

Books about Facing Death and Loss

Albom, Mitch: *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*

Published by Hyperion Press, 23 September 2003, ISBN 0786868716

Eddie is 83; today is his birthday and he is at work at the carnival where he has been a maintenance man, servicing the rides. This is also the day that Eddie will die—he dies while trying to save a child from being crushed when a ride has gone awry. What we as readers get is Mitch Albom's notion of heaven as he traces Eddie's meetings with five people who teach him the meaning of his life. Eddie learns from the "Blue Man," the first person he meets in heaven, "the human spirit knows, deep down, that all lives intersect. [That] death doesn't just take someone, it misses someone else, and in the small distance between being taken and being missed, lives are changed" (*Five People*, 49).

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. Albom has many "quotable quotes" in the book. Select any of the following for journal prompts or other writing activities to use with your students:

"That there are no random acts. That we are all connected. That you can no more separate one life from another than you can separate a breeze from the wind." (*Five People*, 48)

"Time," the Captain said, "is not what you think." . . . "Dying? Not the end of everything. We think it is. But what happens on earth is only the beginning." (*Five People*, 90)

"You didn't get it. Sacrifice is a part of life. It's *supposed* to be. It's not something to regret. It's something to *aspire* to. Little sacrifices. Big sacrifices. A

mother works so her son can go to school. A daughter moves home to take care of her sick father . . ." (The Captain speaking to Eddie, *Five People*, 93)

"That's the thing. Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." (*Five People*, 94)

"Things that happen before you are born still affect you," she [Ruby] said. "And people who come before your time affect you as well. We move through places every day that would never have been if not for those who came before us." (*Five People*, 123)

"Learn this from me. Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from inside. We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade. And the harm we do, we do to ourselves." (*Five People*, 143)

"Lost love is still love, Eddie. It takes a different form, that's all. You can't see their smile or bring them food or tousle their hair or move them around a dance floor. But when those senses weaken, another heightens. Memory. Memory becomes your partner. You nurture it. You hold it. You dance with it. Life has to end. Love doesn't." (*Five People*, 173)

2. Ask your students: Who are the five people you think you'd meet in heaven? Why would it be these five people? What do they have to teach you? Use these prompts for an essay, but also have your students give an oral presentation (a good and easy way to incorporate some speaking activities in your class) about their five people.
3. Consider pairing Alбом's book with Dante's *Inferno* or with any work that deals with the end of life. It can also be used for students to create what they conceive the afterworld to be.

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might be struggling with why someone they loved has died.
- Because they can learn some wise lessons about life and loss.
- Because they might have people in their life they don't understand, as Eddie does.
- Because they might be able to help a peer or a friend who is facing grief and who feels isolated.

Alбом, Mitch: *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Published by Broadway, 8 October 2002, ISBN 076790592X

****Teen Recommended****

Mitch Alбом tells the story of the remarkable life of Morrie Schwartz, a prominent professor of sociology, one of Alбом's favorite professors. In 1994, Schwartz was diagnosed with ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease, a brutal disease that attacks the neurological system. Instead of dying "quietly," Morrie decides his ending days, his dying, will be his final class—this great teacher teaches about life's greatest mystery, death. Mitch Alбом is in the prime of his life and far too busy to see and experience life. The book narrates how Alбом reconnects with Morrie and takes the time to learn how to die with grace.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. One of the best ways to work with this book is simply to read it aloud to your students, a bit every day. The work is powerful enough that it can teach some important lessons that otherwise might not be part of the curriculum. If your school requires character education units, consider using this book so your students can learn from master teacher Morrie about "a guide to living well so that we might die well."
2. This book is filled with quotable quotes. Direct your students to choose any of the following and write why they like the quote or what they learn from it:

"There are some mornings when I cry and cry and mourn for myself. Some mornings, I'm so angry and bitter. But it doesn't last too long. Then I get up and say, 'I want to live . . .'" (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, 21)

"I'm on the last great journey here—and people want me to tell them what to pack." (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, 33)

Key points to reflect on (Morrie asks Mitch the following questions):

"Have you found someone to share your heart with? Are you giving to your community? Are you at peace with yourself? Are you trying to be as human as you can be?" (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, 24)

"The culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. And you have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it." (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, 42)

“So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they’re busy doing things they think are important. This is because they’re chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.” (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, 43)

3. Morrie has a “living funeral” so that he can be present with all his friends and family. Though it may be hard because people think they can’t cry or show emotion, discuss with your students the value of a “living funeral.” If some student in your teaching context has a terminal disease or if someone has recently died from suicide, illness, or accident, consider holding the “living funeral” in your classroom.
4. Helpful websites for teaching the book include:

www.randomhouse.com/resources/bookgroup/tuesdaysmorrie_bgc.html
maincc.hufs.ac.kr/~theargus/370/theory_01.htm
www.1800volunteer.org/learn/family/attitude.jsp
www.fsc.edu/ff/morrie.html

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they may be caught up in stressful things and losing sight of what’s really important.
- Because they might have someone close to them who is dying and who wants them to be able to “be with” him or her.
- Because there is a great deal of wisdom in this book.
- Because Mitch Albom learned a lot and they can, too.

