

Grief & Loss Novels for Teens

The Astonishing Color of After by: Emily X.R. Pan (Age 12+)

Leigh Chen Sanders is absolutely certain about one thing: When her mother died by suicide, she turned into a bird. Leigh, who is half Asian and half white, travels to Taiwan to meet her maternal grandparents for the first time. There, she is determined to find her mother, the bird. In her search, she winds up chasing after ghosts, uncovering family secrets, and forging a new relationship with her grandparents. And as she grieves, she must try to reconcile the fact that on the same day she kissed her best friend and long-time secret crush, Axel, her mother was taking her own life. Alternating between real and magic, past and present, friendship and romance, hope and despair, *The Astonishing Color of After* is a novel about finding oneself through family history, art, grief, and love.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the book, Leigh believes her mother has been reincarnated as a bird. Do you believe in reincarnation?
2. Do you feel the author portrayed the reality of living with the suicide death of a loved one accurately? Why or why not?
3. This book talks a lot about being impacted by a parent's mental illness. Have you been affected by the mental illness of someone close to you?
4. Why do you think Leigh used euphemisms for suicide such as "the stain" and "turned into a bird"?
5. Have you ever said something you regret like Dory's parents did? If so, did you try to repair the relationship?

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes by: Suzanne Collins (Age 13+)

It is the morning of the reaping that will kick off the tenth annual Hunger Games. In the Capital, eighteen-year-old Coriolanus Snow is preparing for his one shot at glory as a mentor in the Games. The once-mighty house of Snow has fallen on hard times, its fate hanging on the slender chance that Coriolanus will be able to out charm, outwit, and outmaneuver his fellow students to mentor the winning tribute. The odds are against him. He's been given the humiliating assignment of mentoring the female tribute from District 12, the lowest of the low. Their fates are now completely intertwined -- every choice Coriolanus makes could lead to favor or failure, triumph or ruin. Inside the arena, it will be a fight to the death. Outside the arena, Coriolanus starts to feel for his doomed tribute... and must weigh his need to follow the rules against his desire to survive no matter what it takes.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did Coriolanus discover was the purpose of The Hunger Games?
2. What evidence do you see in the book of how trauma from Coriolanus' childhood impacted his life several years after the war?
3. What does Coriolanus do to remember his mother? What evidence of the power of sensory memory have you observed in your own life? Sometimes sensory memories can be sweet, while sometimes they can be traumatic and debilitating.
4. What after-death rituals can you observe in the book? Does your family have any rituals you perform after someone has died?
5. What do Ma and Pa Plynth do to cope with the loss of their son?

The Beauty That Remains by: Ashley Woodfolk (Teens 13+)

Autumn always knew exactly who she was—a talented artist and a loyal friend. Shay was defined by two things: her bond with her twin sister, Sasha, and her love of music. And Logan always turned to writing love songs when his love life was a little less than perfect. But when tragedy strikes each of them, somehow music is no longer enough. Now Logan can't stop watching vlogs of his dead ex-boyfriend. Shay is a music blogger struggling to keep it together. And Autumn sends messages that she knows can never be answered. Despite the odds, one band's music will reunite them and prove that after grief, beauty thrives in the people left behind.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which storyline did you identify most with? Why?



2. This book tackles big issues such as mental illness, addiction and sexual identity. How do these issues come into play for the characters in each story?
3. This story highlights the importance of friendship for teens. Do you have a good friend who has helped you to cope with your own grief? What qualities make someone a good friend?
4. What “breakthrough” does Logan have in regards to his healing after Bram’s suicide?
5. What do you think is “the beauty that remains”?

Before I Die by: Jenny Downham (Age 14+)

Tessa has just months to live. Fighting back against hospital visits, endless tests, drugs with excruciating side-effects, Tessa compiles a To Do Before I Die list. Released from the constraints of ‘normal’ life, Tessa tastes new experiences to make her feel alive while her failing body struggles to keep up. Tessa’s feelings, her relationships with her father and brother, her estranged mother, her best friend, and her new boyfriend, all are painfully crystallised in the precious weeks before Tessa’s time finally runs out.

