

# Language Arts

## Summative Reading Assessment

Semester 1 2015

### My 'Reprehensible' Take on Teen Literature

By Meghan Cox Gurdon

1. Why is 'reprehensible' in quotation marks in the title?

Ms. Gurdon used quotation marks in the title 'My "Reprehensible" Take on Teen Literature' because she was being sarcastic. After receiving negative responses on her original article about how her opinion was strongly disagreed with, she expressed her own opinion through her title by showing her readers what people have called her.

'Indignant defenders of young-adults literature called me "idiotic," "narrow-minded," "brittle," "ignorant," "shrewish," "irresponsible" and "reprehensible."

2. In Ms. Gurdon's opinion, which group dislikes her the most, the American Library Association or young adult authors? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

I believe, with the given evidence, that the group that dislikes her the most are the young-adult authors. The young-adult authors have replied and gave their opinions on what Ms. Gurdon's thoughts on young-adult literature. In the text, Ms. Gurdon has given at least three different pieces of evidence revolving around the opinion of some young-adult authors.

From the text:

'Indignant defenders of young-adults literature called me "idiotic," "narrow-minded," "brittle," "ignorant," "shrewish," "irresponsible" and "reprehensible."

'Author Sherman Alexie asked, in a piece for WSJ.com titled "Why the Best Kids Books Are Written in Blood": "Does Mrs. Gurdon honestly believe that a sexually explicit YA novel might somehow traumatize a teen mother? Does she believe that a YA novel about murder and rape will somehow shock a teenager whose life has been damaged by murder and rape? Does she believe that a dystopian novel will frighten a kid who already lives in hell?"

'Sharon Slaney, who works at a high school in Idaho, touched on this nicely in an online rebuke of her irate librarian colleagues: "You are naive if you think young people can read a dark and violent book that sits on the library shelves and not believe that that behavior must be condoned by adults in their school life."

3. Reread paragraph 6. What does this extract mean? Explain each sentence.

1) *For families, the calculus is less crude than some notion of fictional inputs determining factual outputs; of monkey read, monkey do.* 2) *It has more to do with a child's happiness and tenderness of heart, with what furnishes the young mind.*

1) This sentence means that whatever a child reads, they do; "of what monkey read, monkey do". Later in the text, the author mentions that young-adult novels send a message that teenagers are expected to take drugs. For example, if a young-adult novel is about guns, the young reader could assume that guns are not harmful and that they should be used.

*Really? Did it in fact mean the opposite?*

2) This sentence means that what a child sees, reads, or hears makes them who they are. The author used "furnishes" to describe how anything the young mind of a child experiences can affect them. As the mind of a teenager is still developing and very vulnerable, the novels they read could massively change their point of view, and what they think is right or wrong.

4. Reread paragraphs 8 and 9. Do you believe that reading about harmful behaviors makes a teenager more likely to engage in the behavior? Explain.

In my opinion, I think that reading about harmful behaviors could make a teenager more likely to engage in the behavior. I believe that if a teenager reads about something harmful and is not told the otherwise, they will engage in such behavior. Reading about harmful weapons may cause someone to purchase a dangerous weapon and use it on others. Teenagers who read about knives might want to "re-create" a scene from a book that they thought was interesting, putting the people around them in danger. On the other hand, if teenagers are taught early what is good and what isn't, engaging in harmful behavior can be prevented.

	Benchmark	Getting Started	Approaching Standard	Meeting Standard	Exceeding Standard
	2.5 Demonstrates comprehension of literary and informational texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacks understanding of content, point of view, word choice, plot, character development</li> <li>Overly short and lacking information</li> <li>Insufficient evidence to support responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates some understanding of aspects of the author's craft</li> <li>Demonstrates some synthesis of information</li> <li>Some supporting detail using information from the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates understanding of the author's craft: content, point of view, word choice, plot, character development</li> <li>Demonstrates creative synthesis of information</li> <li>Effective supporting detail using information from the text</li> </ul>	<p>Comprehension exceeds grade level expectation. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyses texts more deeply or with greater maturity or sophistication</li> </ul>

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*Ms. Gurdon's original article, "Darkness too Visible" criticized the content of popular young adult literature. Many authors, librarians, and readers disagreed strongly and loudly with Ms. Gurdon's opinions. This is her response. Note: This article has been slightly edited for an 8th-grade audience. Altered segments are italicized.*

### My 'Reprehensible' Take on Teen Literature

Make notes here

By MEGHAN COX GURDON, Wall Street Journal

1. If the American Library Association were inclined to burn people in effigy, I might well have gone up in smoke these past few days. ALA members, mostly librarians and other book-industry folk, are concluding their annual conference today in New Orleans, and it's a fair bet that some of them are still fuming about an article of mine that appeared in these pages earlier this month.

