1991

Positive Models in Literature for the At-Risk Student

Katrina Graham Short

University of North Florida

Suggested Citation
Short, Katrina Graham, "Positive Models in Literature for the At-Risk Student" (1991). UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 27.
https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/27
Positive Models in Literature for the At-Risk Student

by

Katrina Graham Short

A project submitted to the
Division of Curriculum and Instruction
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education (English)

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
Summer, 1991

Running Head: POSITIVE MODELS
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The thesis of Katrina Graham Short is approved:

(Date)

__________________________

Signature Deleted

__________________________

Signature Deleted

__________________________

Signature Deleted

7/15/91

7/1/91

7/8/91

Committed Chairperson

Accepted for the Department:

Signature Deleted

Chairperson

7/15/91
Abstract

It has been found that most at-risk students have a very low self-esteem, which contributes to the sense of failure these students feel about their academic life. This study explored the use of bibliotherapy with secondary students in an effort to raise their self-esteem to a level which would counteract the frustration these students feel as they continually find themselves in failing situations in school. Extensive review of available literature on the topics of self-esteem, motivation, at-risk students, and bibliotherapy resulted in the compilation of an annotated bibliography, complete with suggested uses for the works found therein, selected for the secondary student, with the understanding that at-risk students often function academically below grade level.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement/Rationale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

Problem Statement

This study addresses the question: What evidence exists that a curriculum which incorporates literature portraying characters as productive and possessed of high self-esteem fosters similar attributes in students? In addition, the question of which works are appropriate to provide such models is explored.

Rationale

The excellence in education movement has addressed many areas of the educational world. Educators have long tried to raise the academic standards in our schools, in order to produce better, more well-rounded students. Yet Tanner (1989), citing Hamilton's study of at-risk students, notes that "it has been proposed that if standards are raised for high school graduation, then fewer young people will graduate from high school" (Tanner, 2). In elevating our educational standards we may have created a vicious circle that
positive Models 4

stymies efforts to produce a positive educational environment for all children.

One of the obstacles to excellence in education is the dropout problem. Tanner (1989) points out that 3% fewer students were graduated from our nation's high schools in 1983 than in 1968. This percentage has increased in subsequent years. Tanner also reports that dropout rates are highest among Hispanic and African American students. Educators must determine why these minority students are leaving school in such great numbers, if they are to stem this trend.

Educators' highest priority should be to find and eliminate the factors that produce at-risk students. Obviously, many factors influence students to leave school. One theory, advanced by several researchers, argues that poor self-esteem may be such a factor. Poor self-esteem may cause a student to experience increasing frustration with her failure to progress academically, which in turn may cause her to give up and drop out of school. McCall (1989) notes the necessity for "nurturing students' social development [as well as their] intellectual development" (McCall, 39). In other words, the system should produce
productive, well-rounded adults, not just high achievers.

But how does one motivate at-risk students sufficiently to enhance their academic performance, and still keep them in school? Unmotivated students tend to manifest low self-esteem when faced with any kind of academic challenge. This happens because, having been through many of these same challenges and having failed to meet them successfully, these students can anticipate yet more failure. One study, published in *The Negro Educational Review* (1983), acknowledges that "it is the responsibility, and should be the goal, of the teacher to see that students perform well and in highly productive ways" (p. 102). This practice would provide intrinsic motivation for further efforts.

In an effort to battle the at-risk students' sense of failure scholars have repeatedly reexamined the relationship of self-esteem to academic success. Brookover and Thomas (1963) found that "there is a significant and positive correlation between self-concept and performance in the academic role" (p. 278). If a child does not feel he holds a worthwhile place in the general scheme of the world, he
will not be motivated to do his best to learn and succeed in school. Educators realize that drastic measures must be taken to keep us from losing these students.

The challenge is clear that educators must do whatever is necessary to prevent a significant number of at-risk students from dropping out before those students have completed their public school education. Research seems to have established that high self-esteem is positively correlated with success in any endeavor. Therefore, educators must work to enhance the self-esteem of secondary students. This effort can then afford those students a chance to experience a sense of pride in their academic accomplishments and succeed in their educational experience.

While the research in this study tends to concentrate heavily on minority students, it is intended that the research be applied to all at-risk students, regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic level.
Definition of Terms

At-Risk Student: any student with "serious socio-economic and/or personal problems which often lead other students in similar circumstances to drop out of school" (Geary, 1988). Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, such as Hispanics and African Americans, exhibit these symptoms in disproportionate numbers, although these minority groups should not be considered the only at-risk groups. At-risk students may come from any nationality, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic level.

Bibliotherapy: the process in which there is "dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature -- interaction which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment, and growth" (Russell and Shrodes, 1950).

