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English 112B

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Annotated Bibliography Rationale

The genre, young adult literature, is oftentimes misconstrued as teen literature which lacks depth, reality, or thematic quality. However, young adult literature is rich in themes, important messages, and real-life problems that are shown over a vast amount of complexities that are comparable to adult literature. Young adult literature is important because of the longlasting and powerful impact it has on teenagers and young adults. Teenagers can find comfort or a sense of understanding in literature that deals openly with things they are hiding. Similarly to adults, teenagers and young adults are faced with many of the same interpersonal issues and struggles but have to face them during reactive and transitional times in their lives. Many of the most popular authors of YA literature have gotten where they are today because they produced works that teenagers and young adults can identify with to a certain extent. Through writing about real-world issues such as racism, sexuality, identity struggle, and romance, young adult authors are given the power to impact young adult's life. For many, being a teenager is a very awkward, confusing, scary, and unfair time which makes them one of the most impressionable age groups of people.

Young adult literature is complex. It contains subgenres and topics that authors can take in a multitude of directions. Contemporary realistic fiction, commonly known as "realism" is a

subgenre of young adult literature that contains plots that are believable and realistic because they take place during modern time periods and mirror real-life experiences. Topics that can be blended with contemporary realistic fiction are ones such as; real-life experiences, identity issues, peer relations, and facing abuse. Taken from *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Chapter 4, contemporary realistic fiction is characterized by “writing about young adult fiction with real-world settings in historical periods not far-removed from our own...” meaning that it is something people can find truth and identity in it. Contemporary realistic fiction does not contain supernatural beings, elements, or magic which keeps the “realistic” aspect to it.

Taking a closer look at the topics of contemporary realistic fiction, issues such as discrimination, real-life decisions, bullying, suicide, religious controversy, race, sexuality, and differing levels of abuse are exemplified and portrayed in different ways that create a connectable-ness for readers. For my annotated bibliography I will be examining the dynamics of real-life experiences, strong problem-based novels, peer relationships, and identity issues, and the role they play in adding to the development of major themes and lessons throughout young adult literature. In young adult literature, novels with strong plot lines that deal with identity searching, real-life problems, and peer relations are often portrayed as some of the most common issues in YA literature. According to *Literature for Young Adults*, Chapter 4, the problem novel is based on the idea that young people will “have a better chance to be happy if they have realistic expectations and if they know both the bad and the good about the society in which they live”. This means that the idea that the youth needs to read books with a happy ending in order to be happy, run the risk of being blindsided by the realities of life. The literary term for realistic novels and coming-of-age stories is bildungsroman. This term is formally defined as “novels

dealing with the development of a young person usually from adolescence to maturity”.

Contemporary realistic fiction is successful, according to Marc Aronson, because young adult literature stems from differing “levels of intimacy” and the many ways that it can help take readers from dark places and bring them to understanding. An important part of problem novels is the way the author writes the story. Using colloquial language, authors write in a way that people, focusing on young adults talk, often including lingo, profanity, and grammatical errors. The success in young adult literature lies in its truth of reality.

As a centerpiece work to focus on, I chose Matt De La Pena’s *We Were Here* because of its rich diversity in real-life experiences, identity searching, and the influence that peers have on one another. This book also caught my eye because it showed me the reality in other people’s lives. That aspect of literature also adds to its richness, being able to see how life is for someone else makes it all the better. Due to the fact that contemporary realistic fiction allows readers to connect to a story and identify with the struggles that could possibly mirror their own lives, without having to subject themselves to any outward realizations, is what makes it so important to teenagers and young adults. I also have focused my annotated bibliography on novels that include teenagers experiencing some sort of pain for the first time. In the novels such as *Wintergirls*, *Looking For Alaska*, *Catcher in the Rye* and so on, all of the characters are experiencing differing levels of pain through death, self-harm, and love. Found in Chapter 4 of *Literature for Young Adults*, Aronson poses the question, “Does a book have the potential to touch readers deeply so that, in the struggle with it, they being to see and to shape themselves?” and within that question lies one of the most important aspects of contemporary realistic fiction. That aspect is empathy. When young adult readers can heal, learn, and feel things about

themselves because of a novel, that's when amazing things happen. I enjoy reading young adult literature because not only am I a young adult, but I find reading about teenagers as they undergo various degrees of character development to be the most interesting.

