

**Best Books for Middle School and High School Libraries**

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**For the Morris County School Media Association**

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**Fiction**

Adler, Dahlia. *That Way Madness Lies: 15 of Shakespeare's Most Notable Works Reimagined*. Flatiron Books, 2021. 336p. (grades 10 & up)

This anthology collections takes Shakespeare's works and brings them a modern twist which can mean changing gender, race or sexual orientation of the characters to bring new life in to the well-known tales. Some of the short stories are told through script, text message, or verse.

Albertalli, Becky, & Silvera, Adam. *Here's to Us*. Balzer + Bray, 2021. 490p. (ages 14 & up)

*Here's To Us* is a sequel to *What If It's Us*, a YA favorite that left fans devastated without a HEA, but instead a mutually agreed upon break up. Ben and Arthur have moved in other directions, but as fate would have it, they keep running into each other as they are both back in New York. The story follows their lives now, years later. With new love interests and life events, the two can not forget about each other and question "What-if?" Light and sweet drama ensues with all of the typical rom-com trappings including the happily ever after that many wanted in the first book. A modern romantic comedy that explores first love, their evolution and eventual return.

Albertalli, Becky. *Kate in Waiting*. Balzer + Bray, 2021. 387p. (grades 9-12)

Kate and Anderson are the very best of friends and they share everything, including crushes on the same guys. When Matt, the boy they both crushed on at summer camp, starts attending their high school and is revealed to be the son of Kate's mother's friend, their friendship becomes more of a rivalry and they risk losing each other once Matt realizes he has feelings for Anderson.

Bracken, Alexandra. *Lore*. Disney-Hyperion, 2021. 556p. (ages 12 & up)

For fans of Percy Jackson, this one is right up your alley. *New York Times* Bestseller Bracken combines mythology and modernity to make this fast paced tale. The basic premise is as a punishment for past infractions, Zeus has 9 gods become immortal every seven years and be hunted by descendants of ancient bloodlines on Earth. This hunt takes place in modern day Manhattan. The main character Lore is of this bloodline, her family is murdered and she wants no part of the hunt, but she unwillingly gets tangled into partaking. Be aware, as often occurs with mythology, it is gritty and often gory.

deVos, Kelly. *Eat Your Heart Out*. Razorbill, 2021. 348p. (grades 9-12)

Vee is being shipped off to a fat camp in Flagstaff, Arizona by her mother and stepfather. As she is being driven to camp with the other teens who will be her bunkmates, which includes a former friend of hers, a snowstorm slows the van's ride to the camp. When they arrive, it is clear that something is amiss besides the unusual weather and there are zombie-like creatures prowling the grounds. Vee and her fellow campers soon realize that the nutrition bars being foisted on campers are creating the zombies and that they have to act quickly to summon help, which is no easy feat in a raging blizzard surrounded by bloodthirsty monsters. Not all of her cabinmates make it out unscathed.

Foody, Amanda & Herman, Christine Lynn. *All of Us Villains*. Tor Teen, 2021. 400p. (grades 10 & up)

Every generation, seven families compete in a tournament to the death. The winner claims control over high magick for their family. The tournament is a secret affair, and outside of the families, no one knows about the fight. But when a tell-all book reveals everything, this year's tournament is thrust into the spotlight and the champions are put under a microscope. Told through alternating perspectives, we see the best and worst of each champion and their struggles to live up to, or be better than, their families' legacies.

Fuston, Margie. *Vampires, Hearts & Other Dead Things*. Margaret McElderry Books, 2021. 352p. (ages 12 & up)

This one has all the feels, if you are looking to get a little weepy, this book is for you. The main character Victoria travels to New Orleans with her estranged bestie in order to find a vampire to save her father from cancer. A beautiful blend of supernatural and deep human emotion. The exploration of life and what living means to the hope we all cling to. A quick read with depth of emotion. Trigger warnings include grief and cancer.

