

YA Lit 2.0

How Technology Is Enhancing



The effects of the Web and emerging technology on research and locating information has been largely documented and discussed. We've debated Web 2.0, even Library 2.0—but what about Reading for Pleasure 2.0? What impact will technology have on how we read for enjoyment? We're already seeing the beginnings of it among the members of our current Net-savvy generation. Young Adult Literature 2.0 might be Reading for the Future.

Eliza Dresang (1999) published *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age* in 1999. She discussed, even before the millennium, how books for children and teens were changing, and how new formats were evolving thanks to the Internet's effects on our students.

Novels in verse became popular, as did novels in other formats, such as Walter Dean Myers' screenplay novel *Monster*, or Sharon Dennis Wyeth's *Orpheus Proud*, written as a performance piece. Authors were experimenting with narrative voice—multiple narrators, varied voices and narrative formats. Comics—or, to use the current term, **graphic novels**—gained renewed popularity. **Zines**, written by teens and for teens, became common. Dresang argues that these new formats are popular thanks to kids' shortened attention spans and their comfort with graphics, making them receptive to gaining “information from ‘bits and bytes’” (1999, 21). It was becoming obvious that the mouse-click generation was going to be looking for something new in print.

Seven years later, literature for teens has continued to evolve to meet the technological wants and needs of its readers. Author Web sites are common now, but some authors for teens are taking theirs to new levels by using online technologies in media-rich, interactive ways to promote their books and reach out to teen readers. Frank Portman (a.k.a. Dr. Frank), frontman for the punk band The Mr. T Experience and author of the new YA novel *King Dork*, created a souped-up Web site to provide a multimedia experience for teen readers (and listeners). It includes the complete *King Dork* experience: reviews, articles and blurbs, a link to his blog, his appearance schedule, entries from the *King Dork* glossary, the *King Dork* discography, the

the Pleasure Reading Experience for Teens

Anita Beaman albeam2@ilstu.edu

King Dork reading list, and even a podcast trailer for the book. According to Portman, most of the enhancements were inspired directly by Tom, his narrator. While Tom's music and literary references are integral to the book, Portman realized some of them might be a bit obscure to his readers. His lists explain the references and give readers a chance to get inside Tom's head. Portman also posted the lists on Amazon.com with additional bonus content. On Amazon, Portman explains how *King Dork* the novel was actually inspired by one of his songs, and readers can hear an acoustic version of the song "King Dork" as well as some of Tom Henderson's original compositions (such as "I Wanna Ramone You").

Web sites are just the beginning of enhanced reading. Teen readers, it seems, always look for more info about authors and characters, much as they do for band members and screen icons. What happens after the story ends? What happened before the story? Why did the author end a book that way? When is the next one coming out? They want answers fast—and right from the source.

YA authors are taking advantage of communications technology

to build those relationships with their fans. YA author and editor David Levithan (*Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, *Marly's Ghost*, *Boy Meets Boy*) believes that "having email with which to communicate with readers has revolutionized the role of the author, especially with teen literature" (2006). While he admits he didn't write a single fan letter to anyone as a teen, he believes that it "might have been different if it had involved hitting send instead of using stamps" (Levithan 2006). Teens respond to the ease of e-mail and blogging to connect with authors who might have previously seemed unreachable. And authors value the ability to answer—quickly—without letting it interfere with their writing. The days of writing a letter to your favorite author and waiting months for a reply are gone.

Some authors, such as Levithan and his *Nick and Norah* co-writer Rachel Cohn, shy away from personal blogs, preferring to keep their personal life personal, or perhaps they are reluctant to give up writing time to the regular posting a blog requires. But other authors like to communicate with readers frequently. Sarah Dessen, one of the most reliable YA author bloggers, posts to her livejournal almost every day. Dessen (2006) sees the blog as a way to connect

with her readers, and, judging by the response she received during her spring book tour, it's working; "Instead of just Q&A about the book, I got questions about what I'd written about in the blog . . . I think the blog allows the readers to feel a little closer to you; it's sort of an inside joke." Dessen even met some readers who had read her blog first, then decided to read her books.

