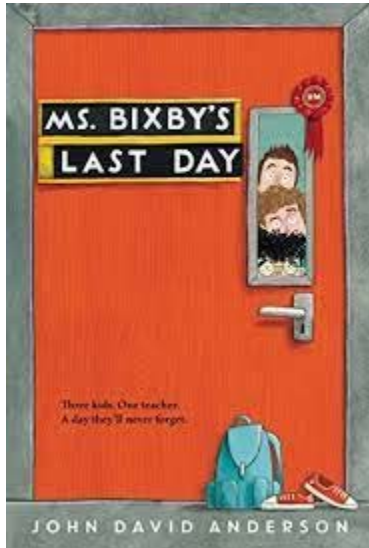


Books for Adolescents Dealing with Grief

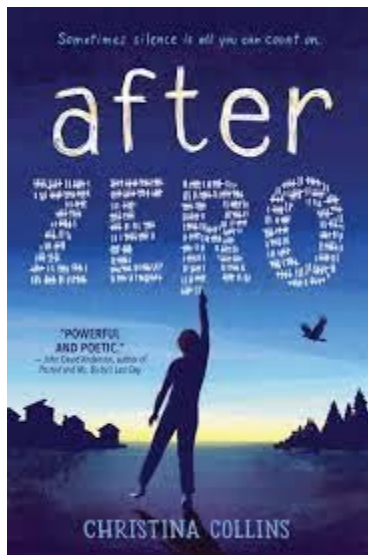
Middle Grade



Ms. Bixby's Last Day

by John David Anderson

“Adults forget that kids feel especially powerless. They have no agency to make things better and very little life experience to equip them with ways to handle grief,” said Harrison. In this novel, three boys who “most people don’t expect much from” take action to give their beloved and terminally ill teacher a special day. Though their teacher’s death “forever changes them” they also realize “that her life will forever shape them,” Harrison said.



After Zero

by Christina Collins

Featuring a main character coping with anxiety that has progressed to mutism, this is “a story that is both heartbreaking and hopeful,” said White. “Elise's struggles with mental health and grief will resonate with anyone who has ever felt like the world was too loud, too demanding or too overwhelming.”

King and the Dragonflies

by Kacen Callender

Not long after 12-year-old King's brother dies, his best friend goes missing. In this middle grade novel set in rural Louisiana, the author “explores how grief affects families while also masterfully tackling larger issues like race, masculinity, and identity, including LGBTQ identity,” said White.

When You Trap a Tiger

by Tae Keller

“This is a story about a girl whose family moves in with her grandmother, but it is also so much more,” said White. A “tale of grief, family and identity,” the book is interwoven with Korean folklore and shows its main character, along with readers, the power of stories.

Young Adult

The Boy in the Black Suit **by Jason Reynolds**

Jason Reynolds is “known for writing about tough topics in an authentic way that respects the emotions and struggles of his young readers,” said White. In this novel, the protagonist, Matt, works at a funeral home while simultaneously grieving the loss of his mother.

The Truth Is **by NoNieqa Ramos**

While coping with the recent death of her best friend, Verdad finds herself falling for a new classmate, who is transgender. Her new relationship prompts questions about her own identity and tension with her mother. “Many teens not only struggle with grieving for the loss of a loved friend or family member, but as they come-of-age, they grieve for childhood, broken friendships and misguided parents,” according to Harrison. This novel, she said, “shines a light” on those challenges.

Early Departures **by Justin A. Reynolds**

Themes of grief and loss aren’t limited to realistic teen fiction. High school English teacher Laura Malafarina [described *Early Departures*](#) as

“a poignant exploration of friendship & grief, with a sci-fi twist” featuring “smart, witty banter and dynamic characters.”

The Patron Saints of Nothing
by Randy Ribay

Words Alive, a nonprofit that organizes teen book clubs and other literacy programs in San Diego, [wrote on Twitter](#) that this 2019 National Book Award finalist “is a favorite for our students. It's a beautiful novel about grief, guilt, and the risks a Filipino-American teenager takes to uncover the truth about his cousin's murder.”

The Astonishing Color of After
by Emily X.R. Pan

After Leigh’s mother dies by suicide, the biracial teen becomes convinced that her mom has turned into a bird. So Leigh travels to find her in Taiwan, where she also meets her maternal grandparents for the first time. “Pan's writing is beautiful and magical, and Leigh's grief is wonderfully interwoven with issues like identity, stigma, family, love and so much more,” said White.

Dancing at the Pity Party
by Tyler Feder

In this graphic memoir, Feder recounts losing her mother to cancer while in college and the difficult moments that followed, such as cleaning out her mom’s closet or celebrating holidays without her. “This book is part memoir, part how-to, and most importantly a celebration of her mother's life,” said Harrison. “It's the perfect book for someone who has suffered a loss and the perfect book for someone trying to understand a friend who has suffered loss.”