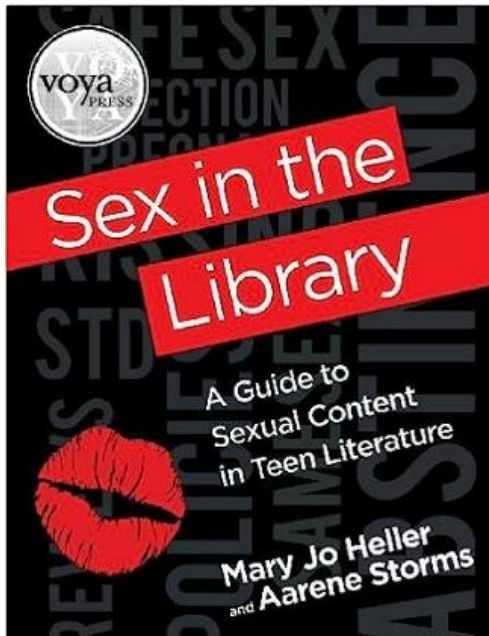


SEX IN THE LIBRARY: A GUIDE TO SEXUAL CONTENT IN TEEN LITERATURE



Adult

By Mary Jo Heller and Aarene Storms

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Book Summary:

Guide for the implementation of the Sex In The Library program providing instruction to school children on the differences between school libraries and public libraries and providing lists of books including sexual content.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains inexplicit sexual activities; nudity; and mild/infrequent profanity.

2 /5

Teen Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

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ix	<p>For nearly a decade, two teen services librarians have been having sex in the library. It's true! ...What we've been doing is hosting a booktalking program for middle school and high school students, teachers, and parents, public library patrons, and librarians about sexual content in books written for teen readers. We call our program "Sex in the Library." ...In order to do all that and keep the attention of middle school and high school readers, we review and booktalk the newest, hottest titles with sexual content written for teen readers. Teachers sign up weeks in advance to bring their classes to Sex in the Library, because they love to watch their students hear about selection policies, though the students think they are only learning about steamy library books. Our Sex in the Library presentation began because of an incident in 2001: Mary Jo, the librarian at Einstein Middle School, started it. She bought a copy of Deal With It: A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a gURL by Esther Drill for her middle school library collection. Deal With IT was on the 2001 Quick Pick list- a list of books that are quick to pick, quick to read- issued by the American Library Association. Perfect springtime reading for seventh and eighth graders, Mary Jo thought. ...Then Mary Jo got to page 88, which deals with oral sex. That's where her internal alarms began to sound. The book contained, she felt, possibly a little too much information for seventh and eighth graders. ...So, Mary Jo pulled the book out of the school library and called Aarene, so she could buy two copies for the public library collection instead. Deal With It is a terrific book, full of really pertinent information in an appealing layout that invites reading. Libraries are all about getting information to the students, and there are some teens who need most of the information in this book. ...The public library is the perfect vehicle for getting that particular information to the students, but the school library is not. The incident got us thinking: Maybe there are some other books we should be looking at that we could "share," so that we can get those appropriate-but-too-controversial-for-school books into the hands of the students who need them.</p>
x	<p>Now, with the Sex in the Library book, we are broadening our audiences still further by inviting our readers to consider having "sex" in their own libraries. This book is a hands-on, try-it-in-your-building-tomorrow manual for teen services librarians- in public schools, private schools, public libraries, or any other kind of library- who want to open up discussion about some great books, especially when the books are a little bit steamy and potentially controversial. ...Teachers working with Common Core standards are looking for complex fictional texts to support a nonfiction curriculum. They want to engage the attention and imagination of students in order to keep them reading. Many SITL books do engage the attention and imagination of students, and viola: a silver platter for teachers, students, and administrators.</p>
5	<p>The key to SITL is to: Highlight the differences and the strengths of each collection; and</p>

