BIBLIOThERAPY: HELPING CHILDREN

COPE WITH DEATH

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INTRODUCTION

While I was in Florida during Easter break in April, 1973, my brother, who was eleven months younger than I, died unexpectedly. My reactions to that situation were probably much like those of every other person who has experienced the death of a loved one—feelings of shock, fear, anger, guilt, and finally, an acceptance of some sort.

Later, in the autumn of the same year, while I was student teaching in a class of twenty-three third graders, one of the girls was faced with the sudden death of her father. Thinking back to my own experience, I realized what a difficult adjustment was ahead of this eight-year-old girl. I decided to investigate bibliotherapy as a means for helping elementary-school children cope with the death of a parent, a sibling, or a friend.

Before proceeding further I felt it was necessary to determine a definition of bibliotherapy to which I could refer throughout my research. There is relative agreement among the various writers who have attempted to define the term "bibliotherapy." It has been defined as "The prescription of reading materials..."
which help to develop maturity and nourish and maintain mental health."\(^1\) A somewhat similar definition describes bibliotherapy as "A form of psychological dietetics in which a practitioner prescribes reading a specific book just as a physician would prescribe a specific medicine, diet, physiotherapy, etc."\(^2\) The Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries has adopted the dictionary definition, which reads: "The use of selected reading materials as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and in psychiatry; also, guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading."\(^3\) The definition which has been utilized most widely, and the one which I prefer to use here, describes bibliotherapy as "A process of interaction between the personality of the reader and imaginative literature which may engage his emotions and free them for conscious and productive use."\(^4\)

Further examination of materials related to bibliotherapy revealed many annotated bibliographies of books for children related to aspects of children's lives ranging from delinquency to family relationships. However, in most cases the subject of


\(^2\)Ibid.


\(^4\)Ibid.
death was not included or it was mentioned only in conjunction with other problems. In Facilitating Human Development Through Reading: The Use of Bibliotherapy In Teaching and Counseling Zaccaria and Moses provide an annotated book list organized according to a functional taxonomy of thirty-nine problems faced by students, including adjustment to a new neighborhood, crime and juvenile delinquency, fears, home and family living, responsibility and maturity, and problems caused by disabilities.\(^1\)

Death is not identified as a specific problem faced by children. Reading Ladders for Human Relations contains four "ladders": creating a positive self-image, living with others, appreciating different cultures, and coping with change.\(^2\) Specific topics such as family and peer relationships are included; however, death is not identified as a topic. Books concerning a child's experience with death are included within other topics but it is necessary to read each plot summary before such books can be identified. Clara J. Kircher in Character Formation Through Books includes a character index which categorizes children's books under topics such as adoption, bravery, adjustment to handicaps, honesty, school, and self-confidence.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Zaccaria and Moses, Facilitating Human Development Through Reading.


include the acceptance of death as a topic heading but lists
the titles of only three books.

Knowing that many children do experience the death of a
friend, a member of the family, or even a pet, and realizing
what a difficult adjustment is involved, I decided to compile
a list of books dealing with the subject. Perhaps the reading
of such books under the guidance of the classroom teacher,
librarian or another adult could help the child reach an accep-
tance of the situation.

Procedures
Establishing the Criteria for Book Selection

The first step in compiling the list is the development
of criteria to be used in the selection of children's books
dealing with death. A discussion of five criteria follows.

Criterion One: The death of a member of the main character's
family, a friend, or a pet should constitute the major emphasis
of the book.

Because my primary interest is in the selection of child-
ren's books dealing with death, it is essential that the
experiences of the main character as a result of the death of
a member of the family, a friend, or a pet should be emphasized.

Until the decade of the 1960's, it seems that death was
seldom considered an appropriate topic for children's literature.
Although Beth dies in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, the
family's reactions are described only briefly. Perhaps it was felt that childhood is a time for enjoying life, that death is not a concern of the young child. But when a child experiences the death of a parent, a brother, a grandparent, a friend, or a pet, he becomes concerned. The purpose of children's books dealing with death is not to frighten, upset, or depress children, but to try to help them adjust to situations in life as they sometimes are -- in this case the situation is the death of a loved one. Mary Q. Steele, author of several books for children, states in an article entitled "Realism, Truth, and Honesty," "The world has not spared children hunger, cold, sorrow, pain, fear, loneliness, disease, death, war, famine or madness. Why should we [authors] hesitate to make use of this knowledge when writing for them?"¹

The reading of books with death as content helps children realize that their problems have been confronted before, that they are not alone. A similar idea is stated in Reading Ladders for Human Relations: "When incidents in books deal with a change that a child has already experienced, he may feel a sense of relief to find his experience is not entirely unique."²

Another writer, A.I. Bryan, states that one of the objectives

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²National Council of Teachers of English, Reading Ladders, p. 263.
of bibliotherapy is to show the reader that he is not the first to encounter the problem he is facing. The content of the book can be of great help in that area. Lee Wyndham, in his book *Writing for Children and Teenagers*, discusses the importance of the theme of a book. What he has to say might also be applied to the content of a book used for bibliotherapeutic purposes. "The theme of a book should be a crystallization of widespread human experiences. That is precisely what makes them interesting and understandable to the reader. The common experience they summarize makes it possible for him to identify with the story characters."2

Authorities appear to agree that books which emphasize a universal problem, such as the death of a loved one, may help the reader face his problem knowing others have had similar experiences.

Criterion Two: The book should meet the reading interests of the individual child.

Every story or poem is read by a specific individual who brings to it his own complex perceptions and reactions, based on his particular needs. Even when a work contains potential value to the individual, the child reads in general for interest.

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rather than instruction and he does not transform potential values into actual gain.¹

Ethel Newell states that a bibliotherapeutic book is "valuable chiefly for its timeliness in the life of an individual child with an individual problem."² The Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries emphasizes this point in a statement regarding the selection of materials: "Interest takes precedence over prestige or literary value."³ The circumstances governing the use of the books necessitate the choice.

Naturally, there is a difficulty in trying to determine what will have the most meaning to the reader. His background and experience will affect his appreciation and understanding. In bibliotherapy the books read must have an impact on the reader. David H. Russell hypothesizes that the impact of reading is determined by a variety of factors, including the reader's expectations, his conscious or unconscious needs, and his personality traits.⁴

³Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries, Bibliotherapy, p. 9.
Therefore it is impossible to select books to meet the needs of a child without having a specific child in mind.

I have, therefore, concentrated on the basic differences in reading interests of boys and girls. Pilgrim and McAllister in *Books, Young People and Reading Guidance* explain:

> A sharp difference between the reading interests of boys and girls occurs in later childhood and continues into late adolescence. Boys seldom like the same books as girls. Whereas boys want books with predominantly male characters with much robust action and no sentiment, the girls of early and middle adolescence prefer books with a good bit of romance. However, girls at this age will read and often like books written for boys, but boys seldom read or like a book written for girls.¹

Huck and Kuhn agree but add: "More recent studies have indicated that boys and girls have definite reading interests that differ as early as the first grade."²

Since girls are more likely to read and enjoy a book written for boys than vice versa, it is particularly important to include books which will meet the reading interests of early and middle adolescent boys, books with a boy as a main character. The more specific reading interests and needs of the child should be determined and considered when working with the individual.


Criterion Three: The book should be written from a personal point of view, presenting a genuine portrayal of a major character and his feelings.

