



Created by the ALA Public Programs
Office and YALSA, with cooperation from
YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults
with Special Needs Committee

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Introduction

The Great Stories Club is a book club grant program organized by the American Library Association Public Programs Office (PPO) and Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), funded by an Oprah's Angel Network Book Club Award, to provide young adults with the opportunity to discuss books relevant to the challenges in their lives.

This resource guide was put together by the ALA Public Programs Office, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. The purpose of this guide is to provide a framework of tips, advice and resources for librarians holding Great Stories Club book discussions in their communities.

Since this project is the first of its kind for ALA—reaching troubled teen populations through an organized book discussion group—we hope to learn and hear from you as project directors. Please let us know how your programs are going by emailing publicprograms@ala.org. We welcome all feedback.

Sincerely,

ALA Public Programs Office
www.ala.org/publicprograms
publicprograms@ala.org

Young Adult Library Services Association
www.ala.org/yalsa
yalsa@ala.org

Program Credits

American Library Association

The American Library Association promotes the highest quality library and information services and public access to information. The oldest and largest library association in the world, ALA has more than 65,000 members, representing all types of libraries and librarians, as well as trustees, publishers, and other library supporters.

ALA Public Programs Office

The mission of the ALA Public Programs Office is to foster cultural programming as an integral part of library service in all types of libraries. The unit provides leadership, resources, training, and networking opportunities that help thousands of librarians and libraries nationwide develop local cultural opportunities for adults, young adults, and families. Since 1983, major donors have awarded more than \$15 million to the Public Programs Office to support library programming initiatives.

Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of ALA

The mission of the Young Adult Library Services Association is to advocate, promote and strengthen service to young adults as part of the continuum of total library service, and to support those who provide service to this population. YALSA is the fastest growing division of ALA.

YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee

The function of YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee is to address the needs of young adults who do not or cannot use the library because of socioeconomic, legal, educational, or physical factors; to serve as a liaison between these groups and their service providers, and to identify and promote library programs, resources and services that meet the special needs of these populations.

Oprah's Angel Network

Funding for the Great Stories Club was provided by a grant from Oprah's Angel Network. The Network is a nonprofit organization dedicated to encouraging people all around the world to make a difference in the lives of others.

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50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611
p: 800-545-2433
www.ala.org

Program, Theme, and Titles

The Great Stories Club is a national book club program targeting troubled teens, organized by the American Library Association Public Programs Office (PPO) and Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), with a grant from Oprah's Angel Network. The goal of the program is to provide young adults with the opportunity to discuss books relevant to the challenges in their lives.

Book selections, theme and program support materials are developed by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee.

The theme for the Great Stories Club is "facing challenges." As stated in a familiar quote by Joshua J. Marine, "challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful." Each of the three books selected for the Great Stories Club focuses on a character that struggles with a serious challenge. These stories illustrate that challenges can come in many different forms. Some characters are better than others at tackling life's problems.

Born Blue by Han Nolan
Harcourt, 2001

Abandoned as a toddler by her addicted mother, Janie/Leshaya finds a friend in foster brother Harmon, and solace in singing like the soulful "ladies" of Jazz and the blues.

Stuck in Neutral by Terry Trueman
HarperCollins, 2000

Fourteen-year-old Shawn suffers from a debilitating condition and thinks his father may be planning to kill him.

