DEATH AND DYING IN ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION:
May 2014

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ABSTRACT

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Death and dying is a very sensitive subject and must be treated as such. Since literature may be first time adolescents may encounter death, it is important to understand what adolescents are learning from reading certain literature. Depending on how books portray death, some literature may be considered more valid than others. Some literature may be portraying death as accurately as possible, while other books may teach or convey the wrong message. Kubler-Ross is a renowned researcher famous for the Five Stages of Grief that include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The purpose of this study was to see if adolescent literature aligned with the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross. Seven adolescent literature books were selected and analyzed. The books had to be a work of fiction, written towards adolescents, and published after 2000. The books were read and examples of each stage of grief were recorded on a data chart. After reading, conclusions and recommendations were made.

After analyzing the results, it was concluded that all books included the stages of anger and acceptance. Anger was generally represented by yelling, breaking objects, or using curse words. Acceptance was generally found towards the end of the book, after the characters had found what they were searching for. Bargaining was the stage that was least likely represented in the literature.

It is recommended that teachers, counselors, or parents read the same literature as adolescents to know what they are learning from literature about death and dying. If these books are being used as bibliotherapy, if each stage is not represented, it is recommended that the stages that are not represented are supplemented with additional material or conversation.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank all of my favorite authors who first got me involved in my love for literature. Thank you to the numerous authors who allow me to connect and live vicariously through others. Ending a great book is always a disappointment to me, but I’m grateful for the experience it allowed me to have.

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Cindy Hendricks for her insight, patience, and guidance along the way. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Trinka Messenheimer and Dr. Penny Soboleski for their dedication to their time and support throughout this process.

I also cannot forget my friends and family who stood by me through the writing and research of this. Thank you all for all your kind words, encouragement, and support. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for standing by me.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Death is a natural process of life. It tends to cause two reactions: grief or the act of being nonchalant. The following three scenarios help explain how death can affect one’s life or how it has no influence at all. In the first scenario, Susie is a seven-year-old girl who won a goldfish at a carnival. She stares at the goldfish in the plastic bag the whole way home. She places the fish into a bowl and watches as the fish swims until it is time for bed. In the morning when she wakes, she notices the fish is not swimming happily as he was before she went to bed. Instead, he is floating at the top of the bowl. Concerned, she asks her parents what is wrong with her fish. It is now up to her parents to explain what happened to her goldfish. Since nothing like this has happened in Susie’s life before and due to her age, her parents have to make a decision on what to tell Susie about what happened to her fish.

The second scenario includes Joey who is a 13-year-old boy who is responsible for completing chores at home to receive his allowance. One of his chores is to water the plants. This is a difficult task for Joey because he often forgets because the plant does not show immediate signs of death, and looks healthy and alive. He only remembers once the plants start to wilt and die. Unfortunately, Joey has neglected one plant for too long, and it has died. When Joey’s mother comes home from work, he tells her the plant has died and she throws it out. The death of the plant has no impact on Joey other than it might cause him not to receive his allowance.

The third scenario involves 16-year-old Sophie who was very close to her grandmother. She spent time at her grandmother’s house baking cookies, helping her clean, and listening to stories about when her grandmother was younger. When Sophie arrived home from school one day, her parents told her they had some bad news for her. They told her her grandmother passed
away. Nothing like this ever happened in Sophie’s life and she does not know what to do or how to react. Things do not make sense to her. She watched people die in movies, but it was different because it was happening to her. Her parents calmed her down and thought about how to handle the situation.

In all three scenarios, Susie, Joey, and Sophie each experienced something that he/she had never experienced before: death. In each scenario, the children did not understand death and it was something that the parents needed to explain to their children. Susie’s parents could have told her the truth about death or they could have told her that her goldfish was just sleeping and replaced it without her knowing. Joey had no regards about the plant dying because it was something about which he had no feelings. His mother could have explained that life is fragile and everything dies sooner or later. Sophie showed signs of confusion and anger when she found out her grandmother died. Her parents calmed her down, but it might be beneficial for Sophie to discuss her feelings. Finding the right thing for the parents to say in each situation is difficult, and it is up to the parents to decide what is the right course of action.

Some adolescents or children do not ever experience death first hand. Sometimes it happens when they are babies or too young to understand and their parents cover it up with avoidance or lies. Parents who do this believe they are acting in the child’s best interest. Children or adolescents may first experience death when reading or watching a movie. Depending on the point of view from the movie or book, death may be portrayed as unrealistic and not aligning with the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross.

**Statement of the Problem**

Since literature may be first time adolescents may encounter death, it is important to understand what adolescents are learning from reading certain literature. Depending on how the
book portrays death, some literature may be considered more valid than others. Some literature may be portraying death as accurately as possible, while other books may teach or convey the wrong message. Some books may include all of Kubler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief while others address only one or two of the stages. Since death is a unique situation and varies under circumstances, it is important that adolescents who read adolescent literature about death are not mislead. Likewise, it is important that teachers and parents understand what messages adolescents are getting from the readings.

Research Questions

If a student selects a piece of adolescent literature that includes components of death or dying, what is the student learning about the portrayal of death? If students have never encountered death before, does the adolescent literature they read reflect the five stages of grief according to Kubler-Ross? Does the adolescent literature include the Five Stages of Death according to Kubler-Ross’s model? It is important to know how books portray death to adolescents because students may be reading books as a source to find more information about death or students may be using books as a source for bibliotherapy. Regardless of the reason students are reading the adolescent literature, it is important that death is portrayed accurately because it is a sensitive subject. Although no death experience is the same, it needs to be discussed with respect to all people involved and in a delicate manner.

Rationale

Both parents and teachers may have a hard time discussing death with adolescents. Some adolescents have experienced the death of a loved one or pet while other adolescents have yet to experience death. Students may only have experience about death from what they have seen in movies or what they have read in literature. According to the National Institute of Health (2006),
parents or other adults discussing death with adolescents need to be honest. It is not a good idea
to lie to someone about a death or avoid the subject entirely. It is suggested that when parents or
adults do not know the answer to a question, they are honest in the discussion and mention they
do not have all the answers. These statements are true for books and movies as well. Books and
movies should reflect to students the Five Stages of Grief. Students who are reading literature
that incorporates death may be reading books for a variety of reasons including: gaining more
information about death, completing a requirement for school, engaging in bibliotherapy, or
selecting a book at random. Whatever the reason may be, it is important that students reading
literature are gaining reliable and accurate information.

Another reason to examine how literature portrays death is because death is inevitable
and at some point or another, everyone will experience the death of a loved one or pet.
Understanding death and seeing how others relate and connect with the experience may help
students relate to death when they experience it in their own lives. Although the literature is
fiction, it should portray the truth of such a sensitive subject. After analyzing selected books, it
evidence will be collected that will give a clearer picture of how books portray death.

Definition of Terms

The following terms below are defined and are important for the understanding of this
study.

Acceptance- The act of understanding and coming to terms with the situation at hand.

Adolescent- A person between the ages of 12-18.

Adolescent Literature- Books written and marketed towards people between the ages of
12-18.

Anger- An act committed to show displeasure.
Bargaining- Negotiating or pleading for an alternate option or solution in a situation.

Denial- Unwilling to accept that something is true.

Depression-Severe dejection, felt over a period of time, can be associated with the acts of loss of appetite, excessive sleeping, and withdrawal from typical activities.

Literature- Written works that include books, short stories, poems, memoirs, biographies and autobiographies.

Limitations

This study is focusing on how death is portrayed in adolescent literature. One limitation is that this study is unable to analyze every adolescent literature book that incorporates death and dying. The sample size that is being analyzed will affect the results of the study. Another limitation of this study is the amount of time that is provided to examine and analyze the results of the study. This study does not include the attitudes of the adolescents who read the literature, nor does it include if the book has altered the readers’ reactions to death. The study also does not focus on the reasons behind why the adolescent is reading a book on death.

Summary

Death is inevitable and occurs daily. It is something that cannot be avoided. In different situations, some people are not affected by death directly while others are. This determines the bereavement period and the process of grief. Adolescents, who have never had any experience with death, may first come across death in literature. It is important to study how death is portrayed in literature to ensure adolescents are receiving valid and reliable information about death and dying. This study will examine the way in which adolescent literature portrays death and dying. Due to time constraints, a limited number of adolescent novels have been read and
analyzed. After the analysis of the books, a better understanding of how death is portrayed in adolescent literature has been concluded.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature may be the first time adolescents experience death; therefore, it is important that the adolescent literature aligns with renowned researcher, Kubler-Ross (1969) and her theory on the Five Stages of Grief. The Five Stages of Grief include the following: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. A content analysis was conducted on a random selection of seven books that meet a specific criteria to determine if Kubler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief were depicted in the selected literature.

Pre-existing literature about death and dying was examined for this study. This included theoretical orientation to this study, historical research, and contemporary literature. Piaget’s Schema Theory was used as a theoretical orientation for this study. Studies similar to the one currently being conducted were also used when looking at contemporary research. Corr conducted many content analyses on death and dying in children’s. He has examined sibling death, pet death, grandparent death, and parent death in children’s literature. Advice for how to discuss death and dying with children included in this study provides additional support for teachers, parents, and school counselors. A summary concludes the chapter.

Theoretical Orientation

In 1926, Piaget introduced Schema Theory. According to an East Tennessee State University publication, “Schemas (or schemata) are units of understanding that can be categorized as well as webbed into complex relationships with one another” (para 1). For example, if a child is asked to draw a house, the house drawn might look like the one in which the child lives. The drawing might include a picket fence or a big front window similar to houses he/she knows. In school, if the student learns about the White House, the student’s
schema would shift to accommodate and include the differences between what he/she formerly
knew as a house, to include the new information just learned about the White House.

Information that does not fit into one’s schema, may not be comprehended, or may not be
comprehended correctly (Widmayer, 1996). Widmayer explains, “This is why readers have a
difficult time comprehending a text on a subject they are not familiar with even if the person
comprehends the meaning of individual words in the passage” (para. 2). When adolescents are
reading literature about death, having no prior experience about death affects their schema. They
may have heard stories from parents or other adults about loss, which may affect their schema.
Knowing nothing about death makes the way death is portrayed in adolescent literature
important. If the reader is only able to read the words without constructing meaning and
comprehending the text, the author’s message is lost and no new information would be added to
the readers’ schema.

