

TOUGH TOPICS

Inspiring Conversations in Difficult Times

Grade 3
through
Grade 5

Addiction/Substance Abuse

The Education of Ivy Blake

By Ellen Airgood
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2015. 240p.

The 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.

The Seventh Wish

By Kate Messner
Bloomsbury, 2016. 250p.

Charlie devises a fantasy to help her cope with family upheaval caused by her sister's addiction to heroin.

Sunny Side Up

By Jennifer L Holm, Illus. by Matthew Holm
Graphix, 2015. 224p.

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.

Adoption

Forever or a Long, Long Time

By Caela Carter
HarperCollins, 2017. 320p.

Eleven year old Flora, her younger brother Julian, and their adopted mom delve into the siblings' past to find out more about the foster families they lived with, and to accept their new, forever home.

Greenglass House

By Kate Milford, Illus. by Jaime Zollars
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books, 2016. 400p.

Milo lives with his adopted parents in Greenglass House, a smugglers inn atop an

isolated cliff. Winter break is usually family time, but Milo is annoyed and then suspicious when a series of unusual guests arrive at the house.

Patina

By Jason Reynolds
Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2017. 240p.

Living with aunt and uncle because of her mother's debilitating diabetes, Patina joins the track team and struggles to help with her younger sisters, while keeping her grades up at a new school full of rich kids.

Soar

By Joan Bauer
Viking, 2016. 296p.

Jeremiah's dreams of playing baseball are put on hold not only because he learns he has a heart condition but also because he and his adoptive father must relocate for a temporary job for his father.

Three Pennies

By Melanie Crowder
Atheneum, 2017. 181p.

Marin risks the chance she has at a forever family in order to find the birth mother who abandoned her years ago.

Body Image/Self Esteem

El Deafo

By Cece Bell
Amulet Books, 2014. 233p.

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.

Short

By Holly Goldberg Sloan
Dial Books for Young Readers, 2017. 296p.

Julia is so self-conscious about her height that she won't even say the word "short," but being cast as a Munchkin in a summer production of *The Wizard of Oz* helps her learn to embrace her stature as one of the things that makes her unique.

Body Safety

Sex is a Funny Word

By Cory Silverberg, Illus. by Fiona Smyth
Triangle Square, 2015. 160p.

A graphic novel introduction to sex education that emphasizes body safety, respect and gender inclusion featuring a group of 4 friends--Zai, Cooper, Mimi and Omar-- who respond in different ways to the lessons in the book.

When the Crickets Stopped Singing

By Marilyn Cram-Donahue
Calkins Creek, 2018. 276p.

When the adults in her small town turn a blind eye to a popular citizen's predatory behavior, young Angie finds the courage to stand up for a friend and tell the truth.

Bullying

Hurricane Child

By Kheryn Callender
Scholastic Press, 2018. 224p.

Twelve-year-old Caroline is bullied and hated by everyone in the island community of St. Thomas for having been born during a hurricane. When she befriends Kalinda, her luck begins to turn around.

Rhyme Schemer

By K.A. Holt
Chronicle, 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's done wrong and how to make amends.

Divorce/Single Parent**Big and Little Questions (According to Wren Jo Byrd)**

By Julie Bowe.
Kathy Dawson Books, 2017. 228p.

Wren doesn't want her friends to think she's weird. She just wants everything the way it was before the summer, and that means not telling anyone that her parents are getting divorced. She can't even tell her best friend, who seems to like the mean, new girl better.

Dragons in a Bag

By Zetta Elliott. Illus. by Geneva B.
Random House Books for Young Readers, 2018. 160p.

In this urban fantasy, Mama has to go to court to fight their apartment eviction notice, so she leaves Jax with Ma, an enigmatic old woman who turns out to be a witch. As Jax and Ma travel through space and time to save three dragons, Jax meets his grandfather for the first time and learns more about his mother's childhood.

Raymie Nightingale

By Kate DiCamillo
Candlewick, 2016. 263p.

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 befriends two other contestants in the contest who have also lost someone close to them.

Grief**Clayton Byrd Goes Underground**

By Rita Williams-Garcia
Amistad, 2017. 181p.

Clayton loves nothing more than playing jazz with his grandpa, Cool Papa Byrd, and his band. After Cool Papa's sudden death, Clayton goes on a journey to Manhattan looking for his grandfather's friends and the peace he once had playing the blues.