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003

The story of Bobby Morris, a teenage father first introduced in Johnson's *Heaven*, is told by filling in the "now" and "then" of his life in New York City raising his daughter, Feather.+

Running a Great Stories Club Book Discussion for Teens

- Remember that the purpose of the Great Stories Club is to reach out to troubled teens by encouraging a love of reading and books. The discussion should be lively and engaging.
- Prior to meeting with the teens, read the book you are discussing carefully—often it requires two readings. Keep notes on characters and plot so that if there is a question or someone needs reminding you can fill in the gaps.
- If you get to choose the time when the discussion is taking place, try to pick a time of day when the teens will be alert and active. First thing in the morning and just after a meal are generally the most ideal times.
- Think of a fun way to have the teens introduce themselves and get to know you.
- Introduce simple rules and expectations that the group will follow (e.g. read and finish the book, raise your hand to speak and wait to be recognized, respect each other's opinions.) If working with a detention facility, make sure that your rules are in line with the institutional rules.
- Try to create a comfortable, open atmosphere. Remember, and remind the teens, that the discussion is not a test, and they won't be judged or graded in any way.
- Food encourages informality and conversation. Check with the staff where you will be holding the group to see if food is allowed. If the food becomes a distraction, serve it at the end.
- Set up the room so that all participants can see each other (in a circle if possible).
- Use open-ended, personal questions (e.g. how did it make you feel, what do you think about . . . , what would you do if . . .); at the same time try to steer away from purely personal digressions. Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no.
- If discussion has completely stalled, or if students haven't read the book, try reading a passage or chapter out loud and discussing just that section.
- Use the Great Stories Club discussion questions provided in this guide or help the teens to create their own discussion questions and let group members each ask and facilitate a question. This will encourage participation and take the focus off you.
- Your role is one of facilitator: keep the discussion rolling and keep it on track. Don't let yourself become a "leader" or "teacher," remain a guide.
- Incorporate a writing exercise, activity, craft or fun quiz that is related to the book. Sometimes busy hands help get the mind working. Check to see what is allowed in the setting where you are working.
- Continuing discussions: if you are able to continue the program with the same group of teens, be prepared with several read-a-likes for the book you discussed. See pages 15–16 in this guide for a related reading list, or consult the resource guide for other "best of" lists for teens. Also, you may provide the teens with the related reading brochure (in PDF format online) at the end of the series. This way teens may read more on their own afterwards, or you can choose the next discussion book together as a group.
- Explore the access the teens will have to related reading books and try to expedite that access through your library.

DOs and DON'TS for running a discussion program

DO

- Maintain discipline and focus
- Prepare more questions and activities than you need in case discussion stalls
- Keep it fun
- Keep the discussion rolling
- Encourage everyone to contribute
- Empower the teens as much as possible by soliciting their ideas and opinions for carrying out the program

DO NOT

- Prod too much or lead answers in a certain direction
- Contribute significantly to the discussion
- Lecture on the book
- Make it seem like school
- Force anyone to talk
- Allow one teen to dominate the discussion

Establishing an Outreach Partnership

- Identify a contact person at the facility you are interested in partnering with, so you can get a sense of who the players are and what the politics are like. Possible contacts include directors, teachers, librarians, supervisors, counselors, etc. There may be a “Friends” of the Juvenile Hall group that may be of help.
- Depending on what your research has yielded, speak with the Director of Juvenile Hall, the principal of the school inside the Hall, or the Director of programs in the Juvenile Hall.
- Present your contact with a clear and simple proposal describing the program and activities you would like to implement. For a sample project proposal form, see page 8.
- Work with your contact to create a workable program plan, taking into consideration such factors as institutional procedures (security clearance, authorization, etc.).

Sample Project Proposal Form

Name _____ Date _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Library _____

Library Address _____

Project title _____

Project description and justification: include statement of importance of project to the community and beyond, and links to library mission and goals.

Intended audience and potential use: whom will the project serve and how?

Collaborative partnerships: describe the nature of the proposed collaboration and what major responsibilities would fall to each partner.

Budgetary contribution: indicate whether budgetary support exists for this project and how the partner might contribute in terms of budget or staffing.

Timeline: describe any preferred start and end dates or other deadlines.

Assessment: indicate measures that might be used in evaluating the impact of the project.

Please provide any additional information that might be appropriate, including letters of support, links to any special event, thoughts on project organization.

