

### **Under the Influence: Narratives of Drug Use in 1970s YA Fiction**

In a 1967 *New York Times* editorial, *The Outsiders* author S.E. Hinton questioned whether books written for young adults addressed the “real” issues pertinent to readers. “Where is the reality?” she pondered. Problem novels of the 1970s attempted to capture reality by focusing on “big issues” in teens’ lives. One recurring topic was drug use, a focus that aligns with the widespread cultural anxiety surrounding teen drug use in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This time period saw a dominant discourse around drug use that capitalized on fear of “good” (read: white) kids being tricked into using drugs. Nixon similarly employed this rhetoric in 1971 with his War on Drugs, a campaign directly tied to the contemporary issue of mass incarceration. In this presentation, I examine YA novels from the 1960s and 1970s such as Eyerly’s *Escape from Nowhere* (1969), Kingman’s *The Peter Pan Bag* (1970), Hinton’s *That Was Then, This is Now* (1971), Sparks’s *Go Ask Alice* (1971), and Strasser’s *Angel Dust Blues* (1979), reading these texts through the lens of 1970s drug policy. I consider the kinds of narratives surrounding drug use present in these books, arguing that YA fiction of the 1970s reproduces commonly-held yet unfounded beliefs about addiction and drug use, thus reiterating conservative positions about drugs and society. In turn, I conclude by illustrating how the pattern established in these early YA novels continues to be seen in representations of drug use in YA literature across time.