Subteen, preteen, tween: Preadolescent literature inside and out

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Subteen, Preteen, Tween: Preadolescent Literature Inside and Out

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the inside and outside of preadolescent literature, a subgenre that has been widely neglected by literary scholars, educators, and book publishers. In Chapter 2, I analyze the themes within *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and use the developmental stage of preadolescence to define a subgenre of preadolescence, which has distinct characteristics that separate it from the other subgenres of children’s literature. In Chapter 3, I focus on the outside of preadolescent literature, using the results of bookseller and author surveys and research on the history of the tween retail market to uncover the subtle messages being communicated to tween consumers. I consider the liminal position of novels for preadolescent readers within the larger book-producing world by studying the publishing, marketing, and store placement of these novels. By comparing the preadolescents’ roles as implied readers and active consumers, I explore why these readers and their novels are being overlooked and offer some possible solutions for amending this great problem.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When preadolescent readers walk into a bookstore, they are immediately confronted with several problems. They experience problems of categorization because they must discern whether their novels are placed in the “children’s section” or the “young adult section.” There are also problems of finance because their parents often accompany them and control the money needed to purchase a book. Most importantly, there are problems of identity because they want a book that relates and appeals to their stage of life, ages 10-14, but are often unsure which stage of life they are even in. Despite—or because of—these problems, the area of preadolescent literature is hugely neglected by book publishers, booksellers, librarians, and even scholars of children’s literature. I undertook this thesis as a small step in combatting this neglect. My goal is to expose the full scope of this problem by analysing the “inside” of preadolescent literature, the themes and content, as well as the “outside” of preadolescent literature by examining the text as a physical commodity. By comparing the inside and outside of preadolescent literature, I suggest that the areas where these two contradict emphasize the liminality of the preadolescent in our society.

In her book about adolescence, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites writes that children’s literature “often affirms the child’s sense of Self and her or his personal power,” whereas young adult literature focuses on the “social forces that have made [teens] what they are” (Trites 3). What, then, characterizes preadolescent literature? The preadolescent is no longer a child but not yet a teen, so how do their novels apply to them as readers? Thomas Crumpler and Linda Wedwick suggest that the preadolescent novel “propels young adolescents forward on their
identity quests and empowers them to continue that exploration” (68). In the second chapter of my thesis, I hope to build on their definition through an analysis of *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, which I consider to be one of the best examples of a novel written for a preadolescent reader due to its content, the depiction of the main protagonist, and the themes throughout the novel. It is categorized as both a children’s and a young adult novel depending on the source, which also seems to be a characteristic of preadolescent readers themselves. Unfortunately, preadolescent literature is most often defined by scholars by what it *is not*: it is not a children’s or a young adult text. Marketers also define the preadolescent age group by what it isn’t, a problem of identification that has been documented since the 1950s. The labels of “preteen, subteen, and tween” all indicate that preadolescents are in a waiting period to eventually “become,” as if their phase of life is not of equal significance to the childhood or teenage years. Trites claims that young adult literature can be cathartic in meeting the emotional and developmental needs of the young adult and can help guide them through the turbulent stage of adolescence. I believe a similar case can be made for preadolescent literature. The “in-between” stage of preadolescence offers a rare level of agency for the preadolescent due to the lack of parental or institutional authority on their choices. In this unique stage, preadolescents have an opportunity to resist the power structures around them and make their own choices as developing young adults. Therefore, I will consider preadolescent literature in terms of the developmental stage of preadolescence. Both the preadolescent reader and the area of preadolescent literature have been neglected within the book industry, and I believe the neglect of one directly affects the other.

The most obvious example of negligence towards preadolescent readers is exhibited in bookstores and libraries across the country. The places where most young readers go to
find a novel have failed to create a separate area for preadolescent literature. Preadolescent, or “middle school,” readers are generally considered to be between 10 and 14 years old. The most common age division for children’s books is 7-12 and for young adults, it is 12 and up, as exhibited in the survey results I received from bookstores across the United States. From the moment preadolescent readers walk into a store or library, they must choose whether they are children or teenagers, a decision that is being forced upon them in many other ways during this transitional period of growth. Although there are many arguments against the categorization of books by age, it is the most common form of categorization in schools, libraries, and bookstores, and preadolescents are being left out, a potentially more harmful process than having separate categories in the first place. In the third chapter, I use the survey results that I received from bookstores and authors to demonstrate this national neglect of preadolescent readers within the book-producing world. The usual designs of bookstores and libraries are preventing choice and independence and, simultaneously, inhibiting the preadolescents from exploring their new agency. Not only are the books that have been written and published for the preadolescent stage mixed into the children’s and teen departments, but the books themselves are unidentifiable within the shelves because of their cover designs.

The differentiation of book jackets is markedly changed between children’s and teen books, but a novel for a preadolescent reader usually imitates one of these categories; it is rarely distinguished with a separate cover design. Using the book recommendations from the surveys¹, I focus on the current trends in the design of preadolescent books, the placement of preadolescent books in bookstores, how publishers market to the preadolescent audience, and

¹ The full survey results are available in the appendix.
the author’s intent in writing books for preadolescent readers. The surveys, in combination with the book cover analysis, will demonstrate the differences between the marketing of successful retail stores and children’s bookstores. The messages conveyed in the marketing show a telling opinion of preadolescent agency, and bookstores are unfortunately not sending a positive message to preadolescent readers.

I believe that the book industry and literary scholars are sending mixed messages to this age group during a crucial time in their development when they are trying to decide their roles as individuals and as members in society. In the final chapter, I argue that preadolescents need to be regarded as a unique group of people, not as simply pre-, sub-, or between more important life stages. The children’s book industry has been defining them by what they are not, leaving them with no sense of identity or individuality. Excellent novels have been and are still being written specifically for preadolescent readers, yet these books are camouflaged and hidden within sections to which they don’t belong. How can these empowering books reach a disempowered group of people if we do not first acknowledge them as a separate group? Other retail sources are offering tweens an identity as informed, influential consumers, but the book industry is woefully behind. Through the surveys, literary analysis, and scholarly research, I hope to call attention to preadolescent readers and spotlight the areas in which we as scholars have neglected their needs and the needs of this subgenre of literature. Though these novels are only intended for readers during a few short years, they deserve to be acknowledged for their distinct preadolescent characteristics, as do their readers.
Chapter 2: Inside Preadolescent Literature

This is when children are moving toward an identity apart from their families but haven’t yet submerged themselves in peer groups. For these brief and wondrous years, they are individuals open to and ripe for the very best we can give them, including those books written just for them, books that invite them into the world outside their families, their schoolrooms, their own lives. (Birdsall)

In the quote above, Jeanne Birdsall writes of the need for books specifically written for preadolescent readers. Of course, these books exist, but they are not always easy to ascertain. Whereas children’s and young adults texts are studied, analyzed, and marketed according to their broad categories, preadolescent literature is assumed to fall somewhere in-between. Yet, as Birdsall suggests, this is when children are developing a new “identity apart from their families,” and the easier availability of books that they can read, enjoy, and relate to could be encouraging to their development. I use the term preadolescence to describe ages 10-14, generally, but even this term, like the books and the readers, is problematic. Within this thesis alone, I reference psychologists, scholars, teachers, etc. who use a variety of terms for this “age range” including: preadolescent, middle level, middle grade, early adolescent, young adolescent, preteens, subteens, and, of course, tweens. I don’t anticipate resolving the many existing contradictory views about preadolescents, but I will focus on the literature and the preadolescent reader within this chapter. Both have yet to be consistently defined across the fields of psychology, education, and literature, but I believe a definition is needed in order to study books for preadolescent readers as part of a preadolescent genre. In this chapter, I will explore the inside of preadolescent literature. I will catalogue the difficulties in defining the preadolescent genre as well as defining the preadolescent reader, and then I will use The Giver by Lois Lowry as an example of a preadolescent text with definitive
preadolescent characteristics. I agree with Birdsell that the stage of preadolescence is “brief and wondrous,” and it should be a time of empowerment and freedom for preadolescent readers who deserve to be able to access and identify “the very best we can give them.”

**Defining Preadolescent Literature**

Book agents and writing blogs commonly define works of “middle grade” literature by the following characteristics: They are shorter in length than young adult novels, contain characters who are the age of the target reader, have simpler vocabulary and sentence structure than young adult novels, and tend to avoid “dark” and overtly sexual content (Upstart Crow, SFWA, Eisley Jacobs). These characteristics can be arranged into two categories: the age of the reader and the content within the novel. The vocabulary and reading level are often associated with the age of the reader, and age is the most consistent characteristic in definitions of preadolescent literature. The other main characteristic involves content, usually broken up into themes of death, sexuality, evil, and power. Although, from a literary perspective, dissecting an entire genre into specific characteristics is generally discouraged, I think it is important to clarify the specific characteristics of preadolescent literature as a starting point for analysis, especially since it has been widely ignored as a distinct genre in the past. In creating a definition for preadolescent literature, I echo Thomas Crumpler and Linda Wedwick who are addressing the same issue of defining a middle grade genre, when they write, “We understand these criteria as guideposts for theorizing the genre of middle-level literature; they help mark explorations into the genre but are not meant to restrict them” (67). By better understanding preadolescent literature, I hope to highlight its strengths in relation to its implied audience, not limit its analysis to definitive characteristics. Building on the two popular characteristics of age and content, I want to expand the current
definition and explore the developmental stage of the preadolescent implied reader as well as the overall themes of preadolescent literature in contrast to children’s and young adult literature.

**Age of the Preadolescent Reader**

If preadolescent literature could be defined by age alone, it would certainly make categorizing it simpler. However, even this most basic characteristic is problematic. In her article, “Betwixt and Between: Tweens in the Library,” Crystal Faris summarizes the problems in defining the “tween” age range, writing, “Each piece of information explored for this article specified the particular age range being discussed, but each range was different than the defined scope in another book or article or webpage. Age ranges varied from 10 to 14, 8 to 12, 8 to 14, 6 to 10, 9 to 13, 10 to 13, to grades 4 to 8” (43). Logically, it could be argued that the age of the fictional protagonist aligns with the age of the implied reader, but this idea has been frequently challenged by literary scholars due to the many exceptions that problematize this rule, such as Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* and Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*. *The Giver* focuses on a twelve-year-old protagonist, centering it squarely between the common book categorizations of children’s (age 7-12) and young adult (ages 12 and up) literature. It would be ludicrous to suggest that only a twelve-year-old reader would be able to read, enjoy, and relate to this novel. Furthermore, *The Giver* exemplifies the wide assortment of suggested age ranges available. An internet search for the age range for *The Giver* novel provides inconsistent results; the Common Sense Media website suggests a reader of 11 years old, the Barnes and Noble bookstore website suggests ages 10-14, and Amazon.com suggests ages 8-12. On the surveys I sent out to bookstores across the U.S., I asked booksellers where they usually shelve *The Giver* in their stores, being that it is a
popular, award-winning novel that most stores would carry regularly. Every store answered differently; they shelve *The Giver* in sections labeled Children, Young Adult, Award Winner, Fiction, or in a combination of sections.\(^2\) This is a telling example of the problem with existing standardized book categories and highlights the need for more research and consideration of books for this age range. Although, certainly, the age of the protagonist is significant to an extent in the marketing of the novel to a child reader, categorizing a book into the preadolescent genre solely by the age of the protagonist and/or the age of the implied reader is a misguided task.