Working in Juvenile Facilities

The following guidelines will help you to establish credibility and respect with the facility administrators, staff and most importantly, the teens. All are necessary components for a successful juvenile detention center partnership and program.

- Identify an internal contact: Possible contacts include directors, teachers, librarians, supervisors, counselors, etc. There may be a “Friends” of the Juvenile Hall group. Think about finding someone who has a role similar to yours in the way they interface with probation staff/youth such as a teacher. This person can help to lead you through the process of starting the group and working with the teens. If you are unable to identify someone on staff at the institution, speak with one of the librarians already providing services to this population for support/feedback.
- Listen more than you talk. As Patrick Jones, nationally known young adult librarian and author of several critically acclaimed books for librarians and educators, says, “When partnering with correctional facilities, we must understand the need to support the goals of that institution even if they may conflict with our values” (“Reaching Out to Young Adults in Jail,” *Young Adult Library Services* [Fall 2004]: 14–17). Remember that you are a guest in this institution and be respectful of that.
- Be aware of the issues that are likely to be prevalent in these institutions. They include:
 - Security: It may take time to get into the institution and set up the program. There are a lot of processes to go through, security clearances, etc. The institution’s main concern is most likely security, and there are a great many things that fall under “security issues” that may surprise you.
 - Power and Control: Within the institution, you will need to be able to know what to stand up for and what to concede. It will be important to access that skill under pressure.
 - Change: The youth can be greatly affected by changes in staff, routine, etc. There can be a lot of change and turnover of youth. Youth may be removed in the middle of your program, in the middle of their most profound moment, etc. Learn to be more flexible and develop an even better sense of humor. Depending on what is happening that day with the staff and/or youth, your program may or may not happen. Some times there will be nothing you can do about it and other times there may be something you can do. You will need to learn to tell the difference between those situations.
- Remember that your “new” ideas may have been tried or implemented before. Make sure you ask staff as well as administrators about any history. Staff may have been there longer than the administrators and know more about what has gone on in the past and also the actual daily operations.

Serving Troubled Teens

- Write up simple expectations and rules for the book discussion. Keep them short and simple (no more than five). Make sure it is something they have basic control over and that abides by the institution's policies (i.e. they may not be able to attend each session in some situations, due to a lockdown, court appearances, etc). Ask the youth for input when developing these expectations.
- Familiarize yourself with the institution's reward and penalty system and incorporate it into your program rules.
- One of the best ways to deal with disruptive youth is to walk towards them and have eye contact with them while you continue with the lesson plan. If a youth is needy (i.e. acting out, asking a million questions, and in general making sure they are the center of attention), stand by them so that all eyes of the class are on them. Rather than have their unmet needs run the show, keep your focus and give them the attention they need by standing near them, walking among them, looking them in the eye, etc.
- Be sure to establish boundaries and to enforce them consistently. Ask the staff what the consequences are for inappropriate behavior. Often the youth get "room time," then a write up, etc. There will be different wording/levels in different institutions. It is likely that you will need to send a youth out of the room, give them room time, etc. and show them that you understand and will enforce the rules. Often this population will test you until you follow through with the stated consequences. Once you do this, and don't try to reason with them or give them multiple chances, but instead show that you mean business and will do what it takes to have a successful class, they will generally respect you, calm down, and your session will proceed.
- Some youth may possess personas that you find intimidating or scary. Although it is true that you are working with youth who have little impulse control and can be violent, for the most part, if you relate to them as a caring human being, they will respond in kind.
- If the youth are having a hard time relating to a book, help them build connections with simple activities such as a writing exercise where they write about themselves. Make sure you tell them not to worry about spelling, grammar, etc.
- Remember confidentiality. In general, use first names only when speaking about the youth.
- Before you give anything to the youth, check with a supportive staff person first. This includes items such as paper, envelopes, food—things you would never think you'd have to check with staff first about. Check with staff to see if bringing food is ok, and have that as a reward for after the program.
- Allow extra time to pass out paper and pencils. In most institutions you will have to count the pencils and make sure you have them all back in your possession before you leave.
- Staff may interrupt your program by participating in ways that are contrary to your goals, such as lecturing the youth or writing a youth up. Over time you will find a balance between respecting the staff actions and maintaining the integrity of the group session.
- Many youth in institutions have a history of abuse. Remember that these youth may not have a lot of family or other support and be mindful of that when guiding discussions.
- Plan for the future. After you are established in the institution (having worked to establish your credibility by your excellent programming and attitude), you will have unlimited choices and options of whom to work with and how your program runs.

