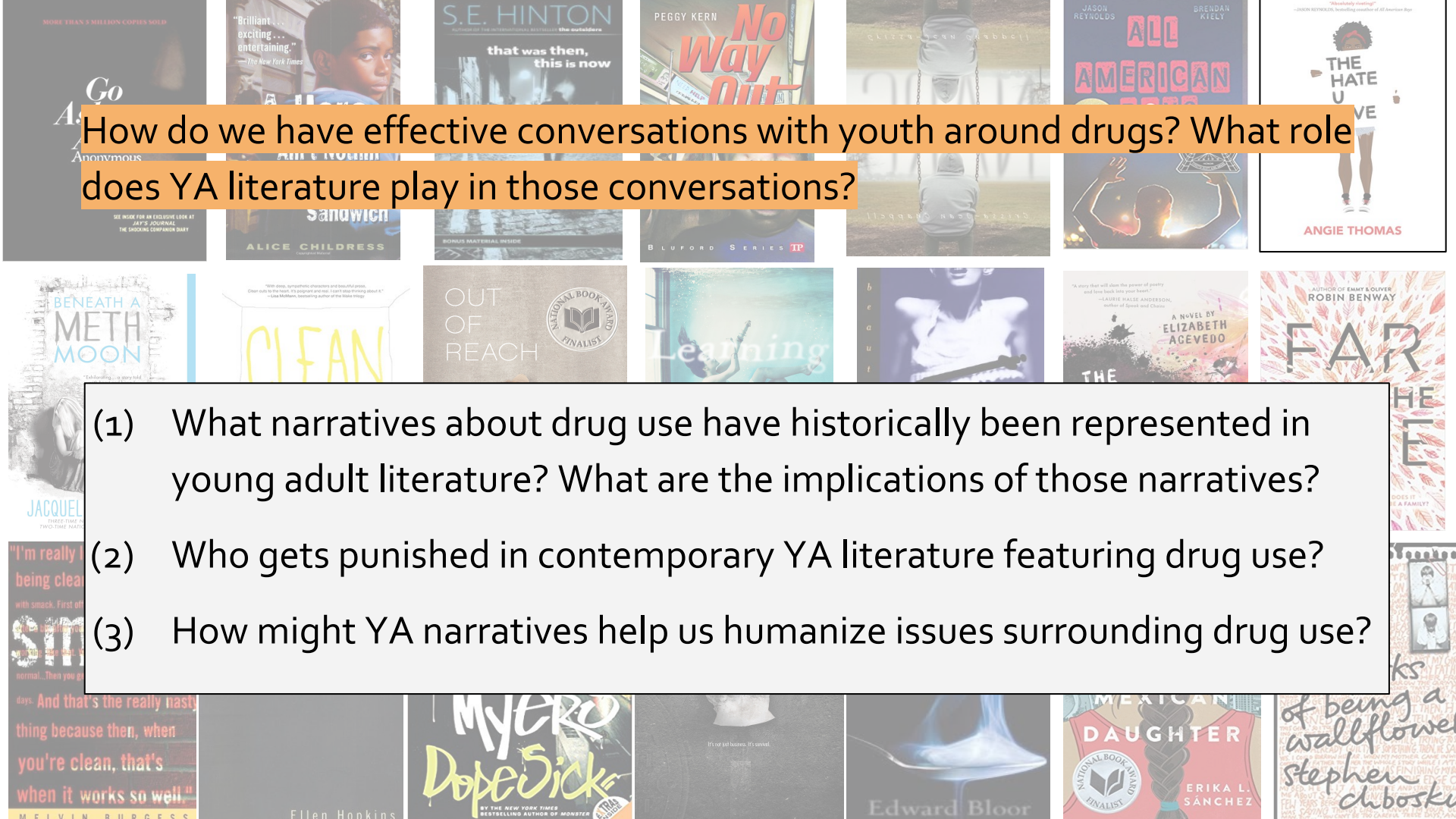




Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, The Ohio State University

Caitlin Murphy, The Ohio State University

Dr. Karly Marie Grice, Millikin University



How do we have effective conversations with youth around drugs? What role does YA literature play in those conversations?

