

## CHAPTER 3 New Technology, New Attitudes and New Literacies



### Focus Box 3.1

#### Help for Adults in Developing New Literacies

*Anime Explosion: The What? Why? and Wow! of Japanese Animation* by Patrick Drazen. Stone Bridge Press, 2002. Check the publisher's website, [www.stonebridge.com](http://www.stonebridge.com), for other books on anime and manga. The author does a good job of explaining the different attitudes that Japanese and Americans have toward nudity and what constitutes sexuality in drawings.

*Building Literary Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* edited by James Bucky Carter. NCTE, 2007. Contributors who wrote the chapters each take a traditional text and pair it with one or more graphic novels; for example, Dante's *Inferno* is taught alongside an *X-Men* story, while Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is taught alongside Will Eisner's *Fagin the Jew*.

*"Don't Bother Me Mom—I'm Learning!"* by Marc Prensky. Paragon House, 2006. The title of Prensky's Chapter 4, "Our Kids Are Not Like Us: They're Natives, We're Immigrants," spells out the idea that a generation that has grown up "surrounded by and using computers, videogames, DVD players, videocams, eBay, cell phones, iPods, and all the other tools of a digital age" has different thinking patterns and approaches to life than do those of us coming to the digital world as immigrants and still wait-

ing for someone to explain and "teach us" about each new device.

*Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* by Steven Johnson. Penguin/Riverside, 2005. Johnson makes a persuasive case for the idea that popular culture entertainment ranging from *The Simpsons* to *The Lord of the Rings* and to video games is growing more sophisticated and posing cognitive challenges that make us better thinkers.

*Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths behind America's Favorite Addiction* by Jake Halpern. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Halpern speaks out for moderation and for guiding teens into areas where they can feel fulfilled from developing skills and interests rather than longing for instant fame, which is something dependent on many factors outside of any young person's control.

*Graphic Novels: A Genre Guide to Comic Books, Manga, and More* by Michael Pawuk (Genrelecting Advisory Series). Libraries Unlimited, 2006. Written for both adults and young adults, this 663-page book is a good source for both skimming and answering specific questions.

*Lesson Plans for Creating Media-Rich Classrooms* edited by Mary Christel and Scott Sullivan. NCTE, 2007. Chapter

topics range from how to manipulate photos for special effects to how to create video games and how to detect bias in print and broadcast news.

**ReadWriteThink** is an online partnership between the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, along with the MarcoPolo Education Foundation. It was established in 2002 and is open and free to users, who can access it through either of the organizations or just by typing the name into any search engine. It provides classroom lessons and background material relating to many aspects of literacy.

**Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know and Doesn't** by Stephen Prothero. HarperSanFrancisco, 2007. Prothero is the chair of the department of religion at Boston University. He chides Americans for operating under the assumption that religious ignorance is bliss. His thesis is that religious illiteracy is dangerous because religion is one of the greatest forces the human race has ever seen for not only good but also evil.

**Secondary School Literacy: What Research Reveals for Classroom Practice** edited by Leslie S. Rush, A. Jonathan Eakle, and Allen Berger. NCTE, 2007. Reviewers are praising this research book for the way the different chapters come together to show similar trends across different kinds of literacy education.

**Spin: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation** by Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Random

House Trade Paperback Original, 2007. The authors' website, FactCheck.org, was listed by *Time* as one of the "25 websites you can't live without." The premise of their book is that "*Spin* is a polite word for deception," and that being able to recognize deception is a necessary literacy for our time.

**What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy** by James Paul Gee. Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003. Gee is a well-known educator who explains thirty-six principles of learning and shows how computer games do a better job of building on these principles than do many standard teaching techniques.

**Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear** by Frank Luntz. Hyperion, 2007. Luntz writes about the power of framing and how much more successful politicians are if they can learn to use phrases that will make them sound active and on task. For example, it is less effective for a politician to go on "a listening tour," than on a "getting it done" tour.

**The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, Updated and Expanded, Release 2.0** by Thomas L. Friedman. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. *School Library Journal* recommended Friedman's book not only to adults but also to sophisticated teenagers who are interested in the many ways that people from different countries are interacting with each other.



## Focus Box 3.2

### "Different" Literacies in YA Books

***The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl*** by Barry Lyga. Houghton, 2006. Fanboy loves comics and dreams of being "discovered" at a comic-book convention because of his in-progress *Schemata* graphic novel, but his real life was far from such success. Then Goth Girl Kyra, herself a loner, reaches out to him through an Instant Message that shows him being beaten up. At first he thinks she is making fun of him, but her friendship is the beginning of better things.

