

I Got Issues with That!

Young Adult Books Dealing with Social Problems

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Racism / Acceptance of Others

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang

Three seemingly unrelated stories blend into a memorable tale of growing up Chinese American. The fable of the Monkey King is merged with Jin Wang's struggles to retain his Chinese identity. Contrasting these two characters is Chin-Lee, a Chinese stereotype.

The Legend of Buddy Bush by Sheila P. Moses

Pattie Mae adores her Uncle Buddy, who has returned home to North Carolina after living in Harlem. When he's arrested for a crime he didn't commit, Pattie and her whole family become outraged and feel they must make sure justice is done.

Mississippi Trial, 1955 by Chris Crowe

Hiram Hillburn returns to Greenwood, Mississippi for a visit in 1955, the summer before he turns sixteen. Immediately upon his arrival, he meets Emmett Till, a black teen visiting from Chicago who soon after is murdered.

Underage Alcohol Use

God of Beer by Garret Keizer

A group teens in rural Vermont form SUDS, or Students Undermining a Drunk Society; the group strives to "lower the drinking age, raise the drinker's awareness [and] destroy the non-drinker's stigma" through nonviolent protest. When the local golden girl, Diana, is killed driving a drunk guy home, the group and their rebellion falls apart.

Making the Run by Heather Henson

In a small Kentucky town, Lulu and Ginny are best friends and regularly make the run via Dead Man's curve to nearby Huntsville to illegally buy the booze that along with their stash gets them through their days.

Whirligig by Paul Fleischman

After a drunk teenage boy kills a girl while driving, his life is transformed by fulfilling a request of the girl's mother. He embarks on a journey to build memorial whirligigs throughout the United States.

Children of Alcoholic Parents

A Room on Lorelei Street by Mary E. Pearson

Faced with an alcoholic mother, a dead father, and trouble in her Texas high school, seventeen-year-old Zoe budgets the paycheck she earns as a waitress and rents a room from an elderly eccentric woman.

Lush by Natasha Friend

After years of pretending she has a "normal" family, a worried teen finally confronts her father's alcoholism. Thirteen-year-old Samantha's father makes empty promises to stop drinking while her mother immerses herself in yoga classes, defending her husband as a "good man."

The Serious Kiss by Mary Hogan

Fourteen-year-old Libby Madrigal's biggest fear is becoming her parents; her father drinks too much, and her mother is an obese fast-food junkie, and they fight constantly. Bringing friends home is nearly impossible. Still, Libby tries to focus on her freshman-year goal: to have a serious kiss.

Girls in Obsessive Relationships

Dreamland by Sarah Dessen

After her sister runs away, sixteen-year-old Caitlin decides that she needs to make a major change in her own life and begins an abusive relationship with a boy who is mysterious, brilliant, and dangerous.

Painting Caitlyn by Kimberly Joy Peters

Fourteen-year-old Caitlyn is really excited when sexy, gorgeous Tyler, 16, pays attention to her. She skips class to be with him, and she neglects her beloved art project. Caitlyn tries to ignore how jealous and controlling Tyler is, even when he slaps her and destroys a piece of her art.

Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories About Girls and the Boys in Their Lives by Sharon G. Flake

Highlighting situations about young people on the verge of becoming adults, the stories in this collection explore how and why so many girls and boys define their significance in terms of their allure to the opposite sex.

Drug Use and Abuse

Crank by Ellen Hopkins

This novel, written in verse, introduces 15-year-old narrator Kristina, who reveals how she became addicted to crank, and how the stimulant turned her from straight-A student to drug dealer, and eventually a teen mom.

Saint Iggy by K.L. Going

Iggy Corso, 16, doesn't do drugs, even though he was born addicted to crack. He lives in a city housing project, in an apartment filled with furniture that his stoned and drunken father collects from the street. Iggy's mother is an addict who has been AWOL for a month.

Stoner & Spaz by Ron Koertge

Sixteen-year-old Ben Bancroft is stuck with a body that only half works because of his cerebral palsy, and he lives with his intensely proper and protective grandmother. So when a girl actually starts to talk to him and touch him, he is stunned and thrilled, although Colleen is stoned more often than straight, has tattoos in amazing places, and has a drug dealer for a boyfriend.

Homeless Teens

Runaway by Wendelin Van Draanen

Through her journal entries, 12-year-old Holly Janquell reveals her experiences of being homeless and also living in foster homes since her mother died of a drug overdose two years ago.

Can't Get There From Here by Todd Strasser

Fifteen-year-old "Maybe" lives with her friends on the streets of New York. They reject even the relative comfort of homeless shelters and use street names such as Rainbow, Maggot, and Jewel. Maybe chooses freedom from all rules over any kind of security, but total freedom ultimately leads to early death or slavery to adult predators.

Theories of Relativity by Barbara Haworth-Attard

Dylan Wallace's cruel mother threw him out to make ready for her fourth man, whom she hopes to marry. The teen's only refuges are a youth center, a 24-hour doughnut shop, and the library. The sixteen-year-old can either continue to panhandle or work the streets for Vulture, which Jenna, a sexually abused runaway, has been doing, first by begging, then by dealing and prostitution.

Sexual Abuse / Rape

Imani All Mine by Connie Porter

Balancing her honor-roll grades with the perils of surviving inner-city Buffalo, N.Y., Tasha gives birth to Imani--a child conceived in violence and given a name that means "faith" and the young mother expresses a powerful, protective love for her daughter.

Such a Pretty Girl by Laura Wiess

Meredith has run out of time. Her father was supposed to be away for nine years, but he is out in three and on his way home. Her mother is in denial, still furious with her daughter for reporting the rape that caused his conviction. This terrifying, powerful novel of child abuse and molestation is told by fifteen-year-old Meredith as it is happening.

