Peggy **Semingson**

Follow, Like, Dialogue, and Connect with Young Adult Authors via Social Media

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Social media can powerfully connect educators, authors, librarians, and students. As NCTE/ ALAN members, we might use social media to make professional connections with educator "rock stars" (as described by Coke, 2013) or, as discussed in this column, with young adult (YA) authors. Histori- cally, students, educators, and librarians have had limited opportunities to meet or interact with many of the diverse authors they've read, been inspired by, or made a personal heartfelt connection with in response to a book. Happily, these limitations are diminishing as a result of rising access to digital and mobile tools. We can connect with authors via platforms like Skype, as described by Ginsberg (2013), for example. With more authors publicizing their work on a variety of social media platforms, students and educators have opportunities to become acquainted with writers in ongoing and personalized ways.

Students of all ages may not realize that many authors maintain a digital presence on social media. Although students may already be connecting socially in digital spaces, this networked approach (Siemens, 2005) can be modeled, discussed, supported, taught, and practiced to enhance learning. For instance, in my instruction of preservice teachers and graduate students in literacy courses, I seek ways to find author and educator role models for my students to follow on social media. I often start by selecting a widely known author or the author of a shared novel we are reading as a class; I do this to broaden my student's profes- sional and literary worlds, to help them learn beyond the texts they read, and to encourage them to see authors as real people. My hope is that this process will motivate them to learn more about authors and to make these connections on their own through digital media, such as their mobile devices.

This approach also moves beyond formalist "author-free" schools of thought of literary analysis. We aren't merely looking inside the text for structures, irrespective of an author. Learning about the author can personalize and enhance the reading experience. Connecting students to authors in multifaceted ways via social networks aligns with approaches to learning that are grounded in a mentor text framework (e.g., Gallagher, 2011) in which authors model and men- tor through text and can continue to do so through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Mentor texts serve as exemplar texts with a specific teaching focus for analysis and further study. If I am teaching about incorporating voice and style in writing, for instance, I might draw on excerpts from the work of specific au- thors who teach and exemplify this writing trait well. I can use these authors' works as mentor texts or mod- els to guide my students' ability to both analyze texts and write with their own voices. The author continues to be a role model of writing through the reading of social media posts.

Three Ways to Connect to Authors and Texts via Social Media

One way to foster networked communication with young adult authors is to connect through Twitter, author blogs, Instagram, and other easily accessible digital platforms. In this column, I suggest a three-fold (three-layered) approach to entering these digital spaces with young adult authors. These do not have to be in this sequence, but gaining experience with social media (Layer 1) helps to facilitate student learning more effectively.

First, educators and librarians might begin regularly connecting with authors and other professionals via their own social media channels. Not all authors maintain their own social media, so determining which are actually checked by the authors themselves is important. This step might also include following other librarians and educators who blog *about* YA books, trends, and authors.

Second, students can follow young adult authors on an author's blog, on YouTube (or other video channel), via podcasts, and through other social media. Educators and librarians can curate content of social media from authors who blog, Tweet, etc. Students might begin this layer by reading and writ-

ing *about* authors; they can also link to the author's social media in their written reader response. Useful opportunities for engaging students in digital reader response were explored by Groenke & Laughter (2015) in the recent Layered Literacies column, "Tech Tools for Reader Response, Communal Engagement, and Effective Writing."

Third, students can comment, retweet, and otherwise engage with authors in digital spaces. They can also pose questions, make reader-response comments, and even chat with the authors. Starting with authors who post content regularly and who interact with followers seems to be a good first step. Examples provided in this column are representative, but educators and students can do the groundwork to locate their own favorite authors online.

Layer 1: Getting the Lay of the Land of YA Authors and Texts via Twitter

At this initial layer of connecting, educators can explore and navigate online spaces where authors connect with readership and fans. This can also include broadly exploring conversations *about* young adult authors in addition to what authors are directly sharing via social media and/or blogging. Another way to connect is through social media outlets. Twitter is another great place to find authors. Figure 1 shares a few starter hashtags and groups for connecting and expanding a professional learning network (PLN) via Twitter. A Twitter glossary of terms is available online at https://support.twitter.com/articles/166337.

