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May 04, 2014

Drug Abuse in YA Contemporary Novels

Due to its ability to immerse readers into realistic plots, contemporary realistic fiction is a genre that has received much praise throughout the young community. Issues explored by contemporary realistic fiction novels include, domestic violence, psychological disorders, bullying and drug abuse. By dealing with universal hardships, this genre has the potential teach young readers very valuable life lessons. The goal of my annotated bibliography is to raise awareness about the negative effects of drug abuse on teenagers.

It was challenging to find a canonical novel that mentioned the problems of drug abuse. But after reviewing some of the novels that I studied in the past, I realized that Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* thoroughly discussed these issues. Although Burgess' novel deals with a dystopian world, the future setting displayed doesn't seem too far from the present and it includes issues that overlap with those of a contemporary fiction novel.

Having *A Clockwork Orange* as my centerpiece, I knew I wanted to show how drug abuse can affect everyone, regardless of race, religion or gender. My annotated bibliography includes many novels with different types of main characters. *Go Ask Alice* for example, is a story about a female teen who gets introduced to LSD in high school, while the novel *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey tells the story about a 23 year old man who struggles with a crack addiction. Both of these novels focus on the gruesome side effects of heavy drug use, but it is important to note that although these works are similar, the characters are different in gender, age, and social status. This juxtaposition highlights the vast impact that drugs can make on any person and are sure to raise awareness for a young reader.

Along with including novels in my annotated bibliography, I wanted to include movies and YouTube video clips. It is important to have a visual representation of what we read and *Requiem for a Dream* is a movie that successfully captures the direct and indirect effects of drug abuse as vividly as the novels do. Although it is based off of a novel, the movie is a good rendition and should be watched by young adults in order to deter their drug use. Along with using a this film, the YouTube video clip I included, features interviews with young adults, both men

and women, who tell about their evolution of substance abuse from marijuana to crystal meth. I feel that by watching real interviews, people will step away from the fiction in books, and realize that this is a very serious issue that happens all over the world.

When looking over the books and visuals that I included in my annotated bibliography, I hope that young adults will be convinced that drugs will only lead to their demise. As someone who has been personally impacted by drug abuse, I feel this is a message that lacks attention in schools.

I hope some high school sophomore who is just about to try drugs for his first time will relate to Lil J from Walter Jean Meyers' *Dope Sick* and say "No thanks. I'm okay" . Or maybe when some high school freshman is being pressured to try drugs due to personal hardships she remembers the horrible things that happened to Laurel in *Beneath a Meth Moon* or Kristina from *Crank*. Who ever it is, I hope that after reading my annotated bibliography and picking up one of the novels, they think twice about taking any type of drug.

Annotated Bibliography

Requiem for a Dream. Dir. Aronofsky, Darren. Perf, 2000.

The film follows the drug-induced utopias of four Coney Island people. These visions are shattered when their addictions become stronger than they can handle. The addicts all have different motives to use drugs. Harry, Harry's girlfriend Marion and Tyrone want to become rich off selling drugs while Sara is a TV junkie who is obsessed with losing weight by taking speed. The films shows the ups and downs of drug abuse and it is important to note that it highlights the demise of both female and male characters alike.

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*., 1962. Print.

A Clockwork Orange takes place in a Futuristic City. Alex, the protagonist, is a 15-year-old leader of a violent teenage gang. He and his gang commit ultra-violent crimes inflicted upon innocent people. Their favorite activities include getting high on drugs, getting drunk, committing gang rapes, vandalism, and arson. Alex's life changes one day when he gets high on hard drugs and rapes two ten-year-olds. Later that Day, Alex proceeds to kill an old woman and gets arrested and imprisoned for 14 years. The gritty details of Alex's state of mind are of importance for those researching the psychological effects of drugs on

teenagers. Along with the direct effects, the indirect effects of drugs are seen through Alex's imprisonment.

Dean Meyers, Walter. *Dope Sick.*, 2010. Print.

