To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amy J. Lantinga entitled "A Study of the Novels of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer and Their Place in Young Adult Literature." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Education.

Theodore W. Hipple, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and
Dean of Graduate Studies

A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF HARRY MAZER AND NORMA FOX MAZER AND THEIR PLACE IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Amy J. Lantinga
December 2001

DEDICATION

For their never-ending support and encouragement, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Susan Lantinga and Larry James Lantinga. For his unwavering optimism and excitement, I dedicate this to Adam R. Hundley. I could not have succeeded without these special individuals shaping my life.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the work of two young adult authors, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, and describe their impact on the field of young adult literature. Long respected as authors in the genre of young adult literature, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer continue to write novels and edit collections of short stories, further contributing to the field. The Mazers are unique in that they write both individually as well as collaboratively, so far producing three novels together. However, aside from their impressive quantity of published material, the Mazers are important for other reasons.

Many of the Mazers' novels have earned numerous awards. Both Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's books have been named Outstanding Book of the Year by the *New York Times*, Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association, Notable Book by the American Library Association, and even a Newbery Honor book, among many others. However, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's work is valuable outside of these accolades. When applied to Robert Havighurst's adolescent tasks in *Developmental Tasks and Education* (1972), the Mazers' novels in this study are found to be potentially helpful in addressing the concerns of young adults coping with the eight adolescent tasks of physical, social, and emotional development.

Many of the Mazers young adult novels possess educational merit as well. When used in the English classroom, some Mazer texts complement the use of canonical classic

novels. In classrooms of other disciplines, the Mazers' novels can also be a valuable addition to the curriculum.

This dissertation explores the genre of young adult literature and examines the life histories of two accomplished young adult writers, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer. It also critiques the value of Mazer novels by evaluating them, using Havighurst's adolescent tasks to determine if the novels address adolescents' developmental concerns. Finally, Mazer novels are examined for educational merit and literary importance for use in the classroom.

Chapter One of this dissertation is an overview of the study. Chapter Two presents a relevant review of literature of the adolescent literature genre. Chapter Three provides detailed biographical information about Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer. The application of Mazer novels to Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks comprises Chapter Four. Chapter Five further examines many Mazer novels for their potential as teachable and useful texts in the English classroom and within interdisciplinary approaches. Chapter Six looks at the results of the findings and explores implications in discerning the value of these young adult texts and the authors' contributions to the field of young adult literature.

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CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING THE MEANING AND VALUE OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Throughout my life, I have read novels as a means of enjoyment and escape. As an English teacher, I appreciate the complications and artistry of conflict, character development, and symbolism, but I am also able to step out of my role as teacher and simply value reading a good story. Books serve both instructional and entertainment purposes, and as an English teacher, I promote reading constantly with my students. As a teacher in an inner city school high fraught with teen pregnancy, gang violence, drugs, and alcohol (but which high school today does not deal with these issues to some degree?), I see that my students' lives are often too complicated for them to be interested in a story, unless that story is about themselves or something to which they can relate.

My students' greatest complaint about much literature is that is has little to do with their reality. They seldom see characters as reflections of themselves and cannot build the bridge necessary to discover that a character may be facing the same issues they are and that the choices made by a fictional character may serve as an example to the reader. The theoretical framework behind the idea of using literature in this manner has roots in Freudian psychotherapy. It also draws on constructs found in learning theory, in the sense that humans learn by imitation, and in fictional characters who offer models of behavior with which to identify (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984).

Two of the teacher's several jobs are to help students understand meaning in literature and apply that meaning to their lives. Many books are written for the adult

seeking assistance with problems, such as Lerner and Mahlendorf's *Life Guidance Through Literature* (1972), which instructs adults to see that "literature as instruction can provide positive models of behavior" and "can also illustrate self-destructive or self-defeating behavior" (p. 9). The difficulty for high school teachers is to teach students to value literature in a similar way. Young adult literature is thought to be a valuable tool used to bridge those gaps between young adults, their reality, and their struggle to appreciate literature of high quality.

Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, two writers of young adult novels and short stories, provide excellent examples of how young adult texts can be used in the English classroom to help young adults better relate to literature and understand themselves as developing individuals. As Stephens (1981) notes, there is a powerful belief that students can find answers in books, and that by reading these books, young adults may "develop greater understanding, empathy, and the ability to bring greater resources to a problem" (p. 3). Not only can Mazer novels be used to teach setting, plot, and thematic elements in a piece of literature, their stories are thought to be helpful to teenagers coping with their emotional, physical, and social development.

Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer have written prolifically since the 1970's and have contributed greatly to the field of young adult literature. Many of their novels, whether written individually or collaboratively, have earned numerous awards and accolades. In addition to earning attention in publishing circles, much of the Mazer material is valued in schoolrooms. Beyond the possibility that novels by the Mazers may assist young adults in coping with developmental stages, some Mazer novels and short stories are particularly effective for use in the English classroom or classrooms of other

disciplines. Many Mazer texts address themes that need to be explored in English, journalism, social studies, health, or even special education courses. Whether paired with a literary classic in English or read in conjunction with a unit on, say, aging and death in America in a health class, novels by the Mazers merit value and attention. This dissertation will explore the works of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer and the proposition that they can benefit a young adult's emotional, social, physical, and academic lives.

The Purpose of the Study

This dissertation will be divided so that three main research questions can be addressed: (1) Who are Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, how do they function as authors, and what is their approach to writing? (2) How can their books be evaluated by a particular yardstick of value (Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks for adolescents), and do their books address each of an adolescent's developmental tasks of education? and (3) Why teachers should consider using Mazer novels in any number of classroom and educational settings and what can teachers do with these works?

1. *Who are the Mazers*? Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer have been writing individually and collaboratively since the 1970's. From where do they gather material for their novels? How do their writing styles differ? To what do they attribute their success in both their individual novels and the few they have co-authored? Analyzing such successful and prolific writers of young adult literature will provide insight into an increasingly popular and important genre. These authors have witnessed the development and growth of the field of adolescent literature, and their attitudes toward

young adults and the genre of young adult literature are enlightening for those who teach, read, and value adolescent literature.

2. *Why Read the Mazers?* Although many educators and young adults have valued the genre of young adult literature for many years, the genre itself still battles stereotypes and arguments from disbelievers. When compared to "the classics," a young adult novel may seem too "young adult"—lacking depth, thematic integrity, and literary merit in general. As a result, when forced to make a choice in the interest of time between a canonical classic and a young adult novel, educators often abandon the young adult novel.

While these misconceptions surrounding the merit of young adult literature for the young adult reader may still sneak into the mindset of the educator, one way of deconstructing these false impressions is by utilizing a yardstick with which to measure young adult literature. Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks for adolescents may be used to evaluate young adult literature's appropriateness and value to the young adult reader. When Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks are applied to the body of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's novels and stories, they may be found to be extremely valuable in providing guidance for the young adult and his understanding of his physical, social, and emotional development.

3. *Why Teach the Mazers*? Aside from evaluating Mazer novels by using Havighurst's psychological theory, the possible value of the Mazers' work can be analyzed in terms of practical and valuable classroom use. In spite of the young adult tag, it can be argued that many Mazer novels are perfect for study in the English classroom, possessing evidence of literary quality in terms of characterization, plot,

setting, and thematic development. In addition, this dissertation will suggest that several Mazer novels can serve as a natural accompaniment to a classic novel. When paired together, it is possible that both the classic work and the Mazer novel are found to be more enjoyable and more accessible to the young reader.

This dissertation will also examine if and how Mazer novels may also serve students in other disciplines. For those interested in interdisciplinary approaches, it is possible many Mazer novels can be placed within a social studies, physical education, or health curriculum. School counselors may take notice of the Mazers' potential in the field of bibliotherapy, where selected books are recommended to students suffering specific physical, social, or emotional problems.

The Plan and Methodology of the Study

The initial step in beginning the study is to read Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's novels and short stories. It will be important to examine published book reviews and biographical information of the Mazers. Armed with this background information, a preliminary interview with the authors will take place at their home in Jamesville, New York. Questions asked will focus on the authors' writing history and their differing approaches to subject, style, and theme.

After conducting the interview, it will be necessary to begin assessing young adult literature and the Mazers' important role within the genre. To conduct a study on young adult authors, it is necessary to begin with a thorough overview of the concept of young adult literature, how it is defined, and how its merit is established. Once the genre is properly defined, it will be easier to place Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer within its

parameters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two will address this definition. In addition to discussing the definition of young adult literature, Chapter Two will provide a review of related literature, hoping to enlighten the reader about the complexities and importance of the genre of young adult literature for the young adult reader as well as the educator of young adults.

Chapter Two will include a brief discussion of Robert Havighurst's *Developmental Tasks and Education*, from which the developmental tasks for adolescents derive. These tasks will be defined in much detail within Chapter Four, where Mazer novels will be applied to and evaluated against Havighurst's tasks. Finally, to further point out the value of the Mazers, Chapter Five will contain information on the use of young adult literature as companion pieces to the classics. There is also evidence suggesting young adult literature be used within other disciplines and even within the area of school counseling.

To achieve the purposes of the study, a great deal of information will need to be collected regarding Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer. Chapter Three will provide a discussion of this information. Information about Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer will be collected through print sources, personal interviews of the authors, and electronic mail correspondence to determine their ideas surrounding young adult literature, to discuss their differing style and approaches to writing, and to discover how the two authors are able to individually contribute and to collaborate successfully within the field of young adult literature.

In Chapter Four, all of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's novels and short stories will be evaluated and applied to the eight developmental tasks for adolescents

found in Robert Havighurst's *Developmental Tasks and Education.* This chapter will discuss each of Havighurst's tasks, and then apply to them several of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's novels and short stories. Providing a brief plot summary or description of the novel or short story will help assess where the literature fits into Havighurst's eight tasks. Analyses of the novels will illuminate if and how the Mazers' work may benefit the young reader in addressing his physical, social, and emotional development.

Chapter Five will examine the educational benefits and rewards of using Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer novels in the classroom. Whereas Chapter Four deals with the young adult's personal development, Chapter Five will examine the Mazers' potential in an educational setting. In this chapter, book reviews, young adolescent literature reports, textbooks, criticism, and further electronic mail correspondence with the authors will be analyzed to determine what Mazer novels work best in the educational setting and what benefits are derived from their usage.

Chapter Six of this study will summarize the findings of Chapters Four and Five. When the Mazers' material is applied to Havighurst's developmental tasks, what is the result? Should these findings determine how and why young adults should value and benefit from reading Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer? How should the findings of Chapter Four and Five affect an educator's decision in utilizing Mazers within the curriculum? Because this study's focus is upon defining the Mazers' novels as young adult literature of high quality, this final chapter will include suggestions for recommending the Mazers' texts to young adults and using Mazer novels within a set curriculum. In addition, Chapter Six will include implications for further research

regarding Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer and their contribution to the genre of young adult literature.

The Justification of the Study

A majority of relevant research states that students' choice of reading material is essential to promote enjoyment and engagement. One study reports that there is a dramatic difference between middle school students' responses to assigned books and self-selected materials (Voorhees, 1993). If young adult literature is already proven to be popular with adolescents, the implications of using young adult literature in the English classroom are enormous. If young adults enjoy this genre and are given some freedom in selection, reading attitudes may improve as well as reading comprehension. In an era when standardized tests are controlling graduation rates and funding for schools, any tool to increase reading skills and improve comprehension must be taken seriously. "To engage today's students in reading, we need to consider quality adolescent literature as a means to meet the needs of those individuals in our English classes who are not reading" (Herz & Gallo, 2000, p. 12). Kaywell (1993) further agrees that as educators, "we often place our students into reading practice that we require, a practice our students view as forced, meaningless, and too difficult" (p. ix). Using young adult literature in the classroom affords students with choice, which may improve reading habits and promote reading success. Examining young adult texts such as those written by the Mazers may be a worthwhile tool in improving young adults' reading interests and abilities.

Researchers have determined that students' interest in reading decreases significantly during the middle school years. One survey concludes that the percentage

of children who reads books decreases by more than half between the ages of nine and seventeen (Hart, 1994). If educators desire to produce literate, educable individuals and lifelong readers, programs or methods must be developed to promote a positive reading attitude inside and outside the classroom. If educators can determine factors to promote student reading, they may be more able to easily promote reading enjoyment, reading comprehension, and subsequent reading success. Young adult literature, including that written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, may be a very useful instrument in the battle to increase and improve reading in young adults.

In addition to reading problems, young adults continue to face an overwhelming number of emotional, physical, and social problems. Where do they turn? Where are the answers to be found? A great deal of research suggests bibliotherapy is the key to connecting young people with texts to help them solve problems. Bibliotherapy "refers to a process of interaction between the personality of the reader and literature—interaction which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment and growth" (Stephens, 1981, p. 2). Authors who continue to appear in the discourse of bibliotherapy, including Russell and Shrodes (1950), Rubin (1978), and Hipple *et al.* (1984 and 1997), stress that bibliotherapy is the planned use of literature for individuals whose problems are the usual developmental ones. Young adult novels are excellent choices for educators wishing to utilize bibliotherapy in a classroom filled with young people struggling with emotional and social concerns. As Hipple *et al.* (1984) state, "Fortunately for these youth, there exists a substantial body of literature—adolescent novels—that explores answers and solutions and that gives teenagers vicarious opportunities to examine the lives of other teens who may be confronting troubles similar to their own" (p. 142).

Literature cannot solve all problems, but a teacher well informed about the quality of young adult material might guide a young reader to the Mazers, whose novels may be useful bibliotherapeutic tools. Within the Mazers, a young adult may find compelling characterization or a fast-paced, effective plot, but he may also find emotional impact and perhaps even guidance in dealing with divorce, bereavement, alcoholism, sexual abuse, or mental illness.

In a world of "so many books, so little time," one may wonder, "Why the Mazers?" However, if it is shown that young adults enjoy, benefit from, and actually *read* young adult novels, any educator should promote young adult literature, inside and outside of the classroom. If the novels of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer address the physical, social, and emotional needs and concerns of young adults as well as provide potential educational merit, then the question "Why the Mazers?" is moot. Instead, "Why *not* the Mazers?" is the question with which educators should grapple.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Before beginning any study of young adult literature, it is necessary to define the term and its implications as a genre. The concept of young adult literature can be confusing since many researchers and practitioners interchange the term with adolescent literature or even juvenile fiction. Wilder and Teasley (2000) do not clarify matters when they suggest young adult literature possesses three separate definitions: (1) Books written for young adults; (2) Anything young adults are reading of their own free will; and (3) Any book marketed as young adult literature by a publisher. Reid (1999) merely suggests young adult literature is defined as "books that adolescents would probably like and be able to relate to" (p. 3). Brown and Stephens (1995) state that young adult literature "focuses upon youthful characters and explores their sense of identity, their adventures, their dreams, and their trials" (p. 6). Some researchers and authors even cringe when asked to define the genre of young adult literature or deny that such a specific genre exists. Cart (1996) believes that the focus of defining a specific model of young adult literature weakens the genre, placing it into a formulaic recipe:

> Take one teenage protagonist...give her/him a story to tell in her/his first-person voice. Keep the number of characters to a bare minimum and develop their identities sketchily....Fold in an undistinguished setting in a sentence or two and don't refer to it thereafter. Add a lot of pop culture references and brand names.

> Stir briskly—no time for reflection or introspection—using lots of dialogue and a simple, unadorned, straightforward, colloquial style. (p. 243)

Such definitions, ironic or genuine, do not provide hard criteria for evaluating young adult literature.

Nilsen and Donelson (2001) provide more guidance in generalizing young adult literature as they outline seven characteristics:

1. Young adult authors write from the viewpoint of young people.
2. Young adult literature contains the "Please, Mother, I want the credit!" syndrome [i.e., parents and adults are generally missing].
3. Young adult literature is fast-paced.
4. Young adult literature includes a variety of genres and subjects.
5. The body of work includes stories about characters from many different ethnic and cultural groups.
6. Young adult books are basically optimistic with characters making worthy accomplishments.
7. Young adult novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults. (pp. 25-33)

These characteristics prove useful in defining young adult literature as a genre and assist in analyzing and evaluating specific examples of young adult literature.

Regardless of what it is called or how it is defined, however, most agree that young adult literature possesses certain qualities. Bushman and Bushman (1993) state that within young adult texts, "conflicts are often consistent with the young adult's experience, themes are of interest to young people, protagonists and most characters are

young adults, and the language parallels the language of young people" (p. 2). Wilder and Teasley (2000) believe young adult literature "deals with issues that young people face...or issues that young people are afraid they may have to face" (p. 55). Angelotti goes so far as to suggest reading a young adult novel "is like a young person choosing a friend, a friend his own age...a friend who talks to him about living, loving, and surviving in a world that he finds himself" (Kelly & Small, 1999, p. 67).

Not only is content similar among young adult novels. Herz and Gallo (1996) suggest most young adult texts possess a certain style in which "the first page or two demands readers' attention, enticing them to read on" (p. xvi). Rather than stressing the beginnings of young adult novels, young adult author Richard Peck addresses what he feels is important about the endings of such texts: "Another distinguishing feature of the YA novel is that it needs to end at a beginning....The events of a YA novel must prepare both protagonist and reader for a lot of life yet to be lived" (Kelly & Small, 1999, p.118). Regarding the young adult protagonist, Reid (1999) adds, "The teenage main character is usually perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature, and independent" and "the actions and decisions of the main characters are major factors in the outcome of the conflict" (p. 4). These statements defining the characteristics of young adult literature help to provide insight into why young adults enjoy young adult literature and why educators should examine the genre seriously.

Some researchers, including Christenbury (2000), argue that the qualities of a good young adult novel are merely the same attributes found in an adult novel, even though the young adult novel is "stripped down in complexity regarding plot, number of characters, breadth of setting, and sheer length of prose" (p. 17). Crowe (2001) worries

that "because of a few bad YA apples, the entire field has come under fire" (p. 146). But he agrees that the scope and quality of young adult novels is equal to that found in adult literature: "We have a handful of classics, followed by a good bunch of brilliant novels, followed by an impressive collection of readable and entertaining books" (p. 146). Many researchers agree that there is quality to be found within young adult literature if one knows where to look.

Another important aspect of young adult literature that promotes the concept of quality is the presence of elements of literature within YA texts. Young adult novels may possess a quick-paced plot to study or a teen protagonist to analyze, but the thematic issues in these novels may surprise many. Hipple (2000) states that the strength of young adult literature rests in the importance of themes:

> Those less familiar with young adult literature tend sometimes to believe that its thematic treatments are slight or superficial—"teenage" if you will. They are not. Like the best of literature written for adults, good novels written for adolescents possess themes that merit and reward examination and commentary. (p. 10)

Zitlow (2000) concurs, arguing that authors of many young adult novels create imagery and crafted writing that can "reinforce all the aspects of literary analysis, personal response, and introspection that are a part of even the most advanced reading and writing curriculum" (p. 21). Clearly, research supports the idea that young adult literature can be valuable to students.

The next step is actually getting students to read young adult literature. Fortunately, educators find that young adult novels work well with young adults. Several characteristics of young adult protagonists and characters appeal to at-risk readers

especially. Kaywell (1993) reminds the educator that "the reading levels of most young adult books are within a range of ease that most students can master" (p. ix), which is helpful to the poor reader. Salvner (2000) believes young adult novels are actually a time-saver in the English classroom, "both because the books are often relatively brief and because their closeness in experience and insight to teenagers today suggests that they might be read with less resistance and more efficiency" (p. 94). In addition to the characters found in the texts, the simpler, more accessible syntax, style, and vocabulary aids the at-risk reader in reading comprehension and improves reading attitudes and success (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 22).

Many elements of the young adult novel appeal to a young adult, but it is interesting to examine why young adults may be interested in this type of literature in the first place. Carlsen (1974) researched adolescent reading patterns and determined that readers progress through five stages of reading comprehension and enjoyment:

1. *Unconscious delight*: the typical response of elementary to middle school readers. They read for enjoyment without analyzing why; they have not developed a vocabulary for discussing emotional responses yet.
2. *Living vicariously*: action and escape seem to dominate for middle school and junior high readers—horror, mystery, romance, adventure, and fantasy.
3. *Seeing oneself*: the typical response of readers in junior high school into high school is more egocentric. Now readers are concerned with what's happening in their personal and social lives. Young Adult Literature has a strong appeal at this stage.

4. *Philosophical speculations*: upper-level high school students shift from focusing on self to an interest in others; looking for relationships; examining why. Some are still reading stories of adolescent life.
5. *Aesthetic delight*: in late high school to adulthood, readers have acquired critical awareness and can recognize universal themes. By this stage readers have developed the vocabulary to describe literary elements. They can delight in, recognize, and appreciate the qualities of writing. (pp. 23-27)

If Carlsen's five stages of reading development are considered, it is no surprise that young adult novels are the practical and preferred choice among young adult readers. According to Carlsen, while in high school, many (if not most) high school students will not reach the aesthetic delight phase in which literature is appreciated for literature's sake. For the educator faced with teaching these students Kelly (1999) advises, "It is critical that the novels selected for study focus on what students can learn *now*; the novels should say something important to them in this stage of their lives" (p. 285). If young adult novels more closely match the level of reading development of adolescents, educators must consider the merit in adding young adult texts to the traditional or canonical English curriculum.

Many educators expect their students to value and appreciate universal themes and qualities of literature that some students will not be able to value until adulthood. Often in the English classroom, the study of these themes and styles generates from the use of classics. However, the use of young adult literature that encompasses Carlsen's reading stages two through four is the more appropriate choice for many young adults. As author Richard Peck states, "Our goals as writers for the very young is of course to

make them inveterate, chronic readers whose tastes will keep pace with their maturity" (Kelly & Small, 1999, p. 19). If young adult novels initially inspire young people to read, a common belief is that they will eventually "move on" to more advanced texts.

The difficult part, however, may be getting young people, especially nonreaders, to read in the first place. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) note that the national educational trend is toward setting reading standards a student must reach before graduating. In remedial reading classrooms across the country, teachers reach out to reluctant readers through the use of young adult novels (p. 346). Herz and Gallo (2000) stress that young adult literature is particularly useful with remedial readers and nonmotivated readers, and serves as a suitable alternative to classics for the lower-level reader (pp. 9-11). The resulting misconception regarding young adult literature is that it is inferior to other genres in the English classroom. "Still relegated to students who are considered poor readers, shoved in the back of the classroom library, offered as a last resort...young adult literature has yet to take its rightful place as literature of quality that is respected, used, and recommended" (Christenbury, 2000, p. 16). As evidence of this misconception, few young adult texts are present on any English curriculum, especially not for the college-bound.

However, young adult literature deals with themes from which all students, regardless of ability, can benefit. Many researchers including Hipple (2000) believe, "The generalization that young adult literature...covers all of adolescent life and, for that matter, all of adult life, where the same themes are universal, can be defended" (p. 10). Brown and Stephens (1995) note the historical development of young adult literature and find it increasingly valuable to students of various family backgrounds, ethnicities, and

socio-economic levels. In fact, they found since the 1960's, the field of young adult literature has changed:

1. Earlier young adult literature focused primarily on disturbed and highly rebellious youth, but contemporary novels also discuss the needs, problems, and interests of affluent, suburban youth.
2. In the 1960s, rebellion in YA literature was directed against authority figures and the establishment, but contemporary novels show rebellion in the context of seeking identity.
3. The influence of the family is more pronounced with a balanced portrayal in the role of parents and the influence of the extended family.
4. The ethnic and cultural diversity of our society is receiving increased emphasis. (pp. 16-17)

By analyzing these recent trends, clearly the genre of modern young adult literature is found to interest and affect young people from diverse backgrounds and situations. Young adult literature is not strictly for the disenfranchised, non-reading, lower-level student anymore.

It has already been stated that at-risk students benefit from young adult literature, but even gifted students can appreciate the messages and themes within young adult texts: "The gifted student may indeed feel the same concerns of the at-risk students: isolation, emotional instability, social indecisions. Young adult literature may indeed validate their own experiences, attitudes, and uniqueness" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 24). Educators of young adults at any ability level should come to value the impact of the genre on students. Readers of differing ability levels feel connected to young adult

literature because "They gain insights into human relationships" and "begin to discover how or why human beings relate to one another" (Herz & Gallo, 2000, p. xvi).

In addition to appreciating the emotional appeal of young adult texts, gifted young adults may appreciate the style and reading level of young adult novels. Whereas it is the job of the educator to encourage gifted students to read texts above their reading level (such as a classic novel), sometimes this challenge is unappreciated. In many cases, a student may possess the reading skills necessary to comprehend the words and style of a classic novel, but may lack the emotional development that would help him appreciate the theme:

> The tragedy is that classroom teachers give classic literature to students whose experience and developmental levels are limited, therefore preventing students the joy and success of reader response at its highest level, and....encouraging students to function only at the analytical level. (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 24)

Reading a higher-level text in place of a young adult novel may not produce the desired effect in the student's level of comprehension or enjoyment.

Gallo (2001) points out that the classics are not the appropriate choice for teenage readers in the first place and are therefore designed to promote discouragement and failure:

> *The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns*! They are about ADULT issues. Moreover, they were written for EDUCATED adults who had the LEISURE time to read them. They were also, not incidentally, written to be ENJOYED—not DISSECTED, not ANALYZED, and certainly not TESTED. When I became an

> adult, I became interested in adult things, and so the classics finally had meaning for me. (p. 34)

Besides, as Wilder and Teasley (2000) point out, "Life is short and books are many. Students need to learn to respond to, analyze, and evaluate all kinds of books" (p. 56). As long as students are learning to talk, think, and write about books, there is no harm in reading a young adult novel in exchange for a classic novel. In fact, many researchers feel that young adult novels are the wiser choice for many students.

If young adults enjoy young adult literature, their interest must be rewarded by educators' respect for young adult literature: "By supporting their choices, we are helping them move through their own personal maturation as serious, committed readers" (Herz & Gallo, 2000, p. 18). Most educators agree that developing lifelong readers is one of the goals of an English education. Some researchers believe that providing young adult texts in an English curriculum will help develop such readers. "If students can have success with young adult literature, they may very well continue the reading process as they move from the school setting" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 130).

Failure to enjoy reading is an alarming trend in a young adult's educational development. Kaywell (1993) attributes this trend partially to educators who "often place our students into reading practice that we require, a practice our students view as forced, meaningless, and too difficult" (p. ix). Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990) recognize that "Literary study, even in the junior high school, is a very serious business, wherein meanings, structures, ambiguities, and backgrounds take the place of reading, responding, and enjoying" (p. 13). Bland (2001) states "for the vast majority of students, reading is a chore unlike any other; it requires self-discipline, concentrations, sustained effort.

Genuine hard work" (p. 20). Gallo (2001) adds that forcing students to read the classics may not only be ruining the current reading experience of students, but such a practice may also be creating a lifelong pattern of disliking reading in general:

> We are a nation that teaches its children how to read in the early grades, then forces them during their teenage years to read literary works that most of them dislike so much that they have no desire whatsoever to continue those experiences into adulthood. (p. 34)

Reed (1994) states, "If books consistently defeat youngsters and make them feel inferior, they are likely to quit reading. It is less embarrassing to quit reading than to feel inadequate" (p. 15). Suddenly, the very reading English educators find enlightening, empowering, and enjoyable becomes "embarrassing," "hard work," and "meaningless" to the English students in the classroom.

It is understandable that young adults dislike reading in classes where literature is pulled apart and analyzed within an inch of its life, but Trelease (1989) reminds parents and educators that this lack of reading enjoyment is pervasive outside of school as well. Trelease's research states that in the 1980's, "Forty-four percent of U.S. adults do not read a book in the course of the year—with young adults showing the largest decline" (p. 7). How can educators promote reading successfully when the parents of their students help comprise the nonreaders of the nation? Trelease continues to question what educators may be doing wrong by analyzing how teachers promote reading in the classroom: "In concentrating almost exclusively on teaching the child *how* to read, we have forgotten to teach him to want to read. And there is the key: desire....What you make a child love and desire is more important than what you make him learn" (p. 8).

Clearly, the goal is to promote reading in the classroom, and if, for young adult students, young adult literature is that provocation to read, educators have a responsibility to use and promote young adult texts in the classroom.

Atwell (1987) notes the importance of young adult literature, but she adds the power of choice as being crucial to promoting a love of reading within and beyond the classroom: "If we want our adolescent students to grow to appreciate literature, another first step is allowing them to exert ownership and choose the literature they will read" (p. 161). Instead of pushing a classics-only curriculum, educators should recognize that young adults require a certain amount of choice in their reading selections, and deserve a certain amount of respect in making that choice. Atwell (1987) finds the genre of young adult literature to be full of quality choices when she states that, "The last twenty years have witnessed an explosion in the number of novels and short stories written expressly for young adults, adolescent literature of such breadth and depth no teacher need ever apologize for building a curriculum around kids' responses to their own books" (p. 161). Nilsen and Donelson (2001) also believe that with over 800 new titles published every year, a young adult should have little difficulty finding a book that will appeal to him or her. Reed's (1994) classification placing young adult novels into several categories (the problem novel, the "good cry" novel, the romance, the mystery, suspense, science fiction, fantasy, humorous fiction, the coming of age novel, multicultural fiction, and historical fiction) further suggests that young adults possess the ultimate choice in selecting the young adult book to match their interests—if they are allowed and encouraged to make that choice.

Relinquishing choice to the young adult is not nearly as difficult when realizing the quality of choices available within the genre of young adult literature and the importance of allowing young adults to make connections with their literary selections. Bushman and Bushman (1993) state, "Literature that relates in meaningful ways to adolescents in middle and high schools should be a very strong part of the English curriculum if we want to increase the numbers of lifelong readers" (p. 124). Allowing students a certain amount of choice in selecting young adult texts may inspire more young people to become lifelong readers.

For a young person, the idea of choice can be liberating and empowering. Similarly, when the student reads that book of choice, he or she may find reading young adult literature empowering as well. Bushman and Bushman (1993) argue, "When the content of the book has a teenager as the protagonist and other young adult characters, the balance of knowledge and the authority that is brought to the reading is changed" (p. 122). If the text is about a young adult facing young adult concerns, no more can the teacher be the sole expert in the classroom. The reality of the young adult novel reflects the reality of the reader, and no one is better prepared to identify with a young adult novel than a young adult reader. Salvner (2000) agrees, adding "because [young adult novels] are about adolescents and for adolescents, they put our students at the center of the learning experiences we devise" (p. 97). In this sense, young adult novels help empower students by making them feel they are the experts in interpreting and evaluating a young adult text.

Furthermore, the young adult novel may empower the young reader in situations beyond the English classroom. Young adult novel writer Richard Peck believes the

protagonists in young adult novels may offer special inspiration to the reader. Although the settings, situations, and characters in young adult novels may reflect the reality of the reader, Peck believes "the protagonist generally must be able to do something that most readers cannot. He must rise up independently from his tribe and assert himself. Or he must work his influence on others" (Kelly & Small, 1999, p. 117). If readers recognize this assertion as possible in their own lives, the young adult novel may help to promote empowerment in the reader's emotional, physical, and social worlds.

Young adult literature can be used to help a young adult deal with the intellectual, emotional, and social changes confronted during the adolescent years because those texts address the fears and concerns of young adults. Bushman and Bushman (1993) state, "if students are asked to read literature that is not consistent with their developmental tasks, they will not be able to interact fully with that literature" (p. 3). The developmental tasks of which they write are those designed by researcher Robert Havighurst. Robert Havighurst's *Developmental Tasks and Education* helps the reader appreciate the complexities of changes an adolescent faces. Havighurst divides these changes into eight "developmental tasks" through which the adolescent progresses before reaching adulthood. The development of an adolescent is measured by the mastery of eight distinct tasks:

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates
2. Achieving a proper masculine or female social role
3. Adapting to physical changes and using the body effectively
4. Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults

5. Preparing for marriage and family
6. Preparing for an economic career
7. Acquiring a personal ideology or value system
8. Achieving social responsibility (pp. 45-79)

Havighurst's text discusses what he considers to be developmental tasks to be mastered by human beings at various stages of life, but Havighurst's analysis of developmental tasks of adolescents in particular has been linked to young adult literature in several texts (e.g. Bushman & Bushman, 1993; Cart, 1996; Nilsen & Donelson, 2001). If this is the case, examining Havighurst's theory of developmental tasks in specific young adult texts can be useful in determining the appropriateness, importance, and value of those young adult texts.

Havighurst's stages, however, have never been directly applied to the specific work of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer. With nearly fifty novels and two collections of short stories to their credit, the Mazers stand out in the field of young adult literature. However, their body of work may become more important to the young adult when the novels are applied to Havighurst's tasks. If the body of Mazer material alone covers and explores each developmental task, through analysis of Havighurst's stages and the body of Mazer material, the quality of the Mazers as young adult writers can be suggested. If the majority of the Mazer novels and short stories can be categorized into potentially helping teenagers deal with each stage of emotional, physical, and social development, the value of using Mazers in the classroom is recognized.

CHAPTER THREE

WHO ARE THE MAZERS?

The subjects of this dissertation, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, are unique for several reasons. Rarely do a husband and wife both continue to write successful novels over the span of thirty years. Currently, Harry Mazer has written sixteen novels and edited one collection of short stories, and Norma Fox Mazer has written twenty-three novels and two collections of short stories, in addition to some poetry. While writing successfully as individuals, Harry and Norma have also combined efforts on three occasions. *The Solid Gold Kid*, *Heartbeat*, and *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, all written collaboratively, earned as many accolades as the Mazers' individual efforts.

The quantity of writing is impressive alone, but what stands out more is the amount of praise these novels consistently earn from critics, librarians, educators, and young people. But who are the individuals behind such popular young adult novels as *The Last Mission*, *Snowbound*, *After the Rain*, and *When She Was Good*? Who are the individuals whose novels continue to inspire and affect generations of young adults? The lives of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer are as complicated and full of adversity as the lives of the young people in their stories, but these two authors' dedication and successes are as inspirational as their novels are for the young people who read them.

Who is Harry Mazer?

Born in New York, New York, on May 31, 1925, Harry Mazer is the son of working class parents Sam and Rose, who were both dressmakers. The Mazers lived in a community called the Co-ops, a cooperative apartment complex filled with Jewish, Polish, and Russian immigrants. The Co-ops also served as the setting for Mazer's novel *Cave Under the City* (1986). According to Reed (1996), "This was the world of Jewish culture...a world that valued traditions and laboring, a world that did not encourage a young idealist to honor his gift of voices and an inner life" (p. 1).

The development of Mazer's "inner life" may have been fueled by books. According to Mazer, "As a boy, my plan was to read my way through the library starting with the letter A. My father thought I was ruining my eyes" (Gallo, 1990, p. 137). Reading remained an enjoyable activity as Mazer grew: "Reading was my great pleasure. I was very interested in every library I ever entered, and I remember it was like a rite of passage for me to go from the juvenile section from the adult section of a library" (Ross, 1979, p. 356). Ironically, it was Harry's mother who, while illiterate, took Harry to see plays and encouraged him to read; Mazer feels these literary experiences fed his "inner life." No doubt his mother's influence shaped his life, and Mazer may have returned the favor by including his mother in his novels such as *The Dollar Man, The Last Mission,* and *I Love You, Stupid!* Mazer himself states, "I've always written my mother" (Reed, 1996, p. 4).

