

Background Information for Library Materials in Review

Book Title: <i>Impulse</i>	Synopsis Three teens who meet at Reno, Nevada's Aspen Springs mental hospital after each has attempted suicide connect with each other in a way they never have with their parents or anyone else in their lives. <i>Source: Novelist Plus - accessed via SCDiscus</i>
Book Author Hopkins, Ellen	
Copyright Year: 2007	

Professional Reviews of *Impulse*

Source: Follett Titlewave

Kirkus Reviews (December 1, 2006)

In sharp, searing free verse divided into two-page chapters, Hopkins sketches three adolescents who have just attempted suicide. Vanessa (razors), Tony (drugs) and Conner (gun) tried to "close out / the ugliness, close / out the filthiness, / close out all light." They begin treatment at Aspen Springs residential center in pits of numb despair, unhappy to have failed and lacking human connection. The therapists broach some psychological issues, but Aspen Springs is more behavioral than psychiatric, awarding levels of privilege for acts of progress. Each distinct first-person story slowly reveals its grim secrets, stinging from start to finish. The origins that the text identifies for Tony's sexuality prevent his being a standard-bearer for gayness in literature, but the three main characterizations ring true. There's a tiny place for love here, but readers familiar with Hopkins' *Burned* (2006) or with signs of serious depression will anticipate the tragic ending. A fast, jagged, hypnotic read. (Fiction. YA)

Publishers Weekly (January 22, 2007)

Hopkins (*Crank*) weaves together the story of three troubled teens locked up in a psychological facility after suicide attempts, once again writing in artful free verse. Each character is full-bodied and distinct. Conner is a wealthy overachiever who had an affair with a teacher; Tony, who thinks he is gay, was locked up in juvenile detention center for years after killing his mother's child-molesting boyfriend; Vanessa is a manic-depressive who cuts herself to "hush the demons/ shrieking inside my brain." All three have attempted suicide. As they begin to open up to their counselor-and each other-they reveal an almost unbelievable amount of grittiness in their backgrounds. Vanessa, for example, found her own mother dying after an overdose and did not call for an ambulance, and had a boyfriend who "wouldn't even hold/ my hand" while she was waiting to have an abortion. But readers will find themselves invested in the characters by the time the three head to their outdoor challenge-the final piece of their program-and can finally divulge their darkest secrets to one another (Tony and Vanessa even form an unexpected romance). This is a thick book, but the free verse makes for a fast read. By book's end, readers may well feel the effects of each protagonist's final choice. Ages 14-up. (Jan.) Copyright 2007 Reed Business Information.

School Library Journal (February 1, 2007)

Gr 9 Up-Three teens tell their stories, in free verse, from a psychiatric hospital after failed suicide attempts. Their lives unfold in alternating chapters, revealing emotionally scarred family relationships. An absent father, a bipolar mother, and a secret abortion have caused Vanessa to slash her wrists. As a compulsive cutter, she

hides a paper clip to dig into her skin. Tony's drug overdose was triggered by an addiction in which he exchanged sex for money. Abused as a child, he is confused about his sexuality. Connor is the son of rich, controlling parents, and he survives a self-inflicted gunshot wound after a doomed affair with a female teacher. Initially, the narrators are inwardly focused, having arrived at "level zero," the beginning of their treatment. As they become acquainted with one another, the story, told in spare verse and colorful imagery, becomes more plot-driven and filled with witty dialogue. Both boys value Vanessa's friendship and there is an inkling of competition for her affection, although she assumes that Tony is gay. During a wilderness camping trip with other patients and staff, which would graduate the trio to the final level of treatment, it becomes apparent that one of them is mentally backsliding at the thought of returning home and has stopped taking meds. The consequences are played out, leaving the others to grapple with an additional loss and a newfound appreciation for life. Mature fans of the verse format will devour this hefty problem novel.-Vicki Reutter, Cazenovia High School, NY Copyright 2007 Reed Business Information.

Horn Book Guide (Fall 2007)

Three teenagers who share a history of suicidal behavior meet in a psychiatric hospital. Reflecting on issues of sexual abuse, abortion, and homosexuality, their conversations and interior monologues weave back and forth amid the hundreds of terse but unremarkable poems that constitute this verse novel. The characters, though sympathetic, lack depth; the melodramatic plot, despite its shock-factor appeal, lacks tension. Library Media Connection (April/May 2007)

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Lives intersect in this free verse collection of poems that describes the heartaches of three teenage residents in the Aspen Springs treatment facility. Conner, son of wealthy parents with impeccable social pedigree, has everything anyone could want except the love and affection of his family. Anthony, abandoned in infancy by his father, has confused feelings about his sexual orientation. Vanessa, daughter of a manic-depressive mother, massages her pain with cutting. Their three stories intertwine seamlessly in this gritty dissection of life inside the "loonie bin." 60 adolescents battle their demons with the help of group and individual therapy. Hopkins smoothly transitions from one story to the next, riveting the reader to the page. This book is not for the tenderhearted, squeamish reader; it paints a brutally honest picture of these tormented characters whose relationships blossom as the storyline progresses. Casting aside their carefully constructed defense mechanisms, they open up to each other and begin to heal from their hurts. Hopkins writes well, fleshing out her characters into human beings with whom we can empathize. *Impulse* is a powerful testimonial for the resilience of the human spirit. Recommended. Susie Nightingale, Library Media Specialist, Santa Fe Trail Junior High School, Olathe, Kansas

Awards/Distinctions Awarded to *Impulse*

Source: Novelist Plus

YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers: Fiction: 2008