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ENGL 112B

Warner

Facing Loss and the Tough Realities of Life through Literature

As human beings, death and loss are both an inevitable part of life. Whether it's losing a family member, friend, significant other, or even a much loved pet, at one point in our lives, we find ourselves facing death and loss. Facing death and loss is especially difficult when we are young adolescents because before we have even grasped the beginning of our lives, we can be hit with the scary realization of mortality. Though there is no best way to prepare young adolescents for the experience, there is a way to introduce them to the concept—young adult literature that focuses on facing death and loss.

There is such a wide variety of young adult novels that focus on protagonists who have to face the loss of a loved one. These stories are important because they allow for different perspectives on loss to expand the minds of young adolescents on the subject. Not only do these stories teach important lessons about strength, growth, rediscovery, and change after loss, but they are also great examples of how these lessons can further develop the growing mental and emotional states of young adolescents.

In choosing the novels included in this annotated bibliography, I wanted to showcase different stories that encompass the range of loss that someone can experience—from family to friends to lovers. I also wanted to show the different journeys that one can take once they have experienced such a hard reality, and how though not every story is the same, the end result comes quite close—life goes on.

Annotated Bibliography

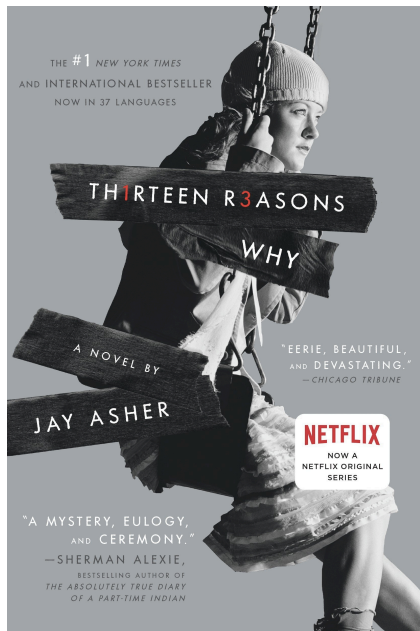


image: <https://bannedbooksweek.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/8174d0jKcL.jpg>

(I have not read this novel.)

Asher, Jay. *Thirteen Reasons Why*. RazorBill, 2007. Print.

Hannah Baker, a teenager who has just recently committed suicide, leaves her classmate Clay Baker a set of prerecorded tapes. The tapes detail the reasons behind her suicide and send Clay on a journey, where he tries to find closure with what has happened and with losing Hannah, who he had romantic feelings for.

Clay uses his experience with the tapes and with losing Hannah to be more emotionally aware of others. His journey teaches young adolescents that closure with losing a loved one is possible and that the experience can be used to discover new perspectives within oneself. Clay uses what he learns from the tapes to change his thinking. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 6 (themes that inform truthfully about the wider world) and 7 (themes that allow the possibility of emotional growth through engagement with personal issues).

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_Reasons_Why

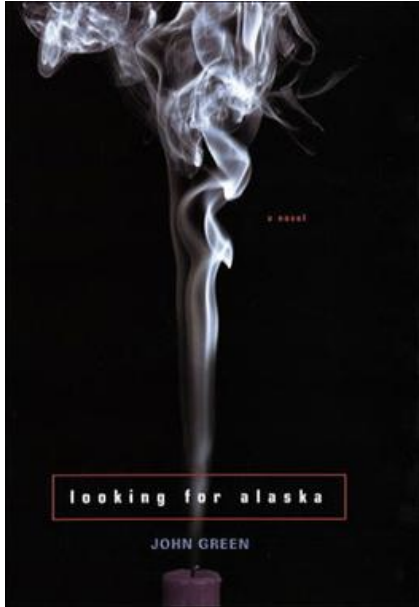


image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_for_Alaska#/media/File:Looking_for_Alaska_original_cover.jpg

(I have not read this novel.)

Green, John. *Looking for Alaska*. Dutton Juvenile, 2005. Print.

The novel follows the protagonist Miles “Pudge” Halter as he moves to Alabama to go to school at Culver Creek Preparatory High School. There, he makes several new friends and become integrated into their group, which includes the beautiful, but emotionally unstable Alaska Young. Eventually, Pudge falls in love with Alaska but she is not able to fully reciprocate his feelings before she unexpectedly dies.