Self-esteem: "having a high regard for one's self" (Blake, 1988). In this study, the terms self-esteem and self-concept will be used interchangeably.
Countless programs have been developed to increase the motivation of at-risk students and combat the rising dropout rate. One such program is bibliotherapy, which can be used by educators to bolster the self-esteem of students (Blake, 1988). Bibliotherapy is the process of using literature to present positive role-models and values to the reader, with the assumption that this will increase her own values and self-esteem. Blake (1988) reports that "the teacher attempts to help a child solve a problem by bringing [her] books containing a similar experience" (p. 20). The child can then explore the character's solution for the experience, and apply that solution to her own life.

Central to the use of bibliotherapy to help foster positive values and self-esteem are two opposing schools of thought. The first, supported by such researchers as Caffee (1975), Pruett (1980), Schrank and Engels (1981), and Tillman (1984), maintains that
bibliotherapy has little or no influence in building a reader's positive self-esteem. The opposing school of thought, supported by Penna (1976), Sims (1983), Kiah (1985), Blake (1988), and others, argues that bibliotherapy can be an indispensable tool in raising a student's self-esteem.

Many researchers feel it vitally important to provide minority students with positive role models in the form of literature to prevent their becoming at-risk students. Sims (1983) observes that "the exclusion of Afro-Americans from literature, or the inclusion of negative stereotypes and subtle racism is harmful to Black and White children alike" (21), noting instead that literature which portrays African Americans in a positive light is essential to the development of that group's positive self-concept. Only by providing positive role models can educators affect the values and self-esteem of young African American students. Sims cites a study conducted during the 1940's by E. Jackson which exposed white students to literature which presented black people favorably. Jackson found that, as a result of this exposure, "the experimental group showed more positive attitudes
towards Blacks than a control group" (21). If literature which portrays an ethnic minority group in a positive light can positively influence the way the white majority feels about that minority, then perhaps these effects can be generalized to apply to the way minorities in general feel about themselves when they experience books with successful characters.

Blake (1988) supports the assertion (presented by Russell and Shrodes, 1950) that readers can reduce inner frustration and anger by identifying strongly with a character in a book. Inner frustration and anger can influence a person's self-esteem. This author feels that the reader's self-esteem can be enhanced through literature portraying positive characters possessing high levels of self-esteem.

Blake's primary research studied a group of six sixth graders involved in an after-school reading program designed to improve their self-esteem. She found that these students experienced a modest gain in scores on the Culture-free Self Esteem Index for Children, Form A after reading Maia Wojciechowska's Shadow of a Bull. She deduced from her own and others' research that the technique of reading plus class
discussion positively influenced the self-esteem of the reader. In a 1976 study by Penna, Blake reports, class discussion reading groups evidenced significant improvement in self-concept (Blake, 1988). Finally, Blake cites a 1976 study by Kanaan which also found that "a bibliotherapeutic program significantly improved the self-concepts of low self-concept peer isolates in fifth grade" (Blake, 1988).

Part of the problem of using literature to portray positive role models is that minority cultures have been largely ignored in traditional reading materials. African-American parents, for instance, have found it difficult to locate literature which features positive characters with whom their children can identify. And parents are not the only ones concerned with finding appropriate cultural literature for their children to read. The student herself also feels the need to find good cultural literature to which she can relate. Sims (1983) cites Purves and Beach, who found that the young reader will seek out characters who relate to the reader's personal experiences, and who are the most like herself. These characters make the story interesting to the reader, who will then apply the
things learned from the story to her own life.

Kiah (1985) notes that much contemporary adolescent literature presents less than desirable models because it may not deal with the real problems African American youth face. Oliver (1988) agrees with Kiah, noting that it is vitally important to provide African American students with literature which strongly presents positive values and examples upon which the reader can model her own life.

Cobb (1985) disagrees that contemporary literature for African American youth is unsuitable. Instead, she feels that this literature portrays "the communal wisdom of a culture, the survival strategies, hero-images, woman-images, social ordering, and authority symbols that ultimately determine values" (252). Cook (1985) also agrees with Cobb, stating that literature gives readers an image of their culture, which in turn can connect that culture with many other world cultures. This global cultural connection, it seems, could do much to give the at-risk reader a more positive idea of herself, and others, and in turn, an improved self-image. Calhoun (1987) agrees, noting that Bohning felt that "directed reading of materials
which portrayed a minority favorably was associated with a positive change in attitude toward the minority" (940).

Geary (1988) found that the students themselves feel that subjects they study should be of direct relevance to them, reflecting their own values, beliefs, and experiences. The educational system, these students feel, should afford them the opportunity to overcome their at-risk backgrounds and become productive citizens of the global world to which Cook refers. Geary believes that literature classes constitute an important source for such a curriculum. Good literature, she notes, consistently contains the values, beliefs, and experiences of characters a reader can emulate.

