**No one understands what I’m going through:**

**An annotated bibliography for urban youth living in poverty.**

Every student should be able to have their experiences mirrored in the books they read. Books have the unique ability to make readers feel less alone. I hope to be a guidance counselor for a school in a high poverty, urban area. As such, I thought it important to find books that realistically portray some of the difficult experiences faced by many urban youth. However, I purposefully selected books that portrayed these issues in a way that does not neglect the strengths of urban communities and individuals. The following books detail the complexities, both the good and the bad, of living in an urban context. While “urban” is often used as a euphemism for people of color, the true connection between the characters in these books is how they are affected by living in poverty in the city. Furthermore, I chose only books that presented a realistic portrayal of how characters develop their own identity within an urban setting. I also strove to choose novels in which characters make mistakes and the stories are not simply a vehicle for a moral.

The bulk of the books on this list came from the recommendation section of the Horn Book article “What Makes a Good YA Urban Novel” by Randy Ribay. All books except for *Lost and Found*, are rated 1-3 on the Horn Book Guide. A few books came from the syllabus and an Amazon search.

Key to How Found:

HBA = Horn Book Article “What Makes a Good YA Urban Novel”

SYL = Syllabus

AS = Amazon Search

*Ball Don’t Lie* by Matt De La Pena. 2005. Random House. Basketball, Foster homes, Child abuse, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Grades 6-9. HBG: 3. HBA.

Sticky has been to four foster homes since he found his drug addicted mother dead in a bathtub. Dealing with issues of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and abandonment, Sticky focuses his energy and emotions into basketball finding a home and make shift family at the local rec center.

*Flowers in the Sky* by Lynn Joseph. 2013. HaperCollins. Immigrants, Brothers and sisters, Dominican Americans, Coming of age, Love, New York, Dominican Republic. Grades 6-10 HBG: 2. HBA.

Begrudgingly sent to NYC from her beautiful town in the Dominican Republic, 15-year-old Nina has strict directives from “Mami” to marry a rich man. Soon after she moves in with her 25-year-old brother Nina begins to question how he makes enough money to pay for their life in Washington Heights and send money home. Although a saccharine sweet love story is not so artfully woven in, Joseph thoughtfully details a young woman’s struggle to understand her new life in a place she never wanted to be.

*Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woods. 2003. Penguin Putnam Books. African American boys, Brothers and sisters, Foster care, Orphans, Schools, Children’s poetry. Grades 4-6. HBG: 1. HBA.

Lonnie is unable to process the sudden loss of his parents until an influential teacher introduces him the outlet of poetry. From heart wrenching descriptions of being separated from his sister to his windy journey to find and understand God, Lonnie endears himself to the reader with his poignant observations and honest insights about the world through the eyes of an 11-year-old boy*.*

*Lost and Found* by Anne E. Schraff. 2002. Townsend Press, Inc. Family, Single parent, Poverty, High School, Class, Mystery. Grades 5-9. HBG: NA. HBA.

While not the highest caliber of writing and verging on moralizing, the first novel in the Bluford High Series presents a fast paced plot at a low lexile-level, allowing struggling readers to engage in an interesting and reflective text. Mixing in ideas of social hierarchy within class Schraff presents Darcy, a straight A sophomore in California, who is struggling to deal with a resurfacing absentee father, rebellious younger sister, overworked mother and seriously ill grandmother.

*Make Lemonade* by Virginia Euwer Wolff. 1993. Henry Hold and Company. Poverty, Teenage mothers, Babysitters, Single parent family. Grades 5-9. HBG: 2. HBA.

LaVaughn needs to save money to be a first generation college student. She finds part time work babysitting for teen mom of two and high school dropout, Jolly. Often urban youth are grouped together as like-minded; however, through poetic verses’ Wolff explores the differences between these teens’ attitudes toward effort, efficacy, and education, as well as LaVaughn’s internal struggle to keep separate from the drama of Jolly’s life and maintain academic success.

