

Novels in Verse Reading List

(Grades 5-12)

In novels written in verse, an entire story arc is conveyed through a collection of poems. These novels provide students an opportunity to focus on language, vocabulary, and verbal reasoning. Novels written in verse may be of particular interest to middle and high school students due to their fast-paced and relatable YA voice. To select novels in verse for your students, consider the recommendations below.

The Poet X

By Elizabeth Acevedo
Published by HarperTeen (2018)

Grade level: 9-12

Awards: National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Pura Belpré Award, Boston Globe Horn Book Award for Fiction and Poetry, Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Young Adult Fiction

Major Themes: family relationships, coming of age, religion

Xiomara's mother has a strict outlook on how she should behave and speak. Feeling silenced and misunderstood, Xiomara writes poems about everything she wishes she could say but knows that she can't, from her love of writing poetry to faith, friendships, and boys.

House Arrest

By K.A. Holt
Published by Chronicle Books (2015)

Grade level: 5-8

Awards: Rhode Island Teen Book Award Nominee, The Magnolia Award for 6-8, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Nominee

Major Themes: family relationships, sacrifice

Timothy is a twelve-year-old boy who gets caught stealing a wallet and is put under a year of house arrest. The court orders him to write a journal. Through his journal entries, readers discover that Timothy decided to steal because he was desperate to help his family and his sick baby brother. During this year, Timothy is under constant pressure and just wants his mom to be happy and his baby brother to be healthy.

Lifeboat 12

By Susan Hood
Published by Simon & Schuster (2018)

Grade level: 5-8

Awards: SCBWI Golden Kite Award for Middle Grade Fiction, Vermont Golden Dome Book Award Nominee, Truman Readers Award Nominee

Major Themes: survival, friendship, coming of age, bravery, history

Based on a true story, Ken is one of the many children who were supposed to be sent to safety from England to Canada during World War II. However, the ship he was traveling on gets torpedoed, and the children on lifeboat 12 are trying to make it to neutral territory.

Inside Out and Back Again

By Thanhha Lai

Published by Harper Collins (2011)

Grade level: 5-8

Awards: Newbery Medal Nominee, National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Jane Addams Children's Book Award Nominee for Older Children, Pennsylvania Young Readers Choice Award Nominee for Grades 6-8, Vermont Golden Dome Book Award Nominee, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Nominee

Major Themes: family, cultural differences, language barriers, friendship

Hà and her family immigrate from Vietnam to the United States during the 1970s. Hà faces challenges that she steadily overcomes: learning English, navigating the culture of the American South, and making friends.

The Magical Imperfect

By Chris Baron

Published by Feiwel & Friends (2021)

Grade level: 5-7

Awards: Sydney Taylor Book Award Notable Book

Major Themes: friendship, family, coming of age

This book is a story about friendship, community, Filipino culture, Jewish heritage, and mental health. Etan works at a grocery store and is sent on deliveries to a house in the woods where Malia lives. Due to her severe eczema, Malia can't be out in the sun and has been bullied for her skin condition. Etan and Malia become friends and try to help each other become more confident and pursue their passions even if not everyone is supportive.

Clap When You Land

By Elizabeth Acevedo

Published by HarperTeen (2020)

Grade level: 7-12

Awards: Odyssey Award Nominee, Audi Award for Multi-Voiced Performance, Teen Buckeye Book Award Nominee, Rhode Island Teen Book Award Nominee, Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, Goodreads Choice Award for Young Adult Fiction, Carnegie Medal Nominee for Shortlist, Kirkus Prize for Young Readers' Literature Nominee

Major Themes: sisterhood, family, cultural identity, grief

Camino lives in the Dominican. Yahaira lives in New York. Their lives suddenly intersect when their father passes away in a plane crash. The two girls discover that they are sisters, though each girl had been kept a secret by their father. Once the two meet, they find out more about who their father was and discover that maybe he wasn't as perfect as they thought he was.

Brown Girl Dreaming

By Jacqueline Woodson

Published by Nancy Paulsen Books (2014)

Grade level: 6-12

Awards: Newbery Medal Nominee, National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Sibert Medal Nominee, Rhode Island Teen Book Award Nominee, Coretta Scott King Book Award for Author, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Nominee for Nonfiction, Claudia Lewis Award for Older Readers, Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Middle Grade & Children's, NAACP Image Award for Youth/Teens, YALSA Award Nominee for Excellence for Nonfiction

Major Themes: race, gender, age, family, history

This story is based on Woodson's own life. She describes what it was like growing up in the 1960s in the South where Jim Crow laws were in place. She writes about her experiences moving from state to state and explains how moving impacted her through the different stages of her life.

Locomotion

By Jacqueline Woodson

Published by Speak (2003)

Grade level: 5-7

Awards: Vermont Golden Dome Book Award Nominee, Coretta Scott King Book Award for Author Honor, Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature Nominee, National Book Award Finalist for Young People's Literature, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Nominee

Major Themes: family, love, loss, race

Lonnie Collins Motions (nickname Locomotion) has been put in the foster system and separated from his younger sister. Full of anger, Lonnie acts out. A teacher introduces poetry as an outlet for his emotions, and it's exactly what Lonnie needs.

A Time to Dance

By Padma Venkatraman

Published by Nancy Paulsen Books (2014)

Grade level: 6-12

Awards: Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Nominee

Major Themes: spiritual awakening, love, courage

Veda is a dance prodigy in India, and her entire life has revolved around it. When an accident leaves her with a prosthetic leg, Veda can't accept a life without dance. She goes back to the basics and pursues dancing with all her might.