This poster is theoretical in nature, serving to bring attention to an intervention that may prove useful in practitioners work with clients at all levels of counseling readiness. Prater and colleagues (2006) highlight the use of bibliotherapy in encouraging expression and discussion of client problems and concern by bringing difficult issues to the forefront. Researchers (Prater et. al., 2006; Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010; Ditrexhe, 2010; Pehrsson, 2005) suggest affective bibliotherapy may allow clients to use characters as a catalyst for examining their own experiences or provide emotional relief through the knowledge that others have experienced similar traumatizing experiences. Additionally, when used in a more cognitive manner, bibliotherapy may be utilized as a self-help tool or a novel way to try new solutions (Prater et al., 2006; Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010). Picture books may prove especially useful for clients of any age when attempting to assist in empathy building, as it allows the reader to practice reading body language and facial expressions in addition to simply placing oneself in the oral story (Zambo, 2005).

Unfortunately, there are very few empirical studies looking at the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as an intervention, particularly when compared to a control group. The few empirical studies that do exist support the use of affective focused treatment through the use of bibliotherapy, citing larger increases in empathy as well as larger decreases in aggression for youth in an affective bibliotherapy group as compared to those in a traditional talk therapy group (Shechtman, 2006). In another study, reductions in adolescent social anxiety compared to a control group and in adjustment problems compared to both the control group and a cognitive based bibliotherapy group were found (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010). However, the
difference between cognitive and affective bibliotherapy groups had a small effect size, suggesting any form of bibliotherapy can be an effective tool in therapy.

Uses of bibliotherapy range from reading as a homework assignment for motivated and willing clients to a getting reluctant youth or clients to open up and begin rapport building. Additionally, a client’s response to any given reading passage serves as a window into that client’s experiences, beliefs, and values and will allow for the counselor to find meaningful opportunities to guide therapy around the client’s needs and experiences through goal setting or therapeutic dialogue based, in part, on the client’s response to the reading.

By no means is bibliotherapy meant to stand alone as the sole method of intervention, but instead as a starting point. Much like having a child draw a picture and using that to build one’s further interventions, bibliotherapy can be used as a therapeutic prompt, encouraging the client to experience a potentially emotional passage and then to process it, through discussion, writing, and/or artistic modes. Later in the therapeutic relationship, bibliotherapy can serve as a reinforcer of the positive work being completed in therapy through the use of “homework” or revisiting past passages to discuss the difference between prior responses and current ones.