd Ed., Massachusetts: Blackwell Reference, 1991: 969.

to the committee that selected them or in the order in which they won. The order for the first reading was as follows:

1. Looking for Alaska (*Printz & Mock Printz*)
2. At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir (*Mock Printz*)
3. Monster (*Printz*)
4. Saving Francesca (*Mock Printz*)
5. Postcards from No Man's Land (*Printz*)
6. America (*Mock Printz*)
7. A Step from Heaven (*Printz, Mock Printz Honor Book*)
8. You Don't Know Me (*Mock Printz*)
9. How I Live Now (*Printz*)
10. Kit's Wilderness (*Printz & Mock Printz*)
11. The First Part Last (*Printz*)

In the second reading I grouped the titles in two groups of four and one group of three. Two of the three groups included the two novels that were selected by both the Printz committee and the Mock Printz Book Club. The third group included the novel that won the Printz and was also listed as a Mock Printz Honor book. When reading the novels in groups I attempted to do a “mini study,” searching for commonalities within the group and taking notes as if the small group were the entire sample. After the group readings I compiled my notes on each and was able to look across the groups to find what was common in all eleven books. While looking within and across the groups, I found myself focusing more and more on two specific themes, one common exclusively to the Mock

Printz titles and the other to the Printz titles. The groupings for the second reading were as follows:

Group 1:

Kit's Wilderness (*Printz & Mock Printz*)

You Don't Know Me (*Mock Printz*)

America (*Mock Printz*)

Group 2:

Looking for Alaska (*Printz & Mock Printz*)

Saving Francesca (*Mock Printz*)

At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir (*Mock Printz*)

The First Part Last (*Printz*)

Group 3:

A Step from Heaven (*Printz & Mock Printz Honor Book*)

Postcards from No Man's Land (*Printz*)

How I Live Now (*Printz*)

Monster (*Printz*)

My third reading was a search for further evidence to support the theme common among the Mock Printz titles and the theme common among the Printz titles. My note taking was heavier than in the first reading and more deliberate than in either of the previous readings. I ungrouped the novels and for the final reading read the Printz winners,

followed by the dual winners, and finally the Mock Printz winners. The order was as follows:

1. Monster (*Printz*)
2. Postcards from No Man's Land (*Printz*)
3. The First Part Last (*Printz*)
4. How I Live Now (*Printz*)
5. A Step from Heaven (*Printz & Mock Printz Honor Book*)
6. Kit's Wilderness (*Printz & Mock Printz*)
7. Looking for Alaska (*Printz & Mock Printz*)
8. You Don't Know Me (*Mock Printz*)
9. America (*Mock Printz*)
10. At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir (*Mock Printz*)
11. Saving Francesca (*Mock Printz*)

Following this final reading I went through each novel and estimated the grade level readability score using Edward Fry's readability graph. Prior to using the graph I selected three 100-word passages from each novel; I attempted to make sure that one of the passages came near the beginning of the novel, the other somewhere in the middle, and the final passage near the end. (I made this choice because at least two of the novels, A Step from Heaven and America are written from the point of view of the protagonist and at points in the novel the protagonist is very young so I wanted to ensure that I had an accurate representation of the novel.) From these passages I plotted the average number of syllables and the average number of sentences per passage on the graph. If two out of

my three scores agreed, I stopped here and averaged the three scores to determine the readability score for the novel. However, if two out of my three scores did not agree I plotted the syllables and sentences for up to two more 100-word passages before averaging the readability score for the novel.

Findings

Brief Synopsis of the Novels in the Sample

Printz Award Winners

Monster by Walter Dean Myers (1999) is the story of sixteen year old Steve Harmon. Accused of serving as a lookout for the botched robbery of a Harlem drugstore in which the owner was shot and killed, Steve is in prison during his murder trial. Steve decides to write his impressions about the case and his incarceration as a movie screenplay to help keep his mind off of his current reality. It is never fully clear whether Steve is actually guilty of the crime for which he is accused and in reading Steve's flashbacks and the courtroom scenes the reader becomes both witness and juror for Steve's trial. Steve is eventually found not guilty but his attorney refuses to hug him after the verdict is read. This rejection leaves Steve filming himself from many angles, trying desperately to see what frightened her.

