

## Growing Up Female around the Globe with Young Adult Literature

**G**rowing up female can be difficult and confusing, but for many young women in other parts of the world, being female can be painful and dangerous. As important as it is for young adult (YA) literature to offer hope and guidance, it is equally important for literature to help us understand the human condition, in this case the conditions that affect young women worldwide. Through literature, authors show the realities of their times and spaces. Their stories are gripping, but the realities are based in facts and research.

Many of the books chosen here deal with common problems female teens encounter in their developing years. The books focus on drugs, sex, relationships, abuse, disorders, peer pressure, and self-inflicted pain. The characters in the annotated novels are female teenagers who suffer from a range of cultural crises, yet exemplify sources of hope and remediation. Readers might relate to the characters, definitely learn from them, and some will realize they are not alone. But there are other books that deal with problems relating to places, cultures, traditions, and practices new to many teen females. As a way to organize the literature, books set in the United States are presented first and then books set in other countries are organized by authors' last names. To provide readers with contexts for reading or thinking about the books annotated here, we have provided some striking facts, statistics, and sources for further exploration.

### Female Genital Mutilation Facts/Statistics

- Amnesty International estimates that 135 million of

the world's girls and women have undergone genital mutilation, and two million girls a year are at risk of mutilation—approximately 6,000 per day. "Female Genital Mutilation." *Amnesty International*. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/femgen/fgm1.htm>

- According to the World Health Organization, most of the women and girls who have been genitally mutilated live in 28 African countries. Some live in the Middle East and Asia, but these women and girls are increasingly found living in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. "Female Genital Mutilation." Retrieved July 16, 2005, from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/index/htm>

### **No Condition Is Permanent by Cristina Kessler (U.S.A. to Africa)**

When 14-year-old Jodie finds out that her anthropologist mother is forcing her to move halfway around the world from California to Sierra Leone, West Africa, in order to study tribal customs, Jodie pitches a fit. Jodie worries if she'll be able to make any friends in this tiny village where she doesn't even know the language. Jodie's fears are soon allayed when she meets Khadi, a friendly village girl. Soon the girls become inseparable. Jodie teaches Khadi how to read and write—skills reserved only for boys in this culture—and Khadi teaches Jodie how to speak the language and dress like the other girls. Jodie becomes curious and feels alienated when Khadi and the other teenage girls disappear for several days at a time, but

she is warned not to ask any questions. When Jodie discovers that the village girls are preparing for a coming-of-age ceremony, which includes female circumcision, Jodie decides she must save her friend from this horrible ritual. Jodie's actions only complicate things, resulting in a dramatic climax.

### ***The Red Moon by Kuwana Haulsey (Africa)***

The novel begins in Harlem and moves quickly to a flashback to Africa. Nasarian, is an outcast within her Kenyan tribe for two reasons: she is getting educated and she has refused to be circumcised for marriage. When her Samburu father dies, the women in her family must submit to the will of the males in the family. Her mother, a Somalian, soon dies, leaving Nasarian defenseless. Because she continues to refuse circumcision, a practice in the Samburu tribe, she cannot be married. As a result, Nasarian is given to a cousin as a house servant to care for his youngest daughter. Nasarian watches helplessly as her young cousin endures the brutality of circumcision and ultimately dies. Nasarian runs away and endures many hardships before eventually going to college in Nairobi. Nasarian studies hard and struggles not only to fit into the college environment, but also to shed the demons that haunt her from her past. She falls in love with Augustin, an uneducated Samburu porter, and becomes pregnant. Augustin wants her to be circumcised for marriage as a second wife. Having already received a scholarship to study creative writing in the United States, Nasarian flees from Augustin. When he catches her and beats her, she betrays him in order to escape.

