

2020

Trauma in children's literature

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Abstract

Trauma is inevitable for many of the students served in school buildings. Nearly 35 million children have experienced one or multiple ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). With students spending a majority of their day within school walls, it is apparent that educators are an essential link to provide a trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approach to reach students' needs. The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. The research questions this study aimed to address included the following: How is trauma portrayed in upper elementary books, what are the themes or events in upper elementary books that portray trauma experiences that students could connect with, and how can teachers share the books while adhering to the sensitivity of the age level of readers? This study utilized qualitative content analysis to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. This study aimed to answer what themes are in upper elementary books that portray trauma-experiences that students could connect with. It also analyzed the age level recommendation of the structure books and how they match to developmental age norms for said age.

TRAUMA IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of School Library Studies

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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August 2020

This Research Paper by: Kyra Ross

Titled: Trauma in Children's Literature

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
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ABSTRACT

Trauma is inevitable for many of the students served in school buildings. Nearly 35 million children have experienced one or multiple ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). With students spending a majority of their day within school walls, it is apparent that educators are an essential link to provide a trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approach to reach students' needs. The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. The research questions this study aimed to address included the following: How is trauma portrayed in upper elementary books, what are the themes or events in upper elementary books that portray trauma experiences that students could connect with, and how can teachers share the books while adhering to the sensitivity of the age level of readers? This study utilized qualitative content analysis to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. This study aimed to answer what themes are in upper elementary books that portray trauma-experiences that students could connect with. It also analyzed the age level recommendation of the structure books and how they match to developmental age norms for said age.

**DISCLAIMER -- Seeking to simply build awareness for teachers to come to an understanding that trauma is prevalent-- presence in libraries and classrooms, conversations about books. Kids can have and need to have access to these books. This study is in no way suggesting that any teacher should diagnose or direct students to read a particular book with any suggestion of therapeutic or healing benefits. Awareness of genre (realistic fiction) creates normality in access and presence in the classroom and library.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Traumatic events such as the school shootings in Sandy Hook and Columbine naturally call national media attention to the need for support services to assist the affected children and families. Much less in the media eye are the children attending school each week affected by toxic stress and trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences such as chronic neglect and family violence.” -Meg Walkley and Tory L. Cox (2013)

Justification of Problem

Mental health issues increase every year in students. According to the Child Mind Institute (2015), just over 17 million children in the United States will have or have had a diagnosable psychiatric disorder (p.1). It also states that 49.5% of American youth will have had a diagnosable mental illness by the age of 18, and 22.2% of American youth will have a diagnosable mental illness with “serious impairment” at some point before age 18 (p. 2). In response to these issues, schools are moving towards becoming “trauma-sensitive” or “trauma-informed” schools. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2015) describes *trauma* as “an emotional response to a terrible event” (para. 1). Terrible events, as mentioned by the APA, can come in many forms such as an accident or natural disaster. Trauma can also affect an individual, as in abuse or neglect, or a whole community, as in a school shooting. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2015), stated “more than two-thirds of children reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16” (para. 1). Those potentially traumatic events included “psychological, physical, or sexual abuse, school violence, war

experiences, neglect etc.” SAMHSA also shares that “the impact of child traumatic stress can last well beyond childhood. Child trauma survivors may experience learning problems, increased use of health and mental health services, increased involvement with child welfare, and long-term health problems” (p. 2).

Trauma can be linked, as a correlation, not causation, to mental illness. The journal *Teaching Tolerance* presents a PD Cafe about “Responding to Trauma in Your Classroom,” (2016) that identifies “traumatic experiences can include instances such as medical crisis or mental health” (p. 16). The article includes a list, though not exhaustive, of traumatic experiences or what can cause trauma, which helps teachers move towards understanding what trauma can include and how to begin to respond to a student affected by trauma. This approach is being used to help students cope and learn resiliency in response to trauma and the staggering, but real, facts presented about trauma. The Treatment and Services Adaptation Center (2019) defines a trauma-informed school as “the adults in the school community are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress” (para. 2). For a school to be truly a trauma-informed school, they must address three components: safety, connection, and emotional/behavioral regulation (Dombo & Sabatino, 2019, p. 18). There has been more discussion and attention around the topic of trauma happening in education “in part because of high rates of violence, suicide, racism, drug abuse, and socioeconomic hardship in the United States that can amplify trauma exposure for children. But it is also because early trauma appreciably influences brain development and learning” (Taylor, 2019, para. 10).

According to Taylor (2019), it is essential for teachers, counselors, and administration, to provide students with resources and an opportunity to read and respond to books with similar

adversities to their experiences, which can create a sense of safety and community within the school. Taylor describes significant learnings from training that identifies trauma as a “disruption of two basic human needs: safety and community” (para. 9). Teacher librarians can assist in the search and use of the books that are deemed quality material for students. Taylor notes that books can help children build resilience and cope with trauma and that librarians should choose titles that “represent a spectrum of stories and diverse characters that normalize asking for help and getting support” (para. 37).

Furthermore, Taylor (2019) points out that, with the rise of mental health issues, schools need to have resources, collections, and teaching techniques for affected students to be part of the student population, and teachers need to be equipped with appropriate teaching techniques aimed to reach all students in their room. Christina Sappey, a State Representative from Pennsylvania, recently introduced legislation to require trauma-informed training and education in Pennsylvania public schools. This bill aims to figure out why so many students were not succeeding in school. This legislation was incorporated into a Pennsylvania senate bill that was signed by Governor Tom Wolf into law in July 2019. Any school staff, according to this new law, who have contact with children will have to complete training on trauma-informed approaches (para. 18-21). Students are coming to school without proper coping techniques, and 70-80% of young people with a mental illness do not get the mental health care they need (Wei, McGrath, Hayden, & Kutcher, 2015). Much of the mental care falls onto the school’s responsibility. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and other leadership positions need to be equipped with tools to help counsel and teach students how to cope with trauma, and students

need to use those tools and respond to them in a way that helps foster resiliency and understanding.

Lack of Trauma-Sensitive Information

Trauma-sensitive training and practice is a relatively new term in education. However, doctors and psychologists have been interested in how childhood adversities have an effect on children and various aspects of their life. Felitti (2009) commented on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study to study how adverse childhood experiences would affect adult health behavior and health outcomes (pp.131-132). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019), the ACES study covers all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18 by using 10 different indicators (para. 6). This study splits the 10 different indicators into three categories: abuse, household challenges, and neglect. The original study, with over 17,000 participants showed that at least one-third of Americans have at least an ACE score of one, indicating that childhood trauma is not rare, giving importance and relevance to schools and the teaching profession (Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016, p. 41).

Schools are beginning to use ACES training and mental health training to help educators gain a background understanding to help them serve the students that occupy their building. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) stated that 50.8 million students will attend public schools in the United States in 2019, which makes schools the ideal place for intervention and prevention to occur when dealing with the effects of trauma in youth (para. 2). The CDC (2019) claims that ACES have been known to affect adult mental health, mortality rate, physical health, and other aspects of life, it is crucial to intervene early with coping skills or intervention

(para. 1-5). The impact that trauma and mental illness can have on a student's success in school can be detrimental. Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich (2016) state that "students' significant emotional and behavioral needs take precedence over their academic needs because they will most likely have difficulty learning if their brains are in a hypoaroused or hyperaroused state" (p. 44).

Social Stigma of Mental Health

Mental health has long had a stigma in society with negative connotation. Stigma is explained as a discrediting and devaluing an individual because that person is in a group thought to have low social power as "the deep discrediting of an individual as a function of his or her membership in a devalued group with low social power" (Heflinger & Hinshaw, 2010). Heflinger & Hinshaw (2010) write stigmas often create a strong feeling of shame and/or personal failure, meaning that one may not seek assessment or treatment even if they recognize that mental illness is present (p. 61). Adolescents have reported, for example, that they have moderate to high mental health stigma and low mental health literacy, that is an understanding of how to access resources, how to recognize symptoms of different mental health illnesses, and other various topics related to mental health. Salerno (2016) wrote that adolescents often fear friends, peers, and school teachers/staff discovering that they suffer from mental illness (para. 2).

Library Standards

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2009) supports the need for students to see oneself in the texts they are reading. One of their common beliefs states, "reading is a window to the world" (p. 12). AASL's (2017) *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* state that learners develop curiosity by

“reading widely and deeply in multiple formats” (Explore A1, p. 104). AASL (2017) also shows the importance of the teacher librarian’s role to provide students opportunities for independent reading through “promoting the use of high-quality and high-interest literature in formats that reflect diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all learners and their communities” (Include C2, p. 77).

One way that teachers and students can learn through a trauma-informed lens is by reading books that feature characters with characteristics of trauma and/or feature childhood adversities that have been known to be related to trauma, such as those on the ACEs questionnaire. In Taylor’s (2019) article, she interviews Melissa Gardner, a school librarian in Kentucky. In her library, Gardner began a project, with other librarians in the state of Kentucky, to “identify books for each of the ACEs” (para. 36). The librarian has the opportunity to not only locate these books, but to also provide access and guidance to them. Gardner wants to “share the list with other librarians, counselors, and teachers, and get those books into the hands of learners to help them become more resilient” (para. 36).

Collaboration between teachers and librarians is one of the core values that the American Association of School Librarians believes is important in the school library program. AASL’s (2018) *National School Library Standards*, affirms that the mission of the school library includes “collaborating with educators and students to design and teach engaging learning experiences that meet individual needs” (p. 8), thus speaking to the importance of knowing students’ needs and working with other teachers to meet those needs. This collaboration includes researching, locating, and providing materials and resources for teacher librarians, teachers and administration to provide to learners to connect with and learn about trauma and the issues

students may be facing due to trauma. Providing this service helps encompass a trauma-informed lens in all facets of the school.

Rationale

Trauma is inevitable for many of the students served in school buildings. Taylor (2019) states that it has been found that nearly 35 million children have experienced one or multiple ACEs (para. 10). With students spending a majority of their day within school walls, it is apparent that educators are an essential link to provide a trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approach to reach students' needs. The Treatment and Services Adaptation Center (2019) states that students' emotional and behavioral needs must first be met because academic success and the ability to learn may be impacted. Trauma can interfere with a student's "ability to concentrate and learn.... delay development of their brains and bodies... change how children view the world... and it can change their behavior, interests and relationships with family, friends, and teachers" (p. 2). The research being presented in this study will have importance to any adult working with children in a school setting such as teachers, administrators, paraeducators, and librarians, to help students academically when they are struggling emotionally due to adverse trauma in their lives. Teacher librarians have the task of searching for and reviewing books as a part of the selection process for school library collections, and as such they can select quality resources that may resonate with children affected by trauma and for all students whose classmates have been affected by trauma to give them a trauma-informed lens.

Uncertainty and Deficiencies on this Topic from Past Research

Most of the studies surrounding mental health illnesses are aimed at literature for YA, or Young Adult, books. In Sandersfeld-Miller's (2018) and Markland's (2013) studies, both

examined books recognized as young adult fiction books. There is a need to expose students to trauma-informed literature in younger grades due to trauma affecting students of all ages.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “more than two-thirds of children reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16” (para. 1).

Age-appropriateness and literature to match those age groups is crucial so by using professional reviews and recommendations professionals use to indicate grade levels, librarians can best guide students who are looking for help to books that may provide a way to see themselves in literature made for them. Markland’s (2013) study analyzed three popular upper elementary and young adult fiction books for characters affected by trauma or traumatic experiences. She used the *DSM-IV* to identify trauma in main characters in each of the novels he analyzed. The current study was influenced by this study by using a human-diagnostic tool for fictional characters, yet will vary from Markland’s study as the books being analyzed will only be for upper elementary grades, roughly in the range of third through sixth grade. The study I have chosen to replicate is the Sandersfeld-Miller (2018) study; this study analyzed the authenticity of the portrayal of mental health, specifically anxiety and depression, in fiction titles for middle school students. This study will be extending Sandersfeld-Miller’s research by looking at how trauma is portrayed, within books for a younger age group than the majority of other mental health illnesses studies.

Summary of Problem Statement

Schools are recognizing that students in their building suffer from trauma and are moving towards having a trauma-informed lens and response system; however, trauma-informed schools are lacking lists of identified student resources such as children’s books that portray trauma that

may help teachers and students gain new perspectives about trauma and how people cope with trauma.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with.

Research Questions

1. How is trauma portrayed in upper elementary books?
2. What are the themes or events in upper elementary books that portray trauma experiences that students could connect with?
3. How can teachers share the books while using text structures within the books that help to provide sensitivity for the age level of readers?

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption that this study makes is that parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, and students need help identifying trauma in an upper elementary book to help students recognize trauma and potentially use it as a coping tool. A second assumption is that teachers and other school staff are trained, going to be trained in the future, or are interested in being trained in trauma-informed education. Along with this is a disclaimer that this study makes to note that the intent of this research is simply to build awareness for teachers to come to an understanding that trauma is prevalent or present in libraries and classrooms and in conversations about books. Kids can have and need to have access to these books. But this study is in no way suggesting that any teacher should diagnose or direct students to read a particular book with any

suggestion of therapeutic or healing benefits. Rather, awareness of these books and the genre of realistic fiction can help to simply create normality in its access and presence in the classroom and library. A third assumption is that teachers, administrators, parents, and librarians can use this study to help begin a conversation about trauma and add to current curriculum or collections to include more trauma-experiences in literature that is quality literature. This study will be limited to the Iowa Children's Choice award books for the year 2019-2020.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. This literature review consists of three components to support and inform the current literary qualitative content analysis: analysis of the portrayal of trauma in children's literature, age-appropriateness of content in children's literature, and the importance of readers having accurate representation of self in literature. These components will be used to analyze the text for a need of literature with trauma experiences or trauma characteristics to give students the chance to see themselves represented in children's literature.

Analysis of the Portrayal of Trauma in Children's Literature

Markland's (2013) study analyzed popular upper elementary and young adult fiction books for trauma, using the *DSM-IV*, which was the most recent version at the time. Markland created three different case studies for three books: *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Book Thief*. This study focused on the complexity of trauma, the different aspects of trauma, and how "the protagonists experience and respond to trauma differently, emphasizing their complexity" (p. 1). Markland combined the *DSM-IV* ideology of trauma with Sigmund Freud's findings, which led to the idea that "melancholia (deep sadness or gloom), the compulsion to repeat, and recurring dreams are evident also in fiction depictions" (p. 16). The *Harry Potter* series has many scenes involving death, an indicator of past trauma, that could be determined as "traumatic." She looked at Harry Potter's melancholia mourning of his parents, and how Harry

Potter turns the mourning into healing, bringing Markland to her idea that “the depiction of potential trauma in children’s literature becomes safe because readers are reassured that characters will enjoy happiness for the foreseeable future (p. 57); this is an idea that she frequented often throughout his study to show that trauma does exist in children’s literature. Markland continued on to work with *The Book Thief* where the characters experience death during World War II and the Holocaust. Markland concludes that the author “does reassure [readers] that trauma can be overcome; no matter how horrible the event one can heal and experience happiness...” (p. 88). Markland’s third analysis was over *The Hunger Games* and “a concept of trauma in which identity is fundamentally changed” (p. 90). Markland wrote “The epilogue does not assure readers that perfect happiness is enjoyed by Katniss and Peeta, but reinforces that traumatic memory is something that must be incorporated in their new identities” (p. 121) in response to the trauma in the novel. This study informs the current study due to the nature of the use of the *DSM-IV* to qualitatively identify and/or diagnose trauma in fictional characters. This study helps show a need for children to see trauma in books, relate to the trauma in books, and to find themselves represented in children’s literature.