Annotated Bibliography: Strong Problem Novels and Real Life Experiences in Contemporary Realistic Fiction

1. *We Were Here* by Matt De La Peña

Matt De La Peña *We Were Here* New York: Delacorte Press, 2009. Print

Following the life of Miguel, readers watch as his life undergoes serious changes that result in his deep and serious character development. After something really bad happened, Miguel ends up in a juvenile halfway house where he “befriends” two boys, Rondo and Mong. When these three break out of the juvenile hall to escape down to Mexico, they experience poverty, realizations about themselves and one another, experiments with alcohol, suicide, murder, and the true reality of what it means to compare bad and good.

As one of the many books that were new to me this semester, this one is my favorite. The main characters are all teenage boys who seemed to have drawn the short end of the stick on life. Readers watch as the three boys open up to one another and share things that they have never told anyone. *We Were Here* encapsulates the idea of a strong problem novel perfectly as this novel is set in a lower-income area, uses colloquial language, and deals with real problems. This novel encapsulates the importance of self-healing, self-forgiveness, and the idea that your actions do not always have to define you. This book is good for young adults to read who are

experiencing issues with dealing with the pressures of right and wrong, identity searching, and the power of peer relations. This novel thrived on the bases of strong peer-connections that help individuals overcome serious and life-changing situations which is a powerful message for teenagers.



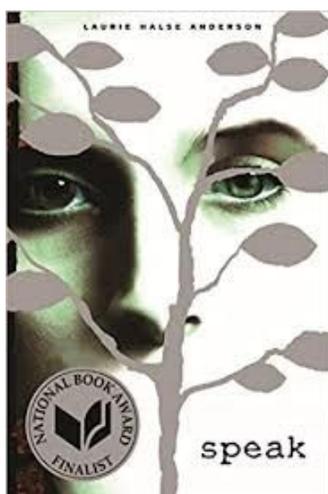
2. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Anderson, Laurie Halse. **Speak**. New York: Square Fish, 2011. Print.

Melinda Sordino begins her freshman year of high school feeling more isolated and alone than anyone. Following an incident at a party over summer that resulted in Melinda calling the cops, promoting all of her peers to socially reject her, Melinda finds herself, depressed, alone, confused, and holding onto a dark secret. Melinda has to go through a lot before she can finally gain her voice, and truly speak out about what really happened at the party.

This is a novel that contains realistic and important themes of sexual abuse, bullying, and identity searching that many people go through. Having darker topics such as these plausible for teens in young adult literature is very important. After watching Melinda struggle daily with the heavy truth weighing on her shoulders, this book portrays important messages about bullying,

sexual abuse, and family and peer relations. Once Melinda begins to finally use her voice and stand up for herself, her entire experience changes for the better. This book is important for young adults to read because it brings up hard topics, such as sexual assault and depression, and sheds a light on the topics, thus making it easier for someone to speak out about it too. Teenagers who are experiencing any type of abuse can find comfort in this book as Melinda works to gain her strength back. This novel can be used to show teenagers that those who are sexually abused do not need to live in the shadow of their abuser and they can speak up for themselves and live a happy life.

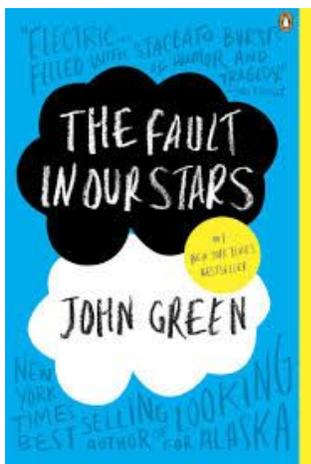


3. *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

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

The popular and best-selling author, John Green, writes about a sixteen-year-old girl who has lung cancer. Forced to go to a cancer support group by her family, Hazel resents this idea until she meets a boy named Augustus Waters. With teenage love, loss, and heartbreak, *The Fault in Our Stars* follows two young adults as they experience life together.

