Many Teen Reading Lounge host sites have had success organizing the book list according to a certain broader theme. Listed here are several examples of themes and issues that teens in the past have enjoyed exploring, with examples of books in each category. It is not necessary that you choose these exact books when planning your TRL session, but these should give you an idea of what kind of books are most effective as you strive to implement positive youth development strategies into every aspect of your session. Keep in mind that there is a significant amount of crossover between these sections, and that one could easily incorporate books from each area when planning your TRL.

**Change Your World**

If you are planning on plunging into the civic engagement potential of TRL, consider arranging your booklist around the themes of civic engagement and general teen empowerment. Some sites have opted to approach this theme through a fictional lens, while others have incorporated some of the nonfiction teen empowerment books on this list.

- **Barter, Catherine. **Troublemakers**. A coming-of-age story about family, sacrifice and how even the smallest of actions can have great consequences.**
- **Coates, Ta-Nehisi. **Between the World and Me**. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences.**
- **Coelho, Paulo. **The Alchemist**. Tells the magical story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who yearns to travel in search of a worldly treasure as extravagant as any ever found.**
- **Fleischman, Paul. **Seedfolks**. Tells thirteen stories from diverse perspectives—young and old, immigrant and native, haunted and hopeful. A fractured neighborhood unites with just a few seeds, turning a drab empty lot in Cleveland into beautiful green garden.**
- **Ganda, Martin & Alifirenka, Caitlin. I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives**. The true story of an American girl and a boy from Zimbabwe and the letter that changed both of their lives forever.
Hiaasen, Carl. *Flush*. The plot centers around Noah Underwood, a boy whose father enlists his help to catch a repeat environmental offender in the act.

Levithan, David. *Wide Awake*. Leviathan delivers an emotional and politically charged novel that’s perfect reading for an election year—and for every year—but most especially for those times when the very democratic process is called into question and basic rights are at risk.

Lewis, John & Aydin, Andrew. *March: Book One*. *March* is a vivid first-hand account of John Lewis' lifelong struggle for civil and human rights, meditating in the modern age on the distance traveled since the days of Jim Crow and segregation.


Shabazz, Ilyasah. *X: A Novel*. Cowritten by Malcolm X’s daughter, this riveting and revealing novel follows the formative years of the man whose words and actions shook the world.


Life Stories: Exploring Experiences, Cultivating Understanding

Some sites have opted to choose books that explore how experiences shape identity, generating discussions on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability. Sites will sometimes have a preexisting group of teens who show an active interest in a certain area of identity, which can be used as a starting point to draw teens to the program. Other sites, use books like these to draw in new teens who might be underrepresented in youth programming. All suggested texts explore different kinds of experiences as a way to cultivate deeper understanding of the ways in which we live our lives and learn about the world around us.