Lejkowski (2012) analyzed trauma and the child’s imagination in three children’s literature titles throughout different periods of American history beginning with *Huck Finn*, written in the late nineteenth-century by Mark Twain. Lejkowski analyzed the framework and inner workings of Twain’s novel for the representation of childhood trauma, its impact on novels in the coming years, and how “twentieth-century texts that, like Twain, used the traumatized child to represent national issues” (p. 2). Lejkowski stated Huck’s trauma is caused by his father, an alcoholic who turns abusive. Through Huck, “Twain’s narrative of childhood abuse and

abandonment provides a voice for the traumatized child and established a tradition that influences subsequent works throughout the American canon” (p. 1). This study is prevalent to the current study in the notion that authors are conscientious of portraying children in various scenarios that are realistic to children today. By including trauma into children’s literature, authors are providing children with an opportunity to see themselves represented in literary works.

Roy (2017) conducted a literature analysis of three young adult works of fiction that are considered landmark novels in the coming-of-age genre read by many young adults. Roy analyzed how trauma in these novels can impact the maturation process, “that of both hindering and catalyzing a child’s coming-of-age” (p. iv). Roy analyzed J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951, S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, published in 1967, and Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, published in 1999. Roy stated that children and adolescent novels that “address trauma are significant because they typically provide a hopeful conclusion to an otherwise mournful tale, thereby conveying to the readers who may be coping with a traumatic event that there *are* ways to survive” (p. 3). These three books are books that are read during a child’s coming-of-age period in their life, usually middle school or high school, and present different ways to how a person, especially a child or young adult, might respond to trauma, both positively and negatively. This influences the current study as it is using literature for a younger age. This study showed that trauma can be both used as a negative experience for characters but can also be a way for characters to rise up and become better, which is a positive message to send to students.

Attention to Book Characteristics in Selection for Various Age Groups

Rocklin (2001), focused on the different developmental ages of children and how to identify books fit for those age groups. Rocklin, an author of children's books herself, explained there are exceptions to every rule... however it is important to have a sense of what text characteristics appeal to kids at different ages so when a teacher, librarian, or parent chooses a book, he/she is doing so cogniscently (p. 3). Rocklin took books for different ages and studied what appealed to each of those groupings, compiling a list of characteristics to attend to for age-appropriateness in literature. Rocklin wrote that many themes among children's literature are the same: "the need for love... the fear of abandonment and separation, and self-acceptance, just to name a few. It is just the packaging, the presentation in terms of language and tone, that changes from age to age" (p. 3). This study impacts the current study by showing the developmental stage of children at the age level being studied and what these students are seeking for in a book.

Jiménez and Mcilhagga (2013) presented at Boston University about how teachers choose literature for their classroom focusing on two different ways of reading: personal and pedagogical. They stated "teachers tend to focus on the pedagogical goals and ignore the personal or the aesthetic aspect of the literature" (p. 52). They continued on to imply that if there is not awareness of both pedagogical goals and personal views or bias, one or the other suffers. "Thus, it is important to be conscientious and recognize both the personal and the pedagogical ways of reading" (p. 52). Jiménez and Mcilhagga studied teacher biases, text complexity and visual elements of books. Jiménez and Mcilhagga concluded that "the outcomes of helping students develop into aesthetic and efferent readers make this effort worthwhile" (p. 56). When

teachers focus on both ways of reading and choosing material, they are effectively meeting all the needs of their students. This study impacts the current study for the analysis of the books in the study to see how and why teachers choose books to use in their classrooms.

Ross (2017) conducted a mixed method study in two sequential phases: a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase, examining how 15 teachers decision-making regarding read alouds for their kindergarten, first, or second grade classroom. The teachers documented their read alouds and share their rationale for their choices. Based on these results, a survey was completed by 259 K-2 teachers across the United States which further explored the read aloud choices. The majority of teachers surveyed stated they used read alouds in their classroom with the “purpose of reading aloud was to develop a love of reading, but their actual selection of the book was determined by how the book would help them teach or develop skills” (p. ii) Eight themes were found from the teachers’ responses to the sentence-starter “I chose this book because...”. Those themes were: “1) It assisted in teaching or developing skills; 2) It correlated to a holiday or current event; 3) It was either a teacher or student favorite; 4) It connected to a current classroom theme or topic; 5) It was included a curriculum they adhere to; 6) It was because of the author, illustrator, or character in the text; 7) It was meant to promote a life skill or citizenship; or 8) It was at a student’s request” (p. 72). This study impacts the current study by showing the reasons why teachers are choosing books in their classroom for read-alouds and the importance of the rationale.

The Importance of Readers Viewing Self in Literature

Bishop (1990) introduced the idea of windows and mirrors in children’s literature, and the idea has influenced many studies since.

Books serve as mirrors for children to see characters who look like themselves and have feelings and experiences similar to their own. Books also serve as windows through which children learn about their world by looking beyond their immediate surroundings and seeing characters and events that occur in other communities or other parts of the world (p. ix).

In order for a book to be considered a “mirror,” it implies that the reader sees something of themselves in the text. Such representations will include identities, cultures, or experiences. Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor (2014) wrote how when a reader sees themselves represented in a text, they are being told that their experiences are not so unique; it tells them they are not the only one going through that experience (p. 29). Many students in the classroom do not see themselves reflected in children’s literature. However, if all children see is themselves represented in literature and no other identities, cultures, or experiences, this can lead to “[growing] up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world- a dangerous ethnocentrism” (Bishop, 1990, p. x) . To avoid this ethnocentrism in students, Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor (2014) recommended that teachers need to provide opportunities for students to view worlds that do not belong to them, thus using books as a window rather than a mirror. This allows for experiences not only related to their life, but to those whose lives are around them.

Lowe (2009) conducted a qualitative analysis on the impact literature can have on a child’s life. Lowe mentioned that “often the reader is looking for a solution to his/her own personal life situation and feel more at ease when learning that he/she is not the “only one” dealing with a life crisis” (p. 2). As society continues to shift for students, not always for the better, real life needs real books, or books that “provide information, comfort, and models for

coping with life's difficult times" (p. 2) Lowe continued to elaborate on the idea that until a child's needs are met, logically the student's suffering will have a greater difficulty concentrating on classroom instruction. Lowe (2009) noted that experiences such as loss, divorce, and bullying are, more recently, appearing in children's literature. These non-traditional published issues provide children with "an avenue of expression and an outlet where children can activate prior knowledge and relate with the feelings of characters in a book" (p. 3). It is important to give students access to books that not only represent themselves, but also books that do not represent themselves but of those around them. "Even when children are not directly affected by a difficult situation, the exposure of life crisis literature helps them to gain a greater understanding of the world and to empathize with others in our society" (p.12). This study impacts the current study by analyzing books with trauma incorporated into the theme or story elements. When having or using life crisis books in the classroom, teachers are providing students with the opportunity of open communication, protection, and self-expression. Teachers teach the whole child, which includes not only academics, but also the social and emotional aspects as well.

Summary

All of the studies reviewed point to the need for children to see themselves within the pages of literature. Some studies (Lejkowski, 2012; Markland, 2013; Roy, 2017) demonstrated the importance of including real-life situations that students in today's classrooms will relate to, even if those situations are deemed "bad". These three felt it was necessary to show the bad and how our students can overcome the trauma, just like in real life. Several of the other studies noted how important it is for students, in general, to see themselves within the pages of the books, making the books a safe place and more relatable to the reader, along with characteristics

within the book structure that lends itself to reader interest and selection (Jiménez & Mcilhagga, 2013; Lowe, 2009; Rocklin, 2001; Ross, 2017; Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Prior studies revealed a need for analysis of trauma in children’s literature, specifically at the upper elementary level. The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. This study aimed to answer what themes are in upper elementary books that portray trauma-experiences that students could connect with. It also analyzed the age level recommendation of the structure books and how they match to developmental age norms for said age.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative content analysis approach to evaluate the selected novels. Wildemuth (2017) defines qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 318). Within the qualitative content analysis, there are three approaches. The current study is classified as *directed* analysis of content, “in which coding starts with a theory or relevant researching findings” (p. 319). The current study uses trauma informed teaching and ACEs to analyze literature; this derives from the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study where individuals analyze their life experiences from birth to 18 to look for 10 different categories of trauma. This research design fits the current study because the selected books written for upper elementary students which include trauma were examined to find themes and patterns in how trauma is portrayed. Past research has

developed criteria to identify ACEs from childhood experiences, so the current study used this research to evaluate the portrayal of trauma in children's literature and created a starting point for themes evaluated in the selected novels.

Sample of Books

The sample of books (see Appendix A) evaluated for this study included fiction titles from the Iowa Children's Choice nominees, for upper elementary students grades 3-6, from the year 2019-2020. Wildemuth (2017) stated that "samples for qualitative content analysis usually consist of purposively selected texts, which can inform the research questions being investigated" (p. 319). The purposively selected initial list of books were chosen for their popularity among students, as they were nominated by students across the state of Iowa for the Children's Choice award and subsequently vetted and narrowed down by a committee of librarians and other adult readers to a list of 20. The vetting is based on the book's publishing date being within four years of the nomination year and having had at least one positive review from one major selection publication. The researcher began by reading all 20 novels in the book sample, locating subject headings, and consulting professional reviews. In analyzing those subjects and story elements, the list was narrowed down to five books to include those only with potential trauma and ACEs within the pages in order to eliminate books that are not pertinent to the trauma-informed study. The five books evaluated for the current study, also listed in Appendix A in bold, are as follows: *One Amazing Elephant* by Linda Oatman High, *The Thing About Leftovers* by C.C. Payne, *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* by Leslie Connor, *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* by Jordan Sonnenblick, and *Finding Perfect* by Elly Swartz.

Procedures

Data Sources

In planning the stages of data collection and analysis, this study followed eight steps of the qualitative analysis of content suggested by Wildemuth (2017). In Step 1 Wildemuth suggests preparing the data to be analyzed, and as described above, the researcher narrowed the sample of 20 Iowa Children's Choice books to 5 of those books that included at least two representations of trauma. In keeping with Step 2 the researcher identified the unit of analysis for reading the selected novels: the Book Evaluation Chart of ACEs scores shown in Appendix B and Relatability for Upper Elementary Students questions shown in Appendix C. In Step 3, the researcher developed a coding scheme to analyze the presence of the ACEs in the literature. It should be noted that the ACEs score is merely a representation of specified trauma within the pages of the book; it is not a rating scale of the book. Furthermore a high or low score is not a quality indicator of books. Next the quotes and textual evidence from the books were recorded in the evidence column to support whether there is evidence of any ACEs. In considering Step 4, the researcher tested the coding scheme on one of the titles from the sample, *The thing about leftovers*. A coding scheme for book evaluation (see Appendix B) based on the previous research in Chapter 2 of the current study explains the ACEs and how it was determined if the selected book has an ACEs score or not. The evidence column shows how the trauma is portrayed in the selected novel. Once the researcher read the book in its entirety while identifying trauma within its pages, the researcher used the Relatability for Upper Elementary Students questions to identify and expand on the relatability of the book for students in the upper elementary grades (grades 3-6). This lens helped the researcher begin to develop a starting point

for dialogue based around literature that portrays trauma. The three relatability questions criteria were deductively adapted and combined from previous research by Markland (2013) and Rocklin (2001). Question number 1 derived from Markland's 2013 study about trauma and triumph over adversity. Question numbers 2 and 3 derived from Rocklin's 2001 analysis of developmental groups of children and book characteristics to fit those groups (see Appendix B and C).

Data Analysis

Wildemuth (2017) explains that qualitative content analysis is used to “condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation” (p. 319). Following steps 1-4 described above is Step 5 of Wildemuth's Process for Qualitative Analysis of Content, which is to Code the Text. The researcher used the coding scheme to code the rest of the sample text. During Step 5, the researcher was conscientious of new themes that emerged and added those to the coding of the text and explored them in writing the Chapter 4 Findings section of the current study. When finding new themes, or codes, the researcher participated in Step 6: Assess Your Coding Consistency. The researcher then went back to the beginning of the sample and rechecked the coding consistency using the same coding process laid out in Step 4 to determine how trauma was portrayed and was relatable to upper elementary students through the lenses of triumph over adversity, identity issues, and book structures such as use of dialogue, as well as newly emerging themes within each of these. In Step 7, the researcher drew conclusions from the data collected in both the Book Evaluation Chart for evidence of the ACEs categories (see Appendix B) and the Relatability for Upper Elementary Students questions (see Appendix C) and described these in Chapter 5. Through this data analysis, the researcher was able to determine an ACEs score for each of the initial 20 books and explored the ACEs through

evidence of reliability for the six books for upper elementary students analyzed in this study. Using both of these pieces of data helped the researcher create a starting point for teachers and schools to have a dialogue around the importance of all students being represented in literature. Finally, within Step 8, the researcher reported the findings of the analysis of the books read for the current study.

Limitations

Only having one researcher read and code the selected novels is one limitation of the current study. Consistency among the coding cannot be checked with only one researcher, so it is possible that results could be biased. Also, the sample of books was limited to six novels from the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice nominee list.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This descriptive study utilized a qualitative content analysis method to examine five fiction titles where four of the five are categorized as *supplementary* or *core collection* (the basic and middle levels of recommended books, but not the top tier of most highly recommended) in *Wilson's Children's Core Collection* and *Wilson's Middle and Junior High Core Collection* databases for highly reviewed books for students in grades PK-6 and 5-8, respectively. The fifth title was recommended in at least one review journal (see Appendix A). The researcher read the initial 20 novels twice for constant comparison and used the Book Evaluation Chart (see Appendix B) to identify ACEs within the content of the book and provide an ACEs score, using textual evidence and quotes for each of the identified ACEs. In response to the first and second research questions, the researcher examined the 20 novels' portrayal of trauma using the 10-question ACEs questionnaire, which covers three major traumatic categories: abuse, household challenges, and neglect. Of the 20 novels, six had at least one ACE score. In response to the third research question, the researcher examined the five novels that portrayed at least an ACE score of two, meaning there was at least two different examples of trauma from the ACEs questionnaire prevalent within the plot of the book, and provided textual evidence and quotes on the Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions chart (see Appendix C).

Book Summaries

A brief summary quoted from the back each of the books is provided below to introduce the characters and plot to the reader.

One Amazing Elephant (High, 2017)

Twelve-year-old Lily Pruitt loves her grandparents, but she doesn't love the circus- and the circus is their life. She's perfectly happy to stay with her father, away from her neglectful mother and her grandfather's elephant, Queenie Grace. Queenie Grace, a circus elephant, is happy to have Grandpa Bill as her keeper. She has had cruel keepers in the past, but Bill is her friend and treats her with love and respect. She doesn't quite understand Lily, who is so afraid of her. Then Grandpa Bill dies, and both Lily and Queenie Grace are devastated. When Lily travels to Florida for the funeral, she keeps her distance from the elephant. But the two are mourning the same man- and form a bond born from loss. And when Queenie Grace faces danger, Lily must come up with a plan to help save her friend.

The Thing About Leftovers (Payne, 2016)

Fizzy is a good Southern girl who's been taught not to make a fuss or say anything that might hurt other people's feelings. But this is becoming difficult since her parents' divorce. Wary of her too perfect stepmom and her mom's neatfreak boyfriend, Fizzy often feels like she might explode over all their new rules. Working to win the Southern Living Cook-Off provides Fizzy with a much-needed distraction. But some cooking analogies are hard to face, like the thing about leftovers: nobody's ever excited over them- and she's become the "leftover" kid from a marriage that both parents want to forget. But Fizzy hopes that with the right recipe and the right ingredients, she can prove leftovers can be delicious.