According to the Schema Theory, an individual’s schema is different and unique and
builds on the individual’s experiences and cognitive processes (Widmayer, 1996). The learner is
actively and constantly building and revising his/her schema as new information is added. As
new things are learned, one adds to the known information. In a sense, it creates a file folder of
knowledge one has about different subjects.

The more information one has about a topic he/she is reading, the more the book or story
makes sense. When adolescents read books about death and dying and encounter the topic for
the first time they may be introduced to that topic, they may not have much prior knowledge
about death and dying. The reader’s schema limits his/her understanding of what is read and
how new things are added to it (East Tennessee State University Publication, n.d). If the reader
is knowledgeable about death and dying, the book may be more valuable because he/she may be
able to comprehend more of the story as compared to someone who knows nothing about death and dying.

When reading books, one might feel empathy for the characters in the books and the experiences the characters endure. According to Goldstein and Winner (2012), “Social cognitive skills such as empathy (matching the emotional state of another) and theory of mind (understanding others’ mental states) are crucial for everyday interactions, cooperation, and cultural learning (para. 1).” McDonald and Messinger explain, “Empathy is a motivator for helping others in distress…The ability to empathize is an important part of social and emotional development, affecting the individual’s behavior towards others and the quality of social relationships” (para 1). Reading books where the reader may feel empathy for the characters is a learning experience the reader may yet to experience in real life. When the situation does occur in the reader’s life, he/she will be able to refer back to the knowledge or schema he/she has and apply what is known to the situation.

Significant Historical Research

Early in the 20th century death was more accepted and children more frequently experienced death firsthand (Walker, 1986). Walker concludes society has become more mobile compared to the early 1900s, few grandparents live with families, and children are removed from death and dying. Many children have never attended a funeral, therefore death is seldom discussed with them; likewise, children have no firsthand experience with the death of other (Walker). More books are being published that deal realistically with acceptance of death and the emotional adjustments following the death of a loved one. Readers’ vicarious experiences with the characters of books often facilitate catharsis: “Reading is one way, as books can act as agents that bring tears and evoke discussion of previously hidden feelings” (Walker, p. 16).
Walker explained picture books stimulate children’s thinking and promote understanding making books a useful tool to help children learn and deal with death.

Johnson (2004), a well-respected, world-wide, grief resource, reported in 1977, the only book she could find for children about death and grief was *The Dead Bird* written by Margarete Wise Brown, in 1938 (Johnson, 2004). Johnson stated, “I’m sure there were others; we just didn’t find them. They were hidden. Grief wasn’t “in” then, and definitely not for children” (p. 293). The recognition of grief among children and the benefits of literature or the use of bibliotherapy is a “very recent phenomenon and growth spurt in our society” (p. 293). In the past, children were looked upon as “tiny adults” and not respected. Johnson explains, “Children were seldom loved, were often beaten, and were frequently killed when they misbehaved. Death to themselves and others was to be expected. There was no time for grief and no recognition of grief for either children or adults” (p. 294). This approach is much unlike current practices.

Today, attempts are made to protect children from harm, which means the discussion of death is avoided and they are either told the deceased is sleeping or that it was God’s will (Johnson).

Johnson (2004) credits Jakob and Grimm (The Brothers Grimm) with writing some of the earliest literature about death for children. The Brothers Grimm wrote tales from the oral tradition of old Europe that became known as the Tales of the Grimms. *Rumpelstiltskin*, by the Brothers Grimm, is a story that does not include death, but the characters experience grief. Johnson summarizes the story, “A maiden is abandoned to an impossible task (grief) and weeps hopelessly” (p. 296). The maiden receives help from a stranger but it costs her the price of some personal belongings. This tale explains that “when children are guided and loved and supported in their grief they can, indeed spin gold out of the straw of bereavement” (Johnson, p. 296).
Another tale Johnson (2006) discusses written by the Brothers Grimm is *The Handless Maiden*. This story reflects the reality that sometimes the parent betrays a child to grief. A father promises a wizard everything that is behind his mill, which he believes is just an apple tree, however, what the father does not realize is his daughter is behind the mill. The wizard wants to take the daughter, and forces the father to cut off her hands. The daughter, recognizing the unhealthy grief patterns of her family, exclaims. Over time, the daughter grows her hands back as she is nurtured and finds love. The moral of the story is, “When we grieve, our hands are cut off, we go into a dark forest, we find help inside ourselves and with others, who are often sent to use and who live with us in our deepest grief” (Johnson, p. 297).

Between 1900 and 1940, Johnson (2004) was unable to find any children’s books about death and grief. At that time, America was becoming urbanized, and people “pushed back unpleasant things” (p. 297). Johnson believes, Buck changed that thought in 1942 with her powerful story of *The Big Wave*. As the nation became more and more educated, society became more interested in emotions, and “Stories for children began to have sub-plots of death and grief” (p. 297). For instance, newsreels showed children the horrors of World War II. Johnson believes, “As a result, better-educated parents who wanted more education for their children, gradually began to talk about—maybe in whispers, but still mentioning—death” (p. 297). *The Diary of Anne Frank* was published in 1952 and made it to the top of the charts. That same year, *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White was published. Johnson explained:

All America was learning to cry in public over books, movies, and sad stories. Grief had introduced itself as a subject of study. We were ready. Death began to move forward from being a punishment to be avoided to a life process that left survivors bereaved. (p. 297)
While some people believe the 1960s to be a time of free-love and free-will, more authors were publishing books about death and grief for adults and children. *Meet the Austins, Anne and the Sand Dobbies, Home from Far,* and *The Secret Garden* were some of the most well-known titles from the time. *The Secret Garden* moved from being just a book to being featured on big screen. The books ranged from a variety of topics including: pet death, sibling death, and losses through foster children.

According to Johnson (2004), the 1970s were pivotal in terms of publications about death and dying. In the 1970s, *On Death and Dying* by Kubler-Ross (1969) was rapidly becoming more well-known. Johnson notes,

The Association for Death Education and Counseling brought a professional tone to study and literature. it was as if the dark clouds of ignorance and superstition had rolled away to introduce us to real downpour- it was virtually raining books for children- books about grief. (p. 298)

In 1971, *Talking about Death: A Dialogue between Parent and Child* (author, 1971) was published as were other books similar in content and theme. These books were written with a gentle and reader-friendly style that made parents and children comfortable. In the 1970s, the term bibliotherapy was also coined. Books were also published about pet death and grandparent death; however, “The deaths of parents and siblings were not yet addressed” (Johnson, p. 299). Few books depicted the death of children such as, *Where’s Jess? We Remember Philip,* and *The Taste of Blackberries.* In 1977, there was an increase in children’s death and grief education and literature. Corr (1977), created lesson plans for one of the first college classes on children and death. Dr. Marvin Johnson, in 1977, created nine coloring books for hospitalized children.
Johnson (2004) believes the 1980s and 1990s were rather prolific in terms of books about death and dying for children. Johnson wrote:

Centering Corporation published more than 150 books for children dealing with the deaths of grandparents, parents, siblings, friends, and classmates. Books to help school staff cope with death appeared through The Dougy Center and The Center for Grieving Children in Portland, Maine, as well as through the Centering Corporation. (p. 301)

According to Johnson, the biggest changes in children’s grief literature over the past 25 years have been related to diversity, specialization, numbers, and acceptance. After the events on September 11, 2001, grief books were donated to families in need by the Centering Corporation. Such giving would not have occurred 25 years ago, which reflects society’s changing values toward the importance of grieving and death education.

Bibliotherapy

Walker (1986) identifies bibliography as a means of using books for a type of counseling. Reading can help children cope with many different types of issues. Walker stated, “Most simply defined, the term bibliotherapy means helping with books” (p. 17). Books used in bibliotherapy must include three factors: the author’s communication with the reader, the reader’s ability to understand and respond to the material, and the therapist’s ability to perceive alterations in attitude (Walker). Since bibliotherapy is identified as a means of counseling, it must be carried out by someone who is certified and trained in the therapeutic use and application of literature. Materials used for bibliotherapy should be critically examined. Walker (1986) suggested using the following criteria to select books for bibliotherapy:

1. The nature and scope of the book should be appropriate for the patient population.
2. Factual information in the book should be accurate; depictions of treatment methods that are no longer used or outdated information on disease can do more harm than good.

3. The emotional impact of the book should be appropriate for the age level.

4. The book should have literary value as well as bibliotherapeutic usefulness.

5. The book should not be a propaganda piece for a particular type of treatment or outlook. Religious books should not be ruled out entirely, but should be carefully chosen.

Death Education

While bibliotherapy can be used by teachers or counselors to help students cope with death and the grieving process, students also need to learn about death. Death education is based on the assumption that we need skills to help us face the inevitability of death (Wilson, 1984). Johnson explained how death education changed over the course of the years. It included developing a sensitivity to the joys of living and an appreciation of life. In the past, people died at home in their own beds, and funerals were held at home. Today, we do not experience death as often or in the same ways. In the courses Wilson teaches to prospective English teachers and librarians, the themes of death and dying are used. Wilson explains, “The objective is to familiarize graduate students with books to broaden their own outlooks and to use in guiding the reading of high school students” (p. 78). According to Wilson, one component traditionally incorporated in death literature is humor. The identification of Kübler-Ross’ five stages of death, now widely publicized, is probably the most significant contribution of her book (Wilson).
Bereavement, if left unattended can affect the mental and physical health of survivors (Wilson, 1984). *Death and the Family* (Pincus, year) discusses the importance of mourning. The author was a social worker in England who wrote her perspective which includes ten years of being a widow (Wilson). Green and Irish (as cited in Wilson) explain the reasons for needing death education:

1. The rate of suicide among adolescents is showing the greatest rise of any group.
2. Schools should be instructed in the basics of crisis intervention, suicidology, and thanatology.
3. The interest underlying a need for death education is not a desire to foster preoccupation with death, but to help people relate better to the reality.
4. Death education initiated on the death bed is not more adequate than sex education on the marriage bed. (Wilson, p. 82)

Death in modern children’s literature has evolved from writings earlier in the century where most death was depicted with a pet or wild animal (Apseloff, year); suicide began to appear in adolescent literature. Although Wilson identified the increasing rate of suicide in his 1984 study, this was not the first acknowledgement that suicide was at a new height. In 1991, Apseloff identified a significant increase in the topic of suicide in children’s novels in the 1960s and 1970s; this is most likely attributed to an increasing public awareness of suicide in adolescents and therefore, it appeared more frequently in novels for adolescents. Apseloff stated that death by illness or accident does not have the same psychological impact on family and friends as the suicide of a young person. The study discusses two books about suicide, *Blindfold* (citation) and *So Long at the Fair* (citation), concluding that, “Both books help the reader understand a little of what might lead to suicidal behavior” (p. 236). Apseloff found the quality
of the home life was an important factor in both novels, and the victims lacked closeness and rapport with parents and concluded that victims in the novels believed there should be something more to the life they experienced. Unfortunately, their future did not look any brighter than their past. She reported that both books included the narrator having a difficult time coming to terms with suicide.

