Child Abuse in Adolescent Literature: Let it Fall Through the Cracks or Take Action?

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In recent years, the problem novel has created a near monopoly on the adolescent literature genre. From suicide to divorce, depression to drug abuse, one will never be at a loss to pull a problem novel off the shelves in a local library, bookstore, or classroom. Why are adolescents so drawn to this literature? Maybe it is simply the drama, but maybe these adolescents are trying to find solutions to problems that they are facing in real life. Maybe it is a cry for help. This *could* be the case if a child is reading numerous books about child abuse.

Should we as teachers question students who are reading these texts? Do we address abuse problem novels in class? Do we teach these novels? How do we teach them? Are the incidents in these adolescent problem novels realistic? What are signs of abuse? What do teachers face with mandatory reporting? Can a teacher use these books for bibliotherapeutical purposes? All these questions will be answered in the following sections.

I. What is Considered Child Abuse?

Child abuse comes in many forms, and before discussing its place in literature, it is crucial to know what exactly falls under the headings of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse.

The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA) defines physical abuse as "nonaccidental injury, which may include beatings, violent shaking, human bites, strangulation, suffocation, poisoning, or burns" that may result in "bruises, welts, broken bones, scars, permanent disfigurement, long-lasting psychological damage, or death." Rather than one attack, physical abuse usually is patterned and takes place

over an extended period of time causing both physical and emotional damage (Jaudes 3).

Sexual abuse can be broken down into three categories. The first is non-physical such as an inappropriate touch, an obscene phone call, or a peeping tom. Second is physical which includes fondling, oral or genital stimulation, and intercourse. Third is violent sexual abuse such as rape. Sexual abuse victims, like victims of physical abuse, may suffer psychological harm. Sexual abuse is often referred to as child molestation (What Everyone Should Know...Sexual Abuse 2).

Child neglect is "a continued failure to provide a child with needed care and protection." Children need proper food, clothing, supervision, medical care, affection, attention, and schooling. Like other forms of abuse, neglect causes life-long scars (What Everyone Should Know... Neglect 2).

Emotional abuse is defined as "treatment by a parent or caregiver that can seriously injure a child's emotional development." This can be done verbally with threats or by name calling and/or by not showing affection towards a child or not spending enough time with a child. The child feels continually rejected and forgotten and carries pain that lasts a lifetime (About Emotional Abuse... 2-3).

II. Portrayal vs. Reality

Does child abuse literature accurately live up to and portray what really happens? In my study of thirteen adolescent novels (these novels are marked asterisk on the "Works Cited" page), portrayal was not accurate in most categories. Factors compared were sex of the victim and perpetrator, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, substance abuse, and families.

In the literature, nearly half as many teenaged males (seven) got abused or neglected compared to their female counterparts (twelve). Out of the seven males, four were pairs of brothers who suffered along with their sisters through abandonment in Cynthia Voight's Homecoming and physical abuse accompanied by extreme neglect in V.C. Andrews' Flowers in the Attic.

In reality, it is not more likely that one sex is more abused than the other, and one sex does not receive any form of abuse more than the other (MacDonald). In the literature, the female characters were victims of more violent types of abuse like the severe beatings received by the protagonists of Don't Hurt Laurie and When She Was Good, the near-drowning incident experienced by Miranda in The Watcher, or the burns suffered to the title character of Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes. The only male who suffers from similar abuse to these girls is Forged by Fire's Gerald.

In this powerful novel, three-year-old Gerald is left alone by his cocaine-addicted mother who leaves for a short time to purchase more drugs. While she is gone, Gerald starts a fire and is severely burned. His mother is arrested on neglect charges, and Gerald then lives with his aunt until he is nine. By that age, Gerald's mother has been out of jail long enough to be married and ready to have her son back in her life. Gerald's new stepfather is a heavy drinker who abuses him physically.

. . . we actually see the statistic in action.

Physical abuse is heavily portrayed in the literature. In 1994, 3,140,000 children were reported to child protective service agencies nationwide as being abused or neglected ("Number of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports Nationwide"). Of these cases reported, 22.7 percent dealt with physical abuse ("Statistics: Child Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse").

