

Comforting Reads for Difficult Times

Addiction/Substance Abuse

The Education of Ivy Blake

By Ellen Airgood

Nancy Paulsen Books, 2015. 240p.

In this companion to *Prairie Evers*, Ivy's world is turned upside down when she is reunited with her alcoholic mother and moves back to the city where they must start a new life together.

GR. 3-5

Sunny Side Up

By Jennifer L. Holm, illus. by Matthew Holm

Graphix, 2015. 224p.

This graphic novel tells the story of 10-year-old Sunny, who is spending an unplanned summer vacation with her grandfather in Florida. A new friend, some comic books, and a loving, supportive Gramps help Sunny find the strength to be able to work through her feelings surrounding her older brother's substance-abuse problems.

GR. 4-8

Adoption

Soar

By Joan Bauer

Viking, 2016. 304p.

Jeremiah lives to play baseball. His dreams of playing are put on hold when he learns not only that he has a heart condition but also that he and his adoptive father must relocate for a temporary job for his father.

GR. 3-5

Just Like Me

By Nancy Cavanaugh

Sourcebooks/Jabberwocky, 2016. 256p.

Three very different girls who were adopted from the same orphanage in China meet at a summer camp where they are to journal their bonding experience for the camp counselor.

GR. 6-8

Home at Last

By Vera B. Williams, illus. by Chris Raschka and

Vera B. Williams

Greenwillow, 2016. 40p.

Lester is happy when he is adopted by Daddy Albert and Daddy Rich; however, at night he finds he cannot fall asleep, because he is alone and wonders when he will feel truly at "home."

K-GR. 2

Body Image/Self-Esteem

Wild about Us!

By Karen Beaumont, illus. by Janet Stevens

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 40p.

All the animals in the zoo look different or have unique things about themselves in this celebration of individualism, told by Warty Warthog.

K-GR. 2

El Deafo

By Cece Bell, illus. by the author

Amulet Books, 2014. 248p.

In order to keep from being isolated, Cece must wear an external hearing device in order to hear. Being different in this way makes her lonely until she discovers a true friend.

GR. 3-5

Bob Is a Unicorn

By Michelle Nelson-Schmidt, illus. by the author

Kane Miller, 2013. 28p.

All of Bob's friends know that Bob is not a unicorn . . . or is he?

K-GR. 2

Wonder

By R. J. Palacio

Alfred A. Knopf, 2012. 320p.

Auggie Pullman was born with severe facial anomalies and is now entering school for the very first time. Despite the cruel nicknames and shock of his middle-school classmates, Auggie shows courage and optimism in new challenges.

GR. 6-8

Bullying

Eddie the Bully

By Henry Cole, illus. by the author

little bee books, 2016. 40p.

This young bully gets a second chance at making friends when the new student Carla shows him some kindness.

K-GR. 2

Lila and the Crow

By Gabrielle Grimard, illus. by the author

Annick Press, 2016. 32p.

Lila has just moved to a new town where she is teased about the color of her hair and

skin. An encounter with a crow helps her to embrace her true self.

K-GR. 2

Rhyme Schemer

By K. A. Holt

Chronicle Books, 2014. 176p.

This novel in verse explores bullying from the bully's point of view, as the bully is caught and comes to terms with what he has done wrong and how to make amends.

GR. 4-5

Depression

Emily's Blue Period

By Cathleen Daly, illus. by Lisa Brown

Roaring Brook Press, 2014. 56p.

Emily struggles with the depression and sadness she feels after her parents separate, making a connection between this difficult moment in her life and Picasso's Blue Period.

K-GR. 2

The Whole Story of Half a Girl

By Veera Hiranandani

Delacorte, 2012. 224p.

Half Hindi Indian and half Jewish American, Sonia feels caught in the middle. As she tries to maneuver in school, she finds it also difficult to maneuver at home when she learns her father is suffering from depression.

GR. 3-5

Friends for Life

By Andrew Norriss

David Fickling Books, 2015. 240p.

Four young teens, linked by thoughts of suicide and feeling like outsiders, form strong bonds of friendship. The author handles the topic with sensitivity and positive suggestions.

GR. 3-6

The Color Thief: A Family's Story of Depression

By Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters, illus. by

Karin Littlewood

Albert Whitman, 2015. 24p.

A child describes the black-and-white world his father experiences when he falls into depression, and the color that returns gradually as he undergoes counseling.

K-GR. 2

Divorce/Single Parent

Raymie Nightingale

By Kate DiCamillo
Candlewick Press, 2016. 272p.

