

Young Adult Conversation Starters: Race and Racism

We hope this list provides our families a common starting ground for conversations on race and racism. It is by no means exhaustive, as the body of literature published from the diaspora of Black voices continues to grow, but has been curated from award winners and experts in the field of reading. We have added, where possible, discussion questions and educator's guides to assist with starting these conversations with our community's families.

An important note: If you're new to #OwnVoices or the #WeNeedDiverseBooks movement, or looking for a place to start incorporating more diverse reads into your shelves, there are some awards you should know about to help guide your reading in the beginning. Some of the books in this list crossover multiple awardships, that's how you know they're really *really* good. If you're looking for more reading beyond this, we suggest looking at:

[Coretta Scott King Award Winners](#)

"The Coretta Scott King Book Awards are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values. The award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and honors his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood." - ALA

Another award to look at is the:

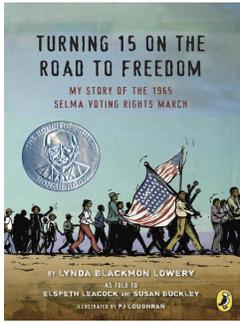
[National Book Award for Young People's Literature.](#)

"The National Book Foundation is guided by the following core beliefs:

- Books are essential to a thriving cultural landscape
- Books and literature provide a depth of engagement that helps to protect, stimulate, and promote discourse in American society
- Books and literature are for everyone, no matter where the reader is situated geographically, economically, racially, or otherwise" - National Book Awards Mission & History

While these two awards are by no means exhaustive of the dearth of Youth Literature Awards out there, they reflect the best of the best in their fields. Our librarians are happy to recommend other awards archives for you to dive into while on the hunt for more diverse reads! For now, please consider adding the following books to the top of your family's "To Be Read" Pile.

Award Winners

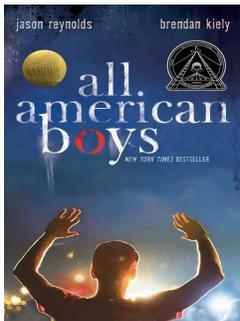


Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights Act March ([Overdrive](#))

Lynda Blackmon Lowery

[\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“As the youngest marcher in the 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, Lynda Blackmon Lowery proved that young adults can be heroes. Jailed eleven times before her fifteenth birthday, Lowery fought alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. for the rights of African-Americans. In this memoir, she shows today's young readers what it means to fight nonviolently (even when the police are using violence, as in the Bloody Sunday protest) and how it felt to be part of changing American history.”



All American Boys ([Overdrive](#))

Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“A bag of chips. That's all sixteen-year-old Rashad is looking for at the corner bodega. What he finds instead is a fist-happy cop, Paul Galluzzo, who mistakes Rashad for a shoplifter, mistakes Rashad's pleadings that he's stolen nothing for belligerence, mistakes Rashad's resistance to leave the bodega as resisting arrest, mistakes Rashad's every flinch at every punch the cop throws as further resistance and refusal to STAY STILL as ordered. But how can you stay still when someone is pounding your face into the concrete pavement?

But there were witnesses: Quinn Collins—a varsity basketball player and Rashad's classmate who has been raised by Paul since his own father died in Afghanistan—and a video camera. Soon the beating is all over the news and Paul is getting threatened with accusations of prejudice and racial brutality. Quinn refuses to believe that the man who has basically been his savior could possibly be guilty. But then Rashad is absent. And absent again. And again. And the basketball team—half of whom are Rashad's best friends—start to take sides. As does the school. And the town. Simmering tensions threaten to explode as Rashad and Quinn are forced to face decisions and consequences they had never considered before.”



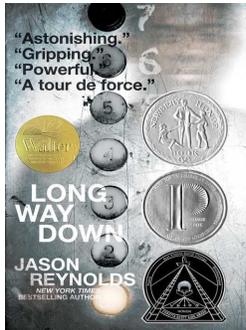
March: Book 1 ([Hoopla](#) | [Overdrive](#))

Sen. John Lewis

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“Book One spans John Lewis' youth in rural Alabama, his life-changing meeting with Martin Luther King, Jr., the birth of the Nashville Student Movement, and their battle to tear down segregation through nonviolent lunch counter sit-ins, building to a stunning climax on the steps of City Hall. Many years ago, John Lewis

and other student activists drew inspiration from the 1958 comic book *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. Now, his own comics bring those days to life for a new audience, testifying to a movement whose echoes will be heard for generations.”



