

What makes "a Positive Approach to Life" in YA Fiction

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Abstract

The Walden Award is remarkable among young adult (YA) fiction awards for focusing on a "positive approach to life." This article reviews the ten novels that have won the award (2009-2018): *The Hate U Give*; *The Serpent King*; *All American Boys*; *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*; *Eleanor & Park*; *The Fault in Our Stars*; *Shine*; *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*; *Fire*; and *My Most Excellent Year*. The novels are analyzed to highlight their "positive approach to life" that made them liable for the award. The present research benefited from both textual analysis and psychoanalysis. Textual analysis renders the prize committee's criteria into three categories of study: the thematic level, character-portrayal, and plot-development. Psychoanalysis shows how the novels foster a positive attitude in their readers through their positive approach to life, leading to notable attitude changes in the main characters.

Keywords: Walden Award, young adult (YA) novel, prize winners, positive approach, textual analysis, psychoanalysis, attitude change.

Introduction

Out of the many awards presented to young adult (YA) fictionⁱ, the Walden Awardⁱⁱ is remarkable for its focus on a "positive approach to life." The award was established in 2008 to honor Amelia Elizabeth Walden (1909-2002). Per Walden's request, the selected title must be a work of fiction, ideally a novel, which possesses a positive approach to life in addition to its widespread teen appeal and literary merit. The announcement of the award identifies the books that include a "positive approach to life" as those that treat teen readers as capable and thoughtful young people; offer hope and optimism, even when describing difficult circumstances; have a credible and appropriate resolution; and portray characters involved in positively shaping their lives, even as they struggle with the harsh realities of life (ALAN, 2018).

Since its beginning in 2009 till 2018, ten novels have won the award: *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2018 winner); *The Serpent King* by Jeff Zentner (2017 winner); *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (2016 winner); *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* by A.S. King (2015 winner); *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell (2014 winner); *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (2013 winner); *Shine* by Lauren Myracle (2012 winner); *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors* by Francisco X. Stork (2011 winner); *Fire* by Kristin Cashore (2010

winner); and *My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love*, Mary Poppins & Fenway Park by Steve Kluger (2009 winner) (ALAN, 2018). This paper's central question is how these novels present different young people's coming-of-age experiences in a way that fosters a positive attitude to life and society. This attitude is supposed to be the merit that made them liable for the award.

Literature Review

Regardless of the still-ongoing dispute about the nature of YA literatureⁱⁱⁱ, it has been witnessing a "growth spurt" (Koss, 2009, p. 73) and gaining broader acceptance in the field of literature since its emergence in the mid-20th century^{iv} (Carstensen, 2018, p. 24). Much of the theorizing work is more concerned with its functionality: how its target audience uses it: a young adult who is old enough to be in junior high or high school (Crowe, 1998, p. 121). Both Crowe and Carstensen refuse to consider all books that are marked for young adults as YA. They are supposed to be books "intended" (Crowe, 1998, p. 121) and "written just for them (...)" books that make them feel heard and help them navigate the world (...)" books that reflect and affirm their own lives; they can read about people living very different lives from theirs in order to expand their horizons or escape from their reality" (Carstensen, 2018, pp. 25-6). Thus, it is a genre mainly defined by its audience

who are going through a critical period in the human life cycle: "a period of accelerated maturation and social transition, when individuals shift from a position of relative powerlessness and dependency characterizing childhood to the responsibilities and in some contexts the autonomy expected in adulthood"(Abby, Kirrily, Jo, & Paul, 2014).