Henry, Katie. *This Will Be Funny Someday*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2021. 386p.(grades 8-12)

Isabel is a high school junior who feels like an outcast in her own family and at school. She had one good friend, Naomi, who she stopped hanging out with at the behest of her boyfriend Alex and now all her friends are his friends and he has become very controlling. One afternoon, she enters what she thinks is a restaurant, but it turns out to be a comedy open mic that she has inadvertently signed up for. She bumbles her way through an impromptu set and then starts talking to a few college students in attendance who assume she is also in college. She keeps up the lie and the stand up with the encouragement of her new comedy friends, but eventually her family learns about her stand-up routine and her new friends learn the truth about her age. Isabel has to find a way to salvage all the important relationships in her life while removing herself from Alex's toxic grasp.

Hiranandani, Veera. *How To Find What You're Not Looking For*. Kokila, 2021. 384p. (grades 4-7)

Set in the summer of 1967, Ariel Goldberg is trying to figure out her place in the world and understand the prejudices of the world around her. When her sister, Leah, falls in love with Raj, a business student born in India but a US citizen, she disobeys her parents' who want her to marry a Jewish boy and runs away from home. Ari copes by writing poetry, helped along by her teacher as she struggles with her learning disability. Ari learns about the civil rights movement, namely the case of Loving vs. Virginia that said banning interracial marriage was illegal, and how that fits into her world view. She's also trying to find her sister who she feels abandoned her and who her parents won't discuss.

Jackson, Tiffany. *White Smoke*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2021. 384p. (grades 9-12)

Mari and her family are moving to Cedarville for her mother's new artist in residency program. They're making a change because Mari had severe anxiety over a bedbug infestation at their old house that led to her abusing pharmaceutical drugs. Their family has also changed with her mother's marriage to Alec who has a ten-year old daughter, Piper, and there are definitely some growing pains. But Cedarville isn't all that it seems, and the house on the abandoned Maple Street has a dark history. Mari and her younger brother, Sammy, have found strange things happening - footsteps when everyone's asleep, shadows in the dark, items going missing... And Piper has a new imaginary friend, Ms. Suga, who Mari finds out actually owned the house many years ago. Not everything is what it seems, and Mari has to overcome her own selfish behaviors and past to make sure her family is safe.

Jean, Emiko. *Tokyo Ever After*. Flatiron Books, 2021. 336p. (grades 8-12)

Izumi has always been on the fringes. She's one of the only Asian Americans in her mostly white town, and she is raised by her single mother. Her father's identity has always been a secret, but when she stumbles on her father's name, everything changes. Because he's the crowned prince of Japan. Soon she's in Japan, meeting her father's side of the family while also getting princess lessons and learning how to make sense of this new world she's been thrust into. But even in a place where she looks like she belongs, Izumi is still learning what it means to belong to two very different worlds.

Johnson, Maureen. *The Box in the Woods*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2021. 283 p. (grades 9-12)

Now that she has famously solved the Truly Devious mystery at Ellingham Academy, teen sleuth Stevie Bell has been invited by the host of a podcast to crack another unsolved case, this one at Camp Sunny Pines, a sleepaway camp where four teens were slaughtered in the middle of the woods back in 1978. She is joined by two of her friends from Ellingham, Janelle and Nate so that they can work for the camp while they sniff out clues, and later she is joined by her boyfriend David, who is definitely not supposed to be visiting her. During her time at Camp Sunny Pines, Stevie uncovers a lot of secrets from decades ago and eventually solves the murders, but she learns that researching people who are still alive and affected by the deaths of their loved ones is very different from what she is used to. This is a standalone book in the series.

Lo, Malinda. *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*. Dutton Books, 2021. 409p. (grades 9-12)  
Lily Hu is a scientifically minded high school student who lives in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1954. She starts to realize that she is attracted to other girls and finds herself drawn to her classmate Kathleen. The two strike up a friendship that turns into a romance, but they are taking a lot of risks, especially when they visit the Telegraph Club, a lesbian bar. Interspersed with Lily's story is the story of her parents and their experiences as Chinese Americans in a country that does not always treat them with dignity and respect. Historical information is included at the end of the book to provide context.

Lucas, Chad. *Thanks A Lot, Universe*. Amulet Books, 2021. 279p. (grades 6-8)  
Brian's thirteenth birthday starts off with him learning that his father has run away in order to avoid his legal troubles and his mother has attempted to end her life by taking too many pills. He and his brother Richie are put in a foster home where they are both miserable, despite the couple looking after them trying their best. Brian struggles with anxiety even at the best of times, and he is feeling lost and overwhelmed trying to manage everything going on. Ezra is of Triniadaian and Polish descent and he hangs out with a group of guys who are not great friends to him, but they are all he has. Ezra is grappling with the fact that he likes boys and his gayness may alienate him even further. When he and Brian start hanging out, they forge a friendship.