The Fault in Our Stars fits perfectly in young adult literature because it encapsulates real emotions and feelings that teenagers experience. The novel takes on a realistic ending, where Augustus sadly dies which leaves Hazel appreciating the fragility of her situation more. The themes of suffering, being angry at the cards they are dealt with, and the realization that life is not promised are exemplified here, making it a good novel to teach to teenagers. The adolescent years are very trying times for teenagers and many think that nothing bad can ever happen to them. A novel that showcases that death is inevitable is a good topic to remind teenagers. The fact that one of the characters dies in this novel is also a good teaching factor that can be used to show to deal with the death of a significant other. John Green uses these themes as the basis of many of his novels so any teenager experiencing first love and the death, or disappearance, of that loved one, can find comfort in reading more works done by him.



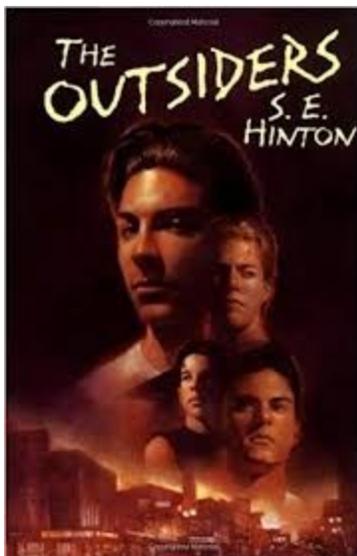
4. *The Outsiders*

Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. Viking Press, 1967. Print.

There are only two kinds of people in the world according to Ponyboy, and those groups are the greasers and the socs. The two groups are at an opposition because the socs, short for

socials, have money which allows them to get away with whatever they want and an attitude to match it. Greasers, on the other hand, are constantly getting in trouble, live on the outside, and always have to watch their backs. Main character Ponyboy, is a proud greaser willing to do anything for his side and his people but it is not until one of his friends, a fellow greaser, kills a soc, making Ponyboy see the harsh reality in the divide of the two groups.

The Outsiders is important for young adults to read because even though it takes place in the early 1960s, it teaches a powerful message about people and diversity. Peer interactions play a huge role in this novel as friendships are tested and the two groups are in opposition with one another. This novel showcases the need for people to be accepting of other people's differences. *The Outsiders* also addresses feelings of isolation that teenagers often face, especially in high school. It is important for teenagers to read this because during high school, "cliques" are a big thing, forcing teenagers to feel as if there is a need to be isolated or at odds with other groups. This book teaches the valuable message that people are not really that different from one another. The principle of differences is not good to have as the basis of the deep-rooted social divide.



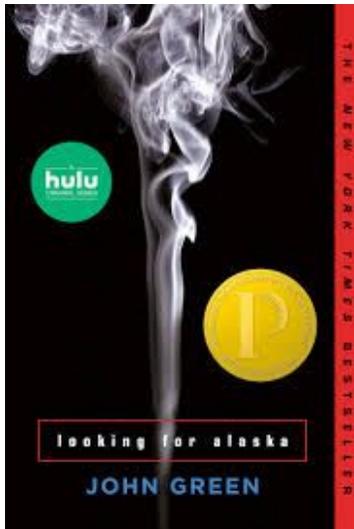
5. *Looking For Alaska* by John Green

Green, John. **Looking for Alaska**: A Novel. New York: Dutton Children's, 2005. Print.

Miles “Pudge” Halter has just become the new student at Culver Creek Preparatory School in Birmingham, Alabama. He was not the most popular at his old school but is hopeful to turn things around at his new school. Pudge makes some friends, Chip, Takumi, Lara, and the beautiful and mysterious Alaska. The group become fast friends and enjoy their time together hanging out, pranking, smoking, and drinking. It is not until the unexpected death of one of them that changes everything.

Looking For Alaska is a good novel for young adults to read because it is based on the importance that good friendships have on people. The friend group is successful because it is based on trust and mutual understanding for one another, each character is somewhat of an outsider which is what brings them together so easily. The group engages in smoking, drinking and sexual acts which make the friend group seem real. It isn't until the death of Alaska that takes everyone by surprise and affects Pudge the most. After trying endlessly to solve her unexpected death, Pudge ends at peace with Alaska's death and though he knows that most of everything about Alaska will remain a mystery, he can keep a part of her alive in his memory. This novel deals with loss, young love, and mystery which can help young readers if they are experiencing any of the same things. The realistic ending of not always knowing if her death was accident or suicide also keeps the realistic aspect alive because there is no way to find out what the person was thinking or doing when they died. Teenagers and young adults can turn to this

novel if they are experiencing any of the themes depicted in this novel such as death, mourning, friendship troubles, or the pain in accepting the loss of a loved one.