In addition to "writing his mother," Mazer also explores the complex relationship between father and son, a relationship with which he struggled while growing up.

Although Mazer claims his father was "steady as a rock," Mazer feels he never knew his father. As a result, Mazer has written and continues to writes several young adult novels where the male protagonists either struggle emotionally to understand their fathers, or they embark on physical journeys to find the fathers they never knew (Reed, 1996, p. 5). Marcus, Mazer's protagonist in *The Dollar Man*, creates fantastic stories about his absentee father, ranging from a spy hero to a generous man who "carried pockets full of dollar bills for men down on their luck and was known by everyone" (p. 49). In *Who is Eddie Leonard?*, Eddie convinces himself and those around him that he is the face on the missing person's poster in order to be embraced by a family he so desperately wanted but never knew. And in several of Mazer's novels where the father *is* present in the home, the father figure often betrays the young male protagonist, selecting a woman over his son (*Guy Lenny*), or threatening the boy and forbidding him from ever returning home (*City Light*). It is Mazer's complex relationship with his own father that allows him to portray the confusion and anxiety of these young males so accurately.

The relationship with Mazer's father may have been awkward, but Mazer's relationships with girls proved even more difficult. While attending Bronx High School of Science from 1939-1943, Mazer dated very little. Again, he admits, "The difficulty [I] had in relating to girls has influenced the plots and authenticity of the male characters in many of [my] novels" (Reed, 1996, p. 8). Harry Mazer did not have a serious girlfriend until Norma Fox entered his life, well after his experiences in World War II.

At age seventeen, Mazer enlisted in the Air Force. Filled with the same idealistic notions his character Jack Raab in *The Last Mission* possessed, Mazer believed war would give him the opportunity to be a hero and save the world. However, both Harry

Mazer and Jack Raab realized that "reality fell short of [their] dreams" (Reed, 1996, p. 12). Mazer served as an aerial gunner in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1943-45, where he reached the rank of Sergeant and earned both an Air Medal and a Purple Heart. While in Europe, his plane was shot down over Czechoslovakia in 1945. Mazer's novel *The Last Mission* is based loosely on this experience during WWII.

When Harry returned from the war, several eventful things occurred. First of all, he enrolled at Union College in Schenectady, New York, where he eventually earned a B.A. in history in 1948. At Union, he wrote for the college newspaper and attempted to write fiction, although he never took a formal writing course. Mazer says it was this experience that taught him that writing can be a struggle: "It was hard—this is what I recall, how hard writing was" (Reed, 1996, p. 16).

While earning a college degree at Union, Harry was also falling in love. In 1946, Harry met Norma Fox, who was visiting her sister in Schenectady, and who was only fifteen years old at the time. Due to the age difference, Mazer waited two years before dating Norma. Upon graduating, Mazer married Norma Fox on February 12, 1950. She was a freshman in college at the time.

Once the newly married couple began living together, Mazer began developing his diverse background of work experience. Mazer's myriad jobs forced the couple to move from New York City to Schenectady, to Passaic, New Jersey, to Utica, New York, and then back to Schenectady before settling in Syracuse, New York. After his undergraduate years, Mazer returned to his working class roots by joining the New York Central Railroad where he worked as a brakeman and switchtender for five years. He then worked construction as a sheet metal worker in Syracuse, New York, from 1957-

1959. In 1959, Mazer relinquished manual labor and began teaching English and history at Central Square High School in Central Square, New York. During this time, he earned an M.A. in English Education at Syracuse University, graduating in 1960. Although Mazer enjoyed teaching, his politics caught up with him. After being falsely accused of being a Communist during the McCarthy era, Mazer was forced out of teaching after only two years. At this time, Mazer became a welder for the Aerofin Corp. in Syracuse, believing he could work in the factory by day and write at night (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000). Other jobs Mazer held in his life include being a longshoreman and a bus driver.

For several decades, both Harry and Norma Fox Mazer have contributed to the field of young adult literature. Their successes, however, are more interesting to note when one discovers the adversity the couple faced in beginning their writing careers. At the time Harry Mazer was working as a welder, Norma was pregnant with their fourth child. Both, however, were harboring desires to write. Together, they devised a writing schedule that would enable both of them to try their hands at writing:

> It wasn't just me. Norma wanted to write, too. If we didn't let ourselves get discouraged, didn't set ourselves impossible goals, if we wrote a little each day (fifteen minutes a day), then in time, maybe we would be writers. And that's the way we started, fifteen minutes a day. (Reed, 1996, p. 18)

Eventually, the work schedule demanded that the writing time occur two hours each morning before Harry went to work. This kept on until, unable and unwilling to keep such a grueling schedule, the Mazers agreed that Harry should quit his job to dedicate all of his efforts to writing.

In 1964, Harry Mazer became a full-time freelance writer writing articles and pulp fiction for various magazines. Norma Fox wrote "confession" stories at two to three cents a word. Together, the writing couple learned about the process of writing, the need for organization, and the necessity of discussing characters and ideas. Reed (1996) feels this experience first taught the Mazers to work together, which eventually produced three young adult novels written collaboratively (p. 21).

Mazer was thirty-eight years old when he became a writer, but he did not publish his first book *Guy Lenny* until 1972. Two years later, he published his first commercially successful novel, *Snow Bound.* Although success finally came for the author, Mazer struggled for years to feel comfortable accepting writing as "real work." "Labor was the work that allowed his parents to leave Poland only twenty years before the Holocaust and raise a family in the new world....He was torn between his inner world of voices, books, and ideals and what he saw as the real world of hard work and tradition" (Reed, 1996, p. xi). Perhaps this is why Mazer moved from job to job before finally settling on the risky career of a writer. Also, Mazer (1990) acknowledged that he never knew any writers growing up, nor was he encouraged to become one: "There were no writers in my family, no journalists, no actors, no entertainers. No teacher ever said, 'Write: you have talent'" (p. 137). Mazer perhaps avoided pursing his dream of writing for so long because of his lack of faith in his ability:

> I made attempts at writing, but they were sporadic and not really satisfactory, and I didn't publish in high school. I really didn't think I could write. My standards were too high and anything that I attempted just looked so awful to me that I couldn't carry on with it. (Ross, 1979, p. 356)

One thing Mazer does admit learning about writing is that writing is truly hard work: "He had to learn to sit in one place and be patient. He learned he might have to write a hundred words to get the right one" (Reed, 1996, p.21). However, Mazer internalized the work ethic to such a degree that it presents itself in many of his novels. The theme of getting a job and maintaining that work ethic and responsibility is important within novels such as *City Light*; *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*; and *The Girl of His Dreams*. In the novel *I Love You, Stupid!*, young protagonist Marcus also struggles to become the writer he wants to be before realizing real writing *does* require work, discipline, and labor.

It has taken years for Harry Mazer to be the writer *he* wants to be, but that may be due to the author's self-doubt about the legitimacy of writing and his ability to write that plagued him for years. However, he appears to feel writing was somewhat destined to be his life's pursuit: "Everything about my becoming a writer was strange. That I met Norma. That she, too, dreamed of writing. Strange that we both found pleasure and meaning in writing for the young. Strange that we both succeeded" (Mazer, 1990, p. 138).

How Does Harry Feel About Writing?

"Everything I've done as a writer I've done despite the feeling that I have no natural talent. I've never felt articulate or fluent, rarely felt that flow of language" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000). Such words seem inconsistent when one realizes they were spoken by one of the most prolific authors in the field of

young adult literature. However, there is nothing inconsistent about Mazer's successes, nor in his admission of how difficult it was to begin a successful writing career.

Harry Mazer remembers his father advising him against becoming a writer: "The idea of his son becoming a writer was foreign to his work ethic and way of life. Mazer remembers his father saying, 'Learn a trade. With a trade in your hands you're a free man. A writer is a fool'" (Reed, 1997, p. 330). This skepticism of writing as a valid career followed Harry throughout his adolescence and well into his adult writing years. Although Harry Mazer is credited with writing a host of successful young adult novels, it took many years before Mazer felt confidence in his writing ability:

> I've felt—I've always felt—that I write and even speak with difficulty. I think I am a writer not because this was something I did well—an inborn talent—but for the opposite reason, because I did it so poorly. I was like the child suffering from polio who determines to become a runner. (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000)

Growing up, Mazer was an avid reader who devoured everything he could get his hands on, including many of the classics. However, this very love of classic literature came back to haunt Mazer as he first began to write:

> It took me years to take myself seriously as a writer....The moment I sat at the typewriter, the Seventy-Six Greatest Authors were there, standing above me, all male, all white-bearded, all wearing long white togas and holding their two-pound tomes over my head. I worked so hard to write anything and it was so futile. (Mazer, 1992, p. 5)

In an essay, Mazer (1992) elaborates upon his initial fear and feeling of futility: "To become a writer, I needed to be loose, to free a flow of imagery and rhythm. I needed to make mistakes, to allow myself the freedom to write poorly" (p. 5). However, initially Mazer was convinced there was no room for error in the classics, and there was no room for error in his own writing world:

> I learned how to write when I accepted that the first writing, a draft, was only that—a beginning, a reaching, and approximation of what I wanted....Words are endless. They come and come. They're like the wind, the air we breathe. We breathe and the words come out. They can be gathered and arranged in so many ways. Revising a line is like dropping a stone into a pool. One ripple leads to another and another. There's no end to the process. (Mazer, 1992, p. 6)

How did Mazer eventually succeed? He allowed himself to simply write:

> I had to learn to accept my own words. It wasn't a matter of being a major or minor anything. I was writing. I was telling stories. I was doing what writers do. Writers write, just as singers sing and a man with a shovel digs. (Mazer, 1992, p. 6)

Again, the metaphor of labor associated with writing indicates Mazer's understanding and final acceptance of the legitimacy of writing as a worthwhile choice in his life.

Harry Mazer would continue to tell any individual aspiring to be a writer to prepare for the work involved, including the physical and mental labor and the actual understanding of the craft. In writing fiction, Harry feels there are some simple requirements:

> Good fiction is good fiction. Good fiction has form. Some of the things I look for are a strong character, sympathetic characters, development, change. A book has to have form: A beginning, a middle, and an end. I struggle for these things in all my books. (Ross, 1979, p. 356)

Once one understands the necessary form, however, Mazer says the next step is to simply begin writing:

> Desire makes up a great part of being a writer, and then there's work: writing, writing—and writing badly, of course, before you write well. I would write a lot and pay close attention to any professional advice or criticism received along the way, and then revise and revise. Nothing is right the first time. That's another thing I didn't recognize in the beginning. Revision, attention to detail, is going to make your book. That's what I think is the hardest. (Ross, 1979, p. 358)

Why Write Young Adult Literature?

Although Harry always wanted to be a writer, he had not predicted his success as a young adult writer. When interviewing Harry Mazer, it is only natural to ask why he chose to write young adult literature for over thirty years:

> Well, I just fell into it. One reason I write them is they read them. And everybody will be fixed at different ages, and some people are perennially twelve and adolescents still. There are certain ages that you feel very comfortable. So I would say the field, the market, or whatever you call that aspect of writing, drew me, found me. I didn't go looking for that. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Although Mazer seems fairly nonchalant about his career choice, his love of adolescence and his special connection to that age is very evident:

> When I started writing I had no idea I would find myself writing for young readers. My agent suggested I do something in this area and I discovered that I like writing about this time of life. Adolescence for me was so intense, so filled with joy, pain, expectations, hope, despair, energy, that though those years are far behind me they remain real to me, and have a vividness and clarity that events much closer to me in time do not have. To my surprise I discovered a thirteen-year-old voice inside me. (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000)

This thirteen-year-old voice inside him has allowed Mazer to explore the many concerns and issues facing the youth of the 1970's, 1980's, 1990's, and the twenty-first century:

> It's such an alive period of life. People have a lot of hope, wanting, desire for love, desire for discovery; and I find that in spite of my age, I remain very interested in beginnings; how people get started, all the freshness and hope you feel when you're young. (Ross, 1979, p. 356)

Harry Mazer is perhaps so suited to write young adult literature because his own adolescent years provided turbulence with parental expectations, self-doubt about the future, and awkwardness around girls. According to Reed (1996), "He shares the inner life of the young through his own experiences and through the stories he creates" (p. 34). Readers can easily discern autobiographical touches within Mazer's work, from the characters he creates to the settings he describes. Mazer remains clear that although he writes fiction, aspects of his life are clearly present within the texts:

> In each of my books there is invention and autobiography. Marcus Rosenbloom is very close to me. In *The Dollar Man* and *The War on Villa Street* I write about fathers and sons. In *Hey, Kid!* and *City Light* I write about beginnings, about how plans and certainties go astray. In *The Last Mission* and *When the Phone Rang* I write about surviving loss. (Mazer, 1990, p. 138)

In addition to writing aspects of his own life, Mazer also acknowledges material and insight from his children: "I think much of what I write comes out of my own memory of myself. Also I've had four children, and I've watched them rather carefully and thought about them" (Ross, 1979, p. 357).

Writing for young adults not only requires a certain connection with that age, it also requires a specific writing approach. Harry recognizes the distinct challenges in writing for young people. Young readers approach stories differently, and they require a certain style. Mazer recognizes his writing must suit his readers' approaches:

> In writing for the young you can't allow yourself the diversions, the long descriptions, philosophical ruminations, endless dialogues of other fictions. You have to rivet the interest of your reader rapidly. I don't expect my reader to be any more patient than I am. (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000)

Although young adult novels are generally considered more simplistic than their adult counterparts, Harry warns a writer must be careful not to make it too simple:

> A greater danger, though, is to oversimplify, to write down, to fudge on emotion, and development, and the realistic working out of the story. Good children's fiction is finally no different than good adult fiction. It needs fully shaped

characters, conflict, and development. (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000)

One aspect of Mazer's books that may startle young readers is the occasional violence demonstrated within the characters' homes. In *The War on Villa Street*, *Girl of His Dreams*, *Guy Lenny*, and *When the Phone Rang*, fathers or older siblings will either slap or hit the protagonist. When asked about these incidences, Mazer is unapologetic about his realistic portrayals:

> I grew up in a world where parents hit their kids, especially fathers, and nobody talked about it. It wasn't quite 'Spare the rod, spoil the child.' It was more, 'I got hit when I was a kid. What's the big deal?' That was the expression. 'I'm okay,' I said. But of course, you never are. There are consequences. The world will be a better place when there is less hitting and more thought. (personal communication, December 15, 2000)

The other issue of concern for some parents and readers is Harry's use of profanity. However, Mazer has an interesting metaphor for his use of language in his texts:

> As for the 'cuss words,' I don't add language to a book. The language emerges from the characters and the life they lead. I don't add words the way you add raisins to rice pudding. The language used by a character is not the language that I necessarily use or even approve of. I don't think reading language that you wouldn't use is harmful. (personal communication, August 30, 2000)

Mazer's realistic portrayal of characters' speech and behavior may not be ideal, but it is real. And although Mazer acknowledges "There is pressure still to prettify the world that you present to the young reader, to present the realities you see in a somewhat

sugarcoated fashion" (Ross, 1979, p. 356), he is more concerned with creating a novel with which young adults can connect.

In fact, one of Mazer's goals as a young adult writer is to create a strong and believable character to which young adult readers can relate. One of the best ways to do this is tap into the often deeper and darker emotions all young adults experience at one time or another:

> I'm interested in character, in those parts of people that are hidden, misunderstood, areas of deprivation, longing, separation and isolation. I write out of the memory of those feelings in myself. When I feel the conflict in the character, the disparate feelings, then I begin to feel the truth of the character, the inner tension, the opposing emotions, that inform the book as well.
>
> (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000)

Mazer's understanding of the "uncomfortablness" of adolescence is one of the strengths of his writing.

Although Mazer has created stories for over three decades, he is not worried that he may be losing touch with the newer generation of young adults. According to Mazer, no one is better suited to write for the young than the "old":

> How many books are there written by writers under twenty, or twenty-five, for that matter? A handful maybe. There's a rightness in the old—I mean, of course, the mature—writing for the young. The young, after all, are young, they're impatient, they've got ants in their pants. I wonder if they can sit still long enough to give form to their own thoughts and feelings. Maybe the trappings of dress and manner have changed, but the emotions of the young are not a foreign

> country. We've all been there. We recognize our ties to the young, even when they don't recognize their ties to us. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 156)

Nor does Reed (1996) believe there exists a disconnection between an older Harry Mazer and his young readers:

> Through his characters, Mazer explores the fantasy world of his own adolescence. In becoming his characters, he is able to examine this inner world from the perspectives of an adult. And, because these feelings and frustrations remain the same for each new generation of adolescents, Mazer's own world and the inner world of his characters connect his books and him to his readers. (p. 35)

Similarly, Mazer himself feels the emotions of adolescence are not bound by a certain time or place:

> There is no end to uncertainty, especially for the young. What if...? What will I do...? Will I be ready? I write my stories with the hope that they have something to say to young readers about the qualities needed to live today—indeed, to live in any time. (Mazer, 1990, p. 138)

Themes in Harry Mazer's Texts

Within the body of Harry Mazer's work, there is an underlying message. The author himself states it clearly: "If I have a message, it's that you, too, can cope; you can get through this period in your life. You have the strength in yourself (Ross, 1979, p. 356). Throughout each of Mazer's many novels, the protagonists are each seen coping with any number of obstacles, be they financial, environmental, sexual, social, or emotional. Lystad (1994) states, "Harry Mazer writes fast-paced novels about young

people coping with ordinary daily hassles and extraordinary life-threatening problems. Despite their predicaments, Mazer's protagonists usually emerge morally victorious" (p. 430). However, emerging victorious does not necessarily mean emerging happily. In fact, Mazer has a distinct feeling about contrived happy endings in young adult novels: "Happy endings are nice in stories. I like them as much as anyone, but they aren't always possible" (personal communication, August 28, 2000). More often, Lystad (1994) suggests, Mazer's endings "emphasize compassion, understanding, resourcefulness, and honesty" (p. 431).

In addition to overcoming obstacles, Mazer's characters have something else in common: their working class background. "The socioeconomic environment in which his teenage protagonists live is important to their identities. In fact, critics have referred to Mazer's novels as working-class literature" (Reed, 1996, p. 55). This is evident in many of Mazer's texts. Jeff in *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?* is a housepainter and dishwasher. George Farina, the protagonist in *City Light*, battles his dad over working in the family's beauty salon and his own enjoyment of woodworking. After his parents are killed in a plane crash, Kevin in *When the Phone Rang* puts his dreams of medical school on hold to become a cab driver. And in *The Girl of His Dreams*, Willis works in factory.

Cleo in *The Island Keeper,* Lisa in *Someone's Mother is Missing*, and Derek, the protagonist in *The Solid Gold Kid* are the only Mazer characters who possess money, and it seems to be a problem for them. Cleo's family hides emotions and turmoil behind money; Lisa's father has died and her mother disappeared, and no amount of money can bring them back; and Derek's money makes him the victim of a kidnapping plot.

However, Mazer does not necessarily subscribe to writing characters that are decidedly rich or poor:

> I like taking characters out of their worlds, be them rich or poor. I do that a lot. It's interesting to me. We often believe the world we inhabit is the world that's meant to be. It's good to step out of that world and see how others live, and perhaps see your own life in a fresh way. (personal communication, October 4, 2000)

Yet regardless of the characters' socioeconomic status, Mazer gives each character a goal to reach, and neither money nor the lack of it has anything to do with the character reaching that goal.

In fact, the importance of a goal or a dream is another clear theme that can be traced from novel to novel. Other than the importance of work ethic, Mazer's characters must have a dream. Willis in *The Girl of His Dreams* wants to be a world-class runner. Jeff wants to be a director in *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*. And in *I Love You, Stupid!*, Marcus Rosenbloom wants to be a writer. However, characters in Mazer novels do not just pursue career goals. In *Who Is Eddie Leonard?*, Eddie Leonard wants a family. In *When the Phone Rang*, Billy will do anything to keep his brother and sister together after their parents' death. In *The Dollar Man*, Marcus dreams of finding his father. The theme of having a dream and sticking to it is a valuable lesson in Harry Mazer's novels. These protagonists pursue dreams—likely or unlikely ones—and learn about themselves and the world around them through the pursuit of these dreams

Harry also believes in his philosophy, "Kill off parents," as they stand in the way of a young adult's development (Reed, 1996, p. 31). Mazer acknowledges that "Very

often in my books the character becomes disillusioned, particularly with the father, and realizes that he must and can face the world on his own strength" (Ross, 1979, p. 356). To ensure his characters discover their own strength, Mazer purposefully removes the adults. Mazer also writes about young adults who are removed or isolated from siblings or peers. "In Mazer's books, the adolescent is almost always alone. This may be because Harry Mazer as an adolescent was often alone" (Reed, 1996, p. 33). However, when parents are present, the father and son relationship is particularly difficult in Harry Mazer's novels. In *Guy Lenny*, the father chooses a new wife over his son. In *The War on Villa Street*, Willis's father is an abusive alcoholic. In *The Dog in the Freezer*, the absentee father writes an occasional postcard, which leaves his son desperately wanting more. Other conflicting father-son relationships are explored in *City Light*, *The Dollar Man*, *Heartbeat*, and *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*:

> I didn't realize when I started to write that the issue of the relationship or the father and the son would be central to so many, many of my books...Fathers and sons. Sons and fathers. It's a subject I'll never be free of. (Reed, 1996, p. 50)

Survival is yet another theme very close to Harry Mazer. This interest may be due to his personal philosophy: "We all have the survivor's mentality, perhaps none so much as the young, knowing so much of the awfulness of life and having still done so little" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 153). Reed (1996) suggests five of his novels fall into this category: *Snow Bound*, *When the Phone Rang*, *Someone's Mother is Missing*, *The Island Keeper*, and *The Last Mission* (p. 62). Others to add would include *The Cave Under the City*, *The Solid Gold Kid*, written with Norma, and *The Wild Kid*. Yet within all of Mazer's survival novels, the external struggle is secondary to the theme. Although

the environment and other external forces provide many obstacles, the characters must first overcome their inner demons before considering themselves survivors (Reed, 1997, p. 333). According to Mazer (1990), "On one level all my stories...are survival stories. I am a survivor, have the survivor's mentality. Survivors take nothing for granted, expect the worst, persist..." (p. 138).

If Harry Mazer and his characters share the survivor instinct, it serves them well. Throughout his writing career, Mazer has survived adversity and obstacles, only to write characters that remain as strong and resilient as he.

Who Is Norma Fox Mazer?

Just as Harry Mazer's family were hard-working immigrants, Norma Fox Mazer's grandparents were Jewish immigrants who settled briefly in London before heading to America, eventually settling first in New York City, then in Glens Falls, New York. Her father's family came from the Ukraine, and it is quite possible immigration officials changed the family's original name Ochs to Fox. Fox's father Michael Fox was born in 1898 in London, England. Mazer describes her father as a shy but exceedingly strong and loyal individual who possessed a strong Jewish immigrant work ethic. Her mother Jean Garlen (born Zlotky Gorelic) was born in 1903 in a small town in Poland, but her family escaped to the United States during Jewish persecution by the Cossacks (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 163).

Both of Norma's parents began working after dropping out of school in the eighth grade. The couple met in New York City, married, and had Norma's older sister, Adele, in 1926, and then Norma on May 15, 1931. Due to the fallout of a labor strike,

Mazer's father was blacklisted; as a result, the family moved to Glens Falls, New York, in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in 1935. Jean's brother owned a bakery in Glens Falls, and Michael worked as a bread truck driver. Norma's mother worked as a sales clerk in a department store and as a waitress.

As a young adult author, Mazer often writes about characters as outsiders. She wonders if she developed this interest by considering her parents' lives:

> I think my parents never felt completely at home in this country, because of their immigrant backgrounds, and I suppose I picked up on that. I don't know if I write about outsiders consistently, but I do an awful lot of it. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 163)

Novels that involve young adult protagonists feeling like outsiders include *Out of Control*, *Silver*, and the short story "Chocolate Pudding," whose characters feel like outsiders due to their socioeconomic status. Other novels such as *A Figure of Speech* and *Three Sisters* have characters that feel more like outsiders within their own families.

Family life is another prevalent theme in many of Mazer's books. She is the middle of three daughters just like her protagonist Karen in *Three Sisters*. "My older sister Adele was beautiful, smart, and admired throughout the family. My younger sister, Linda, was a cutie pie with freckles, blonde hair and a swift, sassy mouth....And there I was, caught between these two sisters" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 163). In fact, the relationship among sisters appears frequently in many Mazer novels and short stories including *A Figure of Speech*, *When We First Met*, and *When She Was Good.*

While growing up, Norma Fox Mazer felt she was an awkward, almost unpopular girl for several reasons. According to the author, she did not fit in:

> I was a girl, not an 'in' girl. I had too many strikes against me: I lived on the wrong side of town. I was Jewish. I had opinions. I didn't know how to make small talk or flirt. I didn't have a steady boyfriend. I was 'serious,' as well, with political ideas. None of these gave me status. (Reed, 1994, p. 20)

Mazer recalls not having the best status within her own family as well, who often called her the "cold one" (Bodart, 1997, p. 337). As a quiet and thoughtful young woman, she preferred to watch the world to learn everything she could about people.

While watching people may have been one of Mazer's interests, reading was one of her passions. Even though her parents quit school at an early age, both were still great readers. "We were a family of readers. There were always books in our house, shelves of them in the living room and more in the hall...I read everything, without discretion, as long as it contained words" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, pp. 163-164). Norma even taught herself to read before the first grade, preferring fairy tales, *Gulliver's Travels*, and Nancy Drew. According to Mazer, "I didn't get any factual education out of it. I don't know what I got out of it, except a lot of pleasure" (Holtz, 1987, p. 11).

Reading may have been preferable to interacting with people, since while growing up, Norma never felt she fit in. "I think from the time I was very young I was the kind of person who had strength inside, but I was also very frightened; it took a long time to get past that layer of fear and to be independent and strong" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 164). Mazer only felt independent and strong when she was writing. While in school, Mazer wrote constantly, concentrating on descriptions, personal thoughts, diary entries, and story beginnings. She assisted friends with their writing assignments, not understanding why they found writing so difficult. But even helping others write was not

satisfying enough for Mazer: "By the time I went into junior high, there was something else: a longing, a need to write, so palpable it seemed it must always have been with me" (Holtz, 1987, p. 164).

At thirteen, Mazer joined the school newspaper, which became "the focus of my school existence" for the next six years. She fell in love with the job and the atmosphere not out of love of reporting, but out of love of writing:

> What did I learn as a writer for the school newspaper? On reflection, not much. It didn't matter. I was around print....I stayed late in school and 'put the paper to bed,' and when the issue came out I sniffed the good clean ink smell and knew I was as close to heaven as I was going to be allowed to get. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 164)

Mazer's experience on the newspaper only fed her dream of becoming a writer one day.

Overall, however, Mazer found that type of writing generally unsatisfying. "I wanted to write more than newspaper articles. There was a longing in me, vague, inchoate, but real, almost an ache" (Garrett &McCue, 1990, pp. 164, 166). The closest she came was writing compositions and stories for English class, but like her husband Harry's experience in school, no teacher ever encouraged her to write. "Nobody told me anything about writing. No hints, no encouragement, no advice, no direction. There just wasn't anybody around to do that sort of thing" (p. 166). But that did not stop Norma from writing journals and story beginnings. However, she did put off her dream of being a writer until well after she became a wife and mother (Bodart, 1997, p. 338).

The road to becoming wife and mother started the year Mazer was only fifteen. Well after Harry had returned from serving in WWII, Harry and Norma met by accident,

although Harry's uncle and Norma's father had been friends for years. Upon meeting Harry Mazer, Norma told her friend that "I'd met an incredibly handsome guy, too bad he was so—ughhh—old!" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 166). However, upon meeting him two years later, Harry was still six years older than Norma, but Norma believed she had more confidence, felt much older herself: "I decided that I would let Harry Mazer fall in love with me" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p.166).

At this time, Norma was attending Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, from 1949-50, but she quickly dropped out after one semester to marry Harry. She was only eighteen, and he was twenty-three. The couple then moved to New York City, where Norma was accepted at Hunter College. However, the noise and crowds of the city became too much, and the newlyweds moved to Upstate New York where they began to raise their family. While living in Syracuse, Norma attended Syracuse University from 1957-59. Like her husband Harry, Norma had many odd jobs to support the family, including working as a secretary at a radio station, a punch press operator, a waitress, and a cashier.

While staying at home with her four children Anne (born in 1953), Joseph (born in 1955), Susan (born in 1958), and Gina (born in 1963), Norma never lost sight of her interest in being a writer. She remembers she "kept notes on her first daughter's babyhood, and wrote short stories when her son was born" (Holtz, 1987, p. 13). However, this type of writing was not helping Mazer fulfill her dream, and she told Harry so:

> We both knew I wanted—to be a writer. But then something surprising happened. Harry began to talk about his longing to be a writer, a dream he'd

> harbored—or hidden—since he was in his teens. And I hadn't known anything of it....Maybe I vaguely knew he was interested in writing. There were all those notebooks he kept, yet he had never actually said the words: I want to be a writer. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 166)

Once Harry and Norma expressed these dreams to one another, both knew it was time to take a more serious approach to writing.

The beginning of the Mazers' writing career is due mostly to Norma's dedication and ambitious scheduling:

> I thought that what I needed—what we both needed—was to develop the habit of writing. Not to write only when we could squeeze in a few minutes here or there. Not to write only when 'inspiration' struck. But to write something every day. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, pp.166-67)

The first writing consisted of stories for women's magazines: "It was a steady, reliable market that needed plenty of stories, and the bulk of them, despite lurid titles, were stories of relationships: men and women, parents and children, brothers and sisters" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 168). Perhaps these initial stories helped the Mazers explore the intricacies of these types of relationships, providing them with sufficient background for their young adult writing careers. In addition, Mazer adds, "One story might be in the voice of a sixteen-year-old girl, another in the voice of a thirty-five-year-old woman, and still another 'by' a nineteen-year-old boy" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 168). Such writing also provided the Mazers the chance to experiment with various points of view, another of their strengths in their adolescent novels.

Mazer admits that writing pulp fiction did teach her a great deal about the writing process: "Writing story after story forced me to learn how a story is constructed, how to hold a reader's attention, how to write dialogue and narration, how to do simple, yet previously baffling things like transitions" (Garrett and McCue, 1990, p. 168). However, such writing was still not what the Mazers truly wanted to do. Finally, Norma and Harry decided to alternate schedules: Norma would try her hand at writing a novel one month while Harry earned rent money through pulp fiction; then they would switch their writing schedules the next month (Holtz, 1987, p. 14).

In spite of the perseverance, demanding writing schedule, and financially binding pulp fiction, it still took seven years of writing to produce Mazer's first novel *I, Trissy* (1971). Next came *A Figure of Speech* (1973), a National Book Award nominee, and then the fantasy *Saturday, the Twelfth of October* (1975). In between books, Mazer continued to write pulp fiction to earn money, but also because she felt her novel-writing ability was tenuous. Only until her success with the collection of short stories entitled *Dear Bill, Remember Me? And Other Stories* (her fourth published book) did Norma relinquish her fear of not considering herself a true writer:

> It was only after I wrote the short stories in *Dear Bill, Remember Me?* that I finally felt like a real writer. I know this might be hard to understand, but I'd wanted to be a writer since I was 12 years old, and even though I'd written other books, I couldn't accept right in my heart that I was actually a writer, a real writer, someone having her books published. But somehow, writing all those short stories one after the other, very quickly [for me], convinced me. (personal communication, December 19, 2000)

Like her husband, Norma Fox Mazer also had difficulty accepting that she was finally a writer until that success with *Dear Bill*. "I somehow lost the secret fear that I was only masquerading as a writer. For the first time, I began to believe fearlessly in the endless vitality of that mysterious source from which my imagination is constantly replenished" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 169).

Although the years have passed and the best-selling, critically acclaimed young adult novels have accumulated, Mazer still sticks to the regimented schedule, writing or making notes every day while she is at home or traveling. "Sometimes I am asked about 'writer's block.' I don't have it and I don't fear it. Those years of writing pulp fiction taught me that there are things inside me waiting to come out that I hardly know are there" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 169). For example, Mazer often admits to not knowing a great deal about a book as she is writing it, such as the full plot of the end or the story itself:

> Her goal in writing is not just to tell an entertaining story. Because she does not start with a fully developed plot, she also writes to get to the end of her story, to find out what happens and why, because she cares about the people she has created. (Bodart, 1987, pp. 338-339)

Mazer has an approach to storytelling that makes her books as much as a surprise to her as they are to her readers.

The Diversity of Norma Fox Mazer

Since Norma Fox Mazer began writing, she has experimented with different forms and narrative devices. In her novels and short stories, a reader could find

newspaper articles, dialogues reminiscent of a screenplay, letters, e-mails, lists, "thoughts specified in italics, and abbreviated sentences that convey information and move the action quickly" (Holtz, 1987, p. 38). In *When We First Met*, the readers learn about Gail's death through a newspaper clipping. In "Do You Really Think It's Fair?" the reader discovers Sara's emotional conflict from her monologue-like, clever one-sided answers to her silent psychologist's questions. And in *I, Trissy*, Trissy's emotions over her parents' divorce are chronicled in such devices as journal entries, lists, and mock medical reports.

Mazer's creative storytelling not only demonstrates her flexibility as a writer, it provides a reader insight into a character. For example, in "Do You Really Think It's Fair?" the readers learn the character's sharp wit and sarcasm are really masking deep pain and confusion. *I Trissy's* screenplay demonstrates Trissy's humor in spite of a painful episode at school. Mazer's narrative approaches allow the reader to be "shown, not told," which is a key to quality storytelling. Many critics agree with this analysis of Mazer's storytelling ability, suggesting its appeal to young adult readers:

> Mazer can be counted on to stretch her artistic range and to experiment with ideas and with forms; she is a writer whose curiosity about life and whose care for her individual characters lead her to write intriguingly, convincingly, and entertainingly about the concerns of young adults. (Holtz, 1987, p. 43)

Since *I, Trissy* is Mazer's first published novel, it is evident she has been eager to experiment with writing styles from the onset of her career. This experimentation did not stop as her writing career developed. Mazer recalls always wanting to write short stories, but her editor warned her they are shelf-sitters. Norma could not be deterred. The result,

her fourth published book and a collection of short stories called *Dear Bill, Remember Me?,* is one of her most highly acclaimed publications. Critics raved about the short stories in *Dear Bill* and only slightly less so in Mazer's second collection *Summer Girls, Love Boys.*

Upon reading *Summer Girls, Love Boys*, a reviewer believes "the strength of the stories is in their inventive style as well as in their carefully drawn characterization" (Reed, 1983). Another reviewer finds the *Dear Bill* collection strong and its characters liberating and inspiring:

> These wholly believable characters successfully meet the challenges of equally credible situations; they are ordinary girls discovering the extraordinary nature of individuality....Any one of these characters is absorbing enough to make the reader wish the story a novel. In each can be seen a very private person who demonstrates a wholly believable measure of boldness and acceptance of responsibility, which is part of any person of strength. To be sure, here are five examples of liberated women in the making. (Ellis, 1977)

Yet another writer states, "No other collection written by a single author for young adults is as important a contribution to young adult literature as Norma Fox Mazer's two collections" (Holtz, 1987, p. 45), while other positive statements suggest the short stories "shine as examples of Mazer's finest work" (p. 29). Such lavish praise may be due to Mazer's compelling collection of female protagonists, each strong in her own way while facing obstacles from first love to mental retardation to cancer. The consensus believes that Norma Fox Mazer excels in short story writing just as she does with the longer

format. Mazer is skilled in her ability and willingness to take chances and experiment with her craft.