Long Way Down ([Overdrive](#))

Jason Reynolds

[[Discussion Guide](#)] | [[Educator Guide](#)]

“A cannon. A strap.

A piece. A biscuit.

A burner. A heater.

A chopper. A gat.

A hammer

A tool

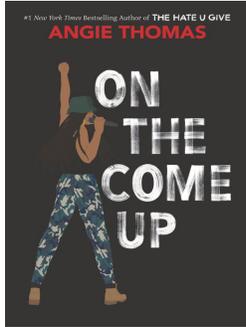
for RULE

Or, you can call it a gun. That's what fifteen-year-old Will has shoved in the back waistband of his jeans. See, his brother Shawn was just murdered. And Will knows the rules. No crying. No snitching. Revenge. That's where Will's now heading, with that gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, the gun that was his brother's gun. He gets on the elevator, seventh floor, stoked. He knows who he's after. Or does he?

As the elevator stops on the sixth floor, on comes Buck. Buck, Will finds out, is who gave Shawn the gun before Will took the gun. Buck tells Will to check that the gun is even loaded. And that's when Will sees that one bullet is missing. And the only one who could have fired Shawn's gun was Shawn. Huh. Will didn't know that Shawn had ever actually USED his gun. Bigger huh. BUCK IS DEAD. But Buck's in the elevator?

Just as Will's trying to think this through, the door to the next floor opens. A teenage girl gets on, waves away the smoke from Dead Buck's cigarette. Will doesn't know her, but she knew him. Knew. When they were eight. And stray bullets had cut through the playground, and Will had tried to cover her, but she was hit anyway, and so what she wants to know, on that fifth floor elevator stop, is, what if Will, Will with the gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, MISSES.

And so it goes, the whole long way down, as the elevator stops on each floor, and at each stop someone connected to his brother gets on to give Will a piece to a bigger story than the one he thinks he knows. A story that might never know an END...if Will gets off that elevator.”



On the Come Up ([Overdrive](#))

Angie Thomas

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#)

“Sixteen-year-old Bri wants to be one of the greatest rappers of all time. Or at least win her first battle. As the daughter of an underground hip hop legend who died right before he hit big, Bri's got massive shoes to fill.

But it's hard to get your come up when you're labeled a hoodlum at school, and your fridge at home is empty after your mom loses her job. So Bri pours her anger and frustration into her first song, which goes viral . . . for all the wrong reasons.

Bri soon finds herself at the center of a controversy, portrayed by the media as more menace than MC. But with an eviction notice staring her family down, Bri doesn't just want to make it—she has to. Even if it means becoming the very thing the public has made her out to be.

Insightful, unflinching, and full of heart, *On the Come Up* is an ode to hip hop from one of the most influential literary voices of a generation. It is the story of fighting for your dreams, even as the odds are stacked against you; and about how, especially for young black people, freedom of speech isn't always free.”



The Hate U Give ([Overdrive](#))

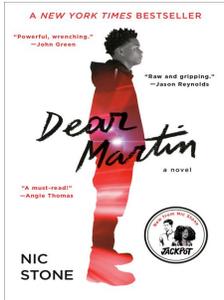
Angie Thomas

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed.

Soon afterward, his death is a national headline. Some are calling him a thug, maybe even a drug dealer and a gangbanger. Protesters are taking to the streets in Khalil's name. Some cops and the local drug lord try to intimidate Starr and her family. What everyone wants to know is: what really went down that night? And the only person alive who can answer that is Starr.

But what Starr does—or does not—say could upend her community. It could also endanger her life.”



Dear Martin ([Hoopla](#) | [Overdrive](#))

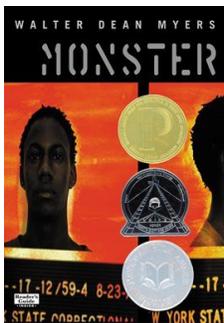
Nic Stone

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“Justyce McAllister is a good kid, an honor student, and always there to help a friend—but none of that matters to the police officer who just put him in handcuffs. Despite leaving his rough neighborhood behind, he can't escape the scorn of his former peers or the ridicule of his new classmates.

Justyce looks to the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for answers. But do they hold up anymore? He starts a journal to Dr. King to find out.

