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ENGL 112B  
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### With an Onion-Like Complexity

This annotated bibliography is inspired by the literary trope “the hero's journey,” that originated from epic poetry including Homer’s *The Odyssey* and Virgil’s *The Aeneid*. When taking English 125: European Literature (Homer through Dante), I grappled with what made these works timeless. I let that thought go as I left the class, but this project really brought me back to questioning, and to the realization that the heroes from these ancient works are what keeps the story alive. This is because although these heroes’ journeys are outrageous and otherworldly, elements of realism within their struggles or attitude towards adversity become tangible no matter what era it is being read in.

In this class I read J.K Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* which was my starting point in this project. Harry struggles with teenage problems like dealing with family members all while trying to protect himself from an “assassin.” Therefore, the layers beneath Harry's heroic traits can inspire teens because on top of the magical forces against him, he preserves through real world problems. Another genre of storytelling I was inspired by was Shonen Japanese Manga, which is targeted at teenage boys. Manga that I’ve read in this genre, for example Kōhei Horikoshi’s *My Hero Academia* and Koyoharu Gotoge’s *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* (in this bibliography) uniquely use illustrations which accentuates the impact of the quests the respective heroes embark on because teens (and I) can visualize the struggle and reflect back on their own experiences to enhance their understanding of the world around them. Rowling’s novel and Shonen Manga helped me understand how YA literature can incorporate

features of “the epic hero” and the hero’s journey as a literary device to create a more universal read for teens to connect and interact with.

I only selected books that fit under the category of Fantasy, Science Fiction, Utopias, and Dystopias because in these genres hero journeys are much more clearly depicted and serve as major plot points in the work itself. Additionally, a common misconception that stems from epic poetry is that heroes can only be male. Therefore, in my annotated bibliography I purposefully included half works with male protagonists, and the remaining five novels focus on heroines. This is because it is important for teenage girls to feel represented in the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong and heroic characters. This is not to say that girls are unable to relate to male heroes (and vice versa), but to illustrate the importance for girls to also have an identity connection with the hero’s journey that boys share with male heroes to strengthen the power of the YA work and the influence in their lives.

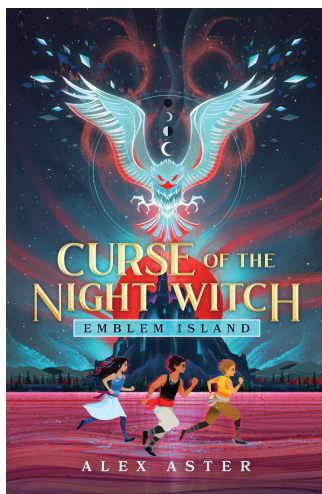
1. *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* - Koyoharu Gotoge



(Have Read, Photo from Amazon.com)

- a. *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* is a shonen manga by Koyoharu Gotoge. In Japan, the Shonen genre targets young adult boys aged 12-18. The manga follows Tanjiro Kamado's journey after demons slaughter his entire family, and his sister, Nezuko, is transformed into one. Tanjiro joins the Demon Slayer Corps to kill demons and figure out a way to turn his sister back to being a human.
- b. Tanjiro's origin and life in the Demon Slayer Corps embody Chapter Five: Books About Facing Death and Loss from Dr. Mary L. Warner's *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping into the Powerful Resource of Story* (Warner 111a). This manga is not a typical novel; however, the illustrations included emphasize these core themes. Furthermore, Tanjiro constantly has to deal with being either the reason for death or its witness. Many teens have experienced death and loss and resonate with Tanjiro's grief and reactions throughout his journey. Reading a hero like Tanjiro experience painful emotions and push through can be inspiring to young adult readers.

## 2. *Curse of the Night Witch* - Alex Aster



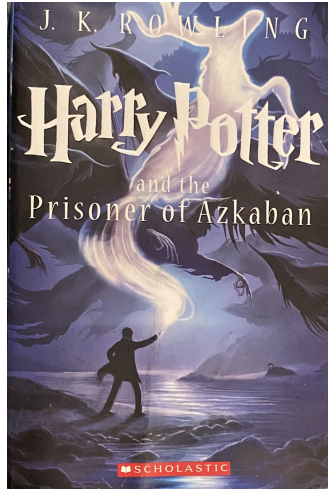
(Not Read, Photo from Amazon.com)

- a. My classmate Fatima did her book talk on this novel, and it was one of the first books I added to my annotated bibliography list once I decided on a topic.  
  
