

2010

Healing through reading : bibliotherapy

Cierra Van Treese
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes

Recommended Citation

Van Treese, Cierra, "Healing through reading : bibliotherapy" (2010). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 320.

https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes/320

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Healing Through Reading: Bibliotherapy

Liberal Studies Fall 2010 Senior Capstone
California State University Monterey Bay

By Cierra Van Treese

ABSTRACT

For some children the joy and innocence of childhood is cut short when they face, or are overwhelmed by traumatic events. Bibliotherapy seeks to begin and encourage the healing process in children as they relate and connect to characters within a book. Connecting children to appropriate books is one of the most crucial aspects of bibliotherapy, however, because libraries, books stores and book lists do not organize books by subject, an online resource which provides a list of good, quality books arranged by subject was needed in order for children to be able to explore and connect for themselves. The design of the website and the resources provided have turned out to be successful, and as the website grows to become more inclusive, its impact of connecting people to books will likewise grow.

Backstory:

Books hold a great power. They allow the reader to transport themselves to another place, another life, another situation, and experience things through someone else's eyes. They are a learning tool, a discovery zone, and sometimes they are even a mirror. Books allow the imagination of both children and adults to soar, to be inspired, and to hopefully understand more about themselves and the world.

Books have played an important role in my own life, and the most influential book came to me at the age of 9. My fourth grade teacher gave the class a book list, asking us to choose one book and to write a book report on it. I wrote down a few names that interested me and went to the bookstore with my mother. We left the store with two books, *Trumpet of the Swan* and *Bridge to Terabithia*. I decided to read *Trumpet of the Swan* because my best friend was also reading that story. I placed *Bridge to Terabithia* on my bookshelf for another day. I didn't think about the book again until almost two years later.

It was the summer after my seventh grade year. My best friend had just suffered a brain aneurysm during the last week of school, and had tragically died. I was lost without him. I picked up *Bridge to Terabithia*, looking for a distraction, for solace and comfort. What I found was so much more. As I read about Jess and Leslie's friendship, I remembered Alex's and mine. I began to think about how much fun we had, and not about the pain of losing him. When Leslie suddenly died, I cried harder than I had in any other book I had read before. However, the story, just like mine, didn't end with Leslie's death. It continues on, as Jess searches for understanding, closure and hope, all of which I found along with him. When I turned the last page, I no longer felt so alone, confused or lost. I had found myself again.

Every child should have the opportunity to connect with a book, with reading, in the way I learned from *Bridge to Terabithia*. Good stories speak universal truths to the reader, no matter where they are in his or her life. Although what one person gets out of a book will not be exactly what someone else gleans from the experience, they are both discovering and finding insights together.

Books are an important tool in the classroom, and should be used to allow children to have these experiences. Literature in a classroom should not only encourage and foster a love of reading, but should also speak to children honestly about their world. The books teachers ask their student's to read should grab them by the hand and take them into a place where they can learn about themselves and the people around them, about other cultures, viewpoints and lives.

Furthermore, children need to be exposed to books that not only teach them about other cultures, but children also need to have their identity affirmed through literature. When children are able to find themselves in a book, and to connect to characters and situations that are similar to their own lives, they can begin to further discover and recognize who they are and the potential for who they might become. My goal is to be able to begin the process of helping children find books they connect to and identify with, so that they might have a similar experience of hope and healing through reading, just as I was able to do with *Bridge to Terabithia*.

Problem Statement:

Childhood is a time where children are able to play, create, imagine, discover and grow into healthy, successful adults. However, childhood is rarely a picturesque experience, and although all children experience stressful events as they grow up, for some children the joy and innocence of childhood is cut short when they face, or are overwhelmed by traumatic events.

Bibliotherapy seeks to begin and encourage the healing process in children as they relate and connect to characters within a book. Connecting children to appropriate books is one of the most crucial aspects of bibliotherapy, however libraries, books stores and book lists do not organize books by subject. Instead, book lists are often organized by title and author, and many times give no additional information and thus leave a child to the fate of picking out a book by mere guesswork or judging a book by its cover.

A comprehensive resource needs to be developed which organizes books by subject, and provides additional information of the book past just the title and author, such as a summary of the plot and themes along with reviews by previous readers.

