

THE READERS' ADVISORY GUIDE TO
TEEN LITERATURE

Angela Carstensen

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ANGELA CARSTENSEN has served as a school librarian since 2000. Currently, she is director of library and information services at Sacred Heart Greenwich, a private K–12 girls’ school in Connecticut. She is author of *Outstanding Books for the College Bound: Titles and Programs for a New Generation* (2011), and she was the editor of *School Library Journal’s* “Adult Books 4 Teens” blog. Carstensen has chaired YALSA’s committees for the Michael L. Printz Award, Alex Award, and Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults.

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Series Introduction

Joyce Saricks and Neal Wyatt

SERIES EDITORS

In a library world in which finding answers to readers' advisory questions is often considered among our most daunting service challenges, library staff need guides that are supportive, accessible, and immediately useful. The titles in this series are designed to be just that. They help advisors become familiar with fiction genres and nonfiction subjects, especially those they don't personally read. They provide ready-made lists of "need to know" elements, such as key authors and read-alikes, as well as tips on how to keep up with trends and important new authors and titles.

Written by librarians with years of RA experience who are also enthusiasts of the genre or subject, the titles in this series of practical guides emphasize an appreciation of the topic, focusing on the elements and features fans enjoy, so advisors unfamiliar with the topics can readily appreciate why they are so popular.

Because this series values the fundamental concepts of readers' advisory work and its potential to serve readers, viewers, and listeners in whatever future space libraries inhabit, the focus of each book is on appeal and how appeal crosses genre, subject, and format, especially to include audio and video as well as graphic novels. Thus, each guide emphasizes the importance of whole collection readers' advisory and explores ways to make suggestions that include novels, nonfiction, and multimedia, as well as how to incorporate whole collection elements into displays and booklists.

Each guide includes sections designed to help librarians in their RA duties, be that daily work or occasional interactions. Topics covered in each volume include:

- The appeal of the genre or subject and information on subgenres and types so that librarians might understand the breadth and scope of the topic and how it relates to other genres and subjects. A brief history is also included to give advisors context and highlight beloved classic titles.

- Descriptions of key authors and titles with explanations of why they're important: why advisors should be familiar with them and why they should be kept in our collections. Lists of read-alikes accompany these core author and title lists, allowing advisors to move from identifying a key author to helping patrons find new authors to enjoy.
- Information on how to conduct the RA conversation so that advisors can learn the tools and skills needed to develop deeper connections between their collections and their communities of readers, listeners, and viewers.
- A crash course in the genre or subject designed to get staff up to speed. Turn to this section to get a quick overview of the genre or subject as well as a list of key authors and read-alikes.
- Resources and techniques for keeping up-to-date and understanding new developments in the genre or subject are also provided. This section will not only aid staff already familiar with the genre or subject, but will also help those not familiar learn how to become so.
- Tips for marketing collections and lists of resources and awards round out the tools staff need to be successful working with their community.



As readers who just happen to be readers' advisors, we hope that the guides in this series lead to longer to-be-read, -watched, and -listened-to piles. Our goal is that the series helps those new to RA feel supported and less at sea, and introduces new ideas or new ways of looking at foundational concepts, to advisors who have been at this a while. Most of all, we hope that this series helps advisors feel excited and eager to help patrons find their next great title. So dig in, explore, learn, and enjoy the almost alchemical process of connecting title and reader!

Part

One

Readers' Advisory and Young Adult Literature

Is there anything more rewarding than a smiling teen returning with a book clutched in his or her arms, asking for another one just like it? It is not an exaggeration to say that for young adults, who are in the middle of figuring out the world and their place in it, reading can be transformational. It is exciting to be part of that journey. Readers' advisory for teens is a wonderful transaction. And it can be a challenge. The heartwarming interactions may be few at the beginning, interspersed as they are with teens who want little to do with an adult's suggestions. This book combines an introduction to readers' advisory language, vocabulary, and techniques with information about what teens like to read and why, followed by an examination of the appeal lurking within each genre of young adult literature. All this is in service to the goal of using readers' advisory to help teens find the right books at the right time.

Readers' Advisory

At its simplest, readers' advisory is the art and science of helping patrons find a book to read.¹ Joyce Saricks defines advisory services for adult readers as being focused on leisure reading.² For teens, we need to be more flexible and include assigned reading as well. Our definition also goes

beyond “a book to read” and includes audiobooks in the mix. You will see that the genre chapters encompass whole collection readers’ advisory to include television and movies as well.

Readers’ advisory for adult readers is in full swing. Books and articles, tweets, conference presentations, and workshops abound. But what about those for serving teens? Not as much. Don’t get me wrong—public and school librarians have been performing readers’ advisory with teens for years. But where is the literature about that interaction? The tweets are more about our own love of particular books, and the conference presentations are more likely to be author panels attended by the readers and fans among us. The books are mostly lists of titles by subject area or genre.

There are exceptions. First and foremost, there is Heather Booth’s *Serving Teens through Readers’ Advisory*. The book you hold in your hands is indebted to this predecessor. Booth leads her readers through the how and why of performing readers’ advisory. This book builds on that foundation and offers an in-depth look at the appeal of each genre, through a close examination of the appeal of core titles.