***Black Duck*** by Janet Taylor. Philomel/Sleuth, May 2006. Fourteen-year-old David is the hero of this exciting mystery story that gets told because David, an aspiring journalist, dares to knock on the door of his elderly neighbor and ask about his mysterious past. The Black Duck was a rum-running ship that back in the 1920s played a mysterious role in the posh town of Newport, Rhode Island.

***The Braid*** by Helen Frost. Farrar/Frances Foster Books, 2006. Told through different poems in different voices, this is the unusual story of Scottish teenage sisters whose family is torn from their Highlands home in the 1850s. One stays with her grandmother in Scotland, while one moves with the rest of the family to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The girls stay connected only through pieces of a braid they intertwine in their hair.

***Evil Genius*** by Catherine Jinks. Harcourt, 2007. A boy who hacked into computers when he was only seven and then more or less tests out of high school launches himself into a grown-up career at age fourteen by enrolling in the Axis Institute and taking classes in Misinformation, Disguise, Basic Lying, Embezzlement, and Explosives.

***Harlem Hustle*** by Janet McDonald. Farrar/Frances Foster Books, 2006. *Harlem Hustle* tells the story of seventeen-year-old Eric "Hustle" Samson, who dreams of making his way out of the projects by becoming a rapper. McDonald, who grew up in the projects and went on to become an international lawyer, was praised for exactly nailing the hip-hop lingo and the street slang, while also throwing in a cultural-history lesson.

***The Invention of Hugo Cabret*** by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, 2007. In this original novel, which was a finalist for the National Book Award, Selznick created 272 full-page drawings plus over 250 pages of text, all deliciously fitted onto black bordered pages that give readers the feeling of stepping into an old fashioned film or more mysteriously

into the back rooms of a museum that once housed the predecessors of today's robots, known as *automata*. Interwoven is the story of Frenchman Georges Méliès, the inventor of modern day movies.

***The Last Days*** by Scott Westerfeld. Penguin/Razorbill, 2006. *The Last Days* is a continuation of Westerfeld's *Peeps*, but rock music plays a big part in this story, and in fact is the medium that calls up and helps to defeat the mysterious forces that almost destroy New York City.

***Lugalbanda: The Boy Who Got Caught Up in a War*** by Kathy Henderson, illustrated by Jane Ray. Candlewick, 2006. Excavators in the 1800s found the cuneiform tablets on which this Sumerian legend was recorded, but the tablets were not transcribed until in the 1970s. And now readers can enjoy what is perhaps the oldest written story in the world. It is about a boy left behind by a marching army, but who becomes a hero anyway.

***Memories of Survival*** illustrated by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz and told by Bernice Steinhardt. Hyperion, 2005. Thirty-four hand-stitched, embroidered, fabric panels tell in great detail the story of Esther's early childhood in a Polish village, then the Nazi invasion followed by a labor camp and death.

***The Princess Academy*** by Shannon Hale. Bloomsbury, 2005. Petite fourteen-year-old Miri feels left out because she does not get to work in the quarry with the other girls. Hoping to prove her worth, she goes away to a special school—far different from a typical "princess" school—but while there she discovers her special talent for "quarry speech," which is a silent way of communicating.

***The Road of the Dead*** by Kevin Brooks. Scholastic/The Chicken House, 2006. Two brothers are trying to solve the murder of their sister on the English moors. It is a grisly and violent story, and the most interesting part is how fourteen-year-old Ruben has the psychic power to see what his older, more impetuous brother, Cole, is doing and thinking even when they are miles apart.

***Voices*** by Ursula K. Le Guin. Harcourt, 2006. Seventeen-year-old Memer and her mentor, the Waylord, are protectors of a secret library in a country where the written word has been declared demonic and books are outlawed. But then the stage is set for change when Orrec, a poet and storyteller, and his wife, Gry, come for a visit.



# Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (2005)

*Francesca Lia Block*, **The Bringer of  
Magical Realism**

The five Weetzie books published between 1989 and 1995 (*Weetzie Bat*; *Witch Baby*; *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys*; *Missing Angel Juan*; and *Baby Be-Bop*) are the ones that the Edwards Committee cited when they chose to honor Francesca Lia Block. Her selection was a surprise because the Margaret A. Edwards Award is for lifetime accomplishment and Block is the youngest person to have been so honored. Everyone expects her to continue writing for many more years.

A second reason for the surprise is that her books are so controversial. Block says that she writes urban fairy tales, but critics point out that her fairy tales start where the traditional ones end, and rather than implying that as soon as young people step into adulthood they can walk off into the sunset and live happily ever after, Block encourages her characters to seek happiness and fulfillment wherever in life's journey they happen to be.