**Content in Preadolescent Literature**

Book editors, book agents, and literary blogs easily define the content of preadolescent literature in the same way that preadolescents are defined by society: “not children, not yet young adult.” The main issues discussed—death, sex, family, language, violence, difficulty, etc.—are shown in a spectrum where preadolescent books, by default, fall in the middle of the two more popularly defined genres. Few of these sources consider the developmental needs of the preadolescent, instead focusing on controversial topics. For example, if children’s literature has “no sex,” preadolescent literature must then have “some sex,” or at least it introduces the topic in an “innocent” way, and young adult literature has “differing amounts of sex.” The best example I have been able to find that displays a broader understanding of content in preadolescent literature was developed by Crumpler and Wedwick for their chapter in the *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature*. Crumpler and Wedwick focus on “sex, power, and innocent world,” comparing children’s literature, middle level literature, and adolescent literature for each of the

\(^2\) The full survey results are available in the appendix.
categories. They use Roberta Seelinger Trites’ *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* to define adolescent literature, and particularly compare topics like social injustice, sexuality, and power within social institutions. Although their chart expands the definition of content in preadolescent literature beyond the superficial movie-rating topics of violence, sex, language, etc., it lacks any consideration of the development of the implied preadolescent reader. They are aware of this problem as well, writing:

> Defining the parameters around a middle-level reader means taking into consideration the unique characteristics of early adolescents, their varied developmental characteristics, how they define reading, how they participate in reading as socially and culturally positioned people, and how they perceive their access to and comfort with unfamiliar ideas and perspectives represented in literature. (64)

Hopefully, researchers like Crumpler and Wedwick are not alone in recognizing the need for a more fully developed definition of preadolescent literature outside of age and content. Molly O’Neill, a book editor of children’s fiction, was interviewed for the Dystel and Goderich Literary Management website on the topic, “Everything you ever wanted to know about middle grade…and were willing to ask” (Dystel). After a discussion of the appropriate age ranges for a middle grade reader, O’Neill says, “Maybe instead of asking ‘What is middle grade [as a genre]?’ it’s easier to think about ‘Who is the middle grade reader, and what is he/she looking for in a book?’ (Dystel). I would agree that defining the genre by its content or age range is an incomplete description of this genre; only by looking at “who” the reader is and what his/her needs are can we ever begin to understand the distinct nature of preadolescent literature. Thus, I suggest that the most productive way to consider the age and
needs of the preadolescent reader with any consistency is to focus on the developmental stage of preadolescence.

Developmental Stage of Preadolescence

Princeton psychologist, Jacquelynne S. Eccles, writes, “Few developmental periods are characterized by so many changes at so many different levels as early adolescence, when children face the biological transformation of puberty, the educational transition from elementary to secondary school, and the psychological shifts that accompany the emergence of sexuality” (36). Although there is a lack of research on the developmental stage of early adolescence, the existing research all concludes that early or pre-adolescence is an extraordinarily turbulent period of life due to so many changes occurring simultaneously. In her chapter, “Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory,” Karen Coats writes, “Unlike childhood…adolescence is not usually remembered with fond nostalgia, nor is it imbued with mythic status as a place of idyllic stasis. Rather, adolescence is a threshold condition, a liminal state that is fraught with angst, drama, and change anxiety” (324). Although Coats is referring specifically to adolescence, preadolescence is rarely remembered with fondness either, and the stereotypical middle school years are also “fraught with angst, drama, and change anxiety.” What then, separates preadolescence from adolescence, since both could be described as transitional periods and “threshold conditions” that follow childhood?

In his article, “Erikson’s Psychosocial Theories Help Explain Early Adolescence,” Lee Manning writes, “Primary concerns during this psychosocial stage are the young peoples’ search for a role identity and their concern with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared to what they feel they are” (99). Although adolescence is usually defined by the “search for an identity,” Manning suggests that “these crucial early adolescent
years include the *beginning* of the search for an identity” as preadolescents leave the identity of being a child and move towards the next stage [emphasis added] (98). Trites writes that children’s literature “affirms the child’s sense of Self” and that young adult literature depicts adolescents learning “about the social forces that have made them what they are” (2-3). Both characteristics are affirming an identity based in either personal power (child) or within an institutional framework (young adult), but early adolescence is centering on the “beginning of the search for an identity” between childhood and adulthood. Manning writes, “The many physical and social changes during these years present new psychosocial crises that require learners to develop a new sense of ‘self’” (99). Developing and exploring their “new sense of self” beyond childhood and before adolescence seems to be the main theme of preadolescence.

In their book, *Understanding Early Adolescent Self and Identity*, Thomas Brinthaupt and Richard Lipka explore the development of the self in preadolescence. Brinthaupt and Lipka consider three aspects—the social, academic, and biological changes—that affect the development of the self in early adolescents (31-33). Each of these three changes is crucial to the development of self for early adolescents, and the protagonist of *The Giver*, Jonas, exemplifies the importance of each of these changes as we witness him developing throughout Lowry’s book.

*The Giver* is about Jonas, a boy who is about to turn twelve years old. In his dystopian society, turning twelve means becoming an adult and beginning your career. Jonas is surprised to find out that the assignment he is given is to be the “Receiver of Memories.” He learns from the previous Receiver of Memories, The Giver, that their society is able to stay peaceful only as long as the memories of the past are kept from the public knowledge.
Jonas’ job is to receive memories of the past so that he can one day help his community make
decisions, but the people within the community are not allowed to have memories. They are also unable to see colors and are physically indistinguishable from one another. As Jonas receives memories, he begins to question the rules of his society and eventually, decides to escape with the aid of The Giver so that the community will be forced to receive the memories as well and hopefully realize that they were incomplete without them. I will use Jonas’ development as a preadolescent protagonist to highlight the main developmental stages of preadolescence and to argue that The Giver, consequently, exemplifies the definitive characteristics of the preadolescent genre and could even be interpreted as allegorical of the stage of preadolescence, due to the dystopian setting which often exaggerates issues that concern the preadolescent.

**Stirrings**

In the beginning of The Giver, the main protagonist, Jonas, is bathing an elderly woman in the community nursing home as part of his community service hours. Jonas “couldn’t see why it was necessary” for people to turn away at others’ nakedness, and he even “liked the expression of trust on the woman’s face as she lay in the water unprotected, exposed, and free” (30). Jonas’ inability to comprehend rules regarding nudity is childlike; he is unashamed of his and others’ nakedness because he has not become consciously aware of his own sexuality. Jonas is not quite a child, however, because in the same scene where he is contemplating the rules regarding nudity, he is watching Fiona, a girl who he later dreams about bathing in a sexualized way. Jonas gives insight into the developmental stage he is in when he thinks, “The dreams had felt pleasurable. Though the feelings were confused, he thought that he had liked the feelings that his mother had called Stirrings” (39). This is one of
the first moments that Jonas is confused by how his feelings contrast to what his parents tell him. His mother reports his dream and gives him a pill that will stop his sexual “Stirrings,” making him emotionally “childlike” again. Don Latham suggests that Jonas’ entire community represents an idealized childhood, writing, “It would seem that in this kind of society, there is no blurring of the line between childhood and adulthood, with every stage in the development process so clearly defined. However, this is not really the case, for in this society everyone is expected to behave as an adult and, at the same time, everyone is treated like a child” (9). This calls into question the social construct of the “asexual child” vs. the “sexual adult,” which I don’t have space to explore in this chapter. However, suffice to say, Jonas’ community sees children as asexual, lacking all sexual desire and sexuality, and uses medication to keep them in this state.

Most child psychologists agree that puberty is the hallmark of preadolescence (Juhasz, Eccles). Brinthaupt and Lipka write, “Changes of the body should…be experienced as a change of the self,” linking the biological changes that occur during puberty with the change in self of the preadolescent (35). This is also a crucial part of the transitioning preadolescent self because “early adolescence is the period of life where biological changes are most intense,” leading to a positive or negative effect on the self, depending on the preadolescent’s reception to these changes (Brinthaupt 30). I believe this is why Lowry situates Jonas’ questioning of nakedness and the onset of his “Stirrings” at the beginning of the novel, highlighting the physical changes that Jonas experiences as he steps into puberty. A heightened sexuality commonly follows the onset of puberty, and, according to Trites, sex is used in YA literature to “[mark] a rite of passage that helps [teenagers] define themselves as having left childhood behind” (84). Coats also comments on this relationship between YA
literature and sex, writing, “While we agree that the age of the protagonist is important to
making the distinction, my colleagues Anita Tarr and Roberta Trites both cite sex as a key
determining factor between YA literature and preadolescent texts—if a book has sex in it, it’s
YA; it if doesn’t, it’s preadolescent” (322). Coats goes on to complicate this claim depending
on the “moral universe” within the text. However, sex is clearly a critical factor in defining
preadolescent literature.

Crumpler and Wedwick make the distinction that growth novels, or
Entwicklungsromane, which is the category most preadolescent novels fall under, “are not
punctuated with graphic language and sexual how to, although there may be a sense of sexual
awakening within the protagonist” (68). I would agree with Crumpler and Wedwicks’
distinction and add that it is important for preadolescent novels to acknowledge the
biological changes that occur during early adolescence because these changes are part of
what makes this stage distinct from other stages. Jonas undeniably experiences a “sexual
awakening,” but Lowry makes it clear that this is only one part of his development. It is a
physical, tangible indication that Jonas is moving beyond childhood and signals future
developments of his self, psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually. I also agree with
Crumpler and Wedwick that a “sexual awakening” is more fitting to the stage of
preadolescence than explicit sex (in general). Crumpler and Wedwick write:

Books for the young adolescent…do not completely reflect the innocent world of
children’s literature, but also do not position the reader in explicit situational contexts
as adolescent literature does. Although books can be a safe place for new experiences
before adolescents try them out in the real world, young adolescents are not always
prepared for the content of literature for older adolescents. (67)
I suggest that preadolescent literature should be defined by the average preadolescents’ developmental needs, such as the distinctive biological changes during puberty and sexual awakening, as shown in *The Giver*. However, explicit sexual content does not seem necessary to fulfill the developmental needs of the preadolescent. The Stirrings, representative of puberty, help Jonas to see his society and his parents in a new light, causing him to question the community’s rule of taking pills to suppress the Stirrings. After Jonas begins to receive more memories of love and emotions, Lowry writes, “The next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away” (129). After he stops taking the pill, he is able to truly feel emotions for the first time in his life. Jonas feels “real sadness” and “rage” and especially “loss” as he realizes that he is leaving his childhood, a common motif of adolescent literature (Lowry 132, 135). I don’t believe, in the context of this novel, that a sexual experience with a partner was needed for Jonas’ development as a character or as a general depiction of preadolescence. Jonas describes the sexual dream about one of his female classmates as “pleasurable” but “confusing,” which appears to be a radical enough change for Jonas’ development and possibly even enough for the preadolescent reader who is “not always prepared for the content of literature for older readers” (Crumpler 67). As Trites writes, sex “marks a rite of passage that helps [teenagers] define themselves as having left childhood behind” and it is often symbolic of entering adulthood, but Jonas’ experience suggests that, for a preadolescent, the onset of puberty is defining in its own right (84). I want to clarify that it is not a mere lack of sexually explicit content that defines preadolescent literature, but instead, it is the introduction of puberty, a biological change of preadolescence, which often includes a sexual awakening, physical changes, sexual dreams,
etc. as we see with Jonas. Thus, the new and confusing move into puberty is both a hallmark of preadolescence and a main identifier of preadolescent literature.

The Receiver of Memories

In Jonas’ community, choice and independence are forbidden, particularly up until the age of twelve, when children are assigned to a career and begin training. It is assumed that in Jonas’ community, twelve marks the passage to adulthood, but Jonas demonstrates that not every child is able to transition according to the system provided. Although realizing that he is stepping into his adult career, Lowry writes that Jonas “was dismayed that his schedule left no time for recreation” (69). Jonas’ feelings suggest that he, at least, was not ready to leave his childhood behind. Our society’s middle school system is not meeting the needs of the preadolescent any better than Jonas’ society, which is described by Latham as “a community of clearly demarcated stages of development and rigidly defined roles [where] children apparently learn a very adult lesson early on: there is considerable incongruity between what actually occurs and what might be desired,” or needed (9). For Jonas, the move from school to his career means that he is forced into a new, intimidating role with a large amount of responsibility during a time when he is also developing abstract thinking, or seeing colors. During this intersection of responsibility and cognitive development, Jonas is able to recognize problems in his society that he had never noticed before. This phase of development is similar to the experiences of many preadolescents as they enter middle school.