Oliver (1988), while strongly agreeing that literature can make a positive difference in the lives of black children, argues against limiting that literature to ethnic examples. Themes from great literature, she maintains, such as "Romeo and Juliet, The Scarlet Letter, and other frequently taught 'classics' have relevance to all students if taught properly" (50). She continues that one should also
include themes from black literature. Her view is congruent with Cook's vision of a global culture incorporating elements from all ethnic groups.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, are the researchers who feel that bibliotherapy has little or no effect on the self-esteem of the reader. Tillman's (1984) analysis of the research led him to conclude, with Schrank and Engels (1981, cited in Tillman, 1984), that although bibliotherapy can be useful in affecting an "attitude change or in contributing to therapeutic gains," these effects could not be said to positively influence self-concept (713). Schrank and Engels felt that because some researchers did not positively support the use of bibliotherapy, great caution should be exercised in its use as a therapeutic tool. Like Schrank and Engels, Caffee (1975) (reported in Tillman) concluded that "bibliotherapy did not significantly increase self concept or self-actualization" (716). Pruett (1980) (reviewed by Tillman) confirmed that the experience of involvement with specific novels did not lead to any major attitude change in the reader.

Although the above researchers do not find
bibliotherapy to have great influence on young readers' self-esteem, they do note relatively minor gains in self-concept as a result of the use of pertinent adolescent literature. Their findings are limited, however: Schrank and Engels (1981, cited in Tillman, 1984) conclude that there is "little evidence indicating how, why, or when [bibliotherapy] works" (714). They also caution that, because this is such a new field of research, great care should be taken in implementing such a program.

Fehl Shirley conducted a survey among Midwestern tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders to discover whether they felt reading had changed their attitudes and behavior. Tillman's review of this study notes that "results showed 30% reported changes in their self-image" (715). He adds that "most students reported beneficial influences, but some reported that certain books had influenced them" adversely (715). Caffee found that although the use of bibliotherapy did not seem to "significantly increase reported self-concept," there were some positive changes observed during his study, and he concluded that "bibliotherapy may help develop interpersonal relationships and more
accepting attitudes toward others" (716). Chatton (1988) notes that bibliotherapy can produce a catharsis in the life of the reader, but that a book should be recommended only after the teacher has carefully perused it. Too often, she notes, the book "may offer little in the way of satisfaction or solutions... there is a tendency to simply give the reader the message that all will work out but without the consolation of seeing the protagonist begin to work out solutions he or she can live with" (Chatton 335). An appropriate book, Chatton believes, is one in which the conflict is very closely aligned with the conflict the reader may be experiencing, and the book should offer a realistic solution to the conflict. Smith (1989), however, praises a non-specific approach, simply because "these books do not probe too deeply into psychological problems. They do, however, offer insights, coping skills, and other appropriate ways of adjusting to teenagers' developmental stages" (245).

Chatton also raises another valid question regarding the use of bibliotherapy. In theory bibliotherapy sounds excellent. But how does an educator motivate a student to want to read the work
placed in her hands? Chatton notes that "children who do not like to read or do not know the pleasure of books will not be helped by bibliotherapy" (337). Helmstetter (1987) feels that students should be encouraged to read by providing them with an environment full of positive references to reading. She also cites Nicholls' study (1983), which found that "when the emphasis is on understanding a task and learning from it rather than on performing well, individuals will naturally be drawn to more difficult [reading] tasks and will attain a sense of satisfaction, even if they are not highly successful" (245). Students must be allowed to fail without censure, or they will never want to try again. Casteel (1989) endorses a program "constructed to meet the needs of its readers" (100), and which includes sustained silent reading, oral reading, and flexible grouping, in order to motivate reluctant readers. All these methods of motivating a student to read may serve to develop students' appreciation of the written word simply for the pleasure they gain in reading it.

While the use of bibliotherapy has been in vogue for thirty or more years, many researchers seem to feel
there is insufficient evidence to conclude that this process has a positive effect on the self-esteem of the reader. Others report in their research significant gains in self-esteem brought about by the use of bibliotherapy. In any case, these studies can provide a base for further studies which may more positively substantiate the effects of bibliotherapy in altering students' self-esteem. The present study, through careful examination of available literary selections, attempts to determine the potential those works have for contributing to positive changes in the self-esteem of the at-risk population.
CHAPTER THREE

Following an extensive review of available literature on the subject of bibliotherapy this researcher developed an annotated bibliography of literary works portraying characters who have strong self-concepts in a positive manner. As noted in the review of literature, there is a substantial body of research which maintains that bibliotherapy can have a positive effect on the self-concept of the young reader. However, there is also another body of research which asserts that the use of bibliotherapy with at-risk students makes little or no positive effect on self-esteem. This study has not been developed as a curriculum at this point. Rather, it is intended as a suggested reading list for a language arts class in which significant numbers of at-risk secondary students are enrolled.