Having grown up in Hollywood and lived all her life in California, Block makes her Los Angeles setting as important as any of her characters. Actual names taken from the Los Angeles area include Hollywood Boulevard, Tick Tock Tea Room, Fredericks of Hollywood, Loves, Shangri-la, Shangri Los Angeles, Shangri-L.A., and Hollywood. She also uses the way Weetzie's father, Charlie Bat, describes Hollywood as an illusion and an imitation and a mirage, to help prepare her readers for the magical realism that she incorporates into the plots of her books.

Most readers think of the stories as lighthearted and fun, even while her characters take in stride such heavy issues as drug overdoses, broken families, sexual experimentation, and abandoned children left on their own. We remember reading *The Hanged Man* when it came out in 1994 and conjecturing with our students on whether Block had studied the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* and made a list of all the reasons censors give for wanting to keep particular books away from kids and then concocted a story to include 90 percent of the actions and words that fundamentalist critics abhor.

When Block won the Margaret A. Edwards Award, even she was surprised. She told David Levithan, who interviewed her for the June 2005 issue of *School Library Journal*, that

she suspected in this conservative political climate, the committee members said something like "In defiance of what's happening now, we're going to do this."

Block's books appeal to older teens and to what Michael Cart describes as a "crossover" audience of readers between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. In 2005, HarperCollins published a follow-up adult book about Weetzie Bat entitled *Necklace of Kisses*. In this book, written almost twenty years after the first one, Weetzie's relationship with My Secret Agent Lover Man has withered and so Weetzie leaves the man who now goes by the more ordinary name of Max. Even though HarperCollins published the book in its adult division, a bookseller who brought the Weetzie Bat books to the 2006 convention of the Children's Literature Association in Mission Beach, California, laughingly assured customers that teen readers were going right through the original Weetzie books, now published in a single volume entitled *Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books*, and then happily buying *Necklace of Kisses* to see what happens to the adult Weetzie and her uniquely named pals and children.

When Block was in college she started writing "short, odd, little punk-influenced stories." She remembers one about a girl who was mad at her boyfriend and so she got a Ken doll and practiced voodoo on him. She told Levithan how she came up with the concept of Weetzie. She was driving on the freeway in the Valley when she saw a Pinto:

*this weird box of a cartoon-looking car. It was light bubblegum pink, and at that time you never saw a pink car—ever, ever. On the license plate it said WEETZIE. And I just remember the moment—the time of day, the way the sky looked kind of smoggy—everything. And there's this bleach-blond head of this girl in this car. (47)*

That was all it took—one name and one flashing image—for a character now loved worldwide to move into Block's creative mind and to make herself at home for at least the next twenty-five years. Only the future will tell if she's going to stay through middle and old age. Many readers hope she does. ●

# Young Adult Authors Speak Out

*Cynthia Leitich Smith* on

## Hosting 1.6 Million Visitors in Cyberspace



The day of the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, I was working in a federal law office in Chicago. My tribe, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, is located in Oklahoma. We have family living in the area, including a great-uncle who was on his way to the building just before the explosion, a cousin who was one of the first nurses on the scene, and another cousin who is in law enforcement and worked on the case. The tragedy inspired me to follow my dream and offer something positive to the world.

I took a long walk along Lake Michigan and came home to my husband, Greg. At the time, we still owed tens of thousands of dollars from student loans that had helped us to earn our law degrees. With little prior discussion, I announced, "I want to quit my day job and write full-time for kids." He paused before asking, "Are you any good at it?" I shrugged. He said, "Let's find out."

We did. The manuscript for my first children's book, *Jingle Dancer*, sold in 1998. Four years later, Greg joined me in the author ranks with the sale of *Ninjas*, *Piranhas*, and *Galileo* for preteens. Along the way, we decided the Internet would be a perfect way to raise awareness of quality books. At a time when library budgets were being cut, independent bookstores were closing, and celebrities were crowding literary voices off shelves, it wasn't enough to light a candle. We wanted to light a torch.

I have a background in journalism, while Greg has a technology background, and so we joined forces to create what might be the largest youth books website on the Internet: *Cynthia Leitich Smith's Children & YA Literature Resources* at [www.cynthialeitichsmith.com](http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com). The site launched in 1998. Early on, I did the design work myself. I started small, with two author interviews and a few new

links each month. I added book recommendations as I read or rediscovered each title. Greg contributed his share, too, especially those reflecting Asian American characters.