Physical abuse ranks second only to neglect in these statistics. The literature gives a false represent-ation of reality in this area. Nearly 37 percent (seven of nineteen) of the fictional characters were victims of physical abuse.

Just as in the sex of the victim, the sex of the perpetrator plays no role in the incidence abuse (MacDonald). This comes across clear in the literature as the number of male perpetrators and the number of female perpetrators is equal. The representation of some perpetrators shows another piece of reality—if one was an abuse victim as a child, they are more likely to be a perpetrator as an adult (Macdonald). This is brought across in four different texts—Flowers in the Attic, Don't Hurt Laurie, Homecoming, and When She Was Good.

In When She Was Good, we actually see the statistic in action. Sisters Pam and Em were victims of their father's physical abuse. When the two decide to run away from home and live on their own, Pam (the elder sister) begins to physically abuse Em on a regular basis. This may not be the prime novel for an abused child to read because they may receive the message that even if you leave the current abusive situation, there is still a possibility of abuse.

Although the texts don't delve into the future of any of the victims, research tells us that females who were abused as children are often tend to "hook up" with a spouse much like the

perpetrator of their past abuse (MacDonald). The four fictional females, abused in the past and who in turn abused their children, did not have a relationship with an abusive male. One example is the mother in Don't Hurt Laurie. Laurie's stepfather explains to Laurie that her mother was abusive towards her because she was abused when she was young and didn't know any other way to deal with things.

A factor in which the book accurately portrays reality is that abuse can occur at any age. Although adolescent fiction usually deals with characters near the age of the reader, there are sometimes minor characters involved that are younger. In What Jamie Saw, the title character is not the target of abuse, but his infant sister is thrown across the room by his mother's boyfriend. Gerald of Forged by Fire is abused and neglected at age three, and the reader sees him suffering abuse until the age of seventeen. Em and Pam of When She Was Good were also abused into their late teens. Flowers in the Attic is another novel in which abuse and age have no correlation. The two younger children and the two older children live through the same situation while being locked away in the attic.

Flowers in the Attic also deals with an extreme case of neglect. Statistics prove that neglect is the most widely reported form of child abuse. 53.5 percent of all abuse cases fall into the category of neglect ("Number of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports Nationwide"). Only 5 of the 13 texts involved neglect situations. One of these books is America's favorite new child hero Harry Potter.

In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, readers learn that Harry has been forced by his aunt and uncle to live in the infamous cupboard under the stairs and receives only tiny rations of food. Harry's abuse does not end here; he also suffers emotional abuse. His aunt and uncle Dursley spoil their son, Dudley, who is the same age as Harry, beyond belief. Harry, on the other hand, is given neither physical affection nor material comforts.

Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling has literally performed miracles in getting children to read. Everyone reading the books, adults and children alike, are whisked away into the magical world of the Hogwarts Academy, but most people aren't thinking twice about Harry's battle with neglect and emotional abuse. The readers who probably *are* thinking about it are those being abused themselves.

Young children and some adolescents who are reading the series may very well be in a

situation like Harry's full of abuse and neglect. Some adolescents are just beginning to be able to reason abstractly; whereas young children are locked into a concrete stage of thinking. Children in abusive situations may be even *more* behind cognitively for their age. It is almost absurd for an adult to think an abusive situation will ever end up happily if the child is swept into a fantasy world, but abused children may be wanting to get out of their situation so badly, it doesn't seem so far-fetched. This book may be giving young readers the wrong impression.

> ***. . . some children may have never heard the words "I love you."***

As I mentioned, Harry Potter suffers from emotional abuse as well. Only 6 percent of reported abuse cases fall under emotional abuse ("Number of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports Nationwide"). The number of emotional abuse cases is less often reported because it is the most difficult to detect. Many people aren't aware of emotional abuse and what it is; therefore it goes unreported.