Blume, Judy: *Tiger Eyes*

Published by Laurel Leaf, reissue edition 15 July 1982,

ISBN 0440984696

****Teen Recommended****

Davey has been enjoying a walk with her boyfriend, Hugh, and now they are in the backyard of Davey’s home. Her dad is working on his paintings in the store, located in the lower level of the family home. Davey and Hugh hear what sounds like firecrackers; unfortunately it is not firecrackers, but a gun, and soon Davey’s father is lying in a pool of blood. Davey, her younger

brother Jason, and her mother face the daunting task of dealing with the murder of their father and husband.

Davey will further struggle when Bitsy, her father’s sister, and Walter, her husband, try to make Davey, Jason, and their mother completely change their lives and resettle in New Mexico. This novel shows how 15-year-old Davey learns to grieve and grow.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. This book is another one that you can share with individual students who have lost parents. It could also be a good book for you to read aloud in a character education unit on being supportive of peers who have experienced violence, death, or loss. The book fits for many of those “teachable moments” arising when students in your classes or school face a tragedy.
2. “Exploring the American Dream: *The Great Gatsby* and Six Young Adult Novels” by Diana Mitchell (chapter 9 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 1, 1993) uses this novel as one of the six YA novels in the unit.
3. Many of Judy Blume’s books are among those that are censored. The following website provides teaching ideas about censorship:

www.randomhouse.com/highschool/resources/guides3/

4. Some websites with recommended reading for grieving children:

www.cgcmaine.org/docs/subdocs/bibliography.htm

homepages.stmartin.edu/students/cbrown/articles.htm (This site has accompanying activities for the young person or child who has lost someone through a difficult circumstance.)

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might have lost a parent and have had to work through grief.
- Because they might be living with extended family and having a difficult time relating.
- Because they might have a mother or father who has lost her/his spouse and maybe they feel like they have to help her/him survive the loss.
- Because they might feel as Davey does about trying to talk about the fact her father has been murdered.

Other books by Judy Blume to consider reading: *Places I Never Meant to Be*, *Letters to Judy*, and *Forever*.

Creech, Sharon: *Walk Two Moons*

**Published by HarperTrophy, reprint edition 30 September 1996,
ISBN 0064405176**

Sal (Salamanca Tree Hiddle) is 13 and has lived most of her life in Bybanks, Kentucky. The book tells two stories simultaneously. The first story is that of Sal and her father, of her mother who died, of the baby who was born prematurely and died, and of Sal's grandparents, the Hiddles—paternal grandparents (Gramps and Gram) who are taking her on a trip to Idaho, actually tracing the path of Sal's mom's last journey. Sal's family is Native American; both Sal and her mom wanted to be called Indian or American Indian. The second story is of Phoebe Winterbottom, a young girl Sal's age. Phoebe and Sal become pals when Sal and her dad move to Euclid, Ohio. They have been there a year when Margaret Cadaver (a very significant woman in the story) finds a job there for Mr. Hiddle.

Phoebe's mom is frightened when a young man appears in the area of the Winterbottom home; eventually readers learn that Phoebe's mom had a son out of wedlock. Her husband, Prudence (one of Phoebe's sisters), and Phoebe are all shocked—and Phoebe has been further upset because her mom disappeared for several weeks before all this came out. The family has also had several mysterious messages left on their porch, saying things like “do not judge a person until you've walked two moons in his moccasins.”

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. With this book and other books on death, you could teach the five stages of grief identified by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Have your students trace the stages in Sal's life and write about how these five stages can connect to other losses.
2. Borrowing a theme from *The Memory String* by Eve Bunting, your students can create an “In Honor Necklace.” Students string beads or tokens, each symbolizing a special wish, thought, or trait that they are grateful for, onto a filament, yarn, or thread. The beads can also symbolize a positive change they want to make because of the life of the person they are honoring. (Credit for this idea is given to Denise and

Carin Beasley, who describe the idea in “Giving Words to Grief: Using *Two Moons in August*, *Saying It Outloud*, and *Tiger Eyes to Explore the Death of a Parent*,” chapter 3 in Allen, *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with End-of-Life Issues*, 2002).

