

**Breaking Point** by Alex Flinn (2002)

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes.

**Summary:** *Breaking Point*, written by Alex Flinn, is the fictionalized story about school violence that explores why and how a good kid can go ‘bad’. Paul Richmond is a new student at Gate School where the rich student population makes life miserable for anyone not like them. Unfortunately for Paul, being from a divorced home and poor, he is nothing like them. In a turn of events, Charlie Good, star student and athlete, invites Paul to join his elite inner circle. All Charlie wants in return are a few small things from Paul—small things that Paul does willingly. Until one day Charlie wants something big—really big. Now, Paul has to decide how far he’ll go to be one of the gang.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Connecting fiction to nonfiction text. Seeing if the fictional text stays true to the reality and effects of teen issues. Giving students information about teen issues to help make informative life choice decisions. Providing students opportunities to read while analyzing author development of plot structure and character development. Challenging students to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary perspective.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

RL.8.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.*

RL.8.3: *Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.*

RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

W.8.7: *Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.*

W.8.8: *Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.*

W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:** This is a very intense novel about trying to fit in when everyone is working against you. The main character so desires friendship that he struggles with the morality of his actions but justifies committing small crimes to maintain social acceptance. The main character comes from a broken home. He lives with his mother, who relies on Paul for emotional support, and his father, who completely ignores him. Ultimately, Charlie manipulates Paul to plant a bomb in the school to teach the impetuous student body a lesson. While it does include some upsetting events, the book can show students how their actions and interactions can negatively affect others and derail their moral compass. The underage characters use language, consume alcohol, and sexual content is implied (no explicit details). The book contains acts of extreme bullying including vandalism to personal and school property as well as animal cruelty. In addition, bullying leads to an act of self-harm and suicide.

This novel won the ALA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Readers, 2003 and has been included on multiple states’ book lists.

**Assessment:** Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel that will be presented at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character’s perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call 238-5800 or email your child’s ELA teacher.

**Gym Candy** by Carl Deuker (2007)

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes.

**Summary:** This story details the rise and fall of high school football star Mick Johnson. He is the son of a former college star and NFL player whose career was ended by what Mick thought was an injury. When Mick becomes first string running back on the high school team, he knows that he needs to keep his edge to be as good as his father was. Mick meets Peter Volz, a personal trainer who introduces Mick to steroids. He then moves on to taking injections and becomes addicted to them through the following football season. When Mick's closest friend, Drew, discovers what Mick is doing, Mick attempts to commit suicide knowing that he has run out of chances and has let his team down. Mick is sent to a rehabilitation center where the book ends without Mick's addiction being cured.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Connecting fiction to nonfiction text. Seeing if the fictional text stays true to the reality and effects of teen issues. Giving students information about teen issues to help make informative life choice decisions. Providing students opportunities to read while analyzing author development of plot structure and character development. Challenging students to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary perspective.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

RL.8.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.*

RL.8.3: *Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.*

RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

W.8.7: *Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.*

W.8.8: *Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.*

W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Deuker's realistic fiction exposes readers to the substance abuse pressures teens face today. The text includes violence (teens physically fighting), discussion on the use of steroids in the form of pills and injections, and an attempted suicide (by the use of a gun). The dominating theme is the substance abuse of steroids due to the personal, parental, and social pressures the main character, Mick, deals with. The value of friendship and rehabilitation is explored by Deuker as readers take a walk in Mick's shoes.

**Assessment:** Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel, present their project at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character's perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call 238-5800 or email your child's ELA teacher.

**Monster** by Walter Dean Myers (1999)

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes

**Summary:**

*Monster*, written by Walter Dean Myers, is a fictional story about Steve, a teenage boy in juvenile detention and on trial for murder. Written in the form of a screenplay taking place in the mind of the boy himself, *Monster* depicts the emotional story of the trial and the struggles of a young teen enduring being on trial for murder.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Students will connect fiction to nonfiction text by evaluating if the fictional text correctly portrays the reality and effects of specific teen issues. While reading, students will analyze the author's development of plot structure and characters. Students will be challenged to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary character's perspective. Students will research and analyze relevant information related to teen issues to inform life choices.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

RL.8.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.*

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RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

W.8.7: *Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.*

W.8.8: *Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.*

W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:**

The book exposes readers to the thoughts and emotions of a teen facing murder charges. Written in his words, the grammar is sometimes incorrect. The reader learns of the conditions inside the juvenile detention center where prisoners are mistreated and beaten, and rape is implied. Mild profanity is used infrequently in the book.