All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook (Connor, 2016)

Eleven-year-old Perry was born and raised by his mom at the Blue River Co-ed Correctional Facility in tiny Surprise, Nebraska. His mom is a resident on Cell Block C, and so far Warden Daugherty has made it possible for them to be together. That is, until a new district attorney discovers the truth - and Perry is removed from the facility and forced into a foster home. When Perry moves to the outside world, he feels trapped. Desperate to be reunited with his mom, Perry goes on a quest for answers about her past crime. As he gets closer to the truth, he will discover that love makes people resilient no matter where they come from...but can he find a way to tell everyone what home truly means?

The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade (Sonnenblick, 2017)

In sixth grade, bad things can happen to good kids. Bullies will find your weakness and jump on it. Teachers will say you did something wrong when you really didn't mean to do anything wrong. The kids who joke the loudest can drown out the quieter, nicer kids. Maverick wants to change all that. One of the last things his father left him was a toy sheriff's badge, back when Maverick was little and his family wasn't in trouble. Now he likes to carry it around to remind himself of his dad--and also to remind himself to make school a better place for everyone...even if that's a hard thing to do.

Finding Perfect (Swartz, 2016)

To twelve-year-old Molly Nathans, perfect is the number four, the tip of a newly sharpened No. 2 pencil, a pad of crips white paper, her neatly aligned glass animal figures. What's not perfect is Molly's mother leaving the family to take a faraway job

with the promise of returning in one year. What if one year turns into two years turns into forever? So Molly hatches a plan to bring her mother home: winning the Lakeville Middle School Poetry Slam Contest. The winner is honored at a fancy banquet. If Molly wins, her mother will hate to come home for the celebration. Right? But as time passes, writing and reciting slam poetry become harder as new habits appear, and counting, cleaning, and organizing no longer are enough to keep Molly's world from spinning out of control.

ACE's in the Five Novels

The five novels each have between two to six Adverse Childhood Experiences within the plot of the story. An overview of these scores is as follows: *One Amazing Elephant* (2 ACEs: Physical Abuse and Neglect); *The Thing about Leftovers* (4 ACEs: Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse, Neglect, and Parent Separation/Divorce); *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (3 ACEs: Neglect, Parent Separation/Divorce, and Family in Jail); *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (6 ACEs: Multiple Instances of Neglect, Parent Separation/Divorce, Abuse towards Mother, Substance Abuse, Mental Illness/Suicide); *Finding Perfect* (2 ACEs: Parent Separation/Divorce and Mental Illness/Suicide).

Portrayal of Trauma

There are three overarching categories of trauma in the ACEs measure. These include Abuse, Household Challenges, and Neglect, which are analyzed below for all of the books.

Abuse

Two of the five books (*The Thing about Leftovers* and *One Amazing Elephant*) have examples of Abuse. In regards to the subcategory of abuse on the ACEs questionnaire, question numbers 1, 2, and 3 all touch on some sort of abuse towards the child by a parent or other adult

in the household. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that were either showing verbal/mental abuse i.e. the ACE questions as follows (Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?), physical abuse (Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?), or sexual abuse (Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?). Two of the five novels examined had abuse represented in some way throughout the plot of the story.

One of the novels studied had examples of verbal/mental abuse within the plot of the story. In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016), Fizzy's mother's new boyfriend, soon to be husband, proves to have a hard time adjusting to having a child in the house. Keene talks about Fizzy and her abilities to cook as though her skill is not very well-developed; he thinks her mom only believes in her because Fizzy is her daughter and he does this downtalk in front of Fizzy often. "Cecily, you don't really believe she can win, do you? She's just a kid" (p. 51). Fizzy's mother stands up for what she believes, to which Keene replies back, "Ooooooh-kay" (p. 51). Fizzy had even heard her mom and Keene through the vent where Mom is trying to convince Keene how great Fizzy is. "He said that *all* parents think their kids are smart, but if they really were, we'd have a world full of geniuses" (p. 66). Keene even goes as far as taking Fizzy's shoes and taunting her that they were his because they were not put away. "No, I found them--finders keepers," he said casually, like he was just sharing the weather report" (p. 220). The instances

within *The Thing About Leftovers* humiliated Fizzy and put her down to the point that it began to cause self-doubt of being loved throughout the book.

Two of the novels had examples of either physical abuse towards the main or secondary character. In the book *One Amazing Elephant* (High, 2017), it is written with two points of view, Lily's and Queenie Grace's. Lily visits Florida when her grandfather dies, and befriends his elephant, Queenie Grace. Lily's mother's boyfriend, Mike, is abusive towards the elephant. "He takes the cigarette from his mouth, pinches it between his fingers... "It looked like he touched the cigarette to the elephant's skin," I whisper (p. 89). Excuses are made for Mike by Truilla, Lily's mother, as to why he is aggressive and abusive throughout the story. "He had it rough. Remember, his mother pushed him down the steps? Pulled his hair and stuff? His childhood was tough" (p. 110). Mike not only burned Queenie Grace, he hit her as well. "And then Mike smacks me. I have never before been hit. I've been burned, and I've been spurred. But I've never been hit, not here" (p. 147). Queenie Grace and Lily, both, are terrified of Mike and have physical reactions such as trembling whenever he is near. Lily feels as though her mother has chosen Mike over her own well-being. If he could hurt an animal, what is to stop him from hurting her too? In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016), Fizzy's friend, Zack, lives with his grandmother after his mother ran off. Living with Grandma means chores before homework and if the chores aren't done, he's grounded. "She didn't wave back, and when Zach passed her in the doorway, she smacked him on the back of his head"(p. 197). Zack is a trouble-maker in school and gets in even worse trouble at home if the school calls home. "Does 'the speech' usually start with a smack on the head?" I asked Zach. Zach laughed. "Only when Gran's gotten a call from the school about my behavior while I was there" (p.217). Through Fizzy's inner

dialogue and thoughts, readers get the sense that this is not the only time physical abuse happens to Zach.

None of the five books examined had any examples of sexual abuse in them.

Household Challenges

All five of the books have examples of household challenges. In regards to the subcategory of household challenges on the ACEs questionnaire, question numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 all touch on some sort of household challenges the child faced in their first 18 years of life. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that were either showing divorce (Were your parents either separated or divorced), violence towards the child's mother/stepmother (Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?), alcohol abuse (Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?), mental illness in the household (Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?), and incarceration (Did a household member go to prison?). All five of the novels examined had household challenges represented in some way throughout the plot of the story.

All five of the novels examined had examples of divorce or separation within the plot of the novel. Along with divorce or separation, there was a common theme of abandonment by characters important to the main character whether it was intentional, such as divorce/separation, or unintentional, such as death. In *One Amazing Elephant* (Hunt, 2017), Lily's mother leaves Lily and her father when Lily was very young to join the circus. "The story of my mother goes

like this: I was three years old when she took off. She left me and Dad in her dust at Magic Mountain Campground..." (p. 10). Lily's grandfather dies in the beginning of the book, causing Queenie Grace, his beloved circus elephant and partner, to feel abandoned as well. In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016), divorce and separation is a very central part of the plot and problem of the story. Fizzy talks a lot about her parents' divorce in her inner thoughts. "I've been in charge of dinner--mostly--ever since my mom and dad divorced. Lots of things changer A.D. (after divorce), including my former stay-at-home mom..." (p. 6). Fizzy feels as though she is a burden to both her mom's new family and her dad's new family. "And if Mom was starting fresh, then that made me a kind of leftover, didn't it? Yes, I was a leftover from her previous attempt at a marriage and family" (p. 88). In *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2016), Perry never knew his father. The only person he has grown up with is his mother, who happens to be incarcerated. "It was all he had to give me, and all I would take from him. And you should know, Perry, he never knew about you. Several months went by before I realized you were coming" (p. 325). Perry's friend, Zoey Samuels, also has a separated family. Zoey's mom remarried Tom, who is now Zoey's step-dad. "Zoey Samuels was mad when she moved here. Mad about her parents' divorce, and mad that her stepdad was trying too hard with her and coming off like a big fake" (p. 16). In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonneblich, 2017), Maverick's mother jumps from abusive boyfriend to abusive boyfriend after his father's death in Afghanistan. "Anyway, I had seen this movie a bunch of times before in the years since I had lost my father. There had been a Glenn, a Dave, a Mike, and three Johnnies. My mom really liked mean guys named Johnny" (p. 4). Maverick and his mother struggle financially as well after his father's death. "Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn't have ever had to

worry about my mom's long string of losers. Or my mom's drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything" (p. 7). In *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016), Molly's mom and dad started their separation six months before the timing of the book. Mom, at the beginning of the story, moved to Toronto for a year-long work transfer. "I'd just turned ten, our whole house smelled like chocolate, and Mom and Dad made me a birthday scavenger hunt. That was long before their official temporary separation that started just six months before Mom fled to Toronto and our kitchen smelled like takeout all the time" (p. 19). Molly struggles with the idea that Mom is gone, wishing she was coming back, and having it just being Dad at home. "Dad drops his head into his big hands and is quiet for a very long minute. "A while back, my wife left to live in Toronto for a year. I work a lot. It's been hard on Molly" (p. 229). Molly's older sister, however, is convinced that Mom is gone for good. "When he's gone, I ask Kate what's been swimming in my brain since Mom left. 'Do you think she's ever coming back?' She stares at me 'Pinky-swear honest?' 'Pinky-swear honest' 'No'" (p. 15).

One of the five novels examined has examples of abuse towards the mother or stepmother in the plot. In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonneblich, 2017), Maverick's mother has a tendency to date abusive men and rotate through them. "Everyone could hear the shouting and the crying and the breaking glass. I mean, you couldn't not hear it. My mom was having it out with her latest loser boyfriend, Johnny Something" (p. 3). Maverick is not excluded from seeing the abuse. "His hand whipped through the air and cracked across my mother's face so hard her head smashed against the couch cushion and bounced forward again. She barely avoided crashing into the table" (pp. 4-5). Maverick's mission heading into sixth grade is to stand up for the little people, the ones who are bullied, including his mother. "I snapped and started pounding

on the thing with both fists. I pretended it was Bowen's face. Or Johnny's. Or the face of any of my mom's other abusive loser boyfriends" (p .21). Maverick, who lost his dad in the war in Afghanistan, idolized his dad. However, he gets a shock when he learns from his Aunt Cat that he wasn't always the hero he thought his dad was. "But then when he grew up and became a husband and a dad, he started acting out the same old pattern. He married a woman who drank a lot, and they got into violent fights with each other" (p. 178).

One of the five novels examined has examples of alcohol abuse in the plot. In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick's mother struggles with an addiction to alcohol throughout the whole book. "Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn't have ever had to worry about my mom's long string of losers. Or my mom's drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything" (p. 7). Maverick felt he can never count on his mom because of her drinking. "I didn't know what to do. My mom couldn't come. She didn't have a car. She was probably hungover. Or still sleeping. Or, worst of all, drunk again" (p. 45). It makes meeting friends hard. "I also started to make a friend, which hadn't happened in a long time. It was just too tricky. What if I got invited to somebody's birthday party? I would have to say no, because we couldn't afford a gift. What if the kid wanted to come over to my house, but my mom happened to be drunk that day? Or worse, what if she had a boyfriend in the apartment?" (p. 59). His mom's drinking caused safety issues for Maverick and his home. "And when I had finally gotten the guts to stand up for my mom against Johnny, she had thanked me by getting so drunk she had burned down our apartment and killed Freddy" (pp. 181-182).

Three of the five novels examined have examples of mental illness in the household in the plot of the story. In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick is

battling his own feelings and potential mental illness in the form of depression. His mother's abusive boyfriends and problematic drinking leaves Maverick feeling all alone. "I considered calling Aunt Cat, but then she would have just gotten mad at my mom for leaving me alone and working all day on a holiday. Being bored and mildly depressed was better than starting a big flare-up between the adults" (p. 95). His mother, by the end of the story, realizes she is sick with a mental disease, alcohol addiction, and enters into a rehabilitation center. "She wasn't going to come right home, though, because after some long talks with Aunt Cat and a therapist, she had decided to go straight from the hospital to a two-month alcohol-rehabilitation treatment program" (p. 182). In *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016), Molly is battling her own mental illness. At first, she doesn't have a name for it; she just feels that she is crazy. "My dad still thinks I naturally wake up early. I started setting my alarm about three months ago, when my organizing and cleaning began getting in the way. It feels like it takes me longer and longer to get ready each morning" (p. 111). Counting, organizing, and cleaning have overtaken Molly's life, and she feels that if she does not do all of these things, something bad is going to happen to her little brother, Ian. "I move on to my shirts, pants, shoes, and finally glass figurines, I organize everything and anything. I hear the clock ticking. Time passes. Is Ian all right now? He's fine. Dad said he just had a cold. But what if it's something worse? Lyme disease, EEE virus, or the bubonic plague. All those illnesses start like a normal cold" (p. 156). Molly takes control and turns to the Internet for help. "Ms. P always says, 'Knowledge is power.' I open SearchMaster and type: Am I crazy? No, delete. Be specific. Like things perfect, clean, neat. I hit Enter and hold my breath." (p. 158) In the end, Molly learns she has a mental illness called OCD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and that it runs in her family. "When I explained to Mom what

had been going on, she told me that she and Aunt Lucy thought Grammy had “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder” (p. 246). Molly’s family seeks out help for her through counseling and group therapy.

In *One Amazing Elephant* (High, 2016), Lily feels abandoned by her mother, who left Lily and her father when she was three. Lily grew up wondering why her mother would leave her own flesh and blood. When Lily was able to finally confront her mother about why she left, the answer shocked Lily. ““So,” Truilla says, “I left, and I never should have done it like that. I should have maybe tried some counseling, or at least taken you with me, but I just up and left. If I could take it back I would but it’s like a breath: here and gone. No getting it back again. I think that maybe I was depressed and I had lots of problems, and I didn’t even know what the heck I was thinking or feeling. And that’s why I just kind of left you alone with your dad, because I knew he could take care of you. I knew he would take care of you” (p. 217). Truilla knew in her heart that Lily’s father could do a better job because Truilla knew her mental illness, hinted at though never fully addressed, could not allow her to be the mother she knew her daughter deserved. “Lily,” she says, “I am so much better, especially now that you’re here. I know that I seem mean sometimes, that I seem to not care. But it’s probably my illness making me that way, bit that I am trying to make excuses. Really, I do care. I just don’t know how to show it, so sometimes it might seem like I’m being a jerk. And every day--every single minute of every single day-- is still a struggle for me.” (p. 219)

One of the five novels examined has examples of incarceration within the plot of the story. In *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2016), Perry Cook lives in a prison in a tiny Nebraska town, however he is not an inmate. His mother is. “She had served nearly

twelve years of a fifteen-year sentence” (p. 9). His mother was pregnant when she was arrested and the warden was granted custody of Perry to allow him to grow up near his mother. When Perry’s friend, Zoey Samuels, tells her stepfather, who happens to be the District Attorney, about Perry’s living situation, things take a dramatic turn. “We thought maybe your mom and Blue River would agree to let you come.” Zoey takes a breath. “Wait, wait. Are you telling me that your school friend---this boy Perry--- lives at Blue River? There is a child? Living at the prison?” (p. 76). Through a school project, Perry learns about his mother’s crimes that landed her in jail and how choices impact our future. “I know what you’ve told me. You’re in Blue River for two reasons. Because you told lies, and because your actions contributed to a death. I know you got manslaughter. Same as Big Ed,” I say” (p. 199).

Neglect

Four of the five books (*One Amazing Elephant*, *The Thing About Leftovers*, *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, and *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*) have examples of Abuse. In regards to the subcategory of neglect on the ACEs questionnaire, question numbers 4 and 5 both touch on neglect the child faced in their first 18 years of life. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that were either showing emotional neglect (Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?) or physical neglect (Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?). Four of the five novels examined have evidence of neglect within the plot.