Following these suggested Twitter handles (with the @ sign) or hashtags (with the # sign) allows for an expanded knowledge of young adult authors and a wider professional learning network (PLN). It also allows for the development of skills specific to Twitter, a prerequisite for helping students to connect with authors via this platform. The easiest way to locate social media is though authors' and/or publishers' Web page(s). (This conversation about which authors and hashtags to follow can continue on *The ALAN Review* Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/The-ALAN-Review-1381540955403962) and on Twitter (https://twitter.com/ALANReview). Post a Tweet or tag and follow *The ALAN Review* to

Twitter Hashtag or Twitter Handle	Content/Reason to Follow
• #yalit	Explore updates on young adult literature.
• #yalitchat	Explore updates on young adult literature.
• #nctechat	Make general connections with other NCTE members on regularly scheduled Twitter chats. Join this chat on the third Sunday of each month at 8:00 p.m. EST.
• #titletalk	See what people are reading on this monthly Twitter chat run by Donalyn Miller on current YA Lit book titles. Also see #bookaday. #titletalk is on Twitter the last Sunday of each month from 8:00–9:00 p.m. EST. The archive can be found at https://titletalk-chat.wordpress.com/.
• Various publishers of young adult literature, e.g., @HarperTeen, @PenguinTeen, @randomhousekids, @SimonTEEN, among others	Gain access to publishers' leads on titles set for upcoming release and other author information.

Figure 1. Twitter hashtags that give educators a "lay of the land" in YA lit

connect with the journal. The Twitter handle is: @ALANReview.)

There are three primary reasons that making social media connections with other librarians, educators, authors, and publishers can be useful. First, educators can begin to make professional connections while broadening their overall knowledge base about the field of young adult literature, including new and forthcoming publications, trends in the field, and specific lesson and teaching ideas. Second, information gleaned can be shared with students. Relevant facts, links, and information about an author's world and public persona can be shared in a discussion, an introduction to a book, a podcast, or an author or genre study. Additionally, information can be shared through common digital spaces such as a class or library blog. Third, exploring authors and publishers on social media allows educators to find engaging author-focused content for students to read. If instructors only want students to read the literary/writing-focused posts by an author, for instance, they might collect and curate the content using the tool Storify (https://storify.com/). Storify is a Web and mobile app for importing social media-based content. An educator could select specific Tweets from an author, for example, and put them in a specific order to be read by students. Content can be imported from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube (videos), Instagram (images), SoundCloud (audio-based content), and other platforms.

Layer 2: Guiding Students to Explore Authors on Social Media

Once an educator or librarian is grounded in social media as a tool to professionally connect with others and has gained experience reading, learning, and exchanging ideas about authors and text(s) via social media, the next step might be to facilitate the students' exploration of content on authors' own social media channels. To best support learners, educators and librarians might begin with curating social media pages of authors who post regularly on social media

and/or blogging spaces with the goal of helping students locate their own authors of interest.

For instance, an author who regularly posts about her writerly life to social media is Jacqueline Woodson. Educators and librarians might collect her Tweets into a curated Storify document and share the link with students. They might read aloud author Tweets and think aloud with students about what her posts suggest about the writing process

> **Encouraging students to follow selected authors on social media and other digital connections can foster creativity and critical thinking.**

and how that might connect with her craft, literary themes, or genre choices, for example. To curate content, Twitter Lists (https://support.twitter.com/articles/76460) or social bookmarking tools—e.g., diigo (www.diigo.com), symbaloo (https://www.symbaloo.com), or delicious (http://delicious.com)—allow students to begin in a "read-only" mode to start. A shared digital table in a Google Doc would also allow for the curation and organization of author leads. This table might provide author information, links to social media, and links to author-created blogs. This could be structured as shown in Figure 2.

Encouraging students to follow selected authors on social media and other digital connections can foster creativity and critical thinking. Students can retweet interesting posts to their own followers or share what they find with the class on a wiki, blog, or other digital space. A bulletin board space (physical or virtual) might allow for a visual display of these author posts. In addition, critical thinking and discussion would foster conversation about the author's digital presence. *How does the author present her- or himself in social media? How does the author choose to be digitally connected?* These "meta-discussions" of digital representation are a component of fostering digital literacy.

Author	Web Page Link(s)	Blog Link	Facebook Page Link	Twitter Page Link	Instagram Page Link

Figure 2. Example of digital table with curated author social media information for students

As a caveat, it is important to remember that personal social media accounts are most often restricted to users who are 13 years of age or older. Individual schools and districts also have their own social media policies. Checking with parents/guardians of minors and/or school administrators is always good practice when incorporating social media use.

Layer 3: Connecting Students Directly with Authors via Social Media

Students can begin to directly connect with an author on digital spaces by "liking" posts or by leaving comments on the author's blog or other social media space(s). Students may simply wish to start by commenting on the author's literary repertoire as a whole or on a specific book. It is helpful to provide students with examples of what these posts or comments might look like. There are several types of questions and comments that can be posted by students to communicate with authors directly. Some examples are listed below:

> These are not only exciting and accessible ways to connect with each other but serve as engaging digital portals of entry through which students can connect directly with authors about their writerly and personal worlds.