The characters in children's literature can be considered a basic influence in the development of attitudes which aid in personal adjustment. "In fiction, boys and girls encounter numerous incidents in which the central characters experience conflict, uncertainty, and anxiety concerning problems which beset most adolescents."¹ Reading about the experiences of these characters can enlarge the student's understanding of human personality. As a result, the student may arrive at a more adequate understanding of himself and his own problems.

An integral process in bibliotherapy involves an identification of the reader with the main character. "The reader responds emotionally to bibliotherapy only when he recognizes himself in the literature."² Books with a single main character allow the reader not only to look on the scene, but also to get into the mind and body of the main character and live the experience with him.³ The incidents and actions of the book should be presented through the main character's senses and emotions.


²Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries, Bibliotherapy, p. 19.

³Wyndham, Writing for Children and Teen-agers, p. 42.
The Committee on Reading Ladders for Human Relations states that books which focus on the individual have the greatest chance of reaching children: "The reader will see in a situation, good or bad, how probable it might be that he would do the same thing or react with the same emotion."¹ When a child identifies with the hero or heroine, the hero's ideals are likely to become for the time being the child's ideals and principles. Therefore, the books selected should be written from a personal point of view. They must present a single main character, in order that the reader may immediately identify with the character around whom the action revolves.

Because the identification of the reader with the main character is an integral part of bibliotherapy, characterization becomes an important consideration in the selection of books. Huck and Kuhn state, "The people portrayed in children's books should be as convincingly real and lifelike as our next-door neighbors."²

One aspect of characterization is growth and development. It has already been established that the main character must experience the death of a loved one. Does he change as a result of this experience or does he remain the same personality that he was in the beginning? Not all characters change, of course, but in books selected for a bibliotherapeutic use change is

¹National Council of Teachers of English, Reading Ladders, p. 12.
²Huck and Kuhn, Children's Literature, p. 11.
imperative. "Characters in literature must move toward full
development in their struggles for survival, maturity, and self-
understanding. These persons then become believable human
beings."¹ Lee Wyndham says something quite similar, "In young
people's fiction, characters must grow, develop, mature, become
better adjusted to life, circumstances, to growing up, or to
whatever their problem happens to be."²

In addition, the author's portrayal of the major character's
emotions is important. The description of bibliotherapy which
I employed earlier states that "The interaction between the per-
sonality of the reader and imaginative literature may engage
the reader's emotions and free them for conscious and productive
use."³ For the reader's emotions to be engaged he must identify
not only with the character's experience, but also with the
character's thoughts and feelings as a result of this experience.
Therefore, another aspect of characterization which must be
included is the author's portrayal of the character's emotions.

Anyone who has experienced the death of someone close
to him is aware of the myriad of emotions which results. The
purpose is not to identify these emotions, but to select books
which depict these emotions as expressed by the characters.
Having read how the character reacted emotionally to the
situation, the reader can say, "When Jenny's brother died she

¹National Council of Teachers of English, Reading Ladders,
p. 13.
²Wyndham, Writing for Children and Teen-agers, p. 44.
³Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries,
Bibliotherapy, p. 7.
felt the same way I felt." The child has a sense of recognition, seeing his reaction mirrored by a character in the book.

Jane Langton further illustrates this point.

And that is what is so important about getting down to the quick, down to this barely hidden level of daily reality. Whether he is a child or an adult, the reader recognizes it. He says, 'Yes, that's right; that's the way it is. I couldn't have said it that beautifully, but it's true!'

And then he feels a kind of relief at being found out, at being discovered. Bleak places in his own life are shown to be common place. His identical feelings are laid bare. 'If the boy in the story feels that way, then he is as alive as I; and what's more, I am as alive as he!'

If death is a universal, a known part of life, then reactions to death must also exhibit some universality. Again, this enables the reader to identify with both the experience and the reaction.

Lee Wyndham says,

The purpose in writing fiction is to interest the reader and to make him feel something. The feeling might be sympathy... or it might be inspiration and hope, making the young reader spiritually pick up his burdens and walk on with courage, because the book has given him a kinship...

The kinship between the child and the character lies in their similar problems and their reactions to the problems.

In "Realism in Children's Literature," Elizabeth Enright states: "The highest accolade a child can pay a book is to say: 'I felt just as if it was happening to me.' And all of us can remember with the child this first revealing, altogether

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2 Wyndham, Writing for Children and Teen-agers, p. 25.
fascinating sense of identification, of being at once oneself and someone else...\(^1\)

In bibliotherapy it is essential that the child be able to say something like: "When my grandpa died I had the same feelings the character in the book had." For the identification of the reader with the book character to occur, the book must genuinely portray the experiences and the emotions of a single major character as he deals with the death of a loved one.

Criterion Four: The main character must reach an acceptance of the situation.

The goal of bibliotherapy is to help the child solve a problem he is facing or to adjust to a new situation, thus freeing his emotions for conscious and productive use.

If the child is given a book to read in which the hero or heroine is suffering from the same trial, handicap, or difficulty, the troubled reader is helped. In reading the story he is able to give vent to his own pent-up emotions, and when he sees the hero solving problems similar to his own, in a satisfactory manner, he gains courage to tackle his own difficulty.\(^2\)

A book selected for bibliotherapeutic use must demonstrate that the main character has progressed toward a successful solution to his problem. Only then can the book be of value to the child.

\(^1\)Elizabeth Enright, "Realism in Children's Literature," The Horn Book Magazine, 43 (April 1967): 166.

Death can bring about abrupt changes in a child's life. Books that portray these changes in the lives of children and young people have the potential of helping them understand that life is not static. "Perhaps the greatest value of these books to children who know them is that the books may help to bring an underlying realization that change itself is very much an element of life that must be faced. Some changes that come are predictable, some are not." ¹ But children must be able to face and accept change creatively. Seeing the characters in books accept change and resolve conflicts may give the child the encouragement he needs to accept his own problem.

However, the book need not present clear-cut answers to children's problems. "At their best, they are open-ended, like life itself. They do not pretend to have answers to questions that puzzle even adults." ² "In living through experiences similar to theirs, made real and vital to them through the pages of literature, young people come to know themselves and to find solutions to their own problems." ³ Regardless of the problem: alcoholism, divorce, death, books should resolve on a hopeful note. ⁴ This is especially true for books to be used in bibliotherapy.

¹ National Council of Teachers of English, Reading Ladders, p. 263.
³ Gray, ed., Promoting Personal and Social Development, p. 11.
⁴ Wyndham, Writing for Children and Teen-agers, p. 21.
Criterion Five: The presentation of the problem and solution contribute insight into the problem of the reader.

William S. Gray cites an important dimension of the reading act:

It is often referred to as the application of ideas read to the solution of problems. The basic step involved in this phase of reading is described as the fusion or integration of the ideas read with previous experience so that new insights, clearer understandings, rational attitudes, and improved patterns of thinking and behavior result.¹

This insight will hopefully help the child plan and carry through a constructive course of action, which is the ultimate goal of bibliotherapy. Books chosen for use in bibliotherapy ought to articulate something which the child has, as yet, only felt.

