



Young Adult Literature Guide

For Books Published 1974–2003

IOWA

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Research Center**

*Student Reading
Success Through
Research and
Collaboration*

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About This Guide

This guide is intended to help teachers, middle and high school students, and caregivers identify young adult literature for middle and high school students to read and study.

The guide sorts books published between 1974 and 2003 that are still relevant and captivating reads today by genre such as realistic fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Each book listed has the approximate grade level for whom the book would be appropriate (by difficulty and by interest, separately), summary, and major themes listed. In addition, some books have supplementary resources, related books, and instructional materials to consider while reading.

Caregivers can use the information to find literature that their adolescents might be interested in reading independently but that also can support literacy learning. Educators can use the guide to develop lessons on literacy standards that their students can complete on the novels of their choice. Middle and high school students can use the guide to help them select a book to read. However, some of the information about each book could undermine a later lesson, such as identifying the themes that already are listed in the guide. Therefore, it will be important to think about the best ways to use the guide.



Realistic Fiction

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Animal Dreams

By Barbara Kingsolver

Published by Harper Collins Publishers (1990)

352 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 8

Interest grade level: 9+

Awards: National best seller

Summary

When her younger sister, Hallie, goes to assist farmers in war-torn Nicaragua, Codi Noline returns to her hometown of Grace, Arizona. She lets it be known that she is there for one year to teach biology at her old high school and see to the care of her father, Dr. Homer Noline, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. However, remaining detached is not as easy as she thinks. She becomes politically involved in the town's pressing environmental issue and romantically involved with the philosophical Loyd Peregrina. And just when Codi thinks she has lost what she loves most, she discovers how deeply her roots run and how interconnected life really is.

Major Themes

Interconnectivity of life, eco-feminism, confronting the past, family relationships

Teaching Points

- literary elements
 - flashback
 - point of view
 - local color
- cross-curricular applications
 - environmental science (industrial pollution)
 - agricultural science (crop diseases, orchards)
 - history (Contras, Kinishba, Pueblos)
- cultural relevancy
 - Latino/Hispanic
 - Native American
 - desert Southwest

The Chocolate War

By Robert Cormier

Published by Random House (1974)

191 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 8

Interest grade level: 8–11

Awards: American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, *School Library Journal* Best of the Best, *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year

Caution: This book is often considered controversial and is frequently banned

Summary

Trinity, a Catholic prep school serving middle-class boys, holds an annual chocolate sale to supplement its revenue. Although characterized as voluntary, the students have always tacitly accepted the duty of selling their share. This year, however, Brother Leon, the assistant headmaster, has ordered twice as many boxes to be sold at twice the usual price, thus compelling him to call on the help of The Vigils. This secret society of students has helped keep order on campus through its tradition of “assignments,” seemingly harmless pranks that test the fortitude of underclassmen and teachers alike. Led by the particularly ruthless Archie, The Vigils have begun crossing more seriously into psychological challenges. At first, skinny freshman Jerry Renault complies with his assignment to refuse to sell the school’s chocolates for 10 days. But when The Vigils call on him to begin participating in the fundraiser, Jerry dares to “disturb the universe,” as his locker poster declares (using a quote from T. S. Eliot). The descent of the school into a primitive state is described by the bullies and bullied alike, but where will the contest of wills end?

Major Themes

Challenging conformity/peer pressure, bullying/hazing, psychological manipulation, private schools, abuse of power, ways of handling stress

Related YA Novels on Female Bullying

- *The Girls* by Amy Goldman Koss (American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, American Library Association Quick Picks Top Ten selection)
- *Please Stop Laughing at Me* by Jodee Blanco (*New York Times* best seller)
- *Walking Naked* by Alyssa Brugman (Children’s Book Council of Australia Honor Book)

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

By Mark Haddon

Published by Vintage Random House (2003)

226 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7.4

Interest grade level: 10+

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, Booklist Editors' Choice, *School Library Journal* Best of the Best, Whitbread Book of the Year, *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year

Caution: profane language

Summary

Fifteen-year-old Christopher Boone is dependent upon routines, order, and precise language. He explains his world through mathematical and scientific principles—but also through the perceptions of an autistic individual. When he finds the neighbor's dog murdered, he sets about to deduce the perpetrator of the crime because he believes in truth and in logical explanations for events. His search leads him to unexpected information about his mother and father that disrupts his ordered and forthright existence, thus launching him on a frightening journey.