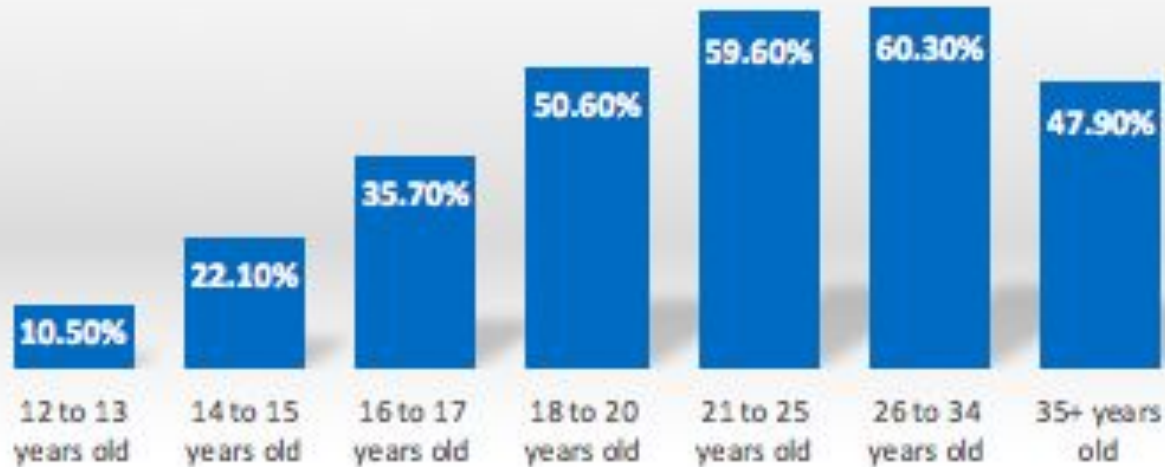
- (1) What narratives about drug use have historically been represented in young adult literature? What are the implications of those narratives?
- (2) Who gets punished in contemporary YA literature featuring drug use?
- (3) How might YA narratives help us humanize issues surrounding drug use?

Percentage of People Who Report Using Illicit Drugs over Past Year



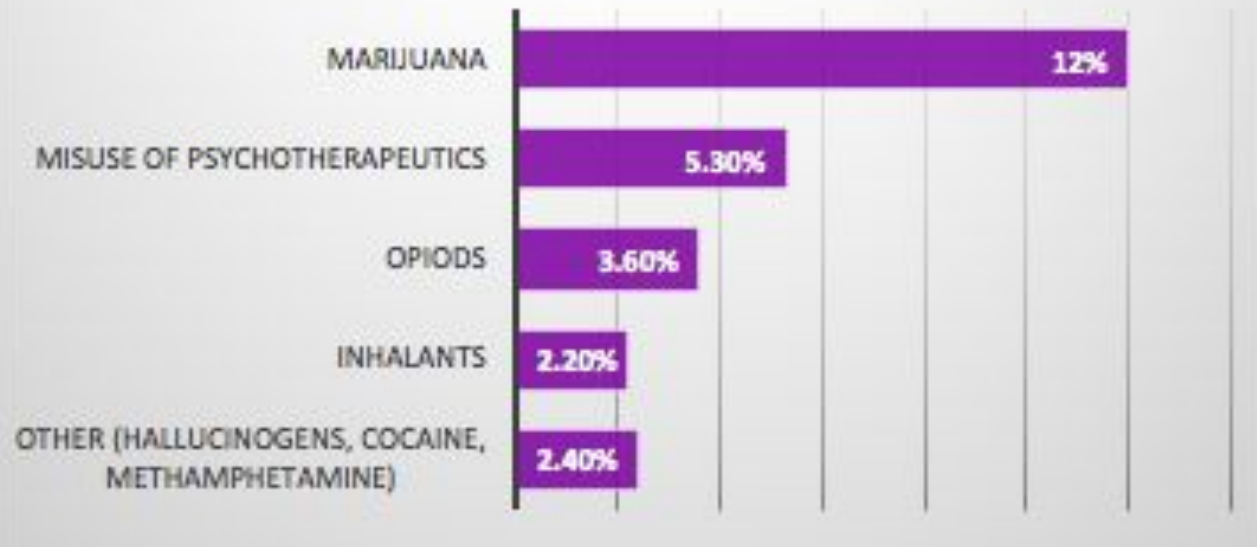
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2016 Nation Survey on Drug Use and Health

Percentage of People Who Report Using Illicit Drugs over Lifetime



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2016 Nation Survey on Drug Use and Health

Drug Use as Reported by 12-17 Year Olds



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2016 Nation Survey on Drug Use and Health

DRUG EDUCATION

- Studies of traditional D.A.R.E education programs have found **“negligible long-term impacts on teen drug use”** (Thombs 2000; Berman and Fox 2009)
- New D.A.R.E. program entitled *Keepin’ it REAL* (**Refuse, Explain, Avoid, Leave**) was implemented for middle schools (2008) and elementary schools (2013). It emphasizes **honesty, safety, and responsibility**.
- High-school Programs offer topics on media literacy, plans for resistance, and “celebrating safely”
- D.A.R.E. administered by **police officers rather than teachers**