Russell and Shrodes define insight as "seeing one's self in the behavior of the character and thereby achieving an awareness of one's own motivations and needs."² If the character appears to work out a satisfactory solution to his problem, the reader is given an opportunity to incorporate some of the character's behavior in his own methods of adjustment to a similar problem. Smith and Twyeffort regard the development of insight as the crucial factor in bibliotherapy. Insight may show how


persons with the same personal liabilities tackled apparent failure with some success.¹

Naturally, it is difficult to predict what aspect of a book may bring insight to the reader. Too much depends on the reader: his interests, the circumstances surrounding his problem, his reading interests, and his reaction to the problem. Therefore, appropriate books do not present easy solutions, do not preach and do not insist any one way is the right way. Instead, many facets of a situation must be presented. Then the reader can see, if his prejudices will allow, "A view of life that may be wider than his own, that does not condemn him for being what he is, but rather makes him feel that there is a place for him as he is—in the world as it exists—and that he is not alone in his dreams and his failure."²

Applying the Criteria for Book Selection

Now that the criteria have been established, the next step in the compilation of the list of children's books dealing with death involves the application of the criteria. Four books—By the Highway Home by Mary Stolz, Fog by Mildred Lee, Home from Far by Jean Little, and With Dad Alone by Jerrold Beim—have been chosen to demonstrate how the established criteria

²Helen W. Painter, ed., Reaching Children and Young People Through Literature (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971), p. 3.
can be applied to aid in the selection of children's books for bibliotherapeutic use.¹

A major portion of Mary Stolz's *By the Highway Home* deals with the adjustments the Reed family had to make when Mr. Reed, a chemical engineer, lost his job and the family was forced to move to Vermont. However, Mr. and Mrs. Reed, Lexy, Catty, and Ginger also had to adjust to another situation. Beau, their son and brother, had been killed in Vietnam. Although several months had passed, Beau's absence was still hard to get used to.

Nothing in this family had been the same since--Cathy, even in her mind, had to pause--nothing had been the same since Beau had gone. The closeness, the laughter, had disappeared so much that Cathy sometimes wondered how truly they had ever been there. (p. 6)

Because Stolz places much emphasis on the family's efforts to adjust to Beau's death, *By the Highway Home* satisfies the first criterion: the death of a member of the main character's family, a friend, or a pet should constitute the major emphasis of the book.

Furthermore the book would seem to meet the reading interests of most adolescent girls and thus satisfy the second criterion. The main character is a thirteen-year-old girl named Catherine, nicknamed Catty by her friends. Catty's relationship with her fifteen-year-old sister, Ginger, might be familiar to many adolescent girls.

Ginger, nearly sixteen, made it clear that even if they two had to be confined in a room together, certain formalities were to be observed. One of them was knocking when the door was closed. Which would be fine, Catty thought, if she knocked when I close the door. When she'd pointed this out one day, Ginger had said kids of thirteen didn't need privacy.

"You know something," Catty replied. "You don't have nice feelings. Maybe that's why nobody likes you."

Ginger had slapped her face, and then burst into tears and begged Catty not to tell on her. . . (pp. 7-8)

Arguments such as this one between Catty and Ginger are fairly common between sisters.

Once the family had moved to Vermont, Catty met Duncan, a college student who worked at the inn. She was immediately attracted to him.

Duncan smiled and Catty blinked and thought, I think I just got interested in the opposite sex. (p. 112)

The attraction was mutual and was alarming because of the differences in their ages. And, as usual, Catty had to contend with Ginger.

She [Ginger] was dancing with Duncan, and Catty couldn't bring herself to interrupt. Duncan, as the day progressed, had drawn more and more into the protection of his six years seniority, as if in that way he could undo, or forget, something that, if it hadn't been such a big deal, had certainly been a sweet deal. (p. 193)

The element of romance in By the Highway Home would certainly interest most adolescent girls.

Three aspects of characterization were mentioned as being integral parts of the bibliotherapeutic process: emphasis on a single character, the growth and development of the main
character and the genuine portrayal of the character's reactions and feelings. Catty's feelings about Beau's death, which allow the reader to identify with her, make By the Highway Home an excellent book for bibliotherapeutic use.

Although Beau had died several months ago, Catty still found it hard to believe he was really gone; she would never see him again.

Sometimes it seemed that nothing could make her believe that Beau was gone. All those billions and billions of people in the world, and not one of them was Beau anymore. It was not possible, and she could not accept it. But other times she knew he was dead, and those were the worst times of all. (p. 19)

Beau's death was an almost impossible realization for Catty and it brought about an intense feeling of loss.

With the loss came sorrow and tears. Catty learned something that everyone learns sooner or later.

She might have been spared for years, but Catty learned at twelve that when you are in pain, when you know that what you are feeling now is sorrow, grief, those words in a book, you are quite alone even if people you love are all around you, feeling what you are feeling. You are in a sealed-off place being beaten raw but not quite to unconsciousness and there is no point in crying because no one can hear you. (p. 47)

Each person felt the loss in his own way. And for that reason, even though the other members of the family were experiencing feelings quite similar, no one was feeling exactly the same emotions.

After the initial reaction to Beau's death passed, Catty and the rest of the Reed family still faced adjustments which
are common to many families in similar situations. It was difficult for the Reeds to decide how to talk about Beau--or if they should talk about him at all. Most of the family decided on the latter solution, never mentioning Beau's name. To Catty, however, it was natural to talk about Beau and to remember him. The family's silence made Catty feel as if no one else remembered. Finally Mr. Reed explained.

"I guess we've been wrong," Mr. Reed began slowly. "I guess we thought that if--if you children were given time--if we didn't refer to him too often--I don't know what we thought. Not that you'd forget, Catty. Just, perhaps, that you'd have time to heal. If we talk about him all the time--" "Not all the time," Catty sighed, "Just sometimes. It's--this way it's as if everybody wanted to forget him. I don't forget him. I think about him and think about him, but only Lex lets me say anything, and I think Lexy doesn't really understand that he's--that Beau is gone. Beau is dead. I don't know what Lexy thinks, but he talks as if Beau had gone around the corner for an hour. And that's nice. I mean, it's nice for me. Only I want you and Mom, and even Virginia, to act sometime as if you remembered him!" (p. 25)

After a while the pain began to lessen. Beau had been gone so long that, to Catty, he sometimes seemed like someone glorious she had read of in a book. (p. 50)

When she came to realize that the constant, fusing pain she had felt for months had lessened some time when she wasn't noticing, so that she would go a few hours without missing Beau, or miss him without wanting to crawl away somewhere and cover her head, when she realized that something in her was trying to be happy, then she cried at this new loss. Maybe, she thought, reaching out her hand as though to grasp at something, maybe we will forget him. Or remember him fondly, rationally. The idea seemed to fold over her, stifling, sadder than anything else she'd thought or dreamed of. (pp. 50-51)
Stolz not only describes Catty's feelings which resulted from Beau's death but also describes Catty's acceptance of the situation. Catty's reactions and acceptance illustrate her growth as a character.

Catty would never be with her brother again, but, naturally, she would always look for the things she loved about Beau in the people around her.

In her room she leaned on the windowsill and thought, I'll be looking for Beau all the rest of my life, and I've always known that since he'd died. What she hadn't known was that she'd find him, once in a while, in an unexpected way, as she'd found him in Duncan's partisan eyes, in Aunt Marian's gentle attention. (p. 134)

Like many other people, Catty found solace in literature. She kept a notebook in which she gathered lines of poetry and prose for sustenance when she would need it. An entry which she included further indicates that she had begun to accept Beau's death.

