

# Establishing the Place of Teen Dating Violence and Young Adult Literature in the Secondary Classroom

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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Establishing the Place of Teen Dating Violence  
and Young Adult Literature in the Secondary Classroom

Honors Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements of HON 420

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By

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Establishing the Place of Teen Dating Violence  
and Young Adult Literature in the Secondary Classroom

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Abstract: Teen dating violence is a significant issue to students due to its reported prevalence and student difficulties with identifying partner violence. Young adult literature is useful for engaging disinterested readers because it helps foster a love of reading and helps students explore a social topic that is relevant to their lives and the lives of their peers. Educators in the secondary classroom can use young adult literature about teen dating violence to engage disinterested readers because the problem novels present gendered and culturally centered approaches and are considered high interest with low readability; furthermore, findings that a significant number of protagonists in the novels analyzed used writing to help them make sense of their violent relationships supports teachers' use of writing, specifically journaling, in their classrooms. Data included thirteen young adult literature novels published between 2000-2013 that had the primary focus of teen dating violence. Texts were read and analyzed for similarities. The results were that the high interest levels and low readability of the novels and the gendered and culturally crafted approaches in the texts would be helpful for engaging the disinterested reader. Furthermore, the significant number of protagonists that utilized writing to help them make sense of their violent relationships supports the use of journaling and peer discussion in the

classroom in order to encourage deeper inquiry. The overarching goal of this study was to create a teaching resource that would achieve the ambitious achievement of helping young adults identify teen dating violence in their own lives.

Keywords and Phrases: teen dating violence, young adult literature, culture, gender, honors thesis, students, classroom, disinterested readers, journaling

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<i>Things Change</i> by Patrick Jones	2004

Table 2: Protagonist Demographics

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<i>But I Love Him</i>	Ann	F	Upper/Middle	White	Deceased father, disinterested mother
<i>Dark Song</i>	Ames	F	Lower	White	Disinterested parents
<i>Dreamland</i>	Caitlin	F	Middle	White	Disinterested parents
<i>Falling for You</i>	Rae	F	Lower	White	Negligent parents
<i>Rage: A Love Story</i>	Johanna	F	N/A	White	Deceased mother and father
<i>So Much It Hurts</i>	Iris	F	Middle	White	Negligent father, disinterested mother
<i>Stay</i>	Clara	F	Upper	White	Deceased mother
<i>Teenage Love Affair</i>	Zsa-Zsa	F	Middle	African American	Deceased father, negligent mother
<i>Things Change</i>	Johanna	F	Middle	White	Active parents

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Above all, I would first like to acknowledge my thesis mentor, Dr. Sally Martin, for her endless support, knowledge, and patience. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Eastern Kentucky University Honors Program for funding my pursuit of this thesis. I would also like to thank the Madison County Public Library for its abundant, free, and accessible resources. Finally, I would like to thank my Mother for inspiring my love of reading, and for her canny ability to find the cheapest copy of a book available without paying shipping costs.



## **Introduction**

Statistically speaking, the reality that educators face is that one in every ten of their students will have been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner by the time they shake hands to receive their high school diploma (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016). Young adult literature has always been used to deal with social issues relevant to the young adult audience. Though it is crafted by adults, the imaginative stories are purposefully created to connect with young readers and help them deal with a variety of issues through the eyes of a fictional character. In times of crisis, scholars have turned to young adult literature in an attempt to explore worldly issues. For example, when school shootings became a prominent issue, educators turned to analyzing violence in young adult literature in hopes of finding trends or ways to discuss violence with their students (Miller, 2005).

As a social issue, teen dating violence is a concern with students as young as sixth grade (Charles & Noonan, 2009). There is reason to speculate that statistics with teen dating violence are skewed due to varying perspectives on the social issue of what does and does

not constitute teen dating violence (Charles & Noonan, 2009). Teen dating violence, in comparison to issues such as sexuality, guns, or drug abuse, is still a rather new topic, as scholars have only started to explore the issue in recent years, and little has been done with teen dating violence and young adult literature in these infant stages. A 1997 survey reported that the top issues that were considered the most prevalent to students were drug and alcohol abuse, sexuality, homosexuality, ethics, gangs, self-reliance, hope, prejudice, self-esteem, and AIDS (Reid & Stringer, 1997). In comparison, a more recent 2009 analysis of overall trends in young adult literature revealed that the focus had shifted to bullying and abuse issues, with the previous aforementioned issues lower than expected (Koss & Teale, 2009, p. 569). A majority of the literature published on this topic has appeared within the last decade, and young adult literature that focuses on the issue has become prevalent at the turn of the century. For example, the young adult literature analyzed in this study was published in the last two decades, starting with *Dreamland* in 2000 to *So Much It Hurts* and *Falling for You* published in 2013.

The overarching goal of this study was to create a teaching resource that could directly address teen dating violence in the secondary English classroom and that would achieve the ambitious achievement of helping young adults identify teen dating violence in their own lives. In order to accomplish this goal, the importance of teen dating violence and young adult literature first must be established in the opinions of educators. Educators in the secondary classroom can use young adult literature about teen dating violence to engage disinterested readers because the problem novels present gendered and culturally centered approaches and are considered high interest with low readability; furthermore, findings that a significant number of protagonists in the novels analyzed used writing to help them make

sense of their violent relationships supports teachers' use of writing, specifically journaling, in their classrooms.

### **What is Teen Dating Violence?**

Teen dating violence, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, is a type of intimate partner violence; it can include physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse ("Understanding Teen Dating Violence," 2016). When discussing teen dating violence with students, it is important to understand that the clinical term may appear foreign. Students may be more familiar with terms such as relationship abuse, partner violence, relationship violence, dating abuse, domestic abuse, or domestic violence. Teen dating violence is the most accurate term when exploring this subject. It is important to clarify and explain what physical, psychological/emotional, and sexual abuse refers to, as well as stalking. The CDC clarified the overall definition of teen dating violence by explicitly stating the definitions of the different natures:

*Physical:* This occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, shoved, slapped, punched, or kicked. *Psychological/Emotional:* This means threatening a partner or harming his or her sense of self-worth. Examples include name calling, shaming, bullying, embarrassing on purpose, or keeping him/her away from friends and family.

*Sexual:* This is forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent. This can be physical or nonphysical, like threatening to spread rumors if a partner refuses to have sex. *Stalking:* This refers to a pattern of harassing or threatening tactics that are unwanted and cause fear in the victim.

