Displacement in Young Adult Literature: A Thematic Analysis

Adrienne Vitullo

Abstract
Providing spaces for adolescents to make sense of the world around them is often the work of educators, specifically those in Language Arts classrooms. In the current historical moment, adolescents often must make sense of the ways socio-political conflict impacts their world. Displacement, often an effect of socio-political conflict, is increasingly a theme in adolescents’ lives, and therefore a prevalent theme in the ways they see the world. Providing spaces for adolescents to discuss their relationships to displacement through Young Adult (YA) texts can provide educators a possible way to support to adolescents at this critical time in their lives. Using affect theory to analyze the ways emotion moves through YA texts and reading bodies, this article examines four YA texts: When Stars Are Scattered (Jamieson et al., 2020), Between Shades of Gray (Sepetys, 2011), Kira Kira (Kadohata, 2006), and They Called Us Enemy (Takei et al., 2019). In examining these YA texts, this article seeks to understand how displacement moves through each text and impacts adolescent characters.

Keywords Young adult · Displacement · Identity · Resistance

Introduction
Displacement has emerged as a distinct issue on a global scale, increasing rapidly in the past decades, primarily due to socio-political conflict (UNHCR, 2021). Given these changes, schools have responded by attempting to adequately represent the lived experiences of those who have been displaced, including through children’s literature (Koss, 2015). Further, children’s literature about displacement has often acted as a tool for discussing these issues while taking into account the range of factors – political, social, and historical (Tomsic and Deery, 2019; Rodriguez and Braden, 2018). Literature provides opportunities for children to make meaning of

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themselves and their experiences in reflection, while also addressing issues surrounding them (McAdam et al., 2020).

While research has focused on these issues within the context of children’s literature with elementary students (Powell and Husbye, 2018; Tagwirei, 2013), young adult (YA) literature may also address these issues and provide important moments of consideration for its impacts on adolescents (Griffith, 2020). Since adolescence is a pivotal moment of development in which young adults try out various identities while making sense of the world around them and their experiences (Duthoy, 2020), young adult literature that addresses issues of displacement can address impacts specific to this age group. For example, in a study of Canadian adolescent literature, Brisson and Rogers (2013) found that discourses of nationality and citizenship played out in YA literature, and that consideration to these narratives shed light on the ways cultural identity and national heritage was represented to adolescents, and therefore impacted them.

Given this specific historical moment across the globe in which adolescents are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, displacement is a significant theme in adolescents’ lives. For example, recent research on the global pandemic highlights the isolation, and increased stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescents (Saggioro de Figueiredo et al., 2021; Imran et al., 2020). Recognizing the ways adolescents are impacted by displacement through a discussion of YA texts can provide a possible tool to guide educators on ways to provide supports to adolescents at this critical time in the field. Pivotal to this work is an understanding of affect theory (Niccolini, 2016) in which embodied and collective intensities impact students and teachers in the classroom space. As such, affect theory (Boldt and Leander, 2020) can be a productive lens by which to analyze YA literature, because this theoretical lens allows us to see the ways emotion moves through texts and reading bodies. Moreover, this lens affords the opportunity to view literature as a way to engage with multiple modes via a variety of emotions, feelings, identities, and experiences.

Repeatedly, across the literature, scholars note that engaging with high-interest, culturally responsive YA texts is vital and affords opportunities for adolescents to “expand the capacity for developing a variety of skills” (Ivey and Johnston, 2018). Yet, despite this perspective, representations of Black, Brown, Latinx, and other minoritized individuals in children’s literature remains critical (Bishop, 1990; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Mendoza and Reese, 2001), and high-interest and culturally responsive YA texts are not widely embedded into high school Language Arts programs (Timberlake et al., 2017). Plausible reasons for this include: neoliberal educational reforms that promote a standardized approach to instruction (Vaughn et al., 2022), persistent underfunding of public schools (Timberlake, 2017), and a lack of representation of historically underrepresented individuals across widely adopted curricular programs (Newvine and Fleming, 2021; Vaughn et al., 2021).

