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ENGL 112B Literature for young adults

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Annotated Bibliography Rationale

Young adult literature is misunderstood. Young adult literature is a mechanism for exploring different worlds and social issues and breaking them down to a level a person can understand. A novel like *Twilight* that focuses on a supernatural romance is part of what makes young adult literature so misunderstood. After all, who can relate to a romance between a vampire and a human? However, suppose you remove the supernatural elements from the novel and change the male love interests to a love interest between an African-American boy and a Caucasian girl. In that case, suddenly, the story becomes more grounded in everyday life. Take *The Hunger Games* as another example. When the layers of the story are peeled back, it becomes more of the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy elites than about a future sadistic game for people's amusement. That is the goal of young adult literature. Package a story that young adults will enjoy but still fill the story with complex ideas taken from everyday life.

However, not all young adult literature novels stray into the realm of fantasy. Many can tell a straight story in the real world without fantasy or embellishment. The stories I chose to include in this annotated bibliography fall under “Chapter 4, Contemporary Realistic Fiction: From Tragedies to Romances” from *Literature for Today's Young Adults* and have a specific focus on justice, with relevant topics that include race, gender, socioeconomic status, racism, discrimination, and social justice. I chose the topic of justice/social justice because much of what

is portrayed in the media are issues that center around race and discrimination. I wanted to include texts that show that there is justice in the world for those who seek it and are willing to fight for it.

Justice is often seen in how we punish those who harm others. However, justice can also manifest in righting a wrong, correcting an imbalance, or correcting an inequality. Young adults can see injustices in popular media or in their everyday lives. However, so few people have the opportunity to see justice prevail. This is why justice is so prevalent and needed. No other concept, save for freedom, is as much required as justice. Novels written about corporations exploiting the poor, government entities belittling the accomplishments of people based on gender and race, people locked away in prison under the pretext of justice, and two-tiered systems of justice based on race are all events that have occurred in recent times. Novels that explore and break down the barriers that prevent justice from prevailing serve as a signpost to readers, cautioning those to what may lie ahead and how they might recognize it and ultimately stand against it.

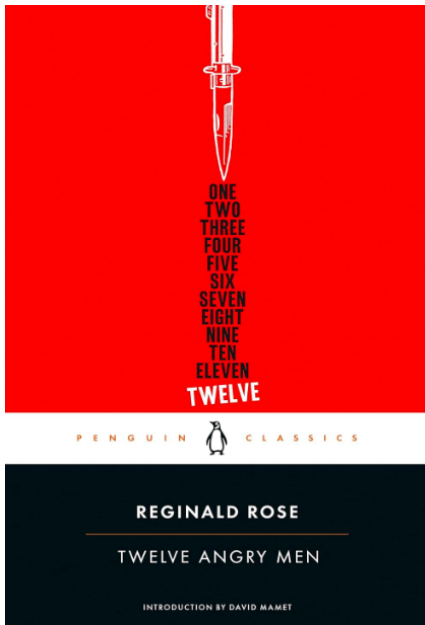
Although many of the books in this annotated bibliography are based on true events and where justice prevailed, justice does not always prevail. However, stories that show that wrongs can be righted, inequalities can be addressed, and justice can and does prevail against those who would see wrong done can fill readers with hope. There are chapters within novels where it may seem that all is lost or that there is no way to win, but in the end, justice prevails. Some novels, such as *1984* by George Orwell, can show a world where justice failed. Such dystopian societies can not compare to the society citizens currently enjoy and give more validity to the fact that justice in our community must be preserved.

Chapter 4: Books About Real-life Life Experiences; Chapter 5: Books About Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story* includes the main subgenres I wish to focus on. Most of the novels follow real life or are adapted from real-life experiences or situations; due to this, they fall under Chapter 4: Books About Real-Life Experiences. However, many of these novels overlap with Chapter 6: Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions due in part to how characters' choices influence or affect that ability to receive or dispense justice. The third component comes from Chapter 5: Book About Facing Death and Loss. Many of the characters in the various novels are either facing death at the hands of the justice system or the potential loss of freedom from incarceration. These elements lead to the inclusion of these three chapters from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*. Despite the overlap between some novels from the various chapters, all books I have chosen incorporate the quest for justice as their central theme.