Abdel-Fattah, Randa. *The Lines We Cross*. An engaging romance within a compelling exploration of the sharply opposing beliefs that tear people apart, and how those beliefs can be transformed through human relationships.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Chains*. Set in New York City at the beginning of the American Revolution, *Chains* addresses the price of freedom both for a nation and for individuals. Isabel tells the story of her life as a slave.
- Flake, Sharon. *You Don't Even Know Me: Stories and Poems About Boys*. This collection of original stories and poems provides rare insight into the minds of adolescent African American boys.
- Green, John & Levithan, David. *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Two teens with the same name, running in two very different circles, suddenly find their lives going in new and unexpected directions, and culminating in epic turns-of-heart and the most fabulous musical ever to grace the high school stage.
- McCall, Guadalupe Garcia. *Under the Mesquite*. Lupita, a budding actor and poet in a close-knit Mexican American immigrant family, comes of age as she struggles with adult responsibilities during her mother's battle with cancer in this young adult novel in verse.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. Presented as a screenplay of Steve's own imagination, and peppered with journal entries, the book shows how one single decision can change our whole lives.
- Neri, G. *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty*. A compelling graphic dramatization based on events that occurred in Chicago in 1994. This gritty exploration of youth gang life will force readers to question their own understandings of good and bad, right and wrong.
- Reynolds, Jason. *When I Was the Greatest*. This gritty, triumphant novel captures the heart and the hardship of life for an urban teen.
- Robert, Na’ima. *Boy vs. Girl*. A coming-of-age story about the tensions which play themselves out within families and between cultures.
- Saenz, Benjamin Alire. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Aristotle is an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. Through their friendship Ari and Dante will learn the most important truths about themselves and the kind of people they want to be.
- Stork, Francisco. *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*. The story of a friendship that helps two young men become all they can be.
- Thomas, Angie. *The Hate You Give*. Sixteen-year-old Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her unarmed friend Khalil by a police officer.
- Velásquez, Liliana. *Dreams and Nightmares*. The autobiography of Liliana Velásquez, who fled from her village in Guatemala to the United States alone when she was 14.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. In vivid poems, Woodson shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s.
Dystopian fiction has been popular in many TRL sites. Past sites have found that teens are often very interested in discussing perspectives that differ from their own, and facilitators have found it natural to use the rules of the dystopian world to generate discussion about relevant social issues through debates and activities. This list focuses on books that portray compelling worlds that have diverse protagonists and interesting angles on pressing real-world issues.

- **Aslan, Austin. *The Islands at the End of the World.* In this fast-paced survival story set in Hawaii, electronics fail worldwide, the islands become completely isolated, and a strange starscape fills the sky. Leilani’s epilepsy holds a clue to the disaster, if only they can survive as the islands revert to earlier ways.
- **Dos Santos, Steven. *The Culling.* Recruitment Day is here...if you fail, a loved one will die. For Lucian Lucky Spark, Recruitment Day means the Establishment, a totalitarian government, will force him to become one of five Recruits competing to join the ruthless Imposer task force.
- **Duyvis, Corinne. *Otherbound.* Teenage Nolan, who lives in Arizona, can see the world through the eyes of Amara, a voiceless servant girl from another realm who speaks an entirely different language.
- **Hopkinson, Nalo. *Falling in Love With Hominids.* Hopkinson’s Afro-Caribbean, Canadian, and American influences shine in truly unique stories that are filled with striking imagery, unlikely beauty, and delightful strangeness.
- **Jones, Stephen Graham. *Mongrels.* A spellbinding and darkly humorous coming-of-age story about an unusual boy, whose family lives on the fringe of society and struggles to survive in a hostile world that shuns and fears them.
- **Krasnostein, Alisa & Rios, Julia. *Kaleidoscope: Diverse YA Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories.* Kaleidoscope collects fun, edgy, meditative, and hopeful YA science fiction and fantasy with diverse leads.
- **London, Alex. *Proxy.* A science-fiction adaptation of *Whipping Boy* where poorer proxies must pay for the crimes of society’s wealthiest members.
- **Lu, Marie. *Legend.* From very different worlds, June and Day have no reason to cross paths - until the day June's brother, Metias, is murdered and Day becomes the prime suspect.
- **Myers, Walter Dean. *On a Clear Day.* It is 2035. Teens, armed only with their ideals, must wage war on the power elite.
Older, Daniel Jose. *Shadowshaper*. With the help of a fellow artist named Robbie, Sierra discovers shadowshaping, a magic that infuses ancestral spirits into paintings, music, and stories. But someone is killing the shadowshapers one by one.


Tahir, Sabaa. *An Ember in the Ashes*. Tyrannical leaders and a building rebellion set the stage for dual narrators, Elias, one of the elite, trained from a young age to become a skilled assassin for the Commandant at Blackcliff Military Academy, and Laia, one of the oppressed, forced into the role of spy and saboteur.

Various authors, *Diverse Energies*. In this collection of original and rediscovered stories of tragedy and hope, the diverse stars are students, street kids, "good girls," kidnappers, and child laborers pitted against their environments, their governments, and sometimes one another as they seek answers in their dystopian worlds.

