

Ten must-read YA novels you've probably never heard of

Just like adult fiction, popular YA books such as *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* are not representative of the sheer diversity of titles and authors out there.

1. [The Unfinished Life of Addison Stone](#) by Adele Griffin

It's written like a longform piece of journalism. After Addison Stone, a talented street artist, mysteriously drowns, her former teacher investigates her death. The book itself is a compilation of the teacher's findings, relaying what happened to Addison through interviews with Addison's friends, which are interwoven with pictures of both Addison and her art. It's a gripping read with a seriously ominous ending, and, because all of the characters are fictional, the way the author decided to tell the story makes it one of the most unique books I've ever read.

2. [How It Went Down](#) by Kekla Magoon

This book hits hard. In many ways reminiscent of the Trayvon Martin case, it tells the story of a black boy who is gunned down by a white man, and the tensions that ripple throughout the local community as a result. None of the numerous point-of-view characters seem to agree on what really happened, though each has strong opinions about Tariq, the boy who was shot: whether he had a gun, whether he was part of a gang, and whether that even matters. In many ways, *How It Went Down* embodies the chaos and denial following such a heavy – and, in the real world, far from isolated – tragedy.

3. [Gabi, A Girl in Pieces](#) by Isabel Quintero

Quintero's novel feels like an anthology of high school issues: body image (Gabi's), teen pregnancy (her best friend's), coming out (her other best friend's), strict religion (her aunt's), drug addiction (her father's), poetry, and worries about college (both Gabi's). Told through Gabi's diary, the book is tragic, hilarious, and always whip-smart. It's also, I'm sure, one of the most diverse and all-encompassing YA novels out there.

4. Under A Painted Sky by Stacey Lee

Under A Painted Sky chronicles the journey of two teenagers during the start of the Gold Rush, one an escaped slave and the other a runaway Chinese girl who longs to become a musician. On the run from law enforcement, the two head West, along the way meeting a fascinating cast of characters. Under A Painted Sky is a historical, a western, a coming of age novel, and a story of friendship all rolled into one.

5. Teeth by Hannah Moskowitz

This book has been pitched by the author as being about “magic gay fish,” which, in a perfect world, would send everyone immediately rushing to a bookstore or library, no questions asked. But, for a little background: the book follows Rudy, whose family moves to a remote island in order to cure his dying brother, and who befriends a fishboy named Teeth. The novel is as addictive as it is painful, taking a pair of lonely, desperate characters and methodically pulling apart their layers. Its premise alone makes it one of the strangest, most intoxicating YA novels out there.

6. Dangerous Girls by Abigail Haas

Haas’s book has been compared to Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* for a reason. As a thriller it’s both creepy and puzzling, and it’s held together by some seriously complex characters. I actually read it while huddled over the Kindle app on my phone, finishing it well past 3am. It’s that difficult to put down. Told nonlinearly, *Dangerous Girls* also has some of the most realistic court scenes out there. And I won’t spoil anything, but – THAT ENDING. If you want a YA thriller, this is your book.

7. Bone Gap by Laura Ruby

Bone Gap is a fantasy novel that is difficult to describe beyond incoherent shouts for everyone to immediately read it. It begins when Roza, one of the most beautiful girls in her home of Bone Gap, is kidnapped, but everyone believes she just up and left. Only her friend Finn saw what happened, and he can’t remember the abductor’s face. Often dreamlike and always

mysterious, Bone Gap is complete with whispering cornfields, a magical horse, and a fairytale that isn't really a fairytale.

8. The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender by Leslye Walton

This book is framed perfectly by its title. As a novel, it's both strange and beautiful, following Ava, a girl who is born with wings. Perhaps even more unique than its plot is the atmosphere of the novel; harrowing and effortlessly lyrical, intoxicating without being too brutal to read.

9. Poisoned Apples by Christine Heppermann

This is feminist poetry. That's not me being abstract. Literally, the book is composed of poems that detail the pressures our society places on teen girls. Even more amazingly, it does this through dark fairytale retellings. Always clever and often darkly humorous, it explores everything from sex to body image, and it comes complete with hauntingly beautiful photographs woven throughout its pages.

10. Proxy by Alex London

Proxy is a cyberpunk novel that explores financial inequality in the extreme. Told in dual points-of-view, it follows Syd, a Proxy, who suffers physical punishments for wealthy Patron Knox's crimes while Knox is forced to watch - until the two become friends and try to escape. Combining a vividly imagined world, a number of awesome twists, and a gay main character, Proxy is a must.

Your top tips

Gemma, via email

You must add the YA novel *The Life of a Banana* by PP Wong. It is read by grown ups too but it is written exactly like a 12 year old and is so funny, so sad and I really identify with it. It is about bullying and horrible racist people and also mental illness. Also, has a cute guy in it called Jay. I think it is the kind of novel that both children and grown ups can read. Must add! Must add!

Stancey, via email

The Belgariad (series) by David Eddings. LOVE them. My husband read them at 12 and loved them then. He then read them to me (and I to him) several years ago, and I LOVED them. I'm amazed no one has picked this series up for a film trilogy (quadruplet)

Keren, via Facebook

Taking Flight and Grounded by Sheena Wilkinson

Forbidden Spaces trilogy, by Helen Grant

Gemma, via email

The Life of a Banana by PP Wong - Guardian reviewer [Claire Hazelton](#) agreed: "PP Wong captures the idiosyncrasies of typical teenage vernacular well."

Neill, via email

The Chaos Walking trilogy by Patrick Ness - Guardian reviewer [Zarah - KECHGreaders](#) agreed: "Chaos Walking is one of those series that will change your life."

Maya, via Facebook

The Boy in the Tower - Polly Ho-Yen - Guardian reviewer [Nattastic](#) agreed: "Really well written and very realistic."

The Accident Season, by Moira Fowley-Doyle

Read Me Like A Book by Liz Kessler

Ketchup Clouds, by Annabel Pitcher - Guardian reviewer [Ellie200](#) agreed: "I felt both happiness and sadness, and wasn't able to put this book down."

Sandra, via email

This is one of the most powerful books I have read: I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives. Look at the review here in the

New York Times, [I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives](#).

Adam, via email

I believe Linda L. Zern's [Beyond the Strandline](#) is definitely worth a look. Normally I'm not a huge fan of YA fiction, but this one was definitely worth reading.

Elisabeth Donnelly, via email

I just wanted to throw my book on the list, which was an independent release, the first from Polis Books, and is the smartest anti-superhero story you'd ever read: [themisshapes.net](#).

Jason, via email

I nominate Supercenter, by Jason Rizos. It's colourful, imaginative, and is not without gripping social commentary.

Kara, via email

John Wyndham's The Chrysalids. The story is about difference and discrimination set in a post apocalyptic world and it has stayed with me for over forty years.