In consideration of this unique nature of literature, which makes it "a field with its own practices, habits, and hierarchies"(Bradford, 2017, p. 19), it requires what Waller calls a "separate critical methodology" to theorize its "in-betweenness" or "liminality"(Phillips, 2018) Liminality underlies this unique nature: the field itself is in-between children's literature and adult literature. Its audience exists between two stages of life: being a child and becoming an adult. Hence, YA literature concerns the space between and serves to accompany young people on their journey from childhood to adulthood(Phillips, 2018). This journey is not the same for each generation. Koss (2009) surveys a list of 205 YA novels compiled between 1999 and 2007 and finds that "(c)current young adult novels appear to be changing in form and structure." She ascribes this changing nature to the fact that these novels "mirror the changing nature of society; in turn, changes in society alter aspects of the way young adult novels are written"(p. 74) Glenn and Ginsberg (2016) compare students' experience in reading classical English literature to their reading of YA novels. They find that the later experience offered "generative space in which struggling readers were afforded opportunities to question and (re)develop their reader identities"(p. 103) Adolescents can more easily relate to YA literature than canonical works and that they provide easier access for struggling readers(Connors & Shepard, 2013, p. 7). Young adult literature has "an explicitly pedagogical function," as its writers "encourage awareness and understanding of many different types of people, cultures, and communities... which may lead to attitudinal changes towards individuals different from the readers themselves" (Kerkhoff, 2017, p. 28). For Alsup, literature affects readers in two ways: identifying with characters and empathizing with them(Kerkhoff, 2017, p. 28).

However, when YA tries to touch upon its audience's reality, it usually comes up with a gloomy, harsh picture. "Why are all those teen books so pessimistic?" ask Abrahamson and Carter (1982) in their review of some 1982 YA novels. They ascribe it to the "new realism" that a large number of YA books are presenting "problem novels that focus on everything from unwanted pregnancy to alcoholism to child abuse and murder." In these novels, readers find "pictures of troubled teens living in a negative adult world and stories that end with little hope"(p. 66).

Realistic YA novels started with S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), which is considered the beginning of YA literature as a genre (Crowe, 1998, p. 121),(Carstensen, 2018, p. 24). The other side tried to avoid the negativism of these problem novels but soaked into romance stories that are detached from real life (Abrahamson & Carter, 1982, p. 66).

So, is it challenging to present realistic novels that possess "a positive approach to life"? The novels that won the Walden are supposed to have accomplished this task. A review of these novels

and how they meet the award criteria can shed light on both the award and the novels. Hadley (2018) explores the representation of motherhood constructs in YA literature that were awarded the Printz Award or the Printz Honor Award for 2016 and 2017. She justifies the selection of her novels upon the grounds that these novels "reflect a well-recognized, well-respected selection of books that appeal to young adult readers"(p. 25). Bradford (2017) observes, in her review of the Australian novels that won the Printz Award, that some cultural capital accrues to books that win or are named as honor books since the winning titles are endowed with weight and value (p. 19). "Prize-winning books," concludes Kidd and Thomas Jr. (2017), "claim to bypass the usual test of time, or rather, the prizing process simulates that test"(p. 3). Therefore, the list of the ten novels selected for this paper carries some weight and value as they are officially labeled as YA novels that possess "a positive approach to life."

A debate sparked in 2011 when *The Wall Street Journal* columnist Meghan Cox Gurdon argued that contemporary fiction for teens is "so dark" and reflects "hideously distorted portrayals of what life is." She concludes that "contemporary fiction for teens is rife with explicit abuse, violence and depravity"(Gurdon, 2011). Many writers and critics responded to refute Gurdon's argument defending the moral-sustaining effect of YA literature. Maureen Johnson correctly pinpointed the underlying factor of the positive message of YA literature when she admitted that "[y]oung-adult fiction shows that bad things happen." Still, she affirms that at the same time, it shows that "you can survive" (Johnson, 2011).

Method of Analysis

The textual and psychoanalytical methods are used in the present study to gain insights into the qualitative issues that made these novels liable for the prize. The textual analysis of the selected books is used to render the criteria set by the prize committee into three categories of research: the thematic level (offering hope and optimism, even when describing difficult circumstances), character-portrayal (treating teen readers as capable and thoughtful young people and portraying characters involved in positively shaping their lives, even as they struggle with the harsh realities of life), and plot-development (presenting a credible and appropriate resolution). For analysis, the novels are discussed collectively in each category. Each text is considered a social fact produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways (Hadley, 2018, pp. 25-26). In this way, textual analysis helps consider the social construction of values, approaches, and attitudes.

