

Learning How to Write Like Stephenie Meyer

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My final research paper in College that helped me learn how to pursue my interest in writing Young Adult Fiction.



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I was introduced to Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series last semester when I read the first book for a report in my Terror in Literature class. I instantly fell in love with the characters and tension that build up because of the forbidden love between a teen girl and a teen male vampire. Meyer has an amazing ability to write in the mindset of a teenage girl, even though she's in her 30s. Last month I finally finished the series. I loved how she wrapped up all the loose ends in the final novel *Breaking Dawn*. It made me want to know more about Meyer and her writing process. Meyer claims that the premise for the first book came to her in a dream. I do not think that I will have that kind of luck, so I looked up what others have to say about her work. When I looked up what literary critics think about Stephenie Meyer's work, I found that most of them do not have anything positive to say. They are particularly critical of the last book in the series, *Breaking Dawn*. It made me wonder how the critics can be so hard on Meyer when she is so successful. Well first of all, the targeted audience of Meyer's work is young adults, not literary critics. So I decided to find out more about the young adult market, specifically Young Adult Fiction, to learn how to write like Stephenie Meyer. The key elements of writing Young Adult Fiction are: understanding the targeted audience, creating relatable and believable characters and plot, using vivid language to grab the reader's attention, and learning where to draw the line on sensitive issues (like sex, violence, or drugs).

First, the targeted audience needs to be defined. Brian W. Sturm and Karin Michel discussed young adults and their psychological state in "The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels". Even though the article refers specifically to problem novels, I feel the information is relevant to all those writers who want to be young adult authors. They feel that "Young adults are typically twelve to eighteen years old (and) are in a transitional period of their lives that is fraught with change" (Sturm 39). These young adults "want to read novels about issues they face every day or fantasies they wish they could" (Buccieri 35). It is important to understand the physiological mindset of young adults. Psychologist Gisela Konopka wrote in her article "Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth" that adolescence is characterized by, "audacity, and insecurity; loneliness; psychological vulnerability; mood swings; peer group need; and the need to be argumentative and emotional" (Sturm 39). Allen Nilsen and Kenneth Donelson did a study of the levels of literary appreciation and found that "the young adults in junior high and high school look to their characters" "to see themselves in their reading" and to explore the "other." They want the familiarity to help them feel they are not alone, and they want the novelty to broaden their horizons and to play with future possibilities" (41). Now that the audience is defined, one needs to know the common trends among Young Adult literature.

Looking at the common trends and popular genres in Young Adult literature can help a writer who wishes to write for young adults a sense of what is expected from a young adult author. Paula Brehm-Heeger, the President of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), discussed the common trends in young adult literature. She mentioned that the most popular genre among young adults is, "Fantasy: The popularity of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series has helped increase the popularity of the fantasy genre overall. Some of the most popular books combine fantasy with other elements teens other, such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, *New Moon* and *Eclipse* titles that combine fantasy with doses of romance and horror and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series that combines Mythology and fantasy" (Kennedy). Brehm-Heeger also described the popular themes among young adult: "Fantasy is popular with many teens. Romance never goes out of style and the number of paperback romances and 'chick lit' for teens being published read proves this. For teen guys 'non-fiction' titles are often well-received." (Kennedy). Although young adults are the ones who read these works, a young adult author should also keep in mind that the parents of the potential young adult readers are commonly the people

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buying the books and they are concerned with the content of the books their young adult children are reading.