("Understanding Teen Dating Violence," 2016)

Teen dating violence is an unfortunately prevalent issue for students. In a startling research survey in 2011, the CDC reported that “among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 22% of women and 15% of men first experienced some form of partner violence when they were between the ages of eleven to seventeen (“Understanding Teen Dating Violence,” 2016). What is most disturbing about any reports of teen dating violence is that it is likely that the numbers are far higher than actually being reported, because many teens do not report teen dating violence. Many teens are afraid to tell their friends and family about the abuse, and are therefore unlikely to report accurate numbers to national surveys (“Understanding Teen Dating Violence,” 2016).

Furthermore, there are studies indicating that teens struggle with their perceptions of teen dating violence. A study of ninth graders and their perceptions of teen dating violence revealed that interventions need to be gender and culturally specific. Reeves and Orpinas noted in this research study that in regards to gender, “findings revealed more support for female-to-male aggression, a strong association between norms and physical aggression but only in males” (p. 1677). In regards to culture, the study found that there was:

Greater acceptance of norms supporting dating violence by non-White students...and participants rejected male-to-female dating aggression because of peer pressure not to hit girls, parents’ beliefs that denounce dating violence, the superior physical advantage of boys over girls, and legal consequences. (p. 1677)

Research also shows that students do not simply struggle with teen dating violence only because of their younger age. Realization of what is and is not considered to be dating

violence does not magically occur after the students are no longer teenagers. In fact, college students experience violence within intimate partner relationships at a rate that is much higher than the normal population (Nabors, Dietz, and Jasinski, 2006). This excludes age and education from the factors affecting teen dating violence with students, and thus the idea that they will “grow out of it.” Finally, students in all four groups in a perceptions of teen dating violence study reported that they felt like teen dating violence was a much more significant and widespread problem in their peers lives than the adults around them believed (Gallopini, 2009, p. 17).

### **Why Young Adult Literature?**

In a world of standards based education and end of course assessments, the suggestion to involve young adult literature in the classroom may seem strenuous to some educators; however, there is a great potential for young adult literature in today’s classrooms. While standards based education does not call for an exclusion of young adult literature from the classroom, educators such as Conner (2013) have expressed the concern that school districts will construe the list of exemplar texts in the Common Core State Standards as a list that teachers are obliged to incorporate into their classroom in the pressure to perform well on the tests (p. 69). Above all, as stated by Janet Alsup, young adult literature is something that students want to read, rather than something they are forced to read by teachers (Alsup, 2003, p. 160). This is an incredibly important detail for students who have a strong disinterest in reading. Many students struggle to connect with text such as Shakespeare, which is frequently used to teach reading standards in the classroom. However, young adult literature does not need to be seen as competition for the classics; rather, young adult literature should be used as a tool for establishing reading

in the lives of students and creating an appreciation for literature as a whole (Knickerbottom & Rycik, 2002, p. 414). Fostering a love of reading is an important milestone for student's future successes. According to Ivey and Fisher, the students in college who not only know how to read, but who read abundantly are the ones who are the most successful, as compared to students who have successfully learned how not to read (Bronz, 2011, p. 414). Many students find sustaining the motivation to read throughout high school difficult as texts become less relevant to their everyday lives, causing students to become disconnected with reading and losing literacy (Knickerbottom & Rycik, 2002, p. 2).

Using young adult literature to teach social issues is also not an entirely new strategy in the classroom. In "Shattering Images of Young Adult Literature", Stacy Miller outlined a unit of how to teach students about violence with activities and class discussion using the novel *Shattered Glass* by Gail Giles. Steven Wolk argued in his article "Reading for a Better World" that one of the most meaningful and enjoyable ways to have students inquire about social responsibility is by using young adult literature because the content can be situated into good stories (Wolk, 2009). Young adult novels have been found to be particularly persuasive with young adult readers by utilizing first person narration and confessional tones to create a "narrative intimacy" between the reader and fictional protagonist (Day, 2013). Young adult literature's defining qualities make it a useful tool for teaching social issues because students can phrase questions from the perspective of the fictional characters.

Teachers should introduce young adult literature books about teen dating violence into their classroom despite the political realities of school. As teachers continue to face the

realities of these bureaucratic and contextual restraints on education, Alsup has concisely stated that:

I believe we can no longer pretend that after classes end students go home to stable families and hot dinners. We can no longer waste the ethical opportunities literature provides in the face of increasing teenage apathy, anger, and violence. The stakes are too high. (p. 162)

Students have the right to read books that are relevant to their lives. Teachers should not avoid giving students these reading experiences out of a fear for possible retributions, though the fear is completely understandable. Contemporary young adult literature focuses on the real world problems that students face today. As the National Council of Teachers of English website has asserted, “English teachers willing to defend the classics and modern literature must be prepared to give equally spirited defense to serious and worthwhile adolescent novels” (The Right to Read and the Teacher of English section, para. 4). The certainty is that occasional objections to literature will occur no matter the subject matter because books are open to constant criticism. Most importantly, as Steven Wolk (2009) reasoned, is that “while teachers need to contend with the political realities of schooling, they cannot see those as insurmountable hurdles but rather challenges for them to creatively rise above” (p. 666).

By putting young adult literature about teen dating violence in the hands of students, educators are accomplishing two goals. They are helping foster a love of reading in disinterested readers and are helping students explore a social topic that is relevant to their lives and the lives of their peers. Assigning books to students that they do not care about will not foster an independence for reading in students.

## **Methods**

### *Data and Sample*

Unfortunately, there is not a pre-existing comprehensive book list of all young adult literature books that deal with dating violence available for teachers to access at any time. The first step of this study was visiting book recommendation sites such as Goodreads.com in order to generate a sample of young adult literature about teen dating violence. The terms that were searched included teen dating violence, dating abuse, abusive relationships, and partner violence. However, finding lists specific to the topic proved to be exceptionally difficult, as the results congregated book lists with this subject tag alongside tags such as bullying, guns, gangs, and rape, creating large and unfocused recommendations. In order to generate this book list, a “Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month: A Discussion and Reading Guide” was referenced, created by a teen, youth, and adult librarian.

The first requirement for this book list was that the central plot of the novel must be focused primarily on the experience of teen dating violence. Due to this requirement, one book was removed from the list because of the determination that the dating violence was a background element. Each of these books are classified as realistic young adult literature, or what is frequently referred to as “problem novels” (Storer 2015, p. 31). The literature reviewed in this study was published between the years 2000 to 2013. A complete list of the books analyzed in this study is included in Table 1.



