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An honest and poignant collection of essays by women about losing their virginity in their teens. *The V-Word* captures the complexity of this important life-decision and reflects diverse real-world experiences. Includes helpful resources for parents and teens.

Losing it. Popping your cherry. Handing in your V-card.

First time sex is a big unknown. Will it be candlelight and rose petals or quick and uncomfortable? Is it about love or about lust? Deciding to have sex for the first time is a choice that's often fraught with anxiety and joy. But do you have anyone telling you what sex is really like?

In *The V-Word* seventeen writers (including Christa Desir, Justina Ireland, Sara Ryan, Carrie Mesrobian, Erica Lorraine Scheidt, and Jamia Wilson) pull back the sheets and tell all, covering everything from straight sex to queer sex, diving-in versus waiting, and even the exhilaration and disappointment that blankets it all. Some of their experiences happened too soon, some at just the right time, but all paint a broad picture of what first-time sex is really like.

Funny, hot, meaningful, cringe-worthy, gross, forgettable, magnificent, empowering, and transformative, the stories in *The V-Word* are never preachy, but provide a map for teens to chart their own course through the steamy waters of sex. With *The V-Word* girls can finally take control, learn what's on the horizon, and eliminate the fear and mystery surrounding this important milestone.

The V-Word: True Stories about First-Time Sex Details

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From Reader Review The V-Word: True Stories about First-Time Sex for online ebook

Jamie Canaves says

While I like anthologies for me I usually love a couple essays/stories, like a few, and skip a few. Just seems to happen when there is a mix of writing/authors. In this case ALL the stories were really strong ranging from 3 stars to 5 stars and I didn't feel the urge to skip any of the stories.

The best part of this anthology is how different all the voices are, the stories. We are brought up with such a weight attached to virginity, to this idea of it being lost/taken one day and that being a monumental thing. The stories of these women and their first sexual experiences were all so different--marginalized groups were represented by far more than just one story--that regardless of whether you're reading this for information as someone looking to hand in your V-card or as someone who long ago got that card stamped it is a reminder of how different women are. We all come from different places, our brains are all filled with different thoughts, emotions, wants, ideas and as much as society might tell us what virginity means it is completely different to each individual.

There were hilarious stories, a bit sad stories, honest stories--it read like a great group of friends each telling their first time story. And for those looking for actual information the book ends with resources.

Heather says

Standard disclaimers about Advance Reader Copies, honest reviews, etc. apply.

The whole time I was reading this book, I was thinking how wonderful it's going to be for all the teens who pick it up and read it. How they're going to learn so much. How it's going to make them feel less alone. How it takes something that teens and adults are afraid to talk with each other about and provides a bridge to say, "hey, we've been there too, and here's what I wish I had known."

And then I realized...it was wonderful for me, too. For all the same reasons, AND because I was so happy that this resource exists for teens today. It was also, frankly, really awkward for me to read at times, but that discomfort is part of the appeal. I had to really look at why I was uncomfortable and acknowledge that I'm not perfect as a nonjudgemental human being.

The essays and stories are beautifully written, utterly frank, and deliberately positive. Although sexual violence is addressed, the editors and authors made a deliberate decision that violence doesn't fit their criteria for these stories. Awkwardness? Ignorance? Bad sex? Sure. All of those! But not things that are outside what should be expected in a sexual experience.

AND this book gave me an awesome idea for passive programing for teens. Put this book, along with others like it (Sex is a Funny Word would be a good one) in an out-of-the-way place with signage encouraging teens to take them out and promising that their library checkouts are confidential. Instead of a traditional check-out system, put the barcode on an index card inside the book so the teens don't have to march over to circ holding it. Provide cloth or paper book coverings and let the teens know that if they don't want to take the book out they're welcome to read it in the library and use a cover for their own privacy. Many MANY of

the stories in this book mention sneaking romance novels out of the library or away from friends/relatives. How much better would teens feel about "sanctioned" sneaking?

Cyra Schaefer says

Publisher: Beyond Words

Publication Date: February 2nd, 2016

Rating: 4 Stars

Source: ARC from the publisher

Add it on Goodreads!