Content Analyses

One of the earliest content analyses appeared to be in 1993 by Seibert. Seibert conducted a content analysis on children’s books with death themes to determine how death was presented. Only books with concepts of death for children aged three to eight years of age and published between 1950-1980 were used. A total of 65 books were referenced in Seibert’s study—55 fiction, 10 non-fiction—and 39 concepts and teacher objectives. Information about death was presented most frequently in 80% of the books. Nearly 88% of the books used direct language when talking about death. The inevitability of death was presented in 28% of the books. Burial was included in 55% of the books. An adult’s death was in 51% of the books, 6% included children’s death, and 18% included the death of an animal or plant. A total of 91% of the adult deaths were grandparent deaths. The cause of death was identified in 49% of the books in Seibert’s study: 14% were by disease, 20% by accident, 15% by old age, and 5% other. The concept of an after life was discussed in 31% of the books. Death was described realistically. More adult deaths were depicted than child deaths. Seibert writes, “Death was also presented accurately for the developmental stages of children ages three-eight” (p. 5). One conclusion from Seibert’s study pointed out that death themes were not included in children literature until 1970-1980. Another conclusion addressed the emphasis of grief and bereavement more than
death and dying aspect. Moreover, positive presentations make children’s literature a preferred teaching tool for death education (Seibert).

Several additional investigations examined death and dying in children’s literature. Two studies were conducted by Corr. In 2004, Corr conducted an investigation related to children’s literature about death and dying and identified four reasons why he undertook this study. The first reason was to discover the extent and variety of death-related literature for children published in recent years. The second reason was interest in what authors of children’s literature were offering young readers about bereavement. The third reason was to examine literature that includes components of bereavement in a unique way- and finally, to determine whether the analysis of lessons about bereavement in the literature for children might hold value for the adults conducting the study. The study involved an analysis of 99 selected children’s books; seven distinct elements were analyzed for each story:

1. Children’s thoughts and questions about death and loss
2. Children’s feelings about death, loss, or scary situations
3. Efforts to explain death and loss
4. Efforts to prepare children for death and loss
5. Grief reactions to death and loss
6. Coping with death, loss, and grief
7. Moving on with living and loving.

Corr (2004) stated that many adults assume children are not aware of significant loss in their lives and are not able to acknowledge the loss until others around them direct their attention to it. He added that adults usually diverge children from acknowledging the loss. These actions are aligned with the notion that adults are acting in the best interest of the children.
In analyzing the books, Corr (2004) found that in five of the books, the authors emphasized the importance of questions and the process of questioning in coping with death and loss. Eight books identified the importance of children’s feelings about death and a number of books written for children emphasized issues related to children’s fears about death and loss of a loved one. Many of the books were written in a symbolic manner. Corr explained that in *The Very Beautiful Dragon* (Johnson, 2001), two boys encountered a dragon. Whenever they encountered the dragon, they were scared—until they confronted their fears. In *A Bunch of Balloons* (Ferguson, 1992), the narrator told the story about a boy who loved to play with balloons. One day the boy lost the balloon from his grasp, and the narrator asked the reader if he/she had ever experienced loss. At the end of the story, there were blank pages with balloons on them where the reader could identify with drawings or writing the things they have lost (Corr).

The next category examined efforts to explain death and loss. Corr (2004) explored how spiritual beliefs were used to explain death and loss to children. According to his study, books in this section included realistic fiction, such as *Why Did He Die?* (Harris, 1965). In this story, a mother explained death to her young son by comparing the human body to a car engine and analogizing that death happens when someone’s body stops working similar to when a car engine no longer functions. In another book, *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide To Understanding Death* (Krancy & Brown, 1998), the author used cartoon pictures and dinosaur characters to represent death and questions that children have about death.

Corr (2004) noted that biological explanations of death appeared in three books. In each of these books, death was explained as a biological process, and children were told that being sad
and crying are both acceptable when someone dies. Three workbooks taught important lessons about death, loss, grief, funerals, and body disposition.

Examples of preparing children for death and loss were provided from three different books. Corr (2004) identified one example as *So Long Grandpa*. In this story, a grandfather took his grandson to a funeral in preparation for his own funeral. The books described in this section were all about grandparents who prepared their grandchildren for their death in some way.

In the category of grief reaction to death and loss, the books explained how grieving is common to everyone (Corr, 2004). In *Tough Boris* (Fox, 1994), the toughest of all pirates was distraught when his parrot died; the pirate cried and cried over the loss of his parrot. This demonstrated to readers that regardless of how tough someone might be, it is okay to be sad or upset when someone dies. Other books were about the death of a parent or grandparent. The four books that included the death of a parent offered “an emphatic approach to a child whose parent had died. In each case, the child’s feelings and needs are more recognized and affirmed as are the ways which the child’s world has been altered” (Corr, p. 347). In three books, *The Mother Tree* (Whitehead, 1971), *And Peter Said Goodbye* (Farrington & Weil, 1993), and *Geranium Morning* (Powell, 1990), Corr found that the children in these books were required to experience death-related situations alone without any help from adults.

Coping through funeral rituals was identified in numerous death-related books for children (Corr, 2004). The books discussed guilt, abandonment, and choices about funerals, burial, cemeteries, and mausoleums. Corr wrote, “Storybooks also describe other situations in which children make up or take part in funeral rituals” (p. 352). Examples of other memorial services were provided for the loss of a loved one. *Sunflowers and Rainbows for Tia: Saying*
Goodbye to Daddy (Greene, 1999) was the story of Tia, a ten-year-old, who described all the people who came to her house, brought food, and shared memories of her father after his death.

Corr (2004) also identified books that allowed children to cope with death through memories and legacies. According to Corr, “The importance of memories and legacies has already been noted, but we can now identify several books in which these are the central themes” (p. 365). In The Best Gift for Mom (Klein, 1995), Johnathan had a difficult time remembering his father who died when he was a baby. His mother shared stories about his father and the songs that he loved to sing to help Johnathan cope with his father’s death.

At the end of his investigation, Corr (2004) identified several strategies for helping bereaved youngsters. These strategies included:

1. Be present and listen
2. Speak clearly and in age-appropriate ways
3. Check to determine how children have understood what you have said.
4. Whenever possible, try to prepare children in advance for encounters with loss, death, and bereavement.
5. Offer support and be willing to share a death-related experience with a child.
6. In all circumstances, honor children’s grief and their need for time to work through their reactions to loss.
7. Provide support to bereaved children and serve as a role model for them in how you cope with your grief and mourning.
8. Encourage children to take part in appropriate ways in funeral and memorial rituals or to develop their own forms of memorializing someone they loved.
9. Appreciate the importance for bereaved children of memories, legacies and continuing bonds.

10. Above all, make an effort now to let those whom you love know you love them. (pp. 358-359)

In 2006, Corr completed a study that selected 46 samples of death-related literature designed to be read by or with children. Corr stated, “The main goal for us is to ask how parents are portrayed in these books and how their interactions with children are depicted” (p. 1). He identified the reason for the study as follows:

First, it is interesting simply to learn more about what authors of children’s literature are offering to young readers as they describe the roles of parents in relation to topics involving dying, death, and/or bereavement. Do these portraits fairly represent ways in which parents actually do or ought to behave? In particular, are these parents helpful to their children in death-related matters or are they not helpful? Would we applaud their behaviors or not? We will not know the answers to any of these questions until we look at the literature itself. (p. 2)

Corr’s (2006) identified one limitation of this study was that it included only a select sample of books of death-related literature for children was studied. Another limitation included elements of the book being confined to a single category.

One way Corr (2006) identified the portrayal of death in children’s literature was parents overlooking or failing to meet the needs of the children; seven books were identified in this category. Parents who try to prepare children for death and loss experiences was another category identified by Corr. Three books were identified in this category, and all the books included the death of someone that was expected. Another category was parents who share their
grief with children; ten books were identified in this category. The next category was parents who try to explain death and loss in their aftermath. This category included four books. These books include stories that describe the situations about death and answer any questions posed by the children. The next category in Corr’s study was parents who appreciate the value of memories and legacies. Parents explain to their children in these five books how they feel about the death of the character or stories to commemorate their memory. Four books were in the category identified as parents who learn from children. Elements of these books include an act by the child in the book that teaches the parents a lesson. Corr identified seven books where the parents involved children in funerals and memorial rituals. Four books were identified where the parents relocated and/or remarried. These books include elements of how children cope with death while relocating and expressing their anger. “Parents and Pets: Euthanasia, Disposition, and Replacement” is another category found in four books. The books included stories about the death of pets and how the children coped with their death. The last category in Corr’s study addressed the topic of parent, children, or adolescent suicide.

Overall conclusions of the study were that children may learn lessons from their parents or vice versa. Some lessons are taught formally, while others are taught informally (Corr, 2006). Another conclusion of the study was that if children are left alone to face death-related events, they may turn to unreliable sources (Corr).

**Discussing Death with Children**

Talking to children about death is often a difficult subject for adults. However, “Death is an inescapable fact of life. We must deal with it, and so must our children. If we are to help them, we must let them know it is okay to talk about it” (National Institute of Health, 2006, p. 1). The National Institute of Health recognizes how talking to children about death allows one to
discover what they know and what they do not know. Having a conversation with children provides opportunities to become aware of their misconceptions, fears, or worries. Although talking alone cannot address all areas of concern, resolution requires some talking (NIH). The age and prior experience of the child as well as personal experiences of the discussants affect the conversation about death that occurs between adult and child. Each situation about death and conversation is unique and somewhat different. Conversations about death can be planned or spontaneous. According to the NIH, “Some discussions about death may be stimulated by a news report or television program and take place in a relatively unemotional atmosphere. Other talks may result from a family crisis and be charged with emotions” (p. 1).