Discussion Questions:

1. Friendship is an important theme in the book. What can we learn from Tessa’s friendship with Zoe? Have you ever been friends with someone who was dying?
2. Tessa talks about how others are afraid of her illness. Why do you think that is? How does that affect Tessa’s life?
3. Why do you think Tessa makes the list? What would you include on your own “To Do Before I Die” list?
4. When does Tessa accept that she is going to die? How does that acceptance change how she lives the rest of her life?
5. Would you want to know if you were dying? Why or why not? How would your life change if you knew you were dying?

Catching Fire by: Suzanne Collins (Age 12+)

Against all odds, Katniss Everdeen has survived the Hunger Games. She and fellow District 12 tribute Peeta Mellark are miraculously still alive. Katniss should be relieved, happy even. Yet nothing is the way Katniss wishes it to be. Gale holds her at an icy distance. Peeta has turned his back on her completely. And there are whispers of a rebellion against the Capitol - a rebellion that Katniss and Peeta may have helped create. Much to her shock, Katniss has fueled an unrest that she’s afraid she cannot stop. And what scares her even more is that she’s not entirely convinced she should try. As time draws near for Katniss and Peeta to visit the districts on the Capitol’s cruel Victory Tour, the stakes are higher than ever. If they can’t prove, without a shadow of a doubt, that they are lost in their love for each other, the consequences will be horrifying. Katniss is about to be tested as never before.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you had to compare The Hunger Games to a real-life event, what would you compare it to?
2. Why do you think Katniss became the symbol of the rebellion?
3. How do Katniss, Peeta and Haymitch cope with the trauma of having been tributes in the Games? Are their ways of coping healthy or unhealthy?
4. Do you think the impact of death and grief is portrayed in an honest way? Why or why not?
5. What are the motives behind the Victory Tour?

Dear Evan Hansen by: Val Emmich (Age 15+)

When a letter that was never meant to be seen by anyone draws high school senior Evan Hansen into a family’s grief over the loss of their son, he is given the chance of a lifetime: to belong. He just has to stick to a lie he never meant to tell, that the notoriously troubled Connor Murphy was his secret best friend. Suddenly, Evan isn’t invisible anymore. And Connor Murphy’s parents have taken him in like he was their own, desperate to know more about their enigmatic son from his closest friend. As Evan gets pulled deeper into their swirl of anger, regret, and confusion, he knows that what he’s doing can’t be right, but if he’s helping people, how wrong can it be?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Evan lied about the letter? What consequences did those lies have for the characters in the story? Are there circumstances when you believe lies are better than the truth?



2. This book is written from two perspectives-Connor's and Evan's. What perspectives do readers gain from each of the characters that help them to understand the story? How does hearing someone else's perspective change the way that you think?
3. How does Zoe grieve differently than the rest of her family? How does she make sense of grieving the complicated relationship she had with Connor?
4. What can the novel teach us about grief in the family context?
5. Often, fictional stories have happy endings. How did this book differentiate from that? Why do you think the author left some things unresolved?

The Fault in Our Stars by: John Green (Age 14+)

Despite the tumor-shrinking medical miracle that has bought her a few years, Hazel has never been anything but terminal. But when a gorgeous plot twist named Augustus Waters suddenly appears at Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel's story is about to be completely rewritten.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the point of including "An Imperial Affliction" in this book? Why is it important? What does it tell us about Hazel?
2. In the Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel talks about the fact that they will all die someday. How do you think we as a society would view death and dying if we talked about it as openly as Hazel?
3. If you were dying, would you want to know? Why or why not? If you knew how much time you had left on earth, would that change how you live your life?
4. Relationship is a big theme in this book. What is the significance of the Cancer Kid support group?
5. In this book, we see the characters dealing with normal teen issues as well as cancer, anticipatory grief and death. Do you think the way this is written is realistic? Why or why not?