Table 1: Books Reviewed and Analyzed

Book	Year Published
<i>Bad Boy</i> by Dream Jordan	2012
<i>Bitter End</i> by Jennifer Brown	2011
<i>Breaking Beautiful</i> by Jennifer Shaw Wolf	2012
<i>Breathing Underwater</i> by Alex Flinn	2001
<i>But I Love Him</i> by Amanda Grace	2011
<i>Dark Song</i> by Gail Giles	2010
<i>Dreamland</i> by Sarah Dessen	2000
<i>Falling for You</i> by Lisa Schroeder	2013
<i>Rage: A Love Story</i> by Julie Anne Peters	2009
<i>So Much it Hurts</i> by Monique Polak	2013
<i>Stay</i> by Deb Caletti	2011
<i>Teenage Love Affair</i> by Ni-Ni Simone	2010
<i>Things Change</i> by Patrick Jones	2004

### *Data Analysis*

Each book on this reading guide was critically read from the viewpoint of an educator. As each novel was read, a running detailed book list reference sheet was kept to note similarities and differences between the novels as well as concerns and initial reactions and thoughts. The original intent with this book list was to develop critical inquiry questions for each novel in order to encourage deeper thinking about the events in the novels. However, this original suggestion was changed after reflecting on what approach in the classroom would be most well received by both educators and students.

The purpose of this book list was to create an easily accessible resource for teachers. These books were easily accessible through hard copies and electronically, most of which were through free public services such as libraries.

### **Results**

#### *Readability*

The books on this list vary in both page length, Lexile readability level, and ATOS levels. The shortest book on this list is 208 pages (*Bad Boy*) and the longest book on this list is 364 pages (*Bitter End*). The books were published between the years 2000-2013. Not all the books had available Lexile levels. Of the thirteen books examined, nine had Lexile levels available. Seven out of the nine Lexile levels were identified as High-Low, commonly portrayed as “HL” before the Lexile score. Books are designated with a high-low Lexile measure when they have a much lower than the average reading level for the intended age range of its readers (Meta Metrics, HL: High-Low section, para. 1). While this was not originally an intended goal for this book list, this is incredibly helpful for educators. Books that are identified as HL are extremely helpful for matching older, struggling, or reluctant readers with appropriate difficulty and developmental levels (Meta Metrics, HL: High-Low section, para. 1). For comparison purposes, the ATOS levels of the books were also provided. Twelve out of the thirteen books had ATOS levels available. The ATOS levels ranged from 3.6 to 4.8. Educators wanting to pair books and students to help guide disinterested readers towards fruitful reading experiences can reference the Appendix, which includes detailed plot summaries of the novels. Along with the summary, each book’s page numbers and Lexile and ATOS levels, if available, are presented in the Appendix.

### *Protagonist Demographics*

Twelve out of the thirteen novels were from the perspective of female victims. Out of the thirteen protagonists, only two characters were racially diverse and dated racially diverse partners. Nick in *Breathing Underwater* is noted to be of Greek descent. This was determined by the author’s description of the characters. This study did not contain a

male victim narrative. While the protagonist of *Breathing Underwater* is a male, he is the abuser. In regards to socioeconomic status, two of the novels explicitly allude to the protagonists being from families of low economic status. Most commonly this manifested as the characters working their own part time jobs in addition to going to school. One novel that is in-between is *Dark Song*, which follows the story of a family that transitions from an extremely high social status to poverty. The dating violence occurs during the low economic status. A majority of the protagonists were either middle or lower social economic classes. Eleven out of the thirteen main characters had deceased, disinterested, or absent parents. Two of the protagonists had abusive father figures. Only two characters could be described as having active parents, which refers to caring parents who are ignorant to the signs of abuse. Absent refers to negligent parents and disinterested refers to parents who are present but are not active sources of guidance for the main character. A complete breakdown of the protagonist demographics is available in Table 2.

Table 2: Protagonist Demographics

Book	Name	Gender	SES	Race	Parent Status
<i>Bad Boy</i>	Kate	F	Ward of the State	African American	Deceased mother and father
<i>Bitter End</i>	Alex	F	Middle	White	Deceased mother, disinterested father
<i>Breaking Beautiful</i>	Allie	F	Middle	White	Active parents
<i>Breathing Underwater</i>	Nick	M	Upper	White	Deceased mother, abusive father
<i>But I Love Him</i>	Ann	F	Upper/Middle	White	Deceased father, disinterested mother
<i>Dark Song</i>	Ames	F	Lower	White	Disinterested parents
<i>Dreamland</i>	Caitlin	F	Middle	White	Disinterested parents
<i>Falling for You</i>	Rae	F	Lower	White	Negligent mother, abusive step-father
<i>Rage: A Love Story</i>	Johanna	F	N/A	White	Deceased mother and father
<i>So Much It Hurts</i>	Iris	F	Middle	White	Negligent father, disinterested mother
<i>Stay</i>	Clara	F	Upper	White	Deceased mother
<i>Teenage Love Affair</i>	Zsa-Zsa	F	Middle	African American	Deceased father, negligent mother
<i>Things Change</i>	Johanna	F	Middle	White	Active parents

### *Literature Similarities*

Furthermore, the one commonality that stood out among the plot lines was the inclusion of writing to vent their thoughts and feelings. Six out of the fourteen novels utilized writing to express the character's deeper feelings. Two of the novels used writing to explore the viewpoint of the abuser. In *Breathing Underwater*, Nick writes

about his abusive relationship with his girlfriend in a reflective journal as part of his court mandated restraining order. In *Things Change*, the only introspection that the reader gets from Paul comes from chapters where he writes to his deceased father about his life.

Two of the main characters, Alex in *Bitter End* and Rae in *Falling for You* used poetry to express themselves and their hurt. Zsa-Zsa in *Teenage Love Affair* briefly utilized a journal to vent her thoughts, and Caitlin in *Dreamland* used a dream journal as a diary to replace the connection she had with her sister.

### **Discussion**

Efforts were made to make this book list as diverse as possible in regards to gender and culture in order to appeal to as many students as possible; however, the book list has the limitations that affect young adult literature as whole. Only two books, *Teenage Love Affair* and *Bad Boy*, contained racially diverse main characters. This reflects the data found in Koss and Teale (2009) that only 20% of young adult literature could be considered multicultural literature (p. 565). Regrettably, the books on this book list are also constrained to the content that has been published, and many are not perfect in their portrayal of teen dating violence. Storer (2015) analyzed eight young adult literature books with the theme of teen dating violence and found that the female characters in the novel were not portrayed in the sense that it could happen to anyone, but rather that women were more at risk who endured a significant family tragedy, suffered from low self-esteem, and/or were inexperienced in relationships. Seven out of the eight books analyzed by Storer were used on this study's book list, and that is a truthful criticism of the novels. While the fictional narratives are not perfect, they do have value as resources for teen dating violence prevention.