Without checking the last entry, she turned to a new page and wrote, Do not grieve, or keep me always in your thoughts, but think of me as you would remember a book you loved in childhood. Simone Weil. It was absolutely the only line in the book by Simone Weil she'd tried to read that she had understood, and this line she understood as if she had written it herself. (pp. 162-163)

Finally, the entire Reed family seemed to have reached an acceptance of Beau's death. They were finally able to talk about Beau.

So gradually, gradually, they would come to speak of Beau. And did that mean he was closer to them? Or that they had, at length, agreed to believe he
was gone? "Feel free," Beau had used to say. If somebody said could they use his bike or his football, could they get a ride downtown with him, or tell him their troubles, Beau would say, "Feel free." So Catty said now, aloud, "If you want to haunt me, Beau, why--feel free." Because of course, he always did. (pp. 169-170)

It is Catty's acceptance of Beau's death which may provide the reader with some insight into his own problem. Although the reader may not be able to incorporate Catty's solution, he may see some similarities in the situations which may prove helpful.

In Fog, a novel by Mildred Lee, Luke Sawyer's father died suddenly of a heart attack. Luke, a high school junior, also faced an adjustment--life without his father. This adjustment is an integral part of the novel.

Fog would certainly meet the reading interests of adolescent boys. Luke and several of his friends, Butch, Sim, Chuck, and Rollo called themselves the Mice-or-Men Club and met regularly in an abandoned hut. Naturally, the club had rules: "Any member was entitled to come to the clubhouse at any time, so long as he brought no outsider with him." (p. 13) And, of course, no girls were ever allowed.

Other aspects of Fog would interest boys. Luke worked after school and on weekends at a gas station where the boys regularly worked on Chuck's old Chevy. The gas station was also the scene of much action. One night, while Luke was working alone, the gas station was robbed.
Telling himself the gun wasn't loaded, still believing it a joke, Luke stepped back. He was only a few steps from the door, while the guy with the gun was between him and the telephone. His idea of its being a joke suddenly dissolved and he was scared. Scared green. He heard the door close softly behind him and knew there were three of them. It was a holdup and he was trapped. They'd come in the back door while he was outside, three of them and one of them armed. It happened all the time, of course, all over and to all sorts of people, but he'd never thought it could happen to him. (p. 157)

When Luke and his friends decided to have a party in the clubhouse, another exciting situation developed. As they discussed their cleaning, the kerosene heater blew up.

Luke ran back to the end of the hut he'd been scrubbing, hoping the wet floor would discourage the flames, but the smoke was rolling like fog now, oil-scented and choking. He seized a chair and smashed a windowpane, heard Rollo cry, "I'm getting outa here, come on, you guys."

Luke dove through the window, scarcely feeling the bits of jagged glass bite into his hands as he pushed himself up. He was stunned by the blow as he landed, headfirst, then scrambled up looking dizzily around for the others. Surely they'd got out, they had to be out.... (p. 93)

Girls will often read and like books written for boys. Lee also includes an element of romance in Fog which might be appealing to adolescent girls. Luke often thought about marrying his girl friend, Milo, but he knew they should finish high school first.

Luke dropped the can into a paper bag and Milo handed him a five-dollar bill. She stuffed the change into her pocket and smiled at him, her wan smile so rare nowadays. That did it. Without saying a word to his father or Old Man Thad Wilson, Luke walked right out of the store and into the hot, bright street with Milo Tarrant. (p. 37)
In *Fog* Mildred Lee describes Luke's emotions which resulted from his father's death. Luke was at school when he learned his father had died. As is often the case, Luke did not need to hear the words to know what had happened.

Mr. Mountjoy cleared his throat, fumbled at the ignition. "They called the ambulance, took him to the hospital, but--" He stopped and Luke looked at him with wide, unbelieving eyes, though he knew what the old man had not said. Mr. Mountjoy got the car started and drove out of the school parking lot toward Main Street. (p. 130)

Naturally, Luke was dazed; he was not capable of showing any emotion—neither sorrow nor anger. However, as soon as he saw his mother sitting in what had been his father's rocking chair, he broke down.

He stumbled to his knees beside the rocker and put his head in his mother's lap. She let the apron go then and stroked his hair, murmuring, "There, there ..." It was like years ago when he was little and Luke had for a second a wild, crazy hope that time had actually turned back and there was no now. (p. 131)

Neighbors can be a great source of comfort to a family. Luke's neighbors were no exception.

The neighbors came, bringing food. It filled the kitchen table, the cupboard shelves, and the refrigerator. As if they could chomp their way through grief and thus, reinforced, begin again. (p. 132)

Although the neighbors were helpful, Luke did not care, he only wanted to be left alone—not to have to say the right things, thank people for doing their duty.

In a seemingly never-ending stream they came and went that first day and night, till at last it was late and the house was silent. And in his
sore mind Luke ticked off one of the awful three days. (p. 135)

As the first three days passed, so did the others. Luke found it hard to believe his father was dead. Hearing men describe how it had happened did not make it more believable.

There were the mornings when the truth jumped at Luke on waking with an ugly jar. His father was dead. It didn't make sense. Henry Sawyer, eating breakfast too fast so he wouldn't be late to work, the man of long patience and sweet reasonableness who could yet lash out at the son whose slovenliness angered and disappointed him. He wasn't the man Ed Baines told about—falling without a gasp to the floor, the unopened plastic bottle of nitroglycerin tablets clutched in his hand. That was a nightmare image, heard of but not accepted till the mind could steady and settle and take. He was Luke's father, the man with the cocked eyebrow, the quiet corny joke, and the boundless love for a brain-damaged grandchild. It couldn't be true. (p. 136)

Many times after his father's death, Luke found himself thinking, "If only I could have known." His feelings of guilt and remorse were troubling.

"He couldn't help wishing he had really looked at his father more often. Surely, if he had only looked, he could have seen him slipping into the gray mists of death. (p. 142)

As Luke contemplated these feelings of guilt, he made an interesting observation.

"I've thought about it a lot since my Dad died. People are a lot kinder to the dead than to the living. You say only nice things about them, you even think only nice things. All the stuff you should have said and done before it was too late. That can really bug you, you know? (p. 197)

Although Luke felt intense sorrow after his father's death, he knew he would come to accept the situation
eventually. Luke's acceptance, while demonstrating the growth of the character, might also contribute insight into the reader's solution to his own problem.

It won't go on like this, he told himself, it can't. It's got to get better or we'll all go nuts. Time passing would make it bearable even for his mother, dull the edge, make it easier till one day it would be forgotten by all except those who'd been closest, and even those it would no longer claw and tear. He knew this not from experience but instinctively. (p. 139)

Luke was finally able to regard his father's life and death more rationally. He knew they were not merely endings, not empty loss.

The time when Henry Sawyer was alive, the good and the bad of it. Long gone it now seemed to Luke. What had Henry left his son besides a few thousand dollars to start him on a long, unknown road? A great deal, Luke knew, but his mind staggered under the effort of assessing any of it. He guessed the years ahead would have to do that, make sense out of what seemed senseless now. (p. 248)

To Luke, his father's death was a beginning. When he was finally able to make a decision about his future, he knew his father had been right in wanting him to apply himself in school.

The silence of the room, broken only by the old dog's asthmatic breathing, wrapped about Luke. He did not know whether he whispered or only thought, I'm going to study medicine, Dad--and envisioned Henry Sawyer's crooked smile, his blue eyes pleased and proud. Luke put a cold hand out and touched a wing of the worn chair, clutched it tightly, straining toward the comfort of something known and solid. He thought in a sort of sweet anguish, whatever I am I hope I can be as good a man as my Dad was. (p. 249)
Luke Sawyer's acceptance of his father's death, illustrated by his ability to see the situation as a sort of beginning, may help the reader of Fog to see a solution to his own problem.

