

# **Beyond the basics:**

## **what *really* differentiates YA from adult fiction.**

NYT Bestselling Author Ally Carter and Agent Kristin Nelson

It seems as if most writers have questions about the differences between writing for teens and adults. Unfortunately, it takes a lot of experience within the young adult world to know when and how to ask the *right* questions and get to the heart of what really differentiates YA and adult fiction.

Below is a list of “wrong” questions that many writers ask when they first start considering a career in YA literature and the “right” questions that we recommend authors ask instead in order to fully understand the world of YA fiction.

**WRONG QUESTION:** How do I develop a “teen” voice?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** Do I have a voice that's appealing to teens?

**WRONG QUESTION:** How long does a YA novel have to be?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** How important is pacing in YA novels?

**WRONG QUESTION:** Should I alter the “level” of my writing when writing for teens?

**RIGHT QUESTION:** Do teens have different attention spans, vocabulary capabilities, etc than adult readers?

**WRONG QUESTION:** How is the best way to market to teens? Do I have to blog?

**RIGHT QUESTION:** Do teens use the Internet to connect with authors?

**THE WRONG QUESTION:** How much sex, violence, adult language can I put in my YA novel?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** My story contains very adult themes and elements. Will this change how it is published and marketed?

**THE WRONG QUESTION:** Can my current agent who sells me into the adult publishing world also sell me into the YA world?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** How important is it for an agent to know and understand the YA and children's publishing market?

**THE WRONG QUESTION:** How important is it to highlight the message I want young adult readers to learn from reading my novel?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** Should my young adult novel have an educational or a learning slant?

**THE WRONG QUESTION:** If I'm already established as an adult trade author, can I sell on proposal to the YA market?

**THE RIGHT QUESTION:** What is the advantage or disadvantage of selling a full manuscript in the YA market versus attempting to sell just on proposal?

In addition, there are a number of questions that most writers who are new to YA fiction don't know to ask at all:

- How important is word-of-mouth when building a teen following?
- Do your teen readers expect to have a closer relationship with you?
- Do authors ever do school visits?
- Will my book ever be used in a classroom? I'm not exactly a Bronte.
- What are these "lists" I keep hearing about? Do they matter?
- Is there a difference between the shelf life of a teen vs. an adult title?
- What do you do when your fans grow up? How can you have a career if your audience won't be reading teen stuff in ten years?
- Is YA really a genre? How do I know if I've written a YA book?
- Will my existing readers pick up my YA books and will teens try my adult romances?
- Is the "world" surrounding YA literature really that different?
- Do I need to change what I read if I'm going to change what I write?

## Helpful links and lingo when navigating the world of YA fiction

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): <http://www.ncte.org/>

The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN): <http://www.alan-ya.org/>

International Reading Association (IRA): <http://www.reading.org/>

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI): <http://www.scbwi.org/about.htm>

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/yalsa.cfm>

YALSA Book Awards and Booklists: [www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists)

Texas Library Association (TLA) State Reading Lists: <http://www.txla.org/html/reading.html>

**Ally Carter** is the *New York Times* Bestselling author of the popular Gallagher Girls series, *I'd Tell You I Love You but Then I'd Have to Kill You*, *Cross My Heart and Hope to Spy*, and *Don't Judge a Girl by Her Cover*. Her first novel for young adults was named a Kansas Notable Book, an Amelia Bloomer book, and is featured on both the Texas Lone Star and Georgia Peach reading lists. She lives in Oklahoma where she is hard at work on her next Gallagher Girls adventure as well as a new highly-anticipated series for young adults.

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**Kristin Nelson** established the Nelson Literary Agency in 2002. In such a short time, she has sold more than 100 books to all the major publishers, has landed several film deals, and has contracted foreign rights on behalf of her clients in all the major territories. Clients include *New York Times* bestselling author Ally Carter and RITA-award winning author Linnea Sinclair, and rising historical romance star Sherry Thomas. Member: RWA, AAR, SFWA, SCBWI.

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