According to Holtz (1987), "One of the most consistent aspects of [Mazer's] work is inconsistency; that is she is a relentless experiment with forms" (p. 19). Mazer has written everything from realistic fiction to fantasy, from a novel series to collections of short stories, and from books for young children to young adults. Within her books, Mazer has played with male and female characters, utilized first, second, and third person points of view, and has taken minor characters in one book and made them the protagonists of another. Mazer continues to experiment and challenge herself through her writing. Of her future writing, she expresses her desire to remain fresh and innovative while writing stories that are personal and special to her: "I write stories that speak to me, it's the only way for me to write. I have to throw my heart into writing, otherwise what's the point?" (personal communication, December 19, 2000)

Norma Fox Mazer's Approaches to Writing

Many authors, educators, and young readers have asked Norma Fox Mazer how she begins to write the novels young people find so compelling. According to the author:

> I start with that blank screen when I write a book...a blank screen facing a blank wall in a back room in my house. And in there I'm alone. I don't have a kid standing around whispering in my ear, *I like this...I don't like that. Write about this. Don't write about that*...so I write about things that mean something to me. (Carroll, 2001, p. 108)

The things that mean something to her are often real characters facing real problems:

> I seem to deal in the ordinary, the everyday, the real. I should like in my writing to give meaning and emotion to ordinary moments. In my books and stories I want people to eat chocolate pudding, break a dish, yawn, look in a store window, wear socks with holes in them... (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000)

It is the genuine nature of her characters and their lives to which her readers find so much to relate. But not only do the readers connect with the characters, Mazer herself finds the characters so real that "my characters do come to inhabit a real space in my mind and I can't just push them around and make them do what I want them to do" (personal communication, November 25, 2000).

Reviewers and critics often praise Norma Fox Mazer on her strong and vivid characterization. However, she does not feel as if there is a prescribed formula in creating such memorable characters:

> Describing characters in a book is a matter of choice, options and style for writers. There isn't a 'right' way to describe characters. Some writers back off description entirely. Some writers describe their characters in almost excruciating detail. I'm somewhere in the middle. I hope to find a few details that will set the tone and then allow room for the reader's imagination to take over. (personal communication, December 19, 2000)

One aspect of writing a novel that remains consistent for Mazer, however, is the importance of drafting and revision. From her days of writing pulp fiction, Mazer understood the value of getting words—as many words as possible—onto the paper:

> Out of the days of sitting frozen in front of the typewriter years ago, tears coming because I knew I'd never make it and our dream would shatter, came this method of 'get it out.' It's still the way I draft—get it out, get it on paper. Never mind what it sounds like, just get it down so I have something to work with. So I can rewrite, so I can clear my mind for other things to enter. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 170)

Revision is a natural process for Mazer, one she does so willingly. Of her latest novel *Girlhearts* (2001), Mazer says she completely revised it five times. And as Harry points out, "That doesn't mean commas and periods, it means scenes, wholes scenes" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

The persistence in revision and mastery of her writing is worthwhile for Mazer, especially when one understands the high expectations she has for her books. In an essay called "The Ice-Cream Syndrome," Mazer (1992) shares her hopes for her readers:

> When I write, I want to entice the reader into another world. I want my readers to fall into what I've written like falling into water, to go down and down and down, to enter that underwater universe, to be transformed, to breathe like a sea creature, effortlessly slipping and sliding and swimming, a fish among fish. (p. 21)

To entice her readers to enter that other world where they become completely immersed in character and story, Mazer understands the dedication fully needed in writing and rewriting her novels and short stories.

Why Write Young Adult Literature?

Writing young adult literature seems to be Norma Fox Mazer's destiny: "I don't think I would ever have written anything else" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). And this goal to write young adult literature is as much for her as it is for her young readers: "Writing for kids, teaching them, getting books to them, letting them know that reading is one of the great pleasures of life—all that is very serious stuff. And not only to those of us who do it, but to those we do it for: the kids themselves" (Carroll, 2001, p. 104).

Mazer recognizes that her job is quite serious—both the field of young adult literature and the young adults themselves deserve some appreciation. Whereas many criticize young adult literature as an unnecessary genre, Mazer disagrees: "I believe that the young do, indeed, need a literature of their own. A literature that doesn't avoid the painful truths of our world, but which will provide affirmation as well" (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 172). Mazer acknowledges that young people have every reason to feel lost and confused in today's world: "I really think the world we live in is very horrible in a lot of ways. The pollution, the nuclear threat—all these things hit kids very hard" (Holtz, 1997, p. 15). As a result, she desires to write within a genre that can help young people better come to terms with the challenges they face in their emotional, social, and physical lives.

Norma Fox Mazer possesses a great deal of respect for her young readers. She does not write down to them, nor does she see them as secondary to adults:

> Children are not imperfect copies of ourselves who magically come into the possession of superior adult reasoning powers at a certain fixed age. Children, in

> fact, have remarkable sense from quite a young age and lack, most of all, experience. It's experience, I believe, which separates 'us' from 'them.'
>
> Of course, there are other differences. The young are more intense, emotional, impatient, lusty, and zestful. Their time sense is quite different. And they can throw themselves into life in a wonderful way which we adults gradually lose. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 172)

She recognizes youth as a special time, a time when experience may be the only factor holding them back. In order to help young adults through these times of conflicting emotions, Mazer desires to write stories that address the real needs, concerns, and interests of her readers.

Mazer may write young adult literature so well because like her husband Harry, she remembers adolescence vividly and calls upon those memories while writing:

> Feelings run high and wide and deep and forever, or so it seems, when you're young. It's one reason I like writing for kids. That part of life is so intense. There are moments of powerful happiness and other moments of equal pain. And everything is ahead of you. And often life seems to be nothing but questions...Growing up...I thought I was the only one who felt different, apprehensive, vulnerable. This is how kids often feel: *Not like anyone else*. This may be the reason I write for kids. Or maybe not....Maybe the only thing to be said is that I must write. I need to write, I write to live, and I live to write. (Carroll, 2001, p. 105)

In that attempt to connect with her adolescent readers, Mazer writes realistically, attempting to capture both the obstacles and difficulties of adolescence as well as the joy

and exuberance upon overcoming these hardships. But a theme in Norma Fox Mazer's writing *is* hardship. Like her husband Harry, Norma's endings are not tidy and conclusive. In fact, her open-ended conclusions are found to be believable and realistic by critics and readers alike.

Not all of Norma Fox Mazer's stories end neatly and happily. Rather, "they end realistically--usually with hope for the protagonists' future beyond the scope of time in the novel" (Broughton, 1999, pp. 150-151). Ending "happily ever after," however, is not necessarily a good thing in a young adult novel. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) state, "The idea is that young people have a better chance to be happy if they have realistic expectations and if they know both the bad and the good about the society in which they live" (p. 115). Mazer agrees that young adults can handle the disappointments of growing up. In fact, she feels these situations make for better, more real, and more interesting stories:

> Without complications and secrets and misunderstandings and mistakes and all the rest of human activity that is not meant maliciously but is far from pure—without that—there would be no stories. The fact is we're generally bored by stories about people who do everything right and have everything figured out. And why? Because most of us are fallible human beings, which is to say we make mistakes, we do things clumsily or thoughtlessly or impulsively or without enough information—and on and on. (personal communication, November 27, 2000)

As Norma Fox Mazer is able to direct this honesty at herself, her readers, and her characters, she is better able to create stories that resonate with the real people who read

her books and contemplate her vivid characterization, wide emotional range, and her challenging themes.

Themes of Norma Fox Mazer

Reviewers of Norma Fox Mazer's work have a great deal to say about her themes. Holtz (1987) believes the strongest of Mazer's themes includes taking responsibility for one's actions (best demonstrated in *Someone to Love* and *Up in Seth's Room*), the difficulty in being an outsider (seen in *Crazyfish*, *Silver*, and *A Figure of Speech*), and the protagonist's fighting against a world of hypocrisy (found in *Downtown*, *A Figure of Speech*, and *Taking Terri Mueller*). Holtz continues the praise for Mazer's thematic ability, stating that she "has a special talent for creating realistic teenage characters and is a tireless experimenter with forms and point of view. Her messages...are meaningful and heartening" (p. 83).

While Norma has experimented with different forms during the course of her writing career, several of her themes remain consistent. One of these themes is the importance of a clear work ethic. Like her husband's characters, many of Norma's protagonists are described as coming from middle-class, working families. Mazer explains her interest in this theme:

> Working-class towns, working-class families are important to me. They are the fabric against which my life was drawn. My father drove a delivery truck, my mother worked in clothing stores. Work and the need for work was a constant thread in our lives. (Mazer, 1990, p. 140)

As a result, Mazer's characters are often described as searching for work or already hard at work at a part time job. In Mazer's latest novel *Girlhearts*, Sarabeth Silver lies sick with the flu shortly after her mother's death. In the midst of her illness and accepting her new status as an orphan, Sarabeth talks of getting a job:

> "You should have heard her, Billy. It was actually sort of funny. There's Sarabeth, flat on her back, saying she's going to live alone and get a job. Right. She's thirteen, running a hundred and three temp, her eyes are bugging out of her head with fever, and she couldn't lift a paper bag if she tried. The perfect employee!"
>
> "But I still sort of wish I could," I said, forking up some green peas. (p. 78)

While both the Mazers write of the importance of a work ethic, they tend to disagree over the importance of adults in their novels. Norma includes families and adult role models a great deal more in her novels than does Harry. According to Holtz (1987), "Mazer has a tendency, more than do other authors of young adult literature, to present the thoughts of adults...instead of just the thoughts of the teenage protagonists" (p. 24). Perhaps it is based on her childhood where Mazer acknowledges, "My parents sitting around and gabbing about the past, their relatives, and friends was another constant" (Mazer, 1990, p. 140).

However, although these parents are present, they still provide challenges and difficulties in the lives of the characters, which is one of Mazer's greatest themes in her novels. "Part of separating from parents has to do with keeping secrets about one's thoughts or life. Norma Fox Mazer's characters keep a wide variety of secrets from their

parents, who, in turn, hide things from their children" (Bodart, 1997, p. 342). Some of Mazer's strongest work including *Silver*, *Taking Terri Mueller*, *Downtown*, *Babyface*, and *Missing Pieces* involves young adults discovering such secrets. In *Silver*, the girls discover that an uncle is sexually abusing their best friend. *Taking Terri Mueller*'s protagonist discovers her own father kidnapped her years ago and said her mother was dead. In *Downtown*, the parents' undercover identities are discovered, while their son Pete deals with his own emerging sense of self. And in *Babyface* and *Missing Pieces*, the protagonists learn the truth about broken marriages and absentee parents.

The resolution of these deceits and the channels of communication opened by these discoveries help Norma Fox Mazer's characters become stronger individuals more capable of living a life separate from parents, which is something all young adults must eventually face. "The teenagers in Mazer's books learn from their parents and then learn to think for themselves and reject the ideas, beliefs, and philosophies that conflict with their own" (Bodart, 1997, p. 340).

One of the strengths of Mazer's material is the importance of relationships in the characters' lives. Young people do not exist in a vacuum, and Mazer's books demonstrate that through involvement in many types of relationships, a young adult can become a stronger individual:

> Through their experiences, the results of their and others' actions, the teenagers in Mazer's books learn to believe in themselves and trust their instincts and beliefs. It is a process of discovery, of making decisions and evaluating them, and of change and growth. They learn from their parents and their families; they also learn through their relationships with their friends, girlfriends and boyfriends.

> Friendship is important in Mazer's books, because through their friends, her characters see glimpses of the ways that others live, new perspectives on themselves, their parents, and other adults in their world. (Bodart, 1997, p. 344)

Themes in Norma Fox Mazer's novels are closely connected with her characters; by examining how her protagonists have changed or evolved, one can extract the theme of many novels. The protagonists in Mazer's work face many challenges—emotional, financial, social, and physical—and their lives are never easy. However, while accepting the difficulty, Norma Fox Mazer never leaves the reader feeling helpless. Her characters are generally strong or are seen developing strength by the conclusion of the novel.

Jenny (*A Figure of Speech*), Rachel (*After the Rain*), Terri (*Taking Terri Mueller*), Finn (*Up in Seth's Room*), Nina (*Someone to Love*), Em (*When She Was Good*), and Sarabeth (*Silver* and *Girlhearts*) are tested by parents, grandparents, siblings, boyfriends, friends, and other outside influences, but generally circumstances are resolved enough—and not oversimplified—so the character has the strength and courage to live with difficult decisions, consequences, sadness, and even regret. Norma Fox Mazer's endings are not always happy, but they are often realistic and helpful. Relationships in her novels are complex and difficult, but characters with the resolve and patience to negotiate through them are rewarded with either a stronger bond or a greater inner strength.

How the Mazers Began Writing Together

Although both Harry and Norma Fox Mazer have written successful novels independent from one another, it can really be said they have written collaboratively from the beginning of their writing careers. Even before they were married, they were both

"drawn together by their common interest in books and things literary" (Reed, 1996, p. 106). Their relationship grew from the interest and connection of reading to that of writing.

At Norma's urging, the couple began a grueling writing schedule, getting up three hours before work and writing while their four children slept. Harry admits that he could never have adhered to such a routine had Norma not been writing beside him (Reed, 1996). And not only did Norma encourage Harry to quit the jobs that prevented him from devoting his efforts to writing, she supported him emotionally and sometimes financially while he began his career as a writer. At the same time, Norma became tired of her half-hearted efforts at writing and was equally excited at becoming serious:

> At the age of twenty-eight, I became serious about writing. At that time, I had already gone through at least ten years of dreaming of being a writer, beginning stories but never finishing them, making excuses to myself about my lack of consistency. When, at last, I had done enough dithering around, I made a pact with Harry that each of us would write an hour a day. (Authors Online Library, "Norma Fox Mazer's Biography," 2001)

Both writers adhered to the writing schedule in spite of obstacles. Harry remembers "At times she'd be writing in the dining room, with all [the kids] right around her. So I said, 'You have these great powers of concentration.' I'd be working in the other room with the door closed" (Ross, 1979, p. 357).

While Harry admits occasional difficulty in his own writing process, he attributes a more successful approach to his wife:

> Norma wrote more easily, and she produced many more images and words, and she had lovely facility of language. My tendency has always been to try to shape it in my head before I dare say this word for which I'll be ridiculed, before I say something I'll be ashamed of. (Reed, 1996, p. 40)

Once both authors do put words on paper, Harry and Norma always serve as first readers of the other's drafts. "Harry and I have been each other's first and most trusted readers for over twenty years. Not a book, article or story that either of us has written has ever gone into the world without the other's blessing" (Reed, 1996, p. 109).

Harry and Norma continue to appreciate one another, be it for mutual support, constructive criticism, or praise regarding who is the better writer. Harry Mazer compliments his wife's writing, admitting that she writes faster, produces more writing than he does, and is more commercially successful. Norma, of course, disagrees (Reed, 1996, pp. 104-105). According to Norma, Harry is "more adventurous and willing to break out than I am—in a lot of ways, in doing things and in writing as well....I think, in that sense, Harry has more range than I do" (Reed, 1996, p. 108).

Not only may they disagree as to who is the more successful writer, the Mazers also possess very different writing styles. Norma describes herself as a Type A writer, very driven and disciplined, while Harry prefers to call himself a Type Z writer, writers who hate to get out of bed in the morning, "and they only go to their desks because Type A is there" (Reed, 1996, p. 107). Speaking with the authors about their writing styles is an enjoyable experience. Their love and respect for one another is obvious even though their writing styles and approaches can be drastically different:

HM: My style is "less is more," so I believe that writing, of course, is suggestion. All art is suggestion because you're dealing with the illusion of reality, whatever your art is. So I very strongly feel that less is more. If I can say something in three words, then I'll say it in three words. If I can say it in one word, I'll say it in one word. And what would you say your style is?

NM: Well, I recognize the principles, but I don't know how to put it. More expansive.

HM: Fulsome...expansive...fruity!

NM: Thanks! We'll edit that.

HM: Well, I think that I lose a lot. I lose by my style. I actually struggle when I'm creating work to write like Norma.

NM: Do you, now?

HM: I do. I do, which means if you say it, just get the words out, is what she always asks me to do. Just speak in as many ways you can. And then you can find things that you didn't know. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

The issue of their differing style is interesting to educators, researchers, and readers. Hipple (personal communication, February 16, 1999) remembers hearing the couple speak at an ALAN meeting. Within their speeches, Harry says he writes a whole book before editing it. On the other hand, Norma is much more painstaking with the revision process, choosing to write only a sentence before editing that. When reminded of this statement, however, the couple at first disregards it, then realizes it may be partly true:

NM: No, I don't think that is true. There are some writers who will edit a sentence as they go along, and I don't do that, if that's what you mean. I mean, I eventually do it.

HM: Sounds good, though.

NM: Sounds interesting.

HM: But there is some sense in it. I mean, my intent is to get the book out. I want to get to the end even if it will change. Then I have something out there in the world. See, I use the analogy sometimes that I imagine myself a sculptor, and what I try to get out, what I try to almost spit out, is like a little stone or a piece of wood that a sculptor is working on. But that's what I've got. When I get the draft down, it's like a chunk of wood. Then I begin to create a shape.

NM: I think I travel forward and forward and forward and forward so I will write a chapter, then the next day I would revise that chapter, then write another chapter. Then when I get done, I still have a rough first draft. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Although there does not appear to be a sense of competition between the two authors, Harry acknowledges tenseness at the beginning of their careers when Norma's books were earning more critical acclaim:

Norma's second book, *A Figure of Speech*, received a National Book Award nomination, and I wasn't getting any special awards. That was hard to take. Then she had a collection of short stories, which got a lot of rave reviews, and I was having trouble finishing *The War on Villa Street*. Well, we talked. You really have to say those awful things you're feeling, things that you're ashamed to say

> out loud: you're angry, you're jealous. Once you are able to voice what you feel, it tends to dissipate. This is what we've had to do at every turn in our writing lives, a lot of talking. (Ross, 1979, p. 357)

However, the couple appears to be remarkably supportive both as husband and wife and as writers so that such difficulties do not affect either relationship.

Generating Ideas

Harry and Norma Mazer agree that research plays a part in generating ideas for their novels, but it is more important for them to examine their own lives for material. Norma says, "Ideas come from everywhere. Sometimes from memories from the past, newspaper stories, sometimes from dreams." Harry adds that ideas can also come from darker places: "Stories come from life. And they come from your anxieties. Stories are like wish fulfillments. In a story you can make things happen" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). The Mazers agree that they can start with a mere character, a voice, or even a simple line when beginning their stories.

Although the Mazers may possess an idea before writing, interestingly, they claim it is possible not to be fully conscious of that idea. Harry states, "You know you're there, and you're going to write, and you want to write, but you don't always know the subject." And Norma adds it is even more likely that they do not know the ending of their stories before they sit down to write:

> Plotting and planning a book is not that hard; there are certain things that anybody can learn. But finding out why you're doing this book and what it means is a lot harder. And you know plotting is just the external thing. It's everything that's

> inside. It's the part of you that goes into making the difference. And sometimes we have stories, and we know we're drawn to that story, but I'm not completely aware of why until the story starts working itself out. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Norma jump-started an idea for a series of novels by remembering a neighborhood child's game in which one strings words together based on letters of the alphabet. She realized this would give her a host of possibilities:

> The title, traveling up the alphabet, would give kids that cozy feeling of reading a series. But in fact I'd write each book as an independent, stand-on-its-own novel. I made up my mind to definitely affirm the importance of girls' friendships. (Authors Online Library, "Norma Fox Mazer's Biography," 2001)

Thus, with the exception of one book concentrating on two boys, the *A, My Name is Ami* "series" was born, with five books dedicated to this idea.

Norma has many other interesting ideas yet to be explored in her books. "I'm fascinated by the idea of having family, relatives, sibs, even parents sometimes out there that we don't know about. I keep wanting to write a book about a mother and a daughter reunion, two people who never knew each other until years later" (personal communication, December 14, 2000).

Autobiographical Approaches in the Mazers

Harry Mazer often writes of his life throughout his books. "Every book is as true as I can make it, but it's true to me not to things outside" (Reed, 1997, p. 332). The settings of his childhood and adult homes, the troubled relationships with fathers and the

opposite sex, and even how he met Norma appear within his texts. For example, in *Heartbeat*, Hilary comes out from beneath a car and sees Tod, just as Mazer saw Norma when they first met (Reed, 1996, p. 105).

In addition, Harry Mazer created Marcus Rosenbloom, the young pseudo-writer who spends more time pretending to be a writer than actually writing. Mazer admits behaving just like Marcus in his desire to write and be popular with girls. Mazer even gives Marcus his concern with being overweight:

> My plan was...I'd write till everyone came home. Another plan was—skip food, I was too fat anyway, and I'd just write. I'm thinking this as I'm going up the stairs, and as I'm going up the stairs, I get more and more rigorous. 'This is what I'm going to do. This is the first day of my new regime. Let's go Marcus, I mean Harry. And you're going to lose weight. You're going to get slim. Right? You're going to be famous...' I unlocked the door and I go straight to the refrigerator. And all that planning has exhausted me. I felt weak. I said, 'I'll eat first, and then I'll write.' (Reed, 1997, p. 328-329)

In *I Love You, Stupid!*, Marcus travels the same tortured path up the stairs, promising he will be disciplined, he will write, and lose weight. Like Harry, he fails.

Norma generates ideas from multiple sources, but like Harry, she admits putting a great deal of herself into her books:

> That adolescent me, that girl who was, as I remember her, insecure, unsure, dreaming, yearning, longing, that girl who was hard on herself, who was cowardly and brave, who was confused and determined—that girl who was me—still exists. I call on her when I write. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 170)

In addition to writing the type of girl she remembers being, Norma Fox Mazer occasionally adds more tangible references to her own life to her novels and short stories:

> Both the narrator and her dead sister in "Do You Really Think It's Fair?" are based on aspects of my younger sister. The feeling between the Pennoyer sisters Jenny and Gail, in *A Figure of Speech* and *When We First Met* are drawn from my early relationship to my older sister. I went back to three sisters in the book of that title, *Three Sisters*....Somewhere I am in everything I write, even a book like *Downtown*, which speaks through the voice of a boy. (Mazer, 1990, pp. 139-140)

One can also determine several other connections between Mazer's life and that of her characters. Holtz (1987) suggests that the professions characters pursue are drawn straight from Mazer's family, and in some circumstances, Mazer protagonists fall in love with older men, just as Norma did with Harry when she was only fifteen and he was in his twenties (p. 78). Also, Norma was one of three daughters and had three daughters herself, a connection obvious in *Three Sisters*.

Settings

Another autobiographical touch found in several Mazer novels is often the novel's setting. Both Harry and Norma spent their lives in New York City and Glens Falls, New York, respectively, before settling in Jamesville, New York, a rural setting just outside of Syracuse. As a result, both have experience in urban and quite rural settings. Reed (1996) argues, "It is a sense of place that makes [Harry] Mazer's books come alive. The places are usually urban, but sometimes they are in his other world—the country world" (p. 4). Harry Mazer invests himself in both the city and country environments; as a

result, he writes with such verisimilitude that the reader is at home in either one. According to Harry, the author's use of setting is directly related to his own life:

> Settings are important. You have the world—not that it changes very much, but the world that I'm comfortable with is this world. The world I'm in. The world I grew up in. And I grew up in the city, but I've spent most of my life here in Central New York. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Similarly, settings Norma Fox Mazer was familiar with growing up play a significant role in her fictional books. Glens Falls and Syracuse, New York, are the settings of many of her short stories and her novels. Even if setting does not play a large role in the development of the story, Norma believes it will always have importance in the author's mind:

> It's important in your mind even if it's not to the story. It's like the iceberg below the surface, so to speak, I think, even if only touches of it come into the book. I don't do any big setting. I don't do anything particularly interesting with setting most of the time, but I always have a place in my mind, and that makes me feel comfortable. And without that, I feel adrift. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Regardless of the setting, however, Norma feels what her readers are really responding to "is the situation and the universality of the emotion" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

Return to Previous Characters

Harry and Norma Fox Mazer feel so connected to the characters they create that both of them on occasion will return to a character. Either they take a protagonist from one novel and continue his or her story years later, or they select a minor character and make him the feature in a later novel. Norma suggests she repeats characters "because I find it interesting to do so, to see what's happened to them, and because they exist for me in some special kind of reality" (personal communication, October 13, 2000). Harry Mazer says he does this to discover more about characters, especially by taking unsympathetic ones and making them the sympathetic focus in another novel:

> Mazer...often creates characters whom he intensely dislikes, perhaps because he recognizes that his protagonists must learn to respond to these people in ways that promote personal growth. But then, he admits, that he finds these characters fascinating. He wants to know why they are so unlikable. He wants to watch as they confront their own internal and external enemies. (Reed, 1996, p. 25)

Harry Mazer does this several times. In *The Dollar Man*, Willis Pierce and his gang torment Marcus. Later, Willis has his own demons to face in *The War on Villa Street* and *The Girl of His Dreams.*

In a scene near the end of Mazer's *The Dollar Man*, the main character Marcus stands on a rooftop and accidentally sees into the kitchen of Willis, whom Marcus considered "this mosquito, this itch, this pest" throughout the book (H. Mazer, personal communication, July 29, 2000). According to Mazer, when he wrote that scene he immediately knew he was going to write a book about Willis:

> Marcus, who hungers for the love of the father he's never known, sees Willis and his father sitting at a table across from each other...I kept thinking about it, coming back to it. Maybe it was what Marcus thought that interested me. 'He was seeing Willis in a secret way, a way he wasn't supposed to, but one that was more truthful than all the other ways.' As much as telling a good story, I want to show my readers that behind the façade that we all throw up to protect ourselves, there exists a human heart. (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 154)

In addition to wanting to demonstrate a deeper part of the human experience, Harry Mazer has a more simple reason for returning to characters in his earlier books: "I didn't want to give them up. Just ways of staying in that world and doing another point of view" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

Harry Mazer has continued characters from other novels as well. Willis Pierce from *The War on Villa Street* does not battle with his father, but rather struggles with his feelings for the opposite sex in *The Girl of His Dreams.* In *The Dollar Man*, Wendy is described as a quirky, offbeat minor character that Marcus finds confusing and fairly annoying to be around. However, a more grown-up Wendy becomes Marcus's love interest in *I Love You, Stupid!* In *Guy Lenny*, Tony LaPorte can do little but make bullying, nasty comments to Guy. But in *Snow Bound*, Mazer makes Tony capable of a great deal more. Suddenly the bully in *Guy Lenny* attracts the readers' sympathy by demonstrating another side to his character:

> According to Mazer, Tony 'wasn't particularly good, kind, or thoughtful, there was nothing redeeming about him.' Tony must overcome these detestable characteristics if he is to mature and survive. So, originally Tony was created by

> Mazer to provide an opportunity for Guy to confront evil, but Mazer's interest in why and how Tony became so mean made him an excellent protagonist for a survival novel in which maturity is required to overcome the environment. (Reed, 1996, pp. 25-26)

Norma Fox Mazer has also experimented with this continuation of characters. In her first novel *I, Trissy*, the spunky protagonist's older brother named Mitch mostly stays in the background during his parents' divorce. However, Mitch becomes the male lead and love interest of Nina in *Someone to Love*, a complex story of a young couple's experience with love and betrayal.

In two other sets of novels, Norma Fox Mazer takes the protagonist at one age and then explores her world several years later. In Mazer's second book *A Figure of Speech*, the protagonist Jenny Pennoyer battles her family as she builds her relationship with her ailing grandfather. Several years later, Jenny and her family are battling the tragic death of her sister Gail in *When We First Met*. In this novel, the readers watch Jenny deal with yet another death while she learns about love and how to live with her parents' expectations. In *Silver*, the reader meets Sarabeth Silver, the protagonist who strives to fit in with her wealthier friends until she discovers money is not the key to happiness. In Mazer's latest novel *Girlhearts*, Sarabeth still possesses little money, but now she must also face the death of her mother. In these continuations of characters in Norma Fox Mazer's novels, readers are rewarded with a deeper understanding of the characters' worlds.

This weaving of characters is fascinating: as readers form alliances with one character in one novel, they are then forced to negotiate new feelings of empathy and

association with a character previously unsympathetic. In this sense, the Mazers not only have their characters mature and grow, they force their readers to reassess their assumptions and understand a little more about human nature—that every character and every individual can possess both likable and unlikable traits. It is the dealing with and accepting of this fact that promotes social and emotional maturity.

When writing characters, the Mazers stress that there is no one, particular formula. According to Norma, character develops during the course of the novel, and she may not feel completely comfortable with that character until the end of the writing process:

> What person you use is just a choice that you make, a decision you make as you write to figure out the best voice that is right for the story. I don't think there are rules for that. Character is something that grows as you understand your story better, as you rewrite. The whole book is like that. For me, writing a novel is just a continual process. And there comes a point for me—it isn't when I first begin—when I fully know the characters and I'm fully at ease within the character, and that's the point where I know it's delightful. It's delicious. And then I know I'm getting to the end, and I'm not going to be here very much longer. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

A particular type of characterization employed by both of the Mazer involves giving the character a middle-class, working background. When asked about this preference, the authors have many reasons for their choice. Harry states, "You can do a character from any setting, but you're looking for pain. You're looking for people having

difficulty." Norma acknowledges the need for a good story, but she claims it is more of a level of comfort for herself:

> I just think it feels more natural to me to understand people who have to work and face a lot of necessity in their lives. Maybe I just like that. I can imagine growing up privileged, but it's like setting. I need a place where I feel comfortable. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Finally, Harry points out that their readers tend to be from middle-class backgrounds, and what makes their novels so popular is that the readers like to read about people like themselves (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

Although the Mazers have developed strong relationships with all of the characters they have written, they do have their favorites. While Norma jokes that her husband loves all of his characters, Harry's favorites include Marcus Rosenbloom from *The Dollar Man* and *I Love You, Stupid!*, and Willis from *The Dollar Man* and *The War on Villa Street*. Others are Eddie in *Who Is Eddie Leonard?*, Tolley in *Cave Under the City*, and of course, Jack Raab in the semi-autobiographical *The Last Mission*. Norma's favorite characters that Harry has written are Sammy and Kevin in *The Wild Kid*. Although Harry prefers Trissy in Norma's first book *I, Trissy*, Norma feels too "far away from her now." She prefers Jenny Pennoyer of *A Figure of Speech* and *When We First Met*, and Rachel in her Newbery Honor book, *After the Rain* (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

In writing their characters, Harry and Norma may experiment with points of view and characterization, but they do not vary widely in their approach of writing male and female protagonists based on their own gender. However, they both have attempted the

gender switch. While Norma concentrates on female protagonists, she tries to accommodate her male readers with a few novels:

> I was set to do *C, My Name is Celia* when a boy asked me, 'Why do you just write for girls?' What could I say? Because I'm female? Because it's easier? This boy was right, he was feeling excluded. Then and there I decided that *C, My Name Is*...was going to be about two boys, their lives, and their friendship. (Authors Online Library, "Norma Fox Mazer's Biography," 2001)

Although Harry Mazer admits writing female characters is getting easier, he and Norma confess initial difficulty:

> HM: Norma worked me over when I drafted *Snow Bound.*
>
> NM: Yeah.
>
> HM: She didn't like the girl. The girl was a crybaby. I was doing the male thing.
>
> NM: And you were very unconscious about it.
>
> HM: I was unconscious. Maybe the book wouldn't have stayed around with that wimpy of a character. She was the equal of the boy—she more than equaled the boy, so there're always things to learn for me to do a girl character. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Harry Mazer must have felt a bit more comfortable when writing *The Island Keeper*, where Cleo is the female protagonist who conquers the elements of the Canadian wilderness while facing her own inner conflicts. While Harry Mazer did initially write the novel from the perspective of a boy, at the suggestion of his wife he took a different approach. Harry argues, however, that the sex of the character should not impact the effect of a good story:

> Why a girl? [*The Island Keeper*] is my first book in which a girl is the principal protagonist; in fact for much of the book, the only character. Why should it make any difference if the hero is male or female? It's the story that must hold the reader. Is the story suspenseful? Does the character show courage, wit, enterprise? Is it a good book? Isn't that finally what matters, not that it's a 'girl's' book or a 'boy's' book, but simply a good book? (Garrett & McCue, 1990, p. 155)

Actually Writing Together: The Mazers' Collaborative Efforts

Harry and Norma Fox Mazer have co-authored three books together. *The Solid Gold Kid* was the first of these collaborations. According to the authors, this collaboration was difficult due to differing styles and approaches. Norma elaborates on the complexities of co-authoring:

> It's a real push-pull. We really fight sometimes because we do write differently and we do have a different take [on things]. At its best, we are adding to each other. We are both giving our strengths. At its worst, we're really close to divorce. (Reed, 1996, p. 110)

The Solid Gold Kid initially was Harry's idea. After giving the first draft to Norma, she complained of the characters: "I had written out a first draft of a kidnap story that Norma said was strong on action but the characters were thin as opposed to warm and fuzzy" (H. Mazer, personal communication, October 25, 2000). Listening to the couple discuss their collaborative efforts is enjoyable. They tease one another yet remain fiercely loyal about the other's efforts and contributions:

HM: I had actually written [*The Solid Gold Kid*], and Norma read it. She liked the action but she hated the characters.

NM: I didn't hate them.

HM: Well...

NM: They just weren't good.

HM: No, what she said at the time was that they were like cardboard. They were flat.