The work of others forms the basis for this research. As many primary sources as possible were consulted, as well as secondary sources, in order to compile a useful review of the literature available on bibliotherapy, to address the needs of the at-risk
positive Models

Titles recommended were located in the Jacksonville, Florida, Public Library, the Landmark Middle School library in Jacksonville, Florida, and the University of North Florida library. In addition, librarians from the Jacksonville Public Library, Kathleen Alley and Nina Casebeer from the Landmark Middle School library, and several professors and librarians at the University of North Florida provided direction and suggestions for titles included in Chapter Four of this study.

No students were actively involved in this study to date. The English Compensatory Education students at Landmark Middle School, however, will serve as the focus of, and eventual beneficiary of, this study. These students are seventh and eighth graders selected for the Compensatory Education program because their reading comprehension scores on the most recent administration of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) fell below the 27th percentile. Many of these students have also failed one or more years of school. All are considered by the researcher to be at-risk students. Very few of them are motivated to read,
and must be coerced to pick up a book and read.

Selections for annotation were chosen from bibliographies compiled by other researchers, as well as from other available reading lists. The researcher either personally read the work included or paraphrased annotated bibliographic sources used in this study.

The titles included in this study address a number of issues which may potentially affect self-esteem. The following categories include issues related to Head of Household, African American Students/Racial Problems, Dysfunctional Homes, Finding a Place in the World, Overcoming Adversity, Relational Conflicts, Extended Family, and Substance Abuse. Probst (1988), as well as the National Council of Teachers of English, through bibliographic works such as High Interest Easy Reading (1988) and Books for You (1985), served as a basis for the thematic divisions seen in this study. The category titles found in this study are more specific than the more general titles which these works provided.

Works are grouped under each category, followed by suggestions for use with individual readers. No effort is made to prescribe a particular book for a specific
reader, since research suggests that bibliotherapy should be used with caution, and educators are not trained psychologists. Instead, teachers are encouraged to use the suggestions at their discretion with at-risk students.
CHAPTER FOUR

Annotated Bibliography

The following sources were consulted to obtain entries for this annotated bibliography:


Each book included in the following bibliography is identified following the annotation, by a parenthetical code identifying the source of the citation. A key to these codes is found above. Any works with the abbreviation (S) are those which have been identified by the researcher and do not appear in any of the above sources. Readers are advised to
consult the above sources for additional examples of works which may be effective for use with at-risk readers.

Works are further identified by categories for use in selecting titles. These categories are:

- Head of Household (HH)
- African American Students/Race Relations (AS)
- Dysfunctional Homes (DH)
- Finding a Place in the World (PW)
- Overcoming Adversity (OA)
- Adolescent Sexuality (AD)
- Conflict in Relationships (RC)
- Substance Abuse (SA)
- Physical Handicap (PH)
- Miscellaneous (M).

These categories were derived from similar categories found in bibliographies by Probst (1988) and the National Council of Teachers of English (1985 and 1988).
**Head of Household:** Readers who find themselves acting as the head of the household may find these books help them cope with the responsibilities, as well as the seemingly insurmountable challenges they face. In each work, the main character overcomes his or her challenge with much hard work and perseverance, and that character is strengthened by the challenge.


Chris must leave his teenage world and quit school to support his family when his father has a heart attack. He learns the hard way about the harsh realities of the adult work world when he is denied a promotion. He successfully avoids the temptation to earn extra money illegally. Finally, Chris learns that he can return to school, since his father will be assured of a job once his recuperation period is up. (HH) (HL)


Sweetgrass is a fifteen year old Blackfoot Indian girl who must prove to her parents that she is both strong enough and mature enough to marry. The story chronicles Sweetgrass's ingenuity in dealing with an enemy almost too great for her, and the reward that is given to her for her tremendous efforts. (HH) (S)


Jeth's Illinois family finds itself in the middle of a common Civil War conflict: sons from the family fighting on both sides. Jeth comes to the understanding that family love and pride should take precedence over any other conflict. (HH) (HL)

Dicey's mother has left, and Dicey is now the head of her household. The children leave, and look for a home while living on the streets. (HH) (BY)

**African American Students/Race Relations:** It is not the intention of this research to label all African American students at-risk. However, research shows that many African American students do suffer many of the characteristics of at-riskness. These works portray African Americans with strong self-esteem, fighting successfully to make a place in the world. The African American reader may find in these works a positive role model.


This book documents the life of Herschel Walker, 1982 Heisman Trophy winner, from his college days through his decision to sign with the New Jersey Generals football team. (AS) (HL)


Beth Lambert feels she is the smartest person in her grade. But one other student, Philip Hall, always seems to win first place in every subject. The story, told in first-person narrative and African American dialect, shows Beth's self-esteem and how she strives to be the best in every area. (AS) (S)

This story of Andrew Young's interest in politics outlines his life from his work as a preacher in the 1950's to his election to Congress and his position as Ambassador to the United Nations. Young was a leader in voter registration efforts with blacks, as well as an avid participator in the civil rights movement.