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	<p>Discuss why the collections are different; and Talk about the awesome books with sexual content written for teen readers. ...When circulation of the book dropped to nearly zero at the school library and the public library, we removed the book from the new edition of the booklist. Conversely is the case with Forever by Judy Blume: Katherine and Michael believe their love is so strong that it will last...forever. We have unofficially awarded author Judy Blume the Honorary Golden Condom award for Forever, because the book simply will not die. It was originally published in 1975...the year that Aarene was enrolled in the seventh grade. The appeal of Forever has never waned. Aarene buys two new copies of Forever every year. ...Even after all these years, if you hold the book in a particular way, it opens automatically to the page where Michael and Katherine finally have sex. ...Aarene remembers: The single schools library copy of Forever that was passed, hand-to-hand, among the seventh graders of Whatcom Middle School back in 1975 was given to me after I was sworn to silence. ...I couldn't help noticing that if I held the book in my hand in exactly the right way, it would fall open automatically to the page where Michael and Katherine finally have sex. I was thrilled.</p>
6	<p>We examine each of the titles on our booklist by asking ourselves a few questions: Does this book have some kind of sexual content, sexual questioning, or sexual identity seeking? That's why it's called "Sex in the Library." ...Are at least one third of the books on the list available in only one of our libraries? ...Does the book discuss a topical trend in publishing that we want to discuss? One year it seemed like every third book was about polygamy. ...Recently we've seen a glut of books about homosexual relationships.</p>
7	<p>With some guidance from participating teachers and librarians, students determine that the sexual choices the book's character, Cyd, makes is a possible reason the school library declines to carry the second and third book in the series. At this point, a student may notice that the character of Cyd is now twenty-one years old- and no longer an age-mate of the middle school students in the class. ...This is the perfect time to mention the public library and talk about reasons that this part of the series might be found there: differences in budget as well as differences in the mission of the public library as compared to the mission of the school library.</p>
8	<p>Our booktalks usually focus on the newest, hottest, and steamiest books with sexual content written for teens.</p>
14	<p>Booklists are slightly problematic, given that a list is a printed page distributed at school. Parents (and some teachers) assume, from years of past experience, that a booklist printed and distributed at school is a list of books that are recommended and/or required for classroom instruction. Obviously, a SITL booklist is a little different, since it contains books that the school library doesn't even own.</p>
16	<p>Every once in a while, we see the light bulb start to glow in the eyes of a parent or administrator...followed by an immediate furrowing of brows as they turn</p>

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	<p>towards Aarene, the public librarian. "But," they sputter, "you don't mean that you would give dirty books to kids, do you?"</p> <p>Sigh. Repeat. Restate. Redundant.</p> <p>The mission of the Public Library is to create free, open, and equal access to ideas and information to all members of the community regardless of the library user's age (among other things).</p> <p>...Emphasize that the differences between the school library and the public library are good and needful. Remind them that, just as their reading choices are not restricted in any way by the public library, neither are the reading choices of children and teens restricted.</p> <p>...Then play your trump card.</p> <p>"Of course," you will say, "we encourage parents to actively participate in the reading choices of their own teens. If you wish to restrict your own teen's reading choices, please feel free to do this." Inform the parent that school libraries may, at the parent's request, restrict their child- but not all students- from checking out certain books.</p>
21	<p>For example, in <i>Stoner</i> and <i>Spaz</i> by Ron Koertge, Ben is thrilled when Colleen offers to show him her "tits" in exchange for a book report due the next day.</p> <p>...Here's something they never taught you in library school: If you want the full and undivided attention of teens during a booktalk, say the word "tits" out loud.</p>
24	<p>Remember: Although the sexual content is important in these books, there should be other things going on as well. If you're going to read some excerpts in a SITL presentation, at least a few of them should be steamy...but they don't all need to focus on sexual situations. For example, in the book <i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> by John Green:</p> <p>Seventeen-year-old Hazel has been surviving terminal cancer for four years when she meets Augustus Waters, who lost a leg to the osteosarcoma. Hazel and Gus are smart and witty- they read, they discuss, and they are both very ill.</p> <p>You would be doing readers a disservice to read aloud the page where Hazel and Gus have intercourse.</p> <p>...Instead, try sharing an earlier scene that invites listeners to hope that, at some point in the book, the two will actually have sex.</p>
29	<p>Each instance of sexual content/longing/kissing, or anything else, MUST contribute to the story.</p>
36	<p>We know of several teachers who include the "male way of learning" in a normal classroom, but we agree that many teachers of teens frequently despair when confronted with boys who will not read. We think that we have an answer to the problem.</p> <p>Sex.</p> <p>...And, if you point them in the right direction, teen boys will happily- although sometimes surreptitiously- read about sex.</p>
37	<p>Some boys know that they aren't ready for sex, but they still have hormonal urges. These boys might find a friend in Arnold Spirit, Jr., called "Junior" in <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie:...</p> <p>...Junior takes joy in basketball, in his artwork, in his friendship with his buddy Rowdy, and in masturbation. He doesn't talk a lot to other people, but his diary</p>

