

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Study:

Reading Mentors: A Reader-Response Study of Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships in Speculative Young Adult Fiction

Researcher(s):

PhD Candidate Janieke Koning and her supervisor Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland at Ghent University

Dear parent(s) / guardian(s),

Your teenager (aged 16 or 17) is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ghent University. Because they are under 18, we want to make sure you are informed about the study and have objections to their participation. We ask you to read the following information carefully.

What is the study about?

This study explores how young readers interpret mentoring relationships between teen characters and adult mentors in speculative young adult (YA) fiction, such as dystopian, fantasy, or alternative history stories. The study aims to understand how fictional mentoring relationships are read and interpreted by young people and how these stories may relate to their own thoughts and experiences about growing up, receiving guidance from adults, and navigating relationships with adults. By listening to young readers' perspectives, we hope to better understand how fiction can reflect and shape ideas about adolescence and adult support.

Your teenager has been invited because they are between the ages of 16 and 25 and enjoy reading speculative YA fiction. They may have expressed interest in participating after hearing about the study through their school, library, or youth organization. We are collaborating with teachers, librarians, and youth workers to share information about the study with young people who might be interested. We believe your teen's perspective can offer valuable insights into how these fictional relationships are interpreted and how they may relate to real-life experiences of growing up and adult guidance.

What will they be asked to do?

Participation involves:

- **Part 1: An online survey (15–20 minutes)**

They will answer questions about how mentoring relationships are portrayed in YA fiction and how they responded to those portrayals. They may choose to reflect on one or two pre-selected series, including *The Hunger Games* trilogy and its prequels *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* and *Sunrise on the Reaping* by Suzanne Collins and the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy by Leigh Bardugo, for example. They can still talk about the books/series if they have not finished the complete series or if they have read the novels in translation. They may also choose their own YA novel or series with a strong teen-adult mentor pair.

There are no extra costs related to participation. The survey is online and can be done from any device (computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone).

- **Part 2: Optional follow-up interview**

At the end of the survey, they may opt to be contacted for a follow-up interview (online or in person). This is entirely voluntary and non-binding and all of you will receive more

information on that at that time, including the consent procedures for that phase. If they are not interested in participating in an interview, this is perfectly fine, and they will not be asked for their contact information.

Does my teenager have to participate?

No, their participation is entirely **voluntary**. They may stop at any time, for any reason, without any consequences, and without giving any explanation. They may also skip any question they do not feel comfortable answering. Their relationship with Ghent University or any other organization through which they, or you, found the study will **not** be affected in any way.

They can start the survey whenever is most convenient for them. The link to the survey can be found in the [Information Letter intended for participants](#) or on [our website](#). Once the survey has started, they can pause and come back later, if they do so on the same device and in the same browser. If they leave the survey and do not come back to it within one week of the last edit, their responses will be deleted automatically. We will not be able to read their answers in that time. They can also start over if they wish.

At the end of the survey, each participants receive a **unique, 5-digit ID code** with the express advice to copy it and keep it safe. If your teenager finishes the survey, but changes their mind about participating, they or you can simply email me within 7 days of completion **with this unique, 5-digit code**, and we will delete their data, no questions asked. **Without this code we will not be able to identify which entry is your teens.**

If you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss the study further, please feel free to contact us. Our information is provided at the end of this letter.

What if I do not want my teenager to participate?

That is no problem. If you object to their participation, we ask you to first talk to your teenager and make sure they do not enter the survey. If they have already participated without your awareness and you would like to object, please send us an email (contact information at the end of this letter) with their unique 5-digit identification code and we will delete their data, no questions asked.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of participation?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. The questions focus on fictional stories and their own reflections on growing up and adult guidance. However, some questions may invite your teenager to reflect on their own experiences or feelings. If any question makes them uncomfortable, they can skip it or stop participating at any time, with needing to give any reason or explanation. If your teenager feels upset or would like to talk to someone after participating, we advise them in the Information Letter for participants to talk to a trusted adult in their immediate environment or seek support from any of the following support services which can be reached via chat, phone, or email:

- www.awel.be (BE)
- Jongerenadviescentrum (JAC) (BE)
- [@ease](#) (NL)
- [De Kindertelefoon](#) (NL)
- [YoungMinds](#) (UK)

What are the possible benefits of participation?

There is no direct benefit or financial compensation for participation in the survey. However, by sharing their thoughts, your teen will contribute to research that aims to better understand how young people engage with stories about growing up and adult guidance. These insights may help educators, librarians, and youth organizations support positive youth development through literature. Some teenagers may also enjoy reflecting on their reading experiences and find it meaningful to have their voice included in academic research. We hope that participation feels validating and interesting, especially for young readers who are passionate about the stories they read.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Belgian law of 30 July 2018 (protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data), we respect your teenager's privacy. All of their data will be kept confidential throughout the research process as well as in any publications or presentations related to it.

Survey responses will be pseudonymized, meaning any information that could directly identify the participant will be removed. We never record their names in the survey, instead each participant will be assigned a unique, 5-digit ID code. In addition, we will redact any specific details they may mention accidentally in open-ended questions (like names of people in their life or familiar places) to prevent indirect identification.

If they choose to provide contact information (their own and your email addresses) for a follow-up interview, that data will be encrypted, stored securely, and kept separate from their survey responses to avoid reidentification.

All survey responses will be stored securely on Ghent University servers and encrypted. Only the researcher (Janieke Koning) and her supervisor (Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland) will have access to the raw data. No directly identifying information will be published or shared. If the results of the study are published, identifying information remains confidential.

After my project ends (estimated 2028), the pseudonymized data will be kept for up to 5 years to allow for further analysis. Personal data, like contact information, will be safely deleted after the end of the empirical study or at the end of my project, whichever comes first.

The Data Protection Officer can provide you with more information on the protection of personal data if you wish. Contact details: Mrs. Hanne Elsen, phone: +32 9 264 95 17 or privacy@ugent.be, Campus Ufo, Rectoraat 2, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 25, 9000 Gent.

What happens to the data?

The results may be shared through academic publications, conference presentations, and public lectures or workshops. These findings may also be used to inform educators, librarians, and youth organizations about how YA fiction can support adolescent

development. All information about participants will be anonymized when the study is published.

A summary of the findings for the survey will be made available **upon request** once the study is completed, as well as a digital copy of my dissertation once it is published. You can request these through me or my supervisor. Just send us an email and we will make sure you receive the information when it is ready.

Who is organising and funding this study?

This research is conducted by the researcher, Janieke Koning, as part of her PhD project at Ghent University. It is funded by Ghent University's *Bijzonder Onderzoeksfonds*. Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland is her doctoral academic supervisor and oversees the research process.

This study has been reviewed and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the faculty of Arts and Philosophy. Under no circumstances should you consider the approval by this committee as an inducement to participate in this study.

Thank you for reading this information!

You can download a copy of this information letter, the informed consent form, and the Information Letter for Participants [here](#).

**Warm regards,
Janieke Koning & Elly McCausland**

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the study or your teenager's participation, feel free to contact us:

Janieke Koning

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Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland (the supervisor)

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