A Step from Heaven by An Na (2001) is the story of Korean immigrant Young Ju Park. The novel is told in Young Ju's voice as she matures from a four year-old child to an eighteen year-old young woman. The text is spare and lyrical, at times almost poetic and there is a distinctly adult tone throughout. Rather than a traditional plot the novel is

comprised of loosely linked vignettes that describe the difficulties immigrants face when coming to the United States including learning a new language, dealing with government bureaucracy, and the struggle to make enough money to survive. Throughout all these vignettes is the underlying theme of dealing with an abusive and alcoholic father.

Postcards from No Man's Land by Aidan Chambers (2002) tells two parallel narratives, separated by more than fifty years. The first narrator is seventeen year old Jacob Todd who left his home in England to spend a few days in the Netherlands honoring the grandfather who died before he was born and visiting Geertrui Wesseling, the Dutch woman who took care of his grandfather after he was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. Geertrui in 1944 is the second narrator and between her story and Jacob's the reader begins to understand the true nature of the relationship between Jacob's grandfather and Geertrui. As each narrative unfolds, similarities and differences between the two eras emerge. Along with art, literature, and love topics dealt with in the novel include euthanasia, adultery and bisexuality. It should be noted that these issues are not necessarily treated as problems to be solved; instead they make up an additional part of the story's texture. The ending is not neatly tied up; there are implications of challenges in the future for Jacob and many of the secondary characters. However, it is clear that Jacob will be able to cope with this ambiguity and is well on his way down a path of self-discovery.

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (2003) is sixteen year old Bobby's story about an event that changed his life and his unrelenting struggle to do the right thing. Told in alternating chapters, ("then" during the pregnancy and "now" after Feather's birth),

Bobby's story unfolds. Bobby and his girlfriend Nia discover that they are pregnant. During the course of the pregnancy they are convinced that their best course of action would be to give the baby up for adoption. This leads to some reader confusion about why when the story opens Bobby is raising Feather on his own, with no Nia in sight. The reader observes Bobby struggle to balance parenting, school, and friends. In the final chapters, flashbacks lead to the revelation that Nia is in an irreversible coma due to eclampsia. Finally, Bobby decides to leave his parents and move with Feather to Heaven, OH to be near his brother because it is a good place to raise children. The novel is well-written and Bobby's love for his daughter comes across quite plainly, but in the end it feels more issue than character driven.

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff (2004) is the story of fifteen year old Daisy, a troubled New Yorker with a dead mother, a distant father, a wicked stepmother and an eating disorder. Daisy is sent to England for the summer to live with her mother's sister's family. When her Aunt Penn leaves the country for a peace conference in Oslo, England is bombed and occupied by an unnamed foe and World War III erupts. Daisy and her four cousins have an almost idyllic existence against this backdrop, tucked away in the countryside without any adults to tell them what to do. During this time Daisy and one of her cousins, Edmond, begin a sexual relationship. Eventually soldiers turn up at their home and the cousins are separated according to gender and sent to live with chaperones. Daisy and her cousins struggle across the countryside to reunite and just when their reunion seems imminent Daisy's father manages to make contact and whisks her back to the United States. The narrative picks back up several years after the war has

ended. Daisy rejoins her cousins in England and attempts to explain to Edmond why she left.