In her article, “The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14,” psychologist Jacquelynne Eccles analyzes the often traumatic transition to middle school from elementary school for preadolescents. Eccles writes: “A poor ‘fit’ between early adolescents and the
classroom environment increases the risk of disengagement and school problems,” suggesting that instead, “adolescents need an environment that is both reasonably safe and intellectually challenging—one that provides a ‘zone of comfort’ as well as challenging new opportunities for growth” (41). Brinthaupt and Lipka also see the structure of middle schools in the United States as counter-productive to the development of the self in preadolescents and they reference one of Eccles’ past studies on the subject, writing, “[middle schools] decrease decision making and choice at a time when desire for control is growing; they emphasize lower-level cognitive strategies at a time when the ability to use higher-level strategies is increasing; and they disrupt social networks at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and may be in special need of close adult friendships” (cited in original 147). During a time when Jonas is wishing for more recreational time and grieving for his childhood activities, he is forced to “be alone, apart, while he is prepared by the current Receiver for the job which is the most honored in our community,” a position that he accepts with “increasing unease” (Lowry 61). Describing Jonas’ new position in society, Lowry writes, “Now, for the first time in his twelve years of life, Jonas felt separate, different” (65). This feeling would most likely be shared by many preadolescent readers who have been pushed into middle school without any guidance and are a “poor fit” for the middle school structure.

Brinthaupt and Lipka write, “In contrast to children who think about things that are real and concern their immediate situation, adolescents become able to think about possibilities” (33). According to their definition, then, an important characteristic of preadolescence is the development of more complex abstract thinking. Eccles suggests that the heightening of abstract thinking is a main marker of preadolescence, writing, “The most
important cognitive changes during early adolescence relate to the increasing ability of children to think abstractly, consider the hypothetical as well as the real, consider multiple dimensions of a problem at the same time, and reflect on themselves and on complicated problems” (38).

In her book *Middle Grade Education*, Pat Williams-Boyd writes that preadolescents “increasingly assess moral matters in shades of gray as opposed to viewing them in black and white terms as is characteristic of young children” (101). After Jonas begins to see colors, a not-too-subtle allegory for seeing shades of gray in a previously black-and-white world, he asks more questions and stops accepting the answers that contradict the lessons he’s learned with *The Giver*. The metaphor of “seeing color” in Jonas’ developmental progression could be interpreted as the beginning of abstract thinking. Williams-Boyd writes that preadolescents “are increasingly aware of and concerned about inconsistencies between values professed by adults and the conditions they see in society” (101). As Jonas begins to receive more memories and gain more “knowledge,” he sees and identifies more colors in his society. He also begins to notice inconsistencies in his society, questioning whether or not his parents lie, and whether the inability to see colors is actually good for the community. During a particularly frustrated moment, Jonas exclaims, “It isn’t fair that nothing has color! ... If everything’s the same, then there aren’t any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and decide things!” (98). Jonas’ frustration with the lack of color is similar to many preadolescents’ frustrations with the system of middle school, where they are encouraged to develop abstract thinking, yet simultaneously denied freedom and choices in the carefully “demarcated” system of public middle schools in America. This struggle for independence signifies the beginning of the struggle with society, which comes to a head during
adolescence, when teenagers must “learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function” (Trites 3). Both the development of abstract thinking and the transition from child to preadolescent are important characteristics of preadolescence, and, in Jonas’ case, crucially important to his development as a preadolescent character.

**The Giver**

Williams-Boyd writes that preadolescents “seek choice and self-responsibility within the boundaries set by nonparental adults” (85). Another main identifier of preadolescent literature is that, although the preadolescents need independence and freedom of choice to continue their cognitive development, they are dependent on the guidance of their peers or a nonparental adult who, in Jonas’ case, is The Giver. As preadolescents move away from their parents and family, they are seeking acceptance in a new family unit, whether it be friends, teachers, etc. For Jonas, The Giver helps him to transition away from his family by becoming a friend and mentor to him. Anne McCreary Juhasz describes this transition for the preadolescent, writing, “In the search for a unique self the adolescents need to select some representative of the adult world, a meaningful individual, a hero, a role model….also, they are selecting an ideal, a model to whom they can make a commitment and be faithful to” (18). Being a dystopian society, the government in Jonas’ world forces Jonas into this stage by pairing him with The Giver to be trained separately from the rest of their society.

When Jonas is told that he will be the next Receiver, they announce that he is to be “alone, apart, while he is prepared by the current Receiver for the job,” which fills Jonas with “increasing unease” (61). Manning writes, “Primary concerns during this psychosocial stage are the young peoples’ search for a role identity and their concern with what they appear to
be in the eyes of others as compared to what they feel they are” (99). Jonas is told that he will be “alone” and “apart,” which is contrary to the desires and needs of a preadolescent. The rules that come with becoming the Receiver further separate Jonas from his family unit, stating that Jonas cannot discuss his training with his parents, that he can no longer tell them his dreams every morning, and that he may lie to them. All of the rules drive a wedge between Jonas and his family, forcing him to depend on The Giver for guidance. Latham writes, “Jonas displays his desire for connectedness by forming close connections to two people in the novel, The Giver, who represents the past, and the newchild Gabriel, who represents the future” (10). Due to the obvious push to separate Jonas from his family and peers, he must consider his mentor and a baby to be his “peer group,” but an important part of preadolescent development is seeking acceptance from someone outside of the family.

Brinthaupt and Lipka claim that, “in early adolescence, social and psychological changes affect and transform adolescents’ relationships with others” (41). Psychosocial theorist, Erik Erikson, divides the human experience into 8 stages of psychosocial development. The two stages that early adolescence falls between are “Industry vs. Inferiority” (ages 7-12) and “Identity vs. Role Confusion” (ages 12-18). Considering the latter part of Erikson’s Industry vs. Inferiority stage, Manning writes, “The adolescent continues to center around the parent or siblings, yet a developing sense of the world outside the family also leads him or her to seek and develop competence in other social situations. Peers and friends act as socializing agents and become increasingly important to early adolescents” (96). However, Williams-Boyd writes, “Although it is true that students at this age are attempting to establish their own sense of identity apart from the family, they do not want the family to be too far removed” (113). We see in the end of the novel that Jonas seeks
guidance from The Giver, but experiences the most pain when he feels that he cannot trust his own family. He even seeks a new family as part of his escape from the community. In adolescent texts, absent or ineffectual parents are a common motif. The absence of a parent or guardian forces the adolescents to explore their independence, such as in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games or Robert Cormier’s The Chocolate War. Nevertheless, the family is still a place of security for the preadolescent who is not ready for complete independence, but it is the peer group or mentor that has the greater influence on their choices.

Brinthaupt and Lipka also focus on the social development outside of the family, writing, “Social relationships outside the family become more important…social recognition and approval by others become a major concern for young adolescents” (33). One of the main marketing strategies towards preadolescent consumers is to target them as a peer group, not as individuals. There is a general understanding among marketers that the preadolescents’ deepest desire is “to fit in.” (I will go into greater depth with the need to fit in in Chapter Three, exploring how marketers target this need in their tween consumers.) In The Giver, Jonas voices the desire to fit in when he thinks, “I feel sorry for anyone who is in a place where he feels strange and stupid,” and he is wary of being “alone” and “apart” as the Receiver of Memories (Lowry 6). The novel is set in a dystopian society that attempts to wipe out any differences in its members. Although the themes of the dystopian genre slightly skew Jonas’ natural development, this genre also supports an allegory of preadolescence. Jonas feels an exaggerated need to fit in due to the dystopian setting, yet it is a need that is also especially exaggerated during the stage of preadolescence and can help the preadolescent reader relate to Jonas.
Although in our society, this need for acceptance would most likely be shown by a preadolescent spending time with a peer group, many preadolescents see a teacher, coach, or other adult as a role model outside of their family unit. This shift from family to an outside influence or peer group is one of the most recognizable characteristics of preadolescence, other than puberty, and Jonas’ actions confirm that he is in the midst of this developmental stage as he shifts his focus from his family to The Giver, while still wanting a family to fall back on as is shown in the ending of the novel.

Release

Death and power are two of the main topics in Trites’ important book on young adult literature, \textit{Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Young Adult Literature}. Trites describes the depiction of death in children’s literature as “part of a cycle, as an ongoing process of life. Learning about death seems to be a stage in the child’s process of separating from the parent more than anything else” (118). From his parents, Jonas learns about the “release” of the elderly and of newchildren (infants). Jonas describes the release ceremonies, saying, “Release of the elderly …was a time of celebration for a life well and fully lived; and release of a newchild, which always brought a sense of what-could-we-have-done” (7). Any unforeseen death of a member of the community is comforted and smoothed over by the Ceremony of Loss and by eventually replacing the lost member with a newchild of the same name. Jonas accepts the descriptions of “release” which his parents and community provide until he begins to meet with The Giver. Trites writes, “Death in adolescent literature is a threat, an experience adolescents understand as a finality” (118). She further writes, “death is the sine qua non of adolescent literature…death is often depicted in terms of maturation
when the protagonist accepts the permanence of mortality, when s/he accepts herself as
Being-towards-death” (119).

As Jonas matures as a preadolescent, we see a shift in his understanding of death. In
the beginning of the novel, he readily accepts his parents’ explanations of release or death as
part of the life cycle, following Trites’ definition of death in children’s literature. However,
when he begins to receive memories from The Giver, he begins to question his community’s
view of death. Jonas is especially affected when he receives a memory of a boy his age dying
during a battle. During this memory, Lowry describes Jonas’ feelings, writing, “…he knew
that he could bear it no longer and would welcome death himself” (119). Jonas depends on
The Giver even more after this experience, but he does not fully separate from his parents
until he watches his father perform the release ceremony on a newchild. Jonas watches as his
father euthanizes a newchild and then throws its body down a chute. Jonas witnesses his
father murder a baby and comprehends the “finality” of death, moving him out of a childish
understanding. With this new knowledge, “Jonas felt a ripping sensation inside of himself,
the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward to emerge in a cry” (150). Jonas feels
betrayed and shocked after seeing his father perform the release ceremony, and Jonas’
childlike naiveté disappears as he struggles with his emotions, reacting with anger and
sarcasm. Trites suggests that in children’s literature, death occurs “offstage,” so the child
learns about it secondhand, but in YA literature, death is “immediate” and shocking (120).
Jonas has experienced both forms of death, the offstage and the immediate, in a short period
of time and is confused and affected by these conflicting experiences, especially since his
father was responsible for the latter. The Giver realizes the irreparable effect that Jonas’
father’s action have caused to Jonas’ psyche and decides that Jonas needs to escape from the
community. To escape, Jonas has to learn to depend on his personal power as well as the memories he received from the Giver.

Trites writes, “Although the primary purpose of the adolescent novel may appear to be a depiction of growth, growth in this genre is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power….adolescents must learn their place in the power structure” (10). The lesson that “social institutions are bigger and more powerful than individuals” is a “primary one in Young Adult literature,” and whether Jonas learns this lesson or not is another main identifier of the preadolescent genre (Trites 3). Jonas undeniably begins to struggle with the institution in his community, questioning the pills that stop the Stirrings, the control over seeing in color, and most of all, the euthanization of newchildren and the elderly. Thus, *The Giver* could be considered to “[investigate] how the individual exists within society,” suggesting that it is a YA novel. However, the way that Jonas avoids the power structures within his society is *not* characteristic of the average YA protagonist. Trites writes, “Once protagonists of the YA novel have learned to discursively negotiate their place in the domination-repression chain of power, they are usually depicted as having grown, satisfying the conventions of the Entwicklungsroman,” or growth novel (52). Jonas does not learn to negotiate his place in society, nor does he truly rebel against the institution beyond deciding not to take the pill for his Stirrings. Trites uses Jerry Renault from *The Chocolate War* as a model YA protagonist because Jerry “asserts his personal power” to “disturb the universe” before he learns his “place in the power structure” (2).