### **Oppression of Women Facts/Statistics**

- Domestic violence is not a crime in Pakistan, and men have the right to beat their wives, sisters, and daughters. A woman who is raped must prove the rape with evidence of four males or else she will be prosecuted for adultery.  
Manzoor, R. (November 3, 2004). "Musharraf's Hypocrisy Won't End Violence to Women." Retrieved July 15, 2005. <http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2004/11/03oakistan.htm>.
- According to an IRIN News Report (February 2, 2005), the incidence of domestic physical, sexual,

and verbal violence against women in Pakistan is among the highest in the world. It is estimated that 80% of Pakistani women suffer from such abuse. Pakistan: Violence Against Women Still a Huge Problem. Retrieved July 15, 2005. [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=45340&SelectRegion=Central\\_Asia&SelectCountry=PAKISTAN](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=45340&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=PAKISTAN)

### ***Breathing Underwater by Alex Flinn (U.S.A.)***

Nick Andreas's peers think that he is rich, popular, and perfect, but his girlfriend knows otherwise; Caitlin and her family have placed a restraining order on him. At 16, Nick is sentenced to six months of counseling that includes his writing 500 words per week in a journal in order to explain how he's ended up in Mario Ortega's Family Violence class with six other angry guys who hit their girlfriends. During his writing process, readers can see the perpetuation of domestic violence as Nick's home life is exposed.

### ***The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis (Afghanistan)***

Set in the early years of the Taliban regime, this topical novel for middle readers explores the harsh realities of life for girls and women in modern-day Afghanistan. Eleven-year-old Parvana has rarely been outdoors. Barred from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, she is trapped inside her family's one-room home. Taliban laws require women to fully cover themselves and ban girls from attending school or going out unescorted. When the Taliban imprisons her father, Parvana disguises herself as a boy to support her mother, two sisters, and baby brother. Parvana's disguise gives her a measure of freedom and the means to support her family while providing a reading service for illiterates.

### ***Second Class Citizen by Buchi Emecheta (Africa)***

This inspiring autobiographical novel shows the resourcefulness of a Nigerian woman determined to overcome strict tribal domination of females. Adah's dream is to go to school and eventually study in the United Kingdom even though her culture discourages females from attaining much more than a basic

education. When her father dies, Adah becomes—as necessity and tradition dictate—a servant in relatives' homes. She struggles to attend school and graduates only to confront another obstacle. According to tradition, she must marry if she is to have a home. Her husband turns out to be lazy, self-centered, and chauvinistic, and Adah stays in Nigeria while supporting his studies in England. Adah eventually follows him to England with their two children, only to find both old and new oppression. Fortunately, Adah is indomitable in her determination to take charge of her life and make it better for herself and for her children.

### ***Journey for the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran* by Roya Hakakian (Iran)**

Told from the perspective of a young Jewish girl growing up in Iran during the fundamentalist Muslim revolution, Roya Hakakian tells of the people's frustration of Mohammed Reza Shah's unwillingness to extend more freedom to the Iranian people. Although Roya leads a peaceful life as an Iranian Jew, she recounts stories of Iranian students who rebel against the Shah's oppression. Once the Shah is exiled and the Ayatollah Khomeini rises to power, Roya realizes the true impact that this daughter of the revolution never dreamed she would experience: Roya and her family are faced with the decision to remain in their homeland in the face of persecution or to flee in order to maintain their dignity and freedom.

### ***My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban* by Latifa (Afghanistan)**

In 1989, civil war broke out in Afghanistan among the rivaling forces of different ethnic backgrounds. During these years, Latifa and her family grew accustomed to the murderous fighting. Latifa, like other Afghan teenagers, finds refuge in the universal passions and interests of adolescents: Her bedroom walls are adorned with Brooke Shield posters, and she spends hours listening to rock music and watching popular western videos. On the morning of September 27, 1996, all comes to an end when Afghanistan falls to the Taliban. Shortly thereafter, the repressive edicts of the new regime are ruthlessly imposed and females are no longer allowed to attend school. Mired in despair, Latifa takes stock of her new situation and

looks for ways to improve the conditions of those around her. At great risk to her personal safety, Latifa opens a secret school for children.

### ***Haveli* by Suzanne Fisher Staples (Pakistan)**

In this sequel to *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, Shabanu is like a beautiful but caged desert bird held captive by the bounds of custom. Although her husband Rahim, an older wealthy Pakistani land owner, adores Shabanu and her five-year-old daughter, Mumtaz, he demands their obedience. While Rahim is preoccupied with politics, his other two wives maliciously scheme against Shabanu. To protect her daughter, Shabanu desperately makes plans for their future by running away to the home of Rahim's widowed sister in the ancient city of Lahore. There her situation becomes more perilous when Shabanu helps her friend Zabo hide from her arranged marriage to a horrible man and meets Omar, who is her husband's nephew.

