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Annotated Bibliography

Female Protagonists in Mystery

For as long as I can remember I have always been interested in solving mysteries. I loved everything from the television show *Blue's Clues* to playing Nancy Drew computer games. Once I began reading more avidly, I became obsessed with mystery fiction. I now understand my obsession after reading the following in *Adolescents in Search for Meaning*, "Through fiction...young readers can experience life at a safe distance while preparing themselves for later experiences in their own lives. These readers learn about characters...by experiencing their lives at a safe and neutral distance, where danger does not threaten" (xi). I was able to escape into the world of the book, and solve complex problems that were often pretty dangerous from the comfort of my home.

After learning about the Exeter Qualities of good young adult literature I found number three to be one of the most important. Number three says, "Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists" (*Literature for Young Adults* 9). With this Exeter Quality and my obsession with mystery in mind I had found the topic of my annotated bibliography.

The work that I am using as the centerpiece of my annotated bibliography is the *Pretty Little Liars* series, but more specifically the first book in the series which has the same title. I

chose this book because the television series is extremely popular right now with young adults; however, I do not think a lot of them realize that it was based off of a series of books. All of the protagonists of the story are teenage females who have to band together to solve the murder of their old friend and find the person who has been threatening their lives. All of these young women are the definition of strong female protagonists because they are putting themselves in dangerous situations to solve a problem.

I am mostly excited about this annotated bibliography because, finding all these novels about strong female protagonists that are solving problems on their own without a male's assistance is empowering for young females. Hopefully young women can learn to embrace their strength as well.

Annotated Bibliography

(* denotes a novel I have not read)

***Golden, Christopher. *Head Games*. New York: Pocket Pulse, 2000. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from Barnesandnoble.com : “Home from college on break, Jenna Blake is horrified to discover that a childhood friend has murdered his entire family—and he's not the only one. During the next two days, several other area teens experience homicidal rages, but are later unable to explain or even recall their actions. The police are leaning toward the popular explanation: brutality influenced by violence in movies and video games. But when Jenna investigates further, she begins to believe that someone is playing sinister head games with her former classmates...and with her, as well. What Jenna needs is someone to take her seriously, but Slick is preoccupied with a mystery of his own, her father has taken off for France, and her college friends have all gone away for the holidays. Jenna's on her own this time.”

Commentary: Nobody is around or willing to help Jenna solve the mystery of what is going on with her former classmates. She has to be strong to be able to overcome the person playing head games all on her own.

Keene, Caroy. *Nancy Drew:#1-64 [Complete Series Set]*. New York City: Grosset & Dunlap, 1900. Print.

Summary: This collection contains the complete series of the teenage sleuth Nancy Drew. All of these mysteries vary in topic.

Commentary: When thinking about a strong female detective, Nancy Drew was one of the first names that came to my mind. Though I have not read all of the books in the series, I have read some, and in the ones that I have read Nancy is always willing to solve the case no matter what sort of danger may be ahead of her.

***Larsson, Stieg, and Reg Keeland. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from Goodreads.com.:“Mikael Blomkvist, a once-respected financial journalist, watches his professional life rapidly crumble around him. Prospects appear bleak until an unexpected (and unsettling) offer to resurrect his name is extended by an old-school titan of Swedish industry. The catch—and there's always a catch—is that Blomkvist must first spend a year researching a mysterious disappearance that has remained unsolved for nearly four decades. With few other options, he accepts and enlists the help of investigator Lisbeth Salander, a misunderstood genius with a cache of authority issues. Little is as it seems in Larsson's novel, but there is at least one constant: you really don't want to mess with the girl with the dragon tattoo.”

Commentary: Though I have not read the book, I have seen the movie, and Lisbeth Salander is the epitome of a strong female protagonist. The other empowering thing about Lisbeth is that she is that she is different. She dresses and looks strangely but she is very clever and good at what she does. These attributes show young women to embrace who they are because everyone has something to offer.

***Patrick, Cat. *Revived*. New York: Little, Brown, 2013. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from Barnesandnoble.com: “It started with a bus crash. Daisy Appleby was a little girl when it happened, and she barely remembers the accident or being brought back to life. At that moment, though, she became one of the first subjects in a covert government program that tests a drug called Revive. Now fifteen, Daisy has died and been Revived five times. Each death means a new name, a new city, a new identity. The only constant in Daisy's life is constant change. Then Daisy meets Matt and Audrey McKean, charismatic siblings who quickly become her first real friends. But if she's ever to have a normal life, Daisy must escape from an experiment that's much larger--and more sinister--than she ever imagined.”

Commentary: Daisy is the epitome of a strong female protagonist when considering the fact that she has died and been brought back to life five times. However, her strength is going to be further tested if she wants a chance to finally live a normal life.