DRUG EDUCATION RESEARCH

- Research on drug education has emphasized the **difficulty in coming up with effective prevention messages surrounding drug use.**
- In the 2018 budget, \$1.3 billion are dedicated “in support of education and outreach programs...**to educate people about the consequences of drug use and to prevent youth initiation** (Office of National Drug Control Policy 2017)
- 19 programs listed in SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. **These programs largely emphasize personal responsibility.**

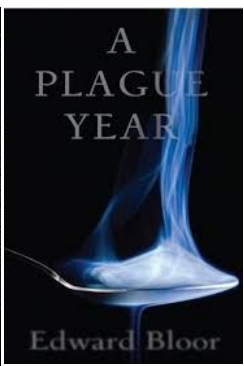
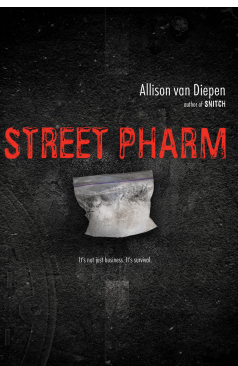
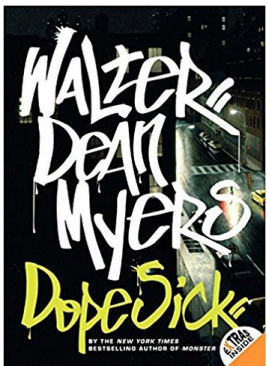
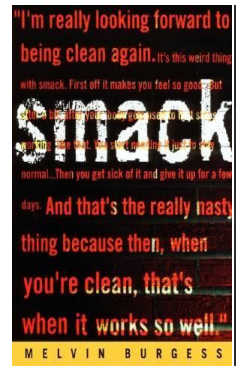
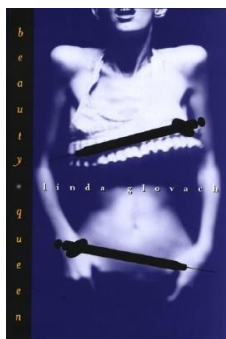
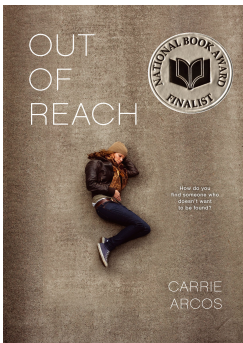
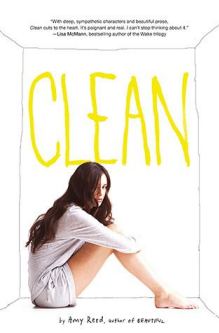
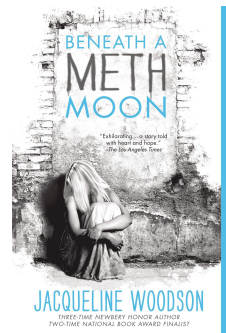
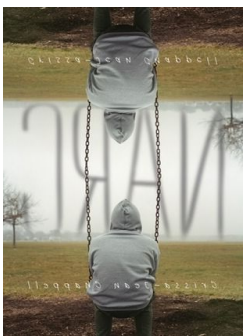
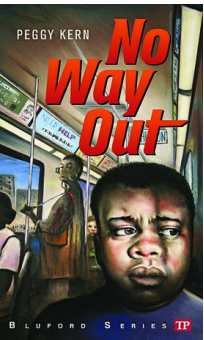
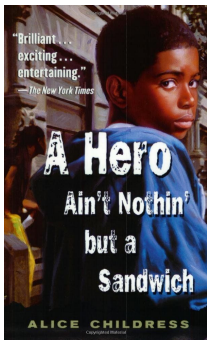
GAPS IN DRUG EDUCATION

- Emphasis on personal responsibility oftentimes **ignores the larger systemic factors impacting drug use and abuse**
- Curriculum is often **implemented by outside sources who do not have relationships with the students** (police officers, prevention experts, etc.)

This gap allows space for English teachers to foster thoughtful discussions around substance use that deal with larger systemic issues related to drugs.

Scholarship on Drugs in YAL

- Drug use as the “problem” in early problem novels (Cart, 2016)
- Drug use is mentioned in roundups of YA books that discuss “tough topics” (Abdul, 2016; Jensen, 2012)
- Discussions of drugs in YA literature appear in work on “urban fiction” (Guerra, 2012)