History Is All You Left Me by: Adam Silvera (Age 15+)

When Griffin's first love and ex-boyfriend, Theo, dies in a drowning accident, his universe implodes. Even though Theo had moved to California for college and started seeing Jackson, Griffin never doubted Theo would come back to him. But now, the future he's been imagining for himself has gone far off course. To make things worse, the only person who truly understands his heartache is Jackson. But no matter how much they open up to each other, Griffin's downward spiral continues. If Griffin is ever to rebuild his future, he must first confront his history, every last heartbreaking piece in the puzzle of his life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Griffin and Jackson are so immediately drawn to each other? Do you think their relationship would have been different if Theo hadn't died?
2. When someone is no longer a part of your life due to a death or a breakup, do you think it's easier to cope with the loss by reliving the history, like Griffin does, or by trying to forget the past?
3. Mental illness is a theme in this book as Griffin struggles with obsessive compulsive disorder. How do we see his OCD manifest? Is how OCD represented in the book different than what is often portrayed in media?
4. In the book, Griffin says "I'm not a big fan of secrets. Secrets can turn people into liars..." What do you think about this? Are there times when keeping secrets is better than the truth? How can keeping secrets cause problems?
5. Several things in the book are described as complete or incomplete puzzles. What is the significance of this?

Hold Still by: Nina LaCour (Age 14+)

Ingrid left behind a painful farewell in her journal for Caitlin. Now Caitlin is left alone, by loss and by choice, struggling to find renewed hope in the wake of her best friend's suicide. With the help of family and newfound friends, Caitlin will encounter first love, broaden her horizons, and start to realize that true friendship didn't die with Ingrid. And the journal which once seemed only to chronicle Ingrid's descent into depression, becomes the tool by which Caitlin once again reaches out to all those who loved Ingrid.

Discussion Questions:



1. We see the way that Caitlin grieves evolve throughout the book. How does she grieve at the beginning of the story versus the end?
2. Which characters in the book play a role in Caitlin's recovery?
3. How does Caitlin's view of her relationship with Ingrid change after she reads her journal?
4. Caitlin and Ingrid both used art as a means of self-expression. How can art both help us to understand and express ourselves and to understand others?
5. Would you want to read the journal of someone you know who's died? Why or why not?

Holding Up the Universe by: Jennifer Niven (Age 13+)

Everyone thinks they know Libby Strout, the girl once dubbed "America's Fattest Teen." But no one's taken the time to look past her weight to get to know who she really is. Following her mom's death, she's been picking up the pieces in the privacy of her home, dealing with her heartbroken father and her own grief. Now, Libby's ready: for high school, for new friends, for love, and for every possibility life has to offer. In that moment, I know the part I want to play here at MVB High. I want to be the girl who can do anything. Everyone thinks they know Jack Masselin, too. Yes, he's got swagger, but he's also mastered the impossible art of giving people what they want, of fitting in. What no one knows is that Jack has a newly acquired secret: he can't recognize faces. Even his own brothers are strangers to him. He's the guy who can re-engineer and rebuild anything, but he can't understand what's going on with the inner workings of his brain. So he tells himself to play it cool: Be charming. Be hilarious. Don't get too close to anyone. Until he meets Libby. When the two get tangled up in a cruel high school game—which lands them in group counseling and community service—Libby and Jack are both pissed, and then surprised. Because the more time they spend together, the less alone they feel. Because sometimes when you meet someone, it changes the world, theirs and yours.

Discussion Questions:

1. Libby's weight is one of the main focuses in this book. What do you think her weight has to do with her mother's death and her grief thereafter?
2. Why do you think Jack keeps his brain injury a secret even though it makes his daily life so challenging?
3. Jack finds solace in Libby's company. Why do you think that is? What does Libby teach Jack?
4. A main theme in the novel is bullying. Is that something that has been/was part of your high school experience? What does bullying have to do with the high school social hierarchy?
5. Do you think this book accurately portrayed the realities of grief from a teen's perspective? Why or why not?

How the Light Gets In by Katy Upperman (Age 12+)

Since her sister's tragic death, seventeen-year-old Callie Ryan has basically given up. Her grades have plummeted, she's quit her swim team, and she barely recognizes the people her parents have become. When she returns to her aunt's run-down coastal Victorian one year after Chloe's death, Callie resigns herself to a summer of guilt and home renovations. She doesn't expect to be charmed by the tiny coastal town or by Tucker Morgan, a local boy brimming with sunshine. But even as her days begin to brighten, Callie's nights are crowded with chilling dreams, unanswered questions, and eerie phenomenon that have her convinced she's being haunted. Will Callie be able to figure out what her sister is trying to communicate before it's too late?

