

University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

---

Senior Honors Projects

Honors Program at the University of Rhode  
Island

---

5-2017

## Healing Through Bibliotherapy

Kristina N. Spinelli

University of Rhode Island, kspinelli21@my.uri.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog>



Part of the [Other English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Other Mental and Social Health Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Spinelli, Kristina N., "Healing Through Bibliotherapy" (2017). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 521.  
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/521>

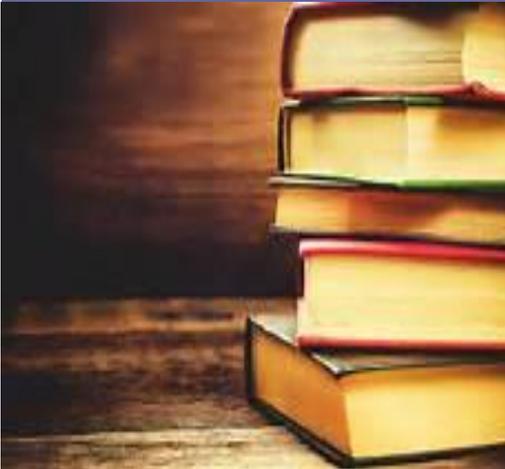
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons-group@uri.edu](mailto:digitalcommons-group@uri.edu).

# Bibliotherapy: A Reader's Guide

A reading regimen for adolescents coping with their parents' divorce

Kristina Spinelli

Undergraduate at the University of Rhode Island



## What it is & how it works

The program connects the three stages of bibliotherapy with the five stages of emotions that an adolescent feels as a result of his or her parents' divorce. Each piece of literature will take the reader through the three stages of bibliotherapy: identification and projection, abreaction and catharsis, and insight and integration. While working through the stages of bibliotherapy, each text will also move the adolescent through the stages of emotions that he or she is likely to feel as an effect of the experience. The five stages of emotions are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The program begins with four poems written by children who have experienced their parents getting a divorce. This will allow the adolescent to connect with another child who has experienced similar emotions. There are poems to show different experiences and perspectives of divorce. It's difficult to get adolescents to read longer novels, so starting with shorter poems can help gradually immerse them into the program. These poems will guide the child through the stages of denial and anger. The program will then switch to three fiction novels, guiding the child through the bargaining, depression and acceptance stages of emotion. Fiction novels will allow the adolescents to connect with characters experiencing similar emotions and explore in text relationships to understand their own.

Title	Author	Genre	Stage of Emotion
<b>Seperation</b>	Sophie	Poem	Denial
<b>Perfect Life</b>	Destiny Ortiz	Poem	Denial
<b>Don't You Want Me?</b>	Jenny Miller	Poem	Anger
<b>Daddy</b>	Veronika J	Poem	Anger
<b>Sometimes Love Isn't Enough</b>	Lurlene McDaniel	Fiction novel	Bargaining
<b>Still Life with Tornado</b>	A.S. King	Fiction novel	Depression
<b>Happyface</b>	Stephen Emond	Fiction novel	Acceptance

# 5 stages of emotions felt by adolescents as a result of their parents' divorce:

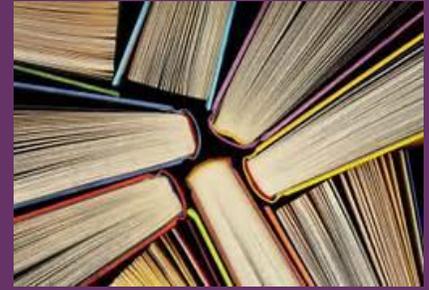


- 1) Denial → this is the stage in which a child does not want to accept that his or her parents are getting a divorce. Why is this happening? It can't happen to my family.
- 2) Anger → this is the stage in which a child gears his or her feelings at everyone else and might be hard to be around. The child may experience negative emotions towards one's parents for allowing this to happen.
- 3) Bargaining → this is the stage in which a child will try and put off or delay the divorce.
- 4) Depression → this is the stage in which a child starts to realize that divorce is becoming a reality and that he or she cannot stop it or delay it from happening. Feelings will be very volatile and one may not enjoy activities that they used to because of the feelings that he or she may be experiencing.
- 5) Acceptance → this is the stage in which a child accepts the divorce experience. He or she will try to adjust and find ways to cope with the experience.



