

Teens in the Book in Indiana

By Edith A. Campbell

Abstract

Teens have been present in Indiana literature since the early twentieth century and they have continued to be present throughout the history of young adult literature in the state. Local publishers have helped maintain this presence. It's important for librarians and educators to be aware of books written by local authors because reading books written by local authors and set in familiar locations makes stories more accessible to young people. Teachers and librarians can more easily bring local writers into the classroom and this is important in exciting young students about reading and writing.

Keywords: Indiana teens in literature, Indiana young adult literature, geography in literature, local authors, Indiana young adult authors

Introduction

Young adult books are contemporary art pieces that offer students the opportunity to relate aesthetically, intellectually and emotionally to places. In that relationship, the teen reader often finds a sense of self. We could talk about books that come from a particular location in ethereal terms, describing the sense of place they create and the identity they form. We could certainly wax eloquently on the poetics of place that take us home. After all, isn't the feeling of home the ultimate place in literature, whether it be that house, that apartment or that town where we grew up? Setting is powerful in stories as it adds another layer of meaning to which a reader can identify.

Part of that setting is the city or town, the local place of adventure. From this place derives a local identity that ultimately contributes to the overall identity of what it is to be a Midwesterner or even to be an American. After all, there is no single American, no single American story. America is as diverse in its geography as it is in its people.

Diversity is a nuanced term. While it seeks inclusion, it does not address the need for equity and social justice. "Diversity" simply seeks recognition for all of our individual differences. This can include ethnicity, body size, physical limitations, hair color and handedness. While the list can begin to sound trite, these differences can provide unique ways to bring readers to books. Teens tend to enjoy reading books in which they find pieces of themselves and can somehow relate.

And, while some read to find themselves, others teens read to escape. Each of these dual purposes emphasizes the importance of location in literature. Stories validate our life experience. While we usually consider diverse books as those that address gender identity or religion, we can also consider books

that address geographic location. Books with a literary sense of place can provide a sense of escape for the reading visitor, but for the local inhabitant, they can not only find themselves, but they can more readily relate to the story (Bedford, 2007).

Authors use many tools to bring readers to a specific location, such as

- dialect and slang expressions.
- buildings, streets and landmarks.
- eating foods in the ways of local teens (e.g., mixing together all available juices and sodas and calling it a Hurricane).
- annual fairs, festivals and other events.
- geography, climate, history and political issues.
- jobs, pastimes, hobbies and hangouts unique to the location (Bedford, 2007).

Readers are quick to realize that most teen books are set in New York. The fact that most authors live there and most publishers are located there can't help but influence this fact. Unfortunately, this in many ways marginalizes teens from so many stories because they don't recognize the landmarks, don't negotiate space in the same way and don't have the same mix of daily interactions.

But, bring a teen Hoosier reader to a book where they may find someone traveling on State Road 63, listening to Bob and Tom, attending Black Expo or exploring at Dunes State Park. Then, where they are and who they are becomes relevant.

Indiana was first relevant to young adult literature when it became the setting for *The Girl of the Limberlost* (Stratton-Porter, 1909) and again with *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (Vonnegut, 1965). The latter title is actually referenced in the name of the state's high school book award, the Eliot Rosewater Award (Blank, 2012). More classic YA fiction set in Indiana includes the following: (Gillis, 1990).

Burnet, Mary Quick. (1921) *Art and Artists of Indiana*. Century, New York.

Higdon, Hal. (1971) *Thirty Days in May: The Indy 500*. Putnam, New York.

Lasky, Kathryn. (1966) *Pageant*. Four Winds Press, New York.

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. (1978) *The Witch Herself*. Atheneum, New York.

Thompson, Charles Nebaker. (1937) *Sons of the Wilderness*. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

Thrasher, Crystal. (1981) *Julie's Summer*. Atheneum, New York.

The state is set more contemporarily in *Running Out of Time* (Haddix, 1996), *Teen Idol* (Cabot, 2004), *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012), *Next* (Kevin Waltman, 2013) and *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy* (Allen, 2011).

Publishing company Bobbs-Merrill put Indiana on the literary map. With regards to children's fiction, its publication of the *Childhood of Famous Americans* series was among the first to gain attention for children's biographies. The series highlighted patriots such as Brigham Young, Thomas Jefferson, Molly Pitcher, Sequoyah, Lou Gerhig, Robert Frost and John Lewis. In 1965, Bobbs-Merrill published *Crispus Attucks, Boy of Valor* by local author Dharathula H. "Dolly" Millender. They also approached the Terre Haute native to write about Martin Luther King, Jr, and Louis Armstrong. A former teacher and school librarian, Millender, currently lives in Fort Wayne and is 94 years old (Visclosky 2010).