Mock Printz Book Club Selections

You Don't Know Me by David Klass (2001) is a novel about a boy named John. John is fourteen and lives with his mother and his mother's boyfriend, ("the man who is not my father"). John attends an "anti-school" and passes the time with his "friends who are not friends" and sits in band class with "a giant frog pretending to be a tuba." However, nobody, not his mother, not the man who is not his father, not his teachers, not the friends who are not his friends, nobody actually knows John. John is being abused by his mother's boyfriend, and he feels that, since nobody knows him, nobody cares. It is just something he must deal with. When his mother goes out of town to take care of a dying relative, the abuse escalates and John's band teacher rescues him as his mother's boyfriend is in the process of beating him to death. When John wakes up in the hospital he realizes he must slowly start to let people in, let them begin to know him, beginning with his mother. *You Don't Know Me* carefully blends humor with horror and somehow manages to not come across as a typical problem novel.

America by E.R. Frank (2002) tells the story of fifteen year old America, a boy who got lost in the social services system when he was six years old. The story is told in the first person, mostly through flashbacks, while America is in counseling sessions with his therapist, Dr. B. Through these flashbacks the reader learns about America's birth to a crack-addicted mother, sees him raised by his foster mother, Mrs. Harper, and then sees the state send him back to his biological mother when he is six years old. It is at this

point that the system breaks down. America's mother abandons him in an apartment with his two brothers and he must take care of himself, he lives like this for two years. When he is finally returned to Mrs. Harper he spends years being molested by her half-brother, Browning, until he sets Browning on fire and runs away to New York City. After living on the streets for a period of time, America is put into a group home and later, after a suicide attempt, a live-in treatment facility where he meets Dr. B. It is here that America's healing begins.

At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir by Miriam Stone (2003) is a college student, Miriam, telling the story of the year her mother died of cancer. The events of the story unfold in alternating poetry and prose, the book divided into seasons like the year itself. The story begins before Miriam's mother's death and ends several months after, in this way it allows the author's journey to come full circle.

Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta (2004) is the story of sixteen year old Francesca Spinelli as she maneuvers her way through a transitional year in both her family and school lives. Francesca's vivacious mother, Mia, falls into a deep depression soon after the story begins. At the same time, Francesca's parents force her to attend St. Sebastian's, the formerly all-boy's school in downtown Sydney. Gradually, Francesca begins to establish herself at her school, bonding with some of the girls from St. Stella's (her former school) whom she had considered misfits, and with some of the St. Sebastian's boys. She even finds herself falling in love for the first time. In the midst of all this Francesca begins, after years of letting everyone else define her, to discover who she is and lets out her own personality. However, her mother's illness takes its toll on her

as she spends most of her free time trying to get her mother out of bed and worrying that the dark depression that has captured her mother is lurking within her as well. The rest of the novel follows Francesca as she tries to use her new-found friendships and the knowledge she's gained about her own personality to save her family and herself.

Printz Award Winners and Mock Printz Book Club Selections

Kit's Wilderness by David Almond (2000) is a novel that focuses on Kit Watson, aged thirteen, and his relationships with fellow thirteen year olds John Askew and Allie Keenan in Stoneygate, a mining town in northern England. Kit divides his time between helping his parents care for his ailing grandfather, and playing the game called Death with mysterious, shadowy John and lively, energetic Allie. Elements of the fantastic are present throughout the novel, made especially evident in Kit and John's ability to see ghosts from Stoneygate's past all around them. When the game called Death is interrupted and ultimately banned by their teachers, John disappears and it is up to Kit to find him. Kit goes down into the old mining pits and spends the night with John, telling stories where the borders of the past and the present are very hazy until morning comes and Allie appears to guide the boys back home.