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	<p>relates it all- and boys who read the book can experience the life of a kid who is like them in many important ways.</p> <p>For boys who think that they are ready for sex, the question they want answered is more likely "How can I convince somebody to have sex with me?"</p> <p>...Dino, who seems the smoothest of the group but is actually the most insecure, cannot seem to get pretty-girl Jackie to "put out" for him.</p> <p>...The fictional boys' obsessive interest in sex seemed a little too close to reality for me. I gave <i>Doing It</i> to a sixteen-year-old boy to read and asked him if he thought that the author was exaggerating the boys' fascination with sex.</p>
41	<p>Please note that although all of the books given as examples in this chapter contain scenes with sexual situations, in many of them, the plot focuses on other aspects, with sexual decision-making being a normal part of life.</p> <p>...By providing boys with a great story that contains some sexual content, you may convince them that reading books won't kill them...and their classroom teachers will bless you for the effort.</p>
45	<p>Our theory: Publishers recognize that "sex sells" and "no sex" doesn't.</p>
53	<p>Talking about awesome books with sexual content written for teen readers.</p>
55	<p>At some point early in the presentation, we simply state that there are books in the program that are not for everyone. They may be outright objectionable to some. We publicly acknowledge that the language used in some of the books is also the language that, if used in the school hallway, would earn a detention. Ask for a show of hands of those who want to continue. Anyone not raise a hand? Sincerely ask them if they would rather opt out.</p>
58	<p>We couldn't do this program without teachers who believe in the program and in the great discussions that occur in their classrooms as a result of it.</p> <p>...No one can sell the SITL program more effectively than classroom teachers.</p>
61	<p>We talk about the difference between child pornography (which is illegal and not permitted in any library) and "regular" pornography (which is legal and protected free speech, and thus accessible in most public libraries by any patron regardless of age, gender, creed, color, etc.).</p> <p>...After dropping the bomb that porn is freely available at public libraries, they are ready to learn that sexual content appropriate for teen readers is also available. Teen sexual content seems so much tamer and kinder by comparison. That's when we launch into our booktalks.</p>
9	<p>For example: In 2003, we presented SITL to a group of eighth grade students who told us clearly that they didn't think books about homosexuality and homosexual teens were appropriate for a middle school library. We overrode their discomfort and continued to talk about books like <i>Geography Club</i> by Brent Hartinger: A group of gay and lesbian teens find mutual support when they form a "Geography Club" at their high school.</p>
23	<p>Author Cris Beam is particularly adept at weaving medical information into <i>I am J</i>: J's parents think he's a lesbian, his best friend Melissa thinks he's a girl, and his girlfriend Blue is pretty sure he's gay. But J knows that he is a boy, although he was born female.</p> <p>J's search for information about his condition and about the medical process of</p>

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	female-to-male transition is imparted bit-by-bit, so that is much easier to accept and understand than a PowerPoint presentation in a health education class.
25	<p>Here's an example of a fun excerpt with slightly-racy vocabulary to share with classes from Swim the Fly by Don Calame:</p> <p>"Movies don't count," Cooper says. "The Internet doesn't count. Magazines don't count. A real, live naked girl. That's the deal. That's our goal for this summer."</p> <p>"Been there, done that," Sean says.</p> <p>"Taking baths with your sister doesn't count, either, Sean." Cooper snorts.</p> <p>"Screw you, meat stain. I haven't done that since I was, like, two, okay. And that's not what I was talking about," Sean says.</p> <p>..."He's talking about Tina Everstone's left boob," I say as we turn onto Maple Drive and walk along the curb.</p> <p>"Oh, please. Not that again." Cooper rolls his eyes.</p> <p>"It's true. I saw the whole thing when she was taking off her sweatshirt during gym. Her T-shirt came up just enough--"</p> <p>"And she wasn't wearing a bra and her left one popped out and you saw the entire thing, nipple and all, and even if I didn't think you were lying to us, it still wouldn't count," Cooper says. "I'm talking totally naked. Not a quick flash, okay?"</p> <p>"Whatever." Sean shrugs and looks off at the rundown ranch houses like he doesn't care what we think.</p> <p>"How are we supposed to see a live naked girl?" I say. "Maybe we better set a more realistic goal for the summer. Like finding Atlantis."</p> <p>This brief excerpt brings the listeners immediately into the situation, it alerts them to the "special language" in the book, it's funny, and it leaves readers wanting to know what happens next.</p>
26	Mary Jo will extol the virtues of the characters and the plot and the suspense and the sex to anybody who will listen...
27	<p>Aarene begins with a light fun book, like How to Get Suspended and Influence People by Adam Selzer:</p> <p>Leon sarcastically narrates the events that result when he decides to make an avant-garde sex education movie as an assignment for his "gifted and talented" class.</p>
28	<p>-Mary Jo might see someone in the audience pointing to the display copy of Jumpstart the World by Catherine Ryan Hyde:</p> <p>Frank is a female-to-male transgendered person, and Elle thinks she loves him. When Elle learns the truth about Frank, she is angry, but more importantly, she questions the significance of her crush. Is Elle a lesbian? Or what?</p> <p>...There is sometimes a tendency for the school librarian to appear to be a conservative "school marm" who will not allow any books with sexual content, while the public librarian appears to be a wild woman who will buy anything for the library collection.</p> <p>...We have three unchanging rules for choosing SITL books:</p> <p>The books must be appropriate and appealing to teens- and they must have some kind of sexual content. We do include books originally written and marketed to adults on our SITL list, but only when we feel that teens will love them.</p>

