Reviewer Handout, *The ALAN Review*

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a reviewer for *The ALAN Review*; you are a vital part of the peer review and publication process. This handout provides guidance to new and new-ish reviewers and includes

Overview of the Review Process

Reading the Manuscript

- Read the manuscript at least once in its entirety. As you read, make notes and consider the following
    - Does the topic align with the call for manuscripts?
    - Is the topic new/original and/or adds new insight/s to existing scholarship?
    - Is the purpose of the submission clear, connected to YAL (Young Adult Literature), and contributes to the field?
    - Is the content grounded in theory, research, and/or practice?
    - Is the content relevant for readers of *TAR*?
    - Are the organization, style, and language of the manuscript clear?

Providing Comments to the Editors

You may consider including the following in your comments to the editors

- a short summary (1-3 sentences) of your review/comments to the authors
- candid reflection of the manuscript as a whole
- and/or additional rationale for your recommendation.
- There is no need to provide comments related to grammar, typos, spelling, APA, or other types of mechanical edits. TAR has an in-house copy editor who makes these types of revisions.

Providing Comments to the Authors

Consider the following as you write your comments for the author

- Provide the author with your honest, kind, and critical reflections of their manuscript.
- Be kind, but challenge productively. Highlight strong aspects of the manuscript as well as areas in which it could improve. Use the bullet points above to guide your feedback.
- Make your feedback specific by including concrete evidence and examples from the manuscript and by offering concrete suggestions to the author. This is especially important as any notes you made on the manuscript while reading will not be available to the author/s.
- There is no need to provide comments related to grammar, typos, spelling, APA, or other types of mechanical edits. TAR has an in-house copy editor who makes these types of revisions.
- See below for examples.

<u>Making a Recommendation</u>

At the end of the review, you will be asked to **make a recommendation**.

- *Accept with minor revisions*: select this option for manuscripts that are excellent across all criteria, but may need minor revisions and/or editing
- *Conditionally accept*: select this option for manuscripts that need some revision, but have a strong foundation. If the author is willing to make the revisions, the article should be accepted.
- *Revise and resubmit*: select this option for manuscripts that have the potential to be published, but need substantial revision. For example, these manuscripts may need entire sections added or entirely rewritten.
- *Reject*: select this option for manuscripts not suitable to be published in *TAR*. This means that the content isn't aligned with *TAR* readers and/or the call and/or the manuscript is theoretically or methodologically flawed beyond simply one more round of revision.

<u>Additional Useful Items</u>

- As a reviewer, it may be helpful in your own process to add notes to the manuscript itself. Remember, however, that your feedback to the editors and author/s will be narrative; they will not see your commented version of the manuscript.
- There are multiple reviewers for each manuscript, as well as feedback from the editor assigned to the manuscript, so your review alone will not "make or break" an author/s opportunity to be published in *TAR.*

Advice from Current *TAR* Reviewers:

Fom Kit Robinson, Aurora Public Schools:

> My best advice for being a reviewer for *TAR* is to focus on giving specific and actionable feedback. I like to have the call for proposals open on one side of my screen as I read submissions. This allows me to give clear [feedback] to the author(s) on how to make their submission more aligned with *TAR*, as well as more accessible and relevant to the readers.

From Dr. Wendy J. Glenn, University of Colorado, Boulder:

> I encourage reviewers to find a balance between identifying strengths and noting suggestions for improvement in a manuscript. It takes courage and vulnerability to put our work, in many ways a reflection of ourselves, out into the world. The best reviewer feedback that I have received celebrates what a piece is doing well and offers constructive and doable feedback, often framed in the form of questions, both of which ultimately get me excited about diving back into the manuscript.

From Karen L. Yarbrough, Maplewood High School:

> Do you remember a time when you were reading a journal article and you thought to yourself… how on earth did this get published? Our goal as reviewers is to avoid that reader experience! Be as objective as possible, and don't worry about hurting feelings. If you are professional and give valid feedback, then that is more helpful than holding back. If you think an article isn't ready to publish, then just say so. The number one issue with most article drafts is Organization. What is the structure of the article? Does it work? Is it easy to follow? Is the author's intent clear and identifiable throughout the document? Remember: No first draft is perfect, and revision is part of the process!

From Dr. Ricki Ginsberg, Colorado State University:

> One thing we don't talk enough about in academia is an extreme pressure to be an "expert." Accompanying this pressure, I think some reviewers can be overly harsh when they review. As some know, there's an academic joke that Reviewer 2 is harsh and cruel in their feedback, and the double-blind process might even encourage this kind of approach. When I review, I try to think about the person on the other end of the review. We put our hearts and souls into our writing, and getting back an overtly mean review can feel devastating. If I am being honest, I have received these reviews that slam my work, and they have allowed me to become a better reviewer. I now start by sharing the strengths of a manuscript. If I don't think an article is close to the level of publication or that it needs significant work, I focus my feedback on the big picture concerns and don't share small concerns. It's similar to the lessons we teach in writers' workshops. Focus first on the big issues, and offer both constructive criticism and praise.