Hence, the purpose of this research is to explore the role of displacement across a select set of YA texts that privilege the topic of displacement and that include multiple representations of individuals across historically underrepresented populations. These YA texts include: When Stars Are Scattered (Jamieson et al., 2020), Between Shades of Gray (Sepetys, 2011), Kira Kira (Kadohata, 2006), and They Called Us Enemy (Takei et al., 2019). These texts were chosen because they were part of the
adapted curricula incorporated into a secondary school in a large North Eastern city, The United States in which the research took place. The following research questions guide this study:

- What are moments of displacement in the selected texts?
- How do moments of displacement influence the adolescent characters in the select texts?

Theoretical Framework

The ways affect theory is enacted has been theorized widely (Dernikos, 2019; Anderson, 2014; Cvetkovich, 2012), though it generally refers to ways of knowing and being in the world that prioritize emotional sensibilities. Affective responses are those that “exceed logical, rational, verbal, and written responses” (Johnson and Vasudevan, 2012, p. 34), and represent those beyond-words moments that are somewhat inarticulable. In classroom spaces, this occurs when sensibilities are felt, and as Dutro says, “spark a very different kind of potential” (2019, p. 385) to facilitate connections within a classroom community.

Further, those moments are ones of potential impacting and are impacted by the classroom space and the individuals within. For Boldt and Leander (2020), affect theory provides a unique tool to unpack those moments of potential in literacy classrooms. The act of reading is a process of attunement, “bringing to life in the world of a story, and [attuning] to the collectively built story world (Boldt and Leander, 2020, p. 528). Reading allows for students to become moved and impacted by the story world around them, while also impacting their lived reality outside of the story. As Ahmed writes, “emotions work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” (2014, p. 1). Since affect is not created or owned by individuals (Probyn, 2010; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010; Thrift, 2007), but rather generated in collective spaces, where reading is a social act (Ginsburg and Glenn, 2019), Language Arts classrooms are well-positioned to engage in this work. For example, Hamilton-McKenna (2020) and Kokkola (2017) utilize aspects of affect theory in relation to how they examine a variety of texts. Hamilton-McKenna (2020) explored the relationship of belonging as a vital tool in allowing students to individually and collectively make meaning of text (Rosenblatt, 2005). That is, readers interact but are transformed within their relationship with the texts they read, and the affective dimension is a key dimension within the exchange. Hamilton-McKenna (2020) explored feelings of belonging within YA literature, illuminating the ways literature, for example, has the potential to provoke feelings, mood, and emotions. Similarly, Niccolini (2016) explores how affect can be used as pedagogy, moving the locus of pedagogical knowledge from solely the teacher to the collective. These studies suggest exploring the role of affect theory in discussions of YA literature affords a space to examine the meaning-making that occurs as a result of interactions with the text.

Although much research examines the potential and possibility of YA literature in high school classrooms for the purposes of differentiation (Groenke and Scherff, 2010), supporting foundational reading skills (Gibbons et al., 2006), and
connections to lived experiences (Flores et al., 2016), YA literature is still sometimes avoided in Language Arts classrooms (Hayn and Kaplan, 2012). Scholars indicate this may likely be caused by neoliberal education’s impacts on teacher tenure and autonomy (Au, 2018). Yet, there are also distinct benefits to including YA literature in English curricula. For example, YA literature can act as a tool for “fostering understanding, empathy, and compassion by offering vividly realized portraits of their lives” (Cart, 2008; Bal and Veltkamp, 2013). Representing multiple perspectives is also a unique benefit of YA literature (Ginsburg and Glenn, 2019), which can positively impact students’ engagement and motivation (Kozak and Recchia, 2019).

As has been well-researched, YA literature can act as mirrors, windows, and doors for students (Bishop, 1990; Ivey and Johnston, 2018). Similarly, Gee (2000) suggests literature reflective of student experience can act as “important means for extending real-world experiences... as vicarious experiences” (p. 38). Given the nature of adolescence as a time of self-discovery and identity renegotiation, themes in YA literature often center around displacement, belonging, and identity (Rogers et al., 2014). As such, YA literature is often focused on characters’ in-between state, neither adult nor child (Valentine, 2010), and the ways characters engage with these difficulties. Affective engagement with YA texts has been partially theorized as a potential avenue for addressing emotional sensations prevalent in YA texts, such as anxiety (Mason, 2020). Significantly, much of this work has been done using LGBTQ+ YA literature (Batchelor et al., 2018; Crisp et al., 2018). The author would argue that, approaching themes such as displacement—and conversely belonging—through an affective lens, can help facilitate greater engagement and deeper conversations about students’ selfhood. Engaging affectively means addressing students holistically as “‘whole’ beings, engaging their minds, bodies, communicative competencies, and hearts, in a relational, sensational assemblage” (Burgess, 2020, p. 800). Some potential benefits of this include brave conversations about difficult topics (Adams, 2020), deeper student engagement (Burgess, 2020), and wider representation (Ginsberg and Glenn, 2019).

