

INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS

Study:

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

Researcher(s):

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

Dear parent(s) / legal guardian(s),

Your teenager (aged 16 or 17) has expressed interest in participating in the interview phase of the *Reading Mentors* study conducted by Ghent University. Because they are under 18, we need your **written consent**, in addition to your teen's own consent.

This letter explains what the study involves, what participation would mean, how confidentiality and data protection are handled, and what your rights are as a parent or guardian. We ask you to read the following information carefully before deciding whether you consent to your teen's participation.

What is the study about?

Reading Mentors is part of a PhD research project at Ghent University that examines how young people interpret mentoring relationships between adolescents and adults in speculative young adult (YA) fiction. In this study, mentoring relationships refer to relationships in which older or more experienced adult characters who guide, influence, or support younger or more inexperienced adolescent characters. The project explores how such relationships are portrayed in popular YA books and how readers aged 16 to 19 understand and respond to them.

The interview phase focuses on your teen's reading experiences, their thoughts about adolescent-adult relationships in a particular novel or series, and how they make sense of these relationships.

What does participation involve?

If your teen chooses to participate, they will take part in an **individual interview of up to 60 minutes**, conducted by the researcher (Janieke Koning). The interview can take place **online** via MS Teams or **in person at Ghent University** (Campus Boekentoren, Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Ghent). They may choose to be interviewed in **English** or in **Dutch**. The interview is semi-structured, meaning your teen may talk freely about their reading experiences and interpretations while guided by open-ended questions. They may skip any question, pause, or stop the interview at anytime, without giving a reason and without consequences.

There is no special preparation for the interview. The discussion focuses on novels they have already read independently. Your teen does not have to re-read any novel or series if they do not want to.

The following novels/series are included in the study:

- *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 (not translated)
- *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

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Participation is entirely voluntary. Your teen may:

- **decline** the invitation to participate,
- **skip** any question,
- **pause** or **stop** the interview at any time,
- **postpone** or **cancel** their interview,
- **withdraw their data within 7 days after the interview** by emailing their pseudonym to the researcher.

Their decision will have no impact on their relationship with Ghent University or with an organization through which they learned about the study. They do not have to provide any reason in any of the above situations.

✚ Extra support

We do not expect the interview to be difficult or upsetting. Some questions may feel personal or emotional. If that happens, we can skip the topic or questions, move on to something else, or take a break. The audio recording can also be deleted at your teen's request at that point. If they feel upset afterwards or if they want to talk to someone, we recommend them to reach out to a trusted person in their direct environment. We have also provided to follow support services:

- 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)

Confidentiality, data protection, and data storage

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 and your teen's privacy.

Your teen's identity remains confidential. Your contact information and theirs is encrypted, stored securely, and kept separate from interview data.

To create an accurate transcript, the interview will be audio recorded. Your teen's **real name will not be recorded**. They will choose a pseudonym, and only this pseudonym will be used in transcripts and analysis. Audio recordings are encrypted and stored securely on Ghent University servers, used only for transcriptions, and deleted permanently once the transcript has been reviewed and finalized.

Interview transcripts are **pseudonymized**, meaning all directly identifying data is removed. Any accidental disclosures will be redacted to prevent indirect identification. Your teen has the right to **review their own transcript**. They may request corrections, ask for clarifications, or ask for the removal of statements they no longer wish to include. If they request a review, the transcript will only be finalized after they have had the chance to propose changes. Upon receiving the transcripts via email, they will have one week to request changes.

Pseudonymized interview transcripts will be stored securely for up to 5 years after the end of the PhD project (expected end: 2028). Audio recordings are deleted after transcription and review. Contact information is deleted once data collection and compensation are

completed. Paper documents (e.g., consent forms, receipts) are stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed at the end of the project. Only myself and, only if necessary, my supervisor (Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland), will have access to the raw data.

Interviews conducted in Dutch may be translated into English. Original Dutch text is always kept, and translations are clearly marked and reviewed by a bilingual researcher.

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.

Results

The results may appear in academic publications, conferences, workshops, lectures, or other educational resources, for example. You and your teen can request a summary of the findings and/or a digital copy of my dissertation once it is published. Simply email me or my supervisor, and we will make sure you receive the information when it is ready.

Costs and Benefits

There are no costs for your teen to participate. While we cannot pay your teen for their time or participation, we do offer a book voucher as a token of our appreciation. The type of voucher differs on location:

- **Belgium:** €15 *De Standaard Boekenbon* (digital)
- **The Netherlands:** €15 *Nationale Boekenbon* (eCard)
- **United Kingdom:** £15 *Waterstones eGift*
- **Other countries:** a local book voucher of similar value

Their voucher will be emailed to them within **one week** after the interview. They will need to confirm their email address during the interview, which counts as their receipt. There is no cash alternative.

If the interview takes place **in person**, reasonable regional travel costs for both your teen and for you (if you accompany them) will be reimbursed. Proof of travel (e.g., paper or digital ticket/receipt) is required. **Long distance or international travel is not reimbursed.**

Reimbursement can be provided:

- in cash or via Payconiq at the interview, or
- through UGent's Refund system. You will receive an email to provide payment details securely.

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.

How to submit a complaint?

If you wish to lodge a complaint regarding the processing of your personal data or if you have any questions concerning your personal data in the context of this research, you may contact the Data Protection Officer of Ghent University at privacy@ugent.be or by telephone at +32 (0)9 264 95 17. You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Data Protection Authority, Drukpersstraat 35, 1000 Brussels (email: contact@apd-gba.be) and/or to the Vlaamse Toezichtcommissie (email: contact@toezichtcommissie.be).

How to give consent

If you agree that your teen may participate, please read and sign the [parent/guardian consent form](#). Your teen must also sign their own [consent form for participants](#). Signed forms can be returned by email before the interview or brought to the interview. If your teen would like to take part in an interview, they can fill out [this short Microsoft Form](#). The form asks about availability (days, times, preferred weeks), online or in-person setting, and which books/series they would like to discuss.

If you do not give consent, your teen will not participate. You do not need to provide a reason. If, before the start of the interview, one of the signed consent forms is missing, your teen cannot and will not participate.

**Thank you for your time and consideration! 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

Email: readingmentors@ugent.be

Address: Campus Boekentoren, Blandijn,
Blandijnberg 2, office 130.005, 9000, Ghent

Prof. Dr. Elly McCausland (the supervisor)

Email: elly.mccausland@ugent.be

Address: Campus Boekentoren, Blandijn,
Blandijnberg 2, 130.015, 9000, Ghent