In order to draw her father, who abandoned the family, back home, Raymie enters a beauty contest. In order to do this, she has to do many good deeds, and along the way, she befriends two other contestants in the contest who have also lost someone close to them.

GR. 3-5

Monday, Wednesday, and Every Other Weekend

By Karen Stanton, illus. by the author
Feiwel & Friends, 2014. 40p.

Traveling between his mother's house and his father's house causes confusion for Henry Cooper and his dog, Pomegranate. Which is "home"?

K-GR. 2

Weekends with Max and His Dad

By Linda Urban, illus. by Katie Kath
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. 160p.

In order to adjust to their new lifestyle, third-grader Max and his dad spend quality time on weekends going on small "adventures."

K-GR. 2

Grief

Where Do They Go?

By Julia Alvarez, illus. by Sabra Field
Triangle Square, 2016. 24p.

Told in poetic form, this book provides answers to many tough questions children ask about death.

K-GR. 2

The Question of Miracles

By Elana K. Arnold
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 240p.

Sixth-grader Iris is looking for just one miracle in the gloom that surrounds her after moving to rainy Oregon and grieving the death of her best friend. What she finds is a life that is surrounded by small miracles.

GR. 6-8

My Brother's Shadow

By Tom Avery
Schwartz & Wade, 2014. 176p.

Eleven-year-old Kaia isolates herself after her older brother's suicide. The mute wild

boy who mysteriously appears outside her boarding school helps draw Kaia out of her mental funk as she begins to work through her grief.

GR. 4-6

The Distance to Home

By Jenn Bishop
Alfred A. Knopf, 2016. 240p.

Her beloved older sister's death changed everything about baseball-fanatic Quinnen's life. In a story that goes back and forth between last summer and present day, the reader finds out what happened on that terrible day and why Quinnen quit baseball.

GR. 3-5

The Dead Bird

By Margaret Wise Brown, illus. by Christian Robinson
HarperCollins, 2016. 32p.

One day while playing in the park, a group of children find a bird that has just died. They bury the bird and grieve its passing together.

K-GR. 2

Summerlost

By Ally Condie
Dutton Books, 2016. 272p.

Still reeling from the death of her father and younger brother in a car accident, Cedar and her family move into a quiet summer house to grieve and heal. An unexpected friendship and an intriguing mystery help Cedar move forward through her sadness one day at a time.

GR. 6-8

Nest

By Esther Ehrlich
Wendy Lamb Books, 2014. 336p.

Set in the summer of 1972, Naomi "Chirp" Orenstein's mother is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis; rather than face the disease, and in the throes of depression, Chirp's mom chooses to end her own life. Chirp and her family must stick together to find a way through this tough time.

GR. 4-6

The Secret Hum of a Daisy

By Tracy Holczer
Putnam Books, 2014. 320p.

After Grace's mother's sudden and unexpected death, Grace is sent to live with the grandmother she has never known. She doesn't want to be there with this stranger, but in spite of herself, Grace becomes attached to the small town where her mother

grew up and all of the people that knew and loved her parents.

GR. 6-8

Ben's Flying Flowers

By Inger Maier, illus. by Maria Bogade
Magination Press, 2012. 32p.

Emily loves observing and drawing butterflies—flying flowers—with her younger brother, Ben. After his death from a long illness, Emily slowly comes to terms with the loss by remembering the things she and Ben did together. Includes a note to caregivers.

K-GR. 2

Cry, Heart, But Never Break

By Glenn Ringtved, illus. by Charlotte Pardi
Enchanted Lion, 2016. 32p.

Death personified comes to the home of four children and their ailing grandmother; throughout his visit, Death explains why sorrow and grief are as essential to life as delight and happiness.

GR. 3-5

Home Situation Change

Crenshaw

By Katherine Applegate
Feiwel & Friends, 2015. 256p.

When Jackson was a little kid, he had an imaginary friend: a cat named Crenshaw. Crenshaw appeared about the time that the family lost their house and had to live in their van for a few months. Now it might be happening again—and all of a sudden Crenshaw is back.

GR. 3-5

Hold Fast

By Blue Balliett
Scholastic Press, 2013. 288p.

The Pearl family happily lives in a small apartment, until one day when Dash, the father, disappears. A violent break-in forces the family to move into a homeless shelter, where Early realizes her world is slipping away.

GR. 6-8

Yard Sale

By Eve Bunting, illus. by Lauren Castillo
Candlewick Press, 2015. 32p.

With her family downsizing from a house to a small apartment, a young girl reminisces about the items she is saying good-bye to at their yard sale.