Discussion Questions:

1. Since your person died, do you find there are places you used to go to together that you now avoid? Are there things you used to like to do but have lost interest in?
2. In the book, Callie smokes as a way to escape reality. Why do you think drug use complicates grief?
3. Did you struggle academically after your person died? Did you stop participating in after-school activities?
4. Do you have a way of connecting with your person? Do you talk to them or write letters? Does your person communicate with you?
5. What did you think of the supernatural element in the book? Did you think it was realistic? If you could have the same experience with your person, would you choose to?

The Hunger Games by: Suzanne Collins (Age 12+)

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen regards it as a death sentence when she steps forward to take her sister's place in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before—and survival, for her, is second nature. Without really meaning to, she becomes a contender. But if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weight survival against humanity and life against love.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which character do you most identify with and why?
2. This book is about children who are forced to fight to the death for the entertainment of the Capitol. If books like this are so popular, are you surprised at how death and dying is still such a taboo subject in our culture?
3. What death impacted you the most? Why?
4. What evidence of trauma did you notice in both Haymitch and Katniss?
5. What similarities did you notice between their world and ours?

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by: Erika L. Sanchez (Age 13+)

Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter. That was Olga's role. Then a tragic accident on the busiest street in Chicago leaves Olga dead and Julia left behind to reassemble the shattered pieces of her family. And no one seems to acknowledge that Julia is broken, too. Instead, her mother seems to channel her grief into pointing out every possible way Julia has failed. But it's not long before Julia discovers that Olga might not have been as perfect as everyone thought. Was Olga really what she seemed? Or was there more to her sister's story? And either way, how can Julia even attempt to live up to a seemingly impossible ideal?

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever discovered a secret that your special person kept after their death?
2. How has the death of your person changed the relationships you have with others in your family? Do you grieve differently than others in your family? How have others in your family been impacted by the loss?
3. Why do you think Julia tried to end her life? If she had received more support following the death of her sister, do you think she would have self-harmed? What do you need in order to feel supported?
4. Why do you think the relationship between Julia and Connor is significant?
5. Does your family have any cultural beliefs about death or an after-life?

I'll Give You the Sun by: Jandy Nelson (Age 14+)

At first, Jude and her twin brother Noah are inseparable. Noah draws constantly and is falling in love with the charismatic boy next door, while daredevil Jude wears red-red lipstick, cliff-dives, and does all the talking for both of them. Years later, they are barely speaking. Something has happened to change the twins in different yet equally devastating ways . . . but then Jude meets an intriguing, irresistible boy and a mysterious new mentor. The early years are Noah's to tell; the later years are Jude's. But they each have only half the story, and if they can only find their way back to one another, they'll have a chance to remake their world. This radiant, award-winning novel from the acclaimed author of *The Sky Is Everywhere* will leave you breathless and teary and laughing—often all at once.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think the author chose to write the book from two different perspectives?
2. The book discusses some big themes such as grief, loss, relationships and sexuality. Throughout the book, several characters use art as a way of coping and a means of expression. Why do you think art can be therapeutic?
3. Why do you think Noah told his father that his mother was on her way to see him and try to repair their relationship when that was the opposite of what she was doing?



4. Both twins struggle with guilt throughout the novel. How did that affect the relationship they had with each other. Why do you think several characters blamed themselves for Dianna's death?
5. Do you think the ghost of Jude's grandmother was real or was it a reflection of Jude's imagination? If so, what does that say about loneliness?

Kids of Appetite by: David Arnold (Age 13+)

Victor Benucci and Madeline Falco have a story to tell. It begins with the death of Vic's father. It ends with the murder of Mad's uncle. The Hackensack Police Department would very much like to hear it. But in order to tell their story, Vic and Mad must focus on all the chapters in between.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the book, Vic finds a hand-written letter from his father detailing how he wants his ashes to be spread. Have you talked with your family about burial and/or cremation? Have you ever spread someone's ashes before?
2. Friendship, self-identity and overcoming adversity are major themes in the book.
3. The book alternates between two narrators, Vid and Mad, and also between the past and present. Why do you think the author chose to write the book this way? How does it impact the story?
4. How does each character cope with loss? Which character do you relate to the most and why?
5. If you were to write a book, who would you include in your chapters?

