

## **The Role of Adolescent Storytelling in Community Building and Preservation in John Green's *Looking for Alaska* and *An Abundance of Katherines***

Long before stories began to be written down, then mass produced, commodified, and widely circulated thanks to the printing press, they were preserved primarily in the memories of the members of a community and shared orally. In the oral storytelling tradition, the burden of protecting and passing on a community's stories is borne almost exclusively by the elderly members of the community while the children are expected to fill the role of listener and recipient of wisdom. More recently, educators, librarians, and healthcare professionals have recognized the benefits of storytelling for adolescent participants. Numerous studies and articles have been published over the last few decades which examine adolescent storytelling, but it is generally studied in terms of its pedagogical applications or as a form of therapy for teens dealing with abuse, mental disorders, illness, or social discrimination. YA author John Green believes in the importance of storytelling, and his teenage characters participate in the oral tradition in various meaningful ways. However, the adolescent characters in his novels are not storytellers with training wheels on, grudgingly telling stories as an exercise in school. Rather, they are eager participants who are concerned about cultural memory and posterity, and they use stories to form connections, build empathy, and contribute to the preservation of community knowledge. This presentation will examine how the teenage characters in *Looking for Alaska* and *An Abundance of Katherines* participate in the oral storytelling tradition and use it to build empathy within their communities and to preserve community memory for future generations.