The site features a section about me and my work, which may be characterized as Native fiction, comedic picture books, and young adult Gothic fantasy. The largest section, though, is on the body of literary children's and young adult trade books as a whole. Articles, bibliographies, and links abound. But it's best known for interviews with authors, illustrators, editors, and other industry professionals. Multicultural, nonfiction, and genre titles are featured along with mainstream fiction. New and quality mid-list voices are highlighted alongside national award winners and *New York Times* best sellers. Put another way, the site contains some 1,000 files, 275 pages, 700 images, and more than 12,000 links to related Web pages. Those links include hundreds to my blog, Cynsations ([cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com](http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com)). The main site is easy to navigate with a guide bar and a search engine. In 2006, 1.6 million unique visitors surfed by.

Our family is European-Asian-Native American. Greg is the son of an immigrant. I'm descended from Native peoples who originally settled what's now the southeastern

United States. Our family backgrounds offer us a certain insight into the need for multicultural literature—historical and contemporary—done well.

With regard to my Native fiction, I was one of the first writers to craft modern-day stories about young Indian characters. My books were cheered for bursting inaccurate and dated stereotypes. My debut tween novel, *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, was one of the first to feature the Internet in an integrated way. An extension on my site was a natural tie in.

More globally, the site is important to us in that it offers a way to hear from and about young readers. I've gotten letters from kids who've lost a friend like Rain, and from black Indians who appreciate that my works reflect diversity within Native America. And since the publication of *Tantalize*, I am hearing from Gothic fantasy fanatics who want their sequel—now!

The Web is all about information and connections. With Greg's support, the site personalizes it to our work and that of our beloved colleagues. We hope you'll surf by!

- **Cynthia Leitich Smith's books for young adults include *Tantalize* (Candlewick, 2007) and *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* (HarperCollins, 2001), while Greg is the author of *Ninjas*, *Piranhas*, and *Galileo* (Little, Brown, 2003) and *Tofu and T. rex* (Little, Brown, 2005), both for preteens.**



## Focus Box 3.3

### Newly Translated YA Books with Starred Reviews

***The Crow-Girl: The Children of Crow Cove*** by Bodil Bredsdorff, translated from Danish by Faith Ingwersen. Farrar, 2004. Young teens will be the ones to appreciate this historical tale set in a remote coastal area of Denmark. A young girl lives with her grandmother, who does everything she can to prepare the girl to survive when she dies, and with the help of the crows the girl manages.

***Emil and Karl*** by Yankev Glatshteyn, translated from Yiddish by Jeffrey Shandler. Roaring Brook/A Neal Porter Book, 2006. Middle school students studying the Holocaust will be the ones to appreciate this novel written about two boys growing up in prewar Vienna. Glatshteyn wrote it after returning to America from a 1934 visit to Poland where he saw how Nazi persecution was changing all of Europe.

***Inkheart*** by Cornelia Funke, translated from German by Anthea Bell. Scholastic, 2003. Twelve-year-old Meggie has a loving father, whom she calls Mo. He is a book mender, but unknown to her he has the accidental, and sometimes dangerous, talent of making characters come right out of a book into real life. Middle school readers especially like this charming fantasy, which is continued in *Inkspell*.

***Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You*** by Hanna Jansen, translated from German by Elizabeth D. Crawford. Carolrhoda Books, 2006. For mature students, this painful

book was written by the author as she tried over and over to help her adopted daughter, Jeanne d'Arc Umubyeyi, recover from the sadness and the anger she feels toward the Hutu neighbors in Rwanda who participated in the 1994 genocide killing of Jeanne's family and destroying her home and life as she knew it.

***The Pull of the Ocean*** by Jean-Claude Mourlevat, translated from French by Y. Maudet. Delacorte, 2006. Middle school readers who like mysteries and stories set in the past are likely to be charmed by this mysterious story of three sets of twins and their dwarf-sized little brother. When they learn that their father intends to kill them, they set off to sea.

***Secrets in the Fire*** by Henning Mankell, translated from Swedish by Anne Connie Stuksrud. Annick, distributed by Firefly, 2003. This fictional account is based on the true story of Sofia Alfaca, a friend of the author who survived the civil war in Mozambique (1975–1992), only to lose both of her legs when she stepped on a landmine.

***The Water Mirror*** by Kai Meyer, translated from German by Elizabeth D. Crawford. S&S/Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2005. Part of the Reflections series, this fantasy is set in medieval Venice. Protagonists are two orphans apprenticed to a maker of mirrors. One of them is blind. The adventure starts when the Egyptian Army invades and the survival of Venice is in doubt.