When discussing death with children, one thing that should be considered is that children are aware of death long before adults realize it. The NIH (2006) provides further insight:

They see dead birds, insects, and animals lying by the road. They may see death at least once a day on television or on video games. They hear about it in fairy tales and act it out in their play. Death is a part of everyday life, and children, at some level, are aware of it. (p. 1)

Allowing children to talk about death provides an opportunity for the exchange of information that is necessary when dealing with a crisis. The NIH believes, “We can encourage their communication by showing interest in and respect for what they say” (p. 1).

The NIH (2006) suggests that avoidance and confrontation are two communication barriers that prevent adults from discussing sensitive subjects, such as death, with children. Children are great observers, and that must be kept in mind when trying to avoid communication or tucking away problems. “They read messages on our faces and in the way we walk or hold our hands. We express ourselves by what we do, by what we say, and by what we do not say”
Not only is a child able to pick up on verbal and physical cues, he/she is able to pick up on nonverbal cues and expression. The NIH added that, “It is also not wise to confront children with information that they may not understand or want to know” (p. 2). Finding the perfect balance of how to have these conversations with children is difficult, but, according to the NIH, it should include the following components:

1. Trying to be sensitive to children’s desires to communicate when they are ready.
2. Maintaining an openness that encourages children’s attempts to communicate.
3. Listening to and accepting children’s feelings.
4. Offering children honest explanations when we are obviously upset.
5. Answering questions in simple language appropriate for their age.
6. Trying to find brief, simple, and age appropriate answers to children’s questions; understandable answers which do not overwhelm them with too many words. (p. 2)

Children at different ages experience different developmental stages of death. According to the NIH (2006), “Preschool children usually see death as reversible, temporary and impersonal” (p. 4). They might have this mentality because when watching cartoons, a cartoon character often dies and then miraculously recovers. Between the ages of five and nine, most children realize that death is final. The next stage of understanding death occurs from ages nine/ten through adolescence. The NIH adds, “Children begin to comprehend fully that death is irreversible; that all living things die and that they, too, will die someday” (p. 4). There are several different ways a teenager may react to death, such as seeking the meaning of life, reacting to their fear of death, or taking unnecessary chances with their lives. As with any series
of stages, it is important to keep in mind that these stages are approximate with ages, and depend on the child’s psychological, emotional, and cognitive development.

If explicit conversations are not held between adults and children about death, misconceptions may arise. The NIH (2006) noted that, “Dr. R. Fulton, in Grollman’s *Explaining Death to Children*, points out that some children confuse death with sleep, particularly if they hear adults refer to death with one of the many euphemisms for sleep: “eternal rest”, “rest in peace” (p. 5). These misconceptions might result in a child fearing sleep or taking naps. Another misconception a child may have about death after a conversation with an adult is hearing that sickness was the cause of death. The NIH warned, “Preschoolers cannot differentiate between temporary and fatal illness” (p. 6). Therefore, when discussing that an illness caused the death, it’s important to explain the sickness to the child and to differentiate that type of sickness versus the kind where people get sick and get better again. The last misconception identified by the NIH was that only old people die. This can lead to distrust when a child learns about the death of someone who is not considered to be of old age.

Children may experience a variety of emotions when dealing with a death in the family. The emotions may include guilt, anger, regression, depress and other behavior problems. Guilt often strikes when the death was of a close family member. Children may “…think that in some way they caused the death; maybe their angry thoughts caused the person to die” (NIH, 2006, p. 8). The death of a close relative also arouses anger. “We feel angry with the person who died for causing us so much pain and sorry or for leaving us alone” (p. 8). Children may regress back to an earlier stage of development, such as sucking their thumb, wetting the bed, or needing diapers. This time is only temporary and can be aided by the assistance of a caring individual. Children may hide their anger and keep it inside, which in turn, leads to depression. Some
children become depressed, withdrawn, irritable, aggressive, or develop physical systems when anger is withheld (NIH).

The topics of children visiting the dying and children attending funerals were also discussed by the NIH (2006). First, a decision needs to be made about including both the dying party and the child in the meeting. If so, the child’s age and cognitive level should be considered. The child should be old enough to understand what is happening and will need to be prepared for what will be heard and seen when both attending a funeral or visiting a loved one in their final days (NIH).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2003) created tips for teachers and parents for helping children cope with loss, death, and grief. The way school personnel handle distress in the school helps shape the long term grieving process for students, staff, and families. Children must be engaged in conversations about death at the appropriate developmental level and with respect to cultural norms and sensitivity to the situation. The significant adults in children’s life will impact how the children view and respond to death, loss, and grieving. “In fact, for primary grade children adult reactions will play an especially important role in shaping their perceptions of the situation” (NASP, p. 1).

According to NASP (2003), children may respond to the news about death in a variety of ways. Emotional shock may overtake a child who then may have no apparent feelings about the death. This behavior allows the child to detach from the pain. Regressive behaviors may occur, which means the child may refer back to situations that occurred when the child was younger. These situations may include difficulty leaving parents, needing to sleep in a parent’s bed, or wanting to be rocked and held. Explosive emotions may arise from the child. A child may also engage in “acting out behavior that reflect the child’s internal feelings of anger, terror,
frustration, and helplessness” (NASP, p. 1). The children may ask the same questions over and over. This is not because they do not understand the facts, but because it is difficult for them to believe or accept the facts.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado (as cited in NASP, 2003) provided tips to help teachers, caregivers, and parents support children who have lost loved ones. Children should be permitted to express their grief experiences. They should also be allowed to share their story and have others be good listeners. When dealing with loss and grieving, Wolfelt recommended using developmentally appropriate explanations. One should never assume that children of the same age will respond in the same way or understand things in the same way. NASP explains that grieving is a process, and “parents and schools need to allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child” (p. 1). Wolfelt added that children should be encouraged to ask questions about death and loss and suggests that adults not be afraid to admit to children that they do not have all the answers. It is also important to understand that children need extended support to deal with their grieving process; “The more losses the child or adolescent suffers, the more difficult it will be to recover” (p. 2). The help and support of loving adults will help the child recover faster.

All children are unique in their understanding of death and dying. It is impossible to categorize ages and stages for grief, and it depends on the child’s developmental level, cognitive skills, personality characteristics, religious beliefs, and previous experience with death. Infants and toddlers might visually see that adults are sad but have no real understanding of death. Preschoolers may associate death with a person leaving and not returning or associate death with magical thinking. During the ages of five through nine (early elementary), children can finally
start to finally comprehend death (NASP) and are better able to understand circumstances that surround death. In middle school, children have a cognitive understanding and can comprehend death as the final event where the body stops functioning (NASP). High schoolers are more than likely highly able to fully grasp the meaning of death in circumstances in any situation (NASP).

Summary

Death was a taboo subject until around the 1960s when books started addressing stories about death. While it took some time to continue publishing books about death, the value of these books soon became apparent.

Books about death can be used in a variety of ways; one way is bibliotherapy. Bibilotherapy is when books are used as a therapy tool to help grieving children or adolescents. These books offer coping mechanisms or valuable lessons to be learned from death. Books can also be used to teach about death education. Death education is used to teach students about death and coping mechanisms before they have experienced death.

Several content analyses have been conducted on children’s literature, but no literature published about adolescent literature could be found. Content analyses on children’s literature included picture books analyzed for their valuable content on teaching children about death. These books included a variety of topics including: pet loss, plant death, grandparent death, sibling death, and parent death. These content analyses are similar to the study currently being conducted on adolescent literature.

Ways of discussing death with adolescents and children was also examined. Although discussing death with children or adolescents is difficult for adults, it is often only discussed when needed, which translates to when a child is already facing a crisis. What a child is told
about death depends on the child’s age and developmental status. Not every child will be ready to hear about death when the literature suggests. Parents, teachers, and counselors need to take into consideration each child’s unique needs and figure out the discussion from there.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Death is a natural part of life and sometimes is not experienced by a person until after the teen years. Depending on individual circumstances, children or adolescents may not experience death until adulthood. Literature may be the first time that adolescents experience death. Parents or teachers may have a hard time discussing death with adolescents, in general, so it is important to see what adolescent literature says about death and dying. Does the literature about death and dying reflect the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross? Since adolescent literature is the first time that death and dying may be experienced by an adolescent, the goal of this study was to see how death and dying is portrayed in adolescent literature. The purpose of this investigation was to answer the following research question: Does the death in adolescent literature reflect the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross? This chapter will describe the present study in full detail. The first section describes the methods used in this investigation, while the second section focuses on the procedures to be used in this investigation.

Methods

Research Design

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during this investigation, which makes the research design one of mixed methods. The specific type of research conducted was a content analysis. A content analysis is a specific method of looking and critiquing content based on specific standards. According to the United States General Accounting Office (1989), a content analysis transforms non-structured information into a format that allows for analysis. With this particular study, a data chart was created for each book in the study. All data charts collected the page number and paragraph of the information that was collected. The recorded
data for each book included the examples of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance throughout the grieving process of the book.

Quantitative data will be collected in the form of frequency counts, and descriptive data about the findings. The quantitative data will result from the specific analysis used to conducted the research and to answer the research question.

**Materials**

Books that were published between the year 2000 and 2013 that are designed to be used with adolescents are used in this study. The Internet was used to find books for this investigation. Specific search terms used to find the books included: ‘adolescent books about death and dying’. The main source where books came from was GoodReads. Other books used in this investigation were obtained from websites recommending books for adolescent literature and best-selling book lists. All books were obtained through the Wood County Public Library or Bowling Green State University library. One book was unable to be obtained through the library systems and was purchased from an online source.

**Instrumentation**

Checklists were created to select the books used in this investigation. Several criteria were used to select books. For example, one criterion of the books is it must be published between the year of 2000 and 2013. If the book did not meet that criterion, it was not able to be selected for this study. Another requirement for the book selection is it must be written and targeted towards adolescents. See Appendix A for a sample of the rubric used for this portion of the investigation.

Data charts were created to analyze the books. After all of the books in the study were analyzed, the data was then interpreted using the data charts and data collected. The books were
analyzed to see if the characters in the book includes characters that experience the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross, which include; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. See Appendix B for the data chart used to evaluate the children’s books located.

Procedures

To collect and analyze data from adolescent literature, the following steps were followed for the content analysis.

1. A review of research was conducted to determine what the literature says about children’s books about death and dying.

