

## Raising Awareness of SV Through Reading: YA Literature and Youth Outreach



By Tegan Stuart, OCADSV Summer 2018 Intern

A book can be a window to the world or a mirror into one's self. Young Adult Literature, or YA Lit, consists of books with teen readers and teen topics in mind. These books have become so popular that it is customary for them to have their own bookstore and library sections. They allow readers to look out into the experiences of other youth, or deeper into themselves while exploring a myriad of topics, such as sexual violence.

#SVYALit is a campaign that was started by the Teen library toolbox in 2014. They partner with library commissions to actively promote reading lists on topics including sexual violence, trauma, abuse, consent, and sexuality. NPR has named this project as a useful tool for parents and guardians to further engage adolescents in topics surrounding SV.

Reading sex-positive books helps to dispel rape myths, combat rape culture, present realistic and age relevant SA situations, present scenes in which consent asked for and given or denied and present healthy relationship framework. For many young adults, a book may be the first place they are able to see sex and consent within a tangible and self-relevant context.

These book lists can be promoted by SV programs in collaboration with library commissions, schools, parents, youth programs and youth centers as a new and exciting form of outreach.

Below I have compiled two book lists with a few of my favorite and most impactful novels:

## Books About Dealing with SV

### **SPEAK – Laurie Halse Anderson (Trauma, Sexual Assault)**

Melinda Sordino busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops. Now her old friends won't talk to her, and people she doesn't even know hate her from a distance. The safest place to be is alone, inside her own head. But even that's not safe. Because there's something she's trying not to think about, something about the night of the party that, if she let it in, would blow her carefully constructed disguise to smithereens. And then she would have to speak the truth. This extraordinary novel has captured the hearts of teenagers and adults across the country. Author Laurie Halse Anderson is a spokesperson for RAINN,



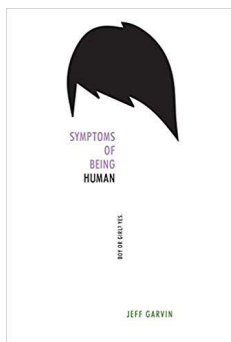
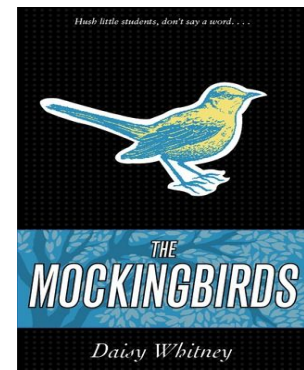
### **What Happens Next – Colleen Clayton (trauma, sexual assault, healthy relationship)**

When Sid finds herself on a ski lift with hunky local college guy, Dax Windsor, she's thrilled. "Come to a party with me," he tells her, but Dax isn't what he seems. He takes everything from Sid—including a lock of her perfect red curls—and she can't remember any of it. Caught in a downward spiral, Sid drops her college prep classes and takes up residence in the A/V room with only Corey "The Living Stoner" Livingston for company. But as she gets to know Corey—slacker, baker, total dreamboat—Sid finds someone who truly makes her happy. Now, if only she could shake the nightmares, everything would be perfect... Witty and poignant, Colleen Clayton's debut is a stunning story of moving on after the unthinkable happens.

### **The Mockingbirds by Daisy Whitney (sexual assault, rape culture, advocacy)**

From the glossy pages of its admissions brochure, the prestigious Themis Academy appears perfect in every way: exceptional academics, extraordinary students, the kind of extracurriculars to make an Ivy League proud, and zero instances of student misbehavior. But this boarding school isn't as pristine as it appears. There's a dark underbelly to the perfect record the Themis administration flaunts. Student infractions are rampant, and it's up to a secret vigilante society, the Mockingbirds, to maintain order on campus—a responsibility their members take very seriously.

Alex Patrick never thought she would need the Mockingbirds. But when she's date-raped by another student, she doesn't know where else to go. As much as she'd like to forget what happened, she can't escape the daily reminders of what went wrong that terrible night. Before she can summon the courage to take a stand, she'll have to accept that her battle for justice is not hers alone. Standing up for someone, especially yourself, is worth the fight.