3. While it may sound a little “morbid,” another suggestion from the same book is to create a funeral. Often adolescents are left out of the process of doing anything to plan the funeral or the memorial. They can select favorite songs, poetry, sayings, or stories, or other artifacts to be included in the funeral.
4. A third idea from Beasley and Beasley is the Memory Book. This is a book that symbolizes the relationship between the deceased parent and the person creating the book. Bringing together mementos, photos, lessons taught, or wisdom shared helps the young person know that memories can help the deceased parent “live on.”
5. “The Motherless Daughter: An Evolving Archetype of Adolescent Literature” by James Lovelace and Laura Howell Smith (*ALAN Review*, Winter 2002) looks at *Walk Two Moons* as one book on the theme of motherless daughters.
6. “Popular Postmodernism for Young Adult Readers: *Walk Two Moons*, *Holes*, and *Monster*” by Stephenie Yearwood (*ALAN Review*, Summer 2002) presents an additional perspective on the novel.
7. Some websites for teaching ideas include:

www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/creech.html

www.sharoncreech.com/meet/interview.asp

www.multcolib.org/schoolcorps/creech.html

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might have experienced the death of a parent.
- Because they may have friends who have lost a parent and need to know how to listen to them.
- Because maybe their parents have “secrets” about their past and the teens become disillusioned when they learn about these secrets.
- Because they need to understand the wise saying, “Do not judge a person until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.”

Other books by Sharon Creech to consider reading: *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, *Bloomability*, *Chasing Redbird*, and *Ruby Holler*.

Creech, Sharon: *The Wanderer*

Published by HarperTrophy, reprint edition 26 March 2002,

ISBN 0064410323

****Teen Recommended****

Sophie, the narrator, says her father calls her “Three-sided Sophie: one side is dreamy and romantic; one is logical and down-to-earth; and the third side is hardheaded and impulsive” (*The Wanderer*, 3). Is it a dream that she and three of her uncles and two of her cousins sail across the ocean? Is Bompie, her grandfather, really alive? Are Sophie’s parents her real parents or an aunt and uncle who have taken her in? *The Wanderer* takes Sophie on a journey to learn who she is and what she’s lost.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. This novel was an ALA (American Library Association) Best Book for Young Adults in 2001 and would make for a quick read aloud in your classroom. It has the potential for generating discussion on death; on adventures—real or imaginary; on relationships with parents, grandparents, and other relatives; and on being orphaned.
2. “Finding Your Way Home: Orphan Stories in Young Adult Literature,” by Dirk P. Mattson (*ALAN Review* 24, no. 3 [Spring 1997]) is a helpful essay for the theme of foster children and orphans; Sophie is essentially an orphan.
3. For author information and teacher resources, check the following websites:

falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/creech.htm

eduscapes.com/sessions/land/land3.htm

www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/creech.html

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might want to trace their family history and learn some of the tales that make up their heritage.
- Because they may have lost someone they love and need to feel their story is heard.
- Because they might love the sea or the ocean, and the journey Sophie and her uncles and cousins make might be one they’d enjoy.

Other books by Sharon Creech to consider reading: *Fishing in the Air* and *Pleasing the Ghost*.

Crutcher, Chris: *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*

Published by HarperTempest, 1 April 2003, ISBN 0060094907

Willie Weaver (he’s Willie Jr., whose dad has been a well-known athlete for the Washington State Huskies and played in the Rose Bowl when the Huskies beat the Michigan Wolverines) is 16 at the time of the remembered event. Several of his friends are on the baseball team with him, a team that’s part of the Eastern Montana American Legion. The game against Crazy Horse Electric is a major rivalry; Willie is the pitcher, and he wins the game with an amazing catch behind his back and a throw out to first.

Willie and his dad take daring rides on the Honda motorcycle. Willie’s mom does not approve because she has already lost one child—Missie was born when Willie was 12, and when she was three months old, she died of SIDS. Willie blames himself since he didn’t know what to do and his mother was across the street talking to a friend.

Then an additional sorrow comes: Willie is in a water skiing accident. While his dad is trying to get the lifejacket off Willie, the dad almost strangles Willie. Jenny, Willie’s girlfriend, actually saves Willie. But with the brain damage that results, Willie has speech problems and is physically no longer who he once was. His dad “clams up”; life at home is incredibly tense. No one “really talks.” At school, Willie struggles with the tension of not wanting to be pitied and trying to fit in.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. Direct your students to write letters from the perspectives of Willie, his dad, and his mom—choose topics that explain the breakdown of communication in the family.
2. Willie eventually meets a number of people who can offer him guidance and help him turn his life around. Let your students assume the role of one of these wisdom figures and write a letter to Willie with their advice.
3. Bonnie O. Ericson, in “Heroes and Journeys in *The Odyssey* and Several Works in Young Adult Literature” (chapter 1 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 2, 1995), describes how to teach *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* in conjunction with *The Odyssey*.
4. For author information and background, check the following websites:

www.Authors4Teens.com

greenwood.scbbbs.com/servlet/A4TStart?authorid=ccrutter&source

5. "A Sense of Balance: Realism in the Characters of Chris Crutcher," by Susan Stevens (in "Adolescent Literature: Making Connections with Teens," special issue, *Virginia English Bulletin* 44, no. 2 [Fall 1994]) gives insights on this novel.
6. An essay by Shirly Chumley on *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* is available in *Rationales for Teaching Young Adult Literature* (Reid and Neufeld 1999).