The psychoanalytical method shows how the novels foster a positive attitude in their readers through their positive approach to life, leading to notable attitude changes in the main characters. It is generally recognized that perspectives are relevant for understanding and predicting social behavior as they facilitate adaptation to the environment. Psychologists explain the nature, formation, and function of an "attitude" in different ways. In a review of the research done on "attitude," Ajzen (2001) finds a general agreement that "attitude" represents "a summary evaluation of a psychological object captured in such attribute dimensions as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant, and likable-dislikable (p. 28). It is the task here to show how the novels led

their young adult characters, despite harsh circumstances, to associate the positive side of each attribute (good, beneficial, pleasant, and likable) to their life vision and adapt to their environment. From a constructivist perspective, this adaptation comes only out of the formative experience that people go through. In the novels under analysis, this development appears on the three categories of the coming-of-age experiences: the thematic level, character-portrayal, and plot development.

The Thematic Level

Despite the different themes in these novels, they are characterized by two essential features: they are so realistic considering what

young people face in real life. They offer hope and optimism. In building their positive approach to life, the novels cannot avoid the difficult circumstances young people face as they come of age; instead, they show that they are not the end of life. There are positive values that counterattack and prove that young people can survive these circumstances in each instance. Table (1) lists the main forms of the harsh reality that young people face in the selected novels and the conditions of hope and optimism they have to counterpart the hardship they face.

Table (1) main forms of harsh reality, hope, and optimism in the 10 Walden Award Winners

Novel	Forms of Harsh Reality	Forms of Hope and Optimism
<i>The Hate U Give</i>	Police brutality Racism	Social action Friendship Empathy
<i>The Serpent King</i>	Parental brutality Family hardships	Friendship Hope Empathy
<i>All American Boys</i>	Police brutality Racism	Self-realization Social action Empathy
<i>Glory O'Brien's History of the Future</i>	Anti-feminism Lifeless fate Parent's past	Hope Self-realization Social action
<i>Eleanor & Park</i>	Out-casting Family hardships Racism	Love Resistance Empathy
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Death (Cancer) Fragility of life	Love Resistance Empathy
<i>Shine</i>	Homophobia Addiction Harassment	Social action Acceptance Empathy
<i>The Last Summer of the Death Warriors</i>	Death (cancer) Revenge Doubt	Hope Love Forgiveness
<i>Fire</i>	Superpower temptation Revenge	Love Forgiveness Good willingness
<i>My Most Excellent Year</i>	Homophobia Identity crisis Parental intervention	Identity formation Social action Empathy

All the forms of hardship revolve around three main patterns: violence, hatred, and life-ending. Young people face violence at

home or in the community. Despite the difference in degree between parental brutality that at worst causes physical and

psychological pain and police brutality that is life-threatening, all types of brutality are portrayed as the most damaging aspects of their life. In *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys*, Khalid and Rashad are the victims of police brutality that result in the death of the former and injuries, physical and psychological, for the latter. Surprisingly, both are entirely innocent and attacked for wrongly assumed violations or suspicions. Again, the policemen attacking them are cleared in both cases, and no justice is directly provided for their cases. Even when these young people are not the main characters in their novels, they lay the ground for the other young people's challenges to act and face forces bigger than their powers: Starr and Quinn, respectively. Similarly, in *Shine*, Cat carries the responsibility of clarifying Patrick's brutal attack circumstances, this time not by police but by a meth-fueled friend. Another young man loses his life in *The Serpent King*, Travis, at the hands of a couple of drug addicts while selling firewood on a rural road.

