

Workshop notes from WHY YA with G. S Prendergast

Am I Writing YA Fiction?

- ✓ Is one of the themes the struggle to break away from “adult” control?

This doesn't need to be the main theme, but it is usually one of the themes or part of the broader theme. Consider **The Hunger Games**, and Katniss's struggle against the adults who control the authoritarian government that exploits teens in the Games.

- ✓ Is your protagonist aged 15-19? (or equivalent)

The character should be the age of an adolescent in whatever species they are. Perhaps as an elf or fairy, that's 100 years old. Perhaps as a bat or dog, that's 1 or two years old. Some exceptions are made for elderly immortals stuck in the bodies of teenagers although this is falling out of favor now. More important than their age is their position in society as a not-quite-mature person, perhaps still under some kind of tutelage. Think apprentices, students, royal pages, squires etc.

- ✓ Is your protagonist struggling with teenage issues, possibly amongst other things?

A wide range of issues fit here. First love, first sex, first job, first time away from parents. Think firsts. But also think of the conflict between generations, lack of parental understanding, the pressures of independence, the disrespect from elders, secrecy, shame, peer pressure etc.

- ✓ Are some or most of the supporting characters also teens?

The love interest, if any, should also be a teen. There should be teen allies. The antagonist(s) can be teens or adults. The protagonist should be in an environment with other teens, not a teen on their own amongst adults. Think about Daenerys, Jon Snow, Sansa and Arya in Games of Thrones. All teens but all isolated for most of the books from other teens, and living more or less as adults and occupying adult roles in society. Games of Thrones for this reason (amongst others) is not YA. But if Game of Thrones was about Dany, Sansa, Arya and Jon running off together and having adventures and fighting battles it might well be YA.

- ✓ Would it appeal to teen readers?

Is it fast paced, plot driven, entertaining? Teen readers can handle advanced vocabulary and challenging themes but they don't want to be bored.

- ✓ Is it between 60,000 and 125,000 words?

Graphic novels, verse novels and some other books are exceptions to this rule but generally YA novels are never over 125,000, especially not the first book in a series. Twilight is 119000 words, one of the longest series openers though the rest of the series is longer.

✗ Does it include explicit and titillating sex scenes?

Sex in YA novels is not depicted to be titillating or erotic. If you are writing erotic scenes with teens you need to age them up to over 18 and call your book erotica.

Exercise

Consider this list of well known novels for adults. Think about what would have to change if you were to re-tell these stories as YA novels.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood	Beloved by Toni Morrison
The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown	Crazy Rich Asians by Kevin Kwan
Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn	The Road by Cormac McCarthy
Outlander by Diana Gabaldon	Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie
The Martian by Andy Weir	1984 by George Orwell

How would the protagonist change?

How would the supporting characters change?

How would the setting change?

How would the plot change?

What else could you change?

What if you changed the time period to from present day to historical or vice versa? How would it change?