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might be dealing with loss and be unable to handle the pain.
- Because they might feel guilty for something totally beyond their control.
- Because they might need to learn from the mistakes that Willie makes.
- Because they might need to know that there are people like Lisa and Sammy who believe in saving those who are hurting.

Frank, Anne: *The Diary of a Young Girl*

Published by Bantam, 1 June 1993, ISBN 0553296981

****Teen Recommended****

Anne and her family, who are German Jews living in Amsterdam, go into hiding in a part of a warehouse where Mr. Frank had an office; the hiding place becomes known as the "Secret Annex." Mr. and Mrs. Van Daan, their son Peter, and a dentist all share the small four-room space with the Franks. Living in constant fear of discovery by the Nazis, the families remain stressed and tense. Anne's diary is her journal of courage and growth.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. "Anne and Me: A Frank Talk with Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld" by Melissa Comer (*ALAN Review*, Summer 2002) presents this couple's response about writing *Anne Frank and Me*, a good piece of literature to use in tandem with *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Share with your students what Bennett and Gottesfeld have to say.
2. Use the book *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary; A Photographic Remembrance* by Ruud van der Rol and Rian Verhoeven (Viking Press, 1993) for further background, and have your students write about any particular photograph that strikes them.

3. "Notes from Girl X: Anne Frank at the Millennium" by Holly Levitsky (*ALAN Review*, Winter 2002) is a good place to begin to get recent insights on the novel and to give you ideas about connecting Anne Frank's story with those of contemporary refugees.
4. "Parallel Lives: Anne Frank and Today's Immigrant Students" by Mitzi Witkin, an essay in *United in Diversity: Using Multicultural Young Adult Literature in the Classroom* edited by Jean E. Brown and Elaine C. Stephens (NCTE, 1998) is another source of teaching ideas.
5. "Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*: World War II and Young Adult Literature" by Joan Kaywell (chapter 2 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 1, 1993) offers extensive teaching ideas for this novel.
6. The following sites are good resources:

www.webenglishteacher.com/frank.html

www.annefrank.eril.net/teaching/re1.htm

womenshistory.about.com/cs/frankacurr

t3.preservice.org/T0301006/lifelp.html

home.earthlink.net/~jesmith/BiogAutobiog.html

www.teach-nology.com/teachers/subject_matter/social_studies/holocaust

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/ks1-2citizenship/cit07/?view=activities

www.edutech.org/student/courses/care/index.cfm?Group_ID=0&SessionID=435

www.bookrags.com/notes/daf/PART1.htm

7. Specifically for teaching human rights, the following sites are helpful:

scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring00/ariew.html

www.cfep.uci.edu/ProDevel/uci-sati/faculty/rodebaugh_unit.html

8. "Letters as a Tool in Teaching about the Meaning of the Holocaust"

www.yad-vashem.org.il/download/education/conf/Berlin.pdf

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because despite the horrible suffering Anne and her family face, she is still able to find good in life.
- Because they need to know that other teenagers have lived through

such devastation and see that what is happening in their lives can be survived.

- Because they can learn about parents willing to do anything to save their children's lives.
- Because they can learn how to live peaceably even in cramped and dehumanizing conditions, as Anne and her family did.

Guest, Judith: *Ordinary People*

Published by Penguin USA, reprint edition January 1993,

ISBN 0140065172

****Teen Recommended****

This story demonstrates the strain on a family from death and loss, particularly when the grief and accompanying feelings are unresolved. Conrad Jarrett's perfectly ordinary world comes undone when his older brother Buck drowns in a boating accident that he (Conrad) survives. Beth, the perfect suburban mother, escapes her grief in denial. Her husband, Calvin, hides in work. The story of how these ordinary people cope with their loss begins when Conrad returns from hospitalization for a breakdown and attempted suicide.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. This book is written from two viewpoints: Conrad's in first person and his father Calvin's in third person. Italics indicate an interior monologue of more uncontrolled thoughts or of dreaming/flashbacks. Have your students chart Conrad's and his father's discoveries of their own hurts and strengths/healing. Then have them make a parallel chart of descriptions about their family relationships before and after Buck's death. A hint for your students: things are not what they seem on the surface.
2. Love and loss are strong themes in Guest's book. Have your students choose incidents in the book that most strongly illustrate that both losing and loving can lead to personal strength and healing.
3. Ask your students to assume the role of friend of Conrad; how would they help him talk about his experience? What advice would they give him?
4. "Catcher as Core and Catalyst" by Ted Hipple (chapter 4 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 1, 1993) discusses language and Guest's novel.