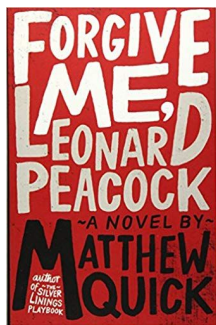
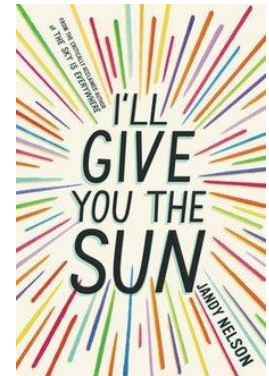
### **Symptoms of Being Human by Jeff Garvin (sexual assault, LGBTQ, sexuality)**

Riley Cavanaugh is many things: Punk rock. Snarky. Rebellious. And gender fluid. Some days Riley identifies as a boy, and others as a girl. But Riley isn't exactly out yet. And between starting a new school and having a congressman father running for reelection in über-conservative Orange County, the pressure—media and otherwise—is building up in Riley's life. On the advice of a therapist, Riley starts an anonymous blog to vent those pent-up feelings and tell the truth of what it's *really* like to be a gender fluid teenager. But just as Riley's starting to settle in at school—even developing feelings for a mysterious outcast—the blog goes viral, and an unnamed

commenter discovers Riley's real identity, threatening exposure. And Riley must make a choice: walk away from what the blog has created—a lifeline, new friends, a cause to believe in—or stand up, come out, and risk everything.

### **I Will Give You the Sun by Jandy Nelson (sexual assault, trauma, sexuality, LGBTQ)**

One of my favorite LGBTQ+ YA novels is *I'll Give You the Sun*, by Jandy Nelson. A magnificent and moving tale of twins trapped in a love-hate relationship—with each other, with their parents, and frequently with themselves—it is nothing short of triumphant. Nelson's prose is lyrical, her imagery sublime, and her depiction of a sensitive, artistic, and emotionally driven gay teenager negotiating his way through first love is beautifully and thoughtfully rendered. Nelson portrays the unfolding romance, a delicate give and take of coded acts and hidden meanings, with intimacy and a pitch-perfect sensibility for her characters. The representation is spot-on, and the novel as a whole exquisite.

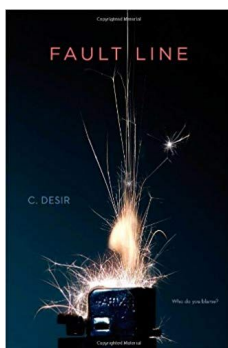
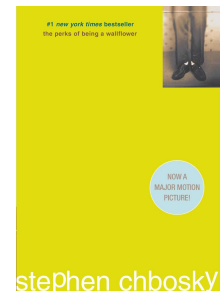


### **Forgive me, Leonard Peacock – Matthew Quick (sexual assault, trauma)**

Today is Leonard Peacock's birthday. It is also the day he hides a gun in his backpack. Because today is the day he will kill his former best friend, and then himself, with his grandfather's P-38 pistol. But first he must say good-bye to the four people who matter most to him: his Humphrey Bogart–obsessed next-door neighbor, Walt; his classmate Baback, a violin virtuoso; Lauren, the Christian homeschooler he has a crush on; and Herr Silverman, who teaches the high school's class on the Holocaust. Speaking to each in turn, Leonard slowly reveals his secrets as the hours tick by and the moment of truth approaches.

### **The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky (sexual abuse, trauma, sexuality, healthy relationship, consent)**

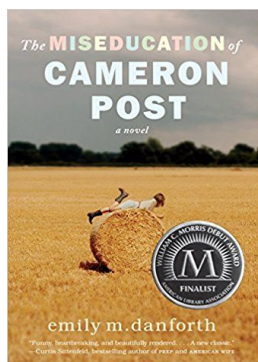
This is the story of what it's like to grow up in high school. More intimate than a diary, Charlie's letters are singular and unique, hilarious and devastating. We may not know where he lives. We may not know to whom he is writing. All we know is the world he shares. Caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it puts him on a strange course through uncharted territory. The world of first dates and mixed tapes, family dramas and new friends. The world of sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, when all one requires is that perfect song on that perfect drive to feel infinite.