***Sepetys, Ruta. *Out of the Easy*. New York: Speak, 2014. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from: “ It’s 1950, and as the French Quarter of New Orleans simmers with secrets, seventeen-year-old Josie Moraine is silently stirring a pot of her own. Known among locals as the daughter of a brothel prostitute, Josie wants more out of life than the Big Easy has to offer. She devises a plan get out, but a mysterious death in the Quarter leaves Josie tangled in an investigation that will challenge her allegiance to her mother, her conscience, and Willie Woodley, the brusque madam on Conti Street. Josie is caught between the dream of an elite college and a clandestine underworld. New Orleans lures her in her quest for truth, dangling temptation at every turn, and escalating to the ultimate test.”

Commentary: Young Josie is stuck in a bad situation and has a bad reputation; however she aspires to do better for herself. Plenty of young women can relate to feeling stuck in an unpleasant situation and can learn that if they aspire to do better, they can get out of that unpleasant situation.

Shepard, Sara. *Pretty Little Liars*. New York: HarperTempest, 2006. Print.

Summary: *Pretty Little Liars* is about four teenage girls who are trying to forget about the disappearance of their old friend Alison. When the estranged friends find out that Alison was murdered they come together to figure out who could have done it. Things get scarier and more dangerous for the girls when they begin receiving threatening messages from a mystery stalker.

Commentary: This book is the book I chose for my centerpiece work because of the popularity of the television show. All of the protagonists are teenage females that are trying to solve this mystery without the help of a man. This strength is obviously admired by young females due to the popularity of both the books and the show.

***Strasser, Todd. *Blood on My Hands*. New York: Egmont USA, 2011. Print**

Summary: This summary is taken from Barnesandnoble.com: “When Callie Carson discovers ice queen Katherine Remington-Day sprawled on the ground one night, she bends down to help her. It’s only natural—the party’s been a bit wild, after all. And it’s only natural for her to pull out the fake knife she discovers, irritated at one more example of Katherine’s callous disregard of other people’s feelings. But the knife is real . . . and bloody. And then Callie hears the click of one cell phone, followed by another, and another. In minutes, images of her holding the bloody knife have gone viral. Now wanted for murder, Callie is on the run from the police. All the evidence points to her guilt, but she’s determined to prove her innocence, which would mean . . . the real killer is still out there.”

Commentary: Callie is in serious trouble and obviously will not be getting any help from the authorities. She has to stay calm and strong in her situation to be able to solve the murder and clear her name.

***Whitsitt, Claudia. *Identity Issues*. : Blue Jay Media. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from Goodreads.com: “I teach. I raise a gaggle of kids. And my husband's out of town... most of the time. This is my normal, and I'm used to it. I can handle the missing passport... the threatening letter... the late night phone calls... even the potential stalker. No problem. I've got it. Then my life takes a sharp left turn, and I'm speeding down a one way street to hell. No longer sure who is friend and who is foe, one truth remains-I've placed myself and my family in mortal jeopardy. Trust me, I'll do whatever it takes to save my family.”

Commentary: Though the protagonist of this novel is not a teenager, she is still a strong female character. The fact that her family is being threatened forces her to do whatever is possible for her to protect them and herself.

***Wolf, Jennifer Shaw. *Breaking Beautiful*.: Walker. Print.**

Summary: This summary is taken from Barnesandnobles.com: “Allie lost everything the night her boyfriend, Trip, died in a horrible car accident-including her memory of the event. She doesn't remember driving on the cliff road. She doesn't recall jumping from the truck just before Trip lost control. As their small town mourns his death, Allie is afraid to remember because doing so means delving into what she's kept hidden for so long, the horrible reality of their

abusive relationship. When the police reopen the investigation, it quickly turns on Allie and her best friend, Blake, especially as their budding romance raises eyebrows around town. As the threats begin and the survivor's guilt takes over, Allie knows she must tell the truth. Can she reach deep enough to remember that night so she can finally break free?"

Commentary: Allie not only has to deal with the tragic loss of her boyfriend, but she also has to deal with the fact that he used to abuse her and is now getting threatened by someone pretending to be him. Throughout the novel she is going to have to learn to be strong and face her dark past if she is to solve this mystery.

***Wolf, Jennifer Shaw. *Dead Girls Don't Lie*. : Walker. Print.**

Summary: This summary is from Barnesandnobles.com: "Jaycee and Rachel were best friends. But that was before. Before that terrible night at the old house. Before Rachel shut Jaycee out. Before Jaycee chose Skyler over Rachel. Then Rachel is found dead. The police blame a growing gang problem in their small town, but Jaycee is sure it has to do with that night at the old house. Rachel's text is the first clue—starting Jaycee on a search that leads to a shocking secret. Rachel's death was no random crime, and Jaycee must figure out who to trust before she can expose the truth."

Commentary: Teenaged Jaycee must come to terms with the fact that her best friend Rachel was murdered. She has to stay strong in order to find out what happened to Rachel, which means she needs to set aside all the guilt she feels about pushing her away.

Works Cited

Goodreads." *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 May 2014.

"Teen Fiction - Teen Sleuths, Mysteries & Thrillers, Fiction & Literature, Teens | Barnes & Noble." *Teen Fiction - Teen Sleuths, Mysteries & Thrillers, Fiction & Literature, Teens | Barnes & Noble*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 May 2014.