Summary (from Goodreads):

HAVING SEX FOR THE FIRST TIME IS A BIG UNKNOWN. LOTS OF PEOPLE WILL TELL YOU WHAT TO DO, BUT IS ANYONE TELLING YOU WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE?

The V-Word pulls back the sheets on sex. Queer and straight. Relished and regretted. Funny and exhilarating. The seventeen women in this book (including Christa Desir, Justina Ireland, Sara Ryan, Carrie Mesrobian, Erica Lorraine Scheidt, and Jamia Wilson) write about first-time sex—hot, meaningful, cringe-worthy, gross, forgettable, magnificent, empowering, and transformative.

Whether you're diving in or whether you're waiting, we hope these stories will help you chart your own course.

I received this from Simon Pulse/Beyond Words for a blog tour that I did a couple weeks ago.

If you never got the sex talk and you want it or you have to give the sex talk and don't know where to start, seriously, just pick up this book.

This book is made up of a story section and a resource section.

All the stories in this book are about a different woman's first time. There's a little bit of everything in this book. Straight. Lesbian. Transgender. Awesome first times. Horrible first times. First times that aren't technically first times. First times just to cash in the V-card.

I found mostly all of the stories in this book to be interesting. All of these first times are so different and all of the writing is so different and unique. I think that these stories would all be valuable to someone trying to decide if they're ready to get it on. Out of the seventeen different stories in this book, there was only one of them that I skipped over because I didn't care for the writing. I thought it was kind of boring.

The second section of this book is resources. The resources section is GREAT! It has sections on knowing your body, knowing what turns you on, knowing what you're up against, knowing about being safe, knowing how to talk about it, and knowing when you're ready. There's a great Q&A. There's a list of website resources. And finally, there's a section of reassurances and resources for parents. There is a LOT of good information in this book for people who aren't sure if they're ready to take this step!

Overall, I would highly recommend this book! If you're a girl thinking about having sex for the first time or

if you're a parent with a daughter and you need to have the talk, this would be good. For instance, my parents got divorced when I was little and I lived with my dad from the age of 8 until I moved out at like 22. How awkward of a conversation would that be to have with your dad? I think this would be a great book for a situation like that!

Tina (As Told By Tina) says

Disclosure: I received a copy from the author/publisher, in exchange for an honest review. This does not influence my review in any shape or form.

What I loved most about The V-Word was the different perspectives of sex. You had the special first times, you had the decent first times, you had the crappy first times and the included both straight and queer sex. It gave the reader a chance to find a story that they could relate to. One where they could really understand and connect with the person who was writing the essay.

Many parents may think this book is preaching to teenagers to go out and have sex but it is not. There is absolutely no preaching to have sex, it is simply sharing stories of first times and sources where to find more information about sex if they chose to have it.

I could relate to some of the stories and I think that's one of the things I loved the most about the book. I could have easily shared part of my story in the middle of the essays because some of them carried a part of me in them.

Is this a book I would recommend? Yes. Where was this book when I was younger? I especially recommend it if you are thinking about having sex and can't find someone older to trust with your questions or concerns.

Please don't forget your voice is the most important V-word of all.

Jim says

Okay guys, I inadvertently took a hit for the team on this one. I had recently read a book written by Molly Bloom and, wanting to read more, I noticed that a Molly Bloom had contributed an essay to this compilation. Apparently we were dealing with a different Molly Bloom. Anyway, this is a compilation of essays contributed by women (or guys who think that they're women) in which the writer relates the manner in which she lost her virginity. There is nothing to titillate here; most couplings were ill-advised and awkward affairs. The book is at least easy to read, having been written at the YA level.

The essays are followed by what seems like sound advice for young women considering sexual activity for the first time, although I personally would shy away from any endeavour that required the use of a condom, latex gloves and a dental dam! There is nothing in here by men or for men...in fact, one contributor stipulates on her GR status that she only reads books written by women or men of colour....that speaks volumes right there.