Three of the five novels examined have evidence of emotional neglect, or the child feeling like nobody loved him/her, within the plot of the story. In *One Amazing Elephant* (High, 2017), Lily struggles with the emotional turmoil of her mother leaving her when she was young. “Sometimes I wonder how my mother could have left all these flowers, this mountain, our campground, my dad. But mostly I wonder how and why she could have left *me*. Her own flesh and blood and bones and breath” (p. 26). When Lily goes to Florida for her grandfather’s funeral, she continues to feel the emotional turmoil when reunited with her mother and the problems she feels she is causing. “So I’m sorry if me being here caused any problems for you. I never meant for that to happen” (p. 191). In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016), Fizzy feels as though nobody wants her because both of her parents are starting new families and she is just leftover. “I tried to think. “Do you want more children?” I asked. “I think I do,” Mom said, taking my hand in hers. “So I’m not enough,” I whispered as tears burned behind my eyes” (p. 85). Fizzy continues through the whole book feeling like she doesn’t belong anywhere in either of the families. “I mean, ever since my parents’ divorce, I felt like I’d lost a really important grocery bag, the one with all the important ingredients--for my life. Substitutions had then been made: new house, new neighborhood, new school, new friends, new stepmother, new stepfather, and now a new baby brother! These are all highly noticeable changes in the recipe of my life, which means they aren't good substitutions, because good substitutions aren't noticeable. But these were so noticeable, I felt like I'd been given someone else's ingredients, for someone else's life” (p. 191). Even when Fizzy wins the *Southern Living* Cook-Off, she feels as though she still is not loved and thought that by winning, she could gain more love. “When Mom came back into our room, I said “You love me more, right?” “More?” she said. “Yes, you love me more...for

winning the cook--off...right?" (p. 264). In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick feels very alone at his home while his mother is drinking or sleeping off the drunkenness. "Then I got ready for school alone in the dark. I didn't really mind. I was used to it, and when you're alone, at least nobody is bothering you" (p. 9). While the neglect in Maverick's life is more physical than emotional, the physical neglect, no doubt, has an effect on his emotional well-being.

Two of the five novels examined have evidence of physical neglect within the plot of the story. In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick lives in a dirty apartment with a drunk mother who spends more money on booze than food for the fridge. His mother, in her state, is not capable of taking care of Maverick's needs. "But--but-- I told him my mom couldn't afford to pay the gym uniform fee, and then he started screaming at me about how I had disrespected him by wearing ratty sneakers to his class. I CAN'T AFFORD NEW SNEAKERS! THAT'S THE POINT!" (p. 68). His mother jumped from job to job every few weeks, leaving not much money for food. "Mom cursed at the manager about it, which led her to getting the boot, too. So she went home and started drinking. And drinking. And drinking. It had never been so bad before. First, I used up all the money in her purse to walk down to the corner market and buy peanut butter and bread. When that ran out after a few days, I scrounged up all the change around our new apartment and got a bunch of nearly expired snack puddings that were ten for a dollar. I ate those until one of them made me throw up" (p. 82). Mom seems to be more occupied with her own needs and the needs of her abusive boyfriends than her own child's. "The last time she had gotten back together with an abusive boyfriend behind my back, she had blown a bunch of cash taking me to an amusement park, and then our electricity had gotten

turned off” (p. 100). In *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2016), Perry lives in a Nebraska prison but not as an inmate. His mother, however, is serving a 15 year sentence. Perry is technically a ward of the state and the warden is his legal guardian. Since Mom is an inmate, she does not have access to a lot of money which causes problems for Perry at school. “I lean forward and tell her, “It was mailed to me. From the state.” “The state? Oh! This is an assistance card!” She seems to get louder with each word. “You’re on assistance! That’s why it wants a code” (p. 20). Mom also cannot afford the best clothes all the time because of a limited prison income. “He was wearing one of the new back-to-school shirts she’d sent Maya Rubin to buy. It’d taken the better part of two prison paychecks, but oh, nice knit, nice fit” (p. 37).

Overall Portrayal of Trauma in Upper Elementary Literature

The first and second research questions for this study asked how trauma is portrayed in upper elementary books and what themes or events within said books portray trauma experiences that students could connect with. As a criterion for selection of the five books for analysis, it should be noted that the five of the books in this study had at least a score of 2 and up to a score of 6 on the ACEs questionnaire, meaning that there were at least two different traumatic experiences in the character’s childhood. All five of the books feature children as the main characters providing readers the opportunity to connect in some way to the character whether through the events, setting, or problem of the story.

Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students

The third research question of this study addresses how teachers can share books with adverse experiences while adhering to the sensitivity of the age level of readers. The researcher used textual evidence and quotes from each of the five novels to complete the Relatability

Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questionnaire (see Appendix C). Appendix C accounts for three evidence points to make the suggestion that this book fits the age groups it is recommended for based on characteristics of books written for that age group. The three evidence points include (1) triumph over adversity; (2) identity issues throughout the book; (3) book structure as far as first person point of view, interesting cover, intriguing dialogue, and snappy title. Triumph over adversity is added to connect the ACEs questionnaire to help students and teachers understand that trauma is found within the pages of the book and, as Markland (2013) concludes in her study the author “does reassure [readers] that trauma can be overcome; no matter how horrible the event one can heal and experience happiness...” (p. 88). This shows students and teachers that even when traumatic or adverse experiences occur in life, a person is able to triumph and overcome the adversity.

Triumph Over Adversity

All five of the novels examined have evidence of triumph over their own adversity within the plot. In *One Amazing Elephant* (High, 2017), Lily struggles with the separation of her mother and father, leaving her for the circus. Lily, near the end of the story, is finally able to share with her mother, Truilla, how hard it was for her to grow up without a mother. “You have no idea how it feels to be me,” I snap, looking her straight in the eyes. Finally speaking my mind, I say ready and strong. “I used to wish that you were dead. I actually used to wish you died, because that might be better than knowing that you didn’t want me” (p. 212). Truilla, never admitting or owning up to her problems, opens up to Lily, not to make excuses, but to hopefully help her understand. “So,” Truilla says, “I left, and I never should have done it like that. I should have maybe tried some counseling, or at least taken you with me, but I just up and left. If I could take

it back I would but it's like a breath: here and gone. No getting it back again. I think that maybe I was depressed and I had lots of problems, and I didn't even know what the heck I was thinking or feeling. And that's why I just kind of left you alone with your dad, because I knew he could take care of you. I knew he would take care of you" (p. 217). Lily finally gets the answers she has wanted and is able to connect with her mother more in a mother-daughter relationship. "And then I make the first move: I stand up and go to Truilla and I draw her into a big strong hug that feels a lot like forgiveness" (p. 219). Lily's family also had to overcome the trauma caused by Mike to Queenie Grace, the elephant. Truilla, realizing his faults, decides to dump him. "Mike never cared about me," she says. "All he cares about is money. Money and the stuff you can buy with it. I'm so glad that I told him to beat it. To get lost and never come back" (p. 211).

In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016), Fizzy is coping with the outcomes of her parents' divorce and feeling loved or wanted by either of her new families. After winning the *Southern Living* cook-off, Fizzy opens up to her mother about her feelings of being unwanted. Then she [Mom] said, "I guess you are a kind of leftover, Fizzy, but you're certainly not spaghetti. If you're a leftover, then you're lasagna. You get better every day. You learn every day--sometimes by making mistakes--and you get better" (p. 274). Fizzy learns to forgive her parents for moving on and even begins to forgive her new stepparents. "I decided to let it pass. I wasn't going to think about it anymore. I really wasn't. Because family doesn't keep score, which is why I also tore all Suzanne-and Keene-related lists out of my journal and threw them away--because they're family" (p. 278).

In *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016), Molly's parents separated six months prior to the start of the story. Molly has a false sense of hope, hoping that her mother will return if she wins her

middle school poetry slam. Under all the pressure of her mother leaving and her father working all the time, Molly starts cleaning and organizing, and it turns into counting, and thoughts of harm happening to her brother if she does not do all of the compulsive thoughts she feels she needs to do to keep him safe. Molly researches and comes across Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Her father comforts Molly through this difficult time. “I promise you that we’ll figure out what’s happening. Maybe it’s OCD, maybe it’s something else. Either way, you’re not alone” (p. 252). Molly receives help from a doctor and even joins a group for kids who suffer from OCD. “OCD is the doubting disease.” Then she looked into that place inside me that most people don’t see and said, “It’s okay to be scared but you don’t have to be the victim of your brain. I’m going to give you what you need to fight the doubt and win. It’ll be hard at first, but eventually it’ll get easier” (p. 270).

In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick’s mother drinks too much, has abusive boyfriends, and they barely have enough money for food after his mother spends the money on alcohol. Maverick wants to be a hero to those weaker than him, both at school and at home. He wants to protect his mom from all the “bad” in their lives and for her to be a real mother. “That night, Mom cooked dinner. It was incredible! Okay, the dinner itself was just spaghetti with sauce from a jar, plus premade garlic bread. But it was incredible that my mother had held it together all day, assembled a set of matching ingredients, cooked everything at the same time, and then actually sat down with me to eat. The TV wasn’t even on. She was drinking water” (p. 168). However, with Maverick’s life, whatever good happens, there always seems to be bad right around the corner. Mom’s abusive boyfriend comes to win her back, and Maverick has finally had enough. “I squirmed my way between them, and said, “Hi me, Johnny.”

My voice cracked, but it didn't matter. Johnny looked shocked. "What are you talking about, kid?" "You think you can do whatever you want to my mom and I can't stop you because I'm small, right? But if you touch either of us again, I'm calling the police. And if you hit me, it's assaulting a child" (p. 171). Mom has many challenges to overcome and decides to take control of her life as well. "She wasn't going to come right home, though, because after some long talks with Aunt Cat and a therapist, she had decided to go straight from the hospital to a two-month alcohol-rehabilitation treatment program" (p. 182). Maverick, finally, is in a stable home where he is adequately taken care of. "Life with Aunt Cat was stable. I had real food to eat...I also had brand-new clothing that I had actually gotten to pick out at real stores. Aunt Cat asked me about school everyday and remembered everything I told her" (p. 189).

In *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2016), Perry is living in a prison with his mother while she serves her sentence and is separated from his mother when the district attorney decides to step in and remove him from the facility. While he is living with his friend Zoey Samuels and her family, whose stepfather ends up being the district attorney that removed him, Perry is working on his mother's case, testifying for her to get parole. "Please don't hand my mom a down letter today. She has served a long time for her confession. That's the truest thing I know to say. She wants to make us a home on the outside now. Don't deny her parole just because I grew up at Blue River. I'm okay. I've always been okay" (p. 352). When Perry's mother is granted her parole, they move out into their very own home, their first, just like they planned. "I love this. Zoey Samuels is at my house" (p. 372).

Identity Issues

Four of the five books have evidence of identity issues where the character feels not like oneself or feeling as if he/she does not have a place or belonging. According to Rocklin (2001), the main character in this age group should reflect the readers and their self-absorption. “These [books] reflect the young narrators’ discovery of the power and beauty of language, their self-absorption, as well as allowing an exploration of identity issues” (p. 10).

In *One Amazing Elephant*, Lily believes that there is something wrong with her, why else would her mother leave her at three years old? “Sometimes I wonder how my mother could have left all these flowers, this mountain, our campground, my dad. But mostly I wonder how and why she could have left me. Her own flesh and blood and bones and breath” (p. 26). Lily soon learns that her mother leaving had nothing to do with Lily; it had everything to do with her mother being mentally ill and not being able to provide the care she deserved. “So it was just...you?” I ask Trullia. “Just that you weren’t ...right?” (p. 218).

In *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2016) Fizzy is convinced that nobody wants her now that both her mom and dad are moving on to new relationships. “And if Mom was starting fresh, then that made me a kind of leftover, didn’t it? Yes, I was a leftover from her previous attempt at marriage and family” (p. 88). Fizzy feels forgotten in the transition from old to new. “Of course, there was still a little knot holding them together, ME! I would always be the knot that tied two people who really, really wanted to be untied. When I realized this, I wondered how they could even love me” (p. 129). She is even convinced that if she wins the *Southern Living* cook-off, she will somehow be loved more because she can be labeled a winner. “After that, I tried to imagine what it would feel like if I lost: I figured things would be the same as they were

before, only with another layer of disappointment--to me” (p. 258). Fizzy, in the end, realizes she is holding onto the past rather than giving these new relationships a try, and this changes her whole outlook on the situation.

In *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016), Molly faces many difficulties in her life stemming from the fallout of her mother taking a new job in a different country for the year. Molly is also worrying about how she is coming off to her peers due to her cleaning and organizing tendencies. “The duo thinks I’m like them. They don’t know that Perfect Molly is a fake. They don’t know that she doesn’t even exist” (p. 47). Molly is trying to figure out what is going on inside of her brain, why she does the things she does. “Ms. P always says, ‘Knowledge is power.’ I open SearchMaster and type: Am I crazy? No, delete. Be specific. Like things perfect clean neat. I hit Enter and hold my breath” (p. 158). She finds out it could potentially be Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and that makes her fret even more. “Now what? Part of me celebrates that I don’t have the thing that makes kids lick stuff, but then my happy dance ends. Because if it’s not OCD, then what’s wrong with me? Is this just some weird version of me?” (p. 168). At the last round of the poetry slam, Molly has a complete breakdown and feels even more self-conscious in front of her peers. “The tears pour down my face. I think of the slam. Now everyone knows I’m crazy. Everyone hates me. I hate me” (p. 233).

In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonnenblick, 2017), Maverick has viewed his mother being abused over and over again and worries he will become just like them. “I thought about this for a while, and then got up the courage to say, “What if I’m like my dad? What if I think I’m a hero, but really I’m going to be a bad boyfriend? What if I’m going to be an abuser? What if I’m already like that, but I just don’t know it yet?”(p. 179). He also feels responsible for

his mother's drinking getting out of control, which can be a common, yet heavy, burden to bear as a child. "This is all my fault. I should have told you right from the beginning about Mom's drinking. I didn't want you to know because...well, you kept saying I could come and stay with you if I ever needed to. But I didn't want to ditch my mother. And I didn't want you to think less of her, and I didn't want you to think I couldn't handle my own problems. But now... maybe if I had told you, you could have gotten her some help or something. I messed everything up. Last night Mom got in a big fight with Johnny, and I dared him to hit me. So my mom kicked him out. And I thought everything was great for a little while. But then she said this called for a celebration. And she started drinking. And drinking. And then she stumbled into her bedroom and passed out. I checked in on her in the morning, and everything looked fine. She didn't have any cigarettes or matches near her or anything. I swear!" (p. 176).

Book Structure Elements

Books written for upper elementary students commonly have a specific structure or features about them to draw readers to want to read them and to connect with their own personal lives. Rocklin (2001) shared characteristics that upper elementary/middle grade books feature to appeal to students of this developmental age group. This study, using Rocklin's suggestions, focused on book structure elements such as being written from a first person point of view to be able to know the thoughts and inner dialogue of the main character, immediate appeal such as "an interesting cover, a snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first sentence or two" (p. 10). All five of the novels the researched examined were written from the main character's point of view, which would be first person point of view. All of them have interesting or intriguing titles and colorful covers that would interest the readers to draw them into wanting to read the book.

However, none of the books have dialogue in the first two sentences that would potentially draw students in.