As young adults venture into the world, they will undoubtedly face situations and circumstances that are unequal, unfair, or face injustice. These situations can include, but are not limited to, race, sex, gender orientation, socioeconomic status, or any intersectionality between them. The novels all contain characters who would speak out against injustice or fight to obtain it. Such texts can encourage young adults to speak out and advocate for themselves when they see injustice visited upon them or others. In a world where these topics are in the news daily, these books can serve as a model for how people of all races, nationalities, genders, or sexual orientations can obtain justice.

Annotated Bibliography:

12 Angry Men by Reginald Rose



Read in 1997/2006

Rose, Reginald. *12 Angry Men*. Penguin Classics, 2006.

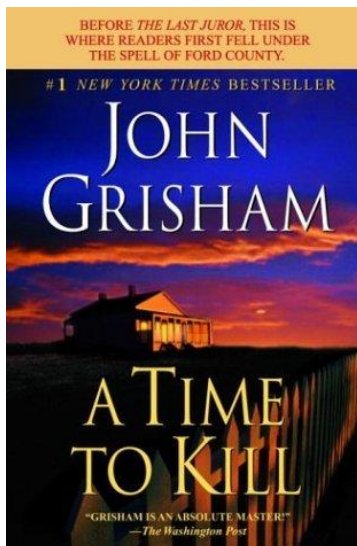
ISBN: 9780143104407 (ISBN10: 0143104403)

12 Angry Men is a story that focuses on one lone juror who is voting not guilty in a trial that threatens to send a young boy to jail for life for the crime of murder. The lone juror attempts not to convince the other jurors that they are wrong but instead focuses on having the other jurors look at the evidence logically and rationally. In doing so, he gets them to see past their preconceptions, biases, and prejudices, and they can render a verdict of not guilty.

The rationale behind why this is my ‘flagship text’ is that the novel demonstrates how quickly a situation can spiral out of control with profound and long-term consequences for the individuals involved all because of bias, racism, or preconceptions and that justice is often the best tool for combating the issues we face today. The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Life Experiences, and Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss. Additionally, the novel deals with justice, racism, and bias/prejudice. The importance of this book lies in one man's determination not to succumb to the pressures placed upon him by others and to look at the facts of the situation. The ability of the individual to look at a problem logically and pragmatically and sway others to see the truth of a given situation or circumstance displays critical reasoning skills that are important for any young adult to emulate. The interplay between the characters is in keeping with what can be reflected in the real world. The novel presents the concept of twelve white men passing judgment

over one Hispanic boy, much like what is seen in modern society. However, through reasoning and careful examination, innocence is preserved, and justice prevails. The novel has been adapted many times into a play and various films. Both the play and the film are short enough to be utilized within a classroom space for further exploration of the dominant themes found in the text. The novel displays Exeter Qualities six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with complex and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.) and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues). Although this is not typical of the young adult experience, it is told mainly from the adult perspective, and because it deals with bias and racial inequality, it nevertheless makes it worthy of inclusion within the adult literature space.

***A Time To Kill* by John Grisham**



Read in 2003

Grisham, John. *A Time To Kill*. Dell, 2004.

ISBN: 9780385338608 (ISBN10: 0385338600)

Two drunken and remorseless young men shatter the life of a ten-year-old girl. The mostly white town reacts with shock and horror at the inhuman crime until her black father acquires an assault rifle and takes matters into his own hands. A defense attorney struggles to save the life of his client in a town that wants to see him put to death for the crime of wanting justice for his

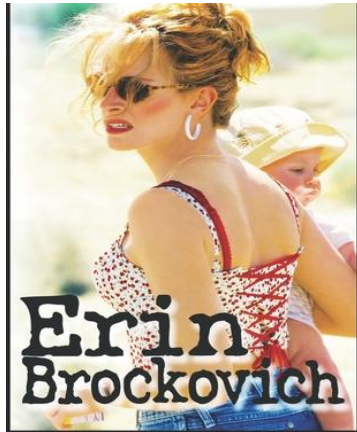
child.

