



Using Bibliotherapy with the Gifted

Experts agree “reading books help children grow, not only intellectually, but also socially and emotionally. One way for both parents and teachers to help gifted children cope with stress, depression, perfectionism, friendship issues, low self-esteem, and a lack of motivation is through... bibliotherapy - the use of literature to help children understand and solve problems” (Whitney & Hirsch, 2011).

Bibliotherapy can be effective with gifted children of all ages, including adolescents and teenagers. When gifted children read about characters who are dealing with different social problems and emotional issues they are more able to make connections to their own similar problems and emotions. These connections help them work through any problems and emotions they have been dealing with in their own life. By making connections to the lives of characters in books (and movies) gifted children are able to feel safe while exploring their own personal issues. Children may also feel less alone while sorting out these issues by knowing that others have survived the same problems. According to Whitney & Hirsch, they begin to interpret and apply the lessons of the literature to their own lives by “trying on” various ideas and solutions, first at a distance in their imaginations, and then, perhaps, in their real lives.

Bibliotherapy is most effective when it is a two-person experience. The child may not fully understand the themes of the book or make personal connections by reading alone. Think of bibliotherapy as a mini-book study between the child and parent, other siblings and family members may also be included. The adult can read the book first or read it simultaneously with the child. The adult should select open-ended questions to discuss with the child throughout different sections of the reading to help the child make connections and offer opportunities for the child to discuss their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. The child will also benefit from listening to the ideas of the adult.

Some of My Best Friends Are Books by Judith Halsted summarizes 300 books that may be helpful for gifted children of all ages. The books are listed by reading level and grouped according to social and emotional themes such as intensity, sensitivity, perfectionism, aloneness, being different, and relationships.

Exploring Gifted Themes through Film: Hollywood has done as much good as harm with its portrayal of the gifted. Yet film can be a springboard for discussing the myths, realities, social, and emotional needs of giftedness in a non-threatening way. The positive opportunities can be fragmented if the child just passively views the film. These entry points assume the film viewing is guided before, during, and after by a supportive adult.

Identification - Children identify similarities between the character and themselves.

Emotional Response - Children feel what the character is feeling.

Insight - Children identify with the character and gain a deeper understanding and insight.

Transfer - Children transfer their understanding and insight about the character's experience to problems and issues in their own lives.

These films are not endorsed, but provided as a point of reference. The films should be previewed before watching with a child. Films not appropriate for children are included because they may be of interest to those supporting gifted children. (*Plot overviews adapted from www.imdb.com*)

Little Man Tate (1992) PG Fred is a genius. His mother, Dede, is determined he has all the opportunities he needs, and is not taken advantage of by people who forget his extremely powerful intellect is harbored in the body and emotions of a child.

Akeelah and the Bee (2006) PG Akeelah is smart, but her environment threatens to strangle her aspirations. As the Scripps National Spelling Bee looms, Akeelah could provide her community with someone to be proud of - if she can overcome her insecurities.

October Sky (1999) PG After the launch of Sputnik, Homer is inspired to learn how to build rockets. Unfortunately, his father and most of the town think it is a waste of time.

Finding Forrester (2001) PG-13 Jamal is sent to a prestigious prep school because he scored exceptionally high on a standardized exam and was a good basketball player. He befriends a reclusive writer who encourages him to pursue his true dream of writing.

Whale Rider (1999) PG Upon the death of her twin brother and mother in childbirth, Pai is the only child in the line of the tribe's chiefly succession. However, because she is a female, she cannot technically inherit the leadership.

Matilda (2005) PG Matilda is an extremely intelligent girl who is anxious to go school and read books. Despite the interference of her parents and her principal, her sweet and supportive teacher helps Matilda harness her intellectual and telekinetic powers.

Searching for Bobby Fischer (1993) PG Josh is a typical American boy interested in basketball until his parents discover his gift for playing chess.

Pay It Forward (2000) PG-13 The assignment: think of something to change the world and put it into action. Trevor conjures the notion of paying a favor not back, but forward.

Gifted (2017) PG-13 Frank, a single man raising his child prodigy niece Mary, is drawn into a custody battle with his mother, Mary's grandmother.