Literature Review:

Childhood is a time where children are able to play, create, imagine, discover and grow into healthy, successful adults. However, childhood is rarely a picturesque experience, and although all children experience stressful events as they grow up, for some children the joy and innocence of childhood is cut short when they face, or are overwhelmed by traumatic events.

Trauma in childhood can be either a one-time occurrence, such as a death of a loved one, or can occur multiple times such as in sexual abuse (2009; Grosmisch, 2010; Murray 2010). Children who experience one traumatic life event may be diagnosed with type one post traumatic stress disorder, have trouble sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks of the event, and hyper vigilance, which can then lead to depression or anxiety in adulthood (Grosmisch, 2010; Murray 2010). Type II post-traumatic stress disorder appears in children who have experienced repeated trauma (2009; Grosmisch, 2010; Murray, 2010). Many of the symptoms or effects are the same, however children who are exposed to repeated traumatic events often experience increased fear and emotional numbness (2009; Grosmisch 2010).

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2009), childhood trauma can have serious long-term effects and often extends into adulthood as it can be related to depression, conduct disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and other antisocial or violent behaviors. However, the damage that trauma and abuse cause on a child's well being can be significantly diminished.

Early intervention close to the event or events, such as familial and outside support, and having a safe environment where a child's basic needs are met, allow the child to safely begin to process the event, find understanding and begin healing (2009; Grosmisch, 2010). An important

aspect of the healing process is when a child interacts with others who have gone through similar experiences and life events. This is often seen through bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy acknowledges the power of books and their effectiveness in helping another person come to terms with their own lives and experiences (Jones, 2006). Bibliotherapy encompasses a wide range of genres, from self-help books to fiction; bibliotherapy seeks to provide support and understanding (Jones, 2006; Brewster, 2008). Bibliotherapy typically has three subsections: self-help or non-fiction books which provide advice, creative bibliotherapy which focuses on the use of fiction, poetry, biographies and creative writing to improve mental health and well being, and informal bibliotherapy which focuses on reading groups and recommendations given by others (Brewster, 2008).

Creative bibliotherapy specifically has been used to explore children's feelings and self-esteem, their own experiences and ability to relate to others and other characters, as well as boosting their own understanding, self-esteem and ability to adjust and deal with the changes in their lives (Amer, 1999; Cohen, 1987; Gates 1980). Books also allow an opportunity for children to explore and develop their own feelings and attitudes about the world around them (Mosher, 2001). Finally, as a character finds understanding for themselves, the reader can also mirror that into his or her own life and often experiences the beginning of closure, healing and the restoration of wholeness.

The steps for successful bibliotherapy include defining the specific problem the child is experiencing, creating goals and activities to address that problem, selecting the appropriate book for the situation, incorporating reading and post-reading activities or reflections and then evaluating the effects bibliotherapy had on the child (Dyches, Johnstun, Johnstun, & Prater, 2006; Jones 2008).

When children are faced with a traumatic life event which could have resounding effects on the rest of their lives, books can provide support, understanding and guidance through what is termed bibliotherapy. This type of therapy through the use of books is most effective when a book or resource is carefully selected for a child's specific needs or situation, and when reading and post-reading reflections are incorporated to help the child think carefully about their own lives and what he or she is learning. Once a child has been able to connect to a book or character and starts to deal with his or her own experiences, the negative traumatic effects can be reduced and the healing process begins.

Project Proposal and Community Partner:

For my capstone project of Fall 2010, I have collaborated with the Seaside and Marina Public Libraries in order to create a comprehensive resource of books for children and young adults which deal with difficult themes. The themes the librarians and I have chosen to specifically address are those of racism, homophobia, disabilities, the loss of a loved one, and broken families. We chose these five areas because we believe they are not only widely experienced, but are of particular importance in the diverse area of Monterey that we live in.

Our vision is to create a website that is more than just a book list, and provides summaries of the books suggested, and reviews from previous readers. We want to include these resources so that children and young adults can find the right book for their interest or situation instead of just choosing a book by its cover or title, which is all most book lists allow for.

The completed website itself will be the evidence of my project and my deliverable aspect of the project. Once I have completed the website, I will present it to the Marina and Seaside Libraries which then they can post a link to on their own websites and perhaps the Monterey County Public Library website as well.

