When Harry

Met Bella

Fanfiction is all the rage. But is it plagiarism? Or the perfect thing to encourage young writers?

Remember when Harry Potter invited Bella Swan to Hogwarts's big dance? And Ginny Weasley and Edward Cullen both went ballistic?

Fans of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* sagas know that that's crazy talk. After all, these fictional megastars aren't even in the same series. Still, it's a tantalizing scenario to consider. What if Bella decided to dump her handsome hunk of a vampire? What if Harry transferred to her school, Forks High, in rainy Washington State? What if…?

Welcome to the world of fanfiction, where fans create stories using characters, settings, and events from their favorite books, movies, or television shows. Put another way, a known author or scriptwriter creates a "sandbox" full of characters and story lines and his fans can't wait to "play" in it. In fanfiction, all offstage events are possible, whether they take place before, during, or after the established action. That means that Percy Jackson can finally take on a pack of werewolves—one of the few menaces he hasn't tackled in Rick Riordan's best-selling series—or *Star Trek*'s Scotty can beam up Wolverine and Professor X. While fanfiction may seem new, it's actually old. According to a recent article in *Newsweek* (www.newsweek.com/id/195963), when "Miguel de Cervantes was slow to produce the second volume of 'Don Quixote,' an anonymous author wrote his or her own continuation of the saga to much acclaim"—and that was way back in 1614.

Why are people so eager to write (and read) fanfiction? The answer is simple: they want more, more, more. Chances are, at some point, you've written fanfiction—you just don't know it. Remember the time your English teacher asked you to write a letter from Mercutio to Romeo or to rewrite a scene from *The Great Gatsby* from Daisy's point of view? That's fanfiction. You put your own spin on somebody else's story.

A few years ago, Geraldine Brooks wondered about the father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Brooks's "what if?" resulted in *March* (Penguin, 2005), a look into the lives (and loves) of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March's parents. Using someone else's characters or plot doesn't mean the resulting work is less worthy than the original tale or than a story created from scratch. The committee that awarded Brooks the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for *March* sure didn't think so. And neither did the hordes of enthusiasts who turned Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Quirk, 2009), a retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, into an international bestseller.

Why is it all right for Brooks and Grahame-Smith to profit from a previous story when writers of fanfiction can't do the same with, say, Megan Whalen Turner's *The King of Attolia* (HarperCollins, 2006)? Plain and simple: copyright. Not only do authors legally own their creations, but they also own the rights to any derivative works. Since *Little Women* and *Pride and Prejudice* aren't under copyright—they're in the public domain—it's fine for Brooks and Grahame-Smith to romp around

By Elizabeth Burns and Carlie Webber

in Alcott's and Austen's sandboxes and make a decent buck doing it.

Still, some authors can't resist riffing on copyrighted works. In 2001, lawyers for Alice Randall successfully argued that their client's novel *The Wind Done Gone* (Houghton) was a parody of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (Macmillan, 1936). Despite some objections from Mitchell's estate, Randall's novel was published. And earlier this year, Swedish novelist Fredrik Colting made headlines when he attempted to publish *60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye*, a spin-off of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (Little, Brown, 1951). Not surprisingly, the fiercely protective Salinger sued in June to stop publication of the new book. Although Colting's lawyers argued that *60 Years Later* was a parody of Salinger's classic and, therefore, "fair use"—which doesn't require an author to seek permission from the original work's copyright holder—a judge issued a temporary restraining order barring publication of the controversial book.

What does this mean for young fanfiction writers and for those of us who work with them? Is it time to retain the top law firm in town? Breathe easy. Luckily, there are many excellent online resources that address these copyright issues. A good place to start is the Chilling Effects Clearinghouse, a joint project of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and various high-powered law schools, including those of Harvard and Stanford. Another excellent resource to check out is the Organization for Transformative Works (transformativeworks. org). It's run by members of various fandoms, including Rebecca Tushnet,

Fab Fanfic Sites

The Archive at the End of the Universe (www.the-archive.net)
While multiple fandoms are included in this members-only archive (anyone can read it, but only invited members may post), it's quickly apparent what inspires most fanfic writers: books, books, books. The archive also hosts original fiction.

