

## Outsiders in the Liminal World of Young Adulthood Fiction That Cultivates Empathy and Activism

With *The Outsiders*, Sue Hinton named a category of fiction for young readers. For fifty years, Young Adult literature has focused on out-groups and in-groups, as authors have showcased the experiences of children marginalized by socioeconomic factors, war, tragedy, family circumstances, and/or identity issues just as they are entering into the rites of passage that mark their paths to adulthood. Among these children are Hinton's Ponyboy, Lipsyte's contender Alfred Brooks, Nancy Garden's lesbian Liz and Annie, Cynthia Voigt's homeless Dicey, Alice Childress's heroin addict Benjie, Virginia Hamilton's M.C. Higgins, Lois Lowry's Jonas, Walter Dean Myers' Steve Harmon, Markus Zusak's Liesel, Suzanne Collins's Katniss—right up to Brendan Alire Sáenz's Aristotle and Dante, Laura Ruby's Finn, Ashley Hope Perez's Wash and Naomi, and Angie Thomas's Starr. YA literature has long been an arena for narratives that challenge the dominant cultural narratives of growing up, developing one's identity, and finding love.

In portraying versions of the rituals that Victor Turner identified as disrupting and reknitting communities while also enacting transitions to adulthood for the community's young people, these novels and others invite readers to identify and empathize with marginalized members of their societies. This focus on a liminal phase of life and protagonists' increasing independence allow young readers to question adult characters' assumptions and practices and act to alter their world in ways that let them thrive. This paper will focus on identifying the rite of passage in several novels and link that process to developing empathy and activism.