Vaughn, Brian K. & Alphona, Adrian. *Runaways*. Teenage fugitives Nico, Gert, Karolina, Chase and Molly are survivors. After learning their parents were secretly super villains, the kids discovered special skills of their own and toppled their parents' criminal empire.

Wilson, G. Willow & Alphona, Adrian. *Ms. Marvel* series. Kamala Khan is an ordinary girl from Jersey City - until she is suddenly empowered with extraordinary gifts.

Yancy, Rick. *The Fifth Wave*. After the 1st wave, only darkness remains. After the 2nd, only the lucky escape. And after the 3rd, only the unlucky survive. After the 4th wave, only one rule applies: trust no one.

**YA BOOK LISTS & BOOK RESEARCH RESOURCES**


**Social Justice Book List (NNSTOY)**

**Young Adult Library Association (YALSA)**’s mission is to support library staff in alleviating the challenges teens face, and in putting all teens – especially those with the greatest needs – on the path to successful and fulfilling lives. YALSA also provides extensive book lists for YA groups. Check out their [Book Finder Database](http://booklists.yalsa.net/) to search and find YA titles, including YALSA’s “Best Of” selections.
Library Services for Youth in Custody (LSYC) is an organization serving the needs of and advocating for those who provide library services for youth in custody, which would include incarcerated/detained/committed youth in both juvenile and adult settings in municipal, county, local, state, or federal settings, including ICE detention centers and youth in secure mental health or rehab settings, and include at-risk youth in other forms of group-home or government custody. Each year they publish their popular “In The Margins Book List”: http://www.youthlibraries.org/what-lsyc.

School Library Journal (SLJ) is the premier publication for librarians and information specialists who work with children and teens. A source of quality journalism and reviews for more than 60 years, SLJ produces award-winning features and news coverage on: literacy, best practices, technology, education policy and other issues of interest to the school library and greater educator community. They evaluate a broad range of resources, from books and digital content to databases, in 6000+ reviews published annually: http://www.slj.com/.

We Need Diverse Books™ is a grassroots organization of children’s book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people. We recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities: http://weneeddiversebooks.org/.

Scholastic was founded in 1920 as a single classroom magazine. Today, Scholastic books and educational materials are in tens of thousands of schools and tens of millions of homes worldwide, helping to Open a World of Possible for children across the globe. Their mission is to encourage the intellectual and personal growth of all children, beginning with literacy. Great site for book ideas and programming/reading resources: http://www.scholastic.com/home/.

The Book Report Network aims to connect the public with thoughtful book reviews, compelling features, in-depth author profiles and interviews, excerpts of the hottest new releases, contests and more every week. We hope you’ll visit our websites and discover why since 1996 The Book Report Network has been the best place online to talk about your last great read --- and find your next one. Homesite for Teenreads.com and Graphic Novel Reporter: http://www.bookreporter.com/

- Teenreads.com is a website with an extensive book lists, reviews written for and by teens, blogs on books for teens: http://www.teenreads.com/teenreadscom-ultimaterreading-list.
- Graphic Novel Reporter is a website with extensive reviews of graphic novels and comic books: http://www.graphicnovelreporter.com/

Social Justice Books is an offshoot of the website Teaching for Change: Building Social Justice Starting in the Classroom and offers a comprehensive list of books on social justice
organized by age group: https://socialjusticebooks.org/. Teaching for Change also offers lesson plans and other resources on the topic: http://www.teachingforchange.org.

Other book-related websites:

- Good Reads: http://www.goodreads.com/
- Diamond Bookshelf: Graphic Novel Resource for Educators and Librarians: http://www.diamondbookshelf.com/Home/1/1/20/1
- Nerdy Book Club: https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/about/
- Reader Girlz Website: http://www.readergirlz.com/issue.html
- The Ultimate YA Bookshelf http://www.ala.org/yalsa/professionaltools/yabookshelf