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# DISCOVERIES

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*An introduction by John Leggett*

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*When I was about ten I took a copy of his [Langston Hughes's] Weary Blues from a shelf and, eyes bright with discovery, mouth shaped in astonishment, rhapsodized, "Why he's writing about me!"*

—Mari Evans

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**A**n element of most literature—of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama—is **revelation**. We might call this the "Ah-hah!" moment. It happens when a character, usually the main one, discovers something important to his or her life.

Suppose we read an account of two friends. Surprisingly, one friend betrays the other. If the story is well-written, we have "lived through" the betrayal ourselves. We believe the tragedy could happen in exactly the way the storyteller relates it. The story has also





taught us something. We've learned a lesson about the delicate nature and value of friendship, almost as surely as, and far less painfully than, if we had suffered through the experience ourselves.

Literature that endures tends to focus on discoveries about the big events in everyone's life—understanding the nature of love, accepting loss, dealing with ambition, accepting the final loss of death itself.

### **Coming-of-Age Stories**

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Many of the stories in this book have to do with the discoveries we all make as we grow up, as we gather the wisdom we need to survive and flourish in adult life. These are often called **rite-of-passage** or **coming-of-age** stories. The discoveries central to these stories are the ones we all make as we pass from childhood into adulthood.

Coming-of-age stories usually deal with the discovery that the world isn't always what we wish it would be. Often these stories are about the acceptance of sound values. They may give us some idea of how to cope with a mother's anxiety, with temptation, with the opposite sex, with a lack of money, with a fear of failure, with the need to be liked.

### **Recognizing Ourselves in Literature**

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When you find a story that has a character involved in a conflict that seems familiar to you—a situation you can *feel*—you experience the shock of recognition. "Hey! That's me!" you might want to say to yourself. That is the best kind of discovery—and that is what literature is really all about.

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