In regards to gender and culture, the book list did not present an all-encompassing range, but it did present a variation in certain aspects. Cultural approaches to teen dating violence can be affected by the characters' socioeconomic class, race, and parental influence. Once again, these representations in young adult literature can be influenced by the archetypal images in literature. For example, the inclusion of the disinterested, negligent, or deceased parent can be due to the "The Orphan" archetype. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) stated that when planning a book, authors typically figure out ways to get rid of the parental figures in order to allow the children the freedom to make their own decisions (p. 103). Therefore, depictions of teen dating violence in young adult literature have limitations, but the combination with High-Low interest levels can be used to engage disinterested readers.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

The approach in the classroom must be practical. As mentioned before, the reality is that the secondary classroom is sculpted by end of course assessments and standards based education, and there is little room for anything else. Teachers who are exploring professional development are hoping to find pragmatic ideas that will directly relate to the day-to-day operations of a typical classroom and that will enhance their effectiveness with the students in that classroom (Guskey 2002, p. 382). Thus, the approach in the classroom cannot be tedious or time consuming because it will be unlikely to succeed; therefore, finding that a significant number of protagonists in these novels used writing to help make sense of their violent relationships supports teachers' use of writing, specifically journaling, in the secondary English classroom.

Journaling emphasizes the reading experience more than it does the content.

Typically, disinterested high school readers are more likely to search online for brief summaries of content rather than reading it themselves, either because they are unable to understand the content in a reasonable amount of time or because they *believe* that they cannot understand the content. Having students create journaling responses to the reading material puts the focus on the student's opinion rather than their ability to recall information. Journaling, as Judith Taylor (1985) asserted, forces students to come to grips with what they have learned, but it allows them to do it on their own terms (Taylor, 1985, p. 3). In relation to the day-to-day operations of a typical classroom, Lindemann and Anderson (2001) described:

The journal has several uses in a writing class. Many teachers set aside the first ten minutes or so of every class period for journal writing. While the teacher checks the roll, returns papers, or reviews the lesson plan, students use the time to write whatever they want in their journals. The procedure settles the class down to work and gives students daily writing practice. (p. 80)

This description of the English classroom presents a pragmatic approach in the classroom that makes use of the time at the beginning of the class period. Furthermore, it is suggested that teachers should not grade journal responses, but should instead offer positive feedback responses in order to encourage students to write out their ideas (Lindemann & Anderson 2001, p. 81). This approach both encourages students to read and write for themselves instead of reading and writing to the standards. This approach is appealing to teachers because it is an overly laborious task to read journals and provide feedback.

As Alsup stated, students need to read, write, and talk about issues that they find relevant and meaning in relation to their lives (Alsup, 2003, p. 165). Reading young adult literature and writing in journals accomplishes two of these goals, but there is still one left. For the teachers who wish to integrate this resource on a deeper level, they can use facilitated peer discussion with the journal writing. In the classroom, Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie (2000) explained that:

Journal writing is one form of response that seems to foster discussion. Prior to participating in a discussion group, students read a story or part of a story and write a response in their journal. Students bring their journals to the discussion group, and the entries provide stimulus for the peer discussion group. (p. 124)

This allows students to explore topics that interest them in these small peer discussion groups. The journals will provide a stimulus for the students to engage in the conversation about their reactions or thoughts to the reading. This can be done with students all reading the same novel, or with everyone in the group reading different novels and looking for the similarities. In peer-led discussion groups students are more likely to consider alternate viewpoints than they are in teacher led discussions (Baker et al. p. 124). The ultimate learning target is for students to be able to identify teen dating violence in their lives or the lives of others by giving them fictional depictions that are blatantly depicted as abusive as a comparison. Using journal writing and peer discussion will lead to a deeper learning experience for the students, and using a social topic that students find interesting can help guide them towards becoming lifelong readers.

## **Conclusion**



The reality is that educators do not have the time to read almost four thousand pages of young adult literature without a purpose. The goal of this study was to take the time to create a workable teaching resource that could easily be integrated into the average secondary English classroom and readily be used by educators. Educators in the secondary classroom can use young adult literature about teen dating violence to engage disinterested readers because the problem novels present gendered and culturally centered approaches and are considered high interest with low readability; furthermore, findings that a significant number of protagonists in the novels analyzed used writing to help them make sense of their violent relationships supports teachers' use of writing, specifically journaling, in their classrooms. Young adult literature in the classroom has the potential to lead students towards becoming lifelong readers by introducing them to literature that has relevance to their lives. Finally, and most importantly, the ultimate goal of establishing the place of young adult literature in the secondary classroom is that students will be able to recall these reading experiences when faced with the natures of teen dating violence. It is the hope of this author that by placing these books in the hands of young adults, they will one day look back and say, "This reminds me of what happened in this book that I read."

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## Appendix

### Plot Summaries

The following section will provide brief plot summaries of each novel included in this study. These brief plot summaries are intended to give educators enough contextual evidence to help them determine if they want to explore the novel more in-depth. It is heavily emphasized that an educator should read any and all books before placing them in the hands of students. The goal of this section is to highlight any concerns that may arise while students are reading these problem novels through the eyes of an educator. The thirteen novels are presented in alphabetical order along with their page length, Lexile level, and/or ATOS level if available.

#### *Bad Boy*, Dream Jordan

197 pages, ATOS: 4.7

Kate is a teenager in the foster care system who finds herself devastated to be back in a group home after her beloved foster parents can no longer care for her. Kate is immediately smitten with Percy, a boy from her troubled past. Kate is sixteen and Percy is nineteen. As Kate's first serious relationship, she is at first enamored with his attention to her, especially as she struggled to connect with the other girls in her group home. There are background mentions of the minors in Kate's group home abusing alcohol. Percy showers her with gifts, such as a new cell phone. During the duration of their relationship, Percy is sweet one moment and then cruel the next, especially when Kate expresses that she will not have sex with him. Kate's best friend Felicia notices the change in Kate's behavior, and tries to reach out to Kate with literature of help resources about dating violence. Kate rebuffs the support from her best friend, but eventually does

reach out to her former case worker and decides to break the relationship off with Percy afterwards. During the duration of the novel, you learn little to nothing about Kate's boyfriend, Percy. Though their relationship lasts only for a month, there is a large amount of emotional abuse in a short amount of time. After trying to completely separate herself from Percy, he tricks Kate into seeing him one last time and beats her up so severely that she is hospitalized for several weeks. In the end, she finds support from the girls in her foster home.