Diversireads says

I didn't personally loooooove the anthology, but this is an important resource for young adults who are just beginning to discover their own sexualities. The collection features a diverse range of first sexual experiences while deconstructing what "virginity" entails and why it's such an arbitrary and incomplete way to gauge sex and sexuality. Puberty is such a time of turmoil and confusion—not only are you trying to figure out who you are, but you face incredible pressure from society and from your peers, and your hormones aren't helping, and I think it's so, so valuable to know that you are not alone. That you are not the only person to have gone through this. That there is nothing wrong with you.

The collection could at times be unnecessarily pedantic in a way that I think I would have definitely felt unappealing as a teenager who thought she knew everything, but I don't really think it's either a big deal or an icebreaker, since the entire point of the collection was to teach girls about sex in a way that goes beyond the cis & hetero birds-and-bees spiel you got in school. It's thoughtful and personal and it's so great in that it normalises female desire.

Of course, as is the case with all collections there were some hits and there were some misses, but that's kind of unavoidable. I didn't love all of it, I didn't love the interludes (which I felt were the most pedantic bits), but I do love the fact of its existence, and I love how diverse it is.

Kelly says

I have an incredibly personal essay in this anthology, as well as an additional piece about female sexuality in YA literature (and beyond).

Obviously I'm biased in writing about this title, but I've finally had the chance to sit down and read it cover to cover and it's outstanding. If you're looking for the kind of honest book to hand to a teen girl about sexuality, virginity, and the social/political/psychological elements wrapped up in each, this is your winner. The essays are honest, with sexual experiences across the gender and sexual spectrum, and the resource guide is chock full of great additional reading for further edification.

An important and worthwhile book that explores sexuality with the sort of lens that doesn't happen in school or in those private places outside of a classroom between teens. This covers it all, and it's not at all a call to partaking or not partaking, but rather, it's a book about making informed choices that align with your desires and needs.

Jessica Woodbury says

If you have a daughter or a niece or a friend that you want to have a really deep sex talk with, you know that talk probably won't go as smoothly as you hope. There's so much you want to tell them, but sometimes you're not the best person to say what they need to hear. This book is perfect to give to young women on the verge of love, romance, and sex. It has several honest stories about girls losing their virginity, from the

planned and romantic first time with a long-time partner, to the haphazard and unexpected, with plenty that goes beyond typical heterosexual expectations.

I wish I'd read this book as a teenager or an early 20-something. It'd still be a great choice for college-aged girls or girls who have already lost their virginity, since there is much to learn here about loving yourself, body image, trust, comfort, and much more. The end also has a long list of resources and references that will surely be invaluable.

(Full disclosure: I know two of the contributors to this book.)

Ben Babcock says

Back in Grade 4, a small group of peers asked me if I was a virgin.

Not knowing what a virgin was, I said *no*. Well, that certainly got them laughing. And I got very upset.

This incident has stuck in my memory (which is otherwise very much a sieve through which most details inevitably fall) for a few reasons. Firstly, it was one of the few times I ever felt bullied in school, despite being very nerdy and introverted and unapologetically individualist in my outward behaviour. And I don't even really think of it as bullying, as I'm sure the people responsible didn't—they probably thought they were just having a laugh at my expense. I don't think they expected me to react the way I did. Of course, they got in trouble. One of them gave me a Pokémon card in reparation (and it was Item Finder, so I really knew he was sorry).

But I digress. That's my first memory of the concept of virginity having an impact on my life. In the next couple of years, we would start sex ed, Judy Blume books would materialize on our desks, the boys and girls would go to separate classrooms, and my classmates would start to pair off. (Uh, to be clear, that last part wasn't school-mandated. That was a kid thing, not a sex ed thing. We're better off than the States when it comes to sex ed, but we're not quite *Monty Python and the Meaning of Life* here.)

I didn't pair off, and I still haven't. I made a few half-hearted stabs at it in high school, but I wasn't all that dedicated. Relationships and sex seemed to be things that happened *to* my peers, and I was just away the day these things got handed out. But that has never bothered me. I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything—and to be honest, I occasionally have a hard time believing other people actually engage in sex. You seriously do that? It just seems so messy, and there are so many ... fluids. But, sure. I guess if you don't have any good books to read you have to do something with your time.

