Welcome to this Short Course:

Heartaches and hard-won wisdom:
Exploring Coming of Age Short Stories
led by Patty Payette, Ph.D.
University of Louisville
Fourth and final session: June 25
Welcome!

Roadmap:
- Introductions
- Closing the loop from last session…
- Coming of Age genre & concept of “liminal space”
- Exploration and discussion of “Where Is It Written?” And “Marigolds”
- Connecting texts across the sessions
- Final reflection
Goals for the short course: review

• Explore the literary coming of age genre
• Read, discuss, analyze the texts individually and as a set
• Deepen the meaning of the texts through active reading
• Realize new insights about the texts, the genre and the human condition
• Have fun!
Closing the loop from last week

1. Explore the literary coming of age genre
   What I’m finding most interesting or engaging about the genre is..

2. Read, discuss, analyze the texts individually and as a set
   What I’m finding most interesting/engaging about the texts (or a specific text) is....

3. Deepen the meaning of the text through active reading
   I find the best way to deepen my understanding of a text is…

4. Realize new insights about the texts, the genre and the human condition
   New insights I’m gleaning about the text, the genre or the human condition are..

5. Have fun!
   Are you having fun yet? Why or why not?........

On the back, please share a question on your mind, or a confusing point or concept you wish we could revisit or address.
1. Explore the literary coming of age genre
   *What I’m finding most interesting or engaging about the genre is….*

2. Read, discuss, analyze the texts individually and as a set
   *What I’m finding most interesting/engaging about the texts (or a specific text) is….*

   **Themes from your responses…**
   - The universal aspects of coming of age****
   - Depth of analysis that can be done
   - Parallels to be found between texts
   - Relevancy to my life
   - The diversity and cross-cultural experiences
   - Reflections on my own coming of age
   - New awareness of challenges of the growing up years
   - The art and beauty of the short story
3. Deepen the meaning of the text through active reading

I find the best way to deepen my understanding of a text is...

Themes from your responses...

- Read and re-read***
- Discuss with others & hearing others’ points of view
- Ask questions while reading
- Framework for Analysis
- Look for patterns of behaviors
- Write comments in margins while reading

Try “the three whys”
5. Have fun!

*Are you having fun yet? Why or why not?*

- Engaging topics & engaging people
- Enjoy the writers’ styles & approaches to the short story
- Get to learn (no strings attached)
- Exercise my brain in a new way
Do we ever stop coming of age?
What about the last chapter of life?

http://theagingamericaproject.com/

What will it mean for us all to grow up, live and age in a society where half the citizens are over the age of 50? Never in human history has this been our reality.

And it’s not just Americans. Europe, China, Japan – we are an aging globe.

It’s new and it’s not temporary – this is a permanent historic transformation.
Coming of age genre—what is it?

Coming of age: a story that relates an adolescent’s movement toward adulthood and the corresponding awakening to a new understanding of his or herself and the world around him or her.
Questions....

Has there been a change in how authors approach coming of age stories over time?

- Coming of age as social integration (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship)
- Coming of age novel as a social commentary (Oliver Twist or Jane Eyre)
- Coming of age as platform for adventure tale (Huckleberry Finn or Treasure Island)
- Coming of age realism & modern social commentary (All Quiet on the Western Front or Catcher in the Rye)
- Coming of age realism for young adults (Judy Blume book)
- Coming of age integration into other genres (The Hunger Games or Harry Potter series)
Also….  

Can we continue the fun of this class?

Some ideas…
- Book clubs (might focus on a genre or time period)
- Literature courses
- Interviews/videos
- Facebook or email the author
- Engage with local authors
- Keep the questions with you
- Other?
And...question for me...

- What is it that you find most interesting about this genre?
- What is your favorite text?
- When is a story just a story?
Texts to consider….

- Michael Chabon “Mysteries of Pittsburgh”
- Jamaica Kincaid “Lucy”
- Annie Dillard “An American Childhood”
- Toni Morrison “Bluest Eye” or “Song of Solomon”
- Sylvia Plath “Bell Jar”
- Laura Cunningham “Sleeping Arrangements”
- Richard Wright “Native Son”
- Maya Angelou “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”
- Frank Chin “Donald Duk”

Many good classics are deal with coming of age:
C. Dickens, C. Bronte, J. Austen, G. Eliot., E. Wharton, T. Mann
There’s this…..

“Hen one reads, one reads in the context of his or her own world. Hat the reader encounters is not the world of the author; the reader encounters the world of the text. He meaning which the text has for the reader emerges from the interaction of the reader’s world with the world of the text.

He meaning does not reside in the text or in the author's intentions. He meaning happens as the text is read and reflected upon.

