Getting students to read is a common problem in many secondary English language arts classrooms. Many teachers continue to assign only classic literature with novels that have been traditionally used in English language arts classrooms because of the belief in timeliness. There is evidence that the use of young adult literature in the secondary classroom can increase the chances that students will participate in the satisfying literary experiences, read more, and become lifelong readers. In addition, young adult literature can better prepare students for the appreciation and understanding of classic literature.

Santoli & Wagner, 2004
What is Young Adult Literature?

Young adult literature: “anything that readers between the ages of 12 and 18 choose to read (as opposed to what they may be coerced to read for class assignments).

Nilsen and Donelson, 2004
Thoughts on Y.A. Literature

...Y.A. literature is something that adolescents want to read as opposed to being forced to read by teachers. Why do they want to read it? Perhaps because it helps them feel as if they are not alone.

-Alsup, 2003

Young adult literature can be a vehicle that allows teachers to present students in stimulating classroom discussions and assignments. Unlike classic literature, it can foster a desire to read. Because it:

a) employs the literary elements of the classics,
b) engages adolescent students in analyzing literature along with themselves and their principles, and
c) promotes and encourages lifelong reading habits.

Young adult literature deserves a valued and respected position in secondary language arts classrooms.

-Santoli and Wagner, 2004
Encourage Healthy, Ethical Decision Making

• Acquiring more mature social skills
• Achieving a masculine or feminine sex role
• Accepting the changes in one’s body, using the body effectively, and accepting one’s physique
• Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults
• Preparing for sex, marriage, and parenthood
• Selecting and preparing for an occupation
• Developing a personal ideology and ethical standards
• Assuming membership in the larger community

Nilsen & Donelson 2004
Encourage Empathy

• In explaining the term “world citizenship” as a function of literature, Nussbaum explained

[cultivating] in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us.

Politicizing young adult literature: Reading Anderson’s *Speak* as a critical text, Janet Alsup

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• Engagement with this novel [*From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*] may have allowed some white readers the discovery that other people experience the world in ways they do not.

Singer & Smith, 2001
Help Students Talk About Emotional or Controversial Topics

They can talk or write about real problems vicariously and with little personal risk...Consequently, in the words of critical pedagogues, students might become more ‘critically conscious’ of their social and cultural realities, and hence better able to deal with them in real life situations.

Alsup, 2003
Cultivate a Desire to Read

...literacy reading rates among young adult ages 18-24 decreasing from 3. percent in 1992 to 42.8 percent in 2002.

...the general consensus among professors and librarians is that the type of books students are reading doesn’t matter just as long as they’re reading.

Maddie Morris, a sophomore nutrition and dietetics major at the University of Nebaska-Lincoln, said she went through a phase where the teen chick lit books were the only type of novels she read, but, as she got older, she found other types of literature more worthwhile.

• Stinson, 2006
Suggested Works

*Make Lemonade*, Virginia Euwer Wolff  
*Forged By Fire*, Sharon Draper  
*Tears of the Tiger*, Sharon Draper  
*Monster*, Walter Dean Myers  
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou  
*Night*, Elie Wiesel  
*Stargirl*, Jerry Spinelli  
*The Skin I’m In*, Sharon G. Flake  
*Speak*, Laurie Halse Anderson  
*The First Part Last*, Angela Johnson  
*Born Blue*, Han Nolan