Overall Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students

The third research question of this study addresses how teachers can share books with adverse experiences while adhering to the sensitivity of the age level of readers. Following the recommendations and conclusions from both Markland (2013) and Rocklin (2001), the researcher found that all five books addressed trauma and triumph over the traumatic adversity in the main character's life. Triumph over adversity pushes the reader to see that in many situations in the book, the characters are able to find the good in the world, rather than dwell on what is going wrong. For example, in *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, Maverick's life is full of adversity, between his mother's continuous return to an abusive boyfriend, her drinking problem, her neglect towards the household and Maverick himself, and his father dying in Afghanistan. Through all this adversity, Maverick chooses to try and be something better for the weak, those who are picked on at school, those who need somebody to stand up for them. He wants to be a hero. Overcoming the adversity of everything else going wrong in his life, Maverick is able to stay kind, decent, and down to earth, even to those who bully him. Four of the five books also addressed various identity issues and self-absorption within the main character's personal relationships, thoughts, and feelings. Identity issues throughout the books included not feeling loved, like Fizzy in *The Thing About Leftovers* where she felt that her mother and father didn't want her anymore after their divorce and starting a new family. She feels the only way she will be loved by either side is to win a cooking contest. While winning the contest was pretty amazing for Fizzy, she overcame her unloved feelings through the power of communication with

both parents. Fizzy overcame her identity issues, which were also the adversity in the story, showing readers that characters go through the same issues about feeling loved and trying to find their place in the world just like them. The book structure for all five of the books examined are written in a first person point of view that is common among novels written for this developmental age group, highlighting the self-absorption component even more. Through first-person dialogue, the readers are able to see the identity issues forming because most of them are not voiced but are, however, shown through interpersonal dialogue within themselves. Having characters that act or think how the reader does helps create that connection even more between the reader and the book, characters, plot, or setting.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Trauma is inevitable for many of the students served in school buildings. The purpose of this literary qualitative content analysis is to focus on a set of upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. The research questions this study aimed to address included the following: How is trauma portrayed in upper elementary books, what are the themes or events in upper elementary books that portray trauma experiences that students could connect with, and how can teachers share the books while using text structures within the books that help to provide sensitivity for the age level of readers. This study utilized qualitative content analysis to focus on five upper elementary texts and analyze them with a trauma-informed lens by identifying ACES scores for each book along with identifying what trauma experience or coping this book could assist with. All five novels had at least an ACE score of two, meaning that there were at least two adverse experiences (or trauma) represented in the book. After comparing the novels to the Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students, adapted from Markland (2013) and Rocklin (2001), all five books show triumph over the adversity in the plot of the story, four of the five novels have identity or self-absorption issues, and all five novels are written in first person point of view allowing readers to know the main character's thoughts and feelings throughout the book. The researcher concludes that (1) trauma is extensive in that there are multiple characters in each book who experience or who have memories of trauma so that all five books represent both windows and

mirrors for building empathy, and (2) triumph over trauma is portrayed realistically through characters who experience life beyond the trauma and find love, hope, and/or insight.

Conclusions

The following conclusions provide key overarching concepts about the findings of this study. They are (1) trauma is more extensive than I had expected in that there are multiple characters in each book who experience or who have memories of trauma so that all five books represent both windows and mirrors for building empathy for trauma, and (2) triumph over trauma is exemplified in all five books not in a didactic sense, but rather realistically showing characters who experience life beyond the trauma and find love, hope, and/or insight.

Extensive Portrayal of Trauma in Upper Elementary Fiction

One conclusion, this researcher found is that traumatic experiences do exist in children's literature and are even more extensive than expected in that there are multiple characters in each book, each who experience or who have memories of a past experience of trauma. As such, all five books provide content for building understanding of oneself as well as empathy for others through these windows and mirrors. Specifically all five have at least two different Adverse Childhood Experiences within the plot. This correlates with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2015) findings that "more than two-thirds of children reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16" (para. 1). The portrayal of trauma in children's literature can be seen by readers with the hope that it is a mirror, reflecting their life, or a window, allowing them to see into a potential peer's world. This could also help readers feel not alone or isolated due to the traumatic experience; this way, they know they are not alone and feel at ease dealing with a life crisis, as referenced in Lowe's (2009) study. Seeing the adversity of traumatic

experiences within the pages of the book and having the first-person point of view allow readers to experience the trauma themselves, acting as they are the main character in the book, hopefully creating that sense of empathy or sense of resemblance to the reader, showing him/her that they are not alone in the experiences of their life.

Through the novels from this study, readers might identify their own personal situations or potentially recognize a peer's situation, or build empathy towards individuals in the situation because they are more knowledgeable about the world around them. These five novels are able to provide both mirrors and windows to the students to build self-reflection and empathy towards others, proving to be a unique take on a reading experience. Readers may view these books as a mirror for their own lives or as a mirror due to the writing technique of having a first-person narrator, living through the adverse experiences. For example, students may see themselves living in a neglectful home where food is not readily available at all times, as in *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, but readers can also experience what it is like to live in a neglectful home by reading through the experience of the narrator, Maverick. Students may also view these books as a window, not seeing themselves in the adverse experiences, but able to take a look into what life could potentially be like for a friend, peer, or classmate, which in turn builds the empathy skills for the reader. For example, a student who lives in a two-parent household may not understand the struggles of a single-parent household, however, by reading many of the books in this study (i.e. *One Amazing Elephant*, *The Thing About Leftovers*, *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, *Finding Perfect*, and *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*), students have the opportunity to gain knowledge of the struggles of one income and build empathy for those in their life who may have the same struggles. While these books and the evaluations are not meant to diagnose

students or their situations, it does give students the opportunity to connect with the text personally or open their eyes to what occurs in the world.

Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students Show Triumph and Hope

All five of the novels analyzed showed triumph over the main character's adverse experiences within the plot and they do so not in a didactic sense, but rather realistically beyond the trauma, there is also love, hope, and insight. This is important for readers to see that trauma doesn't last forever; that they are capable of overcoming their current situation. This idea is mentioned in Markland's 2013 study as she concludes the author "does reassure [readers] that trauma can be overcome; no matter how horrible the event one can heal and experience happiness..." (p. 88). Readers often pick books similar to their own life, looking for solutions to their problems in some cases. By portraying triumph over the main characters' struggles, this can give readers hope.

Four of the five novels examined showed instances of self-absorption or identity issues among the main character's feelings, thoughts, or relationships. It is important for the reader to view themselves within the pages of the book. As Rocklin (2001) mentions, readers in this developmental stage are self-absorbed and are consumed with what others think about them. Only *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2016) did not feature any identity issues with the main character.

All five novels were written in first person point of view, allowing the reader to immerse themselves and feel as though they are the character. Internal dialogue, feelings, and thoughts are a feature throughout the books, showing the reader what goes on in their brains is normal for somebody their age. They can connect with the characters with not just their situations, but with

their thoughts and feelings too. Readers can connect and know they are not alone; children tend to be able to approach and handle difficult topics through books because books feel safe to them. Lowe (2009) stated that books can be “an avenue of expression and an outlet where children can activate prior knowledge and relate with the feelings of characters in a book” (p. 3).

Through the novels in this study, readers are able to see adverse experiences, perhaps similar to their own experiences, and see, through the first-person perspective of the main character that the adversity can be overcome. For instance, in *One Amazing Elephant*, Lilly does not remember much about her mother and harbors deep resentment towards her for leaving. Lilly does not understand her mother’s reasoning for leaving until she is able to overcome her fear at the end of the book and have a tough conversation with her mother. Readers may struggle with the loss or feeling of abandonment from a parent. While a conversation or answer is potentially not always possible, readers can see that there can be triumph over their own adversities.

Recommendations

Throughout this study, the researcher was aiming to answer how teachers can use these books to connect with students who have potentially experienced trauma while still being sensitive to the child’s age. The researcher is in no way recommending that a teacher singles a student or group of students out based on indicators of a possible traumatic incident in the student’s life. However, the researcher feels there are ways for teachers and librarians to use the analyzed materials, and more books with similar themes or subject headings, to teach all students, using the book as a window, about the world and how to be more empathetic to those around us.

The ACEs study was conducted in 1999, 20 years prior to the conclusion of the current study. The researcher feels that there potentially could be questions or indicators added to the survey to make it more inclusive, as far as including more traumatic or adverse scenarios that children could be potentially facing in the world. For example, one of the questions on the questionnaire is “Were your parents ever separated or divorced?” There are situations, even in the books analyzed, that one parent was never known to the child, one of the parents abandoned the child, or one of the parents is deceased. Further research could be done by widening the questionnaire or updating it to more modern questions affecting students of the current times, the researcher feels that more books would show adverse experiences and, in turn, connect with more students as they see themselves and their lives represented in books in their classrooms and libraries.

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APPENDIX A

INITIAL BOOK LIST AND FINAL BOOK SAMPLE

(Titles are the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice nominees. Bolded titles were final

books analyzed for this study. Refer to page 24 for definitions of Core and Supplementary)

Applegate, K. (2017). *Wishtree*. Feiwel & Friends.

Arnold, A. (2018). *A boy called Bat*. Walden Pond Press.

Bauer, J. (2017). *Soar*. Puffin Books.

Bildner, P. (2016). *A whole new ballgame: A Rip and Red book*. Square Fish.

Brown, P. (2016). *The wild robot*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Bundy, T. (2017). *Walking with Miss Millie*. Nancy Paulsen Books.

Connor, L. (2016). *All rise for the honorable Perry T. Cook*. Katherine Tegen Books. --Core

Currie, L. (2017). *The peculiar incident on shady street*. Aladdin.

Gibbs, S. (2015). *Space case*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Gonzalez, A. (2016). *Moving target*. Scholastic Press.

Green, J. (2017). *Left out*. HarperCollins.

High, L. (2017). *One amazing elephant*. HarperCollins. --not listed in database

Korman, G. (2017). *Restart*. Scholastic Press.

Luper, E. (2016). *Key hunters: The mysterious moonstone*. Scholastic Press.

McDonough, Y. (2016). *The bicycle spy*. Scholastic Press.

Mlynosk, S. (2016). *Upside-down magic*. Scholastic, Inc.

Patterson, J. (2018). *Word of mouse*. jimmy patterson.

Payne, C. (2017). *The thing about leftovers*. Puffin Books.-- Supplementary

Sonnenblick, J. (2017). *The secret sheriff of sixth grade*. Scholastic Press.--Supplementary

Swartz, E. (2016). *Finding perfect*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.-- Supplementary

APPENDIX B: Book Evaluation Chart

Title:

Author:

Subject Matter:

Summary:

Researcher Identification of ACES

ACES Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACES characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did a household member go to prison?	<input type="radio"/> Present (1 point) <input type="radio"/> Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>

ACE Score: _____

APPENDIX C: RELATABILITY FOR UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS QUESTIONS

Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions

(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)

Triumph over adversity	<i>Evidence:</i>
Identity issues	<i>Evidence:</i>
Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences	<i>Evidence:</i>

APPENDIX D BOOK EVALUATION NOTES

Title: One Amazing Elephant

Author: Linda Oatman High

Subject Matter: Grief, elephants, human-animal relationships, circus

Summary:

Twelve-year-old Lily Pruitt loves her grandparents, but she doesn't love the circus- and the circus is their life. She's perfectly happy to stay with her father, away from her neglectful mother and her grandfather's elephant, Queenie Grace. Queenie Grace, a circus elephant, is happy to have Grandpa Bill as her keeper. She has had cruel keepers in the past, but Bill is her friend and treats her with love and respect. She doesn't quite understand Lily, who is so afraid of her. Then Grandpa Bill dies, and both Lily and Queenie Grace are devastated. When Lily travels to Florida for the funeral, she keeps her distance from the elephant. But the two are mourning the same man- and form a bond born from loss. And when Queenie Grace faces danger, Lily must come up with a plan to help save her friend.

Researcher Identification of ACES

ACEs Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACEs characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence: <i>"He takes the cigarette from his mouth, pinches it between his fingers.... 'It looked like he touched the cigarette to the elephant's skin,' I whisper" (p. 89).</i> <i>"'Look what your boyfriend did!' Grandma says. She points to the burned spot on Queenie Grace. 'With a cigarette, for heaven's sake!'" (p.110)</i> <i>"'Well I told you about his childhood and all that,' says Truilla. 'He had it rough. Remember, his mother pushed him down the steps? Pulled his hair and stuff? His childhood was tough.' "</i> (p.110). <i>"And then Mike smacks me. I have never before been hit. I've been burned, and I've been spurred. But I've never been hit, not here"</i> (p.147).
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:
Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence: <i>"Sometimes I wonder how my mother could have left all these flowers, this mountain, our campground, my dad. But mostly I wonder how and why she could have left me. Her own flesh and blood and bones and breath." (p.26)</i> <i>"'Nice to make Christmas fun for a kid,' Mike says. 'I never had that. Nobody ever cared enough.' "</i> (p.69)

		“So I’m sorry if me being here caused any problems for you. I never meant for that to happen.” (p.191)
Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence: “And so they are visiting, along with my long-lost mother, Trullia Lee Pruitt, the Girl on the Flying Trapeze.” (p.3) “The story of my mother goes like this: I was three years old when she took off. She left me and Dad in her dust at Magic Mountain Campground...” (p.10)
Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:
Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:
Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence: “So,” Truilla says, “I left, and I never should have done it like that. I should have maybe tried some counseling, or at least taken you with me, but I just up and left. If I could take it back I would but it’s like a breath: here and gone. No getting it back again. I think that maybe I was depressed and I had lots of problems, and I didn’t even know what the heck I was thinking or feeling. And that’s why I just kind of left you alone with your dad, because I knew he could take care of you. I knew he would take care of you.” (p.217) “Lily,” she says, “I am so much better, especially now that you’re here. I know that I seem mean sometimes, that I seem to not care. But it’s probably my illness making me that way, bit that I am trying to make excuses. Really, I do care. I just don’t know how to show it, so sometimes it might seem like I’m being a jerk. And every day--every single minute of every single day-- is still a struggle for me.” (p.219)
Did a household member go to prison?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	Evidence:

ACE Score: 4

Title: The Thing About Leftovers

Author: C.C. Payne

Subject Matter: cooking, family life-southern states, stepfamilies, southern states, family life, family-marriage and divorce, social issues- emotions and feelings

Summary: Fizzy is a good Southern girl who’s been taught not to make a fuss or say anything that might hurt other people’s feelings. But this is becoming difficult since her parents’ divorce. Wary of her too perfect stepmom and her

mom's neatfreak boyfriend, Fizzy often feels like she might explode over all their new rules. Working to win the *Southern Living* Cook-Off provides Fizzy with a much-needed distraction. But some cooking analogies are hard to face, like the thing about leftovers: nobody's ever excited over them- and she's become the "leftover" kif from a marriage that both parents want to forget. But Fizzy hopes that with the right recipe and the right ingredients, she can prove leftovers can be delicious.

