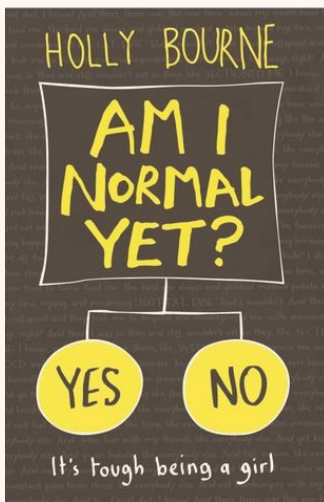


*Best of 2015*

*By*



As we turn the final chapter of 2015, “best of” lists are popping up everywhere. While reading tastes are highly individual, there is always some consensus: some books just have a can’t-put-down quality about them. The most memorable books are notable for their originality, humour, heart-tugging qualities or their thoughtful take on issues affecting teenagers. Mental health and sexuality/sexual identity issues were important trends in this year’s YA selection – as reflected in many of the books on this list – but there were some incredibly strong fantasy novels as well. Without further ado, here are some of TRAC’s reading highlights of the year.



### *Am I Normal Yet?*

*by Holly Bourne*

Evie desperately wants a fresh start. After being hospitalized for a mental breakdown, caused by out-of-control OCD, Evie has got back on track. Enrolled in Sixth Form College, she has new friends and even more than one potential love interest. But being let down by one guy after another is starting to derail Evie’s recovery. Even when her friends rally to her cause, Evie feels that her facade of ‘normal’ is showing some serious cracks. Funny, frank and proudly feminist: this book is a fresh, authentic voice.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** realistic; contemporary; family; friendship; romance; humour; feminism; mental health; OCD

**This book contains references to sexuality and drugs/alcohol.**



## *The Art of Being Normal*

*by Lisa Williamson*

David's parents assume he is gay, but the truth is more complicated. Although he has supportive friends, he still feels completely isolated by his painful reality: his body doesn't match his sense of himself. Leo Denton is new to David's school, but he brings a tough reputation with him. When Leo defends David against the usual bullies, the two become allies – and then friends. This brave, emotionally involving book explores transgender issues through believably complex characters.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** realistic; family; friendship; romance; mental health; bullying; LGBT; transgender

**This novel contains some emotionally disturbing material.**



## *All the Bright Places*

*by Jennifer Niven*

When Fitch and Violet meet on the ledge of the bell tower, it is debatable as to who is saving whom. Violet hasn't recovered from her sister's death, while Fitch – the class "freak" – struggles with highs and lows that he cannot control. Tentative friendship turns into romance, but can there be a happy ending for this unlikely pair? Moving and memorable: this relationship novel will really engage your emotions.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** realistic; family; friendship; romance; mental health; death; social media; Indiana

**This novel contains some strong language and sexual scenes.**



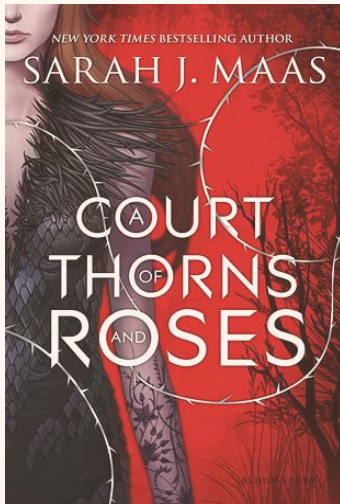
## *The Last Leaves Falling* by Sarah Benwell

For most 17 year-olds, death is an abstract concept; for Abe Sora, it is a grim reality. After being diagnosed with ALS, Abe is trapped in his failing body and isolated in his bedroom. Longing for anonymity, he searches for connections in online chat rooms. Unexpectedly, he makes real friends there – and not just virtual ones. With the help of his friends, Abe figures out how to meet death on his own terms. Thoughtful and funny, this book takes a morbid subject and turns it into a truly life-enhancing

story.

**Realistic and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** realistic; contemporary; family; friendship; death; social media; ALS; Japan



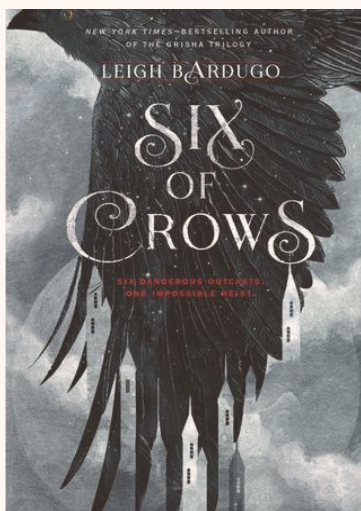
## *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas

Deep in the winter woods, 19 year-old Feyre kills a wolf and unknowingly triggers a dark curse. Taken hostage by the fearsome Tamlin, Feyre is trapped in a luxurious but confining world. Despite their bad beginning, Feyre's sympathy for her captor grows – until she is willing to risk her own life to save him. The compelling and romantic fantasy sets the Beauty and the Beast motif in a complex faerie realm. This is grown-up YA for fantasy lovers.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** fantasy; fairy-tale retellings; action; romance; faerie