Major Themes

Autism, family relationships, logical reasoning

Other Information

Due to Christopher's portrayal as a math savant, there are interesting cross-curricular opportunities with mathematics courses. There are problems and equations given in the book, and there is a particular emphasis on patterns and probability. Other cross-curricular applications are made in science (space/astrology, physics), English language arts (simile, metaphor, literary allusions, idiomatic expressions, Anglican language variants, etymology, symbolism), and social studies (map skills, reading tables/charts, British culture, sociology).

Information on autism is available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>

The Secret Life of Bees

By Sue Monk Kidd

Published by Penguin Books (2002)

320 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 7+

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, *School Library Journal* Best of the Best, *New York Times* best seller

Summary

Lily Owens's search for a mother began at the age of 4 with an indistinct memory of hearing a gunshot while in the closet of her South Carolina home. It is now the summer of 1964, marked by her 14th birthday and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. The wrath of Lily's father and of the town racists have Lily and her African American caretaker, Rosaleen, fleeing Lily's father's peach farm, guided only by a memento of Lily's dead mother's. The picture of the Black Madonna with "Tiburón, S.C.," scrawled on the back leads the pair to the pink home of the African American Boatwright sisters. Here Lily learns about beekeeping, feminine spirituality, and the secrets of her past. Lily attempts to find the motherhood she seeks before the trail of tragedies catches up to her.

Major Themes

Coming of age, maternal influences and matriarchy, race relations, interconnectivity of life

Related Novels

- *Summer of My German Soldier* by Bette Greene
- *Before Women Had Wings* by Connie May Fowler

Other Information

The publisher, Penguin Books, offers a reading guide that includes an interview with the author and list of discussion questions: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/290796/the-secret-life-of-bees-by-sue-monk-kidd/9780142001745/readers-guide/>

One of the unique and potentially controversial aspects of this story for adolescents will be its use of a matriarchal religion spun from elements of Catholicism. Reactions to this, both positive and negative in nature, could be addressed with a companion text: *Unveiling the Secret Life of Bees* by Amy Lignitz Harken. It is promoted by the Christian Board of Publication as an interplay between Kidd's novel and the Bible, exploring the concept of the "Divine Mother" as well as the role of women in the life of the church.

Stand Tall

By Joan Bauer
Published by Penguin Books (2002)
192 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5

Interest grade level: 7–9

Awards: American Library Association Notable Children’s Books, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Summary

Everyone calls Sam Benton “Tree” because at the age of 12, he already stands six feet three and a half inches tall. He does not have the athletic prowess of his older brothers, so he feels distanced from his sports-loving father. He physically does not fit in with his seventh-grade classmates and is misunderstood socially. Because he does not feel at home in the house his mother purchased after the divorce, the joint custody arrangement only adds to his sense of awkwardness and loss of permanency. He does, however, love to fix things and help people. And, more than anything else, he wants to be like his grandfather, a Vietnam War veteran who remains strong and sure despite recently having a leg amputated. With the guidance of his grandfather and the friendship of the new girl, Sophie, Tree just might make it through the battles in his own life.

Major Themes

Divorce, individuality, dealing with disabilities, meeting challenges, war, natural disasters, finding purpose in life

Other Information

The author’s website provides information about Joan Bauer, about her novels, and about writing for young adults. The page for *Stand Tall* has free downloadable discussion guides for both adults and youths: <http://joanbauer.com/books/stand-tall/>. These guides were prepared by a family therapist, Dr. Catherine Hart Weber, as a structured means for intergenerational talk about stressful situations.



