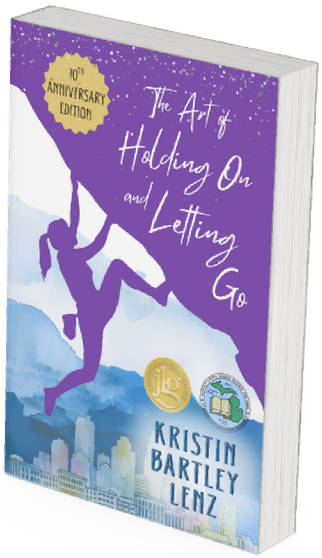
TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING

Book List

1 THE ART OF HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

Young Adult (12+)

Kristin Bartley Lenz



JANDY NELSON meets JOHN GREEN grounded in a world of rock climbing.

Not every loss comes with an ending. How do you hold on—and let go?

"When every piece falls into place, it's like a dance, a delicate but powerful balancing act. The art of holding on and letting go at the same time."

Competitive climber Cara Jenkins feels most at home high off the ground, clinging to a rock wall by her fingertips.

Raised by mountaineering parents, she's grown up roaming the world, making the natural landscape her playground and the writings of Annie Dillard and Henry David Thoreau her guides. But when tragedy interrupts an expedition on an Ecuadorian mountaintop, Cara's nomadic life is abruptly upended. Sent to live with her grandparents in suburban Detroit, Cara begins a year of unexpected discovery—finding friendship, first love, humor, and moments of joy alongside grief. As she navigates what she may have lost, Cara learns that healing doesn't require certainty, and that love, connection, and even home can take shape in surprising ways, with moments of sparkle along the way.

THE ART OF HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO is a lyrical, high-stakes coming-of-age novel about a teenage elite climber forced to confront the limits of control—on the rock, in competition, and in love—when the people she trusts most disappear. It blends the physical intensity of competitive sports with the emotional interiority of literary YA, offering readers a story about courage that isn't just about strength, but about learning when to grip tighter—and when to release. Perfect for readers navigating ambition, fear, and the limits of control.

For readers who are drawn to the lyrical grief of THE SKY IS EVERYWHERE, the emotional honesty of LETTERS TO THE LOST, and the tender character-driven loss narratives of IF I STAY and THE FAULT IN OUR STARS.

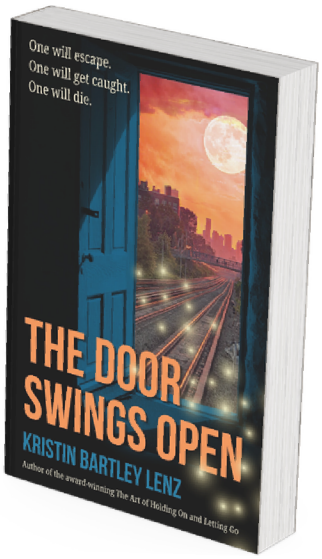
Why It's On This List

Rock climbing becomes an accessible lens for exploring grief and loss, the many layers of "holding on and letting go" that shape teens and the adults around them, and the ways relationships help us through our toughest times.

2 THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN

Young Adult (14+)

Kristin Bartley Lenz



When doors swing open,
the truth is more dangerous than imagined.

One will escape. One will get caught. One will die.

Sixteen-year-old Charlotte is drawn to a teen runaway shelter—fleeing a home unraveling around her war-haunted, veteran father. The full truth: her former best friend, Ella, disappeared after a brief stay at the same shelter, and Charlotte is convinced the adults have missed something dark beneath the surface. Inside the shelter, tension builds around Jolie, a terrified girl hiding from dangerous people, and Aiden, a magnetic runaway who senses more than he can explain and may know exactly what happened to Ella. As Charlotte retraces Ella's last days through a city of abandoned houses, empty lots, and thin places where the ordinary world seems to hold more than it reveals, she uncovers a frightening world of manipulation, sexual trafficking, and vulnerable teens slipping through the cracks.