NM: And you remember that all these years later... (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Once the couple decided to work together due to financial reasons ("We needed money at the time"), they developed a process that they agree is faster than writing alone. Harry describes the benefits of this process:

> The way we write our own stuff (and I do this particularly), I wander around. I don't have things working in an orderly way. And when we do something together, you have to know what you're doing, so it's going to be faster; you don't make false turns. So we don't get pulled off track, and you know what you're heading for. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

The writing process for *The Solid Gold Kid* involved a great deal of communication, as Harry Mazer further explains:

> We did it by talking for a couple of weeks and working out the plot in detail. Then we divided the chapters. I did the first because I like beginnings, Norma did the second, I did the third, etc. Then we exchanged chapters and revised each other's work. An incredible process. When it was over, Norma said she would

not write a book again with 'that man' as long as she lived. You see what happened to that promise. (personal communication, October 25, 2000)

In spite of disagreements and perhaps too much "togetherness" in the writing process, the Mazers have many positive things to say about writing collaboratively. Both agree that it is fun to work together and involves less pressure. "If you run into trouble, it's like, 'Oh, well. Not going to lose sleep tonight—Harry will think about it.'" Harry agrees, stating, "I should have a more collaborative attitude about everything. If I don't work, Norma will get it right" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). While the couple works on the plot and the characterization of the book, they also work on helping each other with their individual writing styles:

HM: The beautiful part is the end when we're sort of reading it aloud and re-writing it. And very often I have something in my head but can't put it in words. Words don't come out that easily. And Norma knows, you know, how I operate very well. And sometimes she'll stop me, and what she really wants me to do is spill out—

NM: Well, I'll ask you to talk.

HM: She just wants me to talk. She wants words. She doesn't want grunts, she doesn't want me looking pained. And it's been a real education for me because we are so different writers.

NM: Very different. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Harry claims to be more of a secretive writer who does not want anyone (including himself) to see his "bad words," while Norma admits boldly, "I'm very willing to write badly." Together, the couple revises, discusses, revises, argues, and creates a novel:

HM: Neither of us falls in love with our word. We sometimes get excited about a scene, and I'd want Norma to read it, but I don't trust that because it's dangerous. Because chances are, she's telling me something else as a reader.

NM: Yeah, I might tell you to tighten it up.

HM: Yeah, tighten it up, and it'll make me mad, so that when we work together, there's...I mean, how do you keep from having fights? You just have fights and like, storm off.

NM: I always thought you were really a lot nicer about those things than I was.

HM: Well, that's right.

NM: No, I'm the one who gets sulky.

HM: Yeah, and we learned the way now to work. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

Somehow, learning this "way now to work" has kept the Mazers' marriage strong and their writing career productive.

While benefits exist in writing together, the authors stress that writing can also be a strong, individual experience—something that collaboration takes away:

NM: It's fun, but the truth is, when we write a book together, both of us get itchy to get out of it by the time we're done and want to get back to our own work. We look at it kind of as a relief and almost a writing vacation, and then it just goes on just long enough.

HM: You know, everybody's got issues, internal, personal issues. And writing is a way to working those issues out. And so if you're doing a collaboration, you're

> really not getting involved with those things in the same way. Finally, it's not something you always want to do. (personal communication, July 29, 2000)

In spite of these obstacles, the Mazers collaborated two more times for *Heartbeat* and *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* and have discussed a fourth combined effort in the future.

Although critics have called *The Solid Gold Kid* "a striking thriller...swift-moving, vibrant, believable" (Lystad, 1994, p. 431), after completing that novel, the Mazers swore they would never again collaborate. Although they broke this promise, they did wait ten long years before attempting another joint effort. The result was *Heartbeat*, a story of three friends struggling with romance, friendship, and loyalty.

After jointly discussing the whole book, again, Harry produced the initial draft; then Norma "has permission to go in and do anything she wants to it" (Reed, 1996, p. 111). Harry Mazer recounts the actual joint writing process:

> The truth is I wrote the whole draft of the book that became *Heartbeat* then handed it to Norma and said, 'It's a little rough but the story is there.' Norma took it, pulled it apart then rewrote it her own way. Then we worked on it together till we were both satisfied. (H. Mazer, personal communication, November 26, 2000)

Together they revised the manuscript side by side, having "constant disagreements, long silences, heavy sighs, [and] deep breathing" (Reed, 1996, p. 113). Norma, however, has a slightly different recollection of the writing of *Heartbeat*:

> We did each leave our fingerprints on the book (or maybe I should say footprints?) but we really did write it together. Here's how we worked: we each drafted different sections, then we revised each other's sections, then we sat side

> by side and worked over the text until we were both satisfied. We did this about five times. Maybe there are still sentences, paragraphs, even perhaps a whole page that one of us originally wrote, but most of the material has been revised so much that we would probably be hard put to figure out who wrote what! (personal communication, November 26, 2000)

Heartbeat provides an example of shifting narrators, as the point of view alternates between Tod and Hilary. The novel also possesses a strained father-son relationship, which is a regular feature in many of Harry Mazer's novels. But regardless of the comparisons to other novels written by Harry, he remains firm in the idea that *Heartbeat* belongs to both of them. "It wasn't my book anyways. It was ours. That's why we've only done three collabs in 30 years. But I like the way it came out" (personal communication, November 26, 2000).

A short three years after *Heartbeat*, the Mazers came together to create *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* (1992), a story of four teenage journalists seeking the balance between ambition and decency. This novel is also told from dual third-person narrators, again a boy (Chris) and a girl (Vicki). Chris resembles Marcus in *I Love You, Stupid!* in that he obsesses about girls, desires to be a writer, and poses as a smooth, ladies' man through his alter ego Crash. Again, the father-son relationship resembles Harry Mazer's in that Chris's immigrant father feels Chris should abandon writing for a real job. According to Reed (1996), *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* is "a character study, more typical of most of the Mazers' individual novels, rather than a novel that focuses on plot and action" (p. 121). Like *Heartbeat* and the romances Harry writes individually, *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* ends without the boy and girl together. Instead, as in the three

jointly written novels, the final chapters consist of characters writing letters to one another, exploring what they learned and what they hope to accomplish in the future (Reed, 1996, p. 122).

According to Harry Mazer, the co-authoring experience with his wife is best described as a "duet" (Reed, 1996, p. 123). Labeling the writing in this way suggests that although the Mazers possess unique styles and approaches to the writing, the process of collaborating is one of growth and harmony.

Awards

Since Harry Mazer first decided to write young adult novels, he has been rewarded with a great deal of recognition from critics in the field of young adult literature. Mazer's first award was the Kirkus Choice list for *The Dollar Man* in 1974. *The Solid Gold Kid*, written with Norma, earned several awards including the Children's Choice List, International Reading Association, the Best Books for Young Adults list, American Library Association (ALA) in 1977, and the ALA One Hundred Best of the Best Books, 1968-1993. Again in 1978, 1979, 1981, and 1986, Harry Mazer's novels *The War on Villa Street*, *The Last Mission*, *I Love You, Stupid!*, *When the Phone Rang*, and *The Girl of His Dreams* were all placed on the ALA's lists for Best Books for Young Adults. The novel *The War on Villa Street* further earned the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award Nomination in 1979. One of Harry's most successful novels, *The Last Mission*, also earned spots on the *New York Times* Best Books of the Year list in 1979, the New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age list in 1980, and the ALA Best of the Best Books list. Harry Mazer's other well-known novel *Snow Bound* has won

a spot on the *Booklist* Contemporary Classics list in 1984. *The Island Keeper* earned an Arizona Young Readers Award nomination in 1985 and was a Junior Literary Guild selection. Both the New York Library Books for the Teen Age list and the International Reading Association-Children's Book Council Young Adult Choice lists honored *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?* in 1986 and 1987. *The Girl of His Dreams* also earned spots on the New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age list and the ALA Books for Young Adult Reluctant Readers list in 1988. *When the Phone Rang* was placed on the Iowa Teen Award Master list in 1988. *City Light* was also placed on the Young Adult Reluctant Readers list in 1989.

In addition to success in the United States, Mazer's novels are well received around the world. *Snow Bound* has been translated into French, Finnish, and German, and was even awarded the German "Preis der Lesseratten." *Snow Bound* was also produced as a television movie both in the United States and Germany. In addition, *When the Phone Rang* has earned the West Australian Young Reader's Book Award.

Two other collaborative efforts with wife Norma Fox Mazer earned awards. *Heartbeat* (1989) won both the International Reading Association Children's Choice and the German Literature Prize. *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* (1992) was placed on the American Booksellers Pick of the Lists.

Norma Fox Mazer has earned literary recognition since 1974, when *A Figure of Speech* was nominated for the National Book Award. Mazer's fantasy *Saturday, the Twelfth of October* earned the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, University of Wisconsin, in 1975. Mazer's first collection of short stories, *Dear Bill, Remember Me? And Other Stories*, remains one of her most successful ventures. The collection earned the

Christopher Award and was named Outstanding Book of the Year by the *New York Times*, a Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association (ALA), a Notable Book by the ALA, landed on the *School Library Journal* Best Books of the Year list, and earned the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award all in 1976.

Up in Seth's Room (1979), and *Someone to Love* (1983) were also named a Best Book for Young Adults by the ALA, *School Library Journal* Best Books of the Year, and the ALA Best of the Best Books 1970-83 list. Norma Fox Mazer's novel *Mrs. Fish, Ape, and Me, the Dump Queen*, republished under the new title *Crazyfish*, won the German Children's Literature prize and a place on the Austrian Children's Books list of honor in 1982. *Taking Terri Mueller* won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best Juvenile Mystery in 1982, as well as the California Young Readers Medal in 1985. *Someone to Love* was placed on the ALA Best Books for Young Adults list in 1983. *Downtown* was both an Outstanding Book of the Year by the *New York Times* and a Best Book for Young Adults by the ALA in 1985. The Iowa Teen Award for 1985-86 was given to *When We First Met*, while *A, My Name is Ami* was the International Reading Association Children's Choice for the same year.

Norma Fox Mazer's best-known novel, *After the Rain,* has earned numerous awards and recognition. In 1988, the novel was named a Newbery Honor Book as well as a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, an ALA Notable Book, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, Canadian Children's Books Council Choice, *Horn Book* Fanfare Book, and Association of Booksellers for Children Choice. Several years later, *Silver* won the Iowa Teen Choice Award and the ALA One Hundred Best of the Best Books, 1968-1993. *Babyface* was named International Reading Association Teacher's Choice

and American Booksellers Pick of the Lists, while *Out of Control* earned a spot on the ALA Best Books for Young Adults list and American Booksellers Pick of the Lists. *Missing Pieces* was also named on the American Booksellers Pick of the Lists.

Of the more recent Mazer publications, Norma's *When She Was Good* (1997) was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a *School Library Journal* Best Book, and an ALA *Booklist* Editor's Choice, while Harry's *The Wild Kid* (1998) earned a place on the *Horn Book* Fanfare List and was a *School Library Journal* Best Book of 1998.

Where Are They Now, And Where Are They Going?

Currently, Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer split their time between two very different places: New York City and Jamesville, New York. Both continue their writing schedule and work on research, and Norma adds to her busy schedule by working with college students who wish to become writers. But in between their activities, the Mazers do hope they are accomplishing several things in the field of young adult literature. In fact, if they could each say one thing they would like the parents of young adult readers to know about their books, their answers would concentrate on the quality of their work. Norma would tell parents many things about her books: " I think they're interesting, they're well written, and they have a strong sense of morality underlying them. They're about people accepting responsibility for other people. Characters are people who care about other people. To me, that's what counts." Harry would tell parents, "I write books that kids read. I want your kids to read them. It's a big problem; a lot of kids don't read" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

But not only do the Mazers want young adults to read, they would like them to read quality stories, which they hope they are writing. Harry believes the goal in his writing is originality and creativity: "You want an interesting book. You want to write a fresh book. You want to write something not written before. That's what's important" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). Norma's goal is slightly loftier and equally important:

> My ideal in writing is to write a book that's intelligent and well written, but popular, and sometimes those things are at war with each other. I want the readers, I want the kids, but I also want the reviewers, I want the adults. Naturally, I want everything. (Holtz, 1987, p. 80)

Looking back on their prolific writing careers, the Mazers can see how they have matured as writers, but they still do not feel they possess any superior insight into the adolescent mind. They would argue they write young adult novels well because they understand themselves well. Harry would argue, "I don't know if I have any particular insights. I'm always writing some aspect of myself." Norma agrees, stating, "I think we both are. And I get these letters that say, 'Oh, you understand teenagers so well.' Basically, I think about people" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

Thinking about people has served the Mazers well for decades of award-winning writing. And the Mazers desire to keep writing unless, as Norma suggests, it "become[s] routine in any way." But the future of their writing remains bright; they see no end to a source of ideas, states Norma, "as long as there are people out there..." And Harry reminds one that as the world develops, so develops a whole new source of ideas for his books: "Norma was just reading somewhere about genetic testing and knowing things

about families that way. That's a whole new world that's opening up. No, you never run out of material" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

The writing goals of the Mazers are as strong today as they were over thirty years ago as they sat churning out pulp fiction at three-thirty in the morning. Although they may have matured as individuals and as writers, they still see room for improvement and still have high expectations for their work. Norma says, "I'm still very involved in writing as well as I can, writ[ing] better than I have, tell[ing] a good story, but tell[ing] it as well as I can in terms of my nature and the understanding of the character." Similarly, Harry is concerned with perfecting his approach, stating, "Well, my aim is to draw the reader in and to hold him. And you need character and story for that. To do a complex character and a compelling story—then you've got it" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

Whether by examining the Mazers' innovative narrative devices, tracing their clever continuation of characters, enjoying their collaborative efforts, or analyzing their timely themes of identity and survival, one can see the Mazers have indeed "got it," as Harry says, and will continue to for the remainder of their writing careers. The Mazers have proven to educators, librarians, researchers, critics, and young readers that while they are sturdy veterans of the young adult field, they continue to make an impact each day.

CHAPTER FOUR

HAVIGHURST AND THE MAZERS

Sociologists and psychologists have been studying human development for centuries. What these experts have agreed upon is that human beings progress through several stages of development through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Each set of stages is complex and fascinating in its own right, but the stages most important to the secondary-level educator are the developmental stages of adolescence. Adolescence is a difficult time for individuals at any age: young people struggle to establish identity while the adults in their lives demand mature behavior although often treating them as children. The result is an often-tumultuous set of years. Educator Nancie Atwell (1987), however, finds adolescence a time to celebrate: "Confusion, bravado, restlessness, a preoccupation with peers, and the questioning of authority are not manifestations of poor attitude; they are the hallmarks of this particular time of life" (p. 25). Once educators and researchers realize this, a better understanding and appreciation of adolescence may develop. Robert Havighurst has already proven his understanding of adolescence in his analysis of the developmental tasks of adolescents.

Many doctors, researchers, and scientists have developed their own classification of developmental stages, but Robert Havighurst's stages found in *Developmental Tasks and Education* (1972) are especially helpful within the field of education. Influenced by Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and his work on adolescence and identity achievement, Havighurst has developed his concept of developmental tasks,

which he states is "midway between an individual need and a societal demand" and "is a useful concept for students who would relate human development and behavior to the problems of education" (p. iv). Havighurst's text explores developmental tasks from infancy through later maturity, but his section on adolescence and the role of education is particularly compelling, especially when utilized in determining how education can perhaps help the adolescent progress through these stages. The stages are as following:

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role
3. Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively
4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults
5. Preparing for marriage and family life
6. Preparing for an economic career
7. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior—developing an ideology
8. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior

Havighurst's text may not seem relevant when discussing adolescent literature or English curriculum. However, the connection is understandable when one realizes the developmental tasks of which Havighurst speaks are present in every classroom in every school:

> The school becomes a place where [adolescents] may learn the tasks of social development, and American educators consider the teaching of these tasks an important part of the school's responsibility. Also the American school is expected to help out other training institutions of society—the family, church,

> industry, youth-serving organizations—in the teaching of such diverse tasks as learning physical skills, selecting and preparing for an occupation, preparation for marriage, and learning a scale of value. (Havighurst, 1972, p. 37)

If an educator understands the developmental stages of the adolescents, it may be possible to better design curricula where these tasks can be explored and addressed. Young adult literature, particularly that written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, may be the perfect addition to an English classroom concerned with adolescent development in that it helps a young person explore the components of these developmental tasks.

Before discussing these tasks, it is important to clarify what Havighurst means by "developmental task." Havighurst (1972) provides a specific definition for his term:

> [It is] a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks. (p. 2)

Some developmental tasks are confronted and achieved, and these are known as nonrecurrent tasks. An example of a nonrecurrent task in infancy and early childhood is learning to walk. One this task is mastered, there is generally no need to return to it or relearn it. As an individual ages, however, many developmental tasks become recurrent in nature. These are tasks one develops, but such tasks must constantly be renegotiated, reworked, and relearned (pp. 40-41).

Havighurst suggests that learning a masculine or feminine social role is a recurrent task one may discover in childhood, but he or she must revisit this task

constantly, especially in adolescence and early adulthood. In fact, many of the adolescent's developmental tasks are recurrent, which only adds to the confusion and frustration of the adolescent. Once the task is confronted, an adolescent is never free from rethinking and relearning aspects of this task. However, returning to these tasks throughout the adolescent years will help the young adult reassess and better come to terms with his emotional, physical, and social development.

Havighurst suggests that there are three origins of developmental tasks. Some tasks are strictly due to physical maturation, some arise from cultural and societal pressures, and some arise from the personal motives and values of the individual. For the teenager, it is necessary to deal with all three of these levels of developmental tasks. The life of a teenager is particularly difficult in this sense. Not only is he dealing with and supposedly accepting physical changes (and often some embarrassing ones), he is expected to develop a sense of values, self, and identity—but one that is socially acceptable by his culture; otherwise he faces ostracism and failure. The pressures of reaching each of these developmental tasks may seem insurmountable, especially to the adolescent. However, reading young adult literature may help ease the adolescent's burden:

> Although all young adult literature could be classified as coming-of-age literature, there is a specific genre that focuses on the growth of the adolescent from childhood to adulthood—usually on the psychological and sexual growth. This is the literature whose theme is adolescence, the period of transition from the usually carefree life of childhood to the increased responsibility of adulthood.

> During this phase, young adults experience isolation, socialization, confusion, and rebellion. (Reed, 1996, p. 126)

Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer write young adult novels "whose theme is adolescence." By using Havighurst's developmental tasks, it may be determined that selected Mazer novels are the ideal tool in helping a young adult better understand, accept, and appreciate the emotional, physical, and social changes in his life.

Further, researcher Margaret Early (1960) has suggested young people also progress through developmental reading stages, whereby a child moves from an "unconscious enjoyment of language and books" to becoming an egocentric reader who wants to become part of the story. Since most secondary-school students are at the level where they possess an egocentric interest in books, providing them with young adult novels may be beneficial. If readers can place themselves into the stories as they wish, they may experience a character's development, which may also help readers with their own developmental progression. In addition, some young readers may be inspired to read young adult novels in an attempt to feel older: "Children want to feel grown-up and problem novels offer to youngsters—in simple language that they can perfectly well follow—the implication that they are ready to deal with issues and themes that are indisputably adult" (Cart, 1996, pp. 67-68). Young adult novels may do much more for a young person than present an entertaining story; they provide the opportunity for young adults to develop confidence and security in their emotional, physical, and social development.

The first of Havighurst's developmental tasks in adolescence is *Achieving New and More Mature Relations with Age-mates of Both Sexes.* According to Havighurst, the

goal of this task is "to learn to look upon girls as women and boys as men; to become an adult among adults; to learn to work with others for a common purpose, disregarding personal feelings; to learn to lead without dominating" (p. 45). Biologically, this task is based on the adolescent's increased sexual maturity and sexual attraction. Psychologically, the adolescent deals with adult social skills and becomes accustomed to group social and athletic activities.

Young adults facing once of the most awkward phases of adolescent development may find that young adult literature can help. As many young adults struggle to fit in with peers and attract members of the opposite sex, they can find solace in books whose characters battle similar roles. Reading about a character who makes foolish mistakes around girls or finds acceptance with his teammates can help the adolescent reader negotiate those experiences in his own life: "There is no doubt that for many adolescents the inner world is far more appealing than the real world of clumsy attempts at love and sexual relationships" (Reed, 1996, p. 60). Harry Mazer presents such an inner world in many of his young adult novels. When analyzed with Havighurst's tasks, the strength of these novels lies within the male protagonist.

Harry Mazer writes romance novels from the male perspective. He is honest and clear about the boys' obsession with sex and their sometimes awkward and inappropriate treatment of girls. Sexual development is extremely important to teenagers. Glossing over the awkwardness of wanting and fantasizing about sex only serves to make the young reader question his own sexual issues. If he reads novels where sex is never mentioned or addressed by the teenage characters, he begins to feel isolated and cut off. If the reader assumes the characters in the book reflect real life, his reality is suddenly not

the reality of others. This causes more frustration and confusion. Instead, Harry Mazer confronts the issue of sex head on. "Unlike some teenage romance authors, [Mazer] does not avoid issues of developing sexuality. In fact, Marcus's sexual development is one of the major issues in *I Love You, Stupid!* Mazer deals with Marcus's sexual development with humor, guilt, honesty, and integrity" (Reed, 1996, p. 85).

Mazer's *I Love You, Stupid!* contains arguably one of the most sexually-obsessed young men in print. Marcus fantasizes about teachers, strangers, friends, his friends' girlfriends, and is even excited by the sound of women's footsteps in the hallway:

> Sometimes he felt his preoccupation with sex distorted his life. He didn't want to be looking at a girl's breasts all the time, but that's where is eyes led him. If he caught a glimpse of skin, his heart jumped. Even sex jokes he thought were stupid got a response from him that he couldn't control. (p. 43)

Obsessed with his sexual development, Marcus is thrilled when friend, Wendy, agrees to his plan to lose their virginity together. However, after their experimentation, Marcus and Wendy discover sex is more emotionally and psychologically powerful than either had imagined:

> "I never thought I would feel this way. Isn't it funny, Marcus: here we are, the same people we were yesterday, but it's different. Do you feel it, too?"
>
> "Yes," he said. "I feel different, the same but different."
>
> "I thought it would feel good. You know, it's over with, I did it, hooray, and all that. But," She linked arms with him. "I keep getting these weird, possessive thoughts. Like he's mine, mine, mine!"
>
> He smiled. "It's all right with me."

> "Not with me. I don't want to own anyone. Just because we—No, I really didn't think it would be this way." (pp. 147-148)

In Mazer's novel, Marcus finally realizes that sex is often not simply about sex. Rarely does it satisfy fully the need for friendship, companionship, and love. The physical enjoyment of sex may be fleeting, but the repercussions are not so easily dismissed.

Although Mazer writes the male perspective more frequently, he writes women very well, even giving them more control, power over their world, and maturity than their male counterparts. In *The Girl of His Dreams*; *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*; and *I Love You, Stupid!*, Sophie, Mary, and Wendy (the objects of the male protagonists' sexual desire) have a greater sense of self, understand the complexities and seriousness of sexual relationships, and are better able to cope and function in their worlds. Both male and female readers of Mazer's texts can learn a great deal about coping with members of the opposite sex.

In addition to enlightening readers about male/female relationships, Mazer's novels may inform the reader that sex is not the necessary additive to make those relationships work. In spite of sometimes vivid descriptions of sexual urges and fantasies of his male protagonists, Mazer's romance novels overall possess the theme that sex does not guarantee a healthy relationship:

> It is essential that the relationships grow in many ways—that the partners care about each other's feelings, that they respect each other, and that they work together to help each other achieve their dreams. The books make it clear that no matter how much a person cares about another, sometimes the relationship must wait, and maybe it will not grow beyond initial longings. (Reed, 1996, pp. 90-91)

Such is the case in *I Love You, Stupid!*, where Marcus's sexual desire for Karen leaves him humiliated and without a babysitting job. Jeff's blatant sexual interest in Mary in *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?* is so one-sided that he could not believe she could leave him for a better life. And in *The Girl of His Dreams*, Willis nearly loses Sophie because though he continues to have sex with her, he will never consider her the girl of his dreams. In all of Mazer's novels, the protagonists must first learn to respect their partners before appreciating or being rewarded with the intimacy that a sexual relationship can offer. According to Reed (1996), "The characters in his novels are searching for themselves both in and out of romantic and sexual relationships" (pp. 90-91). In these examples, Mazer has presented characters coming to terms with Havighurst's first developmental task of achieving appropriate age-relations with the opposite sex.

Developing an appropriate and satisfying relationship with members of the opposite sex is a complex task for adolescents, but other novels by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer also deal with this important and most confusing phase in the adolescent's life. The novels include Harry's *City Light*, and Norma's *Out of Control*, *Someone to Love*, and *Up in Seth's Room*. *Up in Seth's Room* is especially important as it portrays the developing relationship between a young man (Seth) and his girlfriend Finn who refuses to have sex at her young age. Readers of this novel realize that sex can complicate a relationship and does not necessarily hold a relationship together. Similarly, *Up in Seth's Room* demonstrates that postponing sex until both partners are ready may be a wise decision for the adolescent.

As with all of the developmental tasks, achieving "new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes" is important in the emotional, social, and psychological development of a young person:

> Success in accomplishing this task means a reasonably good social adjustment throughout life, and a good chance, without unnecessary hindrance, at the other developmental tasks of adolescence. Downright failure means an unhappy adult life. Not only may marriage be made difficult, impossible, or unhappy, but the individual has also failed to learn to work with other people as equals, and in his later relationships with people he is limited to childish dependence or arbitrary dominance. (Havighurst, 1972, p. 46)

Of course, reading young adult fiction written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer is no guarantee an adolescent will move smoothly to the next developmental task. However, using such novels as touchstones or as models of acceptable and unacceptable behavior may help an adolescent learn some painful lessons without necessarily experiencing the pain firsthand.

Havighurst's second developmental task is *Achieving a Masculine or Feminine Social Role*, which states the adolescent will learn "to accept and to learn a socially approved adult masculine or feminine social role" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 49). Havighurst suggests that this is simpler for boys because society has created stronger, more defined roles. The traditional role of the woman is continually challenged, yet many women still feel conflicted between the roles of career and motherhood. According to Havighurst, "The school can help girls to think through their choices with respect to the feminine sex role" (p. 51). One way the school can help is through the utilization of appropriate young

adult literature. "If we believe that literature makes us reevaluate our ideas about others and ourselves, then the portrayal of male and female roles in young adult fiction is an important classroom consideration" (Cole & Kelly, 2000, p. 121). Several novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer are suitable for the adolescent facing Havighurst's second developmental task.

Cole and Kelly (2000) argue that as "teens should be reading to find direction for their lives, to develop personal values, and to picture themselves in an adult world, many female adolescents are receiving one message: a woman has value only if she is with a man" (p. 128). Fortunately, although many Mazer books address growing relationships between males and females, the books also provide alternatives to finding a boyfriend. In regards to this task, only novels concentrating on feminine social roles will be discussed.

Although Harry Mazer's *Hey Kid! Does She Love Me?* has a male protagonist, a reader can learn a great deal about female social roles. Jeff's story involves his falling in love with a young woman, Mary, and her child, but Mary's story is more applicable to Havighurst's second developmental task. Mary desires to be an actress. In spite of having a child and being offered the support of a male, Mary rejects the traditional expectations of someone in her situation and joins an actor's co-op. Jeff is shocked at her unconventional choice:

> "Jeff, do you realize what this will mean to me? It's going to change everything." She stated ticking off on her fingers. "I'll be able to share Hannah's care. I'll act and earn my own way. I'll be part of a real family. And it's all thanks to you, Jeff."

> "Everything you can do with them, you can do with me. Better, in fact. You want to act, I'll help you. I know how to take care of Hannah. Two heads work better than one. You told me that yourself. We can go to New York or California, anywhere you want to. If we're together, everything will be easy."
>
> "No." She looked at him. "Jeff—no." (pp. 156-157)

Mary is confident and in full pursuit of her dreams, challenging Jeff's idea of how her life should be, in spite of the love Jeff has given her and thinks she needs to survive. Harry Mazer also challenges traditional female social roles in *Snow Bound* and *The Island Keeper*, giving his female characters the opportunity to be strong, brave, and creative in the face of environmental hardships and adversity.

Other novels worthy of consideration are Norma Fox Mazer's *Someone to Love* about a young couple living together until Nina decides she will be stronger and happier without Mitch in her life. *Up in Seth's Room* also portrays a young girl battling with feelings for her boyfriend, worrying she will lose him if she refuses sex. At the conclusion of this novel, Finn defeats peer pressure and has maintained her strength and sense of morality. Finally, Norma Fox Mazer has written a powerful novel, *Out of Control*, not about a girl dealing with a boyfriend and the roles that involves, but a girl battling society and the roles it has prescribed as acceptable to men and women. In this powerful novel, Valerie is sexually harassed by three of the most popular and wealthy boys in school. The consequences are minute to them, but chilling to her. Mazer demonstrates in this book that it is acceptable for young women to fight back. In a stinging and revealing letter to the editor, Valerie writes that it is not acceptable to sexually assault a girl, it is not acceptable to punish the victim instead of the male

perpetrators, and it is not acceptable for the male principal to cover up the incident. Valerie fights back, which is clearly an unpopular and shocking thing for a young, unpopular girl to do. A *Kirkus* reviewer of this novel finds Mazer's approach impressive: "Mazer's balanced depiction of both sides is a powerful demonstration of the evils of harassment and how its victims can assert themselves; it may even help harassers see the other side" (Broughton, 1999, p. 151). In *Out of Control* and these other novels, Norma Fox Mazer has shown young readers that young women can challenge and define their social roles while challenging themselves in the process.

Havighurst's third developmental task of adolescence is *Accepting One's Physique and Using the Body Effectively*. The goal of this task is "to become proud, or at least tolerant, of one's body; to use and protect one's body effectively and with personal satisfaction" (p. 51). This task is an extremely difficult one for many individuals through adulthood and middle age. Biologically, adolescence is the time a young person learns he or she will be short, tall, thin, or heavy. A girl begins menstruation and developing breasts—each at an unexpected and different pace from her peers, which compounds the confusion and anxiety. Eating disorders are prevalent, in both sexes as boys strive to have the muscular build of an athlete and young women fight to achieve society's overly–thin standard of beauty. Havighurst states that this phase is of the utmost concern to the adolescent:

> Everyone in our society goes through adolescence with a lively interest in his developing body. He constantly compares himself with his age-mates. Slowness of development is almost sure to be a cause for concern. The girl asks herself why her breasts are not developing. The boy is worried because his genitals have

> not grown as much as those of the other boys he knows. Shortness in a boy, tallness and large feet in a girl, are often causes of concern. Both sexes are worried about crooked teeth, acne, obesity, and many other physical characteristics which they may define as inferior. (p. 53)

Havighurst also reminds the reader "Since we teach boys and girls to evaluate themselves so largely on the basis of their physical development, we must expect this to be a source of interest, pride, assurance, doubt, worry, or inferiority" (p. 53). Because the physical development of adolescence is such a preoccupation for young people, they may be extremely open-minded to reading about protagonists in young adult literature struggling with his or her body image.

In Norma Fox Mazer's books, young girls struggle with the occasional bout of doubt over personal appearance and development. Mazer even writes adults in a way to make young girls feel good about their bodies, regardless of their size. In *Crazyfish*, young Joyce describes her beloved Mrs. Fish as "big, fat, strong, and beautiful" (p. 81).

Harry Mazer also writes about body image. Mazer admits expressing his own adolescent concerns with weight when writing Marcus Rosenbloom, the overweight protagonist in *The Dollar Man*. A *Kirkus* reviewer writes that *The Dollar Man* "is an outstandingly empathetic and realistic study of...a food addict, and moreover, a sensitive interior view...of the kind of kid who is usually shoved into the background" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Harry Mazer," 2000). But Harry Mazer also writes Cleo Murphy, the wealthy, overweight teenager who escapes to her family's secluded island summer camp to avoid her depression over her sister's death.

In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo uses food as a source of comfort when she feels lost and fearful:

> She found the package of trail food and took a mouthful, going down into that old foul mood where she hated herself and everything she did, and only wanted something comforting to put in her mouth. She chewed, swallowed, reached for another mouthful, sat there and ate while the wind swung the canoe in circles. That was the way they'd find her on the lake—dead, but fat as a pig. (pp. 40-41)

When Cleo runs out of food, however, she is forced to deal with death, sadness, and survival in other ways.

Yes, Cleo loses weight due to near starvation; Mazer is not advocating this. However, Mazer does demonstrate how Cleo not only comes to accept her body, she becomes more accepting of her life. Many young adults would benefit from feeling more at ease with their bodies if they worked on larger issues of self-worth and inner strength. *That* is how Cleo develops as a character. She does not merely go from fat to skinny, she moves through a grief process and a process of developing confidence and ways to handle life: "There was a progression to things. She'd learned it on the island. One step, then the next, and then the one after that. A progression to the day and to the season and to all of life" (p. 163). *The Island Keeper* is an excellent novel to help adolescents deal with Havighurst's third developmental task.

The best example of using the body effectively may be seen in Harry Mazer's *The Girl of His Dreams*. Willis is the protagonist who runs daily while contemplating his family, job, and relationship with Sophie: "He ran because he loved to...He ran because he had to run. Running, he felt whole, complete, at peace" (p. 1). In detailed segments,

Willis's training and passion for running is described. Reading how this physical experience gives Willis emotional peace, enjoyment, and even a scholarship opportunity is an excellent way for a young person to come to terms with the power of using the body effectively, also part of the third of Havighurst's developmental tasks.

In Harry Mazer's novel *The Dollar Man*, Uncle Albert tells young Marcus, "Every young man has to run away from home—the sooner the better" (p. 86). Havighurst would agree. The fourth of Havighurst's developmental tasks involves *Achieving Emotional Independence of Parents and Other Adults*. This task requires the adolescent "to become free from childish dependence on parents; to develop affection for parents without dependence upon them; to develop respect for older adults without dependence upon them" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 55). Although this task belongs to adolescence, it is one that adults find quite difficult as well, which only adds to the confusion of the young person:

> In our society, adolescents and their parents are worried and confused over this task....Boys and girls want to grow up and be independent, yet the adult world is strange and complicated, causing them to wish for the continued security of parental protection. Parents want their children to grow up, yet they are afraid of what the world may do to innocent and inexperienced youth. (p. 55)

The struggle of young people during adolescence is the need to become an adult while living within adolescent and child-like restraints. Adults expect or at least desire for young people to behave as adults, but rarely are adolescents given an adult's emotional, social, and physical freedoms.

Harry Mazer gives his characters these freedoms by following one simple philosophy: "Kill off parents. Parents are always a problem in a book, especially when you're writing about young protagonists who you hope will be brave and resourceful and solve their own problems" (Reed, 1996, p.31). Although Brown and Stephens (1995) note that, "a significant element in the evolution of the young adult novel is the role and portrayal of adults" (p. 17), Mazer's books are more known for their lack of adult figures and how the young protagonists approach the world without them.

Analyzing Harry Mazer's books with Havighurst's developmental tasks is not a difficult process because Harry's books can be categorized into several themes, themes that fall into categories similar to Havighurst's. Mazer has written many of these novels that can be classified as separation stories, in which the protagonists are removed from their parents or choose to remove themselves (Reed, 1996). These all fall into Havighurst's "emotional independence from parents" task. Harry Mazer tends to write novels regularly where the parents are absent, and the adolescent must deal with this lack of authority figure in order to develop emotionally, physically, or mentally.