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Nonfiction

Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America

By Firoozeh Dumas

Published by Random House (2003)

187 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 8

Interest grade level: 9+

Awards: *School Library Journal* Adult Books for Young Adults

Summary

Firoozeh’s experiences as an Iranian émigré in California began when she was only 7 years old and trying to learn enough English to function in her second-grade classroom. Her clever and amusing observations take the reader into her life and that of her quirky but lovable family as they adjust to America and deal with the political and social ramifications of their Persian background. Trips to the warehouse club are an adventure in food samples, learning to swim is elevated to a high rite of passage within her extended family, and even being chased by anti-Shah protesters can’t dampen her father’s appreciation of a visit to Washington, D.C. Firoozeh, like her father, approaches everything with a sense of humor and optimism—from her traumatic camp experience in childhood to her cultural clashes with her in-laws as a grown woman. She knows what really matters in life and values the riches her family and experiences have given her.

Major Themes

Immigrant experiences, Iranian culture, cultural diversity, religion, family relationships, education, coming of age

Topics for Discussion or Quick Writes, by Chapter

- “Leffingwell Elementary School”: first day of school or first day at a new school
- “Hot Dogs and Wild Geese” (for English learners [ELs]): experiences learning English and/or translating for parents
- “With a Little Help from My Friends” (for ELs): others’ misunderstandings about your home culture/country; ways in which friends helped you adjust here
- “The ‘F Word’”: significance of names; what happens with foreign names
- “Waterloo”: learning under pressure versus learning when you’re ready
- “Treasure Island”: finding the “hidden treasure” in your life
- “It’s All Relatives”: compare family relationships; value of education to different cultures; number of words to describe something important
- “Me and Bob Hope”: most important holiday and how you celebrate it
- “I-raynians Need not Apply” (for ELs): prejudice in the labor market

- “Girls Just Wanna Have Funds”: first jobs
- “The Wedding”: wedding rituals of different cultures and families
- “If I Were a Rich Man”: what it means to be wealthy

Elements of Writer’s Craft

Irony, sarcasm, conclusions, anecdotes, local color

Uncommon Champions: Fifteen Athletes Who Battled Back

By Marty Kaminsky

Published by Boyds Mills Press (2000)

147 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 7+

Summary

The author points out in his introduction that champion athletes have a way of making their sports look so easy that we tend to think of these athletes as beyond our normal daily struggles. These biographies demonstrate that success takes more than just ready talent and does not guarantee a charmed life. The 10 males and five females featured had to overcome such adversities as genetic conditions, chronic illness, poverty, racism, behavioral syndromes, substance abuse, accidents, injuries, political dangers, and even their own self-doubt. They excelled in a variety of athletic pursuits, from mountain climbing to the decathlon, but the accounts of their accomplishments in private, decidedly human battles are even more inspiring.

Major Themes

Overcoming obstacles, disabilities, athletes, helping others

Related Nonfiction

- *Counting Coup: A True Story of Basketball and Honor on the Little Big Horn* by Larry Colton
- *I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography* by Jackie Robinson
- *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* by Laura Hillenbrand

Other Information

There are obvious lesson possibilities for further research on the athletes' diseases and disorders, for exploring the biography genre, and for service-learning projects.



Short Story Collections

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Fishing for Chickens: Short Stories About Rural Youth

Edited by Jim Heynen

Published by Persea Books (2001)

177 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 7+

Summary

This collection of short stories covers a range of rural experiences from different parts of the United States as well as from different cultures. They are primarily stories of the heartbreaks and challenges that shape the lives and characters of those who grow up knowing hard work and a life intricately bound to nature. The authors relate a variety of stories about rural adolescents (male and female), including: checking traps in a Northeastern snowstorm, cleaning up after storms in the mountains of California, working a grain elevator in the Midwest, canning pineapple in Hawaii, hunting geese in North Carolina, fishing for salmon in Alaska, confronting intolerance on a Native American reservation, surviving as Mexican American migrant farmers, and harvesting tomatoes while dealing with conflict in a Japanese American family.

