

# Top 10 feminist icons in children's and teen books

## 1. Pirate Girl ([Pirate Girl](#) by Cornelia Funke)

Our eponymous Pirate Girl, Molly, sets off alone in her boat to visit her grandmother and is set upon by a fierce pirate captain who takes her prisoner and makes her slave away for him, cooking and cleaning. But Molly refuses to be cowed and instead uses her wits to summon her mother – the fiercest pirate of the lot – to rescue her. Together with her mum, Molly turns the tables on her captors and heads off alone once more to visit grandma. Female characters for the under-fives don't come more brave or bold than this.

## 2. Matilda ([Matilda](#) by Roald Dahl)

My daughter Alula says about Matilda: “She’s really powerful. She refuses to be bullied or watch others being bullied. She shows that being intelligent and reading books, and being kind, is more important than being pretty.” And that says it all really.

## 3. Luna Lovegood ([Harry Potter](#) series by JK Rowling)

Oft overlooked, Luna Lovegood stands out among the pantheon of great female characters Rowling offers us in the Potter series. Yes, Hermione is the classic choice but Luna too is smart, brave and loyal, and more than that, she refuses to bow to bullying or pressure to change. She is who she is – quirky and strange – and is unapologetic about it. She embraces her weirdness, remains compassionate to those who bully her and is unfazed by critics. We love Luna!

## 4. Malala ([I am Malala](#) and the young readers' edition [Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and changed the World](#) by Malala Yousafzai and Patricia McCormick)

At just 17 years old, human rights activist Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 for her work in advocating for girls' education. Shot by the Taliban for speaking up on the right of girls to attend school, she has

since started a fund to empower girls to reach their full potential. Her story is incredibly inspiring.

### **5. Katniss Everdeen ([The Hunger Games](#) by Suzanne Collins)**

Yes, Katniss is strong, brave and can wield a bow and arrow like nobody else. She also becomes the poster child for equality for all, but it isn't this alone that makes her a feminist, I would argue that the way she forges relationships with others, particularly women and girls, in defiance of a patriarchal society, is why she ultimately triumphs in the arena and what makes her such a special character in the YA world.

### **6. Celie ([The Color Purple](#) by Alice Walker)**

Alice Walker's famous novel tells the story of Celie, a poor black woman in 1900s America. Starting off as a victim of abuse Celie finally learns, through the support, example and sisterhood of other black women, to speak up for herself, and ultimately finds the courage to make her own choices.

### **7. Tavi Gevinson ([Rookie Yearbook](#) edited by Tavi Gevinson)**

At just 18 years old, Tavi Gevinson is hailed as one of her generation's leading voices. The website she founded and edits, [Rookie](#), tackles subjects from break-ups to politics, with all the content (art and writing) contributed by teenagers as well as influential thinkers, musicians and creatives. The yearbooks (there are three) contain curated highlights from the website.

### **8. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ([We Should All Be Feminists](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the author of the award winning novel [Half a Yellow Sun](#) (another recommended teen reading), writes a funny and accessible book (based on her TEDx talk) about what it means to be a feminist today, and entreats everyone to consider the profound ways that inequality affects us all.

### **9. Melinda Sordino ([Speak](#) by Laurie Halse Anderson)**

Teenage Melinda is finally set free from her traumatic burden of silence by choosing to speak up against her rapist and by fighting back against the cultural and societal pressure imposed on her to keep quiet about the attack. In doing so she becomes a symbol of courage and power to all victims of abuse.

**10. Lena Dunham ([Not That Kind of Girl](#) by Lena Dunham)**

This is the book I wish I had read as a teenager. Musing on issues including body image, sex, mental health, friendship, career and sexuality with her trademark honesty and wit, Lena Dunham admits she's a 'girl who is keen on having it all' and then humbly offers her own nuggets of wisdom and experience to help others do the same.