



Middle School English Language Arts Books With Mental Health Themes

Young adult books, both fiction and non-fiction, often include mental health-related themes and provide an opportunity to raise awareness about such topics. These books can be used by educators to develop lessons for English, Health or Psychology, among others. For example:

- students select a book to read and write a report
- students select a book and conduct research for class presentation or poster projects
- teachers assign one or more books from the list and divide class into discussion groups

When using literature to raise awareness about mental health awareness, it is recommended that teachers leverage the expertise of School Social Workers, School Counselors, School Psychologists, School Nurses and/or Library Media Specialists to identify helpful community resources and talking points to educate themselves and to help students better understand the issues. Below is a list of fiction and non-fiction young adult literature followed by online resources for further information on the topics.

Book	Description
<p><i>OCD Love Story</i> By Corey Ann Hayden</p>	<p>Bea is diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder who becomes self-destructive from her emotional feelings for a boy.</p>
<p><i>Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key</i> By Jack Gantos</p>	<p>This book explores Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder by telling the story of Joey and his journey through medication, behavioral modification and self-care. If you enjoy this book check out the sequel <i>Joey Pigza Loses Control</i>.</p>
<p><i>Finding Audrey</i> By Sophie Kinsella</p>	<p>Audrey is a 14-year-old girl with Social Anxiety Disorder who is bullied at school. Themes in this book include bullying, isolation, support and recovery.</p>
<p><i>Perfect</i> By Natasha Friend</p>	<p>Isabelle develops an Eating Disorder after her father’s death and becomes friendly with a girl named Ashley in a support group. This novel explores the road to recovery through therapy and a strong support system.</p>