Major Themes

Connection with land and animals, work and consequences of work, rural family relationships, death, different cultures

Instructional Information

Two or three stories could be selected for comparative analysis. Students could be asked to compare and contrast:

- The consequences of neglecting chores and/or the efforts to save a wounded animal in “The Burn Pile” and “The Colt.”
- The experiences of working around dangerous post-harvest farm equipment in “The Elevator Man” and “Pick Up Your Pine.”
- The reactions to encountering unexpected and defenseless animals in “What Happened During the Ice Storm,” “Aliceville,” and “I Have the Serpent Brought”

- The expectations of young rural females in “The Burn Pile,” “The Egg Boat,” and “Seventeen Syllables.”
- The portrayal of discontented rural mothers in “Sugar Among the Chickens” and “Seventeen Syllables.”
- The treatment of those with physical or cultural differences in “Miracle Boy,” “The Raleigh Man,” and “The Salamanders.”
- The experiences of young men with absent fathers in “Aliceville” and “Golden Glass.”
- The reactions to surviving in harsh weather in “Walking the Trapline” and “The Salamander.”

Shattered: Stories of Children and War

Edited by Jennifer Armstrong

Published by Random House (2002)

192 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 6

Interest grade level: 7+

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, National Council for the Social Studies and Children’s Book Council Notable Social Studies Book, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Summary

This collection of 12 mostly fictional stories by notable YA authors (e.g., M. E. Kerr, Lois Metzger, Marilyn Singer, Suzanne Fisher Staples) portrays the different ways that male and female adolescents are impacted by war. Some are caught in the crossfire of bullets; others, in the crossfire of ideologies. The stories cover a range of wars, cultures, and time periods, from Native Americans fighting in the U.S. Civil War to Japanese Americans attempting to defend Pearl Harbor to Afghans battling the Soviets. Those not actually involved in the armed conflicts themselves are also affected—be they the children of veterans, the siblings and friends of objectors, or the young refugees forced from their homes. The stories help shape the concept of being an “innocent victim” in ways both direct and subtle.

Major Themes

War, family relationships, survival, loss of innocence

Wars Addressed in the Collection

- U.S. Civil War
- World War II
- Cold War
- Vietnam War
- 1967 Six-Day War in Palestine
- 1979–1987 war in Afghanistan
- 1992 Venezuelan coup attempt
- War in Bosnia



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Poetry

Locomotion

By Jacqueline Woodson

Published by Penguin Books (2003)

128 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5

Interest grade level: 5–8

Awards: Coretta Scott King Author Honor, Boston Globe–Horn Book Award, National Book Finalist, American Library Association Notable

Summary

The poetry notebook was an assignment in Ms. Marcus’s class, so Lonnie Collins Motion, or Lo Co Motion, started writing down all the ideas in his head before they left his brain like a wisp of smoke. Sometimes he writes because Ms. Marcus has given the class a topic or a type of poem to write about. More often, he writes because he wants to remember his family or work out his feelings about his foster mother, his separation from his little sister, and his experiences with his classmates. Lonnie is only 11, but he has been a survivor since birth. His poetry spins itself from the people and events in his life.

Major Themes

Loss of parents, relationship with siblings, peers, school, foster care

Poetry Lessons

- haiku
- sonnet
- epistle poem
- description poem
- list poem
- line breaks
- epitaph
- free verse
- occasional poem

What My Mother Doesn't Know

By Sonya Sones

Published by Simon & Schuster (2001)

288 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 6

Interest grade level: 7–10

Awards: American Library Association Top Ten Quick Picks, American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, Booklist Editors' Choice

Summary

Sophie is an artistic high school freshman who adores her two best friends for all the right reasons and her fleeting boyfriends for all the wrong reasons. In quick-moving free verse, she shares her private thoughts about her emotional distance from her parents, her efforts to fit in, and her growing awareness of what it really means to love someone. In diary fashion, she takes us through her fall experiences at school and at home, leading up to the winter break that changes everything.

Major Themes

Coming of age, teenage angst, teen romance, peer pressure, relationships

Related Novels in Verse by Sones

- *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* (1999)
- *One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies* (2004)

Students Who Like the Style of This Book Will Also Enjoy

- *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* by Louise Rennison (now a series on the *Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*)
- *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding
- *Girl Coming in for a Landing* by April Halprin Wayland

You Hear Me?: Poems and Writing by Teenage Boys

Edited by Betsy Franco

Published by Candlewick Press (2000)

107 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 7+

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, American Library Association Quick Pick, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Caution: mature

Summary

This collection of mostly free verse poems written by 12- to 20-year-olds from across the country is an honest, if occasionally raw, glimpse into the ruminations of adolescent males. Their poems address how the teens feel misunderstood, how they seek releases for their anger, and how they struggle with environments filled with drugs and crime. Many of the poems reveal a disillusionment with adults at school and home who do not provide proper guidance or show concern for the boys' needs. But the poems also express the boys' dreams, loves, and desire for a better future. The boys all want their voices heard.