PART 1: BRINGING THE "WAR ON DRUGS" TO PRINT

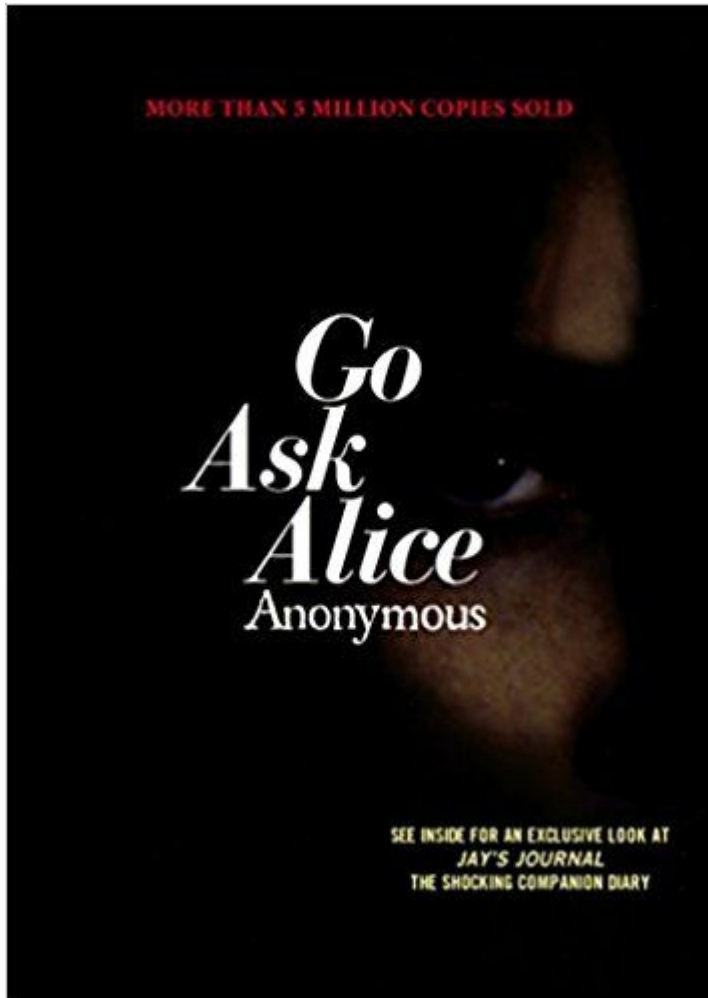
"The War on Drugs was never about the drugs.

If it were, there would be consistency and logic about which drugs are prohibited. Science and evidence would determine what gets banned.

Instead, **drugs have been selected for prohibition arbitrarily, and not according to which ones cause harm, or whether they cause harm at all.**

(Mallea, 2014)





- Published in 1971
- Purports to be the diary of an “anonymous” teenager
- Unknowingly takes LSD and soon begins seeking out a variety of drugs and selling drugs. She eventually overdoses and dies.
- Written by Beatrice Sparks who went on to “edit” 7 books with the stories of “anonymous” teens
- One of very few early YA books that remain in print
- Rated over 200,000 times on Goodreads (more than *The Pigman*, *The Chocolate War*, and *Forever* combined)

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS ABOUT DRUG USE UNDERLYING THE WAR ON DRUGS AND DRUG ABUSE EDUCATION

Addiction is connected to **criminality and moral deficiency**.*

Drug dealers are intent on **corrupting young people**.

Addiction can be combated through teaching **personal responsibility** and ways to say no.*

Most (if not all) illegal drugs are **equally addictive and equally deadly**.

Addiction is a criminal issue, **not a public health issue**.*

(Alexander, 2010; Halliwell, 2017; Green, Pranis, & Ziedenberg, 2006; Quinones, 2016)



ADDICTION IS CONNECTED TO CRIMINALITY AND MORAL DEFICIENCY

"Another day, another blow job." (Sparks, 1971, p.112)

"I am sick of the screwed up potheads and acidheads and all the other dopey dopers who are persecuting me." (Sparks, 1971, p. 150)

- Diarist runs away from home because she doesn't want her family to know "what a weak and disreputable person I have been" (65)
- Drug use leads the diarist to witchcraft and "sexually deviant" behavior.
- Diarist's addiction is connected to her desire to fit in and, subsequently, her choice to hang out with the "wrong" kind of friends.

DRUG DEALERS ARE INTENT ON CORRUPTING YOUNG PEOPLE

"I don't know how I ever got so miserably brainwashed. Guess I was just a stupid, dumb kid asking to be taken, and I was!" (Sparks, 1971, p. 69)



- The diarist is tricked into initially taking drugs by friends. When she later tries to get clean, they constantly follow her around, taunt her, and, ultimately, poison her with tainted drugs.
- After she begins using drugs, the diarist nearly immediately begins selling drugs, first to high schoolers and middle schoolers and then to elementary school students.

ADDICTION CAN BE COMBATED THROUGH TEACHING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WAYS TO SAY NO



“For thirty-five years, the acclaimed, bestselling first-person account of a teenage girl’s harrowing descent into the nightmarish world of drugs has left an indelible mark on generations of teen readers. As powerful--and as timely--today as ever, *Go Ask Alice* remains the definitive book on the horrors of addiction.” - back cover of *Go Ask Alice*

- Diarist decides of her own accord to stop using drugs; does not enter any kind of treatment.
- Part of her plan for staying clean is to completely avoid the addicts at her school and, instead, only hang out with “good” kids.