### **Fault Line by Christa Desir (sexual assault, trauma)**

Ben could date anyone he wants, but he only has eyes for the new girl—sarcastic, free-spirited Ani. Luckily for Ben, Ani wants him, too. She's everything Ben could ever imagine. Everything he could ever want. But that all changes after the party. The one Ben misses. The one Ani goes to alone. Now Ani isn't the girl she used to be, and Ben can't sort out the truth from the lies. What really happened, and who is to blame? Ben wants to help Ani, but the more she pushes him away, the more he wonders if there's anything he can do to help the girl he loves in this powerful, gut-wrenching debut novel.

## Sex Positive Books (consent, healthy and diverse sexual behavior)

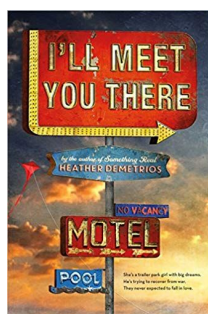
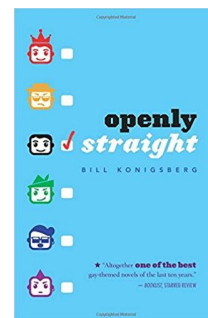


### **The Miseducation of Cameron Post by Emily Danforth (sexuality, LGBTQ, healthy relationship, consent)**

When Cameron Post's parents die suddenly in a car crash, her shocking first thought is relief. Relief they'll never know that, hours earlier, she had been kissing a girl. But that relief doesn't last, and Cam is forced to move in with her conservative aunt Ruth and her well-intentioned but hopelessly old-fashioned grandmother. She knows that from this point on, her life will forever be different. Survival in Miles City, Montana, means blending in and leaving well enough alone, and Cam becomes an expert at both. Then Coley Talor moves to town. Beautiful, pickup-driving Coley is a perfect cowgirl with the perfect boyfriend to match. She and Cam forge an unexpected and intense friendship, one that seems to leave room for something more to emerge. But just as that starts to seem like a real possibility, Aunt Ruth takes drastic action to "fix" her niece, bringing Cam face-to-face with the cost of denying her true self—even if she's not quite sure who that is.

### **Openly Straight by Bill Konigsberg (LGBTQ, sexuality, consent)**

Rafe is a normal teenager from Boulder, Colorado. He plays soccer. He's won skiing prizes. He likes to write. And, oh yeah, he's gay. He's been out since 8th grade, and he isn't teased, and he goes to other high schools and talks about tolerance and stuff. And while that's important, all Rafe really wants is to just be a regular guy. Not that GAY guy. To have it be a part of who he is, but not the headline, every single time. So when he transfers to an all-boys' boarding school in New England, he decides to keep his sexuality a secret -- not so much going back in the closet as starting over with a clean slate. But then he sees a classmate breaking down. He meets a teacher who challenges him to write his story. And most of all, he falls in love with Ben... who doesn't even know that love is possible.



### **I'll Meet You There by Heather Demetrios (consent, healthy relationship)**

If Skylar Evans were a typical Creek View girl, her future would involve a double-wide trailer, a baby, and the graveyard shift at Taco Bell. But after graduation, the only thing separating straightedge Skylar from art school is three months of summer... until Skylar's mother loses her job, and Skylar realizes her dreams may be slipping out of reach. Josh had a different escape route: the Marines. But after losing his leg in Afghanistan, he returned home, a shell of the cocksure boy he used to be. What brings Skylar and Josh together is working at the Paradise—a quirky motel off California's Highway 99. Despite their differences, their shared isolation turns into a friendship and soon, something deeper.

### **Where the Stars Still Shine by Trish Doller (consent, trauma)**

Stolen as a child from a large and loving family, and on the run with her mom for more than ten years, Callie has no idea what normal life might be like. She's never had a home or gone to school, and she gets most of her meals from vending machines. Then Callie's mom is finally arrested for kidnapping her, and Callie's real dad whisks her back to what *would* have been her life in small-town Florida. Now she must find a way to leave the past behind and learn to be part of a family. And she must believe that love—even with someone who seems an improbable choice—is more than just a possibility. This searing story of love and betrayal will resonate with readers who want stories that are gritty and utterly true.

