

## Best of the Best 2019 Middle Grades and YA Lists

### Realistic/Contemporary YA Fiction

by Dr. Stacey Reese, West High School

#### **Top 10 Book List:**

1. *Internment* - Samira Ahmed
  2. *Hot Dog Girl* - Jennifer Dugan
  3. *The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* - Sabina Khan
  4. *Two Can Keep a Secret* - Karen McManus
  5. *White Rose* - Kip Wilson
  6. *We Regret to Inform You* - Ariel Kaplan
  7. *People Kill People* - Ellen Hopkins
  8. *XL* - Scott Brown
  9. *Jacked Up* - Erica Sage
  10. *The Downstairs Girl* - Stacey Lee
- \*\**Patron Saints of Nothing* - Randy Ribay (Bonus title!)

#### **Notable Titles:**

*Dream Country* by Shannon Gibney  
*Let's Go Swimming on Doomsday* by Natalie C. Anderson  
*How to Make Friends with the Dark* by Kathleen Glasgow  
*Field Notes on Love* by Jennifer E. Smith  
*Hope and Other Punchlines* by Julie Buxbaum  
*We Walked the Sky* by Lisa Fiedler  
*The Princess and the Fangirl* by Ashley Poston  
*If I'm Being Honest* by Emily Wibberley and Austin Siegemund-Broka  
*Dealing in Dreams* by Lilliam Rivera  
*If You're Out There* by Katy Loutzenhiser  
*The Universal Laws of Marco* by Carmen Rodrigues  
*Death Prefers Blondes* by Caleb Roehrig  
*On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas  
*How It Feels to Float* by Helena Fox  
*Let Me Hear a Rhyme* by Tiffany D. Jackson  
*Somewhere Only We Know* by Maureen Goo  
*Ray needs and Delilah's Midnite Matinee* by Jeff Zentner  
*Heroine* by Mindy McGinnis  
*With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo  
*The Rest of the Story* by Sarah Dessen  
*What if It's Us* by Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera  
*The Music of What Happens* by Bill Konigsberg

### Young Adult Speculative Fiction

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#### Dystopian/post-apocalyptic

- *Dry*, Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman (4★)

#### Fantasy:

- *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge*, M. T. Anderson and Eugene Yelchin (4★)
- *A Blade So Black* (A Blade So Black, #1), L. L. McKinney (1★)
- *The Boneless Mercies*, April Genevieve Tucholke (3★)
- *Courting Darkness* (Courting Darkness Duology, #1), Robin LaFevers (4★)
- *For a Muse of Fire* (For a Muse of Fire, #1), Heidi Heilig (2★)
- *The Gilded Wolves* (The Gilded Wolves, #1), Roshani Chokshi (4★)
- *Lovely War*, Julie C. Berry (5★)
- *Seafire* (Seafire, #1), Natalie C. Parker
- *Strange Grace*, Tessa Gratton (1★)
- *Tales from the Inner City*, Shaun Tan (4★)
- *We Hunt the Flame* (Sands of Arawiya, #1), Hafsah Faizal (3★)
- *We Rule the Night*, Claire Eliza Bartlett (4★)
- *We Set the Dark on Fire* (We Set the Dark on Fire, #1), Tehlor Kay Mejia (4★)

#### Fantasy (literary):

- *Damsel*, Elana K. Arnold (2★ + Printz Honor)
- *And the Ocean Was Our Sky*, Patrick Ness and Rovina Cai (4★)

#### Horror:

- *The Good Demon*, Jimmy Cajoleas (3★)
- *Sawkill Girls*, Claire Legrand (4★)

#### Magical realism:

- *Blanca & Roja*, Anna-Marie McLemore (3★)

#### Science fiction:

- *Aurora Rising* (The Aurora Cycle, #1), Jay Kristoff and Amie Kaufman (2★)
- *Once & Future* (Once & Future, #1), Amy Rose Capetta and Cori McCarthy (3★)
- *Stronger, Faster, and More Beautiful*, Arwen Elys Dayton (5★)
- *The Waning Age*, S. E. Grove (3★)

#### Anthologies:

- *Toil & Trouble: 15 Tales of Women & Witchcraft*, eds. Jessica Spotswood and Tess Sharpe (3★)
- *Unbroken: 13 Stories Starring Disabled Teens*, ed. Marieke Nijkamp (3★)