I will also hold a workshop with a group of students in order to introduce them to the website and begin to connect children with books and start the process of healing in their lives. The workshop will consist of anywhere from five to twenty students, depending on who is available to show up and responds to our advertising, and there will be two meetings. The first as an introduction and to show them the website and suggest books, the second to check back with them in a week to two weeks in order to assess how the students enjoyed the books they chose and if the website was useful and successful.

Significance:

Bibliotherapy seeks to begin or encourage the healing process in children as they explore their feelings and experiences in order to relate to others and other characters who are going through similar difficulty in their lives. It is the hope that books can provide support and understanding so that as the characters search and find understanding for themselves, the readers can also mirror that back into their own lives and wholeness can begin to be restored.

One of the most important aspects of effective bibliotherapy, is finding the appropriate book for each child and that the book is something he or she is interested in reading. Because libraries, books stores and book lists do not organize books by subject, a resource which provides a list of good, quality books arranged by subject is needed in order for children to be able to explore for themselves. Furthermore, many book lists only provide the name of a book and the author, therefore leaving one up to finding out more about the book on their own through different resources, which can be time consuming and frustrating.

What makes this project unique is that by creating a comprehensive website which provides books organized by subject, with descriptions, reviews and an area for further reading and reflection, children and adults alike will be able to explore the website, and find a book which fits their specific interest and needs more readily.

The main purpose in adding descriptions and reviews of the book is so that the reader doesn't have to simply "choose a book by it's cover" but can make an informed decision about which book, or books, he or she would most enjoy reading. After the description of the book, there will be the review section, where other readers can read about how someone else responded to the book. This is a nice addition because it goes beyond the summery of just talking about

what the book is about, but allows a reader to find out how the book impacted another person in a positive way.

This website is also beneficial because it is in a public domain and can be accessed by children around the world, instead of a book list distributed in a certain area or a small workshop held for a limited number of children. This website makes a broader impact by being accessible to the vast area of the internet and by bridging the gaps between children wanting to read, and allowing them to make that first step towards the right book to engage them, encourage them and hopefully spark a love for reading in young minds as well.

Assessment:

The method I will be using in order to assess the successfulness and helpfulness of my project will be a survey handed out to members of the two workshops I conducted, as well as to the staff at the Monterey County Libraries in Seaside and Marina, along with other random participants from the libraries, California State University Monterey Bay and the Monterey Peninsula College who will be introduced to the website and asked to fill out the survey based on their impressions.

This survey is anonymous and is the best tool for assessing the successfulness of the project because it allows for participants to be asked specific questions while gleaming opinions from a wide range of people in order to see how useful this website turned out to be. There will also be an area for further comments and suggestions, in order to allow participants to offer their thoughts for improvement.

Furthermore, when I was able to conduct the two workshops for students at the Monterey County Libraries, they each were given a notebook in order to write down and express what they were dealing with or going through, what they were learning from the book they were lead to, and how of if that book was an effective bibliotherapy tool.

The journals had no specific format from me, and when completed by the students, I will retain a copy of two of them in order to submit with my results and final capstone project as evidence to the successfulness of bibliotherapy in general.

Results:

In order to assess my capstone project, I conducted a survey which was handed out to members of the two workshops I conducted, as well as to the staff at the Monterey County Libraries in Seaside and Marina, along with other random participants from the libraries, California State University Monterey Bay and the Monterey Peninsula College who were introduced to the website and asked to fill out the survey based on their impressions.

Almost all of the results I received back were positive. The first question the survey asked was whether or not the website was easy to navigate, and I was very surprised and pleased that every survey response had replied "very easy." Furthermore, all of the responses said the book summaries were helpful or somewhat helpful, with a few responses commenting on how a few of the books described were not available at the libraries or local bookstores. Over 70% (42 of the 58 surveys) said they would recommend the website to others and over half said they would use the website in the future themselves.

When it came to describing how the website was different than other booklists or resources the respondents cited how the website was organized by subject, which was praised across the board, along with how the website had included pictures of the books, which added a more visual appeal with the summaries and reviews. This was very encouraging as the website being a unique and helpful resource was one of the main outcomes I was aiming for.