Researcher Identification of ACEs

ACEs Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACEs characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
<p>Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> "‘Cecily, you don’t really believe she can win the contest, do you? She’s just a kid.’ ‘Of course I believe she can win,’ Mom said. Keene snorted.” (p.51)</p> <p>“ ‘I once heard Keene ask Mom if she loves me more than she loves him.’” (p.67)</p> <p>“‘From now on, any shoes that aren’t put away are mine.’ ‘You took my shoes?’ ‘No, I found them-finders keepers.’” (p.220)</p>
<p>Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> “She didn’t wave back, and when Zach passed her in the doorway, she smacked him on the back of his head.”(p.197)</p> <p>“Does ‘the speech’ usually start with a smack on the head?” I asked Zach. Zach laughed. “Only when Gran’s gotten a call from the school about my behavior while I was there” (p.217)</p>
<p>Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> “I tried to think. ‘Do you want more children?’ I asked. ‘I think I do,’ Mom said, taking my hand in hers. ‘So I’m not enough,’ I whispered as tears burned behind my eyes.” (p.85)</p> <p>“‘What if I get sick or something while you and Mom are away, and I need you to come home?’ ... ‘Oh no, you don’t,’ he said, smiling like we were sharing some of inside joke. ‘We’re not going to miss a minute of our honeymoon, not a minute, not for anything.’”(p.127)</p> <p>“Of course, there was still a little knot holding them together: ME! I would always be the knot that tied two people who really, really wanted to be untied. When I realized this, I wondered how they could even love me.” (p.129).</p> <p>“Shhh--because it would hurt Keene to see pictures of me as another man’s wife--knowing and seeing are two different things.’ Does it hurt him to see you as the mother of another man’s child? I wondered. (p.142)</p>

"I spent the rest of the afternoon and most of the evening, too, in my room, having a little pity party for myself: no mail from Southern Living; a whole decade of my life and my family erased like the big fat mistake it was and a house that was barely recognizable as my home. Well, at least my room still felt like mine." (p.143)

"My heart ached for Zach. It must've been awful not having anyone who wanted him, even temporarily. And I knew how hard it was to live with one stranger, let alone a house full of strangers." (p.170)

"Mom laughed some more. 'We met in the middle, Fizzy. There are things of mine that Keene isn't fond of either.' Like me? I wondered, but didn't say it." (p.180)

"I'd wanted her to feel at home and when she did, it gave me hope-hope that maybe I'd feel at home someday, too." (p.190)

"I mean, ever since my parents' divorce, I felt like I'd lost a really important grocery bag, the one with all the important ingredients--for my life. Substitutions had then been made: new house, new neighborhood, new school, new friends, new stepmother, new stepfather, and now a new baby brother! These are all highly noticeable changes in the recipe of my life, which means they aren't good substitutions, because good substitutions aren't noticeable. But these were so noticeable, I felt like I'd been given someone else's ingredients, for someone else's life."(p.191)

"After a few minutes I asked, 'Do you ever feel uncomfortable in your house?' 'Uncomfortable how?' 'I don't know, like you're intruding or...interrupting or...like maybe you're not supposed to be there.'" (p.192)

"I nodded my understanding: You were too busy with your perfect new family to be bothered with your old leftovers. Yep, got it." (p.205)

"By the time we arrived home, I understood that I truly was a guest in my own home. That the roof over my head wasn't really mine, and that the man who considered it his was unrelated to me, not responsible for me, had no obligation to me, and didn't love me--he'd said so himself." (p.209)

"'You don't understand,' I said. 'He doesn't want me,' 'Do you want him?' I lowered my eyes. 'No, ma'am.'" (p.228)

I wondered, What does it say about you when even your own family doesn't want you anymore? I felt sure it indicated that there's something seriously, severely wrong with you." (p.233)

"When Mom came back into our room, I said 'You love me more, right?' 'More?' she said. 'Yes, you love me more now...for winning the cook--off...right?'" (p.264)

"I threw my arms out at my sides and screamed. 'Because even my own family doesn't want me!'" (p.265)

"'Now,' Mom said. 'May I ask why you think we don't want you?' I shrugged. 'I guess I'm not pretty enough or smart enough or good enough--or maybe I just make too many mistakes--that's probably it.'" (p.266)

<p>Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Were your parents ever separated or divorced?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>"I've been in charge of dinner--mostly--ever since my mom and dad divorced. Lots of things changer A.D. (after divorce), including my former stay-at-home mom..." (p.6)</i></p> <p><i>"The sickness started when Mom and I moved to Lush Valley last May--right after school let out, and after Mom and Dad's divorce was final. Since Dad got the house in the divorce, we had to move." (p. 16)</i></p> <p><i>"And even though my parents had lived apart for more than a year by then, and even though they didn't seem to like each other--at all-- I still told myself that they'd eventually get back together. And then I'd get to go home. I even believed it. I believed it right up until my dad got remarried last August..." (p.17)</i></p> <p><i>"I always forget something when I pack for my dad's house." (p. 26)</i></p> <p><i>"'They went out to dinner,' I said. 'Without you? Fizzy, the whole point of your dad's weekend is for him to spend time with you.'" (p.32)</i></p> <p><i>"I probably would've told you that you aren't my mother and you shouldn't go around pretending you are. '...Back when Dad and Suzanne had first gotten married, I'd worried a lot about whether or not Suzanne would like me.'" (p.40)</i></p> <p><i>"I never get to choose, never! I didn't choose you and I didn't choose Dad. I didn't choose for you to get divorced. I didn't choose who I was going to live with. I didn't choose Lush Valley or our town house or my school, or even piano lessons, and I surely didn't choose Keene Adams to be my new stepfather.'" (p.82)</i></p> <p><i>"And if Mom was starting fresh, then that made me a kind of leftover, didn't it? Yes, I was a leftover from her previous attempt at a marriage and family." (p.88)</i></p> <p><i>"'So your parents don't live together?' Mrs. Hoshi said, looking concerned, as she handed me a steaming mug. 'No, ma'am,' I said. 'But everything's okay.' 'Are they married?' 'Um...not to each other,' I said." (p.98)</i></p> <p><i>"Dad didn't know Keene. And he didn't want anything to do with Mom, just like she didn't want anything to do with him. That's why they'd divorced."(p.128)</i></p> <p><i>"I mean, ever since my parents' divorce, I felt like I'd lost a really important grocery bag, the one with all the important ingredients--for my life. Substitutions had then been made: new house, new neighborhood, new school, new friends, new stepmother, new stepfather, and now a new baby brother! These are all highly noticeable changes in the recipe of my life, which means they aren't good substitutions, because good substitutions aren't noticeable. But these were so noticeable, I felt like I'd been given someone else's ingredients, for someone else's life."(p.191)</i></p>

		<p><i>“As far as I was concerned, it was very sweet of me to accept a man that wasn’t my father and let him live with me!” (p.208)</i></p> <p><i>“It was the last Christmas morning we would all be together, but I’d had no idea and it showed...” (p.211)</i></p> <p><i>“‘Well that’s how it is when your parents get remarried,’ I informed her. ‘You want your stepparents to go home after a while, or you want to go home, but nobody ever gets to go home again.’” (p. 223)</i></p>
<p>Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did a household member go to prison?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>

ACE Score: 4

Title: All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook

Author: Leslie Connor

Subject Matter: Prisoners, prisons, mothers & sons, foster home care, children of women prisoners, foster children-Nebraska, perseverance (ethics)

Summary: Eleven-year-old Perry was born and raised by his mom at the Blue River Co-ed Correctional Facility in tiny Surprise, Nebraska. His mom is a resident on Cell Block C, and so far Warden Daugherty has made it possible for them to be together. That is, until a new district attorney discovers the truth - and Perry is removed from the facility and forced into a foster home. When Perry moves to the outside world, he feels trapped. Desperate to be reunited with his mom, Perry goes on a quest for answers about her past crime. As he gets closer to the truth, he will discover that love makes people resilient no matter where they come from...but can he find a way to tell everyone what home truly means?

Researcher Identification of ACES

ACES Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACES characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i> "I lean forward and tell her, 'It was mailed to me. From the state.' 'The state? Oh! This is an assistance card!' She seems to get louder with each word. 'You're on assistance! That's why it wants a code.'" (p. 20) "He was wearing one of the new back-to-school shirts she'd sent Maya Rubin to buy. It'd taken the better part of two prison paychecks, but oh, nice knit, nice fit." (p.37)
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i> "Zoey Samuels was mad when she moved here. Mad about her parents' divorce, and mad that her stepdad was trying too hard with her and

		<p><i>coming off like a big fake.” (p.16)</i></p> <p><i>“It was all he had to give me, and all I would take from him. And you should know, Perry, he never knew about you. Several months went by before I realized you were coming.”(p.325)</i></p>
<p>Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did a household member go to prison?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“She had served nearly twelve years of a fifteen-year sentence.” (p.9)</i></p> <p><i>“Rumors might be whispered behind the slender back of a boy who called a correctional facility home.” (p.11)</i></p> <p><i>“Hmm. You know what else Brian said? He said he’d rather be dead than live at a prison.” (p.27)</i></p> <p><i>“He was wearing one of the new back-to-school shirts she’d sent Maya Rubin to buy. It’d taken the better part of two prison paychecks, but oh, nice knit, nice fit.” (p.37)</i></p> <p><i>“We thought maybe your mom and Blue River would agree to let you come.’ Zoey takes a breath. “Wait, wait. Are you telling me that your school friend---this boy Perry--- lives at Blue River? There is a child? Living at the prison?” (p.76)</i></p> <p><i>“I will need a list, and Mom and I will need a corner of the Blue River Common to ourselves. That’s a tall order. Saturday is the busiest visiting day.” (p.90)</i></p> <p><i>“Blue River is a minimum-security facility. I am in favor of prison reform through the courts, and by that I mean reduced sentencing for the nonviolent.” (p.158)</i></p> <p><i>“I know what you’ve told me. You’re in Blue River for two reasons. Because you told lies, and because your actions contributed to a death. I know you got manslaughter. Same as Big Ed,’ I say.” (p.199)</i></p> <p><i>“She shakes her head sadly. ‘I just got the message this morning. It seems that the topic becomes sensitive because of...’ ‘Because of Blue River,’ I say. ‘Because it’s a prison.’” (p.284)</i></p>

ACE Score: 3

Title: The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade

Author: Jordan Sonnenblick

Subject Matter: Mothers & sons, children of alcoholics, dysfunctional families, middle schools, bullying, friendship, alcoholism, schools

Summary: In sixth grade, bad things can happen to good kids. Bullies will find your weakness and jump on it. Teachers will say you did something wrong when you really didn't mean to do anything wrong. The kids who joke the loudest can drown out the quieter, nicer kids. Maverick wants to change all that. One of the last things his father left him was a toy sheriff's badge, back when Maverick was little and his family wasn't in trouble. Now he likes to carry it around to remind himself of his dad--and also to remind himself to make school a better place for everyone...even if that's a hard thing to do.

Researcher Identification of ACES

ACEs Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACEs characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i> "Then I got ready for school alone in the dark. I didn't really mind. I was used to it, and when you're alone, at least nobody is bothering you." (p. 9)
Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i> "There was a bottle on the coffee table. It was three-quarters empty--of course." (p.4) "Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn't have ever had to worry about my mom's long string of losers. Or my mom's drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything." (p.7) "I didn't know what to do. My mom couldn't come. She didn't have a car. She was probably hungover. Or still sleeping. Or, worst of all, drunk again." (p.45) "I would tell my mom about the trouble I'd gotten in. I didn't say that my plan was to wait until she'd had a bunch of drinks and was about to pass out." (p.54)

“Mom came home a few hours later, happily convinced that hard times were over. She was always doing this. Every time a guy dumped her, or we got kicked out of an apartment, or she lost a job, she would somehow find a shred of good news. Then she would cling to it and ignore every other bit of reality, in order to convince herself that this time our lives were just about to turn around.” (p.56)

“I also started to make a friend, which hadn’t happened in a long time. It was just too tricky. What if I got invited to somebody’s birthday party? I would have to say no, because we couldn’t afford a gift. What if the kid wanted to come over to my house, but my mom happened to be drunk that day? Or worse, what if she had a boyfriend in the apartment?” (p.59)

“Anyway, there was a ten-dollar uniform fee. I couldn’t remember the last time I had held a ten-dollar bill in my hand, and if I did somehow find myself in possession of one, I certainly wasn’t going to blow it on this monstrosity. However, my gym teacher, Mr. Cavallero, informed us on the first day, right after he handed me my too-large ‘extra small’ uniform, that if we didn’t pay the fee soon, we could fail gym.” (p.63)

“‘FALCONER!’ he shoulder in my face. ‘I’m right here, sir.’ ‘Do you have ten dollars today?’ My face burning, I stared down at my feet. I don’t ever have ten dollars, I thought. And since today is part of ever, I am going to have to say no, I don’t freaking have ten dollars. ‘Um, no, sir. But here’s the thing. My mom just switched jobs, and money is kind of tight at home right now, so---’”(p.64)

“‘Then what happened?’ ‘Mr. Cavallero kicked me out of class for being poor!’” (p.67)

“‘But--but-- I told him my mom couldn’t afford to pay the gym uniform fee, and then he started screaming at me about how I had disrespected him by wearing ratty sneakers to his class. I CAN’T AFFORD NEW SNEAKERS! THAT’S THE POINT!’” (p.68)

“Then he put one hand on my shoulder and shouted, ‘I GOT MR. OVERBYE’S EMAIL ABOUT YOUR FAMILY’S MONEY PROBLEMS. DON’T WORRY ABOUT THE UNIFORM FEE! WE HAVE A SPECIAL FUND OF CASES LIKE YOURS! YOU SHOULD HAVE JUST COME AND TALKED TO ME ABOUT IT!’ (p.71)

“What was I supposed to put down? At the end of June, we got kicked out of our apartment because Mom lost her ten millionth job, so we had to pack our meager belongings in garbage bags and move across town by bus? Or maybe The best part of my summer was the middle of July, when my mother worked at a diner for nine days. One of the cooks thought she was pretty, so he made me hot breakfast for nine days in a row! Then he got caught stealing eggs and lost his job, so that was the end of the best part of my summer.” (p.81)

“Mom cursed at the manager about it, which led her to getting the boot, too. So she went home and started drinking. And drinking. And drinking. It had never been so bad before. First, I used up all the money in her purse to walk down to the corner market and buy peanut butter and bread. When that ran out after a few days, I scrounged up all the change around our new apartment and got a bunch of nearly expired snack puddings that were ten for a dollar. I ate those until one of them made me throw up.” (p.82)

"Nothing got my mother up off the couch until the eighth day, when she ran out of alcohol. I was in the bathroom, brushing my teeth, when I heard her shuffling around. At first, I got excited, because I thought this meant the binge was over, and she was ready to start getting dressed, looking for work, finding food, and taking care of me again." (p.82)

"My heart sank. I had seen this before. Mom was going to sell off some of our stuff so she could buy more booze." (p.83)

"I had left her a note, but I suspected she would still be out cold when I got home. Just another fun weekend of quality time at the Falconer estate." (p.89)

"The last time she had gotten back together with an abusive boyfriend behind my back, she had blown a bunch of cash taking me to an amusement park, and then our electricity had gotten turned off." (p.100)

"But my mom followed, right after she poured herself a drink that was not apple juice." (p.102)

"I lay there in the dark for a long time, trying to count the number of times Mom got up, walked to the kitchen, and clinked ice cubes into her glass. I lost track at four." (p.104)

"She insisted on coming into the apartment, which I didn't like. What if Mom had left it a mess? What if there were bottles of booze all over the place? What if it reeked of cigarettes and last night's garbage?" (p.121)

"Mom didn't complain about the cost of any of it, but I felt really awful, because i knew the amount would just get added to her credit card debt." (p.162)

"'And, well, he always answers the phone. I mean, she's...um...awake and stuff.' My mother's eyes filled up with tears. 'You mean, you know she won't be in some kind of ... embarrassing condition when you need her.'" (p.164)

"'Maverick, the fire started when your mother fell asleep with a lit cigarette. Apparently, the cigarette fell from her hand and landed on a pile of wood chips.'" (p.174)

"'This is all my fault. I should have told you right from the beginning about Mom's drinking. I didn't want you to know because...well, you kept saying I could come and stay with you if I ever needed to. But I didn't want to ditch my mother. And I didn't want you to think less of her, and I didn't want you to think I couldn't handle my own problems. But now... maybe if I had told you, you could have gotten her some help or something. I messed everything up. Last night Mom got in a big fight with Johnny, and I dared him to hit me. So my mom kicked him out. And I thought everything was great for a little while. But then she said this called for a celebration. And she started drinking. And drinking. And then she stumbled into her bedroom and passed out. I checked in on her in the morning, and everything looked fine. She didn't have any cigarettes or matches near her or anything. I swear!'" (p.176)