2. The book selection process began. Books were selected based on a checklist. If the books met the criteria on the checklist, they will be able to be used for the content analysis. Examples of criteria on the checklist include targeted audience, genre, and year published.

3. Using the Internet to search for books, a list of 84 possible books was compiled. Using a random number generator, seven books were randomly selected. Those books were then obtained using the Bowling Green State University library or Wood County Public Library.

4. After each book was selected, the book title is listed at the top of the scoring rubric. The scoring rubric will be used to record data on as the book is read. Since adolescent literature books tend to be lengthy, books will only be read one time. As each book is being read, items will be identified as events occur in the book. See Appendix B for the data chart.

5. Each book was read and data was collected. All rubrics were present when the book was being read to be sure that what is read was accurately reflected on the
rubrics. If the books did directly state any of the criteria listed on the rubrics it will either be inferred based on text statements from the book or will be left blank.

6. A master data chart was created that listed the name of each book in the study along the left hand column and at the top of the row listed each of the Five Stages of Grief. An x was placed in the corresponding column if any evidence of that stage was present. If no evidence was collected, the box will be left blank.

7. An analysis of if the Five Stages of Grief were depicted in the literature was conducted.

Data Collection

The data was collected by using rubrics that were created specifically to analyze the contents of the books. As each book is read, the rubric will be used to check off applicable areas based on the content of the book. Examples of requirements on the rubric include, the characters experience the anger stage, the characters experience grieving, and the characters experience the denial stage. Overall, a highly informative book will include all five stages of grief.

Each book had the data collected as the book was being read. As a stage or requirement appears in the book, the evidence was recorded by paragraph and page number. If the book has been read and evidence on the data chart have yet to be collected, it is assumed that the book did not include evidence of that stage, and nothing is recorded on the data chart.

The rubrics are also analyzing the adolescent literature for gender, age of characters (alive and deceased), cause of death, and relationship of the deceased character with the main characters in the book (may be more than one). With this data, conclusions were able to be made based on this supplemental information such as, how characters were affected in literature about suicide versus an accidental death. Age of characters, gender, and cause of death will all be able
to be analyzed and compared among the books selected for the study. Specific patterns will be found based on criteria and contents of the book.

Summary

Adolescent literature was gathered that include themes about death. The books were then critiqued based on a rubric to see if the books met the minimum criteria needed for the study. A selection of seven books was selected for this study. If the books passed the initial criteria, they were able to be placed on a list for a random selection used for the content analysis. Each book was read one time due to time restrictions. As the books were being read, data charts were used to check the content of the books. As the books were being read, evidence of anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance was listed. After all books were read, a master data chart was created to use when analyzing the data. A comparison of the books was made and final conclusions along with recommendations were made.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

When students read literature about death and dying, it is important that the information they read be portrayed in a realistic manner. Although every situation about death is unique and varies under different circumstances, it is important that students who are reading the adolescent literature are not misled. The Five Stages of Grief is a theory by renowned researcher Kubler-Ross, who postulates that those who grieve experience five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The purpose of this investigation was to assess if adolescent literature reflected the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross. Chapter IV presents the results of the investigation and provides a discussion of the results as they relate to the research question.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine seven selected books about death and dying and using a context analysis, and evaluate if the books aligned with the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross. The research question was does adolescent literature reflect the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross? This investigation consisted of a content analysis of seven randomly-selected fiction books published after 2000. Using a data sheet, the books were then analyzed based on Kubler-Ross’s theory. Each incident throughout the book the characters experienced were recorded by page number and paragraph number. To report the results, each of the seven books will be discussed. The format to be followed in reporting the data is as follows: (a) summary of the book, and (b) analysis of the five stages of grief with supportive documentation from the story.

The Dogs of Babel

The Dogs of Babel was written by Carolyn Parkhurst and published in 2003. The story is about Paul Iverson, a linguistics professor at a university. He receives a call from work one day
that his wife was found dead after she fell out of a tree. The only witness was their dog, Lorelai. Paul does not believe that his wife’s death was an accident; although it was ruled as one by the police. He believes that his wife committed suicide. Paul recalls a story about a man named Wendell Hollis, who conducted surgery on dogs to get them to speak. While this man is now in prison for his actions, Paul sends him a letter and Wendell puts him in touch with friends on the outside who can help him teach his dog to talk. Paul disagrees with their ways (of surgery), and spends his time trying to get his dog to speak using flashcards and a specially designed keyboard. This book is about Paul’s journey to figure out what really happened to his wife.

Paul experiences denial believing that his wife’s death was an accident. He found anomalies with their bookshelves and believed that she was trying to send him a message before her death and to have him figure out what it meant. Their books were typically divided by ‘her’ books and ‘his’ books and then books they had bought ‘together’. Throughout the story, Paul keeps going back to the books to figure out the meaning behind the new arrangement. At one part in the novel, Paul questions what he is doing and acknowledges his denial. He says, “What exactly do I think I’m looking for, a message from beyond the grave arranged neatly in my study?” (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 55). Parkhurst directly has Paul, the main character, note that he is a grieving man doubting what he has been told about his wife’s death.

Maybe these events mean nothing. After all, I am a grieving man, and I am trying very hard to find some sense in my wife’s death. But the evidence I have discovered is sufficiently strange to make me wonder what really happened that day, whether it was really a desire for apples that led my sweet wife to climb to the top of that tree?

(Parkhurst, 2003, p. 8)
Paul believed even if his wife Lexy climbed to the top of the tree, she had a choice. “The day was hers to choose, and perhaps in that treetop moment when she looked down and saw the yard, the world, her life, spread out below her…” (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 79).

Paul was spending all of his time trying to teach his dog Lorelai how to speak. His ex-wife Maura was contacted by his concerned friend, Matthew. When Maura confronted Paul, insisting that he needed help and needed to get over Lexy’s death, he called his dog Lorelai into the room, and commanded her to attack Maura. This action demonstrates how angry Paul was over his wife’s death. “And stay out!” I yell after her. It’s strangely satisfying. I start to laugh. I watch Maura drive away, and then, laughing, I walk back into my cluttered living room to continue my research.” Paul does not feel any remorse for the way he acted. He found the situation to be funny.

Paul has a dream that Lexy comes back and is not really dead. He yells at Lexy and says, “You can’t just come back here.” I say, “Do you have any idea what I’ve been through? What the fuck were you thinking?” I’m shouting at her now. “This is your fault, I yell at Lexy. I’m screaming, I’m out of control. (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 208).

Paul finds out that Lexy was pregnant with their baby when she died. “I’m angry at a dead woman” (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 222). Paul says after finding out that Lexy knew she was pregnant with their child, “I feel like yelling, I feel like pounding the walls with my fists, I feel like ripping apart everything in the house. My blood feels hot in my veins, and I want to jump out of my body” (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 223). Paul became even angrier about the death of his wife knowing that they could have had a family, and raised a child together.

Late one night when Paul was unable to sleep, he heard his wife’s voice on a commercial for a psychic hotline. He calls this number numerous times only to receive a different operator
every time. After checking the phone records, he finds out that she called this number the day before she died. Now he becomes even more desperate to find Lady Arabelle. After finally reaching her and finding out she does not initially remember the phone call with Lexy, he says, “You spoke to her for forty-six minutes. Surely you can remember something. You can at least try.” He is bargaining for Lady Arabelle to be able to give him any information about his wife. He even tells her that he will stay on the phone and be charged the five dollars a minute price until she can remember something about her.

Paul refused to get out of bed or eat after he first found out about Lexy’s death. “I wake up then with a start, my chest filled with wild joy. It’s a moment before I can situate myself, before I come to myself again and remember that I am alone in my bed and my wife is gone” (Parkhurst, 2003, p. 87).

After searching for the answer to why Lexy killed herself, or what happened to Lexy, Paul finally learns that Lexy intended to commit suicide when she climbed the tree, and once he figures that out, he says, “I know at last that my Lexy killed herself (Parkhurst, p 238).

*Thirteen Reasons Why*

*Thirteen Reasons Why* was written by Jay Asher in 2007. The book is from the point of view of a boy named Clay Jenson. Clay finds an unmarked package on his porch. In the box are cassettes labeled with numbers. After listening to the tapes, Clay finds they are from a late classmate and crush, Hannah Baker. The tapes contain 13 reasons why she committed suicide, and each of the 13 reasons are someone on the tape. Clay is supposed to listen to the tapes, and then send then anonymously to the next person who is on the tapes. The last person can do whatever he/she wants to do with them. As Hannah warns on the tapes, if they are not sent to the next person, someone will make sure everyone knows the reasons that are on the tapes.
Clay received the box of tapes from Hannah Baker. He barely knew her; “Over the summer, we worked together at the movie theater. And not long ago, at a party, we made out. But we never had the chance to get closer” (Asher, 2007, p. 10). When he opens the box, he says, “These tapes shouldn’t be here. Not with me. It has to be a mistake. Or a terrible joke.” (p. 10). Clay is in denial that he has anything to do with Hannah Baker’s death. He believes that he was sent these tapes as a joke.

While listening to the tapes again, Clay hears about all the people who hurt Hannah in some way and what they did to her and says, “Because my name does not belong with theirs. I should not be on this list I’m sure of it. I did nothing wrong!” (Asher, 2007, p. 41).

While listening to the tapes, one of the reasons Hannah killed herself was because her name appeared on a list someone made about who is hot and who is not. Clay says, “I should’ve grabbed every copy I could find and thrown them all away” (Asher, 2007, p. 65). Clay believed he could have prevented one of the reasons why Hannah decided to end her life if he had only thrown those lists away.

After listening to another person on the tape for spying on Hannah Baker and taking pictures of her, Clay takes a rock and throws it at Marcus’s house; the peeping Tom. While throwing the rock at Marcus’s house, he blames Marcus for being one of the reasons Hannah killed herself, and he became angry.

After listening to the tapes and hearing his name, Clay becomes angry;

And that’s why, right at this moment, I feel so much hate. Toward myself. I deserve to be on this list. Because if I hadn’t been so afraid of everyone else, I might have told Hannah that someone cared. And Hannah might still be alive. (Asher, 2007, p.181)
At another point, Clay becomes so upset that he smashes his arm into the car door and mentions that he wants to pound his head into the window. After reflecting, he decides to put his banged his head into the head rest instead of the window.