Of course, knowledge of the author's world and intentions, and of the responses of other readers, can help one read a text better—with more insight and satisfaction.”

http://web.mst.edu/~gdoty/classes/conceptspractices/interpretation-literature.html

How? Reflection, discussion, active reading, metaphors and examples from your own life,
Coming of age & concept of the “liminal space”

- Liminal state: “of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase or condition”
- Betwixt and between
- A threshold state—the doorway concept
The Liminal State

Characterized by:

- Openness, ambiguity, and indeterminacy
- A sense of identity dissolves, bringing disorientation
- Limits to thought, self understanding and behavior are relaxed and this can lead to new perspectives
- Bounded (but you can get stuck!)
- Irreversible (connected to a critical life stage—college, new parenthood, adolescence)

• Comes with ‘troublesome knowledge’

Examples? Examples from our texts?
Themes for the short course:

- Money, class and socioeconomic status
- Mentors and positive/negative role models
- Relationship to, and separation from, parents and family
- Cultural and racial background and expectations
- Love and sexuality/gender norms
- Friendship and role of peers

protagonist
Adam Schwartz

- Raised in NJ
- Parents divorced when he was six
- Attended Iowa Writers’ workshop
- Published many short stories The New Yorker and other literary periodicals
- Teaches at Wellesley College
- Focuses his writing on a deeply complex subject--his family

“Where Is it Written?”
Published in an anthology called
Writing our Way Home: Contemporary Stories by American Jewish Writers (1992)

“I wanted my short stories to have the richness and density of a novel, and writing them felt like trying to coax an elephant into a doll house.”
Schwartz’s first novel

Stranger of this Planet (2011)

Based on earlier short stories—1988 and 1992—follows Seth Shapiro

His novel: “Most of it is invented and that it’s all true—true to a fictional universe that parallels my own life.”

Where have you heard the title of this book before?

Why does he seem to keep writing variations on the same story? Why do our writers often seem to be writing about these coming of age events that “parallel their own life,” if not autobiography?
“Where Is it Written?"

What Schwartz says about himself growing up: “Between the distant poles of my mother and father, I felt as I were trying to navigate my way in the middle of some vast white tundra”

In “Where is it Written,” we see Sam struggling between his parents who represent two different poles.

- What does his father represent? What does he offer Sam in the book? (both the positive and the negative)
- What does his mother represent? What does she offer Sam in the book? (both the positive and the negative)
- How does Sam try to resolve it? Is he successful?
“Where Is It Written?”

- Schwartz’s mother commented on his novel:
  “I love the way you capture all my meshugah but humanize me at the same time.”
  - How does Schwartz try to do this in “Where is it Written?” Is she humanized?
  - What about the last scene—what happens at his coming of age ceremony?
- What about the title? Why is this question by his mother the title?
Eugenia Collier

- Born 1928 in Baltimore
- Her father was a physician and mother was an educator
- B.A. from Howard U.
- Ph.D. from U. of Maryland
- Taught college-level English at a number of schools and colleges and retired in 1996
- Began in late 1960s to publish stories and essays
- Writing touches on her love of African American literature, drama, and culture

“Marigolds”
- 1969 award winner of Gwendolyn Brooks Prize for Fiction
- One of the most widely-anthologized stories in English secondary school collections
Marigolds

- Who is telling the story and from what vantage point?
- If Lizbeth were in a liminal phase, describe the phase. Identify the components of the liminal phase as that of disorientation, new perspectives, and the irrevocable change.
- What is the “troublesome knowledge” she gains?
- Describe the ending—where she ends up—both as a kid and an adult.
Think of both stories for tonight….

I chose these two stories as our last two texts to read, in part because I feel that the protagonists grow and make an important shift at the end of their episodes. What do you think about the endings of these two stories? Do they represent a signpost of maturity that stands apart from the other stories we have read?
Coming of age genre—what is it?

Coming of age: a story that relates an adolescent’s movement toward adulthood and the corresponding awakening to a new understanding of his or herself and the world around him or her.
Looking at the threads that bring the texts together. Work at your tables.

Movement toward adulthood:
Where or what is the “threshold” each protagonist finds him or herself to be during the episode?

Awakening to a new understanding:
What is the troublesome knowledge they gain about themselves and/or world around them?

What do we learn?
How are they different that the way they were before—what is the irrevocable, permanent change about them?
What can we learn from this?
Framework for analysis

✓ What’s going on with the protagonist? What is the tone of the text (happy, sad, resigned, content)?

✓ What words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs seem to be especially revealing about the protagonist’s inner and outer journey?

✓ What are the objects, people or places that are significant on this journey? Why or how are they significant?

✓ What might the components in the story symbolize in the coming of age process beyond the story itself?
What do you think…?

Please answer the questions on the evaluation before you go…

Happy reading!

Thank you!