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31	Perhaps the students will ask about Very's attitude toward sex, which is one of the most open in teen literature. She calls herself bisexual.
32	<p>From here you can segue into a book that focuses on using technology in funny ways, but with serious reflections on human emotions and feelings, such as <i>Girl Parts</i> by JohnM. Cusick:</p> <p>David's parent decide to socialize their son through the use of a perfect robot girl- a companion with built-in timing for appropriate levels and times for kissing, touching, etc. if he goes too fast, he receives an electric shock.</p> <p>...On our table we always keep a copy of a book that students often ask about, but Mary Jo doesn't like to discuss, <i>Doing It</i> by Melvin Burgess:</p> <p>Three British teen boys confront the confusions, joys, and fears of sexuality.</p>
35	<p>"Either you can sleep with any woman- OK? Any woman, at any time. They can't say no. No matter how beautiful and gorgeous, all you have to do is ask. At your disposal. And they have to do whatever you want them to. But. You ALSO have to be buggered. Once a year for twenty minutes. On the radio."</p> <p>..."Because on the radio you'd try and keep really quiet so that no one would know it was you, but you wouldn't be able to. Little noises would escape. Oh. Oh. Oo. Ow. You know. Mmm. Ah. Mmm. Woo. Ah. Na-ha. And if you don't, then you get no sex ever. Never. No one. For life."</p> <p>Dino tried to think about it, but he couldn't. No sex was impossible. So was being buggered.</p> <p>The first chapter of <i>Doing It</i> is full of excerptable vignettes, each one more hormonally slang-driven and socially offensive than the last- and each one typical of the hyperbolic sexual bluster of insecure teen boys.</p>
44	<p>Readers learn that the boy who "only wants one thing" habitually uses girls for sex, and it's up to the girls to stick up for themselves and each other.</p> <p>...Bad Boy is terrific in terms of presenting different characters and the very different choices they make. Although the first girl featured in the narrative says "no," the book contains some cuss words and sex scenes with "details" later in the story, and these might be considered inappropriate for some conservative collections.</p>
47	<p>"I had sex before, but now I don't want to be forced into it. What do I do?" This is the subject of <i>Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac</i> by Gabrielle Zevin:</p> <p>Yearbook editor Naomi slips, falls, and suffers amnesia, reducing her last four years to nothing. Everyone wants to help her recover her memory, but Naomi isn't sure she wants to be the girl she evidently was.</p> <p>While Naomi is trying to put together a sensible narration of her recent life, which she has forgotten as a result of head trauma, her boyfriend tells her they are going out and they will be having sex, as usual.</p>
48	<p>Self-obsessed Cara is struggling with an awakening desire to be with girls instead of with her "perfect" boyfriend. Would having sex with him prove that she really is (or isn't a lesbian?</p>
51	<p>Unsafe safe is definitely a problem for one of the characters in <i>Rainbow Boys</i> by Alex Sanchez:</p> <p>Three high-school boys struggle with family issues, gay bashers, first sex, and conflicting feelings about each other.</p>