1. **Author as writer/mentor.** Students might compose comments or questions responding to the *author as a writer and mentor*. This could include the posing of genuine questions about the author's writing process or literary choices; this is especially useful if the student is seeking to emulate the author's writing style, dialogue, craft choices, and/or genre focus. It involves stepping out of the text (Langer, 1995) to engage in literary meaning making. Providing and discussing with students the tools and language of literary analysis support these kinds of conversations with authors.

2. **Author-as-person**. Students can make comments regarding the author as a person. For instance, authors might share celebrations or news links related to current issues or professional or personal milestones. Students can post questions, comments, or provide an encouraging word to the author related to the author's posts.

3. **Stepping inside the text: Story and text-focused questions**. Drawing on the work of Judith Langer (1995) and her envisionment model of literary meaning making, we know that when students are deeply immersed in a story world or caught up in the details of an informational or argumentative text, questions arise; those questions can be posed to authors.

These are just a few ways to help students organize and construct posts and comments to authors. Students' own thoughts will also emerge organically, of course. By way of example, consider how such student–author interactions might look in the case of YA author Jacqueline Woodson, who regularly posts both personal and writing-related Tweets, many of which lift up other authors and those who are making changes in the world (https://twitter.com/JackieWoodson, @JackieWoodson). To examine these Tweets, educators and librarians might ask students the following questions: *What do Jacqueline Woodson's Tweets tell us about her as a person and as an author? How can we synthesize what we are learning about the author on social media with her writing style, choice of subject matter, and characters?* Students might also follow Woodson on other social media communication platforms, including her website (http://www.jacqueline-woodson.com/) and Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Jacqueline.Woodson).

Given these options, educators and librarians have multiple avenues for guiding students to make connections to authors on a regular basis. It is important to impress upon students, however, that they should be selective in how often they post or comment on the pages or posts of busy authors. They might also read through or skim previous social media content to see if a similar question has already been asked. It helps to model this process; educators and librarians can not only share the many options, they can also Tweet and/or post comments in visible ways while thinking aloud about their process.

Net Etiquette ("Netiquette") for Students: Commenting and Connecting

An essential component of connecting online includes sharing with students about proper "netiquette" (net etiquette) and expectations for how to connect with authors on social media. Formality and tone vary

according to the type of social media. For instance, when commenting, students should be taught to use varying levels of language depending on the context and platform of the post. The expectation of the level of formality can be discussed and determined by the instructor and student. For instance, on Twitter, less formal and short responses are necessary because Tweets must be 140 characters or less. However, in longer digital posts, such as blog comments, students can carefully craft longer comments. In all cases, they may want to proofread for writing tone, grammar, and spelling.

Conclusion

Authors, publishers, literacy organizations, librarians, and educators are connecting on social media using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. These are not only exciting and accessible ways to connect with each other but serve as engaging digital portals of entry through which students can connect directly with authors about their writerly and personal worlds. This process can inform students' thinking about books and authors and perhaps leave them wanting to know more about the person behind the book. It is especially easy to connect to social media via a mobile device. Mobile learning is increasingly ubiquitous in and out of classroom spaces.

Fostering and encouraging participatory connections to authors can be done by curating content, reading aloud from authors' posts and blogs, and otherwise using selected digital media content as curriculum within the classroom. Out of the classroom, students can continue to connect with authors through social media. It can also be personally satisfying to learn more about a favorite author. For instance, it was exhilarating to follow along with Jacqueline Woodson as she Tweeted and posted on Facebook after winning the National Book Award for *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014). Authors can challenge our ideas; they can push us out of our comfort zones with a body of work or just a post. The result is that we look deeper and further into critical issues, as Woodson encouraged us to do by confronting the issue of racial justice.

On a broader level, beyond books and authors, social media connections provide ways for students and educators to connect to trends such as #weneed-diversebooks. These are important conversations, and they can begin from the Twittersphere (where we post Tweets) and the blogosphere (the online blogging world) where both our students and we can learn more about the nuanced and complex facets of books and authorship.

Dr. Peggy Semingson is an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Arlington where she teaches online courses in Literacy Studies. Dr. Semingson has experience as a classroom teacher and reading specialist in both Southern California and Texas. Her research interests include social contexts of literacy learning, digital pedagogies, and online literacy teacher education. She has published in Teachers College Record, Language Arts, *and* Research in the Teaching of English. *She was awarded the Jeanne S. Chall Research Grant from Harvard University in 2009–2010.*

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