Clay turns his anger toward Hannah Baker because he thinks that if she would have opened up to him, he could have helped her. “…because I was there for you. We were talking. You could have said anything. I would have listened to absolutely anything” (Asher, 2007, p. 212).

Anger is also present when Clay begins thinking about why Hannah killed herself. He says, “I unbuckle my seatbelt and lean forward. I clasp my hand over my mouth and squeeze to keep from screaming. But I do scream, the sound dampened in the palm of my hand” (Asher, 2007, p. 214).

In the introduction to the tapes that Clay listens to, Hannah gives an explanation of why she is distributing the tapes. She says, “Because every story I’m telling leaves so many unanswered questions. Unanswered? I would’ve answered any questions Hannah. But you never asked” (Asher, 2007, p. 78). Clay rationalizes that he would have answered any questions Hannah had if it meant that Hannah Baker did not kill herself.

No evidence of depression was found.

Hannah had distributed a map that corresponded with each tape and story on the tape. Clay went to each place on the map to understand Hannah’s story better. “I’m not following the map because she wants me to. I’m following it because I need to understand. Whatever it takes, I need to truly understand what happened to her” (Asher, 2007, p. 101). Clay needs to understand what happened to Hannah, and why she killed herself to accept her death.
If I Stay was written by Gayle Forman in 2009. Seventeen-year-old Mia is with her mom, dad, and younger brother to go on a trip to visit family. Mia wakes up and all she sees in wreckage. While she’s outside of her own body, she sees that she is the only one who survived the crash. She watches her family and friends mourn the loss of her family and hope that she survives the accident. Mia watches her best friend, Kim, and her boyfriend, Adam, hope for her to pull through and come out of a coma.

Kim, Mia’s best friend, and her mother are at the hospital waiting to see Mia. Kim’s mother is upset and crying. “‘Stop it!’ Kim demands. ‘If I’m not crying, there’s no … way you’re allowed to.’ Kim never curses. So this shocks me’” (Forman, 2009, p. 55). Kim walks away from her mother after yelling at her. She tells her that Mia is still holding on and is not gone yet.

Towards the end of the novel, Kim becomes angry at her mother yet again:

When Kim shouted at her crying mother to “pull it together and start acting like an adult around here” and then stalked off into the club leaving a shocked Mrs. Schein at the curb, a group of guys in spiked leather and fluorescent hair cheered and high-fived her.

(Forman, 2009, p. 180)

Kim did not respond to her mother being upset by Mia being in a coma or the fact that she lost every member in her immediate family.

No evidence of denial was found.

No evidence of depression was found.

Kim was visiting Mia and having a casual conversation with her when she started to pray.

“Please don’t die. I can understand why you’d want to, but think about this: If you die, there’s
going to be one of those cheesy Princess Diana memorials at school where everyone puts flowers and candles and notes next to your locker” (Forman, 2009, p. 57).

Mia’s boyfriend is a musician, and he had to leave a concert that night to come and be by her side at the hospital. He pleaded for her not to die.

Adam is mumbling something now. In a low voice. Over and over he is saying: please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Finally, he stops and looks at my face. “Please Mia,” he implores. “Don’t make me write a song.”

(Forman, 2009, pp. 166-167)

Adam bargains again at the end of the book. He begs Mia to stay with him even if it means they break up. “If you stay, I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll quit the band, go with you to New York. But if you need me to go away, I’ll do that too. …I can lose you like that if I don’t lose you today. I’ll let you go, if you stay (Forman, 2009, p. 193).

Mia is the one in the novel who expresses the acceptance of her own death for her friend. She acknowledges that it will be awful for her friends and family when she dies but she also thinks that Kim will get over it.

She’ll move on. She’ll leave Oregon. She’ll go to college. She’ll make new friends. She’ll fall in love. She’ll become a photographer, the kind who never has to go on a helicopter. And I bet she’ll be a stronger person because of what she’s lost today.

(Forman, 2009, p. 182)

*When You Were Here*

*When You Were Here* was written by Daisy Whitney in 2013. Danny is a high school senior whose mother was diagnosed with cancer five years earlier, and his father died a few years earlier. All Danny had wanted was for his mom to see his valedictorian speech at his high
school graduation. She had held on for so long, and died a few weeks before graduation. He hears from his mother’s housekeeper in Tokyo about personal belongings he might want. He flies out to Tokyo and meets the doctor and other people who were close with his mother while she was there for her special treatments. He thinks he will find answers about why his mom let go fighting and what really happened in Tokyo.

Danny goes on his trip to Tokyo to try to determine how his mother spent her time there. “Maybe there was something she wanted to tell me about her time in Tokyo, about her treatments there, about her last great hope, but she couldn’t figure out how to say it (Whitney, 2013, p 50). Danny tries to find the reason his mother stopped fighting cancer and to find the hidden messages she left him. He is in denial that she died ‘naturally’.

When Danny found out his baby passed away, he yells at his new friend in Tokyo. He does not understand how his mom would know this secret and keep it from him. His friend Kana explains his mother was protecting him from further loss in life. He had already lost his father; his girlfriend broke up with him, and she was dying. “I shake my head many times. “No. No. No. That’s not how it works. That’s not how it works,” I repeat (Whitney, 2013, p. 195).

Danny was driving home from school and ran into a car that was parked in front of his house. “Still, I’m pretty sure I’m not going to regret hitting this car for no reason, so I bang into it one, two, three, four, five, six times, each hit radiating under my skin, jump-starting me like paddles to shock the system” (Whitney, 2013, p. 2). After this incident occurs, he wonders if he will be sent to an anger-management class. He then remembers that there is no one to send him, because he no longer has any parents.

While having friends over, Danny’s friend Jeremy starts playing Danny’s mom’s piano. This is something Danny does not like, and asks him multiple times to stop playing. After a few
times asking Jeremy to stop, “something in my voice stops him, so he backs off, holds up his hands” (Whitney, 2013, p. 9).

Danny’s father had died six years earlier. His older sister Laini was “…pissed my mom was working again right after my dad’s death. Laini seemed to think mourning should have been my mom’s job” (Whitney, 2013, p 95.) Laini told her mother she wished their dad would have married her real mom. Laini was adopted from China and had a stronger connection with her adoptive father than mother.

Laini also had a letter she had ripped up from her father to her mother the day he died. Laini snapped when she saw the note. When Danny asked her why, she said it was because the last thing her father would ever say was to her mother and not to her. “I was jealous. And I was mad. So I started to rip the note, but I stopped and instead kept this part” (Whitney, 2013, p. 141).

Danny finds out that his ex-girlfriend and his mom’s best friend’s daughter kept a secret from him. He found out she was pregnant with their child and she was born early and died prematurely. His mother knew this secret, he said, “I’m mad at someone else. Someone I’ve never really been mad at before. My mom” (Whitney, 2013, p. 186).

Danny believes his mother stopped fighting, that she no longer wanted to fight to stay alive. After leaving her bedroom at the house in Tokyo, “I leave her room and slam the door. I like the sound of it, so I slam it again and again, the sound echoing through the apartment, the noise splintering in my ears” (Whitney, 2013, p 191). Slamming the door repeatedly shows Danny was angry with his mother.

No evidence of depression was found.
Fall for Anything

*Fall for Anything* is by Courtney Summers and was published in 2010. Eddie Reeves is struggling to find out the reason behind her successful photographer father’s death. All Eddie can think about is how her father was happy and loved her and her mother. Eddie spends time away from home with her best friend, Milo, because she does not get along with her mother’s best friend who moved in to take care of her. Eddie often visits the place her father committed suicide looking for answers. While there, Eddie meets Culler, one of the students her father took on. He takes Eddie to pick up the rest of her father’s belongings at his studio because it upset her mother too much to go. There, Eddie finds seven pictures and on the back each has a number. Eddie and Culler set out on a road trip to explore those seven places and find hidden messages in each one. Eddie thinks this will give her the answers the desires about her father’s death.

Eddie is hanging out with a group of friends from school and becomes angry when no one asks her about his death or how she is doing. “Even though it’s nice not to talk about it, I think that makes these people assholes. I go to school with assholes. What kind of people wouldn’t ask me about my dead father? Assholes” (Summers, 2010, p. 50).

Eddie and her friend Culler go to retrieve her father’s box of possessions from the studio. Eddie is mad that when her father taped up the only box he left there, he knew that he was going to kill himself. “Anger wells up inside me, turns my blood hot” (Summers, 2010, p. 93). Eddie could not stand the thought that her father knew what he was doing, and intentionally left items for her and her mother to retrieve.

Eddie never got along with her mother’s best friend, Beth. She moved in to take care of her mother after her father died. During an argument, Beth told Eddie that her father would hate the way she was talking to her if he was still alive. “I see red. I see it. Everything goes red, a
red door, and I throw the glass I’m holding into the sink. It breaks. It’s not some spectacular shattering into a thousand pieces, it just goes into two pieces” (Summers, 2010, p. 117). Eddie was angry at Beth for talking to her about her father and saying he would have been upset with her.

Eddie escapes the house at night because it is part of the only way she can escape from the reality of what happened. “I like to make my nighttime escapes unnecessarily dramatic because it makes it easier to ignore the weight in my chest” (Summers, 2010, p. 11). Eddie escapes and sometimes goes to the place where her father last committed suicide, it allows her to be away from Beth, and the depression her mom is experiencing.

When Eddie and Culler retrieve her father’s belongings from his studio, she becomes upset knowing that her father emptied out the rest of his belongings and left one box specifically for her and her mother to find. “I have to handle this. I’m supposed to handle this. Beth sent me down here to handle this” (Summers, 2010, p. 86). Eddie is upset, and all she can think about is how she is supposed to be able to hold her composure because that is what is expected of her.

No evidence of bargaining was found.

Since Beth moved in to take care of Eddie’s mother, she tried to help her mother gain basic control of her life. She wanted her to get out of bed, eat meals, and spend time out in the sun. “I hate when Beth stays the night. Mom upgrades from zombie to total robot, which isn’t much improvement because it just means she’ll do anything Beth tells her to do” (Summers, 2010, p. 19).

Eddie entered her own state of depression. “Which means for four days, I stop brushing my hair and live in my housecoat and shuffle around the house, mute, and sad, and I don’t answer my phone” (Summers, 2010, p. 57).
Eddie heard her mom crying to Beth wondering if her husband had forgotten that their wedding anniversary was coming up and questioned the timing of his death. She wanted to know the answers to so many questions but realized it was easier for her to forget it and to just crawl into bed.