Ormsbee, Kathryn. *Candidly Cline*. HarperCollins, 2021. 320p. (grades 5-8)  
Cline Alden has always loved country music and dreams of being a musician. When a friend gives her a flyer about a Singer-Songwriter Workshop at the University of Kentucky, she makes a plan to do it, even without permission from her mother. With the help of her grandmother, she's soon attending classes and collaborating with a new friend, Sylvie, on a song they want to audition with for a bluegrass festival. But Cline also is dealing with outgrowing friendships, understanding how she feels about religion and the people that believe same-sex attraction is wrong, and being true to herself. She's also worried about her grandmother who is starting to forget more because of her Alzheimer's.

Owen, Margaret. *Little Thieves*. Henry Holt and Co (BFYR), 2021. 512p. (grades 9-12)  
Vanya is the thirteen daughter of a thirteen daughter, and that's just bad luck. Her mother gives her away to the gods Death and Fortune to be raised, who in turn, help her become the servant of Princess Giselle. But Vanya doesn't like her lot in life, and to overcome it, she'll do anything, even take on the conterance of Giselle through magic and use her newfound station in life to rob the rich so she can finally make a life for herself. But she crosses a god that does not appreciate her thievery and she's cursed - she's going to turn into her greed if she doesn't repay back her debt. Vanya is racing the clock to find a way to break her curse, while also not getting caught by the Prefect Emeric, a junior detective, for her thievery. Vanya has to make amends with Giselle, who she left penniless; defeat her future husband, a man who is not all he seems; and come to terms with her traumatic past.

Schwab, Victoria. *The Invisible Life of Addie Larue*. Tor, 2021. 448p. (ages 14 & up)  
Although technically an adult book, Schwab is wildly popular with young adults. Published in 2020 but still in high demand and reprinted. This novel is a Faustian tale beginning in the 1700's and spanning over 300 years in a twisting fantasy. Addie, the main character, makes a deal in the dark after being warned of the dangers, she ends up being cursed with that everyone forgets her existence. As an immortal she crosses continents and centuries, being forgotten by all who meet her, until she stumbles across a boy in a bookshop who remembers her! This fantasy is completely engrossing and has some epic twists to keep the reader riveted. A lighter, YA version of fantasy, that allows the reader to be absorbed and a dark antagonist that many are hoping to become an enemies to lovers story. I would not be surprised to see a prequel with the antagonists backstory or a sequel.

Sharpe, Tess. *The Girls I've Been*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2021. 356p. (grades 8-12)  
Nora, her girlfriend Iris, and her good friend and ex-boyfriend Wes are at the bank to deposit money when they find themselves being held hostage by two bank robbers. Nora, who was raised by her conwoman mother, is two steps ahead of the robbers and does her best to keep Iris and Wes safe while recalling the events that led to her breaking away from her abusive mother and her stepfather, who has a bounty on her head. Nora, Iris, and Wes have all been shaped by the abuse and mistreatment they have endured, and a list of resources for teens who have experienced similar violence and abuse is included at the end of the book.

Shusterman, Neal & Jarrod. *Roxy*. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021. 384p. (grades 9 & up) note: drug abuse, drug addiction  
Told through alternating perspectives, we follow Isaac and Ivy Ramey as they combat the need for pharmaceutical assistance- Isaac for his sprained ankle and Ivy for her ADD. Drugs are personified, notably Roxy (Roxicet) and Addison (Adderall) as they bet to be there with their charges until the end at the Party. The Party is a personified party where all the drugs, medical and street varieties, gather with their "plus ones," which sometimes can prove deadly. Roxy and Addison make a bet to be there at the end for Isaac and Ivy, and one Ramey sibling won't survive.