Chilling Effects Clearinghouse: Fanfiction (www.chillingeffects.org/fanfic)
What's legal? Is it OK to do that? I didn't go to law school, and I don't understand this legal mumbo jumbo. Get your questions answered at this legal guide to fanfiction, copyright, and trademark. It's a joint project of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and several law schools, including those of Harvard, Stanford, and Berkeley.

Fanfics.org (fanfics.org)
A general fanfiction site that covers books, movies, anime, and more.

Fanfiction.net (fanfiction.net)
Want to find out just how many different fandoms there are? At fanfiction.net, you can find stories for almost any movie, book, TV show, or game you can imagine. The best (and worst!) thing about this site is that anyone can post a story. There's a lot of quantity here, but the quality is often questionable.

FictionAlley (www.fictionalley.org)
The largest Harry Potter–only fanfiction archive on the Internet, FictionAlley is known for its strict rules concerning spelling, grammar, and adherence to the Harry Potter canon. All stories are vetted by actual humans before they're posted, and these guys won't hesitate to send fics back for editing if their standards aren't met.

MediaMiner (www.mediaminer.org/fanfic/series.php)
Anime and manga are flying off library shelves—and, of course, anything that popular is bound to inspire fans. Readers who crave more of *Naruto*—Masashi Kishimoto's superpopular manga series—should head here!

Skyehawke (skyehawke.org or archive.skyehawke.com)
A limited number of TV, book, and movie fandoms are covered by this site. While the general public can read the fanfiction, authors may post by invitation only, and quality writing is encouraged.

Twilighted (www.twilighted.net)
Whether it's making Team Jacob happy, filling in Bella's backstory, or exploring Edward's history, this *Twilight* fanfiction site is the place to go.

a lawyer who wrote "Legal Fictions: Copyright, Fan Fiction, and a New Common Law" (www.tushnet.com/law/fanficarticle.html), one of the landmark articles on the topic. To keep you and your teens out of trouble, we recommend that you observe a few basic ground rules. First, don't try to sell your fanfiction stories. Second, if the original work's author asks you to remove a story you've posted online, just do it. And in a twist on the military's "don't ask, don't tell" rule, as long as you aren't trying to profit from your writing and the work's original creator hasn't objected, it's fine to keep your story online.

There's no denying that fanfiction has a bad rep in some schools. For starters, it's frequently dismissed as being poorly written and derivative. Fanfiction is a waste of time to read and

a bigger waste of time to write. Why read it when you can read the original? say the naysayers. Teens should be encouraged to do their own writing, rather than regurgitating someone else's. After all, don't we want them to be creative? But critics of fanfiction are often blind to its benefits. Fanfiction helps to develop writing and reading skills, and it's just as legitimate a hobby as knitting or collecting postcards. Plus, unlike writing something for a school assignment, it's fun to create fanfiction. Writing and posting fanfiction also encourages positive interactions and feedback among folks who might not otherwise meet. In fact, the genre requires an active community to survive.

As for the accusation that fanfiction saps kids' creativity, that's a lot of you-know-what. Young writers can actually be

more creative (and less stressed out) when they don't have to invent everything. Creating original, believable characters can be the toughest part of writing—and using existing characters allows fanfiction creators to concentrate on other areas of writing, such as pacing, style, and plot.

What if a fan-generated story *is* poorly written? Well, everybody needs a good editor. In the world of fanfiction, editors are called beta readers, and it's their job to correct errors in grammar, spelling, characterization, plot, and dialog. The betas also make sure that writers get their canon straight. "Canon" refers to the facts and events portrayed in the source material: When is Percy Jackson's birthday? What do Hermione Granger's parents do for a living? It's not uncommon for inexperienced fanfiction writers to insert a new character into an original work—one that's usually a smarter, more tragic, prettier version of themselves. When these characters are female, they're called "Mary Sues"; their male counterparts are known as "Gary Stus." Beta readers can help budding writers avoid those embarrassing gaffs. (For a list of other essential fanfiction terms, visit us online at slj.com.)

If you're encouraging kids to write fanfiction or creating it yourself, here are some dos and don'ts you'll want to follow:

Don't send your story to the author. No, really. While some authors are flattered by fan stories, others, notably Anne Rice and Nora Roberts, are not. Fanfiction writers should understand that they're writing for themselves and for other fans. Even if an author is supportive of fanfiction, she won't read your story for fear that a fan can claim he created an idea that later appeared in the author's published work.

