

Book Recommendations for Middle Schoolers

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Every now and then, people would ask me for book recommendations for their middle school aged student. “Are there any *good* books out there that my kid will like?” they ask. Acknowledging that there are books not all teens will like, let’s define what is meant by a “good” book for the purpose of these recommendations. For teenagers, good books provide IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional quotient) perspective. In terms of IQ, books that give adolescents a point of view other than their own so they can expand their horizons would make great books. Teens will read plenty of sources bolstering their IQ through school, so this list offers only a couple suggestions in this area. In terms of EQ, teens will really benefit and grow from reading first-person narratives so they can learn to empathize and identify with the main character. In the case of auto-biographical writing, we benefit from the author’s perspective and voice. In an age where we need to develop more student leadership, compassion, and

solidarity, I recommend the following:

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

In a collection of poems, award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson offers her readers insight into what it was like growing up African American in South Carolina and New York in the 1960s and 1970s. She gives a child's perspective of increasing awareness during the Civil Rights movement, as well as her personal coming-of-age experiences as a young writer.

Dragon Hoops by Gene Luen Yang

When the pandemic put a halt to all sports (professional and amateur sports) in March 2020, this graphic novel about Bishop O'Dowd High School's basketball team trying to win the California State Championship was published at just the right time! With no televised games, my family and I all read Gene Yang's inspiring story of how individual and collective transformation begins with taking a small step of faith towards overcoming obstacles.

Hello, Universe by Erin Entrada Kelly

A third-generation Japanese American, a shy Filipino boy, and a third generation neighborhood bully makes a girl who is hard of hearing, and up the diverse cast of characters in this book. They all just finished 6th grade

at the same school and through a mean prank, their lives intersect. This Newberry award-winning novel brings attention to the theme that despite what we may appear to be on the outside, we all face the same insecurities and challenges on the inside.

Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai

The pain of the Vietnam War, separation from homeland and family, and experiencing a new life as an outsider in a different county are all intimately and vividly portrayed in Thanhha Lai's poems. For teenagers who may not understand or may not have encountered trauma, the words expressed in *Inside Out and Back Again* will give youth a medium to connect with unfamiliar experiences.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey

Teenagers are full of potential, but how do they hone in on practices that will yield a beneficial, successful outcome for their future? The seven habits outlined in this book will help teens align all their energy so they know how to make their goals become a reality.

Stamped, Racism, Antiracism, and You by Jason Reynolds

In light of the Black Lives Matter movement that gained momentum in 2020, I really wanted to understand the historical perspective of racism in America. This book

by Jason Reynolds is a remix of Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*. Using a voice that is relatable to youth, Reynolds "connects-the-dots" in the big picture of racism in our nation. It has opened my eyes to historical and current laws that have kept Black people from a life of freedom and liberty.

Happy Reading!

Jaime

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