Told through an unforgettable chorus of narrators, human and inanimate, from the teens themselves to the rooms, streets, and objects that watch over them, The Door Swings Open blends literary suspense, mystery, and a thread of magical realism into a story about trauma, intuition, exploitation, grief, and the invisible ways young people learn to survive when the adults meant to protect them fall short. It asks which missing girls are searched for, which are forgotten, and what it costs to tell a story you have been warned to keep quiet.

Written by licensed clinical social worker Kristin Bartley Lenz, the novel handles sexual exploitation and trafficking with sensitivity rather than sensation, and leaves room for hope, for connection, and for the fierce, ordinary courage of teenagers who refuse to look away. At its heart, this is a story about resilience and the deep bonds of friendship and family.

Why It's On This List

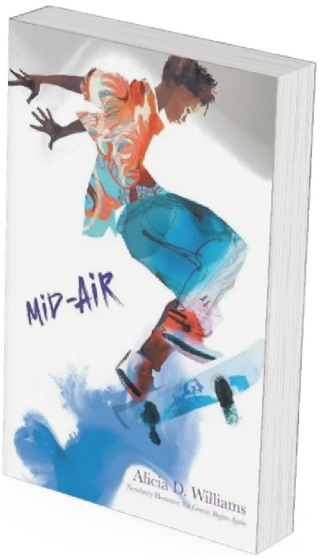
For readers who want a powerful, emotionally accessible look at the spectrum of sexual exploitation facing vulnerable teens today, wrapped inside a gripping, literary suspense story.

3

MID-AIR

Alicia D. Williams

Middle grade; novel in verse



A tender-souled boy reeling from the death of his best friend struggles to fit into a world that wants him to grow up tough and unfeeling in this stunning illustrated middle grade novel in verse "full of vulnerability and hope" (*Booklist*, starred review) from the Newbery Honor–winning author of *Genesis Begins Again*.

Longlisted for the National Book Award

It's the last few months of eighth grade, and Isaiah feels lost. He thought his summer was going to be him and his boys Drew and Darius, hanging out, doing wheelies, watching martial arts movies, and breaking tons of Guinness World Records before high school. But now, more and more, Drew seems to be fading from their friendship, and though he won't admit it, Isaiah knows exactly why. Because Darius is...gone.

A hit and run killed Darius in the midst of a record-breaking long wheelie when Isaiah should have been keeping watch, ready to "CAR!" Now, Drew can barely look at Isaiah. But Isaiah, already quaking with ache and guilt, can't lose two friends. So, he comes up with a plan to keep Drew and him together—they can spend the summer breaking records, for Darius.

But Drew's not the same Drew since Darius was killed, and Isaiah being Isaiah isn't enough for Drew anymore. Not his taste in clothes, his love for rock music, or his aversion to jumping off rooftops. And one day something unspeakable happens to Isaiah that makes him think Drew's right. If only he could be less sensitive, more tough, less weird, more cool, less him, things would be easier. But how much can Isaiah keep inside until he shatters wide open?

Why It's On This List

A multi-layered story about grief, friendship, and the hurts we carry in secret, told in accessible verse. Isaiah experiences a cascade of life changes and losses which ultimately lead to insight, facing hard truths, and growing more confident and comfortable with his own identity.

4 SIMON SORT OF SAYS

Erin Bow

Middle grade



From award-winning author Erin Bow, *Simon Sort of Says* is a breathtaking testament to the lasting echoes of trauma, the redemptive power of humor, and the courage it takes to move forward without forgetting the past.

Simon O'Keeffe's biggest claim to fame should be the time his dad accidentally gave a squirrel a holy sacrament. Or maybe the alpaca disaster that went viral on YouTube. But the story the whole world wants to tell about Simon is the one he'd do anything to forget: the story in which he's the only kid in his class who survived a school shooting.

Two years after the infamous event, twelve-year-old Simon and his family move to the National Quiet Zone—the only place in America where the internet is banned. Instead of talking about Simon, the astronomers who flock to the area are busy listening for signs of life in space. And when Simon makes a friend who's determined to give the scientists what they're looking for, he'll finally have the chance to spin a new story for the world to tell.