Do promote fanfiction as a form of expressing thoughts and analyzing a book. Knowing how to craft a five-paragraph expository essay is important, but writing fanfiction often encourages readers to be persuasive in more creative ways. If your kids are convinced, for example, that Sirius Black didn't die when he fell through the veil in the Department of Mysteries, can they write a believable story about it?

Don't charge money. Yes, it takes work to write great fanfic. But if you choose to play in someone else's sandbox, do it as a labor of love. Remember, the original copyright owner is the only one who is entitled to make money from his work.

Do hold fanfiction to the same standard as original writing. Fanfiction writers need to know about editing, sentence structure, grammar, and spelling.

Don't post your story on your library or school Web site. Some authors encourage fanfiction, and some publishers sponsor fanfiction contests to promote new books. Others are appalled that someone is tinkering with their baby. Encourage students to post their stories in archives, like FictionAlley, or on fanfiction sites, such as Twilighted. The people who run those venues know the ins and outs of sharing fanfiction.

Are you eager to promote fanfiction at your library? Then you'll definitely want to let kids know about some terrific online resources like the Harry Potter Lexicon (www.hplex.info/timeline.html) and the Weasley Family Tree (www.hp-lexicon.org/wizards/weasley.html). For slightly older devotees of Bella and Edward, there are two cool sites they won't want to miss:

Twilighted Teens (www.twilightedteens.com) and Twilighted Forum (www.twilighted.net/forum). Another very good way to get kids excited about fanfiction is to host a program about beta readers, where you discuss the right and wrong ways to copyedit another's work and how revision can strengthen a story. Since being a beta is about being a good editor, English teachers are a terrific resource in structuring this type of program. Or take a tip from the C. Burr Artz Public Library in Frederick, MD, and the Groton (CT) Public Library, which offer aspiring teen fanfiction writers simple how-to programs to sharpen their skills and share their stories.

Anyone can post fanfiction on the Internet (which is both the form's greatest strength and greatest weakness), and that means it can be hard to find quality fanfiction. A great way to practice research skills, including evaluating sites and materials, is to host a "finding fanfiction" program online. Hold brainstorming sessions in which kids try to figure out the most effective search strategies. For example, is it best to spell fanfiction as one word or two? Do you need to put "fan fiction" in quotation marks? And what about searching for "fan fic"? Will that yield a lot of hits? If you discover a site that claims it has "The Year's Best Fanfiction," does it? What standards is it using to determine the best?

Now that you know that "canon" is the term used to describe the source material on which fanfiction is based, why not have a program in which people create a written canon for others to use? Depending on the original work you're using, it can include family trees, maps, school schedules, floor plans, and time lines. Have multiple copies of the books you're using available, plenty of paper, and Post-its for taking notes, and see what types of resources can be put together.

Contests are always loads of fun because they give teens a chance to strut their stuff. For the past two years, the Milton (NH) Free Public Library (www.miltonfreepubliclibrary.org/fol_projects.htm) has hosted a "Fun Fan Fiction Contest"—winners were announced, and prizes were handed out at the local high school. The Harris County (TX) Public Library also offers a fanfiction contest, and this summer the Grand Rapids (MI) Public Library's summer reading program has included a "Harry Potter Fanfic Contest."

You may even want to try our opening scenario with your teens: What *would* happen if Harry Potter and Bella Swan went out with each other? See what your kids come up with. Who's telling the story? Is it Harry? Bella? Hey, maybe it's Draco Malfoy… with a lot of nasty comments added to the mix. Have a beta reader figure out how to reconcile the two series' distinct time lines. Explain that while it's tempting to introduce the violet-eyed exchange student Serena, to help Ginny get a grip, Serena is a "Mary Sue." Enjoy your kids' creativity and hard work—and, most of all, have fun!

New Jersey librarian Elizabeth Burns (lizzy.burns@gmail.com) blogs about books, movies, and TV shows at "A Chair, a Fireplace, and a Tea Cozy" (yzocaet.blogspot.com). Carlie Webber (carliebeth@gmail.com) wrote about teen magazines ("The Original Handhelds") in our May issue.