Following positive praise, I first (and sometimes only) focus my feedback on larger revisions I perceive (e.g. more scholarly grounding, more evidence for claims, a different organization, a stronger articulation of the manuscript's contribution). If I don't perceive significant, larger revisions or if they feel manageable, I also focus on smaller revisions. Scholarly journals have copy editors, so there's never a need to make suggestions at the copy editing level. I always end by encouraging an author to continue to revise their work for publication, even if that comes with suggestions for major revisions. As a writer, I have completely overhauled a manuscript following some incredible, encouraging feedback from reviewers. I would never tell a person to stop writing and revising, so I wouldn't do the same in a blind review. We can always improve our work, and encouragement from an anonymous reviewer has given me strength, so I try to pay it forward.

From Dr. Ryan Schey, University of Georgia:

Thank you for offering your time and expertise by reviewing for *TAR*! Reviewing is such an important dimension of our work as scholars, especially in that it helps shape the field, but it's also an activity that largely happens behind the scenes. For me, one of the great joys of reviewing is to see a manuscript that I'm invested in grow, develop, and eventually be published and taken up by other scholars. I review pieces related to my own areas of research, so I'm deeply invested in those manuscripts moving the field along pathways that are more critical, humanizing, and justice-oriented. I invite you to take up a similar spirit in your approach to reviewing.

I have a few thoughts that I hope might be helpful. First, work hard to understand each manuscript on its own terms and try to figure out what the author(s) is/are trying to accomplish. It's important to honor their autonomy and agency as a scholar. Perhaps it's related to my own orientation as an ethnographer, but I think it's valuable to seek to understand first before making any judgments or evaluations. Given how busy scholars are, it can be challenging to take the time to slow down though. Once you have this understanding, attempt to give feedback that helps the author accomplish their goal. Remember that their project, research questions, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, etc. might be different than yours or not be the ones that you would choose. That's okay! Of course, if there are ethical concerns (such as an author using a deficit framework or reasoning that is dehumanizing or oppressive), challenge those moments. There are many, many ways for scholars to do critical work though, and by cultivating a diversity of these approaches, we help foster a vibrancy in the field.

Second, as a former high school English teacher and someone still in English education, I feel that a lot of my work as a reviewer as in a similar mode to that of a writing educator, so it often feels pedagogical. This doesn't mean that I know more or better than any author, but rather that

I approach feedback by posing important questions and trying to help the author and manuscript grow.

Third, be specific in giving examples and suggestions. Point out what the piece does well and where. Point out where the piece struggles and in what ways. Give specific page numbers or quotes to help illustrate. Doing so helps your review be more concrete and usable for the author(s), even if they and/or the editors don't choose to take up your suggestions. Similarly, provide some suggestions of what the author(s) might do to address your feedback. Don't dictate a single right choice here, but offer suggestions of the types of revisions that might help the manuscript be stronger. You should not do the author's job for them, but it can be helpful to gesture toward some ways forward. For instance, if I am reviewing a manuscript that I feel lacks a clear central focus and new intellectual contribution, I might suggest that the author include research questions in the manuscript to help readers understand the main idea more clearly (if they haven't already included RQs).

Fourth, after all the reviews are sent out, read what the editors and other reviewers wrote. Compare and contrast with your own feedback. Doing so can help you learn to be a better reviewer.

Example Reviews

Below are examples of kind and honest comments to authors that are clear, concise, and provide constructive feedback. These reviews have been modified to preserve anonymity of the authors' work.

Review Example #1:

Comments to Author(s):

In sum, I recommend the following revisions: making the connection to the call for manuscripts more explicit, stating the manuscript's main argument earlier in the paper, providing a description of the author's text selection and textual analysis process, and providing specific examples of the recommended pedagogical implications.

Comments to Author(s):

It was a joy to read this thoughtful analysis of how *<book title>* can <concept>. Upon reading the manuscript, I offer the following feedback, notes, and suggestions as aligned with the review criteria for *The ALAN Review.* Specifically, I recommend the following revisions: making the connection to the call for manuscripts more explicit, stating the manuscript's main argument earlier in the paper, providing a description of the author's text selection and textual analysis process, and providing specific examples of the recommended pedagogical implications.

