

Books with complex plots, character development and content

Fever, 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

In 1793 Philadelphia, sixteen-year-old Matilda Cook, separated from her sick mother, learns about perseverance and self-reliance when she is forced to cope with the horrors of a yellow fever epidemic.

Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill

An epic fantasy about a young girl raised by a witch, a swamp monster, and a Perfectly Tiny Dragon, who must unlock the powerful magic buried deep inside her.

Wolf's Boy by Susan Beckhorn

Marked as tabat--the unlucky one--Kai and his wolf, Uff, must brave the long winter together and learn what it takes to survive on their own.

Scandalous Sisterhood of Prickwillow Place by Julie Berry (SMS)

Seven very proper Victorian young ladies conspire to hide a murder from the authorities at their boarding school.

Summerlost by Allyson Condie

Following the sudden deaths of her father and autistic younger brother, Cedar Lee spends the summer working at a Shakespearean theater festival, making a new friend, and coming to terms with her grief.

Inquisitor's Tale by Adam Gidwitz

Crossing paths at an inn, thirteenth-century travelers impart the tales of a monastery oblate, a Jewish refugee, and a psychic peasant girl with a loyal greyhound, the three of whom join forces on a chase through France to escape persecution.

Blood Red Horse by K.M. Grant

A special horse named Hosanna changes the lives of two English brothers and those around them as they fight with King Richard I against Saladin's armies during the Third Crusades.

Skinful of Shadows by Frances Hardinge

In the 1640s during the English Civil War, the twelve-year-old illegitimate daughter of an aristocratic family shares their unique hereditary gift: the capacity to be possessed by ghosts.

Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai

Through a series of poems, a young girl chronicles the life-changing year of 1975, when she, her mother, and her brothers leave Vietnam and resettle in Alabama.

Furthermore by Tahereh Mafi

Twelve-year-old Alice Queensmeadow, with the help of her friend Oliver, travels through the dangerous, magical land of Furthermore in order to rescue her missing father and prove her own magical abilities.

Greenglass House by Kate Milford

At Greenglass House, a smuggler's inn, twelve-year-old Milo, the innkeepers' adopted son, plans to spend his winter holidays relaxing, but soon guests are arriving with strange stories about the house that send Milo and Meddy, the cook's daughter, on an adventure.

Left Handed Fate by Kate Milford

A quest story to find the three pieces of a magical engine which can either win the War of 1812...or stop it altogether.

Kiki Strike by Kirsten Miller

Life becomes more interesting for Ananka Fishbein when, at the age of twelve, she discovers an underground room in the park across from her New York City apartment and meets a mysterious girl called Kiki Strike who claims that she, too, wants to explore the subterranean world.

In the Shadow of the Sun by Anne Sibley O'Brien

Twelve-year-old Mia is on a five-day tour of North Korea with her older brother, Simon, and their father, Mark, an food aide worker, but she is scared because her father keeps sneaking off at night, and terrified that her brother's sullen, rebellious behavior (which has absolutely nothing to do with the Koreans) is going to get them in trouble--and things get much worse when she is pulled into a deadly political game that seeks to expose North Korean atrocities, and her father is arrested.

Night Divided by Jennifer A. Nielsen

When the Berlin Wall went up, Gerta, her mother, and her brother Fritz were trapped on the eastern side where they were living, while her father, and her other brother Dominic were in the West--four years later, now twelve, Gerta sees her father on a viewing platform on the western side and realizes he wants her to risk her life trying to tunnel to freedom.

Forest of Wonders by Linda Sue Park (Wing & Claw)

When Raffa makes a cure from a rare crimson vine he finds deep in the forbidden forest, the bat he saves transforms into something much more.

Hero's Song by Edith Pattou

On a quest to rescue his kidnapped sister, Collun discovers that he is a key figure in the struggle to save the kingdom of Eirren from conquest by Medb, the Queen of Ghosts.