Why It's On This List

The author takes particular care to not vividly describe the school shooting. Instead, the book focuses on how Simon is dealing with the world in the aftermath and how he manages to build new community and connections that provide a brave space for him to open up and trust others. Readers experience Simon's traumatic responses and learn how this horrific event changes how he interacts with the world on a daily basis. We meet Agate, who is autistic and obsessed with gross facts, and Simon's mom, who is a mortician. These characters offer Simon another way to process mortality and trauma from a healthy distance. Simon doesn't want the trauma he experienced to be central to how people see him. Through the book, he learns how to cope with this tragedy that has shaped him and how to build new realities for himself through meaningful relationships.

5

HURRICANE CHILD

Kacen Callender

Middle grade



Winner of the Lambda Literary Award and the Stonewall Book Award.

Caroline Murphy is a Hurricane Child.

Being born during a hurricane is unlucky, and 12-year-old Caroline has had her share of bad luck lately. She's hated and bullied by everyone in her small school on St. Thomas of the US Virgin Islands, a spirit only she can see won't stop following her, and—worst of all—Caroline's mother left home one day and never came back.

But when a new student named Kalinda arrives, Caroline's luck begins to turn around. Kalinda, a solemn girl from Barbados with a special smile for everyone, becomes Caroline's first and only friend—and the person for whom Caroline has begun to develop a crush.

Now, Caroline must find the strength to confront her feelings for Kalinda, brave the spirit stalking her through the islands, and face the reason her mother abandoned her. Together, Caroline and Kalinda must set out in a hurricane to find Caroline's missing mother—before Caroline loses her forever.

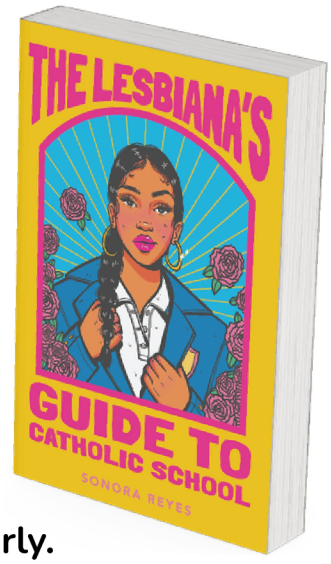
Why It's On This List

Spoiler alert: Caroline's mother is still alive and has another family. This book invites readers to consider the impacts of mental health on parent-child dynamics as people navigate postpartum in unstable environments. This book also offers a glimpse into the turmoil one experiences when their sexuality and psychological experience must remain hidden.

6 THE LESBIANA'S GUIDE TO CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Young Adult (13+)

Sonora Reyes



National Book Award Finalist * William C. Morris YA Debut Award Finalist * Goodreads Finalist for Best Teen Book of the Year * Walter Honor Award Winner * Pura Belpré Honor Book * Lambda Literary Award Winner for LGBTQ+ Young Adult

One new school. Two queer girls.
And a foolproof plan to stay in the closet that's failing spectacularly.

A sharply funny and moving debut novel about a queer Mexican American girl navigating Catholic school, while falling in love and learning to celebrate her true self. Perfect for fans of Erika L. Sánchez, Leah Johnson, and Gabby Rivera.

Sixteen-year-old Yamilet Flores prefers to be known for her killer eyeliner, not for being one of the only Mexican kids at her new, mostly white, very rich Catholic school. But at least here no one knows she's gay, and Yami intends to keep it that way.

After being outed by her crush and ex-best friend before transferring to Slayton Catholic, Yami has new priorities: keep her brother out of trouble, make her mom proud, and, most importantly, don't fall in love. Granted, she's never been great at any of those things, but that's a problem for Future Yami.

The thing is, it's hard to fake being straight when Bo, the only openly queer girl at school, is so annoyingly perfect. And smart. And talented. And cute. So cute. Either way, Yami isn't going to make the same mistake again. If word got back to her mom, she could face a lot worse than rejection. So she'll have to start asking, WWSGD: What would a straight girl do?

Told in a captivating voice that is by turns hilarious, vulnerable, and searingly honest, The Lesbiana's Guide to Catholic School explores the joys and heartaches of living your full truth out loud.