**Method**

This study used a literary analysis to analyze a selection of four YA texts. This approach was used to examine each text for themes of displacement and how young adult characters responded to their displacement. Specifically, the selected texts were chosen from an adapted curricula incorporated into a secondary school. Each text was coded for salient moments in how young adult characters experienced displacement, the significance these moments had in the text and the main character’s life, and moments of identity (see Table 1). Additionally, the author utilized the theoretical framework and literary analysis to unpack how displacement impacted each text’s adolescent characters. Through coding, specific themes emerged that will be discussed below in the findings section.
| Book               | Pivotal moment of identity                                                                 | Significance                                                                                      | Displacement                                                                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kira Kira         | “Finally, I approached the nail polish aisle. I stuck some beautiful pink nail polish in my pocket and walked calmly out… Suddenly I felt a hand grab my upper arm. I didn’t even turn to look—I just ran, and ran” (Kadohata, 171) | Katie’s family experiences economic hardship because of the racism in their previous town, so her act of stealing shows how she moves from being passive toward taking an active stance | “Lynn and I were perfectly happy in Iowa. I did not see why we had to move to a southern state where my father said you could not understand a word people said because of their southern accents” (Kadohata, 20) |
|                   | Chapter 13—“Inside the living room, my father laid me down on my cot. ‘She’s gone,’ he said,” (Kadohata, 200) |                                                                                                  |                                                                                                  |
|                   | The family’s business goes bankrupt because no one wants to buy their Asian foods in Iowa (p. 7) |                                                                                                  |                                                                                                  |
|                                 |                                                                                                      | The family is displaced because there is not a market for Asian food in Iowa. There are other moments in the text that also show how racism is enacted |                                                                                                  |
| They Called Us Enemy | P. 141—older Takei confronts father about “passively consenting”                                    | Takei has positive things to say about his father until this point. This is sort of a flash forward and only limitedly addressed in the text. It shows that the author has some negative feelings about the way his parents handled internment. This shows a transition in Takei’s identity—he is no longer passive. While Takei’s family answers these questions with ‘no–no,’ others say ‘yes–yes’ and serve in the army. Takei’s family takes a principled stand by indicating they do not have any allegiances to the Japanese government and therefore can’t give them up. This makes them targets for the American government and their internment continues | P. 16—every adult Japanese citizen in the U.S. was now an “alien enemy” P. 31—arrived at Santa Anita racetrack where Japanese were housed P. 159—Mama renounces her citizenship |
| Book             | Pivotal moment of identity                                                                 | Significance                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Displacement                                                                                                      |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *Between Shades of Gray* | • Finding father on train  
• Understanding why her family was deported (for helping her cousin’s family repatriate)  
• Elena dies after being ill   | When Lina finds her father on the train, she has disobeyed her mother’s requests to stay put. She sneaks out of the train car and risks her life—she does know what could happen if she is caught.  
Lina hasn’t known about her family’s assistance in repatriating her cousin’s family. Her cousin is someone she looks up to as well as a dear friend, but Lina has to suffer because of her family’s decision.  
Lina is now in charge of Jonas and becomes his caregiver. Elena had spent so much of her time and energy taking care of her family. Lina now has to enact all of the hopefulness and smarts Elena provided their family. | • Taken from home (p. 3–5)  
• Relocated to community farm  
• Lina and Andrius are separated and Lina and family go to Trofimovsk in the Arctic Circle |
| Book                        | Pivotal moment of identity                                                                 | Significance                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Displacement                                                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| When Stars Are Scattered    | • Ch 3 (p. 52–59) He begins to like school, saying “his brain was starving but is now ‘getting the food it needs’” (p. 52)  
• Omar is “throwing his chance away”  
  Maryam tells him (talking about his education) (p. 107)  
• Fatuma says to Omar, “if you love me, you’ll leave me” (ch. 15) | This moment is a shift for Omar who had been fearful of attending school and leaving his brother. He wasn’t sure the benefits outweighed the potential issues, but in this moment he realizes there are positives to doing something for himself. He doesn’t need to be a martyr.  
  Gender differences are clear here as Maryam must get married, although she would much rather attend school. Omar realizes what value education can have and how he should be grateful for the opportunities it can provide him.  
  Omar chooses to leave the refugee camp and go to the U.S., though he is fearful of leaving those he has loved. He is now the sole caregiver for Hassan until they reach the U.S., and they are leaving yet another mother. The brothers had already lost their biological mother, and now Fatima, their camp mother. Again, Hassan chooses to risk loss in the hope of future gains | “For me, the first years are lost” (1)  
P. 36—when he Omar decides to leave Hassan to go to school  
When they leave the refugee site to go to the U.S. |
Findings