Connection to the Call for Manuscripts

This manuscript relates to the call for manuscripts and specifically connects to the call's question of <question from call for manuscript>. Yet, throughout the piece the connection to <concept> was alluded to, but was not explicitly named. Specifically, the connection between <theory> and <concept>, the textual analysis of *<book title>* and <concept>, and the classroom implications and <concept> could be made more clear. When considering these revisions, I encourage the author to consider the following questions: How is <theory> connected to <concept>? How is the use of the text and <theory> in the classroom a form of <concept>? How does using *<book title>* to explore themes of <concept>, <concept>, and <concept> relate to ideas of <concept>? How do the pedagogical recommendations relate to <concept>?

Originality

Examining the novel *<book title>* through the lens of <theory> provides an innovative approach to examining novels. As this is already a popular text, there already are a lot of teaching guides, discussion questions, and activities online for this novel. This leaves me wondering how this work is similar and/or different from the material that is already out there around teaching *<book title>*. Explicitly calling out how viewing this novel through a <theory> lens is a new approach to exploring this novel would increase the originality of this manuscript.

Purpose

The purpose/argument of this paper is unclear. The manuscript may be improved by explicitly stating the manuscript's argument upfront or providing a guiding inquiry/research question in the introduction section of the paper. These revisions would focus and guide the reader throughout the piece. In making these revisions the author may consider, what is this piece communicating about texts and <theory>; why is this important/why does this matter; and how does this connect to <concept>? This is stated in the first two sentences of the conclusion section and these sentences might be more effective earlier on in the paper.

Grounding in theory, research, and/or practice

This manuscript is grounded in theories of <theory>, and the authors do a beautiful job of weaving this theory into their analysis of *<book title>.* Missing is grounding in the author's research process through a description of why the text *<book title>* was chosen as the focus of the manuscript. There are many other popular YA novels, so why was this text chosen as the focus of this piece? I was also left wondering about the author's analysis process- what reading, coding, and sense making did the author engage in to conduct the analysis?

Suitability to TAR Audience

This article provides implications for teachers and educators for using the YA novels in classrooms. This manuscript could be even more suited for the *TAR* audience by providing explicit examples of classroom implications. For example, what is a specific activity, lesson, or assignment that teachers could use in the classroom alongside the reading of these texts that <recommended implication>; what are ways that teachers can use these texts to <recommended implication>; what is a specific lesson, activity, or assignment that teachers can use to incorporate <recommended implication> when reading these novels or other novels?

Organization

This manuscript is organized and well-written. Because of the author's clear and concise writing style, it is easy to read and understand.

Recommendation:

Revise and resubmit

Review Example #2:

Comments to Author(s):

Dear Authors,

Thank you for your manuscript and for sharing your important work. Reading texts with students and developing racialized lenses as a way to talk about race, racism, antiblackness, and white supremacy is a commendable classroom activity and way to engage with texts. The guiding questions y'all offer, which can be productive for preservice teachers and K12 students alike (which group do you teach?), are useful prompts in guiding students to reflect on how characters of different social identities are portrayed in texts and what effects those portrayals have as they intersect with readers' socialized and racialized views of race.

One element of your work that I'm struggling with is the use of "<this concept>." Below I offer some notes and questions that I hope will spark your thinking and development of the idea.

● What thinkers do you draw on to define "<this concept>"? When I read "<this term>," I am reminded of <this thinker's concept>—are you using the terminology in the same way and/or drawing on <the thinker's> language and definitions? How so or, if not, how are you defining the term? What about the approach is "<this term>"? What intellectual genealogy do you draw on to define and help readers ground "<this concept>"? A good example of the authors defining their terms that acknowledges previous thinkers is when they explain <this other concept> as grounded in <this other thinker's> work.

● I'm having a hard time grounding my reading of the sections <Section 1, Section 2, Section 3>, largely because these three concepts overlap, but their overlap is only glossed over. The presentation of the ideas makes it seem like the authors engaged with these ideas separately and perhaps sequentially? In what ways can the presentation of what happened lean into the nuance of how all three interact? For example, <this construct>, coupled with <this construct>, builds <this construct>.

● Related, what is the relationship between <this, that, and the other construct> and <this concept>? Are the former instantiations of the latter? How is this relationship established in your manuscript?

Another item I'm having trouble with is that the examples offered of student responses that inspire the lessons that push against <this concept>: <so-and-so> comes up a lot. Are there other comments/students that catalyzed the additional lessons?

I'm also concerned about the assumed dynamic between teacher and student. What happens when the students already know the history of, say, <this thing>? The authors have positioned themselves as perpetual teachers and the students as perpetual learners. In what ways might teacher and student co-construct critical and antiracist approaches to texts?

Again, thank you for your research, teaching, and writing.

Best,

Reviewer

Recommendation:

Revise and resubmit