Anyway, *The V-Word* is of interest to me for a few reasons. Firstly, as I mentioned, this is something outside my realm of personal experience. Because of the importance that sex holds in our society, however, I still find it very fascinating. It's why I'm enjoying the Banging Book Club so much, and why I seek out non-club reads, like this book, about sex. I don't see what the big deal is myself, but reading about why others consider it such a big deal helps a little bit. Secondly, I'm a teacher. I don't actually teach sex ed, and I don't even teach high school students at the moment—but I care a lot about what we teach our students about sex. I am pleased with the revised health curriculum that Ontario is rolling out. And so I approached *The V-Word* with the eyes of an educator, wondering if this was something teenagers might find useful—and I would like to think the answer is “yes”.

There is such a wonderful plethora of experiences served up here. This is obviously a book that was not spontaneously created, nor even curated: it was lovingly constructed. Amber J. Keyser, whose own first time is the first of many first times related here, has gone out of her way to include diverse voices from all sorts of women, cis and trans, of varying sexualities and races and religions. I laughed out loud at some of these stories, because they attest to how sex can be funny, or awkward, or how the relationships that surround them can take unexpected turns. Some of these stories were sweet, others more bittersweet. As Keyser's interjections between each story reinforce, *The V-Word* is also unabashedly a message book. I don't see how it could be otherwise. There are so many good quotations in here, so many good ways of summing up its message, but for convenience I'll grab Kelly Jensen's pronouncement near the end of the book: "There's not one single right way to have a sex life."

I've been very lucky. I have friends of many genders and sexualities who have talked to me about their sex lives, about first times, about what they like and don't like and who or what turns them on. I value these conversations, not just because they signify the close friendships I have, but because they are windows into other people's selves. We are so isolated from one another. It is so difficult to figure out what someone else is truly thinking or feeling at any given time. I get that, for some people, sex provides a level of connection and dialogue that talking doesn't. But I have been lucky to have these conversations, and I know that many people grow up with parents who are too nervous to talk about sex, schools who cannot or will not educate them properly, and a big scary Internet full of porn and really bad sex advice.

This book gives *good* sex advice, not in the sense of *how* (or even *when*) to "do it" but in the sense of reassuring people that they are not somehow freakish or abnormal. Exploring your sexuality when you're eleven? Normal! Not exploring your sexuality until you're twenty-five? Normal! Having sexual desire but choosing to wait until marriage? Normal! Sometimes we confuse sex positivity with promiscuity and the idea that you're only liberated if you're actively going out and having lots of sex. I like that *The V-Word's* sex positivity is much more inclusive than that, both in how people timed their first times as well as the actions that qualify for a "first time".

Following the stories, the book includes end matter with resources for teens and parents. **This is brilliant.** Why don't more books do this? I can totally imagine a questioning teen reading the book and, having finished the last story think, "OK, but what can I read or watch now to learn more?" Keyser has you covered. The end matter is, much like the rest of the content, brief but full of compassion. This is a book that wants you to do you (until you decided to do other people, I guess)—and it's all about how you can do that safely and healthily.

And that's really what it comes down to, if I can step on a soapbox for a moment. I get really angry when people justify censorship and weak-to-no sex ed "for the children" (much in the same way people will justify anti-abortion laws "for women's health"). If we really want our children to be safe, to be healthy, to be happy and grow up into full members of our society, then we need to equip them with knowledge. We need to tell them that there is nothing shameful in asking questions, in learning about sex, and in making informed decisions. *The V-Word* does that, and it's totally a message I can get behind.

Now, I don't want to get all "but what about the men", but I would really be interested in a companion book with men's stories about their first times. I totally get why this is a book centred on women. Virginity and "the first time" have always been particularly germane to women's sexual expression, and indeed one might say that the entire Western idea of femininity is grounded within demarcations of virginity. So it is understandable and completely valid that *The V-Word* should give voices to women. But boys need books too. Boys need male voices telling them about the importance of consent, of communication, of comfort with yourself and your partner(s). *The V-Word* is an excellent foray into a more compassionate sex ed than what

you see in most American classrooms; I cannot wait to discover similar books out there.