Young adult authors should also keep in mind the parents of the targeted audience. Harold D. Underdown states that “Not only children read children’s books. Editors read them first. Then parents, grandparents, teachers, and librarians largely decide what children read, although teenagers typically have some control of their own spending. These people are the gatekeepers, and it’s a fact of life that you must get your book past them to the children you want to reach” (Underdown 73). Phyllis J. Fogelman is an editor for children’s books who gives advice that is not only good for editors, but also writers of children’s books (which include Young Adult Literature). Fogelman suggests, “we must also appeal to adults in order to reach our ultimate audience: the children for whom the book is meant in the first place. It is generally adults who buy the books—mainly paperbacks—for themselves. But even these books must first be filtered through booksellers and librarians—more adults” (Gross 306). However, writers must remember that the ones reading the books are the young adults and not their parents. Lisa Rojany Buccieri and Peter Economy state, “so if you want to appeal to parents, get down and dirty—literally, get down into the sandbox and listen to what’s really going on in children’s minds and hearts. And then write from that perspective, writing what a child wants to hear, not what you as a parent feel he has to hear” (Buccieri 59). Now that the targeted audiences and what they desire in Young Adult literature are clearly defined, it is time to start learning about the processes needed to actually write a young adult novel.

Young adult authors must make sure that their characters and plot are believable and relatable. Strum and Michel describe this type of writing as “contemporary realistic fiction”. They go into great detail about the genre stating that, “contemporary realistic fiction is derived from actual circumstances, with realistic settings and characters who face problems and opportunities that are within the range of what is possible in real life” (Strum 40). They also argue that the characters should “resemble real people; live in a place that is or could be real; participate in a plausible, if not probable, series of events; are presented with a dilemma that is of interest to the [the reader]; and discover a realistic solution” (40). Using the first-person perspective helps the readers put themselves in the characters shoes. Strum and Michel state that “the first-person perspective of many of these novels heightens the complicity of the reader in these taboo topics because readers are meant to identify with the “I” in the book. Indeed, it is difficult not to do so. The word “I” is inherently self-referential; it refers to whoever speaks it. Each time the character speaks, the reader reads “I” and treats the experience as if it were his or her own” (43). Stephenie Meyer is a young adult fiction author who has successfully created a series in which the characters make the plot believable, despite the supernatural nature of the story.

Even though Stephenie Meyer writes about the supernatural world with vampires, werewolves, and human-vampire hybrids, she uses lively, relatable characters which give the reader a sense that the plot is believable. Bella, Edward, and Jacob are described in ways that are relatable and believable to the audience. Meyer also uses her knowledge of classical romance novels, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, to create a believable plot.

Meyer tells the story from Bella’s perspective. Bella is a smart, clumsy and very-capable teenage girl whose parents are divorced. Bella decides to move to Forks, Washington with her father Charlie. She has to cook and clean for her father and her relationship with him slightly strained (she spent most her life living with her mom). The first few chapters of the first book in the series, *Twilight*, depicts Bella adjusting to a new town and a new school. Bella feels that at first the students treat her like a shiny new toy—everybody except for Edward who appears to have severe hatred for her when they first meet in science class. Edward later saves Bella’s life by stopping a van with his fist. Bella searches for an explanation of how Edward was capable of such strength and by the time she figure out that he is a vampire, she is already completely in love with him. Meyer does a great job of portraying the obsessive mindset of a teenage girl. When Edward leaves Bella to protect her, Bella shuts down and becomes severely depressed. Bella is immune to

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Edward's mindreading powers (as well as all other powers of the mind), which implies that Bella is unique. In *Breaking Dawn*, Meyer explains that Bella's immunity to mind powers is referred to as a "shield" and that she has the ability to protect others from mind powers by controlling the "shield". This defensive power ultimately makes Bella the most important player in the battle against the Volturi.

Edward is a Byronic hero; he is vampire, he speeds, he lies, he has killed humans before. He is a sympathetic character despite his flaws. He has the ability to read the minds of people, werewolves, and other vampires (with the exception of Bella). Even though he is a supernatural being, Meyer describes him in such a way that he seems real. He is just a typical guy, with his smart comments and love for fast cars. He becomes overprotective of Bella when he learns that she has befriended a werewolf; at one point he disconnects the engine in her car so that she cannot go see Jacob. Eventually, he eases up and allows Bella to hang out with Jacob. Edward is afraid of hurting or even killing Bella and does not let their physical relationship go past a kiss. He is so obsessed with keeping Bella safe that he moves away from Forks because he feels that she would be safer without him in her life. Furthermore, when Bella is heading for death because of the baby Edward and she made, Edward even goes so far as to ask Jacob to convince Bella to have children "werewolf" babies to ensure her safety.