Cassie Logan has grown up strong and independent in a Depression-era Mississippi Black family. But events occur that initiate Cassie into the adult world. Once there, she learns how important land ownership is, what benefits accrue to landowners, and how quickly those benefits can be destroyed by prejudiced, overbearing whites. This knowledge matures Cassie, and adds to her own self-esteem.


In 1933, in Mississippi, a black man did not, under any circumstances, call a white man by his first name. Yet, here is Mr. Tom Bee, an old black man, calling Mr. John Wallace, the storeowner, by his first name. Cassie Logan and her brothers learn that even though Mr. John long ago gave Mr. Tom his permission to call him by his first name, the others in the community cannot allow it.
Dysfunctional Homes: Many at-risk students face a home life that is much less than ideal. There may be divorce, remarriage, blended families, and many other potential conflicts involved in their home lives. The situations presented in these books may parallel those encountered by the at-risk reader.


Julie's mother has remarried, and Julie feels like a fifth wheel. She can't seem to settle down in her new school, but when she meets Cal, she begins to make her own way with his support. Cal helps her to see that she must stand up for what she believes. (DH) (BY)


Sibilance T. Spooner feels like a self-made woman. But Sib decides that she wants her father, Taxi, to take her to San Francisco, for two reasons: she wants to meet her mother, and she wants to audition for a special musical scholarship. Along the way, Sib finds out some surprising things about people. Others can change, she finds, and so can she, without destroying her own self-image. (DH) (S)


Carlie names herself, Thomas J., and Harvey the Pinballs, because, like pinballs in a giant pinball machine, they bounce to and fro without any control over their lives. An odd bounce created by events beyond their control puts them in the same foster home one summer. Slowly, the three children become friends, and this fact, plus the understanding care of their foster parents, helps them realize they can make choices that will enhance the quality of their lives, and give them some measure of control over circumstances. (DH) (S)

Phoebe's parents are divorced, and she spends her time traveling back and forth on the bus between Woodstock and New York City. She meets a new friend who is in the same situation. Rosie and Phoebe must learn to cope with new experiences as they travel on their own. (DH) (BY)


This sequel to *Philip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon Maybe* reintroduces us to Beth Lambert, the plucky rural farm girl with high thoughts of her own self-worth. Beth has once again been beaten by Philip and the Tiger Hunters. She begs permission to live with her grandmother and attend another school. Her family agrees, and Beth is able to forge a place for herself in this new setting. (DH) (S)


Elaine comes to appreciate her family and their simple lives while dealing with Melodie, her celebrity friend. She contrasts her own family with Melodie's, whose parents are divorcing and fighting over Melodie and the other children. (DH) (BY)


Paul's world is crumbling. His Uncle Dick has committed suicide, his father is in a mental hospital, and his mother has left the family. Paul must somehow pull his family back together again, alone. (DH) (BY)
Finding a Place in the World: All readers go through a period in their lives when they strive to find their place in the world. Adolescents encounter many problems as they try to do this. These works may help the reader to see that she can be successful in finding her place, and that she is, indeed, a person of worth.


Jan wants to work as an assistant to her uncle, who is an apartment manager, but she must first prove to him she can do the work as well as a boy. She gets the job. But why does she hear a child crying in an empty apartment? Jan looks for clues, which lead her to discover a kidnapped child. She encounters the kidnappers, and becomes the liaison between them and the child's family. The child is returned, but Jan thinks she must find the villain. (PW) (HL)


The Holocaust provides many positive role models of the courage with which people deal with calamity. This is a true story of a group of children who successfully prevented their being shipped to a death camp by making the wife of the commanding German officer a beautiful fur coat. (PW) (HL)


Sara is searching to find her place in the world, in spite of her huge feet and terrible hands. This pivotal year in her maturation has made Sara feel that nothing is right. But one night, Sara's autistic brother Charlie wanders off, and Sara must find him. During the search for Charlie, Sara finds even more--her own self-worth, a new friend, and the realization that first impressions can be wrong ones. (PW) (S)

Rick has been uprooted during his senior year to move to a farm. He doesn't want to leave, but chooses to do so out of love for his family. He finds, however, that life on the farm can be rewarding. (PW) (BY)


Anne has decided to become her grandmother's live-in companion during the time her grandmother is trying to give up alcohol. Through their experiences, they learn to help others, as well as themselves. (PW) (BY)


Ginny Ruth Grover wants to grow up and leave her dirt-poor Texas home. She wants to be a writer, and although her Maw can't understand her longing, Ginny Ruth knows her long-absent father would. Elements of her mother's practicality, plus a love of books instilled by Miss Marnie and Mr. Billy, help her find her place in the world and follow her dream. (PW) (S)


Jessica has very low self-esteem, and feels no one likes her. Through her encounters with a bag lady and a crazy woman she begins to see her own worth. (PW) (HI).


This story about Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees in Tanzania shows a student the value of hard work, and the sense of adventure and fun that accompanies that work. (PW) (HL)

Miguel is unable to find work in Mexico, so he must enter the United States illegally to support his family. Sympathetic friends in Houston get Miguel a job and help him start the process of becoming a legal resident. He knows that he will eventually be able to send for his family and provide for them here.


