

Metrowest Readers' Advisory Roundtable
Science Fiction – Young Adult subgenre
Benchmark title: "Cinder" by Marissa Meyer
Monday, November 14, 2016 @ 9:45 am
Weston Public Library

Attendees: Liz Reed (Norwood, Morrill Memorial), Margaret Perkins (Medway), Karen Perkins (Natick, Morse Institute), Joellen Toussaint (Wellesley), Sarah Breen (Needham), Meena Jain (Natick, Bacon Free), Christine Brown (Bridgewater State), Christine Muir (Bedford), Pam Aghababian (Bedford), Kirstie David (Norwood, Morrill Memorial)

Topic Discussion

After introducing ourselves, we talked about Young Adult Lit in general, and how "Cinder" fits into trends in YA SF as a whole.

- While a work of SF, "Cinder" is also a retelling of the classic fairy tale, Cinderella. There is a trend of retelling fairy tales in YA and Children's lit.
 - YA Lit tends to genre-blend more often than books written for adults
- Popular culture often feeds into YA Lit and series, and we see that with "Cinder"
- There is especially a trend to bring stronger female characters to these classic fairy tales, and Cinder is indeed a strong female character.
 - However, does everyone know the original stories, or are they old enough that people don't see the changes being made? And, does that matter?
- YA is more simplistic in style than most books written for adults and this can be a good thing
- Some YA books seem to be written more for younger teens while other YA books target older teens. "Cinder" seems to be meant more for the younger set.
 - This book is a good introduction to SF for middle schoolers
- How do we decide to divide Children's Lit and YA Lit? Many libraries rely on book reviews, and others choose based on the age of the main character
- Many adults now read YA, and both teens and adult readers of YA tend to look for plot-driven stories
- "Cinder" is the first book in a series, and each book in the series focuses on a different character. This doesn't usually appeal to adult readers, but this sort of episodic look at a storyline where each book focuses on a different character is a big trend in both YA and Children's Lit. This style tests much better with teens than adults
- "Cinder" does not have much explanation of the world's backstory, but this makes sense within YA Lit. In YA, it's common for the world of the book to be presented as screwed up and readers just accept that this is the way it is, and focus more on the current story. Also, instead of explaining all the backstory in the first book, YA series tend to build the backstory with each book so as to avoid "info-dump"
- Something YA Lit does is introduce teens to complex, difficult, and dark topics, and "Cinder" does a good job with that:
 - Cyborg prejudice
 - Politics and conspiracies
 - Quarantines
 - Valuing people by genders
 - Dr. Erland is not a pure character; he has both good and bad actions and motives

- Why is there so much dystopia in YA Lit? One explanation: 15 year-olds have never lived without war, so these books are a reflection of their reality

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- There were mixed reviews among the group
- Those of us who had read other books in the series thought the rest of the series wasn’t good, and part of that reaction could be because as adults we’re not as comfortable with series that focus on different characters in different books and don’t follow a linear storyline
- The tone is similar to the TV show “Once Upon a Time”
- Even though this is the retelling of a fairy tale, it doesn’t rely on stereotypical characters, which is good for kids to see
 - The books plays with gender roles and culture
- Blends the SF and fantasy genres
- “Cinder” is not written on a complex level and seems better suited to younger teens
- Cinder herself is a more complex character than others in the book. She’s not one-dimensional, and is more interesting. She is thoughtful of other people
- Pure evil is pure evil in this book and there are no subplots
 - This makes sense given that YA as a whole tends to be more stylistically simplistic
- There are a lot of loose ends. This makes sense given that it’s the first book in the series, but keep it in mind when recommending
- Recommended for:
 - Middle school kids
 - Parents who want to connect with their kids over a book
 - People who want a series
 - People looking for a “clean” book
 - People who don’t mind loose ends and unknowns
 - Teachers and book groups because it’s a great book for starting discussions (see above for topics introduced in the story)
 - People who like the TV show “Once Upon a Time”
 - People looking for “hopeful dystopia-lite”

Next Meeting: Monday January 9th at 9:45 am in Medway

SF subgenre: Time Travel

Benchmark: “Kindred” by Octavia Butler