*Home From Far* by Jean Little focuses on the adjustment the MacGregor family had to make when Hilda and Michael Jackson, foster children, were brought into the family. Jenny, age eleven, had to cope with an added difficulty. Her twin brother, whose name had also been Michael, had been killed in a car accident in December. In one day Jenny was not "one of the MacGregor twins" any longer. She was just a girl with two younger brothers. To Jenny, Michael Jackson's inclusion in the family seemed to indicate that the rest of the family was trying to replace her twin—and she knew that was impossible. Her reactions to Michael's death, her feelings toward the additions to the family and her acceptance of the situation make *Home From Far* an excellent book for bibliotherapeutic use with boys and girls.

There are several situations in *Home From Far* which would meet the reading interests of both boys and girls. For example, girls who have only brothers usually wish for a sister more than anything else. Jenny was no exception. In fact, she often imagined what her new sister would look like, and, occasionally, she even named her imaginary sister.

Mother had often said that what their family needed was another girl, and before Michael's death there had even been talk of someday adopting a sister.
Sometimes Jenny called her Elizabeth Mary. Sometimes she changed it to Jean Louise. "Melissa," she murmured today. She pictured Melissa walking on her other side. She was smaller than Jenny with a white face and huge brown eyes. Her hair was silky black and cut in bangs. (pp. 8-9)

Jenny did get a sister. But six-year-old Hilda did not look at all as she had imagined Melissa. Hilda was chubby and dressed in a frilly pink dress. Her blonde hair frizzled around her face. Although Jenny was somewhat disappointed, she tried to act like an older sister toward Hilda. For example, Mrs. MacGregor took the children to the quarry to go swimming. Hilda had never learned how to swim so Jenny offered to teach her.

It was no easy. They had to stay on the small rocky ledge where the water was shallow. With Jenny right beside her, Hilda dog-paddled bravely, but Jenny soon saw that she never took both feet off the bottom at the same moment. (p. 25)

Although Jenny is the main character, Michael's reactions and feelings are also an integral part of Home From Far. Boys would certainly be able to identify with Michael's experiences. Boys who enjoy action would be interested in the following situation. When Jenny discovered a hideout which Michael had built next to the garage, she took a candle into the hideout in order to explore it more carefully. In her haste to leave the hideout before Michael discovered she had been snooping, Jenny knocked the candle over and the hideout caught fire. Jenny was not able to get out.

The way to the ladder was already blocked. The flames crackled out across the opening fiercely. Mike tore back to the center of the garage, thrusting
past whatever got in his way. Jenny was cowering back against the other wall now, staring at the yellow flames. He saw her cringe away from the hot breath of the fire. She looked queer in the dancing light, queer and unreal and terribly afraid. (p. 72)

Both boys and girls would be interested in the excitement of such an adventure.

Jenny's reactions to her twin brother's death offer much insight into her character. In addition, these feelings are like those that the reader might have experienced in a similar situation. Several passages from Home From Far illustrate Jenny's reactions and feelings.

Although Michael had died in December, Jenny was still not used to his absence. She often wondered if anyone else in the family missed Michael as much as she did. Somehow, Jenny knew she could not test her mother.

Jenny looked at her. There was still a scar on her forehead and another on one side of her nose. They looked like smudges of ink. Otherwise, Jenny could find no change in her face. There was nothing in her matter-of-fact voice, nothing in the blue eyes meeting Jenny's steadily, that said, "I remember Michael. I miss him all day long." (p. 6)

Since Michael had died and Jenny was no longer "one of the MacGregor twins", she had felt very much alone. Alec had Mac and Jenny had had Michael. Now all that had changed.

She [Jenny] felt more miserable than ever. She had nobody, that was what was wrong. Alec and Mac were always together. Even when they were angry at each other, they stuck together, punching at each other and yelling threats. But without Michael, she had no one. And no strange boy, no "new sister", was to take Michael's place either. (p. 14)
Jenny did not want anyone to take Michael's place; she knew no one could. But she believed that her mother wanted the new boy to take the place of her twin.

Other reactions toward Michael's death affected Jenny's relationship with her mother.

Even to herself, Jenny could not explain what exactly she felt had gone wrong between Mother and her. Until Michael had been killed, Mother had been just the way mothers are supposed to be. She had called them to meals and read stories to them and laughed at their jokes and lost her temper at them and kissed them good-night. Jenny still shrank from remembering those first days without Michael. Everytime they sat down to eat he was not in his place. When she passed his bedroom door, she would see into his room—everything put away, no books open on the desk, no wrinkles in the bedspread, no sound at all. Dad had closed the door, but that had made it worse. Then mother had shifted all the furniture around and had moved Alex in there. (p. 79)

Other changes had been made. Michael's butterfly collection was gone one day. And Michael's clothes and his school books had all disappeared in the same way. Jenny was sure her mother had done it, although she had not seen her. Jenny had begun to feel shy about talking about Michael.

Jenny's mother, however, knew something was bothering her. In a conversation with Mike she explained her concern about Jenny.

She and Michael looked alike, but in so many ways they were very different. Jenny feels things she can't talk about. She takes life much more seriously than her brother did. I want to help her...to keep her from making herself grieve for him when she should be getting on with growing up and learning to laugh. But I can't help her if she doesn't want to be helped. (pp. 26-27)
Then, one day, while looking for a clown costume Michael had worn, Jenny found the box which held their butterfly collection, the box she had always imagined her mother had thrown away. Already she knew that she had been wrong, that Mother missed Michael just as much as she did, that Mother loved them both as she always had. "I thought...I thought sometimes...that I was the only one who missed him," Jenny gulped. "I even thought you didn't want me to care about him any more..." (p. 120)

With this realization, Jenny had begun to understand what her mother had done. Mrs. MacGregor explained:

"I imagined you sitting brooding over the accident and cherishing Michael's things as though they were more important than Michael himself." (p. 123)

Jenny remembered all the times she had wanted to speak, all the things she had almost said. She saw that part of the blame for the difference which had come between her and her mother was hers.

This talk with her mother allowed Jenny to face fears she had not admitted even to herself before and she held none of them back.

"Sometimes, Mother, I feel awful--not because I'm lonely for him--but because I get so happy and busy, I forget all about him. For a whole day even! I love him so much--how can I forget?" (p. 124)

Jenny's mother explained that she did not stop loving Michael just because he was not in her thoughts for awhile.

Jenny's discussion with her mother helped her accept the situation which she had found so difficult. Mike, the "new boy", became her fast friend. In fact, she was able to say, "Michael would have liked Mike."
...None of her joy faded as she thought of her twin. It was almost as if he were here, with her. She had sung his song the day before. She had worn his clown suit. They were playing a game he had loved playing, in the yard where he and she had played just the summer before. (pp. 135-136)

Jenny's mother helped her to realize that remembering Michael kept him always with her. And she did not need to remember him constantly. Jenny's problem and solution may not be appropriate for every reader. However, the reader may identify with a particular emotion of Jenny's or with a certain episode and, therefore, discover an insight into his own problem or solution.