#### High-Demand Sequels/Series

- *King of Scars* (Nikolai Duology, #1), Leigh Bardugo (2★)
- *Kingdom of Ash* (Throne of Glass, #7), Sarah J. Maas
- *Muse of Nightmares* (Strange the Dreamer, #2), Laini Taylor (2★)
- *Queen of Air and Darkness* (The Dark Artifices, #3), Cassandra Clare
- *The Red Scrolls of Magic* (The Eldest Curses, #1), Cassandra Clare and Wesley Chu
- *The Storyteller* (The Reader Trilogy, #3), Traci Chee (3★)
- *The Toll* (Arc of a Scythe, #3), Neal Shusterman (coming 11/2019)

**Sequels or Companion Novels to Titles Highlighted in Previous Year**

- *Archenemies* (Renegades, #2), Marissa Meyer
- *Capturing the Devil* (Stalking Jack the Ripper, #4), Kerri Maniscalco (coming 09/2019)
- *Escaping from Houdini* (Stalking Jack the Ripper, #3), Kerri Maniscalco
- *The Everlasting Rose* (The Belles, #2), Dhonielle Clayton (2★)
- *The Wicked King* (The Folk of the Air, #2), Holly Black (3★)
- *Wildcard* (Warcross, #2), Marie Lu (2★)

**TV and Movie Tie-In Titles**

- *Catwoman: Soulstealer* (DC Icons, #3), Sarah J. Maas
- Mortal Instruments series (*City of Bones*, etc.), Cassandra Clare
- *Pan's Labyrinth: The Labyrinth of the Faun*, Guillermo del Toro and Cornelia Funke (2★)
- *Superman: Dawnbreaker* (DC Icons, #4), Matt de la Peña (1★)

*Note:* A number next to a star within parentheses (ex: 2★) following a title denotes the number of starred reviews that title received from among the following six publications or organizations that regularly review youth literature: Booklist, The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, The Horn Book, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, and School Library Journal. Many thanks to the hard work of Jennifer Jazwinski, an early literacy librarian at the Palatine Public Library District, IL, for her fantastic spreadsheet compilation of starred children's and young adult book reviews, from which I sourced this information. Visit her at <https://booksheets.wordpress.com/> for more spreadsheet and book wonder.

## Middle Grade and Young Adult Nonfiction

Emily Davenport

### Middle Grade

(\*Titles with asterisks also recommended for high school)

#### **Social Studies & Current Issues**

*\*Born to Fly: The First Women's Air Race Across America* by Steve Sheinkin, Bijou Karman (Illustrator)

*Growing Friendships: A Kids' Guide to Making and Keeping Friends* by Eileen Kennedy-Moore, Christine McLaughlin (Contributor)

*\*It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood (Adapted for Young Readers)* by Trevor Noah

*They Lost Their Heads!: What Happened to Washington's Teeth, Einstein's Brain, and Other Famous Body Parts* by Carlyn Beccia

*\*This Promise of Change: One Girl's Story in the Fight for School Equality* by Jo Ann Allen Boyce, Debbie Levy

*The Thrifty Guide to Ancient Greece: A Handbook for Time Travelers (The Thrifty Guides to History)* by Jonathan W. Stokes

*\*You Are Enough* by Jen Petro-Roy

#### **Science**

*Apollo 8: The Mission That Changed Everything* by Martin W. Sandler

*Astrophysics for Young People in a Hurry* by Neil deGrasse Tyson, Gregory Mone

*Beavers (Superpower Field Guide)* by Rachel Poliquin, Nicholas John Frith (Illustrator)

*Camp Panda: Helping Cubs Return to the Wild* by Catherine Thimmesh

*\*Path to the Stars: My Journey from Girl Scout to Rocket Scientist* by Sylvia Acevedo

*Science Comics: Polar Bears: Survival on the Ice* by Jason Viola, Zack Giallongo (Illustrations)

#### **Biography/Memoir**

*\*Always Smile: Carley Allison's Secrets for Laughing, Loving and Living* by Alice Kuipers

*Born Just Right* by Jordan Reeves, Jen Lee Reeves

*\*March Forward, Girl: From Young Warrior to Little Rock Nine* by Melba Pattillo Beals