Although the attack on Patrick in *Shine* came out to be not related to his sexual orientation as it seemed to be, other novels feature different forms of violence that are less brutal but still damaging. Most young people in the novels have experienced hatred, usually based on intolerance of their otherness. They face rejection, verbal assault, or mockery out of unaccepted differences. This difference can be for the appearance like in *Eleanor & Park*, where her schoolmates bully Eleanor because of her overweight and unusual dress code; or ethnic like park, in the same novel, who is still treated as an outsider for his half-Korean origins. In *Fire*, Lady Fire, the last human monster with exceptional beauty, is the target of many attacks and attempts to misuse her powers by others. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel and Augustus' cancer sufferings are insulted by Van Houten, for whom they have traveled to track the unfinished end of his novel. At home, young people are liable for different forms of brutality; in *The Serpent King*, Travis suffers physical and emotional abuse at his drunken father's hand. He escapes to a fantasy world to find some compensation. Such a fantasy world is not a solution for *Eleanor*, in *Eleanor & Park*,

These previous examples make these young people take action and realize their own identity is a deep sense of empathy and sometimes an enduring friendship. Empathy, this capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from their frame of reference, is what makes these young people come together despite many differences that would make them otherwise

Love, as well, is an intertwining string in all the novels. Most of the time, it is a first love experience, something usual for young adult life. It acts all the time as the saving boat for those young people out of their challenging experience: for Eleanor and Park in the novel that carries their names^v, for Dill and Lydia in *The*

Character Portrayal

The novels feature 19 young adults who cover a broad spectrum on the diversity chart in terms of color, ethnicity, and sexuality. Despite the vast differences among them, most of them are all loveable young people with much vitality, enthusiasm, and love-for-life. Except for *Fire* which features a superhuman monster, and *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, in which the main character acquires some supernatural powers, the other characters are

who finds it unescapable to flee home to escape her stepfather's abuse.

If life-ending is not feared due to brutality, life-threatening diseases and suicidal inclination are not less damaging. This feeling dominated both *The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, cancer-stricken Hazel and Augustus come together out of their tough experience with the disease to experience a love story that ends in Augustus' death. Daniel Quentin (D. Q.) in *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, tries to live out his last days of brain cancer fully. Life-ending looms in *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* and *fire*; O'Brien is haunted by her mother's suicide and thinks that it is an inclination that she could not escape. Fire does not have the desire to end her own life, but she is taking some herbs to kill any possibility in her to have children and continue her human monster race.

These hostile forces are not the defining factors in the novels. The young people in all of them face these challenges with other positive aspects that form the core of the positive approach to life for which these novels were selected for the award. As shown in Table (1), these are fundamental factors related to hope and optimism in the form of the essential coming-of-age turning points of self-realization and identity formation accompanied by love, friendship, and empathy.

In all these novels, young people realize their position in life and take life-turning decisions that help establish their identity; after all, YA literature provides an area of "in-betweenness" that allows for such a change. In *The Hate U Give*, Starr decides to be active and tell Khalid's story realizing her real position in two distinct worlds: the poor, mostly black neighborhood where she lives and the rich, mostly white, prep school she attends. In *All American Boys*, Quinn decides to stand by Rashad and sacrifice his white privilege and family friend relationship. In *Shine*, Cat decides to get out of her trauma and search for Patrick's attacker. In *The Serpent King*, Travis' death draws Dill and Lydia together despite the entirely different backgrounds.

strangers. Quinn, the privileged white boy in *All American Boys*, demands justice for a classmate that he has no personal relationship with against his fatherly family friend cop. In *The Hate U Give* Starr voices her story about the injustice of Khalid's death, although her position and social acceptance among her rich white schoolmates were endangered.