5. "Using Young Adult Literature to Modernize the Teaching of *Romeo and Juliet*," by Arthea J. S. Reed (chapter 6 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 1, 1993) uses this book as a text on suicide.

6. Ideas for teaching the novel can be found at the following websites:

scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall96/f96-11-Research.html
www.uen.org/Lessonplan/preview.cgi?LPid=1528

Master Teacher's Guide

- Have students read Margery Guest's interview with her sister Judith in *Writer's Digest* (vol. 77, no. 8 [August 1997]: 30–34).
- Discuss this quote with your students: "Our whole lives are an education toward realizing that we don't conquer. If you get through life with grace and a certain amount of happiness and good humor, you're doin' well. I'm sure this is a boring cliché, but it comes into my mind all the time: You're given this hand to play, and it makes no difference if it's a winning hand or a losing hand or a mediocre hand. It's your hand and you play it the best way you know how" (Judith Guest).

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might be in a family experiencing some of these same kinds of trauma.
- Because they may have a friend who has undergone therapy to help him/her cope, and reading this book might help them relate to that friend as he/she tries to come back to "regular life."
- Because they might feel guilt about someone or something they could have dealt with in a different way.
- Because life can throw tough things at us and we wonder if we can cope.
- Because parents are human, too, and often that scares teens.
- Because we all have strengths we never imagined.
- Because even when it's filled with pain, life is worth living.

L'Engle, Madeleine: *A Ring of Endless Light*

Published by Laurel Leaf, reissue edition 15 July 1981,

ISBN 0440972329

****Teen Recommended****

In *A Ring of Endless Light*, L'Engle's protagonist, Vicky Austin, is facing death and loss on several fronts, from companioning her grandfather who is dying

of leukemia to supporting three young men who have all experienced death. The novel opens with a funeral; the Austins have joined others to grieve the death of Commander Rodney, a family friend on the small island. Rodney, the same age as Vicky's parents, died of a heart attack after rescuing a young man who'd gone out sailing, disregarding all weather warnings.

Ironically the young man who Commander Rodney rescued, Zachary Gray, was attempting to commit suicide. Zachary is wealthy and spoiled, confused and in late adolescence, acting out his response to his mother's recent death and loss by engaging in risky behavior. Vicky is Zachary's grip on sanity; she also becomes a main support for Leo, Commander Rodney's oldest son, and for Adam, who is doing summer marine research on the island. Vicky becomes the one Adam will trust to reveal his own inner tragedies. When a young girl dies in Vicky's arms in the hospital emergency room as Vicky is awaiting word about her grandfather who has had to be admitted for a transfusion, she succumbs to the burdens of all these losses.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. Have your students make a gift to give Vicky. The idea of giving something to a person experiencing loss comes from Kyle Gonzales, Cynthia Clark, and Denise Beasley in chapter 4 of *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with End-of-Life Issues* (Allen 2002); this chapter deals with loss of a sibling. Students can discuss what they gave and why.
2. Anne Cobb and Maribeth Ekey (in chapter 5, on loss of grandparents, in Allen, *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with End-of-Life Issues*, 2002) share a series of Quick Writes—quotes from the novel that lead to writing. Many of these prompts build on my favorite quotes from the novel as well—I've made some changes to Cobb and Ekey's ideas. Use these quotes for quick writes as an alternative to giving reading quizzes.

"Thou art all replete with very thou" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 24). What does this quote mean? Have you known a time when you were "all replete"? Describe it.

"When one tries to avoid death, it's impossible to affirm life" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 50). Describe ways you affirm life.

"All life lives at the expense of other life" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 98). What are examples of this quotation?

"It's hard to let go anything we love. We live in a world, which teaches us to clutch. But when we clutch we're left with a fistful of ashes" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 111). Describe a time when you "clutched" and came up with ashes. Grandfather says, "I thought I could die with you around me, and I didn't realize how much it would hurt you and that I cannot stand that hurt." His son, Vicky's dad, responds, "Perhaps you ought not deprive us of that hurt" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 123). What does Vicky's dad mean? Can pain be good for us? Explain.

"Every death is a singularity" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 155). This is built on Grandfather's belief that a butterfly's death can cause an earthquake in another galaxy. Do you believe this? Why?

Adam tells Vicky about Jeb's two losses and comments "But he still isn't over it" (*Ring of Endless Light*, 164). Is death something we can "get over"? Explain.

3. "Exploring the American Dream: *The Great Gatsby* and Six Young Adult Novels," by Diana Mitchell (chapter 9 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 1, 1993) uses this novel as one of the six YA novels in the unit.