The Last Time We Say Goodbye by: Cynthia Hand (Age 13+)

The last time Lex was happy, it was before. Now she's just the girl whose brother killed himself. And it feels like that's all she'll ever be. As Lex starts to put her life back together, she tries to block out what happened the night Tyler died. But there's a secret she hasn't told anyone-a text Tyler sent, that could have changed everything. Lex's brother is gone. But Lex is about to discover that a ghost doesn't have to be real to keep you from moving on.

Discussion Questions:

1. In our society, there is often stigma and shame surrounding a suicide death. Why do you think that is? How does that change the way someone grieves the loss of a person who died from suicide?
2. This book is written from the perspective of a grieving sister. Often, sibling death is not discussed as much as the death of a parent or spouse. What did you learn about the impact the death of a sibling has on the remaining sibling?
3. What helped Lexie cope with the death of her brother? What coping skills do you use or find helpful?
4. Tyler was struggling with depression before he died. Mental health is also stigmatized in our society and guys are often less likely to reach out for support than girls. Why do you think that is?
5. What are the other changes (secondary losses) Lexie experiences after Tyler's death? In this book, we see how so many areas of a person's life are affected by a death. How has your life changed since your person died?

Looking For Alaska by: John Green (16+)

Miles "Pudge" Halter is done with his safe life at home. His whole life has been one big non-event, and his obsession with famous last words has only made him crave "the Great Perhaps" even more (Francois Rabelais, poet). He heads off to the sometimes crazy and anything-but-boring world of Culver Creek Boarding School, and his life becomes the opposite of safe. Because down the hall is Alaska Young. She pulls Pudge into her world, launches him into the Great Perhaps, and steals his heart. Nothing is ever the same.

Discussion Questions:

1. After Alaska's death, many students claimed that they loved her even though they didn't. Why do you think that is? Do you think that people feel they need to have had a close relationship with the person who died in order to grieve their loss?
2. Alaska's death is kind of ambiguous. Do you think she did by suicide or was her death an accident? Why do you think the author left the cause of death open for speculation?
3. What kind of influence do you think Alaska had on Miles?
4. What does this book teach readers about grief and the impact the death has on a school community?

5. What character in the story do you relate to the most and why? What do you think that says about you?

The Lovely Bones by: Alice Sebold (Age 16+)

The Lovely Bones is the story of a family devastated by a gruesome murder -- a murder recounted by the teenage victim. Upsetting, you say? Alice Sebold takes this difficult material and delivers a compelling and accomplished exploration of a fractured family's need for peace and closure.

Discussion Questions:

1. The author does a good job of showing how the same loss impacts family members in different ways. How does each family member cope with the loss? Which family member do you relate to the most?
2. Do you think that some ways of grieving are better than others? Explain.
3. Do you believe in heaven or in an afterlife? If so, where do you think people go after they die?
4. How do we see Suzie's perspective change from that of an adolescent to more of an adult in heaven?
5. We see that once Suzie realizes she's dead that she enters a place called "The In-Between" where she watches over her loved ones. Do you think that your special person can look down on you? If so, is that comforting or not?

Me Earl and the Dying Girl by: Jesse Andrews (Age 14+)

Greg Gaines has only one friend, Earl, and together they spend their time making movies, until Greg's mother forces him to rekindle his childhood friendship with Rachel, who has been diagnosed with leukemia. When Rachel stops treatment, Greg and Earl decide the thing to do is to make a film for her, which becomes a turning point in each of their lives. And all at once Greg must abandon invisibility and stand in the spotlight.