Adolescent protagonists must “learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist” in their social structures to learn their place in society, but Jonas runs away from his society (Trites 3).
Whereas Jerry Renault asks himself, “Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?”, Jonas is frightened by the power he has as a Receiver of Memories and knows “with certainty that he could change nothing” (Lowry 135). Jonas doesn’t even recognize the institution of power in his community as being at fault for the injustice and hypocrisy he sees. After receiving memories from the Giver, Lowry writes that Jonas “found that he was often angry now, irrationally angry at his groupmates, that they were satisfied with their lives which had none of the vibrance his own was taking on. And he was angry at himself, that he could not change that for them” (99). When he is told for the first time that he can lie as a Receiver of Memories, he questions whether or not other adults are allowed to lie, particularly his parents. He is disturbed by the thought that his father could lie to him, not about the implications of the community’s rules. Even after Jonas realizes that “release” has meant that newchildren have been murdered for years, he is mainly upset that his father lied to him. He questions the actions of his parent whom he trusted, not the greater institutions that make the rules, as we see in YA novels like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. After witnessing a child being murdered by a boy from another community during the gladiator-esque match, the main protagonist, Katniss thinks, “To hate the boy from District 1…seems inadequate. It’s the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us” (Collins 236). Katniss clearly sees the Capitol, the governing body of her country, as responsible for the death of the child, and she wants revenge. Jonas doesn’t want revenge, and he insists on blaming his peers, family, and even himself for the problems in his society. Again, the dystopian setting could affect this interpretation of Jonas’ actions or it could exaggerate the allegory of preadolescence since Jonas does not blame the obviously controlling government for the problems in his society. This suggests to me that he has not developed to a stage where seeing the effect of the
institution is a logical conclusion, as the older Katniss does. Jonas still sees the world in relation to his friends and family, not in terms of the institution, which is why he believes he can escape his problems by leaving his community. In terms of power, Jonas is still not recognizing the institutions within his society, and he does not even consider escaping until The Giver arranges it.

It is The Giver who sees the need for change in their community and arranges an escape plan for Jonas. Jonas begs The Giver to escape with him, not yet ready to set off on his own and still depending on The Giver’s guidance as a mentor. In his article, Latham complicates Jonas’ escape from the community, writing:

*The Giver* depicts the conflict between the power of the individual and the power structures of a totalitarian society and suggests that radical social change may be possible through courageous acts of resistance. In one sense, Lowry’s novel, much like its protagonist who ultimately rejects his assigned role, eschews the role of the typical adolescent novel, which is to ‘depict how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures’ (Trites, 7). The novel contradicts this notion, suggesting instead that Jonas should be admired precisely *because* he resists the institutional structures of his community. (135)

According to Latham, *The Giver* cannot be labeled a YA novel because Jonas resists the institutional structures of his society by escaping instead of being integrated within them. However, I question how much resistance Jonas actually exhibits throughout the novel, other than refusing to take the pill for his Stirrings. Jonas starts to see the faults of his community and wishes they had made different decisions, but he does not actually act on his feelings independent from The Giver’s instructions until the very end of the novel when he takes
Gabe, a newchild who is scheduled to be released, with him when he runs away. The resolution of *The Giver* firmly settles this novel into the preadolescent genre and could even be seen as the completion of an allegory for the preadolescent experience.

**Resolution**

The ending of *The Giver* “eschews closure and resists easy interpretation,” (Latham 149) which is ironically similar to the difficulties in defining preadolescence. At the end of the novel, the reader is left wondering whether Jonas and Gabriel died in the wilderness outside of their community or if their sled ride towards a distant community was more than a metaphorical death, and that they were able to become part of a new community that Jonas hopes is a place “where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love” (Lowry 178). Lowry cunningly complicates any easy interpretation of Jonas’ fate with the final sentence of the novel, “But perhaps it was only an echo,” referring to the community Jonas believes he is sledding towards (179). The ending is ambiguous, but as a plot resolution, that fits the preadolescent genre in several ways.

The ending does not resolve Jonas’ role as either a child or adolescent according to the characteristics of children’s or young adult literature. Trites writes, “Although children’s novels often have absent parents so that the child protagonist is free to have an adventure, the child often returns to some sort of parent-based home by the end of the narrative” (Trites 55). *The Giver* defies the circular pattern of the children’s literature genre in that Jonas does not return to his home or to his surrogate parent, The Giver. On the contrary, it would seem that Jonas is still hoping to find a “real” family that will love him in the next community. Concerning adolescent literature, Trites writes, “A major convention at work in novels about adolescence [is that] the child must create for her-or-himself a parent figure, a symbolic
parent, to murder” (57). *The Giver* refuses to fit into the linear pattern of young adult literature because Jonas does not betray or desert The Giver by choice. It is The Giver who tells Jonas to leave and find a new home, despite Jonas’ insistent pleas for him to leave as well. We do not even know if Jonas consequently “murdered” his real father after leaving the community because it is not clear whether Jonas’ escape from the community resulted in chaos or freedom when the memories spread to the people. The ambiguity of the ending completely prevents the reader from ascertaining whether the pattern of the story will situate Jonas in a new family (circular) or whether the story resolves in Jonas’ death or redemption (linear), further complicating an existing genre label.

The last way that the resolution “eschews closure” is in Jonas’ final position within a power structure. Although The Giver originally decides that Jonas should escape, it is Jonas who inspired The Giver to see the possibility of change for their community in the first place. The Giver tells Jonas, “Having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change” (154). Jonas, just by being himself and asking questions, helps The Giver decide to release the memories. The Giver, as Jonas’ mentor, organizes the escape plan, but in the end, Jonas has to improvise a new plan and escapes early in order to save Gabriel. The Giver intended to give Jonas memories of “strength and courage,” but Jonas has to leave before he can receive them or say goodbye to The Giver (166). After running away with Gabriel in order to save his life, Jonas realizes that “he had strength of his own, and had not needed what The Giver might have provided” (168). He found his strength when he needed it to survive and to protect Gabriel, displaying a level of empathy that we have yet to see in him up until this point. Thus, “Jonas ultimately renounces his assigned role, choosing instead to risk his life by trying to escape” (Latham 146).
Trites writes that in the YA novel, *The Chocolate War*, Jerry Renault is punished by society for challenging the power structures, but that in the end, Jerry was right for doing so. Teenagers in YA literature are “repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books” (Trites 7). Why then, did Jonas run away? If we consider Jonas to be an adolescent protagonist, it would be cowardly and useless to run away from an institution instead of learning how to operate within it or rebelling against it, even within a dystopian society. In Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series, the teenage Katniss Everdeen chooses to fight and destroy the Capitol in order to bring about change for her society. If *The Giver* is a dystopian adolescent text similar to *The Hunger Games*, Jonas’ escape would mean that he refused to actively resist society and instead used his agency to run away. However, if we consider Jonas to be a preadolescent protagonist, this choice makes more sense.

Jonas depends on The Giver up until he escapes, and having to personally make the choice to escape in order to save Gabriel allows Jonas to use his growing knowledge of colors and memories, as well as his childlike personal power. By taking Gabriel with him, Jonas increases the chances of getting caught and decreases his chances of survival, choosing to give Gabriel most of his food. From this experience, Jonas realizes that he has personal power, not power borrowed from The Giver or his community. The night before their planned escape, The Giver tells Jonas, “You have the colors…and you have the courage. I will help you to have the strength” (157). Jonas has the ability to think abstractly—to see colors—and decides to leave early, saving Gabriel and protecting him throughout their journey. Jonas also has courage, possibly the courage from a sense of his personal power, which Trites writes is characteristic of child protagonists. Since Jonas has yet to be integrated
into his society as an active member, he still has the naïve expectations of a child, but combined with the experiences/memories he has received, he is more mature than he was as a child. He has separated himself from dependence on his family and must leave The Giver behind, replacing his role model with the newchild, Gabriel, so that he is not alone.

After leaving his family and his role model, Jonas takes on the responsibility of saving himself and Gabriel, which teaches him more about who he is and what he is capable of. Latham writes, “Jonas’ act of resistance, then, represents a (perhaps symbolic) victory of the subject’s power over the power structures of society” (147). By deserting his role as the Receiver of memories and his role in society to conform to the norm, Jonas is able to avoid and escape from the power structures of his community. This is significant for the developing preadolescent reader because, as Crumpler and Wedwick write, “The middle-level novel propels young adolescents forward on their identity quests and empowers them to continue that exploration;” unlike in a YA novel, where his personal power would be replaced by an acceptance of the power structures of society (68). By escaping his community, Jonas is able to discover his personal power and explore his identity away from his parents, friends, and even his mentor. Thus, Jonas’ ability to avoid the power structures of society is due to his position as a preadolescent since the developmental aspects that characterize preadolescence as distinct from childhood and adolescence empower him to escape and because his society underestimates the power of all preadolescents, similar to our society. Jonas’ society allowed him to receive memories because they did not consider him to be a threat, but the memories, symbolic of his abstract thinking, pushed him to begin questioning his community. Jonas’ fresh perspective inspires The Giver to recognize a need for change, but it is Jonas who must escape from the community to free the memories. Jonas is only able to leave because his
community has granted him freedoms as the Receiver of Memories, never expecting a twelve year old to have the desire or the power to escape. I don’t believe a child, adolescent, or adult would have the disregarded position, the knowledge and memories, and the naïve confidence in their personal power that enabled Jonas to escape and survive. It is Jonas’ position as a preadolescent that enables him to leave his community with Gabriel in search of a new home.

**Conclusion**

Latham writes, “Whether or not Jonas ultimately survives, it is clear that in leaving the community, he escapes the imposition of a role of honor and embraces the role of the criminal, as defined by this community” (149). Latham describes a criminal in Jonas’ community as “anyone who cannot be completely integrated into the power structures,” which also describes the position of the preadolescent in our society. They fail to fit the category of child, yet they are not adolescents who can be integrated within the power structures. Due to the biological, academic, and social changes associated with early adolescence, preadolescents are constantly recreating their selves and, as a result, their position within society remains elusive until they reach the more definite stage of adolescence. Preadolescents are defined by their inability to be defined according to our categorization systems and according to their missing role in society. Like Jonas, preadolescents are in a unique position because they are underestimated, so they too have the power to resist the structures that they are slowly becoming aware of because the structures do not consider preadolescents to be a threat…at least not until they reach adolescence and can become accepted members of society. Preadolescents are at a stage where they “believe that they have the power to make a difference,” and they haven’t been taught otherwise, unlike Jerry Renault at the end of Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (Crumpler 68).
In this space of raw belief in their personal power as post-children and during a time when their new selves are being created separately from their families, preadolescents can avoid the power structures for a short time and explore their personal power as they simultaneously begin to learn more about the inner-workings of society—a position that is unique to the preadolescent stage. This healthy exploration rests on a precarious balance of guidance and independence, which The Giver provides for Jonas. Unfortunately, many adults within our society are still undecided about whether to regulate or to ignore preadolescents until they reach a more definable age. Ironically, their ability to be unmanageable, yet not cast as “unmanageable teenagers,” is the key of their empowerment. Thus, I suggest that Jonas’ choice to escape enables him to discover his power as an individual before he can be integrated into society. It is also an example of the rare agency preadolescents have during a time of great biological, social, and intellectual change, whether their resistance results in positive change in society or is “only an echo.”
Chapter 3: Outside Preadolescent Literature

The genre of children’s literature has been understood as a product of the consumer market from its inception. One of the most popular examples is John Newbery’s *A Pretty Little Pocketbook*, which was published in 1744. *A Pretty Little Pocketbook* was one of the earliest printed children’s books available to the masses due to its affordable price. When purchasing *A Pretty Little Pocketbook*, buyers received a free toy, either a ball for a boy or a pincushion for a girl. Children’s literature aligned with consumerism in this market-scheme to sell more books, and certainly, the books themselves have always been commodities to purchase and collect. Young Adult literature was born from similar roots, and the term “teenager” was even coined by marketers to identify their target audience in the 1940s (Trites 9). Although there is a lack of research on preadolescents in the fields of literature, psychology, and education, marketers have been keenly aware of the buying potential of this age category since the 1940s and are even responsible for creating the terms “subteen, preteen, and tween.” Like their older teen siblings, tweens are the offspring of a capitalist culture, and as such, they are expected to acknowledge their heritage by becoming “good consumers.” As an age category that is in-between the dominant categories of childhood and adolescence, the only power that society allots to tweens is their large consumer potential. However, this identity does not necessarily cross over into purchasing literature, and I will analyze the design of bookstores, libraries, and book covers to reveal how the book industry is failing to communicate through the paratext the empowered identities that preadolescent novels offer. In Chapter Two, I analyzed *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, suggesting that the themes—the inside elements—of preadolescent literature support the developmental stage of preadolescence and encourage preadolescent readers to explore their identity and agency. Of
course, the text is the most important element of a book, but in order for preadolescents to access the text, the paratext—the outside elements of a book—must make a “good first impression.” To better understand the in-between position of preadolescent readers and preadolescent literature within the book industry and in wider society, I think it is crucial to consider their liminality.