Harry Mazer does not write authority figures well because he feels they have no place in young adult literature. Mazer even admits, "I don't like the concept of authority figure; it makes me bristle a bit just to hear the phrase" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). Mazer likes to use the example of his popular survival novel *Snow Bound* when discussing adults in his novels: "What if Tony's father had been along? It would be a totally different book" (personal communication, July 29, 2000). Mazer is unapologetic also because he believes his young readers are not interested in adult voices anyway: "What's satisfying to a reader is to read about somebody his own age who goes

out into the world to figure something out for himself. And that doesn't leave too much room for parents, teachers, librarians, ministers" (personal communication, July 29, 2000).

In some of Harry Mazer's novels, the parental figure is present but is weak or stands in the way of the young person's growth. In some novels, the parental figure is strong—too strong—and pushes the young adult out into the world, forcing the separation. And in the last category, the parental figures are absent in that they are either sick, missing, or dead. Almost the majority of Harry Mazer's novels could be explored to some degree within Havighurst's fourth developmental task.

One approach of Harry Mazer's is simply to remove the parents from the scene while the characters fight their way back. *The Cave Under the City* presents Tolley and his little brother surviving the Great Depression while their father is missing and their mother is ill. In hopes of fooling social services, the brothers learn to scrape by in a city already burdened with poverty. In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo lives successfully for months in the Canadian wilderness. In *Snow Bound*, Tony and Cindy survive a dreadful blizzard in which their car is buried in rural Upstate New York. And in *The Wild Kid*, a mildly retarded boy and a mysterious cave boy come together to survive quite well without an adult in sight. In one of Harry's most popular books, *When the Phone Rang*, the adolescents do not survive the elements, they survive the grief of their parents' death and the reality of moving on without them: "The teenager must deal with the anger and pain of loss, but they must also deal with the peaks and valleys of living with each other...they talk, listen to each other, and reaffirm their commitment to be a family—they endure"

(Abrahamson, 1986). In these examples, the characters have proven they are stronger without their parents and are capable of living without them.

In *Guy Lenny*, Guy lives with his father until his father wishes to remarry. Suddenly, after not seeing his mother for seven years, Guy is stuck between two parents who do not really want him. In *The Dollar Man*, Marcus lives with single mother Sally while making up fantastical dreams about his real father, whom he has never met. The absence of this father haunts Marcus until the tortured and ironic ending when his real father turns out to be far from fantastic. *The War on Villa Street* contains another imperfect father. In this novel, Willis's battles with his abusive, alcoholic father are as bad as the beatings threatening him on the street.

Mazer continues this search for parents in several others of his books. In *Someone's Mother is Missing*, Lisa's father has just died and her mother has disappeared in her grief. Lisa and Sam spend the course of the novel searching for answers and learn a great deal about themselves. In *Who Is Eddie Leonard?* Eddie lives with his abusive grandmother until she dies suddenly. Eddie then dedicates himself to finding the perfect family, convincing the Diazes and himself that he is their long-lost son. However, in the end, Eddie is still family-less and alone. One of Harry's newest publications, *The Dog in the Freezer*, continues the long history of Mazer exploring the idea of sons and their estranged fathers:

> His father hadn't been home since last Thanksgiving. He called, but it had been so long since he'd seen his father that lately Jake had been having weird thoughts. That voice on the phone: It sounded like his father—but was it really his father? It could be a recording, or a clever computer program that made all the right

> sounds. His father could be a prisoner in some South American country where he went to play ball every winter, and Jake wouldn't know it. (p. 81)

As Jake progresses through a rather bizarre journey through New York City (with his neighbor's dead dog in tow), Jake comes to understand that loss and confusion are a very real and unmistakable part of life, with or without a father.

Like her husband, Norma Fox Mazer has been known to write books in which protagonists cope with absent parents. Holtz (1987) says, "This universal need to exclude one's parents from the contemplation of precious and private adolescent experiences occurs several times in [Norma Fox] Mazer's stories" (p. 47). Norma Fox Mazer, whose books possess more adult role models than Harry's, believes writing stories without parents simply makes for interesting stories:

> As to why Harry Mazer and I often [not always, not always!] write about divorced, separated, or over-protective parents, it's not a planned thing. It's just that in writing our stories we're always looking for people who are off balance. Good stories of the kind I like to write are based on some kind of emotional conflict and how it's worked out. (personal communication, December 13, 2000)

Norma Fox Mazer has written several novels where her protagonists solve this emotional conflict in spite of or without the help of parents.

Some of Mazer's protagonists survive in a world without parents, while others survive living with useless or damaging parents. Some characters live in both worlds, like the protagonist in "Chocolate Pudding" whose father is an alcoholic and her mother is dead. In Mazer's latest *Girlhearts* (2001), Sarabeth's twenty-nine year old mother dies of a heart attack, and Sarabeth comes to terms with being an orphan and finding any

semblance of family she can. In *Missing Pieces*, Jessie battles her mother for information regarding her missing father. Her mother fails to understand that Jessie feels incomplete until that mystery is solved and refuses to help. Another parent with a confused sense of what is best for his child is Terri Mueller's father in *Taking Terri Mueller*. Terri has been told her mother is dead; what she discovers in this novel is that her own father kidnapped her after a messy divorce. In *Babyface*, Toni also learns a great deal about parents' betrayal after discovering the lie her parents have been telling her for fifteen years. But in *Downtown*, the lies Pete Conner's parents have been living not only hurt him emotionally, they put his life in danger.

While these characters live among or without parents, they all discover what is involved in emotionally and physically distancing themselves from their parents. Even Mimi, the shy character in Mazer's short story "Mimi the Fish" (found in the collection *Dear Bill, Remember Me?*), recognizes how urgent it is for adolescents to break out on their own. After Mimi's mother sabotages Mimi's first date, she collapses on her daughter's bed, tearful while reminiscent about her own life. However, in spite of feeling hurt and betrayed, Mimi recognizes she has just taken an important step—breaking free of her mother:

> She was young. She could let her mother hold her, dreaming of Mimi's life as her life. Because even now, with her head bent, she was moving away. She was moving away from her mother, out of this life, these closed rooms, swimming free, swimming toward her own life, into her own blue sea. (p. 108)

In creating these compelling novels and short stories, Norma Fox Mazer proves she can write the "missing parent" concept just as effectively as her husband.

Reed (1996) states that, "During the separation stage, it is not unusual in real life or in novels for peers to take center stage while parents are noticeably absent" (p. 23). This is also true of the three novels the Mazers have written collaboratively. In *The Solid Gold Kid*, a group of teenagers are kidnapped (because of Derek's rich father) and forced to escape their kidnappers and find their way back without help from adults. In fact, the only adults in the novel are quite negatively portrayed. The Mazers' second collaboration *Heartbeat* shows a very strained relationship between Tod and his father. In *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, four aspiring journalists are free of most adult supervision for the summer. However, most of the problems they face are based on relationships with their families: Chris's blue-collar father finds his son's interest in writing disgusting, and Faith's rich family has caused her a great deal of shame and embarrassment. Emotional independence form their families is exactly what these youth seek.

Although an adolescent should expect obstacles while developing and achieving emotional independence from his parents, the implications of failing this task are fairly serious in society:

> Adults who have failed in this task are dependent people, often still tied to their parents, unable to make up their minds on important matters, unable to move freely in our adult society because they are still children emotionally...Marriage is often a difficult matter for such people, and successful in a limited way only when a person finds a father-figure or a mother-figure for a mate. (Havighurst, 1972, p. 56)

However, novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer may provide strong examples of young people daring to break free of their physical and emotional

environments in order to grow. Reed (1996) states that at least for Harry Mazer's characters, it is a difficult but necessary step to move away from parents:

> For all of Mazer's characters, separation from their families is the rite of passage—the test for his adolescent protagonists. For some this route toward independence is chosen for them (by the divorce or death of parents, for example); others select this road to maturity without the knowledge of their parents (by running away); and some of them merely separate themselves from their parents while still living at home. However, all of his protagonists to a lesser or greater extent are growing up on their own. (p. 29)

In this sense, Mazer books work beautifully in Havighurst's developmental stages, when young people have to separate themselves or challenge authority in order to grow. Although some critics disagree with the prevalence of absent parents from young adult novels, including the Mazers' (and even Norma disagrees with Harry to some extent), young adults are better able to develop their own strategies for success and come to terms with their own social, emotional, and physical development sans parents. Harry Mazer argues that it is more important for young people to develop a relationship with their inner lives rather than rely upon mentors, parents, siblings, or peers. "It is only through the connections of their inner lives with the realities of their real worlds that they grow into independent, responsible adults who care as much about the feelings of others as they care about themselves" (Reed, 1996, p. 35).

Havighurst's fifth developmental task of education is *Preparing for Marriage and Family Life*. This goal expects the adolescent to "develop a positive attitude toward family life and having children." It also involves developing the knowledge to properly

run a home and manage children (Havighurst, 1972, p. 59). Males and females may approach this task differently and with varying levels of eagerness and enthusiasm, but society expects both sexes to accomplish this task equally.

Although schools can do little to prepare students for this task, Havighurst suggests that accomplishment of earlier developmental skills will ensure success. Once an adolescent has developed appropriate relationships with age-mates and has gained emotional independence from parents, he or she will be better prepared to create his or her own home and family. However, a young person's observation of the world may be the primary tool in discerning how males and females interact:

> Students at the secondary level are observant and they mimic the adult world. They observe the interactions of males and females as rendered through the media, but they rarely have the opportunity to scrutinize how the opposite sex feels or thinks about these modeled interactions. (Broughton, 1999, pp. 148-149)

Fortunately, several Mazer novels explore the idea of adolescents preparing for this major step of creating a marriage and a home and can help a young person develop an understanding of these roles.

It is interesting to note that the strongest example of a novel coinciding with this developmental task is the male romantic novel *Hey Kid! Does She Love Me?* by Harry Mazer. Mazer provides the positive and negative aspects of child rearing, and he tells it from the male perspective. As Jeff agrees to watch Mary's child, Hannah, for the week, he wonders how difficult raising a child can be. He soon discovers the reality:

> For the rest of the day, he hauled her around everywhere. He hung out with her. Fed her again, gave her a bottle, changed her. Cleaned her up for bed. He walked

> until she fell asleep in his arms, then sat with her, watching TV, afraid to put her down. He was wiped out. The house looked like a hurricane had come into the front door and stayed for the weekend. And this was only the first day, he reminded himself. It was just the beginning. (p. 126)

In spite of the tremendous work, however, Mazer is able to depict a young man pondering the joys or raising a family and a child like Hannah:

> Jeff lay down on the floor with his face next to hers and looked into her eyes the way he couldn't look into anyone else's eyes. She looked back at him, her eyes wide, unblinking, with a trusting open look that went deep inside him. It hurt to look at her. Love was what he saw in her eyes. It scared him. A few days ago, he'd hardly known she existed and now—when had it happened?—he was caught. (p. 143)

The rest of the novel shows Jeff emotionally preparing himself for the tremendous challenge of helping Mary raise her daughter, demonstrating the understanding of the commitment a young adult must possess before reaching this developmental task of marriage and family.

Other Mazer novels showing protagonists grappling with this developmental task include Norma Fox Mazer's *Someone to Love*. In this novel, Nina and Mitch move in together and experience the joys and tensions of establishing a home together before realizing it takes a great deal more commitment than either is prepared to make. Harry Mazer's *When the Phone Rang* is a survival story rather than a romance, but the experiences of Billy, Kevin, and Lori after the death of their parents provides an excellent example of young people trying to run a home. The young characters quickly learn about

finding work, doing laundry, cleaning the house, doing the shopping, and paying the bills. Though no character contemplates marriage or children, readers still catch a realistic glimpse of what is involved in managing a home, another aspect of Havighurst's fifth developmental tasks.

The task of preparing for marriage and family life may be taken for granted in terms of difficulty. However, there is nothing easy about running a home and negotiating a mate and children at the same time. These Mazer novels help a young reader realize there are some difficult realities amid the excitement and expectation of getting married and having a family.

Preparing for an Economic Career is Havighurst's sixth developmental task. The goal of this task is "to organize one's plans and energies in such a way as to begin an orderly career; to feel able to make a living" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 62). Although many schools possess vocational opportunities to teach young people a trade, reading a young adult novel may help a reader learn more about how it feels to have a job and experience the stresses and rewards of being a productive member of the work force. The novels of both Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer explore the power of labor in a young person's life. In Harry Mazer's own life, his father told him to abandon writing for a real trade. In his novels, his protagonists struggle similarly with the need to work for a living and feel satisfied with that choice. In Norma Fox Mazer's books, the idea of getting a job is often central to the character's development:

> As Mazer explores aspects of independence throughout her fiction, she often writes about a protagonist working or hunting for a job. Holding a job is seen as a

> mature and independent thing to do, and finding a job shows that the world outside of home and school is hard. (Holtz, 1987, p. 68)

Havighurst would agree with the importance of a young person developing a work ethic.

In one of Norma Fox Mazer's most powerful novels, *When She Was Good*, the main character Em has a great deal to handle in life, including the death of two parents and her sister Pamela, a frighteningly small sense of self-worth due to years of mental and physical abuse from Pamela, and the fact that sometimes the only food she can find is a rotting onion that she can boil for soup. In spite of incredible obstacles, for the course of the novel, Em searches for work. In fact, the development of her character is related to her humiliating and desperate hunt for a job—any job:

> "Tell me something about yourself, Em. Are you a good worker?
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Why do you want this job?"
>
> "Because...because...I want a job. I need a job."
>
> "You have somebody to support?"
>
> "Me." (p. 206)

In Mazer's haunting novel, young adults discover that jobs are necessary for spending money, self-worth, and survival.

In almost every Mazer novel, a reader will see an individual hard at work at a job, usually a blue collar one. In *When the Phone Rang*, the characters' futures depend upon Kevin sacrificing his medical school goal in order to drive a cab and support the family. In *City Light*, George's choice of woodworking as a job threatens the relationship with his father but gives George great personal satisfaction. Marcus baby-sits in *I Love You,*

Stupid!, Jenny in *When We First Met* is a fast food worker, and Jake in *The Dog in the Freezer* has a paper route. Of the collaborative effort *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, Brown and Stephens (1995) state that the Mazers "create four serious and highly focused young people who are involved in a summer intern program for a group of small local newspapers....They strive to refine their skills and judgment while preparing for careers in writing and journalism" (p. 55). And in *Someone to Love* and *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?,* Mitch and Jeff, respectively, work as house painters.

Not only do books by the Mazers demonstrate how adolescents search and secure jobs, they explore how adolescents feel about earning, spending, budgeting, sharing, and balancing time, and establishing priorities. Readers will also witness adolescents experiencing pride, exhaustion, frustration, and sometimes anger related to jobs or careers. Another benefit to Mazer novels is that they are accessible and enjoyable to reluctant readers; these readers are generally the students who often select a technical path over a college preparatory route in school. Thus, the novels dealing with a life of labor are the perfect reading materials for those same young people choosing a life of labor over intellectual pursuits. Such realistic portrayals of the "real world" may help young readers prepare for the complexities of this developmental task of preparing for a career.

In addition to the theme of working, another theme in Mazer's books is the search for identity, which just happens to be another aspect of one of Havighurst's phases. The adolescent's search for identity is perhaps the strongest need, and it occurs at a time in the young person's life when she or he is most at risk for becoming involved in criminal behavior, drug or alcohol use, sexual behavior, running away, dropping out of school, or

even attempting suicide. According to Reed (1994), this time in adolescents' life is crucial:

> They base their judgments on the approval of family, traditional values, laws of society, and loyalty to country....If the adolescent does not have the security of these rules, he or she is likely to abide by the 'rules' established by the peer group. Frequently these rules are in conflict with mature, adult moral values. On the other hand, if the rules by which the adolescent must abide are not compatible with his or her intellectual, psychological, and emotional development, he or she may feel compelled to rebel against those rules. (pp. 13-14)

In determining a set of rules for appropriate behavior, adolescents attempt to develop an ideology and a sense of values, which is Havighurst's next developmental task.

The seventh of Havighurst's developmental tasks of education is *Acquiring a Set of Values and an Ethical system as a Guide to Behavior—Developing an Ideology*. This complex task involves establishing an identity through the "formation of a socio-politico-ethical ideology" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 69). During this task, a young person develops a religious, philosophical, political, and moral philosophy. Teaching these philosophies is impossible in the schools. Ascribing to one, specific moral education is not advised in the classroom, but young adult novels can help in assisting young adults develop their own sense of identity and values: "Young adult literature promotes an empathetic understanding of the life circumstances of the characters. It helps young people to broaden their perspective and to move out of an egocentric way of thinking to consider other perspectives and values" (Brown & Stephens, 1995, p. 71). Once students are

equipped and ready to empathize and understand others, they are more prepared to develop their own ideology or a set of guidelines for ethical behavior.

Reed (1994) argues, "If adolescents do not confront ethical dilemmas while at home and at school, they will have severe difficulty doing so as independent adults" (p. 23). Fortunately, several of Harry Mazer's novels involve a character's search for an identity and an ideology in a world full of ethical traps and pitfalls. Many of Mazer's strongest protagonists are those who begin their journeys with a lie, such as Jack Raab in *The Last Mission* who lied about his age to enlist or Cleo in *The Island Keeper* who told her father she was returning to school instead of heading to the secluded island camp. However, within these lies, the characters build strength and understanding about how to better live in a difficult world. Tolley has to steal food in *The Cave Under the City*; Marcus is suspended on a drug charge in *The Dollar Man*; Tony steals his mother's car in *Snow Bound*; and Lori becomes a shoplifter in *When the Phone Rang*. Yet regardless of their crimes (which are not condoned), these adolescents develop a greater sense of ethics and understanding of consequences.

Harry Mazer also writes characters who deal with a different but equally important concept for young adults: sexual ethics. In *I Love You, Stupid!*, *The Girl of His Dreams*, and *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?,* Marcus, Willis, and Jeff learn that sexual maturity does not guarantee maturity of character. These young men often treat their female counterparts atrociously until they discover that feeling comfortable with themselves comes with treating others fairly and decently. Only after becoming alienated from the girls they love do they realize how they need to act and who they need to be.

Mazer's characters do not always make the correct decision, but they are real in their decision-making and their understandings of rewards and consequences.

Harry Mazer is not the only one adept at addressing the ethics of sex. Norma Fox Mazer has written two novels exploring how young adults treat each other in sexual relationships. In *Someone to Love*, Nina and Mitch feel they are quite adult in their decision to live together, but their mutual cheating and betrayal of the other destroys their relationship and challenges their ideologies. In *Up in Seth's Room*, Finn's ideology about sex ("Too soon, too young, too important," p. 17) is challenged daily by her older boyfriend Seth. The novel is a strong portrayal of a young woman determined to hold onto her beliefs in spite of tempting pressure. Finally, in *Out of Control*, the dual narration of sexual assault victim Valerie and her attacker, Rollo, provides a compelling insight into the minds of two young people of differing sexes dealing with ethics and empathy.

Other Mazer novels capable of helping a young person explore ideologies are *The War On Villa Street* where Willis assists a retarded boy with his physical abilities and discovers the value of being kind and decent to others, and *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* where Vicki withholds reporting Faith's family secret to the newspaper out of empathy and respect for Faith's privacy. Broughton (1999) states, "Developmental psychologists suggest that students at this age seek literature that lets them explore the sociological and psychological struggles of characters in situations that may soon be theirs as emerging adults" (p. 148). Fortunately, novels by the Mazers are suitable literature to help readers explore their sociological and psychological ideologies.

Havighurst's last developmental task is *Desiring and Achieving Socially Responsible Behavior*. The goal of this complex task is "to develop a social ideology; to participate as a responsible adult in the life of the community, regions, and nation; to take account of the values of society in one's personal behavior" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 75). In developing a social identity, "The adolescent must sacrifice some things for the greater good, and be rewarded by social approval and the privileges of an adult" (p. 76). At a time when adolescents are extremely egocentric in their attitudes, this developmental task is by far the most difficult to reach. In fact, many adults have not mastered this developmental task themselves. However, Havighurst is convinced that "Many young people during late adolescence are highly altruistic. They are ready to think and act for what they conceive to be the good of the community and larger social groups" (p. 76). Similarly, there are a handful of characters in novels written by the Mazers who are able to understand the importance of social sacrifice and making the world a better place.

Many young people make a conscious effort to develop a social conscience. They are motivated by a need to improve circumstances in their community, region, or world. However, in *When She Was Good*, Em's act of improving her community is more for her than it is for anyone else. As she asks her landlord for permission to plant a small garden in the empty field behind his building, Em takes an enormous step to connect with happier moments from her past and to develop a new relationship with her environment and community:

> "Marigolds, that's all—a few marigolds. I won't ask you for anything."...
>
> I hold out the packet of seeds, as if that will convince him. "It would only be a

small garden, not just for me. For everyone." *Liar you won't let anyone get near it.* I turn my face away from her voice. "I'll keep it neat, promise." (p. 151)

With Pamela's voice haunting her, Em fears that her motives in wanting the garden are not pure. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Not only is Em's desire to plant a garden an attempt to beautify her world, she gains emotional and physical satisfaction from it. In this sense, *When She Was Good* is a fine example of how doing something for the community can bring self-satisfaction. The planting of a garden is a lovely metaphor for Em's emotional growth beyond the abuse of Pamela, but it also serves as a step toward reaching out to others and belonging in the world.

In *When She Was Good*, Em understands the importance of taking care of an environment, which is part of achieving social responsibility. In addition to this aspect of Havighurst's task, an equally important lesson for young people is learning how to treat others. A true test of how this behavior can be gauged is by examining how people behave in desperate circumstances, such as a war. The Mazers have each written a novel based on the young adult's experience in WWII. In *Goodnight, Maman*, Norma Fox Mazer writes of Karin Levy and her family's escape from occupied Paris. Young readers can learn a great deal about developing empathy toward others while reading of the sacrifices many made to help the Jews like Maman, Karin, and her brother Mark. *Goodnight, Maman* informs readers of the choices they have to behave with decency or with selfishness. This novel may help readers understand the impact one person can make in the world.

In *The Last Mission*, Jack Raab desires to make his own impact and contribution to the world by running away and joining the army to fight Hitler. Although Jack

initially has selfish motives for wanting to "snap Nazi necks like green beans" (p. 71), he soon realizes the seriousness of his sacrifice. As adolescents read of Jack's plane being shot down, his entire crew dying, and his experience as a prisoner, they come to understand the power of what Havighurst (1972) suggests is "sacrificing some things for the greater good, to be rewarded by social acceptance and privilege" (p. 76).

Most young adults will not face a war in their lifetime like Jack Raab, but they may face a more personal battle found in two of Norma Fox Mazer's novels: sexual abuse. Mazer has written two novels where young women face sexual abuse either committed by adults or by their peers. Recognizing and attempting to stop this behavior is part of these characters' experience in developing a social ideology. In *Silver*, Sarabeth and her girlfriends discover a terrible secret: their friend Patty is being continually abused by her uncle. Faced with this horrible truth, Sarabeth and her friends sacrifice their relationships with their own parents, risk their privacy and reputations, and endanger their friendships with each other to protect Patty. Their hard-won victory shows young adults the importance of coming forward with such a crime in order to protect the individual and other innocent people in society.

In *Out of Control*, Mazer writes of a thirty-second sexual assault that threatens to change a girl, three boys, and a community's sense of security forever. After the attack, Valerie finds it easier to be the perpetrators than the victim as the three boys get slaps on the wrist while the male principals, interested in "damage control," encourage Valerie to transfer to another school. It is the thought of the same incident happening to another girl that incites Valerie to write a bold letter to the editor in which she exposes the injustice and asks society what can be done about it:

> Why can boys do what they did to me and get away with it? What are other boys thinking? Will the boys who did this to me do it again to some other girl? Will other boys get the idea that they can do this, too? Am I wrong to be worried for other girls? How do we stop those things from happening?
>
> Something bad happened that shouldn't have happened. Something that should never happen again. What should we do so that it never does? (p. 214)

Valerie is an excellent example of a young adult sacrificing privacy and risking humiliation to ensure that society understands it has an obligation to correct injustices. Valerie has a specific social ideology worth examining. *Out of Control* may be the Mazers' best example of a novel suited to aid a young adult with Havighurst's final developmental task.

Havighurst states, "If this task is taken to be an essential one for youth in America, we must recognize that it is very poorly accomplished" (p. 76). Similarly, this developmental task of education is addressed in only a handful of Mazer novels. It is hard to inspire loyalty and a sense of sacrifice in young people whose needs and wants and desires are so easily fulfilled. Adults must remember that it is easier to be concerned with oneself than it is to be selfless. One of those primary concerns of adolescence is "Why do I feel so alone?" Adolescents struggle with issues of independence, with their developing bodies, and with their developing sets of values. But they also feel they are doing all of this struggling alone. Reading young adult literature while progressing through the developmental stages will help a young adult not only see the struggles and victories within each task he is unconsciously or consciously developing, these books

may help him not feel so isolated while this emotional, social, and physical growth is taking place:

> Literature is not simply a reading activity; it is an aesthetic experience and creative experience. Approaching literature both cognitively and affectively promotes an involvement that has the potential to move and change students through that involvement. Readers are provided opportunities to examine and articulate their values. The role of young adult literature in students' lives can provide them with opportunities to explore major issues confronting youths. (Brown & Stephens, 1995, pp. 68-69)

If a young adult selected only two authors to help him through his "major issues," Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's material is developmentally appropriate.

The novels of Harry and Norma Fox Mazer are diverse in their characterizations, settings, and themes, but each can be counted on to cover—adequately in some cases, more than adequately on others—all eight of Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks of education. For a young adult struggling with her relationship with her family, there is *Three Sisters*, *After the Rain*, and *A Figure of Speech*. For a young adult concerned with body image, there is *The Island Keeper* and *The Dollar Man*. For a young adult developing a sense of morals and values, she may read *Up in Seth's Room* or *Someone to Love*. And for a young adult wondering where he fits in world, there is *The Last Mission* and *When She Was Good*. Young male and female readers will find guidance and support in addressing their physical, emotional, and social devolvement by examining and enjoying the novels of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY TEACH THE MAZERS?

Pairing Mazers with the Classics

Classic novels are difficult for many adults, but educators in the English classroom continue to present classics to students at both the middle and high school level. The classics are indeed important for many reasons in that they provide a glimpse into the past in terms of writing styles, dialects and vocabularies, and modes of presentation. They are also important for the present, in that their conflicts and themes are universal and can be applied to human beings even centuries later. However, there are many reasons classic texts are problematic for young people. Bushman and Bushman (1993) remind educators: "Classics were really not intended to be read by young people at all. Even though this literature may indeed speak to the universal human condition, young people have trouble relating because they have not experienced many of those human conditions" (p. 128). Not only do young adults lack life experience, Engdahl (1975) suggests they do not possess the required reading experience yet to appreciate what the classics have to offer: "This is not because they are 'too young' for adult materials; it is because they have had *too little time* to develop background" (p. 48).

Stanek (1975) conducted a survey of students in which she discovered what students feel they are most concerned with and interested in their lives. The results of the survey are as follows:

1. Family

2. School
3. Personal
4. Appearance
5. Boy-girl
6. Concerns about the future
7. Money
8. Moral issues
9. Recreation-leisure time
10. World tensions (p. 51)

It is not surprising for educators to see that their students have such egocentric concerns. However, each day in English classrooms across the country, educators are selecting classic novels that deal with none of the interests and concerns of young people, and then these same educators express frustration that they fail to connect with their students. Classic novels are taught due to their universal themes and their ability to shed light upon the human condition, but the closest concepts on the students' list are "concerns about the future" and "moral issues," concepts ranking sixth and eighth. Educators should not insist on solely teaching novels of little interest to young people when there is a shorter, easier, more accessible, and more interesting genre equally useful in presenting universal themes while entertaining and connecting with young adults at the same time.

Harry Mazer himself possesses strong emotions regarding the teaching of the classics. As a voracious young reader, Mazer believed one had to read classics, whether one understood them or not:

> I dipped into these books....It was like putting a toe into the ocean. I got it, but what did I get? If it was a story, I paid attention, but, mostly, my eye wandered. I lacked whatever it took to master the classics. All my efforts convinced me that I was inadequate: too young, too stupid, too ill-prepared. (Gallo, 1992, p. 4)

Fortunately, Mazer admits loving to read to such a degree that the classics could not deter him. However, he does blame his lifelong struggle with writing on his relationship with the classics. Mazer further notes that other young people can relate to his battle: "Many kids emerge from their current contact with the classics feeling that literature is something forbidden...without relevance to their lives. They think it belongs to an elite, and they reject it, reject all literature. That's a loss we can't afford" (Gallo, 1992, p. 7).

However, few researchers or authors advocate a complete abandoning of classic literature in the English classroom; such a suggestion is irresponsible and unadvisable. Yet young adult novels deserve a necessary place in the classroom. An acceptable solution is to use the classics in conjunction with other types of literature: "It's all in the presentation, and adolescent literature can help make our teaching of the classics more appealing" (Kaywell, 1993, p. x). Herz and Gallo (1996) believe young adult literature helps students become more confident and better able to move on to the classics. They also acknowledge young adult titles are less intimidating to young readers. Christenbury (2000) suggests that using young adult literature is not only appealing, it is a necessity in forming reading confidence and building connections:

> When classic novels are the major required reading in school curricula...consistently confronting complex, complicated text whose main

> character is an older adult can turn students away from reading and intellectual engagement altogether. Thus using young adult literature as parallel reading, as a way *into* the classics cannot only keep students reading....it can help students make links to the classic novel, play, or poem. The connection is not a frill; for many students, it is truly necessary. (p. 18)

In addition, using young adult literature gives voice to a larger population of writers and attracts a larger population of readers. According to Harry Mazer, "Much has been heard from the few, little from the many of humankind....It's only...in books that are being written now and will be written in the future that we have a chance of hearing these voices—these voices who are us" (Gallo, 1992, p. 8). Young adult literature is the voice of young people, and young adult literature needs to be addressed in the classroom, with or without classic novels as companion pieces.

For the educators desiring to use young adult literature and the classics, the choices are many. Christenbury (2000) suggests there are three rules to selecting suitable young adult novels to be read with the classics: select young adult literature that is of excellent quality, try to use more than one young adult book as a link, and choose companion texts that offer real connections to the classic novel. Using these criteria, many novels of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer work beautifully in conjunction with several classic novels and plays traditionally taught in the English classroom.

For the lower-level, nonmotivated reader troubled with the American classic *Death of a Salesman*, there is a young adult novel by Norma Fox Mazer that works to explore themes found within Arthur Miller's play. One theme of *Death of a Salesman* is the complex family dynamics and Biff's self-destructive behavior upon learning of his

father's infidelity. In Norma Fox Mazer's *D, My Name is Danita*, the results of a similar infidelity are explored. Young Danita meets her half-brother, the product of her father's earlier and forgotten romance, and watches her family cope with this crisis. According to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, "Danita's first-person narrative reveals all the anguish and turmoil expected of someone in her situation, which she handles with remarkable maturity. Mazer's skilled writing allows her main character to be perceived in very human terms" (Roback, 1991, p. 75). Students who read both Miller's and Mazer's texts "could compare Willy's affair in *Death of a Salesman* with Danita's father's and the difference in how each man reacted" (Cline, 1975, p. 88). Reading *D, My Name is Danita* will assist the young reader in finding a younger, more current character—a character more like the reader—facing classic conflicts.

Another classic conflict in literature is that of war. Several classic novels such as *The Red Badge of Courage* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* are assigned in the classroom to give the adolescent reader a glimpse of the emotional and physical conflicts an individual faces in war-like situations. Crowe (2000) feels young adult fiction plays a special role in teaching adolescents about war:

> When today's kids become tomorrow's adults, they'll have some say about if or when or where wars will be fought, and good YA books about war can help today's teenagers appreciate the blessings of peace and the horrors of war. And maybe, just maybe, that appreciation will inspire them to do whatever they can to preserve peace in our country and around the world. (p. 159)

Cole (1995) suggests that Harry Mazer's *The Last Mission* is especially suited to pairing with *The Red Badge of Courage* because of its simpler language and its more youthful

approach: "Pairing this American classic...with similar, but less sophisticated, young adult novels that explore the human response to war can aid students in developing a deeper understanding of issues raised by Crane's work" (p. 21). In Harry Mazer's *The Last Mission*, Jack Raab's dreams of heroism are similar to Henry Fleming's illusions. One reviewer calls Jack Raab "Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming placed in WWII—a young man who learns that war kills the innocent as well as the enemy" (Lomax, 1980). For both Henry and Jack, war is initially a chance to be courageous—until they both discover war's painful realities:

> "I don't like war. I thought I'd like it before. But war is stupid. War is one stupid thing after another. I saw my best friend killed...My whole crew was killed." Now he was talking, it was coming out, all the things he'd thought about for so long. "A lot of people were killed. Ordinary people...War isn't like the movies. It's not fun and songs. It's not about heroes. It's about awful, sad things, like my friend Chuckie that I'm never going to see again." (Jack, *The Last Mission*, p. 188)

According to Cole (1995), Henry Fleming experiences similar emotional and physical trauma during his time at war:

> His grand illusions are shattered, however, when he finds himself on the battlefield. Henry experiences the brutality, horrors, and exaltation of war and moves through periods of doubt, fear, anxiety, and bravery. As he does, he becomes a symbolic representation of human nature in the face of war. (p. 22)

In reading the classic *The Red Badge of Courage* (or another war classic *All Quiet on the Western Front*) with the more recent *The Last Mission*, students can compare wars,

young men's dreams of heroism and courage, the real physical and psychological horrors of war, and the lasting emotional scars one must explore upon returning home.

Students can learn a great deal about the conflicts of returning home from war in reading Homer's *The Odyssey*, another staple of the high school English curriculum. *The Odyssey*'s important themes, as Herz and Gallo (1996) point out, include "the journey, search, or quest to prove oneself" and "the hero returning from a challenge or test" (p. 49). Novels written by the Mazers are certainly not of the epic proportion of *The Odyssey*, but many Mazer novels deal with journeys and the related issues of survival and coming of age. As Ericson (1995) suggests, stories with young protagonists and simpler plots are great companion pieces to *The Odyssey*: "All have a heroic or potentially heroic character who undertakes some sort of journey. In most, a character develops or 'grows up' over the course of the book, and a family relationship figures prominently" (p. 19). In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo flees to her family's secluded island summer camp in Canada to escape the turmoil over her sister's death. As she realizes the difficulty of surviving in the wilderness, she prepares to return home, only to find that the elements and nature fight her with each step of her journey. As Cleo completes her physical journey home, she deals with this emotional journey, as well. A reviewer of *The Island Keeper* believes Cleo will connect with her readers, making the story more accessible than the epic *Odyssey*:

> The story should have deep appeal for adolescents, because they will see that as Cleo kills a lame deer to survive and builds a rude hut to avoid freezing, she comes to know herself, understand the world around her, and care more deeply for those who have so long said no. They will witness a series of survival

> episodes that will speak to the more basic notions of discovering the self. (Milner, 1981)

Readers will be able to make connections between Odysseus's and Cleo's adventures to get home, as will they be able to address thematic issues of physical and emotional strength and their effects on survival. Others novels possessing journey and survival themes include *The Cave Under the City*, *Snow Bound*, *The Wild Kid*, and *The Dog in the Freezer*, all written by Harry Mazer.