**This book contains violence and sexuality.**



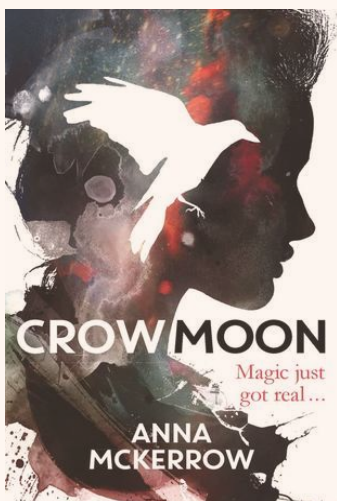
## *Six of Crows*

*by Leigh Bardugo*

In the mean streets of Ketterdam, six unlikely allies will be recruited to break into the unbreakable fortress of the Ice Court. Their mission: to liberate a scientist/inventor who holds the secret to manipulating Grisha magic. Their price: enough money to escape from their dangerous, dead-end lives. This fast-paced heist story is the first in a new series by Bardugo . . . intricately plotted, with richly shaded characters.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** fantasy; paranormal; magic; action; adventure



## *Crow Moon*

*by Anna McKerrrow*

As the world runs out of fossil fuel, environmentally minded people have established a “Greenworld” in Devon and Cornwall and returned to the old ways of living. Powerful witches, like Danny’s mother, work to keep out the unscrupulous gangs who would exploit the earth’s natural energy. Danny is more interested in girls than magic, but he is drawn into the battle between the Greenworld and the gangs. Although Danny doesn’t understand his own magic, forces on both sides need it – and will stop at nothing to get it. This book excels at both plot and characterisation, and gives a topical post-apocalyptic spin on a more traditional fantasy landscape.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** fantasy; post-apocalyptic; paranormal; magic; adventure; family; romance; environment; witches

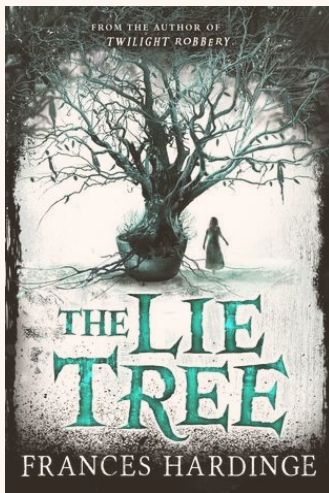


## *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard

In the Kingdom of Norta, the Silvers are born to rule while the Reds are born to serve. Any Red who cannot find a job will become cannon fodder in the long-running war. Mare is a lowly Red, a former pick-pocket turned serving girl; but when it is discovered that she possesses an unusual power, the Royal Court decides to make different use of her. Mare is transformed into a long-lost Silver noble and engaged to Maven, the younger prince. It is a dangerous game of subterfuge, made even riskier when a Red terrorist operative enlists Mare's help. Twisty and unexpected, this best-selling fantasy novel will fill *The Hunger Games* gap.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** fantasy; paranormal; magic; romance; war; politics



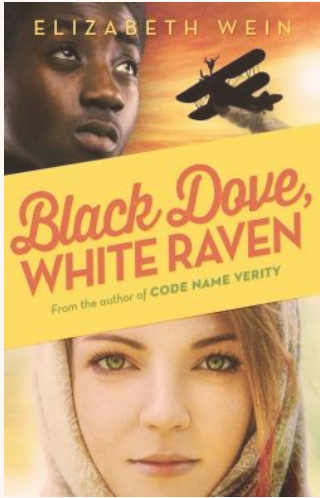
## *The Lie Tree* by Frances Hardinge

In this historical fantasy, a young girl refuses to conform to the Victorian belief system that females should be 'good' but not clever. Faith's father is a renowned natural scientist whose reputation has been tainted by scandal. When he dies under mysterious circumstances, on the remote island of Vane, Faith is determined to prove that his death was not a suicide – but rather a murder. Applying logic, observation and misdirection, Faith is determined to salvage her father's reputation. This beautifully written book is a suspenseful murder mystery, but also a thoughtful analysis of women's roles in Victorian England.

**Reading and interest level:** 12+

**Genre:** historical; fantasy; mystery; family; science; religion; feminism





## *Black Dove, White Raven*

*by Elizabeth Wein*

Best friends Delia (Black Dove) and Rhoda (White Raven) are stunt flyers during the 1920s, but the ongoing racism in the southern United States inspires a dream: to emigrate to Ethiopia, the one African country which has never been colonized. After a freak accident kills Delia, Rhoda is determined to keep her partner's dream of equality and freedom alive. Despite the difficulties, Rhoda transplants Delia's son Teo and her own daughter Emilia to a coffee collective in Ethiopia. But as Teo and Emilia come of age, Mussolini's Italian army invades Ethiopia and their family is drawn into the tragic conflict. This fascinating story highlights a cultural and historical setting that rarely gets attention in YA literature.

**Reading and interest level:** 14+

**Genre:** historical; friendship; family; culture; war; Ethiopia

## *FINAL WORD*

Well, there is no final word when it comes to reading. There is always another great book just begging to be read. TRAC hasn't read every single book published in 2015, so no doubt we have missed some worthy inclusions to the "best of" list. Other YA books which have been getting lots of positive buzz include *Asking for It*, by Louise O'Neill; *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*, by Patrick Ness; *Finding Audrey*, by Sophie Kinsella; *An Ember in the Ashes*, by Sabaa Tahir; *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*, by Becky Albertalli; *Winter*, by Marissa Meyer; *One*, by Sarah Crossan...

*and the list just goes on! Happy reading!*

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