The blog was another way to get the word out about her new novel, *Just Listen*. The novel is the story of a girl and boy who initially connect through his love of music, so Dessen decided to use the blog to take the reading experience one step further. She created a playlist on iTunes for the novel, and she posted the list on her blog. She chose songs she listened to while writing the novel, songs that continue to remind her of the book. She sees the playlist as a bonus for readers:

My hope was that the playlist would just be an addition to reading the book, a sort of behind-the-scenes thing. Kind of like the extras on a DVD; you don't have to watch them to get the movie, but if you're interested, it's always kind of fun . . . as a reader, I would have liked to know what else the author was thinking about while

they were writing the book, to get a bit more insight into that process (Dessen 2006).

Dessen isn't the only one creating playlists for her novels. Authors Lara M. Zeises (*Anyone But You; Bringing Up the Bones*) and Stephenie Meyer (*Twilight; New Moon*) have posted playlists for their books on their Web sites. When she started the blog *yerlittersister.com*, YA author Clea Hantman created a forum for sharing YA lit playlists and for talking to other writers about two of her passions: music and writing. Tired of writing alone, Hantman was interested in exploring how music plays a role in the craft of writing. She began e-mail conversations with other YA authors, requesting playlists for their books. As a result, Hantman was able to share Rachel Cohn's playlist for *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*. As someone who "never doesn't have music playing," the playlist seemed natural to Cohn: "I have a playlist for every mood, for any book I'm writing—sometimes, the playlists do indeed feel infinite"

(2006). While Cohn admits her own musical tastes might be a little out of date for today's teens, she feels playlists can be a great way to get teens excited about reading a book and provide insight into the characters, story, and inspiration behind the book.

Of course, the monster of Teen Lit 2.0 is MySpace. Visiting a favorite author's MySpace page not only provides teens with insider info, but also connects them with the author's "friends"—often other YA authors and readers. There's even a MySpace group for Teen Lit. Among the group's nearly five hundred members are several authors, including group founder Sarah Mlynowski (*Bras & Broomsticks; Frogs & French Kisses*); John Green, author of the 2006 Printz Award winner *Looking for Alaska*; E. Lockhart (*The Boyfriend List; Fly on the Wall*); Frank Portman (*King Dork*); Cecil Castellucci (*The Queen of Cool, Boy Proof*); Brent Hartinger (*Geography Club, The Order of the Poison Oak, The Last Chance Texaco, and Grand & Humble*); David Levithan (*Boy Meets Boy, The Realm of Possibility, Are We There Yet? Marly's Ghost, Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist*); and Rachel Cohn (*Gingerbread, Shrimp, Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist, Pop Princess, Two Steps Forward*), to name a few. The forum allows readers to post questions to the entire group, getting a variety of answers from other readers and authors—similar to a great big book club discussion, with authors in attendance. Members ask about the writing process (some are aspiring authors), share other YA lit resources (some are librarians), discuss important YA concerns (like bullying), and, of course, get a heads-up about new YA books.

By using technology, authors are reaching out to online teens on teens' terms and meeting their demands: teens want to know more, and they want to know it

fast. They like the exclusivity of being in the know about their favorite author and books. And they want to bond with their favorite authors. Author David Levithan (2006) agrees:

For a writer, the book is the most important thing. For an author, the reader is the most important thing. When I'm writing, I couldn't care less about Web sites or the Internet. But [as an author] when I'm seeing my books take on a life of their own in the hands of readers, I'm completely plugged into their reactions and concerns and (if I'm lucky) praise. And I really have the Internet to thank for that.

YA Lit 2.0 is a sign that books and reading remain relevant to teens in a digital world. If librarians want to revitalize readers' advisory for teens, if we want them to take our opinions and suggestions seriously, we need to download the playlists, read blogs and create them, and visit the MySpace pages to share the entire reading experience with our teens.

IT'S TIME TO BECOME YA LIBRARIAN 2.0.



Anita Beaman is the new Librarian at Illinois State University's laboratory high school.