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because, like Vicky, they might need to be a support to a friend or peer who has experienced a sudden death in the family.
- Because often teenagers have their first experiences with death when their grandparents die, so like Vicky, they can learn about how to "say goodbye" to grandparents.
- Because they may have a friend who is contemplating suicide and can learn through Vicky how they might be able to help.

Lowry, Lois: *A Summer to Die*

Published by Laurel Leaf, reissue edition 1 December 1983,
ISBN 0440219175

This story is told from the viewpoint of Meg, the younger sister and less beautiful (especially from Meg's perspective) daughter of the Chalmers. Molly, the older sister, is the popular one, the prettier one; she has just become a cheerleader. Mr. Chalmers has been given a year from the university to finish a book—he's an English professor. The family rents a small

house in the country so Mr. Chalmers can have the quiet to write. They move right before Thanksgiving.

The owner of the house is Will Banks, 70, a kind and creative man who befriends the Chalmers, especially Meg. Will quotes poetry—in particular, one great poem, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “Spring and Fall.” He tells Meg, “It’s Margaret you mourn for,” and at the time Meg doesn’t understand what he means. Meg can do photography, and she eventually gets a darkroom—her father builds it when he is “stuck” on his writing—and is able to teach (as well as learn with) Will Banks.

In the midst of all this, Molly gets ill. It starts with nosebleeds; but one night as Meg awakens knowing “something is wrong,” Molly is in a pool of blood. What Molly develops is a kind of leukemia, but for a long time, Meg doesn’t realize how ill Molly is. Her parents don’t tell her since there is some hope that medication will work. The book conveys how a family deals with death and offers some great images of friendships.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. This book is a central one in chapter 4 of *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with End-of-Life Issues* (Allen 2002). A good teaching idea from the writers of that chapter suggests having students design a gift for Meg.
2. Teach the Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “Spring and Fall”; lead a discussion about who we really “mourn for” when we experience death.
3. Some teaching resources are located at:

endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/lit-med-db/webdocs/webdescrips/
lowry1015-des-.ht ml
scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/lowry.html
www.crinkles.com/authorAuthor.html
www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/lowry.html

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they might have to deal with the death of a sibling.
- Because someone they know might be dealing with the death of a sibling.
- Because the book offers great images of friendships among people of different ages.
- Because they might need to know how to deal with grief and loss.

Myers, Walter Dean: *Fallen Angels*

Published by Scholastic, reprint edition February 2003,

ISBN: 0590409433

****Teen Recommended****

The book is dedicated to Walter Dean Myers’ brother, Thomas, “whose dream of adding beauty to this world through his humanity and his art” ended in Vietnam on May 7, 1968. The book opens with a group of soldiers en route to Vietnam, on a flight from Massachusetts to Anchorage, Alaska. The narrator, Richie Perry, is not even supposed to go—he has a bad knee, but his paperwork has been messed up; he says the war will be over soon anyway. Perry has graduated from high school and plans to go college and be a writer like James Baldwin; he goes into the army hoping to earn and send money home to his mother and younger brother Kenny.

Peewee, Jenkins, and Perry are sent out to Chu Lai, their first trip into combat—they are in Alpha Company. Johnson, a large African-American, is also in their group. Jenkins is afraid he is going to die in Nam. Peewee and Perry are in a foxhole; they had to kill a Vietcong to be there. When leaving the hole and trying to get to a pickup area, Perry realizes Peewee is injured. Monaco is also in danger; all three get on a chopper, but Perry is again injured. Perry does recover, Peewee also recovers—for a time, and Monaco has to go back to the “Boonies.”

Monaco, Peewee, and Perry have all “tasted what it feels like to be dead.” They are “not all right.” “We would have to learn what it was like to be alive again” (*Fallen Angels*, 304). Peewee and Perry fly “back to the world” together.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. The following are a few of the powerful lines from the novel. Use these and others that you select as writing prompts to lead to discussion:

On a first little trial, Jenkins steps on a land mine by accident; he’s killed. Perry never is able to forget Jenkins. A description of how Perry feels about Jenkins says, “I wanted to say the only dead person I had ever seen before had been my grandmother” (*Fallen Angels*, 43).

Seeing the body bags gets to Perry: “It was only inside that I was numb” (*Fallen Angels*, 43).

Lieutenant Carroll’s prayer: “Lord, let us feel pity for _____, and sorrow for ourselves, and all the angel warriors that fall. Let us fear death, but let it not

live within us. Protect us, O Lord, and be merciful unto us. Amen" (*Fallen Angels*, 44).

Carroll says his father used to call all soldiers angel warriors because usually they get boys to fight wars. Most are not old enough to vote; Carroll is 23.

"The air in Nam was always hard to breathe; it was heavy, thicker than the air back home. Now it was harder" (*Fallen Angels*, 67).