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. Additionally, the novels address concepts of justice, racism, bias/prejudice, and social/societal inequalities. The importance of this book is one man's ability to look past an individual's actions and state of mind. This is done through the representation of activities that seek to balance the scales of justice and shine a light on the dual system of racial justice that can often be found in states where slavery was most rampant. The questions of what is and what is not justice, what actions can be justified, and how blatant racism can affect both previous concepts are thoroughly explored in a novel whose characters' emotions and actions are superbly told. The book also deals with the horrible reality of a person's actions when they feel justice has failed them. The way the story progresses and how the arguments are made from inside and outside of the courtroom showcase the harsh realities that many persons of color face while, at the same time, showing that justice can and does prevail. Although a film version of this novel exists because of some of the more graphic themes, it is unsuitable for classroom use.

This novel displays Exeter Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.) four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). This novel connects to young adults on two levels. The first is to show that while justice is meant to be color-blind, it isn't always and can fail a

person. The second is that justice can and does prevail for those who take the time to convince others so that justice may prevail.

***Erin Brockovich* by Donna Naggie**



I have not read this novel yet.

Naggie, Donna. *Erin Brockovich*. Independently Published, 2020.
ISBN: 9798640253740

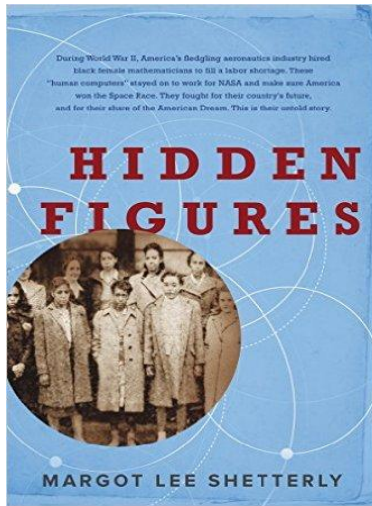
Erin Brockovich tells the true story of how a down-and-out single mother working with a law firm uncovered one of the biggest environmental scandals in American history. As the story progresses, Erin faces the challenges of raising her kids while seeking justice for hundreds of people who had been knowingly poisoned by a major energy company's negligent actions. Erin's determination to view the people not as names on a sheet but as natural persons helped ensure they got the justice they deserved. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. The novel deals with circumstances of justice, bias/prejudice, social/societal inequalities, and exploitation. The importance of this book is multi-varied. The book contains a strong female lead who is a single mother of three, a position not thought highly of in today's society. The book also shows that people can be treated with prejudice and bias and exploited beyond race but also based on class. This form of class-based discrimination/exploitation where the wealthy corporations prey upon the low-income families of a community is a narrative that is becoming more popular as corporations continue to grow while everyday people grow even poorer. The inclusion of the environmental damage and how that

damage doubles to poison the poor people, vastly affecting their health, only serves to showcase the vast power differences between the haves and the have-nots. Young adults would find this novel an enjoyable read as it demonstrates a form of discrimination that is far more prevalent than one based on race and with even farther-reaching and damaging implications for everyone involved. Although a film adaptation exists, its length and some of the novel's more sensitive aspects do not make it suitable for classroom viewing.

This novel displays Exeter Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.), three (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.), four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), five (Lively, varied, and imaginative language that is grammatically correct while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through lexical density or complexity.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). The novel's importance is demonstrated in how justice can prevail even when it seems as though it were all but impossible. It reveals its importance by showing that anyone of any gender and background can achieve the unthinkable.

Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly



I have yet to read this novel.