*With Dad Alone* by Jerrold Beim is an excellent book for possible bibliotherapeutic use. Bruce Madison and his brother Robby returned home after spending the summer with their grandparents to face life without their mother. Although he saw that the house had not changed, Bruce knew many things would be different.

Bruce walked slowly, hesitantly, toward the door. Often, before the summer, Dad had taken Robby and him on an errand after dinner. They would come home, the three of them alone, like this. When they entered the house Mom would be waiting in the living room for them. What if she were there now, Bruce thought, but no—he knew that couldn't be, because Mom had died just at the beginning of the summer. (pp. 6-7)

*With Dad Alone* emphasizes the adjustments Robby, age 7, and more specifically, Bruce, age 10, had to make as a result of their mother's death.

The book includes several incidents which might meet the reading interests of nine and ten-year-old boys. Quarrels
between brothers are relatively common occurrences in most families. The Madisons were no exception.

Just then Bruce felt Robby's foot kicking against his leg.
"Stop kicking!" he said and gave him a poke back with his foot.
"I didn't kick you!" Robby exclaimed indignantly. "You did, too! There--you just did it again!"
"Oh, I was just swinging my leg--" (p. 32)

Like many ten-year-olds Bruce enjoyed playing cowboys in the neighborhood. Bruce and his friends like to play in a big hole on Cambridge Street which to them was the Grand Canyon. And playing with Stevie and Frankie, who were a little reckless at times, made it even more exciting.

"I'm an Indian! But I'm not going to be dead. I'm going to scalp you!"
Stevie leapt at Frankie in a fierce way that frightened Bruce for the first moment, but then turned out to be exciting. The two boys grappled, turning and struggling in the dust.
"Bang! Bang!" Bruce turned his rifle on them.
"I've shot both of you dead!" (p. 32)

It seemed as if anytime Bruce found himself playing with Frankie and Stevie, he also found himself in trouble. The slingshot episode might interest any boy who has ever broken a window.

They were standing in a gravel driveway and Bruce found a stone, pulled his slingshot taut, and hit the sill even closer to the window than Frankie had. Stevie also took a turn but he made a bad shot.
"You can't be in the Sure-Shot Club unless you do better than that!" Frankie said. He aimed again, but didn't do very well and Stevie hooted, "Who won't be in the club?"
"Looks like I'm the champ so far!" Bruce said proudly. He picked up a good stone, aimed at the sill again and then--CH--AS--SH!
His heart seemed to go to pieces at the same time that the window went shattering to the ground. (p. 93)

Although Stevie, Frankie, and Bruce ran away, a neighbor later informed Bruce's father of the incident and Bruce had to pay for the broken window with money from his allowance.

Bruce thought of his mother often and each time he did, he seemed to feel a different emotion. For example, the first time Bruce walked into the living room, it seemed as if he wanted to avoid the situation at home completely.

Bruce noticed something new in the room. There was a picture in a silver frame on one of the end tables. It was of Mom, smiling and pretty, and he couldn't bring himself to look at it directly. He gave it a quick glance, then averted his eyes. (p. 9)

However, Bruce found other changes in the house and these were not so easy to avoid. In the room that had been his mother's and father's Bruce discovered that his father's things had been moved into the study and that his mother's dressing table had been cleared off. Bruce learned that the new housekeeper would be sleeping in this room. Naturally, these changes were a little frightening.

Hangers hung neatly in a row without any clothes on them. The shelves and floors were empty, too. "I gave all of Mom's things away, Bruce." He whirled about, startled by Dad's voice. "Don't look so frightened, Bruce. It's better to talk about these things. Mom had an old friend, Mrs. Standish, who really needs things and I knew Mom would like her to have some. I took the rest to the Salvation Army. A few things I saved." (pp. 11-12)

Bruce did not like talking about his mother's death to anyone; he tried to hold his emotions in completely. Sometimes
that was impossible. When the Madisons and their next-door-neighbors, the Dickersons, had a barbecue, Bruce was reminded of how his mother had always loved picnics. Bruce excused himself and ran home. There, the first thing he saw was the picture of his mother. Bruce grabbed the picture and laid it on the table, face down.

The tears were running down his cheeks as he flung himself on the bed in his room.

"Mommy--Mommy--" he called, choked with sobs, his hands digging into his pillow.
It wasn't the first time he had cried like this. He had cried and cried right after Mommy died, not believing that she wouldn't come back. He remembered Dad sitting on his bed one night saying "It's all right to cry, Bruce. We all have a lot of sadness in us. Robby, you and I, Grandpa and Grandma, everyone who knew and loved Mommy. It--It's good to let it out." (p. 19)

Bruce couldn't be glad to be home because without his mother it was not like home anymore.

As the days went by Bruce grew more and more accustomed to being at home again. Of course, the house still seemed strange without his mother. But Bruce had begun to adjust to his new situation--and to accept it. At Christmas Bruce realized that his attitude had changed.

Mom's picture stood there in the silver frame. Bruce usually turned his eyes away from it. But somehow, after talking about Mom--because that was who they had really been talking about in Jimmy's room, he knew--he found himself looking at Mom's picture. It wasn't hard. He didn't have that sharp, stabbing pain he usually had when he tried to look at it. (p. 103)

Bruce's father was instrumental in helping him accept the situation.
"Bruce, Mommy isn't here! You can't go on calling for her to help you! Bruce, when Mommy first died, I told you to cry if it would make you feel better, didn't I? But the time's come now when we have to stop crying for her every time we get into a jam. We have to accept the fact that she's gone for good and that we can only depend on ourselves." (pp. 121-122)

With his father's help, Bruce learned that although it was not better living without his mother, good things could result.

"You know, Bruce, sometimes from having a lot of problems--the way we do trying to manage without Mom--you grow stronger. You have to grow stronger in order to be able to pull through all that happens to you." (pp. 144-145)

Although Bruce felt intense sorrow as a result of his mother's death, he finally reached an acceptance of the situation. The reader may not come to the same conclusion Bruce did; however, reading about Bruce's feelings and reactions may bring the reader closer to his own solution.

By the Highway Home, Fog, Home From Far, and With Dad Alone are just four possible books which might be used in helping children cope with death. Although the books meet the reading interests of different children, each emphasizes a main character's experiences with the death of a member of the family. Passages from each book which reflect the emotions and feelings are, indeed, feelings which are experienced by children and adults in similar situations. The main character in each instance reaches an acceptance of the loss, alone or with the help of another individual. This acceptance, coupled with the character's
feelings of sorrow, anger, or guilt which the author describes may bring to the reader insight into his own problem and its solution.

Annotated Bibliography of Books for Children that Deal with Death

The following section contains an annotated bibliography of thirty-five children's books which have fulfilled the requirements of the five criteria discussed on pages four through sixteen. However, the inclusion of a book in the list is not an indication that it can be used successfully in bibliotherapy with a particular individual. As it was stated earlier, a child's reaction to a book depends on the varied experiences which he brings to the reading situation. It is hoped that the information which follows will enable the reader to select the children's books which might be used most successfully with an individual child in a bibliotherapeutic program.


The characters of the four sisters, Meg—16, Jo—15, Beth—13, and Amy, the youngest, are well developed. Each girl has faults but also discovers worthwhile traits. Numerous incidents are described, the saddest being Beth's death. Although they are not discussed at length, the family's reactions are understood. Jo, perhaps, feels Beth's death most strongly and does come to accept it.
Norris, an eleven-year-old boy, his mother, his younger sister, Lovey, and his baby brother Edwin, are left on the farm without any help after Norris' father died. Norris' nineteen-year-old cousin, Tryg, arrives from Ohio to help the family with the work. At first, Norris resents Tryg because he thinks he is trying to take his father's place. Later, he comes to depend on Tryg.