Serpent King, for Augustus and Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars*, and D. Q. and Marisol in *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*. Even *Fire* is an exquisitely romantic novel with its exotic supernatural setting, with Fire and Brigan's love reconciles many of the atrocities the novel exhibit

ordinary young people who have ordinary dreams and visions for the future. They are all facing similar situations almost typical of their age; situations in which there is a need to take action or change attitude, or both of them at the same time. Table (2) lists the main YA characters in the novels providing a short sketch of each character and a brief description of the way they shape their life in a positive way

Table (2) Capable & Thoughtful Characters in the 10 Walden Award Winners and how they shape their life in a positive way

Novel	Capable & Thoughtful Character/s	Shaping Life in a Positive Way
<i>The Hate U Give</i>	Starr , a 16-year-old black girl, lives in two worlds: the poor, mostly black, neighborhood where she lives and the rich, mostly white, prep school she attends.	Protest and riots break as a result of clearing a white policeman who killed Khalid, a black boy. Starr is the only witness. She decides to be active and tell the story of Khalid. She faces tensions in her school when she decides to voice her story.
<i>The Serpent King</i>	Three high school friends face a lot of hardship as they all struggle to find their way in life during their final year: Dill , whose father is currently incarcerated, has to take responsibility for his family debt and help his mother. Travis escapes to a fantasy world out of the physical and emotional abuse of his drunken father. Lydia , though the most fortunate among them, is an outcast in the local high school.	When Travis is murdered by a couple of drug addicts while selling firewood on a rural road, Dill, shocked by this death, sees no reason to live. Lydia, though shocked as well, pulls him out of this darkness to live out his dreams. Dill is accepted to a local college and starts a new relationship with Lydia.
<i>All American Boys</i>	Rashad is a black high school teen who falls an innocent victim of police brutality as a result of an incident of misunderstanding in a corner store. Quinn is a white high school teen who witnesses the brutality of his fatherly family friend's cop against his classmate Rashad.	The school and the whole community are divided on Rashad's cause. Quinn realizes his color privileges and obligations and struggles to take action. Both boys join a community protest that demands justice.
<i>Glory O'Brien's History of the Future</i>	Glory , a 17-year-old girl haunted by her mother's suicide years ago, is certain she'll die young, too, and can envision no future for herself. She starts to see scenes from the future in which she is a prominent rebel fighter in a war sparked by rampant institutional misogyny.	Through the vision, Glory starts to overcome both the fear of having the same fate of her psychologically unstable mother and the pressures society places on teenagers, especially girls; she shapes her life into a thoughtful, mature young woman.
<i>Eleanor & Park</i>	Eleanor , a 15-year-old overweight new girl at school, is bullied by her schoolmates, and nobody is ready to accept her, even on the school bus. Her home life is very harsh as a result of her poor conditions and her abusive stepfather. Park , a half-Korean shy boy, has lived all his life in the same district but still feels like an outsider.	Through their love of comic books, Park and Eleanor start a passionate love story that becomes the only refuge for Eleanor out of her home misery. When things at home come to an unbearable condition, he helps her run away to start her own life in a better place.
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Hazel , a 16-year-old girl, has thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs. Augustus , a 17-year-old boy, has lost his right leg because of bone cancer. Later, cancer attacks him again.	When Augusts and Hazel meet at a cancer patient support group, they develop an interest in each other. They will become the first love for each other. Their interest in a novel written by a writer living in Amsterdam leads them to travel to meet him to inquire about the novel's unfinished end. After Augusts' death, Hazel discovers that he was writing a sequel to the unfinished story.