Major Themes

Coming of age, male adolescence, teenage angst, sex, drugs, family relationships, teen romance, community violence, school

Related Anthology

The editor has previously compiled a females' counterpart to this anthology, titled *Things I Have to Tell You: Poems and Writing by Teenage Girls*.

Other Information

The editor utilized the following resources in compiling this anthology:

- InsideOut Literary Arts Project: <http://www.insideoutdetroit.org/>
- Poets & Writers Magazine: <http://www.pw.org/mag/>



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Inside the Walls of Troy

By Clemence McLaren

Published by Simon & Schuster (1996)

208 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 7–10

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Summary

In the first chapters, the beautiful Helen narrates her story beginning at the age of 12, when she is taken for ransom by Theseus, and continuing through her marriage to Menelaus and later elopement with the handsome and charismatic Paris of Troy. The story then shifts to the narration of Cassandra, whose gift of prescience tells her of the impending war and destruction of Troy that Helen's presence brings. While the Greeks assemble their armies and the brutal battles are waged, Cassandra recounts the lives and relationships of the women inside the gates of Troy.

Major Themes

Women in male-dominated societies, war, ancient Greece, relationships

Related YA Versions of Greek Epics From a Female Perspective

- *Goddess of Yesterday* by Caroline B. Cooney (prelude to the *Iliad*)
- *Daughter of Troy: A Magnificent Saga of Courage, Betrayal, Devotion, and Destiny* by Sarah B. Franklin (Briseis's account of the *Iliad*)
- *Waiting for Odysseus* by Clemence McLaren (four women of the *Odyssey*)

Other Information

Information on Greek deities is available at:

<https://www.greek-gods.org/greek-deities.php>

Lessons on Greek mythology for younger readers can be found at:

<https://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/familytree.html>

Once Upon a Marigold

By Jean Ferris

Published by Harcourt (2002)

266 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 6

Interest grade level: 5–8

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, Smithsonian Notable, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

Summary

At the age of 6, the stubborn and inventive Christian ran away to the forest, where he was taken in by the kindly troll Edric and his two dogs. Edric taught Christian manners and how to feel safe and happy—but nothing about living around other people. Soon after the now 17-year-old Christian begins p-mailing (communicating via carrier pigeon) with the Princess Marigold from the castle across the river, he and Edric agree it's time for him to experience more of the world. Christian travels across the river to secure himself a job in the castle, but he is unable to keep his identity a secret from Marigold, who can read a person's thoughts simply by touching that person. Christian's love for the princess causes him to take bold and somewhat reckless actions in his attempts to save her from unworthy suitors and an unscrupulous mother. Everyone involved must discover the right place where all the pieces of their lives fit together and make something wonderful—something that could not be seen when looking at only one part by itself.

Major Themes

Coming of age, fairy tales, complex family relationships, royalty, adjusting to life's changing conditions

Suggested English-Language Arts Lesson Topics

- fairy tale genre
- archetypal characters
- mixed metaphors
- classical literary allusions
- symbolism
- foreshadowing
- puns

The ending of the book establishes a basis for a student writing assignment predicting what Queen Olympia will do and how her actions will impact the other characters.

Spinners

By Donna Jo Napoli and Richard Tchen
Published by Penguin Books (1999)
208 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 9+

Awards: New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age, Carolyn W. Field Honor Book (Pennsylvania Library Association), South Carolina Book Award Master List

Summary

This story, a young adult rendition of the classic folktale, is told from the alternating perspectives of Rumpelstiltskin and his daughter. As a young man, Rumpelstiltskin takes an old woman's spinning wheel against her wishes in his quest to spin straw into gold and win the hand of his love. He creates a golden bridal dress but cripples his leg in the process. The disability causes him to lose his pregnant love to the miller and to be shunned by all. He spends the next 10 years as an itinerant spinner and tailor while his daughter Saskia grows up in the home of the drunken miller, who she thinks is her father. By the age of 14, Saskia has herself become a skilled spinner, creating the most unique yarns, which draw the attention of the king. When the miller boasts that Saskia can spin straw into gold, the king demands that she do it or be put to death. The crippled man secretly comes to the aid of Saskia in exchange for her firstborn child. Saskia's only hope of being released from the promise is to guess the mysterious crippled man's name.