### **Poverty Facts/Statistics**

- According to the 1994 Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, approximately one out of four children in America lives in poverty. "Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children. New York: Carnegie Corporation. Retrieved September 28, 2005. [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2248/is\\_148\\_37/ai\\_97723213/pg\\_4](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_148_37/ai_97723213/pg_4)
- Over a billion children are severely deprived of one or more of the necessities essential to childhood. In millions: 90 lack food, 400 lack safe water, 640 lack shelter, 500 lack sanitation, 300 lack access to information, 270 lack health care, and 140 lack schooling. *The State of the World's Children 2005*. "Childhood Under Threat." Retrieved September 28, 2005. <http://www.unicefusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=duLR1800H&b=262152>

### ***Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata (U.S.A.)**

Set in 1951 during the post World War II Era, a Japanese-American family move from Iowa to rural

Georgia in an attempt to improve their living conditions. Five-year-old Katie, her older sister Lynn, and brother Sammy are spurned by their peers, but these siblings find solace in their devotion to one another. Their parents toil untold hours under horrendous conditions at the local poultry hatchery in order to fulfill their lifelong dream—to buy a home. All of this is shattered when Lynn suffers from a devastating illness that tests the family’s fortitude. This Newbery award-winning novel is the story of a clash of cultures as well as the story of the overwhelming hardships endured by the Takeshima family as they struggle to attain the American dream.

### ***Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan (U.S.A.)**

Esperanza and her mother are forced to flee their prosperous home in Mexico, El Rancho de las Rosas. They flee to a company-owned Mexican work camp outside of Los Angeles where they live in dirty, cramped quarters. At thirteen, Esperanza has to care for her ailing mother, work the fields, and care for the young ones living with them—all tasks unbecoming a rich Mexican rancher’s daughter who should be attending a private school in Mexico.

### ***The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl* by Ma Yan (China)**

While growing up in a drought-stricken rural area of northwest China, Ma Yan sees education as the only hope for escaping a life of devastating poverty. *The Diary of Ma Yan* is the true story of how a 14-year-old girl’s struggle, courage, and persistence helped her to stay in school. This book inspired the establishment of *The Association for the Children of Ningxia*, an international charitable organization dedicated to helping children like Ma Yan stay in school.

### **AIDS Facts/Statistics**

- AIDS is the number one cause of death in Africa and the fourth leading cause of death globally. “The Facts: The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic.” Know HIV/AIDS. Retrieved July 16, 2005. [http://www.knowhiv aids.org/ep\\_facts.html](http://www.knowhiv aids.org/ep_facts.html)
- By the end of 2002, an estimated 42 million people

worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS. Over 30 million of them were in sub-Saharan Africa. Fifty-five percent of the HIV-positive people in sub-Saharan Africa are women, with six of seven HIV-positive children being girls.

“Africa Health.” Globe Africa. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.globeafrica.com/Health/hivstats.html>

- At the end of 2003, 12 million children orphaned by AIDS are living in Sub-Saharan Africa. “World HIV/AIDS Statistics.” Avert. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm>.
- Sub-Saharan Africa had 30 million people living with HIV/AIDS in early 2003 after 3.5 million new infections in 2002. 2.4 million Africans died in 2002. Ten million young people (aged 15–24) and almost 3 million children under 15 are living with HIV. Dixon, Patrick. “AIDS in Africa.” Global Change. Retrieved 16 July 2005. <http://www.globalchange.com/aidsafrica.htm>.

### ***It Happened to Nancy* by Beatrice Sparks (U.S.A.)**

Beatrice Sparks edits an anonymous teenager’s diary after her tragic death from AIDS, resulting from a one-time date rape. “Nancy” shares her story from beginning to end with her counselor providing answers to questions Nancy raises throughout.