MOST (IF NOT ALL) ILLEGAL DRUGS ARE EQUALLY ADDICTIVE AND EQUALLY DEADLY.

“Then I turned around and one of the men passed me a joint and that was it. I wanted to be ripped, smashed, torn up as I had never wanted anything before.” (Sparks, 1971, p. 76)



- Diarist rapidly begins using a wide variety of drugs after unknowingly taking LSD once.
- Everyone that she encounters seems to use and have access to nearly every kind of illegal substance.
- Diarist eventually dies of an overdose, but it is unclear which drugs cause it.

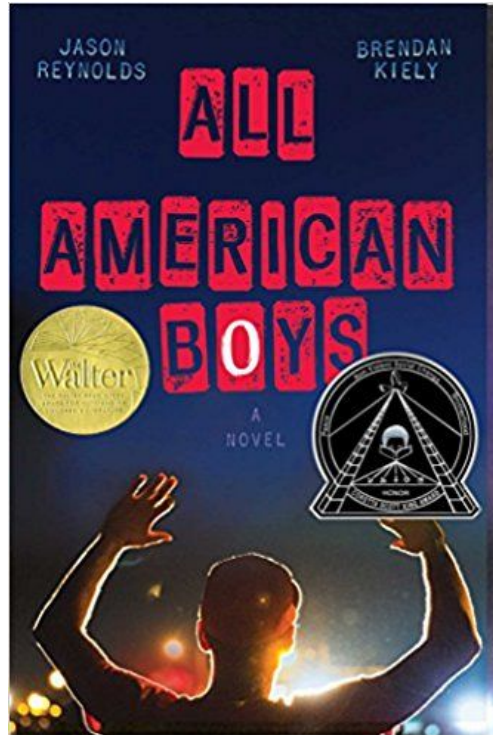


ADDICTION IS A CRIMINAL ISSUE, NOT A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

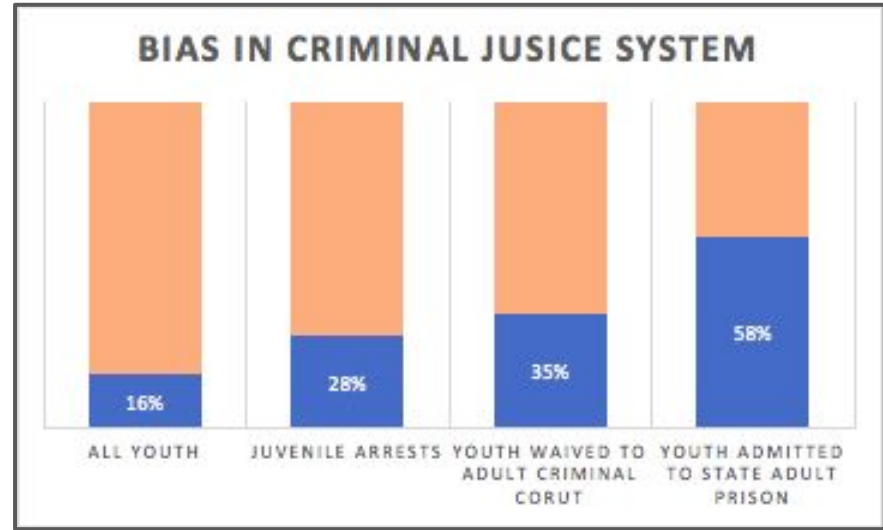
"It is not a definitive statement on the middle-class, teenage drug world. It does not offer any solutions. It is, however, a highly personal and specific chronicle. As such, we hope it will provide insights into the increasingly complicated world in which we live."
(Sparks, 1971, n.p.)

- Paratexts emphasize the individuality of the diarist's account.
- Rehab or any kind of formalized system for recovery is not mentioned.
- In the end, the diarist is punished for her addiction through death. A way to recover or any potential solution besides "just say no" is absent from the text or paratexts.

PART 2: RACE, CLASS, CRIMINALITY, AND DRUG USE IN YA LITERATURE



The War on Drugs lead to the greatest spike of incarcerated people in America. It is near impossible to disentangle the Mass Incarceration crisis from the War on Drugs.



“The stigma of race has become the stigma of criminality” (Alexander, 2012, p.199)

All American Boys and *The Hate U Give* provide teachers with nuanced examples of the continuing effects of the War on Drugs and places to have conversations with youth about the criminal justice system.

(Alexander, 2012; Bridges & Steen, 1998; DuVernay, 2016)

LET'S REALLY TALK ABOUT "DRUG-FREE ZONES"



deray ✓
@deray

Following

1. POC are being targeted.
2. Drug free school zones have zero impact on drug use by anyone in a school.
3. Mandatory minimums are bad.
4. The same offense in rural areas have different penalties. Why?