Shakespeare's plays remain some of the most challenging works to present to a high school class. Especially in a non-honors class, the Elizabethan language and use of iambic pentameter can pose a problem. In addition, plays are designed to be watched rather than read, but few English classrooms are afforded the luxury of transforming into stages. However, young adult literature can assist students with one of their most daunting tasks, understanding and appreciating Shakespeare:

> Today we have the benefit of quality young adult literature that helps make students make connections with Shakespeare's universal themes. [Shakespeare's] language is difficult, and his plays are seemingly so distant from students' experiences. YA literature helps to bridge that gap because students can first relate to the contemporary realistic fiction and then see the relevance of Shakespeare today. (Daniel, 1995, p. 145)

Two young adult novels, one by Harry Mazer and one by Norma Fox Mazer, can help students understand similar themes and conflicts found in one of Shakespeare's most taught plays, *Romeo and Juliet*.

One theme found within *Romeo and Juliet* is the role of friendship and peer pressure. Students can discover that the drastic conclusion of *Romeo and Juliet* could have been prevented had Mercutio and his gang not encouraged Romeo to fight Tybalt and the Capulet family. Reed (Kaywell, 1993, p. 93) suggests that Harry Mazer's *The War on Villa Street* possesses themes similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. In *The War on Villa Street*, protagonist Willis lives a tough street life full of abuse, an alcoholic parent, and peer pressure. When compared to *Romeo and Juliet*, this novel may help students make connections between Romeo and Willis, who both face difficult decisions regarding conformity, honor, and violence. Both the play and novel deal with characters' reactions to peer pressure, rival gangs, and the idea of consequences and responsibility for one's actions. Analyzing characters' reactions and behaviors may help young readers make connections between Mazer's *The War on Villa Street* and the classic *Romeo and Juliet*.

Although peer pressure and gang rivalry is present in *Romeo and Juliet*, the play is more often touted as a love story between two young people from opposing families. Norma Fox Mazer's *When We First Met* presents a similar conflict, as high school senior Jenny Pennoyer falls in love with Rob, whose mother killed Jenny's younger sister in a drunk driving accident years ago. As Jenny struggles to stay loyal to both her family and to her own emotions, the reader cannot help making the obvious connection to Romeo and Juliet's struggle (even their names begin with the same letters). *When We First Met* is the perfect complement to Shakespeare's famous play. Jenny and Rob's difficult relationship resembles Romeo and Juliet's, but Mazer's characters and language are more accessible to the twenty-first century young adult reader. Pairing the classic play with the

young adult novel will help young readers make bold comparisons between texts and explore timeless conflicts and themes.

Another of Shakespeare's plays students are bound to face in high school is *Julius Caesar*. Some of the important themes found in this play include "betrayal; tyranny of the group; sacrificing ethics for the group; and leaders who abuse power" (Herz and Gallo, 1996, p. 44). A young adult novel that covers similar themes (while wrapping it in a timelier issue for young adults than overthrowing a dictator) is Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control*. In this novel addressing sexual harassment and the power of the group, Valerie is fondled in an abandoned hallway at school by three of the most popular male students. The second protagonist, Rollo, is one of these male perpetrators who was more caught up in the moment than desiring to cause or understand what harm he was doing. Rollo's "going with the crowd" attitude is a perfect segue into discussing the mob mentality in *Julius Caesar*. Mazer's novel addresses ethical concerns, the abuse of power of those in charge, and the betrayal Valerie feels by her school and what society at large is willing to accept about sexual assault. *Out of Control* is also effective when teaching *Julius Caesar* as it possesses a strong female protagonist, which is something clearly lacking in Shakespeare's play.

Out of Control can also be paired with another novel dealing with the power of the group and the abuse of power. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* possesses themes similar to those found in *Julius Caesar*, but Herz and Gallo (1996) add "loss of innocence; taking a stand for one's personal belief; and the need for rules to foster civilized behavior" (p. 46). Again, *Out of Control* is the perfect companion to Golding's text. The reader is clearly able to see Valerie's struggle as she loses her innocence

through the actual harassment experience as well as the way she is treated and mistreated after the incident. Valerie loses faith in herself as well as a faith in humanity. Using both texts will help students identify multiple losses of innocence in a person's world, be they physical, emotional, spiritual, and social. Valerie's defiant letter to the editor is a brilliant way to teach the theme of standing up for one's personal belief in spite of an imminent group attack. Students can make connections between Ralph and Valerie as well as Jack's seemingly innocent choirboys and the popular boys who tyrannize Valerie. Students will also be interested in Rollo's thought process as he tries to reconcile his evil behavior toward Valerie with his overall good intentions and choirboy image.

Although Harry Mazer's *The War on Villa Street* has the potential to be paired with Romeo and Juliet, it also possesses themes similar to Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, traditionally taught in American literature. Themes to address in Steinbeck's classic include "exclusion from mainstream society; surviving poverty, prejudice, and brutality; holding onto friends who are loyal; and the dignity of the individual" (Herz and Gallo, 1996, p. 52). Willis, the main character in Mazer's novel, does not live in the rural west during the Depression, but he does face similar examples of brutality and poverty in his own urban, more modern world. Facing abuse from his alcoholic father, Willis runs to the street, where he battles a street gang suspicious of his friendship with a retarded boy named Richard. Willis, like George in *Of Mice and Men*, sometimes desires to be rid of his highly demanding mentally retarded friend, but they both come to learn the value of friendship and the importance of helping their mentally challenged friends succeed.

Educators may find *The War on Villa Street* a more modern, easier, and less controversial companion to *Of Mice and Men.*

Herz and Gallo (1996) discuss the themes of one of the most highly-taught novels in high schools across the country, but also a novel fraught with difficult dialect and detailed descriptions: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* The themes Herz and Gallo refer to include the innocent's initiation into the world; the journey to find self; finding peace and harmony in nature as opposed to civilized society; and surviving without adult role models (p. 28). The themes found in *Huck Finn* are certainly important, but similarly, Harry Mazer's *The Island Keeper* possesses themes regarding journeys, nature, and the absence of adults. And *The Island Keeper* is shorter, easier, and is written for a more modern audience. As Cleo runs away to the family's summer camp in the Canadian side of the Thousand Islands region, she hopes to escape her insecurities and the pain over her sister's untimely death. However, as the days progress, Cleo not only embarks on her emotional journey, she faces changes of the seasons, the behavior and cycles of the natural world, and must survive the ruthless winter to prove to herself she can survive her sister's death. Students can analyze the survival skills of both characters, Huck and Cleo. They can assess the differences in male and female protagonists and how they handle crises and dangers. Students can make the connection between the lessons learned, the impact of adult role models, and the physical and metaphorical journeys taken by both Huck and Cleo. To get students more engaged with *Huck Finn* and interested in its important themes, Harry Mazer's *The Island Keeper* is a suitable companion.

In addition, *The Island Keeper* could be paired with Thoreau's *Walden*, as both address "the concept of learning from nature as well as learning through self-discovery" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 133). The reader sees how Cleo comes to learn, respect, and benefit from her relationship with nature:

> Today was a hot, sunny morning, the sky cloudless, almost white with heat, the lake wrinkled with light. In all this space, was there anything but the island, or anyone but Cleo? At times this thought diminished her, made her feel insignificant; more often it enlarged her—all this space flowing through her, lifting her till she felt almost majestic, the ruler of water, land, and sky. (p. 74)

While Cleo and Thoreau possess similar discoveries about nature, it may be difficult for young adults to relate to Thoreau's mature descriptions and discoveries. Young readers of *The Island Keeper* may connect with this novel more because "Readers will also have a better chance of understanding limited isolation and self-study when it is done by one of their own" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 133).

There are many other possibilities in combining Mazer novels with classics. Herz and Gallo (1996) suggest that a much easier and faster companion to Dickens' *Great Expectations* is Norma Fox Mazer's *Silver*, which can be used to cover the themes of "the illusion that money brings happiness and the search for one's place in society" (p. 34). Jack London's "To Build a Fire" can readily be paired with Harry Mazer's *Snow Bound* for several reasons. Students can note the importance of setting while following the literal path of the characters in their wintry journey, assess their attempts at survival, discuss the importance of fire, evaluate the importance of calm and sense and strength,

discuss the impulsive actions that brought the characters in both stories to their dire situations.

If educators want their students to value the classics, educators might be wise to value the role of young adult literature in the curriculum as companions to the classics:

> If some of our goals are to help students become lifetime readers and to help them realize the importance of literature in understanding themselves in relation to the complexities of their world, don't we need to use all the resources available to us? To engage today's students in reading, we need to consider quality adolescent literature as a means to meet the needs of those individuals in our English classes who are not reading. (Herz & Gallo, 1996, p. 12)

Herz and Gallo offer a compelling argument for including young adult literature such as that written by the Mazers. In addition to being written well and connecting with students, several novels and short stories written by the Mazers serve as suitable and effective companions to classic novels and plays often required in English classrooms. Teachers must learn to be more dedicated to seeing their students read than seeing their students read classics. Luckily, reading young adult literature written by the Mazers may be the key to achieving both.

Using the Mazers as an Interdisciplinary Approach

Educators desiring to make connections between curricula and eager to have students build bridges between disciplines understand the value of interdisciplinary approaches in the classroom. Students should be expected to write in every course, and reading should be an integral part of each subject. Young adult novels can help teachers

of disciplines other than English reach their students and provide a more genuine connection with the material presented in the curriculum. Herz and Gallo (1996) agree: "Another advantage to the integration between reading/language arts and various disciplines is the message students receive about the importance of reading across the curriculum" (p. 84). Several novels by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer work well in subject areas other than English and should be used to benefit student comprehension.

Two disciplines that blend beautifully are English and social studies. The literature of a time period is more greatly understood and valued if students truly understand the political and social constructs surrounding it. Too often these subjects are taught in strict isolation, and the potential connections are lost. However, the young adult genre of historical fiction can be useful in either (or both) of the disciplines. Brown and Stephens (1995) developed some characteristics of quality historical fiction that may help the educator determine if a young adult novel is suitable for study. Some of their criteria include:

1. Authenticity of detail about the period, which reflects careful research
2. Accuracy of chronology of events
3. Characters who are believable
4. Relevance of the story to current times, attitudes, and beliefs as well as to the historical period
5. A vivid and accurate sense of history

Although these are just a few suggestions for identifying quality historical fiction, already three of Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer's novels fall into the category of historical fiction that would benefit any social studies classroom.

In the social studies curriculum, World War II can dominate a class's schedule, as so many crucial themes of the human experience can be explored. Whether taught as the backdrop to *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, as part of Holocaust literature, or in terms of military strategy and political turmoil, WWII is a powerful subject favored by many educators. However, often today's high school students cannot comprehend the tragedy and scope of this event.

Since young adults today have no personal experience with a war (nor have most of their parents) beyond news briefs of bombings in the Middle East or other equally physically and emotionally distant locations, many young people struggle to find the meaning in WWII that many adults insist they possess. And there is so much to comprehend, be it the Holocaust and the Jewish experience, the Japanese internment camps, those who risked their lives, and those who were left behind to make meaning of it all.

Two Mazer novels work beautifully to help the young adult better understand the world during WWII. Harry Mazer's *The Last Mission* chronicles the days of Jack Raab, a sixteen-year-old American-Jewish boy who steals his older brother's birth certificate to enlist during WWII. Jack's experience focuses on his battle experiences, the destruction of his plane, and his capture and subsequent release from a German camp. "The horrors of a war that he never should have fought in make him an adult before his time" (Kaywell, 1993, p. 21). Useful to the social studies curriculum, *The Last Mission* portrays war in a realistic and sobering manner, and it portrays the experience of a young adult, which students can connect with better than a description in a dry, social studies textbook. Not only does *The Last Mission* accurately describe planes, air battle

sequences, and camaraderie among units; the novel provides what a textbook cannot: a more personal approach to the emotional and psychological effects of war. As Jack is forced to abandon his romantic ideas of war and heroics, the reader recognizes how war can touch individuals—a much-needed lesson for young adults who have difficulty with broader themes and implications.

Focusing on a much-neglected issue in WWII is Norma Fox Mazer's *Good Night, Maman.* As Karin Levi's world is torn apart by Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940, her family labors to seek safety. Their efforts land them aboard a ship to America, where they are taken to Fort Ontario in Oswego, NY, the only refugee camp on American soil during WWII. *Good Night, Maman* is powerful for young adults in that Karin's experiences are real and individual; her narrative is easier to comprehend than the staggering statistics of the Holocaust:

> This moving WWII story is neither highly dramatic nor politically charged; it is the very personal and immediate experience of a young girl grappling with the loss of her old life and with a new life that changes daily. The wartime setting is conveyed through the direct impressions of Karin. (Adams, 1999, p. 743)

Other reviewers find the novel effective in that "Mazer writes with a simplicity that personalizes the history for middle-school readers, yet her research is never intrusive. Twelve-year-old Karin's first-person narrative is both direct and restrained about the survivor trauma" (Rochman, 1999, p. 2053). Karin and her brother's flight from occupied Europe to their bittersweet life in the camp located in Oswego brings a more personal touch to a topic rarely discussed in a history class's study of WWII. Norma Fox

Mazer understands the importance of addressing historical moments through personal stories to better impact the readers:

> Sometimes the only way we can even begin to comprehend these things is to know an individual story, like Karin's, and then to realize and think about the fact that her story and her parents' and her brother's was multiplied infinitely. (personal communication, October 20, 2000)

Both *Good Night, Maman* and *The Last Mission* are suitable and worthwhile complements to a WWII curriculum.

Although the Depression is not as exciting for students to study as a world war, Harry Mazer's *Cave Under the City* gives students a glimpse of what it was like to be young and surviving in New York City during the Depression. Many students have difficulty removing their egocentric attitudes from their studies and may not appreciate the nation's struggle at that time. Fortunately, Mazer writes a realistic and compelling young adult novel about Tolley and his brother Bubber's daily search for shelter and food: "Tolley's narrative is moving, and the details of life in the city during the Depression are vivid....Those who take their fast food for granted will realize how easy they have it when they read this book" (Agee, 1987).

Historical novels are effective in English classrooms, but their impact must be recognized in a social studies curriculum:

> Historical novels allow us—at their best they force us—to make connections and to realize that despair is as old and as new as hope, that loyalty and treachery, love and hatred, compassion and cruelty were and are inherent in humanity, whether it

be in Ancient Greece, Elizabethan England, or post-World War I Germany. (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001, p. 240)

Pairing Mazer novels with historical study will connect students emotionally better than any social studies textbook ever could. Students will end their units feeling more affected and more understanding of their country's history.

While social studies is a requirement in schools across the country, courses such as Teen Parenting and Adult Living are also popping up as electives or requirements for a vocational education. College-bound students or those taking the vocational route will all face similar concerns in raising a family, managing a home, and contributing to society. Several novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer could be read in a Teen Parenting or Adult Living class to demonstrate how young people can learn to better cope with adult responsibilities of family and home.

In Harry Mazer's *When the Phone Rang*, Billy, Lori, and Kevin Keller learn to survive without parents and remain a family in spite of jobs, bills, debts, and other adult pressures. Together the Kellers gain experience running a household, dividing housekeeping duties, and adhering to a budget. Due to the complexity of running a home, their days are hard and their relationships are strained. Yet *When the Phone Rang* provides a realistic portrayal of adolescents becoming adults.

Other novels suited to a Teen Parenting or Adult Living class include Norma Fox Mazer's *Someone to Love* where Nina and Mitch negotiate living together, and Harry Mazer's *Hey Kid! Does She Love Me?* in which Jeff falls in love with a girl and her baby and discovers that being a parent requires dedication, patience, and sacrifice.

Another subject in school that teaches young adults to make adult decisions is health. Health is often a requirement covering such important topics as illnesses, drugs and alcohol, aging, death, and sex education. While discussing these topics in class, students can also read several Mazer novels that help young readers personalize these abstract issues.

Sex education remains a difficult and controversial subject. In addition to teaching the physical facts, one must discuss appropriate sexual behavior, which involves morals and values. Fortunately, novels written by the Mazers can help. In *Someone to Love*, Nina and Mitch not only share an apartment, they share a sexual relationship. Their sexuality may make them feel mature, but neither is prepared for the level of commitment and consideration required to make the relationship work. Nina and Mitch's subsequent infidelities destroy their relationship and teach the reader that "It's easy to get together and hard to stay together" (N. F. Mazer, personal communication, November 14, 2000).

In *Up in Seth's Room*, Finn's decision not to have sex is the problem—at least for her older boyfriend Seth. However, Finn's decision withstands peer pressure and feels more real than didactic, a point young adults will appreciate. While promoting abstinence may be the goal of many sex education programs, educators cannot ignore that young people are having sex. *I Love You, Stupid!*; *Hey Kid! Does She Love Me?*; and *The Girl of His Dreams*, all by Harry Mazer, demonstrate that the decision to have sex is never easy, nor are the consequences. Sex possesses emotional, psychological, social, and physical strings; Mazer's novels show young people this often-ignored fact.

Unfortunately, another aspect of sex education involves sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Two novels written by Norma Fox Mazer provide insight into these very complex and timely issues. *Silver* explores the repeated sexual abuse of an adolescent girl by her uncle, while *Out of Control* portrays a sexual attack at a high school. Both novels address the difficulties surrounding the revealing of these painful secrets, the coping with fear, guilt, and humiliation, and the beginning of the healing process. Using *Silver* and *Out of Control* in the health classroom will help young adults discuss appropriate sexual conduct, sexual harassment, and criminal sexual behavior. Assigning these Mazer books may allow for important dialogue to take place concerning sexual topics young people will face the rest of their lives. In addition, Broughton (1999) feels that Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control* is a suitable text when discussing gender, which could also be part of a health unit: "It could be the springboard from which the teacher of English language arts, psychology, social students or social issues could begin discussion regarding gender issues" (p. 147).

A less controversial issue in health classes is diseases and illnesses. While in health class, young people may research several illnesses, their causes, and their cures. In *Heartbeat*, a joint effort for Harry and Norma Fox Mazer, Tod, Amos, and Hilary's friendship is made stronger due to Amos's illness. Young readers will learn about the progression of his disease as well as its emotional effects on Amos and his friends. Using young protagonists will help adolescents, who generally feel invincible, better understand illness and death from an adolescent perspective.

While young adults may experience the death of a peer, they are more likely to experience the death of a family member. Quite a few novels by the Mazers address an

adolescent surviving the death of a parent, sibling, or grandparent. *When We First Met, When She Was Good,* and *The Island Keeper* deal with the death of a sister. *Girlhearts*, *When the Phone Rang*, and *Someone's Mother is Missing* address the death of parents. In *Who Is Eddie Leonard?*, *A Figure of Speech*, and *After the Rain*, the protagonist must cope with the death of a grandparent. In each of these novels, the characters experience diverse and complex ranges of emotion. As with many adolescents dealing with death, the characters feel fear, guilt, sadness, and anger.

The same emotions related to handling death may be experienced by a young adult adjusting to the aging of a loved one. Two of Norma Fox Mazer's most powerful novels, *A Figure of Speech* and *After the Rain*, can be used in the health classroom to explore what happens to families emotionally, socially, and physically as grandparents grow old. Jenny and Rachel develop special relationships with their grandfathers while watching their grandfathers' bodies grow slower and their minds more forgetful. As characters, Jenny and Rachel are models for their young readers as they represent real and genuine adolescent attitudes toward the aged. The girls can be resentful of the burden their grandfathers place on the family at one moment, and they can value their special relationship with them the next. Adolescents in a health class will connect with Jenny and Rachel and better understand the complexities of watching the people they love grow old.

Another confusing aspect of health involves mental health. Young adults in today's schools are familiar with the terms ADHD and special education, but they may not understand the impact of having a mental illness or living with someone who does. Norma Fox Mazer's *When She Was Good* is the best example of the torture and abuse a

mental illness can create. Em's sister Pamela has terrorized her for years with violent and unpredictable outbursts. However, Em is still fiercely loyal to her ill sister. *When She Was Good* will help students understand how mental illness can cripple entire families unless treatment is sought.

Few students will have experience with an illness such as Pamela's, yet in an age of mainstreaming special education students into regular education classrooms, adolescents will be forced to deal with students possessing a variety of mental and physical handicaps. These adolescents may not be emotionally or socially prepared to accept those possessing handicaps or disabilities, but there are some Mazer novels that can help. When discussing the abilities or limitations of special needs students, young adults can refer to *Out of Control*, where Rollo has a very special relationship with his mentally handicapped sister, Kara. In *The War on Villa Street*, Willis reluctantly trains Richard, a retarded boy wanting to be a better athlete. By the end of Harry Mazer's novel, Willis (who once referred to Richard as "retard") understands the unique relationship he and Richard share, and he appreciates Richard's earnest desire to be the best person he can be: "It is finally Richard, a mildly retarded boy, who gives Willis the opportunity to achieve some self-satisfaction and face the fact that only he can change the course of his life" (Keister, 1979). In *The Wild Kid*, Sammy has Down's syndrome, but he manages to teach Kevin that they can survive without adults. These three novels written by the Mazers will challenge stereotypes of readers possessing negative impressions of special education students.

Using young adult novels in health class is beneficial because they help adolescents connect more readily with abstract issues such as aging, illness, and death.

However, young adult novels can help young adults understand and appreciate a more concrete concept for them: their bodies. As part of health, wellness, or physical education classes, several Mazer novels explore the benefits of physical activity as a means of taking care of the body, mind, and spirit. In Harry Mazer's *The War on Villa Street*, Willis finds escape from his alcoholic father by running. In *The Girl of His Dreams*, an older Willis still adores running, finding he enjoys the runner's high, the time to think, and the element of competition. Both novels are fine examples of how a young adult can enjoy and benefit emotionally, physically, and socially from physical activity.

While health and gym may be requirements in a high school curriculum, students do have options for elective credit. Journalism is a popular elective for many students interested in a career in newspapers, television, media studies, or writing. However, it takes a great deal more than writing skills to succeed as a journalist. *Bright Days, Stupid Nights* is the perfect novel for the journalism classroom to demonstrate the importance of ethics: "While their writing is never preachy, the Mazers provide much food for thought on such pertinent issues as journalistic integrity and freedom of the press versus an individual's right to privacy." (Review of the book *Bright Days Stupid Nights*, 1992, p. 63). Even students thinking of other careers will recognize the lessons of sacrificing personal gain for preserving others' privacy and well-being, which is a valuable life lesson for everyone.

Although such skills are rarely called upon in life, survival skills may prove to be valuable to young people. Some science courses may contain a survival unit in which students are taught to survive in harsh environments in case of emergency. Harry Mazer's *Snow Bound* and *The Island Keeper* are useful in such a survival unit. In *Snow*

Bound, Tony and Cindy must survive blizzard conditions, build a fire in their buried car, and conserve energy and warmth to seek help. In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo chooses to isolate herself in the wilderness until the harshness of nature and the elements teaches her several lessons in using mental and physical strength to survive. The lessons taught in survival units seem abstract and useless for a young adult in a safe and warm classroom, but reading Mazer novels in conjunction with this study makes these lessons seem more real and applicable to young people like themselves.

Many young people find the subjects they study in school unnecessary and unrelated to their own lives. Utilizing young adult novels within these subjects may help them build connections with these subjects. Whereas students may abstractly understand illness, the need to build a fire in extreme temperatures, or the importance of treating disabled people well, when they read about young people like themselves discovering these lessons, they are more apt to embrace these lessons and recognize their value in their own lives.

Using the Mazers with Bibliotherapy

Young adult author Chris Crutcher was a therapist before venturing into the field of young adult literature. Crutcher uses this experience to help him write novels with which young people can associate, as he is able to understand and empathize with the psyche of both male and female adolescents:

> Big boys don't cry....I'm told I'm not really angry when I am. I'm told I'm not really sad when I am. And when I'm told I'm *not*, and I know I *am*, I start to

> wonder what's wrong with me. What is this monster inside that keeps being what it's not supposed to be, feeling what it's not supposed to feel? (Gallo, 1992, p. 38)

Similarly, Crutcher empathizes with the plights of young females who not only deal with the same emotional confusions, but also are encouraged to conform to a different set of rules for dealing with these emotions:

> I'm a young girl. I live in a traditional American family that puts dad at the head and believes *reason* is superior to *emotion.* Reason is heard. Emotion is not. My brothers are taught reason, *I'm* left with emotion. Emotion is not heard. I am not heard. My voice is not important....My emotions are powerful, but they cannot get out. I begin to hate myself for them. I get depressed. I feel hopeless and I feel alone. (Gallo, 1992, p. 38)

And not only are adolescents dealing with gender issues, they must deal with the stresses of simply being in that transitional age between youth and adulthood. Young adults are at a difficult age in that they are expected to behave as adults but are rarely treated as such. Crutcher acknowledges this hypocritical message society sends young people:

> As a teenager, I am expected to pretend I am an adult, to be polite, to hide my feelings, though I am accorded few privileges that go with adulthood....I may be studying things I'm not interested in, and am often told how important those things will be in my life, when I *know* that isn't true. Nothing seems under my control. Sexually I'm exploding like desert flowers following a flash flood, at the same time I'm being told only to keep it under control, not *how* to keep it under

> control. I don't know whether it excites me or terrifies me more. (Gallo, 1992, p. 36)

But Crutcher, along with many other authors, educators, and researchers, believes books can help. Not only do books provide stories and entertainment, Crutcher acknowledges that books can provide examples of behavior and ways of dealing with problems:

> Stories can help teenagers look at their feelings, or come to emotional resolution, from a safe distance....I have never met a depressed person, or an anxious person, or a fearful person who was not encouraged by the knowledge that others feel the same way they do. *I am not alone* is a powerful medicine. If others feel this way, and they have survived, then I can survive too. (Gallo, 1992, p. 39)

This theory constitutes the theory of bibliotherapy, where books are used to help individuals cope with their problems. Characters in novels who face problems similar to the ones the reader is facing may give the reader a "misery loves company" feeling, where the reader actually feels better about his problems and feels more motivated to solve them. Crutcher summarizes the theory of bibliotherapy quite accurately:

> If I can consider someone else's pain and it is the same as mine, I can begin to work things out. If I can cry at a movie or reading a book when I can't cry about my own life, I will begin to get in touch with ways to deal with the losses. (Gallo, 1992, p. 39)

For those young adults struggling with their lives, young adult books may assist them by allowing them to see how characters are dealing with similar problems: "Knowing how a fictional character acts and reacts may give insight to a student in a

similar situation. Students may find alternatives for deciding about life issues through their understanding of literature" (Cline, 1993, p. 791). Reed (1994) further suggests that "often adolescents feel isolated, as if no one else has ever faced the conflicts they are experiencing. Young adult books can help them feel less alone while helping them develop mature reading interests." (Reed, 1994, p. 110) Brown and Stephens (1995) agree with the importance of young adult literature in helping young people find solutions:

> An inherent value of literature is that it lets readers know they are not alone. Youthful readers find situations and characters with whom they can identify. This process of identification is a vital connection that makes the relationship between the reader and the text personal. (pp. 71-72)

Perhaps bibliotherapy can work better than a lecture or a counseling session because "Authors of young adult books become anonymous mentors who are able to speak to early adolescents as no adult on the scene can. They do this by talking through their young characters, not by talking down to readers" (Reed, 1994, p. 110). Bibliotherapy also empowers the reader by allowing him to work through the issues on his own while using the characters as models (of either good or poor behavior). "When they read young adult literature, early adolescents can share their problems with other young people, the characters in the book. Characters help adolescents examine their own problems with increased objectivity, allowing them to see them from a different perspective" (Reed, 1994, p. 111).

The myriad problems adolescents face can be placed into numerous categories. Those discussed in Kaywell's *Adolescents At Risk* (1993) and Hipple, Yarbrough, and

Kaplan's "Twenty Adolescent Novels (and More) That Counselors Should Know About" (1984) are quite inclusive, ranging alphabetically from alienation to suicide. In 1997, Hipple, Comer, and Boren added four more categories to the extensive list of problems young adult novels could address. Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer, although prolific, have not written young adult novels covering all of the problems of adolescents. For example, no Mazer protagonist has yet to face AIDS or an unwanted pregnancy. However, the scope of problems addressed in the Mazers' novels are wide enough to give young adults "vicarious opportunities to examine the lives of other teens who may be confronting troubles similar to their own" (Hipple, Yarbrough, & Kaplan, 1984, p. 142) and to help any adolescent find a suitable connection in a young adult novel. The following list represents the categories of teenage problems the Mazers' novels address.

Alienation: In *Adolescents At Risk*, Kaywell (1993) provides alarming statistics regarding the troubles teenagers can face in their daily lives. Among these obstacles is a profound feeling of alienation. The repercussions of feeling alienated are overwhelming: "Teenagers experiencing extreme feelings of alienation are more prone to suicide, alcohol and drug use, pregnancy, and violence" (p. 1). Establishing an identity is extremely difficult when a teen faces so many choices, including choices that can jeopardize relationships with peers and relationships with parents and family. How do young people decide who to be when facing both potentially devastating internal and external conflicts? Several young adult novels written by the Mazers aid a young reader in exploring alienation and identity.

In Harry Mazer's *Who is Eddie Leonard?*, Eddie spends the duration of the novel searching for a family which he feels will give him the identity of which he is in desperate need. A reviewer of the novels feels, "The character [Eddie Leonard] does work, at least partially, as a metaphor for the alienation that many teenagers feel. Readers may also appreciate the unsentimental treatment of the main character, who is far from perfect and far from innocent" (Review of the book *Who is Eddie Leonard*? 1993, p. 79). Readers of the novel will see that Eddie's search for a family leads him to discover that the identity he desires must come from within.

Other Mazer novels addressing alienation and a developing a sense of identity are *The Dog in the Freezer*, *The Dollar Man*, *Guy Lenny*, *City Light*, *The Girl of His Dreams*, *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, *The Island Keeper*, *Missing Pieces*, *A Figure of Speech* and *Downtown*. Within all of these novels, the young characters feel alienated from family, friends, or society at large until they are able to look to themselves for the affirmation and direction they need.

Athletics: Research reveals that young adults who participate in athletics have better self esteem. Those young adults who are members of a team develop better team building and social skills. However, Willis in *The War on Villa Street* and *The Girl of His Dreams* chooses to run solo, finding it helps clear his mind of family problems, concerns with his girlfriend, and gang involvement. As his running improves, Willis must make the difficult decision to run for a college team, thereby giving up his freedom and accepting the possibility of letting someone else down. Young readers of these novels can see the importance of athletics for personal gain, but they will also recognize

the need to be part of a team and to make connections with others while improving oneself.

Close friend or sibling rivalry: It is nearly a guarantee that young adults will experience some form of jealousy and rivalry, be it from peers or a sibling. Many Mazer novels contend with this problem. In *Three Sisters*, youngest sister Karen desires her older sister's boyfriend to such a degree she risks losing her sister forever. In *B, My Name is Bunny*, Bunny steals her friend Emily's identity to snag a boyfriend. In *A Figure of Speech*, Jenny battles against being the unpopular child in her large family. In *Babyface*, Toni discovers her sister Martine's anger and resentment over being the only daughter who knows the parents' ugly secret. While reading these novels, young adults will see the often desperate and foolish acts one will go to to compete with a friend or sibling; but they will also learn, as the characters do, that as one becomes happy with oneself, such rivalry is not necessary.

Death and dying: Teenagers face death each day on television, but an alarming number of young people deal with accidental death and death from long-term illness or aging in their own lives. Many novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer deal realistically and poignantly about the deaths of friends and family members. In *Heartbeat*, Tod and Hilary deal with Amos's death and realize he was the glue that kept them all together. In *When We First Met*, in a twist of fate, Jenny falls in love with the son of the drunk driver who killed her sister, Gail. The reader is thrown into the deep sadness of Jenny's family as well as the conflicting emotions of guilt, anger, and love that Jenny feels for her new love as she tries to remain loyal to her dead sister. In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo copes with the death of her sister. In *When the Phone Rang*, a phone call in

the first few pages of the novel informs the Keller children of the plane crash that has taken their parent's lives. Parents are dead in *Someone's Mother is Missing*, *Silver*, and *Downtown*. Grandparents die in *Who Is Eddie Leonard?*, *After the Rain*, and *A Figure of Speech*. Within the Mazers' novels, adolescents have many choices to help them with the complexities of death. The Mazers' characters experience every possible emotion as they cope with loss and bereavement. A critic notes this fact in a review of Norma Fox Mazer's *After the Rain*:

> Forgiveness, the temporal nature of life and concern for an older relative are strong lessons, though the book is not didactic in tone...Junior high girls will identify with Rachel, and the experience with death will provide another view for a unit on that topic. Mazer writes with sensitivity and introspection. (Cline, 1988)

For any adolescent seeking help in accepting the death of a loved one, the Mazers' material can help.

Divorce: Death may be a fact of life for young people, but a plight much more common in the life of a child is divorce or growing up in a single-parent home. Again, the Mazers have written several young adult novels that could be used as an effective part of bibliotherapy for the adolescent coping with divorce. Harry Mazer's *Guy Lenny* reveals a particularly difficult situation, but one many young adults face. After his parents' divorce, Guy has lived with his father and has not even seen his mother in eight years. However, as Guy's father wishes to remarry, suddenly Guy is expected to live with his mother, whom he considers a virtual stranger. In *Taking Terri Mueller*, Terri did not have a choice to live with her father. In fact, he kidnapped Terri after the divorce and told Terri her mother was dead. Not only does Terri cope with the loss of a parent, she

discovers the only parent she has committed a terrible crime. A review of *Taking Terri Mueller* calls it "one of Norma Mazer's best," especially noting Mazer's "fine job of taking Terri through the emotional ups and downs caused by her discovery." Students struggling with which parent to live with will appreciate the novel, which "is timely and well written. The subject of divorce and deciding which parent to live with will strike a familiar chord for many teens" (Abrahamson, 1982).

Other novels dealing with divorce and living with a single parent include Norma Fox Mazer's *A, My Name is Ami*; *Missing Pieces*; *Silver*; *I, Trissy*; and Harry Mazer's *The Dollar Man*; *I Love You, Stupid!*; and *The Dog in the Freezer*.

Some young people deal with divorce; others are transferred from home to home, deal with adopted and foster families, or live with neighbors or extended family members. In *Downtown*, Pete lives with his uncle just as Joyce does in *Crazyfish*. In Harry Mazer's *Someone's Mother is Missing*, Lisa and her sister must now live with her aunt and uncle since the death of her father and the disappearance of her mother. In *Girlhearts*, newly-orphaned Sarabeth Silver is traded from family friend to family friend as the adults decide who can care for her. In all of these novels, young readers can explore how the protagonists accept loss, establish identity without family, and cope with the fear of not being wanted.