		<p><i>“But then when he grew up and became a husband and a dad, he started acting out the same old pattern. He married a woman who drank a lot, and they got into violent fights with each other.” (p.178)</i></p> <p><i>“And when I had finally gotten the guts to stand up for my mom against Johnny, she had thanked me by getting so drunk she had burned down our apartment and killed Freddy.” (p.181-182)</i></p>
<p>Were your parents ever separated or divorced?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“Anyway, I had seen this movie a bunch of times before in the years since I had lost my father. There had been a Glenn, a Dave, a Mike, and three Johnnies. My mom <u>really</u> liked mean guys named Johnny.” (p.4)</i></p> <p><i>“Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn’t have ever had to worry about my mom’s long string of losers. Or my mom’s drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything.” (p.7)</i></p>
<p>Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone could hear the shouting and the crying and the breaking glass. I mean, you couldn’t <u>not</u> hear it. My mom was having it out with her latest loser boyfriend, Johnny Something.” (p.3)</i></p> <p><i>“Mom was sitting on the couch, looking down into her lap, clutching at her left eye, and sobbing. Johnny was leaning over her, shouting so loud that I could see the spit flying out of his mouth into her hair.” (p.3-4)</i></p> <p><i>“Johnny’s words were so awful that I started forgetting them even as they went into my ears. Anyway, I had seen this movie a bunch of times before in the years since I had lost my father. There had been a Glenn, a Dave, a Mike, and three Johnnies. My mom <u>really</u> liked mean guys named Johnny.” (p.4)</i></p> <p><i>“His hand whipped through the air and cracked across my mother’s face so hard her head smashed against the couch cushion and bounced forward again. She barely avoided crashing into the table.” (p.4-5)</i></p> <p><i>“After Johnny left, I wrapped up some ice in a dish towel for my mother’s face--her nose and left eye were already pretty badly swollen--and helped her wash up.” (p.6)</i></p> <p><i>“I snapped and started pounding on the thing with both fists. I pretended it was Bowen’s face. Or Johnny’s. Or the face of any of my mom’s other abusive loser boyfriends.” (p.21)</i></p> <p><i>“She would either have to walk three miles or take two different buses to reach the school. I knew she didn’t have money for a taxi. Plus, her face probably looked awful; the swelling was always much worse the day after.” (p.45)</i></p> <p><i>“I mean, where do you direct a question like this? Hey, my mother’s abusive ex-boyfriend just brought over a tacky fake Christmas tree. Do I let him in? Should I offer him a beer? Am I supposed to hang out and watch football with him for six hours until Mom gets here?” (p.97)</i></p>

		<p><i>“The last time she had gotten back together with an abusive boyfriend behind my back, she had blown a bunch of cash taking me to an amusement park, and then our electricity had gotten turned off.” (p.100)</i></p> <p><i>But her expression had already told me, and soon the angry murmurs that cut through the sound of the running sink water confirme it. Johnny was in the apartment. I turned the faucet on harder so I wouldn’t have to listen to my mom and Johnny arguing.” (p.169)</i></p> <p><i>“Get your freaking hands off me!’ my mother shrieked” (p.170)</i></p> <p><i>“You mean, my mom dated loser guys like this before she met my dad? But how would you even know that? You didn;t know her then. And besides, after what she had with my dad, how could she go back to guys like Johnny?’” (p.177)</i></p> <p><i>“But then when he grew up and became a husband and a dad, he started acting out the same old pattern. He married a woman who drank a lot, and they got into violent fights with each other.”” (p.178)</i></p> <p><i>“Some people who have been beaten or abused, like my mother, spend the rest of their lives trying to be nice to every bully they meet, thinking the next one won’t turn and start swinging at them.” (p.191)</i></p>
<p>Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“There was a bottle on the coffee table. It was three-quarters empty--of course.” (p.4)</i></p> <p><i>“Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn’t have ever had to worry about my mom’s long string of losers. Or my mom’s drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything.” (p.7)</i></p> <p><i>“I didn’t know what to do. My mom couldn’t come. She didn’t have a car. She was probably hungover. Or still sleeping. Or, worst of all, drunk again.” (p.45)</i></p> <p><i>“She hardly even drank anything; she just splashed the last dregs of the previous night’s bottle into her share of the sample artificial fruit punch.” (p. 57)</i></p> <p><i>“I also started to make a friend, which hadn’t happened in a long time. It was just too tricky. What if I got invited to somebody’s birthday party? I would have to say no, because we couldn’t afford a gift. What if the kid wanted to come over to my house, but my mom happened to be drunk that day? Or worse, what if she had a boyfriend in the apartment?” (p.59)</i></p> <p><i>“Mom cursed at the manager about it, which led her to getting the boot, too. So she went home and started drinking. And drinking. And drinking. It had never been so bad before.” (p.82)</i></p> <p><i>“Nothing got my mother up off the couch until the eighth day, when she ran out of alcohol. I was in the bathroom, brushing my teeth, when I heard her shuffling around. At first, I got excited, because I thought this meant the binge was over, and she was ready to start getting dressed, looking for work, finding food, and taking care of me again.” (p.82)</i></p>

		<p><i>“My heart sank. I had seen this before. Mom was going to sell off some of our stuff so she could buy more booze.” (p.83)</i></p> <p><i>“I had left her a note, but I suspected she would still be out cold when I got home. Just another fun weekend of quality time at the Falconer estate.” (p.89)</i></p> <p><i>“But my mom followed, right after she poured herself a drink that was <u>not</u> apple juice.” (p.102)</i></p> <p><i>“I lay there in the dark for a long time, trying to count the number of times Mom got up, walked to the kitchen, and clinked ice cubes into her glass. I lost track at four.” (p.104)</i></p> <p><i>“She insisted on coming into the apartment, which I didn’t like. What if Mom had left it a mess? What if there were bottles of booze all over the place? What if it reeked of cigarettes and last night’s garbage?”(p.121)</i></p> <p><i>“This is all my fault. I should have told you right from the beginning about Mom’s drinking. I didn’t want you to know because...well, you kept saying I could come and stay with you if I ever needed to. But I didn’t want to ditch my mother. And I didn’t want you to think less of her, and I didn’t want you to think I couldn’t handle my own problems. But now... maybe if I had told you, you could have gotten her some help or something. I messed everything up. Last night Mom got in a big fight with Johnny, and I dared him to hit me. So my mom kicked him out. And I thought everything was great for a little while. But then she said this called for a celebration. And she started drinking. And drinking. And then she stumbled into her bedroom and passed out. I checked in on her in the morning, and everything looked fine. She didn’t have any cigarettes or matches near her or anything. I swear!” (p.176)</i></p> <p><i>“But then when he grew up and became a husband and a dad, he started acting out the same old pattern. He married a woman who drank a lot, and they got into violent fights with each other.” (p.178)</i></p> <p><i>“And when I had finally gotten the guts to stand up for my mom against Johnny, she had thanked me by getting so drunk she had burned down our apartment and killed Freddy.” (p.181-182)</i></p> <p><i>“She wasn’t going to come right home, though, because after some long talks with Aunt Cat and a therapist, she had decided to go straight from the hospital to a two-month alcohol-rehabilitation treatment program.” (p.182)</i></p>
<p>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“I considered calling Aunt Cat, but then she would have just gotten mad at my mom for leaving me alone and working all day on a holiday. Being bored and mildly depressed was better than starting a big flare-up between the adults.” (p.95)</i></p> <p><i>“She wasn’t going to come right home, though, because after some long talks with Aunt Cat and a therapist, she had decided to go straight from the hospital to a two-month alcohol-rehabilitation treatment program.” (p.182)</i></p>

Did a household member go to prison?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>
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ACE Score: 6

Title: Finding Perfect

Author: Elly Swartz

Subject Matter: Obsessive-compulsive disorder, emotional problems of children

Summary: To twelve-year-old Molly Nathans, perfect is the number four, the tip of a newly sharpened No. 2 pencil, a pad of criss white paper, her neatly aligned glass animal figures. What's not perfect is Molly's mother leaving the family to take a faraway job with the promise of returning in one year. What if one year turns into two years turns into forever? So Molly hatches a plan to bring her mother home: winning the Lakeville Middle School Poetry Slam Contest. The winner is honored at a fancy banquet. If Molly wins, her mother will hate to come home for the celebration. Right? But as time passes, writing and reciting slam poetry become harder as new habits appear, and counting, cleaning, and organizing no longer are enough to keep Molly's world from spinning out of control.

Researcher Identification of ACES

ACES Questions (CDC, 2019)	Is the ACES characteristic present in main/secondary characters?	Evidence from text
<p>Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p>
<p>Were your parents ever separated or divorced?</p>	<p>Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"He doesn't need to know that we miss Mom's laugh, her bad sense of direction, her lasagna. It's already too hard for him. It's been three weeks since she drove out of the driveway in the back of a cab and he still can't sleep at night." (p.15)</i> <i>"When he's gone, I ask Kate what's been swimming in my brain</i></p>

		<p>since Mom left. ‘Do you think she’s ever coming back?’ She stares at me ‘Pinky-swear honest?’ ‘Pinky-swear honest’ ‘No’” (p.15)</p> <p>“I hear Mom’s voice promising me she’ll only be gone for one year. ‘But she swore she was coming back. That this was temporary,’ I say. ‘Like their separation?’” (p.16)</p> <p>“I’d just turned ten, our whole house smelled like chocolate, and Mom and Dad made me a birthday scavenger hunt. That was long before their official temporary separation that started just six months before Mom fled to Toronto and our kitchen smelled like takeout all the time.” (p.19)</p> <p>“‘Aren’t you going to eat?’ When Mom and Dad were Mom <u>and</u> Dad, he’d skip meals for a deadline, but that still left one parent sitting at the dinner table.” (p.80)</p> <p>“‘She said the separation from Dad was temporary,’ Kate argues. ‘It is. What’s your point?’ ‘Moving to Canada seems pretty permanent.’” (p.121)</p> <p>“Dad drops his head into his big hands and is quiet for a very long minute. ‘A while back, my wife left to live in Toronto for a year. I work a lot. It’s been hard on Molly.’” (p.229)</p>
<p>Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p>Evidence:</p>
<p>Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p>Evidence:</p>
<p>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?</p>	<p>Present (1 point)</p> <p>Not Present (0 points)</p>	<p>Evidence:</p> <p>“My dad still thinks I naturally wake up early. I started setting my alarm about three months ago, when my organizing and cleaning began getting in the way. It feels like it takes me longer and longer to get ready each morning.”(p.111)</p> <p>“Things are getting worse. I’m losing control. I have to tell someone. Today.” (p,116)</p> <p>“As we cross the street, the school comes into view, and Hannah navigates around a muddy puddle and ends up standing on my left side. I wish she hadn’t done that. I wish she knew. That. Nothing. Works. On. The. Left.” (p.127)</p> <p>“‘I don’t even remember,’ I say. Lost my nerve. Too many signs screaming, Don’t Tell! She’ll think I’m crazy and weird and never want to hangout with me. No one will want to be with me. I’ll be the girl that everyone avoids. I’ll be <u>that</u> girl.” (p.131)</p> <p>I feel my face turn brick red. I know what I’m doing. I didn’t</p>

miss the class. I walked by it on purpose. Next time I'll count by fours. Fours are better. They're made up of two twos. The square is sixteen and the square root is two." (p.134)

"A drop of sweat slides off my forehead and lands on my desk. Not now. Come on. Get it together. Wipe the sweat. Fix the paper. Count 68, 72, 76, 80. Take the quiz. Be normal." (p. 137-138)

"I move on to my shirts, pants, shoes, and finally glass figurines, I organize everything and anything. I hear the clock ticking. Time passes. Is Ian all right now? He's fine. Dad said he just had a cold. But what if it's something worse? Lyme disease, EEE virus, or the bubonic plague. All those illnesses start like a normal cold." (p.156)

"Ms. P always says, 'Knowledge is power.' I open SearchMaster and type: Am I crazy? No, delete. Be specific. Like things perfect clean neat. I hit Enter and hold my breath." (p.158)

"I discover 2,310,000 results have popped up from my search. 'Do 'Neat Freaks' have OCD?' '11 things Messy People Will Never Understand About Neat Freaks.' 'International OCD Foundation-5 Things OCD Is Not.' '14 Beautiful and Perfect Gifts for the Neat Freak in Your Life.' 'Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder-Kids Health.'" (p. 161)

"The numbers tumble and then go quiet. Neat Freak, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. I remember when I went over to Brudgett's house one time and she laughed at me when I wiped off the table four times. 'You're so OCD. That's what your obit is going to say.'" (p.161)

"I move to the top of the OCD Foundation page, to where it says 'OCD in Kids,' and click. The page opens with a message in big letters across the top: 'There is Hope.' Not likely. Then it asks, 'So what is it, really?' If I knew the answer to that question, I wouldn't be on this stupid website." (p.161)

"Fewer yeses. That has to mean something. Right? I read on. It says if I have these thoughts, I likely also do the compulsive stuff. I look at that list. Sude, I do some of those things, but not all of them. I mean, who doesn't wash their hands? And how am I supposed to know how much is too much?" (p.162)

"I read and search and read. One in every two hundred kids has OCD. At least, if I had OCD, I wouldn't be alone. For now, though, my confusion lands on the only decision it can understand. I made a list and have fewer yeses. I should be relieved, but I'm not. Because now I don't know what I am. Maybe just crazy and by myself." (p.163)

"For school, we have to find a thing--you know, a disorder that's hereditary. And I, um, found this one called OCD, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. And.. What are you doing? YOU already made a list. Counted. You don't have it. Stop. Talking." (p.166)

"Hannah hugs me. Super close. She stares at me too long. Is my

crazy showing?” (p.178)

“I’m so tired. Last night was an unrelenting march of irrational fears that Ian was going to die in his sleep. EEE. West Nile. Some unknown and unnamed virus. Part of me knew he was just sleeping, but the other part of me checked on him eight times throughout the night. Quietly, I count under my breath so the constant worry that I need to check on Ian goes away.” (p.208)

“8,12,16. Sorry, Hannah. Please forgive me. Ian needs me to count.” (p.211)

“In my head the numbers spill. 132, 136. Crowding my every thought. 140, 144. I am frozen in space, unable to move. 148, 152. On the right, the right, always the right. 156, 160. I line, I straighten, I tuck, I clean. 164, 168. But it’s not enough. 172, 176. The numbers come, they flood, they pour. 180,184. No normal thoughts anymore. 188, 192.” (p.219)

“‘If I stop, bad things will happen.’ ‘Stop what?’ she asks, her voice like a soft blanket meant to keep me safe and warm. ‘Counting,’ I whisper. Then I say the numbers aloud, ‘164, 168, 172, 176.’ My wounds are open now.” (p.224)

“I’m worried about Ian. If Dad is here, who is with Ian? What if he stops breathing and non one’s there to notice? What if he needs to go to the hospital and no one can drive him?” (p.225)

“‘While I’m not a doctor, it’s my belief your daughter may be suffering from anxiety or severe stress,’ says Ms. P.” (p.229)

“‘Ian!’ I yell again. Anger and worry compete for my attention. 644, 648, 652, 656. My glass figurines are crooked, cock-eyed, knocked off. Everything is out of order.” (p.233)

“‘I’m crazy, Ian. Not hurt, just nuts.’” (p.236)