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.

The Distance to Home

By Jenn Bishop
Knopf Books for Young Readers, 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.

Finding Langston

By Lesa Cline-Ransome
Holiday House, 2018. 104p.

Still grieving over his mother's death, eleven-year-old Langston deals with moving from Alabama to Chicago with his dad, and trying to avoid being bullied in school. But he finds solace in the library, the poetry of another Langston, and a secret that he learns about his mom.

My Father's Words

By Patricia MacLachlan
Katherine Tegen Books, 2018. 144p.

A terrible accident leaves Fiona and Finn O'Brien without a father, but his memory and his words remain to guide them through their grief.

Home Situation Change**Crenshaw**

By Katherine Applegate
Feiwel and 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.

The Journey of Little Charlie

By Christopher Paul Curtis
Scholastic Press, 2018. 256p.

After his father dies, twelve-year-old Charlie is forced to leave his home under the watch

of the nefarious Cap'n Buck. In their travels from South Carolina to Canada, in search of stolen property, Charlie experiences firsthand the ugliness of discrimination in pre-Civil War America.

Just Under the Clouds

By Melissa Sarno
Knopf, 2018. 229p.

Since her dad died, Cora, her younger sister, and her fiercely independent mother have moved from place to place, from friends' couches to a shelter, searching not just for a place to live, but for a place to belong.

Merci Suarez Changes Gears

By Meg Medina
Candlewick Press, 2018. 368p.

Everything is changing for eleven-year-old Merci at school and at home, but hardest of all are the changes in her beloved grandfather who has started forgetting important things, falling from his bike, and getting angry over nothing.

Illness (Catastrophic)**Just My Luck**

By Cammie McGovern
HarperCollins, 2016. 240p.

Fourth grader Benn 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.

Love Like Sky

By Leslie C Youngblood
Hyperion, 2018. 296p.

Eleven-year-old Georgie worries about losing her best friend to a bully, about how to get close to a step sister, and how to help make things right when her little sister is diagnosed with bacterial meningitis.

Ms. Bixby's Last Day

By John David Anderson
HarperCollins, 2017. 336p.

Ms. Bixby is the sort of teacher that makes going to school worthwhile. When she is diagnosed with cancer, three boys decide to make sure her last day is perfect.

Immigration

Front Desk

By Kelly Yang
Arthur A. Levine Books, 2018. 304p.

Mia Tang and her parents expected to work hard when they came to the United States from China, but they had no idea how difficult things would be. After a year or two struggling to make ends meet, they find themselves managing a motel for a cruel and exploitive owner and Mia works the front desk.

Harbor Me

By Jacqueline Woodson
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018. 192p.

Six kids meet for a weekly chat organized by their school. They discover it's safe to talk about what's bothering them from deportation and incarceration to fears of racial profiling.

Nowhere Boy

By Katherine Marsh
Roaring Brook Press, 2018. 368p.

After losing his father and fleeing a life of suffering in Aleppo, Syria, 14-year-old Ahmed meets Max, a self-centered American Boy, also newly arrived to Brussels, Belgium.

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey

By Margriet Ruurs
Orca Books Publishers, 2016. 28p.

This unique book incorporates both Arabic and English to tell the story of a refugee family's journey. The artwork highlights a Syrian artist's work with stones, creating powerful images of the family's struggles.

We Came to America

By Faith Ringgold
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.

Natural Disaster

Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World

By Ashley Herring Blake
Little, Brown, 2017. 320p.

When a tornado rips through town, Ivy's family home is destroyed. Ivy deals with the stress of her family's unstable living situation, along

with the devastating loss of her diary and the fear that her crush on a girl will be revealed.

Ninth Ward

By Jewell Parker Rhodes
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012. 224p.

Twelve-year-old Laneshia must summon all her strength and resilience to survive Hurricane Katrina and the following floods that take her Ninth Ward home, as well as the life of her beloved Mama Ya-Ya.

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."

Resilience

Amal Unbound

By Aisha Saeed
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018. 240p.

Amal's life is quiet and ordinary in a Pakistani village, but she had no complaints, and besides, she's busy pursuing her dream of becoming a teacher one day. Her dreams are temporarily dashed when--as the eldest daughter--she must stay home from school to take care of her siblings.

Everlasting Nora

By Marie Miranda Cruz
Starscape, 2018. 288p.

