

Contemporary Young Adult Novels: Displaying Social Issues and the Human Condition

Introduction

A shift in young adult literature has occurred over the past few decades as fantasy and imaginative literature has transformed into complex contemporary pieces displaying prevalent social issues. Portraying the modern human condition for young teens is difficult while crafting a piece of literature suitable for the age group. In this paper, I explore how the young adult genre can be told in a contemporary context to display realistic conditions and the crises that modern teens face. I examine pieces of children's literature that have successfully depicted contemporary social issues including *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen* (Nielsen, 2016), *Piecing Me Together* (Watkins, 2017), and *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2003). These selected pieces portray modern young adult issues that are directly affected by or coincide with, contemporary social issues including, funding displacement, racial disparities, inequality, bullying, and death. An accurate portrayal of social issues is essential, but the representation of the authentic human condition during early teenage years is vital. I argue that children's literature, more specifically the young adult genre, must address contemporary social issues as main antagonists in literature to adopt an activist form and create genuine empathy to today's youth. I will discuss the emergence of this type of genre and how each of these three pieces conveys prevalent social issues including financial realities/ misfortunes, minority/sexuality status, and mental health.