Looking for Alaska by John Green (2005) is the story of sixteen year old Miles "Pudge" Halter who, seeking what Rabelais called the "Great Perhaps," sets off for Culver Creek boarding school in Birmingham, AL. Once at Culver Creek, Pudge makes friends with Chip "the Colonel" Martin and Alaska Young. It is Alaska's adventure-seeking and self-loathing, self-destructive behavior that end up driving the story. Alaska and the Colonel teach Pudge to drink, smoke, and plot elaborate pranks. The three

friends stay up all night talking and swapping stories and gradually the depths of Alaska's unhappiness become obvious. The chapters of the novel are headed by the number of days "before" and "after" what becomes clear to the reader is Alaska's death. The remainder of the novel depicts Pudge's attempts to come to terms with Alaska's death by trying to figure out if it was an accident or suicide and in so doing, save her.

Readability

<i>Printz Award</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Fry Readability Score</i>
2000	<u>Monster</u>	Myers, Walter Dean	6 th grade
2001	<u>Kit's Wilderness</u>	Almond, David	4 th grade
2002	<u>A Step from Heaven</u>	Na, An	5 th grade
2003	<u>Postcards from No Man's Land</u>	Chambers, Aidan	8 th grade
2004	<u>The First Part Last</u>	Johnson, Angela	6 th grade
2005	<u>How I Live Now</u>	Rosoff, Meg	10 th grade
2006	<u>Looking for Alaska</u>	Green, John	7 th grade

Table 1: Grade Level Readability Scores, Michael L. Printz Award Winners

<i>Mock Printz Award</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Fry Readability Score</i>
2000	NONE	NONE	NONE
2001	<u>Kit's Wilderness</u>	Almond, David	4 th grade
2002	<u>You Don't Know Me</u>	Klass, David	8 th grade
2003	<u>America</u>	Frank, E.R,	5 th grade
2004	<u>At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir</u>	Stone, Miriam R.	7 th grade
2005	<u>Saving Francesca</u>	Marchetta, Melina	7 th grade
2006	<u>Looking for Alaska</u>	Green, John	7 th grade

Table 2: Grade Level Readability Scores, Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club Selections

Table 1 depicts the Fry grade level readability scores for the seven Printz award winning novels and Table 2 depicts the scores for the six Mock Printz Club selections. The average grade level for Table 1 is 6.57, which rounds up to 7th grade. The average grade level for Table 2 is 6.3, which I have rounded down to 6th grade.

It should be noted that the 10th grade score for the Printz novel, How I Live Now is more than likely skewed as the novel is written in run-on sentences and the Fry method

for scoring grade level readability is based on the number of syllables and sentences in a 100 word segment. The overly long, run-on sentences in Rosoff's novel and lack of proper punctuation make it difficult to properly determine the actual grade level readability. Additionally, fellow Printz winner, A Step from Heaven and Mock Printz selection, America are each written in the voice, style, and age of their protagonists and as the character ages over the course of the novel, the writing ages as well.

I took multiple scores of the novels to determine the grade level readability and I always took a reading near the beginning of the novel, somewhere in the middle, and near the end. Interestingly, the grade level readability score range of the majority of the novels, regardless of which committee selected them, followed a similar pattern. Most of the novels started at either a high grade level (6th, 7th, or 8th grade) or a low grade level (2nd grade), and then proceeded to fluctuate either high, low, high or low, high, low. For the novels I took more than three readings from, the pattern was more interesting. For example, Kit's Wilderness started at a low grade level readability, then grew to a high readability, dipped low again, and finished high. Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate the pattern more clearly.

<u>Monster</u>	<u>Kit's Wilderness</u>	<u>Step from Heaven</u>	<u>Postcards...</u>	<u>The First Part Last</u>	<u>How I Live Now</u>	<u>Looking for Alaska</u>
7 th grade	2 nd grade	2 nd grade	8 th grade	6 th grade	10 th grade	7 th grade
5 th grade	2 nd grade	7 th grade	9 th grade	6 th grade	9 th grade	6 th grade
7 th grade	6 th grade	4 th grade	7 th grade	7 th grade	9 th grade	7 th grade
	3 rd grade	4 th grade	7 th grade	4 th grade	11 th grade	
	7 th grade	7 th grade				

Table 3: Michael L. Printz Award Winners, Grade Level Readability Range, (Scores taken at the beginning, middle, and end of each novel.)

