

Call for Manuscripts, Study and Scrutiny, Volume 6, Issue 2

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RURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: CONSIDERING DIVERSITY AND COMBATting RURAL ERASURE IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD

Nearly half, or around 44%, of the world’s population is rural—that’s around 3.5 billion people—and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, around 20% of the U.S. population (60 million people) live in rural areas. Within these global and U.S. rural populations, there are a variety of unique and diverse intersectional identities. That is, readers living in rural places may feel a strong resonance with their identity as rural people while also belonging to other cultural groups (e.g., queer, Latinx, differently-abled), and we consider the centering of intersectional rural stories to be of great concern to the field of YA literature.

Despite their prevalence in the U.S. and global populations, rural people, places, and experiences are often difficult to find in YA books (Petroni & Behrens, 2019; Ruday et al., 2021). It’s hard to know just how difficult because there is no market research on the percentage of YA books published that take place in different (e.g., rural, urban) geographies and because “rural fiction” is not used as a genre in conjunction with its “urban fiction” counterpart (criticized as it may be).

Despite its relative invisibility, rurality in young adult literature (YAL) is a growing area of consideration for teaching YAL in classrooms as a way to increase curricular relevance (Kuehl, 2020a; Kuehl, 2020b; Parton, 2020; Parton, 2022a; Parton, 2022b; Ruday et al., 2021). In 2020, author Jason Reynolds was appointed National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, and in his interview as part of the *TIME 100 Talks* (2021), he described his frustration with urbanormative attitudes toward rural places:

The fact that we call so much of this country “fly-over” is the most disrespectful, arrogant thing in the world to me. Human beings live there. Right? And what we do because we’ve never been there—we make wildly gross assumptions and we assume that the entire middle of the country looks a certain way and acts a certain way and believes a certain thing instead of wrestling with the fact that human beings are who they are, that everybody is a complicated figure, that we’re all amalgams of our experiences and what we know in our families.

We strongly believe that all young people—including rural youth from all nations, cultures, experiences, and backgrounds—deserve to see themselves in books, and that the representations found therein must combat the enduring deficit ideologies and negative stereotypes of rural people as uncultured, unintelligent, and uncivilized. As such, this special issue considers the study,

teaching, and centering of intersectional rural stories through western and global YAL as an issue of equity and seeks to draw further attention to the invisibility of rural dreams, lives, and experiences to combat rural erasure in YAL and in classrooms. To that end, we invite critical pieces that interrogate, examine, explore, and critique YAL set in rural places with the aim of dismantling unhelpful stereotypes about rural people and communities.

Cognizant of moving towards the goal of diversifying rural students' experiences with YAL, we are seeking contributions to this special issue that feature critical and empirical studies as well as theoretical and/or conceptual pieces that explore the vast richness of rural life and experience as featured in YAL set in and outside of U.S. contexts. Possible questions or topics for consideration include:

- How are various forms of diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, gender, LGBTQ+, ability/disability) represented in young adult literature set in rural places?
- How are racism/whiteness/ethnocentrism problematized in rural YA literature?
- What messages about rurality are conveyed to readers of young adult literature set in rural places? In what ways do characters take up and/or disrupt stereotypical depictions of rurality?
- How do stories set in rural places take up and/or disrupt the dominant narratives of leaving; that is, that to be successful, rural young people must leave their hometowns?
- How does YA literature set in rural places bring awareness to the economic exploitation of rural people? How can critically reading texts set in resource extraction communities (Howley & Howley, 2010) empower rural young people to see themselves as agents of change?
- What representations of the global rural (across Western and Non-Western populations) exist in YA literature? How can expanding the study of rural YA literature to include Non-Western rural communities further shed light on what it means to be rural, live rural, and teach rural perspectives?
- What theories can be applied to the study of rural YA literature that will broaden our understanding of its relevance to middle and high school classrooms in both rural and non-rural communities?

Send critical or empirical studies with a title page, as a Microsoft Word file to crag.a.hill@ou.edu. Manuscripts should be approximately 8,000-12,000 words, including tables, figures, and references, and should be written in Times New Roman 12-point font. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with 1" margins and should follow the 7th edition of the APA style guide.

All references to the author(s) should be removed from the body of the manuscript in preparation for blind review. However, the title page should include the following:

- author contact information
 - a 100-word abstract
 - 5-8 keywords
 - an originality statement
 - 2-3 sentence author bio
 - social media information
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Study and Scrutiny: Research on Young Adult Literature is a peer-reviewed, open access journal. As such it provides immediate access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

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