Major Themes

Folktales, definitions of love, acceptance of disabilities, roles of women

Literature Lesson Topics

- folktales
- point of view
- theme
- conflict
- foreshadowing
- symbolism
- round versus flat characters
- dynamic versus static character

Related YA Versions of Folktales by Donna Jo Napoli

- *Beast* (Beauty and the Beast)
- *Bound* (Chinese Cinderella)
- *Breath* (Pied Piper of Hamelin)
- *Crazy Jack* (Jack and the Beanstalk)
- *The Magic Circle* (Hansel and Gretel)
- *The Prince of the Pond: Otherwise Known as De Fawg Pin* (The Frog Prince)

- Zel (Rapunzel)

Other Information

An interesting article on the scientific basis of turning straw into gold is available at:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0829/p02s02-usgn.html>



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**Historical
Fiction**

Ashes of Roses

By Mary Jane Auch

Published by Random House (2002)

250 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5

Interest grade level: 6–9

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age, National Council for the Social Studies and Children’s Book Council Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

Summary

In February of 1911, Rose Nolan’s family attempts to immigrate to New York from Limerick, Ireland. When difficulties precipitate their return home, 16-year-old Rose convinces her mother to allow her to remain and to take charge of her 12-year-old sister. The two are determined to make it on their own, but survival is not easy in the strange and dangerous city. When Rose gets help and sees her future in America looking up, she experiences the profound tragedy of the Triangle Factory Fire.

Major Themes

Coming of age, immigration, cultural diversity, women’s history

Related Autobiography

’Tis: A Memoir by Frank McCourt

Other Information

Comprehensive information about the Triangle Factory Fire is available at:

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

Information about women's impact on the economic life of the United States between 1800 and the Great Depression is available at:

http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/events_league.html

Information on Ellis Island, immigration history, and genealogy is available at:

<http://www.ellisland.org/>

Up Molasses Mountain

By Julie Baker

Published by Random House (2002)

224 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5.7

Interest grade level: 6+

Awards: Parents' Choice Award

Summary

Life in the coal-mining town of Clay, West Virginia, is never easy. The miners and their families struggle on the edges of poverty and deal with death on a regular basis. But the spring of 1953 is more charged with tension than usual as the union attempts to organize, thus dividing the town and even Elizabeth's family. The 15-year-old narrates her story of dating the most popular boy in school, fretting over her brother's involvement with the union and her father's crossing of the picket lines, and befriendng the outcast Clarence. In intervening chapters, Clarence provides his perspective on living as the object of everyone's ridicule and on his father's scorn of him simply for being born with a cleft lip. Both of these thoughtful, introspective teens must confront violent tragedies and find the strength to climb a "mountain of molasses" that leads to greater understanding.

Major Themes

Acceptance of differences (physical and ideological), labor unions, coal mining, coming of age

Related Novel

Rocket Boys: A Memoir by Homer H. Hickam Jr. (also titled *October Sky*)

Suggested Persuasive Writing Assignments

1. Who do you think is ultimately responsible for the deaths of Johnny and Mr. Haley: the union or nonunion supporters? If you were a lawyer trying to charge that group with the crimes, what evidence would you use? Prepare your argument for the grand jury that lays out the grounds for an indictment.
2. Are unions still controversial today? In what industries? Why are they controversial? Explain why you would/would not join a union.