Sparks, Lily. *Teen Killers Club*. Crooked Lane Books, 2020. 263p. (grades 9-12)  
After being found guilty of murdering her best friend and imprisoned, Signal Deere is resigned to spending the rest of her life behind bars, even though she has no memory of the night the murder took place. When she is offered the chance to leave prison and train for a special opportunity, Signal decides to take a chance on being on the outside. She is bussed to an abandoned summer camp where a group of fellow teens who have been convicted of violent crimes have started to train as a sort of suicide squad, where they will be sent on missions to kill specific targets. Once the campers start to get stalked by a strange man in a bulldog mask, it becomes clear that the organization they are working for is hiding a lot of information from them and has no real regard for their safety. While Signal starts to figure out what she is really doing and who her target is, she is helped along by fellow teen killer Erik, who enables her to uncover the truth of what happened the night Rose was murdered and who framed Signal.

Thao, Dustin. *You've Reached Sam*. Wednesday Books, 2021. 304p. (ages 12 & up)  
If you are looking for a good ugly cry...here you go! Seventeen year old Julie's boyfriend Sam dies suddenly in a car crash. You have love, loss, grief and guilt, coupled with diverse characters. As Sam was on his way to pick up Julie upon his death, she blames herself and tries to erase all things Sam, including his texts etc., quickly regretting the decision, she calls him and although without a doubt deceased, he answers. The two talk regularly, we hear their story and witness their goodbye. Julie gets the devastating closure that many do not get to experience in grief.

Thomas, Aiden. *Lost in the Never Woods*. Swoon Reads, 2021. 384p. (grades 8 & up)  
Wendy Darling has spent 5 years trying to overcome the grief of losing her brothers in the woods. But now other children are going missing in town, and she's run into an oddly familiar boy- Peter, who knows her name and doesn't have a shadow. Wendy has to help Peter defeat his shadow and save the missing children while coming to terms with the tragedy that happened to her brothers and Peter Pan's role in ushering the lost souls of children to the afterlife.

Yoon, Nicola. *Instructions for Dancing*. Delacorte Press, 2021. 285 p. (grades 9-12)  
Until Yvette learned that her father was cheating on her mother, she was a huge fan of romance novels. Her mother and sister are in the dark about the reasons behind the divorce and still believe in love, but Evie has become a cynic. When she goes to donate her formerly beloved books to a Little Free Library, a woman insists she takes a book called Instructions for Dancing, which leads her to a dance studio, where she meets X, a handsome free spirit who becomes her dance partner. While she is learning about the world of dance and starting to believe in love again, she discovers that she has the power to see the future of a relationship once she witnesses a couple kissing. This leads to problems among her friends and family, while she has to decide if the pain of heartbreak is something she is willing to risk when she gets a good look at what the future holds for her and X.

## **Graphic Novels**

Justus, Rob. *Death & Sparkles Book 1*. Chronicle Books, 2021. 368p. (grades 4-8)  
Sparkles is the last unicorn, and he is a beloved influencer who promotes cupcakes, rainbows and socks. Death, a collection agent of Death, collects souls when their time is up. This is a very lonely job, and he can't touch anyone. When a stunt Sparkles participates in goes horribly wrong, Death comes to collect. But somehow Sparkles isn't ready to pass on, and Death and Sparkles become friends. Sparkles teaches Death how to enjoy life, but while partying with cupcakes and a group of humans, Death accidentally touches someone and they...drop dead. The two are branded as villains, and Sparkles gets replaced in the public's heart by the Lizard Bros, a group of lizard brothers who came to earth to spread the message about being eco-conscious. Sparkles and Death compete with the Lizard Bros to repair their public image, and Sparkles learns what it is he had to do to become worthy of reaching the last resting place of the unicorns.

McKinney, L. L.. *Nubia: Real one*. DC Comics, 2021. 205p. (ages 14-18)

Born with super Amazonian strength, Nubia is not always seen as a hero. This novel examines bias and how society has undermined this hero. Nubia learns to trust in herself regardless of how she is viewed for both her race and gender. Features two moms as strong caregivers. Strong women are the leads in this graphic, which also has a nice Wonder Woman cameo. Nubia, is a timely exploration of race, culture and identity. Would recommend for a reluctant reader who wants something that packs a punch in an easily accessible package.