During her first year at U-High, Beaman is trying to survive the library renovation and update the collection. While all the authors discussed in this article are among her favorites, the best books she's read in the last year are *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer and its sequel, *New Moon*. While anxiously awaiting *New Moon's* release, Beaman enjoyed the many enhancements included on Meyer's Web site.

Hormone Jungle ▼
Coming of Age in Middle School
Brod Bagert



Welcome to middle school where girls rule, boys drool, drama reigns, and hormones rage!
Featuring color art created by middle school students. MH# 137 • \$23.95

Sneak a peek inside online!
www.maupinhouse.com 
800-524-0634 (PH) • 352-373-5546(FAX)

Works Cited

- Cohn, Rachel. 2006. E-mail interview, 2 May.
- Dessen, Sarah. 2006. E-mail interview, 4 May.
- Dresang, Eliza. 1999. *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*. New York: H. W. Wilson.
- Hantman, Clea. 2006. E-mail, 9 May.
- Levithan, David. 2006. E-mail interview, 2 May.
- Portman, Frank. 2006. E-mail interview, 10 May.

YA Novels

- Castellucci, Cecil. *Boy Proof*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Pr., 2005.
- . *The Queen of Cool*. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Pr., 2006.
- Cohn, Rachel. *Gingerbread*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2002.
- . *Pop Princess*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2004.
- . *Shrimp*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2005.
- . *Two Steps Forward*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006.
- Cohn, Rachel, and David Levithan. *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2006.

- Green, John. *Looking for Alaska*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2005.
- Dessen, Sarah. *Dreamland: A Novel*. New York: Viking, 2000.
- . *Just Listen*. New York: Viking Juvenile, 2006.
- . *Keeping the Moon*. New York: Viking, 1999.
- . *Someone Like You*. New York: Viking, 1998.
- . *That Summer*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998.
- . *This Lullaby*. New York: Viking, 2002.
- . *Truth about Forever*. New York: Viking, 2004.
- Hartinger, Brent. *Geography Club*. New York: HarperTempest, 2003.
- . *Grand & Humble*. New York: HarperTempest, 2006.
- . *The Last Chance Texaco*. New York: HarperTempest, 2004.
- . *The Order of the Poison Oak*. New York: HarperTempest, 2005.
- Levithan, David. *Are We There Yet?* New York: Knopf, 2005.
- . *Boy Meets Boy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- . *Marly's Ghost*. New York: Dial Books, 2006.
- . *The Realm of Possibility*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Lockhart, E. *The Boyfriend List*. New York: Delacorte Pr., 2005.

- . *Fly on the Wall: How One Girl Saw Everything*. New York: Delacorte Pr., 2006.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005.
- . *New Moon*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006.
- Mlynowski, Sarah. *Bras & Broomsticks*. New York: Delacorte Pr., 2005.
- . *Frogs & French Kisses*. New York: Delacorte Pr., 2006.
- Portman, Frank. *King Dork*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2006.
- Zeises, Lara M. *Anyone But You*. New York: Delacorte Pr., 2005.
- . *Bringing Up the Bones*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2002.

More YA Lit 2.0 Resources available on KQ Web!

- Where to Go for YA Lit 2.0:
A Sample
- A YA Lit Soundtrack
- YA Librarian 2.0 Wiki: A Place for Sharing & Learning
- Just What Is It with Graphic Novels Anyway? By Kat Kan
- Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom: Lesson Ideas
- Zines, Literacy, and the Adolescent by Denise Aulik



AASL Board of Directors, 2006–2007. Standing, from left, Julie Walker, Ann Petersen, Janice Ostrom, Floyd Pentlin, Dee Gwaltney, Allison Almquist, Eloise Long, Irene Kwidzinski, A. Elaine Twogood, Dennis Leloup. Seated, from left, Mary Ann Harlan, Sylvia Norton, Sara Kelly Johns, Cyndi Phillip, J. Linda Williams, Ann Martin. Not pictured: Patricia Bauer, Jim Hayden, Virginia Wallace, Hilda Weisburg.

Copyright of Knowledge Quest is the property of American Library Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.