# Why these specific texts?

These pieces of literature have specifically been chosen to be included in the reading program because they each represent the divorce experience in a different way. Every child that is involved in his or her parents' divorce has a different experience.



## Seperation

© Sophie

Published on November 2011

One day, the worst in my life  
The two that once loved me so,  
Ripped my world apart with some few words  
That I really wish I had not heard  
But that night changed my life  
Like the way day turns to night  
I had now given up trying to fight.

What happened to richer or for poorer,  
For better or for worse?  
I look back at those photographs  
You two, filled with many content laughs  
But that one night, which will never be forgotten  
Changed my life, not for better, but for worse  
A light had been turned out like there had been a curse.

Perhaps I could have done something  
To stop this grim thing  
Was it me? Did I play a part in this?  
You say it is not so, but how could I ever know?  
Perhaps, just perhaps, I could have changed your ways  
And I may not be in such a daze.

## Perfect Life

© Destiny Ortiz

Why did it have to be me  
This isn't how it should be  
My father was never there  
I don't even know if he cares  
My mom was in a relationship for years  
I saw her through all her fears  
I saw her cry at night  
I saw the day she had to fight  
I was there through it all  
Back then she seemed so small  
Now she stands so tall  
It is like she can touch the sky  
To those problems she said bye  
While I laid in bed and wondered why  
My perfect life fell, just died  
My dad choose to do wrong things  
Now just thinking about it stings  
Now I have another sister and brother  
They make me smile like no other  
My dad is having another baby  
Now I thought that was just crazy  
My heart is bleeding like it was stabbed with a knife  
But it's just me wondering what happened to my perfect life.

## Don't You Want Me?

© Jenny Miller

Daddy says he loves me but he doesn't really mean it  
Mommy says she cares but I'm not dumb enough to believe it  
They both just want the money that comes with the child  
Don't you want me?

Daddy says mom's lying that she doesn't really want me  
Mommy says she knows the truth that dad doesn't want me  
I know it's true but it hurts to know that I'm not wanted  
Don't you want me?

I'm your own flesh and blood and daughter too  
Why do you ignore me when I love both of you  
I give you presents of love but you both decline  
Please, can't you listen to what's on my mind

I'm alone and unwanted  
Uncared for unloved

But no one can hear me, not even my friends  
They still believe I'll be happy till the end

## Daddy

© Veronika J.

It happened 6 months ago  
Though it seems like yesterday  
I remember it clearly  
It was a cold autumn day  
You told me you loved me  
Then left through the door  
3 bags and a suitcase was all you carried  
As you got in your car and drove more and more  
Wet tears ran down my cheek  
As I heard your last car beep  
I knew the fun times and the games were over  
No more kisses at night no more bear hugs when I'm sober  
No more laughing in front of a warm blazing fire  
No none of that because you're a cold hearted liar  
For 13 years you only cheated and swore  
You weren't the daddy figure I would adore  
You tried your best to be a good dad  
But somehow at the end of the day I would end up being sad  
When I was younger it was easier  
I was put into a your arms and you held me tight  
You would never let go if I were scared at night  
But all those moments are just pale memories  
Because of you I was left on the bottom of a hole  
I had to find my own way out.  
It wasn't easy but I survived  
Because my mum and my sister were by my side  
I have just one more thing to say  
As you live with your new wife, just remember  
You gave a 13-year-old girl life  
And it doesn't matter what you feel or did  
She is still your little kid.

*Seperation* is a poem written by a girl named Sophie who experienced her parents' divorce. Her poem embodies the emotions that an adolescent experiences in the denial stage. The major key word is WHY? WHY is this happening? WHY couldn't I do something to prevent it?

A copy of this poem can be found at:

<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/seperation>

*Perfect Life*, written by Destiny Ortiz, is another poem where a child experiences the emotions in the denial stage. She's still unsure of WHY this all happened to her. This is an alternative poem because divorce is an event that individuals experience differently.

A copy of this poem can be found at:

<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/MzE4NDU>

*Don't You Want Me?* written by Jenny Miller, is a poem that embodies the emotions that an adolescent experiences in the anger stage. Adolescents often get mad at their parents for putting them through this experience.