Then comes the day Justyce goes driving with his best friend, Manny, windows rolled down, music turned up—way up, sparking the fury of a white off-duty cop beside them. Words fly. Shots are fired. Justyce and Manny are caught in the crosshairs. In the media fallout, it's Justyce who is under attack.”

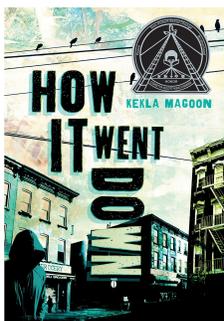


Monster ([Overdrive](#))

Walter Dean Myers

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“Young, black 16-year-old Steve Harmon, an amateur filmmaker, is on trial for the murder of a Harlem drugstore owner and could face the death penalty. Steve copes by writing a movie script based on his trial. But despite his efforts, reality is blurred until he can no longer tell who he is or what the truth is.”



How it Went Down ([Overdrive](#))

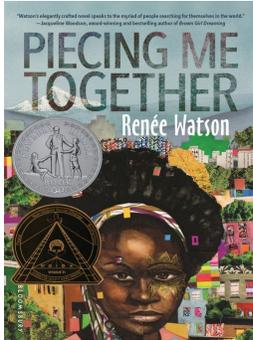
Kekla Magoon

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“When sixteen-year-old Tariq Johnson dies from two gunshot wounds, his community is thrown into an uproar. Tariq was black. The shooter, Jack Franklin, is white.

In the aftermath of Tariq's death, everyone has something to say, but no two accounts of the events line up. Day by day, new twists further obscure the truth.

Tariq's friends, family, and community struggle to make sense of the tragedy, and to cope with the hole left behind when a life is cut short. In their own words, they grapple for a way to say with certainty: This is how it went down.”

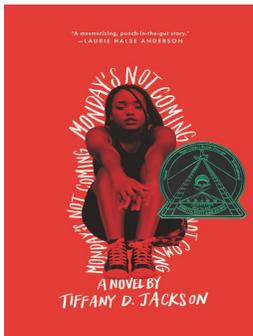


Piecing Me Together ([Overdrive](#))

Renee Watson

[\[Discussion /Educator Guide\]](#)

“Jade believes she must get out of her poor neighborhood if she's ever going to succeed. Her mother tells her to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way. And Jade has: every day she rides the bus away from her friends and to the private school where she feels like an outsider, but where she has plenty of opportunities. But some opportunities she doesn't really welcome, like an invitation to join Women to Women, a mentorship program for "at-risk" girls. Just because her mentor is black and graduated from the same high school doesn't mean she understands where Jade is coming from. She's tired of being singled out as someone who needs help, someone people want to fix. Jade wants to speak, to create, to express her joys and sorrows, her pain and her hope. Maybe there are some things she could show other women about understanding the world and finding ways to be real, to make a difference.”



Monday's Not Coming ([Overdrive](#))

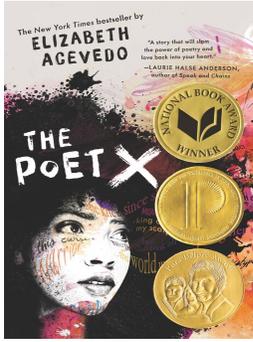
Tiffany D. Jackson

[\[Discussion Guide\]](#)

“Monday Charles is missing, and only Claudia seems to notice. Claudia and Monday have always been inseparable—more sisters than friends. So when Monday doesn't turn up for the first day of school, Claudia's worried.

When she doesn't show for the second day, or second week, Claudia knows that something is wrong. Monday wouldn't just leave her to endure tests and bullies alone. Not after last year's rumors and not with her grades on the line. Now Claudia needs her best—and only—friend more than ever. But Monday's mother refuses to give Claudia a straight answer, and Monday's sister April is even less help.

As Claudia digs deeper into her friend's disappearance, she discovers that no one seems to remember the last time they saw Monday. How can a teenage girl just vanish without anyone noticing that she's gone?”



The Poet X ([Overdrive](#))

Elizabeth Acevedo

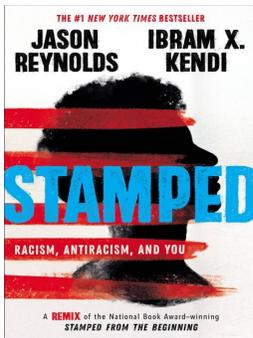
“Xiomara Batista feels unheard and unable to hide in her Harlem neighborhood. Ever since her body grew into curves, she has learned to let her fists and her fierceness do the talking.