Life As We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer

Through journal entries sixteen-year-old Miranda describes her family's struggle to survive after a meteor hits the moon, causing worldwide tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

Melting Stones by Tamora Pierce

Residents of the island of Starns send for help from Winding Circle temple, and when prickly green mage Rosethorn and young stone mage trainee Evvy respond, Evvy finds that the problem is with a long-dormant volcano and tries to use her talents to avert the looming destruction.

Jackaby by William Ritter

Newly arrived in 1892 New England, Abigail Rook becomes assistant to R. F. Jackaby, an investigator of the unexplained with the ability to see supernatural beings, and she helps him delve into a case of serial murder which, Jackaby is convinced, is due to a non-human creature.

York: The Shadow Cipher by Laura Ruby

In order to save their apartment building, Tess, Theo, and Jaime search for the Old York Cipher treasure created by the architects of New York.

Echo by Pam Munoz Ryan

Lost in the Black Forest, Otto meets three mysterious sisters and finds himself entwined in a prophecy, a promise, and a harmonica--and decades later three children, Friedrich in Germany, Mike in Pennsylvania, and Ivy in California find themselves caught up in the same thread of destiny in the darkest days of the twentieth century, struggling to keep their families intact, and tied together by the music of the same harmonica.

Under the Blood Red Sun by Graham Salisbury

Tomikazu Nakaji's biggest concerns are baseball, homework, and a local bully, until life with his Japanese family in Hawaii changes drastically after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Secret Keepers by Trenton Lee Stewart

When twelve-year-old Reuben finds a peculiar, magical watch that has the power to turn its wearer invisible, he's propelled on the adventure of a lifetime.

One Came Home by Amy Timberlake

In 1871 Wisconsin, thirteen-year-old Georgia sets out to find her sister Agatha, presumed dead when remains are found wearing the dress she was last seen in, and before the end of the year gains fame as a sharpshooter and foiler of counterfeiters.

New Policeman by Kate Thompson

Fifteen-year-old musician J.J. Liddy leaves his small, Irish town and travels to the land of the fairies to search for time so he can give it to his busy mother, but when he gets there, he discovers that the inhabitants are in trouble and learns about his family's secret history.

The Book of Mordred by Vivian Vande Velde

Under King Arthur's reign, Kiera--daughter of Lady Alayna--is abducted by knights who leave their barn burning and their only servant dead, and Alayna travels to Camelot to entreat Mordred to help rescue her.

The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making by Catherynne M. Valente

A young girl named September finds herself transported from her home in Omaha to Fairyland, where she must battle the mysterious Marquess alongside her creature-friends.

Navigating Early by Clare Vanderpool

Odyssey-like adventure of two boys' incredible quest on the Appalachian Trail where they deal with pirates, buried secrets, and extraordinary encounters.

Countdown by Deborah Wiles (Bk1)

As eleven-year-old Franny Chapman deals with drama at home and with her best friend in 1962, she tries to understand the larger problems in the world after President Kennedy announces that Russia is sending nuclear missiles to Cuba. Features historic quotations and photographs.

Revolution by Deborah Wiles (Bk 2)

It's 1964 in Greenwood, Mississippi, and Sunny's town is being invaded by people from up north who are coming to help people register to vote. Her personal life isn't much better, as a new stepmother, brother, and sister are crowding into her life, giving her little room to breathe"--From publisher's description.

The Dragons of Ordinary Farm by Tad Williams

After their great-uncle Gideon invites Tyler and Lucinda to his farm for the summer, they discover his animals are extremely unusual.

YA

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/> for information about potential issues.

Simon vs The Homo Sapiens Agenda by Becky Albertalli (BHS)

Sixteen-year-old, not-so-openly-gay Simon Spier is blackmailed into playing wingman for his classmate or else his sexual identity--and that of his pen pal--will be revealed.

Girl of Fire and Thorns by Rae Carson

A fearful sixteen-year-old princess discovers her heroic destiny after being married off to the king of a neighboring country in turmoil and pursued by enemies seething with dark magic.