Wayne Gretzky has been the MVP in the National Hockey League four times since joining the Edmonton Oilers. His contract is valued at $1.75 million, but he has worked long and hard to achieve that status.


In Sand Key, Florida, Beth Goodall has grown up as the docile daughter of a local hardware store owner. Now Beth is infatuated with Jason, a tourist who specializes in shoplifting. She must come to grips with her own identity and convictions. In the end, Beth discovers that she can be her own strong person, and not just an extension of those around her.


This book takes the reader to the swamps of the deep South, where Br'er Rabbit outwits animals both bigger and stronger than he. Hamilton tells the trickster tales created by African Americans captured and brought to the United States as slaves.

This book chronicles the growth of the Guardian Angels, who have dedicated their efforts to preventing crime in large cities. It presents differing viewpoints on the group. Students are always looking for a cause to champion, and the Guardian Angels seems to be a positive channel for those efforts. But many are opposed to this group's work. (PW) (BY)


Peter has a history of shoplifting. His arrest puts him into a program where he works behind the counter of one of the very stores he robbed. Despite the pressure of his friends to use his new position nefariously, Peter decides to do what is right. (PW) (HL)


Aunt Dew has come to live in Michael's house, and the adjustment has not been easy. Michael feels his mother is unfair to force Aunt Dew to give up her possessions and make a new life with them. When Michael tries to save Aunt Dew's possessions, she shows him that love is all that counts. (PW) (S)


Anne resents being left at home while her mother crusades for the miners in the coal country. But once she sees the living conditions of these miners, she realizes she, too, must crusade. (PW) (BY)


Jenny begins to reconsider her own life through her concern over Cindy, a suicidal friend. She decides to volunteer at the senior citizen's center, and learns that life can be wonderful and rewarding. (PW) (BY)

Gwyn is a special boy with a very special grandmother. Nain believes that Gwyn is a magician, just like his ancestors. The gifts she gives him for his birthday, however, get Gwyn into trouble. As he explores this talents, he finds that being a magician means learning to handle all things wisely. (PW) (S)


David must take time from playing his beloved basketball in order to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. He also initiates a new relationship with Kelly, which takes even more time. David must come to grips with the demands of maturity. (PW) (HI)


Martin Snodgrass is the ordinary child in the midst of two other extraordinary children. Martin thinks he does nothing worth noticing, but gradually realizes that he is a little extraordinary himself. (PW) (S)


Michael registers as a conscientious objector in the Vietnam war as a Mennonite, a religious sect which practices pacifism. He is strengthened in his stance by the stories of his ancestors. (PW) (BY)

This story begins the epic fantasy of Middle-earth. Bilbo Baggins, an hobbit with impeccable character, suddenly becomes entangled in an Adventure. He accompanies a band of dwarves to the Lonely Mountain in order to retrieve the golden horde which the dwarves lost when their home was attacked and taken over by Smaug, the ferocious dragon. Along the way, Bilbo learns about the world outside of the Shire, and acquires a valuable treasure: a magic golden ring. He also acquires a less tangible treasure: invaluable knowledge of himself and his capacity for endurance. (PW) (S)


The summer becomes one of change and maturation for Mina, an young African American girl from North Carolina. She faces racial injustice and discrimination, and must confront her feelings about being black. The story provides a glimpse into the lives of a functional African American family, sharing with the reader ways in which they deal with the joys and sorrows of being black. (PW) (S)
Overcoming Adversity: Many readers encounter situations in their lives that, to them and perhaps even to the world around them, seem unsurmountable. But every day people overcome, by use of their gifts and talents, myriad problems that prevent their living a full life. Readers will see such people in these works, and may be able to pattern their own lives after the characters found there.


Someone is trying to destroy Stile, who is a serf and gamesmaster. He escapes into the parallel world of Phaze, where magic, instead of technology, reigns, but finds that he is hunted there, as well. Only Neysa, the unicorn, and the Lady Blue, his beloved, help him survive. (OA) (S)


Three-year-old Princess Ivy is lost in the jungles of Xanth, where the Gap Dragon is on the loose. Somehow, Ivy must find her way back home, even though the Forget-whorl has erased her memory of the route. (OA) (S)


Ben suffers from cerebral palsy and hates how this disease makes others around him act. But Ben is determined to prove to his brother, as well as others, that he can live his own life. He decides to give his brother a gift for his anniversary, and this decision proves to Ben that he can be his own person. (OA) (HL)

Caddie, an eleven year old pioneer child, is the product of her father's experiment: can a sickly child from Boston become healthy and hardy once again by running free outside with her brothers? Caddie overflows with health and good spirits, and with a good dose of courage, which gets her through many exciting experiences. Through it all, Caddie's good sense and personal abilities help her deal with every new adventure. (OA) (S)