Only four of 13 texts deal with emotional abuse making it the least represent-ed category of abuse in my research, so it's incidence is realistic in the books sampled. The four texts differ vastly in the cases of emotional abuse (Harry Potter already being discussed). If The Giver's Jonas was in our society, he would seem to suffer emotional abuse from his parents due to societal constraints. Some might not even consider this as abuse simply because of how the utopian society of the novel is set up, but we must remember that there are parents out there who may not show any affection. Like Jonas, some children may have never heard the words "I love you."

In the novel, mature readers can see absurdity in the parents' lack of affection. This could lead a reader facing emotional abuse through a process of realization in which they conclude the treatment they receive from their parents is not normal and not tolerable in our society.

In Dancing on the Edge, Miracle, who has been motherless since birth, loses her father. She lives with her extended family who neglects to offer her adequate comfort after her father's death. In Sights Unseen, Hattie lacks motherly love because her mother suffers from manic depression.

The final category of abuse is sexual abuse. Eleven percent of abused or neglected children suffer from sexual abuse ("Number of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports Nationwide"). This population is

underrepresented in adolescent literature. It may be that authors are more apt to use this theme in adult literature.

Only one book included sexual abuse—Forged By Fire. The main character, Gerald, was not sexually abused; his half-sister Angel was the victim. The perpetrator was her father (Gerald's stepfather), Jordan. Having a girl as the victim of sexual abuse is realistic in that girls are more likely to report sexual abuse. Boys are less apt to report sexual abuse because they feel a more intense sense of shame (Litman).

An outside factor in abuse that played a role in Forged By Fire was alcohol. Gerald's mother was a crack addict and his stepfather an alcoholic. Other than Gerald's mother, only male perpetrators in the literature had substance abuse problems, and unlike Gerald's mother, these males were alcoholics.

These alcoholic males used violent forms of physical abuse such as Jordan's hitting Gerald, Em and Pam's frequent beatings from their father in When She Was Good, and Virgil Byrnes pushing his daughter into a hot stove resulting in physical and emotional scars in Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes.

Although abuse can happen in any family or any socio-economic class, substance abuse and alcoholism prove a common contributing factor in child abuse cases (MacDonald).

A commonality running through all of the texts was the absence of a traditional family (mother, father, children). Only one novel, Sights Unseen, displayed this complete family unit. Four novels contained characters whose fathers were dead. Two other characters had lost both of their parents. Interestingly enough, both of these characters—Kit in The Witch of Blackbird Pond and Harry Potter—were locked in small spaces by their uncles and both novels included something about witchcraft.

In the three novels in which there was a stepparent, only one (Jordan in Forged By Fire) was a perpetrator, and only one novel included a significant other in the role of a parent. Van, the mother's boyfriend in What Jamie Saw, proved to be the perpetrator as well. Again, abuse is not exclusive to any socio-economic class nor is it more likely to occur in a traditional or nontraditional family.

Finally I want to discuss the involvement of authorities and happy endings in the adolescent literature sampled in this study. Five texts that reported the abuse had happy endings in which the child was out of the abusive situation by the end of the text.

None of the texts had an incident which was reported that was not dealt with in a positive manner. Only one text lacked reporting *and* a happy ending. Another five did not report abuse and had happy endings.

I would categorize The Giver as having an ambiguous ending. So reporting and living happily ever after gives the same outcome as not reporting and living happily ever after. This could tell the reader they have the same chances of the abuse ending whether or not they involve the police or social services.

"Teacher! My mom does that kind of thing to me!"

On the whole, the adolescent literature sampled does not portray reality. The literature shows that girls are more to be targeted as victims than are boys, while in reality either sex can be a victim. The sampled texts show mainly physical abuse while neglect tops the list in reality. These adolescent problem novels *are* fictional, but since they're dealing with such serious, real life issues, they should try to portray real life a bit better.