Richard Parker 🍷 @Bill_Branch3

Normally, I am agree with @deray. But selling drugs is the real issue, not necessarily whether your black or white. I do agree that the school zone part of it is a little strange, but unless black people are being targeted, I don't see the racist part
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8:34 PM - 25 Jan 2018

131 Retweets 563 Likes

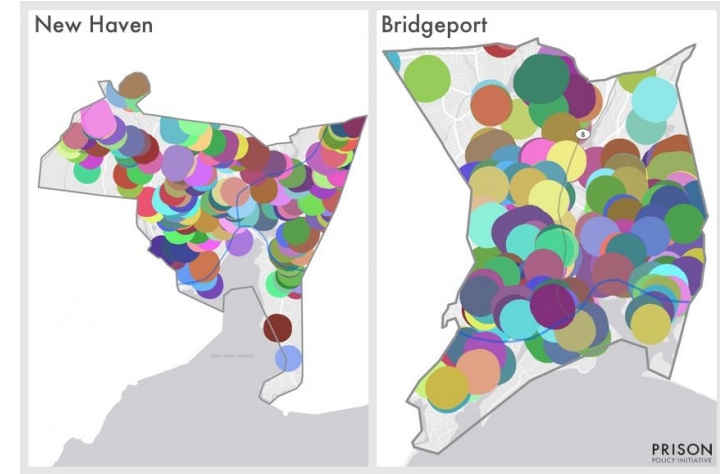


7 131 563

- Deray McKesson
 - Community Organizer
 - Black Lives Matter Activist
 - Former Teacher
- <https://twitter.com/attn/status/956601572368109568>

SENTENCING ENHANCEMENT ZONES

- The original intent is a noble one: protect youth from harm by motivating those involved in “bad activities” to go elsewhere.
- The Flaw(s)
 - The distance of the zones is too large
 - The zones overlap
 - *“When a legislature says that every place is special, no place is special.”*
 - Two-Tiered System of Justice
 - Harsher system in population-dense, urban spaces
 - Residents are 5 times more likely to live in a Sentencing Enhancement Zone
 - Milder system in population-sparse, rural and suburban spaces
- The Prison Policy Initiative recommends 100 ft distances compared to 1500 ft



*"Maybe he got out of hand?" I just had to say.
'Maybe he was on drugs.'*

'On drugs? What are you? Seventy-five? Since when have you ever gotten off your ass, let alone thrown a punch, when you were stoned, man?'

'Meth?'

'Only white people do that shit.'

'Fuck you, man.'

'No, fuck you Quinn.' He stood and pointed at me.

'Why does it automatically gotta be Rashad's fault? Why do people think he was on drugs? That dude doesn't do drugs. He's ROTC, man. His dad would kick his ass. You do drugs, asshole'

(Kiely & Reynolds, 2015, p. 175)

ASSUMED CRIMINALITY

- The conflation of blackness and crime didn't come about "organically".
- "The criminal justice system provides a vehicle for the expression of conscious and unconscious antiblack sentiments"
- The War on Drugs provided the release valve for a socially acceptable racism

(Alexander, 2012)

"GUYS WITH THE NAME D-MONEY, SMOOTHIE, SHIFTY"

Trump has followed Maine Governor, Paul Le Page's strategy of placing blame on those who cross the border for causing the United States' drug problem.

He rarely acknowledges the effect of deindustrialization and "epidemic of despair" (Dasgupta et al., 2018) along the the east coast.

"Whether a kid is perceived as a dangerous drug dealing thug or instead is viewed as a good kid who was merely experimenting with drugs and selling to a few of his friends has to do with the ways in which information about illegal drug activity is processed and interpreted, in a social climate in which drug dealing is racially defined."

(Alexander, 2012, p.118)

“Throughout the black community, there is widespread awareness that black ghetto youth have few, if any, realistic options, and therefore dealing drugs can be an irresistible temptation”

“For ghetto youth, drug sales--though rarely lucrative--are often a means of survival, a means of helping to feed and clothe themselves and their family”.

(Alexander, 2012)

“Absolutely riveting!”
—JASON REYNOLDS, bestselling coauthor of *All American Boys*

THE HATE U GIVE LITTLE INFANTS...

