



High School English Language Arts Books With Mental Health Themes (Fiction and Nonfiction)

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, The Dude, and Me</i> By Lauren Roedy Vaughn (fiction)</p>	<p>This novel tells the story of Danielle who navigates her new life at an alternative school as she deals with her Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.</p>
<p><i>Skinny</i> By Ibi Kaslik (fiction)</p>	<p>Holly tries to keep her own life in balance while coping with the mental and physical issues of her older sister Giselle, who has Anorexia. This novel explores Eating Disorders and recovery, as well as the role of a caregiver.</p>
<p><i>It's Kind of a Funny Story</i> By Ned Vizzini (fiction)</p>	<p>Craig Gilner has stopped eating and sleeping, and attempts suicide. Isolated from the pressures of school and classmates at a psychiatric hospital, he is finally able to confront the source of his Anxiety and Depression and find the road to recovery and happiness.</p>
<p><i>Challenger Deep</i> By Neal Shusterman (fiction)</p>	<p>Fifteen year-old Caden Bosch has Schizophrenia. His internal narratives are sometimes dreams, sometimes hallucinations and sometimes undefinable, dominated by a ship, its captain, and an enormous, sullen crew.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>Speak</i> By Laurie Halse Anderson (fiction)</p>	<p>High school freshman Melinda barely speaks after she is bullied at school and becomes a victim of sexual assault at a party. Through artwork and the support of a compassionate teacher is she able to face the trauma and speak up for herself.</p>
<p><i>Waltz with Bashir</i> By Ari Folman and David Polonsky (fiction)</p>	<p>This novel tells the story of an Israeli soldier who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after the Lebanon War. It explores mental illness, issues of war and memory. (fiction)</p>
<p><i>Without Tess</i> By Marcella Pixley (fiction)</p>	<p>Tess and Lizzie are sisters who share a secret world of fantasies in their youth. As they grow older, Tess still clings to these fantasies and sinks further into her delusions. Lizzie must find a way to help her sister deal with her mental illness and to take care of herself.</p>
<p><i>My Mad Fat Diaries</i> By Rae Earl (non-fiction)</p>	<p>This memoir chronicles a year in the life of English teenager, Rae Earl, after she was released from the psychiatric ward in 1989. A confused, lonely teenager, she clashes with her parents and struggles to conform with cultural standards about beauty.</p>
<p><i>Made You Up</i> By Francesca Zappia (fiction)</p>	<p>Alex is a high school senior with Schizophrenia unable to tell the difference between real life and her delusions but determined to go to college.</p>
<p><i>I, Girl X</i> By Annalise Grey (fiction)</p>	<p>Carleigh is a 14 year-old girl whose younger brother's undiagnosed mental illness impacts her family and her friendships. Just when things seem to get better, one night will change Carleigh and her family forever.</p>
<p><i>Wintergirls</i> By Laurie Hale Anderson (fiction)</p>	<p>Lia and her friend Cassie are dealing with an eating disorder and self-injury. When Cassie dies, Lia must navigate recovery on her own.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>Everything Here is Beautiful</i> By Mira T. Lee (fiction)</p>	<p>When her mother dies and Lucia starts hearing voices, her sister Miranda must find a way to reach her sister. Lucia works with her mental health challenges while trying to be a good mother and live a fulfilling life.</p>
<p><i>Freaks Like Us</i> By Susan Vaught (fiction)</p>	<p>When Jason's best friend disappears, the whole town starts searching for her. But the insistent voices in Jason's head won't let him get to the heart of the mystery. He has Schizophrenia, and the voices make it hard to know what is real and what is not.</p>
<p><i>Finding Alice</i> By Melody Carlson (fiction)</p>	<p>After her senior year in high school, Alice's psychotic symptoms begin to develop at a rapid pace. The novel documents her experiences and offers a powerful portrayal of life with Schizophrenia.</p>
<p><i>The Burn Journals</i> By Brent Runyan (non-fiction)</p>	<p>This is the true story of the author's suicide attempt when he was in eighth grade. It explores the topics of suicide and recovery.</p>
<p><i>Cut</i> By Patricia McCormick (fiction)</p>	<p>After struggling with self-injury, Callie enters a "residential treatment facility" where she meets girls with problems of their own. She doesn't want to have anything to do with them. Callie won't even speak.</p>
<p><i>Dr Bird's Advice for Sick Poets</i> By Evan Roskkos (fiction)</p>	<p>James Whitman is a teen with Anxiety and Depression who deals with a dreadful home life by finding solace in the poetry of Walt Whitman - and to get advice from his Inner Therapist, who happens to be a bird. Dr. Bird is a big part of what makes him such a humorous character.</p>
<p><i>Schizo</i> By Nic Sheff (fiction)</p>	<p>Driven to the point of obsession to find his missing younger brother, and wrapped up in a romance that may or may not be the real thing, Miles is forever chasing shadows. This novel is a story of a teen with Schizophrenia who is chasing the clues to a missing brother.</p>