Jacob is a werewolf and Bella's best friend. Part of *Breaking Dawn* is told from his point of view, since Bella is pregnant with Edward's child and spends most of her time lying on the couch. Jacob's passion is to work on cars and motorcycles. As a werewolf, Jacob is Edward's mortal enemy because his duty is to protect humans from vampires. In *New Moon* and *Eclipse*, Jacob has a crush on Bella and has a grudge against Edward because he owns Bella's heart. Jacob kisses Bella twice; the first time Bella punched him and broke her fist and the second time Jacob tricked her into saying that she wanted him to kiss her. Jacob has a strong hatred towards Edward because of the fact he is a vampire. He constantly refers to Edward as "blood sucker" and "leech". In *Breaking Dawn*, Jacob breaks off from Sam's pack, becomes alpha of his own pack, imprints on (falls in love by fate with) Edward's and Bella's baby girl, Renesmee, and befriends Edward.

Meyer uses her knowledge of classical romance novels to create a relatable plot for her readers. For example, Meyer uses *Romeo and Juliet* as a model for the second story in the series, *New Moon*. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet is being forced to marry Paris, but she is in love with Romeo. They are star-crossed lovers, which their love is forbidden. She decides to fake her death so that she can be with Romeo. Romeo finds her and assumes that she is in fact dead and stabs himself to death. Juliet awakes up shortly after and finds that Romeo is dead, so she stabs herself. Meyer uses this plot as a model, but adds her own twist on it. Bella is a human and Edward is a vampire, causing them to be star-crossed lovers. In *New Moon*, Edward decides to leave Bella because he is convinced that she is safer without him in her life. Bella goes down a destructive path when she realizes that when she does something dangerous, she can hear Edward's voice in her head telling her to stop. Bella hangs out with Jacob because he fixed up motorcycles for her and teaches her how to ride. When Bella decides to cliff dive in the middle of a tropical storm to get her fix of Edward, Alice sees what Bella has planned and is convinced that Bella has committed suicide. Rosalie tells Edward about Alice's revelation and decides to antagonize the Volturi so that they will kill him. Bella considers what would have happened if Juliet had married Paris and decided to be with Jacob. Before they could kiss, Alice shows up. Bella finds out Edward's plan and stops him before the Volturi has the chance to see him exposing his sparkly skin to all the people at the festival and to kill him.

Authors of Young Adult fiction must master the art of vivid language in order to be successful. Buccieri and Economy explain that young adult books have "writing that uses language to paint pictures in the mind and writing with style and voice" (Buccieri 38). Jossip Novakovich believes that nouns are better than adjectives, "express your images in details. Don't rely on adjectives to accomplish your task, but rather on nouns. For example, 'his dignified appearance' and 'her graceful looks' won't

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accomplish much, unless the adjectives are accompanied by images that corroborate the adjectives. Adjectives express your intention as to how your character should be portrayed. But after your intention, you need the things, the nouns, with their colors and shades, not with abstract qualitiesâ (Novakovich 27). Navakovich then goes on to say â like a painter, show light, colors. Show people in motionâ especially people at work, using their hands, shoulders, feet. Express their characters in how they tackle their hammers, stones, ice, papers, typewriters, phones, forks and knives, and so forth. Make your characters come alive in an interactive wayâ the way they interact with their setting and their co-workers and their observersâ (27). The best way to master the art of vivid language is to tap into the five senses.