This book not only illustrates Norris' reactions to his father's death, but also discusses the differences between Norris' reactions and those of his sister.

Heather, one of the prehistoric Forest People, falls in love with Wolf Stone, a warrior of the Sun People. Heather is eventually sacrificed to the God of the Spring to bring life back to the spring.

Reading about feelings and beliefs which people of another time and culture had toward death may provide the reader with information to apply to his own problem.

After finding a dead bird, four children decide to have a funeral for it the way grown-up people do when someone dies. In the woods they bury the bird and place flowers and ferns on the grave.
This is a good book for young children. Some reactions to the bird's death are indicated. Acceptance is also illustrated in that the children eventually forget about the bird and go on with their play.


After Jiya's home and family are destroyed by a tidal wave, he moves up the mountain to live with Kino and his family. Kino's father tries to help not only Jiya, but also Kino, understand life and death. Jiya's acceptance, illustrated by his desire to build his house on the beach and face the same dangers his family had faced, make this an excellent book for bibliotherapeutic use.


Julia, supported by her neighbor and friend, Daddy Chandler, decides to submit her story, "The Mask", for publication on the Saturday page of the local newspaper. This decision leads to new friends and adventures for Julia. When Daddy Chandler dies, Julia must cope with her feelings of sadness and guilt. This book is an excellent example of character growth and development. Julia's escapades may interest many girls.


When Grover's mother is ill and goes to the hospital for an operation, the adults do not explain the situation to Grover
because they feel he is too young and does not need to worry. But when his mother commits suicide Grover and his father must learn to cope with life without her.

Boys will particularly enjoy this book. The reactions and feelings of the main character are well expressed and reflect Grover's struggle to accept his mother's death.


Roy Luther tells his daughter, Mary Call, what she is to do when he dies. Although the instructions seem almost impossible to follow, Mary Call manages to fulfill them. She must then struggle to keep the family together on their own land.

Girls may enjoy Mary Call's independence and determination to carry on in spite of the death of her father. All readers may be interested in how the children manage to live without both parents.


Before his death, David's Grandpa had told him, "...I am not afraid to die because I know you are not afraid to live." David did not understand at first, but later, remembering his Grandpa's words helped him accept the situation.

This excellent book for younger children discusses David's feelings and, importantly, shows that he must continue doing the things he had enjoyed before his Grandpa's death.

Ash is a young Indian Warrior who has already faced the death of his father. After his grandmother dies Ash feels an intense loss, but he comes to realize that a part of his father and his grandmother is alive in him—the memories he has of them.

Boys will enjoy reading about the adventures of this young warrior and his dog. Although Ash's feelings toward death reflect his time and culture, the reader may find aspects which also apply to his own situation, particularly Ash's acceptance of the deaths.


Christl, Hans, Alex, and Sophie are students in Germany during World War II. They work together in writing underground pamphlets against Hitler. Christl, Hans, and Sophie are sentenced to death for their activities.

Each character's feelings toward his impending death are described and each character reaches his own acceptance. Boys and girls may appreciate reading about the dangerous efforts of the four students for the cause they believed in.


Dan and his grandfather flee as Warsaw is being bombed by the Germans. Dan's parents are killed defending their home. Dan, Sholem, Hanna, and several others travel to Israel to seek
a new life. Once he arrives in Israel, Dan realizes that the fighting, death, and destruction have not ended. But his experiences with frustration, war, and death convince him of the necessity to work for a better life in Israel.

The book provides an excellent example of character growth and development. Dan's feelings toward death are influenced by the war in which he is involved. His struggle to accept death may help a reader who is experiencing a similar struggle.


Miranda and Brian's parents have been killed two weeks ago. Although they are very close and hate being separated, Miranda goes to France to live with her grandmother and Brian goes to Mexico to live with his grandfather. Miranda hates the arrangement and writes stories of the happy family she knows she and Brian will be someday. But as the years pass Miranda begins to love her grandmother and to accept her situation.

Girls will particularly enjoy this book for the element of romance which is included. Miranda's long struggle to accept the situation may be of help to an individual who has a similar problem.


Al and her friend become acquainted with Mr. Richards, the building superintendent. There, Mr. Richards often helps the
girls build bookcases or they slide on his shiny kitchen floor. When Mr. Richards has a heart attack the girls visit him in the hospital. After his death the girls learn that the best thing about knowing Mr. Richards is that they will never forget him.

The book particularly emphasizes the acceptance of Mr. Richard's death. Al shows much growth and development as a character.


Tim is sent to Aunt Kate's ranch because his mother is very sick. When Aunt Kate's dog Mac dies, Tim learns that death is very real when it happens to someone close. When his mother dies, Tim must apply what he was learned to this new situation.

Boys may be particularly interested in the ranch setting of this book. Tim's fears about his mother's health and death are well expressed and demonstrate the growth of his character. His acceptance of his mother's death is especially important.


In a confrontation between two rival gangs, a boy is killed. Ponyboy, the main character, and Johnny escape to a church. When the church catches fire, Johnny and Ponyboy save some children who are trapped inside. Johnny dies as a result of the burns he receives. Ponyboy tries to repress the memory. Later he explains that he could not get used to Johnny's death overnight.

Ponyboy's attempt to pretend that Johnny is alive and his
final acceptance may be valuable to the reader and provide insight into the reader's problem and solution.


This is the story of the Creighton family during the Civil War. Many Southern Illinois families are split ideologically and the Creightons are no exception. Three men in the family fight for the North. Bill, to satisfy his conscience, has to fight for the South. Jethro learns that death is neither simple nor lightly brushed aside when it strikes at home.

Jethro's experiences may be interesting to boys who enjoy reading about the Civil War.


Julie, age 7, and Chris, age 9, go to stay with Aunt Cordelia after their mother dies. Their older sister Laura is allowed to stay in the old house. Because Julie is young she is able to adapt to the new situation rather easily.

Feelings are not stated as specifically as in other books. However, the reader may be able to identify with Julie's situation and her adjustment to that situation.


Hal, an American, meets Eddie Raphael and the rest of the Raphael family in London. When Mr. Raphael, a Hebrew teacher,
takes the family to America, Eddie and Hal lose contact. Eddie leaves school to work and to help support the family until his health begins to fail. Although treatment is suggested, Mr. Raphael does not feel it is necessary. Eddie dies during an operation.

Although the story revolves around Eddie, it is told from two viewpoints—Hal's and Sybil's. Thus, it may be difficult for the reader to identify with any one character. It is interesting to note the different effects Eddie's death has on Sybil, Mr. Raphael, and Hal.


After Libby's papa dies, she and her mother travel across the country to meet Uncle Charles whom mother is going to marry. Libby's reactions to her father's death are mentioned only briefly. The book primarily relates Libby's experiences at the logging camp and her adjustment to the new family situation. The adjustment may be particularly helpful to the reader.


Jeff, as a soldier during the Civil War, sees death in a variety of circumstances—on the firing squad, on burial detail, and on the battlefield. Boys will be particularly interested in Jeff's experiences as a spy. The deaths Jeff experiences, although upsetting at first, seem to be accepted as part of the war experience. The reader may be able to apply aspects of Jeff's feelings and reactions to his own experience.