<u>Kit's Wilderness</u>	<u>You Don't Know Me</u>	<u>America</u>	<u>At the End of Words...</u>	<u>Saving Francesca</u>	<u>Looking for Alaska</u>
2 nd grade	9 th grade	6 th grade	7 th grade	7 th grade	7 th grade
2 nd grade	6 th grade	3 rd grade	7 th grade	7 th grade	6 th grade
6 th grade	9 th grade	6 th grade	8 th grade	6 th grade	7 th grade
3 rd grade		4 th grade			
7 th grade					

Table 4: Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club Selections, Grade Level Readability Range, (Scores taken at the beginning, middle, and end of each novel.)

The fluctuating low-high-low-high pattern demonstrated in Kit's Wilderness and the other novels studied could be indicative of a writer's choice to start their novel at a lower readability level in order to draw readers in and then steadily raise and lower it in order to maintain interest, easing the reader out of the novel at the end. Additionally, the pattern could be dismissed with the explanation that the lower scored sections indicate dialogue and the higher scored sections indicate exposition. I believe that further research is needed to decipher the meaning behind the pattern demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4.

Common Themes

As previously discussed, during my examination of the sample, I found that the eleven novels separated themselves into three groups around two main themes and one pattern. Again, I admit that I encouraged their separation according to committee selection, however, I do not believe that I tried to push a theme that was not present within the novels. The groups, themes, and pattern are described below.

Printz Award Winners

- I could not locate a shared theme among the five Printz winners. Each novel seems to speak to a completely different readership, set of issues, and writing style. All five novels shared certain qualities. All were well-written, all possessed a strong narrative voice, and all dealt with a unique set of problems facing teenagers today. In fact, it was these problems that perked my interest. Each novel dealt with its issues in its own way, from violence and crime among youth in Monster to eating disorders and war in How I Live Now, alcoholism and domestic violence in A Step from Heaven, bisexuality and euthanasia in Postcards from No Man's Land, and finally teen pregnancy in The First Part Last. The common link between all of these novels was that they each, at times, became more issue than narrative driven. It seems that the Printz committee, in their effort to keep selecting cutting edge work and not repeat their selections, have gone completely to the other side and piled on the problems in each of their novels.

Mock Printz Book Club Selections:

- The common theme that I found connecting You Don't Know Me, America, At the End of Words, and Saving Francesca was the protagonist's desire to be mothered. The presence or absence of a mother or mother figure featured prominently in all four of these novels.

Printz Award Winners and Mock Printz Book Club Selections

- The common theme I found running throughout Kit's Wilderness and Looking for Alaska was the protagonist's need to "save" or "rescue" their friend. Friendship was important in both books, but what really connected the two in my mind was the "friendly rescuer" element which was very present in the latter half of both books. In fact, the "friendly rescuer" drove much of the story in the later chapters of both books.

Printz Award Winners

The pattern uniting the four Printz Award winners was that they each, at times, become more issue than narrative driven and in so doing border on becoming the typical young adult "problem novel."

The plot in Monster is driven by Steve's trial and the flashbacks to his crime-ridden inner city New York neighborhood. Prison violence, gangs and gang violence, murder, theft, and drugs are all elements that are heavily present throughout the novel.

A Step from Heaven is a series of loosely connected vignettes but the themes connecting these vignettes are the difficulties immigrants face when coming to the United States and a family dealing with an abusive and alcoholic father.

Postcards from No Man's Land is almost two parallel novels going on at once. The first novel is Jacob's quest to find himself and in the process introduces elements of homosexuality, bisexuality, euthanasia, and deep, dark family secrets. It is the family secrets, and Jacob's attempts to come to terms with them while dealing with the previously mentioned elements, that drive Jacob's story. The second novel is a love story between Geertrui and another Jacob set against the backdrop of World War II and the Battle of the Bulge. This story is also heavily driven by family secrets, but also a war, Nazi occupation, and death.