Books began being classified as 'young adult' in 1973, just 10 years before Bobbs-Merrell ceased to exist (O'Bar 1985). While many titles published by Bobbs-Merrill had teen appeal, there wasn't a strong effort to publish and market this genre for most of the company's lifetime.

While many other publishers have flourished in Indiana, three stand out in the young adult market. Luminis Books is headed by Tracy Richardson and located in Carmel, IN. This young company began in 2008 and its authors are achieving national recognition through awards lists such as Laurie Gray's *Maybe I Will* appearing as a finalist on the 2014 YALSA Teen's Top Ten list. Richardson is a Hoosier native who spends much time exploring Indiana for settings in her books. She wrote and published *Indian Summer* (2010) and *The Field* (2013).

Tanglewood Press, located in Terre Haute, was founded by Peggy Tierney in 2003. *Ashfall*, a book of which Peggy is quite proud, was written by Mike Mullin, the only Indiana author she publishes. Mike originally wanted to set his dystopian series (*Ashfall; Ashwinter; Sunrise*) in Indiana, but it was just too far away from the supervolcano in Yellowstone National Park to be accurate. His next book is planned to take place in Indiana.

Lacewing Books, an imprint of Engine Books, is a small boutique press focused on realistic fiction. Lacewing in headquartered in Indianapolis and publishes two books each year. Heidi Faith and Andrew Scott, a husband and wife team, developed Lacewing in 2011. Their most recent release, *Looking for Jack Kerouac* (2014) was written by Hoosier native, Barbara Shoup. She is an award winning fiction and nonfiction author. *Looking for Jack Kerouac* received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly*.
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As important as books set and published in Indiana are to maintaining local teen's interest in reading, so too is a collection of local teen authors. Not only are these the people who write about Sullivan, Avon, Hammond, Portage, New Albany and Angola but these are the people who visit the schools and libraries in Westfield, Warsaw, Pittsboro, Vevay and Evansville. Access to local writers is extremely important in encouraging reading and writing! Bringing in Sharon Biggs Waller, author of *A Mad, Wicked Folly* (2014) tells students that someone right there in Chesterton can be a successful writer. Waller can confidently talk to the students about why reading and writing matters. She can also talk about the hard work necessary to become successful while describing her dedication to her craft. Local writers are also much more affordable speakers for libraries and schools who are stretching limited budgets to promote a lifelong love of reading.

Many of Indiana's young adult authors can be found on the Website *Indiana Children's and Authors and Illustrators* as well as in the print book *Indiana Books by Indiana Authors* (1990). While quite thorough in their offering, the lists are a bit dated. Many more writers continue to contribute to the state's literary legacy.

Janet Oke, a Canadian by birth, writes contemporary YA Christian fiction and lived in Indiana for a very short while. Ashley Hope Perez completed her forthcoming book, *Out of Darkness* (2015) while living in Bloomington. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor was born in Anderson and lived for a little while in Muncie. Kathlyn Gay, author of over 100 nonfiction books, spent about thirty-six years in Elkhart, Indiana. Kekla Magoon grew up in Fort Wayne and still visits her family there. Her book, *The Rock and the River* (2009) has won numerous awards including the 2010 Coretta Scott King-John Steptoe Award, 2010 NAACP Image Award as well as appearing on the Eliot Rosewater list.

Margaret McMullan is the National Author Winner of the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana Authors Award 2011. An Evansville native, she is the author of six award winning books. Kay Cassidy, author of *The Cinderella Society* series, lives in Egmont. Cassidy is also founder of The Great Scavenger Hunt Contest, a nationwide summer reading program for for middle grade and teen readers (Blank 2012).

Elsa Martson, author of over two dozen children's and young adult books about the Middle East and North Africa, lives in Bloomington. Her most recent book, *The Compassionate Warrior: Abd El-Kader of Algeria* is a co-winner of the Middle East Book Award for Best Youth Nonfiction awarded by the Middle East Outreach Council.

Mary Lou Carney has written over 20 inspirational books for young adults and established three national magazines. A resident of Chesterton, she is currently a senior editor with *Guidepost* magazine.

Certainly there are others who have written or are writing in and about Indiana and their work will continue to inspire a new generation of Hoosier readers and writers. Building a culture of readers begins when we can offer books where readers can find themselves. The art of the book, the heart of the book, is the place in the book.

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Edith Campbell is a mother, librarian, educator and quilter. She promotes literacy in its many forms to teens and she does this through her blog, CrazyQuiltEdi at <http://campbele.wordpress.com> and in her work as an Education Librarian at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Ind. Edith currently serves as the Indiana State Ambassador for the U.S. Board on Books for Young People and on the WNDB Walter Award Committee. She is a past member of YALSA's Best Fiction for Young Adults selection committee and the CYBILS Nonfiction Awards committee. Her research interests include geography in young adult literature, critical information literacy and critical literacy within young adult literature.