Shetterly, Margot. *Hidden Figures*. William Morrow PB. 2016.
ISBN: 0062363603

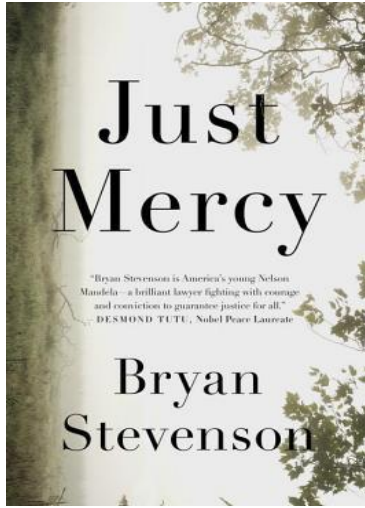
The novel is Set amid the civil rights movement and is the never-before-told true story of NASA's African-American female mathematicians who played a crucial role in America's space program. Segregated from their white counterparts, these 'colored computers' used pencil and paper to write the equations that would launch rockets and astronauts into space. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel, touching on the civil rights era, the Space Race, the Cold War, and the women's rights movement, 'Hidden Figures,' interweaves a rich history of mankind's most incredible adventure with the intimate stories of five courageous women whose work forever changed the world. The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. Aspects of the novel touch on racial injustice, bias/prejudice, social/societal inequalities, and gender. The importance of this book is multi-varied. The book contains multiple solid female leads. Much of the achievements and history behind these women's accomplishments still need to be significantly included. Despite this, their contribution is largely omitted or downplayed, yet American history would have a vastly different outcome without their efforts. The importance of this novel is similar to that of *Erin Brockovich* in that a strong female can achieve the impossible. However, this novel includes the element of race that was so prevalent during the Civil Rights Movement and can still be felt

today. This is significant to young adult literature because it demonstrates that outstanding accomplishments can be made, regardless of race or gender, despite outside pressures that would attempt to limit or dissuade a person from trying. Social justice is achieved in recognition of the women's contributions to NASA, without which it would not have led to America's first human-crewed space flight to the moon. Although *Hidden Figures* has a movie adaptation, its length is unsuitable for classroom use. However, specific excerpts can be used to differentiate or illustrate critical points found within the text.

This novel displays Exeter's Qualities Three (Characters who reflect the experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.), five (Lively, varied, and imaginative language that is grammatically correct while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through lexical density or complexity.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). The novel's importance is twofold because of both the racial aspect prevalent during the civil rights movement and the gender aspect where women were struggling for equality in the workplace. The novel can also showcase the power dynamic within any workplace, from governmental offices to retail jobs involving race or gender. This novel can benefit young adult leaders through the exploration of the intersectionality present in the story. The readers can see that justice can still prevail even if it takes time.

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson



Read in 2019

Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy*. One World, 2014.

ISBN: 9780812984965

Just Mercy tells the story of the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit law office in Montgomery, Alabama, dedicated to defending the poor, the incarcerated, and the wrongly condemned from its earliest days, with a small staff facing the nation's highest death sentencing and execution rates through a successful campaign to challenge the cruel practice of sentencing children to die in prison. One of EJI's first clients was Walter McMillian, a young Black man who was sentenced to die for the murder of a young white woman that he didn't commit. The case exemplifies how the death penalty in America is a direct descendant of lynching — a system that treats the rich and guilty better than the poor and innocent. Stevenson's dogged determination in the face of death threats, police persecution, corruption, and personal struggles eventually leads to Walter's freedom but underscores the fact that many more remain incarcerated. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

This highly acclaimed novel deals with elements from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decision. Additionally, racial injustice, bias/prejudice, social/societal inequalities, racially motivated violence, corruption, and brutality are present throughout the novel. Although not exclusively a young adult literature text as it deals mainly with adults, it does connect to the YA Community as there is a portion of the text that follows Joe Sullivan, who received a life sentence with no parole for a non-homicide crime

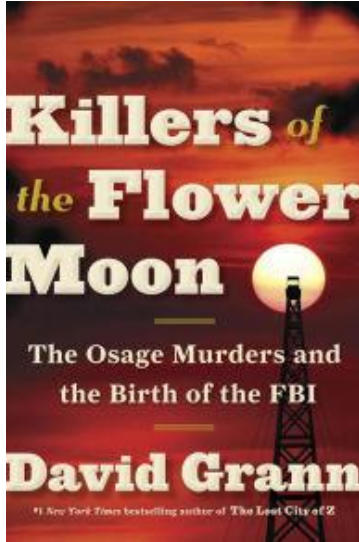
from when he was just 12 years old. Joe's case was poorly investigated, evidence was withheld from the defense, and blatant bias was present in the courtroom. All of these efforts conspired to deliver a sentence of life in prison before he even had a chance to know his place in the world. This story alone can help connect your readers to the character because, regardless of race, such circumstances could arbitrarily work to do the same to them.