III. Do We Teach Child Abuse Literature? And if so, How?

The major concern with teaching a novel with child abuse as a theme is the feeling of uncomfort that may come over the teacher if a child reveals in the middle of class that s/he has been or is being abused (Litman). Should we take the chance of teaching a book like Willo Davis Roberts' Don't Hurt Laurie if we're afraid of hearing something like "Teacher! My mom does that kind of thing to me!" while giving a quiz? If you fear having to deal with such a situation, you should not teach the book. This student and other students in the classroom will see your fear and discomfort and see this as a sign to back off. The students will feel that by dropping the subject they will be protecting you (Litman).

Despite how we may feel at times, our students will often go out of their way to protect us and make us feel comfortable. For this reason, teachers unwilling or unready to tackle this difficult subject would be better off to stay away from it until they *are* ready. The last thing we need to do, as teachers, is to give an abused child the wrong impression about revealing the abuse and/or perpetrator.

Those of us who are ready to deal with the subject have preparation to do. Before even considering a text about abuse, one must make sure the class is ready

to be immersed into the topic. The best way to do this is to let the class choose it. The more ways to allow students to exert some form of ownership in a classroom, the better.

If you feel there is a sense of community and respect in the classroom and the students are ready to tackle the subject, lay out some books that you would like to teach in class. Have a wide variety of genres but not enough so that the students are indecisive (five books would do). Tell the class they get a chance to choose the next book you do and that they should look the books over in class before you take a vote at the end of the week. At the end of the week, have the students vote by writing their choices on note cards (Litman). (This could possibly be paired with a social studies lesson about voting.) Tally their votes over the weekend and be ready to tell them the results on Monday.

If the book dealing with child abuse is chosen, Monday should be used solely as a day of explanation and a day to let your role be known. Let the class know that only a mature class would choose such a topic, and you are proud that they did. Also tell them that you are sure they will do a good job with it. Explain what a serious subject abuse is and give statistics about the number of children abused each year in our country to let the students know just how many lives abuse effects.

You should also point out that the book *is* fiction and that it shows only one representation of abuse (doing this along with statistics will prove helpful—pointing out, for instance, that Sights Unseen includes emotional abuse but only six percent of abuse victims report this).

Most importantly, let the students know that if anyone is having a hard time dealing with the material or needs to talk about abuse or anything troubling, they can come to you and you will be happy to set aside time to talk with them. These words can-not leave your lips unless you truly mean it because there is a very good chance an abused child will take you up on that offer in a heartbeat. It is unfair for them to be exposed to the subject matter and then have no one to go to in hopes of discussing it further.

In actually teaching the piece of literature, journals should be integrated into the curriculum. Eighth grade language arts teacher Dawn Conlan says that more student feeling, emotion, and opinion will emerge in journaling than in any other medium (Conlan). Journals allow us to have private one-on-one conversations with our students. Students feel more

comfortable revealing things to be seen only by a teacher's eyes rather than announcing it in a "group share" type of environment. If a student *does* reveal something in a journal, it is our job to report it (see pg. 11).

In addition to the mandatory reporting, tell the student in private that you are there to talk to if they ever need you. In assigning journals while reading the abuse texts, we have to be ready to take in self-disclosures like, "My dad gets just like Jordan in Forged By Fire when he's drunk" or "Once I saw my mom hurt my baby sister kind of like Van did" (What Jamie Saw) and many other heart-wrenching self-disclosures. It is crucial to be mentally prepared.

"Ask for questions and be available."

When teaching a unit dealing with child abuse, many creative assignments can be given. In groups, students can brainstorm ideas to help a family dealing with abuse. After this, they could write down services or individuals in the community who could help such a family.

If the environment/situation allows, the groups could then interview some of those services/groups/individuals and report their findings to the class. If this isn't possible, you could ask a police officer and/or social worker to come in and speak to the class about the role child abuse/neglect plays in their career (Wolverton).

In another assignment, students could role-play a situation out of a text. Four students could play out the climactic scene in The Watcher as the father, Miranda, Chris, and Evan. Maybe even continue by having the students write up additional parts for those characters and for the police officers. Immediately after, create a panel in which the characters take questions from the class (Wolverton). If students in a school organization such as a National Honor Society are willing to do a service project with abuse, they could prepare an "Information Day on Child Abuse" open to the public (Wolverton). Finally, you could give a creative writing assignment that must include abuse as a factor (Wolverton).