### ***Nine Hills to Nambonkaha* by Sarah Erdman (Africa)**

Sarah Erdman lived in several different countries as a youth, so it is little surprise she volunteered for two years in Nambonkaha, a northern Ivory Coast village, after she graduated from college. From 1998–2000, she worked as a health care volunteer, dealing with pregnancy, malnutrition, and child-care issues. A significant challenge for Sarah was trying to meld medical knowledge with villagers’ traditional beliefs. Villagers, for example, believed that illness and misfortune were caused by witchcraft rather than infection. Such beliefs were particularly dangerous when AIDS first comes to the village by way of a widow and her son. Though an important issue for Erdman’s work, her book is far more than health care, AIDS prevention, or birth control. Sarah tells how she

learns local ways, how she gains the confidence of the villagers, and how there were some traditional practices she could do nothing about—such as female genital mutilation. She tells the village’s story with love and sensitivity; the people and the village and their customs come alive in her prose. As a female, her story has a decidedly female slant, but health care issues are nearly always grounded in female issues.

### ***Chanda’s Secrets* by Allan Stratton (Africa)**

Sixteen-year-old Chanda’s life is tough. Her mother has been married several times, she has been sexually abused by one of her stepfathers, and she has just discovered that her beautiful little sister is dead—kidnapped from the world by an epidemic that plagues many of the people who live in her fictional, yet seemingly real, African town. Due to the horrific conditions, Chanda learns what it means to grow up before her time. When her mother disappears and she is forced to abandon her studies and care for her siblings, Chanda confronts her community head on. She finds a voice she never knew she had and comes to term with the fact that her mother might die and she too might be infected by the less than beautiful beast—AIDS.

### **Depression Facts/Statistics**

- In Australia, the number of children and adolescents who suffer from depression is estimated at about 100,000, and the number of prescriptions for anti-depressants issued per month to people under the age of 19 is estimated at about 20,000. “Mental Illness.” Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.youthfacts.com.au/index.php?option = displaypage&Itemid = 265&op = page#depression>.
- At any point in time, up to 5% of adolescents experience depression that is severe enough to warrant treatment, and around 20% of young people will have experienced significant depressive symptoms by the time they reach adulthood. “What are the different stages of depression and anxiety?” Beyond Blue: The National Depression Initiative. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link id = 1.7&print = true#Youth>.

- The rates of depressive disorders are three times higher for young women than for young men and depression among 18-24 year old women (10%) is higher than the overall female rate of 7%. “Young Women’s Health: Depression and Risk-taking Behaviour.” Department for Women. Retrieved July 16, 2005. <http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/PDF/Archived/Young%20Womens%20/Health.pdf>.

### ***Upstream* by Melissa Lion (U.S.A.)**

Living with her unconventional mother and sisters in rural Alaska, Martha copes with the death of her boyfriend, Steven, the summer before her senior year of high school. Consumed by depression, Martha attempts to restore normalcy, but every day she is tormented by her memories of Steven and her role in his death. When investigators probe the details of the accident, Martha is forced to confront her feelings of guilt and inadequacy. With the support of her family and friends, Martha confronts this tragedy head on.

### ***Saving Francesca* by Melina Marchetta (Australia)**

Australian born Francesca “Frankie” Spinelli is about to enter her 11th year of high school. Although she would typically be excited about moving on and almost moving out, this year is going to be quite different. So that she might gain more exposure to “opportunity,” as her pushy mother puts it, Frankie is forced to attend St. Sebastian’s, a historically all-male school. Angry with her mother’s decision to make her attend a school where less than 4% percent of the students are female and teachers still refer to students as *gentlemen*, Frankie is reluctant to make friends, partly due to the fact that the only people available for friendship are the people she shunned at school last year while her so-called buddies molded her into whomever they wanted her to be. And, if the uncomfortable situation at school isn’t enough to stress Frankie out, the sudden sickness of her mother is sure to do her in. With no warning at all, Frankie’s crazy, out-spoken, and intelligent mom refuses to get out of bed. A stranger at school and at home, Frankie must figure out who she is and how to save both her mother and herself from the dark cloud of depression and teen angst.

