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## Reviews

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# Adolescent Literature: What Are Your Kids Reading?

by Sylvia J. Davis

It is . . . the literature we read for amusement or purely for pleasure that may have the greatest . . . least suspected . . . earliest and most insidious influences upon us.  
—T.S. Eliot

In 1980 as part of my thesis for the master of arts degree, I prepared and administrated a survey to determine the reading habits of approximately 500 eleventh and twelfth graders in five Seventh-day Adventist schools. The questionnaire, which asked the students to list favorite books, included questions that probed how they chose them and sought their general attitudes about literature. It was given in a variety of classroom settings with no prior announcement. No signature was required. Students were given the freedom to list preferences not recommended by their teachers or unavailable in their school library. I undertook the study with the hope that the knowledge gained would help teachers on both the secondary and college levels to select and recommend literature that would enhance the cognitive and emotive growth of their students. Limitations of space permit only a listing of the top 25 books selected by the students and a brief analysis. (Books are listed in order of popularity, most to least.)

Though writing specifically aimed at adolescents is a fairly new field, this list indicates that date of publication holds no absolute sway over reader appeal. Whereas six of the choices held positions on the best-seller list the year of the survey, *Huckleberry*

### SDA Academy Favorites

J.R.R. Tolkien	<i>The Hobbit</i>
Peter Benchley	<i>Jaws</i>
J.R.R. Tolkein	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> (Entire trilogy)
George Lucas	<i>Star Wars</i>
C.S. Lewis	<i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> (Entire series)
James Herriot	<i>All Creatures Great and Small</i>
George Orwell	<i>Animal Farm</i>
Hank Searls	<i>Jaws 2</i>
Mark Twain	<i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>
E.G. Valens	<i>The Other Side of the Mountain</i>
James Herriot	<i>All Things Bright and Beautiful</i>
Flora Rheta Schreiber	<i>Sybil</i>
Judy Blume	<i>Forever</i>
Joni Eareckson	<i>Joni</i>
Coleen McCullough	<i>The Thorn Birds</i>
Gale Sayers	<i>I Am Third</i>
Alex Haley	<i>Roots</i>
Jack London	<i>The Call of the Wild</i>
Alan Paton	<i>Cry, the Beloved Country</i>
Vincent Bugliosi	<i>Helter Skelter</i>
Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey	<i>Grease</i>
Frank B. Gilbreth	<i>Cheaper by the Dozen</i>
Ernest Hemingway	<i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>
Chaim Potok	<i>The Promise</i>
John Powell	<i>Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?</i>

*Finn* first appeared in 1884 and the Lewis series has survived 30 years of young readers. Granted, six of the books chosen have been made into films, indicating the influence that this medium has on the adolescent, but few books of laughter or light comedy were chosen. Students take life seriously, and they chose material that explored wide experiences, often filled with violence and tragedy.

Only nine of the books on the list are “true” stories, though a closer look at many of the books shows an undercurrent of high moral and religious value in theme and plot. Adventure is still a perennial literary focal point in a reader’s search for interest. Six of the 10 most-chosen books are tales of ad-

venture. While *Jaws* is a fictional story focusing on the man-vs-animal theme, James Herriott's books chronicle the British country atmosphere and a simple way of life with animals, where the need for care surrounds everyone. Mark Twain also wrote with an adventuresome spirit, following the rich history of early America. Written in a colloquial dialect, *Huckleberry Finn* survives and was a favorite of these high school students.

The appeal of stories that allow the reader to "live through the lives of others" is undoubtedly what put Valens' *The Other Side of the Mountain* among the favorites. A dream of every adolescent is to become the "best." Young Jill Kinmont was striving to be an Olympic champion when she met life head-on in a skiing accident. The honesty of this story reaches a climax when Jill, though paralyzed, informs a prospective employer, "You have no idea of what I am capable!" Every growing adolescent speaks these lines to parents, teachers, and friends, and that same appeal of identifying outside one's self may account for the choice of Tolkien's and Lewis' fantasy classics. Both fantasies follow a search for the black and white of good and evil and utilize elements of escapism. Bilbo, the Hobbit, begins an adventure that becomes a heroic quest defining good and evil.

Judy Blume is the only author on the list who writes specifically for the adolescent. She has written over 11 books, all in the first person, portraying significant moments of a young person's life. Her book *Forever*, 13th on the list, tells of the first experience of love. Without making a traditional moral statement, it raises the question of the appropriate expectations involved in intimacy. Its poignant message is that life is seldom filled with experiences that are "forever." In noting the lack of books listed from authors who write specifically for the adolescent, one may conclude that possibly

these students just have not been introduced to this literature. However, a wealth of literature is produced for this group by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but for some reason these books have not reached their intended audience or have failed to impress their adolescent readers.

If students are introduced to the authors who write about the experiences of youth, and teachers make time for discussion of the material, the knowledge of how others have struggled and coped with adolescent problems can be a resource for a positive growing process. One advertisement for adolescent literature reads in bold type: "To get them reading, to keep them reading." Maturity begins for many students when they learn to question pat answers and experience the richness offered by differences of opinion. Seventh-day Adventist educators must use books to help young people become more sensitive to the specialness of each human being.

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Sylvia J. Davis received her M.A. degree in English from Loma Linda University. She now resides in Redlands, California.

## The Great Controversy As the Key to Ellen White

Joseph Battistone. *The Great Controversy Theme in E.G. White Writings*. xiii + 134 pp., bibl. Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 1978. \$8.95 (paper)

by Rolf J. Poehler

Although he now is a pastor, this paperback grew out of a series of lectures Battistone presented while serving as an associate professor of religion at Andrews University. Battistone contends that Ellen White's writings can only be correctly understood and interpreted if the battle between good and evil is properly recognized as the central motif of, not only the "Conflict of the

Ages'' series but her entire literary production.

As Battistone moves from Ellen White's treatment of Satan's rebellion in heaven all the way to her description of the final deliverance of God's people at the second advent, his analysis, at times, makes for tedious reading, at least for the reader interested in less studious material. But as a reference tool this book will undoubtedly be an asset to every serious student of Ellen White. To yield its fullest value the book must be studied in connection with those volumes of Ellen White Battistone attempts to elucidate.

Although his analysis is limited to her historical works, Battistone makes a valuable contribution to the long-overdue hermeneutic of Ellen White's writings. According to Battistone, Ellen White's writings are not inerrant source books providing objective historical and exegetical information. Rather, Ellen White intends to evoke through her commentary a religious response to Scripture and history. Ellen White, Battistone says, sees past events and personages as paradigms of the imminent final scenes of the great controversy.

One wishes that the author had devoted more space to these and other implications of his study. Future research, which would go beyond the expressed purpose of this book, will have to develop further the relationship of the great controversy motif to the problem of theodicy (stressed by Battistone), to the non-historical writings of White (neglected in the book), and to apocalyptic imagery and thought (ignored by the author). It will also be important to investigate the possibility of different conceptions of the great controversy motif. Since the theme of a battle between good and evil was neither new nor uncommon in White's time, the true uniqueness and originality of her approach deserve further study. In other words, the book serves only as a valuable starting point for the necessary hermeneutical reflection on the writings of Seventh-day Adventism's most influential writer.

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Rolf J. Poehler is, at this writing, a pastor in West Germany, and is also working toward the Th.D. at Andrews University with a major in systematic theology.