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Finding Self-Identity Amid Social pressures

Understanding self-identity versus societal expectations is crucial for teens, as it helps them navigate the often conflicting pressures of who they are and who they are expected to be. During adolescence, individuals are in a pivotal phase of self-discovery and development. They are forming their values, beliefs, and sense of self, all while being bombarded with societal norms and expectations. Books like "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Bronte and "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" by Erika Sánchez offer powerful narratives highlighting these struggles. These stories provide a mirror for teens, reflecting their own experiences and challenges in a way that is both relatable and enlightening. Through the characters' journeys, readers can see the importance of authenticity and the courage it takes to stand up for one's true self.

These books serve as essential educational tools for teaching teens about the complexities of identity and the external pressures they face. For instance, "Everything, Everything" by Nicola Yoon and "Turtles All the Way Down" by John Green delve into the protagonists' internal battles and how they reconcile their identities with the world's expectations. These narratives encourage empathy and understanding, allowing teens to see the value in embracing their unique identities. By reading about characters who grapple with similar issues, teens can gain insights into their own lives and feel less isolated in their struggles. This understanding fosters resilience and self-acceptance, which are crucial for navigating the often tumultuous teenage years. Ultimately, literature exploring self-identity versus societal expectations not only entertains but educates and empowers teens to be true to themselves.

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ENGL-112B, Sec 01

Annotated Bibliography

Albertalli, Becky. *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*. Balzer + Bray, 2015.

- I have not read this novel, but it has been on my TBR list for a long time.
- "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" by Becky Albertalli is a heartfelt and humorous novel that explores self-identity and the journey of coming out as a gay teenager. The story centers on Simon Spier, a high school junior who is not openly gay and prefers to keep his sexuality a secret. However, when an email falls into the wrong hands, Simon must step out of his comfort zone and navigate the challenges of coming out to his friends and family. The novel delves deeply into themes of self-acceptance, the fear of being different, and the courage it takes to be true to oneself. Albertalli's writing is engaging and relatable, making it a significant and influential read for teens grappling with their identities. The book also highlights the importance of supportive friendships and the impact of societal pressures on personal growth, making it a valuable addition to discussions on self-identity for young adults. Through Simon's journey, readers are encouraged to embrace their authentic selves and find strength in their uniqueness.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999.

- I have read this novel and seen the movie. It is a heart-wrenching story for women who have experienced SA.
- "Speak" by Laurie Halse Anderson is a powerful and poignant novel that addresses the struggles of self-identity and the impact of trauma on a teenager's life. The story follows Melinda Sordino, a high school freshman who becomes an outcast after calling the police at a summer party and subsequently loses her voice, both literally and metaphorically. As Melinda grapples with the aftermath of a traumatic event, she retreats into silence, finding solace in art and slowly reclaiming her voice. Anderson's writing is

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ENGL-112B, Sec 01

raw and honest, capturing many teens' emotional turmoil and isolation. The novel profoundly explores the importance of speaking out and the journey toward self-acceptance and healing. Through Melinda's experiences, readers are encouraged to understand the significance of finding one's voice and the strength it takes to confront and overcome personal demons. This book is a crucial read for teens dealing with identity struggles and the pressures of high school, offering a message of resilience and hope.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Elder & Co Smith, 1847.

- I have not read this book, but I have seen the movie.
- "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë is a canonical novel that delves deeply into the themes of self-identity, independence, and moral integrity. The story follows the life of Jane Eyre, an orphaned girl who faces a series of trials and tribulations from childhood to adulthood. Despite the hardships and societal expectations of the Victorian era, Jane remains steadfast in her principles and sense of self.
- Throughout the novel, Jane's journey is marked by her quest for love, belonging, and self-respect. Her relationships with characters like Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers challenge her to balance her emotions with her need for autonomy and self-worth. Brontë's portrayal of Jane as a strong, resilient, and morally upright woman underscores the importance of self-identity and personal integrity.
- The novel emphasizes that true self-identity comes from within and is not defined by external circumstances or societal norms. Jane's refusal to compromise her values, even when faced with loneliness and adversity, is a powerful message about staying true to oneself. "Jane Eyre" remains a timeless exploration of the complexities of identity, making it a significant read for anyone grappling with their sense of self in the face of societal pressures.

Brianna Gier

Dr. Warner

9 Dec. 2024

ENGL-112B, Sec 01

Green, John. *Looking for Alaska*. Dutton Juvenile, 2005.

- I have read and seen the movie.
- "Looking for Alaska" by John Green is a captivating novel that navigates the complexities of self-discovery and personal growth amidst the challenges of adolescence. The story follows Miles "Pudge" Halter as he embarks on a journey to a boarding school in search of a "Great Perhaps." There, he meets the enigmatic and unpredictable Alaska Young, who leads him on a whirlwind of experiences that ultimately shape his understanding of life, love, and loss.
- "Looking for Alaska" poignantly reminds us that self-discovery is a journey filled with both joy and sorrow and that true growth often stems from moments of vulnerability and introspection. It resonates with teens navigating the pressures of social expectations and the search for a genuine sense of identity in a rapidly changing world.