K-GR. 2

Illness (Catastrophic)

The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya

By Jane Kelley
Feiwel & Friends, 2013. 224p.

Alya, desperately ill, finds hope when an orphaned African gray parrot, Zeno, comes to her window.

GR. 3-5

What a Beautiful Morning

By Arthur A. Levine, illus. by Katie Kath
Running Press Kids, 2016. 40p.

Things are different with Grandpa when Noah comes to visit this summer. Although it is difficult when Grandpa cannot remember simple things, and scary when he does not even recognize Noah, Grandma gently reminds Noah to focus on what Grandpa still has and not on what he has lost.

K-GR. 2

Just My Luck

By Cammie McGovern
HarperCollins, 2016. 240p.

Fourth-grader Benny is struggling. His father is ill, his best friend moved away, and school isn't going well at all. He is doing his best to be a good person, student, and brother, but no one seems to be noticing.

GR. 3-5

Immigration

It Ain't So Awful, Falafel

By Firoozeh Dumas
Clarion Book, 2016. 384p.

Set in the tumultuous times around America's bicentennial and growing anti-Iranian sentiment, Zomorod (Cindy) Yousefzadah finds comfort in family and making new friends.

GR. 6-8

We Came to America

By Faith Ringgold, illus. by the author.
Alfred A. Knopf, 2016. 32p.

Bold illustrations punctuate the short text in this celebration of the diversity found here in the United States because of immigration.

GR. 3-5

The Journey

By Francesca Sanna, illus. by the author
Nobrow Press, 2016. 48p.

"Last year our lives changed forever," so

begins one family's heartbreaking journey as refugees. This is one family's story, and yet it is also a universal story of leaving, losing, and, ultimately, hoping for a better future.

K-GR. 2

A Piece of Home

By Jeri Watts, illus. by Hyewon Yum
Candlewick Press, 2016. 32p.

Hee Jun and his family are slowly adjusting to their new home in America, but it is difficult when everything is different and new. Learning that a rose of Sharon is the same as a Korean *mugunghwa* blossom ties their two homes together and helps to make things just a little bit easier.

K-GR. 2

Kindness

Peace

By Wendy Andersson Halperin, illus. by the author
Simon & Schuster/Atheneum, 2013. 40p.

A collection of sayings and illustrations that promote peace.

GR. 6-8

If You Plant a Seed

By Kadir Nelson, illus. by the author
Balzer + Bray, 2015. 32p.

A rabbit and a mouse learn the sweetness found when they plant seeds of kindness.

K-GR. 2

Each Kindness

By Jacqueline Woodson, illus. by E. B. Lewis
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012. 32p.

After her teacher gives a lesson on kindness, Chloe and her class realize that they have treated the new student, Maya, poorly.

GR. 3-5

Natural Disaster

The Rhino Who Swallowed a Storm

By LeVar Burton and Susan Schaefer Bernardo, illus. by Courtenay Fletcher
Reading Rainbow, 2014. 32p.

A young mouse who once lost her home to a storm is frightened by severe weather; her father calms her fears with the tale of a rhino who was also displaced but learns "you're never really alone when bad things happen."

GR. 3-5

Another Kind of Hurricane

By Tamara Ellis Smith
Schwartz & Wade, 2015. 336p.

Two boys, both grieving terrible losses, somehow connect with each other in the chaos after Hurricane Katrina.

GR. 6-8

Flood

By Alvaro F. Villa, illus. by the author
Capstone, 2013. 32p.

This wordless picture book shows the devastation caused by a natural disaster, as well as the resilience and hopefulness of a family whose home has been destroyed.

K-GR. 2

Resilience

The Bell in the Bridge

By Ted Kooser, illus. by Barry Root
Candlewick Press, 2016. 32p.

This quiet book captures the loneliness of a boy left at his grandparents' house for two weeks in the summer. Is the sound he hears when he hits that old metal bridge with a rock only an echo? Or could it be the answering sound from someone just as alone as he?

K-GR. 2

The Invisible Boy

By Trudy Ludwig, illus. by Patrice Barton
Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. 40p.

A shy young boy who feels invisible uses art and drawing to keep from feeling lonely, until a new student in class befriends him.

K-GR. 2

Snowflakes Fall

By Patricia MacLachlan, illus. by Steven Kellogg
Random House, 2013. 32p.

Written as a tribute to the lives lost in the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut (without mention of the event), this gentle picture book uses the uniqueness of snowflakes, the rhythm of changing seasons, and the promise of dawn after darkness to offer uplifting comfort.