Brian Stevenson's work with the Equal Justice Initiative at times places his own life in jeopardy, not just in his quest to obtain justice for those wrongly convicted but in exposing those whose corrupt practices and racist views allowed for such injustice to perpetuate in the first place. This would show that justice can be achieved and serve as a cautionary warning that pursuing the right thing is not easy and can come at a cost, but doing so benefits many others beyond oneself. This form of selflessness is displayed in many of the novels in this bibliography but is most prevalent in *Just Mercy*. A film adaptation does exist, but its length makes it unsuitable for classroom use. However, like *Hidden Figures*, select clips from the film could be used to differentiate or illustrate critical points found within the text.

The novel shows Exeter's Qualities, five (Lively, varied, and imaginative language that is grammatically correct while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through lexical density or complexity.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). The importance of this novel to young adults is that it can not only connect to other young adult literature novels such as *This Is My America* but also shows that regardless of cost, there is no price for fighting for what is right.

***Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* by**

David Gran



I have yet to read this novel.

Gran, David. *Killers Of The Flower Moon*. DoubleDay Paperback, 2017.

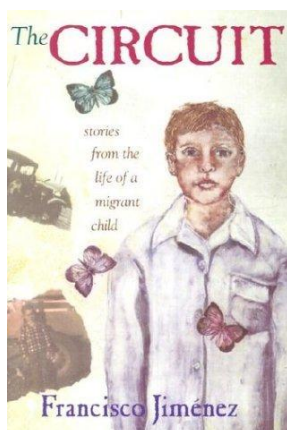
ISBN: 9780385534253 (ISBN10: 0385534256)

Killers of the Flower Moon tells the story of the Osage Native Americans and how they found oil on their reservation land. This oil made them wealthy based on the standards of the time, and all seemed to be going well until they mysteriously began to die off. Anyone investigating the crimes soon suffered a similar fate. Shootings, beating, and poisoning were all inflicted upon the native people in the name of greed. Eventually, the President formed the Federal Bureau of Investigations and tasked them with solving the murders that would uncover one of the most significant and sinister criminal conspiracies in American History. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. This novel depth shows the reader a true story of how a people can be brutalized with impunity. Still, it goes beyond the typical narratives of African, Latino, or Arab American literature that are so prevalent in the media, showing that racism and prejudice are not confined to one skin color and can affect anyone. Through exceptional storytelling, the novel uncovers more and more plot twists and conspiracies as one sinister secret after another is exposed. The book also demonstrates the tremendous personal cost of seeking justice; however, it does not discourage those from pursuing it. The importance of this

novel to young adult literature beyond the racial aspect comes from demonstrating that injustice, corruption, and bias can and do affect entire communities and are not subject to one person, small groups, or institutions but can take over entire communities. Although a film adaptation by legendary director Martin Scorsese, its length of over three hours makes it completely impractical for classroom use. Because of its recent film release, its evaluation of the value of specific scenes for classroom purposes in illustrating critical points has yet to be conducted.

This novel displays Exeter Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.) four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). Although mainly told from an adult experience, the novel has several points where young adults recount their stories or give the reader valuable perspective.



***The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* by**

Francisco Jimenez

Read in 2023

Jimenez, Francisco. *The Circuit*. University of New Mexico Press. 2016

ISBN: 9780395979020

These independent but intertwined stories follow a migrant family

through their circuit, from picking cotton and strawberries to topping

carrots - and back again - over several years. As it moves from one labor camp to the next, the little family of four grows into ten. Impermanence and poverty define their lives. But with faith, hope, and back-breaking work, the family endures. The rich and unique stories show a different perspective on the lives of children living in the United States.

This novel is a novel tailored for young adult literature. In addition to being told from the perspective of a young boy, it also speaks of this boy's struggles in coming to America. The immigrant experience and those of his siblings and family. The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents In The Search For Meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. The novel exposes the reader to racism, bias/prejudice, social/societal inequalities, and socioeconomic and legal status differences. Although there is no direct impact of justice in a legal sense within the novel, there is implied social justice in the inequalities and differences of treatment that the main character describes throughout his years as the son of a migrant family. The novel's short chapters and the individualized experiences of the main character show in depth the life of a child who is not legal in the United States but still is endowed with certain rights.