Using an affective lens, this research examined moments of displacement in four YA texts to understand how adapted curricula incorporated into a secondary school with emotion moved through the curriculum. In so doing, this research sought to address the following research questions: What are moments of displacement in the selected texts and how do moments of displacement impact adolescent characters? This study revealed two themes in answer to these questions. One theme is that adolescent characters’ experience as well as enact changes to their identity as they encounter challenging situations. Secondly, that adolescents enact moments of resistance in accordance with their evolving identities as they relate to the overall theme of displacement. A corresponding table outlining additional findings as they pertained to these themes is provided as well.

Select examples from the texts are discussed to portray these themes of the overall feeling of displacement in which the protagonist is forced to leave their original community and relocate to another. The action of forced movement impacts characters differently, but each character appears to understand their own identity in response to their displacement, as well as experiencing moments of resistance.

Displacement

Of the selected texts, all focused on the topic of displacement caused by political tensions, though three of them deal with global socio-political shifts. For example, in *Between Shades of Gray* (Sepetys, 2011), tensions arise primarily because of Stalin’s efforts to annex Lithuania in the 1940s. The adolescent main character’s life is uprooted by the socio-political forces at work within her context, which detaches her from her father as well as her community and begins her struggle for survival.

In *When Stars Are Scattered* (Jamieson and Mohamed, 2020) the main characters are impacted by the Somalian civil war and are forced to relocate to a Kenyan refugee camp. Similarly, both texts, *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019) and *Kira Kira* (Kadohata, 2006) involve complex narratives of how families of Japanese origin are impacted by racism in the U.S. While in *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al., 2019), the author directly experiences Japanese-American internment, Kadohata’s (2006) main character is displaced because of secondary financial concerns impacted by socio-cultural issues caused by racism toward Japanese-Americans. Although set in different time periods, both stories illustrate ways in which Japanese-Americans have experienced displacement throughout history. Overall, characters in these texts are separated from their communities, homes, and ways of life. Further, they all deal with marginalization because of the shifting socio-political tensions they faced or faced during critical experiences of displacement. For example, Lina in *Between Shades of Gray* must cope with harrowing conditions as she is relocated to the Siberian gulags, whereas in *They Called Us Enemy* (2019), the main family is displaced because of their status as Japanese-Americans and interned in various camps. Similarly, in *When Stars Are Scattered* (Jamieson et al., 2020) Omar must live in a refugee camp as his country’s civil war rages on. *Kira Kira* (Kadohata,
(2006) is the only story in the selection in which displacement occurs as somewhat of a choice.

As a central theme in each of these texts, displacement focuses on the ways young adults are displaced by socio-cultural forces outside of their control. Each moment of displacement begins as simply removal from a geographic location, but is compounded by its social-emotional effects. As young adults removed from their communities, each main character must make choices about how they engage with the new worlds around them. Additionally, as the socio-political event that caused displacement for each character subsides or changes shape, they are again displaced into another setting to which they must adapt. For example, in They Called Us Enemy (2020), Takei and his family must figure out how to live in a changed world after their internment ends. In a sense they are displaced again, even feeling anxiety about how and where they will live: “the irony was that the barbed-wire fences that incarcerated us also protected us” (p. 152). Similarly, in When Stars Are Scattered (Jamieson et al., 2020), the main character, Omar, is sad to leave the refugee camp, though it has been a challenging place to live. Displacement, therefore, does not only exist as a singular incident in each text, but rather an extended process through which main characters are changed.