The Tips for Project Directors section was prepared by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. Amy Cheney, a committee member, has been involved in setting up and running outreach programs for the Alameda County Library for fifteen years. With questions or for advice on working with juvenile detention centers, please feel free to contact Amy.

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Sample Discussion Questions: *Born Blue*

- Why does Janie change her name to Leshaya?
- Do you think names are important? Why or why not? Do you know someone who changed their name? Why do you think he or she did it?
- Where is she going? Do you think she is going to get there? Why or why not? Then what?
- Why isn't Leshaya happy with the James family? If you were in her place, would you feel the same way about them? Why or why not?
- Talk about how one of the characters resembles someone you know.
- What about the book is realistic to you?
- Music—suggest music for them to listen to—Billie Holliday, Ella Fitzgerald, modern blues artists (short history of the blues?). Discuss the “blues” as a musical genre—how does it tie into the book?
- Do you think we each have hidden talents (or not so hidden)? Why or why not?
- Why did she eat so much bread? What did it do for her?
- Why do you think Leshaya leaves Etta with Harmon? Do you think it is for the same reason each time? Why or why not?
- Where is she safe? Tell about a place that is safe for you.
- She talks about having to look out for herself since no one else will. How does this affect her relationships with those who really do care about her?
- Why does she hurt others? Is it intentional?
- How does her relationship with Mama Linda at the beach house change Leshaya?
- Issues to explore: Race, social workers/“the system,” identity.
- Where did the system fail her? What should have been done?
- Do you think Leshaya is following her dreams or running away from things? Why?
- What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel? Do you feel they achieved that? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what are the most important relationships in the book? Why?
- Was there a minor character that was particularly memorable to you? If so, why?

Born Blue discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Sample Discussion Questions: *The First Part Last*

- Describe how Bobby and Nia's parents react to the news of her pregnancy. How would your parents react?
- Find a quote that most reveals who Bobby is as a person. Explain why you picked it.
- Can you think of three examples that show what kind of father Bobby is to Feather?
- What do you think is the most difficult thing for Bobby? Why? (Ask this question after a few chapters, ask it again at the end of the novel and see if the answer changes)
- What do you think will happen to these people ten years into the future?
- What questions would you ask Bobby?
- What questions would you ask Mary?
- What questions you would ask Nia?
- On page 35 Bobby says, "... which pisses her off and makes her scream, and then I look around my room and miss me." What do you think he means?
- Angela Johnson tells the story backwards. Why do you think she chose this way to tell the story?
- How would you cope if you were Bobby?
- Would you make the same choices? Why or why not?
- How would you cope if you were Nia?
- Would you make the same choices? Why or why not?
- If Bobby had Nia's help with Feather would he be a different father? What makes you think so?
- Do you agree with Mary and Fred's approach to grandparenthood? Why or why not?
- How do you think your life would change as a teenager if you suddenly had the responsibility of an infant? List the things you do every day now. Make a new one based on a life with baby.