What if you run your class as a reading workshop? Should a teacher be worried if they see a student continually reading abuse literature? Eleven-year social work veteran Tracy Litman says no. She says that rather than being worried we need to be comfortable: "Ask for questions and be available." Make sure you don't plant a seed. It would be optimal to have more than one suspicion beyond just the reading; perhaps bruises, perhaps a journal entry.

Just as in teaching any novel, be open to questions from those reading abuse texts in the workshop environment. If as a teacher you feel it would be a good idea to recommend an abuse book to a recovering victim, take a step back.

Depending on where the student is in their case, a child may naturally gravitate to these books. It is better for them to pick the book rather than giving it to them. That way they feel no obligation to read it (Litman).

Since sometimes merely reading the back of the book will not give enough of a plot summary, you may want to recommend books to the person in charge of the child's case.

IV. Mandatory Reporting

As professionals in education, we are mandatory reporters. Minnesota Mandatory Reporting Requirements State Statute 626.556 reads:

> A person who knows or has reason to believe a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, as defined in subdivision 2 or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused within the preceding three years shall immediately report the information to the local welfare agency, police department or the county sheriff. ("Training; Investigation, Apprehension; Reports").

In these cases, "immediately" is defined as "as soon as possible" but in no event longer than 24 hours. A reporter's name is "confidential, accessible only upon consent of the reporter or by court order" (What Can I Do To Prevent Harm To Children 2).

Upon reporting, a reporter must supply "[their] name and phone number, what happened to the child and when and where the child is now, the names and addresses parents or caretakers, and firsthand knowledge [they] have about the child or family" (What Can I Do To Prevent Harm To Children 3).

It is *not* a teacher's job to be a counselor (Conlan). We need to leave that role to a trained professional like a school social worker. In some school districts, a teacher must report to the principal while in others they must report to the social worker and yet others directly to the police (Litman). As a teacher, it is crucial that you know your district's policy.

Many teachers may feel afraid to report (Litman), but we have to remember that we are in our profession because of children.

Ideally, we want to educate the students, but students can't learn if they can't cope with a situation outside of the classroom (Litman).

Teachers who are scared must recall the consequences of not reporting. First off, the child remains in a dangerous, possibly life-threatening situation. Furthermore, not reporting may result in a misdemeanor, gross misdemeanor, or even a felony (up to two years in prison). Finally, there will also be consequences to face at your school such as probation or suspension (Gornick).

> ***. . . even the literature reinforces the students to confide in teachers.***

Fear and failure to report is intolerable in the school setting. If you are a teacher who is scared to report, it would not be ideal to teach abuse literature. In teaching the abuse literature, you should have already prompted students that they could come to you for help. In a book like Don't Hurt Laurie, the protagonist attempts to go to a teacher for help, so even the literature reinforces the students to confide in teachers.

All mandatory reports are good faith reports (Marquardt). You truly believe that a child is in an abusive situation. When making the report, you may want to bring in written evidence. Provide an example of a student's journal which speaks of abuse. Take pictures in class one day to create a bulletin board to decorate your room. If a child shows signs of physical abuse, show the pictures to the social worker or principal.

Sometimes students report on their own. A discussion in your class or simply reading a section of the text may prompt the student to tell authorities. As mentioned in a previous section, girls are more likely to report than boys because males feel shame in admitting to being abused, especially sexually (Litman).

Some teachers may choose to or feel obligated to try and help the student on their road to recovery. A teacher may volunteer to provide transportation for the child to therapy if needed. They could tutor a student or connect the student with a tutor to help him or her with what s/he's missed in school.

A teacher can simply be available to give the child emotional support. More indirectly, a teacher can get involved with local authorities/agencies to deal with child abuse (What Everyone Should Know About the Sexual Abuse of Children 15).