#### **Sports**

*Between the Lines: How Ernie Barnes Went from the Football Field to the Art Gallery* by Sandra Neil Wallace, Bryan Collier (Illustrator)

*My Corner of the Ring* by Jesselyn Silva

*Strong Inside (Young Readers Edition): The True Story of How Perry Wallace Broke College Basketball's*

*Color Line* by Andrew Maraniss

#### **Literature**

*Our Story Begins: Your Favorite Authors and Illustrators Share Fun, Inspiring, and Occasionally Ridiculous Things They Wrote and Drew as Kids* by Elissa Brent Weissman

### Young Adult

#### **Social Studies & Current Issues**

*The Book of Pride: LGBTQ Heroes Who Changed the World* by Mason Funk

*D-Day: The World War II Invasion that Changed History (Scholastic Focus)* by Deborah Hopkinson

*Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic (Young Adult Adaptation)* by Sam Quinones  
*(Don't) Call Me Crazy: 33 Voices Start the Conversation about Mental Health* by Kelly Jensen (Editor)  
*Enough Is Enough: How Students Can Join the Fight for Gun Safety*  
 by Michelle Roehm McCann, Shannon Watts (Foreword)  
*No More Excuses: Dismantling Rape Culture* by Amber J. Keyser  
*One Person, No Vote: How All Voters Are Not Treated Equally* by Carol Anderson, Tonya Bolden  
*Parkland Speaks: Survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas Share Their Stories* by Sarah Lerner (Editor)  
*Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist* by Eli Saslow  
*A Quick & Easy Guide to Queer & Trans Identities* by J.R. Zuckerberg, Mady G  
*Spies: The Secret Showdown Between America and Russia* by Marc Favreau  
*Troublemaker for Justice: The Story of Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the March on Washington* by  
 Jacqueline Houtman, Walter Neagle, Michael G. Long  
*Viral: The Fight Against AIDS in America* by Ann Bausum  
*Your Brain Needs a Hug: Life, Love, Mental Health, and Sandwiches* by Rae Earl  
*We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* by Malala Yousafzai  
*We Are Here to Stay: Voices of Undocumented Young Adults* by Susan Kuklin  
*We Are Not Yet Equal: Understanding Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson, Tonya Bolden, Nic Stone

### **Science**

*The Book of the Moon: A Guide to Our Closest Neighbor: A Guide to Our Closest Neighbor* by Maggie Aderin-Pocock  
*The Weather Machine: A Journey Inside the Forecast* by Andrew Blum

### **Biography/Memoir**

*Brave Face* by Shaun David Hutchinson  
*A Cave in the Clouds: A Young Woman's Escape from Isis* by Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, with Susan Elizabeth McClelland  
*Elon Musk: A Mission to Save the World* by Anna Crowley Redding  
*Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka  
*Shout* by Laurie Halse Anderson  
*Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* by Jacob Tobia  
*Strangers Assume My Girlfriend Is My Nurse* by Shane Burcaw  
*Warhead: The True Story of One Teen Who Almost Saved the World* by Jeff Henigson

### **Sports**

*K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches* by Tyler Kepner  
*SprawlBall: A Visual Tour of the New Era of the NBA* by Kirk Goldsberry

### **Literature**

*Dear Ally, How do You Write a Book?* by Ally Carter

### **Anthologies**

*Color Outside the Lines* by Sangu Mandanna  
*The (Other) F Word: A Celebration of the Fat and Fierce* by Angie Manfredi (Editor)