Eddie’s mother became depressed after her husband’s suicide. When Beth moved in to help, she asked Eddie to clean up the living room and to give her mother a new space to begin the process of starting over. Beth was trying to help Eddie’s mother accept the death of her husband and move on.

After exploring all the places in the photographs her father left her, Eddie mentions that she knows that there is an answer to why he killed himself, but all she knows I that her father is dead. Although she was unable to figure out why he killed himself, she hopes that he finds peace wherever he is, and hopes that she finds peace as well.

*The Fault in Our Stars*

*The Fault in our Stars* was written by John Green in 2012. Hazel is a 16-year-old cancer patient whose mother makes her attend a support group. At the support group she meets Augustus through her friend, Isaac. Augustus and Hazel become very close over the next few months. Augustus uses his one wish from the foundation to fly Hazel and him to Amsterdam to meet her favorite author. While this is a risky trip due to Hazel’s stage of cancer, her doctor allows her to go. Augustus later reveals that his cancer has returned, and that his time left is limited. Hazel then experiences the death of Augustus and searches something he was writing before he died.

Augustus and Hazel were both diagnosed with cancer. Augustus said, “I’m sorry. You’ll be okay. I’ll be okay. I promise,” and smiled his crooked smile. Augustus knew that he would
not be okay. His cancer was coming back at a fast rate, and when he was diagnosed his whole body ‘lit up’ (Green, 2012, p. 215, para 2).

Hazel had cancer and saw Augustus putting a cigarette to his mouth. She became angry that someone was ruining a perfectly good set of lungs when she would do anything to have hers healthy again. She said:

I feel this weird mix of disappointment and anger welling up inside of me. I don’t even know what the feeling was, really just that there was a lot of it, and I wanted to smack Augustus Waters and also replace my lungs with lungs that didn’t suck at being lungs.

(Green, 2012, p. 20).

Augustus’s cancer returned. He called Hazel and needed to meet with her. When she met with him, he was in his car and said, “I hate myself I hate myself I hate this and I hate this I disgust myself I hate it I hate it I hate it just let me fucking die” (Green, 2012, p. 245). Augustus was embarrassed to be in the condition he was in. He would have rather died than to have allowed people to see him the way he was, which made him angry.

After Augustus died, Hazel’s mom tried to make her eat dinner. She said, “I’m not eating dinner, and I can’t stay healthy, because I’m not healthy. I am dying, mom. I’m going to die and leave you here alone and you won’t have a me to hover around....” (Green, 2012, p. 296, para 5).

No evidence of bargaining was found.

Hazel explained that her mother thought that she was depressed. “Late in the winter of my seventeenth year, my mother decided I was depressed, presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my free time to thinking about death” (Green, 2012, p. 3). Hazel was
experiencing depression which showed in her not being interested in any events and her lack of appetite.

When Augustus was explaining his relationship with cancer to Hazel, he said, “It is a civil war, Hazel Grace, with a predetermined winner” (Green, 2012, p. 216). Augustus understood that he was dying, and he knew that he was not able to fight the battle anymore. His treatments were no longer working and his cancer returned. He accepted that cancer was the predetermined winner in this war.

*The Lovely Bones*

*The Lovely Bones* was written by Alice Sebold in 2002. Susie was a fourteen-year-old girl who was found murdered in her neighborhood in 1973. From Susie’s heaven, she looked down and followed the lives of her family members and friends as they learned more about her murder and moved on with their lives.

When the police told the Salmon family that a dog in the neighborhood found an elbow bone that they believe belonged to Susie, the family became upset. The policeman told them “Nothing is ever certain” (Sebold, 2002, p. 22). The family repeated this quote several more times in the book not believing that the bone belonged to Susie. They did not want to believe that it is was hers.

When Susie’s sister Lindsey was talking to her friend Samuel at camp, he asked her how she was doing. “I’m fine,” she said. But Samuel knew she wasn’t” (Sebold, 2002, p. 123). The camp that they were attending changed its competition from its original ide to a new competition about how to plan the perfect murder. Lindsey said she was fine although she was not because she was still upset about her sister’s murder.
Ruth, a friend of Susie's asked her friend Ray to go to the cornfield where Susie was murdered to light candles to say goodbye. Ray said, “How many times can you say it?” (Sebold, 2002, p. 202). Ruth remarked how it was just an idea. Saying goodbye was always hard especially since they never had a funeral for Susie. They had a service at the school, but many people did not attend. Since Susie was never found until many years later, it was more difficult to say goodbye to someone who was not actually there.

Susie and her father used to build ships in bottles together. It was something they always did together and her brother and sister never took part in this. While watching from heaven, Susie watched her dad smash the ships in bottles they had built. She wrote, “I watched him as he smashed the rest. He christened the walls and wooden chari with the news of my death and afterward he stood in the guest room/den surrounded by green grass” (Sebold, 2002, p. 46).

Lindsey was mad about her sister’s death. “My father listened to Lindsey in her room. Bang, the door was slammed shut. Thump, her books were thrown down” (Sebold, 2002, p. 60). Slamming the door and throwing her books down were two insights of the way Lindsey was expressing her anger.

No evidence of bargaining was found.

Susie’s mother left home after her death. She moved away to California to work in a winery. After taking breaks and exploring different places on a daily basis, she would feel it then, creeping up the side of her calves and into her gut, the onslaught, the grief coming, the tears like a small relentless army approaching the front lines of her eyes, and she would take a breath I, taking a large gulp of air to try to stop herself from crying in a public place. She asked for coffee and toast in a restaurant and buttered it with tears. (Sebold, 2002, p. 223)
Lindsey would tell Susie stories about a dead knight whose wife had to move on. “She couldn’t be trapped for the rest of her life by a man who was frozen in time. …‘You are dead, knight,’ she would say. ‘Time to move on’” (Sebold, 2002, p. 92). By telling this story, Lindsey and Susie acknowledged the acceptance the wife would have for the knight’s death. She had to move on.

People in the community were having a memorial for Susie and the family was surprised. Lindsey wanted to go and her mother said, “We’ve had the memorial,” she said, “That’s done for me” (Sebold, 2002, p. 206). Susie’s mother had already said her goodbyes and made peace at the memorial they had originally had for Susie, so she refused to go to another one.

When Susie’s mother returned home from California to be with her husband who had just had a heart attack, Susie’s father said something to her mother, “She’s never coming home. A clear and easy piece of truth that everyone who had ever known me had accepted. But he needed to say it, and she needed to hear him say it” (Sebold, 2002, p. 289).

Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if adolescent literature reflects the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross. Since death is a sensitive subject, it is important that when students are reading about death and dying, they are receiving information that reflects reality. It is important to know how books portray death and dying because students may be reading the selected literature as a source to find out more information, use as bibliotherapy, or for recreation. Regardless of the reason, the National Institute of Health (2009), recognizes that death be dealt with in an honest manner, and realistically, meaning, tell no lies about death and be honest from the beginning. In order to answer this question, a content analysis of seven
selected adolescent literature was selected and analyzed to see if the books align with Kubler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief theory.

In six out of the seven books (see Table 1), the characters experienced denial about death. Common characteristics were (a) loved ones did not want to believe that someone had died and (b) there was more to the death than was originally believed. In these books, the characters went looking for the reason why the person had died. In *The Dogs of Babel*, Paul believed that Lexy killed herself, and he wanted to know why. In *When You Were Here*, Danny was searching for the reason why his mother gave up her fight with cancer. In *Fall for Anything*, Eddie was in denial that her successful and happy father could have committed suicide, so she searched for the reason why. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Clay was in denial that he was, in fact, one of the reasons Hannah Baker killed herself.

*Table 1*

Summary Chart of Stages of Grief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Bargaining</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Dogs of Babel</em></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Thirteen Reasons Why</em></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>If I Stay</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>When You Were Here</em></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fall For Anything</em></td>
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<td><em>The Fault in Our Stars</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Lovely Bones</em></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the seven books had characters who experienced anger (see Table 1). The anger expressed was typically the character yelling, using curse words, or breaking objects. In *The Lovely Bones*, Susie’s father broke all the ships in glass bottles they had made together. In *The Dogs of Babel*, Paul dreamed that he saw Lexy again and yelled at her for leaving and for doing what she did knowing she had a baby on the way. In *If I Stay*, Mia’s best friend yelled at her mother when she was crying because she did not want to believe that Mia would not come out of the coma. Anger was either expressed by yelling or breaking and throwing objects.

Bargaining was only represented in three books. One book was when an unexpected death occurred and the victim was in a coma and the family and friends were holding on. The family and friends bargained and would have given anything for Mia to awaken from her coma. In *The Dogs of Babel* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the characters bargained to get answers they wanted after their loved ones had died.

Depression was depicted in five out of the seven books. A close loved one with the deceased often became depressed. In *If I Stay*, Eddie’s mother became depressed when her husband committed suicide. She would not eat, and would not get dressed and showed no interest in activities. The same occurred in *The Fault in Our Stars*. In the beginning, Hazel was depressed, would not eat, leave her bed, and was not interested in any activities. Other books such as *The Lovely Bones* depicted Susie’s mother being depressed after she would see whole families; she had to fight back her tears and pretend like she was not hurting.

All seven books included evidence of acceptance about death. This typically came at the end of the books when the grieving characters had experienced all the other stages or had found what they were searching for or answers to their questions. Acceptance in books about suicide
typically took the longest to occur versus the books in which the characters were dying from a medical condition or accident.

Summary

Seven books about death and dying were analyzed. The books were analyzed to see if the books aligned with Kubler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief theory. The books were read and evidence from the books was recorded on data sheets. After all books were read, a table was created in order to determine what books were missing stages if any.

Only one book that was analyzed included all five stages of grief. This book was about suicide and a husband’s determination to figure out if it was really an accident like it was originally ruled. All books analyzed included evidence of anger and acceptance.

Depression was the next category that was missing from two books. One book was about an accidental death of three family members while one remained in critical condition and the other was about a suicide.