V. Bibliotherapy

Problem novels can be used in the field of bibliotherapy, and those dealing with child abuse are no exception. Bibliotherapy is defined as "the use of books to help people solve problems." More precisely, it is a "technique for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant based on mutual sharing of literature" ("What is Bibliotherapy?").

Problem novels are successful in this process because they are "patterned after the lives of adolescents [and] their plots and characters mirror [the lives of] our students" (Reid).

Bibliotherapy involves five basic procedures. The first is motivating the individual with introductory activities ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). It may be too overwhelming for a child if you throw a book in front of their face right away. You may want to use Don't Hurt Laurie or The Watcher for a physical abuse victim. You can give them a plot synopsis before they even begin reading.

Adequate time must be allotted for reading the text ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). It may be difficult for a child who has been abused to read about the subject, so we can't expect them to breeze through the material even if they are normally a quick reader. While reading Don't Hurt Laurie, they may come across instances similar to what happened to them. They need time to think about these.

Time must be allowed for incubation before conducting a follow-up discussion. This incubation period should consist of time for the student to do personal reflection about what they've read ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). You may ask them to write reflection if they're comfortable. Otherwise, they can do this personally.

The follow-up discussion should allow students to relate to the text. This can be done orally or by journal entries. Do not start the discussion section by bringing up the abuse. Talk about other points in the plot or what characters the student liked. In Don't Hurt Laurie you may want to start with sibling or friend relationships. Allow the student to be the one to bring the topic of abuse into the discussion. Finally, an evaluation must be conducted at the end of bibliotherapy in order to provide closure for all those involved ("What is Bibliotherapy?")

Bibliotherapy is used for various reasons. It helps in developing an individual's self concept ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). This is especially evident in child abuse cases in which victims tend to begin with a low self esteem. It can increase understanding of human behavior ("What is Bibliotherapy?"), so a student reading Don't Hurt Laurie could see that abuse, even though one comes from a family of abuse, is always wrong. It can provide a way for a person to find interests outside of self ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). This could possibly help a child get interested in reading. It can relieve emotional pressure or stress ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). Although the student may still be thinking about abuse, s/he may not be thinking about their *own* situation. It can help a student speak more freely about the topic ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). They may need that extra push to help talk about their situation. They may also be more comfortable talking about their own abuse through a character or occurrence in the book. They can also simply relate their situation to sections of the literature.

By choosing not to teach or discuss abuse, we are leaving it on the wayside and may be endangering children.

Bibliotherapy, just like teaching literature dealing with abuse, should not be taken lightly. Although a teacher *can* use bibliotherapy, not every teacher should. If interested, one must possess "personal stability; a genuine interest in working with others; and the ability to empathize with other without moralizing, threatening, or commanding" ("What is Bibliotherapy?"). It is recommended that a teacher work with a professional from another field so the most can be gained from the process. Teachers might choose to contact a social worker or psychologist with whom they can conduct bibliotherapy sessions.

Conclusion

What is the answer to the title question? Do we bring abuse literature into our English classrooms? I believe if the teacher is comfortable enough and willing to deal with the topic, nothing but positive outcomes can emerge from the experience. Maybe no students in the class are in an abusive situation. The topic and discussion will enlighten them about abuse and allow them to be able to recognize signs of abuse. If nothing else, these students could count their blessings.

Teaching this literature can prove most helpful to abused or neglected children in the class. Simply letting them know you are willing to talk may do the trick. The literature and discussion will possibly instill in them the view that their own abuse and that of others is intolerable. The literature may give the students ideas about taking steps to get out of their own lives,

and in the best of situations, give the students courage to reveal the abuse to authorities. "Good communication means effective listening, and that requires patience and insight as well as a genuine desire to communicate" (A Parent's Guide to Common and Uncommon School Problems).

As teachers, we should possess all of these qualities. We are in the teaching profession because we love children. We want to help them. Kids may be able to hide that they suffer from abuse. We need to make these students aware that there are services out there to help them and their families. We must urge them to get help. No child should have to suffer from any form of abuse. By choosing not to teach or discuss abuse, we are leaving it on the wayside and may be endangering children. By teaching the literature, we can play a role in putting an end to abuse.