According to Fatima, *Curse of the Night Witch* takes place in a world where people are born with the knowledge of their fate (Tayyab). Protagonist Tor Luna decides to wish for a new destiny but receives a curse that drastically shortens his life. The only way to break the curse is for Tor to go on a quest to find the Night Witch (Tayyab).
- b. Tor Luna's narrative based on Fatima's summary can classify him as the "Innocent Embarking on a Journey" archetype described in Alleen Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson's book *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (Donelson and Nielson 2). Tor's story begins with him going on a journey to be different, launching him on his frightening quest with his life on the line. This archetype is common in YA novels and depictions of the hero's journey. This literary element works because having a character start as young and innocent makes their development more stark and impactful overall. For teens, this means they will pinpoint what events



lead to a character's maturing through the journey and analyze their journey to maturity.

3. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*- J.K Rowling

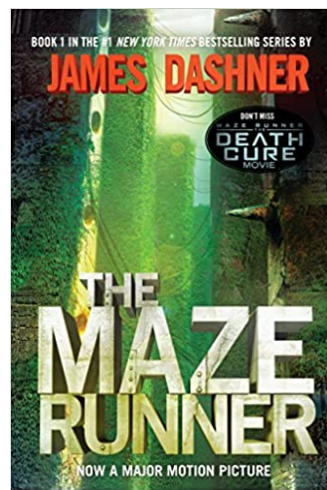


(Have Read, My Photo)

- a. The third installment of the series follows Harry's struggle upon learning that the notorious murderer, Sirius Black, has escaped Azkaban prison and has set his sights on him. Soul-sucking Dementors are sent to Hogwarts to protect the students, but Harry constantly falls ill or relives trauma in their presence. Professor Lupin, a werewolf and old friend of Black, discovers that the "murderer" is innocent and Harry's godfather. As it so happens, Black was framed by another old friend, Peter Pettigrew, and in his grief, took the blame for Pettigrew's crime. Using the time turner and under the watchful eye of the Dementors, Hermione and Harry embark on a journey to restore justice and embrace the horrors of the past.
- b. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* embodies many qualities that represent a successful YA novel. One thing, in particular, this novel does well is present quality number seven of aspects of a good problem novel: "a universal appeal so

that it speaks to more than a single group of readers" (Warner "Honor List Book CharacteristicsSp21"b). Although fictional, this book interrogates the idea of justice and friendship, both of which apply universally. Harry's heroism in this installment is shown through his mental strength during the dark times, an example that is valuable regardless of geographical location. Since mental health is such an essential topic amongst teens, it works in the YA realm.

4. *The Maze Runner* - James Dashner

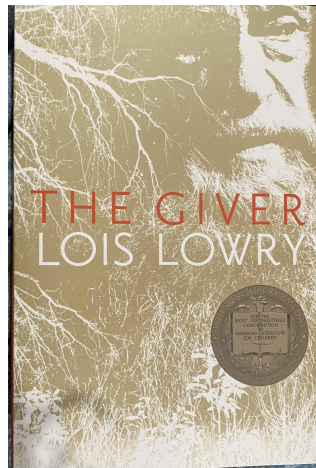


(Have Read, Photo from Amazon.com)

- a. *The Maze Runner* follows protagonist Thomas who wakes up with no memory, except his name, in a maze with other boys who also experience amnesia. Thomas shows unique promise in the maze's society and quickly becomes a runner-- someone who runs the maze in dangerous routes trying to find an exit. Thomas figures it out and has to convince the others of his escape plan, despite the danger involved.
- b. This book is more of an entertaining read for teens rather than for teens to identify with. Thomas is a seemingly flawless character, and the book's central struggle is one-dimensional: the boys have no memory and cannot escape the maze. In

addition to entertainment, teens can refer to *The Maze Runner* for an excellent example of the hero archetype described in Alleen Nilsen and Kenneth L Donelson's book, *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (Donelson and Nielson 6). Thomas is the hero of the story for the escape plan and acts as a strong-willed and fearless leader who will stop at no lengths for his peers.