The most valuable lesson Pudge’s story teaches young readers about facing loss is forgiveness—Pudge forgives Alaska at the end of the novel for dying. It’s common to blame oneself for losing a loved one, but it’s also common to be angry with the one that has been lost for leaving. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 2 (exciting plots) and 7.

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_for_Alaska

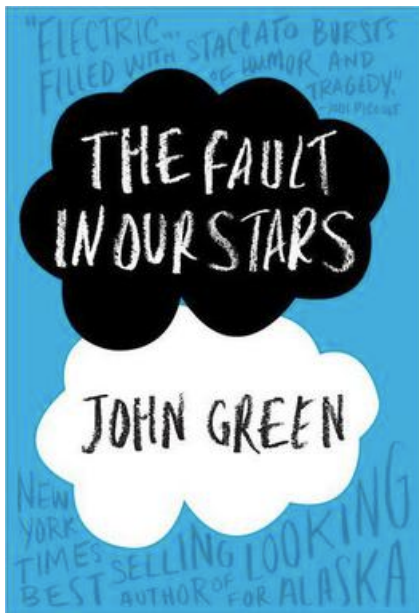


image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fault_in_Our_Stars#/media/File:The_Fault_in_Our_Stars.jpg

(I have read this novel.)

Green, John. *The Fault in Our Stars*. New York: Penguin Books USA, 2012. Print.

This novel follows the protagonist Hazel Grace Lancaster, a teenager sick with cancer, as she falls in love with Augustus Waters, who she meets at a cancer support group. Augustus helps Hazel experience a different part of life, when her whole life has been cancer ridden. Unfortunately, Augustus later falls sick with cancer again and eventually dies.

This novel is valuable in teaching teenagers that though some people only come into our lives for a short amount of time, the lessons we can learn from knowing them are life-changing. Hazel learns from Augustus that there is more to her life and her story than the cancer she has been diagnosed. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Quality 7 because Hazel goes on a tremendous emotional journey through her time with Augustus—she goes from an apathetic person to someone who lives with her feelings and in her passions.

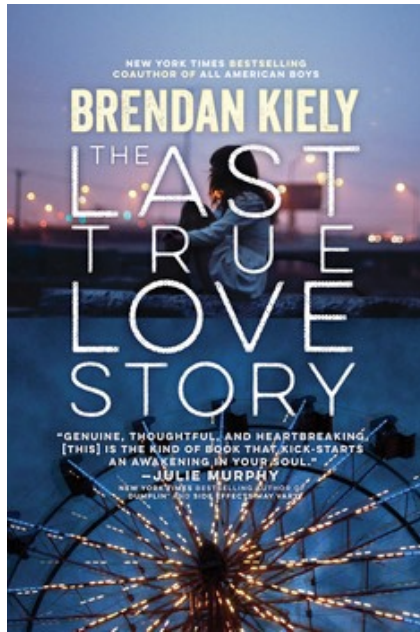


image: https://d28hgpri8am2if.cloudfront.net/book_images/onix/cvr9781481429894/the-last-true-love-story-9781481429894_lg.jpg

(I have read this novel.)

Kiely, Brendan. *The Last True Love Story*. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2016. Print.

Two teenagers, Teddy and Corrina, strike up an unlikely friendship as they decide to ditch their small town and take Teddy's grandpa, who has dementia, on a cross-country road trip to Ithaca, New York. Important plot lines that focus on loss include Teddy's struggles to deal with the death of his father (who he never knew) and Gpa's inevitable memory loss of his beloved, deceased wife Betty.

Through both Teddy's and Gpa's struggles with loss, young adolescents learn about leaning on the people who are left and letting go of things out of our control. Teddy spends a lot of the novel in search of answers about the man that his late father was, but he eventually realizes that it's enough to accept that fact that his father is gone and that he might not ever truly know. Teddy, Gpa, and Corrina all lean on each other on the adventure that they take and its because they are together that they reach their destination. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 2, 3 (characters who reflect experiences of teen readers), and 7.



image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everything_I_Never_Told_You#/media/File:Celeste_Ng_-_Everything_I_Never_Told_You.png

(I have read this novel.)