Short but sweet (insert sex joke here), *The V-Word* is an intense but wonderful collection of experiences. It is successful in its goals, and I can only hope that many teens (and even adults) read this book and take something positive away from it. For those who are just beginning to explore their sexuality, it is not a manual, but it is a reassuring signpost along the way. For those who, like me, have decided to opt-out (at least for now), it still provides insight into a critical part of our society.

Alina Borger says

The concept of this book drew me in, as well as some of the big names. I'm glad to have read it, I imagine it will be a useful resource for girls, and the stories were compelling. Jamia Wilson, Justina Ireland, Chelsey Clammer, Alex Meeks, and Carrie Mesrobian all had standout stories.

At the same time, some of the writing itself was a little lackluster--either the tone got a little preachy and I lost the thread of story, or the writer was more interested in telling about the experience than in letting the scene roll.

LOSING IT, a similar anthology, offers much crisper narrative writing than some of these stories--but much less focused on girls. And reality. So there is that.

Jordan says

When I received an advance copy of this, I thought I'd keep it in my classroom. I was deluded into thinking the right student would find this book, at the right time, and start a dialogue about sex-related decisions and experiences that would prove fundamental to her development.

What happened was a teenage boy found it in the middle of Speech class and wouldn't stop hee-ing and haw-ing over the word, "clit."

I get it. For teens, sex is new, it's taboo, and it involves nudity. HILARIOUS.
But it also involves emotions, and pressure, and insecurity.
The laughter is just as much about the discomfort as it is about the nudity.

That's where this book is golden. When I decided to preview it, post-teenager-gigglefest, I found tremendous power in hearing from grown-ass women having grown-ass experiences in their teens, some of which they weren't entirely ready for. It presented the same honesty as *The Letter Q: Queer Writers' Notes to their Younger Selves*, which is so often lacking from our conversations with teens, *especially* about sex.

I was also pleased by the range of perspectives: heterosexual, of course, but also bisexual, transgender, and queer and questioning. Not a full spectrum, true, but definitely more hearty than a traditional textbook would

allow.

Moreover, the book transitions smoothly from narrative to nonfiction, and presents a wealth of information, books, websites, blogs, and other resources to help teens and their parents to have responsible, sex-positive conversations. It's everything you should have gotten in high school health class, and much, much more.

So, take that, giggling teenage boys! This book isn't necessarily for you, but the conversations it starts concern you and your future. #respect

Melanie says

ARC provided by the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

This was such a wonderful book that I wish every young girl could read; especially those who are contemplating having sex for the first time. This book tells the story of seventeen different women, and how each of them lost their virginity. And the spectrum of the narratives in this book is phenomenal. I think every woman could connect to at least one of these very different women's experiences.

“Virginity isn’t a possession locked behind a chastity belt or spread wide on silken sheets. It’s not a ripe cherry waiting to be plucked, popped, or eaten. Virginity is a state of being. Being a virgin means standing on one side of an experience, not yet having walked through the door. Crossing the threshold is far more about gaining something than about losing it.”

href="http://meltotheany.tumblr.com/"&... | Instagram | Youtube | Steam | Twitch

Emily says

Grades 8 up. This collection of short essays by women focus on the loss of virginity, but also the defining of virginity. An absolute must-read for teens entering sexual maturity, boys and girls alike.

Aj Sterkel says

Have you ever fallen down an Internet rabbit hole? Like, you start researching one topic, and then suddenly you’re reading about something completely different, and then you find yourself buying a book about virginity for teenage girls?

Yeah. That’s what happened to me.

I started out looking for lists of 2016 books that had been challenged in schools. After much clicking, scrolling, and getting distracted by Twitter, I came across *The V-Word*. The synopsis got my attention. When 11-year-old-me took sex-ed. classes, the teachers basically told us “Babies and diseases occur when Tab A is inserted into Slot B.” That was it. Very scientific. No discussion of emotions or relationships. No discussion of LGBTQIA issues. No discussion of rape. Not nearly enough information to satisfy our curiosity.