Bertie, Joey's pet raccoon, provides a variety of exciting situations for the whole family. However, during the year Joey learns that a raccoon can be a very demanding pet. Although Joey is angry and upset when Bertie dies, he remembers the fun he had with his pet and is thankful for his year with the raccoon.

This book is a good example of character growth and development. Joey's acceptance of Bertie's death may also be useful in a bibliotherapeutic program.


Thirteen-year-old Enie lives on a small farm in Arkansas with her parents, two sisters, and three brothers. She loves school and secretly wants to be a writer. When Enie's sister, Sue Ann, dies, Enie struggles with prayer but finds no comfort. When her mother dies, she accepts the situation, realizing that her mother's spirit will never be lost.

Although Enie struggles with her beliefs in God and heaven, she does reach an acceptance of the deaths. The reader may see some solution to his own problem in Enie's struggle.


This book describes the reactions of the Foss children—Mark, Julie, Stephen, and Barbie—when their sister, Maryanne,
dies of a heart defect. Maryanne's spirit is compared to the moth which escapes from its cocoon.

The book would be particularly useful with younger children and may provide answers to questions children may have.


When Uncle Hal, a jet pilot, dies, Vickie and the rest of the Austin children are naturally saddened. Aunt Elena comes to stay with the family and brings a little girl whose father had also been killed in the accident. Together, they try to understand what has happened.

Many enjoyable incidents are also included in this story, narrated by Vickie, age 12.


Father is called Big Doc by the back country people he treats. The family's time is often dictated by the emergencies to which Big Doc is called. Weakened with tuberculosis, Mother dies of a heart attack and the narrator must take care of Big Doc and her brother. When Big Doc dies she feels her life has been dissolved. However, she finds she will always have the memory of her father.

This book will meet the reading interests of most adolescent girls. It may be helpful to use with an individual whose father has died.

Marged, her parents, her grandmother, and her brother come to America from Wales. As their Pennsylvania home is threatened by a flood, a neighbor rescues the family in a boat. However, the boat capsizes and Marged's parents are drowned. Although Marged is very bitter at first, she realizes that she is fortunate to have her grandmother and her brother.

Marged's acceptance of her parents' deaths illustrates the growth and development of her character. This book may interest adolescent girls who, like Marged, find themselves without parents.


This is the story of Karana, an Indian girl who lives alone for years on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. When her young brother, Kamo, is killed by wild dogs, Karana vows to kill them. Year after year, she watches one season pass into another and waits for a ship to take her away. But while she waits, she keeps herself alive by building shelter, making weapons, finding food, and fighting her enemies, the wild dogs.

This adventure should meet the reading interests of both boys and girls. Karana's reaction to her brother's death, anger, and her wish for revenge may be emotions common to others.

Libby Feldman loves Grandma Liza more than anyone else. She often goes to visit her and they play the piano together. When Grandma Liza is sick, Libby walks all the way across town to see her. But when Grandma Liza dies, Libby realizes she can remember Grandma Liza in her music.

Young girls will enjoy reading about Libby and her experiences. Libby's reactions to Grandma Liza's death may be common to those children who have experienced the death of a grandparent.


When Lucinda's parents go to Italy for a year they leave her with Miss Peters and Miss Nettie. Lucinda makes many friends, including Trinkel, a very small girl. When Trinkel becomes very sick, Lucinda brings the doctor. After Trinkel dies, the doctor tells Lucinda that the Eskimos believe a person's soul becomes a white gull after death. Lucinda returns to Trinkel's parents to help them understand and accept her death.

Lucinda's many adventures may be exciting reading for girls. Her acceptance of Trinkel's death may provide the reader with insight into his own problem and solution.

Mr. Pomeroy knows he probably will not live much longer. So he decides to die, giving himself and his belongings away to nature, to animals, and to children.

This interesting and unusual book may initiate the reader's examination of his own attitudes toward death. Therefore, this book may be particularly useful in contributing insight into the reader's problem and solution.


Adam Bookout lives with his Auntie Vann and Auntie Meg. Sometimes the only way Adam can get to sleep at night is to pretend that his mother and father did not die in the plane crash. One night, realizing that pretending is not going to work any longer, Adam travels to Brooklyn to stay with his cousins Gideon and Kate. In Brooklyn Adam makes friends with Saul, Willie, and Magdalena. Finally Adam is able to return to Auntie Vann and Auntie Meg.

Adam's reactions to his parents' deaths and his search to find a solution may be helpful to boys who are experiencing a similar problem.


The Sager family is travelling across country to settle in Oregon. However, when Mr. and Mrs. Sager die, the responsibility
of the children and reaching Oregon falls to John, the oldest child. His grief over the loss of his parents provides him with the courage and determination necessary to complete the long and dangerous journey.

Boys will not only enjoy this adventure story, but will also read how one boy coped with the death of his parents.


Phillip and his mother leave Curacao during World War II. Before they reach the United States, their ship is torpedoed. Phillip finds himself on a raft with Timothy. A blow he received when trying to abandon the ship, blinds Phillip. Eventually, they reach an island where Timothy teaches Phillip to function without his sight. When Timothy dies, Phillip feels betrayed. After his rescue, Phillip realizes how much he owes his survival to Timothy.

Boys and girls will enjoy the adventure and excitement as Phillip and Timothy struggle for survival on the island. It is an excellent example of character growth and development.


When Barney, a cat, dies, Mother suggests that the boy think of ten good things to say about Barney at the funeral. This book may answer a few questions children may have about their pets.
The compilation of a list of children's books dealing with death which might be used in a bibliotherapy program involved several steps. Initially, it was necessary to determine the criteria which would be used in the selection of such books. First, the major emphasis of the book should deal with the death of a member of the family, a friend, or a pet. This helps the reader face his problem knowing others have had similar experiences. Secondly, the book should meet the reading interests of the individual child. These reading interests are determined by the child's age, sex, experiences, needs, personality traits, and many other factors. The third criterion states that the characterization of the book should be written from a personal point of view and should present a genuine portrayal of people and their feelings. The characterization should demonstrate growth and development. The author's portrayal of the character's emotions should be such that the reader can readily identify with the reactions and feelings expressed by the main character. The fourth criterion stipulates that the main character must reach an acceptance of the situation. The goal of bibliotherapy is to help the child adjust to a problem or a new situation he is facing. Therefore, the character must also adjust to his situation to be of benefit to the reader. Finally, the presentation of the problem and solution should contribute insight into the problem of the reader. This insight will hopefully help the child plan and carry through a constructive course of action.
The second step in the compilation of a list of children's books dealing with death involved the application of the criteria to four children's books. The books were *By the Highway Home* by Mary Stolz, *Fog* by Mildred Lee, *Home From Far* by Joan Little and *With Dad Alone* by Jerrold Beim. Each book emphasized the main character's experience with the death of a parent or a sibling. Incidents from each book which might meet the interests of a certain reading audience were examined. Passages were quoted to illustrate the reactions and feelings of the main character. Passages from each book were also used to demonstrate that the main character was able to accept his situation as a result of the death.

Finally, a list of thirty-five children's books dealing with death, each meeting the criteria established, are suggested for use in a bibliotherapy program. The list is by no means complete; it is meant to serve as a beginning for an individual who is considering bibliotherapy as a means of helping a child cope with the death of a parent, a sibling, a friend, or a pet.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Magazine Articles