But Xiomara has plenty she wants to say, and she pours all her frustration and passion onto the pages of a leather notebook, reciting the words to herself like prayers—especially after she catches feelings for a boy in her bio class named Aman, who her family can never know about.

With Mami's determination to force her daughter to obey the laws of the church, Xiomara understands that her thoughts are best kept to herself. So when she is invited to join her school's slam poetry club, she doesn't know how she could ever attend without her mami finding out. But she still can't stop thinking about performing her poems.

Because in the face of a world that may not want to hear her, Xiomara refuses to be silent.”

New and Notable Reads

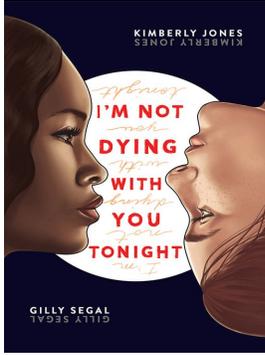


New! Stamped--Racism, Antiracism, and You ([Overdrive](#))

Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

“The construct of race has always been used to gain and keep power, to create dynamics that separate and silence. This remarkable reimagining of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's National Book Award-winning *Stamped from the Beginning* reveals the history of racist ideas in America, and inspires hope for an antiracist future. It takes you on a race journey from then to now, shows you why we feel how we feel, and why the poison of racism lingers. It also proves that while racist ideas have always been easy to fabricate and distribute, they can also be discredited.

Through a gripping, fast-paced, and energizing narrative written by beloved award-winner Jason Reynolds, this book shines a light on the many insidious forms of racist ideas—and on ways readers can identify and stamp out racist thoughts in their daily lives.”



I'm Not Dying With You Tonight ([Overdrive](#))

Kimberly Jones and Gilly Segal

[\[Discussion Questions\]](#) | [\[Educator's Guide\]](#)

“Lena has her killer style, her awesome boyfriend, and a plan. She knows she's going to make it big. Campbell, on the other hand, is just trying to keep her head down and get through the year at her new school.

When both girls attend the Friday-night football game, what neither expects is for everything to descend into sudden mass chaos.

Chaos born from violence and hate. Chaos that unexpectedly throws them together.

They aren't friends. They hardly understand the other's point of view. But none of that matters when the city is up in flames, and they only have each other to rely on if they're going to survive the night.”

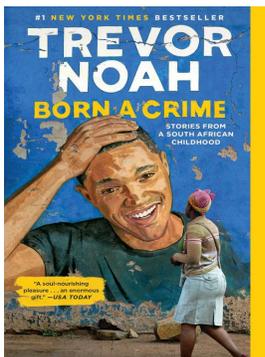


Stella by Starlight ([Overdrive](#))

Sharon M. Draper

“Stella lives in the segregated South—in Bumblebee, North Carolina, to be exact about it. Some stores she can go into. Some stores she can't. Some folks are right pleasant. Others are a lot less so. To Stella, it sort of evens out, and heck, the Klan hasn't bothered them for years. But one late night, later than she should ever be up, much less wandering around outside, Stella and her little brother see something they're never supposed to see, something that is the first flicker of change to come, unwelcome

change by any stretch of the imagination. As Stella's community—her world—is upended, she decides to fight fire with fire. And she learns that ashes don't necessarily signify an end.”



Born a Crime ([Overdrive](#))

Trevor Noah

“Born a Crime is the story of a mischievous young boy who grows into a restless young man as he struggles to find himself in a world where he was never supposed to exist. It is also the story of that young man's relationship with his fearless, rebellious, and fervently religious mother—his teammate, a woman determined to save her son from the cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse that would ultimately threaten her own life.

The stories collected here are by turns hilarious, dramatic, and deeply affecting. Whether subsisting on caterpillars for dinner during hard times, being thrown from a moving car during an attempted kidnapping, or just trying to survive the life-and-death pitfalls of dating in high school, Trevor illuminates his curious world with an incisive wit and unflinching honesty. His stories weave together to form a moving and searingly funny portrait of a boy making his way through a damaged world in a dangerous time, armed only with a keen sense of humor and a mother's unconventional, unconditional love.”

Additional Resources

https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/beyond_golden_rule.pdf

<https://childrensalliance.org/resource/talking-about-racism-resources-parents-and-caregivers>

<https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/>

<https://educationpost.org/tag/teens-talk-about-racism/>

<https://www.mother.ly/child/talking-to-kids-about-racism-age-by-age>