## Homosexuality Facts/Statistics

- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, homosexuality has existed in most societies for as long as recorded descriptions of sexual beliefs and practices have been available, but it wasn't until 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association reclassified homosexuality as a sexual orientation/expression rather than as a mental disorder. "Policy Statement on Homosexuality and Adolescence (RE9332)" published by The American Academy of Pediatrics, 1993, Vol. 92. <http://www.aap.org/policy/05072.html>
- Societal attitudes toward homosexuality have had a decisive impact on the extent to which individuals have hidden or made known their sexual orientation. In fact, the psychosocial problems of gay and lesbian adolescents are primarily the result of societal stigma, hostility, hatred, and isolation. The gravity of these stresses is underscored by current data that document that gay youths account for up to 30% of all completed adolescent suicides. Approximately 30% of a surveyed group of gay and bisexual males have attempted suicide at least once. "Policy Statement on Homosexuality and Adolescence (RE9332)" published by The American Academy of Pediatrics, 1993, Vol. 92. <http://www.aap.org/policy/05072.html>
- To date, at least 10 peer-reviewed studies have found a clinically and statistically significant association between suicide attempts and homosexuality, strongest among males. "Suicide and Sexual Orientation: Nearing the End of Controversy?" by Gary Remafedi, MD, MPH published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, October 1999, Vol. 56, No. 10. <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/issues/v56n10/rfull/ycm9279.html>

## ***Far from Xanadu* by Julie Anne Peters (U.S.A.)**

In rural Kansas, a girl softball star, Mike Szabo, comes to terms with her alcoholic father's suicide. In the two years following his death, Mike's dysfunctional family has offered her little support and love. In fact, her morbidly obese mother has not uttered a word to her since his suicide. When Xanadu moves to

Coalton, Mike instantly falls in love with her; however, Xanadu is not gay.

NOTE: We discuss this topic in the United States, but none of us could find any book that addresses this issue in another country. We all believe that is a fact worth noting.

## Suicide Facts/Statistics

- An estimated 1.7 million adolescents die each year, the victims of accidents, suicide, violence, pregnancy-related complications, and other illnesses that are either preventable or treatable. World Health Organization, "Overview of Child and Adolescent Health and Development." Retrieved July 15, 2005. [http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/overview/ahd/adh\\_over.htm](http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/overview/ahd/adh_over.htm)

## ***Things Left Unsaid: A Novel in Poems* by Stephanie Hemphill (U.S.A.)**

Eleventh-grader Sarah Lewis plays the part of the average teenager who's focused on boys, girlfriends, shopping, and appeasing her parents. As her act wears thin, Sarah yearns for something else—something different. This restlessness leads Sarah into an intense friendship with Robin, a dressed-in-black rebel with a defiant, tough-talking façade. When Robin attempts suicide, Sarah is forced to reassess her self-identity.

## ***Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori (Japan)**

Yuki Okuda is only ten years old when her mother, Shizuko, commits suicide. Her father hastily remarries, which places an additional burden on Yuki's development. Yuki must come to terms with her mother's death, adjust to stoic parents, and accept her own development.

## War Facts/Statistics

- Between 1986-1996, armed conflicts took the lives of over two million children. During that same time period, over six million children were seriously injured or disabled, over one million lost their families, and more than ten million were traumatized. "War Affected Children." FTC Worldwide. Retrieved

July 16, 2005. [http://www.freethechildren.org/youthinaction/war\\_affected\\_children.htm](http://www.freethechildren.org/youthinaction/war_affected_children.htm).

- For 36 years, Guatemala was terrorized and torn apart by a guerrilla war that left over 100,000 dead and one million people displaced. Brutal in both depth and duration, the war formally ended in 1996.  
“Guatemala.” FTC Worldwide. Retrieved July 16, 2005. [http://www.freethechildren.com/ftcworldwide/ftc\\_project\\_guatemala.htm](http://www.freethechildren.com/ftcworldwide/ftc_project_guatemala.htm).

### ***Tangled Threads* by Pegi Deitz Shea (U.S.A. from Thailand)**

Mai Yang has spent 10 of her 13 years in a refugee camp in Ban Vinai, Thailand. Originally from Laos, Mai and her grandmother fled after their village was poisoned by “yellow rain” dropped from airplanes. Finally, after long last, Mai and her grandmother are getting approved to relocate to the United States where Mai’s uncle and cousins had gone five years earlier. Mai’s certain all of their problems will end once they move in with her uncle and cousins in Providence, Rhode Island, but things do not go smoothly. Mai’s cousins have changed, and she doesn’t understand many things about this new country. As if things can’t get any worse, Mai learns a terrible secret her grandmother kept from her and the family.