*Monster* by Walter Dean Myers*.* 1999. HarperCollins Children’s Books. Trials (Murder), Prisons, Self-perception, African Americans. Grades 9-12. HBG: 1. HBA.

Through a unique screenplay presentation Myers provides a play-by-play of teen Steve Harmon’s trial for murder. The addition of Steve’s journal entries and memories of events leading up to the trial details the young man’s struggle to define his own actions as right or wrong. The distinctive format combination allows readers to consider the influence of Steve’s race and urban ecological context in regards to his guilt.

*One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia. 2010. HarperCollins. Sisters, Mothers, Poets, African Americans, Black Panther Party, Civil rights movements, Race relations, Oakland. Grade 4-6. HBG: 1. SYL.

Three young sisters leave NY to spend the summer with their eccentric mother who abandoned them years before. Arriving in Oakland at the height of the Black Panther Movement the girls become enmeshed in a world of social activism and Black pride. The characters exemplify the positive effects of community organizing. Even though they are living in severe poverty, through their involvement in summer programing the girls begin to find their voices and feel empowered*.*

*Something Like Hope* by Shawn Goodman. 2010. Random House. Mental Health, Juvenile detention homes, Emotional problems, Family problems, Violence, Abuse, African Americans. Grades 9-12. HBG: 2. HBA.

Nearing her 18th birthday Shavonne, who has been institutionalized since the age of 6, meets the disheveled but honest counselor, Mr. Delpopolo. Dealing with depression, suicidal ideation, and explosive anger Shavonne takes a journey of self-discovery, learning how to forgive and take responsibility. Goodman skillfully helps young readers understand that these disorders are a normal consequence of the traumatic events such as rape, abuse, parental drug use, and abandonment that Shavonne has experienced.

*The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson. 2003. Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing. Parenting, Teenage, Family, Single Father, African Americans, Teen Pregnancy, New York City. Grades 7 to 10. HBG rating: 2. HBA.

Told from the often neglected viewpoint of a single teen father, the novel provides insight into the daily struggle of a young father’s quest to love and care for his newborn baby. Vacillating between moments of terror about his new responsibility and unconditional, all-encompassing love for this tiny new person, the main character tries to balance fatherhood, friends, family, and school while also coming to terms with the absence of the baby’s mother.

*Tyrell* by Coe Booth. 2007. Scholastic Inc. Older Fiction, Homelessness, Poverty, African Americans, Bronx (New York, NY). Grades 10-12. HBG: 1. HBA.

Living in the Bronx, Tyrell is forced into manhood by the re-incarceration of his father and his mother’s inability to accept responsibility. Dealing with horrific emergency housing, Tyrell struggles to find a legal means of supporting his family and to make the “right” life decisions about school, relationships and family. The bitter ending, and true to life language and sexual content help to portray genuine hurdles that many economically disadvantage youth confront daily*.*

*Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* by Meg Medina. 2013. Candlewick Press. Bullying, High schools, Queens (New York, NY), Latino Americans, Gossip, Self-esteem, Single Parent. Grade 8-10. HBG: 1. AS.

For Pidead (Piddy) Santiago starting a new school as a sophomore without her best friend is hard enough, but when a girl she doesn’t know threatens to beat her up for unspecified reasons Piddy has to decide between living in fear and becoming the ever-hated narc. Using an authentic fusion of Spanish and English, Medina realistically portrays the contextual elements that can lead an urban youth to fall from academic prowess to possible drop out.

*Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* by G. Neri. Illustrated by Randy Duburke. 2010. Lee & Low Books Inc. Sandifer, Roberts, African American youth, Illinois, Chicago, Social conditions, Graphic Novels, Gang members, Juvenile delinquency, Violence. Grades 7-10. HBG: 2. SYL.

This graphic novel depicts the story of Robert “Yummy” Sandifer’s life and death in Chicago’s crime ridden Roseland. Based on real life events and told through the narration of Yummy’s fictional classmate Roger, readers are shown the complexity behind labeling this 11-year-old gang member and murderer a villain or a victim. The black and white cartoon illustrations help younger readers access the very serious material.