

# The Depiction of Law and Lawyers in Adolescent Literature

## An ORCA Scholarship Proposal by

Recently, the legal system has become a popular theme in the entertainment industry. More and more Grisham-like novels are being published, different versions of *Law and Order* are on television every night, and courtroom movies make millions in the theaters. Law has become a driving influence in the mediums of popular culture.

Adolescent literature is no exception. Since the courtroom classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, more and more fictional books have included lawyers and law-related issues in their action. And yet the number of non-fiction works that address these issues remains comparatively limited. Until a few years ago, little research had been done on legal themes in fiction, especially adolescent fiction. Lately, however, new interest in the relationship between law and literature has grown. Richard A. Posner's book, *Law and Literature*, pioneers the study by looking at both law in literature and the literature of law. Law professors are starting to use works of literature to teach their students. English professors are sponsoring courses on legal themes in literature and the rhetoric of law—Ellen Jelkins, a professor at West Virginia University, has developed a website titled *How to Read Literature Legally*. But in all the excitement of this new field, little has been said about the relationship between law and adolescent literature.

### Statement of Purpose

I propose to examine how lawyers and the law are depicted in adolescent literature. The scholarly community does not currently have access to this type of analysis. My research goals include the following: 1) to create a general overview of how lawyers and law are portrayed in juvenile fiction, and 2) to reveal how they are accurately or inaccurately represented.

My research will be most helpful to teachers, editors, and authors. If teachers are aware of the depictions of law in specific adolescent works it will help them develop their curriculum accordingly. Reading a book as a class presents a perfect opportunity for teaching an entire unit on the legal system. Editors need to be sensitive to how certain people/professions are represented in the works they edit. Part of an editor's job is to edit for false statements and unfair generalizations. My research will help editors be more aware of the how the legal system and especially lawyers are portrayed in adolescent fiction. Authors who read my findings will recognize a need for proper representation of legal issues in their works.

### Methods

I will use these research and writing methods to complete this project:

1. I will research and document the best examples of lawyers in adolescent literature.
2. I will analyze selections of adolescent fiction dealing with lawyers. In some books, a lawyer may only be briefly mentioned, while in others, a lawyer may be the protagonist or antagonist. All degrees will be important to the research.
3. I will consult with a variety of different authorities on children's literature. This will include professors as well as editors and authors.
4. I will find other resources to summarize and understand what editors and publishers today are looking for in contemporary realistic fiction.

### Working Annotated Outline

#### I. Introduction

This will include a brief background on the development of adolescent literature as well as a review of literature focusing on the study of law and literature. The introduction will demonstrate the lack of research on law and adolescent literature and thus, the need for my project.

*II. Lawyers as Professionals in Adolescent Literature*

This section will be divided into two subtopics: Lawyers as Protagonists and Lawyers as Antagonists.

*III. Lawyers as People*

This section will analyze how lawyers are portrayed as "normal" or "regular" people in adolescent fiction. Ex. Spouses, parents, siblings, citizens, friends, etc.

*IV. Creating Legal Systems in Adolescent Literature*

This section will focus on the rhetoric and language used by fictional characters to create their own societies. Works such as *A Separate Peace*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Animal Farm* will be analyzed.

*V. How the Reader is Affected*

I will pull the previous analyses together to determine how the depiction of lawyers affects those reading adolescent fiction. Children and young adults are extremely impressionable. If the books they read promote incorrect ideas or stereotypes, it could have lasting effects.

*VI. Conclusion*

I will draw conclusions based on the results of my analysis. My research and findings will enable the field of adolescent literature to understand the ideas and stereotypes juvenile and young adult fiction could be unintentionally promoting.

### **Researcher's Qualifications**

I am qualified to research in the unique field of adolescent literature and law. As an English major, I have taken classes on adolescent literature as well as a class on rhetoric and law. I will be working closely with Dr. Jesse Crisler as my research develops. I also have access to other scholars in the field who have offered to assist and mentor me during the evaluation process. I am a capable and responsible student and have financed 100% of my college education through scholarships and part-time employment. I also volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate. I work with the Guardian ad Litem attorneys to help abused children understand the legal system.

Thank you for considering my research for an Orca Scholarship. This project will require a substantial amount of time, but I plan on finishing it before March. The Orca Scholarship will enable me to focus on the research and devote more of my time to the project. The result will be a paper worthy of publication.