(Funny story: I first saw the word “masturbation” in a Stephen King book when I was a young teenager. I had no idea what it meant, so I looked it up in the dictionary. It’s probably not ideal for kids to be learning about the human body from Stephen King.)

Anyway, *The V-Word* sets out to give girls all the information they don’t get from school. The essays in this book are no-frills, honest, and straightforward. Sex isn’t masked by beautiful writing. The writers describe exactly what happened during their first sexual encounter. **The book isn’t unnecessarily graphic, but it definitely doesn’t hide anything.** In addition to essays, the book has information for parents and additional resources for teens. (Including recommendations for YA books that have accurate portrayals of sex.)

I love the diversity of perspectives in this collection. You get to hear from doctors and sex experts as well as straight women, lesbian women, bisexual women, and trans women. They talk about different ways to have sex and how porn and YA novels are unrealistic. They show that emotions are complicated and relationships often don’t work out. The first person you have sex with may not be your “true love.” There is a lot of discussion about consent and using your words. **This book is all about giving teens realistic expectations.**

“Two people can choose to have sex for no other reason than that it feels good. It doesn’t have to be the next step in a committed relationship. It doesn’t have to be about love. But if you tell me that it means nothing, I’ll lift an eyebrow in disbelief.” – *The V-Word: True Stories of First-Time Sex*

My biggest issue with this collection is that there’s no asexual representation. There also isn’t much representation from disabled people. Ace and disabled girls have thoughts about sex, too! I think their perspectives would have added a lot to this book.

The V-Word contains tons of no-nonsense info about sex, but parents should probably read it before handing it over to their teens. Some kids may feel overwhelmed by it. There is a lot of information packed into this tiny book.

Amy! says

As the librarian who purchased this book for the library, I really appreciate that they put the most salacious quotes on the back. :-/

My actual review: Generally, I think this is probably a great resource for young women thinking about having sex for the first time. I’m sure this is definitely something I would have appreciated having when I was 17 and thinking about losing my virginity (instead, I had *Stranger in a Strange Land*). I like that all the stories covered a really wide range of experiences, from LGBTQ people to sex after sexual assault to doing it fairly young or waiting until they’re older. I only recognized a couple of the authors who contributed stories, and after looking at all their Goodreads profiles, it appears that most of them are white, which ... more diversity there probably would have been a good thing.

I also like that the last quarter or so of the book was full of further resources for readers: a quick rundown of having safer (and better!) sex, with additional resources to read/view included, as well as an interview with a teen librarian who suggested lots of good fiction titles with different depictions of sex, plus a one page "Reassurance for Parents" and resources for them about talking about sex with their daughters.

There's lots of good here in this book.

HOWEVER. The one story that explicitly deals with a bisexual woman's sexual experiences was INFURIATING. First, I do appreciate that she talks about the need she has to continually reaffirm her bisexuality as an adult in a heterosexual marriage, so it's great that she, first thing, hit on the idea that you don't stop being bi when you're in a relationship. UNFORTUNATELY, she talks about her first straight sex, and then goes on to talk about how she as a young adult thought she was bi, but she had never had gay sex so she didn't feel comfortable calling herself that, but then she DID have gay sex, so it's totally okay! She's definitely bi! Without once mentioning the fact that you can be bisexual *without ever having sex with people of different genders*. If a young woman questioning her sexuality read this, she wouldn't know that your sexual preferences are based on *who you're attracted to NOT who you fuck*. And it's just really REALLY frustrating that a book that is supposed to be inclusive and informative would contribute to bi-erasure. All I am asking for here is for that woman to use one of her THIRTY TWO fucking footnotes to say "hey, this is my experience having sex with people of both genders, but, girl, you're still bi even if you only ever have sex with dudes." Or SOMETHING. This was a glaring, unfortunate omission in an otherwise pretty great resource for young women.