Delinquency and dropouts: The Mazers do not overly portray this particular crisis of adolescence in their novels. Usually when a Mazer character accepts that he will not be attending college or desires to drop out of school, he immediately looks for employment to better his situation and start an economic career. However, there are two novels by Harry Mazer that may help a young person understand the repercussions of

choosing delinquency. In *The Dollar Man*, young Marcus is so angered over the absence of his father that he begins to associate with the wrong crowd:

> The beer went around again. Marcus received his share, more than he'd ever drunk at one time before. He felt really at ease. This was real friendship, the comradeship of older boys, the brotherhood of young men. The future, the past, all the things that had bothered him—all of that seemed unimportant now. What he wanted and what his mother wanted, the dissatisfied feelings, and the things that had seemed so difficult to him before now faded away like the last light into the night. (p. 109)

As his so-called friends pin a drug possession on Marcus, he is wrongfully expelled and arrested. *The Dollar Man* is a novel in which both Marcus and a young reader learn a great deal about honesty, integrity, and accepting the truth.

In *When the Phone Rang*, brothers Kevin and Billy are so concerned with house payments, finding jobs, and avoiding the Department of Human Services, they fail to recognize their sister Lori's delinquency. Seeking attention and affirmation from a destructive friend, Lori becomes an expert shoplifter, risking her family's welfare and her own future. In a detailed scene, Lori and her brothers return the stolen articles and acknowledge that crime is not a substitute for a family's love.

Drugs and alcohol: The aforementioned novel *The Dollar Man* demonstrates the dangers of drinking and using drugs. Not only does Marcus damage the relationship with his mother, he risks damaging his school career while picking up a criminal record. Harry Mazer's *The War On Villa Street* portrays the emotional and physical pain of living with an alcoholic; Willis is often embarrassed, humiliated, scared, and physically harmed

by his drunken father. The consequences of drunk driving are explored in Norma Fox Mazer's novel *When We First Met* and her short story "Do You Really Think It's Fair?" In both stories, the protagonists Jenny and Sara cope with anger, sadness, bitterness, resentment, and guilt all caused by someone's irresponsible drinking. The situation is made more complex in *When We First Met* as the drunk driver, Rob's mother, is a tragic and empathetic character. A young reader examining the mother's life will see that although one can survive a drunk driving accident, one never recovers emotionally.

Ethical dilemmas: Young people face ethical dilemmas each day of their lives. Cutting school, shoplifting, use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, or premarital sex are just a few of the moral issues with which adolescents contend. Many novels written by Harry and Norma Fox Mazer deal with premarital sex and the emotional, physical, and social consequences. These novels include *Someone to Love*; *Up in Seth's Room*; *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*; *The Girl of His Dreams*; and *I Love You, Stupid!* Within each of these novels, the decision to have or not have sex is complicated and filled with positives and negatives. For young adults seeking guidance and honest portrayals, the Mazers provide plenty.

Other novels exist where young adults learn about telling the truth or the dangers of breaking the law. Marcus is torn between clearing his name of a drug charge and convicting his friends in *The Dollar Man*. In *The Last Mission*, Jack Raab steals his brother's birth certificate to lie to the armed forces about his age. In *The Island Keeper*, Cleo lies to her family in order to run away from home. Tolley feels guilty for stealing food for his starving brother in *The Cave Under the City*. Sammy and Kevin steal to survive in *The Wild Kid*. If anything, the Mazers demonstrate that ethical decisions are

far from black or white. Young adult readers will appreciate the Mazers' candor and honesty in portraying ethical issues. Their characters may not make the best choices, but their motives, actions, and consequences are very real.

Handicaps: A 1989 Statistic from *Adolescents At Risk* (Kaywell, 1993) states that 55% of special education students graduate from high school (p. 16). Special education students, which include handicapped and disabled students, face challenges in and outside of the classroom. Many regular education students do not understand or appreciate the special student's needs, and instead can only focus on the differences. Willis in *The War on Villa Street* is one of these youths who found Richard's differences annoying, and even thought Richard could be like everyone else if he tried hard enough. Ironically, Richard teaches Willis about dedication, perseverance, and compassion. Similarly, in *The Wild Kid*, in spite of his Down's syndrome, Sammy is also seen as smart and brave, learning new things out of necessity and developing skills out of strength and bravery. According to a reviewer of *The Wild Kid*, "With his simply worded third-person narrative, Mazer captures the thoughts and emotions—and occasionally profound insights—of someone whom most people, including the boy's own family, discount for being 'retarded'" (Review of the book *The Wild Kid*, 1998, p. 73). Young adult readers, with or without disabilities, can see healthy relationships between regular and special students and see the benefits of working together and helping each other. Reading these two Mazer novels shows how young people with and without special needs can develop healthy and enjoyable friendships while building skills, strength, and knowledge together.

Mental illness: More than ever, young adults are hearing about treatments for anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, just to name a few. While the Mazers do not address these more common illnesses in their novels, Norma Fox Mazer's *When She Was Good* could help a young reader deal with a family member's mental illness, especially if the illness dominates the family dynamics. Since Em was fourteen, she and her ill sister Pamela have lived alone, trying to run a household. In between paying bills and looking for work, however, Em is routinely terrorized by her sister's physical and mental abuse. Only when Pamela dies suddenly however, does Em recognize the impact Pamela's illness had on Em's life—and continues to have on her life:

> Told by Em, the story delineates her pain with careful sparseness, and while the abuse and indignities become somewhat repetitive, their overwhelming relentlessness conveys the weight of Pamela's power. The book is at its best when showing Em's tentative grasping for a new life of her own after Pamela's death, when her dignity and hope begin to assert themselves and our feelings change from pity to respect. (Sutton, 1997, p. 682)

When She Was Good chronicles the coping mechanisms Em uses to survive life with and without Pamela; the novel could easily help a young adult struggling with any abusive relationship at home.

Parents: Many adolescents have confusing relationships with their parents. Fortunately, there is a Mazer novel portraying almost every example of a conflicting parent-child relationship. The Mazers' portrayal of parents is not uncommon in young adult literature: "Many young adults are, indeed, struggling with their relationships with their parents and other adults, and to be realistic, their literature should not be presented

in any other way" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 29). The Mazers are genuine in representing diverse child-parent relationships in their novels.

Often, parents ignore their children, as in Norma Fox Mazer's *Downtown* or Harry Mazer's *Guy Lenny*. Often parents are abusive such as Willis's father in *The War on Villa Street*. Sometimes parents appear supportive but end up suffocating their child, such as the parents in *When We First Met*. Parents' expectations of their children can nearly drive them away, a situation found in *City Light* and *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*. There are parents whose poor decisions threaten the happiness, well-being, or even safety of their child. Examples of this include *A Figure of Speech*, *Silver*, and *Taking Terri Mueller*. And sometimes a parent's absence destroys a young person's self-worth, which is a pattern explored in *The Dollar Man*, *Missing Pieces*, and *Who Is Eddie Leonard?* Relationships with parents remain tricky even as children become adults, but novels by the Mazers may help a young reader better understand and accept the complex dynamics of the parent-child relationship.

Peer pressure: Life is not always easy in a young adult novel. Characters face difficult problems, and like their readers, they often struggle to make the best choices; like their readers, they often fail. "Often the characters do not select the answers that are best for them and must suffer the consequences of their decisions, but in good adolescent literature there are always consequences" (Reed, 1994, pp. 112-113). In *The Dollar Man*, Marcus feels that punishment when succumbing to peer pressure results in a drug charge and an expulsion from school. In Harry Mazer's *When the Phone Rang*, Lori seeks approval from Maureen who sees shoplifting as the tie that will bind their friendship together. In Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control*, when Rollo blindly follows his friends'

plan to molest Valerie, his life will never be the same. The characters in all three of the novels realize the consequences for their poor choices in "following the crowd." In Norma Fox Mazer's *Up in Seth's Room*, however, Finn demonstrates that being an individual can be rewarding. Her decision to postpone sex may be rejected by friends and her boyfriend, but Finn shows the reader that believing in your own mind is more important than what others think of you.

Poverty and homelessness: A startling number of young people are living at or below the poverty level. Often run by single parents, these households possess pressures many cannot imagine. Fortunately, several Mazer novels portray young adults living without money or even without a home of their own. In Norma Fox Mazer's *Silver*, Sarabeth is convinced her rich friends have perfect lives while they express horror at her living arrangements:

> "Welcome to Number Two," I said.
>
> "Number Two?"
>
> "It's the second trailer," I said.
>
> "You call it Number *Two*?" she repeated. She half smiled. "That's what babies say when they have to go to the bathroom."
>
> I took out my key. Now she'd see all our old shabby things—the dining room chair with the legs tied with a cord and the toaster that only burned bread. We used paper napkins, our blankets were pilly, and none of our dishes matched. If we needed a cup or glass, Mom went to a Rescue Mission thrift shop and bought one for a dime. (pp. 157-158)

Like Sarabeth, Joyce in Norma Fox Mazer's *Crazyfish* is embarrassed that her home is located next to the town dump, especially when her peers label her the Dump Queen. A touching novel about friendship, *Crazyfish* teaches a reader that a person can transcend where he lives to become the person he wants to be: "For all its candidness in describing the cruelty of the peer group, the book also portrays the powerful effects of love as an anchor in the lives of three different people" (Trelease, 1989, p. 234).

While Sarabeth and Joyce are self-conscious about their living conditions, at least they possesses a home. In Harry Mazer's *The Cave Under the City*, the protagonists are destitute and desperate, looking for shelter and a meal anywhere. In *Girlhearts*, Norma Fox Mazer's sequel to *Silver*, Sarabeth wishes she could remain in her humble trailer after the sudden death of her mother. With no income, no health insurance, no home, and no family members to rely upon, Sarabeth is a remarkable example of how one copes with both poverty and homelessness.

Sexual abuse and rape: Two novels may be able to help a young person cope with the devastating effects of a rape or other forms of sexual abuse. Within *Silver*, Sarabeth and her friends help Patty escape the cycle of sexual abuse committed by a family member. Together they figure out how to tell the awful secret, how to get Patty's mother to accept the truth, and how to begin healing in spite of trials, news reports, and other daily reminders. *Silver* shows a reader the importance of telling someone about the abuse. It is also a fairly realistic portrayal of how a family struggles to maintain normalcy in spite of a horrible discovery. Norma Fox Mazer's *Out of Control* is a powerful novel addressing a sexual attack at a high school. Her attackers did not rape Valerie, but things would have been clearer if they had. Since she was not exactly raped,

the male perpetrators receive slaps on the wrists. As she was not raped, the principal is more concerned with damage control than justice. But if she was not raped, why does Valerie feel so violated, humiliated, and out of control? Mazer's novel is a compelling look at sexual harassment and the complex relationship between the victimizer and the victim. Young readers—male or female—will find a great deal to absorb in *Out of Control*, and they will never look at sexual harassment in the same way again.

Sex: Adolescents are very interested in sex, but they may—and should—possess conflicting attitudes about it. Many Mazer novels address the ups and downs of adolescents engaging in sexual behavior. Harry Mazer's male romances include *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*, *The Girl of His Dreams*, and *I Love You, Stupid!* Within these novels, the young males are obsessed with sex; they fantasize, masturbate, and spend much of their energies convincing their girlfriends to have sex with them. However, each of the three protagonists discovers there is a great deal more to sex than physical pleasure. Jeff, Willis, and Marcus learn about commitment, dedication, heartbreak, and consideration. For adolescents having sex or contemplating having sex, these novels may serve useful in demonstrating the more emotional and social repercussions of a sexual relationship. In *Hey, Kid!*, the presence of Mary's baby is a reminder of the possible physical and financial consequences of sex.

Norma Fox Mazer writes of one couple who engages in premarital sex, and one couple that abstains. Both are written honestly and genuinely. In *Up in Seth's Room*, Finn and Seth battle the other's views on a sexual relationship. The novel, though not asexual in tone, promotes the idea that relationships can flourish without sex, and young people can survive peer pressure and abstinence. In *Someone to Love*, Nina and Mitch

eagerly engage in a sexual relationship, but their immaturity just as quickly destroys it. As commitment becomes boring and fidelity becomes difficult, suddenly Nina and Mitch find themselves cheaters and liars. The sex that made them feel so adult transforms their relationship into one of lies and secrets. Although the message seems obvious, readers of *Someone to Love* will see the layers of complexity in living with—and sleeping with—someone before they know the other person or even know themselves.

Survival: According to therapist and novelist Chris Crutcher, for bibliotherapy to work, "stories don't need a perfect resolution—one seldom exists in real life—to become a tool in the healing process" (Gallo, 1992, p. 40). However, many Mazer novels possess a resolution that does help the young person build hope. In Harry Mazer's survival stories, especially, resolutions exist that prove young people can survive, be it surviving the harsh environment or the harsh treatment of a family. "The nightmares, the fearful journeys, the testings can be lived vicariously through the characters, and readers, by identification, can begin to sense and believe in their own strength" (Reed, 1996, p. 83). Such is the basis of bibliotherapy. If a young person can read a book of survival where a fictional young person triumphs over internal and external conflicts, the reader may feel he or she has a chance of doing so as well.

In addition, Reed (1996) argues, "Many teenagers like to imagine what it would be like if they were caught in a situation in which they must use ingenuity and strength to free themselves...because [young adult novels] show how ordinary young adults overcome extraordinary situations" (p. 68). Ironically, while many young people would describe themselves as "ordinary," they label their own problems (which are ordinary to

the adolescent) as extraordinary and unbelievably difficult to negotiate and overcome. Reading survival stories not only helps adolescents achieve escapism from their own lives, such stories may help young adults understand that problems come in varying degrees, and even the most extraordinary ones can be managed and overcome.

Harry Mazer has written several novels of survival in which young people overcome physical environments while coming to accept their emotional, social, or psychological worlds. These novels include *Snow Bound*, *The Island Keeper*, and *The Wild Kid.* In these stories, protagonists must fight the environment. In *The Cave Under the City*, Tolley and Bubber wage a battle on poverty and homelessness, so in a sense it is a survival story as well. Other stories possessing elements of survival include *The Last Mission*, where the reader traces Jack's escape from a German prison, and *When the Phone Rang*, where Billy and his siblings must survive living without parents. Written by Norma Fox Mazer, *Goodnight, Maman* and *When She Was Good* may classify as survival novels, as both Karin and Em must create a new life out of the chaos of war—Karin's being WWII, and Em's being the reign of Pamela. Together, the Mazers have written *The Solid Gold Kid*, in which a group of young people escapes from kidnappers; this quick-paced novel demonstrates how people work together in survival situations. All of these novels help a young reader understand that although some survival situations require sheer force and athleticism, a person requires emotional and mental strength to survive.

Bibliotherapy is a serious and multi-faceted concept that should not be taken lightly. Educators desiring to use bibliotherapy must remember two things: 1) Giving a child a novel is not a guarantee his problems will disappear, and 2) Prescribing a book to

a child may not be the teacher's job. For adolescents with severe emotional problems, an educator must direct the child to the proper person better trained to treat serious problems. That is not to say, however, that educators should not feel free to recommend certain novels to adolescents experiencing certain problems. As adolescents continue to confide their concerns, worries, and problems to their teachers, teachers should not hesitate suggesting a novel or two that will provoke the reader. Using this extensive list and analyses of Mazer novels provided above, perhaps the educator will not hesitate in suggesting a novel or two—by the Mazers.

Literary Merit

While many believe books can help a person developmentally, socially, and emotionally, educators cannot ignore what they need books to do for their students: help them *educationally*. Fortunately, the field of young adult literature possesses many choices noteworthy of classroom analysis and discussion. Bushman and Bushman (1993) argue, "It is folly to think that students can respond to universal themes, literary techniques, and the craft of specific authors by reading and studying only the classics" (p. 129). Educators desiring to forego classic novels for a young adult novel should feel galvanized by the fact that many quality young adult novels possess impressive characterizations, examples of beautiful writing, and important thematic concepts. It has already been proven that young adults will identify with these techniques to a greater extent if they identify with the book itself. And another reason for using adolescent literature in the classroom? Young adults identify with young adult literature.

But before selecting any young adult novel for classroom use, including those written by the Mazers, one must first establish its literary merit. Many researchers and educators have created criteria by which to judge young adult novels. Brown and Stephens (1995) designed their own standards for indicating the quality of young adult literature. Their suggestions include all of the literary elements and the elements of style one would expect to be discussed and taught in any work of literature, young adult or otherwise:

1. Believable characters. Carefully crafted characters are multifaceted people who are neither stereotypical nor prototypical.
2. Coherent, but not predictable plot
3. Reasonable conflict
4. Satisfying resolution of conflict
5. Meaningful interaction among characters
6. Significant themes
7. Appropriate settings
8. Authentic dialogue
9. Clarity of language
10. Vivid images
11. Rich, but not effusive, descriptions
12. Language that is appropriate to the characters and the times
13. Timeless themes that speak to timely issues
14. Responsible presentation of controversial issues (p. 161)

Hipple and Maupin (2001) also determined what is "good about the best" young adult novels. Their criteria for judging young adult novels include plots, characters, themes, something they called "artistry in detail," emotional impact, and teachability, which is a useful category for the educator. While these yardsticks were applied to winners of the ALAN survey of best young adult novels of the 1990's, the categories are equally effective in determining "what's good about the best" novels of Harry and Norma Fox Mazer.

Plot

Bushman and Bushman (1993) state that in interest surveys of young adults, young adults enjoy novels that possess realistic conflicts and plot lines. They state that "this reality is found in four plot types" (p. 28) including protagonist vs. self, protagonist vs. society, protagonist vs. another person, and protagonist against nature. The Mazer novels possess each type of plot.

Protagonist vs. Self: Novels with this plot line are diverse; protagonists can struggle with so many aspects of self, including physical appearance, career choice, ethical issues, or establishing an identity. Likewise, Mazer novels with the protagonist vs. self plot line are plentiful and diverse.

In *Up in Seth's Room*, Finn struggles with her decision to abstain from sex. Trissy in *I, Trissy* fights her own emotions over her parents' divorce. Marcus and Cleo in *The Dollar Man* and *The Island Keeper* battle negative feelings regarding their weight. And Terri in Norma Fox Mazer's *Taking Terri Mueller* must decide with which parent to

live. These are just a sample of the protagonist vs. self plot line present in the Mazers' novels.

Protagonist vs. Society: *Out of Control* is perhaps the greatest example of the protagonist vs. society plot line. After her sexual assault, Valerie has a great deal of conflict in her life. Although Valerie fights off her attackers and battles inner demons, her greatest struggle is challenging society to do something about a world that allows these attacks to happen and protects the victimizers instead of the victims. Valerie's letter to the editor is a direct challenge to society to make sure what happened to her will never happen again.

Other protagonist vs. society plots may be found in Harry's *The Last Mission* and Norma's *Goodnight, Maman* in which protagonists battle anti-Semitism and other horrors of WWII.

Protagonist vs. Another Person: Any number of Mazer novels contains a person vs. person plot. In Harry Mazer's *City Light*, George and his father disagree about George's future. In Norma Fox Mazer's *Three Sisters* and *Babyface*, Karen and Toni have relationship-threatening disagreements with their older sisters. In *The War on Villa Street*, Willis battles an abusive father at home and Rabbit Slavin's gang on the street. In *The Solid Gold Kid*, Derek fights for his life against his kidnappers. The protagonist vs. another person plot line is one to which every adolescent reader can relate, be it a conflict with family, friends, or enemies.

Protagonist vs. Nature: Although few adolescents find nature a source of serious conflict, they may enjoy reading about young adults like themselves demonstrating strength, bravery, and ingenuity when faced with extreme conditions.

Snow Bound, The Wild Kid, and *The Island Keeper*, all by Harry Mazer, are fine examples of both male and female protagonists battling nature for their survival. Tony and Cindy, Sammy and Kevin, and Cleo will impress young readers with their tenacity just as they will horrify readers with their poor judgment. But since "most authors will not have their teenage characters involved in events or carrying out actions that most young adults would not normally do," (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 32), these Mazer novels are fine examples of young protagonists bettering themselves while battling the environment.

Characters

Without successful characterization, the protagonist and his story remain flat. Characterization, be it direct or indirect, brings life to a story. Critics agree that Norma Fox Mazer's success lies within her strong characterizations, though Mazer admits her characterization is no exact science:

> Some writers back off description entirely. Some writers describe their characters in almost excruciating detail. I'm somewhere in the middle. I hope to find a few details that will set the tone and then allow room for the reader's imagination to take over. (personal communication, December 19, 2000)

Several of Norma Fox Mazer's novels demonstrate that effective characterization. Speaking of *A Figure of Speech*, one critics states, "The fine definition of all characters, the plausibility of the situations and the variety of insights into motivation make [the novel] almost too good to be true" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000). Of *After the Rain*, one reviewer states that the grandfather, Izzy's "harsh, rough

personality [is] so realistic and recognizable that we feel we have known him and can understand the sorrow that overcomes Rachel" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000). Another reviewed calls the novel "A stunning portrait of two human beings" (Lystad, 1994, p. 432).

The praise for Mazer's characterization continues. Lystad (1994) states "Mazer's characters are not all admirable, but they are believable and provide insight into why people behave the way they do. Because of her strong characterizations, Mazer is one of the most widely read writers for young adults today" (p. 432). In addition, Mazer's character descriptions are realistic: "Mazer's descriptive ability is excellent. The reader is able to see vividly what her characters look like, what their physical environment consists of, and most importantly, how they feel about themselves and others" (Lystad, 1994, p. 432). Some of Mazer's most vivid characters include Izzy in *After the Rain*, Mrs. Fish in *Crazyfish*, and Em and Pamela in *When She Was Good.* Since "At her best, [Mazer] can set down the everyday scenes of her characters' lives in images that are scalpel sharp" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000), the characterization in any Mazer novel is worthy of examination.

Harry Mazer, though self-admittedly more interested in plot, develops his own memorable characters, such as Jack Raab in *The Last Mission*, Billy in *When The Phone Rang*, Marcus in *I Love You, Stupid!*, and Sammy in *The Wild Kid.* Critics of this novel in particular note Mazer's characterization, stating, for instance, "Mazer captures [Sammy's] world, his feelings, and his reactions with convincing surety" (Peters, 1998, p. 2007). According to Flynn (1998), "Mazer manages to portray both the victim and the victimizer as sympathetic, complex characters" (p. 611)

If characterization is one aspect in determining literary merit, the quality of novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer is easily discernible.

Themes

As Hipple (2000) states, young adult literature "must be read with attention not simply to its story lines, characters, or settings but also and very importantly to its themes" (p. 2). Due to the accessibility of young adult literature, important themes become more accessible to the young reader: "Young adult literature presents readers with the opportunity to examine significant themes of the human experience. It allows readers to have vicarious experiences that heighten the condition of the human condition" (Brown & Stephens, 1995, p. 72). As the Mazers have written dozens of young adult novels, they have addressed multiple thematic concepts. The themes explored in Mazer novels are those directly related to young people. As young people are concerned with parents, boy-girl relationships, appearance, school, and social issues, they will most appreciate themes associated with their interests. Therefore, as necessary and important as classic novels may be to the classroom experience, young adult novels and their themes are easier and more accessible for their readers.

Many novels written by Harry and Norma Fox Mazer address important and universal themes. The theme of the fragility and impermanence of life is found within *After the Rain*, *A Figure of Speech*, *When the Phone Rang*, and *Girlhearts*. Many young people must learn that they are not alone in the world, and that reaching out to others such as family and friends, or simply reaching beyond their egocentric view, will help them survive. Novels with this complex theme include *Someone's Mother is Missing*,

When She Was Good, *The Wild Kid*, and *Silver*. A difficult lesson to learn is that often an individual must sacrifice himself for the general good or the well being of others. This theme is present in *The Last Mission*, *Out of Control*, and *Goodnight, Maman*. Another theme to which students will relate is the need to face alarming odds and stick to one's goals and dreams. *The Girl of His Dreams*, *City Light*, and *I Love You, Stupid!* are novels by Harry Mazer that explore this theme. Even more difficult than pursuing a dream may be standing up for one's belief in the face of doubt and pressure. This valuable theme is found in Norma Fox Mazer's *Up in Seth's Room*, *Out of Control*, and *When We First Met*.

As one can see, the themes found within Mazer novels are as important as those found within classic novels. As Hipple (2000) says, "Yes, literature written for young adults is fine literature, about themes that are universal, with quality that is stunning. Such literature merits—and rewards—attention" (p. 12). Due to their thematic concepts, novels by the Mazers deserve such attention.

Artistry in Detail

According to Hipple and Maupin (2001), "For many readers the language of a book can be its most endearing feature. The passages that cause them to pause, to reread, to highlight may also cause them to value a novel highly" (p. 41). One of an educator's greatest dreams is to watch a young reader devour a book once, let alone again and again. But often a book is able to pull the reader into its language and story to such a degree that multiple readings are required. The Mazers have written several novels worthy of this distinction, due to the language, literary approaches, and imagery in their novels.

One of Harry Mazer's most powerful novels is the semi-autobiographical *The Last Mission.* Within this book, Mazer depicts Jack Raab's enthusiams and dreams of glory within italicized text, placed sometimes ironically between Jack's mild training period and the harsh realities of Jack's war experience:

> Below, Jack could see the Gulf of Mexico, the bluest blue he'd ever seen. *He was at the control of his P-51 Mustang barreling and diving and twisting down through the German squadrons, scattering them like sheep...he caught an ME 109 in his sight...fired...and blew it from the sky*...(p. 17)

Due to Mazer's style, the reader feels he is inside the plane, inside the war, and inside Jack's mind as he helps execute the dangerous missions, makes his journey through Germany, and returns home as a confused and haunted veteran.

Norma Fox Mazer similarly utilizes italics to represent the hidden voice in her haunting novel *When She Was Good.* After Pamela's death, Em is ridden with flashbacks filled with abuse and terror. Even in moments when Em gathers strength to get a job, ask the landlord for a garden, or find a friend, Pamela's derisive voice appears to eat away at Em's confidence:

> They smile at me. "Hello, Em," they say, with the same voice and the same smile they had for William. "How are you today, dear?" They give me kind smiles and bustle to the elevator.
>
> I sit there, stupefied. Me and William? *Yeah you you you, you and your stupid words you and William*—Pamela's voice bangs in my ear; my heart bangs in my chest. (p. 171)

As Em slowly and painfully accepts her conflicting emotions over her sister's abusive behavior and death, Pamela's voice appears less and less frequently. In fact, in Em's final memory of a time when life was good, Pamela's presence does not appear at all.

Artistry in detail can also be created through literary devices such as flashback, foreshadow, simile, and metaphor. Other novels possessing especially poignant descriptions or artistry include Harry Mazer's *When the Phone Rang.* In Billy's hurry to answer the phone, he bumps a family photo that breaks as it hits the ground. Although a casual accident, the very next phone call informing him of his parents' death in a plane crash makes that broken picture an omen of what is to come for the Kellers.

The story of *When She Was Good* provides an example of fragmented storytelling and the use of flashback. The reader learns about the death of Em's parents, her searches for work, and Pamela's outbursts through the use of flashback interspersed with the present. And although the reader sees Em purchasing Pamela's coffin early in the story, the most compelling flashback involves finally informing the reader of Pamela's actual death, which does not present itself until Chapter 49. As the reader comes to know the details, Em comes to accept her own guilt, relief, and sorrow over her sister's death.

In terms of simile and metaphor, there are many examples found in the Mazers' books. Perhaps the most compelling use of metaphor is again in Norma Fox Mazer's *When She Was Good.* In the final chapter of the novel, Em recalls her only positive memory in a story full of flashbacks. In this memory, Em and her mother make elderberry jam. According to Nilsen and Donelson (2001), "The memory of the 'good' jam is a metaphor for the good thoughts that Em now manages to have. She can't change the past, but by being able to change the way she thinks about it, she is free to move

forward with her life" (p. 125). Em's desire to tend a garden is also an effective metaphor for her improving ability to reach out to others.

Any other number of novels could be examined for examples of effective simile and metaphor, especially Norma Fox Mazer's *After the Rain*. Within this novel, Rachel develops a unique relationship with her dying grandfather. Within this chapter of *After the Rain*, Rachel reaches out to an elderly stranger while she recovers from her grandfather's death:

> Her heart fills in some strange and surprising way, and all the way home, against all logic, she feels that she has somehow helped her grandfather. And it all comes back to her. The walks, the games, the food, the coughing, Alice, the white dog, maple-walnut ice cream—everything. And the missing becomes very real, very tangible, a little clawed insect stuck in her chest. (p. 244)

The use of his ugly image of a clawed insect in the midst of Rachel's beautiful memories highlights the conflicting emotions death and loss can create. Mazer's artistry in details such as this makes her novels worthy of examination for their literary quality.

The Mazer novels mentioned above provide just a few examples of literary quality based on artistry in detail. As successful and practiced writers, the Mazers understand the literary elements best suited for their stories. These literary qualities of simile and metaphor, imagery, flashback, and foreshadowing add to the argument for utilizing the Mazers' novels in an English classroom.

Emotional Impact

Teaching fiction allows educators the opportunity to explore plot, character, and other literary elements with their students. However, a much-neglected aspect of teaching novels is discussing how readers are emotionally affected by what they read. According to Cart (1996), this is one of the benefits of fiction in the first place. Cart believes that reading fiction "gives us not only an external view of another life, however, but an internal one as well, through its empathetic immediacy, the emotional rapport that it offers the reader; it enables us, in short, to eavesdrop on someone else's heart" (p. 269). Hipple and Maupin (2001) also recognize that discussing emotional reactions takes a backseat to teaching the elements of fiction, especially when a standardized test may be waiting in the wings:

> The business of the emotional impact of literature seems often overlooked in many classrooms, having given way to factual matter that may appear on tests. We believe, however, that attention to what readers feel about a book they are studying may well be every bit as important as what they know about it. (p. 42)

Novels written by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer provide adolescents the opportunity to laugh, cry, get angry, and get in touch with many other emotions that adolescents possess.

While every novel written by the Mazers strikes an emotional chord at some level, some are more emotionally powerful than others. Norma Fox Mazer's *A Figure of Speech* and *After the Rain* are particularly touching in their portrayal of the special relationship between a girl and her grandfather. Speaking of *After the Rain*, one critic notes, "What distinguishes this book, making it linger in the heart, are the realistic

portrayals of the tensions, guilt, and sudden, painfully moving moments involved in Rachel's and Izzy's situations" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000).

Many young adults relate to this special bond with a grandparent, which makes the death of Jenny and Rachel's grandfathers more emotional for the reader. In fact, the concept of death has quite an emotional impact on young people. Other novels exploring the emotional impact of death include *When the Phone Rang, When She Was Good, Girlhearts*, and *The Last Mission.*

Young love is incredibly powerful for adolescents. They feel as if no one has had emotions matching the strength of their own, so novels possessing this passionate idea of young love are quite effective. *When We First Met, Someone to Love*, and *Heartbeat* are novels exploring love, commitment, betrayal, and heartache. Writing of *When We First Met,* Lystad (1994) notes "emotions of hatred, guilt, forgiveness, and caring are expressed. Relationships are complex, often explosive, and they ring true" (p. 432). The Mazers' realistic portrayal of young love will ring true for many young readers.

Anger, frustration, loneliness, happiness, and guilt are just a few in the vast range of emotions teenagers experience. Any number of Mazer novels portrays characters grappling with these emotions. *Out of Control* is a model of dealing with anger and frustration; *Girlhearts* portrays the depths and desperation of loneliness; *Goodnight, Maman* has moments of great happiness; and *Someone to Love* is an exercise in guilt management. When adolescents read about young people feeling what they are feeling, their own emotions are validated. This is an argument for why adolescents should read.

Richard Peck, a writer of young adult literature (1999), agrees that authors and educators cannot ignore the real reason young people read books:

> While we novelists for the young lie awake nights trying to pull tight plots together and worry over the stylistic devices our editors and reviewers are conditioned to look for, our young readers seem far more interested in a book as an emotional outlet. (p. 118)

As educators strive to select the novel best suited for classroom use, they must not forget that in addition to setting, plot and theme, the emotional impact of novels should be addressed. Fortunately, while containing literary elements, stylistic devices, and terrific themes, Mazer novels may also pack an emotional punch.

Teachability

In addition to reading the novels for emotional response, the Mazers' books can be read to help teach young adults the variety of literary elements. Teaching a Mazer novel is easy for several reasons. Mazer novels are fast-paced, written in the voice of young adults, possess believable settings, and do not get bogged down in description. Although a few novels possess tidy endings, for the most part, the characters have a long way to go in their physical, emotional, or metaphorical journeys. The beauty of Mazer novels is that they are accessible to the young reader, but they also possess a great deal of literary merit appreciated by the more advanced reader.

An example of this dual ability to reach both advanced and inexperienced readers is *A Figure of Speech.* Speaking of Norma Fox Mazer's novel, a critic praises its literary merit:

> There is no point at which it passes into an area of depiction or explanation that would exceed the experience of a young adolescent. But there is also no point at which the psychological perceptiveness and narrative control would disappoint an adult reader. (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000)

Several Mazer novels reach this level of success. As a result, Mazer novels should be considered in the English classroom.

Although Hipple and Maupin (2001) have suggested plot, character, and theme in their process of defining quality young adult literature, there are several other literary elements necessary to teach. Novels by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer are strong choices in that they are very teachable: they possess the desired literary elements, they are written on appropriate reading levels, and adolescents relate to them.

Setting

For any English teacher, the elements of fiction remain essential concepts to be covered in the classroom, regardless of the grade level taught. Setting is one of these important elements. For Harry Mazer, "Setting is central to the plots and character development of his books" (Reed, 1996, p. 16). Mazer may be particularly strong in describing his settings due to his personal experiences and his ability to translate that reality into his novel's settings:

> Mazer knows Canada, having lived near its border in upper New York State for most of his adult life and owning a summer camp on a lake like the one in *The Island Keeper*. He also knows the grim, windswept Tug Hill Plateau—not far

> from his New York home—that is the setting for *Snow Bound.* He spent the war years on the base in England and in the bomber he describes in *The Last Mission.* And New York City, the home of his childhood, is the environment that has formed him. (Reed, 1996, p. 76)

In novels such as *Cave Under the City, Snow Bound,* and *The Island Keeper*, the setting and the strength of its verisimilitude directly relate to the plot and the development of character. "Next to voice, [Mazer] considers place the most important element in his novels" (Reed, 1996, p. 72).

In many of Harry Mazer's novels, Reed (1996) argues that setting also establishes the tone of the novel. The examples she cites include Cleo's isolated cave in *The Island Keeper*, which helps to highlight Cleo's attempt at independence while battling the elements of the Canadian wilderness. Another example is *The Solid Gold Kid*, co-written with Norma Fox Mazer, where the initial sighting of the kidnapper's gray van parallels the gloominess of the days and the conflict yet to come. Reed also believes that setting is crucial in *Who Is Eddie Leonard?,* where Eddie's bleak apartment encourages Eddie to find a new home—even one that does not belong to him—by posing as the family's missing son. *Someone's Mother is Missing* also possesses a discouraging setting as the family prepares to attend a funeral in the beginning of the novel. This opening scene highlights the theme of loss throughout the text.

