

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS

Study:

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

Researcher(s):

PhD researcher Janieke Koning and Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland (supervisor) at Ghent University

Hi!

I'm Janieke Koning, a PhD researcher at Ghent University, and I'm doing a study to learn more about how young people like you read mentoring relationships in speculative young adult (YA) fiction. If you are between 16 and 25 years old and enjoy reading dystopian, fantasy, or alternative history fiction (for example), your insights could help us better understand how these stories resonate with readers like you. Your perspective helps us understand how fiction interacts with real-life experiences of growing up and adult guidance.

Note for participants under 18

Before we explain what the study involves, there's an important note for participants **under 18**. If you are under 18, you can only take part **with the informed non-objection of your parent(s) or guardian(s)**. Before starting the survey, you'll be asked to confirm that your parent(s)/guardian(s) have read the [Information Letter for Parents or Guardians](#) and do not object to your participation. This is part of Ghent University's policy on ethical inclusion of minors aged 16 and over in research studies like this one and complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Belgian law. It helps ensure that you and your family are fully informed and comfortable with your involvement, knowing that your personal data is handled with care and respect.

What do I need to do?

This study focuses on how fictional relationships between adolescents and adult mentors are read, interpreted, and connected to real-life experiences. There are two parts to the study. You can choose to do only part 1 (the survey) or both (the survey and an interview).

In part 1, the survey (15-20 minutes), you'll answer questions about how mentoring relationships are shown in YA fiction, how you reacted to those relationships as a reader, and whether they reminded you of real-life experiences. You can choose to talk about one or two of these series:

- *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) and its prequels *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020) and *Sunrise on the Reaping* (2025) by Suzanne Collins
- *The Great Library* series (2015-2019) by Rachel Caine
- *The Shadow and Bone* trilogy (2012-2014) and its prequel graphic novel *Demon in the Wood* (2022) by Leigh Bardugo
- *The Testing* trilogy (2012-2014) by Joelle Charbonneau

If you haven't read an entire series or if you've read the novels in translation, that's okay. You can still talk about the books that you *have* read. You can also suggest your own favorite speculative YA book/series with a strong teen-adult mentoring relationship.

Your participation in the survey does not involve any extra costs for you. The survey is online and can be done from any device (computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone) whenever it suits you best.

Part 2 consists of a follow-up interview (online or in person, up to one hour). If you are interested in doing that, you can opt-in at the end of the survey and provide an email address so we can reach out later. Saying yes now doesn't commit you to anything: you can always change your mind. You will get a new information letter, like this one, via email and we'll confirm again if you are still interested in doing the interview and you can still say no. If you're not interested in doing an interview, that's absolutely fine. In that case, you won't have to provide any contact details.

✅ **Do I have to take part?**

Nope! Participation is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time, for any reason, without any consequences, and without giving any explanation. You can also skip any question you don't want to answer, and you choose whether or not to share contact details for the potential follow-up interview.

If you start the survey and close the window, you can return to the survey within a week if you do so from the same device and in the same browser. If you leave the survey waiting for longer than a week, your responses will be deleted automatically. In that time, we won't be able to read the answers you had already given. Starting again is, of course, also an option.

At the end of the survey, you are given a **unique, 5-digit ID code**. If you have finished the survey, but change your mind about taking part, you can simply email me within 7 days **with that code**, and I will delete your data, no questions asked. You can find my contact information at the end of this letter.

Your relationship with UGent or another organization through which you found this study will not be affected in any of these circumstances. If you have any questions about your participation, feel free to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact information is listed at the end of this letter.

📌 **Extra support**

Some of the questions ask about personal experiences. If you notice you feel upset or would like to talk to someone after participating, we suggest you either talk to a trusted person in your direct environment or contact any of the following support services which can be reached in an online chat, by phone, or by email:

- www.awel.be (BE)
- Jongerenadviescentrum (JAC) (BE)
- [@ease](https://www.ease.nl) (NL)
- [De Kindertelefoon](https://www.kindertelefoon.nl) (NL)
- [YoungMinds](https://www.youngminds.co.uk) (UK)

📁 **What do I get out of it?**

There's no payment or prize for participating in the survey, but your input is incredibly valuable. By sharing your thoughts, you'll help researchers better understand how young(er) readers like you engage with stories about growing up and adult guidance. The findings may be used to make recommendations for educators, librarians, and youth organizations on how fiction can support positive youth development. Hopefully, you will also enjoy reflecting on your reading experiences and knowing that your perspective is helping shape future practice and research.

🔵 Is my data safe?

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

Your answers will be pseudonymized, meaning any information that could directly identify you will be removed from our database. We also never record your name, you'll instead be assigned a unique, 5-digit ID code. We will also redact any specific details you might mention accidentally (like names of people in your life or familiar places) to prevent indirect identification. If you choose to provide contact information for a follow-up interview, that data will be encrypted, stored securely, and stored separately from the survey responses on Ghent University servers. Your identity will never be shared or published. Only myself and my supervisor (Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland) will have access to the raw data.

If you want more information about how your data is protect, you can contact our Data Protection Officer: Mrs. Hanne Elsen, phone: +32 9 264 95 17, email: privacy@ugent.be, address: Campus Ufo, Rectoraat 2, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 25, 9000 Ghent.

🔴 What happens to the data?

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

After my doctorate (est. end in 2028), your pseudonymized data will be kept for up to 5 years to allow for further analysis. Your personal data, such as your contact information, will be safely deleted after the end of the data collection or at the end of my project, whichever comes first.

If you're interested, you can request a summary of the survey findings and/or a digital copy of my dissertation, the result of this project, once it's published. Simply email me or my supervisor, and we'll make sure you receive the information when it's ready. Our contact information can be found at the end of this letter.

📄 Who is behind this study?

This research is part of my PhD project at Ghent University. It is funded by Ghent University's *Bijzonder Onderzoeksfonds*. Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland is my 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. Please note that this approval does not imply any obligation to take part in this study.

👉 Would you like to participate?

If you would like to participate, please start the survey [here](#) or scan the QR code. This will lead you to the survey platform Qualtrics. There's no need to create an account or log on. You'll be given (a condensed version of this information again, just to make sure we're all on the same page, followed by an informed consent form. As a reminder, if you are under 18, please inform your parent(s)/guardian(s).



If you do not wish to participate, thank you for your time and consideration!

**Thank you, and with warm wishes,
Janieke Koning and Elly McCausland**

Contact Information

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

Janieke Koning

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