Novel	Capable & Thoughtful Character/s	Shaping Life in a Positive Way
<i>Shine</i>	<p>Cat, a 16-year-old girl, lives in a small Southern town. A hate crime against her childhood friend, Patrick, gets her out of a three-year withdrawal from the world as a result of personal trauma.</p> <p>Patrick, a 17-year-old openly gay, is brutally attacked and goes into a coma. The hate crime</p>	<p>Cat's investigation not only results in solving the crime but helps her overcome her problems. Patrick awakens from his coma and finds himself surrounded by Cat and other loving friends.</p>
<i>The Last Summer of the Death Warriors</i>	<p>Pancho, a 17-years-old boy, travels to St. Anthony's Home seeking revenge for his murdered sister. He is assigned to help DQ.</p> <p>DQ. (Daniel Quentin), a 17-years-old boy, is under chemotherapy and wants to enjoy his last days to the utmost, with the love of the beautiful Marisol. He is writing the "Death Warrior's Manifesto."</p>	<p>D.Q., the physically weak but emotionally strong boy, managed to remove the hatred and revenge drives from Pancho, the physically strong but emotionally weak boy. Instead, he inspired hope and the will to live in Pancho, who started to rethink his life vision.</p>
<i>Fire</i>	<p>Fire (Lady Fire) is the last human monster. Her exceptional beauty drives men wild. She has the power to read and control the minds of others. She is afraid to misuse these powers, like her father, and invade innocent people's minds. Although all men are attracted to her, she has genuine love only for Brigan.</p>	<p>At a time of chaos in the kingdom, she takes part in fighting the repels without resorting to her superpowers. She is wounded and loses some of her fingers. She takes a herb to make herself infertile so as not to produce any more human monsters. She works in hospitals to relieve people of their pain.</p>
<i>My Most Excellent Year</i>	<p>Three high school freshmen are writing a school essay about their "Most Excellent Year."</p> <p>T.C. (Tony Conigliaro), a 14-years-old boy, is named after a famous Red Sox player like most of his family. He is a vivid baseball-lover Boston boy.</p> <p>Alé(Alejandra), a 14-years-old girl, recently moved to Brookline when her father accepted a position at Harvard after he served as the ambassador to Mexico. She is accustomed to meeting high-rank people. She is weighing her musical and dance inclination against the diplomatic future planned by her parents.</p> <p>Augie, a 14-years-old gay, is the son of a Chinese immigrant mother and an American-born Chinese father. He is a quiet boy who loves musical theatre. He and T. C. are inseparable since they decided to be brothers when they were young.</p>	<p>The three young people are trying to figure out who they are by writing an essay that shows a formative year in their lives. Alé performs a song in the talent show, wins the first prize, and is picked by the principal for the lead in the next school play. Surprisingly, her family is not upset with her artistic success and thinks it can boost her chances for diplomatic success. T. C. fails to start a love relationship with Alé through his plots and decides to be genuine in his pursuit, waiting for the right time. Augie develops his talents into a gifted director, creating masterpieces. Love, friendship, and how they take care of each other turn them into fully-realizing-their-real-stance young people.</p>

The novels are characteristically remarkable for the way they are presenting and treating their teen readers as capable and thoughtful young people. The question of how much these characters are thinking and behaving like adults and not young adults is one of

the recurrent issues in many reviews on the YA literature. Mullan (2006) reminds us that "[nothing] is stranger or more important in our reading of novels than the sense that we are encountering real people in them." However, he concludes that a character "is not a

human being, but it resembles one"(p. 79). Boulton (1975) affirms that such lifelikeness "arises from vitality rather than deep psychological probability" (p. 73) Sometimes, these characters seem to think and behave older than their age; however, it is not to say that the novels are not realistic in their portrayal of the characters. In terms of the exceptional circumstances that beseech them and require remarkable reaction, they reinforce the idea that young people have the potential to think and act positively when they are in a situation that triggers their actions. These novels portray characters involved in shaping their lives in a positive way, even as they struggle with the harsh realities of life.

Starr in *The Hate U Give*, Dill in *The Serpent King*, Quinn in *All American Boys*, and Cat in *Shine* are all young people living their ordinary lives differently. When events throw them in a problematic situation in which they are the only people to stand for other young people who have been victimized by forces that are usually beyond their reach. After some reluctance and sometimes the inability to believe they can do it, they start to take action and seek justice for the victims. It is very significant that, in most cases, final justice is not reached. The main focus is on the way they act positively to achieve it, not the fact they can achieve it or not.

Eleanor in *Eleanor & Park*, Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars*, Glory in *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, Fire in *Fire*, and D. Q. in *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors* face similar situations in

which they have to make life-changing decisions. Their lives are threatened by home violence, disease, war, or chaos. The ability of those young people to act positively in such circumstances is very remarkable. All the circumstances force them to surrender and lose hope; however, they decide to push their way out of these circumstances and cling to hope and love-life attitudes.