Discussion Questions:

1. How was Greg's life changed by his friendship with Rachel?
2. In the epilogue, Greg writes about the impact of Rachel's death on his life before coming to the conclusion that he wants to pursue film school rather than go to college. In what ways is writing about his story therapeutic? Have you even written about your life experiences?
3. What was the significance of the film? How did the film impact the lives of Greg, Earl and Rachel?
4. Throughout the book, Rachel is dying. What can this book teach readers about anticipatory grief?
5. Why do you think Rachel decided to stop chemotherapy? How did you feel about her decision?

Mockingjay by: Suzanne Collins (Age 12+)

The final book in the ground-breaking HUNGER GAMES trilogy, this new foiled edition of MOCKINGJAY is available for a limited period of time. Against all odds, Katniss Everdeen has survived the Hunger Games twice. But now that she's made it out of the bloody arena alive, she's still not safe. The Capitol is angry. The Capitol wants revenge. Who do they think should pay for the unrest? Katniss. And what's worse, President Snow has made it clear that no one else is safe either. Not Katniss's family, not her friends, not the people of District 12.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your impression of President Coin? Do you think good people can be warped by power?
2. Do you think the way Katniss was used as a symbol was the right thing to do? If so, who was it right for?
3. In the book, Peeta is tortured in order to torment and humiliate Katniss. What signs of His deteriorating mental health do you notice? What evidence is there that Katniss is coping with severe trauma?
4. Why do you think Katniss executed President Coin instead of President Snow?
5. Primrose, who is a symbol of loveliness and kindness, is killed near the end of the book. What meaning can you derive from the death of this character? What symbolism do you see?

My Sister's Keeper by: Jodi Picoult (Age 12+)

Anna is not sick, but she might as well be. By age thirteen, she has undergone countless surgeries, transfusions, and shots so that her older sister, Kate, can somehow fight the leukemia that has plagued her since childhood. Anna was conceived as a bone marrow match for Kate -- a life and a role that she



has never challenged... until now. Anna makes a decision that for most would be unthinkable, a decision that will tear her family apart and have perhaps fatal consequences for the sister she loves.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the book, we see the different ways each family member is dealing with Kate's illness as well as the other main events in the story. This is representative of grieving families in general. Has this been your experience of grieving within your family?
2. One of the big discussion points in this book is whether or not it was ethical for Sarah and Brian to conceive a "designer baby" in order to save Kate. What do you think about this? Do you think it's ethical? How do you think this impacted Anna's identity?
3. Why did Kate ask Anna to sue her parents for medical emancipation? How do you think Anna felt about being asked to do that?
4. Is it right to put a child through multiple painful and invasive medical procedures in order to save another?
5. What can this book teach readers about anticipatory grief?

Second Chance Summer by: Morgan Matson (Age 12+)

Taylor's dad gets devastating news, and her parents decide that the family will spend one last summer all together at their old lake house in the Pocono Mountains. Crammed into a place much smaller and more rustic than they are used to, they begin to get to know each other again. And Taylor discovers that the people she thought she had left behind haven't actually gone anywhere. As the summer progresses and the Edwards become more of a family, they're more aware than ever that they're battling a ticking clock.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you had one last summer to spend with your special person, where would you go and what would you do?
2. In the book, we see Taylor's dad go from diagnosis to death. In your opinion, do you think it's easier to deal with a death if you know it's going to happen? Why or why not?
3. A romantic relationship develops between Taylor and Henry in the midst of her dad's illness. Do you think this is realistic? Why do you think the artist wrote this into the plot?
4. In the past, Taylor ran away from her problems. This time, she can't run away from her dad's illness and impending death. How does she come to terms with her father's diagnosis?
5. Who supports Taylor in her grief? How do they support her? Who supports you?

Summer Bird Blue by: Akemi Dawn Bowman (Age 14+)

Rumi Seto spends a lot of time worrying she doesn't have the answers to everything. But there is one thing she is absolutely sure of—she wants to spend the rest of her life writing music with her younger sister, Lea. Then Lea dies in a car accident, and her mother sends her away to live with her aunt in Hawaii while she deals with her own grief. Now thousands of miles from home, Rumi struggles to navigate the loss of her sister, being abandoned by her mother, and the absence of music in her life. With the help of the "boys next door" Rumi attempts to find her way back to her music, to write the song she and Lea never had the chance to finish.