Among many other notable honors and awards, *Monster* is the winner of the *Michael L. Printz Award*, *Kentucky Bluegrass Award*, *Coretta Scott King Award Honor*, and an ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults choice.

**Assessment:**

Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel that will be presented at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character's perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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**Notes from the Midnight Driver** by Jordan Sonnenblick (2006)

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**Summary:**

16-year-old Alex decides to get even. His parents are separated, his father is dating his former third-grade teacher, and being 16 isn't easy, especially when it comes to girls. However, instead of revenge, Alex ends up in trouble with the law. He is ordered to do community service at a senior center where he is assigned to Solomon Lewis, a "difficult" senior with a lot of gusto, advice for Alex, and a puzzling (yet colorful) Yiddish vocabulary. Eventually, the pair learn to deal with their past and each other in ways that are humorous, entertaining, and life changing.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Connecting fiction to nonfiction text. Seeing if the fictional text stays true to the reality and effects of teen issues. Giving students information about teen issues to help make informative life choice decisions. Providing students opportunities to read while analyzing author development of plot structure and character development. Challenging students to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary perspective.

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Reading:

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RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

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W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

*Sonnenblick uses humor to explore teen issues such as: substance abuse (underage drinking), divorce, coming of age, intergenerational relationships, high school, and understanding self and others. Readers will connect with the main character, Alex's, epiphanies as he discovers life lessons through his interactions with supporting character, Solomon.*

**Assessment:** Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel, present their project at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character's perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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**Speak** by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)

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**Summary:** *Speak*, written by Laurie Halse Anderson, is the fictionalized story of Melinda Sordino’s freshman year at high school. Melinda begins the school-year as a social pariah because she called the police at an end-of-summer party. Melinda remains silent in school mulling her experiences over in her head. However, there is one particularly painful memory she is trying to forget. No matter how hard she tries to suppress it, the memory keeps looming in her mind. Will Melinda be able to work past the pain and speak out about the events of the party? This fictional novel demonstrates to teens that although it is hard to speak up for yourself, keeping silent is worse.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Connecting fiction to nonfiction text. Seeing if the fictional text stays true to the reality and effects of teen issues. Giving students information about teen issues to help make informative life choice decisions. Providing students opportunities to read while analyzing author development of plot structure and character development. Challenging students to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary perspective.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

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RL.8.3: *Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.*

RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

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W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:** This novel draws attention to the emotional suffering endured by teens struggling to speak out against violence that has happened to them. The main character reveals her rape through memories, which are not graphically described. There is also trouble at home because her parents don’t get along; we are given reason to believe her parents are having affairs. Teen drinking is also addressed.

This novel has won the ALA Best Book for Young Adults, Booklist Editors' Choice, A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, Michael L. Printz Honor Book, and National Book Award Finalist.

**Assessment:** Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel that will be presented at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character’s perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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***The Pearl*** by John Steinbeck

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes.

**Summary:** *The Pearl*, written by John Steinbeck, tells of how a young Indian man and his family struggle to save their son's life after a scorpion bite. The Indian, a pearl diver, finds a very valuable pearl and tries to sell the pearl to save his son's life and better his family. Only then does he find himself becoming very greedy and engrossed with the notion of being wealthy and powerful. The journey to sell the pearl and gain possessions ultimately leads to the death of his son and the loss of all he had.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

*The Pearl* is a timeless novel dealing with many themes pertinent to young adults' lives. Materialism, greed, selfishness, community, family and other themes are developed through the novel. Literary devices including symbolism and metaphor can be examined at length, offering new and deeper ways of reading and thinking of texts. Discussions of multi-culturalism, bias, and stereotypes can also easily be drawn from the text, and social studies connections are clear through the topics of oppressed people and cultures.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading Literature:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

RL.8.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.*

RL.8.3: *Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.*

RL.8.7: *Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Reading Informational

RI.8.3: *Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events through comparisons, analogies, or categories.*

Writing:

W.8.1: *Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.*

W.8.4: *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience..*

W.8.7: *Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.*

W.8.8: *Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.*

W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:**

This short novel makes an excellent introduction to literary criticism, as the author's use of symbolism is fairly simple for teen readers to analyze and understand. However, the message put forth by the book -- that man invites evil by trying to better his situation -- invites a lot of questions. Also, gender roles in the book are very old-fashioned, as the story offers a portrayal of poor, uneducated Mexican people as simple folk who live unquestioningly, as generations before them have lived.