Life is not easy for Nora whose father has died in a fire that also destroyed the family home, leaving Nora and her mother to live in a shantytown in a Manila cemetery. When Nora's mother disappears, Nora struggles to fend for herself as she embarks upon a dangerous search.

Out of Left Field

By Ellen Klages
Viking Books for Young Readers, 2018. 320p.

It's 1957, so even though Katy is the best pitcher in her Berkeley, CA neighborhood, she can't play on the Little League team because she's a girl. She is determined to prove that women can and have played baseball, refusing to back down in the face of gender discrimination.

Suicide

All Three Stooges

By Erica S. Perl
Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2018. 240p.

Seventh graders Noah and Dash enjoy their friendship and shared love of comedy, but everything changes when Dash loses his father to suicide.

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.

Trauma/Violence/War

Flowers for Sarajevo

By John McCutcheon, Illus. by Kristy Caldwell
Peachtree Publishers, 2017. 32p.

In the midst of war, Drasko takes over his father's job of selling flowers in the market; after a horrible tragedy occurs at the marketplace, Drasko is a witness to the kindness of a stranger.

The Night Diary

By Veera Hiranandani
Kokila, 2018. 272p.

Through diary entries, twelve-year-old Nisha tells her deceased mother about the family's search for religious freedom, safety and a new home as India gains its independence from the British in 1947.

Painting for Peace in Ferguson

By Carol Swartout Klein
Treehouse Publishing Group, 2015. 47p.

A community painting project reclaims neighborhoods damaged by rioting in Ferguson, MO in this moving photographic tribute to resilience and hope.

Resources for Adults

Books

Building Resilience in Students Impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences: A Whole-Staff Approach

By Victoria E. Romero, Ricky Robertson, and Amber Warner
Corwin, 2018. 248p.

Covering topics including poverty, divorce, neglect, homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence and parent incarceration, this workbook style resource for K-12 educators shows how the school community

can work together to assist children impacted by these issues.

Tender Topics: Picture Books About Childhood Challenges

By Dorothy Stoltz, Elaine Czarnecki, and Buff Kahn
Huron Street Press/ALA, 2013. 176 p.

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

Articles

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.

Talking to Cyberbullied Kids—and to Bullies

By Tori Coridiano, PhD
School Library Journal. Accessed October 18, 2018.
www.slj.com/?detailStory=talking-to-cyberbullied-kids-and-to-bullies.

Article includes links to eight websites on coping with cyberbullying.

This Is How You Teach Kids About Consent

By the Good Men Project
Huffington Post/Life. Accessed November 28, 2018.
www.huffpost.com/entry/this-is-how-you-teach-kids-about-consent_b_10360296

A list of parenting action items (geared toward kids ages 1-21), created in the hope of raising a generation of children who have less rape and sexual assault in their lives.

After #MeToo: Educators Seek Strategies To Teach Students About Consent

By Drew Himmelstein
School Library Journal. Accessed December 27, 2018.
www.slj.com/?detailStory=after-metoo-educators-look-for-strategies-to-teach-students-about-consent

With systemic harassment and assault in the news, educators are teaching age appropriate lessons about boundaries, safety, and sexual assault.

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

By Sue Mankiw and Janis Strasser
Young Children 68, no. 5 (Mar. 2013): 84-90
issuu.com/naeyc/docs/tender_topics_mankiw2_0313

A graded, annotated list of books for children about topics such as bullying, death, divorce, tragedy and disaster, with suggestions for how to use books to explore difficult issues with young children.

Parents Explain the Me Too Movement To Their Kids In Emotional Video

by Alanna Vagianos
Huffington Post/ Life. Accessed December 17, 2018
www.huffpost.com/entry/parents-explain-the-me-too-movement-to-their-kids-in-emotional-video_n_5ac51d16e4b09ef3b24309b4

In this video, three parents discuss the Me Too movement with their children, showing how difficult, but ultimately worthwhile, it can be to talk about sexual assault.

Websites

How to Talk to Children about Difficult News and Tragedies

American Psychological Association. Accessed December 15, 2018.
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 December 15, 2018.
www.imyourneighborbooks.org

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

Talking about Difficult Topics with Children

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Accessed December 15, 2018.
www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/talking-about-difficult-topics

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

Teaching Tolerance website

Accessed December 15, 2018
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.