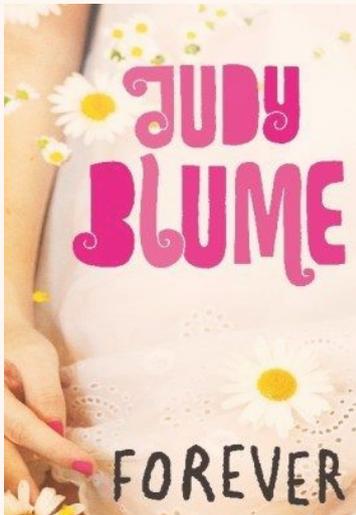


YA Classics

By



Although Young Adult novels have exploded in popularity in the last 20 years, this genre has been around for a while. Many people consider *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* (1868) to be the first novel that could be properly considered "YA". For this month's reading list, TRAC presents a diverse range of 20th century novels notable for their ability to win over successive generations of readers. Some of these YA classics are hard-hitting "problem" novels, dealing with controversial and difficult topics like rape, bullying, drug abuse and criminal violence. Others, like *The Catcher in the Rye* or *I Capture the Castle*, are enduring favourites because of the compelling narrative voice. Any "classic" worth that title deserves reading and rereading. These are proven favourites which have stood the test of time.



Forever

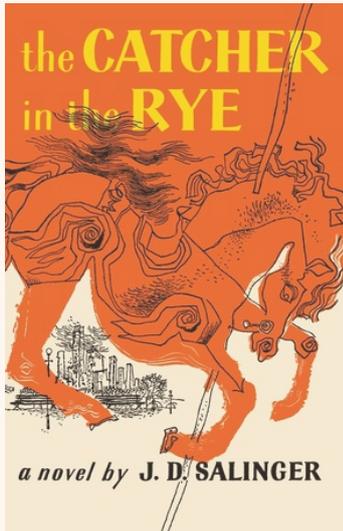
by Judy Blume (1975)

This groundbreaking YA novel has been both celebrated and reviled for its frank treatment of teenage sexuality. When high school seniors Michael and Katherine fall in love, they decide to pursue a sexual relationship. Without romanticising its subject, the novel explores both the emotional and physical aspects of sexuality. Teen pregnancy, birth control, STDs and homosexuality are all alluded to – not sensationally, but in the straightforward manner that is the trademark of Judy Blume.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; family; friends; romance; sexuality

This novel contains a few instances of strong language, references to drugs/alcohol and some sexual scenes.



The Catcher in the Rye

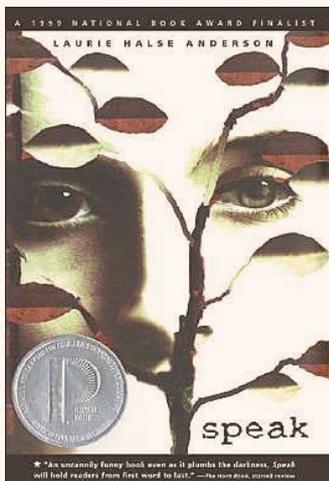
by J. D. Salinger (1951)

Featuring one of the most memorable narrators in YA literature, this classic is a must-read. After being expelled from yet another school, Holden Caulfield spends a long, sleepless weekend drifting around New York City. Comic and tragic both, Holden's voice has an enduring appeal for adolescents – and all other readers struck by the phoniness, absurdity and fragility of the world.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; friends; family; boarding school; mental health; death; New York City

This novel contains strong language and some emotionally disturbing scenes.



Speak

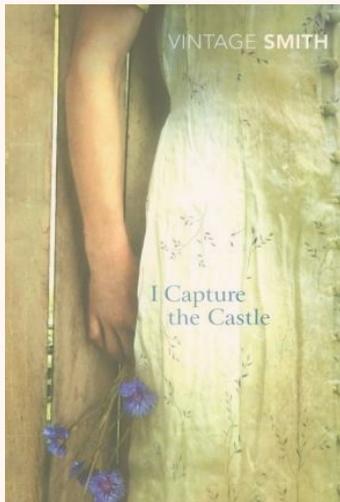
by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)

After she calls the police at an out-of-control summer party, Melinda becomes a social pariah. Rejected by old friends and neglected by her parents, Melinda begins to shut down emotionally. Why speak if no one will listen? This brave book was one of the first YA books to tackle the difficult subject of rape.

Reading and interest level: 12+

Genre: realistic; family; friends; art; sexual violence; rape

This novel contains some emotionally disturbing scenes.



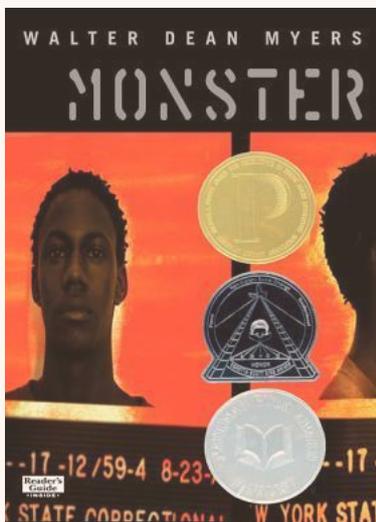
I Capture the Castle

by Dodie Smith (1948)

Cassandra Mortmain lives with her eccentric family in a crumbling Suffolk Castle. Her father has suffered from writer's block for years, and the family's finances are dire. When a pair of American brothers visits the area, Cassandra falls in love for the first time – amidst all sorts of family complications. Full of charm and whimsy, this classic coming-of-age story has an enduring appeal.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; historical; family; romance; 1930s England



Monster

by Walter Dean Myers (1999)

Steve Harmon, a 16 year-old African American boy from Harlem, is on trial for felony murder. As he sits through his trial, or in his jail cell, Steve imagines his story as if it were a film and he the director. Like the jury, the reader must determine whether or not Steve is guilty. This award-winner was groundbreaking in its use of graphic elements and unique storytelling, and it is just as topical now as it was when first published.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; family; friends; crime; law; New York City

This novel contains some emotionally disturbing scenes.



