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English 112B

Annotated Bibliography

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Annotated Bibliography: Teenage Depression and Suicide in Realistic Fiction

For my annotated bibliography, I wanted to focus on the topic of teenage depression and suicide. The issue of teen suicide seems to be a problem that continues to grow in the United States. According to the introduction to *Adolescents in Search for Meaning*, “somewhere in the United States, a teenager commits suicide very two hours” (xx). With an issue as serious and dangerous as suicide, it is a wonder that it is a subject that is almost a taboo in the typical high school classroom.

I wanted to choose books that highlighted the affects that the suicide of one person, particularly a teen, can have on those around him or her. Not only did I want books that focused on depression and/or suicide and its affects on others, but also ones that feature characters that suffer first hand from depression and/or thoughts of suicide. The books I have chosen each contain a major character that is either suffering from depression, has attempted to or successfully committed suicide, or both.

The center piece I have chosen is *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher. I chose this as my center piece because does not deal with depression *or* suicide, but rather both depression *and* suicide. The protagonist of the story, Hannah, is highly affected by the incidents involving her and her fellow high school students, which leads her to become not only depressed, but suicidal.

Reading and exploring young adult fiction that addresses suicide and depression instead of treating it as a sort of social taboo would allow for more honest discussions about depression,

suicide, their effects on others, and possibilities for help. If teenage depression and suicide were discussed more openly and honestly in the classroom through the use of fiction, it would give teens the comfort of knowing that others, fiction or not, have the same thoughts, feelings, and problems that they do.

Annotated Bibliography

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

Summary

Thirteen Reasons Why follows Clay Jensen as he comes home to find a box containing seven cassette tapes, containing thirteen stories about fellow classmates. As he listens, he finds that the tapes were recorded by his secret crush, Hannah Baker, who committed suicide only two weeks earlier. As Clay listens to the tapes, he finds out how he and some of his classmates played a role in Hannah's decision to commit suicide.

Commentary

The novel's use of dual narratives allows for two perspectives on the incidents told throughout the book. Clay's reactions mirror the reader's as both are experiencing the stories for the first time; Hannah's depiction of how each person and incident affected her so deeply gives insight into the justification and decision making process that a suicidal teen may have. Asher depicts the emotions and dialect of adolescence well and accurately, making the novel feel realistic and easy to understand.

2. Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Virgin Suicides*. New York: Warner Books, 1994. Print.

Summary

Months after the youngest sister of the Lisbon family commits suicide by jumping out of the window during a parent-chaperoned party, the other four sisters decide to follow suit and commit suicide all on the same night. That is, not before they experience some of life's greatest teenage pleasures, including a high school dance and sex. It is narrated by the boys from the Lisbons' neighborhood and deals with the fact that the girls' deaths and their decision to commit suicide will always remain a mystery to them.

Commentary

This book provides wonderful account of how one suicide can affect so many people. It also explores the idea of seemingly "normal" people contemplate the idea of suicide. It does not aid so much in giving insight into how a suicidal teen may be feeling, but it provides evidence that suicide happens to even the most happy of people.

3. Ford, Michael Thomas. *Suicide Notes*. New York: HarperTeen, 2008. Print.

Summary

Suicide Notes is about Jeff, a 15-year-old boy, who finds himself waking up on New Year's Day in a psychiatric hospital with bandages wrapped around his wrists. Jeff is in utter denial of his situation, and believes him to be out of place among the "nut jobs" surrounding him. Over time, he finds himself noticing that they seem less and less crazy and more relatable to him and his problems. Through the help of two newfound friends, Sadie and Rankin, Jeff comes to terms with his attempted suicide and finds himself on a path of self-discovery.

Commentary

What I found most compelling about this particular novel is that it uses humor to depict such a difficult and, often times, emotionally draining subject matter. The presence of two other teens that have also attempted suicide allows teenaged readers to recognize that suicidal thoughts are present in many people their age. It gives reassurance that there is hope in new friendships and that problems such as denial, struggle with self-identity, depression, and suicidal actions can all be overcome.

4. Halpern, Julie. *Get Well Soon*. New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2007. Print.

Summary

“Anna Bloom is depressed—so depressed that her parents have committed her to a mental hospital with a bunch of other messed-up teens. Here she meets a roommate with a secret (and a plastic baby), a doctor who focuses way too much on her weight, and a cute, shy boy who just might like her. But wait! Being trapped in a loony bin isn’t supposed to be about making friends, losing weight, and having a crush, is it?”

Commentary

This book, like many others on this list, introduces readers to a character who, because of depression, is placed in a psychiatric hospital. What’s interesting about this particular book is that it includes issues that come up *within* the hospital as well as what caused her to be put there in the first place. The exploration of additional issues, such as pushy doctors and secret crushes on other patients, gives a unique perspective on dealing with depression on top of additional problems.

