

# Top 10 teen books to save your life

Top 10 lovely, tough, honest, and ultimately life-affirming YA books

Books reach into the darkest, loneliest parts of us and remind us it's okay.

## 1. [I'll Give You the Sun](#) by Jandy Nelson

Jude and Noah are twins. Artistic Noah is bullied and isolated. He's also in love with the boy next door. Bold, outgoing Jude has sworn off boys forever. Three years later, the twins are broken and barely speaking. Noah has given up art and taken up cliff-diving, and brave Jude is paralyzed with fear. The early years are told from Noah's point of view, while 16-year-old Jude narrates the current day. We know they've suffered a tragedy, but we have to rely on these two to separately and cumulatively reveal what happened. *I'll Give You the Sun* is a vibrant, sparkling story that reminds you to follow your heart, face your fears, and live the life you were meant to live.

## 2. [The Outsiders](#) by SE Hinton

This classic, first published in 1967, is the bestselling young adult book of all time. It tells the story of Ponyboy, a greaser, or outsider, who lives in a world of us versus them. The "us" here are the outsiders, the "them" are those with money, otherwise known as the "Socs," or "Socials." The Socs beat up greasers for sport, but one tragic night, Ponyboy and his fellow greasers take their revenge, and someone is killed. The novel is as powerful today as it was forty-some years ago, and its message – being judged by what you are instead of who you are, and overcoming circumstance and prejudice – is timeless.

## 3. [Fat Kid Rules the World](#) by KL Going

When we first meet Troy Billings, he is standing on the edge of a New York City subway platform contemplating suicide. At 296 pounds, the 17-year-old is friendless and, recently, motherless. Part-time high school student and punk-rock guitarist Curt MacCrae comes to the rescue and saves his life. The result is an unlikely friendship, with the troubled, drug-addicted MacCrae inviting Troy to join his band. The book is a rollicking, moving celebration of acceptance, diversity, new beginnings, self-discovery, and the outsider in all of us.

#### **4. [Saving Daisy](#) by Phil Earle**

Before he became an author, Phil Earle had a job as a care worker in a children's home. There, he met people like Daisy, whose mother is dead and whose father has closed himself away. Daisy blames herself for her mum's death, and tries to become invisible at school to escape notice. It's a gritty story – Daisy struggles with self-harm and a second tragedy, which leaves her completely alone. Earle tackles bullying and depression, but in the end the book is about learning to live, and it's Daisy who is finally responsible for her recovery.

#### **5. [Speak](#) by Laurie Halse Anderson**

There's a reason why *Speak* is so beloved. Few YA novels are as powerfully affirming in their message: find your voice and use it. High school freshman Melinda is an outcast in the aftermath of a single incident – she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops. She finds herself isolated and turned on not only by her classmates but by her closest friends. As the isolation grows more pronounced, she finally stops speaking, and only through work on an art project is she able to face what really happened at the party. Melinda represents too many alienated, victimized teens, and when she at last finds her voice, it makes you want to find and use your own. Loudly.

#### **6. [Before I Die](#) by Jenny Downham**

Tessa is 17 and dying of cancer. Instead of shutting down and waiting for the inevitable, she creates a list of things to do before she dies: have sex, say yes to everything and everyone for an entire day, try drugs, fall in love. Her parents are separated, her dad hovers, her mom is estranged. Tessa struggles with depression, falls in love with the boy next door, and discovers what it really means to be alive. Downham's prose is exquisite, and her poignant story breaks your heart at the same time it makes you grateful for even the smallest moments. Like another very famous teen cancer novel, it's actually more about life than death.

#### **7. [It's Kind of a Funny Story](#) by Ned Vizzini**

Craig Gilner always thought he was brilliant and exceptional. Until he's accepted at Manhattan's elite Executive Pre-Professional High School,

where he finds out he's actually pretty average. Life as he's always known it is over – suddenly his perfectly planned future seems improbable, maybe impossible. Craig stops eating and sleeping. And he tries to kill himself. He's so rattled by the near-death experience, he checks himself into a mental hospital, where he attempts to put the pieces of himself and his life back together. Ned Vizzini tragically died of suicide in 2013, but what he's created on these pages is a reassuringly funny, human, and touching tale of hope.

### **8. The Beginning of Everything by Robyn Schneider**

Ezra Faulkner has it all – he's junior class president, varsity tennis champion, and he drives a BMW. He's even dating the most popular girl in school. Until she cheats on him. And then, the weekend before his junior prom, Ezra is brutally injured in a hit-and-run accident, which turns his entire life upside down. For Ezra, it's the end and the beginning of everything. He meets new girl Cassidy Thorpe, who has her own scars to bear, and he is forced to face who he was, who he's expected to be, and who he's going to become. As Cassidy says to Ezra, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" Inspiring.

### **9. Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli**

Susan Caraway is better known as Stargirl. She's the eccentric new girl at a high school that prizes conformity. She's kind to everyone – remembering birthdays with songs and cards – dresses colourfully (kimonos, pioneer dresses), plays the ukulele, dances even where there isn't any music. Sixteen-year-old narrator Leo Borlock doesn't understand her any more than anyone else does, but he falls hard for her. When he finds himself alienated from his classmates because of it, he tries to change Stargirl, who becomes a cheerleader and sheds her magical nickname for "Susan." It's a sweet, haunting book about being true to who you are in spite of everything and everyone else.

### **10. Wonder by RJ Palacio**

Wonder speaks to anyone of any age who's ever felt alone. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse. Those are the words of fifth grader August "Auggie" Pullman, who was born with a facial difference. This is his first year in a mainstream school, and what he

wants most is to be treated like any other kid. Except that his classmates, unable to get past his face, see him as a freak. RJ Palacio describes her book as “a meditation on kindness,” and it is. But Auggie and Wonder will not only make you “choose kind,” they will remind you that it’s oh-so important to stand out.