Book	Description
<p><i>The Impossible Knife of Memory</i> By Laurie Halse Anderson (fiction)</p>	<p>Hayley is searching for a normal life with a father who struggles with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder following his deployment to Iraq. When they return to the town where her father grew up, will his memories and issues with drug abuse create more problems?</p>
<p><i>Willow</i> By Julia Hoban (fiction)</p>	<p>Sixteen year-old Willow’s parents die in an accident when she is driving. She begins cutting as she tries to cope with overwhelming emotions and her brother’s silent anguish. Willow develops a close relationship with Guy, her classmate and struggles towards self-forgiveness.</p>
<p><i>Clean</i> By Amy Reed (fiction)</p>	<p>Olivia, Kelly, Christopher, Jason, and Eva all have substance use disorders. They’ve hit rock bottom and are together in rehab to face their problems, sobriety and themselves. None of them wants to be there. None of them wants to confront the truths about their pasts.</p>
<p><i>Under Rose-Tainted Skies</i> By Louise Gornall (fiction)</p>	<p>At seventeen, Norah, who has Agoraphobia, has accepted that the four walls of her house delineate her life. But when Luke arrives on her doorstep, he doesn’t sees a girl who is funny, smart, and brave. Can Norah learn to see herself through Luke’s eyes?</p>
<p><i>Changing Ways</i> By Julia Tannenbaum (fiction)</p>	<p>Struggling to cope with the constant stress of school, her mother, and her social life, 16-year-old Grace uses self-destructive ways to cope: dieting and self-injury. This book explores the long road to recovery.</p>
<p><i>Lost in Los Angeles</i> By Jenny Lynne (fiction)</p>	<p>Soon after 18-year-old Erin loses her best friend, she is betrayed by her high school crush. Plagued by anxiety attacks, Erin travels to Los Angeles, searching for a sign that life is still worth living. She meets Ben, who reveals shocking secrets of his childhood and helps Erin believe that she can heal from the wounds of her traumatic past.</p>



Book	Description
<p><i>Invisible Girl</i> By Mariel Hemingway (nonfiction)</p>	<p>Mariel Hemingway shares her story as teen with parents with Depression and substance use problems, and a sister and a grandfather who completed suicide. Mariel Hemingway writes as her teen self to share her pain, heartache, and coping strategies with young readers.</p>
<p><i>Mum, I Wish I was Dead: The Story of a Teenager who Conquered Depression</i> By Adam Schwartz (nonfiction)</p>	<p>At the age of 10, Adam Schwartz began periods of school refusal, physical illness, endless trials with unsuccessful drug regimes and contemplation of suicide. Finally, he was forced to dropout of high school. In this memoir, Adam describes what it was like to live with Depression as a child and teenager, as well as his successful road to recovery.</p>
<p><i>That Night</i> By Cecily Wolfe (fiction)</p>	<p>Kayla, a high school senior, dies of a heroin overdose. Her family and friends are filled with anxiety, sadness, frustration and questions. Her best friends deal with the insensitive reactions of parents, classmates and teachers; her boyfriend Paul struggles with Depression and goes down a dangerous path.</p>
<p><i>OC Me</i> By Kristin Albright (fiction)</p>	<p>When a tragic accident leaves Amy’s favorite aunt unconscious in the intensive care unit, irrational fears begin to flood her mind. Embarrassed, she keeps them to herself, lying to everyone to cover her behavior. When Amy learns she has Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, she begins a journey of self-discovery that will shape the rest of her life.</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>