After getting involved in a drug deal that ended in the shooting of a police officer, Jeremy Dance, known as Lil J is looking for a place to hide. He stumbles into an abandoned building and finds an open apartment occupied by a man named Kelly. Although Lil J at first assumes that Kelly is just another junkie, he slowly begins to realize that Kelly is something different. Using a television remote that seems capable of revealing all facets of Lil J's life both past and present, Kelly guides, probes, and sometimes unsettles the teen into reflecting on the choices he's made leading to a life of crime and drug addiction. This novel serves as a reflection of life choices and will be key to understand the side effects of drug abuse amongst low income teens.

Frey, James. *A Million Little Pieces.* (2003)Print.

After waking up to a broken face, James Frey fails to recollect his memories for the last two weeks. As an alcoholic for 10 years and a crack addict for 3 years, he tells his story of going to rehab. Here he tells his struggles with withdrawals and relapse. Through this fictional recollection, James Frey (the author) convinces his readers that the effects of drug abuse on an individual can be everlasting.

Hopkins, Ellen. *Crank.* Print.

In *Crank*, Ellen Hopkins chronicles the disturbing relationship between Kristina, and the "monster," the highly addictive drug crystal meth, or "crank." Kristina is introduced to the drug while visiting her father. While under the influence of the monster, Kristina discovers her sexy alter-ego, Bree who is willing to do anything for a steady flow of crank. This novel shows the allure that comes with drug abuse and highlights the downwards spiral that is guaranteed once the user becomes sober.

Lowery, Lauren. *Teen Drug Abuse.*, 2011. YouTube Video

This video features interviews with young drug addicts who retell their experiences with drugs at a young age. They depict the evolution of their drug abuse from marijuana to heroin and meth. The video also includes many facts about teen drug abuse along with visuals. This video will be important if you want to create a sense of urgency to stop drug abuse amongst students in a classroom.

N. Roses, Jams. *Get Clean.*, 2013. Print.

Get Clean follows Jimmy Walker, a cocaine addict who realizes he needs a big change in order to become completely sober. He decides to move from the UK to Spain in order to avoid his constant drug use. Once in Spain, Jimmy is again attracted to crowds who are avid cocaine users and falls right back into the same cycle despite his big move. This work shows how accessible drugs can be and that sometimes setting plays no role in addiction. In the end, the individual must have the internal power to reject drug abuse and this something that should be highlighted to young adults.

Seaward, Andrew. *Some are Sicker Than Others.*, 2012. Print.

The lives of three addicts converge when they are court-mandated to a drug & alcohol rehab. Monty Miller, a self-destructive, codependent alcoholic, is wracked by an obsession to drink himself to death as punishment for a fatal car accident he didn't cause. Dave Bell, a former all-American track star turned washed-up high school volleyball coach, routinely chauffeurs his bus full of teens on a belly full of liquor and head full of crack. Angie Mallard, a recently divorced housewife with three estranged children, is willing to go to any lengths to restore the family she lost to crystal meth. This story shows the similarities between all addicts regardless of their drug of choice but it highlights that some people truly are "sicker than others". This is a good book to read due to its focus on the universality of substance abuse.

Sparks, Beatrice. *Go Ask Alice.*, 2006. Print.

Lonely, awkward, and under extreme pressure from her "perfect" parents, "Anonymous" swings madly between optimism and despair. Her battle with drugs begins at a party when her drink is spiked with LSD. She then continues to chase her highs, but continuously encounters the lows that come with drug addiction. This novel is sure to make an impression to anyone reading it and it is essential when talking about drug awareness.

Woodson, Jaqueline. *Beneath a Meth Moon.*, 2012. Print.

After losing her grandmother and mother to Hurricane Katrina, Laurel Denau attempts to get her life back together. Then her new boyfriend introduces her to meth, and Laurel is instantly seduced by its spell, the way it erases, even if only temporarily, her memories. Soon Laurel is completely hooked, a shell of her former self, desperate to be whole again, but lacking the strength to break free. This novel is worth reading due to its relevance and how close to home it hits by taking place during Hurricane Katrina.

Works Cited

All photos taken from *GoodReads.com*

GoodReads.com Reviews used in this annotated bibliography include.

A Million Little Pieces

Crank

Beneath a Meth Moon

Get Clean

Amazon

Amazon Books Reviews used in this annotated bibliography include.

Dope Sick

A Clockwork Orange

IMDB Synopsis used in this annotated bibliography for,

Requiem for a Dream