**Liminality**

Victor Turner defines liminals as members of society who are “no longer classified and not yet classified” (48). As preadolescents leave the classification of child and wait to become adolescents, they embody a liminal status. Turner writes, “As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture” (47). Thus, preadolescents naturally fall between the cracks of age classifications and definitions as our culture has designated them. In the field of children’s literature alone, the categories of children’s literature and adolescent literature are studied in depth by scholars like Roberta Seelinger Trites, Michael Cart, and Perry Nodelman. However, there is little scholarship on the genre of preadolescent literature, and the research that exists is usually focused on the reading levels of preadolescents, not on the literature. Due to their invisibility and non-existence within the classifications system of our society, preadolescents, as liminars, exist in “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner 48). In other words, the space of liminality allows for agency and experimentation that a classified individual does not usually have as an accepted member of society. I would suggest that, due to their liminal status, tweens have finally recognized their power as consumers and begun to create their own “realm of pure possibility” based on
their communal tastes, as exhibited in their annual spending. Preadolescents are in a developmental stage that enables them to explore and develop a new self beyond childhood before they must be integrated into society. Within this stage, there is a rare opportunity for agency and individuality outside of the cultural norms, which I believe tweens have tapped into within the retail industry. They have started to create a new “tween” identity, as exemplified in the new tween stores and products, but I think this is only the beginning.

During the course of one year, tweens are credited to spend (directly or indirectly) a combined $176 billion in the U.S. (Siegel 78). Ingvild Kvale Sorensen and Claudia Mitchell write, “Regarded by some marketers as the heart of the child market, [tweens] are thought to have quite a lot of spending money on their own and are seen to be the segment of the youth market that has more power and influence than the others” (159). Kevina Cody studies tweens through the lens of Victor Turner’s liminal stage theory within the consumer market. Cody suggests that due to their current market value, tweens have actually surpassed teenagers and become the market’s “focal point.” (287). Diane Prince and Nora Martin support this idea of the powerful tween consumer, writing, “[Tweens] are described as hyper brand conscious, spend a lot of time with peers and are peer influenced. They grow up faster, are more connected, more direct, more informed, have more personal power, more money, more influence and attention than previous generations” (32). However, with all their power, finances, and influence, this tween category is still elusive. Cook and Kaiser write, “A dichotomy tends to divide those who see the child as active and ‘empowered’ and those who see the child as a manipulable being subject to exploitation by advertising and marketing” (230). Cody responds to this dichotomy within tweens specifically, arguing that as not only children but as children belonging to the liminal space of preadolescence, tweens are both
manipulated products of consumerism and active, influential consumers themselves. Similar
to the teens of the 40s and 50s, tweens were given their consumer position due to their
economic potential. However, they have moved beyond the styles and products provided for
them and begun to actually influence the market trends. The market is now meeting their
great demand for tween style products. This paradoxical role places them in a unique position
of power within the American economy.

The question I want to consider, then, is what the retail and book industries are doing
to meet the needs and attract the attention of this powerful, liminal tween consumer. I will
address this question by looking at three crucial areas of marketing to preadolescents and
compare successful industry strategies with the current efforts of the book industry. The three
areas I will be considering are: Issues of Categorization, The Role of Parents, and Specialized
Tween Products.

**Issues of Categorization**

The topic of specialized tween spaces is complicated. Developmentally,
preadolescents are in a stage characterized by the need to find acceptance and to “fit in.” In
her article on early adolescence, Jacquelynne Eccles writes, “Individuals are not likely to do
very well, or to be very motivated, if they are in social environments that do not fit their
psychological needs” (37). Eccles claims that there is a direct connection in early
adolescence between a preadolescent’s development and their social environment. Lee
Manning writes, “When young people fail to achieve a sense of personal identity…they feel
a sense of not knowing who they are, where they belong, or to whom” (99). Manning
suggests the idea of “belonging” is connected with the preadolescents’ identity development.
I would, therefore, suggest that based on the developmental needs of the preadolescent, they
would do best in a space that they can identify as theirs, a space where they belong and “fit in.” Throughout the history of the tween market, creating a space and therefore, a distinct identity, for preadolescents has been the greatest challenge.

In their article, “Betwixt and be Tween: Age Ambiguity and the Sexualization of the Female Consuming Subject,” Daniel Cook and Susan Kaiser describe the progression of preadolescence as a market category within the clothing retail industry during the 20th century. Cook and Kaiser write, “The ‘tween’ (or subteen/preteen) has been constructed and maintained as an ambiguous, age-delineated marketing and merchandising category” (203). Following shortly behind the teen market, preadolescents have seen a shifting identity, as shown in the many labels for this age category. Cook and Kaiser write, “The mixed use of the term tween, Tween, subteen and preteen is telling of the shifting boundaries and meaning of this persona” (205). I find it particularly interesting that these terms all situate preadolescents as either be-“tween” the major categories of child and young adult or as sub- and pre- the more distinguishable category of young adult. The labels alone suggest that this group is only defined in comparison, not as distinct unto itself. The history of the tween further portrays this age group’s inability to “fit in” within our consumer culture.

As early as the 1940s, “the apparel industry has made a number of attempts to cater for girls in-between the categories of childhood and young womanhood” (Cook 207), but it wasn’t until the 1950s that they were given the label “subteen.”

Cook and Kaiser write:

The ‘subteen’ as a commercial persona and age/size category, did not begin to be elaborated as a market worthy of much attention until the mid-1950s. Until this point in time, preteens had been overshadowed by the numerical prominence of 4 million
new babies born each year, during the baby boom years, and by the cultural and commercial attention foisted upon teen girls. (208)

This age category continued to be elusive for retailers throughout the 20th century. Cook and Kaiser note that problems arose with the subteens’ desire to dress like teenagers. They describe this problem, writing, “It is a sizing nightmare for manufacturers and a potential fitting disaster for retailers who must negotiate with these girls and their mothers on the sales floor” (210). The subteens’ desire to dress older was problematic since their bodies were physically developing and changing at a rapid pace. Subteens wanted to wear teen clothing which was made in specific teen styles and standard sizes, not intended for younger, developing bodies. Cook also notes that negotiating between the girls and their mothers proved an additional challenge, since mothers were reluctant to let their subteen daughters wear older teen styles. However, these styles were popular among their peers, so the demanding tween consumers were finally noticed by retail marketers.

Cook writes about the development of tween spaces from the 1940s through the early 2000s, listing the successes of separate preteen departments and eventually, entire tween stores, like Limited Too, which was started in 1998. Limited Too’s contemporary replacement, Justice, is designed for tween girls and is part of the Tween Brands retail company. Under the same company, the store Brothers targets a tween male audience. Other retail companies are publishing specialized tween magazines to advertise products and are designing tween spaces on their websites for shopping and socializing (Simpson 638, Siegel). The development of specialized tween spaces, both physically and online, suggests that this is a successful strategy for marketers of tween products.
I believe that the book industry is falling behind in marketing to a specified tween audience in comparison to the retail industry. Gay Ivey and Karen Broaddus write, “Middle school students are most likely to get their preferred books from bookstores and libraries and are least likely to find preferred materials through their teachers or their classroom” (70). If, as Ivey and Broaddus suggest, preadolescents are depending on bookstores and public libraries to find books, then these locations are responsible for creating a space where tweens feel comfortable. However, bookstores and libraries are most often divided into two categories for young readers: children’s and young adult. This serves to reinforce the liminality of preadolescents and forces them to struggle with their liminal identities every time they enter the store or library. From the surveys that I sent to bookstores around the country, only one store included a separate section that aligns with the average tween age range (Grades 5-7). The other stores use the traditional categorization of children’s (ages 7/8-12/13) and young adult/teen (12/13 and up). The large bookstore chain, Barnes and Noble, recently began a young adult section outside of the children’s section. Within the children’s section alone, there are multiple areas and levels, usually divided by age or reading levels. The “Young Readers” section, which is the oldest age range in the BN children’s section, labels the novels as appropriate for an audience of 7-12 year olds. Outside of the children’s department, the Young Adult section is labeled for readers ages “12 and up.” These separate categories suggest that readers around the age of twelve must decide whether they consider themselves to be children or teenagers. This identity crisis could be exacerbated if the preadolescent is shopping with a parent who may be suspicious of the young adult section with its mature, dark covers and “edgy topics.”

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3 The full survey results are available in the appendix.
Libraries are similarly designed, and there has been a recent acknowledgement about the tween issue by librarians but very little action so far. One article on the YALSA website suggests, “We all have to remember that our patrons—whether they’re teens, tweens or adults—may not feel comfortable seeking out their books in unfamiliar (and potentially unfriendly) departments” (YALSA Cross-Unders). This sounds as if this librarian would be supportive of a tween department, if it makes the reader more comfortable. The article suggests that creating departments that readers feel comfortable in “[allows] them the freedom of choice” (YALSA Cross-Unders), aligning with the theory that preadolescents flourish most through guided independence. Preadolescents are in the process of forming a new identity beyond their child identity, and they often cling to a role model to help them as they navigate their new role. Crystal Faris also sees a disconnect in how libraries operate within a consumer economy, writing:

Libraries could learn from the demographic and marketing studies of tweens. Clearly what libraries offer this age group needs to be less childish than something availed to preschoolers or elementary school age children. At the same time, what libraries offer should not be so sophisticated as to make tweens feel uncomfortable and frustrated.

Faris compares the retail and economic industries that target a tween audience to libraries and sees a need for more specialized areas for tweens. She specifically notes that an area needs to be “less childish,” which is of great importance to the tweens who moving towards adolescence.

The President of the American Library Association, Jack Martin, seems to believe that specialized sections are less important than personalized assistance. In answer to a
question about recommending books for early adolescents, Martin suggests, “It's about knowing what your reader is interested in and what level they're reading at. I often give new readers a stack of 5-10 reading recommendations and tell them to have a seat…Giving them plenty of choices is the most important step” (Silvester). I would suggest that, although ideally every librarian and bookseller would know how to make “good” recommendations for a range of readers, depending on the recommendations of an adult is problematic for the tween reader. Instead, I find the idea of a specialized department to be a good solution; however, it is not without complications.

The ALA is wary of the issues of age segmentation, which could lead to exclusion and pigeon-holing. The ALA website states clearly that their association is against categorizing books by age or reading level, but in reality, this occurs often. Not every librarian or bookseller is able to look beyond the age and reading level of a child, and not every child or parent seeks their advice. Kevina Cody suggests that in order to avoid the age segmentation issues, “tweens need a defined and recognized space within the retail environment, albeit one that is characterised by a fusion of past, present and future identities” (297). As liminars, tweens are between their child selves and their future teen identities and often tap into parts of each as they explore their liminal identities. Cody writes that tweens “need the possibility of fluctuating between the signifiers of child and teen segments” (298), so a tween area must provide that option. In terms of bookstores and libraries, one way this could occur is by having a tween section positioned in relation to the children’s and teen sections. This could create a “bridge” between the two dominant categories in literature and in society of “child” and “young adult” and result in a scaffolded development through these stages. Instead of looking and moving between a children’s and a young adult department, a
“tween” area would help the preadolescent know “where they belong” and allow them to freely explore with ideally less interference from a parent or sales associate. Certainly, as Perry Nodelman has pointed out, children’s literature can never be too far disassociated from adults (The Hidden Adult). Adults create the literature, adults decide which books should go on the shelves, and adults decide where to put the books. However, I believe there is a great difference between an adult suggesting even “5-10” books to a reader and an adult pointing a reader to an entire section that they can comfortably explore on their own. The small difference in agency could allow for a much greater experience for the preadolescent and aligns with their developmental need for guided independence. A separate tween space may also be beneficial for the parent, who controls the money and often the choices of their preadolescent child.

