Valuing Student and Teacher Voices: Using Literacy Quadrants to Disrupt Notions of Stigma in Young Adult Literature Focused on Mental Illness.

Kia Jane Richmond  
*Northern Michigan University, krichmon@nmu.edu*

Elsie L. Olan  
*University of Central Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_conferencepresentations](https://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_conferencepresentations)

Part of the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](https://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_conferencepresentations)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_conferencepresentations/356](https://commons.nmu.edu/facwork_conferencepresentations/356)

This Conference Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the FacWorks at NMU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Conference Presentations by an authorized administrator of NMU Commons. For more information, please contact kmcdonou@nmu.edu, bsarjean@nmu.edu.
Exploring Emotion, Mental Illness, and Grief in English Education

Valuing Student and Teacher Voices: Using Literacy Quadrants to Disrupt Notions of Stigma in Young Adult Literature Focused on Mental Illness

National Council of Teachers of English Conference, Houston 2018

Kia Jane Richmond, Ph. D.

Northern Michigan University

Elsie Lindy Olan, Ph. D.

University of Central Florida
Mental Illness

- Students’ literacy quadrant drawings (from two different universities) demonstrate their clear understanding of the stigma associated with mental illness (e.g., negative words & behaviors).

- According to research from the National Institute of Mental Health - which estimates that 1 in 5 teens and 1 in 25 adults has a serious mental disorder, teachers **will** have students in their classes for whom mental illness is a reality.
Mental Illness

- Teacher candidates can address this issue through literature included in their curriculum, especially with young adult texts that feature mental illness as a theme (e.g., *Turtles All the Way Down* - OCD; *Challenger Deep* - Schizophrenia; *Highly Illogical Behavior* - anxiety; *Girl in Pieces* - self-injury/suicide; *When Reason Breaks* - depression/suicide).

- Literacy quadrants can be a key practice in confronting the stigma associated with mental illness.

- Definition of “literacy quadrants” - adapted from the Frayer model (1969), literacy quadrants include prompts for each quadrant about students’ thinking, writing, identity, and cultural awareness. Literacy quadrants are used as a metacognitive tool that helped students to explore their cultures, learning, and literate lives.
Literacy Quadrants Data Analysis

Semiotics - Morris (1964)
Symbols - Langer (1948)

- Images - What images say about students’ perceptions of mental illness (key terms, emotions)
- Language - What words say about students’ perceptions of mental illness (themes)

*Literacy Quadrants convey students’ perceptions of mental illness and other social issues, their knowledge of literature (including YA texts), and their cultural beliefs/backgrounds.*
Literacy Quadrants Instructional Sequence

- Upper Left Quadrant
  - Draw a picture that depicts mental illness
- Upper Right Quadrant
  - Draw a picture about how the characters with mental illness are portrayed in literature (canon and YA lit)
- Bottom Left Quadrant
  - Draw a picture showing your favorite text featuring a character with mental illness
- Bottom Right Quadrant
  - Draw images that reflect your concerns/difficulties with teaching texts about characters with mental illness

Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Realistic!

Confusion

Self-harm

Helplessness

Heartbreakingly

Hopeful

Self-doubt

Looking for Alaska

13 Reasons Why

You're not qualified to teach a topic like this!

You're putting ideas into their heads?

They cannot handle these topics!

This is irrelevant!
Common Themes Identified

1. Mental illness is having 2 sides:
   a. Internal/external
   b. Private/public
   c. Internal conflict/brave face
   d. Conceal truth/pretend
      (Related – doesn’t want world to know about private side)

2. Feeling lonely, excluded, isolated, face in the crowd, misunderstood – related to bullying, constant questioning, struggling, trapped, lost, feeling helpless, falling apart, racing thoughts

3. Negative emotion or thoughts such as sadness, angry, mad, unhappy, upset, frustrated, confused, unfocused, conflicted, uncertainty, fears, attacked

4. Popular books mentioned – *13 Reasons Why, Girl in Pieces, Perks of Being a Wallflower, Looking for Alaska*

5. Difficult to talk about mental illness – suffer in silence; people are opposed to the topic

Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Key Terms (emotions, mental illnesses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lonely/Loneliness/ALone in a Crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racing thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceal unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying/Retaliating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't want world to know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood swings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar disorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Key Terms (emotions, mental illnesses)

My mind won’t shut up
Kindness for weakness
I need help
I don’t know how to help you
On the inside
Misunderstood
Everyday people
Real problems
Anxiety
Why?
I’m not good enough
Mental illness

This is a sensitive topic
How can you talk about what you don’t know?
Sad/misfortunate
Bad/or/crazy
It’s poison
Do it!
They’re watching! They want to hurt you!
Look here
___’s acting funny! What’s wrong with ___?
13 reasons why
Perks of being a wallflower
Looking for Alaska

Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Significant Statements from Data

1. Having a mental illness is related to an internal/external conflict.
2. Mental illnesses are associated with negative emotions and behaviors/actions.
3. Mental illness is difficult to talk about; people are often opposed to the topic.
4. There are popular young adult books that focus on mental illness.
The statements perpetuate the dominant narrative about mental illness.

Stereotypes of individuals with mental disorders contribute to stigmatizing behaviors.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Canada) reports common misconceptions about individuals with mental illness include believing that they are

• “all potentially violent and dangerous”
• “responsible for their condition” and
• “have nothing positive to contribute.” (2001)

Likewise, research on public stigma toward mental illness in the U.S. finds that stigmatizing beliefs about the dangerousness of individuals with mental illness have risen over time and that beliefs of “shame, blame, incompetency, punishment, and criminality of people with mental illness are common.”

Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Results

How do literacy quadrants disrupt notions of stigma in young adult literature specifically focused on mental illness?

1. The creation of drawings helps students unpack their notions about mental illness (the images are pictures of their understandings).
2. Engaging students in dialogue about the drawings (the next step we would take in the classroom) helps students identify their values and identify stigma.
3. Using young adult literature can help students to revisit their biases and position them in relation to literature and to their world.

Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Statements’ relationship to dominant narrative and research on mental illness

Since 2012, there has been a renaissance of interest in mental illness in young adult literature (e.g., publications in *Study and Scrutiny; Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy; Language Arts Journal of Michigan; School Library Journal; Journal of Popular Culture, International Journal of Literary Theory*).

Our study is supported by Kia’s research on the issue, which is included in this fall’s *ALAN Review* (a special issue on “The Psychology of YA Literature), and in her new book, due out next month from ABC-CLIO (Libraries Unlimited Press).
Resources


Copyright Kia Jane Richmond and Elsie Lindy Olan, NCTE Houston 2018
Thank you!

Elsie Lindy Olan
elsie.olan@ucf.edu
Kia Jane Richmond
krichmon@nmu.edu