John Steinbeck is a highly reputable author who won the Noble Peace Prize.

**Assessment:** Students will analyze and evaluate the symbolism and development of theme within the novel. They will also analyze and evaluate the author's development of the character by comparing the contrast of the characters' expected actions (that were already established in the story) versus the characters' actual actions.

Students will research materialism in society and a society of convenience. They will draw conclusions about the role materialism/greed plays in creating our society and the effect it has on our society. In an essay, students will make a claim about the positive or negative effects that materialism/greed has in our society today and support their argument with evidence from the text as well as outside research they find. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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**Trouble** by Gary D. Schmidt (2008)

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes

**Summary:**

*Trouble*, written by Gary D. Schmidt, is a fictional story about Henry, a teenage boy who has lived his entire life believing that trouble cannot find his affluent family. Following a devastating accident that leaves his brother in critical condition, Henry is determined to climb a mountain to prove that he is capable of approaching the challenge on his own, accompanied by his new dog. Throughout the text, he discovers the truth about himself, his brother's actual character, and the nature of dealing with one's troubles.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Students will connect fiction to nonfiction text by evaluating if the fictional text correctly portrays the reality and effects of specific teen issues. While reading, students will analyze the author's development of plot structure and characters. Students will be challenged to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary character's perspective. Students will research and analyze relevant information related to teen issues to help make informative life-choice decisions.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

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RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

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W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:**

The book does expose readers to the issue of racism, as several characters in the book have a prejudice against the immigrant Cambodian families living near their town. There is mild profanity, including several racial slurs toward Cambodians used sporadically throughout the book.

Gary D. Schmidt is a two-time Newbery Honor-winning author and National Book Award Finalist.

**Assessment:**

Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel that will be presented at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character's perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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## **Wintergirls** by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009)

Approved for use in Eighth Grade ELA classes.

**Summary:** *Wintergirls*, written by Laurie Halse Anderson, is a fictionalized story about best friends Lia and Cassie, Wintergirls frozen in fragile bodies, competitors in a deadly contest to see who can be the thinnest. But then Cassie suffers the ultimate loss-her life-and Lia is left behind, haunted by her friend's memory and racked with guilt for not being able to help save her. Laurie Halse Anderson explores Lia's struggle, her painful path to recovery, and her desperate attempts to hold on to the most important thing of all: hope. This fictional novel brings to light a teen issue that is becoming more prevalent among adolescents (girls and boys).

### **Connection to the Curriculum:**

Connecting fiction to nonfiction text. Seeing if the fictional text stays true to the reality and effects of teen issues. Giving students information about teen issues to help make informative life choice decisions. Providing students opportunities to read while analyzing author development of plot structure and character development. Challenging students to use textual evidence to rewrite the original text from a secondary perspective.

### **Common Core State Standards Addressed:**

#### Reading:

RL.8.1: *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

RL.8.2: *Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.*

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RL.8.6: *Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.*

RL.8.10: *By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

#### Writing:

W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.*

W.8.3.B: *Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

W.8.7: *Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.*

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W.8.9: *Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.*

**A Note on the Text:** This is a very intense novel about the mental and physical pain endured by teens with eating disorders. The two main characters, the "wintergirls" of the title, both have emotional problems that lead to and exacerbate their disorders. There is graphic detail about their physical deterioration as the girls starve themselves. This is an educational novel, not only about the pressures today's teens feel, but also about the way these girls maintain their lies and how others enable them to do so. There is mild language used. It is implied (no explicit details) that sexual abuse was the reason Cassie moved to Lia's neighborhood when she was still in elementary school. It is also mentioned that various characters use or abuse drugs, alcohol, and tobacco in the novel.

This novel won the ALA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Readers, 2010; ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 2010; Booklist Editors' Choice: Books for Youth, 2009; and *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Books, 2009.

**Assessment:** Students will: create an informational research project regarding the teen issue found in the novel that will be presented at a research fair, draw a conclusion about the authenticity of the subject matter in the novel (how well did the author portray the true effects of this teen issue), write a literary analysis analyzing the theme or character development of the protagonist in the novel, and create a narrative of an event in the novel from a secondary character's perspective. These assessments allow students to demonstrate mastery of the Common Core Standards listed above.

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