The Role of Parents

One of the defining characteristics of the developmental stage of preadolescence is the transition from the family to a peer group. During this stage, the preadolescents still rely on their parents’ opinions and support but are also influenced by their peers. The parents must watch their child move towards independence, indicating the dreaded move towards adolescence. The turbid emotions and complex implications of this transition are manifested in a retail environment. In their book on tween marketing, The Great Tween Buying Machine, David Siegel, Timothy Coffey, and Gregory Livingston write:

Younger tweens have not yet left the family. They still rely heavily on mom’s approval. Retailers of items designed for the young tween must make it inviting for tweens, especially girls, to shop with their moms. Advertisers may, in some cases, be wise to reinforce to this audience that ‘moms will approve it too.’ (66)
Siegel et al. are careful to note that if advertisers target the parent audience *alone*, they will not hook the attention of the preadolescents. Instead, the focus needs to be on the preadolescent *or* on the preadolescent *in combination with* the parent. In the case of clothing retail, Cook and Keiser write about the difficulty in designing tween styles that cater to the preadolescent and the parent (203). The preadolescent wants to dress like a teenager, but the parent believes that the teen clothing is inappropriate either because of the cut of the clothing or because of the “teen” connotations. Similarly, many preadolescents want to wear make-up and parents notoriously forbid it until a certain age. Any retailer trying to appease both audiences will have a difficult time.

One of the main characteristics of preadolescence is the shift from the family to a peer group. During this stage, preadolescents are trying to balance the influences of their families, their new peer groups, and their more complex level of abstract thinking. Preadolescents are beginning to form their opinions separately from their parents’ influence, yet most research suggests that the values and opinions of parents still affect their decisions (Drake-Bridges, Siegel). They exist in a stage where they care more about their peers’ opinions of their clothing than their mothers,’ yet still want parental approval. This is even more complicated by the mother being the gatekeeper of the money needed to purchase clothing.

Siegel et al. suggest that it is more complicated than what each audience, the preadolescent and the adult, wants. They write, “Since tweens still depend heavily on parent spending and money, their true power lies not in their purchasing power, but in the ability to influence their parents…to make purchases on their behalf” (67). Since a preadolescent is unable to legally work in the United States, it is difficult for them to earn spending money
outside of what their parents give them. Thus, they must use their “ability to influence” adults to attain the items they want. This position of power is in many ways unique to the preadolescent who is beginning to want products that will allow them to “fit in,” yet they are in a stage where they rely on adults for nearly everything. As liminars, they do not fit the stage of childhood where the adult has the greatest influence on their choices, nor are they adolescents, who they are eligible to earn money and become active members of society; yet tweens are responsible for spending more money than individuals in either of the dominant stages of childhood or adolescence.

I have found that there are many similarities with appeasing this dual child/parent audience between retailers and the book industry. Issues of censorship, age banding, and banned books have always been a part of children’s literature. Parents have specific expectations for the literature their children read, and those expectations often align with the categories of a bookstore or the overall appearance of the book itself. An adult who walks into a bookstore or library with a preadolescent may have the same struggle of finding the “right style” of literature for her child as in a clothing store. The “fit” of a book could be judged by the length, title, illustrations, cover, award medal seals, author, publisher, content, lexile number, or age level. Numerous factors contribute to how a book is received, and as a commodity, books are designed to appeal to the consumer—be it the preadolescent, adult, or both. Positive and negative connotations are associated with standard bookstore categories, such as children’s, award winners, classics, fiction, nonfiction and young adult. I personally worked in a Barnes and Noble children’s section and an independent children’s bookstore for three years. In my experience as a book seller, the young adult section was often seen as a threat to a parent of a preadolescent due to the edgy covers and the content that characterizes
YA literature. Given the choice, I believe most parents feel more comfortable with their preadolescent child choosing novels from the children’s section, as opposed to the YA section, whether it be from nostalgia for the children’s novels or nostalgia for their child’s lost childhood. Unfortunately, bookstores and libraries all use their own systems of categorization, as shown in the survey results, so a book written for a preadolescent could be shelved in several sections. As it is, a preadolescent reader, particularly a reluctant reader, must pass through the hurdles of parent opinion, adult recommendation, and confusing categorizations in order to find a book written for her developmental stage. If having a tween section could allow for the peace of mind of the book purchaser and an increase of agency and choice for the book reader, I believe it would be a worthwhile addition to bookstores and libraries.

**Specialized Tween Products**

Siegel et al. write, “Many of these savvy tween shoppers are still looking for social cues that indicate what is popular, while also starting to rely on their own opinions” (118). The tween’s concern to “fit in” often translates to a reliance on what is labeled as “cool.” These trends derive from “social cues,” which marketers track and often initiate in an effort to keep their target audience happy. Cody suggests that our consumer culture has encouraged and even exaggerated the needs of preadolescents, teaching them that buying the right brands and merchandise is necessary to “fit in” and belong to a peer group. Cody writes:

This conceptualisation of pre-teens as ‘preternaturally frantic’ as individuals ‘who desperately need to belong and who believe that having the right 'stuff' is the quickest route to acceptance’ became a vision of a market segment teeming with potential for those in the business of selling identity and security to children and teenagers. (288)
Whether this desire to fit in is as inherently crucial to the preadolescents’ development as researchers suggest or not, marketers have certainly gone to a great effort to meet this need with specialized tween products. Starting in the 1950s-1970s, retailers designed “both ‘older’ clothing styles and ‘older’ identities while somehow maintaining the categorical integrity of subteen/preteen merchandise” in an effort to appease the desire of tweens to look and dress like teenagers (Cook 210). More recently, marketers have started creating tween-oriented spaces and filling them with tween products, giving tweens a consumer identity of their own. Tween stores like Justice and Brothers offer a variety of items in bright, vibrant colors and specialized sizes, as shown in the stores’ advertisements in Figures 1, 2, and 3.
Fig. 1 *Justice*, 2014. Web. 15. Jan. 2014.
HUNDREDS OF NEW SPRING STYLES TO WEAR NOW & WEAR LATER

▶ tops & tees
▶ capris

tops in sizes 6-20, jeans & pants in reg, slim & half sizes 6-18½

Fig. 2 Justice, 2013. Web. 18. Dec. 2013.
Fig. 3 *Brothers*, 2013. Web. 18. Dec. 2013.

The advertisements in Figures 1, 2, and 3 showcase bright colors and basic designs and depict models in groups, which suggests that these products are “popular” and will allow the consumers to fit in within their own peer group. The models in the pictures appear to be preadolescents and are wearing chic, teen-inspired clothing. The target audience is assumed to be around their age or younger, which aligns with Siegel’s rules for advertising to a tween audience. Siegel et al. write, “Marketers of tween products must minimize the possibility of having their products appear to be for younger kids. Packaging must not look too babyish. Talent in ads or on the package must be tweenage or older” [emphasis in the original] (65). Faris writes, “Ads targeting tweens needed to be sophisticated enough to attract attention but not so sophisticated they made the tweens feel stupid” (43). Both Siegel et al. and Faris seem
to suggest that tweens are sensitive and “worry about not using the right products and thereby not fitting in with their peer groups” (Siegel 143).

Disney has been one of the leaders in tween media, “[offering] a whole slew of ‘soft’ teen media franchises such as Camp Rock, High School Musical, and Hannah Montana…they omit anything too edgy or close to the realities of teen life, offering instead a nice bubble-gum version of adolescence” (Coulter 147). Natalie Coulter writes, “Disney knows who these markets are, what they want, where to find them, and how to talk to them” (147). Disney found success with their tween-targeted shows and movies in the form of “live-action as opposed to traditional Disney cartoons” (Sorenssen 158-9). This suggests that tweens like to see real children their age or older on television, like in High School Musical, not animated cartoons that were popular in the past. The appearance of a product from how it’s advertised, where it’s placed in a store, and how it “fits” their interests and the current popular trends is crucial in catching the attention of tween consumers. There is an undeniable pressure that comes with keeping up with popular trends. Siegel et al. summarize this pressure, writing,” On the most basic level, children want certain products, but tweens feel they need certain products” [emphasis added] (143).

This emphasis on needing products in order to fit in helps the tweens identify their position in a capitalist economy. If a product is popular among teenagers, then by purchasing that product, the tween can act out her desire to fit in with her peer group or even belong to the teen category. Tweens have adopted this strategy so well, in fact that, “research suggests that tweens place even more emphasis on brand names than do older adolescents” (Simpson 638). In an attempt to look like teenagers and in answer to the manipulating market strategies, tweens have surpassed the buying practices of teens, becoming a more influential
consumer base and inspiring new tween styles and brands. Thus, they are both a construct of the market and an active influence on the market trends. Cody writes, “These tweens are no longer merely ‘becoming’ consumers but have entered into a very visible social relation with consumption as they mediate their liminal status with consumption objects and practices” (61). Cook and Kaiser suggest that although the subteens/preteens in the past lacked an identity within the marketplace other than an elusive, shifting possibility, the modern “Tween’, “does not present itself as a diminutive category or as a weigh station on the way to some other desirable status, but as an identity in itself” (218). The tweens have inspired a new style. Specialized sections were placed in stores to meet the needs of tween consumers but in the past twenty years, entire specialized tween stores have been built and are experiencing wide success. Tweens are coming into their own and the market is having to keep up with their demand, not merely throwing a bone of half sizes that imitate teen styles. There is a distinct tween style emerging, as is shown in the Justice and Brothers stores. The tween market is flourishing, research and studies are being conducted increasingly every year, and specialized stores for tweens are popping up in malls across America. Tweens are informing and influencing the retail industry, and exploring their own identities and power within the consumer market. The economic value of tweens has been noticed by marketers in multiple fields; however, I am concerned with how marketers of literature are meeting the demands of this powerful consumer audience.

As the marketers and trends have shown, there are a few basic strategies when advertising to tweens. Tweens want to see models/characters/actors presented in live-action, not in cartoons. The models need to be their age or older, never younger, and Siegel et al. also mention that musicians, celebrities, and athletes are popular with this audience (151).
Advertisements tend to show models in groups, suggesting that this product is popular. Bright colors are also common in tween clothing and advertisements. If this is how stores like *Justice* and *Brothers* are successfully advertising to tweens, how does the book industry advertise their books in comparison? I’ve already established that bookstores and libraries are not currently categorizing their books into separate tween spaces. However, the best advertisement a book has is the book cover itself because, as Cat Yampbell writes, “Regardless of the quality of the literature, its cover often determines a book's success” (348). An analysis of preadolescent book covers, using the tween advertising model as a basis for comparison between the book and retail industries, will ascertain whether preadolescent readers truly exist in a “realm of pure possibility” within the book publishing industry.

