

Youth/YA Books

9th Grade through College Age

Far from the Tree by Robin Benway: Being the middle child has its ups and downs. But for Grace, an only child who was adopted at birth, discovering that she is a middle child is a different ride altogether. After putting her own baby up for adoption, she goes looking for her biological family, including—Maya, her loudmouthed younger bio sister, who has a lot to say about their newfound family ties. Having grown up the snarky brunette in a house full of chipper redheads, she's quick to search for traces of herself among these not-quite-strangers. And when her adopted family's long-buried problems begin to explode to the surface, Maya can't help but wonder where exactly it is that she belongs. And Joaquin, their stoic older bio brother, who has no interest in bonding over their shared biological mother. After seventeen years in the foster care system, he's learned that there are no heroes, and secrets and fears are best kept close to the vest, where they can't hurt anyone but him.

The Quiet You Carry by Nikki Barthelmess: Victoria Parker knew her dad's behavior toward her was a little unusual, but she convinced herself everything was fine until she found herself locked out of the house at 3:00 a.m., surrounded by flashing police lights. Now, dumped into a crowded, chaotic foster home, Victoria has to tiptoe around her domineering foster mother, get through senior year at a new school, and somehow salvage her college dreams . . . all while keeping her past hidden. But some secrets won't stay buried especially when unwanted memories make Victoria freeze up at random moments and nightmares disrupt her sleep. Even worse, she can't stop worrying about her stepsister Sarah, left behind with her father. All she wants is to move forward, but how do you focus on the future when the past won't leave you alone?

See No Color by Shannon Gibney: Being a transracial adoptee doesn't bother sixteen-year-old Alex Kirtridge—at least, not in a way she can explain to her white family. It doesn't matter that she's biracial when she's the star of the baseball team. But when Alex is off the field, she's teased for "acting" too white and judged for looking black. And while she loves her parents, her hot-headed brother, and her free-speaking sister, they don't seem to understand what it means that Reggie, a fellow ball player, is the first black guy who's wanted to get to know her. Things only get more complicated when she finds hidden letters from her birth father. Alex can't stop asking questions. Does she really fit in with her family? What would it be like to go to a black hairdresser? Should she contact her birth father, despite the fact that it might devastate her parents? Meanwhile, her body is changing, and Alex isn't sure she can keep up with her teammates. If she's going to find answers, Alex must come to terms with her adoption, her race, and the dreams she thought would always guide her.

The In-Between by Rebecca K.S. Ansari: Cooper is lost. Ever since his father left their family three years ago, he has become distant from his friends, constantly annoyed by his little sister, Jess, and completely fed up with the pale, creepy rich girl who moved in next door and won't stop staring at him. So when Cooper learns of an unsolved mystery his sister has discovered online, he welcomes the distraction. It's the tale of a deadly train crash that occurred a hundred years ago, in which one young boy among the dead was never identified. The only distinguishing mark on him was a strange insignia on his suit coat, a symbol no one had seen before or since. Jess is fascinated by the mystery of the unknown child—because she's seen the insignia. It's the symbol of the jacket of the girl next door. As they uncover more information—and mounting evidence of the girl's seemingly impossible connection to the tragedy—Cooper and Jess begin to wonder if a similar disaster could be heading to their hometown.

If You Find Me by Emily Murdoch: Fourteen-year-old Carey and six-year-old Jenessa have been living in the woods with their mother for as long as they can remember; the sheltering trees and a broken-down camper are all they know. But what they've never been told is that Carey vanished from the real world ten years ago, when their mother took her, causing an uproar in the media - and in her father's life. Now, abandoned by the mother they trusted, they're often left alone for long periods of time to fend for themselves - but, in one moment, everything changes. They're found by Carey's father and thrust into a bright and perplexing new world, one of shopping malls, shiny appliances, new clothes, and mouth-watering food. Carey desperately wants to believe in this new reality but is held back by a deep and painful loyalty to her mentally ill mother, who gave Carey her violin and taught her how to play the soaring music that helps her survive.

You're Welcome, Universe by Whitney Gardner: When Julia finds a slur about her best friend scrawled across the back of the Kingston School for the Deaf, she covers it up with a beautiful (albeit illegal) graffiti mural. Her supposed best friend snitches, the principal expels her, and her two mothers set Julia up with a one-way ticket to a "mainstream" school in the suburbs, where she's treated like an outcast as the only deaf student. The last thing she has left is her art, and not even Banksy himself could convince her to give that up. Out in the 'burbs, Julia paints anywhere she can, eager to claim some turf of her own. But Julia soon learns that she might not be the only vandal in town. Someone is adding to her tags, making them better, showing off—and showing Julia up in the process. She expected her art might get painted over by cops. But she never imagined getting dragged into a full-blown graffiti war.

Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate (YA edition): Based on one of America's most notorious real-life scandals—in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country—Lisa Wingate's riveting, wrenching, and ultimately uplifting tale reminds us how, even though the paths we take can lead to many places, the heart never forgets where we belong.

Hey, Kiddo by Jarrett J. Krosoczka: In kindergarten, Jarrett Krosoczka's teacher asks him to draw his family, with a mommy and a daddy. But Jarrett's family is much more complicated than that. His mom is an addict, in and out of rehab, and in and out of Jarrett's life. His father is a mystery -- Jarrett doesn't know where to find him, or even what his name is. Jarrett lives with his grandparents -- two very loud, very loving, very opinionated people who had thought they were through with raising children until Jarrett came along. Jarrett goes through his childhood trying to make his non-normal life as normal as possible, finding a way to express himself through drawing even as so little is being said to him about what's going on. Only as a teenager can Jarrett begin to piece together the truth of his family, reckoning with his mother and tracking down his father. Hey, Kiddo is a profoundly important memoir about growing up in a family grappling with addiction, and finding the art that helps you survive.

The Girl I Am, Was, and Never Will Be by Shannon Gibney: Part memoir, part speculative fiction, *The Girl I Am, Was, and Never Will Be* tells the true story of author Shannon Gibney's experience growing up as the adopted Black daughter of white parents in America alongside the fictional story of Erin Powers, the name Shannon was given at birth by the white woman who put her up for adoption. At its core, the novel is a tale of two girls on two different timelines, occasionally bridged by a mysterious portal and their shared search for a complete picture of their origins. Gibney surrounds her stories with reproductions of her own adoption documents, letters, family photographs, interviews, medical records, and brief essays on the surreal absurdities of the adoptee experience. Strikingly honest and beautifully written, this speculative memoir explores the rarely depicted experience of transracial adoption first-hand, and offers an insightful look into the discovery of one's own identity.

The Language of Flowers by Vanessa Diffenbaugh: The Victorian language of flowers was used to convey romantic expressions: honeysuckle for devotion, asters for patience, and red roses for love. But for Victoria Jones, it's been more useful in communicating mistrust and solitude. After a childhood spent in the foster-care system, she is unable to get close to anybody, and her only connection to the world is through flowers and their meanings. Now eighteen and emancipated from the system with nowhere to go, Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But an unexpected encounter with a mysterious stranger has her questioning what's been missing in her life. And when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

We Were Here by Matt de la Peña: When it happened, Miguel was sent to Juvi. The judge gave him a year in a group home—said he had to write in a journal so some counselor could try to figure out how he thinks. The judge had no idea that he actually did Miguel a favor. Ever since it happened, his mom can't even look at him in the face. Any home besides his would be a better place to live. But Miguel didn't bet on meeting Rondell or Mong or on any of what happened after they broke out. He only thought about Mexico and getting to the border to where he could start over. Forget his mom. Forget his brother. Forget himself. Life usually doesn't work out how you think it will, though. And most of the time, running away is the quickest path right back to what you're running from. From the streets of Stockton to the beaches of Venice, all the way to the Mexican border, *We Were Here* follows a journey of self-discovery by a boy who is trying to forgive himself in an unforgiving world.

Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline (YA-friendly): Penobscot Indian Molly Ayer is close to "aging out" out of the foster care system. A community-service position helping an elderly woman clean out her home is the only thing keeping Molly out of juvie and worse. As she helps Vivian sort through her possessions and memories, Molly learns that she and Vivian aren't as different as they seem to be. A young Irish immigrant orphaned in New York City, Vivian was put on a train to the Midwest with hundreds of other children whose destinies would be determined by luck and chance. Molly discovers that she has the power to help Vivian find answers to mysteries that have haunted her for her entire life - answers that will ultimately free them both. Rich in detail and epic in scope, *Orphan Train* is a powerful novel of upheaval and resilience, of unexpected friendship, and of the secrets we carry that keep us from finding out who we are.