The plot in The First Part Last is driven by sixteen year old Bobby learning to handle fatherhood. The plot is further complicated by Nia's irreversible coma, leaving Bobby to deal with being a single parent on top of being a teenage parent. The First Part Last handles teen pregnancy differently than most YA "teen pregnancy novels" in that it focuses almost exclusively on single fatherhood rather than motherhood.

The story in How I Live Now deals with a protagonist with an eating disorder, a disinterested father, and a dead mother and then goes on to bring in a semi-incestuous relationship, quasi-psychic abilities, and World War III. It would not be fair to say that the plot is fully driven by these elements, but they are heavily present throughout and at times do drive the story.

Mock Printz Book Club Selections

The common theme connecting You Don't Know Me, America, At the End of Words, and Saving Francesca was the protagonist's desire to be mothered.

In You Don't Know Me, John never tells his mother that her boyfriend has been beating him because he does not think that she will believe him. He believes that she will choose her boyfriend over him, that she loves her boyfriend more than she loves her son.

“He’s petting the top of your head like he would pet a dog, with his right hand, which just happens to be the hand he hits me with. When he hits me he doesn’t curl his fingers up into a fist because that would leave a mark. He slaps me with the flat of his hand. WHAP. And now I’m watching him stroke your cheek with those same fingers. He holds me tight with his left hand when he hits me so that I can’t run away. And now he’s holding you tenderly with his left hand. And I’m telling you this as I watch through the window...”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she demands, and there is both anger and pain in her voice. A very strange thing happens...I grab her back, and I open my mouth, and in an awful croaking whisper, I answer her with a single word: “Him.”

“Him what? What are you saying?”

Somehow I manage to whisper out five words, slowly, each one an effort. “You—would—have—chosen—him” (Klass, 2-3, 331).

In America, America’s biological mother abandons him twice before he is eight years old. He finds happiness and stability for a brief period with his foster mother, Mrs. Harper, but this happiness is short-lived. America draws on these early memories with Mrs. Foster, early memories of trust and love to help him to learn to trust Dr. B later in the novel.

“I see you, Mister. I see you over there.” And I scream because it’s real good to be seen. And she pulls off her smock and goes, “I’m going to get you, America! I’m going to get you!” And I’m banging out the screen door running real hard and

laughing real hard, and she's running right after me and laughing, too, and she's going to snatch me up any minute and hold me real close and tickle, and I run harder, and then she catches me, and she's going, "I got you! I got you!"

I try real hard to remember my mother. I try to remember her face or her voice.

I'm lying on my stomach in bed. I hear a dragging sound, mixed up with creaking, and when it gets closer, I know it's Mrs. Harper with her walker. It takes her forever to get to the side of my bed, and I stay still, pretending to be asleep. She hasn't touched me since she washed out my mouth, and her little, light hand in the middle of my back is nice. I stay real still as her hand moves up and down (Frank, 20, 38, 64).

In At the End of Words, Miriam struggles to come to grips with her changing relationship with her mother, first as she and her mother trade places and she takes care of her mother while the cancer ravages her mother's body. Later, after her mother's death, Miriam looks at the empty space beside her where her mother should be and misses her presence, misses her mother's role in her life.

In my mind I see hundreds of snapshots...My mother on a hospital bed, smiling at me with her thin mouth. Click. Me crawling onto the couch beside her with the newest J. Crew catalog, ordering shirts for her in medium, even though she's less than a small, so no one can see the outlines of bandages and tubes on her chest.

I watch as she observes her daughter, her concerned eye and slightly nagging voice, and I wonder what it would be like to have my own mother standing behind me right now. It's hard to imagine, now that I have taken on my independence like a call to war.

