

Teaching Notes for *Year's Best YA Speculative Fiction 2014*

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Themes:

Year's Best Young Adult Speculative Fiction 2014 collects a range of diverse fiction originally published in 2014. These stories first appeared in a variety of magazines and books, and they explore issues relating to adolescence. There is a combination of light and dark themes among the science fiction and fantasy worlds, and the protagonists come from a diverse array of backgrounds.

Summary:

“Left Foot, Right” by Nalo Hopkinson takes place in the Caribbean and features a girl who saves herself.

“Selfies” by Lavie Tidhar is a horror story about a haunted phone that compels the owner to take endless selfies.

“The Vitruvian Farmer” by Marcelina Vizcarra is a short piece about time travel and how it can affect a family.

“The Lady and the Fox” by Kelly Link is a wintertime fairy tale involving a girl who saves a fox man.

“Cat Calls” by Margo Lanagan is set in India and examines the ways in which a group of schoolgirls can fight back against oppressive sexist cat calling.

“Walkdog” by Sofia Samatar is written in the form of a high school homework assignment and explores African-American music and folklore through the lens of adolescence, love and bullying.

“No Lonely Seafarer” by Sarah Pinsker is a fantasy story about sailing ships and examines issues of gender.

“The Endless Sink” by Damien Ober explores a world where people float or sink to different societies, and examines the different biases individual societies can adopt.

“No Mercy for the Executioner” by Deb Biancotti is a dark post-apocalyptic tale in which loyalty and survival are set against each other.

“The Ancestors” by Laurie Tom is a story about an Asian-American family’s rituals around their ancestors, which turn out to involve more than the protagonist realizes.

“Jelly and the D-Machine” by Suzanne Church features a gay teen in a story about dimension hopping and bullying with a hopeful ending.

“Kneaded” by S. G. Lerner features a girl who finds out she is made of dough, and follows her as she comes of age.

“Resurrection Points” by Usman T. Malik is set in Pakistan during a time of upheaval between Christians and Muslims, and features a boy who can reanimate corpses.

“Memory Lace” by Payal Dhar features a boy raised to be a slave in a matriarchal society, and the girl who decides to set him free.

“Collected Likenesses” by Jamey Hatley is a heartbreaking story about the granddaughter of a former slave who is enlisted to enact supernatural revenge on the family who owned her people.

“Scout” by Will McIntosh features a boy who finds an alien during a time of war, and questions whether killing aliens is right.

“Selfie” by Sandra McDonald is about a girl who uploads her consciousness into an artificial body in order to spend some time with each of her parents, only to find out later that she may no longer have a real body.

“The Boy Who Grew Up” by Christopher Barzak features a gay teen in London who meets Peter Pan.

“Cookie Cutter Superhero” by Tansy Rayner Roberts is the story of a disabled girl who ends up becoming a superhero.

“The Stuff We Don't Do” by Marissa Lingen is a time travel story that explores the responsibility of family members to be there for one another.

“Figment” by Jeri Smith-Ready features a boy who wants to be a rock star and a magical cat doll who gives him a luck boost, but what if his success is only because of magic?

Study notes:

Year's Best Young Adult Speculative Fiction 2013 would be useful in teaching various social issues, history, and areas of geography.

- “Left Foot, Right” is set in the Caribbean and features an incarnation of Mama D’lo. Use the internet to research Caribbean folklore. Are there stories in your part of the world that are similar? In this story the folklore aspect is just one part of the whole. Jenna is also struggling with different kinds of grief. Discuss her choices. Can you relate to any of them? Would you have stopped returning Clarence’s calls if you were in Jenna’s situation?
- Two of the stories in this book play with the word “selfie”. How are the concepts in both stories similar and different? Have students form teams and debate the pros and cons of the different kinds of selfies.
- Divide students into groups and have them each write a “deleted scene” for one of the stories. Have them perform their scene for the class.
- “Scout” and “Resurrection Points” both examine interactions between members of opposing sides in a war. Discuss the similarities and differences between these stories.

- “The Vitruvian Farmer” and “The Stuff We Don’t Do” both deal with time travel if you could go back in time to any point for a visit, where and when would you go, and why? Do you agree with the point that Irene makes in her letter to her uncle?
- Several of the stories feature technology that doesn’t exist yet, and “Cat Calls” features a lot of creative thinking about how to get by without technology that the characters can’t afford. What kinds of new technology would you find most useful to solve a problem you face in the world today? Can you think of a non-device based alternative solution?
- In “Cookie Cutter Superhero” the main character asks to keep her stump instead of getting a new hand when she becomes a superhero. She also takes a superhero persona that has traditionally gone to a boy. Why are both of these things important to her? Write an essay defending her choices.
- The Boy who Grew Up and Figment both build on stories that came before (Peter Pan and Puss In Boots). Are you familiar with the originals? How about other things that reference them like the television series Once Upon a Time, or the movie Shrek 2? Read the Charles Perrault version of Puss In Boots (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault04.html>) and discuss the similarities and differences between that and Figment.