Other novels with settings crucial to character development include *Cave Under the City*, where brothers Tolley and Bubber hide from authorities and avoid starvation in the abandoned buildings of New York City during the Great Depression (modeled after Mazer's own apartment building while growing up). Reviewers of the novel have said,

"The details of life in the city during the Depression are vivid" (Reed, 1996, p. 77). Another city setting, although a more modern one, is that of the novella *Dog in the Freezer*. The cold and sterile city provides no area to bury the neighbor's dead, surly dog, forcing Jake to develop compassion, persistence, and understanding on his journey around New York City.

Harry Mazer's *The Wild Kid, The War on Villa Street, Snow Bound, The Last Mission* also have settings crucial to the plot and character development.

Suspense

Reed (1996) provides an excellent definition of the suspense novel:

> The suspense story usually has a complex plot and may contain several subplots, which help to build tension and uncertainty. Character development of both the protagonist and the antagonist is central to the plot, and the authors frequently provide clues that are misleading. Chapters usually begin with hooks and end with cliffhangers to keep the reader turning pages, the setting is important and adds to the foreboding sense of drama within the plot. Literary techniques such as foreshadowing and flashback are often employed. (pp. 63-64)

This helpful definition makes the value of including suspense novels in the English classroom evident. Harry and Norma Fox Mazer have co-authored one suspense novel, *The Solid Gold Kid*, which possesses a fast-paced plot, diverse characters, and a quick hook to involve readers immediately. From the minute Derek and the four hapless townies jump into the kidnapper's van, they and the reader are off on a wild ride of

suspense and survival. Heins (1977) calls the novel "a skillfully written and credibly plotted suspense story with fascinating psychological overtones" (pp. 451-452).

Harry Mazer has individually written six novels with elements of suspense that could also be used to teach the suspense novel quickly and efficiently within an English class. The novels are *The Last Mission, Snow Bound, When the Phone Rang, Someone's Mother Is Missing, The Island Keeper*, and *The Wild Kid.* All of these novels can be examined for subplots, foreshadowing, and cliffhangers. Norma Fox Mazer has attempted one novel that can be categorized as suspense. In *Taking Terri Mueller*, Terri looks for clues from her past to determine the dark secret her father is hiding. Speaking of *Taking Terri Mueller*, a critic praises Mazer's handling of the suspenseful plot. "The unfolding and the solution of they mystery...are effectively worked...filled with tension and with strong characterization, the book makes compelling reading" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000). For the teacher wanting to design a suspense unit, several Mazer novels make excellent choices.

Point of View

Many adolescents find the concept of point of view quite difficult to comprehend. Some believe the narrator, protagonist, *and* the author are all the same person. Using the Mazers in examining point of view may alleviate many of these problems. Herz and Gallo (1996) believe a strength of young adult literature is that is speaks to adolescents through its characters, whose "dialogue resembles teenage speech, including slang" (p. 8). If adolescents better related to young adult characters, they may better understand the concept of point of view.

The Mazers are creative and diverse in their use of point of view. In several novels by Harry, Norma, and co-written, they use dual points of view. Very often, the narration alternates between a male and female character. In *Someone's Mother is Missing*, cousins Lisa and Sam alternate relating their hunt for Lisa's mother. In *Snow Bound*, Tony and Cindy take turns explaining their survival story. In *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, the Mazers "round out their engrossing narrative with male and female points of view" (Review of the book *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*, 1992, p. 63) as Chris and Vicki provide very different perspectives of one summer's events. Similarly, in *Out of Control*, Valerie and Rollo trade points of view to give the reader a compelling view of victim and victimizer. And often, the Mazers will remain consistent with one adolescent narrator until quickly and briefly presenting the point of view of a parent or grandparent. *When We First Met* and *A Figure of Speech* are examples of this technique.

Cart (1996) argues that the conventional first-person narration found in many young adult novels "encourages the colloquial, the declarative, the conversational, and discourages adventurous diction or syntax, imagery, figurative language, rhythmic or aesthetic expression. Reader empathy seems to demand the sacrifice of literary style" (p. 252). The Mazers have written several novels using the first-person point of view, including the popular *The Solid Gold Kid*, *When She Was Good*, *Crazyfish*, and *Girlhearts*. But instead of maligning the narrative approach, Bushman and Bushman (1993) believe that "the first-person narrative point of view tends to connect more personally with the young adult reader. A bonding occurs between the young adult character and the reader" (p. 31).

However, the Mazers are equally capable of creating effective third-person point of view, which Schuhmann (1982) finds important: "Third-person narration in young adult novels can sometimes enrich a reader's experience with a novel by allowing an author to be more creative, versatile, and thorough in characterization, plot development, and language than is possible when using first-person narration" (pp. 318-319). Further, Schuhmann argues, "Third-person narration also seems to release the language of the young adult novel from the limitation of an average adolescent expressive vocabulary and thus allows for more variety in modes of expression" (p. 319). *Snowbound*; *Heartbeat*; *Bright Days, Stupid Nights*; and *After the Rain* are examples of the Mazers' third-person point of view approach.

On rare occasion, the Mazers have utilized the second person narrative. The use of this narration is startling and highly effective. In *Taking Terri Mueller*, Terri discovers her father kidnapped her from her mother years ago after a custody battle. Until recently, Terri believed her mother was dead. The discovery leads to a great deal of confusion, anger, and doubt:

> And, afterward, too, there was that curious numbness that comes with an accident. A lack of feeling, a lack of connection, all the nerve endings frozen, so that the little shocks you expect as you remember the accident don't come. They hit the frozen nerves and are stopped dead. Then you go through the day after the accident, smiling and talking and thinking, *I'm normal. I'm unaffected.* Only later, much later, do you find the bruises, and discover that you ache everywhere. (p. 86)

Just as Terri feels distance and removed from her father since his terrible secret has been revealed, the use of second-person in the novel at this point allows Terri to make her problem the concern of an abstract "you." This second-person switch is also seen in Harry Mazer's *Hey, Kid! Does She Love Me?*

Teaching Activities

While there are many aspects of a Mazer novel to teach, there are also several activities possible to help young people connect with the Mazers in the classroom.

Using Mazer novels may involve students examining how characters develop from one book to the next. Several characters such as Marcus Rosenbloom, Willis Pierce, Jenny Pennoyer, Tony LaPorte, and Sarabeth Silver are continued in other books. Following a character as she/he ages and develops from novel to novel can encourage a student to evaluate growth and maturity.

An additional assignment could involve having students read several Mazer books (since they are short and accessible) to determine how the authors have grown. Students rarely have the time in a classroom to read more than one novel per author, especially with longer and more difficult classic novels. But with Mazer books, it may be possible to read several novels and analyze if and how Harry or Norma's writing approach and style has changed in their over thirty years of writing. Such an analysis is sophisticated in its scope and would require a great deal from students. Just because students are not reading classics does not mean they are not challenged.

In addition, students could read Harry or Norma Fox Mazer's novels, then read any of the three (or all) of the collaborative efforts to try to determine stylistic changes.

Although both Harry and Norma argue their joint efforts are too "joint" to determine who was responsible for what, students could argue those thematic issues or plot or character development "belonged" to one author or the author. This would be a literary analysis project that is still demanding in its concepts, but less demanding with the reading material. A student could spend more time devoted to the analysis than the actual reading of the texts.

As students devour young adult novels at a much quicker pace, a classroom teacher could design a buddy journal project where students select their own Mazer novels, then write to fellow classmates to discuss plots, emotional reactions, and stylistic issues. Any opportunity to get students writing about and discussing books with their peers is an opportunity worth seizing. Using the Mazers in an English classroom is worthwhile.

Since Mazer novels are short and accessible, a teacher could present a genre unit where the student could read Mazer novels to better understand differing genres. The several genres the Mazers cover include the romance, mystery/suspense, fantasy, short story, survival, historical fiction, coming-of-age, and problem novels. An effective analysis and comparison could be done by students desiring to discuss elements of each type of book while analyzing how the Mazers use these elements within their many texts.

Many young adult novels now fall into the category of a realistic problem novel. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) classify the characteristics of evaluating quality problem novels. Many of those characteristics are as follows:

1. A strong, interesting, and believable plot centering around a problem that a young person might really have.

2. The power to transport the reader into another person's thoughts and feelings.
3. Rich characterization. The characters "come alive" as believable with a balance of good and negative qualities.
4. A worthwhile theme. The reader is left with something to think about. (p. 119)

Based on these qualities, several of the Mazers' novels qualify as quality problem novels. These novels include *Out of Control*, *Silver*, *After the Rain*, *A Figure of Speech*, and *Who Is Eddie Leonard?*

For the teacher wanting her students to analyze aspects of the "Good Cry" novel or the "Coming of Age" novel, the options are plentiful. *Someone to Love*, *After the Rain*, *Girlhearts*, *When She Was Good*, and *Goodnight, Maman* classify as "Good Cry" novels. *When the Phone Rang*, *Downtown*, *Babyface*, and *Three Sisters* are just a few of the Mazers' novels that explore "coming of age." Any educator could design a unit examining genres such as these.

Using historical fiction benefits both the social studies and English classrooms. Therefore, adolescents could study the historical novel in a language arts class and analyze both the literary and historical aspects to improve understanding of both disciplines. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) discuss the strengths of good historical novels, including several of the following criteria:

1. Setting that is integral to the story
2. An authentic rendition of the time, place, and people being featured
3. Believable characters with whom young readers can identify

4. Evidence that even across great time spans people share similar emotions
5. Readers who come away with the feeling that they know a time or place better. It is as if they have lived in it for at least a few hours. (p. 239)

A quick reading of the three historical novels of the Mazers', *The Last Mission*, *The Cave Under the City*, and *Goodnight, Maman* (and the short story "Carmella, Adelina, and Florry" detailing life of the female factory workers in the 1940's), may help students not only determine the characteristics of historical fiction, but force them to analyze whether the Mazer texts truly fit the description of quality historical writing.

While English educators rely heavily upon novel study, short stories also have a place in the English classroom. Therefore, an educator could use Norma Fox Mazer's short story collections *Dear Bill, Remember Me?* and *Summer Boys, Love Girls*. Critics find many good things to say about Norma's collections, especially *Dear Bill*. One critic states that the short stories are "written specifically as a book, a fact which gives the stories an unusual unity and connectedness," while another believes, "Clearly Mazer appreciates the short story form, with its narrow focus and spotlit moments where others might do up the same material as diluted novels" (Contemporary Authors Online, "Norma Fox Mazer," 2000). If this is the case, an educator could assign all of Mazer's short stories in order to assess the collection's "unity and collectedness," or students could select their own stories by which to study the short story genre.

A difficult concept to teach young people is the archetype, but novels written by the Mazers can help. According to Herz and Gallo (1996), archetypes have their role in the classroom, and young adult literature can help:

> Like classic or current adult fiction, some YAL includes a variety of situational archetypes such as the test/trial as a rite of passage, the journey or quest of the hero, birth/death/rebirth, and the search for self. Character archetypes such as the wise old man or woman, the sacrificial redeemer, the hero, the matriarch/patriarch, and the innocent are recognizable in many stories. (p. 11)

Archetypes are not easy concepts to teach adolescents, but Mazer novels are filled with multiple trials, tons of journeys, and many searches for self. Novels to examine for these archetypes include *The Wild Kid*; *The Last Mission*; *Snow Bound*; *Goodnight, Maman*; and *Who Is Eddie Leonard?* just to name a few.

Character archetypes in the Mazers are more difficult to find, but one example is Norma Fox Mazer's *Crazyfish.* This novel does possess the all-knowing Mrs. Fish, who is instrumental in "protect[ing] or assist[ing] the main character in facing challenges" (Herz & Gallo, 1996, p. 68), which is indicative of the wise old woman archetype. Further, the importance of the grandfather is obvious in two of Mazer's novels, *A Figure of Speech* and *After the Rain.* Herz and Gallo (1996) believe the study of archetypes is particularly important in helping students improve their reading experiences:

> [Archetypes] build the foundation for making connections among various works of literature during the course of their reading lives....Archetypes also help students become more conscious of an author's style and to think about and recognize the way in which a particular writer develops a character or story. (pp. 64-65)

Introducing the concept of archetypes can be difficult in the classroom, but Mazer novels could help.

Writing

While teaching reading comprehension and literary analysis skills is extremely valuable in the English classroom, the educator must also stress writing. Fortunately, young adult literature not only helps adolescents become stronger readers, it can promote better writing. Using young adult literature helps a young adult with written response. Written response is a great opportunity to allow students to relate to and explore literature and their own reactions to it, which is also known as reader response. Reader response theory encourages the use of literature to "provide young people with universal themes that interact with their own goals, desires, visions, values, and morals" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 65). In addition, "Writing that ties the literature and the student's world together helps students formulate answers to their personal dilemmas" (Bushman & Bushman, 1993, p. 65). Young adult literature is the ideal avenue for promoting reader response theory in the English classroom.

Mazer novels with which the students identity and appreciate are perfect in eliciting responses regarding character behavior, morals, and attitudes, conflicts, and themes found in the novels. These same concepts explored in the novel can be applied to the adolescent's daily life, which allows the adolescent to be the expert in his opinion and analysis. Too often, the approach in a classroom's novel study is to generate one meaning for all readers. Reader response theory encourages students to write their own responses and not feel limited by the traditional emphasis on "the one right" interpretation. In this sense, any Mazer novel is suited for reader response and

encouraging reading and writing in the classroom. If students truly connect with Mazer novels, they will feel more inclined to write about the novels.

Main Character as Writer

If educators desire their adolescent students to write more, they need to model that behavior themselves. Writing must be stressed and modeled and encouraged as an important, enjoyable, and necessary activity. Fortunately, there are dozens of Mazer novels where the importance of writing is stressed, thereby providing the perfect writing role model.

Many Mazer novels are ideal for teaching students the importance of writing as either a career choice, a simple and effective means of maintaining communication with others, or as a therapeutic experience. *I, Trissy*, written in journal format, demonstrates how Trissy Beers copes with the trauma of her parents' divorce. She even explores writing in several modes such as lists, dialogues and dramas, and diary entries. *I Love You, Stupid!* features protagonist Marcus writing creatively in class, and even securing afternoons away from school to write his stories. Marcus takes the reader through the problems of lack of focus, writer's block, and getting published. Harry Mazer models Marcus's foray into writing after his own desires to write as a youth:

> I was always buying notebooks—notebooks of different sizes, the kinds that fit into your pocket. I called them journals, diaries, workbooks, and I like all those names. They gave me the feeling I was really doing something, but of course what I really had, finally, was a fine collection of empty notebooks. (Reed, 1996, p. 10)

Similarly, Marcus is more into the accoutrements of a writer than the demands of one. In *I Love You, Stupid!*, Mazer shows the reader how difficult it is to be a writer but also provides valuable information regarding the necessary drafting, scheduling, revising, and publishing process. *I Love You, Stupid!* is an excellent novel for showing young people the benefits and rewards of dedicating one's time to writing.

Bright Days, Stupid Nights features four young adults competing as interns at the local newspaper during the summer. They learn a great deal about journalism ethics as well as writing style, story generating, and competition in the newspaper world. *Bright Days* is a very useful book for the journalism class as well, as the novel reminds the reader that ethics are involved and the power of the written word can be enormous. In Norma Fox Mazer's *Babyface*, Toni writes to her friend in California to help maintain their friendship and get help with family problems. In *After the Rain*, Rachel writes journal entries and letters to her brother to share information and gain emotional support. In one of *When She Was Good*'s most horrific scenes, Pamela tears the pages of Em's journal into pieces.

Mazer characters even find value in writing letters no one will ever see. Richie, in the Norma Fox Mazer short story "Avie Loves Ric Forever," writes letters to Stephan she will never send, as does Kathy in "Dear Bill, Remember Me?" Writing these letters helps the protagonists work through their emotions and feeling for these young men. In *Goodnight, Maman*, Karin also finds writing letters cathartic. While recording details of her life in letters to her mother, Karin slowly accepts her new life in her country without her mother.

In the age of technology, e-mail correspondence is an important aspect of writing for communication. In Harry Mazer's *City Light*, George develops an Internet relationship through e-mail; in *Girlhearts*, Sarabeth and her friend fire e-mails back and forth in spite of seeing each other every day in school.

Even the main character in *Out of Control* finds release in writing a powerful letter to the editor to expose her trauma and the school's subsequent cover up. Valerie's letter is a strong example of persuasive writing.

In the many novels of the Mazers, young readers learn a great deal about the importance of writing for pleasure and for purpose. Mazers enable their readers to view writing as necessary, enjoyable, and thought provoking. Portraying characters as writers, either of lists, e-mails, diaries, or screenplays or school assignments, shows the reader the importance of writing in the everyday world.

Conclusion

Like many researchers and educators, Gallo (2001) recognizes the literary quality of many young adult novels:

> Like classics, contemporary books for teenagers have plots that can be charted, settings that play significant roles, and characters whose personalities, actions, and interactions can be analyzed. There are figurative language, foreshadowing, irony, and other literary elements in the best of the newer works. The symbolism, however, usually isn't as heavy as in most classics, and the vocabulary is usually less difficult, but no young adult reader will object to those things; in fact, many teachers I know will be relieved by that as well. (p. 36)

Novels written by Harry and Norma Fox Mazer possess these very literary elements that make them useful with the classics, teachable in the classroom, and enjoyable for young readers. For the educator desiring to help a student emotionally, developmentally, or educationally, the Mazers' novels are an excellent choice.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer are two authors whose contributions to the field of young adult literature are undisputed. For over three decades, these writers have written and continue to write novels that are not only entertaining and enjoyable for young readers, but also they deal with issues and concerns that directly appeal to the adolescent audience.

This adolescent audience is a tough one to capture. Norma Fox Mazer identifies the conflicting emotions ever-present in the world of the adolescent: "The land of the young is the land of energy, enthusiasm, confusion, hope, despair, love, optimism, faith, and belief" (Reed, 1994, p. 3). Adolescents are trapped between childhood and adulthood, and in many ways, they belong in both worlds. What they require are novels capable of addressing these complex needs. They need novels exploring adolescent sexuality as well as getting the first job. They need to read about developing an ideology while watching their bodies develop. Classic novels cannot do this. And as Bland (2001) notes, drastic changes in thinking are needed:

> The implication, of course, is to replace this limited literature with a library that speaks more directly to students and allows them to bridge their own experiences with those on the page. But this is not an easy solution, for it means turning our collective backs on the very canon most of us have defended through the years....So be it. A change—a deep and drastic change—is needed. It's time we

> English teachers embraced and defended those authors whose works have been labeled for too long as juvenile: Robert Cormier, Walter Dean Myers, Madeleine L'Engle, Paul Zindel, Cynthia Voight, Sheila Klass, Robert Lipsyte, Nat Hentoff, Gary Paulsen, Sue Ellen Bridgers. (p. 21)

And now educators can and should add the Mazers to this list.

As authors, the Mazers are interesting to examine. Few authors have had the success each of the Mazers has enjoyed, and few collaborative writing teams—especially a husband and wife—exist in the field. As a result, the Mazers have a special place in the genre of young adult literature, and their contributions are even more note-worthy. The Mazers also deserve recognition for the diversity in their writing. Both have written short stories, essays, poetry, novellas, and novels. The novels include survival stories, adventure, fantasy, romance, problem novels, and historical fiction. Together they have written for pre-adolescents to young adults nearing their twenties. The Mazers have experimented with settings, narrative devices, multiple points of view, and themes. Studying the Mazers and their material provides anyone with a strong lesson in writing style and the development of writing as a craft.

But primarily the Mazers want adolescents to read their books. Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer do not write in hopes of helping a young person develop self-esteem, nor do they wish their novels to be deconstructed in a classroom setting. They desire to create a good story their readers will appreciate and enjoy. Due to the range of their writing approaches, they are able to capture a wide audience possessing diverse interests. Research has determined that female readers enjoy romance, followed by mystery and suspense and novels dealing with the problems of growing up. Young male readers

prefer sports novels, then science fiction, adventure and survival, and mystery and suspense (Reed, 1994, p. 15). With the exception of science fiction (Norma Fox Mazer has written only one fantasy, and Harry none), the scope of Mazer material covers young adults' preferences.

In an age where more high school freshmen are entering reading one, two, or more years below grade level, teachers cannot teach the canon, composition, and literary criticism as they once could. Now they must address the increasing numbers of reluctant readers who come into the classroom each day:

> Reluctant readers come in both male and female varieties and from all social and I.Q. levels. Many of them have fairly good reading skills; they simply don't like to read. Others are poor readers partly because they get so little practice. What these students have in common is that they have been disappointed in their past reading. The rewards of reading—what they received either emotionally or intellectually—have not come up to their expectations, which were based on how hard they worked to read the material. They have therefore come away feeling cheated. (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001, p. 346)

Educators are finally realizing that acknowledging an adolescent's reading preference may well improve his attitude toward reading. Under the pretense of knowing what is best for the students, teachers traditionally select the classroom reading material, leaving young adults' voices unheard. However, in his essay "Big Books, Sex, and the Classics" (1992), Harry Mazer chides the educator possessing that faulty philosophy: "Literature belongs to all of us. It's a scandal if a student graduates having no use for books or literature, and hating to read" (p. 7). Further, Bland (2001) warns the educator,

"In short, it's time we legitimized the whole of literature for our students and rejected without qualms the presumption that certain books are more fit to be read than others" (p. 21). Young adult novels such as those written by the Mazers deserve top billing in classrooms, especially when they are suggested to help a student's emotional, social, and educational development.

In the educational setting, teachers and librarians acknowledge the alarming trend: young people do not read. Due to poor reading skills, a simple lack of interest in reading materials, or a combination of both, a frightening number of adolescents are failing to make connections with literature. The result? Reading scores fall. In an era when a school's success is bound tightly with standardized test scores, educators and administrators must soon understand that getting students reading is the solution to raising these scores. Teachers can teach reading and test reading, but until the students *practice* reading, they will not become better readers, nor will standardized test scores improve.

If one is still not convinced how crucial it is to encourage reading through young adult literature, in her essay "The Ice Cream Syndrome," Norma Fox Mazer (1992) reflects upon the dangers associated in the life of a non-reader:

> Reading often has all kinds of moral qualities attached to it. It 'widens your horizons.' It 'puts you in touch with our literary heritage.' What else does reading do that's good for you? Oh, yes, it keeps your brain alert; it exercises your imagination, improves your vocabulary, not to speak of your reading scores on those damnable but necessary (we think) states tests. And more: it gets you in decent working order through this society of ours, which is structured on the

> assumption that the citizens are literate. As much of a stranglehold as TV has on our minds, the written word is still cheaper and remains a standby, a staple, a necessity for advertising, for charitable appeals, for news, for information, for getting a driver's license, renting an apartment, applying for health insurance, or understanding your bills. (p. 29)

That is not to say, however, that young adult literature is the cure-all for what the nation feels are lagging test scores or an ill-prepared young workforce. Young adult author Aidan Chambers would agree with many critics that young people need to read literature other than young adult literature as soon as possible. But Chambers also recognizes that young adults will feel more comfortable expanding their reading horizons thanks to the young adult genre available to them:

> [Young adults] will reach into it more vigorously, more willingly, and with deeper understanding of the pleasures it offers if they have encountered on the way a literature which is *for* them...and which is written and published with so much dedication and skill as the best of the mainstream work. (Cart, 1996, pp. 245-246)

Of course, most educators within the classroom recognize that standardized test scores do not take into account the child's emotional, psychological, physical, or social development. Reading is fine for improving academic skills, but many students in today's classrooms are more concerned with survival skills—how to survive family relationships, how to survive peer pressure, and how to survive the death of a loved one. Fortunately, reading can assist in this development as well. In an essay, Norma Fox Mazer (1992) understands the complexity of life but notes that reading can be the greatest tool in moving successfully through it:

> Stories are what we human beings feed on emotionally and psychologically. Stories explain the world to us in a personal, feeling way...We know about nerve regeneration, black holes, quasars, white dwarfs...yet we still crave stories. We are creatures of curiosity. We want to know about other creatures like ourselves, and we can't possibly satisfy that curiosity without reading: novels, stories, true stories and fictional stories.
>
> We come out of ourselves when we read. We reach beyond our smallness and into the great world. And this we need to do more today than ever before. We all need each other now, more than we ever have. We need each other to save our world, our planet. We need to understand others, to take them into our lives and ourselves. The greatest gift you can give your students is a love of reading. (p. 31)

This love of reading is best developed when an adolescent can select his own reading material, connect with it, and grow from having read it. An adolescent can do all of this successfully with novels written by the Mazers.

Why Read the Mazers?

As was discussed in Chapter Four, novels written by the Mazers are capable of addressing, at some level, each of Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks, be it preparing for a career or family, developing relationships with the opposite sex, or developing a social and moral conscience. For each of the developmental tasks, the Mazers have written at least one novel that can be used to help an adolescent address these tasks. The Mazers approach their writing and their stories with an honesty the

young reader will appreciate. In spite of the thirty-year span of writing, characters in the books of the 1970's are just as believable and realistic as those of the 1990's and 2000's. Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer write the teenagers of yesterday, today, and the future. Their empathetic, not overly sentimental, and very realistic portrayals of young people seeking jobs, finding a girlfriend or boyfriend, negotiating familial relationships, and establishing a sense of identity are strengths present in most of their novels. Even Harry Mazer himself takes prides in the honest and real approach to his writing:

> Why are my books important? They're important because they're honest, and they are written with real guilt...There is integrity in the work so it's effective, not hokey. I have a great belief in the workmanship, good work, solid work, and work that is well founded has a structure with a foundation, a cellar and walls and a roof—it stands. (Reed, 1996, p. 127)

Not only do the Mazers' novels stand up to Havighurst's developmental tasks, the novels are also worth approaching in the English classroom, and in classrooms of other disciplines. Within Chapter Five, the novels written by the Mazers were examined for their merit in the English classroom. It was asserted that the Mazers' work is worth analyzing for its characterizations, settings, points of view, and other literary elements. The Mazers possess some diversity in their characters, although each adolescent protagonist offers a realistic and honest voice, which Cart (1996) feels is essential to quality adolescent fiction:

> This fiction must give faces to all young adults—straight and gay, black and white and brown, native born and newly immigrant. Homeless, impoverished,

> endangered, abused, afraid. And its writers must risk taking the gloves off to tackle dangerous subjects and to deal with them unflinchingly and honestly. Not to shock and scandalize and sensationalize but to tell the simple, plain, and unvarnished truth. For how can we change the world if we cannot first see it plain and then see ourselves, whole—warts and all—in it? (pp. 277-278).

The Mazers are fearless in their approaches to death, sexual abuse, alcoholism, and divorce, and their readers are rewarded with honest, genuine stories.

While reading the Mazers, young adults can search for symbols, metaphor, and other figurative language. They can study the writing process as well as the genre of the short story or the historical novel. Young readers can be instructed to examine Mazer novels for literary quality, helping them understand their reading experience while helping them make it their own:

> Our goal must be to help young people know individual works aesthetically. Understanding and appreciating the aesthetic as a way of knowing is essential for all of our students who, when they have opportunities to participate in a work, learn to discriminate between aesthetic experiences that are rich and those that are not. (Zitlow, 2000, p. 26)

As students better understand what makes a novel worth reading, they can apply this knowledge to other works of literature. Also, they are better able to approach other reading experiences. Many students will find reward in reading a Mazer novel as a companion piece to a classic novel, as the Mazer novel is shorter, possesses simpler language, and utilizes characters to which they can better relate.

As well as helping a young adult grow educationally within the classroom, several novels written by the Mazers may assist a young person grow to better handle emotional and social problems that may be plaguing him. It has been suggested that the Mazers have proven worthwhile in terms of bibliotherapy and giving a voice to young adults without voices:

> As we adult readers can turn to fiction for portrayals of the universalities of our condition, our students can find their perspectives reflected and explored in a body of fiction of their own, books that can help them grow up, books that can help them love books. (Atwell, 1987, p. 161)

In this sense, as young adults use books to better understand the world, they also develop improved reading habits that may help them learn to love and appreciate books.

In an age of "return to basics" and a fear driven by test scores, the idea of young adults actually enjoying books has gotten lost. Yet nearly every educator would agree that promoting the enjoyment of reading is key to solving many of the problems discussed in this dissertation. The mere "reading for reading's sake" cannot be ignored. If students enjoy reading the novels by the Mazers, then it may not be necessary to deconstruct the themes nor categorize the methods of narration. Perhaps the books should simply be enjoyed. Louis Sachar, author of many young adult books including the Newbery-winner *Holes*, says books do not always have to have a message:

> [*Holes*] was written for the sake of the book and nothing beyond. It was meant to be enjoyed. If there's any lesson at all, it is that reading is fun...When I finish reading a book I love, I feel somehow enriched by it. My favorite books have

become a part of me. That's so much more significant than anything as mundane as a moral or a lesson. (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001, pp. 203-204)

While reading Mazer novels, young people may find examples of social ideology, third-person point of view, or connections with a classic novel. However, if they find *enjoyment*, then half the battle is won.

Implications for Further Research on the Mazers

The information found within the chapters of this dissertation can be useful in many ways if one desired to continue research specific to the Mazers. There are countless classroom activities that a qualitative researcher could examine to determine how Mazer novels can effectively be used in the classroom. These activities can be monitored to explore the Mazers in a personal and educational setting. Having the class select a Mazer novel and having the teacher or students read aloud to the class each day might improve reading skills, listening skills, and reading attitude. With the numerous choices of Mazer novels available to young people, students could select their novels or choice and utilize "journal buddies" where students write back and forth with one another to discuss the books. A qualitative researcher could analyze these journals to assess reading comprehension and reading enjoyment.

The Mazers are systematic in replying to the letters they receive from readers. A researcher could design a program where students read Mazer novels and write to the authors, creating a special dialogue between author and reader. Other class projects worthy of investigation may include having students "teach" Mazer books to the class or provide oral or written reviews to be posted in the classroom. Such research projects

would give students a voice in determining selections and how they feel about those selections, making the students the experts in the analyses. Reading attitude and improved reading comprehension could be assessed.

In terms of counseling and bibliotherapy, a researcher could explore a teen counseling group where students discuss real problems based on the experiences of the Mazers' characters. There are many possible quantitative and qualitative research possibilities still existing to explore the impact of the Mazers on young readers and the field of young adult literature.

Implications for Further Research—Other Authors and Young Adult Literature

A great deal of work is still to be done in analyzing and evaluating the field of young adult literature. To determine the value of other young adult writers' material, Havighurst's developmental tasks of education can be applied. If the genre of young adult literature is to increase its value in the minds of researchers, librarians, educators, and parents, perhaps a greater psychological and sociological link must be established. In addition, there are other psychological and sociological criteria available in addition to Havighurst (such as those developed by Maslow and Erikson) which could be used to assess and evaluate young adult literature.

Just as there are other frameworks possible for evaluating the developmental appropriateness of young adult novels, there are numerous yardsticks of value that can measure the educational and affective quality of young adult literature, such as Blair and Gerber's (1959) "Nine Yardsticks of Value" and Murphy's (2001) "In Search of Literature for the Twenty-First Century." Whichever criteria are used, Cart (1996)

suggests that there are a great many questions we should ask of young adult literature before believing its quality:

> As we choose works of YA literature to use with our students, we can evaluate them by asking questions like these: "Do they offer wisdom—or knowledge, at least, which is the beginning of wisdom; are they artfully written; are they successful in aesthetic terms; and are they entertaining?" (p. 251)

Fortunately, the Mazers novels do all three of these things—provide knowledge, have moments of aesthetic beauty, and are enjoyable and entertaining for young people. But what about the novels written by other young adult authors? A researcher could utilize these other existing standards, or develop his or her own by which to rate the quality of young adult novels by a particular author, or those of the genre in general.

The novels by the Mazers are described as effective companions to several classic novels taught in the high school setting. A further study, perhaps qualitative in nature, could pair young adult novels by other authors with classic novels to assess student comprehension and appreciation. Similarly, a qualitative study could be designed using young adult novels of a particular author within the constructs of bibliotherapy. As adolescents' problems and the severity of those problems increase, a quality study establishing the link of young adult novels in helping students seems crucial.

The Mazers exist as unique contributors to the field of adolescent literature, but countless other authors deserve specific study and analysis. As the field of young adult literature grows in popularity and importance, new authors appear and veterans continue their histories of success. Just as the authors of the classics warrant study, the authors of young adult literature deserve the spotlight. Within these studies, one can discover

interesting approaches to writing and revision, from where these authors gather material in order to reach their readers, and how the authors feel they have influenced young readers.

Finally, the writing team of the Mazers has produced novels equally successful to those written by Harry and Norma individually. How many other writing teams in the field of young adult literature exist? What are their approaches and methods, and what do they hope to accomplish? As the Mazers' writing efforts can be studied as examples of style, approaches, and devices, so can the writings of other writing teams.

Conclusion

Although a great deal has been said about the young adult novel, those written by the Mazers and other successful authors are not guaranteed to solve the world's problems. In fact, Nilsen and Donelson (2001) help clarify that although books can be powerful, they cannot cure the severely emotionally disturbed, nor can they guarantee the reader will make the same socially appropriate decisions suggested in the text. And although these Mazer novels may deal with the same problems the reader is facing, each reader will bring his or her own experience to the text and may or may not find suitable help. That said, the power and implications of using young adult novels such as those written by the Mazers could be enormous. These novels may:

1. Provide a common experience for both young adults and adults upon which to focus their attention

2. Serve as a topic of discussion, making others more comfortable because it is easier to talk about a character's problems instead of his own (even though they may be similar)
3. Provide readers the confidence to handle problems such as the characters face
4. Improve a reader's understanding of the world and discovering his place in it
5. Show the reader that he is not alone in facing problems or experiencing difficult emotions
6. Provides insight into the concerns, values, and psyche of the adolescent (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001, p. 354)

The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss the value of the Mazers and their novels within the field of young adult fiction. However, there is a great deal more at stake here than the reputation of the Mazers as young adult writers. If educators do not soon embrace the world of young adult literature, they risk the reading lives of their students. And if students are not reading, according to Harry Mazer (1992), they are also not fully living:

> What is literature but the marking and reflection of our lives? It's paying attention, framing, distillation and celebration. Literature is about the world we inhabit. In literature, we hear the voices and spirit of our times. We need to hear those voices. The young, who still know so little and want so much, hunger for them. Literature is an ordering of the tumble-jumble of our thoughts, our fantasies and fears, our ecstasies and exaltations. It offers answers to the big questions and the trifling ones as well (p. 7).

As additional research and study is dedicated to the field of adolescent literature and the importance of its authors, one must remember Cart's (1996) warning:

> We cannot permit young adult literature to be silenced. Everyone who cares about literature and about young people has a dead-serious responsibility to focus attention on, support, and defend the very best, most courageously outspoken and bluntly honest of young adult books. By doing so, we strengthen *its* voice, we amplify it so that is can be heard by those who most need to hear it: the most-at-risk-ever young adults themselves. (p. 278)

Harry Mazer and Norma Fox Mazer have done what they can to strengthen the voice of young adults and the literature made for them. It is time for educators, critics, researchers, librarians, parents, and young readers to take heed of that voice.

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