Changing Identities

Across the texts, the theme of evolving identities emerges. This theme captures the ways in which the main adolescent characters’ identities change agentially as they experience displacement. Although each character has experienced displacement differently, they each experience an identity crisis as they at first simply cope with their displacement. As their story unfolds, they begin to critically engage with the effects and affects of their displacement and begin to question its justification.

For example, in They Called Us Enemy (Takei et al., 2019), Takei at first idolizes his father who is an active member of their community of interned Japanese-Americans. Senior Takei has even been elected community leader. Young Takei has only positive things to say as he retells how he has felt about his father’s actions. Yet, as Takei grows and is able to see more of his family’s situation, he is critical of his father’s actions. When given an ultimatum to renounce any affiliation to Japan, Takei’s family recognizes that they do not have any affiliations, but reasons it is best to go along with the U.S. government’s wishes. Takei’s father says, “all the forces were against us” (p. 141), but this is not an adequate explanation for Takei, who is frustrated his father did not exert more agency. He says to his father “you passively consented” (p. 141). Although Takei firmly believes this as he says it, he later reflects and realizes how unfair he was, recognizing the ways his father enacted his own forms of resistance. Additionally, later on in life, Takei engages in his own act of agency by testifying for the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. Takei’s progression from passive child to resistant adolescent takes shape in his adult form as he engages in a form of activism that feels empowering for him and the memory of his father. Through this process we see Takei as he negotiates his own identity within the context of his displacement.
Similarly, in *Kira Kira* (Kadohata, 2006) Katie continuously experiences racism from her neighbors in Iowa, as well as when her family moves to a new state in the Deep South. When they stop at a motel at one point, her family is labeled as “Indian” and told “Indians stay in the back rooms” (p. 27). Katie becomes frustrated when the hotel receptionist labels her family incorrectly again as Mexican. This frustrates Katie, and she speaks back to the motel workers, though to no avail. After staying in the motel for a short time, Katie sympathizes with the receptionist. No longer is her identity as a victim but rather, she views the receptionist as an individual with her own identity and surrounding problems. For example, Katie says when seeing the receptionist intoxicated, “Earlier I hadn’t liked her, but now I felt bad for her. I wondered if her parents loved her as much as mine loved me” (p. 31). This moment of reflection helps alter her feelings about this woman and her prejudiced views. Rather than writing her off, Katie explores the complicated interplay between their identities.

In another text, *When Stars are Scattered* (Jamieson et al., 2020), the character Omar also experiences moments of reflection and growth throughout the story, which informs identity transformations. As primary caregiver, Omar has difficulty leaving his brother, Hassan, to go to school. Although it is a tough decision for him to leave Hassan each day, he realizes school is important to him because “his brain was starving but is now getting the food it needs” (p.52). Omar’s identity expands to include viewing himself as a learner; his experiences at school have caused him to adopt this new aspect of his identity in which he can be both caregiver to his brother and also learner.

Before attending school, Omar did not identify as a learner, but after time at school he began to realize his worthiness and belonging in learning spaces. School offers many opportunities for Omar to change his thinking and grow in terms of his analysis of societal expectations as well as his own personal emotional growth. For example, while he prepares for his high school admittance exam, his friend Maryam encourages him to take it seriously. She is not able to attend high school despite being eligible because she is expected to get married. She tells Omar he is “throwing his chance away” when he does not take studying seriously (p. 107). In this moment, Omar critically engages with his community’s expectations for young women, and recognizes the injustice Maryam faces and a level of privilege he has not yet analyzed within himself. “Now I understand… I am lucky. So many people love and support me and Hassan” (p. 111). Omar’s moment of reflection here represents the ways he is relating to his community in different ways than previously. School has provided him with a moment of reflection through which he can critique his community while also recognizing its value. Further, Omar has to engage with the loss of this community when he has the opportunity to move to the U.S. In telling his story to the U.N. worker, he says “I’d practiced this story many times in my head. I didn’t realize how hard it would be to say the words out loud, to this unfriendly man in this strange world” (p. 179). Although this is a challenging time for him, Omar continues to grow as he navigates yet again difficult situations. Later, his ‘camp mother’ as he calls her, Fatima, tells him that although he is scared to leave her and travel to the U.S., he must, as “if you love me, you’ll leave me” (p. 244). This represents a challenging moment in which his identity becomes more nuanced as he is
more reflective and engaged in the choices he has to make. Omar’s decision in this moment is reflective of his identity as caregiver to his brother, while also recognizing the ways his own identity is changing.