This novel displays Exeter Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.), four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). The importance of this book within the scope of

young adult literature is to offer another alternative perspective that could be relatable to young adults.

The Hate You Give by Angie Thomas

"Absolutely riveting!"
—JASON REYNOLDS, bestselling coauthor of *All American Boys*



ANGIE THOMAS

I have yet to read this novel.

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate You Give*. Harper Collins. 2017

ISBN: 9780062498533

Starr Carter straddles the line between the poor

in the neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school

she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when

Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the

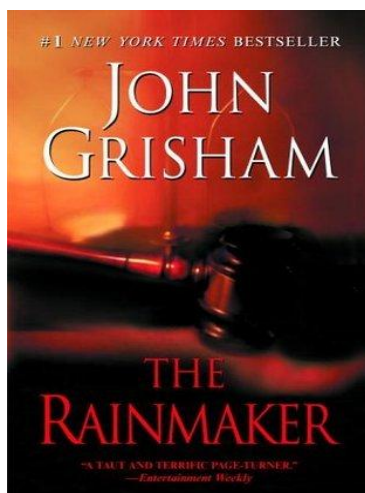
hands of a police officer. Some cops and the local drug lord try to

intimidate Starr and her family. What everyone wants to know is what went down that night. And the only person alive who can answer that is Starr. But what Starr does—or does not—say could upend her community. It could also endanger her life. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. Elements of justice, racism, bias/prejudice, gender, socioeconomic status, and witness trauma are at play within the novel. This novel's brilliance lies in the simplicity of the story's subtext. Everyone has seen someone doing something they shouldn't, and the choice they must make, stay silent or speak up, is familiar to everyone. The option that is made and the implications and ramifications that stem from it are relatable to anyone. However, having the story grounded within the young adult realm makes it even more significant as young adults feel the weight of these decisions more. How the story

twists and turns in the way in which truth and viewpoint bias all work together to tell a story that could be true but is nonetheless false. This story and how it unfolded are reminiscent of how the Black Lives Matter movement started. With this in recent memory, the novel would be more relatable to a young adult literature audience. A film adaptation of this novel does exist. Its length makes it impractical for classroom use. However, clips from it can be used to illustrate critical points.

This novel displays Exeter's Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.), three (Characters who reflect the experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.), four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). Because of the novel's similarity to stories found in popular media and other real-world events, this novel would be a great addition to the classroom paired with other canonical texts.



***The Rainmaker* by John Grisham**

I have yet to read this novel.

Grisham, John. *The Rainmaker*. Delta, 2005

ISBN: 9780385339605 (ISBN10: 0385339607)

The Rainmaker tells the story of a young man barely out of law school who finds himself taking on one of America's most powerful, corrupt, and ruthless companies and exposing a

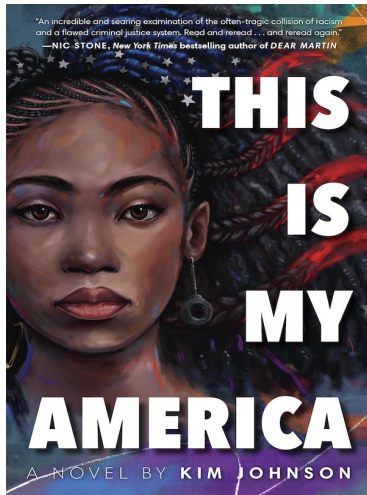
complex, multibillion-dollar insurance scam. In his final semester of law school, Rudy Baylor is required to provide free legal advice to a group of senior citizens, and it is there that he meets his first "clients," Dot and Buddy Black. Their son, Donny Ray, is dying of leukemia, and their insurance company has flatly refused to pay for his medical treatments. While Rudy is at first skeptical, he soon realizes that the Blacks really have been shockingly mistreated by the giant company and that he just may have stumbled upon one of the largest insurance frauds anyone's ever seen -- and one of the most lucrative and important cases in the history of civil litigation. (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. Also, the elements of justice, socioeconomic status, and discrimination are strongly felt throughout the novel. *The Rainmaker* does not deal directly with young adult literature. However, its strength lies in the story itself. Donny Ray could be anyone's more youthful brother or sister. Someone's daughter or son. The novel serves as an example of economic exploitation that can exist when greed and corruption take precedence over civil well-being. The story's message that you can do everything right to support the ones you love and still be exploited by those who prioritize greed over morality is poignant.