2. "Connecting with Students through Multicultural Young Adult Novels" by Diana Mitchell, an essay in *United in Diversity: Using Multicultural Young Adult Literature in the Classroom* edited by Jean E. Brown and Elaine C. Stephens (NCTE 1998), discusses ways for teaching the novel.
3. Bonnie O. Ericson, "Heroes and Journeys in *The Odyssey* and Several Works in Young Adult Literature" (chapter 1 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 2, 1995) describes how to teach *Fallen Angels* in conjunction with *The Odyssey*.
4. Pam Cole, in "Bridging *The Red Badge of Courage* with Six Related Young Adult Novels" (chapter 2 in Kaywell, *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, vol. 2, 1995), uses *Fallen Angels* as one of the YA novels to pair.
5. In "John Wayne, Where Are You? Everyday Heroes and Courage" by Pamela S. Carroll (chapter 2 in Gregg and Carroll, *Books and Beyond*, 1998), this novel is one of the YA novels that supplement the unit.
6. Check the following websites for information on Walter Dean Myers and teaching guides for the novel:

www.Authors4Teens.com

www.neiu.edu/~gspackar/INDEX.html

www.mcdougallittell.com/disciplines/_lang_arts/litcons/fallen/guide.cfm

www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/myers.htm

7. An essay on *Fallen Angels* by Jolene Borgese and Susan Ebert is available in *Rationales for Teaching Young Adult Literature* (Reid and Neufeld 1999).

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they may wonder what it would be like to have to kill others in war, especially civilians.
- Because they may have a father or another relative who has been in

Vietnam, Korea, the Gulf War, or Iraq, and need to understand how that person's life may be affected.

- Because so many men and women, not much older than these teens and sometimes known by the teens, are dying in Iraq and other countries.
- Because males are often put into a stereotype of not being able to cry or to be afraid, and this book shows how important those emotions are for every person.

Park, Barbara: *Mick Harte Was Here*

Published by Random House Books for Young Readers,

27 August 1996, ISBN 0679882030

****Teen Recommended****

Phoebe, the almost-14-year-old sister of Mick, tells the story. Mick is just 10 months younger than Phoebe and is a classic clown and annoying younger brother. The day he is fatally injured in a bike accident changes the lives of Phoebe and her parents. One of the amazing things Phoebe learns is that Mick in death is not "lost," but is actually present everywhere. She is also able to talk to her peers in an assembly at school about the importance of wearing a helmet while riding a bike—had Mick worn a helmet, his life would have been saved.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. Because this book deals with the sudden death of a sibling, it works well for any students in your class who have experienced similar losses. Phoebe's best friend in the book has to remind Phoebe that others are feeling Mick's death too. This makes the book good as well for classmates of those who have lost a sibling. The following website lists books for dealing with grief and loss:
www.bereavement.net/Bibliography.pdf
2. Phoebe learns about death in experiencing her brother's death. Create an "I've been there" bulletin board which allows those who have had similar experiences to share their insights on death, grief, and the guilt they often feel about not being able to prevent the death.
3. In the book, Phoebe talks about helmets and bike safety. The following sites reinforce this message:

www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/EPIC/bike/documents/MickHarteTeachersGuide.pdf

www.ohsu.edu/hosp-thinkfirst/tf_parent-teacher.shtml

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they may have experienced a death of a sibling or family member.
- Because they might feel some of the same emotions that Phoebe experiences.
- Because they might have peers, classmates, or friends who have lost a family member and need to know how to understand their experience.

White, Ruth: *Belle Prater's Boy*

**Published by Yearling Books, reprint edition 12 January 1998,
ISBN 0440413729**

Woodrow is the 12-year-old son of Everett and Belle; as the novel begins his mother has disappeared—no one knows where she is. It's very mysterious since the family lives in a very isolated hollow, Crooked Ridge, near Coal Station, Virginia. His cousin Gypsy is also 12; she's the narrator of the book.

Gypsy's mom is named Love. Love was the family beauty; her sister Belle (Woodrow's mom) always longed to be the beautiful one. Belle had been in love with a man named Amos, and all seemed right; then Amos saw Love and they were an instant "match." Belle was humiliated and hurt; she eventually went out and met/eloped with the first miner she saw, Everett. Gypsy only later realizes that her father, Amos, was actually in love with Woodrow's mom first, and then feels sorry for him. Amos, who loved Gypsy dearly, died suddenly after being seriously disfigured in a fire (he was a volunteer fireman)—he shot himself and Gypsy saw the shooting through the bedroom window. She has blocked that memory, though she keeps having nightmares of some hurt animal. Her mom, Love, has remarried to Porter Dotson, though Gypsy refuses to accept Porter; she sees him as "taking her dad's place."