Overall, each of these moments through the selected episodes map out some of the ways the main characters deepen and navigate their identities throughout the narratives. As they deal with the displacement they face, each main character finds ways to adapt to their new context and in doing so change aspects of their identity. Displacement is a theme inherent in adolescence generally, though specifically during this time of increased displacement on the global scale (UNHCR, 2021). Reading and making meaning of these texts with adolescents has the potential to engage them in discussions of their own contexts and how they relate to them.

Resistance

As the main characters continue to experience and negotiate their identities, many enact moments of resistance in which they appear to assert a sense of control over what has largely been uncontrollable. Although this looks different for characters throughout the texts, based on their personalities and needs, each character demonstrates moments of resistance applicable to their situation. These moments of resistance are indicative of the ways in which characters’ identities change as they become more empowered to speak up against injustice.

For example, in *Kira Kira*, Katie is impacted by financial concerns, and her moment of resistance occurs within the context of shopping. While her family’s grocery store is negatively impacted because “unfortunately, there were hardly any Oriental people in Iowa” (p. 7), Katie decides to shoplift to exert an act of resistance. “Finally, I approached the nail polish aisle. I stuck some beautiful pink nail polish in my pocket and walked calmly out...Suddenly I felt a hand grab my upper arm. I didn’t even turn to look...I just ran, and ran” (p. 171). Katie and her family experience economic hardship throughout the novel, but at this moment Katie goes against her own value system to take what she believes is owed her. This is an act of resistance in which she redistributes wealth to support her wants and desires.

In another text, *Between Shades of Gray* (Sepetys, 2019), Lina also resists her environment. The text, situated in the 1940s as Stalin annexes Eastern European countries, is situated in a dangerous time in which political dissent can have grave consequences. Lina’s artistry gets her in trouble when she begins to draw political cartoons relating to her experience in invaded Lithuania. Lina’s father, a university professor, is at risk because of the political nature of his position, and Lina’s new hobby troubles him. Although Lina’s father confronts her several times, she does not stop making these drawings, and believes they are significant for public history as well as her own mental well-being. Over the course of the story, Lina uses her skills to create many pieces of artwork, although she is constantly fearful they will be discovered by Stalin’s police force. Although this resistance seems relatively small, the act of creating freely in a time when survival is often not a given is resistance in itself. Lina’s drawings as political commentary act as a subtle, yet powerful, form of resistance.
Additionally, Lina’s family resists labels put on them by Stalin’s oppressive forces. Lina’s family, while sequestered to the community farm and forced to perform manual labor, is instructed to “sign that [they] agree to pay a war tax of two hundred rubles per person, children included…[and] [they] agree that [they] are criminals” (p. 142). Signing would mean conceding to the Soviet Union’s characterization of them and therefore agreeing their imprisonment is justified. Lina’s family resists this label and does not sign, though they pay for this choice in terms of their safety and freedom.

Similarly, in They Called Us Enemy (2019), Takei’s family and “every adult Japanese citizen in the U.S. was…considered an ‘alien enemy’” (p. 16). As internment continues, though, Japanese Americans are told they must renounce any connections they have to Japan, pledge allegiance to the U.S., and join the army (p. 117). Given that Japanese-Americans like Takei are citizens of the U.S., some never having set foot on Japanese soil, this means agreeing that they are ‘alien enemies.’ Accepting this label would mean agreeing that they are in some way dangerous to the American public. Although more dangerous to their safety and general well-being, the Takei family deny taking on this label, which only further continues their internment. This direct act of resistance symbolizes how the main character would like his father to enact his own agency, and further how the main character hopes to create change for his context.

Overall, moments of resistance in the selected texts range from child-parent relationships to socio-political-individual relationships. These moments demonstrate the ways in which the main characters must engage in acts of resistance against their parents, their countries, and their oppressors. Navigating these moments of resistance is challenging for these characters and means taking on a degree of risk, though relinquishing their sense of self outweighs the potential risks.

Discussion

Since adolescence is a pivotal moment of development in which young adults try out various identities while making sense of the world around them and their experiences (Duthoy, 2020), reading literature that supports this foundational development may impact students’ perceptions of self and ways to negotiate perceived obstacles and barriers. As Clark and Blackburn (2009) write, schools can be non-inclusive spaces, where students “may feel not only disconnected from school, a place that they may feel hateful and unwelcoming, but also from literacy, particularly conventional reading and writing (p. 26). As the characters within these texts experience displacement, they construct differing versions of themselves, enact new aspects of their identities, and enact resistance within their contexts.