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<p><i>The Science of Breakable Things</i> By <i>Tae Keller</i></p>	<p>Seventh-grader Natalie seeks a creative way in Science class to attempt to “cure” her mother of Depression. She enlists the help of two friends who provide emotional support as Natalie confronts the limits of her own power to change the situation.</p>
<p><i>Quit It</i> By <i>Marcia Byalick</i></p>	<p>Carrie, a seventh-grader with Tourette’s Syndrome, tries to fit in with other kids in her class.</p>
<p><i>Waiting for Normal</i> By <i>Leslie Connor</i></p>	<p>Addie is a seventh-grader who lives alone with a neglectful mother who has Bipolar Disorder. When Addie’s mother and stepfather divorce and her stepdad moves away with her two half-sisters, Addie is forced to grow up quickly and find a way to cope with her new family.</p>
<p><i>OCDaniel</i> By <i>Wesley King</i></p>	<p>This coming-of-age story follows 13-year-old Daniel who has Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder but desires to hide his disorder from his classmates.</p>
<p><i>The Manifesto on How to Be Interesting</i> By <i>Holly Bourne</i></p>	<p>Bree sees herself as a high school outcast and decides to write about her experiences in a manifesto that changes her life. This book addresses Social Anxiety Disorder and experiences what teens go through to fit in.</p>
<p><i>Lush</i> By <i>Natasha Friend</i></p>	<p>13-year-old Sam is concerned with her father’s excessive alcohol consumption and its impact on her family. She later gets caught up in substance use as a teenager.</p>
<p><i>Swing Sideways</i> By <i>Nanci Turner Steveson</i></p>	<p>Annie suffers from Panic Attacks and has an Eating Disorder. A summer trip to a lake house with her parents leads to a friendship that helps Annie heal and transform her life.</p>
<p><i>Courage for Beginners</i> By <i>Karen Harrington</i></p>	<p>As a seventh grader, Mysti, has her fair share of hardships. Among them are her mother who has Agoraphobia and never leaves the house and her father who is in a coma after falling off a ladder. This leaves Mysti home alone in the role of caregiver with her little sister and mother.</p>
<p><i>Buried</i> By <i>Robin Merrow MacCready</i></p>	<p>Claude endures her mother's excessive alcohol consumption and subsequent disappearance as she slips into the grips of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in this suspenseful book.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>Anything but Typical</i> By Nora Raleigh Baskin</p>	<p>Jason is a 12-year-old with Autism who only feels comfortable communicating in writing. When he comes across Rebecca, a girl who also posts stories on the same online site, he desperately wants to meet her, but fears she will only see his diagnosis and distance herself from him.</p>
<p><i>Finding Perfect</i> By Elly Swartz</p>	<p>12-year-old Molly appears to have the “perfect” life until her mother moves out and her world falls apart. She is reluctant to seek treatment for her Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.</p>
<p><i>Small as an Elephant</i> By Jennifer Richard Jacobson</p>	<p>This adventure book chronicles 11-year-old Jack’s journey to find his mother, who suffers from Depression, after leaving him alone while they are on a camping trip in Maine.</p>
<p><i>Fish in a Tree</i> By Lynda Mullaly Hunt</p>	<p>Sixth grader Ally Nickerson is clever at hiding her reading and writing issues and acts out in class so people won’t figure out what’s really going on. With the help of her teacher, Mr. Daniels, Ally discovers that she has Dyslexia. She gets the support she needs, and her self-confidence skyrockets as she recognizes her own strengths.</p>
<p><i>Finding Stinko</i> By Michael de Guzman</p>	<p>Newboy has lived in foster homes for the first 12 years of his life and has not spoken in three years. When he runs away he finds a ventriloquist dummy that helps him regain his ability to speak. This books deals with Early Childhood Trauma and Selective Mutism.</p>
<p><i>Some Kind of Happiness</i> By Claire Legrand</p>	<p>When Finley is sent to her grandparents’ home while her parents work out their marital differences, her Depression becomes worse and she escapes into a fantasyland that only exists in her notebook.</p>
<p><i>The Seventh Most Important Thing</i> By Shelley Pearsall</p>	<p>After his father’s death, Arthur is prone to fits of rage. This book touches on redemption, kindness and recovery from grief.</p>
<p><i>The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B</i> By Teresa Toten</p>	<p>This novel explores Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and offers the prospect of hope, happiness and healing.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book One: The Lightning Thief</i> By Rick Riordan</p>	<p>A boy who has Dyslexia and Hyperactivity, 12-year old Percy discovers his true identity as a demigod. <i>This adventure story</i> throws a modern-day twist into ancient Greek mythology and helps kids rethink their own abilities.</p>
<p><i>Umbrella Summer</i> By Lisa Graff</p>	<p>Annie has not been the same since her older brother died when he was hit with a hockey puck. Everyone tells her not to worry, but she can't stop being obsessively nervous and careful about everything from bike helmets to germs. When a neighbor her age moves in across the street, she slowly helps Annie overcome her anxiety and sadness.</p>
<p><i>Lily and Dunkin</i> By Donna Gephart</p>	<p>Lily, an eighth-grader who is transgender, develops a friendship with a new classmate Dunkin, who has Bipolar Disorder. This book explores the difficulty of dealing with personal challenges and family strife, while navigating the Middle School years.</p>
<p><i>Nest</i> By Esther Ehrlich</p>	<p>Eleven-year-old Naomi (aka 'Chirp'), a bird expert and nature lover living in Cape Cod, must navigate her own emotions after her mother is diagnosed with Depression following an accident. When a new friend, Joey, comes into her life, they end up on a life-changing adventure together.</p>
<p><i>The Girls</i> By Amy Goldman Koss</p>	<p>Five middle-school friends ride the emotional roller coaster of adolescence in this novel. A range of mental and emotional health issues, including Phobias, are sensitively handled. This realistic and engaging book provides powerful examples of how interpersonal communication skills can enhance mental health wellness.</p>
<p><i>How to be a Real Person (In Just One Day)</i> By Sally Warner</p>	<p>Over the course of one day, 12-year-old Kara narrates her life with a mother who has Bipolar Disorder. Her parents have recently separated and her mother's mental state is rapidly deteriorating. Kara takes it on herself to try and keep their lives together by not telling her father, her best friend, or her school-all the while feeling that she is not quite "real." This book explores the steps needed to be an advocate for personal and family health.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>Raising the Shades</i> By Doug Wilhelm</p>	<p>As 13-year-old Casey struggles to deal with his father's excessive alcohol consumption, he becomes increasingly isolated and angry. This novel explores the impact of this issue on family members.</p>
<p><i>Hannah in Between</i> By Colby Rodowski</p>	<p>Twelve-year-old Hannah's childhood comes to a quick halt when she realizes that her mother's drinking is getting out of control. Since no one else in the family is willing to admit there is a problem, Hannah carries the secret alone. Her mother's painful struggle to regain sobriety and Hannah's attempts to create order out of chaos are the themes of this novel.</p>

The following online resources provide information and talking points for educators:

The Child Mind Institute #MyYoungerSelf Educator Toolkit includes resources, video materials and discussion questions for the following disorders: Anxiety, Depression, Dyslexia, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Eating Disorders. This site also includes videos of actors, athletes, comedians, and others sharing personal videos speaking about growing up with a mental health or learning disorder. <https://childmind.org/downloads/2018MYS-Ed-Toolkit.pdf>. Additional information about mental health disorders, as well as other topics, such as bullying, abuse and divorce can be found at <https://childmind.org/topics-a-z/>.

The Mental Health America website includes information on many of the mental health disorders, including links to information about topics like psychosis, self-injury, stress, coping with trauma, bereavement and grief, self-care, being a caregiver and recovery. <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-information>.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the lead federal agency for research on mental health disorders, offers basic information on mental health disorders, a description of different treatments and therapies, and the latest mental health research on its website. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/index.shtml>

OnTrack NY is an innovative treatment program for adolescents and young adults who have had unusual thoughts and behaviors, or who experience hallucinations. OnTrackNY helps people achieve their goals for school, work and relationships. Programs are located throughout New York State. General information about psychosis and links to providers across the state is available at <http://www.ontrackny.org>

As the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders, the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures and access to quality care. Through programs and services, NEDA raises awareness and builds communities of support and recovery. This site provides extensive information on eating disorders and would be a good resource to develop talking points. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/> In addition, click on the following link for “9 Eating Disorder Myths Busted” from the National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2014/9-eating-disorders-myths-busted.shtml>