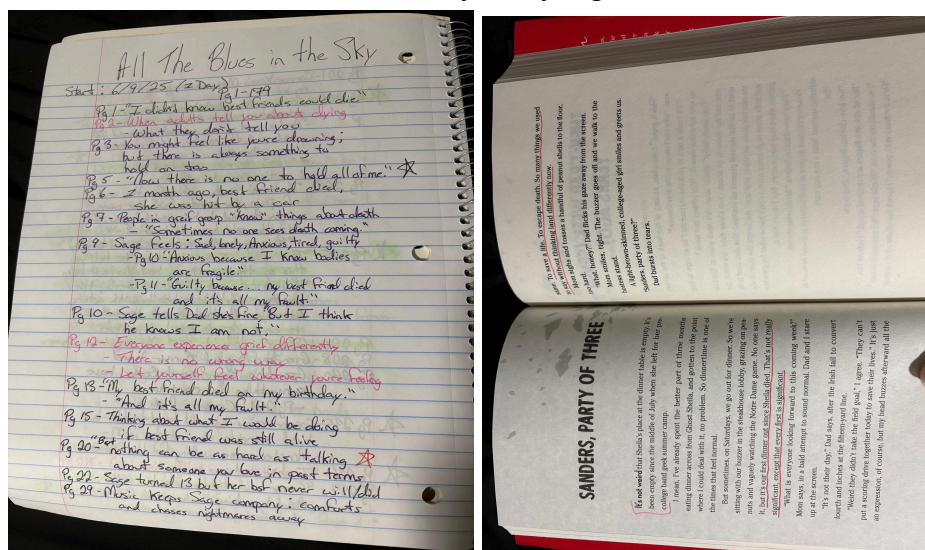


End Of Summer Report

This summer I wanted to find literature that I didn't think existed. When I say I didn't think it existed I mean I didn't have access to it. Going into this project I was expecting to find gaps between the adolescent experience and the experience of characters in the novels. When I was going through the grief process as an adolescent I looked for a book that reflected how I was feeling, and I couldn't find one that wasn't a self-help book for adults or a book for elementary students. No teenager wants to read a self-help book, and the childrens books didn't talk about all of the emotions I was feeling all at once. When I was sixteen, my two-year-old nephew, Colton, was murdered and it turned my whole world upside down. No one grieves the same, that being said, I didn't see anyone around me who was showing the same emotions I was. My mom wanted to talk about it all the time and my dad was always asking me how I was doing, but I didn't want to talk about it or my feelings all the time. So, I turned to books. Books had always been there for me and I was able to get lost in the adventures and feel seen by made up characters. At the time, I needed a book to show me I wasn't going crazy and my feelings were normal, and when I needed it, I couldn't find it. So, in my head, it didn't exist. Because I believed these books didn't exist, I wanted to fill that gap in the literature. But, to fill the gap I needed to identify it. And my research topic was born! I read two novels a week on the topic of adolescent grief. I also journaled about my own experience with grief and talked to Holger Elischberger, a developmental psychologist, and Naomi Avril at Ele's Place, a grief center. By talking to people about the adolescent grief experience and journaling it helped me normalize grief and the grieving process better as a whole, for myself and the characters in the novels. My original end goal was to write a ten to fifteen page essay exploring literary representations of child grief, my own experience, and the complex emotions young adults face while grieving. However, my goal changed after I began reading the books. Now, my goal was to write a draft of a proposal to get an installation of books in the library at my high school.



I did not achieve my original goal of writing a ten to fifteen page essay. However, I was able to write a draft of a proposal to get an installation of books about grief at my high school's library. I was able to find books that represent adolescent grief in an amazing way and I want to make these resources available to everyone. We give kids books when we are dealing with something complex, like if someone gets cancer or if Mom and Dad are getting a divorce. Why don't we do the same for grief? Why does it stop when that kid hits puberty? I will always encourage books as a tool for the grieving process. Adolescents already feel distanced from their parents and when they are grieving it can feel extra isolating because they feel like their peers don't understand either. When I was sixteen, my mom gave me a self-help book she was reading. She was trying to help, but it didn't help me the same way it helped her. Everyone is different and everyone grieves differently. That makes the novels I read even more amazing because I was able to connect with each one of them even though I was different from all of the main characters and our experience with grief was different. All ten of the novels I read were exactly what sixteen year old me wanted to find. The books I thought didn't exist were out there the whole time! I was able to suggest books for the library at Ele's Place.

I spoke to Naomi Avril, the young adult coordinator. We discussed common stereotypes people hold about grief like, I can only be sad for x amount of time. The other biggest thing that stood out to me was that death is normal, everyone and everything living will die, but grieving and the grief process aren't considered normal. Yes, it is 'normal' to feel sadness and loss but what about shame, anger, and guilt. These emotions are often called 'negative' but throughout this project I have been calling them gross emotions. Because, these emotions make me feel gross. Throughout my grieving process I have felt shame, guilt, happiness, embarrassment, and excitement all at once. Humans are complex beings, we are capable of feeling multiple emotions at the same time, that doesn't change when we grieve.

My favorite takeaway was the amazing books I was able to read and heal the girl who needed these books at sixteen. All of the books I read dealt with different types of loss and totally different characters. I was able to connect with at least one emotion or scene in every book, and I cried during all of them too. I cried through the entire book, *All The Blues In The Sky* by Renee Watson. It talks about grief very openly and anyone who has ever lost someone should read it. There are a couple really powerful pages where the main character, Sage, just asks questions and when I was looking back over my journal entries there was a page that became a list of questions. Sage was thirteen when her best friend was hit by a drunk driver on Sage's birthday. Our experiences were so different but I found that a lot of our questions had the same meanings of how and why. When I say these books are amazing, I mean they are amazing in terms of how they talk about grief. Some novels, like *All The Blues In The Sky*, speak very openly about grief. But others deal with grief in more of a fantastical way, like *You're Breaking My Heart* By Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich. The main characters go on a quest underneath New York's subway systems and there is talk of different timelines and traveling through those timelines. Both novels were amazing in their own way and they ended up being my two favorite books I read during FURSCA.

This research is going to be the base work for my thesis for the Prentiss M. Brown Honors Program and I will be presenting the work I did this summer at Elkin Isaac. As of right now, my thesis project is going to be an insulation of novels about grief at my high school. I only say as of right now because my idea has changed about thirteen times, originally I wanted to write a book. The insulation has multiple parts, getting the books and designing a grand opening. The grand opening is important to teach people why these books are important and why they should read them. I will give a brief presentation explaining where this idea came from and why it matters then I want to design an interactive learning activity. I am also debating adding a website that has all the books and their information so I can spread these resources farther than my high school library. Through this experience I was able to rethink my ideas about adolescent grief novel existence, help my inner adolescent feel seen, and learn about how complex grief is. Along with being base work for my thesis, I now have a list of resources I can recommend to friends and family.