

# Writing for Young Adults by Michelle A. Hansen

## What is Young Adult Lit?

- Books written for and about teens (ages 12-18)
- Kids read up. Remember the rule of -2.
- Focus on issues & themes of interest to and concern teens
- Usually in 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view.
- Length: 45,000 to 90,000 words

## Overview of the Market

- Growing market. Everyone is now publishing YA.
- The focus is on teens, but not just teens read YA.
- Must have good quality writing, solid themes and “feel” YA
- 55% of YA books are purchased by adults, 78% of those adults said they purchased the books for their own reading. (Publisher’s Weekly, Sept 13, 2012). According to Justin Chanda in 2011, “YA is the new romance novel and Kindle is the new brown paper bag to hold it.” (SCBWI Western Washington, April 2011).

## What’s in a good a YA book?

- Teen world and Teen perspective
- Character, Conflict, Change with a side of Angst
- VOICE
- High Concept

## Teen world & Teen Perspective

- Rule #1- Get rid of the parents
- Rule #2- Teens deal with and SOLVE their own problems.
- Rule #3- Issues relate to teens directly, things they experience and are concerned about
- Rule #4- Teens struggle, grow and change
- Rule #5- Optimism. Belief in a better future. Working to make it happen.

## “Secret Sauce of YA”

Character, Conflict, Change with a side of Angst

## Character

- Strong, likeable protagonist.
- Usually female.
- Stack the odds against her. Let her struggle, grow and **change**.

## Conflict

- The conflict must resonate with teens.
- It’s all about me!

## Change

- This sets the YA market apart. The protagonist must change, usually in dramatic ways.
- YA books highlight the pivotal points upon which a teen's identity is built—the things that create lasting change.
- Life turns on moments.

## **What is Angst?** From the Urban dictionary: Angst

Angst, often confused with anxiety, is a transcendent emotion in that it combines the unbearable anguish of life with the hopes of overcoming this seemingly impossible situation. Without the important element of hope, then the emotion is anxiety, not angst. Angst denotes the constant struggle one has with the burdens of life that weighs on the dispossessed and not knowing when the salvation will appear.

## VOICE

- Young & authentic
- Fresh & unique
- Vulnerable, confrontational
- Expresses contradictions
- Establishes a unique POV
- Reader establishes an emotional connection to the character through the voice.

## Tips for Creating YA Voice

- Relax your grammar
- Match sentence structure & paragraphing to audience.
- Embrace immaturity
- DON'T PREACH!
- Hyperbole, hyperbole, hyperbole

## What about "Edgy"?

- Anything goes in YA, but remember the gatekeepers.
- You don't have to be edgy to write YA. Common misconception.
- Cheesy will flop.

## High Concept YA

### What is high concept?

- It is a big idea with broad appeal.
- A good hook and a punchy "So what?"
- THEN, you have to dig deep and tell the truth.

### Common Mistakes in YA

- Characters don't change
- Moralizing or preaching.
- Telling the big idea of the story outright. No suspense.
- Melodrama, over-the-top emotional reactions.
- Denial to hold off the plot.
- Misunderstandings upon which the plot turns. (The ol' Shakespeare comedy routine.)
- Cliché of any and all kinds.

Recommended Reading: *Writing Irresistible Kidlit* by Mary Kole

### Sources used:

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