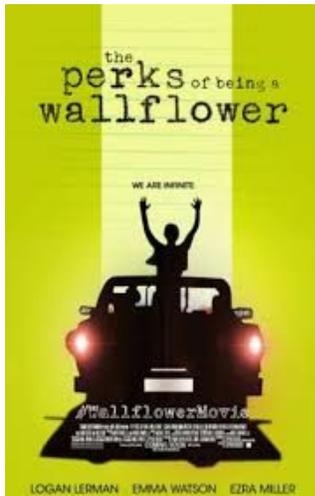
6. *Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. MTV Books, 2012. Print.

Following quiet and shy “wallflower”, the main character Charlie, is observed as he transitions into adulthood. With first dates, new friends, parties, experimenting with drugs, young love, loss, and drama, this novel expresses a pretty realistic version of going up.

One of the most important aspects of this novel is when Charlie comes to the realization that his aunt used to sexually assault him. As someone who he used to look up to, his realization is hard on him. This realization is powerful for two reasons, one is that both Charlie and the reader do not know this until the end of the book, making its realization a large surprise, but also because this realization is a sad reality that many teenagers face. Charlie has a very supportive group of friends which makes his realization easier to handle but this type of issue is a big problem for many teenagers. This novel touches on a few important themes, the main one being

sexual assault, the second one being sexual assault by a family member. Literature that focuses on shedding light on difficult topics makes it easier for teenagers who are experiencing them to come to terms in a healthy way. This real-life experience literature is very important for teenagers.



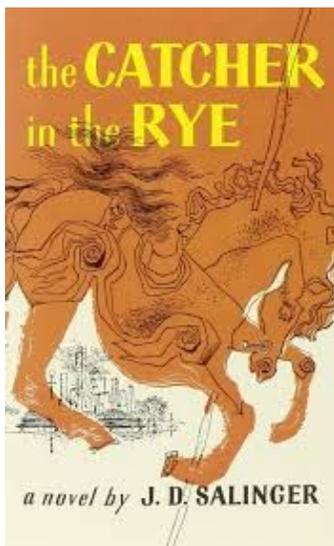
7. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little, Brown and Company, 1951. Print

Holden Caulfield is a sixteen-year-old complex individual who leads his story as he has just gotten kicked out of prep school. Having not told his parents yet, he leaves school and stays in New York for a couple of days and undergoes various degrees of character development through encounters with different individuals, including prostitutes. Holden has many voices in his head adding to his overall complex character.

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most popular American novels and is most commonly read in high school classes. This novel is important for teenagers to read because it showcases the reality that teenagers are not perfect. Holden is kicked out of school for failing grades and rather than telling his parents, he begins a journey home filled with all sorts of

situations, including prostitutes. This novel also showcases the fact that mental illness is something that people should talk about more as it is a reality for many people. The death of his brother, Allie, stays with him at all times and in doing so, creates a unique representation of the loss of a family member. This novel is important for teenagers to read because of the importance of family relations. Holden is very close to his sister, Phoebe, who knows him better than anyone else. This dynamic is important to show because teenagers who are struggling person battles with school, mental health, or the loss of a loved one, can see that it can sometimes be best to turn to family during hard times.

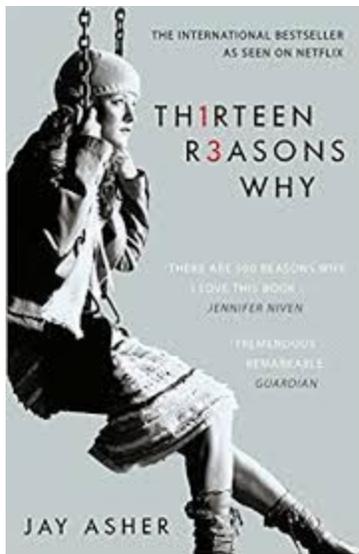


8. *Thirteen Reasons Why*

Asher, Jay. *Thirteen Reasons Why*. New York: Razorbill, 2007. Print

Written in ways similar to a mystery, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, follows main character Clay Jensen as he listens to cassette tapes left for him by now deceased, Hannah Baker. Listening to her tapes, people's sides of the story, and putting together information, Clay works to solve the mystery of the reason why Hannah Baker took her own life.