As discussed in the thematic section, identity formation is a significant factor that underpins most of the character's actions and struggles. Alé, T. C. and Augie in *My Most Excellent Year*, Pancho in *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, Rashad in *All American Boys*, Lydia in *The Serpent King*, and Park in *Eleanor & Park* can be fairly described as identity hungry human beings. Their life is planned or destined to go in a direction that does not fit what they feel themselves to really be. Gradually, they realize their own identity and what they want to be in life.

Plot Development

A YA novel that treats real issues and presents a positive attitude to life runs the risk of leading the events into unrealistic resolutions. How, in the face of all these hardships and antagonistic forces in life, those, to some extent fragile young people, can positively shape their life? The resolution of the ensuing events is questionable in terms of their credibility and appropriateness. However, the positive attitude of the novels turns their resolutions from an end to a new beginning. Table (3) lists the plot resolution in the selected novels

Table (3) Plot Resolution in the 10 Walden Award Winners

Novel	Plot Resolution
<i>The Hate U Give</i>	Starr keeps to Khalid's memory and intends to continue her fight against injustice. Her white friends stand by her.
<i>The Serpent King</i>	Dill is accepted to a local college and starts a new relationship with Lydia.
<i>All American Boys</i>	Both Rashad and Quinn join a community protest that demands justice.
<i>Glory O'Brien's History of the Future</i>	Glory writes down her visions to help America a civil war incited by a governmental agenda of misogyny.
<i>Eleanor & Park</i>	When things at home come to an unbearable condition, Park helps Eleanor run away to start her own life in a better place.
<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	After August's death, Hazel discovers that he was writing a sequel to the unfinished novel. He noted that he was happy with the choice he made, and Hazel assures him that she is happy too with her choice.
<i>Shine</i>	Patrick awakens from his coma and finds himself surrounded by Cat and other loving friends.
<i>The Last Summer of the Death Warriors</i>	DQ. inspired hope and the will to live in Pancho, who started to rethink his life vision.
<i>Fire</i>	Fire recovers from her injury, reconciles with Brigant. He goes to war, and she starts to work in hospitals to relieve people of their pain.

My Most Excellent Year	Alé performs a song in the talent show and wins the first prize. T. C. decides to be genuine in his pursuit of Alé's love waiting for the right time. Augie develops his talents into a gifted director, creating masterpieces.
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In terms of credibility and appropriateness, most of the selected novels present ends that raise few questions about their realistic or positive nature. However, in *Eleanor & Park*, the ending is not as credible and appropriate as the other novels. The decision to run away seems "imperfect," though it can be still be described as "believable" (Publishers Weekly, 2012, p. 63). The novelist herself admits in an interview that she created a female hero with powers, but she came out to be more passive than her male counterpart (Schulman, 2013, p. 2).

In the other novels, the main characters start a new life powered by the experience they have been through. Dill and Lydia in *The Serpent King*, Pancho in *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, and Alé and Augie in *My Most Excellent Year* realize their own identities and make brave decisions about their future. It is a positive move in how it puts their feet on the right path they have

chosen and not set for them either by others or the circumstances around them. Dill and Lydia will join college, Pancho diverts his life vision into new directions away from revenge, and Alé and Augie develop their talents and shape their future on their own terms.

Attitude Change

Leading their young adult characters, despite harsh circumstances, to associate positive attributes to their life vision and adapt to their environment necessitates, in these novels, dramatical changes in the attitudes of the main characters whether toward their selves, others, or the whole life. Young adult literature is usually considered "a rehearsal stage for the identity formation of its readers." It is the key to "positive identity growth and development for teen readers" (Buyserie & Hill, 2012, p. 57). Table (4) lists the attitude change in the main characters in the selected novels.