5. Hopkins, Ellen. *Impulse*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007. Print.

Summary

The first book in a two-book series, *Impulse* follows Vanessa, Tony, and Conner. Each of them lead very different lives, but all have one thing in common: they have all tried to commit suicide and now find themselves in a psychiatric hospital. With the help of one another, they try to overcome the problems from their pasts that caused them to end up in the hospital.

Commentary

I like that this book focuses on three individuals who come from different backgrounds. It plays into the idea that no matter who you are or what problems you have, there is always someone who understands what you are going through, and they can often be who you would least expect. Having each of the three main characters lean on each other for support to help through their difficulties gives hope and reassurance that teens who are currently suffering or who have suffered in the past from suicidal thoughts can help someone else going through something similar. The importance of companionship and turning to people for help is a big role in this book.

6. LaCour, Nina. *Hold Still*. New York: Dutton Books, 2009. Print.

Summary

After Ingrid, Caitlin's best friend commits suicide, Caitlin feels alone and lost. When she finds a journal left to her by Ingrid, she begins to realize how and why Ingrid suffered from depression and why she committed suicide. During Caitlin's experience reading through the journal, she begins to realize that she has closed herself off from the potential of new friendships, and starts to reach out to others again.

Commentary

Hold Still allows for a deeper and more intimate understanding of how suicide affects those who are closest to us. It is interesting that this book focuses more on Caitlin's journey out of the depression that she finds herself in rather than Ingrid's depression leading up to her suicide. It's important for teenagers to know that even if they are deeply impacted by the loss of someone close to them, there is always hope.

7. Mickle, Shelley Fraser. *The Turning Hour*. Montgomery, AL: River City Publications, 2007. Print.

Summary

Told through dual narratives of mother and daughter, *The Turning Hour* tells the story of Bergin Talbot, a popular high school senior who, much to her mother's surprise, attempts to commit suicide. The narrative tells how Bergin must now try to return to a normal life, to find a way to fit in again at school, and to repair the relationship between her and her family.

Commentary

Much like *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the use of dual narratives in this book gives a deeper, better, and more personal understanding of how attempted suicide can affect others. The fact that half of the narrative is told through the point of view of the mother of the protagonist would give teenagers a glimpse into how it feels as a parent to have a child want to end their life.

8. Peters, Julie Anne. *By the Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead*. New York: Hyperion/DGB, 2010. Print.

Summary

Daelyn Rice is a girl who is known as an outcast and a freak at her private high school. She has attempted to commit suicide multiple times and has now decided that she is going to do it correctly and successfully and looks to a "website for 'completers'" to aid in her successful suicide. After school one day, a boy named Santana sits with her as she waits to be picked up. Daelyn makes it clear she does not want his company but he is persistent.

Commentary

The issue of bullying is an important one in this novel, as it is the main reason for Daelyn's suicide attempts. It allows for discussion on how actions and words can push someone to the brink, and cause them to want to end their life.

9. Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Print.

Summary

Esther Greenwood is a young, extremely talented young woman with a cynically humorous view of the world around her. She is given a wonderful opportunity working as an intern at a magazine in New York for a month. Despite her enormous potential and seemingly blessed life and opportunities, Esther continuously struggles with depression, is hospitalized, and makes attempts at suicide.

Commentary

Though the text isn't as modern as the others on this list, it gives a realistic look into the mind of a depressed, suicidal young woman who seems to have an exceptional and promising life ahead of her. The study of this book could raise questions and discussions on the pressure one puts on oneself to be successful and what effect it can have.

10. Vizzini, Ned. *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. New York: Miramax Books/Hyperion for Children, 2006. Print.

Summary

Craig is a 15 years old and wants to attend a prestigious and highly competitive private high school. Once he is accepted, he begins to feel the pressure that school puts on its students to be successful and unique, and Craig begins to contemplate suicide. He calls a suicide hotline and is referred and admitted to a psychiatric hospital. During his stay at the hospital he meets new people, confronts his own anxieties about school, and discovers a hidden art talent in himself that acts as a catalyst for his recovery.

Commentary

The book addresses many important issues that occur in adolescent years, including the pressure to succeed in school. One of the most important aspects of this novel is that it is sure to include optimism—Craig's family and friends are supportive of his being in the psychiatric hospital, he finds an outlet to express himself through art, and it ends on a hopeful note that he is able to work past his depression and do something that he truly wants to do rather than fit the mold his private school has set.

Sources

Book synopses:

“By the Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead.” *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 May 2014.

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