In order to create effective vivid language, a writer needs to tap into the five senses. Buccieri and Economy state, â One way to help you create a vision for your readers is to engage their senses. You engage their sight when they are reading your words, but to engage the mindâ s eye, you need to help them see in their imaginationâ (Buccieri 165). They explain that the best vivid language describe, â the way it looks, the way it feels on the skin or to the touch, the way it sounds, the way it smells, (and) the way it looksâ (165). The five senses are crucial for making Young Adult literature interesting and attention-grabbing. â Most everyone has the same five senses operating all the time. Those five senses constantly feed information into our brains without our taking much notice. Whenever we experience an event, our senses record it right along with our hearts and minds. As a result, most people have years and years of stored experiences trapped inside them that can be accessed by reawakening those sense memoriesâ (167). Tapping into the five senses is important â because the best writing gets the readerâ s senses fired up alongside the heart and mind. And if you can familiarize yourself with your senses again and learn to translate those sensory experiences onto paper, you are well on your way to becoming an evocative, provocative writer. Engaging your senses, your emotions, and your fertile imagination brings you closer to a childâ s worldâ (167). Stephenie Meyer uses the five senses to relate to her audience and grab their attention.

Stephenie Meyer has mastered the art of vivid language using the five senses. For example, she does a great job of describing Bellaâ s first moments as a vampire in *Breaking Dawn* so completely in just a few pages. She starts with Bellaâ s heightened sense of sight, â Everything was so clear. Sharp. Defined. The brilliant light overhead was still blinding-bright, and yet I could plainly see the glowing strands of the filaments inside the bulb. I could see each color of the rainbow in the white light, and, at the very edge of the spectrum, an eighth color I had no name forâ (387). When Bella first looks at Edward with her vampire eyes and realizes â I had never seen him before this secondâ (390). She continues, â For the first time, with dimming shadows and the limiting weakness of humanity taken off my eyes, I saw his face. I gasped and then struggled with my vocabulary, unable to find the right wordsâ (390).

Then she describes the lack of need to breathe in her new vampire body. â The dust was so beautiful that I inhaled in shock; the air whistled down my throat, swirling the motes into a vortex. The action felt wrong. I considered, and realized the problem was that there was no relief tied to the action. I didnâ t need the air. My lungs werenâ t waiting for it. They reacted indifferently to the influxâ (387-388). Even though Bella does not have to breathe, doing so causes a heightened sense of taste and smell, â I could taste the room around meâ taste the lovely dust motes, the mix of the stagnant air mingling with the flow of slightly cooler air from the open door. Taste a lush whiff of silk. Taste a faint hint of something warm and desirable, something that should be moist, but wasnâ tâ !That smell made my throat burn dryly, a faint echo of the venom burn, though the scent was tainted by the bite of chlorine and ammonia. And most of all, I could taste an almost-honey-lilac-and-sun-flavored scent that was the strongest thing, the closest thing next to meâ (388). Here Meyer explains that Bella smells the half human smell of her newborn child and Jacob downstairs and the lovely scent of her husband without explicitly mentioning the names of those she smells.

Meyer then describes Bellaâ s heightened sense of sound. â The TV downstairs had been muted, and I heard someoneâ Rosalie?â shift her weight on the first floor. I also heard a faint, thudding rhythm,

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with a voice shouting angrily to the beat. Rap music? I was mystified for a moment, and then the sound faded away like a car passing by with the windows rolled down. With a start, I realized that this could not be exactly right. Could I hear all the way to the freeway?â (388). Meyer describes when Bella first hears Edwardâs voice with her vampire ears: â I could not answer immediately, lost as I was in the velvet folds of his voice. It was the most perfect symphony, a symphony in one instrument, an instrument more than any created by manâ (391).

Finally, Meyer describes Edwardâs touch. â I didnât realize someone was holding my hand until whoever it was squeezed it lightly. Like it had before to hide the pain, my body locked down again in surprise. This was not a touch I expected. The skin was perfectly smooth, but it was the wrong temperature. Not coldâ (389). This startled Bella at first. â Of course Edward wouldnât feel cold to me. We were the same temperate nowâ (389). Stephenie Meyer effectively uses the senses to grab the attention of her readers.