When the Emperor Was Divine

By Julie Otsuka

Published by Random House (2002)

141 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 7

Interest grade level: 9+

Awards: American Library Association Alex Award, Asian American Literary Award, Booklist Editors' Choice for Young Adults, New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age

Summary

The mother, the girl, the boy, the father . . . the experiences of a nameless Japanese American family caught in the hysteria immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor are conveyed in an impressionistic fashion. The preparations for their forced relocation from their home in Berkeley, California, are succinctly observed through the eyes of the mother, whose husband has already been arrested and taken to New Mexico. The children's voices carry them through the bulk of their quiet struggles as they travel by train deep into the desert of Utah and make the difficult adjustment to the harsh environment of the camp. More than three years later, they discover that reentering their lives is no easier than it was to be pulled away. They are forever changed by their undeserved branding as enemies.

Major Themes

Internment camps, World War II, prejudice, family separations

Related Notable YA Books on Japanese Internment Camps

- *The Children of Topaz: The Story of a Japanese-American Internment Camp Based on a Classroom Diary* by Michael O. Tunnell and George W. Chilcoat (Parent's Choice Gold Award, Carter G. Woodson Honor Book)
- *I Am an American: A True Story of Japanese Internment* by Jerry Stanley (ALA Notable, Horn Book Fanfare Honor Book, SLJ Best)
- *Remembering Manzanar: Life in a Japanese Relocation Camp* by Michael L. Cooper (Carter G. Woodson Award)

Related Informational Texts

- Archived 1942 San Francisco newspaper articles on the evacuation/relocation of Japanese Americans are available at: <http://www.sfmuseum.org/war/evactxt.html>.
- Educator resources on the internment camps are available at: <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation>

The Winter People

By Joseph Bruchac

Published by Penguin Books (2002)

176 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5.5

Interest grade level: 5–9

Awards: *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, International Reading Association Notable Books for a Global Society, Booklist Top 10, National Council for the Social Studies and Children’s Book Council Notable Social Studies Book

Summary

In the fall of 1759, the Indian mission village of St. Francis is ambushed by the British Rangers while most of the Abenaki men are away aiding the French in the defense of Quebec. Saxso, who at 14 is the man of his house, receives a whispered warning and attempts to do his duty to protect his mother and sisters, but a fateful decision leaves him wounded and his family captured. He is determined to track the Rangers—not to avenge the destruction of his village but to rescue his mother and sisters. Relying upon the advice of the Worrier and the skills he has learned from his people, Saxso pursues his singular purpose and triumphs over those who have winter in their hearts.

Major Themes

The Abenaki people, French and Indian War, family, coming of age, survival, religion, interconnectivity

Teaching Note

This novel does not follow the standard narrative structure. Instead, it is considered a multilinear narrative and follows a looping or layering pattern that could present some comprehension difficulties without adequate preparation. This is consistent with cultures that have an oral tradition of storytelling. There is a main body of information that provides the basis for the story, but along the way, short detours are made to related stories that enrich the reader’s understanding and provide for interaction between the storyteller and the audience. It is considered a more authentic approach to relaying a past event, since an individual’s experience and understanding are, in fact, shaped by other events, experiences, and feelings that happened before or after the time of the primary story.

Other Information

Information on Indigenous storytelling (including the history of the tradition, recordings of storytellers, and classroom lessons) is available at: <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/>

Information on Indigenous authors and publications is available at:

- <https://oedb.org/ilibrarian/20-native-american-authors-you-need-to-read/>
- <http://www.ipl.org/div/natam/>



Fantasy and Science Fiction

IOWA

Iowa Reading
Research Center

The Devil's Arithmetic

By Jane Yolen

Published by Penguin Books (1988)

170 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 6

Interest grade level: 7–10

Awards: National Jewish Book Award, American Booksellers Association Pick of the Lists

Summary

"I'm tired of remembering" are 12-year-old Hannah's first words in the story as her family heads to her grandparents' house for the Seder dinner. She would rather eat jelly beans (like her Catholic friend does at Easter) than the bitter herbs of remembrance, and she is embarrassed and confused by the behavior of the Holocaust survivors. When she is asked to complete the ritual of opening the door and looking for the prophet Elijah, she finds herself transported back in time to a 1942 Polish village where everyone knows her as Chaya. At first, Hannah retains the memories of her modern-day life and balks at the provincialism of the village and people. But when they are all sent to a concentration camp, her memories begin to fade in exchange for a heightened sense of appreciation for having even basic necessities, a chance to survive, or a way to remember.