**Preadolescent Book Covers**

Although the large labels hanging over book sections in stores and libraries capture the immediate attention of parents and readers (Children’s/Young Adult), the most important marketing element of a book is the book cover. In her article, “Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature,” Cat Yampbell addresses the influence of book covers:

The materiality of a text is often taken for granted. A common assumption is that the inner text is the kernel of value and significance while the rest is merely a protective husk. In the world of publishing, the paratext is not only equally significant, but many industry people argue that the cover is the foremost aspect of the book. Regardless of the quality of the literature, its cover often determines a book's success. (348)
Yampbell stresses the need to consider the physicality as well as the literary merit of a book, writing, “The paratext is the text. Literary merit becomes irrelevant if the book does not, or cannot, reach the reader” (348). This thesis is subtitled, “Preadolescent Literature Inside and Out” for the purpose of considering preadolescent literature in the ways that Yampbell suggests. In Chapter Two, I examined the “inside” of Lowry’s The Giver, analyzing the literary merit and genre classification of the novel. The “outside” of the book involves the marketing strategies, product placement, and physical design—specifically the book covers of preadolescent literature. I don’t believe the inside and outside of a text can or should be studied separately. The purpose of creating literature that aligns with the developmental stage of preadolescence is for readers of this age group to be able to access and experience the literature. However, as Yampbell suggests, the purpose of these novels is “irrelevant” if the readers cannot find the books. Within the two common bookstore and library categories of Children’s and Young Adult, there are preadolescent novels playing hide and seek, visually unidentifiable by their location or their covers. Yampbell writes, "’Grabability’ is a key marketing concern. The book must visually leap off the shelf and ‘grab’ the consumer's attention so that the consumer will ‘grab’ the book” (349). The liminality of preadolescents leads to a liminality of their literature. A cover analysis of modern preadolescent literature demonstrates how the book cover designs reduce the “grabability” of the literature.

In order to determine the keys to “grabability” in a preadolescent novel, I look to the habits of successful retail stores, like Justice, Brother, and other tween spaces. Siegel et al. write:

Tweens need special sizes of many items like clothing, food, and packaging, to fit their respective frame sizes and they have a special need to have products made ‘just
for them’…tweens do not want to think of themselves as younger children and, therefore, will not want to use the same products they perceive as being made for ‘babies’…They want their products to reflect their interests. (30)

Whereas the subteens in the past wanted to imitate the teen trends, the newly empowered tween consumers are beginning to form their own tween style. Although it’s difficult to define this elusive tween style, marketers seem to agree on a few important rules. Siegel et al. warn about creating products that are too “babyish.” In general, the goal is to create products for their age or older, so the teen influence is still present. Faris writes, “Ads targeting tweens needed to be sophisticated enough to attract attention but not so sophisticated they made the tweens feel stupid” (43). Sophistication is important to tweens, but apparently, not a sophistication beyond their maturity level. Siegel et al. write, “The basic need to fit in with, and belong to, their group of peers has tremendous significance to marketers of ‘billboard’ type products—products that tweens must use in public” (65). Finally, a product needs to be “cool” with the tweens’ peer group, or they will not use it in public. This has particular significance for book covers, which are difficult to hide unless you are reading on a tablet or computer. As I noted before, Disney has hugely influenced the “tween style” with television shows starring real tweens and teenagers, moving away from animation and cartoons. Tween stores like Justice create products and advertisements using bright colors, which are shown to be popular among tweens. Applying these rules in the last decade has led to a great increase in tween spending, and bookstores seem to be at least aware of these marketing tactics, whether or not they apply them effectively.

Shannon Maughan writes, “Editors routinely try to stay in step with what tweens wear, watch on TV, buy at the mall, surf on the internet, read in magazines and flock to see at
Maughan notes that editors are attempting to follow tween trends, writing, “Specifically, at Simon and Schuster, Murphy has observed that ‘tweens still like bright colors’ when it comes to book jackets, whereas teen books ‘are more graphically designed; we use more photographs—they look more like adult books’ (36). Perhaps children’s book editors are taking note of successful marketing tactics, but I question how they are applying these tactics to the final book cover designs. Based on the survey results I sent to booksellers around the U.S., I would suggest that the publishers’ efforts have been ineffectual in creating a “tween style” in comparison to successful retailers.

For the surveys, I asked booksellers and middle grade authors to list how they identify a novel as either middle grade or young adult. The majority wrote that they identify these novels by age of the reader, age of the book protagonist, and content. I also asked booksellers and authors to list what they consider to be good examples of novels for middle school readers, around ages 10-14. The resulting list was lengthy and contained popular novels commonly found in both the children’s and young adult sections of bookstores and libraries. In order to do a cover analysis based on their recommendations, I limited this analysis to novels featuring a protagonist between the ages of 10 and 14. I used the Barnes and Noble Bookstore website to find the covers for these recommended novels, and the resulting images are shown in Figure 4:
Admittedly, I had hoped to use the bookseller and author recommendations to highlight cover trends in preadolescent literature. Instead, I believe the only analysis I can show from these recommendations is the subjectivity of recommendations and the absence of an identifiable tween cover style. These covers are almost all illustrated, already breaking the Disney rule of
using real models. The color palettes move from pastel, to bright, to dark—dissimilar to the *Justice* and *Brothers* advertisements. If you were to take this selection of texts and lay them in front of a tween reader, it is unlikely that the reader would find them to be “[reflective] of *their* interests,” as Siegel et al. advise. The “grabability” is not there. This is not to say that every tween book needs to look exactly the same, but I have found that most book categories have a unique “look,” with the exception of preadolescent texts. Here are photos of book shelves at a *Barnes and Noble Bookstore* (BN) that clearly portray the category trends:

Fig. 5 Fort, Bethany. “*Barnes and Noble* Picture Books.” 2013. Photograph.
Figure 5 is a picture of the BN section labeled “Picture Books.” The covers in this photo are all illustrated and contain a wide array of colors, animals, large fonts, etc.

Fig. 6 Fort, Bethany. “Barnes and Noble Early Readers.” 2013. Photograph.
Fig. 7 Fort, Bethany. “Barnes and Noble Chapter Books.” 2013. Photograph.
Figures 6 and 7 are pictures of the Early Reader and Chapter Book shelves at BN, labeled for ages 5-8. The bright colors and illustrations stand out, similarly to the picture books. The dimensions of the books are also notably similar within each category.

Fig. 8 Fort, Bethany. “Barnes and Noble Young Readers 1.” 2013. Photograph.
Figures 8 and 9 are pictures taken from the large Young Readers section at BN, labeled for ages 7-12. In Figure 8, you can see a range of color palettes, some light or bright, and some dark. The size of the books varies, as well. A closer look at the covers is shown in Figure 9. Most of the book covers in Figures 8 and 9 are illustrated, but there are also a few stock photos of animals or human models.
Fig. 10 Fort, Bethany. “Barnes and Noble Young Adult 1.” 2013. Photograph.
Figures 10 and 11 are pictures of the Young Adult Section at BN, labeled for ages 12 and up. Immediately, you notice that the shelves are painted a dark brown, separating this section from the light wood shelves in the children’s department. The covers are also noticeably darker, predominantly made of purples, blues, and grays. The size of the books seems to be fairly similar. There are more covers depicting live models than illustrations and many are close-up shots of the models’ faces. In her 2011 YA cover study, Kate Hart analyzed more than 900 YA novels to show the cover trends of newly published novels. Hart writes that the main trends were dark colors and Caucasian models, which seem to have continued in these BN photos from 2013 (Hart).
These photos suggest that book publishers are “branding” each of these dominant categories by creating a style that focuses on book dimensions, colors, and cover art. This holds true for every category except the Young Readers category. I believe this is because the category of books for ages 7-12 is impossible to brand. A seven year old has very different tastes than a twelve year old. Figure 8 best exemplifies the problem of showing 12 year olds a shelf of books and expecting them to find one that “reflects their interests” or “grabs” them. When you compare the book covers in Figure 9 with the advertisements from Justice and Brother, or the popular tween Disney shows, the differences are distinct. Essentially, these bookshelves highlight the lack of marketing to tween readers, specifically. The rules dictating colors, cover art, and sophistication are all neglected within the large shelf of middle grade books shown in Figure 8.

However, the inability to find preadolescent novels within the large category of children’s literature could ideally be resolved by creating a preadolescent category. The greater question, then, is would a preadolescent category lead to “grabability” of these novels, or are the book covers as problematic as the categorization? To answer this, I compiled a selection of preadolescent book covers that seemingly follow the marketing rules laid out by retailers. If tweens are familiar with the advertisements from stores like Justice, these titles most reflect the styles, colors, and design of the store advertisements. I again used the BN website for the cover images since it is the largest bookstore chain in America, and the majority of these novels were currently on the BN store shelves when I took photos of the Young Readers and Young Adult sections. These are the most recent editions of these novels available:
Fig. 12 *Barnes and Noble*, 2014. Web. 18. Jan. 2014.
My initial reaction to these covers was positive. They blend the bright colors and fun cover photos of children’s novels with photos of live models, similar to YA covers. This melding seems to perfectly depict the tween position and even gives them their own style with items like the brightly colored tennis shoes that keep reappearing. However, as I collected these photos, a disconcerting trend became evident. The models, ambiguous in age, are faceless—and, not only faceless, but nearly bodiless in almost every photo. The models are hidden behind colorful objects or removed from the cover altogether, with the exception of parts of their faces, feet, hands, or other slivers of their body. In fact, I could find hardly any covers that displayed the full body of a preadolescent model. Hart noted a trend in YA literature during 2011, where 20% of teen models were shown with their heads covered or missing from the cover (Hart). This trend of covering models could have trickled down from YA to preadolescent novels, wanting tween covers to show the same sophistication as the popular YA novels. To show this trend, Hart uses covers where a fully mature body of a faceless teen is shown. However, the preadolescent texts seem wary of showing hardly any of the unobstructed body. I believe that this is more than a cover trend passed down from the YA section. It is a visual example of the liminality of the tween in the book industry.

There are several contributing factors to the trend of covering-up models on preadolescent book covers. From the publishers’ perspective, putting a child of a discernable age on a cover could limit the readership. If the model is too young and “babyish,” tweens will ignore it. If the model is a tween, teens will ignore it. This aligns with Siegel et al.’s rule of showing models the age of the target audience or older. There is also the problem of parents, which could conceivably explain why the models on the preadolescent book covers mainly show arms and legs, leaving the developmental stage of the body to the imagination.
A physically mature teenager might pose a threat to those parents who are wary of their child reading from the YA section, no matter where the book is categorized. The main factor, however, is the book industry’s perception of the tween reader as a liminar within the book industry.

Turner writes, “Since neophytes are not only structurally ‘invisible’…they are very commonly secluded, partially or completely, from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses” (49). Turner often refers to the liminars as invisible, due to their inability to fit into the dominant categories of a society. If a preadolescent is not a child or a teen, he might as well be invisible because society does not have another identity for him. Turner writes about the liminars as going through a rite of passage before they can be included in the next category. During this process, Turner writes, “Where they aren’t removed to a sacred place of concealment they are often disguised, in masks or grotesque costumes” (49). The models on preadolescent covers are being similarly “disguised,” almost to the point of invisibility. Whereas the advertisements from Justice and Brother show full body photos of obviously preadolescent models, book covers hide and cover them.

Retail stores have created spaces and identities for tweens as market consumers, and tweens have answered with an empowered, voracious response that translates into 176 billion dollars. The store advertisements are a small reflection of the agency that retailers offer to tweens as consumers. They invite tweens into a space designed for them and listen to the tween voice as they mold their new lines and products. Turner writes, “[liminars] have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (49). This was true for preadolescents until the 1990s, when retailers began to notice their spending power. It is, in many ways, still true for
preadolescent readers. Certainly, books are more than physical commodities. However, the
text is hidden within a physical book cover, which reflects a visual identity to the tween
reader. The images on preadolescent covers are suggesting that preadolescents are difficult to
define and thus, not worth the effort. The models on these books are covered and cleverly
concealed behind brightly covered objects, and the books themselves are jammed between
books written for readers in completely different phases of life.