*Bitter End*, Jennifer Brown

354 pages, Lexile: HL740L, ATOS: 4.8

Alex is a senior in high school and develops a romantic relationship with the new student at her school, Cole. Alex feels like she has a connection with Cole because they both come from troubled home lives. Alex's father is estranged after the death of her mother years earlier, and Cole's father frequently abuses his mother in front of him. Alex has two close best friends, Zack and Bethany, and Cole is immediately jealous of Alex's friendship with Zack, causing tension. As their relationship goes on, Cole abuses Alex in a variety of emotional, physical, and verbal ways, but she struggles to pull away from him because of the good times that they shared together. Alex becomes isolated from her two friends because even though they are not aware of the abuse, they still voice their dislike of Cole. Alex's father is unobservant and does not notice the abuse. Isolated from her friends, Alex reaches out to an adult coworker after finding out that Alex abused his past girlfriend as well. Her adult coworker encourages her to end the relationship. When confronting Cole about his behavior, he brutally beats her up behind her work until her coworker rescues her and she ends up in the hospital. Alex spends the next year

recovering from the abuse that she has endured, repairing her friendships with Bethany and Zack, and finally accepting the loss of her mother.

*Breaking Beautiful*, Jennifer Shaw Wolf

376 pages, Lexile: HL650L, ATOS: 4.2

Allie wakes up with no memory of the terrible accident that took the life of her boyfriend, Trip. She is told by the police that she survived after jumping from the moving vehicle before it crashed off the side of a cliff. Allie lives with her mother and father, but her father was in the military and was not around for a majority of her relationship with Trip. Trip's parents are very wealthy and prominent figures in their small town. Trip's father is suspicious of Allie's involvement in his son's death, so he pressures the police into reopening the investigation. As Allie tries to return to a normal life, she is haunted by memories of Trip's physical and mental abuse all while being isolated by her classmates for their suspicion of Trip's death. Allie consistently wonders if her relationship with Trip would have gone differently if her father had been home. The only person who notices the abuse is Allie's twin brother, Andrew. Andrew suffers from cerebral palsy and other chronic health issues, and is therefore wheelchair bound. Allie also suffers from a mild case of cerebral palsy. In her memories, Allie recalls Andrew trying to intervene in the abuse of his sister, but her brother ultimately felt hopeless from not being able to protect her because of his disabilities. Allie falls under further scrutiny when she decides to start a romantic relationship after Trip's death with her one and only friend Blake; however, the detective quickly uncovers the abuse and encourages her to be forthright about the details of her and Trip's relationship. At the climax of the story, Andrew falls ill and has to be hospitalized. Allie realizes that the



night that Trip died was because Andrew cut the breaks in Trip's car. Allie finally remembers what happened the night of the accident, and remembers that she was knocked unconscious by Trip after she refused to marry him. Blake intervened, and Trip, thinking he had killed Allie, agreed to drive them all to the hospital. At the last second, Blake jumped out of the car and pushed Allie out before it crashed over the side of the cliff. Allie eventually confides in the detective about the abuse she endured, and he decides to close the case. Allie does not disclose her brother's involvement in order to protect him. In the end, Allie and Blake stay together, and Andrew recovers from his illness. Trip's mother, who Allie discovers has been abused by Trip's father, leaves her husband.

*Breathing Underwater*, Alex Flinn

262 pages, Lexile: HL510L, ATOS: 3.9

As part of his court mandated restraining order and anger management class, Nick Andreas, sixteen, is required to reflect in a journal with five hundred words a week about his relationship with his girlfriend, Caitlin, who files abuse charges against him. He claims he only smacked her once. Nick struggles to come to terms with his role as an abuser as he also suffers abuse at the hands of his father. Nick reluctantly attends his anger management classes under threat of jail time and is isolated at school from his friends who turned against him when the abuse was made public, including his best friend since kindergarten, Tom. The narrative switches between the past and the present. He reflects on how his relationship with Caitlin began, and how they both suffered from low self-esteem. Despite being popular, Nick was too insecure to approach Caitlin, and she had recently lost weight after a lifetime of obesity. Tom sets them up, and they meet

at a party where Nick assaults someone for insulting and touching Caitlin. Nick reflects on how he was jealous of Tom's relationship with his parents, because though his father is wealthy, they have a very strained relationship. Caitlin and Nick became closer after she discovered he was being abused by his father. In his family violence class, Nick refuses to disclose his father's abuse. Nick violates his court order and by calling Caitlin and not saying anything, and approaches her in the school hallways. He begs her to lift the restraining order, but after becoming angry with her, she is able to rebuff him. Nick is physically and verbally bullied by his classmates. Nick becomes close with one of the members of his class, Leo, who no longer has to attend because he persuades his girlfriend to drop the charges, so they hang out together. Nick begins to acknowledge in his journal that he psychologically controlled Caitlin with verbal abuse. Nick decides that he wants to avoid Leo after he shows Nick the gun that he uses to threaten his mother's boyfriend and after witnessing Leo verbally abuse his girlfriend at the carnival. Nick reflects on his biggest fights with Caitlin where he tried to drive their car off the road and when he brutally beat her in the school parking lot for performing in the talent show. Nick is startled by the news that Leo killed his girlfriend and then killed himself, and decides that he wants to take the class again to better himself. The next time his father tries to hit him, he stands up for himself. Tom and Nick look to renew their friendship after Caitlin moves away because she tells Tom about Nick's father abusing him and how she believes he really has changed. There is strong language and mentions of drug and alcohol abuse in this novel.

*But I Love Him*, Amanda Grace

264 pages, ATOS: 4.3

Told in a non-linear narrative, Ann meets Connor her senior year of high school and they quickly begin dating. Ann was co-captain of the track team, had a close group of friends, and excelled in her academics prior to starting her relationship with Conner. Conner is Ann's first serious boyfriend, and they feel connected due to their troubled home lives. Ann's father died when she was young, and her mother's depression affects their relationship. Conner moved out of his house after witnessing his father verbally and physically abuse his mother, but he continues to worry about her even after he has left home. Conner's father is an alcoholic, and exerts controlling behavior over Conner such as withholding food from him. The longer Ann and Conner date, the more isolated she becomes as he grows more jealous of any time or anyone that she devotes her time to instead of him. Ann is eventually asked to leave the track team because she misses so many practices to be with Conner. Ann moves in with Conner after multiple fights with her mom over her relationship, and the abuse escalates. Ann devotes her time to painstakingly creating a glass sculpture of her heart to give as a gift to Conner as he physically and verbally abuses her. There is strong language in the verbal abuse, and there is a short pregnancy scare. Ann stays with Conner because she knew what his home life was like, and she believes she is the only one who can be there for him. In an angry episode, Conner throws the sculpture Ann made for him and shatters it to pieces. With her arm then broken, Ann decides to move back home with her mother after reaffirming that she loves herself more than she loves Conner.

