**Integrating Literature into Suicide Prevention Programs: A Proposal**

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**Workshop Title:** Life Through Literature: A Creative Approach to Suicide Prevention

**Workshop Facilitator:** Susan Nadathur, MA

**Statement of Need**: Today’s teens are facing serious psychological and emotional challenges that are growing every day more severe. In my capacity as an author of young adult literature, I have interacted with hundreds of young people. And sadly, I have encountered one persistent and universal theme: self-harm as a way of dealing with the painful realities of being young. Many young people today are going to dark places to find meaning and control in their often-tumultuous lives. But, they are not talking about it. Why would they? What teen wants to share what is happening in their world with adults who might, despite all good intentions, offer advice and tell them what to do?

**Workshop Premise:** Perhaps an alternative to talking with young people about the life challenges they face is to talk about the struggles others face—in life and literature. Then discussions can evolve into “what would you do if you were in that position? We can help young people to understand the challenges they face through the safety net of literature. Through books and story, young people can perceive how others have encountered and resolved problems that cause sadness, stress, fear and uncertainty. Through literature, young people can understand that they are not alone in encountering heartache, rejection, loneliness and fear. Books can do so much more than support reading comprehension and model good writing. They can help students relate to their world and consider the complexities of the human experience. Once a teen sees himself represented in a book, his experience is validated. Feeling part of something bigger, something universal, can be a powerful tool in combating suicidal thoughts and negative emotional impulses.

**Workshop Objective:** By the end of this presentation, students will feel more comfortable in talking about themselves and their problems by identifying with the challenges and struggles of others as presented through relevant young adult literature.

**Workshop Description:** Using the platform of young adult literature to navigate the challenges of being young, this workshop is designed to understand and talk about the chain of events that often leads to a young person wanting to either self-harm or to dabble in the dark arts. But unlike other workshops which focus on understanding how and why a young person makes a destructive choice, “Life Through Literature” offers a way out of the darkness, a road map that can be used to escape the strongholds of relationship stress, poverty, low self-esteem, the occult and self-harm.

**Learning Outcomes:** After participating in this presentation, students can expect to 1) learn to look inside themselves for the tools they need to grow; 2) identify coping strategies that work for them; and 3) rely on the power of story to be heard and understood.

**How this Workshop is Unique**: This workshop probes into the vulnerable corners of young adulthood and offers the opportunity to talk about messy struggles over relationships, body image, bullying, suicidal ideation and—more daringly—the occult. Many young people, looking for meaning in their lives, gravitate toward the occult through one of its major attractions: curiosity. This workshop does not shy away from the controversy and fear of talking about the occult with those who are most attracted to it. The connection between the occult and suicide is often ignored, but there is an innate human attraction to the mysterious, the secret and the unknown—especially for a young person who is contemplating ending his life. Why not meet young people where they are, with an open discussion on the occult and its connection to suicide? With their natural curiosity for the morbid, young people will gravitate to a discussion of death that is free from adult “teachable moments”—or so they think. By capturing their attention with what naturally fascinates them, help can come in the most unexpected way.

**Workshop Dynamics:** Through selected readings from popular young adult novels that tackle the weighty issue of teen suicide, this workshop offers hope by not being afraid to delve into the dark corners where unhealthy thoughts often grow into tragic decisions.

**Selected Novels**: *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *Death, Dickinson, and the Demented Life of Frenchie Garcia* by Jenny Torres, *Playlist for the Dead* by Michelle Falkoff, *The Halls of Abaddon* by Susan Nadathur

**Post Workshop Follow-up:** After the workshop, students will be invited to connect with a network of past participants who will serve as peer-to-peer suicide-prevention mentors known as “Abaddon’s Angels.”

**Timeframe:** Six hours, which can be spread over one or several days

**Target Students:** Grades 7-12

**Supplies Required:** Photocopies of **s**elected readings

**AV Equipment Required:** PowerPoint Projector, Screen, sound system

**Facilitator Fee:** $900

**Instructor Bio:** Susan Nadathur is a young adult author whose work focuses on the vulnerable corners of young adulthood. She is actively involved in teen suicide prevention programs via books, stories and the creative arts. Susan lives and works in Lajas, Puerto Rico, but divides her time between the island and her second home in Connecticut. For more information about Susan and her work, please refer to her website at www.SusanNadathur.com

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