Many students and respondents expressed a desire for the website to be expanded

in order to include more books on each topic along with additional categories. Some of the most suggested categories included bullying, abuse, eating disorders, and to break up the disabilities category into physical disabilities, mental disabilities and terminal illnesses such as cancer. The libraries and I agree that the website can and will continue to be expanded to include more topics with as many good, quality books as possible. I also received some suggestions for books the students had read and enjoyed, and I will be looking into those books and continuing to post and expand the website in the future.

One aspect that is disappointing for me in terms of the website is how many of the books which deal with controversial or difficult topics such as gay and lesbian youth or a death in the family are either out of print, or not available in the county public libraries or carried in the local bookstores. Although this poses a problem and makes some of the books less accessible to a wide range of people, I did make sure all of the books I included in the website could be ordered over amazon.com for less than ten dollars.

A reason I came across as to why the books which dealt with tough or honest issues children faced in their everyday lives were challenged, banned or out of print was because many adults see children as needing to be sheltered or protected from the realities of the world, or from difficult ideas and information. According to the ALA, the American Library association, the top three reasons cited for challenging materials is because they were considered "sexually explicit," contained "offensive language," or were "unsuited to any age group" with violence and homosexuality as the next two reasons why a children's book is not offered at a public library. There are organizations which are fighting for children's (and authors') rights to the freedom of speech and against book banning such as kidSPEAK, Bookstore People, the United Students Against Book Banning along with other free speech

groups which have become a part of the cause and joining up with one or a few of these organizations might be another good way in the future to get the website out and to continue to expand it.

Conducting the workshops was another very positive aspect of my capstone project. In the workshop I held at the Monterey County Library in Seaside, eight students showed up between the ages of 8 and 15, We met twice, the first to give them a notebook in order to journal in, and to show them the website so they could use it as a resource to connect them to a book which they could identify with. The students who gathered journaled about dealing with a variety of difficult issues from a brother and sister who had just lost their mom to cancer, to the youngest girl who had just finished her last chemotherapy treatment after being diagnosed with Leukemia. After they had journaled what they were interested in reading more about, they were given the option to talk about it as a group or to simply go onto the website and see if they could find a book which they were interested in. All but one of the students wanted to talk about it in a group, and as each child shared their experiences, we all were able to grow and encourage each other. All the students left with a book to read and when we met again a week and a half later, it was to talk about how successful the experience was for them.

The youngest girl who had just finished treatment for Leukemia read *Zink* by Cherie Bennett. She said she loved *Zink* because even though it had a fantasy element to it which was engaging, the main character still had real emotions in facing the disease and seemed so realistic. She said, "I liked *Zink* because the emotions Becky had about the disease were very much like my own and it felt like she was really telling me the truth about how hard it was for her without trying to say, like everyone else does, that it's just going to be okay in

the end, like, I know it was for me, but sometimes you just want someone to listen to you being afraid." Her response to the book was exactly what I, and she, had been hoping for. Through reading, she was able to connect to a story and begin to make sense of not only how lucky she was to be in remission, but also said, "I know if my Leukemia comes back, no matter what happens, it's not going to be so bad because if Becky could be at peace with it, so can I."

There were many other encouraging remarks and conversations I was able to have with the children, and I loved being able to work with them in such a small group. We opened up to each other as I told them about my own experience with losing my best friend and how *Bridge to Terabithia* helped me understand I wasn't alone in the world and began the healing process in my own life. Once I had told my story, the kids seemed to relax around me and were much more open about sharing what was going on in their own lives, and I was very glad I had decided to share my own story with them.

Although the website will continue to grow and expand, I wish that I could continue to meet with kids individually or in small groups like this one in order to have a more personal aspect to the process of bibliotherapy. However, as I can't be everywhere at once, the website will be able, and has been able, to connect children and young adults with books which they can identify with much more broadly than I could imagine doing or reaching as a single person.