Ng, Celeste. *Everything I Never Told You*. Penguin Press, 2014. Print.

Set in the 1970s, the novel follows a mixed-race Chinese family as they struggle to deal with the abrupt and surprising death of the middle daughter, Lydia Lee. As time passes in the aftermath of Lydia's death, secrets about both Lydia and her family begin to unfold. The remaining members of the Lee family are forced to look within themselves before they are able to find closure with Lydia's death.

The story of the Lee family teaches young adolescents that it is okay to find closure and acceptance in losing a loved one—a realization that the family, especially Lydia's brother, experiences at the end of the novel. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 3 and 7. The secrets that unravel about Lydia's story prior to her death are topics that are extremely relatable to young teens—the pressures of doing well academically and socially, feeling alone and misunderstood.



image: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/61/All_the_Bright_Places.jpg

(I have not read this novel.)

Niven, Jennifer. *All the Bright Places*. Knopf Publishing Group, 2015. Print.

Another novel that highlights an unlikely friendship turned romance between two teenagers—Theodore Finch and Violet Markey. They meet when they are about to plan to commit suicide in the exact same place at the exact same time. Finch is severely depressed and constantly thinks about dying while Violet feels responsible for the death of her sister and is unable to move on. Finch and Violet fall in love, but Finch's mental condition worsens and he eventually decides to take his life.

Violet finding peace at the end of the novel and realizing that Finch's suicide is not her fault teaches young adolescents an important lesson—that they are not to blame for the loss that they experience and that it is okay to find closure. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 3 and 7.

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_the_Bright_Places

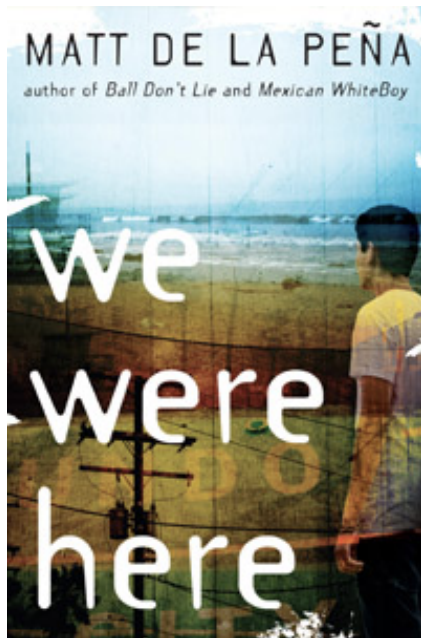


image: http://mattdelapena.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/wwh_big.jpg

(I have read this novel.)

Pena, Matt de la. *We Were Here*. Random House Inc., 2009. Print.

The novel follows the protagonist Miguel, a juvenile delinquent who is caught and sentenced for a crime he has committed. His sentencing requires him to stay in a group home and write his day-to-day thoughts in a personal journal. At the group home, Miguel befriends two other boys there, Rondell and Mong, and the three devise a plan to escape from the home. Throughout the novel, Miguel internally deals with the death of his brother, who he accidentally stabbed and killed.

Miguel's story teaches young adolescents a valuable lesson in finding a voice and facing loss instead of ignoring it. It's not until near the end of the novel that Miguel accepts the death of his brother and actually talks about it, but his emotional and intellectual growth from such actions is undeniable. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 2 and 7.

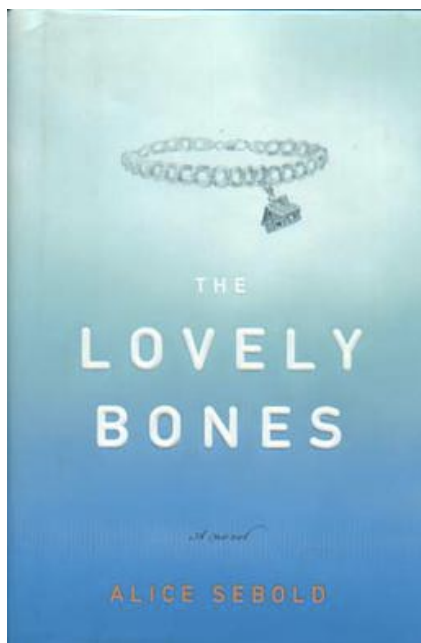


image: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/1/1f/Lovely_Bones_cover.jpg

(I have read this novel.)

