

Yalsa Best Of The Best

The 100 Best Books for Young Adults

History was made on June 23 and 24 in Chicago when the 127 participants in YALSA's 2005 Best of the Best Preconference met, deliberated, debated, discussed, and, in due course, selected the 100 best books for young adults published during the significant decade 1994–2003. It was, indeed, a significant decade, since this ten-year span was a period of remarkable renaissance for a genre that many observers had actually pronounced “near death” as recently as the early 1990s.

Context for the deliberations was provided through a series of presentations and panel discussions that began with an evening session examining teen trends and demographics. Presentations continued throughout the next day, beginning with a panel on the current state of the art of young adult literature, continuing with a noontime panel conversation among local teens about their reading, and concluding with an afternoon discussion of the impact of the internet on YA literature and publishing. Then it was time to reveal the hundred titles on the list that follows.

How were these titles—judged by their selectors to be “the best of the best”—selected? The glib answer, of course, is “very carefully.” But the better answer is through the Preconference Committee's exacting planning and the enthusiastic participation of the ten YALSA members who volunteered to serve as discussion leaders.

Here's how the process worked: Each participant who registered for the preconference was assigned to one of ten discussion groups—one for each year from 1994 through 2003. Ultimately, each group would select the

top ten books published during its year. Both adult and young adult books were eligible, with particular attention given to books that had appeared on the annual Best Books for Young Adults lists and—beginning in 1998 and 2000, respectively—the Alex Award and Printz Award lists. Participants were also invited to submit meritorious titles that had been overlooked by the original compilers of these lists. Naturally, this meant prodigious amounts of reading—anywhere from 50 to 100 titles. It also meant prodigious pre-preconference discussion, most of which took place online. Participants' remarkable commitment of time and energy paid off, however, for the groups arrived in Chicago with manageably sized lists of books that were judged to be both user friendly *and* notable for their literary merit. The payoff, the real fun—and the passion—came in the on-site discussions that determined the final choices.

Are they truly the best of the best? Well, here they are. What do *you* think?—*Michael Cart, Preconference Chair*

Fiction

Alvarez, Julia. *In the Time of the Butterflies*. 1994.

Dede and her three sisters, “Las Mariposas,” turn from being interested in hair ribbons to gunrunning and acts of political sabotage against the despotic Dominican Republic dictator, Trujillo.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Fever 1793*. 2000.

Sixteen-year-old Matilda survives the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia and

learns important lessons about self-reliance and perseverance.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. 1999.

Melinda is shunned by her friends when they don't understand the reason she called the police during a party.

Anderson, M. T. *Feed*. 2002.

Teenagers Titus and Violet live in a future where corporations define the lives of Americans, and it's common for parents to endow their newborns with the Feed—a minicomputer with an Internet connection that's implanted in a child's head.

Barron, T. A. *The Lost Years of Merlin*. 1996.

Emrys, a young boy who washes ashore with no memory, travels to the mythical land of Fincayra to discover his true parentage and destiny.

Bauer, Joan. *Hope Was Here*. 2000.

Sixteen-year-old Hope and her aunt move from Brooklyn to Mulhoney, Wisconsin cooking up a storm.

Bauer, Marion Dane (ed.). *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*. 1994.

Sixteen short stories, told from gay and lesbian perspectives by popular young adult authors, explore pride, individuality, and struggle.

Block, Francesca Lia. *Baby Be-Bop*. 1995.

Sixteen-year-old Dirk struggles to come to terms with being gay, fearful that family and friends will no longer love or accept him.

Block, Francesca Lia. *Girl Goddess #9*. 1996.