Why It's On This List

An underlying detail that impacts Yamilet and her brother is that their father has been deported. They communicate over Facetime until Yamilet comes out to her father and he distances himself from her. She experiences the loss of this relationship with her father while also navigating the secrets she keeps from her family and the homophobia she navigates at her Catholic school.

7

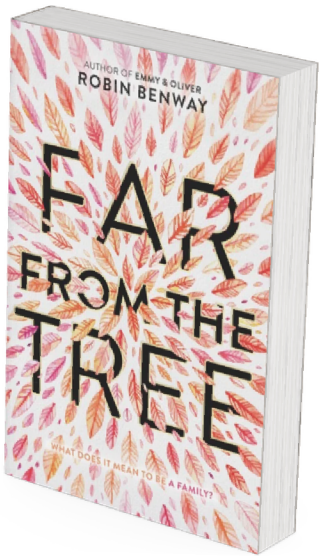
FAR FROM THE TREE

Young Adult (12+)

Robin Benway

National Book Award winner

What does it mean to be a family?



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.

Why It's On This List

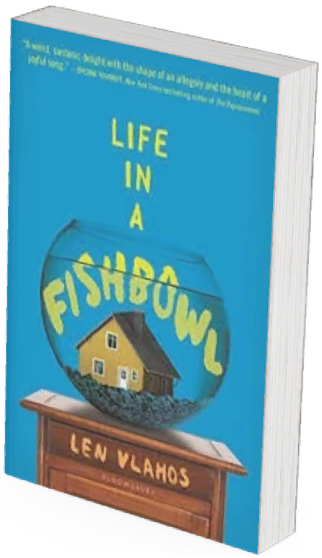
This book offers a look at three siblings dealing with ambiguous loss caused by adoption and distance or total disconnection from their biological parents. Joaquin, the non-white sibling, has been the most negatively impacted by the foster care system. The story highlights how racism exacerbates the impact of ambiguous loss and further divides families.

8

LIFE IN A FISHBOWL

Young Adult (14+)

Len Vlahos



A humorous story of death, media manipulation, and family."
-*Publishers Weekly* starred review

In this brilliantly written tragicomedy from acclaimed Morris finalist Len Vlahos comes a story about a girl whose dying father does the unthinkable–puts his life up for auction online.

When fifteen-year-old Jackie discovers that her father has been diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor, her whole world starts to crumble. She can't imagine how she'll live without him.

Then, in a desperate act to secure his family's future, Jackie's father does the unthinkable–he puts his life up for auction on eBay. Jackie can do nothing but watch and wait as an odd assortment of bidders, some with nefarious intentions, drive the price up higher. The fate of her entire family hangs in the balance.

But no one can predict how the auction will finally end, or any of the very public fallout that ensues. Life as Jackie knows it is about to change forever...

Fifteen-year-old Jackie Stone is a prisoner in her own house. Everything she says and does 24/7 is being taped and broadcast to every television in America. Why? Because her dad is dying of a brain tumor and he has auctioned his life on eBay to the highest bidder: a ruthless TV reality show executive at ATN.

Gone is her mom's attention and cooking and parent-teacher conferences. Gone is her sister's trust ever since she's been dazzled by the cameras and new-found infamy. Gone is her privacy. Gone is the whole family's dignity as ATN twists their words and makes a public mockery of their lives on Life and Death. But most of all, Jackie fears that one day very soon her father will just be . . . gone. Armed only with her ingenuity and the power of the internet, Jackie is determined to end the show and reclaim all of their lives, even in death.

Why It's On This List

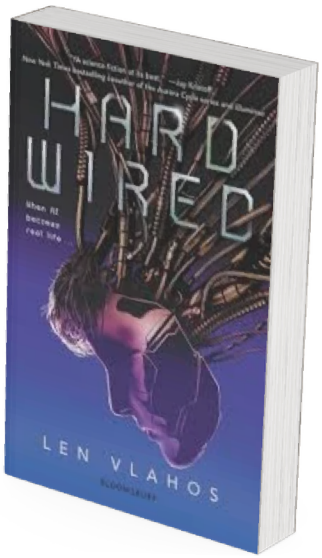
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9

HARD WIRED

Young Adult (14+)

Len Vlahos



Acclaimed Morris Award finalist Len Vlahos pens a high-stakes contemporary-rooted sci-fi that asks big questions about humanity.