In working with the Monterey County Library in Seaside and Marina I learned that people can be very enthusiastic about a project and wanting to get involved, but are not necessarily able to follow through on their promises. For instance, the librarians I talked to and presented to on both sites were encouraging and excited about my project, they both

helped me find books and decide upon which categories to address on the website specifically. However, we had wanted to be able to publish a link to Healing Through Reading on the Monterey County Library webpage, which did not go through as the board in charge said the website's theme was too sensitive and they couldn't endorse books which they did not have at their libraries. Furthermore, I was supposed to conduct two separate workshops, one at the Library in Seaside, and one in Marina. The workshop planning in Marina fell through as the librarian became busy with her own life and was no longer able to help me plan a sufficient time to hold a workshop in that location.

Another thing I learned about the logistics of planning a workshop was that the optimal time for a workshop was around 4:00 to 5:00 pm, as that is after school gets out but before most dinner times. I was also really glad that I was able to buy new, blank journals for the children who came to the workshop and provided pens and pencils for them to write with as well.

In the end, the Healing Through Reading website has been and will continue to be a success, and as it grows and expands, so will its, and by an extent, my impact will also grow. Holding the workshop in Seaside and being able to talk to the children on two different occasions about their lives was so rich and I am very thankful for the journey we all embarked upon together. I can only hope to have similar experiences in the future and bring what I have learned into my future classroom.

References:

- (2009). Childhood trauma and its effects. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/publication_store/your_child_childhood_trauma_and_its_effects
- Amer, K. (1999). Bibliotherapy: Using fiction to help children in two populations discuss feelings. *Pediatric Nursing*. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FSZ/is_1_25/ai_n18608664/?tag=content;coll
- Brewster, L. (2008). The reading remedy: Bibliotherapy in practice. *APLIS*, 21(4), 172-177.
- Cohen, L.J. (1987). Bibliotherapy. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 25(10), 20-24.
- Dyches, T., Prater, M., Johnstun, M. & Johnstun, M. (2006). Using children's books as bibliotherapy for at-risk students: A guide for teachers. *Preventing School Failure*, 50(4), 5-13.
- Gates, S. (1980). Children's literature: It can help children cope with sibling rivalry. *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal Child Nursing*, 5, 351-352.
- Grosmishc, E. (2010). Types of childhood trauma. Sallyfd. <http://www.brighthub.com/>

education/k-12/articles/74850.aspx

Jones, J. (2006). A closer look at bibliotherapy. *Young Adult Library Services*, 5(1), 24-27.

Murray, B. (2010). What is childhood trauma? Uplift Program. http://www.upliftprogram.com/facts_childhood_trauma.html

Appendix:

Below is a copy of the survey which was posted on the website and handed out.

Healing Through Reading Feedback

1.

1. Did you find this website easy to navigate?

☐ Very Easy

☐ Somewhat Easy

☐ Confusing

☐ Difficult

Other (please specify)

2. Did you find the book summaries helpful?

☐ Yes, very helpful and interesting

☐ Somewhat helpful

☐ Not descriptive enough

☐ Not helpful at all

Other (please specify)

3. Would you personally use this website in the future?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why or Why not?

4. Would you recommend this website to someone else?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Why or Why not?

5. Are there any additional categories or genres you would like to see this website address?

6. How is this website different, or not different, than other book lists or resources you've seen or used before?

7. Do you have any further suggestions for improvement of this website?

Pictures of the website at www.healingthroughreading.wordpress.com:

Healing Through Reading

A comprehensive resource



[Home](#) [Books](#) [dealing with racism](#) [Broken Families](#) [Disabilities](#) [Homosexuality](#) [Loss](#) [Survey for Feedback](#)

Welcome

Posted on [October 9, 2010](#) by [cvanatreese](#)

Welcome, our vision has been to create a website that is more than just a book list, and provides summaries of the books suggested, and reviews from previous readers. We are seeking to create a comprehensive resource of books for children and young adults which deal with difficult themes. The themes chosen are those of racism, homosexuality, disabilities, the loss of a loved one, and broken families. We chose these five areas because we believe they are not only widely experienced, but are of particular importance in the diverse area of Monterey County California that we are located in. Furthermore, we also want to include these resources so that children and young adults can find the right book for their interest or situation instead of just choosing a book by its cover or title, which is all most book lists allow for.

Feel free to browse the progress, and leave comments and suggestions, your input is greatly appreciated!