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	...He impulsively hooks up with a guy named Brick, and they have unprotected sex.
60	A always we emphasize the main points of SITL: Highlighting the differences and the strengths of the school library collection and the public library collections; and Discussing why the collections are different; and Talking about awesome books with sexual content written for teen readers.
63	Flash Burnout by L.K. Madigan:... When Marissa’s mother is later believed to be dead, Black and Marissa find that sex is the common connection for dealing with death.
65	Just Do It: Having Sex With Librarians ...We do hit the three main points, as always: Highlighting the differences and the strengths of each collection; and Discussing why the collections are different; and Talking about awesome books with sexual content written for teen readers.
69	By contrast, Aarene had a hard time reading Sold by Patricia McCormick: Lakshmi is thirteen years old when her stepfather sells her into a life of sexual slavery in an Indian brothel.
70	In talking with teens about books with sexual content, we have noted repeatedly that they often censor their reading much more strongly than most adults will.
73	This chapter focuses on that research for the schools, as well as arguments for the inclusion of fictions with sexual content in libraries and classroom curricula.
77	Sold by Patricia McCormick: Lakshmi is thirteen years old when her stepfather sells her into a life of sexual slavery in a brothel in India.
79	For example, You Against Me by Jenny Downham: Things fall apart when fifteen-year-old Karyn says she has been raped at a party. She refuses to leave the house or even participate in life. ...Karyn alleges she was raped at a party. The fact that she was both drunk and made advances toward Tom complicates the fact of the rape.
80	We consistently recommend Speak to eighth graders at the school library and the public library. Melinda is a just-graduated eight grade girl who is so impressed when a senior boy pays attention to her that she drinks alcohol at a party to impress him, and then cannot escape the rape that ensues.
81	When a teen asks for a novel about teen suicide, adult alarm bells should sound. We should proceed cautiously and with great care. Only when we are satisfied that a book is what the teen actually needs should we hand over a powerful novel on the topic written for teens, such as Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher: After the death of his crush, Hannah Baker, Clay Jensen receives a recording from Hannah. She chronicles the circumstances that led to her suicide and the thirteen people who played a role in the terrible choice she made. Or Crash into Me, by Albert Borris: Four teenagers make a pact to road-trip across the country, visiting the sites of celebrity suicides until they get to Death Valley, where they will take their own lives. But, as the trip progresses, they must ultimately decide if life is worth living

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	<p>despite the pain.</p> <p>...Abuse, particularly sexual abuse within the family, is so hard to talk about. For example, the book <i>Identical</i> by Ellen Hopkins</p> <p>In her mother's absence, Kaeleigh becomes the object of her father's sexual attention. Her identical twin Raeanne begins to abuse drugs and alcohol and laments that her father doesn't love her, because she gets none of his attention</p> <p>Goes beyond gritty, and it asks the questions that many adults have problems answering. Raeanne looks forward to the abuse because, in her mind, it means her father loves her.</p>
82	<p>In recent years, "gay literature" has finally found its way into mainstream teen literature. Homophobia exists in the classroom, in the teacher's lounge, in the public library staff rooms, on the streets, and in many homes.</p>
83	<p>Yes, there is sex and sexual decision-making in all the books on our list.</p>
89	<p>If there is a single factual mistake, we will cite that mistake specifically in the review, as we did in the review of <i>Jumping Off Swings</i> by Jo Knowles:</p> <p>Every time Ellie hooks up with a new guy, she's sure that there will be more to the encounter than sex, and that she will finally feel loved. But the "one-time thing" with eager virgin Josh gets much more complicated when Ellie gets pregnant. "The condom slipped off" is an unlikely plot-point, and we noted this in our review of the book, along with some criticism of less-than-terrific writing style.</p>
104	<p>Very enjoys multiple sexual partners, and she thinks her playlists help her deal with frequent breakups.</p>
149	<p>J has always felt misunderstood, and no wonder: His parents think he's a lesbian, his best friend Melissa think he's a girl, and his girlfriend Blue is pretty sure he's gay. But J knows that he is a boy, although he was born female. After doing some Google research, J learns about testosterone shots, and is convinced that taking "T" will fix everything in his life. But even after seeing a psychologist and starting hormone therapy, J learns that, as much as he loves them, the people in his life are still not perfect.</p>
150	<p>Readers will learn a lot about the lives of transgender teens, as J attends a support group, enrolls at a school for transgender teens, and does his best to become a man in a society that isn't quite sure how to define him.</p>
156	<p>Cyd is sixteen, has just had an abortion, been left by her boyfriend, and fights constantly with her mother.</p>
161	<p>Masturbation. It's there. There aren't any pictures, though.</p> <p>...Dino desperately wants to shag his girlfriend Jackie...or, you know, anybody.</p> <p>...Ben actually has too much sex, because he's the sexual partner of a predatory teacher. The boys talk about sex, fantasize about it, worry about it, and talk about it again in the raunchy, rude slang of British teens.</p>

Profanity	Count
Cock	1
Cunt	1
Fuck	2
Piss	1
Shit	1
Tit	5