A copy of this poem can be found at:

<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/Mzg1MTk>

*Daddy*, written by Veronika J, is another poem where the child feels anger towards a parent. Sometimes children feel anger towards both parents, other times it's just towards one. This poem shows another perspective.

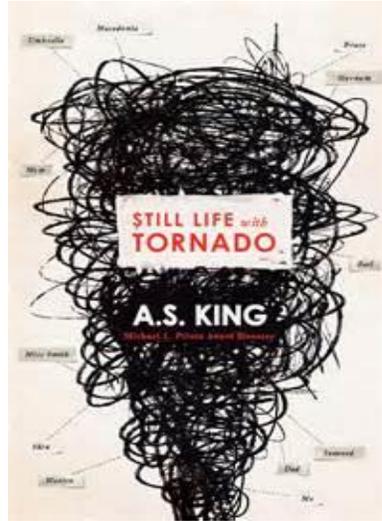
A copy of this poem can be found at:

<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/daddy-im-still-your-kid>

# Fiction Novels:



*Sometimes Love Isn't Enough*, written by Lurlene McDaniel, is a story about a seventh grade girl experiencing the effects of her parents' divorce. Andrea is doing what she can to try and keep her family together and keep their secrets from being exposed. She tries bargaining with her parents to stay together because she wants to have a 'normal' family. She tries setting them up on a blind date until she finds out her father is seeing another woman. As her parents take on a temporary separation, Andrea is told she needs to take on more responsibilities at home. She becomes overwhelmed trying to balance school, friends, a new boy, the lead role in the school play, and her chores at home. Andrea struggles with the challenges that her new lifestyle brings. Many adolescents feel embarrassed when their parents are getting a divorce and try to hide their family life from their friends at school, which is what the main character is doing here. Although she keeps this secret from her teachers and best friend, she does eventually confide in a new boy that she has met at school. This is important because adolescents should feel like they can speak about the divorce experience without being ashamed. Andrea, the main character, experiences the thoughts and emotions that many adolescents feel during the bargaining stage. She finds various ways to plead with her parents to not get a divorce.



*Still Life with Tornado*, written by A.S. King, is a novel about a girl trying to express her feelings through creativity. Sarah has been trying to come to grips with her parents' toxic marriage that supposedly ended years ago and has left a huge hole in her heart. Sarah's brother reveals to her that her parents have only stayed together for the sake of their kids. She's been dealing with her emotions for years and trying to find a way to come to terms with what has happened. She is depressed and has stopped going to school, showering, and engaging in social activities as a result. Her parents are too busy fighting to notice and feel like they can't control their daughter's actions anymore. Sarah's brother moved away due to his parents' abusive relationship. The entire family has been keeping secrets from Sarah, and now that the truth is finally coming out, Sarah is trying to find a way to cope with her feelings. This novel is unique because it displays the emotions that Sarah feels at different ages. It also displays her brother's feelings towards their parents. The depression stage can usually last the longest out of all the stages and is usually when a child is referred to a therapist or psychologist. Finding a way to cope with one's feelings during this stage, such as reading or art, is critical to helping an adolescent move forward. Sarah's lack of emotions in the novel also displays the impact that divorce can have on making a child depressed.



*Happyface* is a unique book that is written and illustrated by Stephen Emond. It takes the form of a journal, to display insight into a troubled boy's life. He decides to write this journal to document memories, express his feelings, and make sense of his crazy life, including his parents' collapsed relationship. After his parents get a divorce and a tragic event involving his brother, this tenth grade boy puts on his mask and takes on the role of 'happyface'. Happyface is forced to move into a new apartment with just his mother, and make friends at a new school. His father becomes a vacant figure who is battling alcohol addiction. Happyface displays his emotions through the private journal that his father got him for Christmas. His journal helps him accept this new lifestyle and forgive the past. Happyface is essential to this program because it is tangible evidence of someone accepting a broken relationship and being able to find a way to cope with the divorce experience. This book is suggested in the hopes that adolescents experiencing divorce will connect with the character and see how he has struggled in each stage, just like them, but has been able to find a way to cope with his feelings and free himself of the unhappiness propelled onto him by his parents' divorce. He has taken a creative approach as a means of catharsis and it helps him better understand relationships both familial and friendly.