Discussion Questions:

1. This book touches on the subject of survivor guilt. Why do you think Rumi feels guilt over her sister's death?
2. In what ways, healthy and unhealthy do we see Rumi dealing with the loss of her sister?
3. How has the family been impacted by the loss? What other losses do the main characters experience?
4. How does music serve as a therapeutic way for Rumi to process what has happened?
5. Which significant characters help Rumi to come to terms with her sister's death?

The Sky Is Everywhere by: Jandy Nelson (Age 14+)

Adrift after her sister Bailey's sudden death, Lennie finds herself torn between quiet, seductive Toby—Bailey's boyfriend who shares her grief—and Joe, the new boy in town who bursts with life and musical genius. Each offers Lennie something she desperately needs... though she knows if the two of them

collide her whole world will explode. Lennie's struggle to sort her own melody out of the noise around her is always honest, often uproarious, and absolutely unforgettable.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Lennie leave notes all over town? What is the purpose of them?
2. In the book, we see both sisters grieve for a mother they don't remember. In what ways does that loss impact their lives as adolescents?
3. The author does a good job showing how much is lost and changes after the death of a significant person. What other losses and changes do you notice? How do these additional losses affect Lennie?
4. What is the significance of Lennie's relationship with Joe? How do you think Lennie feels grieving the loss of her sister while also falling in love? Why do you think the author chose to show this juxtaposition?
5. If you were to write your own grief notes, what would you write? Where would you write them?

The Thing about Jellyfish by: Ali Benjamin (Age 10+)

After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy must have been a rare jellyfish sting--things don't just happen for any reason. Retreating into a silent world of imagination, she crafts a plan to prove her theory--even if it means traveling the globe, alone. Suzy's achingly heartfelt journey explores life, death, the astonishing wonder of the universe...and the potential for love and hope right next door.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you known someone your own age that died? If so, did that make you think about your own mortality?
2. Do you think the impact the death of a friend can have is considered as significant as the death of a family member?
3. Do you know how your person died? Do you think it's better to know how someone died or would you prefer not to know? Why?
4. A lot of people talk of "finding closure" after a loss. Do you think that's possible? What does closure look like for you?
5. In the book, Suzy's family tries to understand her grief and to support her. Do you think the amount of support a bereaved person receives could affect their grieving process? Who has been a supportive person for you?

The Thing with Feathers by: Mccall Hoyle (Age 12+)

Emilie Day believes in playing it safe: she's homeschooled, her best friend is her seizure dog, and she's probably the only girl on the Outer Banks of North Carolina who can't swim. Then Emilie's mom enrolls her in public school, and Emilie goes from studying at home in her pj's to halls full of strangers. To make matters worse, Emilie is paired with starting point guard Chatham York for a major research project on Emily Dickinson. She should be ecstatic when Chatham shows interest, but she has a problem. She hasn't told anyone about her epilepsy. Emilie lives in fear her recently adjusted meds will fail and she'll seize at school. Eventually, the worst happens, and she must decide whether to withdraw to safety or follow a dead poet's advice and "dwell in possibility."

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is Emilie so upset by her mother's relationship with Roger?
2. Hitch the therapy dog is a main character in the book. Have you experienced the therapeutic power of animals?
3. What was the significance of the orange sea glass? Do you have something precious that reminds you of someone who has died?
4. What helped Emily get over her fear of having a seizure at school? Have you ever overcome a big fear or challenge?
5. What does the book title refer to?

We Are the Ants by: Shaun David Hutchinson. (Teens 14+)

Henry Denton has spent years being periodically abducted by aliens. Then the aliens give him an ultimatum: The world will end in 144 days, and all Henry has to do to stop it is push a big red button. Only



