

Parents and Fanfiction: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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Abstract: This article addresses some of the major concerns that parents may have against fanfiction and how parents can make sure their children are reading appropriate subject matter.

Debate surrounds the literary format of fanfiction. It is one of the newest forms of literature and many of the “ground rules” of publishing online are still being discussed. Beyond the issue of copyright, the rules and regulations that apply to material published through a publisher do not apply to fanfiction. Fanfiction “is an outlet for fans of anything from boy bands to soaps to write stories depicting their favourite characters” (Kyle, par. 5). This self-published genre allows authors, of any age, to present their work for consumption online, allowing fans to share their obsession with others. Laura Miller’s March 11, 2015 essay, *You Belong to Me*, offers an interesting discussion of some of the key players in the fanfiction world at the moment, and is well worth the read for those unfamiliar with the concept.

Many parents are concerned about their children reading fanfiction. There are few options for understanding the world of fanfiction and most parents are learning about format through trial and error. Parent’s apprehension seems to centre around the perceived lack of control related to this specific online environment, and the lack of ability to filter or monitor story content. Further to this, arguments have been made that fanfiction is poorly written, containing numerous spelling and grammatical errors, and suffers from poor plot structure. Others have pointed out that some longer stories are never completed, leaving readers wondering about the outcome of the story, and that some stories contain explicit sexual content.

The concern is certainly justified, in the same way that concern about Internet content is justified. As with any Internet community, there are pockets of members with very specific interests that might make some readers uncomfortable should they stumble upon them. Some of the most well-known fiction types to arouse the ire of parents are mpreg (male pregnancy), rapefics, (exactly what it sounds like), and snuff stories

(a story with the intent to kill off a character). This is to say nothing of the presence of trolls (online bullies who intentionally seek out and create controversy), whose presence can be particularly worrisome to parents given the number of teen suicides resulting from cyber-bullying.

However, snuff fiction stories and trolls are, for the most part, disliked by many within the fanfiction community. Well-established forums are combating these issues by implementing strict rules regarding undesirable content or behavior. Those sites that do not have rules for publishing often provide disclaimers that warn a reader about the content. Tumblr allows the user a further level of protection from material they do not want to see by downloading a “blacklist” extension (Tumblr). The blacklist allows users the ability to block tags that contain content that they do not want seen therefore allowing the user to control the content in their queue. Tumblr contributors, for their part, are careful to tag their posts appropriately, especially when they post content that might make other users uncomfortable. Tumblr etiquette is largely user-moderated and taken quite seriously, and is therefore fairly reliable.

Fanfiction.net takes a different approach to environment control, allowing users to create custom filters for their searches, which is particularly useful in regards to content rating and subject matter. Many fanfiction authors tend to err on the side of caution, posting items as “Teen” or “Mature” if they are unsure if it is suitable for a younger audience. Users may also select from an extensive genre filter, allowing them to further customize the content of their search results.

Finding fanfiction is like finding information on the Internet, and users must take the good with the bad. Fanfiction allows fans free reign to create stories on their favourite characters and star, fostering creativity, facilitating social networking, and offering burgeoning artists and writers a platform upon which to hone their skills. Fanfiction can also present young minds with ideas and situations that they may not yet be ready for. Within the two extremes, there is significant opportunity to talk to teens about topics that they are either already facing in school, or will shortly be facing when they leave home for the first time. Wolfson champions the idea of fanfiction as an informal educational resource, even going so far as to state that the

majority of fanfiction is “a rejection of Rihanna and EL James's leather-bound version of sexuality. When most teenagers are faced with the miserable advice of sex education (put a condom on a carrot, use a mirror to look at your bits), or the miserable version of sexuality in porn, fanfiction offers a more honest way to engage with relationships and sex” (Wolfson, par. 4).

Information is neither inherently good nor inherently evil; what matters is how you engage with it. The same can be said of fanfiction. Whether as a creative outlet or educational tool, the potential benefits of reading and writing fanfiction are immense. However, the only way to reap these benefits is to become involved.

Works Cited

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