Sebold, Alice. *The Lovely Bones*. Little, Brown, 2002. Print.

This novel follows teenaged Susie Salmon, who after she has been murdered, watches from Heaven the aftermath that her friends and family experience as they struggle to move on. While the Salmon family have a hard time finding peace and closure, especially since Susie's murderer walks free and is never caught, Susie herself has a hard time coming to terms with her death.

This novel is valuable in helping young adolescents relate to what happens after someone we love has passed away. The feelings and the turmoil that the Salmon family go through allow young adolescents who have also been through a similar situation feel validated in their emotions. The novel also helps comfort young adolescents in finding peace after loss, because Susie does find peace at the end of the novel and accepts her death. *The Lovely Bones* best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 1 (imaginative and well-structured plots going beyond simple chronologies), 4 (characters who go beyond typical experiences), and 7.



image: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hate_U_Give#/media/File:The_Hate_U_Give_\(2017_cover\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hate_U_Give#/media/File:The_Hate_U_Give_(2017_cover).jpg)

(I have not read this novel.)

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Balzer + Bray, 2017. Print.

The novel follows sixteen year old Starr Carter, who is torn between two worlds—the poor, black neighborhood that she’s lived in all her life (Garden Heights) and the mostly white private school that she attends (Williamson Prep). One night, she is out with her childhood best friend Khalil when they are stopped by a police officer. The encounter ends in Khalil’s death when the police officer wrongfully shoots him, thinking Khalil has a weapon. Starr spends the rest of the novel trying to find peace with Khalil’s death while racial tensions continue to rise in both of the communities that she is tied to.

Starr’s experience teaches young adolescents that where there is loss, there is also strength. She uses Khalil’s death as motivation to rise up against racial injustice, despite being afraid to at first. This novel best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 3, 6, and 7. Starr is definitely a strong female protagonist and her fight against racial injustice sheds light on a real social problem that is happening in the real world. The growth that she undergoes with first losing Khalil and then taking on the fight against racial injustice acts as a great lesson for young adolescents.

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hate_U_Give

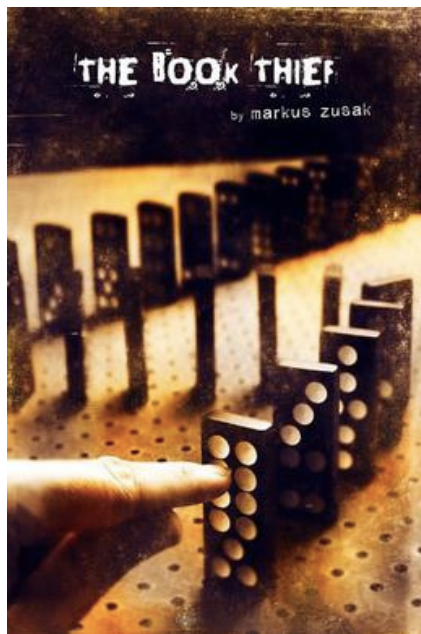


image: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/8f/The_Book_Thief_by_Markus_Zusak_book_cover.jpg

(I have not read this novel.)

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Picador, 2005. Print.

This novel is set in Nazi Germany during World War II and is actually narrated by Death. Death follows the story of the protagonist, Liesel, who experiences a tremendous amount of loss during a horrific period in history—her younger brother, both her biological parents and eventually her adoptive parents, and her close friends. However, she finds solace in her love of life and her love of books.

Liesel's story is important in teaching young adolescents that even in dark times, there is light. Even though she loses the people she loves, she is still able to find joy in something as simple as reading books. *The Book Thief* best exemplifies Exeter Qualities 4 and 6 because of the historical setting and events, and Liesel's journey as a result of such a setting.

source: <http://novelinks.org/uploads/Novels/TheBookThief/Concept%20Analysis%20Strategy.pdf>