In order for readers to experience the empowerment hidden within these texts, they
must first see it reflected on the covers because other sources are vying for their attention.
The inside of the novels may be portraying the liminal phase as a “realm of pure possibility,”
but the outside subtly suggests that invisibility is what characterizes this stage. Book covers
need to enter the battle of visual appeal that stores and websites have been engaging in for
decades or they may lose their tween audience altogether. Tweens have demonstrated the
pure possibilities of their power, following the teens to become commanding consumers. The
book industry needs to meet tweens at their powerful position and make novels available to
them in ways that are already familiar. Using the marketing strategies of retailers would
mean acknowledging tween agency and could translate into more preadolescent novels and
an increased involvement from the tween reader.
Chapter 4: Preadolescent Literature Inside and Out

The book industry is sending a mixed message to preadolescent readers. A conflict exists between the inside and outside of preadolescent texts, and this conflict could be discouraging readers during a crucial stage of development. Although the defining characteristics of preadolescence are echoed in the themes of preadolescent novels, like *The Giver*, I am concerned that the marketing and presentation of preadolescent texts negate these themes. I believe that this contradiction is due to a subconscious effort on the part of the book industry to subvert the precarious agency of the preadolescent by hiding and camouflaging preadolescent novels within the larger categories of children’s and young adult literature.

In Chapter Two, I suggest that Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* exhibits the power and agency of the protagonist Jonas, who symbolizes the potential position of all preadolescents within our society. Similarly, in Chapter Three, I suggest that the spending power of tween consumers demonstrates the potential power of tween readers, under the right circumstances. Determining the conceivable power of the preadolescent within our society is complicated and is best understood through Victor Turner’s research on liminality.

Turner writes that the liminal period “expose[s] the basic building blocks of culture just when we pass out of and before we re-enter the structural realm” (55). This stage, for preadolescents, subteens, preteens, and tweens, exists between the two “basic building blocks” of childhood and adolescence. Being in this uncategorized phase of life allows liminars “to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them” (Turner 53). We see this process exemplified as *The Giver* gradually opens Jonas’ eyes to the problems in his society. It is his in-between position that allows Jonas to eventually escape from his family and society with the blind hope of finding a new home.
Preadolescent novels like *The Giver* encourage readers to consider the “realm of pure possibility” during their liminal term as preadolescents. Preadolescent readers are able to see beyond the categories of child and adolescent and adult and consider their society from outside of the “structural realm.” However, to be able to find these novels that boldly unveil the inherent liberties of their liminal position, preadolescents need to be categorized and recognized by the book industry. The paradox of a categorized liminality raises obvious issues, but the history of the tween consumer has proven that tweens flourish within a structured system.

Chapter Three catalogues the history of the tween retail shopper from the 1950s, where they were lucky to find clothes that fit, to the 1990s, where a line of specialized tween stores and brands meets the ever-growing demands of the tween consumer. Although preadolescents have certainly had their own opinions and tastes long before the 1950s, it would seem that they needed a slight push from the retail industry before they could truly come into their own as *active* consumers. Turner writes, “As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture” (47). Based on Turner’s reasoning, the retail industry expected to see preadolescents grow and evolve as consumers if the market created a classification for them, leading to lucrative results and specialized tween products. In the book industry, the message being sent using Turner’s reasoning is that we do not expect to see preadolescent readers and, therefore, do not include them in our classification system. The retail industry is expressing to tweens that they are in a “realm of pure possibility” as consumers and encourages them to voice their opinions on retail websites, to develop a unique tween style, and to spend more money. Whereas the book
industry, as demonstrated through the book cover analysis, is expressing to preadolescents that it is easier to ignore them than to adjust the industry categorizations for readers that span only a few years of the age spectrum. This is a particularly harsh lesson considering children’s progression through the age-defined subgenres of children’s literature that lead to preadolescence.

The theme of “hiding” preadolescents and preadolescent texts is woven throughout every aspect of the children’s book industry. Physically, preadolescents do not make many appearances on the covers of books written for and about them. Within the field of children’s literature, preadolescent novels are referred to as “in-between” books in relation to the dominant literary categories of children’s and young adult, not studied as belonging to a unique subgenre of children’s literature. In bookstores and libraries, preadolescent novels are not placed together but are separated and hidden within the children’s and young adult categories until a well-intentioned adult plucks a few to offer to a liminal reader. Preadolescents are drawn to mentors, like Jonas is to The Giver, but forced assistance is not mentoring, nor is it guidance. Research on preadolescence suggests that a guided independence, as modeled in specialized tween stores, allows tweens to flourish. Instead of forcing preadolescents to seek the advice of an adult to find a book that might appeal to them, a comfortable tween area allows them to decide whether or not they want advice from a skilled bookseller or librarian. In order to create such a space, these elusive readers and their novels would have to come out of hiding and be loosely defined as a literary category.

Whereas The Giver teaches Jonas to think for himself and to explore his independence, the book industry’s handling of the preadolescent novel seems to align with Jonas’ parents and society who try to sustain his childhood and are threatened by his liminal
status. Perhaps the book industry is also threatened by the powerful potential of tweens because they are elusive and unmanageable and awkward. Perhaps the influence that tweens have exhibited as voracious consumers in the retail industry is intimidating to an industry that has predominantly profited from the parents, the scholars, the librarians, the educators, and the booksellers—not the child reader. Perhaps we, as adults, are threatened by the tween liminality and find it easier hide their pubescent bodies behind brightly colored bobbles in-between covers of illustrated pigs and conclusively mature teenage models rather than allow for the changes an empowered group of 10-14 year olds might bring to our classification systems and to our unquestioned adult dominance. Whatever the reasons, the book industry is not echoing the message of preadolescent agency that Jonas gathers from The Giver when it comes to the marketing and classification of preadolescent texts.

As scholars, we are pro-literature. We lobby for the dissolution of invisible classifications that hinder readers from accessing texts based on their age, race, socioeconomic status, and so forth. However, I question whether this ideal is wholly accomplishable. I believe that the classification systems will always exist and that the child reader will always be subject to the adult book producers at some level. Only by inclusion within an expanded classification system of book labels and genre definitions will preadolescent texts have the full potential to reach preadolescent readers. The power of the novel is unquestioned, and authors like Lois Lowry are honored and acclaimed because of their bold, brilliant contributions to children’s literature. Unfortunately, making a powerful novel accessible to its intended readers is half the battle, and it is the half that most influences a consumer audience desiring to “fit in” and expecting a tween-centric marketing strategy. If early adolescence is indeed “the beginning of the search for an identity” beyond childhood,
the book industry is competing with a successful retail industry that is currently informing an army of tween consumers (Manning). I believe that we, the book lovers, need to engage in this battle and offer the identity that books provide through the reading experience: not an identity of a mere consumer, but one of a critical thinker and empowered individual. To create a physical and metaphorical space for preadolescents and preadolescent texts within children’s literature, we may have to step off of our pedestals and out of our ivory towers and get our hands messy with revamped categorizations and innovative marketing strategies. Only by making changes to the outside of preadolescent literature will the inside of this subgenre and its intended readers be recognized as equally important alongside the currently dominant subgenres of children’s and young adult literature. Making these necessary changed in order to attract preadolescent readers will be well worth the effort.
Works Cited


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APPENDICES
Appendix A: Survey Results

Below are the results from Google form surveys that were emailed to bookstores and authors around the U.S. Both of the surveys were written with open-ended questions, and the survey results listed below summarize the submitted answers from the authors and booksellers into categories for analysis. The names of the booksellers, bookstores, and authors have been removed from the results to protect the participants’ privacy.

Bookstore surveys
All bookstores surveyed were independently owned; either independent children’s bookstores or independent bookstores with a children’s literature section.

Number of bookstores surveyed: 5
Number of states represented: 5

How would you define a novel for middle school readers?
1. By age of the reader (3)
2. By the amount of sexual content (2)
3. By content in general (3)
4. By the reader’s interests (1)
5. By the presence of puberty (1)
6. By the age of the protagonist (3)

Please describe the organization of the individual book sections in your store.
1. Stores organized by the sections of picture books, early readers, early chapter, middle grade, and young adult (4)
2. Stores organized by the sections of picture books, early readers, early chapter, early middle grade (grades 3-5), later middle grade (grades 5-7), and young adult (1)

In which section of your store would you shelve a fiction novel for a middle school reader?
1. Grades 5-7 (1)
2. Young Adult/Teen (1)
3. Dependent on the specific book (3)

In which section do you usually shelve *The Giver* by Lois Lowry?
1. Children’s (1)
2. Grades 5-7 (1)
3. Young Adult/Teen (1)
4. Children’s and Young Adult (1)
5. Award Winners (1)
Which novels do you most often recommend for middle school readers?

By author:
1. Watt Key
2. Walter Brooks
3. Mildred Taylor
4. Leslie Connor
5. Oko Kawashima Watkins
6. Frank Cottrell Bryce
7. Kate DiCamillo
8. Carl Hiaasen
9. John Green (2)
10. Laurie Halse Anderson
11. Sarah Dessen
12. Joan Bauer
13. Terry Pratchett
14. Michael Scott
15. Tamora Pierce
16. Neil Shusterman
17. James Dashner
18. John Flanagan

By novel:
1. *The Penderwicks* by Jeanne Birdsall
2. *The Name of this Book is Secret* by Pseudonymous Bosch
3. *No Flying in the House* by Betty Brock
4. The Four for Four series by John Coy
5. *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen
6. *Tale of Emily Windsnap* by Liz Kessler
7. *Saffy’s Angel* by Hilary McKay
8. *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio
9. Septimus Heap series by Angie Sage
11. Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz
12. *Brief History of Montmaray* by Michelle Cooper
13. *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell
14. *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell
15. *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak
16. *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card
17. *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner
18. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness
19. *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2)
20. The Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan
21. The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins
22. *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein
23. *Every Day* by David Leviathan
24. *More Than This* by Patrick Ness
25. *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* by Laini Taylor
What are your most requested or best-selling novels for middle school readers?
By author:
1. Rick Riordan (3)
2. Erin Hunter
3. R.J. Palacio
4. Cynthia Rylant
5. Carl Hiaasen
6. James Dashner
7. John Green

By novel:
1. *Nick and Tesla’s High-Voltage Danger Lab* by Bob Pflugfelder
2. *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
3. Origami Yoda series by Tom Angleberger
4. *The Penderwicks* by Jeanne Birdsall
5. *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart
6. *No Flying in the House* by Betty Brock
7. *The Name of this Book is Secret* by Pseudonymous Bosch
8. The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins (4)
10. *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (3)
11. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
12. *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (4)
13. *Graceling* by Kristin Cashore
14. *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card
15. *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak (2)
16. *Looking for Alaska* by John Green
17. *Legend* by Marie Lu
18. *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell
19. *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson

What is the biggest challenge in recommending books to middle school readers?
1. Parents (1)
2. Getting them to read (1)
3. Finding a book for them (3)
Author Surveys
All authors surveyed either write preadolescent novels or contribute to websites that focus on middle grade literature.

Number of authors surveyed: 6

How would you define a novel written for middle school readers?
1. By age of the reader (4)
2. By the content (2)
3. By the age of the protagonist (1)

What do you consider to be a good example of a novel for middle school readers?
By author:
1. Kirby Larson

By novel:
1. The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis
2. The Murphys by Lynda Mulllaly Hunt
3. Michael Vey by Richard Paul Evans
4. The Giver by Lois Lowry
5. The Hattie series by Kirby Larson
6. Charlotte’s Web by E.B. White
7. A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L’Engle
8. Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula LeGuin

In your opinion, is there a difference between a novel for middle school readers and a novel for young adults? If so, what is it?
1. Age of the reader (2)
2. Age of the protagonist (2)
3. Content (4)
4. Sexual content (4)
Appendix B: Letter of Approval
December 5, 2013

Bethany Fort
Department of English Language and Literature

Dear Bethany:

The College of Arts and Sciences Human Subjects Review Committee (CAS HSRC) of Eastern Michigan University has reviewed and approved your proposal (#1208) “Subteen, Preteen, Tween: Preadolescent Literature Inside and Out” The CAS HSRC has determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals participating in your study are not at risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the HSRC of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Approval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the one-year period, you must apply for a renewal. Please specify in your consent form that approval is from 12/05/2013 to 12/05/2014.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,

Michelle Byrd, Ph.D.
Interim CAS Human Subjects Review Committee Chair

Note: If project continues beyond the length of one year, please submit a continuation request form by 12/01/2014.

Cc: Dr. Ramona Caponegro