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

A traumatic event near the end of the summer has a devastating effect on Melinda's freshman year in high school. She refuses to speak about the event and the entire school shuns her.

Bullying / Hazing

Good Girls by Laura Ruby

The dark side of the digital age is revealed in this cautionary tale about a good girl who is photographed while "hooking up" with a popular senior. Audrey and Luke's relationship consists of passionate sexual experimentation at parties, but barely a hello in the school hallways, and Audrey is sick of it. However, before she can end it, a photograph of her in a compromising position is maliciously transmitted to everyone she knows, including her horrified father.

Shattering Glass by Gail Giles

When the coolest guy in school decides to elevate the school outcast to popularity, things don't work out quite as planned. The outcast has his own agenda and other students in the popular clique turn to violence.

Returnable Girl by Pamela A. Lowell

Ronnie's drug-addicted and alcoholic mom abandoned her at age 11, and Ronnie has been kicked out of numerous foster homes ever since. Now at age 13, she's found a good home with her latest foster mom who wants to adopt her, but Ronnie can't let go of her dream of reuniting with her real mother. Ronnie acts out violently, steals and lies, but worries that she's abandoning an equally troubled friend as she strives for acceptance with the "in" crowd at her middle school.

Depression / Suicide

Cut by Patricia McCormick

Burdened with the pressure of believing she is responsible for her brother's illness, 15-year-old Callie begins a course of self-destruction that leads to her being admitted to Sea Pines, a psychiatric hospital the "guests" refer to as Sick Minds. Slowly, she begins emerging from her miserable silence, ultimately understanding the role her dysfunctional family played in her brother's health crisis.

Wrecked by E.R. Frank

Anna is driving a very drunk friend home from a party. Moments into the journey, a head-on collision leaves Ellen with a punctured lung and other serious injuries, Anna with a lacerated eye, and the other driver dead. The dead teen happens to be her brother's girlfriend.

Trigger by Susan Vaught

Jersey Hatch recovers from the brain damage inflicted by a gunshot to his head by his own hand. Through a hazy series of flashbacks, memories, dreams, and scenes from the present—often coded as haphazard gibberish—he reaches inward to uncover the lost pieces of his memory and to figure out why he might have shot himself.

Body Image / Weight Issues

Massive by Julia Bell

Carmen, 14, is distressed when her mother, Maria, insists that they leave Yorkshire (and Carmen's stepfather) and move to Birmingham. But Maria is wildly erratic because of her eating disorder, and as she starts her new life, she insists that Carmen ("Piggy") join her on endless diets and incessant exercise.

The Earth, My Butt and Other Big, Round Things by Carolyn Mackler

Sophomore Virginia Shreves lives in Manhattan and has a budding romance with Froggy the Fourth, but she doesn't want his wandering hands to feel her fat. Her baggy clothing helps her to "hide." Her mother is an adolescent psychologist obsessed with her imperfect daughter's weight, and her father is rarely around. Her older sister joined the Peace Corps to escape mom, and brother Byron is big man on the Columbia campus—until he's suspended for date rape.

Skin by Adrienne Maria Vrettos

Donnie, 14, has a dysfunctional family. His parents, completely ineffective, constantly rage at one another. His sister, Karen, 16, is anorexic and storms around screaming profanities and lying. Donnie is simply becoming invisible. The outcast at school, he suffers from ear infections and lays low, watching his sister starve herself.

Questioning Sexual Identities

Far From Xanadu by Julie Anne Peters

Mike Szabo born Mary-Elizabeth, must deal with more than her share of problems. Her alcoholic father committed suicide, her obese mother has given up on life, and her no-good brother has driven the family plumbing business into the ground. To make matters worse, Mike falls deeply in love with a new girl in their small Kansas town, bad-girl Xanadu.

Eight Seconds by Jean Ferris

Between his junior and senior years in high school, John Ritchie and his best friend spend a week at rodeo school. One of the young men there, Kit, strikes John as intensely interesting, both in his graceful, confident demeanor and in his calm attitude toward both bulls and the town bully. After he returns home, John learns that Kit is gay.

So Hard to Say by Alex Sanchez

Thirteen-year-old Latina chocoholic-chatterbox Xio can't keep her eyes off blond-haired, steel-eyed Frederick, the intriguing transfer student just in from Wisconsin. At first, the soft-spoken newcomer, unsure of his new Southern California junior high and maybe his own sexuality, doesn't know what to make of her pursuits. Slowly and surely, Xio charms her way into his life.

Divorce and Family Issues

Many Stones by Carolyn Coman

Berry's sister, Laura, has been murdered in South Africa, where she was volunteering at a school, and Berry, still smarting from her divorced father's perceived rejection of the family, is becoming angry and isolated. Early on she explains that she collects stones and stacks them on her chest so that she can feel their heft and "know there's something there to be weighted."

Night Hoops by Carl Deuker

Nick Abbott finds himself trying to deal with his parent's divorce and a host of other problems that face him during his sophomore year. Nick learns how to control the tempo of a game as a point guard, and he also begins to reach a greater maturity in his life. Central to the story is his relationship with his disturbed and angry teammate and neighbor, Trent Dawson. The young men form an uneasy bond as they quietly practice each night on Nick's backyard court.

The Big Nothing by Adrian Fogelin

Pudgy, quiet Justin Riggs' father leaves home; his mother is so shattered by arguments, put-downs, and suspicion that she withdraws to bed; and his older brother, Duane, has enlisted and is sent to Iraq. His best friend has a girlfriend, leaving little time for him, and he feels abandoned. His coping mechanism is to withdraw into a state that Justin thinks of as "The Big Nothing."

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