

Relationship Violence

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"The first time Alex called Tabitha a bitch, she thought he was kidding-after all, they were in love" (Hudepohl 169). There are other teen boys like Alex who say similar words to their girlfriends. Tabitha is encountering one of the most prevalent teen problems in America: Relationship Violence. According to the clothing manufacturer Liz Claiborne, one-third of all teen girls report that either they or their friends have been involved in a violent dating relationship.

"When Words Hurt," an April 2002 article in Seventeen magazine, is a must read to understand why so many teens can be touched by this type of maltreatment. The author, Dana Hudepohl, provides us with a glimpse into relationship violence and its causes and symptoms. School media specialists and youth librarians are encouraged to make this excellent article available to teens and their parents, teachers, and others who care about teens.

Relationship violence is mostly a high school issue even though some middle schoolers who are dating may experience this form of abuse. The reason that relationship violence is primarily a high school issue is because for the most part- dating and coupling begins during these years. During middle school, young teens are more likely to engage in same sex friendships and group boy/girl activities.

Two fiction books about relationship violence that are recommended because of the strength of their story and the realism of the abusive situation are *Breathing Underwater* by Alex Flinn and *Dreamland* by Sarah Dessen. By reading these books, teens and adults will gain a realistic understanding about the symptoms and causes of relationship violence.

Breathing Underwater is a must buy. What makes this book so unique is the point of view of the story teller. It is told by Nick who becomes more and more controlling of his girlfriend, Caitlin, until one day he strikes her. Caitlin and her mother notify the authorities and Nick must stand trial. At the trial, Nick appears unremorseful and does not recognize the violence he has imposed on Caitlin. The judge requires that Nick attend anger management classes and keep a journal. *Breathing Underwater* is Nick's journal about his experience in the anger management class and the retelling of his abusive relationship with Caitlin. *Breathing Underwater* is a great example of young adult literature because it shows the growth of Nick and how he is able to tackle some of the developmental tasks of adolescence.

Another good selection is *Dreamland*. This is Caitlin's account of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of Rogerson Briscoe. Caitlin's response to Rogerson's control is classic. We are brought into this story to watch as she morphs into timidity, cuts off contact with her friends, and wears long sleeve shirts to cover bruises.

When read together, both books will help librarians and educators gain understanding about abuse in teen relationships.

Resources:

Dessen, Sarah. *Dreamland*. New York: Puffin Books, 2000.

Flinn, Alex. *Breathing Underwater*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.

Hudepohl, Dana. "When Words Hurt." *Seventeen* Apr. 2003: 169-171.

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