### **Professional Interest**

*Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens* by Melissa Hart

**Best of the Best Graphic Novels 2019**

Dr. Brooke Bianchi-Pennington, Hardin Valley Academy

**Middle Grades and Up**

- *The Breakaways* by Cathy G. Johnson  
Bad at soccer. Okay at friends. A group of middle school girls are on their school's C level soccer team, tricked into joining by an upperclassman. None of them enjoy the game or each other. But Faith finally has enough of all of the girls fighting and losing. Her sweet attitude helps everyone be a little more themselves and a little kinder to each other no matter how different they are.
- *Estranged* by Ethan M. Aldridge  
A human boy is the darling pet of the fey creatures who switched their own son for him as a baby. When the fey are attacked, the boy only knows one person he can turn to, the fey boy who took his place in the life he was supposed to lead. In a high fantasy world of fey, dragons, and changelings, two boys from different cultures must come together to save their families while finding new family along the way.
- *Fake Blood* by Whitney Gardner  
It's the beginning of the new school year and AJ feels like everyone is changing but him. He hasn't grown or had any exciting summer adventures like his best friends have. He even has the same crush he's harbored for years. So AJ decides to take matters into his own hands. But how could a girl like Nia Winters ever like plain vanilla AJ when she only has eyes for vampires?
- *Illegal* by Eion Colfer (Author) Giobanni Rigano (Illustrator)  
Illegal tells the story of Ebo, a young boy whose only future lies with making it to Europe with his siblings. Along the way, he uses his optimism, determination, and beautiful voice to survive. Ebo's epic journey takes him across the Sahara Desert to the dangerous streets of Tripoli, and finally out to the merciless sea. But with every step he holds on to his hope for a new life, and a reunion with his sister.
- *Island Book* by Evan Dahm  
Sola is different from everyone on her island. When the monster came, it came for her. Now, she wants to know why. Sola sets out on a journey to find the monster. Along the way she learns hers is not the only island, and she's not the only one who feels like an outcast.
- *Making Friends* by Kristen Gudsruk  
Sixth grade was SO much easier for Danny. All her friends were in the same room and she knew exactly what to expect out of life. Now that she's in seventh grade, she's in a new middle school, her friends are in different classes and forming new cliques, and she is totally, completely lost. Danny needs some new friends, but making friends is hard - unless you have a magic sketchbook in which everything you draw comes to life. The thing is, even when you create a best friend, there's no guarantee they'll always be your best friend. Especially when they discover they've been created with magic!
- *New Kid* by Jerry Craft  
Jordan Banks is the new kid. Not only is he new, he's also on scholarship and one of the school's few students of color. Jordan must navigate sticking true to himself while also making new

friends who are very different from him and coping with students and faculty that, though seemingly well-intentioned, don't quite get what the world looks like from his perspective.

- *Sanity & Tallulah* by Molly Brooks  
Even though she's only in 8th grade, Sanity is a master scientist living in a community on a remote space station. When Sanity uses some of her lab equipment to create herself a pet, Princess Sparkle Destroyer of Worlds, only her trouble-making best friend Tallulah can help her save her pet and the space station from destruction.
- *Sheets* by Brenna Thummler  
Both Marjoire and Wendell feel trapped in their lives. One washes and folds sheets to keep her grieving family afloat. One floats underneath a sheet to avoid scaring the living. When these two meet, both learn to cope with both life and death.
- *This Was Our Pact* by Ryan Andrews  
Each year on the autumn equinox, Ben's town sends floating lanterns down the river to join the stars. This year, Ben makes a pact with his friends that they will follow the lanterns until they see what really becomes of them. But only Nathaniel, the boy ostracized from the rest of the group, follows through. Once the other boys leave, Ben and Nathaniel encounter a fantastic adventure with a talking bear, mad scientist, and bottled stars. But will they ever reach the end?

### High School and Up

- *Bloom* by Kevin Panetta (Author) Savanna Ganucheau (Illustrator)  
Ari is perpetually dissatisfied with his life. He doesn't want to be stuck running his family's small-town bakery. Instead, he wants to move to the city to pursue his music career, even if all of his bandmates aren't the nicest people. When he tries to soften the blow of his leaving by finding someone to take his place, he is reminded of what true love, friendship, and satisfaction look like - complete with adorable baking scenes.
- *Check, Please!* By Ngozi Ukazu  
Vlogger, baker, and hockey player Eric Bittle begins his freshman year of college battling his fear of being hit on the ice. His lovable teammates help him overcome his fears while learning about love and friendship.
- *Dead Endia: The Watcher's Test* by Hamish Steele  
A diverse cast of characters who work at the celebrity-themed amusement park Pollywood have to cope with the events that transpire on a regular basis due to the fact that Pollywood has a portal to the seven realms of angels and demons. Sure, they have to deal with possessions, time travel, ghosts, demons, children's birthday parties, and an impending apocalypse, but what they end up achieving is a greater understanding of themselves and their anxieties.
- *Dodge City* by Josh Trujillo (Author) Cara McGee (Artist) Brittany Peer (Colorist)  
Tomás has joined the city's worst dodgeball team, the Jazz Pandas. But once he overcomes his fear of being hit, he learns his ability to communicate with and care for others can lead this disparate group to come together. From conversations entirely in Spanish with no translation to

sign language, *Dodge City* includes all readers in story about working together.