The First Part Last discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Sample Discussion Questions: *Stuck in Neutral*

- How would you describe Shawn? How has he been labeled by society?
- How do labels prevent us from really knowing someone? How has a label prevented you from knowing someone? Or someone knowing you?
- How would others label you? How does that label differ from how you see yourself?
- How do we define ourselves apart from the labels we carry around with us? How would you define Shawn? His sister, Cindy? His brother Paul? His father and mother? Can you see anything in any of them that goes deeper than these definitions?
- How is Shawn like a typical teenager? What does he have in common with you?
- How is Shawn misunderstood?
- How do you think divorce impacted the family relationships? Would this story be different had the parents stayed together? How so?
- What role did other family dynamics play? Which relationship in the book do you think is the strongest? Weakest? Why?
- Have you ever felt anger as strong as Paul's? How do you cope with that anger?
- How did you feel during the scene where Shawn describes Paul fighting with the two bullies who tried to burn Shawn?
- What do you think Cindy would say about Shawn if you were able to ask her some questions? What about Paul? What questions would you like to ask them?
- If you could speak to any of these characters, who would it be and what would you say to them?
- If you could ask the author, Terry Trueman, one question, what would it be?
- Who do you think is the character that has the strongest disability? Why and how so?
- With which character do you most identify? Why? How?
- Each chapter begins with a portion of the poem that Shawn's father wrote. How did this add to the story? Would you have wanted to read the entire poem?
- Which character did you like the most? Why? Which character did you like the least? Why?
- Has this book changed your perceptions of people with disabilities? Why? How?
- Do you think Shawn's father killed him? Why or why not? How did you feel about the ending that Terry Trueman wrote?
- In the author's note, Terry Trueman tells of his own son, perceived by the world very much like Shawn. How does knowing this about the author change the story, if at all? How?

Stuck in Neutral discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Related Reading for Participating Teens

- Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *A Place to Stand: The Making of a Poet*.** Grove Pr., 2002. \$13 (0-8021-3908-6). The writer of the movie *Blood In/Blood Out: Bound by Honor*, Jimmy chronicles his years growing up in orphanages, juvenile halls, and prisons, teaching himself to read and write at the age of twenty-one while in solitary confinement.
- Buckhanon, Kalisha. *Upstate*.** St. Martin's Pr., 2005. \$11.95 (0-3123-3269-6). Natasha and Antonio, young lovers, communicate via letters for nine years during his incarceration for murdering his father.
- Desetta, Al, ed. *The Heart Knows Something Different: Teenage Voices from the Foster Care System*.** Persea Books, 1996. \$14.95 (0-8925-5218-2). Fifty-seven teens write about their lives and the issues they faced growing up in the foster care system.
- Draper, Sharon. *Romiette and Julio*.** Simon Pulse, 2001. \$5.99 (0-6898-4209-0). Sixteen-year-olds Julio and Romiette fall in love and face their parents' prejudice and harassment from the local gang.
- Ewing, Lynne. *Party Girl*.** Laurel Leaf, 1999. \$5.50 (0-3758-0210-X). Kata's best friend Ana is shot in a drive-by shooting, leaving Kata to cope with her desire for revenge and hope for a way out of the gang lifestyle.
- Flake, Sharon. *Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories about Girls and the Boys in Their Lives*.** Hyperion Books for Children: Jump at the Sun, 2004. \$5.99 (0-7868-1504-3). Ten short stories focus on sometimes difficult male-female relationships as experienced by African American teen girls.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breathing Underwater*.** HarperTempest, 2002. \$7.99 (0-0644-7257-4). After Nick's girlfriend, Caitlin, has a restraining order issued against him, he is forced to come to grips with his anger and low self-esteem.
- Frank, E. R. *America*.** Simon Pulse, 2003. \$7.99 (0-6898-5772-1). A young man named America gets "lost" in the social welfare system and, after a series of foster homes, hospitals, and suicide attempts, he meets a caring psychiatrist who refuses to give up on him.
- Klass, David. *You Don't Know Me*.** HarperTempest, 2001. \$6.99 (0-0644-7378-3). John, a fourteen-year-old boy from a small town, defends himself against an abusive home life, an outcast school life, and being a social misfit by living outside of himself.
- Mikaelsen, Ben. *Touching Spirit Bear*.** HarperCollins, 2002. \$5.99 (0-3808-0560-X). After angry Cole attacks another boy, he agrees to a Circle Justice sentence of banishment to a remote island, where he encounters a mystical spirit bear.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *The Beast*.** Scholastic, 2005. \$7.99. (0-4393-6842-1). Seventeen-year-old Spoon wants to marry his girlfriend, Gabi, but doesn't know what to do when he finds out that she is using "the beast": heroin.
- Philbrick, Rodman. *The Last Book in the Universe*.** Blue Sky Pr., an Imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2002. \$5.99 (0-4390-8759-7). In this futuristic urban dystopia, an epileptic gang member, together with an old man and an orphan, travels over hostile turf to visit his sister before she dies. A chance meeting with one of the genetically improved members of the ruling class causes major changes in society.