Learning how to use vivid language by tapping into the five senses is important, but it is also important to know when to leave distracting details out. Young adult writers must remember that it is just as important to know when to leave details out, as it is to know when to add detail. Buccieri and Economy argue that descriptions of setting may be distracting, â sometimes, tossing in a description of the place where the action is occurring can interrupt the flow of the story that you have been so meticulously crafting. When that happens, your reader may become momentarily confused or disorientated or may simply lose interest in the storyâ outcomes that are not ones you want as an authorâ (Buccieri 161). Their argument continues with a way to identify and fix problems with distracting setting descriptions, â How do you know whether your description of a place interrupts the flow of your story? A sure sign is if you feel like putting parenthesesâ or if you find yourself moving it around because you are not sure where it really should go. When in doubt, leave it outâ (161).

Meyer does a good job of not using distracting details of setting. The descriptions of setting always move the plot forward. Her description of Forks (a small town that is always rainy, dark, and gloomy) is a believable setting for vampires who sparkle in the sunlight. Every time Bella talks about the weather in her new home town, it helps create the mood of the story. Meyer never spends pages explicitly discussing Forks, but instead shows the town from Bellaâs point of view, using the five senses. Showing the setting from the perception of a character is an effective way of avoiding distracting passages that will cause the reader to lose interest. Even the mastery of knowing how to effectively add details and when to leave details out, cannot help young adult writers with the toughest problemsâ learning where to draw the lines on sensitive issues so that the book does not end up on the list of books that parents want to ban.

As a writer of Young Adult literature, an author must know how to draw the lines on sensitive issues. Lisa Rojany Buccieri and Peter Economy state that â sometimes writing about what children like may offend adults. J. K. Rowlingâs *Harry Potter* series, because it has magic, witchcraft, and other subversive or pagan content in it, has been banned in many areas of the United Statesâ (Buccieri 61). This creates an ultimatum for the writer, â So you have a choice: You can play it safe with topics children love (and adults donât mind) or you can take a chance with topics children love (and adults mind). Entirely up to youâ (61). Harold D. Underdown argues, â Donât censor your writing for a teen audience. Adults sometimes underestimate the sensitivity and self-awareness teens possess. Long before an official â young adultâ genre was created, authors who respected teens were reaching them. For example, J. D. Salingerâs coming-of-age novel *The Catcher in the Rye* caused controversy among adults when it was published in the 1950s but is now considered a classicâ (Underdown 71). However, there are consequences to writing about sensitive issues; the biggest consequence is parents and other adults demanding that the book be banned.

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The consequence of not censoring sensitive issues is adults may demand that the book be banned because of those sensitive issues. The author that I fell in love with, Stephenie Meyer caused a controversy with her *Twilight* series that has caused parents to demand the banning of all the books in the series. Meyer's books placed fifth on the American Library Association's list of books which people tried hardest to ban the last year. (Flood). Parents and other adults wanted the books banned because of their level of sexual explicitness and their religious viewpoint (Flood). Meyer is not the only popular young adult author who has made the list of challenged books. J. K. Rowling has also been targeted because of satanism and anti-family themes (Flood).

The main problem young adult authors have is determining how graphic to make the sex scenes, particularly in romance novels. Linda Marrow, an editor of romance novels, explains that Sensuality is an important element of the romance novel and is what many people think of in connection with romances. However, it's a mistake to think that the writer can substitute a few fractious conversations and several sex scenes for authentic sexual tension and sexuality between the hero and the heroine. If a novel doesn't communicate the necessary emotional intensity without the sex scenes, then adding them will not achieve the necessary depth of feeling (Marrow 354). Regarding how graphic to make the scenes, Marrow's advice is, I suggest that writers read a number of romances. Always make sure that the sex scenes are emotionally well motivated, that they never feel as though they were gratuitously and arbitrarily inserted into the novel. It's essential that editors and writers remember that sex is merely one element of what gives the romance novel its tremendous appeal (354).