Movie stars, rock stars, pond nymphs, intergalactic superheroes . . . who are the real goddesses in Block's world? Real young

- women—the kind who ache, bleed, dance, and talk to blue ghosts in closets.
- Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine*. 1997.
Is Tangerine, Florida, like the Bermuda Triangle? A sinkhole swallows the middle school, lightning strikes repeatedly, underground fires burn endlessly—and all newcomer Paul Fisher wants to do is play soccer, despite his thick glasses, his parents' indifference, and his evil brother.
- Brashares, Ann. *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. 2001.
Four lifelong high-school friends and a magical pair of jeans take summer journeys to discover love, disappointment, and self-realization.
- Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Shadow*. 1999.
Alien monsters threaten Earth's future. Will a tiny superintelligent kid be able to lead his older comrades to victory?
- Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. 1999.
The hilarious, heartbreaking tale of Charlie, a high-school wallflower in full bloom.
- Cofer, Judith Ortiz. *An Island Like You*. 1995.
Twelve beautifully written stories capture the pain and joy of teens growing up Puerto Rican in a New Jersey barrio.
- Cohn, Rachel. *Gingerbread*. 2002.
When sixteen-year-old Cyd Charisse is sent to New York to stay with her biological dad, she gets to know not only her older brother and the sister who calls her "Daddy's Little Indiscretion" but also herself.
- Cormier, Robert. *Heroes*. 1998.
Eighteen-year-old Francis returns home from World War II with his face blown off and a mission to murder the childhood hero he feels betrayed him.
- Cormier, Robert. *Tenderness*. 1997.
Fifteen-year-old Lori loves eighteen-year-old serial killer Eric Poole.
- Cormier, Robert. *The Rag and Bone Shop*. 2001.
When twelve-year-old Jason is questioned as a witness in a young girl's murder investigation, he doesn't realize that the interrogation, by a skilled detective, will become a matter of life and death.
- Crutcher, Chris. *Ironman*. 1995.
When he calls his teacher an asshole in class, Bo is forced to attend an anger management program, where he learns to deal with his real problem—his cruel father.
- Crutcher, Chris. *Whale Talk*. 2001.
Multiethnic T. I. leads a high-school swim team of nonconformists on a quest for varsity letter jackets.
- Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. 1995.
Because Kenny Watson's older brother Byron is fast becoming a juvenile delinquent, the family drives from Detroit to Birmingham so Grandma can straighten him out.
- Cushman, Karen. *Catherine, Called Birdy*. 1994.
Fighting fleas, unsuitable suitors, and her mother's attempts to make a lady of her, Catherine writes in her diary about her frustrations with her life as a young noblewoman in medieval times.
- Donnelly, Jennifer. *A Northern Light*. 2003.
Set in upstate New York in 1906, against the background of a true murder case, Mattie fights her family and the societal constraints of the times to become her own person. A 2004 Printz Honor Book.
- Farmer, Nancy. *A Girl Named Disaster*. 1996.
When her family arranges her marriage to a cruel man with three wives, Nhamo escapes by canoe to seek a better future.
- Farmer, Nancy. *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*. 1994.
When General Matsika's three children are kidnapped after leaving the safety of their armed compound, their mother hires the best detective team available in 2194 Zimbabwe—the appropriately named mutant partners the Ear, the Eye, and the Arm.
- Farmer, Nancy. *The House of the Scorpion*. 2002.
In a world where human clones are a reality and drug lords rule, Matt discovers the horrible secret of his creation and El Patron's despicable plans for him. A 2003 Printz Honor Book and a 2003 Newbery Honor Book.
- Flake, Sharon G. *The Skin I'm In*. 1998.
Her extremely dark complexion makes thirteen-year-old Malleka the butt of jokes and an outcast—until her teacher shows her that she can accept herself.
- Fleischman, Paul. *Whirligig*. 1998.
After killing a girl when driving drunk, Brent Bishop learns a lot about himself and life when he's forced to pay for his crime by traveling to the four corners of the United States to build whirligigs in her memory.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breathing Underwater*. 2001.
After Nick's girlfriend Caitlin has a restraining order issued against him, he is forced to come to grips with his anger and low self-esteem.
- Frank, E. R. *America*. 2002.
Troubled foster child America reveals the sad confusion of his short life to sympathetic Dr. B., the one adult who may be able to help him.
- Frank, E. R. *Life Is Funny*. 2000.
Growing up in New York can be agonizing, humorous, and always a challenge for the teens who tell their stories.
- Giles, Gail. *Shattering Glass*. 2002.
When charismatic Rob decides to make Simon, the school nerd, "Mr. Popularity," nobody believes he can do it. Little do they know.
- Going, K. L. *Fat Kid Rules the World*. 2003.
A chance encounter with a homeless teenage punk rocker rescues obese seventeen-year-old Troy from himself. A 2004 Printz Honor Book.
- Haddix, Margaret. *Among the Hidden*. 1998.
After remaining hidden for twelve years because the population police want to eliminate all third children, Luke finally has hope for a future when he learns there are others like him.
- Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. 2003.
Christopher, a fifteen-year-old autistic teen who can solve quadratic equations in his head but can't bear to be touched, solves the mystery of who murdered his neighbor's dog.