### ***A Stone in My Hand* by Cathryn Clinton (Palestine)**

This story of a Palestinian girl and her family living under Israeli military occupation captures 11-year-old Malaak’s experiences of the occupation, and the never-ending cycle of anger and retaliation. Malaak’s father has been killed in a bus bombing, and her brother has joined a youth activist group that engages in terrorist activities. Malaak finds courage and risks her life, but there are no happy endings or simplistic solutions. Clinton shows the diversity of Palestinians in class, religion, and politics.

### ***A Sky So Close* by Betool Khedairi (Iraq)**

A first-person narrative, this novel in translation is a powerful depiction of the clash between East and West and of a young girl shaped by two cultures yet fully accepted by neither. This story of a girl growing

up in wartime Iraq sparked controversy when it was published in the Middle East. Her father is Iraqi; her mother is British. The novel begins in a peaceful village outside Baghdad, but when the narrator is a teenager, Iraq and Iran are at war and her family moves to Baghdad, where her mother and father continue their personal conflict. Her father dies, and the narrator falls in love with an Iraqi soldier, who is a Christian. When the Gulf War begins, she accompanies her mother, who has terminal cancer, to England, where her cultural estrangement continues. Readers never learn the name of the narrator in this tale.

### ***Tree Girl* by Ben Mikaelson (Mexico)**

Loosely based on fact, *Tree Girl* is the tale of Gabriela Flores, a 14-year-old girl who loves to climb trees so she can appreciate and contemplate the natural splendor of the forest that surrounds her. Despite her infatuation with nature, Gabriela’s view from the trees becomes less than beautiful when, from the highest limbs, she witnesses the murder of her teachers, fellow classmates, and nearly all of the people in her Mayan village. Realizing she must find a way to escape the American-trained guerillas, Gabriela begins her quest to reach the Mexican border where she hopes to be reunited with her younger sister. Unfortunately, on her way to the refugee camp, she is exposed to more violence and brutality. Camouflaging herself at the top of a tree once more, Gabriela watches as another village is ransacked and destroyed; women and children are beaten, raped, and finally executed. When there is no one left to murder and the soldiers leave, Gabriela climbs down from her perch and promises never to climb again. Gabriella continues her journey north and while hoping to find her sister, she somehow manages to find herself.

### ***Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye (Jerusalem from U.S.A.)**

Liyana, a 14-year-old Arab-American girl, is unhappy when her father, a native Palestinian doctor, decides to move the family from St. Louis to Jerusalem. Immediately, she is immersed into a culture where only tourists are permitted to wear shorts, and relationships between boys and girls are restricted. When Liyana falls in love with Omer, a Jewish boy, she goes against family, culture, and tradition. Under-

lying their daily lives is the violence between Palestinian and Jew. Israeli soldiers destroy her grandmother's bathroom, but in turn, Palestinians bomb a Jewish marketplace. Liyana's friend is shot and her father is jailed. Readers experience the varying landscapes, from villages to Bedouin camps, and the story resonates with hope for peace and understanding.

### ***Under the Persimmon Tree* by Suzanne Fisher Staples (Afghanistan)**

In war-torn Afghanistan, young Najmah must find a way to survive after the Taliban takes her father and brother away to fight in the war. Because her mother is eight months pregnant and cannot travel, they are unable to flee to Peshawar, Pakistan. As bombs fall around her, Najmah hides among the boulders and witnesses something so tragic she can no longer speak. Concurrently, an American Muslim named Nusrat has organized a school in Peshawar for the refugee children. Nusrat has not heard from her husband, a medical doctor working in a clinic based in Afghanistan north of Kandahar and fears for his safety. Staples masterfully weaves these two stories together into a gripping and suspenseful drama.

### **Conclusion**

It was our intention to show that there are, of course, many similarities across cultures, but there are also many striking differences. It is not always enough to see only ourselves in literature; we need to see others. Young adult literature can provide a variety of lenses through which to view the adolescent female condition and can help broaden the awareness of its readers.

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