*Dark Song*, Gail Giles

292 pages, Lexile: HL570L, ATOS: 3.8

The plot structure of the book is split into two parts. In part one, readers are introduced to Ames' happy life as a teenager with wealthy parents attending private school. Her happy life slowly begins to crumble as it is revealed that her father has been stealing money from his clients, and the once rich family finds themselves poor and distrusting of one another. The family is forced to move to a slum rental in Texas that is owned by her father's parents, and the family struggles to adjust to their new living circumstances filled with secrecy and arguments. Ames' father begins to become an alcoholic as he cannot find work because of his damaged reputation, and her mother becomes cold and harsh because she is reminded of her poor childhood. In part two, Ames meets Marc. Marc responds to a help advertisement on social media created by Ames' best friend, Emily. He tells Ames and her family that he is seventeen. Ames is immediately drawn to Marc because of the protection that he offers her and his understanding. Marc reveals that he is not actually seventeen. There is a seven-year age difference between the two: Marc is twenty-two and Ames is fifteen. When Ames is unable to grab her parent's attention with shoplifting, smoking marijuana, and sneaking out at night, she turns to Marc. Ames' is drawn to Marc because she likes the danger she feels when she's with him but also that he makes her feel safe. Marc intervenes the second time that Ames' dad raises a hand against her while he was drunk. Marc constantly carries a conceal carry gun on his ankle, and has a gun collection. Marc is controlling and physically violent when he becomes jealous, such as pushing Ames out of the car and driving away. There are brief mentions of sexual situations where Ames does not enjoy sex. Ames is finally scared of Marc when he shows her his extensive gun collection and admits to breaking into people's houses at night and pointing guns at them

while they sleep. Ames lets Marc calm her down, but she makes him promise that he will tell her every time he “creeps” a house and that he will never do it to her and her little sister. After Marc tells her about his creeping experience, he is angered when he finds out that Ames’ mother slapped her, and he tells Ames that they need to make plans to kill her parents to escape together with Ames’ little sister if her parents try to keep them apart. The climax happens when Ames is caught having sex with Marc in the car by her father, and it is revealed that Ames’ best friend Emily had her lawyer step-father investigate Marc, revealing his true age and that he has had statutory rape charges against him for dating a fourteen-year-old girl. There is disturbing imagery where it is revealed he shot his ex-girlfriend’s family dog in the head fifteen times. Afraid of his jail charges, Marc pressures Ames into the plan to kill her parents and escape together, but Ames is overcome by guilt and confusion and tells her parents before the plot can unfold. They are able to get Marc put away for jail time with multiple charges.

*Dreamland*, Sarah Dessen

250 pages, Lexile: 920L, ATOS: 5.8

Caitlin and her family are left reeling when her older sister goes to California to be with her new boyfriend instead of going to Yale. Trying to be different from her sister, Caitlin joins the cheerleading squad. Through this new circle of friends, she meets Rogerson at a party, whom she is immediately drawn to because of his demeanor. She does not see Rogerson again until she runs into him while he is doing community service, and they go on a date that night. The date almost falls flat because Rogerson takes Caitlin with him on his drug deals, but it takes a turn when he gives her a hit of marijuana and then introduces her to his parents. They get together after Caitlin sees Rogerson’s

dad physically abusing him. Rogerson bashes the circle of friends that Caitlin has surrounded herself with, and Caitlin begins tagging along with him on his drug deals. Caitlin finds his protective tendencies to be flattering. She is sexually attracted to him, but confesses that they do not talk much. Through his drug deals, Caitlin meets Corina, whom she quickly befriends. Caitlin's grades begin slipping and her relationships with the cheerleaders become strained. When Caitlin is late to meet Rogerson because she was helping her friend Rina, she is stunned to be punched by Rogerson later that day. They pretend like it did not happen, and he tells Caitlin that he loves her for the first time. Her parents do not notice the bruise because they are too distracted by her older sister's phone call. Rogerson hits Caitlin again in a jealous rage after seeing her talk to her photography teacher. Caitlin does not tell anyone, but she writes in her dream journal that her sister left her. Rogerson begins abusing her with no pattern, and having forgiveness episodes for the twenty-four hours afterwards. Caitlin becomes isolated and falls deeper into drug use, and is kicked off the cheerleading squad. When Rina takes Caitlin to the park for a day out, Caitlin is riddled with anxiety over not being able to contact Rogerson. When she finally gets home, Rogerson beats her in the road but is stopped by her parents. Rogerson is arrested, and Caitlin spends the next few weeks in a care center, slowly mending her other relationships. She secretly keeps the necklace that Rogerson gave her.

*Falling for You*, Lisa Schroeder

355 pages, Lexile: 920L, ATOS: 3.6

Rae is seventeen years old, and lives with her negligent mother and abusive step-father. She works hard at her job in a flower shop that she loves, but when her step-father

loses his job he begins taking her paycheck. Her friends know the bare details of her unhappy home life. When Nathan, the new kid, comes to town he immediately lets her know he is interested. They have almost nothing in common, he makes assumptions about what she likes, and he blatantly ignores what she does share. Having no dating experience, Rae does not think any of that is abnormal. He is late to their first date, and when they exchange numbers he asks her to delete any other boy's numbers that he thinks she has. Though Rae is attracted to Nathan, she is frustrated by his continued attempts to have sex with her despite her repeated objections. She is startled when he appears at her work and questions her about her friend, Leo, who works next door. She is angry when he grabs her and pushes her against the wall, but she decides to leave work with him after he makes her feel guilty with a tearful apology that he just found out his dad is cheating on his mom. Rae asks Nathan to give her some space the next day after she starts to feel stifled by his presence. He agrees, as long as it is only temporary. After Nathan appears in the parking lot while Rae and her friend Alix are shopping, Rae admits to Alix that she feels like she cannot break up with Nathan or he will be suicidal, but that his constant calls and presence are suffocating. At the same time, Rae is dealing with her mother who refuses to leave their step-dad who is displaying suspicious behavior. Rae finally breaks up with Nathan after he tries to pressure her into sex again. At first Rae feels freed, but then she begins to worry about him when she finds out he never returned home that night. Nathan appears, begging Rae to take him back, but she rebuffs him when he is not able to list anything she even likes other than kissing him. Free from Nathan, Rae returns to her old self. She begins hanging out more with her friend, Leo. With the holidays, her home life becomes harder. Her step-father takes her savings

