

STRONG PROBLEM NOVELS: CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION

By Kendall Story



WHY IS CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION IMPORTANT?

- Many respected authors and critics argue against realism as a literary concept, but these stories feature young protagonists that hold the potential to connect with readers facing similar struggles.
- Contemporary realistic fiction offers differentiating perspectives when giving a story to emphasize the concept of the many (& at times contradicting) viewpoints that young adults are beginning to be exposed too.
- This genre also portrays the concept that life does not always accompany a happy ending (as in *Looking for Alaska*)



- ***The Fault in our Stars*** – Hazel Grace must choose if she wants to continue to live a life of medical loneliness or pursue a relationship as a “ticking time bomb.”
- ***Looking for Alaska*** – Miles struggles internally with the love and loss of his friend, Alaska (who’s death is left unconfirmed regarding accident or suicide)
- ***Thirteen Reasons Why*** – Exposes the influence that your peers can have on a specific individual and uses situations involving mental health, sexual violence, and bullying to encourage its readers to rethink their own characters.
- ***The Lines We Cross*** – Provides a double narrative to offer opposing sides and force readers to think more about the other side of the story or the “bigger picture.”
- ***Before Goodbye*** – Cate and David struggle with different personal issues but lean upon each other to heal from their prior traumas.
- ***We Were Here*** – Miguel is forced to confront the consequences of his actions, ultimately allowing him to begin the process of healing and moving forward.
- ***I Have Lost My Way*** – Focuses on the important of friendship while battling a personal crisis.
- ***The Outsiders*** – Exposes territorial violence and the internal struggles that many young adults face when “cliques” set the standards for societal acceptance.
- ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** – Emphasizes the transition away from childhood innocence as well as the existence of societal inequalities, racism and general prejudices, and the importance in understanding human morality.
- ***All the Bright Places*** – Focuses on the relationship between a young boy, who fascinated with dying, and a girl who learns what it means to truly live until he eventually takes things too far

CHAPTER 4: BOOKS ABOUT REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES



CHAPTER 5: BOOKS ABOUT FACING DEATH AND LOSS

- *The Fault in our Stars* – Hazel Grace not only suffers with her own life-threatening health conditions but must deal with losing the love of her life to the same disease of a different variation.
- *Looking for Alaska* – Pudge suffers with accepting his friends “reckless behavior” being the assumption for her death.
- *Thirteen Reasons Why* – Hannah Baker ultimately has decided to end her life and this story explains each of her reasonings for doing so.
- *The Lines We Cross* – Before leaving Afghanistan, Mina’s father and aunt are killed resulting in the rest of the family fleeing to Australia.
- *Before Goodbye* – Both characters in this novel suffer with feelings of survivor’s guilt.
- *We Were Here* – We learn at the end of the novel that Miguel had accidentally killed his brother and that was the reason behind being in the group home.
- *All the Bright Places* – While Theodore already suffers with depression and frequent thoughts of suicide, this novel depicts the true reality that many of those suffering with their mental health experience.



- ***The Fault in our Stars*** – Hazel Grace only sees herself as the cancer patient or a "ticking time bomb" and it isn't until she meets Augustus where she learns that she still deserves to experience life.
- ***Looking for Alaska*** – Pudge initially decides to transfer schools because he is "seeking for his Great Perhaps" and
- ***The Lines We Cross*** – Mina is able to open up Michael's mind and begin to create his own set of values aside from what his parents raised him to believe.
- ***We Were Here*** – Miguel is able to realize that his actions do not define who he is as an individual, rather than what he chooses to do moving forward.
- ***I Have Lost My Way*** – Follows the realistic events that drastically affect the three main characters involving discussions of mental health, sexual orientation, and family relationships.
- ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** – While transitioning out of childhood innocence, Scout is forced to create her own opinion of the world as she learns the differences between good and evil.
- ***All the Bright Places*** – While Theodore had always been fascinated with dying, he exclaims how there is always something (no matter how small) stopping him, until one day his decision is taken too far.

CHAPTER 6: BOOKS ABOUT IDENTITY, DISCRIMINATION, & STRUGGLES WITH DECISIONS



The book cover features a black and white photograph of a young woman with long, wavy hair, wearing a beanie, a jacket, and a skirt, sitting on a swing. The text is overlaid on the right side of the cover.

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
AS SEEN ON NETFLIX

THIRTEEN REASONS WHY

'THERE ARE 500 REASONS WHY
I LOVE THIS BOOK ...'
JENNIFER NIVEN

'TREMENDOUS ...
REMARKABLE'
GUARDIAN

JAY ASHER

THIRTEEN REASONS WHY

BY JAY ASHER

This novel exposes its readers to themes of mental health, suicide, depression, and many of the other factors that tend to result in teenage suicide. There are many reviewers of this novel who are disappointed in Hannah's decision to put the blame of her suicide onto thirteen of her classmates, but this novel offers extremely realistic situations of the way that many teenage students treat each other. This novel gives the opportunity for readers to take an inside look at the person in the mirror first.