I glance back at the mirror. I imagine my mother behind me, nodding her head with approval, her neck long and thin like mine, telling me I look beautiful, how proud she is of me, and hugging me as I walk out the door (Stone, 3, 37, 38).

In Saving Francesca, Francesca's mother has fallen suddenly into a deep depression and, as she was the life force behind the family, her disappearance has left her children and husband to more or less fend for themselves.

“I’m going to try to be better tomorrow. I promise,” she says. Her voice is pitiful. Who is this person? I can’t help thinking how strange her words are. Does it mean she has control over this thing, whatever it is?

“My mother had a nervous breakdown. She’s suffering from depression and she won’t get out of the house. And every day it’s killing us more.” I can’t believe I’ve said it out loud. The truth doesn’t set you free you know. It makes you feel awkward and embarrassed and defenseless and red in the face and horrified and petrified and vulnerable. But free? I don’t feel free. I feel like shit (Marchetta, 25, 137).

Francesca realizes that without Mia to push her, fight with her, and love her she doesn’t really know who she is. Francesca needs her mother to define herself.

And Mia. I want her to say, “Frankie, you’re silly, you’re lazy, you’re talented, you’re passionate, you’re restrained, you’re blossoming, you’re contrary.” I want to be an adjective again. But I’m a noun. A nothing. A nobody. A no one.

My mother’s rituals become ours. One morning it’s You Am I’s “Heavy Heart,” and another time my dad puts on Joe Jackson’s “A Slow Song” because that was their wedding waltz...I try to find music that belong to me, but I realize that Mia’s music has become mine. Mia’s everything has consumed us all our lives and now Mia’s nothing is consuming us as well (Marchetta, 44, 111)

Printz Award Winners and Mock Printz Book Club Selections

The common theme running throughout Kit’s Wilderness and Looking for Alaska was the protagonist’s need or desire to “save” or “rescue” their friend.

In Kit’s Wilderness Kit’s friend John Askew run’s away from home. Kit and John believe that they are fated to be friends because their names are carved at opposite ends of a churchyard monument to the children who died in the pit disaster a generation before. Kit also believes that it is up to him to find John and bring him home and rescue him from the darkness he seems drawn to throughout the novel.

She [Askew's mother] looked at our faces. She reached out and gripped my hand. "Bring him home," she whispered. "Bring my boy home." Her fingernails and rings dug into my skin. "Bring him home." Then she hurried homeward through the dark (Almond, 157).

Kit tried to bring John back from the darkness by inviting him to illustrate his stories.

John's drawings, like Kit's stories, depict Stoneygate during the mining days.

"I've done more stories," I said. "You could do pictures. We could be a team."

Askew grunted. "Team. Bloody team!"

"The other one you did was great," I said (Almond, 103).

In Looking for Alaska, Pudge feels an immense amount of guilt for helping Alaska sneak off campus the night that she died. He feels that he let her down, he wasn't there for her when she needed him, he wasn't a good enough friend to her. Pudge decides that if he can determine whether Alaska's death was an accident or suicide, he will be able to, in a way, redeem her.

The Colonel said, "I just want to save her so bad," and I said, "Chip, she's gone," and he said, "I thought I'd feel her looking down on us, but you're right. She's just gone."

And now I don't even know if you chose the straight and fast way out, if you left me like this on purpose...I needed, I decided, to really know her, because I needed more to remember. Before I could begin the shameful process of forgetting the how and the why of her living and dying, I needed to learn it: How. Why. When. Where. What.

"We all let her go, really," he said (Green 152, 173, 183).