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The Dollangange family is living the perfect life until their father is killed in an auto accident. Their mother cannot support the four children until she claims her father's inheritance. Since her father would disapprove of her having children, they must be locked away in the attic until he dies. The book tells of the three and a half year span spent in the attic.

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One night Jamie's (third grade) mother's boyfriend, Van, throws his baby sister across the room (the mother catches her). The mother takes Jamie and his sister away to a trailer in the woods and after Jamie has missed numerous days of school, his teacher tries to intervene and help the family through the difficult time. They're safe from Van in this secluded place. Or are they?

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Sarah Byrnes has been horribly scarred since the age of three and has been an outcast in school befriended only by Eric, who is the fat kid in class. When Sarah spends time in a home, she refuses to speak to anyone – except Eric, who learns of the abuse she's suffered from her father. Eric wants to help Sarah and contemplates who to tell or whether to tell at all.

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Gerald Nickelby was abused by his mother. At age 3, he was left alone and started a fire which caused his mother to be tried and convicted of neglect allowing him to live with his Aunt Queen. Six years later, Aunt Queen dies leaving Gerald to return to his mother (out of jail for a year), her new husband, Jordan, and their daughter, Angel. Jordan, too, is abusive (both physically and sexually), and his abuse becomes so extreme that Gerald and Angel go to the police. He is sentenced to jail but years later finds his way back to their life for one final round of abuse in which Gerald is the winner.

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Fourteen-year-old Em Thurkill has been coping with her mother's death for years. It doesn't help that her older sister, Pamela, physically abuses her and that her father has remarried to a woman who is simply not cut out to be a mother. Pamela and Em run away from home and make a life for themselves when they cannot deal with their new stepmother. Pamela dies at age 21, and the majority of the book deals with how Em deals with the death of her sister and being alone.

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Miracle McCloy never met her mother. Her family named her Miracle because her mother was already dead when the baby was taken from her body. Now Miracle's father has "melted." Raised by her grandmother who is a psychic, Miracle tries desperately to contact her father and hurts herself in the process.

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Eleven-year-old Laurie is physically abused by her mother, Annabelle. Annabelle's wrath keeps Laurie from living a "normal" adolescent life. Fear keeps Laurie from telling anyone about her home life, but things get so bad that Laurie runs away from home with her younger stepbrother and stepsister. Laurie finally reveals how Annabelle treats her.

*Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. New York: Scholastic, 1997.
Eleven-year-old Harry Potter has lost his parents and lives with his aunt, uncle, and cousin where he spends his time locked away in a cupboard. Harry begins to receive a multitude of letters only to find out that his parents were famous wizards. Harry goes off to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where he, too, is famous. Harry's quest becomes finding the Sorcerer's Stone before the evil Voldemort does.

"Statistics: Child Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse." 2001. The National Center for Victims of Crime. 4 April 2001. <www.nvc.org/stats/ca_csa.htm>.

*Speare, Elizabeth George. The Witch of Blackbird Pond. New York: Dell, 1958.
Kit Tyler sails from England to Connecticut when her grandfather died. In Connecticut, she moves in with her aunt, uncle, and two cousins —the Wood family. Kit meets an intriguing old woman who lives in a home far in the woods. A strong friendship grows between Kit and this woman whom everyone else in town believes is a witch. When the townspeople find out Kit's connection to the woman, Kit is put on trial for witchcraft.

"Training; Investigation, Apprehension; Reports." 2000. Minnesota Statutes. 1 May 2001. <http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us>.

*Voight, Cynthia. Homecoming. New York: Faucett Juniper, 1981. Thirteen-year-old Dicey and her three younger siblings (James, 10; Maybeth, 9; and Sammy, 6) are abandoned by their mother. The four decide to set out on a walking journey to their grandmother's house which is several states away. Dicey becomes a mother learning how to handle money, take care of the children, and make due with what is available. Dicey and her family endure a long, difficult journey during which they encounter interesting people and end up just where they belong.

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