

Bibliotherapy and YA Literature

Abstract:

Books can be used as powerful tools for teens to explore their worlds, make sense of what is going on around them, participate in self-reflection, and be exposed to new cultures, beliefs, and perspectives. This article discusses some ways Young Adult (YA) literature can be used to provide teens with an opportunity to identify and work through their emotions through the practice of bibliotherapy. In this article, you will find a brief definition of what bibliotherapy is, how the practice can be used in libraries and with teen patrons, as well as a list of teen fiction materials paired with various mental health disorders many teens face.

Introduction

Books have many purposes in our lives, for education, entertainment, or self-discovery. Books can be powerful tools used to explore the world and make sense of what happens in it, participate in self-reflection, and expose ourselves to new cultures, beliefs, or perspectives. Fictional stories can interlace worlds outside of reality that simulate feelings of empathy, connection, and understanding. For those who feel alone, perhaps a friend awaits within the pages of a good tale. Books can offer insights into peer connection, serve as valuable benchmarks, conversation starters, and companions (Moulton, 2014).

People are emotional beings, and are not always aware of what exactly they are feeling. This is especially true with teens, as they may not have the necessary emotional vocabulary or coping skills to describe what is going on inside of them, due to their young age and developmental stages (Mathers, 2014). Reading for pleasure and positive attitudes toward reading can have positive impacts on adolescent mental wellbeing. Regular reading of fiction is also associated with the development of prosocial characteristics including empathy and perspective-taking. Reading books can also be used for both mental and social support (Merge 2020). Bibliotherapy is one method that can serve as an unobtrusive, non-threatening practice, to help teens relieve their stress and increase their coping skills (Moulton, 2014).

What is Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy is a therapeutic method that uses people's connection to literature to help them deal with challenges in life. It is often a regulated therapy like psychiatry and typically involves a partnership with a registered psychiatrist or psychologist (Mathers, 2014). Through bibliotherapy, readers gain insight into problem-solving and coping skills exhibited by the characters and can apply this learning to their own lives (Moulton, 2014).

Bibliotherapy can help teens deal with the issues they are facing from a safe distance. However, it's not about finding the perfect book that will fix everything in a teen's life. It is about facilitating self-discovery and helping teens cope with their emotions in a safe, comfortable, and authentic way (Mathers, 2014). Bibliotherapy is one strategy librarians and teachers can use to help their students identify, work through, and find resolutions to stressful and uncomfortable situations (Moulton, 2014).

How Can Bibliotherapy be Used in Libraries?

Recommending books for bibliotherapy is about much more than matching up life experiences in books with the life experiences of the reader. It is important to look for key emotions behind a story and how

they are expressed, rather than specific plot points (Mathers, 2014). The reader's response to the story is more important than an intellectual understanding or grasp of the work. The value of the story chosen is dependent on the work's ability to encourage an emotional response from the reader (Tukhareli, 2011).

Researchers have stressed identification as an important part of creating connection between the reader and the characters in the story. The reader should identify with some aspect of the character and be aware of the parallels between their life and experiences and the ones described in the book (Tukhareli, 2011). Bibliotherapy provides the opportunity for teens to reflect upon how characters in the book solved their problems and apply that knowledge to their own lives. It can help readers understand they are not alone or the only ones to experience challenges and discomfort in life. Other important goals to focus on when facilitating bibliotherapy include relieving emotional or mental pressure, developing a sense of self-concept, communicating new values and attitudes, and providing teens with alternative solutions to their problems (Tukhareli, 2011).

Teen books have an emotional awareness and sense of honesty that can often be lacking in adult literature. As adolescence is a time of growth and development, those emotions are often strong and vibrant, and therefore more easily identifiable. As bibliotherapy is about providing readers with an opportunity to identify and work through their emotions, Young Adult literature can be particularly useful (Mathers, 2014). Bibliotherapy can also help to strengthen relationships and partnerships between public libraries and their communities. Developing and providing bibliotherapy services that target vulnerable children and teens demonstrates and reinforces the library's commitment to their community and community needs (Moulton, 2014). This is particularly important in today's age of uncertainty and unpredictability, where people of all ages and walks of life need help coping with emotional issues caused by a lack of security and normalcy (Tukhareli, 2011).

Conclusion

Finding the right book for a teen can be like turning a key in a locked door, providing the opportunity to open insight and reflection and allowing the release of pent-up emotions (Mathers, 2014). When facilitating bibliotherapy it is important to remember the process is not about finding a book that will fix all teens' problems, it is about safely and authentically facilitating self-discovery. Different books will have different meanings to different readers, and books can be meaningful at different points in a person's life (Mathers, 2014). Professionals agree that bibliotherapy is not a replacement for therapy, however, it can be a very beneficial part of the therapeutic process.

Realistic Teen Fiction and Mental Health (Moulton, 2014)

Anxiety Disorder

The Nature of Jadde, Deb Caletti

Anything but Typical, Nora Raleigh Baskin

Waiting for You, Susane Colasanti

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Harmonic Feedback, Tara Kelly

Mindblind, Jennifer Roy

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Mark Haddon

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Playing Tyler, T.L. Costa

Club Meds, Katherine Hall Page

Motorcycles, Sushi, and One Strange Book, Nancy Rue

Bipolar Disorder

Impulse, Ellen Hopkins

All the Bright Places, Jennifer Niven

This is How I Find Her, Sara Polsky

Depression

Lovely, Dark, and Deep, Amy McNamara

It's Kind of a Funny Story, Ned Vizzini

Try Not to Breathe, Jennifer R. Hubbard

Eating Disorders

Nothing, Robin Friedman

Skin and Bones, Sherry Shahan

Pointe, Brandy Colbert

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Not as Crazy as I Seem, George Harrar

Fallout, Ellen Hopkins

Don't Touch, Rachel Wilson

Abuse/Assault

Forgive me, Leonard Peacock, Matthew Quick

Complicit, Stephanie Kuehn

Reality Boy, A.S. King

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