Thirteen Reasons Why has become one of the most popular young adult storylines in literature. It was also turned into a Netflix show, which adds to its popularity and important message. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is filled with harder topics which make it such an important novel for teenagers. It is filled with abuse, bullying, sexual interactions, drugs, alcohol, and suicide. These topics are hard, yet vitally important as many teenagers experience these first hand. This novel takes head-on the harsh realities that many teenagers face and create a platform that allows them to see that even in the worst situations, things can be and will be alright. Teenagers struggling from abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts or actions can turn to this novel to know that they are not alone.



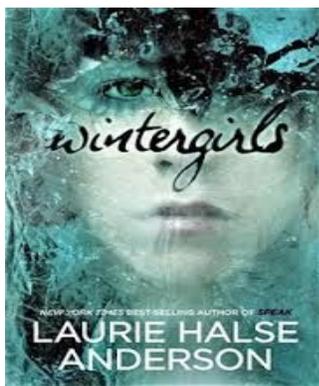
9. *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Wintergirls*. New York: Viking, 2009.

Following the story of eighteen-year-old Lia Overbrook, readers are alongside her as she hates her family and her life and through anorexia and cutting, tries to make herself feel better.

Matters are made worse when her best friend, Cassie, dies in a motel room after a long session of bingeing and purging which causes Lia to begin to spiral out of control as she blames Cassie's death on herself. As the novel progresses, Lia is faced with the realization that she must face her biggest fear which is coming to terms with the truth and face her emotions if she wants to continue to live.

Self-harm, self-hate, and death are the major themes in this novel and though it is sad, the reality is that many teenagers and young adults deal with situations like this every day. One of the main issues in this novel is that all Lia wants is control, and one of the ways she maintains that is through being anorexic. Lia struggles with her parent's divorce, is haunted by Cassie's ghost who seems to want her to cross over too, forcing her to engage in the most severe self-harm episode she has ever experienced. At her lowest weight and almost overdosing on sleeping pills, Lia comes to the realization that she wants to live and begins to turn her life around. This is a very important teaching concept for young adults as many are faced with body dysmorphia. Especially in today's society, problems with depression and body issues are even higher than before so having a novel that struggling teenagers can turn to could be the difference in saving someone's life. This novel deals with real-life situations, peer interactions, and strong situations that young adults deal with.

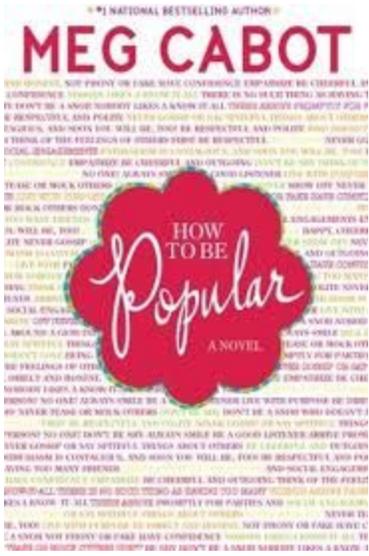


10. *How to be Popular* by Meg Cabot

Cabot, Meg. *How to be Popular*. Harper Collins, 2006.

Stephanie Landry is tired of not being apart of the popular crowd at her school. Still suffering from an indecent involving a red Slurpee that happened years ago, Steph is tired of still being the butt of people's jokes. Willing to do anything to become popular, she beings her journey up the social latter and begins following the rules in a book she found called "How to be Popular". Once she makes it up to the top and hangs with the popular crowd, she begins to wonder if its really worth it. She's losing touch with her two best friends and still getting cyberhate and she feels like she lost apart of her self.

How to be Popular is a novel that many teenagers could identify with. Though popularity is subjective, many teenagers want to feel included and a part of something "cool". High school is a hard time for many individuals and having a novel that shows teenagers the importance of staying true to yourself is the best way to be happy. Main character Stephanie has to come to terms with the fact that popularity does not always mean it seems and that the best way to be actually happy, is to find peace with one's friends, family, and self. She comes to the realization after a cute boy begins to flirt with her, even though he has a girlfriend, showing that the "popular" crowd lacks the depth she wants from her friends. This novel contains elements of the importance of peer relations, the importance of being accepting, and the importance of being happy. Teenagers who feel the need to be accepted by the "in" crowd can find a connection to this novel and can see the truth in it.



Works Cited for pictures:

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