he isn't sure he wants to. After all, life hasn't been great for Henry. His mom is a struggling waitress held together by a thin layer of cigarette smoke. His brother is a jobless dropout who just knocked someone up. His grandmother is slowly losing herself to Alzheimer's. And Henry is still dealing with the grief of his boyfriend's suicide last year. Wiping the slate clean sounds like a pretty good choice to him. But Henry is a scientist first, and facing the question thoroughly and logically, he begins to look for pros and cons: in the bully who is his perpetual one-night stand, in the best friend who betrayed him, in the brilliant and mysterious boy who walked into the wrong class. Weighing the pain and the joy that surrounds him, Henry is left with the ultimate choice: push the button and save the planet and everyone on it...or let the world—and his pain—be destroyed forever.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the alien abductions were real? If not, what did they represent?
2. Why is Henry so desperate to find out why Jessie took his life? Why does he feel responsible for his death?
3. Henry experiences bullying and violence throughout the book. If you or someone you know is the victim of bullying, do you know a safe person you can tell or somewhere you can get help?
4. There are several different losses that occur throughout the book. How many can you think of? What examples of primary and secondary losses do you see?
5. What helps Henry to make up his mind about the button?

What to Say Next by: Julie Buxbaum (Teens 12+)

When an unlikely friendship is sparked between relatively popular Kit Lowell and socially isolated David Drucker, everyone is surprised, most of all Kit and David. Kit appreciates David's blunt honesty—in fact, she finds it bizarrely refreshing. David welcomes Kit's attention and her inquisitive nature. When she asks for his help figuring out the how and why of her dad's tragic car accident, David is all in. But neither of them can predict what they'll find. Can their friendship survive the truth?

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about neuro-diversity from David's character? How does the way he thinks and acts shape his relationship with Kit? What is it about the way David talks about death that Kit finds refreshing?
2. Why is the accident project so important to Kit? What does this teach us about how guilt impacts the way we grieve?
3. For many children and teens who experience a significant loss in their life, it's the secondary losses (changes resulting from the death of a person) that can be as profoundly impactful as the death itself. What secondary losses does Kit experience?
4. What does David help Kit to discover about her father's death? Why is this important?
5. Kit describes the various ways she is physically impacted by her grief. What physical symptoms of grief have you experienced?

When We Collided by: Emery Lord (Teens 14+)

We are seventeen and shattered and still dancing. We have messy, throbbing hearts, and we are stronger than anyone could ever know...Jonah never thought a girl like Vivi would come along. Vivi didn't know Jonah would light up her world. Neither of them expected a summer like this...a summer that would rewrite their futures. In an unflinching story about new love, old wounds, and forces beyond our control, two teens find that when you collide with the right person at just the right time, it will change you forever.

Discussion Questions:

1. This book talks a lot about mental illness. What did you learn? Did anything about bipolar disorder surprise you?
2. Why do you think Jonah felt so much responsibility to take care of his siblings and maintain his father's restaurant?
3. What does Jonah learn about leaving a legacy?
4. Why does Vivi keep her diagnosis a secret? What does this say about how mental illness is thought/talked about in society?
5. How does living with loss and or mental illness change/shape one's identity?

Wing Jones by: Katherine Webber (Age 14+)

Wing Jones, like everyone else in her town, has worshipped her older brother, Marcus, for as long as she can remember. Until the night when everything changes. Marcus, drunk at the wheel after a party, kills two people and barely survives himself. With Marcus now in a coma, she is tormented at school for Marcus's mistake and haunted at home by her mother's and grandmothers' grief. To make matters worse, the bank is threatening to repossess her family's house because all their money is going to pay her brother's mounting medical bills. Every night, unable to sleep, Wing finds herself sneaking out to go to the school's empty track. When Aaron, Marcus's best friend, sees her running one night, he recognizes that her speed, skill, and agility could get her spot on the track team—and better still, a shot at a coveted sponsorship from a major athletic gear company. Wing can't pass up the opportunity to train with her long time crush and to help her struggling family, but can she handle being thrust out of Marcus's shadow and into the spotlight?

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Wing cope with her brother's car accident and her family's grief following?
2. Wing's brother Marcus is the star of the family and is well-loved by his friends, family and community. How does his image change after the accident? Do you think it's fair to judge or condemn a person because of one mistake?
3. How does Wing's identity change throughout the novel? Do you think she would have changed had her brother's accident not happened?
4. Themes such as race, bullying and cultural identity come up throughout the novel. What did you learn?
5. Although this book can take readers on an emotional roller coaster, Wing's journey is very inspiring. What did you take away from the book?