To All the Boys I've Loved Before by Jenny Han (SMS)

Lara Jean writes love letters to all the boys she has loved and then hides them in a hatbox until one day those letters are accidentally sent.

The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton (SMS)

Presents Susan Hinton's young adult novel about three brothers who, after the death of their parents, face the conflicting values of adolescence in a society that separates the "haves" from the "have nots."

The Story of Owen: Dragon Slayer of Trondheim by E.K. Johnston (BHS)

In an alternate world where industrialization has caused many species of carbon-eating dragons to thrive, Owen, a slayer being trained by his famous father and aunt, and Siobahn, his bard, face a dragon infestation near their small town in Canada.

Under A Painted Sky by Stacey Lee (SMS BHS)

In 1845, Sammy, a Chinese American girl, and Annamae, an African American slave girl, disguise themselves as boys and travel on the Oregon Trail to California from Missouri.

Legend by Marie Lu (SMS)

In a dark future, when North America has split into two warring nations, fifteen-year-olds Day, a famous criminal, and prodigy June, the brilliant soldier hired to capture him, discover that they have a common enemy.

Egg & Spoon by Gregory Maguire (BHS)

Impoverished Russian country girl Elena Rudina and the aristocratic Ekatrina meet and set in motion an escapade that includes mistaken identity, a monk locked in a tower, a prince traveling incognito, and the witch Baba Yaga.

Cinder by Marissa Meyer (The Lunar Chronicles) (SMS)

Cinder, a gifted mechanic and a cyborg with a mysterious past, is blamed by her stepmother for her stepsister's illness while a deadly plague decimates the population of New Beijing, but when Cinder's life gets intertwined with Prince Kai's, she finds herself at the center of an intergalactic struggle.

Renegades by Marissa Mayer (SMS)

The Renegades are human, but with extraordinary abilities. They emerged from the ruins of a crumbled society and established peace and order where chaos reigned. As champions of justice, they remain a symbol of hope and courage to everyone... except the villains they once overthrew. Nova has a reason to hate the Renegades, and is on a mission for vengeance. Adrian is a Renegade boy who believes in justice-- and in Nova. But Nova's allegiance is to a villain who has the power to end them both.

Akata Witch by Nnedi Okorafor

Twelve-year-old Sunny Nwazue, an American-born albino child of Nigerian parents, moves with her family back to Nigeria, where she learns that she has latent magical powers which she and three similarly gifted friends use to catch a serial killer.

ShadowShaper by Daniel Jose Older (SMS, BHS)

When the murals painted on the walls of her Brooklyn neighborhood start to change and fade in front of her, Sierra Santiago realizes that something strange is going on--then she discovers her Puerto Rican family are shadowshapers and finds herself in a battle with an evil anthropologist for the lives of her family and friends.

Ghosts of Heaven by Marcus Sedgwick (SMS)

Four linked stories of discovery and survival begin with a Paleolithic-era girl who makes the first written signs, continue with Anna, who people call a witch, then a mad twentieth-century poet who watches the ocean knowing the horrors it hides, and concluding with an astronaut on the first spaceship from Earth sent to colonize another world.

Scorpio Races by Maggie Stiefvater (SMS)

Nineteen-year-old returning champion Sean Kendrick competes against Puck Connolly, the first girl ever to ride in the annual Scorpio Races, both trying to keep hold of their dangerous water horses long enough to make it to the finish line.

The Accidental Highwayman: Being the Tale of Kit Bristol, his Horse midnight, a Mysterious Princess and Sundry Magical Persons B sides by Ben Tripp (BHS)

In eighteenth-century England, young Christopher "Kit" Bristol unwittingly takes on the task of his dead master, notorious highwayman Whistling Jack, who pledged a fairy he would rescue feisty Princess Morgana from an arranged marriage with King George III.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (SMS)

Trying to make sense of the horrors of World War II, Death relates the story of Liesel--a young German girl whose book-stealing and story-telling talents help sustain her family and the Jewish man they are hiding, as well as their neighbors.