Thank you,
Monterey County Library Staff and California State University Monterey Bay Capstone Student.

Posted in [Updates](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

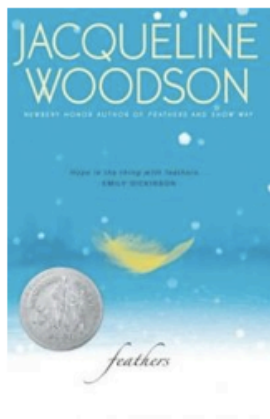
Recent Posts

• [Welcome](#)

Archives

• [October 2010](#)

Books dealing with racism



Feathers by Jacqueline Woodson
118 pages

Narrator Frannie is fascinated with Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is the thing with feathers/ that perches in the soul," and grapples with its meaning, especially after a white student joins Frannie's all-black sixth-grade classroom. Trevor, the classroom bully, promptly nicknames him "Jesus Boy," because he is "pale and his hair [is] long." Frannie's best friend, Samantha, a preacher's daughter, starts to believe that the new boy truly could be Jesus ("If there was a world for Jesus to need to walk back into, wouldn't this one be it?"). The Jesus Boy's sense of calm and its effect on her classmates make Frannie wonder if there is some truth to Samantha's

musings, but a climactic faceoff between him and Trevor bring the newcomer's human flaws to light. Frannie's keen perceptions allow readers to observe a ripple of changes. Because she has experienced so much sadness in her life (her brother's deafness, her mother's miscarriages) the heroine is able to see beyond it all—to look forward to a time when the pain subsides and life continues. Set in 1971, Woodson's novel skillfully weaves in the music and events surrounding the rising opposition to the Vietnam War, giving this gentle, timeless story depth. She raises important questions about God, racial segregation and issues surrounding the hearing-impaired with a light and thoughtful touch.

A short introduction to the story:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlSXG6pPmP4>

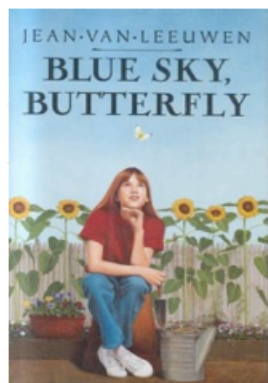
Recent Posts

• [Welcome](#)

Archives

• [October 2010](#)

Broken Families



Blue Sky Butterfly by Jean Van Leeuwen
128 pages

Twig, 11, tries to remove any vestige of her father from her life after her parents separate. She's furious at him and refuses to see him—how could he leave without even saying good-bye? Meanwhile, Twig's mother has stopped functioning: Dust balls pile up under the piano and dirty laundry overflows the basket in the bathroom. Twig's older brother, Nathan, offers little support, retreating into his guitar music and staying away from home as much as possible. Twig tries valiantly to cope before admitting she's not up to the task. She calls upon her quirky, world-traveling grandmother for some pinch-hitting. Gradually, through the

healing power of a garden, Twig's mother returns to the living and Twig begins to adjust to the changes in her family.

Reviews:

This book is both sad and upbeat. I felt bad for Twig because she is in a bad place and I want things to work out for her. — Anonymous

Twig's story is brief but intense, honest and effective. Through characters that are heartbreakingly real, Van Leeuwen offers compassion, acceptance, and hope to those who are suffering through the devastation of divorce. — Susan

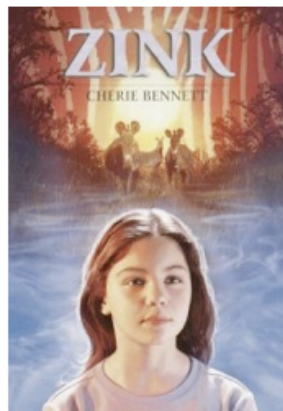
Recent Posts

• [Welcome](#)

Archives

• [October 2010](#)

Disabilities



Zink by Cherie Bennett

256 pages

On the grassy plains of East Africa, a herd of zebras listen to their leader tell stories of a legendary spotted zebra called Zink. Meanwhile, self-conscious Becky Zaslow is diagnosed with leukemia. The narratives merge when representatives of the zebra brood pass into the human world to visit Becky in the hospital in her imagination. (where only she can see and hear them). While still a patient, she is in turn twice transported to their homeland. There, though her pain disappears, she faces such challenges as escaping from a band of marauding lions and swimming across a raging river with a monkey on her back. The hospital scenes stand

out for their authenticity, and Becky's bravery in facing cancer becomes all the more poignant as a result of Bennett's candor in setting forth the girl's ordeals.