This novel also encourages the importance of checking in on your loved ones because you never truly know if they are fighting silent demons. By using specific real-life experiences, this novel exposes some of the variations of violence, bullying, teenage suicide, relational issues, struggling to fit in, and facing death or loss that many young adults are not encouraged enough to push through during (but not limited to) their high school years.



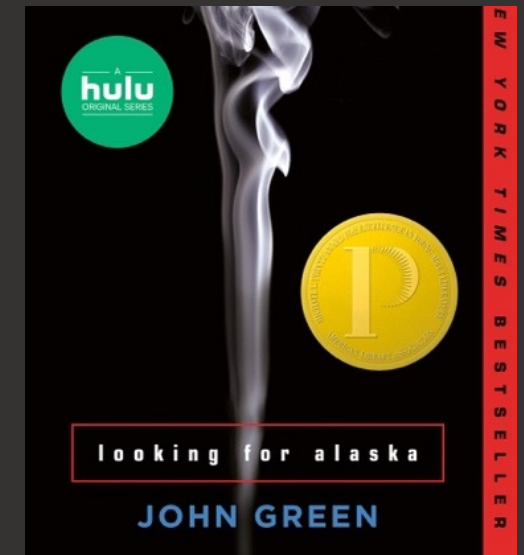
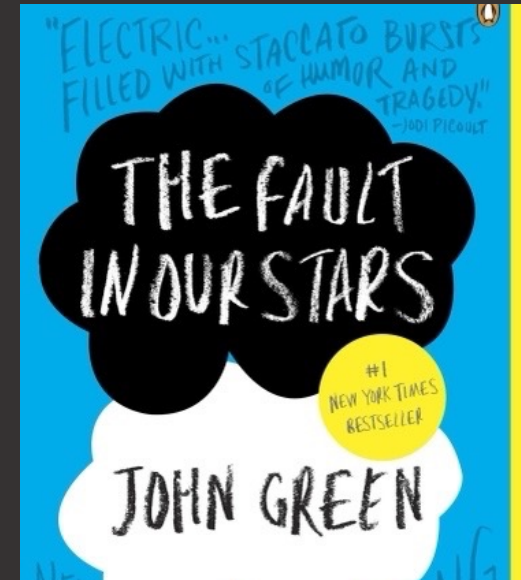
LOOKING FOR ALASKA & THE FAULT IN OUR STARS

BY JOHN GREEN

Both novels carry similar themes involving love and loss. Gus is in remission for a decent portion of *The Fault in our Stars*, but his cancer returns and takes his life before the ending of the novel. This novel deals with a version of death that an individual and their loved ones are actively preparing for as well as unforeseen circumstances. Hazel Grace character specifically does an extraordinary job at portraying some of the genuine feelings that many young adults experience. This novel focuses on the ideals behind true love, loss, anger, depression, grief, and offers a notion to not take your own life or a loved one's for granted because at any point it could be gone.

Looking for Alaska follows Miles and his roommate during their investigation into the *real* reason for their friend Alaska's death after the boys find a note in her bedroom with that said "straight and fast" was the way out of the labyrinth. This novel not only focuses on issues revolving suicide and choosing to persevere instead "running" from your problems instead, but significantly highlights the importance and influence that a good friendship holds. This novel expresses many moments of genuine realism that teens and young adult experience (like acts of smoking, drinking, and sexual explorations) while placing a special emphasis on the importance and value behind true friendships.

Green ultimately includes Alaska and Gus's deaths into his stories in order to give reader's something more realistic than the typical "fairytale happy ending."



I HAVE LOST MY WAY

BY GAYLE FORMAN

This novel follows realistic events that occur to three drastically different strangers with discussions involving family relationships, sexual orientation, and mental health. This novel only takes place over the course of a day, but each of their personal experiences, issues, and insecurities are what bring these three together in order to work on their healing processes. All three characters within this novel face situations involving death or loss that can be relatable by many different audiences while also highlighting the importance that those around you may hold.

GAYLE FORMAN

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of *if i stay*

I HAVE
LOST
MY
WAY



JENNIFER NIVEN

A New York Times Bestseller

ALL

The story of
a boy called
Finch and
a girl named
Violet.

THE

a novel



BRIGHT



PLACES



ALL THE BRIGHT PLACES BY JENNIFER NIVEN

This novel focuses on themes revolving the social stigma behind mental health and suicide. By highlighting the importance of community and support, *All the Bright Places* offers an opportunity for readers to determine their own individuality and identity. Finch cycles through different phases for how he expresses his physical appearance, going from ideas such as “80s Finch,” “Badass Finch,” or even “Dirtbag Finch,” allowing readers greater variations for relatability and the difficulties one can face while trying to “fit in.” I believe this novel is important for young adults because in the end, Finch loses his battle with depression and amplifies on of the more common side effects from mental health being suicide.



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WORK CITED