Major Themes

Holocaust, triumph over evil, Jewish culture and tradition, empathy

Related Works

Related novels on the Holocaust are well known, but multigenre YA fiction is usually not as familiar to most teachers. The following novels combine historical fiction with the science fiction element of time travel:

- *The Ancient One* by T. A. Barron (Native Americans, with elements of fantasy)
- *47* by Walter Mosley (African Americans and slavery)
- *King of Shadows* by Susan Cooper (Shakespearean theater)
- *Trapped Between the Lash and the Gun: A Boy's Journey* by Arvella Whitmore (African Americans and slavery)

Another of Yolen's multigenre YA novels, *Briar Rose*, is a revisionist fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty set in Poland against the backdrop of the Holocaust

The Giver

By Lois Lowry

Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (1993)

180 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 6

Interest grade level: 6–10

Awards: Newbery Medal, American Library Association Notable Children’s Book, American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, Boston Globe–Horn Book Award Honor Book, Booklist Editors’ Choice, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, International Reading Association and Children’s Book Council Children’s Choice, Regina Medal

Caution: controversial/frequently banned

Summary

The futuristic society in which Jonas lives is a carefully ordered utopia. Everything is assigned: spouses, babies, basic necessities, and even rites of passage. At the age of 12, children are assigned their adult jobs. Jonas, however, is *selected*. He is to be The Receiver of all the memories of the world so that he can serve as adviser to the Elders who govern the community. As The Giver gradually transmits these memories, Jonas learns of all the extremes of human emotion and experience that have been eradicated from his society. He begins to question the “sameness” that was created and to consider a way to help everyone “see beyond.”

Major Themes

Family relationships, euthanasia, expressing feelings, coming of age, dangers of conformity, value of the individual, memory, strictly ruled society/utopia

Other Information

The movie *Pleasantville* (1998) would make a good viewing companion to the novel for comparative analysis. And Jonas’s society’s use of “precise language” and euphemisms could be used to explore and enrich students’ vocabulary.

The Last Book in the Universe

By Rodman Philbrick

Published by Scholastic Books (2000)

192 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5

Interest grade level: 5–8

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults

Summary

A great earthquake has reduced the world of the future to an urban wasteland ruled by violent gangs, who have divided up the territory into “latches.” The masses of “normals” are approaching self-destruction with the brain-rotting help of “mindprobes,” which project euphoric images directly into the brain via a needle, while an elite group of genetically improved beings, or “proofs,” lives in the protected and idyllic Eden. Spaz, so named because he suffers from epileptic seizures, bravely teams up with the wise old Ryter (the last known writer), a feral child, and a visionary proof named Lanaya to save Spaz’s foster sister and challenge the status quo.

Major Themes

Dystopia, the future, social stratification, taking risks for the good of others, epilepsy, leukemia

Relevant Classics

- *Anthem* by Ayn Rand
- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
- *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller Jr.
- *Cat’s Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut
- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
- *1984* by George Orwell

Other Information

Read more about social stratification:

<https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/introsociology/TeacherResources/IMForUnitVI.html>

The Window

By Jeanette Ingold

Published by Harcourt (1996)

181 pages

Reading difficulty grade level: 5.5

Interest grade level: 7+

Awards: American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, International Reading Association Young Adult Choice

Summary

When most of the other kids her age are learning how to drive cars, 15-year-old Mandy is learning how to use a cane for the blind. In one tragic car accident, Mandy lost both her sight and the only family member she has ever known—her mother. After being sent to relatives in Texas, Mandy discovers she can “see” and “hear” scenes from her family’s past through the open attic window. Through these lessons and those she learns from her new friendships, Mandy begins to let down her guard and to realize that everyone needs help and understanding sometimes.

Major Themes

Dealing with disabilities, divorce, loss of parent(s), family relationships, adoption, memories, coming of age, interdependence, high school

Other Information

- Potential areas of concern for parents
 - playing with Ouija boards
 - eloping and living independently as a teenager
- Topics for further study
 - Korean War
 - adoption
 - adaptive technology
 - blindness
- Topics for discussion
 - how to respectfully interact with people with disabilities
 - how to communicate with your parents on difficult issues
 - definitions of “normal”