This novel displays Exeter's Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.), four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth

through engagement with personal issues.). This novel can also serve as a cautionary tale that if something does not seem right to get help sooner rather than later, or the problems will fester and grow beyond any capacity to fix.

This Is My America by Kim Johnson



Read in 2023

Johnson, Kim. *This Is My America*. Random House Children's Books. 2020

ISBN: 9780593118788 (ISBN10: 0593118782)

Every week, seventeen-year-old Tracy Beaumont writes letters to Innocence X, asking the organization to help her father, an innocent Black man on death row. After seven years, Tracy is running out of time—her dad has only 267 days left. Then, the unthinkable happens. The police arrive in the night, and Tracy’s older brother, Jamal, goes from being a bright, promising track star to a “thug” on the run, accused of killing a white girl. Determined to save her brother, Tracy investigates what happened between Jamal and Angela at the Pike. But will Tracy and her family survive the uncovering of the skeletons of their Texas town’s racist history that still haunt the present? (Summary taken from Goodreads).

The novel deals with elements from *Adolescents in the search for meaning* in Chapter Four, Real Experiences; Chapter Five, Facing Death and Loss; and Chapter Six, Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions. Concepts of justice, socioeconomic status, and discrimination are present throughout the text. This novel is solidly in the realm of young adult literature. However, this story is unique because it deals with aspects found in many other texts reviewed except one, but the perspective is through the lens of a young adult. This perspective

offers the reader a new story, even if the events are not necessarily original. This vision of what the main character is going through is a window into the minds of any young adult who has or has ever had a parent incarcerated.

This novel displays Exeter's Qualities two (Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative books and a fast pace.), three (Characters who reflect the experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.) four (Characters who go beyond typical experiences so that readers can use the fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own lives.), six (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.), and seven (Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.). This novel can also serve as a cautionary tale that if something does not seem right to get help sooner rather than later, the problems will fester and grow beyond any capacity to fix.

Closing Thoughts



Growing up, I read a lot of books. Looking back, I see that there wasn't any particular genre that was read; instead, it was a mix of everything. However, aside from novels like *The Hatchet*, which centered around young adult characters and

were required reading for school, I can't recall ever reading texts centered explicitly around young adults. It wasn't until the demands of my military career left me in a unique position

where all there was to do was read that I seriously took it up again, and I read everything.

Self-help, new age religion, romance, murder mystery, sci-fi, fantasy, fiction, historical novels. I read if it had a cover, and I could get my hands on it.

As I tried to reconcile my experiences from the war, I found authors like Dean Koontz, David Weber, and Mathew Reilly, who are my go-to reads. David Weber became a personal favorite with his *Honor Harrington* series. I could get lost in his novels, which have unforgettable characters and a unique blend of technical writing. David Weber had written critically acclaimed Sci-Fi novels for over thirty years, often collaborating with other authors to create an expansive universe for more readers to enjoy. One of his more recent contributions is *A Beautiful Friendship*, a novel set within the *Honor Harrington* universe but centered firmly within the young adult literature genre. This was the beginning of my awakening to young adult literature.

While I had heard of books that were YA and seen movies that had been adapted from them, I dismissed them as books written for kids until I read *A Beautiful Friendship* by my favorite author and the subsequent books that followed. Soon, other books followed. I had seen the movie *The Hunger Games*, but now I picked up the book and received an entirely different experience. Novels like *The Newsflesh Trilogy*, *The Maze Runner Series*, *Code Talker*, and *A Good Girl's Guide To Murder series* were quickly added to my list of reads. I discovered that the reader's experience was not dependent on the age of the novel's characters or how "adult" or "mature" their experiences were. It was the journey of the characters themselves in the story that they were in that made a novel worth reading. To that end, I will simply say the age-old adage: Never judge a book by its cover.

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