The Sky Is Everywhere by Jandy Nelson: Adrift after her sister Bailey's sudden death, Lennie finds herself torn between quiet, seductive Toby—Bailey's boyfriend who shares Lennie's grief—and Joe, the new boy in town who bursts with life and musical genius. Each offers Lennie something she desperately needs. One boy helps her remember. The other lets her forget. And she knows if the two of them collide, her whole world will explode. As much a laugh-out-loud celebration of love as a nuanced and poignant portrait of loss, Lennie's struggle to sort her own melody out the noise around her makes for an always honest, often uproarious, and absolutely unforgettable read.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky: The critically acclaimed debut novel from Stephen Chbosky follows observant "wallflower" Charlie as he charts a course through the strange world between adolescence and adulthood. First dates, family drama, and new friends. Sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Devastating loss, young love, and life on the fringes. Caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it, Charlie must learn to navigate those wild and poignant roller-coaster days known as growing up.

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven: Theodore Finch is fascinated by death. Every day he thinks of ways he might kill himself, but every day he also searches for—and manages to find—something to keep him here, and alive, and awake. Violet Markey lives for the future, counting the days until graduation, when she can escape her small Indiana town and her aching grief in the wake of her sister's recent death. When Finch and Violet meet on the ledge of the bell tower at school—six stories above the ground—it's unclear who saves whom. Soon it's only with Violet that Finch can be himself. And it's only with Finch that Violet can forget to count away the days and start living them. But as Violet's world grows, Finch's begins to shrink.

Turtles All the Way Down by John Green: Aza Holmes never intended to pursue the disappearance of fugitive billionaire Russell Pickett, but there's a hundred-thousand-dollar reward at stake and her Best and Most Fearless Friend, Daisy, is eager to investigate. So together, they navigate the short distance and broad divides that separate them from Pickett's son Davis. Aza is trying. She is trying to be a good daughter, a good friend, a good student, and maybe even a good detective, while also living within the ever-tightening spiral of her own thoughts.

They Both Die at the End by Adam Silvera

On September 5, a little after midnight, Death-Cast calls Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio to give them some bad news: They're going to die today. Mateo and Rufus are total strangers, but, for different reasons, they're both looking to make a new friend on their End Day. The good news: There's an app for that. It's called the Last Friend, and through it, Rufus and Mateo are about to meet up for one last great adventure—to live a lifetime in a single day. In the tradition of *Before I Fall* and *If I Stay*, *They Both Die at the End* is a tour de force from acclaimed author Adam Silvera, whose debut, *More Happy Than Not*, the *New York Times* called “profound.” Featuring a map of the novel's characters and their connections, an exclusive essay by the author, and a behind-the-scenes look at the early outlines for this critically acclaimed bestseller.

All Eyes on Us by Kit Frick

The daughter of small-town social climbers, Amanda Kelly is deeply invested in her boyfriend, real estate heir Carter Shaw. He's kind, ambitious, the town golden boy—but he's far from perfect. Because behind Amanda's back, Carter is also dating Rosalie. Rosalie Bell is fighting to remain true to herself and her girlfriend—while concealing her identity from her Christian fundamentalist parents. After years spent in and out of conversion “therapy,” her own safety is her top priority. But maintaining a fake, straight relationship is killing her from the inside. When an anonymous texter ropes Amanda and Rosalie into a bid to take Carter down, the girls become collateral damage—and unlikely allies in a fight to unmask their stalker before Private uproots their lives.

Gabi, A Girl in Pieces by Isabel Quintero: Gabi Hernandez chronicles her last year of high school in her diary: college applications, Cindy's pregnancy, Sebastian's coming out, the cute boys, her father's meth habit, and the food she craves. And best of all, the poetry that helps forge her identity. *July 24: My mother named me Gabriella, after my grandmother who, coincidentally, didn't want to meet me when I was born because my mother was unmarried, and therefore living in sin. My mom has told me the story many, many, MANY, times of how, when she confessed to my grandmother that she was pregnant with me, her mother beat her. BEAT HER! She was twenty-five. That story is the basis of my sexual education and has reiterated why it's important to wait until you're married to give it up. So now, every time I go out with a guy, my mom says, "Ojos abiertos, piernas cerradas." Eyes open, legs closed. That's as far as the birds and the bees talk has gone. And I don't mind it. I don't necessarily agree with that whole wait until you're married crap, though. I mean, this is America and the 21st century; not Mexico one hundred years ago. But, of course, I can't tell my mom that because she will think I'm bad. Or worse: trying to be White.*