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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume III: Children's Literature, Infancy to Early Adolescence

"Hey Wait! I Think I've Read about Something Like That!" Using Bibliotherapy to Help Teenagers Cope with Issues in Their Lives

Guide for Curriculum Unit 06.03.05, published September 2006
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Adolescents face issues that seem almost insurmountable, from acne to physical, mental, and substance abuse, homelessness, loneliness, and gender choices. Who can help them? Parents are often absent from the home, or are very ambivalent about the issues their children face. Educators might be considered the second choice for help. Our job is to instruct and help prepare students for the outside world. One way that teachers can help is through bibliotherapy.

Davis and Wilson point out that "developmental bibliotherapy. . . [is that which can help to] sensitize. . . students. . . to either potential or realized problems that occur during life" (Davis and Wilson, p. 2). Admittedly, teachers are usually not licensed therapists. But this is one way for teachers to help their students.

This unit presents lesson plans and suggested annotated bibliographies of books that can help students address various issues. It is built around S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, which deals with many of the issues teens face. It involves building careful relationships with students to foster a safe atmosphere for conversation. Students may then be willing to accept the teacher's suggestion for books that portray a character dealing positively with a serious issue which might affect the student herself.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for Language Arts, grades 6-8)

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