Four books were missing bargaining. Two of the books that were missing bargaining were about the death of a loved one due to Cancer, one was about a suicide, and the other was an accident. Two of the books were about teenage characters who died, one fourteen and one was seventeen. The book about suicide was from the point of view from the deceased’s daughter and her experience dealing with her mother as well after his death.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to determine if adolescent literature reflects the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross. While death is a sensitive subject, it is important that when students are reading about death and dying, they are receiving information that reflects reality. It is important to know how books portray death and dying because students may be reading the selected literature as a source to learn more information, use as bibliotherapy, or for recreation use. In order to answer this question, a content analysis of seven selected adolescent literature was selected and analyzed to see if the books align with Kubler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief theory. Data charts were created and used to collect the data from the selected literature, and an analyses was conducted. This chapter will include a brief summary of the previous chapters, conclusions, recommendations for teachers, parents, and teacher educators, and for future research, along with a final summary.

Summary

It is important that students who are reading books about death and dying are reading information that is accurate. The National Institute of Health (2006) recognizes that when discussing with children or adolescents about death and dying that they receive accurate information. It is important that children and adolescents are not mislead when learning about death or experiencing it. This is one reason why it is important that books about death and dying reflect Kubler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief theory.

Pre-existing literature about death and dying was examined for this study. Chapter two included theoretical orientation to this study, historical research, and contemporary literature. Corr has conducted several content analyses on children’s literature. He has analyzed books about parent death, grandparent death, pet death, and sibling death.
John Piaget’s Schema Theory was used as a theoretical orientation for this study. Advice for how to discuss death and dying with children was also included in this study. This includes advice for teachers, parents, and school counselors.

A content analysis was conducted on seven selected adolescent books. These books were read and a data chart was used to gather evidence for this study. Each book was read and evidence of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance was recorded on a sheet. Afterwards, a table was created where an x was placed in each of the Five Stages of Grief areas if the books included evidence of those stages. Interpretations were then made based on the data gathered.

Only one book that was analyzed included all five stages of grief. Depression was the next category that was missing from two books. One book was about an accidental death of three family members while one remained in critical condition and the other was about a suicide. The category that was absent the most in the selected literature was bargaining.

Conclusions

Only one book included all of the Five Stages of Grief according to Kubler-Ross. It is evident that the literature is not aligned with the five stages of grief. All seven books in this study had three or more stages. One book included three, five books were missing one, and one book included all five stages. Anger and acceptance was always depicted in the literature. The stage that was most often missing was bargaining, followed by depression.

One conclusion that can be reached regarding adolescent books about death and dying is that bargaining was the least depicted stage in books. Characters in the books did not bargain with the deceased characters death in four out of the seven books. Since bargaining is not depicted in all the books, students who are reading these books will not fully understand the five
stages of grief depicted in all books. It is problematic that the books do not entail all of the Five Stages of Grief because if the books were being used for bibliotherapy, these books might not be as beneficial as other books that included all stages. According to Walker (1986) all information in the books that are being used for bibliotherapy needs to be accurate. While this pertains to medical practices and information about diseases, it also pertains to the grieving process. Including no evidence in any of the literature that a character might bargain when he/she loses a loved one, does not qualify these books to be used for bibliotherapy. Since bibliotherapy is a source of therapy, it must be conducted with a professional, and the professionals need to be aware of what books are being used and what components the books have. This is one reason why it is important for adults to read this literature as well as adolescents.

Another conclusion that can be reached is the two most frequently occurring stages of death and dying are anger and acceptance. Characters who were angry expressed their anger through yelling, throwing objects, breaking objects, or by using curse words. The curse words appeared in three out of seven books. While reading, it is important to note that these words enhance the speech the characters are given and really allows one to know that the character is experiencing anger. With acceptance, the characters typically accepted the death at the end of the novel or after they learned something they thought they were searching for. In every book, the characters were all looking for an answer to some question, whether it be why did my father kill himself? Or why did my mom really spend her time in Toyko and what did she want me to find out? After the characters figured out the answers to their question, they were able to accept the death and loss of their loved one. In every novel, the characters that experienced acceptance always had a discussion with someone or shared the moment with another character in the book. In most books, all characters had one best friend they relied on throughout the story.
Based on this content analysis that was conducted, when students are reading literature, not all of the literature will align with Kubler-Ross’s five stages of grief. It is important for students to understand all five stages because people experience the five stages. When all five stages are depicted in the literature, students who are learning and reading about death for the first time will have a better understanding of the five stages of grief and how the grieving may respond to death in different situations. While it is not necessarily true that everyone experiences every stage of grief in the specific order, it is important that when learning about death we are learning about death in more than one way. As mentioned, every death experience is different and no one has the same experience. Some stages of grief may last longer for some people than others. It varies person to person, but it is important that students recognize there are five stages and can be exposed to the five stages.

Recommendations

Death is a very sensitive subject and must be handled in a delicate manner. While no death experience will ever be the same, it is important that students understand the grieving process and that students who are reading books and are understanding death as it aligns with the five stages of grief.

For Teachers Educators

Teacher educators should be required to teach about death and dying. Classroom teachers might be the ones who will have to discuss death with the students in their classroom. Learning what books can be used as bibliotherapy or as a teaching tool would be very beneficial for teachers. A classroom teacher would not want to pull a book off the shelf to teach about death and dying or to use as a book for bibliotherapy when it does not include all the five stages of grief. Although it is recognized that it might not be true that everyone experiences every stage
of grief, students should still be exposed to seeing every stage of grief depicted. Books about bibliotherapy are required to contain factual information in order to be helpful (Walker, 1986).

Recommendations for Parents

Parents and guardians who are looking for literature for their children to read will want to be aware of the Five Stages of Grief and how they are portrayed in books for their students. According to the National Institute for Health (2006), when discussing death with children and adolescents, it is important to be honest. As stated, children should never be lied to about death and being honest is the best way to explain death. Explaining the Five Stages of Grief to children through literature might allow the children to connect more to the literature and be able to make text-to-self or text-to-world connections. Making text-to-world or text-to-self connections allows students to make more meaningful connections with the text and be able to relate to it on a deeper level.

For Future Research

This topic is prevalent in today’s world and more content analysis need to be conducted to learn more about this topic. This topic used to be taboo in the 1970s and 1980s and we have now ventured a long way. While discussing death out loud is still difficult for some people, there is more and more literature being published yearly about death and dying.

While this investigation included books about death and dying that were based on accidents, medical conditions, or suicide, future studies could be conducted in with more specific causes of death. For example, the Five Stages of Grief could be investigated in books about suicide, or accidental deaths. This would allow a better understanding about what books about death and dying are most aligned with the five stages of grief. By selecting books based on the specific cause of death, more data could be collected. Choosing books based on the cause of
death would allow more insight and more critical analysis to be conducted. This could possibly be connected with the way loved ones deal with suicide or an expected or unexpected death. While no grieving process is the same, looking at more specific generalizations in the area would be beneficial to future researchers. Choosing a book that reflects something someone has experienced in his/her own life would be beneficial when being used with bibliotherapy.

In the future, more books should be analyzed. Only seven books were analyzed which limits the data. The more books that are analyzed, the clearer the picture will become about how books address issues of death and dying and how the five stages of grief are represented in those books.

Summary

The books that were selected for this analysis allow us after interpretation of the data collected to determine that adolescent literature does not reflect the Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross. It is important that the literature reflects the Five Stages of Grief because students may be reading the literature to gain more information and the lack of information in the novels will not provide an accurate representation of grief with stages missing.

It is recommended that parents and teachers both read the books that students are reading about death and dying so they are able to know if the books are providing them with accurate information. While it is noted that not everyone will experience every stage of grief, students still need to know about all of the five stages of grief when dealing with a death.

Future educators need to be taught about teaching death and dying when preparing for their licensure to make sure they are able to adequately relate and connect with their students. This will allow teachers to make recommendations to students about a book if needed.
For future research, more research should be conducted. More books should be analyzed and a longer study should be conducted. It is important that more research is done and it should be broken up into categories based on the cause of death.
REFERENCES


Green, J. (2012). The fault in our stars. Waterville, Me: Thorndike Press.


McDonald, N. & Messinger, D. (n.d.). The development of empathy: How, when, and why. Informally published manuscript, University of Miami Department of Psychology,


APPENDIX A

CHEKLIST FOR BOOK SELECTION CRITERIA
Book Requirements:

_____ Published between 2000-2013

_____ Written towards young adults

_____ Fiction
APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION TOOL
Book Title _____________________________________________________

Author ________________________________________________________

Year Published _________________________________________________

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Deceased character ______________________________

Age ______________

Cause of Death __________________

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1.

2.

3.

4.
APPENDIX C

DATA COLLECTED
Book Title *The Lovely Bones*

Author Alice Sebold

Year Published 2002

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Deceased character **Susie**

Age **14**

Cause of Death **murder**

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Mother
2. Father
3. Sister - Lindsey
4. Brother- Buckley

5. Ray – Boy who had a crush on Susie
Book Title *If I Stay*

Author Gayle Forman

Year Published 2009

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Deceased character **Mom, Dad, Mia’s brother, Mia (in a coma)**

Age **Mia’s brother- 7, Mia- 17**

Cause of Death **Car Accident**

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Kim- Mia’s best friend
2. Kim’s mother
3. Adam – Mia’s boyfriend
**Book Title** Fall For Anything

**Author** Courtney Summers

**Year Published** 2012

**Evidence:**

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Deceased character **Eddie’s Father**

Age **Approximately 50-60**

Cause of Death **Suicide**

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Eddie- Daughter

2. Wife

3. Culler – His student

4. Milo – Eddie’s Friend
**Book Title** *The Dogs of Babel*

**Author** Carolyn Parkhurst

**Year Published** 2003

**Evidence:**

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Deceased character **Lexy**

**Age** Approximately 30-35

**Cause of Death** Ruled an accident, thought to be suicide

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Paul, her husband
Book Title *When You Were Here*

Author *Daily Whitney*

Year Published *2003*

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Deceased character **Danny’s mom**

Age **Unknown**

Cause of Death **Cancer**
List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Danny - Son
2. Holland – Danny’s girlfriend
3. Kana- friend of Danny and his mother
4. Laini- Daughter/Danny’s sister
**Book Title** *Thirteen Reasons Why*

**Author** Jay Asher

**Year Published** 2007

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Deceased character Hannah Baker

Age 16

Cause of Death Suicide

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Clay – Friend of Hannah
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**Denial:**

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Deceased character Augustus

Age 17

Cause of Death Cancer

List of grieving characters along with relationship

1. Hazel - Girlfriend
2. Hazels Parents
3. Isaac – Friend
APPENDIX D

LIST OF QUALIFIED BOOKS


