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Annotated Bibliography: Contemporary Realistic Fiction

The Many Faces of Abuse

Young adult literature uses abuse and painful situations to relate to something teens may be experiencing to deliver a valuable message. Abuse can be physical and it can also be mental. Dealing with bullying, rape, and violence can change the course of a person's life. This genre of realistic fiction is so valuable for teens struggling to make sense of situations they personally experience or witness. This specific genre is important to me because I hear so many stories from peers of mine. At times I cannot fathom why such horrific things happen to them and find comfort in literature's ability to make sense of it all. Characters throughout books like *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins, all work through their own experiences with abuse while dealing with struggles that many young adults may face.

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson is the story of Melinda who is new to high school. She is raped at a party and is struggling to come to grips with the fact that it happened (Anderson). *Speak* is an honest depiction of something that happens far too often to young women and men. This book acts as a great centerpiece for this genre of contemporary realistic fiction that focuses on themes of abuse. This book displays Exeter Qualities number six and seven, which relate to exposing tough themes and provides emotional growth for teens. Melinda is abused both

physically and mentally by Andy. This book is important to young adult literature because it is honest and unapologetic about the true impacts of being raped and assaulted.

Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky shows how it feels to be somewhere between someone and no one at all. High school freshman Charlie, goes through friendships and the struggles of high school while dealing with the repressed memory of being sexually assaulted (Chbosky). *Perks of Being a Wallflower* shows a different kind of perspective than *Speak* as it tells the effects of being raped from the point of view of a male. This book shows real-life experiences so it fits with Exeter Quality number six. The book furthers the knowledge of abuse by giving another situation in which to relate to. Many other books in the same genre chose to focus on rape from a significant other but *Perks of Being a Wallflower* shows how damaging abuse from a family member can be.

The book of poetry, *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur confronts the many highs and lows of finding identity in this age of social media. One poem in particular, “sex takes the consent of two...”, deals with calling rape by name (Kaur). This poem is blunt and essentially defines what rape is. Exeter Quality number six fits with *Milk and Honey* because it shows how to engage with a difficult theme like rape. In relation to the centerpiece of this topic, in *Speak*, Melinda is unable for much of the book to say the four letter word. Here, in Kaur’s short poem, she does not try to avoid calling it what it is.

13 Reasons Why the novel by Jay Asher, that tells the story of a teen Hannah who deals with bullying, rape and much more which causes her to take her own life. Through tape recordings, she gives reasoning as to why she took her own life. With reasonings ranging from failed friendships to being raped, Hannah shows why she feels suicide is the only way to escape

the pain (Asher). This book essentially is the worst case scenario for a high school student yet something that is all too prevalent which makes it fit with Exeter Quality number seven. It is invaluable as it calls to the attention the consequences of actions and how a choice to treat someone a certain way can have permanent effects.

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29844228-thirteen-reasons-why?ac=1&from_search=true)

Abuse can manifest itself within a character which is seen in *Forgive me, Leonard Peacock* by Matthew Quick. This book follows the story of a teen planning to murder his best friend and subsequently kill himself. First, he has to evaluate all the important people in his life before he goes forward with his plan (Quick). Exeter Quality number six would fit here because it shows the real-life issue of identity. This book is important to young adult literature because of how current the topic is.

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13477676-forgive-me-leonard-peacock?ac=1&from_search=true)

A Child Called "It" is a memoir documenting the life of Dave Pelzer who recounts being abused as a child. Pelzer's mother treated his abuse as a game for him which results physical and psychological damage (Pelzer). This book is valuable to young adult literature because it gives another perspective on physical abuse. Exeter Quality number seven because the book confronts a side of abuse that many people find hard to come to terms with. When trauma stems from childhood, it can have ongoing effects in teen years and adulthood.

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/60748.A_Child_Called_It?ac=1&from_search=true)

Dreamland by Sarah Dessen illustrates how the wrong person can change everything. Caitlin is influenced by a new guy in her life that brings her immense amounts of pain. He is abusing her physically and making her do things she normally wouldn't do (Dessen). Exeter Quality number seven where teens can learn and grow from the topics discussed in the book. This book is important to young adult literature because it shows how susceptible teens are to the influence of others. It also shows a positive outcome for Caitlin who gets the help she needs. *Dreamland* helps to show that though Caitlin faces difficult things, she is still able to find the help she needs to live a happier life. This story could be in many ways inspiring to teens who may be experiencing similar things.

(<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4325.Dreamland>)

Stolen by Lucy Christopher is a story of a case of Stockholm Syndrome. When Gemma is kidnapped from the airport, her captor, takes her into complete isolation in the Australian Outback. Here, Gemma begins to fall in love with her captor under the spell of complete delusion. The captor Ty, uses emotional and mental abuse in order to gain the liking of Gemma (Christopher). *Stolen* best represents Exeter Quality number four where the book goes beyond typical experiences to relate to the reader. Though not all teens can relate to being kidnapped, teens can relate to this same feeling within a relationship. At times, especially in high school, relationships can be abusive without ever being physical.

(https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6408862-stolen?from_search=true)

Crank by Ellen Hopkins shows abuse in many forms. Kristina is enamoured with a boy she meets named Adam. Like in *Dreamland*, he uses her emotions to influence her to do drugs. She meets more guys along her addiction to meth who violate her and rape her, leaving her

pregnant (Hopkins). An Exeter Quality that fits well for this book is number six which involves relating teens to difficult themes. This book is heartbreaking in many aspects, however, it is so important in showing how quickly things can spiral. Not only does Kristina abuse drugs but she is abused physically.

The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold depicts the rape and murder of Susie, a fourteen year old girl. In the book, she describes the view and life from her own personal heaven (Sebold). *The Lovely Bones* goes along well with Exeter Quality number four because it reaches outside the realm of everyday life. Susie describes her supernatural afterlife to deliver the important message of family and the value of life. This book is very graphic and shows the unjust precautions young people have to take.

Abuse, as shown in the works chosen, can come in many different forms. From being abused to abusing a substance, the main characters prove how it changes the course of their future. These books are so valuable to young adult literature because they are raw and honest. It also acts as a way for some to cope with things they may be experiencing. *Speak* acts as a fitting center piece because of how it popularized it is in young adult literature. The theme of abuse is something that should not have to be dealt with alone. Young adult literature is a mechanism for teens to escape and make sense of their reality.

Work Cited

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