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YOUNG ADULT WRITERS FEATURED AT BOOK FESTIVAL ON APRIL 19th

Who says teenagers don't read? Not the award-winning teen writers who will be on hand at the Alabama Book Festival on April 19 in Montgomery.

Among the featured young adult—or YA—and teen writers for this year's festival are Jay Asher, author of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, R. A. Nelson, author of *Teach Me* and the recently published *Breathe My Name*, and Jennifer Echols, whose books are *Major Crush* and *The Boys Next Door*.

These writers find an avid audience among young readers for their works, many of which touch on issues important to young people, ranging from first love to teen suicide. Their awards testify to their success. Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* was named one of the Best Books for Young Adults in 2008 and one of Barnes & Noble's Top 10 Best for Teens 2007. Nelson's *Teach Me* was a New York Public Library Best Teen Book. Echols's *Major Crush* was a National Readers' Choice. Her teen drama, *Boy in Blue*, will be published by MTV Books in March 2009.

Echols and Nelson have Alabama connections: Echols grew up in a small town in Alabama and now lives in Birmingham. Nelson works at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. He says one lesson from his book *Teach Me*, about a relationship between a teacher and student, is "not to isolate yourself from the important people around you, family and friends."

Asher is based in California, but he already has a following among Alabama students. "Holtville Middle School held the very first (as far as I know) book club discussion using my book," notes Asher.

"A little over a month before the discussion, their school librarian contacted me and we began brainstorming ways to make the meeting as special as possible for the students." Asher goes on, "I sent the students bookmarks and autographed bookplates. They submitted questions about the book or my writing process, and then I recorded my answers on an audiocassette, which they listened to as part of their meeting."

Asher says, "The idea started spreading. Now schools in many states across the country are putting together their own *Thirteen Reasons Why* book clubs, following Holtville Middle School's format."

These writers and more than 50 others will be on hand at the Alabama Book Festival on April 19. To be held on the grounds of Montgomery's historic Old Alabama Town, the festival will open at 9 a.m. and run until 4 p.m. It is a free event and will include exhibits, activities and presentations for all ages.

Sponsored by the Alabama Center for the Book, Old Alabama Town, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Alagasco, AT&T, Auburn University's College of Liberal Arts and many others, the festival is a signature literary event for the entire state. For a full list of festival authors/presenters and more information, go to www.alabamabookcenter.org.

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