Green, John. *Turtles all the way down*. Dutton Books, 2017.

- I have not read this novel.
- "Turtles All the Way Down" by John Green is a deeply moving novel that explores themes of mental illness, identity, and the search for self amidst the chaos of life. The story centers around Aza Holmes, a teenage girl grappling with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), as she tries to solve the mystery of a missing billionaire while navigating the complexities of her own mind.
- "Turtles All the Way Down" highlights the significance of self-identity in facing mental health challenges. It underscores that understanding and accepting oneself, including one's flaws and struggles, is crucial for personal growth and meaningful connections. This novel offers a powerful message about the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of compassion and empathy in the journey of self-discovery.

Khorram, Adib. *Darius the Great is Not Okay*. Dial Press, 2018.

Brianna Gier
Dr. Warner
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- I have not read this book but it's on my TBR!
- "Darius the Great Is Not Okay" by Adib Khorram is a touching novel that delves into identity, mental health, and cultural heritage themes. The story follows Darius Kellner, a half-Persian, half-American teenager who struggles with clinical depression and feels like an outsider both at school and within his own family.
- When Darius travels to Iran to meet his maternal grandparents for the first time, he embarks on self-discovery. There, he forms a deep friendship with Sohrab, a local boy, which helps him explore his cultural roots and understand his own identity better. Through this friendship, Darius learns to navigate his feelings of inadequacy and finds a sense of belonging.
- Khorram's novel beautifully captures the complexities of growing up with multiple cultural identities and dealing with mental health issues. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and accepting oneself and the value of genuine connections with others. "Darius the Great Is Not Okay" is a poignant reminder that it's okay not to have everything figured out and that seeking help and embracing one's true self are crucial steps in the journey toward self-acceptance and happiness.

Riordan, Rick. *Lightning Thief*. Miramax Books, 2005.

- I have read this entire series and seen the movie and tv series!
- "The Lightning Thief" by Rick Riordan is the first book in the Percy Jackson & the Olympians series. It follows the adventures of Percy Jackson, a twelve-year-old boy who discovers that he is a demigod, the son of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea.
- Percy's life changes dramatically when he learns of his true heritage and is sent to Camp Half-Blood, a safe haven for demigods. There, he meets other demigods and learns about his powers. Soon, Percy embarks on a quest to prevent a war among the gods.

Brianna Gier
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He must retrieve Zeus's stolen lightning bolt and return it to Mount Olympus before the summer solstice.

- Throughout his journey, Percy faces numerous challenges and monsters from Greek mythology. He is joined by his friends Annabeth Chase, the daughter of Athena, and Grover Underwood, a satyr. Together, they navigate various trials and discover the importance of friendship, bravery, and self-acceptance.

Sánchez, Erika. *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. Random House Children's Books, 2017.

- I have not read this novel.
- "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" by Erika L. Sánchez is a powerful novel that explores themes of family, identity, and cultural expectations. The story centers around Julia Reyes, a Mexican-American teenager who struggles to live up to the idealized image of her older sister, Olga, who has recently died in a tragic accident.
- Through Julia's journey, Sánchez addresses the complexities of growing up between two cultures and the challenges of finding one's own path amid familial and societal pressures. The novel is a poignant exploration of self-discovery, resilience, and the importance of authenticity. It resonates with readers who have experienced similar struggles with identity and the desire to carve out their own place in the world.

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. HarperCollins, 2017.

- I have not read this book but I do own it!
- "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas is a compelling and thought-provoking novel that delves into issues of race, identity, and social justice. The story follows Starr Carter, a sixteen-year-old African American girl who lives in a poor neighborhood but attends a predominantly white prep school.

Brianna Gier
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- As Starr navigates these challenges, she confronts her identity and the different worlds she inhabits. The novel explores the impact of systemic racism and the power of finding one's voice amid adversity. "The Hate U Give" is a powerful narrative that encourages readers to reflect on their beliefs and the importance of standing up for what is right.

Yoon, Nicola. *Everything, Everything*. Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2015.

- I have not read this book.
- "Everything, Everything" by Nicola Yoon is a captivating and emotional novel about Maddy Whittier, a teenager who has lived her entire life in isolation due to a severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), which means she is allergic to almost everything. Her world is confined to her home, where she lives with her mother and is cared for by her nurse, Carla.
- The novel explores love, risk, and the desire for freedom. Maddy's journey is one of self-discovery and courage as she decides to step out of her comfort zone and take control of her destiny. "Everything, Everything" is a touching story highlighting the importance of living life to the fullest, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Works Cited

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