The Outsiders

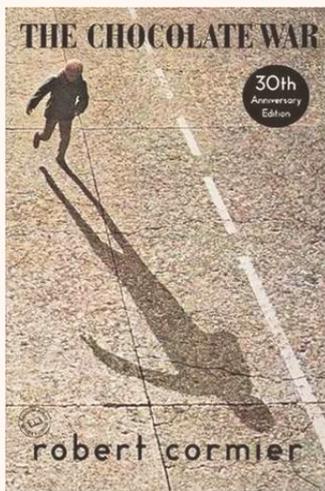
by S. E. Hinton (1967)

This beloved American YA classic tells the story of 14 year old Ponyboy and his close-knit gang of brothers. Labelled “greasers” and treated like losers, these boys are struggling to rise above the disadvantages of poverty and neglect. When the most gentle member of their gang kills someone in self-defence, it sets off an unavoidably tragic chain reaction of events. There have been 120 editions (and counting) of this all-time great about male friendship and class warfare.

Reading and interest level: 12+

Genre: realistic; family; friends; class warfare; death; Oklahoma

This novel contains some emotionally disturbing and violent scenes.



The Chocolate War

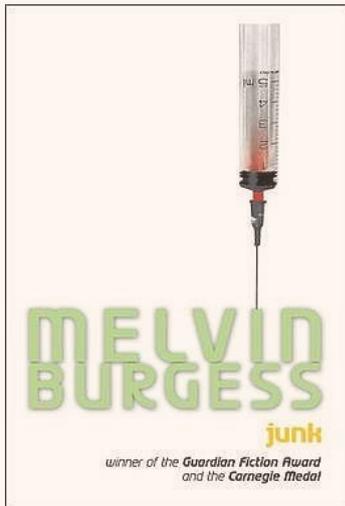
by Robert Cormier (1974)

When freshman Jerry Renault refuses to sell chocolates for his school this small act of defiance has a huge ripple effect. Exposing the manipulations of a corrupt Catholic priest and a powerful secret society called The Vigils, Jerry’s rebellion threatens the entire balance of power at his boys’ school. This disturbing and psychologically acute YA novel examines how peer pressure, conformity and power work in enclosed communities. Frequently appearing on banned book lists, this novel examines the corrupt nature of authority.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; friendship; school; bullying

This novel contains some emotionally disturbing and violent scenes.

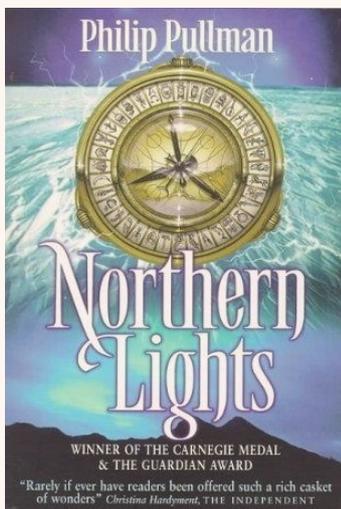


Junk

by Melvin Burgess (1996)

Gemma and Tar have different reasons for running away from home; Tar wants to escape from an abusive home, while Gemma is wild for freedom from her strict parents. At first, the world of “squatting” in Bristol seems like a glorious adventure. But as they get trapped by a growing dependence on heroin, everything will be sacrificed to feed their addiction. This award-winning UKYA novel, titled *Smack* in the United States, is an unflinching portrait of drug addiction and an unforgettable classic.

Reading and interest level: 14+ realistic; friends; family; drug addiction; prostitution; Bristol
This novel contains explicit references to drugs and alcohol, scenes of sexuality, and some emotionally disturbing material.

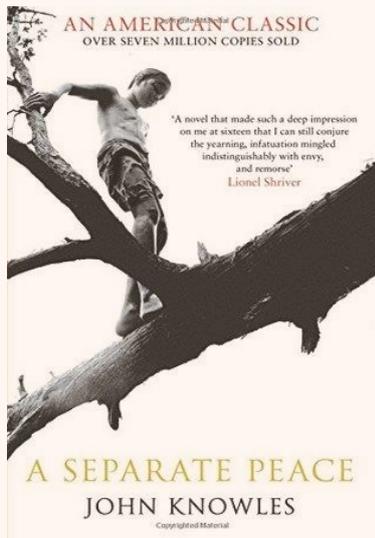


Northern Lights

by Philip Pullman (1995)

In this classic fantasy novel, feisty protagonist Lyra travels from an alternative “steam-punk” Oxford to the far North in order to solve the mystery of why children are being kidnapped. Trusted adults turn out to be enemies, whilst all manner of surprising creatures (including witches and an armoured polar bear) turn out to be friends. This beautiful, thought-provoking book has a storyline which operates on two levels. There is a rich fantasy adventure to enjoy, but older readers will appreciate the philosophical questions the book raises about science, religion and ethics.

Reading and interest level: 12+ fantasy; historical; adventure; mystery; science; religion; ethics; Oxford



A Separate Peace by John Knowles (1959)

At a New England boarding school, in the summer of 1942, a group of 16 year old boys experience their last year of freedom before being drafted into World War II. Phineas and Gene are best friends, but there is a fierce rivalry at the heart of their friendship. Games and dares may distract them from the long shadow of war, but they cannot escape the tragedy that stalks them.

Reading and interest level: 14+

Genre: realistic; historical; friends; sports; war; death; boarding school

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