- *Fence: Vol. 1 and 2* by C.S. Pacat (Author) Rebbeca Nalty, Johanna the Mad (Illustrators)  
Fencing is an elite sport, but Nicholas doesn't have an elite budget. Regardless, he fights to be the best fencer he can be, wanting to follow in the steps of the father who abandoned him. When he faces the arrogant top junior fencer in the world at his first tournament and loses spectacularly, he is driven to one day beat him, no matter the cost. That is, if he can survive being roommates with him first.
- *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett Krosoczka  
In this autobiographical work, Krosoczka outlines his childhood coping with his absent father and drug-addicted mother. As he grows, he learns both about his art and the value of found family.
- *Home After Dark* by David Small  
Set in the 1950s, *Home After Dark* pairs well with other coming-of-age tales of the time such as *Catcher in the Rye*. Russell moves across the country after his parents' divorce and has difficulty fitting in with the toxic masculinity of his father and friends. This book explores generational and societal violence with hints at how empathy can lead to escaping those cycles.
- *Kiss Number 8* by Colleen AF Venable (Author) Ellen T. Crenshaw (Illustrator)  
Mads doesn't get what the big deal is with kissing, that is until kiss number 8. Kiss number 8 is the first time she kisses a girl. For this church-going teen, coming to an understanding of her sexuality and her family's history of anti-LGBTQ+ actions is a difficult journey, but one which teaches her that people can change for those they love.
- *Lost Soul, Be at Peace* by Maggie Thrash  
A follow-up to *Honor Girl*, (though able to stand alone) Thrash uses the metaphor of a ghost to explore confronting generational disconnection and coming-of-age. Maggie learns about how her distant and silent father left his past behind when visiting the house he grew up in, learning to be more accepting of him and herself.
- *Luisa: Now and Then* by Carole Maurel adapted by Mariko Tamaki  
Luisa is 32, but is still finding it difficult to understand and be her authentic self. Through a magic bus ride and a helpful neighbor, she is confronted with the teenager she was and still is. This is a story about caring for your inner child and righting past wrongs against yourself through self-acceptance.
- *On a Sunbeam* by Tillie Waldon  
*On a Sunbeam* is a beautiful coming-of-age story about finding oneself and one's chosen family set in a sprawling, imaginative universe. Each character in the almost entirely female book is unique and brings emotional depth to this sci-fi world.
- *Shuri Vol. 1: The Search for Black Panther* by Nnedi Okorafor (Author) Sam Spratt, Leonardo Romero (Artists)  
Shuri, Wakanda's brilliant engineer, sends her brother to space on a mission. The only problem is, she hasn't heard back from him. While he's gone, Shuri must wrestle with her place in a new,

open Wakanda, search for her brother, and defend her country and the whole of Africa.

- *Skyward Vol. 1: My Low-G Life* by Joe Henderson (Author) Lee Garbett, Antonio Fabela (Artists)  
When Willa was a newborn, gravity broke. All of the sudden, the Earth's gravity is a fraction of what it was, and, if you're not careful, you could fall into the sky. Twenty years later, society has adapted, but it is still dangerous to travel out of the city. In a quest to convince her over-protective father to let her see the world, Willa uncovers her father's role in this new world and brings new danger to her family. She won't stop until the evil man profiting from the low-gravity world ends his threats.
- *Space Boy* by Stephen McCraine  
After her father loses his job in deep space, Amy and her family must leave everyone they know, become cryogenically frozen for thirty years, and move to earth. Out of space and time, Amy must acclimate to her new life. However, she meets someone who seems even more out of place than she is.
- *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott (Authors) Harmony Becker (Illustrator)  
George Takei recounts his childhood in Japanese-American internment camps in World War II as well as how activism in all forms in the face of injustice can be life-changing.