Stephenie Meyer's sex scenes in *Breaking Dawn* have become a cause for concern among parents and other adults. Although this is true, Meyer did not have Bella and Edward engage in sexual behavior until after their marriage. The first two times Edward and his new human bride Bella have sex on their honeymoon; Meyer does not describe the actual sex scenes and leaves the details up to the reader's imagination. However, she does describe the effects of Edward's strength and urge to kill Bella after the fact. After the first time they have sex, Bella has bruises all over her body because of Edward's strength and a feather pillow is ripped apart because Edward bit it to avoid biting Bella. After the second time, Meyer explains that Edward had ripped apart Bella's nightgown with his teeth and destroyed the headboard. Although Meyer leaves the first two sex scenes up to the imagination of the reader, she goes into great detail about the sex scenes that take place after Bella is transformed into a vampire.

Although this is true, Meyer never uses explicit language. On page 482, Meyer uses Bella's senses to describe how she feels when Edward touches her, which is a total new experience than when she was human. Bella says, I could really appreciate him now I could probably see every beautiful line of his perfect face, of his long, flawless body with my strong new eyes, every angle and every plane of him. I could taste his pure, vivid scent on my tongue and feel the unbelievable silkiness of his marble skin under my sensitive fingertips. Meyer then goes on to describe the sex scene: He was all new, a different person as our bodies tangled gracefully into one on the sand-pale floor. No caution, no restraint. No fear especially not that. We could love together both active participants now every touch was more than I was used to. So much of himself he'd been holding back. Necessary at the time, but I couldn't believe how much I'd been missing (482). Then they talk for awhile, but the conversation does not last long because, as Bella says, we laughed together, and the motion of our laughter did interesting things to the way our bodies were connected, effectively ending the conversation (485). That is the extent of the sex scenes, which are not explicit at all when one considers how graphic Meyer could have been.

Despite all the controversy, Meyer is still a successful young adult fiction author because of her knowledge of her audience, her ability to create reliable and believable characters and plot, her ability to use the five senses and vivid language to grab her reader's attention, and her choice to not have Bella and Edward engage in a sexual relationship until after they were married.

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In conclusion, I read Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series and it helped me realize that I would love to be an author of Young Adult Fiction. I have learned that in order to be a successful young adult fiction author, a writer must: understand the targeted audience, create relatable and reliable characters and plot, using vivid language to grab the reader's attention, and learn where to draw the line on sensitive issues. Young adult readers are those between twelve and eighteen years old and suffer from many psychological problems because of the changes that are happening in their lives. They tend to read fantasy and romance, with the exception of boys who wish to read nonfiction. It is important that the writer keeps in mind to market the books to parents because they have a say in what young adults read, while ensuring that the story appeals to young adults. Writers must make sure that their characters and plot are believable and relatable. Meyer accomplishes this with her descriptions of Bella, Edward, and Jacob. She also uses her knowledge of classical romance novels, specifically *Romeo and Juliet*, to make her plot more relatable to her readers. Vivid language, specifically use of the five senses, is essential to grabbing the reader's attention. Meyer has mastered this ability, specifically in her description of Bella's first moments as a vampire. Writers must make sure that their descriptions of setting do not distract the reader from the plot. Meyer does a good job of avoiding this problem. Finally, writers must make sure they are not crossing the line when they discuss sensitive issues. Even though Meyer does a good job of leaving out explicit details in her sex scenes, some parents have still demanded that the series be banned because of sexually explicit language. Researching and writing this paper has taught me a lot about the field of Young Adult Fiction. I hope that this information will help me be a successful young adult fiction author sometime in the near future.

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