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. The book deals with "what essential is invisible to the eye": from the ugliness of Belle (or her lesser beauty) which plagued her; to Woodrow's severe cross-eyed situation; to Gypsy's dislike of her long hair—which though beautiful, she sees as a bother and something that hides her richer qualities; to Amos' inability to live after he's been disfigured; to Blind Benny, who was born with some disfigurement and no eyes. This central theme can be connected to many other selections of literature where the theme is appearance versus reality, or to focus students on the essentials of inner beauty rather than physical beauty. You can

also use this book as part of a unit on respect or on other positive qualities that may be part of character education units.

2. The following is the poem, written by Jalal al-Din Rumi in the thirteenth century, that Woodrow's mom was often reading right before she disappeared; use it with your students to discuss his mother's actions:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill where two worlds
touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

3. Teaching guides and author background are available at the following websites:

theliterarylink.com/belle_lessons.html
www.successlink.org/great2/g1768.html
www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/whiter.html
www.csulb.edu/org/childrens-lit/proj/nbgs/nbgs-lists/nbgs1997.html
www2.sjsu.edu/testupdates/faculty/patten/belle_lessons.html

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because they may be someone who is judged on appearance only and who has been hurt by what others haven't "seen."
- Because they might be someone who doesn't always look beyond the surface of things, and who can learn more about why seeing beyond surface beauty is important.
- Because they may have lost a parent and might be trying to deal with that loss.

Zindel, Paul: *The Pigman*

**Published by Bantam, reissue edition 1 February 1983,
ISBN 0553263218**

Zindel, Paul: *The Pigman's Legacy*

**Published by Bantam, reissue edition 1 May 1984, ISBN 0553265997
Teen Recommended**

John and Lorraine are typical teenagers who are very creative. These books are narrated by John and Lorraine, alternating each chapter as they tell of

meeting Mr. Angelo Pignati, whom they later dub “The Pigman,” and in the second book, Colonel Glenville. A combination of curiosity and adolescent daring cause John and Lorraine to become involved with both these elderly gentlemen. John and Lorraine also come to understand a good deal about loneliness, loss, and death as they try to make the last days of the Pigman and the Colonel the happiest they can be. The teens also experience fear and guilt about the role they play in the Pigman’s death. Paul Zindel’s ability to create realistic adolescent characters makes these books classics no adolescent should miss.

Teaching Ideas and Resources

1. Both books are written in first person, with chapters alternating between John and Lorraine. These books both work well for teaching point-of-view. Your students could be paired and do a team-writing of an experience similar to John’s and Lorraine’s, particularly focused on elderly relatives in their lives.
2. “Time and Tradition Transforming the Secondary English Class with Young Adult Novels,” by Gary Salvner (in Monseau and Salvner 2000) discusses both these novels, giving insights on how you can teach them.
3. “The ‘I’ of the Beholder: Whose ‘Truth?’” by Joanne Brown (in “Adolescent Literature: Making Connections with Teens,” special issue, *Virginia English Bulletin* 44, no. 2 [Fall 1994]) uses *The Pigman* as one of the novels central to the unit.
4. “Gaining Understanding about Human Relationships through Young Adult Fiction” by Elizabeth Poe (in “Adolescent Literature: Making Connections with Teens,” special issue, *Virginia English Bulletin* 44, no. 2 [Fall 1994]) uses this novel as one of the works in the unit.
5. For author information and background, check the following websites:

www.Authors4Teens.com
[greenwood.scbbs.com/servlet/A4TStart?authorid=pzindel&source =](http://greenwood.scbbs.com/servlet/A4TStart?authorid=pzindel&source=)
scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring95/Russick.html
www3.pei.sympatico.ca/gordie.cox/pigman.htm
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/pigman/pigmantg.html

6. The *ALAN Review* has several articles on Paul Zindel:

“The Effect of Gamma Rays on the Man and the Writer Zindel: *The*

Pigman Plus Twenty Years and Counting” (*ALAN Review* 16, no. 3 [Spring 1989]: 21–25, 43).

“Welcome Back, Zindel” by John A. Davis (*ALAN Review* 9, no. 1 [Fall 1981]: 2–4, 10).

“Something Wonderful, Something Beautiful: Adolescent Relationships Through the Eyes of Paul Zindel” by Kim Hansen (*ALAN Review* 18, no. 2 [Winter 1991]: 41–43).

7. www.webenglishteacher.com/zindel.html is a good site for teaching ideas.

Why Give This Book to Teens?

- Because maybe like John and Lorraine, they are curious about older people and want to have a relationship with them.
- Because maybe they need to learn that not all teenage pranks are harmless.
- Because John and Lorraine learn much about themselves, especially about how to be sensitive to the elderly.
- Because John and Lorraine are honest and realistic in their narration.