This book is part of the American Library Association’s Readers’ Advisory Series. As such, it shares terminology with the other books in that series. In *Readers’ Advisory Service in the Public Library*, Joyce Saricks defined and established readers’ advisory and the elements of appeal. I establish and use related terms in this book’s genre chapters, particularly tone, pacing, characterization, story/theme, and setting. And I echo the basics of genre appeal as established in *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* by Saricks, and *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Nonfiction* by Neal Wyatt. These basics work very well for young adult books as well, although there are cases in which the appeal of a genre or subgenre is somewhat different for teens, and we point out those distinctions.

Young Adult Literature

Now that we’ve begun to define readers’ advisory, we need to turn our gaze to young adult (YA) literature. The American Library Association defines young adult literature as books published for readers ages 12 through 18. (For a full overview of the changes in this definition over the decades, one cannot do better than the latest edition of Michael Cart’s *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*.³) Young adult literature encompasses every genre and format, and it feels like there has been an explosion of publishing for this age group. Meanwhile, adults have

become major purchasers of young adult literature. In 2015, Nielsen statistics showed that “80% of all the YA books that are selling are being bought by adults.”⁴ Obviously, some of these are being purchased by adults for young adults (i.e., parents buying for their children). But this adult audience is also alarming. Are publishers now printing books in the YA category with the goal of appealing to adults? If so, we need to be even more conscious of what appeals to our teen readers, and why.

This brings us to a brief look at crossover books; that is, titles that appeal to both young adults and to adult readers. We need to understand the appeal of YA books to the adults in our libraries who enjoy them. Perhaps this appeal stems from the fact that many of these books are quick reads, are immediately engaging, and feature good writing. For some of us adults, the appeal of teen literature may be the nostalgia factor, or the fact that many YA books waste no time to launch into the meat of the story. This isn't hard to understand. These stories harken back to a time when everything meant so much to us, when emotion ran high, when the stakes were high, when our choices were in front of us. It's thrilling, scary, and meaningful. There are also adult book groups that read YA literature. Join one and test your own theories!

When working with teen readers, we quickly learn that they do not differentiate between books published for adults and those published for young adults. A great read is a great read. Books like *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* by Maria Semple or *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern are read as voraciously as the new Sarah Dessen or Cassandra Clare novel. As they grow older, teens gravitate to adult books more and more often. They become more interested in adult characters, are more aware of what their parents are reading, and are ready to push the boundaries, especially in a favorite genre. Their teachers may also be recommending what they consider modern classics, like *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead.

Intended Audience

The audience for this book is librarians and library staff who serve young adults in public libraries, middle and high school libraries, and college and university libraries. This book will help readers' advisors understand what young readers appreciate about their favorite genres and will expand their knowledge of the core titles in each genre. Collection development librarians will find titles to enhance and expand their buying, and

administrators will learn more about serving young adult patrons. It is my hope that adult librarians whose duties and interests have expanded from adult readers' advisory to include young adult fiction and nonfiction will find this book particularly helpful, since the genre chapters feature both popular young adult titles and adult titles with crossover appeal.

What to Expect

Readers' advisory begins with knowing our audience and knowing their literature. We look at both teen reading habits and at young adult literature, genre by genre. Teen literature can appear particularly intimidating and overwhelming to readers' advisors who are not already reading among its titles. By the end of this book, we will have established touchstone titles in every genre on which to scaffold future reading, as well as providing resources for keeping up with newer titles, and solid advice for talking to young adults about books.

The genre chapters are the heart of the book. Each chapter begins by defining the genre and pinpointing its appeal elements. Then we dig down to the subgenre level and recommend "core titles" and "next reads" to get a handle on the books to know. Each genre chapter includes whole collection advisory that highlights movie and television titles, which can help us to understand what a teen is looking for. This is followed by resources of all types to help us keep up with new and established titles in that genre.

Of course, genres blend together. There were instances where we struggled to place certain subgenres. Historical thrillers and mysteries? Historical fantasy? Paranormal suspense? To some extent, assigning a genre to a book is artificial. We thought very hard about just what draws readers to each book as we made these choices.

Again, readers' advisory is as much an art as it is a science, and every great artist needs solid technique and background knowledge. It can be a challenge to think about books for their specific appeal elements, and just why we might suggest a particular book to a patron. Hopefully, this challenge is also enjoyable! There is a certain mindset that needs to be established and practiced. When reading for advisory purposes, we keep our mind on the book, but also on the teens we know who might enjoy it. Consider *why* certain teens might enjoy a particular book. Is it because they have expressed love for another book that feels similar to this one? Tease out the source of that similarity. Is it a certain tone? Does it call up the same emotions? Suggest the book to one of those teen patrons the next

time they come in, and ask for feedback. This is how we build a repertoire of titles to suggest. As we become more experienced, a well-written review can be enough to trigger a list of read-alikes in our minds.

In other words, it is important to read, especially in genres we do not usually enjoy. The Reference & User Services Association's annual Reading List⁵ is a great way to keep up with adult titles and authors to know each year. The core titles in each of the genre chapters in this book are a similar resource. Many will be familiar. If we consider what appeals to *teen* readers about each of these core titles, we are on our way to thinking like readers' advisors.

NOTES

1. Heather Booth, *Serving Teens through Readers' Advisory* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2007), 19.
2. Joyce G. Saricks, *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2005), 1.
3. Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2016).
4. Natasha Gilmore, "Nielsen Summit Shows the Data behind the Children's Book Boom," *Publishers Weekly*, September 17, 2015, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/68083-nielsen-summit-shows-the-data-behind-the-children-s-book-boom.html>.
5. "The Reading List," RUSA Update, <https://www.rusaupdate.org/awards/the-reading-list/>.

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