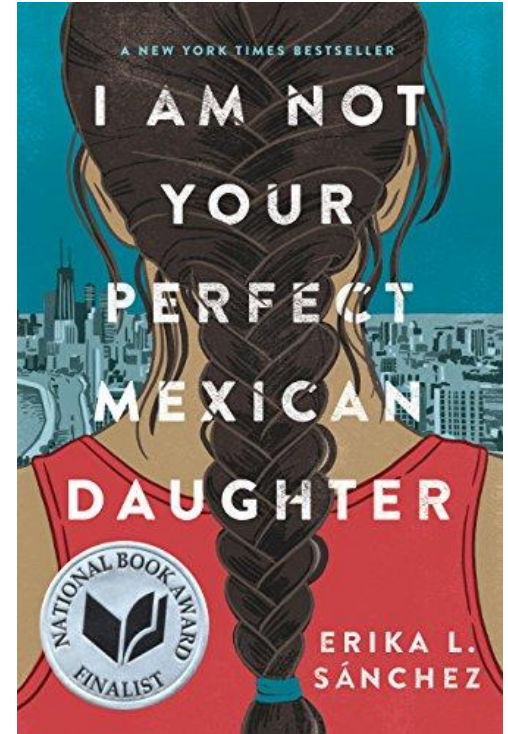
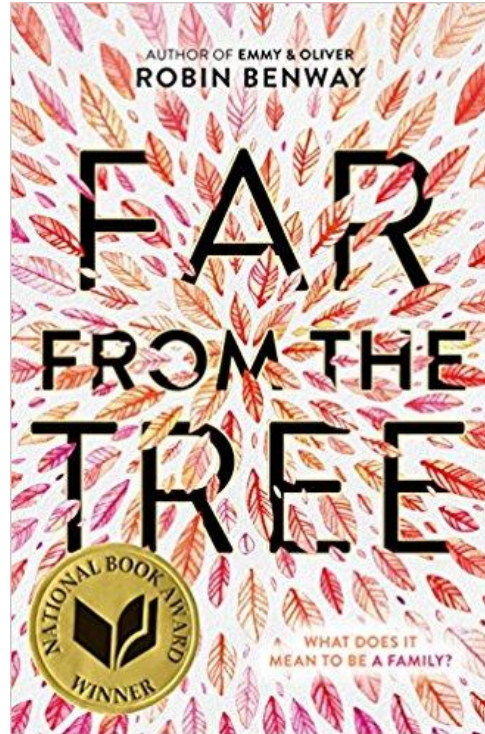
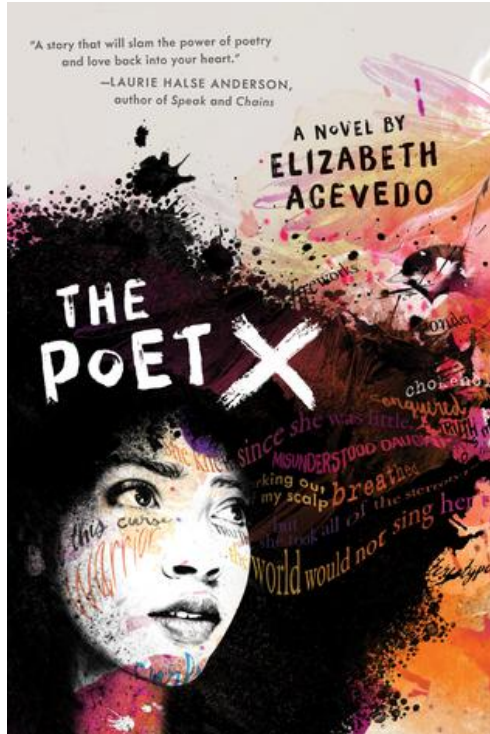
“Bullshit. You know my dad would help you out.”

He wipes his nose before his lie. “I don’t need help from nobody, okay? And that li’l minimum-wage job your pops gave me didn’t make nothing happen. I got tired of choosing between lights and food.”

(Thomas, 2017, p.18)

ANGIE THOMAS

PART 3: ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES OF DRUG USE IN CONTEMPORARY YA



FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS ABOUT DRUG USE COMPLICATED IN CONTEMPORARY YA LIT

Addiction is connected to **criminality and moral deficiency**.*

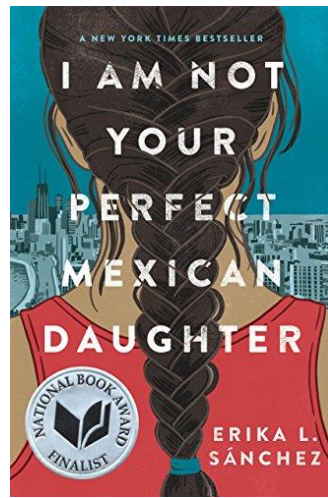
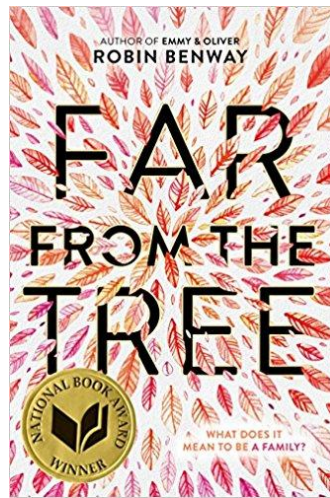
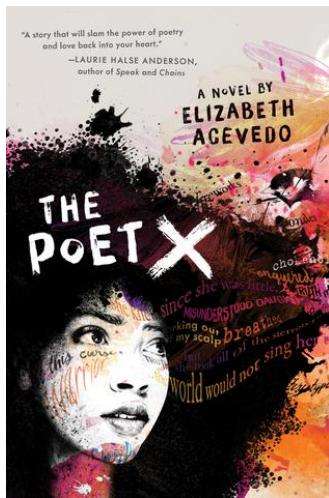
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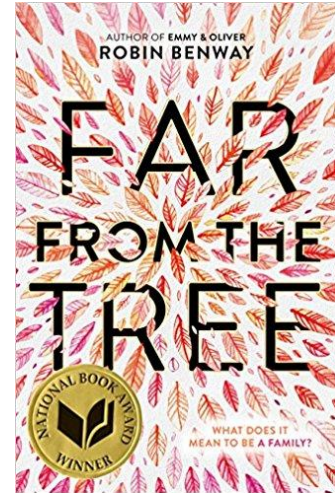
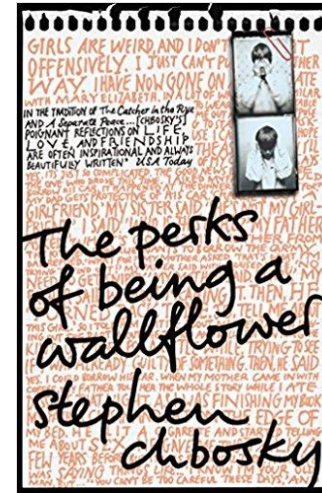


DRUG USE'S CONNECTION TO CRIMINALITY AND MORAL DEFICIENCY IS CHALLENGED

- Representations of teen drug use move beyond the flat Villains, Victims, and Vaudeville archetypes.
- Drug use isn't the character's main story or defining characteristic, and more often than not it is symptomatic of other issues as opposed to the cause.
- Traditionally overt moralizing scripts of sexual purity (e.g. abstinence-only, fear-mongering, slut-shaming, and marital/monogamous/heteronormative sexuality) are questioned and nuanced.

ADDICTION EXISTS--BUT SO DOES CASUAL DRUG CONSUMPTION

"Too many abstinence-only programs try to scare young people away from trying drug by highlighting phony horror stories -- "if you use marijuana you may turn into a homeless heroin addict." Yet, the vast majority of people who try marijuana never become addicted or go on to try harder drugs. . . . Once we lose our credibility, it is harder for them to hear the messages that they truly need to hear, like the most dangerous thing you can do is get in a car with someone who has been drinking or high." Tony Newman, Drug Policy Administration



"Regardless, I decided to never take LSD again"
(Chbosky)

JUST SAY NO VS. JUST SAY "KNOW"

“Let’s go back to the heart of what everyone in this debate has in common: wanting to make young people as safe as possible. The first step to solving any issue is to acknowledge the realities of the situation. In this case, it’s that young people encounter and sometimes take drugs. We must accept this, just as we have accepted that young people might have sex.” -Katie Anderson, Students for Sensible Drug Policy



- Informative drug education based on being honest, open, and informative about safety, including harm reduction (Newman; Tupper).
- Complicating & nuancing sex scripts can be used to parallel challenging abstinence-only drug policies

What We AREN'T Saying:

- Just say yes!
- Drug use has no consequences
- Everyone is doing it

What We ARE Saying:

- Drug Education needs to be more realistic and not traffic in sensational/melodramatic scripts of drug use (proven problematic paradigm for contemporary adolescents)
- Contemporary YA Lit is useful for engagement with complex, contextualized conversations around drug use, prevention, and enforcement
- Contemporary YA Lit can expand the understanding of engagement with drugs in more empathetic ways

DRUG EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF YA LITERATURE

- What are the implications of “just say no” narratives?
- What is the potential role of YA literature in changing the overarching “just say no” narratives around drug use that we present to teens?
- How do we have conversations around drug use and abuse that do not undermine adult/adolescent relationships and trust?
- What are your lingering questions? What would you like to potentially see in an edited collection that addresses drugs and young adult literature?

Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, rickard.24@osu.edu

Caitlin Murphy, murphy.1493@osu.edu

Dr. Karly Marie Grice, kgrice@millikin.edu

Please email us for a copy of a handout including suggested YA books, resources, and discussion questions.

DISCUSSION POINT: ABSTINENCE VS. HARM REDUCTION

OVERDOSE IS



PREVENTABLE