Mel, injured in a automobile accident, has made a good physical recovery. But the accident's psychological effects have caused her to run away from life's problems. Trying to recover her life, Mel trains for and secures a job as a blacksmith. As a woman in a traditionally male job, she learns to deal with resentment. She must also help Dee-Dee learn to cope with her irrational fear of jumping. (OA) (HL)


When Paul and Cathy find out that Cathy is pregnant they marry. The usual sad story of teen marriage and pregnancy is changed in this story, when Paul and Cathy write up a marriage contract by which they agree to abide. Their parents offer both money and emotional support to the young parents, who are then able to adjust to both baby and marriage. (OA) (HL)

In order to fund a senior class trip to Bermuda, Barb organizes a quilting project. A cooperative effort by several students results in added funds for the trip. But the quilt is vandalized by someone who breaks into the school. The students are able to overcome these problems, and work together to attain their goal. (OA) (HL)


Connie Griswold wants to go with her class to Washington, but she must earn the money for the trip. She decides to become an errand runner, and develops a friendship with Mrs. Marston. Even though she is very old, Connie feels Mrs. Marston understands her. (OA) (BY)


Willa's unhappiness manifests itself in anorexia. She must learn to love herself, as well as her family, in order to release herself from the purging ritual. (OA) (BY)


Kate is determined to train Wild One for the races, even though she is not sure the horse can win. In the face of all opposition, Kate gets Wild One ready to compete. (OA) (HL)


Francessa must be perfect, and can't deal with the pressure. Kessa can, though, so Francessa renames herself. But Kessa deals with life through anorexia, so Francessa/Kessa is dying. A loving therapist makes Kessa see that Francessa doesn't have to be perfect to be loved. (OA) (S)

Rosa feels she must ask her migrant worker husband, Juan, for permission to enter a training program for teachers' aides. He reluctantly agrees, and his agreement changes their lives. Both Rosa and Juan grow individually and together as Rosa goes to school. (OA) (HL)

**Conflicts in Relationships:** Many at-risk students experience daily problems in relating positively to those around them. They need to learn that relationships can be nurturing ones. These works are chosen with that purpose in mind. They are intended to be models for positive relationships.


The "Two Rows Back" band is experiencing difficulty preparing for competition. Burt, one of their members, threatens to defect to the "Pied Pipers." Soon, the two bands are at odds. Preparing for the contest, the two bands learn that each person is different, and has something to give to both groups. (RC) (HL)


Steve Berger plays basketball for the championship Pintos' Dairy PALs, and his friends are jealous. Steve thinks they are rejecting him, and becomes very lonely. (RC) (HL)

Tyrone is one of the fastest runners in Los Angeles, but he runs only to forget his broken heart. His teammates fail to understand this. Once they do, they decide to help Tyrone. Tyrone, however, has already decided to win for his coach and his teammates. (RC) (HL)


A class assignment pairs Lori and Rick together as a "pretend" married couple. But their relationship is more real, since they plan to marry immediately after leaving high school. Fortunately, Lori realizes that they are too different to undertake a serious relationship. (RC) (BY)


Duke thinks he has solved his problems by stealing a car. But the act lands him at Highland Hills, an experimental reform school, where he learns to be responsible for himself and others. Gradually, the events at the school teach him to respect himself and others. (RC) (HL)


Dicey and her brothers and sister, deserted by their mother, live with their grandmother. Dicey has been in charge for too long, and must now learn to give the parenting to Grandma. (RC) (BY)
Adolescent Sexuality: Many readers may find themselves in the position of marrying very young for many reasons. These adolescent readers need guidance in how to manage problems normally encountered by adults. These works have been selected to aid in this guidance.


Robbie and Janine married young and have a toddler. Like many teenage parents, they are not financially or emotionally able to deal with a child. Janine meets a young woman in the park just when she feels she can no longer handle the pressure of being a young mother. The young woman encourages her to deal positively with P.J., her son. Both Janine and Robbie realize that their marriage will survive only if they get help. They attend a support group for abusive parents, and their lives start to turn around. (RC) (HL)


When Paul and Cathy find out that Cathy is pregnant they marry. The usual sad story of teen marriage and pregnancy is changed in this story, when Paul and Cathy write up a marriage contract by which they agree to abide. Their parents offer both money and emotional support to the young parents, who are then able to adjust to both baby and marriage. (OA) (HL)


A class assignment pairs Lori and Rick together as a "pretend" married couple. But their relationship is more real, since they plan to marry immediately after leaving high school. Fortunately, Lori realizes that they are too different to undertake a serious relationship. (RC) (BY)
Positive Models 42

Substance Abuse: Many readers either come from households where substance abuse occurs, or are abusers themselves. The works in this category are chosen to show that abusers can work through their abuse problems and go on to live full, productive lives.