Table (4) Attitude Change in the Main Characters in the 10 Walden Award Winners

Novel	Main Characters after the Experience
The Hate U Give	Starr decides to be active and tell the story of Khalid. She faces tensions in her school when she decides to voice her story.
The Serpent King	Dill decides to join a local college and starts a new relationship with Lydia.
All American Boys	Quinn and Rashad decide to take action and join a community protest that demands justice.
Glory O'Brien's History of the Future	Glory decides to shape her life into a thoughtful, mature young woman.
Eleanor & Park	Park and Eleanor start a passionate love story, and he helps her run away to start her own life in a better place.
The Fault in Our Stars	After August's death, Hazel decides to live the rest of her life to the utmost.
Shine	Cat overcomes her personal problems, and Patrick restarts his life surrounded by loving friends.
The Last Summer of the Death Warriors	Pancho is inspired by hope and the will to live and starts to rethink his life vision.
Fire	Fire decides not to produce any more human monsters and instead helps poor people by working in hospitals to relieve their pain.
My Most Excellent Year	Alé, T. C. and Augie discover their way in life as love, friendship, and how they take care of each other turn them into fully-realizing-their-real-stance young people.

In featuring the formative effect of YA literature, Alsup (2015) refers to the way in which they may lead to "attitudinal changes towards individuals different from the readers themselves" (Kerkhoff, 2017, p. 28). The attitudinal changes in the selected novels are broader and more profound. If added to the moral sense, this aspect of cultural diversity helps readers

"consider right and wrong in a complex world with unique 21st-century problems" (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016, p. 32), leading to new perspectives through which many issues in life are looked at differently. For example, in *The Hate U Give*, *All American Boys*, *Eleanor & Park*, and *The Serpent King*, the young people come out of the experience with a strong will to take action and decisions that change the course of their life. In *Glory O'Brien's History of*

the Future, The Fault in Our Stars, Shine, The Last Summer of the Death Warriors, Fire, My Most Excellent Year, the young people

Conclusion

The present study showed that the ability to survive with hope and optimism is the underlying principle that governs the narrative in the novels discussed. This ability appears on all the discussed levels: the thematic level, character-portrayal, and plot development. The harsh reality in which the young people come to age may have put some obstacles in attaining their life vision, but it does not evade this vision or turn it into a gloomy one. Hope elements in the novels bring an outlet for this vision to form the attitude change necessary for these young people to carry on in their future life as positive, capable people.

The study restricted itself to these points in both its range of novels and its areas of analysis. The Walden Award winners are not the only YA novels that present a "positive approach to life." The award itself includes its yearly nomination of four finalists for each year and the year winner. Other novels carry this feature and can be analyzed to show the distinctive way in which they tackle this approach. They can also be interpreted from different perspectives to show this specific feature.

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ⁱLike Michael L. Printz Award (since 1930) by the American Library Association (YALSA), Margaret A. Edwards Award (since 1988) by YALSA and School Library Journal, The Carnegie Medal (since 1956) by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, The Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (since 1956) by *The Guardian* newspaper, The Young Adult Canadian Book Award (since 1980) by The Canadian Library Association, and The National Book Award for Young People's Literature (since 1996) by the National Book Foundation.

ⁱⁱThe Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award is sponsored by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) of the NCTE (the National Council of Teachers of English).

ⁱⁱⁱIf many refuse the simple identification of YA literature as an "aspect of children's literature" or a "reading level" for a proposed age range, they are still disputing if it is a "genre" or a "field" of literature: see (Phillips, 2018), (Duran, 2018), (Stephens, 2018), (Crowe, 1998) and (Khan, 2018)

^{iv}The publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) is often heralded as the birth of modern YA fiction (Carstensen, 2018, p. 24).

^vHarrison and Baines consider *Eleanor & Park* a good example of a contemporary work that explores similar themes to *Romeo and Juliet* and hence can be a good companion to teaching this classic that involves star-crossed lovers. (Harrison & Baines, 2016)