account, and her mother refuses to leave him. Upset about her home situation, Rae falls into a moment of weakness and kisses Nathan back when he appears in a parking lot, which encourages him. Rae's best friend Alix is supportive of her. Rae becomes closer to Leo, and there is confrontation between Leo and Nathan when he is drunk. Nathan fades into the least of her worries when men show up to her home looking for her step-dad and she and her mother have to stay in a hotel for a week out of fear for their lives. Then her step-dad reappears, and he and her mother disappear for weeks, leaving Rae home alone. Stressed by her home situation, she drifts away from Leo. Nathan begins leaving her notes again, and he storms off when she rejects him again. Rae finally encourages Nathan to receive psychiatric help. Then her step-father once again falls into his gambling debt, and he attempts to rob the flower shop that Rae works at for money. He shoots Rae in the altercation. Rae recovers, and starts a happy relationship with Leo.

*Rage: A Love Story*, Julie Ann Peters

290 pages, ATOS: 3.1

Johanna is deeply infatuated with Reeve, her female classmate, though they have never spoken. Johanna is a high school senior living in the apartment above her older sister Tessa's rental after their parents have both passed away. Johanna finally gets the opportunity to interact with Reeve after she begins tutoring Reeve's twin brother with autism. Though Reeve has had several relationships before, Johanna has only come out to her best friend Novak. Johanna and Reeve begin to develop a relationship, and Johanna unveils that both Reeve and her brother have suffered severe physical and sexual trauma in their lifetime and are currently suffering while living with their drug addicted mother and violent and crass Uncle. Johanna immediately begins enduring explosive



physical and verbal abuse from Reeve, who frequently storms out on Johanna multiple times. Reeve physically abuses Johanna in a wide range of pinching to punching her hard enough to give her a black eye. Johanna is frequently made uncomfortable by unsettling comments made from Reeve's twin brother, and is emotionally abused by Reeve threatening to break up with her. Johanna refuses to leave the relationship even after Reeve's ex-girlfriend warns her that the abuse will get only worse. Johanna is forced to promise to not return to the hospital where she volunteers at after she brings Reeve with her and she steals from one of the patients in a coma. In a startling climax, Reeve's twin brother is murdered during an altercation at their home, and Reeve disappears. Johanna's older sister pressures Reeve to leave town after all the emotional distress that she has caused Johanna, and she decides to get help at a therapeutic group home. Johanna receives counseling, and she moves with Tessa and her fiancé out of state since they have become closer after the relationship and the loss of Tessa's second unborn child. Johanna visits Reeve at her group home. This book contains strong language and sexual content in the background.

*So Much It Hurts*, Monique Polak

279 pages, Lexile: HL630L

Through being cast as Ophelia in her school's drama program, Iris meets Mick, an older man whom she is immediately attracted to. Iris, seventeen, is aware that Mick is older, but she slowly learns that he is actually thirty-one, recently divorced, and has a toddler back in Australia. After breaking up with her current boyfriend, Iris and Mick become involved after he pursues her and makes it clear to her that he is interested in her by showering her with gifts and praise. Mick stresses to her that their relationship must

remain secret, so Iris does not tell her best friend Katie or her mother about him. Mick isolates Iris away from her best friend, saying that she has outgrown her. Iris is normally quite close with her mother, but there is a wedge between them as Iris goes to meet her father for the first time with Mick. There is immediate sexual intercourse between Iris and Mick, but the descriptions are tasteful and non-graphic. Mick is controlling and easily jealous. Mick assaults Iris for the first time after she changes her relationship status on Facebook and refers to him by the first letter of his name in a post. Feeling like she caused his anger, she quickly adjusts her behavior. The second time, he punches her after she offers him tea, and she is just thankful that his anger disappears. Iris is incredibly influenced by Mick's moods, and he never apologizes for the assaults. They go shopping at the mall, and Mick persuades Iris to have sex in the changing room before stuffing the items into her backpack. Iris is shaken by the realization that she would be the one arrested for Mick's actions. Iris then discovers that Mick's ex-wife has a restraining order against him, and overwhelmed by her emotions with this realization she snaps at a customer and loses her job, which makes her break out into hives. Mick is originally supportive while drunk, but tells her that she made good money there the next day. When Mick's neighbor is robbed whom Iris has been housesitting for, Iris, recalling the store incident, asks Mick if he stole the jewelry and he punches her for it. Afterwards, Iris cowers in the closet. When it is finally time for the performance of the play, Iris' mother discovers that Iris has not been staying at Katie's house, which forces Iris to come clean about Mick. Her mother is shocked, and shortly after Mick wants Iris to move to Australia with him. Iris is conflicted, but turns against him when she sees his neighbor's watch in his bag. This novel contains light hearted jokes about suicide, and

Iris briefly contemplates it while fighting with Mick. Mick leaves for Australia, and Iris decides to break it off with him after a group intervention by her loved ones.

*Stay*, Deb Caletti

313 pages, Lexile: HL700L, ATOS: 4.4

The story alternates between the past and the present to tell the story of Clara and her relationship with Christian. Clara is a senior in high school and her father is a famous fiction writer. Her mother died when she was young. Prior to her relationship with Christian, Clara had been in an abusive relationship that she ended. She quickly develops an intense relationship with Christian, who goes to another school, after meeting at a rivalry game. Christian is at the game with another girl whom he ditches to pursue Clara, who mentally acknowledges this fact. Christian is from a very wealthy family, but he and his father are estranged. It is not mentioned if Christian was abused by his father. While their romance starts off as ideal as first, it eventually sours as Clara struggles with Christian's possessiveness and jealousy. Clara ultimately realizes that she needs to end her relationship with Christian after he exhibits psychological abuse, intense jealous behavior, and begins to threaten suicide. Due to her father's wealthy status, they are able to leave town for the summer on the advice of a police detective after Christian continues to stalk and monitor Clara after their break up. Clara attempts to sever all ties with Christian, and does not tell anyone where she and her father are going for the summer. Clara and her father go to live in Deception's Pass for the summer. Both Clara and her father begin new relationships in their new life. Christian finds Clara's new phone number and constantly calls her phone. Through an old family friend, Clara discovers the secret behind her mother's passing: that she actually killed herself after learning her

husband was having an affair. Despite suffering through this realization, Clara finds comfort in her new relationship, and contacts her best friend from home out of excitement to tell her about her new boyfriend. Her best friend's mother lets it slip to Christian where Clara is, and he appears on a stormy night when her father is not home. Terrified for her safety, Clara flees into the night to escape Christian and resorts to jumping into a small boat to row into the ocean after he corners her. Christian disappears as Clara is being rescued. At the conclusion of the novel, Christian has moved on to a new relationship, but still sends Clara letters after the restraining order ends.