K-GR. 2

What Do You Do with a Problem?

By Kobi Yamada, illus. by Mae Besom
Compendium Books, 2016. 36p.

A child has a problem and is afraid to confront it; when he finally does, he learns it is not exactly what he expected.

K-GR. 2

Trauma/Violence/War

A Game for Swallows

By Zeina Abirached, illus. by the author
Graphic Universe, 2012. 188p.

Abirached's graphic memoir of her childhood in war-torn Beirut shows how, amidst the horrors of conflict and fear, one can always find solace in the strength of family and the comfort of neighbors.

GR. 6-8

Year of the Jungle

By Suzanne Collins, illus. by James Proimos
Scholastic, 2013. 40p.

In this memorable story, Suzy's father leaves for the Vietnam War, and she spends her first-grade year waiting for his return. When her father's postcards stop coming, she struggles with understanding what it all means.

K-GR. 2

Painting for Peace in Ferguson

By Carol Swartout Klein
Treehouse Publishing Group, 2015. 48p.

A community painting project reclaims

neighborhoods damaged by rioting in Ferguson, Missouri, in this moving photographic tribute to resilience and hope.

GR. 3-5

The Forgiveness Garden

Lauren Thompson, illus. by Christy Hale Feiwel & Friends, 2012. 32p.

Two children, weary of generations of fighting and violence between their villages, take a courageous step toward peace by building a garden together. Inspired by the actual Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, Lebanon.

K-GR. 2

Resources for Adults

Books

Tender Topics: Picture Books about Childhood Challenges

By Dorothy Stoltz, Elaine Czarnecki, and Buff Kahn

Huron Street Press, 2013. 176p.

Grouped by topics such as life lessons, divorce, and trauma, this listing of more than 300 picture books with annotations is recommended to get adults and children talking about the subjects.

Journal Articles (Available Online)

What Makes a Good Picture Book about Loss?

By Thom Barthelmess

Horn Book Magazine 89, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2013): 56-62

www.hbook.com/2013/09/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/what-makes-a-good-picture-book-about-loss

Barthelmess offers solid advice on how librarians can evaluate children's books about death.

Tender Topics: Exploring Sensitive Issues with Pre-K through First-Grade Children through Read-Alouds

By Sue Mankiw and Janis Strasser

Young Children 68, no. 5 (Mar. 2013): 84-90

www.naeyc.org/yc/article/tender_topics_exploring_sensitive_issues_mankiw_strasser

A graded, annotated list of books for children about topics such as bullying, death, divorce, homelessness, military deployment, race, and tragedy and disaster.

Websites/Webpages

How to Talk to Children about Difficult News and Tragedies

American Psychological Association. Accessed November 14, 2016.

www.apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children.aspx

A brief overview of how to proceed after a tragedy, which includes the following downloads and weblinks:

- "Disaster Distress Hotline"—SAMHSA.gov
- "Listen, Protect, Connect—Psychological First Aid for Teacher & Students"—Ready.gov
- "Tips for Talking with and Helping Children and Youth Cope after a Disaster or Traumatic Event—a Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers"—SAMHSA.gov
- "Helpful Hints for School Emergency Management: Psychological First Aid for Students and Teachers: Listen, Protect, Connect—Model & Teach"—U.S. Department of Education
- "Explaining the News to Our Kids"—CommonSenseMedia.org
- "Children & Grief: Guidance and Support Resources"—Scholastic.com
- "The Road to Resilience"—APA.org

I'm Your Neighbor website

Accessed November 17, 2016

www.imyourneighborbooks.org

Resources for teachers and parents to promote using children's literature to connect "new arrivals" to "long-term communities."

Books for Young Readers about Hope, Courage, and Resilience in Challenging Times: An Annotated Bibliography

Sasha Lauterbach & Marion Reynolds. Prepared for "To Light the World. Stories of Hope & Courage for Challenging Times," April 3, 2014, cosponsored by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed November 14, 2016.

www.nps.gov/jofi/learn/education/upload/To-Light-the-World-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf

This annotated, graded list includes fiction and nonfiction books about such challenges as racism and discrimination, immigration, war and conflict, the environment, and activists and social movements.

Talking about Difficult Topics with Children

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Accessed November 14, 2016.

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/talking-about-difficult-topics

Suggestions for parents on how to open and carry on a discussion about a sensitive topic.

Teaching Tolerance website

Accessed November 14, 2016

www.tolerance.org

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance has classroom resources like films and lesson plans on topics such as bullying, immigration, equality, and more.