Reviews:

Zink is my favorite book. It's about this girl who usually doesn't stand up for herself in school. Then she's diagnosed with cancer and had to go through a scary experience. But along the way, she had a herd of zebras in her imagination to help her. The zebras taught her bravery and many of life's lessons. She gets bolder and learns to stand up for herself towards the end.

Recent Posts

• [Welcome](#)

Archives

• [October 2010](#)

Homosexuality



The House You Pass on the Way by Jacqueline Woodson

160 pages

Staggerlee Canan is shunned by her peers because her mother is white. This is not the sole cause of her isolation, however. She has a secret. In sixth grade, she had kissed another girl. Rejected by that friend, Staggerlee has no one to talk to about her sexual feelings until her adopted cousin, Trout, visits for the summer when both girls are 14. Both wonder if they are gay, but sexual identity is really only one of the things that troubles them. Their platonic intimacy is the intense kind shared by friends who see themselves as different from the crowd. Asked by Trout to say whether she's black or white, Staggerlee replies, "I'm me. That's all."

That they seem to be taking different paths in the end adds to the story's poignancy. This richly layered novel will be appreciated for its affecting look at the anxious wonderings of presexual teens, its portrait of a complex interracial family, and its snapshot of the emotionally wrenching but inarticulate adolescent search for self.

Reviews:

This is a very important book for everyone to read, not just young adults. As a gay woman I see the power of literature like this. Everyone needs to realize that these are issues that are present in our world and cannot be ignored as if they are not there because a few people are

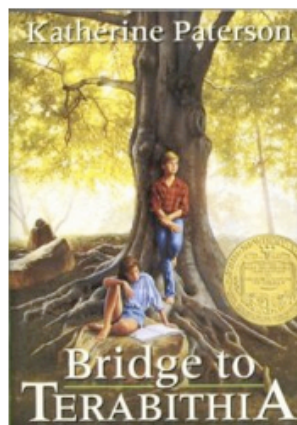
Recent Posts

• [Welcome](#)

Archives

• [October 2010](#)

Loss



Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson
144 pages

Jess Aarons wants to be the fastest boy in the fifth grade—he wants it so bad he can taste it. He's been practicing all summer, running in the fields around his farmhouse until he collapses in a sweat. Then a tomboy named Leslie Burke moves into the farmhouse next door and changes his life forever. Not only does Leslie not look or act like any girls Jess knows, but she also turns out to be the fastest runner in the fifth grade. After getting over the shock and humiliation of being beaten by a girl, Jess begins to think Leslie might be okay. The two create a secret kingdom in the woods named Terabithia, where the only way to get into the castle

is by swinging out over a gully on an enchanted rope. Here they reign as king and queen, fighting off imaginary giants, sharing stories and dreams, and plotting against the schoolmates who tease them. Jess and Leslie find solace in the sanctuary of Terabithia until a tragedy strikes and the two are separated forever.

Reviews:

This story is a beautifully written piece about being young and all that comes along with growing up and it tells the tale of the wonders of finding someone who falls into place along side of you in the long walk of life. I was completely captivated in 6th grade when we were

assigned this book, and reading it again I find details and pieces of it that refuel my love of the book. While this story is wonderful for younger kids in elementary school, it also has a sense of humor and a sense of the world that caters to any age. This is a fantastic story, and I highly recommend it. — J. Shields

The book itself is short and an easy read, but what the book really says to the reader is quite a bit bigger than its page count. Much like growing up, this book is both sweet and painful, and Paterson truly has a great handle on what its like to be a ten year old, fifth grade boy. So for all those readers who aren't afraid of a book that will make them cry (for both sad and warmer reasons) then I recommend this book. It doesn't matter if you're a child or an adult, *Bridge to Terabithia* is universal. — Pat Shand

Recent Posts

▪ [Welcome](#)

Archives

▪ [October 2010](#)