

Diving into Fan Fiction

If you are interested in fanfiction for teens, it may be helpful to understand who uses it and why it is beneficial to young adults to take part in the writing and reading of fanfiction. First of all, fanfiction is “more likely to inspire youths to produce and actively engage in processes of sharing and circulating literature” (Garcia, 2016, p. 353). Frankly, there are less barriers to access fanfiction than other areas of publishing, leading it to be an accessible area for young adults to interact with media. It is a way to encourage writing and reading about the media teens love in a way that is not necessarily so focused on what many would consider “traditional” literature. Fanfiction is a way to engage with peers about media that they enjoy.

Garcia touches on the notion that fanfiction is sometimes regarded as “challenging the ideas and representation in [popular] texts” (2016, p. 354). There are plenty of media sources that young adults may love, but do not see themselves reflected in. Fanfiction, as a form of content creation, can be about seeing yourself in the stories you love, when the author might not otherwise represent you. However, fanfiction is, in fact, more than this, it is also building upon the fictional universes that young adults love and taking them past the points where those universes “end,” or, alternatively, taking plot points and completely reimagining a fictional universe based on those changes. Fanfiction is an opportunity to express creativity and interact with static content.

These thoughts are echoed by *Writers in the Secret Garden* which found, during an ethnographic study, some of the reasons why those involved in fanfiction communities write. Aragon and Davis discuss the many lessons fanfiction writers have learned, including mentorship from other writers, learning to write better, and the general ability to “interact with like-minded people” (2019, pg. 59). The authors distinctly note the importance of distributed mentorship in which others in fanfiction communities can build-up the skills and confidence of writers through asynchronous mentorship (Aragon & Davis, 2019). Some of the important characteristics from distributed mentorship that Aragon and Davis uncover in their study is receiving feedback from others from a large and distinct variety of sources, writing resources, friendships with other writers/fans, collaboration, motivation to write, among many other crucial benefits to users (Aragon & Davis, 2019).

Understanding the benefits of what fanfiction can do for those involved in the greater community is essential for those working with youth to understand. As Miller notes in “Information Seeking Behaviors of Young Adult Readers of Fiction and Fan Fiction,” there is this notion that fanfiction is something to be “embarrassed or even ashamed” about when there are actually concrete benefits of being involved in online communities (2020, pg. 1). Content creation, in the form of fanfiction, is something that, if you know a young adult is intrigued by should be encouraged. Young adults do not necessarily have to be reading Shakespeare or Vonnegut to be learning and growing their abilities. There are many forms of learning and engagement that can be fostered in young adults.

Building upon this, it may be of interest to note what young adults are reading and the demographics of this audience. In Aragon and Davis’s study, they discovered the mean age of

those involved in their study were around 16, with 72.5% of users being between 10 and 20 years old (2019). They also noted that of these users the strong majority, at 73%, identified as female (Aragon & Davis, 2019). In terms of the content these young adults were engaging with, Aragon and Davis found that the most contributed to categories were anime/manga, TV shows, and books (2019). While there is a large skew in age, fanfiction does seem to be an area of content creation that older young adults tend to be the biggest users of. There are a large variety of fandoms which continuously change based on what is popular but understanding that these fandoms are derived from what is popular in the media (within the top three categories) may be beneficial to understand when young adults may be interested in this type of content creation.

References

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