5. *The Giver* - Lois Lowry

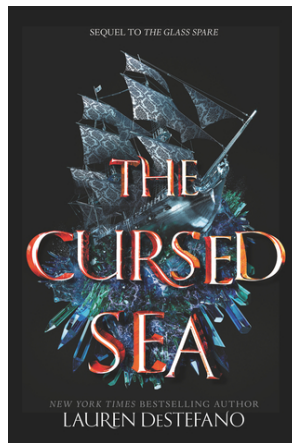


**(Have Read, Canonical Work, My Photo)**

- a. *The Giver* is a canonical work and often taught in the classroom. The novel takes place in a utopian society where all of the members live by stringent rules. During the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas receives the honor to become the next receiver of memory. Jonas is exposed to a new world, plagued by the loneliness of the memories only he can access. However, as he continues learning all of the secrets the Elders are hiding, such as color, music, love, and pain, Jonas becomes determined to release these memories so his fellow community can have them.
- b. As Jonas eases into his role as the receiver, he begins to question the world around him and struggles with his identity as the memories expand his horizons. Therefore, Jonas' narrative exemplifies “Chapter Six: Books about Identity,

Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions” from Dr. Mary L. Warner’s *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping into the Powerful Resource of Story* (Warner 187a). Teens can empathize being unsure of themselves and wondering who they are. Jonas' story also revolves around secrets that are very common in the teenage experience and can lead to difficulty making choices and discrimination. The tangibility of Jonas' thoughts and reactions enhances the plot's contents.

6. *The Cursed Sea* - Lauren DeStefano



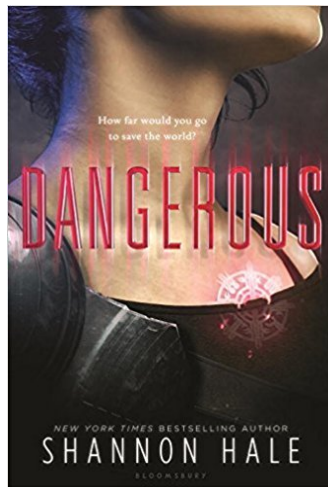
(Not Read, Photo from Goodreads.com)

- a. Wil is an exiled princess in a supernatural realm who is cursed and must return home to investigate its history (“19 Badass Heroines in YA Books That We Need in Our Lives”). Upon returning home, Wil discovers her evil brother is King and starts a war, and Wil has to engage in the fight of her life. Traveling from kingdom to kingdom, Wil and her friends have to move forward to better their world but must defeat her brother and other evil to do it (“19 Badass Heroines in YA Books That We Need in Our Lives”).

- b. Based on this summary, this novel seems to embody Exeter quality seven:

"Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues" because, underneath all the fiction, this story revolves around themes of family, strength, and self-discovery (Donelson and Nielson 9). Teens reading this book can interact with the way Wil approaches these personal struggles and reflect on their ideas of coping and perseverance. Wil as a hero, illustrates an inner journey layered under her quest to save the kingdom.

7. *Dangerous* - Shannon Hale



(Not Read, Photo from Theyashelf.com)

- a. Maisie Danger Brown uncovers a conspiracy and finds love at a boot camp ("The Best Superhero Books for Teens"). However, Maisie discovers she has to be the world's hero before it gets destroyed. Maisie must figure out how to find the will and a plan to do this on her own, all while navigating her personal life ("The Best Superhero Books for Teens").
- b. Based on this summary from The YA Bookshelf, Maisie's hero's journey will fit in "Chapter Seven: Books about Courage and Survival" from Dr. Mary L. Warner's *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping into the Powerful Resource of*

*Story* because this novel contains the classic "save-the-world" trope (Warner 217a). Maisie will have to go from camper to hero, which requires a lot of mental strength. Survival stories like this become tangible because teens sometimes experience unexpected events that force them to adapt to make the best out of situations. The summary suggests Maisie will develop courage when facing her high-stress quest, which teens may find inspiring as they learn to conquer their fears and other forms of pressure.