As characters experienced different dimensions of their localized context, they adapt new ways of engaging with challenges in order to cope with difficult situations. For example, in When Stars Are Scattered (Jamieson et al., 2020), the main character Omar explores a side of himself that identifies as a learner, although there are many barriers to his school attendance. Despite the challenges he faces at the refugee camp, he explores this part of himself and views it as valuable. Differing
versions of self were explored by all main characters in the selected texts, which points to the significance of this theme in YA literature. Given the nature of adolescent identity, these YA texts point to the significance of emergent senses of self.

As adolescent characters identified new aspects of their identities, they enact new ways of being in their context. For example, in *Kira Kira* (Kadohata, 2006), the main character Katie experiences many instances of racism. Katie’s relationship to racist acts by others is enacted differently as her experiences broaden. When a motel worker demonstrates prejudice against her family based on their racial identity, Katie is able to eventually recognize the complex nature of the experience she has witnessed. Additionally, the ways she deals with this moment changes over time as she decides how she would like to handle such situations. As the young adults in these texts gain a greater understanding of themselves within their contexts, they engage with the world in new ways.

The characters express their demonstrations of resistance by providing counter-narratives through their action, speech, and choices. For example, in *Kira Kira* (Kadohata, 2006) and *When Stars Are Scattered* (Jameson et al., 2020) the main characters must make choices about acting against what they know to be important, enacting resistance when they feel wronged. Giving adolescents opportunities to try out decision-making via these critically-oriented YA texts is uniquely suited for the Language Arts classrooms (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016), and enacted resistance is one way of doing so.

Adolescence is a time where young adults are often negatively impacted by feelings of not belonging in communities and schools (Parr et al., 2020). Therefore, moments of identity and reflection in YA texts like the ones discussed in this research, provide a lens by which adolescents can explore and make sense of their identities and ways to possibly navigate challenges they experience in their own contexts. As the COVID-19 pandemic impacts adolescent mental health (Horigian et al., 2020), embedding YA texts inclusive of topics of displacement, identity construction, and resistance into the curriculum can provide much-needed support. As in Colantonio-Yurko et al.’s (2022) study, YA literature can be used to discuss challenging topics that are relevant to adolescents’ lives. In this study, YA literature was used to discuss topics of feminism and sexual violence, the result of which was students feeling individually empowered and socially active. As students read texts that represent issues that surround their lived experiences, they could make sense of themselves within challenging situations. Engaging students in this way has the potential to increase students’ sense of belonging to and relevance of schooling and reading. By giving students opportunities for self-exploration in safe ways, classrooms become spaces for emotional and interpersonal development that overall aids in feelings of belonging.

Further, when students, and adolescents in particular, lack opportunities to experience these tensions via engaging with critically-oriented texts like the ones discussed here, schools miss valuable opportunities to engage students in critical conversations about history, social inequities, and connections to historical movements that continue to have repercussions today. Therefore, the overall findings of this research suggest the need for topics of critical literacy (Friere, 1983), to be included in ELA curriculum for adolescents.
Conclusion

As displacement continues as a theme in adolescents’ lives because of both the nature of adolescence as well as socio-political events, literary representations can continue to provide adolescents with chances to examine issues of identity and resistance within their own contexts, as well as those of characters. This book analysis sought to examine moments of displacement in YA literature, and found possible spaces for students to engage in meaning-making related to both their characters’ lives as well as their own. Further, this analysis points to the ways students can use multiple examples of displacement to discuss its impacts on adolescent identity and enacted resistance. Providing students with this space could assist adolescents in examining how they are doing the same within the context of their own historical moment.

Further research can examine the ways affect more specifically moves through classroom spaces when dealing with themes of displacement, and its impacts on identity and resistance. As adolescents continue to engage in texts such as these, how do they reformulate their identities and make sense of characters’ moments of resistance? As future research continues to explore these questions, decisions about classroom text choices can develop to better address students’ social-emotional needs, depending on each particular context. Overall, using displacement narratives in classrooms holds potential to engage with issues of identity formation across a range of cultural contexts, allowing diverse students to engage with their own identities within the context of fiction.

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