Trueman, Terry. *Cruise Control*. HarperTempest, 2005. \$6.99. (0-0644-7377-5). Seeming to have it all, at the top of his senior class, and a three-letter sports star, Paul's intense anger at his absent father and developmentally disabled younger brother threatens to derail his future. *Cruise Control* is the companion book to Terry Trueman's *Stuck in Neutral*.

Williams, Lori Aurelia. *When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune*. Simon Pulse, 2002. \$8 (0-6898-4593-6). When Shayla befriends the new girl next door who tells great stories about lizard people and memory beetles, she doesn't realize the desperate and dangerous situation Kambia Elaine is in or how to help her.

The Great Stories Club related reading list was compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee.

Suggested Reading for Anyone Working with Incarcerated Teens

Allen, Bud. *Games Criminals Play: How You Can Profit by Knowing Them.* Rae John Publishers, 1981.

Anderson, Elijah. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* W. W. Norton & Co., 2000.

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *A Place to Stand: The Making of a Poet.* Grove Pr., 2002.

Bernstein, Nel. *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated.* New Press, 2005.

Gruwell, Erin. *Freedom Writer's Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them.* Main Street Books, 1999 (movie coming out in 2006).

Hubner, John. *Last Chance in Texas: The Redemption of Criminal Youth.* Random House, 2005.

Lerner, Jimmy. *You Got Nothing Coming: Notes from a Prison Fish.* Broadway, 2003.

Louise, Regina. *Somebody's Someone: A Memoir.* Warner, 2003.

Mondowney, Jo Ann G. *Hold Them in Your Heart: Successful Strategies for Library Services to At-Risk Teens.* Neal-Shuman, 2001.

Prothrow-Stith, Deborah. *Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem.* HarperCollins, 1991.

Saltzman, Mark. *True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall.* Knopf, 2003.

Web Sites About the Juvenile Justice System and Troubled Youth

The Beat Within: www.thebeatwithin.org. An excellent program that provides writing and publishing for incarcerated youth. Check out the Write to Read Section for lists of books written by a Juvenile Hall librarian.

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice: www.cjcj.org. CJCJ is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to reduce society's reliance on the use of incarceration as a solution to social problems. In 1997, CJCJ formed the Justice Policy Institute (JPI), a policy development and research body which promotes effective and sensible approaches to America's justice system. This Web site offers reliable information on juvenile justice statistics, study reports, and several policy reports.

Each One, Reach One: www.each1reach1.org. Mentoring youth through creative arts and education.

National Council on Crime and Delinquency: www.nccd-crc.org. NCCD is a non-profit devoted to reducing delinquency and improving the lives of young people. The group also includes the Children's Research Center. There are several resources listed on this Web site, including studies, policy papers, and other related agencies and how to access their resources.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp. Grant opportunities and information.

Prisonwall.org: www.prisonwall.org. Articles about prison life.

Southern Poverty Law Center: www.tolerance.org. Fight Hate and Promote Tolerance. Lots of resources for teachers and librarians.

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