8. *Graceling* - Kristin Cashore

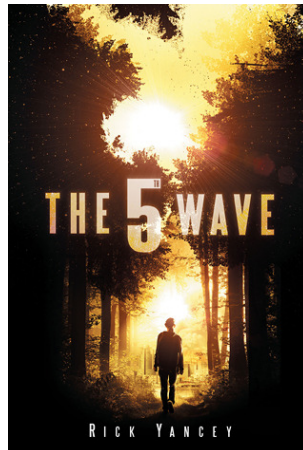


(Have Read, Photo from Amazon.com)

- a. *Graceling* follows Katsa, who is born with a "Grace" of killing and lives in service of her uncle, the King. While out on a mission, Katsa meets Prince Greening, who is graced with mind reading. Katsa escapes with the prince to search for his grandfather's kidnappers, and land in the trail of King Leck graced with lying. Katsa and Prince Greening then find themselves with a new mission: defeat the King and rescue his daughter, Bitterblue, and Prince Greening's aunt.
- b. Katsa's character arc in the novel is illustrative of Exeter quality number four: "characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the

fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives” (Donelson and Nielson 9). Due to her grace, Katsa does not view herself positively and often is even disgusted by her actions. Katsa's reason for self-hatred stems from a trait that is not inherently possible in the real world, which is beneficial to teens, so they cannot discover they have that trait and feel terrible. The extremity of Katsa's example and her journey to realize she is not a graced killer, but a graced survivalist, can impact teens who are struggling with self-esteem or self-perception issues as they absorb potential lessons rooted in the content to understand themselves more.

9. *The 5th Wave* - Rick Yancey



(Not Read, Photo from Goodreads.com)

- a. A series of unfortunate events continuously sweep through protagonist Cassie's world, coming in waves (“The 5th Wave (The 5th Wave, #1) by Rick Yancey”). *The 5th Wave* is human-like beings that kill anything alive. Cassie, living alone, meets Evan Walker and realizes he can save her brother and herself (“The 5th Wave (The 5th Wave, #1) by Rick Yancey”). But, Cassie doesn't know if she can



trust him or push through the struggle, and those choices could cost her her life (“The 5th Wave (The 5th Wave, #1) by Rick Yancey”).

- b. This summary suggests that this novel will contain "a setting that enhances the story and is described so that the reader can get the intended picture," which is a quality good problem novels usually contain (Warner “Honor List Book CharacteristicsSp21”b). It is apparent that this is a survival journey about overcoming physical and mental adversity, and the beyond worldly elements will make these real-world themes enjoyable for teens to read. Additionally, it is plausible that if just by a summary the book is presenting a quality from a good problem novel, the book as a whole should contain more and pique teenagers' interests and leave them something to think about regarding the plot and their own experience.

#### 10. *Divergent* - Veronica Roth



(Not Read, Photo from Goodreads.com)

- a. *Divergent* is a dystopian novel that follows protagonist Beatrice Prior's journey after selecting her faction, away from her family, to live in (factions are based on personality type) (“Divergent (Divergent, #1) by Veronica Roth”). Beatrice (now



Tris in her new life) is subjected alongside new members to participate in high-intensity psychological and physical tasks to prove they deserve initiation into the faction. Through all of this, Tris must deal with the pressures of real-life love and keep a secret that could send her to the grave if discovered; that secret may be the key to protecting her loved ones from the conflict looming behind the scenes of this utopia (“Divergent (Divergent, #1) by Veronica Roth”).

- b. After reading the summary, it seems *Divergent* illustrates Exeter quality #3: "Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists" (Donelson and Nielson 9). Although teens in the real world will not experience being categorized by the government based on their personality, it represents cliques in schools or teens singled out for certain traits amongst their peers. Tris is a strong female hero that can help teenagers (especially girls) who feel afraid of their differences by reading how Tris chooses and adapts to her own path. As Tris overcomes barriers that intend to set her back, she serves as a literary example of female strength and individuality that, although is showcased in extreme instances, contains remnants of the teenage experience in its layers.

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