2. The essay, titled "Darkness too Visible", I discussed the way in which young-adult literature invites teenagers to wallow in ugliness, barbarity, dysfunction and cruelty. By focusing on the dark currents in the genre, I was of course no more damning all young-adult literature than a person writing about reality TV is damning all television, but from the frenzied reaction you would have thought I had called for the torching of libraries.

3. Within hours of the essay's appearance it became a leading topic on Twitter. Indignant defenders of young-adult literature called me "idiotic, "narrow-minded," "brittle," "ignorant," "shrewish," "irresponsible" and "reprehensible." Authors Judy Blume and Libba Bray suggested that I was giving succor to book-banners. Author Lauren Myracle took the charge a stage further, accusing me of "formulating an argument not just against 'dark' YA [young-adult] books, but against the very act of reading itself." The ALA, in a letter to The Journal, saw "danger" in my argument, saying that it "encourages a culture of fear around YA literature."

4. The odd thing is that I wasn't tracking some rare, outlier tendency. As book reviewer Janice Harayda observed, commenting on my essay: "Anyone who writes about children's books regularly knows that [Mrs. Gurdon] hasn't made up this trend. . . . Books, like movies, keep getting more lurid."

5. They do indeed. I began my piece by relating the experience of a

Maryland woman who went to a bookstore looking for a novel to give her 13-year-old daughter and who left empty-handed, discouraged by the apparently unremitting darkness of books in the young-adult section. To her and many other parents, the young-adult category seems guided by a kind of grotesque fun-house sensibility, in which teenage turbulence is distorted, magnified and reflected back at young readers.

6. For families, the calculus is less crude than some notion of fictional inputs determining factual outputs; of monkey read, monkey do. It has more to do with a child's happiness and tenderness of heart, with what furnishes the young mind. If there is no frigate like a book, as Emily Dickinson wrote, it's hardly surprising that parents might prefer their teenagers to sail somewhere other than to the lands of violence and substance abuse.

7. But, to some, those are desirable destinations. Many of the angriest responses to my essay came from people who believe that a major purpose of young-adult fiction is therapeutic. "YA Saves!" was the rallying hashtag of thousands of Twitter posters who chose to express their ire in 140 characters or less.

8. It is true that so-called problem novels may be helpful to children in anguished circumstances. The larger question is whether books about harmful experiences and behaviors help to normalize such behaviors for the vast majority of children who are merely living through the routine ordeals of adolescence.

9. There are real-world reasons for caution. For years, federal researchers could not understand why drug- and tobacco-prevention programs seemed to be associated with greater drug and tobacco use. It turned out that children, while grasping the idea that drugs were bad, also absorbed the meta-message that adults expected teens to take drugs. Well-intentioned messages, in other words, can have the unintended consequence of opening the door to expectations and behaviors that might otherwise remain closed.

10. If you think, as many do, that novels can't possibly have such an effect, ask yourself: When you press a wonderful, classic children's book into a 13-year-old's hands, are you doing so in the belief that the book will make no difference to her outlook and imagination, that it is merely a passing entertainment? Or do you believe that, somehow, it will affect and influence her? And if that power is true for one book, why not for another?

<Text deleted>

- YA books are "dark"

- what kids read, they do

} positive side,  
} opposing  
#YASaves

- adults expect teens to do drugs, sending the wrong message

11. In the outpouring of response to my essay, I've been told that I fail to understand the brutal realities faced by modern teens. Adolescence, I've been instructed, is a prolonged period of racism, homophobia, bullying, eating disorders, abusive sexual episodes, and every other manner of unpleasantness.

12. Author Sherman Alexie asked, in a piece for WSJ.com titled "Why the Best Kids Books Are Written in Blood": "Does Mrs. Gurdon honestly believe that a sexually explicit YA novel might somehow traumatize a teen mother? Does she believe that a YA novel about murder and rape will somehow shock a teenager whose life has been damaged by murder and rape? Does she believe a dystopian novel will frighten a kid who already lives in hell?"

13. No, I don't. I also don't believe that the vast majority of American teenagers live in anything like hell. Adolescence can be a turbulent time, but it doesn't last forever and often—leaving aside the saddest cases—it feels more dramatic at the time than it will in retrospect. It is surely worth our taking into account whether we do young people a disservice by seeming to endorse the worst that life has to offer.

14. Sharon Slaney, who works at a high school in Idaho, touched on this nicely in an online rebuke of her irate librarian colleagues: "You are naive if you think young people can read a dark and violent book that sits on the library shelves and not believe that that behavior must be condoned by the adults in their school life." It is that question—the condoning of the language and content of a strong current in young-adult literature—that creates the parental dilemma at the core of my essay. It should hardly be an outrage to discuss the subject.

Effigy: a roughly made model of a particular person, made in order to be damaged or destroyed as a protest or expression of anger

Lurid: shocking, in vivid detail, of an explicit nature

Reprehensible: deserving condemnation

Frigate: a heavy, armed warship

Ire: anger

- a book can't change people's perspective