“‘No, I really am crazy.’ There’s no stopping me now. ‘The slam was just part of it. I’ve been counting by four under my breath since you walked into the room. I can only have someone walk on my right side, the left is bad-always. I brush my hair and my teeth in sections four times each and if I’m not sure I did it right, I need to start all over again. I wash my hands so much they’re cracking. My glass animals need to be aligned with my ruler. My homework’s done sometimes four times until it’s finished with no mistakes, smudges, or eraser marks. Each morning, I sharpen and organize my pencils. I could go on, but by the look on your faces, I think you get the picture.’” (p.242)

“When I explained to Mom what had been going on, she told me that she and Aunt Lucy thought Grammy had Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.” (p.246)

“‘I promise you that we’ll figure out what’s happening. Maybe it’s OCD, maybe it’s something else. Either way, you’re not alone.’” (p.252)

“‘I can’t. I have to fix my room before I leave or it won’t be right. Nothing will be right,’ I’m crying. It’s too much—the worry, the perfection, the counting.” (p.256)

Did a household member go to prison?	Present (1 point) Not Present (0 points)	<i>Evidence:</i>

ACE Score: 2

Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions

(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)

Book Title: One Amazing Elephant (High, 2017)

<p>Triumph over adversity *Lily struggles with the separation of her mother and father along with mom leaving for the circus *Mike, Mom's new boyfriend, is abusive towards one of the main characters, Queenie Grace the elephant</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"I guess she's tired, like super tired. Stressed, too, I guess." "Don't make excuses for her, honey," says my grandmother. "She needs to face her own mistakes." (p.201)</i></p> <p><i>"In a way, I'm glad I came. I learned to love an elephant, and I made a new best friend who's really cool. I got to spend some time with my grandma, and I figured out that Trullia will never change." (p. 207)</i></p> <p><i>"Mike never cared about me," she says. "All he cares about is money. Money and the stuff you can buy with it. I'm so glad that I told him to beat it. To get lost and never come back." (p.211)</i></p> <p><i>"You have no idea how it feels to be me," I snap, looking her straight in the eyes. Finally speaking my mind, I say ready and strong. "I used to wish that you were dead. I actually used to wish you died, because that might be better than knowing that you didn't want me." (p.212)</i></p> <p><i>"So," Truilla says, "I left, and I never should have done it like that. I should have maybe tried some counseling, or at least taken you with me, but I just up and left. If I could take it back I would but it's like a breath: here and gone. No getting it back again. I think that maybe I was depressed and I had lots of problems, and I didn't even know what the heck I was thinking or feeling. And that's why I just kind of left you alone with your dad, because I knew he could take care of you. I knew he would take care of you." (p.217)</i></p> <p><i>"And then I make the first move: I stand up and go to Truilla and I draw her into a big strong hug that feels a lot like forgiveness." (p.219)</i></p> <p><i>"And then I whisper one word, under my breath, just for me: "Mom." (p.254)</i></p>
<p>Identity issues</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"The 'freaks' are a big attraction for this little circus. Sometimes I wonder if I'll be a 'freak' too, on account of already being over five feet seven inches tall, and being related to the Giant." (p. 10)</i></p> <p><i>"One day, I hope Truillia will explain. I want her to explain everything, like how and why she left us, and I'm going to ask her to explain what we ever did to force her to run away like that." (p.24)</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes I wonder how my mother could have left all these flowers, this mountain, our campground, my dad. But mostly I wonder how and why she could have left me. Her own flesh and blood and bones and breath." (p.26)</i></p> <p><i>"So it was just...you?" I ask Trullia. "Just that you weren't...right?" (p.218)</i></p>
<p>Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>This book is written in first person from two different characters' points of view- Lily and Queenie Grace.</i> <i>Cover has a picture of both main characters on the front. The cover- draws people in with the elephant.</i> <i>The title also draws students in with the wonder "Why is this elephant an amazing elephant?"</i></p>

Relatability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions
(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)
Book Title: The Thing About Leftovers (Payne, 2016)

<p>Triumph over adversity *Fizzy's parents are divorced and she is struggling with feelings of being wanted by either new family.</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>"I took a deep breath and said, "I knew you didn't think I could do it, so I had to prove you wrong," (p.262)</i></p> <p><i>"I sat on the bed, thinking things over. For the first time, I understood that sometimes, someone doubting you is as helpful as someone believing in you. I didn't know that before." (p.263)</i></p> <p><i>"But you aren't compromising with me, Mom. I used to cook dinner all the time, and now I hardly ever get to. I used to watch TV with you, and now I never do--now you watch with Keene. I used to have lots of time with you, but now I never have any time with you." (p.271)</i></p> <p><i>"Mom smiled. "Of course you do, because that's what families do." (p.273)</i></p> <p><i>Then she said, "I guess you are a kind of leftover, Fizzy, but you're certainly not spaghetti. If you're a leftover, then you're lasagna. You get better every day. You learn every day--sometimes by making mistakes--and you get better." (p.274)</i></p> <p><i>"Did Suzanne love me a little bit? Even though I wasn't hers? I thought she might, and not in a way that was forced--by Dad. I thought Suzanne might actually love me, all on her own, just because she found me...lovable." (p.275)</i></p> <p><i>"I decided to let it pass. I wasn't going to think about it anymore. I really wasn't. Because family doesn't keep score, which is why I also tore all Suzanne-and Keene- related lists out of my journal and threw them away--because they're family." (p.278)</i></p>
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Identity issues	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“And if Mom was starting fresh, then that made me a kind of leftover, didn’t it? Yes, I was a leftover from her previous attempt at marriage and family.” (p.88)</i></p> <p><i>“Mrs. Adams? Who was Mrs. Adams? That’s when I realized my mom was Mrs. Adams. We didn;t even have the same last name anymore!” (p.121)</i></p> <p><i>“I felt like a stranger to them, somebody on the outside looking in --a pitiful face pressed against the glass--instead of part of their family. But I hadn’t really expected to be part of the Adams family, had I?” (p.121)</i></p> <p><i>“I felt invisible.... Might as well get used to it, I told myself, because somehow I knew I’d always end up in the backseat with Mr. and Mrs. Adams” (p.124)</i></p> <p><i>“Of course, there was still a little knot holding them together, ME! I would always be the knot that tied two people who really, really wanted to be untied. When I realized this, I wondered how they could even love me.” (p.129)</i></p> <p><i>“Does it hurt him to see you as the mother of another man’s child? I wondered. But I didn’t ask. I figured I already knew the answer because I already knew that I wasn’t exactly a cherished member of the Adams family. I’d known that I was Russo leftovers long before now.” (p.142)</i></p> <p><i>“Perfect, I thought. Unlike me. That explains a lot.” (p.199)</i></p> <p><i>“Suddenly, I felt like I was looking at a picture of dead people. And I sort of was, because none of us were the same people we’d been that day, especially not me.” (p.211)</i></p> <p><i>“Dad and Suzanne didn’t share happy glances either--at least, not over me-- maybe over Baby Robert. Apparently leftovers just aren’t that great or cute or funny or smart.” (p.211)</i></p> <p><i>“No amount of cleaning or cooking or studying would change the fact that there was something wrong with me. My family knew it. Mrs. Ludwig knew it. Mrs. Warsaw knew it. Even my former best friend, Olivia Moore, probably knew it. And now I knew it, too. What I didn’t know what it was or how to fix it.” (p.242)</i></p> <p><i>“After that, I tried to imagine what it would feel like if I lost: I figured things would be the same as they were before, only with another layer of disappointment--to me.” (p.258)</i></p> <p><i>“Now,” Mom said. “May I ask why you think we don’t want you?” I shrugged. “I guess I’m not pretty enough or smart enough or good enough --or maybe I just make too many mistakes-- that’s probably it.” (p.266)</i></p> <p><i>“Am I really that terrible?” I asked. “So terrible that people just can’t imagine letting me hang around?” (p.268)</i></p> <p><i>“I knew for sure then that I was still me, so I said, “I can’t believe the cook-off is over and I’m still just plain old freckle-faced Fizzy Russo, the leftover kid...who is nobody special at all!” (p.273)</i></p>
Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>The book is written from a first-person point of view, written through Fizzy’s eyes. The author includes multiple instances of internal dialogue and thoughts that go on inside Fizzy’s mind.</i></p> <p><i>The cover is bright and has a fork with spaghetti on it, leading readers to wonder what the book is really about. Same with the title--just by looking at the cover and title, a reader might not know that this book is about family issues.</i></p>

Reliability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions
(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)
All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook (Connor, 2016)

<p>Triumph over adversity *Perry is living in a prison with his mother while she serves her sentence and is separated from his mother when the district attorney decides to step in.</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"Please don't hand my mom a down letter today. She has served a long time for her confession. That's the truest thing I know to say. She wants to make us a home on the outside now. Don't deny her parole just because I grew up at Blue River. I'm okay. I've always been okay." (p.352)</i> <i>"The spokeswoman says, "Ms. Cook, we are sorry..." Now my eyes fly open. My jiggling knee freezes. "...sorry for the many weeks of delay. This board wishes you and your son the very best. Your parole is granted." (p.356)</i> <i>"I love this. Zoey Samuels is at my house." (p.372)</i></p>
<p>Identity issues</p>	<p><i>Evidence: NA</i></p>
<p>Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>The book is written from Perry's point of view (first-person). Readers get to read his thoughts and see actions unfold through his eyes. Readers may be intrigued by the cover, especially if they know what "all rise for the honorable.. " means.</i></p>

Reliability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions
(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)
The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade (Sonnenblick, 2017)

<p>Triumph over adversity *Maverick is dealing with his mother's drinking, his mother's abusive boyfriends, and not having enough money for decent food and clothes.</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"At some point, I must have dozed off, because somehow, I found myself in bed, and Mom was sitting on the edge, stroking my hair and saying, "Maverick. Maverick. You never needed a badge to be my hero." (p.165)</i></p> <p><i>"That night, Mom cooked dinner. It was incredible! Okay, the dinner itself was just spaghetti with sauce from a jar, plus premade garlic bread. But it was incredible that my mother had held it together all day, assembled a set of matching ingredients, cooked everything at the same time, and then actually sat down with me to eat. The TV wasn't even on. She was drinking water." (p.168)</i></p> <p><i>"I squirmed my way between them, and said, "Hi me, Johnny." My voice cracked, but it didn't matter. Johnny looked shocked. "What are you talking about, kid?" "You think you can do whatever you want to my mom and I can't stop you because I'm small, right? But if you touch either of us again, I'm calling the police. And if you hit me, it's assaulting a child." (p.171)</i></p> <p><i>"She wasn't going to come right home, though, because after some long talks with Aunt Cat and a therapist, she had decided to go straight from the hospital to a two-month alcohol-rehabilitation treatment program." (p.182)</i></p> <p><i>"Life with Aunt Cat was stable. I had real food to eat...I also had brand-new clothing that I had actually gotten to pick out at real stores. Aunt Cat asked me about school everyday and remembered everything I told her." (p.189)</i></p>
<p>Identity issues</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>"Because I have the worst weakness of all: I'm weak." (p.2)</i></p> <p><i>"This is all my fault. I should have told you right from the beginning about Mom's drinking. I didn't want you to know because...well, you kept saying I could come and stay with you if I ever needed to. But I didn't want to ditch my mother. And I didn't want you to think less of her, and I didn't want you to think I couldn't handle my own problems. But now... maybe if I had told you, you could have gotten her some help or something. I messed everything up. Last night Mom got in a big fight with Johnny, and I dared him to hit me. So my mom kicked him out. And I thought everything was great for a little while. But then she said this called for a celebration. And she started drinking. And drinking. And then she stumbled into her bedroom and passed out. I checked in on her in the morning, and everything looked fine. She didn't have any cigarettes or matches near her or anything. I swear!" (p.176)</i></p> <p><i>"I thought about this for a while, and then got up the courage to say, "What if I'm like my dad? What if I think I'm a hero, but really I'm going to be a bad boyfriend? What if I'm going to be an abuser? What if I'm already like that, but I just don't know it yet?"(p.179)</i></p> <p><i>"It was time to give up, throw in the towel, and accept my destiny as a plain old shrimpy loser." (p.182)</i></p>
<p>Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i> <i>This book is written from a first person's point of view- Maverick's. The reader gets to read his inner thoughts about what is occurring in his life. The cover and title could be interesting to some readers because it is around their age level (6th grade) and it is referencing a secret sheriff. The first chapter is titled "Why I am the World's Lamest Hero".</i></p>

Reliability Characteristics for Upper Elementary Students questions
(Adapted from Markland, 2013; Rocklin, 2001)
Book Title: Finding Perfect (Swartz, 2016)

<p>Triumph over adversity *Molly struggles with her mother leaving for a new job in another country and also dealing with a mental illness.</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“I promise you that we’ll figure out what’s happening. Maybe it’s OCD, maybe it’s something else. Either way, you’re not alone.” (p.252)</i></p> <p><i>“OCD is the doubting disease.” Then she looked into that place inside me that most people don’t see and said, “It’s okay to be scared but you don’t have to be the victim of your brain. I’m going to give you what you need to fight the doubt and win. It’ll be hard at first, but eventually it’ll get easier.” (p.270)</i></p> <p><i>“A few weeks ago, we decided to write an article together on children and OCD. In addition to all things grammar, I was in charge of the interviews.” (p.274)</i></p> <p><i>“I walk into the OCD group meeting and see Parker Ray by the chips at the table near the windows.” (p.286)</i></p>
<p>Identity issues</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>“The duo thinks I’m like them. They don’t know that Perfect Molly is a fake. They don’t know that she doesn’t even exist.” (p.47)</i></p> <p><i>“What bad things? The sane part of me wants to know. The mixed-up part of me doesn’t answer.” (p.74)</i></p> <p><i>“Later, I promise.” The annoyance in her voice is less hidden now. I’ll still be crazy then.” (p.105)</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t even remember,” I say. Lost my nerve. Too many signs screaming, Don’t Tell! She’ll think I’m crazy and weird and never want to hang out with me. No one will want to be with me. I’ll be the girl everyone avoids.” (p.131)</i></p> <p><i>“I want to be normal.” (p.145)</i></p> <p><i>“Hannah’s not the fake. I am, I say to no one.” (p.147)</i></p> <p><i>“I rub my fingers across the sea glass and wish my life was different. I wish I was different.” (p.155)</i></p> <p><i>“Ms. P always says, ‘Knowledge is power.’ I open SearchMaster and type: Am I crazy? No, delete. Be specific. Like things perfect clean neat. I hit Enter and hold my breath.” (p.158)</i></p> <p><i>“Is my list wrong? Are there kids like me? Do they hide like me? Confusion floats to the front of my brain. Again.” (p.165)</i></p> <p><i>“Now what? Part of me celebrates that I don’t have the thing that makes kids lick stuff, but then my happy dance ends. Because if it’s not OCD, then what’s wrong with me? Is this just some weird version of me? (p.168)</i></p> <p><i>“Is my crazy showing?” (p.178)</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe. So just ask her,” I say like a take-charge kind of girl who knows how to fix a problem. A girl nothing like the real me.” (p. 181)</i></p> <p><i>“As for the other thing, Fake Molly obviously needs to sharpen her acting skills.” (p.192)</i></p> <p><i>“The tears pour down my face. I think of the slam. Now everyone knows I’m crazy. Everyone hates me. I hate me.” (p.233)</i></p>
<p>Book Structure Elements (i.e.:Written in first-person OR internal dialogue present, interesting cover, snappy title, or intriguing dialogue in the first two sentences</p>	<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <p><i>This book is written from a first-person point of view-Molly’s. It shows her thoughts written in italics. The cover is interesting with the words being the objects that are aligned perfectly. The tagline is “Keeping It Together, Inch by Inch.”</i></p>