From Morris finalist Len Vlahos comes a contemporary sci-fi story about a boy who might not be human—for fans of *Westworld* and *Black Mirror*.

Quinn thinks he's a normal boy with an average life. That is, until he finds a trail of clues the father he barely knew left behind.

After Quinn unravels his father's puzzles, he "wakes up" ... and realizes his world was nothing more than a virtual construct. In reality, he's the first fully-aware A.I. in the world, part of an experiment run by a team of scientists—including the man he thought was his father.

As the scientists continue to study him, Quinn's new existence becomes a waking nightmare. Determined to control his own destiny, he finds allies in other teens—including crush Shea—and plots his escape. But what does true freedom look like when you're not human?

Why It's On This List

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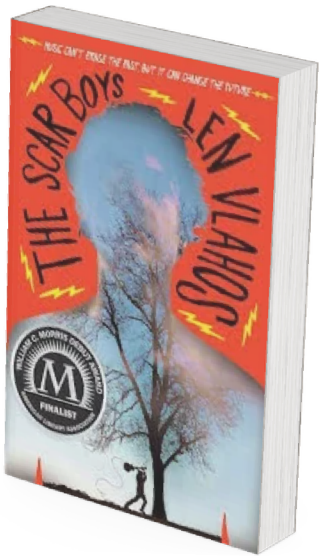
10

THE SCAR BOYS

Young Adult (14+)

Len Vlahos

2015 William C. Morris YA Debut Award Finalist



A severely burned teenager. A guitar. Punk rock. The chords of a rock 'n' roll road trip in a coming-of-age novel that is a must-read story about finding your place in the world . . . even if you carry scars inside and out.

In attempting to describe himself in his college application essay–to "help us to become acquainted with you beyond your courses, grades, and test scores"–Harbinger (Harry) Jones goes way beyond the 250-word limit and gives a full account of his life.

The first defining moment: the day the neighborhood goons tied him to a tree during a lightning storm when he was 8 years old, and the tree was struck and caught fire. Harry was badly burned and has had to live with the physical and emotional scars, reactions from strangers, bullying, and loneliness that instantly became his everyday reality.

The second defining moment: the day in eighth grade when the handsome, charismatic Johnny rescued him from the bullies and then made the startling suggestion that they start a band together.

Harry discovered that playing music transported him out of his nightmare of a world, and he finally had something that compelled people to look beyond his physical appearance. Harry's description of his life in his essay is both humorous and heart-wrenching. He had a steeper road to climb than the average kid, but he ends up learning something about personal power, friendship, first love, and how to fit in the world. While he's looking back at the moments that have shaped his life, most of this story takes place while Harry is in high school and the summer after he graduates.

Why It's On This List

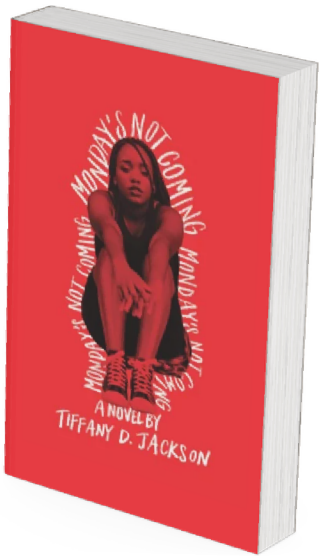
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11 MONDAY'S NOT COMING

Young Adult (14+)

Tiffany D. Jackson

2015 William C. Morris YA Debut Award Finalist



A severely burned teenager. A guitar. Punk rock. The chords of a rock 'n' roll road trip in a coming-of-age novel that is a must-read story about finding your place in the world . . . even if you carry scars inside and out.

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?

Why It's On This List

When Monday stops coming to school, her best friend Claudia is left searching for answers while the adults around her fail to respond. The novel offers a powerful entry point for discussing ambiguous loss, the uncertainty surrounding someone's disappearance, and what it means for a young person's absence to go unnoticed.