Jenny feels unloved and unwanted by her divorced mother and father, and looks for love with Pete, who is a drug dealer. She falls into substance abuse, but finds that she is not only affecting herself when she abuses drugs. (SA) (HI)


Chris is a teen-aged alcoholic, but will not admit it. As life closes in on him he reacts by drinking more and more. He is accused of a crime he can't remember having committed during one of his alcoholic stupors. (SA) (BY)


Cindy will not admit to herself or others that her mother is an alcoholic. Each new incident precipitated by her mother's drinking embarrasses Cindy more. Finally, Mitch persuades her to attend an Alateen meeting, and Cindy learns to cope with the problem. (SA) (HI)


Summer suspects that her mother and her mother's boyfriend are growing marijuana for sale. She feels responsible for her younger sister, and goes to her English teacher and Nicky for help in coping with her troubles. (SA) (BY)
Physical Handicaps: Both the reader who is handicapped in some way and the reader who is not may be helped by reading about people who have handicaps and yet live full lives.


Julie is very active in school, but suddenly, she begins to have black-outs. She finds she cannot control those around her, or more importantly, her own life. Gradually she learns to deal with epilepsy, and begins to regain control of her life. (PH) (BY)


Rob lost his hearing in a diving accident, and refuses to allow his mother to control his life. He leaves with Kate, his girlfriend, and must learn to live in a hearing world. (PH) (BY)

Miscellaneous: The one textbook in this category is intended as a resource for educators.


The attempt of the authors of this textbook was to compile an anthology which draws from the works of as many subcultures as possible. Students will be able to see that being different is not a detriment, but an advantage. (M) (N)
CHAPTER FIVE

Implications

Researchers are far from being unified in their opinions on the use of bibliotherapy with at-risk students. Many extol the benefits of bibliotherapy in positively affecting the self-esteem of the student with low self-esteem. They feel that providing a student who has low self-esteem with a book portraying characters with high self-esteem can make a lasting change in how the student views herself. Others, however, feel that the use of bibliotherapy does not affect the reader's self-esteem enough to make a difference in the way she views herself, and can indeed be detrimental to the reader.

Yet the fact remains that educators must somehow motivate at-risk students sufficiently to prevent them from leaving school too early and becoming a burden on tax-payers because they have no marketable skills with which to provide for themselves. It seems that even the perhaps small benefits derived from bibliotherapy should be considered valid, if those benefits enhance
students' self-esteem sufficiently to make them want to be successful in school. As has been previously noted in this paper (Purves and Beach, cited in Sims 1983), adolescents often model themselves on characters in books they have read, and if they are presented with a work in which the main character has a positive self-image, perhaps they will also model that self-image.

Educators must, however, be careful not to prescribe works of literature as a doctor would prescribe medicine. The educator is not a doctor. Nor can bibliotherapy be used in a haphazard way. Works must be carefully chosen to match the readers' interests so that they will be motivated to read the works suggested. Educators cannot hope to force students to read books which appear to address their self-esteem issues. Educators can only make available a wide range of books geared to readers' reading abilities and interest levels, and then guide students toward those suitable for them.

Various methods may be found useful in responding to the problem of motivating a student to read
initially. Class reading and discussion seem to have positive motivational effects. Small group reading and discussion might also be found effective. Additionally, the educator may choose to read aloud to her class, and follow that reading with group discussion. All readers enjoy being read to by an adult or more capable peer and can enjoy the story more when they are not hampered by their own reading deficits.

The efforts of this study have been to provide an annotated bibliography for use by educators in dealing with at-risk students who exhibit signs of low self-esteem. Works recommended are offered as suggestions only. The researcher has made no effort to conduct readability studies on all the recommended works, but it is safe to assume that most of the books are designed for lower ability readers. The various works researched in this study contain titles specifically written for low-ability readers. Works were chosen from these with the intention of satisfying the interests of the middle and senior high school student,
and to that end such topics as fantasy, romantic interest, and personal triumphs are included. However, not all at-risk students are poor readers, and other titles have been included with this in mind.

Although bibliotherapy has been in use for many years, more studies need to be carefully conducted and published in order that researchers may gain a wider knowledge for the application of bibliotherapy. In addition, in using bibliotherapy, researchers should pay more attention to investigating methods of motivating the reluctant reader, since the at-risk student is often also the reluctant reader. The present study suggests that researchers do not know all there is to know about the effects of bibliotherapy. Educators who are genuinely concerned about the state of their students' self-esteem are encouraged to attempt the use of bibliotherapy, in an effort to enhance the self-esteem of that at-risk population.
References


Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Grimes for the emotional support she has given to me during the course of this study, and for the many hours of supervision she has given to help this study to be brought to its fruition.

Secondly, I would like to thank my daughter Bethany and my husband Doug for the unselfish way in which they have encouraged me and allowed me all the time I have needed to complete this study.

Finally, I would like to thank God for both the thirst for knowledge, and for the ability to communicate knowledge to others, which He has given to me.