*Teenage Love Affair*, Ni-Ni Simone

300 pages, ATOS: 4.1

Zsa-Zsa is seventeen years old, and her love life becomes even more complicated when her first love Malachi moves back into town. Malachi has a special place in her heart for letting her and her little sister take refuge in his family's apartment when her father would beat their mother. When Malachi suddenly moved out of town without even saying goodbye, Zsa-Zsa was heartbroken. In the present, Zsa-Zsa is now dating Ameen. Ameen is easily made angry with his jealousy, but he tries to apologize with expensive gifts. After crashing his car the month before, Zsa-Zsa allows him to driver her car around. He physically abuses her by smashing her face against windows and she attests that he has hit her a few times. Zsa-Zsa struggles with the abuse because she compares her father and Ameen, and she feels like Ameen is nothing like her father when he would get drunk and beat her mother every Friday night. When Ameen thinks that Zsa-Zsa is cheating on him with Malachi, he immediately takes back his gift and gets out of the car. She is unable to get ahold of him on the phone for three days, and she sinks into a minor

depression thinking she has lost her boyfriend. Zsa-Zsa and her mother have a strained relationship since her father died from cancer. Her mother wakes her up in the middle of the night when Zsa-Zsa did not do the dishes that night and slaps her when she mouths off. Her mother is rarely home, and Zsa-Zsa has been left to basically raise her ten-year-old sister. Feeling like she cannot control Zsa-Zsa, her mother invites Zsa-Zsa's aunt and uncle to live with them, and they become involved in her life where her mother has not been. Zsa-Zsa's best friends, Courtney and Asha, convince her to come to the movies with them. Neither of them support Zsa-Zsa with Ameen. At the movies she runs into Ameen. At first Zsa-Zsa is angry because he has been ignoring her calls, and he responds by saying that she was on "punishment." He is angry to see her out having fun with her friends. He emotionally abuses her by asking if her best friends or school are more important to her than he is. Zsa-Zsa, not wanting him to break up with her, decides to ditch the movie and leave with him. He suppresses any attempt of Zsa-Zsa's to express how she feels. Zsa-Zsa then discovers that Ameen is cheating on her when he ditches her at his home to be with another girl. Zsa-Zsa angrily attacks him, and he punches her. Zsa-Zsa vandalizes the car that belongs to the girl that he cheated on her with. Zsa-Zsa's mother attempts to reach out when she recognizes the bruises, but Zsa-Zsa is still angry and distrustful from the years where she called the cops on her father every week but never did anything about it. Once again Zsa-Zsa and Courtney go to the movies, and they run into Malachi and Ameen. Ameen corners Zsa-Zsa in the bathroom and threatens her for damaging the car. Zsa-Zsa and Malachi become closer after being paired together for a fake baby simulator assignment. Then, Zsa-Zsa is stunned when her mother introduces the family to her fiancé. Zsa-Zsa becomes happy with her new relationship with Malachi,

and Ameen repeatedly calls her and leaves her messages. When Zsa-Zsa decides to meet him one last time, he beats her while high in the park after she hits him for throwing her necklace and puts her in the hospital. Zsa-Zsa and her mother go to group counseling together, but she is conflicted because while she recognizes her life in the stories of those who share, she feels like she is different because she hit him first. Then Ameen's mother dies, and she goes to the funeral. Ameen reaches out to her asking if he can borrow her car to drive to a job interview, and she relents. He crashes her car with drugs in the car, and Malachi breaks up with her thinking she is cheating on him with Ameen. Zsa-Zsa begins to take the counseling seriously, and gets back together with Malachi as she finally decides she is done with Ameen.

*Things Change*, Patrick Jones

216 pages, Lexile: 710L, ATOS: 4.7

Sixteen-year-old Johanna boldly asks Paul, a senior, to kiss her while he is giving her a ride home. Surprised, he politely declines, but he decides to pursue her after he is once again rejected by his long time crush, Vickie. Vickie politely but firmly denies his advances, and in anger he grabs her and punches a wall. Paul struggles with alcoholism, and frequently goes to a storage unit that he keeps specifically to talk to his deceased also alcoholic father. He hides his pain with humor, and is somewhat of a class clown. Johanna is incredibly smart, and is pressured to do well by her parents. She only has one friend, Pam, because she frequently just reads books instead. Johanna and Paul start a relationship, and Paul immediately wants Johanna to stop hanging out with Pam because he thinks she is a lesbian. Paul is chronically late, but apologizes with roses. He asks Johanna what flavor of ice cream is her favorite so he can buy her some, but declares that

he hates that one and buys her his favorite instead. Johanna begins to call it her favorite flavor afterwards. Paul verbally abuses Johanna in a restaurant on a double date with his best friend Brad and his girlfriend Kara, and leaves without her after she expresses wanting to wait for Pam to stop by to say hello. When his friends are giving Johanna a ride home, Paul jumps on the hood of the car and makes his apology with a joke. Pam and Johanna's friendship starts to fall apart because of Johanna's isolation and reluctance to disclose the abuse. Johanna discovers that Paul is not actually going away to Stanford for college, but she does not call him out on it every time he lies to her afterwards. Johanna devotes her first time with Paul in a non-descriptive scene, and her grades begin slipping to less than perfect because of all the time she spends with him. As punishment from her parents she can only see Paul once a week, and he brutally smacks her around in his car in a jealous rage accusing her of spending time with other boys when she's not with him. Johanna tells her parents she slipped on ice, but she and Paul break up. Paul begs for Johanna to take him back every night by serenading her, and Johanna calls Pam to talk to her about it. Pam, hurt by Johanna choosing Paul over her, hangs up the phone. Johanna then calls Kara, who encourages her to take Paul back without knowing about the abuse. After prom, Johanna becomes closer with Kara and her friends, and they become her support system. When Kara discovers that Paul has been abusing Johanna, she encourages her to break it off and tells her about how Paul also assaulted his ex-girlfriend. After talking to Paul's ex-girlfriend, Johanna finally finds the courage to break it off with Paul, who she has learned will not stop beating her or drinking. Nine months later Paul comes to her graduation party, and she sees signs of him beating his new girlfriend.