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on my observations from the data set reviewed I found that for the past seven years YALSA's Printz selection committee has consistently attempted to select books that are varied and non-repetitive in terms of readability and theme, (readability scores range from the 4th grade to the 10th grade but can be averaged to the 7th grade). This variety and avoidance of repetition comes across as an effort to avoid repeating winning themes. The Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club is under no obligation to think of the future of the young adult genre when selecting their winners; their only obligation is to the criteria set out on the Printz page on the YALSA website. Eva Perry's Mock Printz Book Club has consistently selected novels that share a common theme, (the protagonist's desire to be mothered) and share a middle school grade level readability, (averaged to the sixth grade). The novels selected by both groups also share a common theme, (the protagonist's need or desire to "save" or "rescue" his friend) but do not share a common grade level readability with each other, (though their readability level fits with the description of the readability levels within their individual Printz and Mock Printz subgroups).

When beginning this study, I set out to answer the question, what is the difference between the books that young adults choose and the books adults choose for young adults. I cannot generalize from my findings here to answer this question in broad

terms. However, if I amended my question to something like, what is the difference between the books the Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club selects as compared to the books chosen by YALSA's Printz selection committee, I could use these findings. The answer to that question would be that Eva Perry's books share a common theme and a middle school grade level readability while YALSA's Printz Award winners share no common theme and, on average, no common grade level readability.

Michael Cart discussed the fact that the Printz Award was created, in part, to encourage further risk-taking and creativity among the authors and publishers of young adult literature.⁴¹ I believe that this fact can partially explain the pattern I noticed when examining the Printz award winners. It appears, to me, that the Printz selection committee is attempting with each successive year to reach a new audience with its picks. I do not dispute the literary quality of their selections. However, I do believe that they are employing additional criteria in the selections process beyond that which is outlined on the official Printz page of the YALSA website. My findings lead me to believe that novels with "controversial" subject matter, novels that reach an underrepresented demographic or portion of the population, novels that deal with issues that have traditionally been ignored in young adult literature, and novels that are written in a non-traditional style are more likely to be selected by YALSA's Printz selection committee than other young adult novels published in the same year. Additionally, once a specific issue has been "done" by the Printz, that is, once a novel wins a Printz and wins it while dealing with a specific subject matter, no future novel dealing with that subject matter will win the Printz in the near future.

⁴¹ Cart, "Creating the Michael L. Printz Award" 31.

Conversely, I believe my findings indicate the Mock Printz Book Club's selections to be right on target with the selectors' stage of development. These teens are in middle to late adolescence, the term encompassing children ages 14 to 19.⁴² The children participating in Eva Perry's club during the years of the sample ranged in age from 14-18. This is a very confusing time for many children. Of all the characteristics of adolescence, those most pertinent to this discussion include loneliness, psychological vulnerability, and peer group need.⁴³ Another important characteristic to this discussion is the adolescent coming to terms with the idea of their parents as not being perfect.⁴⁴ This last factor, combined with psychological vulnerability, comes into play heavily with the shared theme among the Mock Printz Club's selections, (the protagonist's desire to be mothered). Loneliness and peer group need are involved in the common theme for the novels selected by both the Mock Printz Club and the Printz Committee, (the protagonist's desire to save or rescue his friend).

I believe that my findings indicate a trend wherein the Printz committee selects books with a semi-political agenda in mind whereas the Eva Perry Mock Printz Book Club selects books along developmentally appropriate lines. If I were to generalize further, and try to answer the question I started out with, these findings would lead to the conclusion that adults select books for children with the goal of sending children

⁴² Melanie Rapp, "Adolescent Development: an emotional roller coaster," Young Adults and Public Libraries, ed by Mary Anne Nichols and C. Allen Nichols, Greenwood, 1998: 1-10.

⁴³ Gisela Konopka, "Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth," *Adolescence*, 4 (Fall) 1973: 301.

⁴⁴ L.T. Stover and E. Tway, "Cultural Diversity and the Young Adult Novel," Reading Their World, ed by V.R. Monseu and G.M. Salvner, Boynton/Cook, 1992.

a message while children or young adults select books that meet a need they sense within themselves at a particular time or in a particular situation.

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Appendix A: Edward Fry's Graph for Estimating Reading Age (Grade Level)