Oseman, Alice. *Heartstopper: Vol. 3*. Graphix, 2021. 384p. (grades 9 & up)

Heartstopper follows Charlie and Nick as they navigate their all-boys' school in the UK, their friendship turned romance, and the bullies that come along with being gay. Nick had never thought he was bisexual until he met Charlie, and they've both been keeping their relationship a secret from their friends, but on a summer trip to Paris with their school, it's harder. Charlie is worried since when he was outed at school there was a lot of bullying he had to deal with that has left lasting scars (Charlie may have an eating disorder that will be explored in later volumes and used to self-harm) and he doesn't want that to happen to Nick. But together, he and Nick decide that they will be able to support each other and come out to their friends.

Smythe, Rachel. *Lore Olympus*. Del Ray 2021. 384p. (ages 16 & up) \*Please note this is intended for mature audiences.

This graphic needs to be mentioned based off of the sheer popularity of a Webtoon turned graphic novel. Lore Olympus is the first season of the story of Persephone and Hades in a modern retelling. Like most mythology it is gritty, there are instances of rape, abuse and trauma. Persephone is on a "maiden" scholarship to university and is accosted by Apollo, someone that she repeatedly turns down. The story explores her struggles and then her developing and misunderstood relationship with Hades. The next season is highly anticipated. The modernity and art are captivating. This retelling is reimagined in a romantic and compelling way. Really beautiful.

Viola, Jason & Ristiano, Andy. *Science Comics: The Digestive System: a tour through your guts*. First Second, 2021. 122p. (grades 5-8)

Learn more about the mouth, stomach, liver and other organs that make up the digestive system as well as what makes up the food we eat and other microbes in this funny and informative nonfiction graphic novel.

## **Non-Fiction**

Cherry-Paul, Sonja (Adapter). *Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You*. Little, Brown and Company, 2021. 164p. (grades 6-8)

In this youth adaptation of the book *Stamped* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Fendi, this title provides an overview of the history of racism in America, how the Black community has been shaped by this history, and what steps are currently being taken to raise awareness of the systemic effects of racism.

Henley, Ariel. *A Face for Picasso: Coming of Age with Crouzon Syndrome*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux (BYR), 2021. 400p. (grades 7-12)

Ariel and Zan Henley are identical twins who were diagnosed with Crouzon Syndrome— a rare condition where the bones in their head fuse prematurely, and they were the first known to survive it. Ariel details the physical and emotional ordeals of the many surgeries they undergo, and her strive to find beauty. She also speaks on the reactions of others around her and the way they treat her and her sister.

Kiely, Brandon. *The Other Talk: Reckoning with Our White Privilege*. Atheneum, 2021. (grades 7-12)

Parents of color have to have “the talk” with their children, to make sure that they understand that people will react to them differently because of the color of their skin. This book is for white teens, to help them understand the scope of their privilege and the ways that they can be active allies who support their peers of color.

Loveless, Gina. *Puberty is Gross But Also Really Awesome*. Rodale Kids, 2021. 184 p. (grades 5-8)

This is a straightforward discussion of what happens as puberty begins, acknowledging that certain aspects can be discomfoting. This overview covers physical changes to the body as well as issues regarding sexuality, gender identity, and social concerns that young adults face.

Magoon, Kekla. *Revolution in Our Time: The Black Panther Party's Promise to the People*. Candlewick Press, 2021. 390p. (grades 7-12)

This is a thorough history of the Black Panther Party and the services that they offered to people in their communities who were in need of assistance, such as free lunch programs and childcare. The contributions of women and teens are highlighted, as they were crucial to the Black Panther Party. While the Party did their best to meet the needs of their communities, they were often met with hostility and resistance from government officials.

Sheinkin, Steve. *Fallout: Spies, Superbombs, and the Ultimate Cold War Showdown*. Roaring Brook Press, 2021. 342p. (grades 6-8)

This is a look at the events leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis, showing just how close the United States came to a nuclear attack and the impact of the Cold War.

Yoo, Paula. *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*. Norton Young Readers, 2021. 374p. (grades 9-12)

In 1982, anti-Asian sentiment was boosted by claims that Japanese car manufacturers were putting Americans out of work. After two autoworkers in Detroit murdered a man named Vincent Chin in a bar fight and received a lenient sentence for the killing, protests led to changes in the Asian American community. Connections between how the Chin case was viewed by the public and the anti-Asian sentiment that has been rampant since the outbreak of Covid are made.