

## Introduction to Escapism

Dear readers,

Recent years have been dramatic to say the least. Since January of 2020, the world has contended with a seemingly endless string of tragedies and terrors including the COVID-19 pandemic, political turmoil, police brutality, hate crimes, gun violence, wildfires, global warming, and murder hornets to name just a few. The emotional toll of these events is not limited to adults. Teens—in what is already an exhausting and trying period of self-discovery—are attempting to survive and navigate these dark times while still striving for independence and dreaming of the future. It's exhausting just to think about. To help offer teens a mental and emotional break from these crazy times, we have focused this issue of YA Hotline on the theme of escapism.



"Escapism" Drawn by M. Coyle

What exactly *is* escapism? Merriam-Webster dictionary defines escapism as a “habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine” (n.d.). Likewise, the American Psychological Association defines it as “the tendency to escape from the real world to the delight or security of a fantasy world” (n.d.). As escapism really only requires the use of one’s imagination, outlets for escape can come in almost any form, including books, film, videos games, music, art, and more.

Historically, escapism has received criticism from researchers and scholars for allowing people to avoid confronting difficult situations and shirking reality in favor of instant gratification and fantasy (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). While one can understand the concerns raised by scholars, we believe that escapism—especially during times of global crisis—is not inherently bad and may instead offer a number of benefits to those who engage with it. Recently, the American Psychological Association (2020) released a report about perceptions of stress in the United States. In it, Gen Z teenagers reported feeling stress due to the pandemic, politics, the future of their education, and police violence. Additionally, 51% of surveyed teens reported that “the pandemic makes planning for the future feel impossible” (APA, 2020) and 50% of surveyed teens felt that “the pandemic severely disrupted their plans for the future” (APA, 2020). With such bleak feedback and an ongoing pandemic, who doesn’t need a break? Beyond offering people a break from the stress of real life, researchers have identified a number of benefits associated with escapism such as increased bonding between those who socialize during escapist activities (such as playing video games or watching movies with friends) and the development of emotional skills due to audiences empathizing with characters (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Additionally, and far less academically—though no less important to a teen’s development—escapism is *fun*. On top of navigating life during a pandemic, adolescents may find themselves overwhelmed with the pressure of increased academic and extracurricular commitments; reminding teens to take time to enjoy things simply because they are fun is crucial for one’s mental and emotional health.

Our aim in creating this issue of YA Hotline is to provide librarians—and/or anyone working with adolescents—resources and inspiration for offering escapist materials and services to their audiences. This issue contains everything from podcast reviews to exploratory articles to programming ideas. Topics covered include role playing games, graphic novels, animated films, Indigenous speculative fiction, LGBTQ2SIA+ fantasy, and more. We hope that our enthusiasm for escapism will prove evident—and infectious—throughout the pages of this issue of YA Hotline. Hopefully, the provided ideas and activities will help provide a fun break from reality for not only teens but those who serve them. These are dark times, and everyone could use a bit of an escape.

We thank you for taking the time to read our issue of YA Hotline and send you forth with well-wishes for safety and good health.

Happy reading!

The YA Hotline Escapism Team

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