Hautman, Pete. *Mr. Was*. 1996.

After witnessing his mother's brutal murder by his father, Jack Lund escapes through a mysterious attic door and finds himself fifty years in the past.

Hobbs, Will. *Far North*. 1996.

Stranded in the Canadian wilderness, two boys endure a brutal subarctic winter of bear, wolf, and moose attacks while they repeatedly struggle to escape.

Holt, Kimberly Willis. *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. 1999.

The summer of 1971 is pretty dull until Zachary Beaver, the fattest boy in the world, arrives and best friends Toby and Cal befriend him.

Johnson, Angela. *The First Part Last*. 2003.

Passages that alternate between the past and present tell the story of Bobbie, a teenage father in New York City who first appeared in Johnson's *Heaven*. Winner of the 2004 Michael L. Printz Award and the Coretta Scott King Author Award.

Klass, David. *You Don't Know Me*. 2001.

John, a fourteen-year-old social misfit from a small town, copes with an abusive home life and being an outcast at school by living outside himself.

Klause, Annette Curtis. *Blood and Chocolate*. 1997.

Beautiful teenage werewolf Vivian falls in love with Aiden, a human—a meat-boy—and longs to share her secret with him.

Kluger, Steve. *Last Days of Summer*. 1998.

"Dear Mr. Banks, I am a twelve-year-old boy and I am dying of an incurable disease" begins the first of many letters sent by determined, perfectly healthy Joey Margolis to tough-talking, loose cannon Charlie Banks, rookie third baseman for the New York Giants. Filled with energy, heart, and laugh-out-loud humor, this poignant epistolary novel looks at loneliness, friendship, and love in a way that both transfixes and transcends its 1940s setting.

Korman, Gordon. *Son of the Mob*. 2002.

Vince wants nothing to do with "the family business," but he can't help becoming

involved when he discovers that his girlfriend's dad is the FBI agent assigned to bring his own father to justice.

Lawrence, Iain. *The Lightkeeper's Daughter*. 2002.

A teenage mother returns to reconcile with her lighthouse-keeping parents despite her feeling that it was their lonely lifestyle that led to her brother's death.

Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted*. 1997.

Imagine this: Cinderella's real problem isn't her cruel stepmother and stepsisters, it's just that she cannot refuse a direct command from anyone.

Levithan, David. *Boy Meets Boy*. 2003.

In a novel set in a mythical, free-spirited high school with many openly gay students, Paul tries to balance a new relationship with Noah while still caring for his ex Kyle.

Marsden, John. *Letters from the Inside*. 1994.

With each letter, teenage pen pals Tracey and Mandy share personal experiences, each fearing the future—then Tracey's letters come back stamped "Return to Sender."

Marsden, John. *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. 1995.

When they return from a wilderness camping trip, Ellie and her friends are shocked to discover Australia has been invaded and soon find fighting and surviving have become their way of life.

McDonald, Joyce. *Swallowing Stones*. 1997.

Depression, guilt, and fear plague Michael's dreams after a stray bullet from his rifle kills a man.

Mosher, Richard. *Zazoo*. 2001.

When Zazoo, almost fourteen, sees the handsome young man on the black bicycle, her life changes, and she must face never-explored questions about her past and the past of her beloved Grand-Pierre.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. 1999.

In this riveting courtroom drama, Steve Harmon recounts his trial for murder in the form of a movie script. The 2000 Printz Award winner and a 2000 Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor Book.

Nix, Garth. *Lirael*. 2001.

Apprentice librarian Lirael discovers that the library guards' magic allows her to conjure Disreputable Dog, who accompanies her on a quest to stop the dead from waging war on the living.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Habibi*. 1997.

Fourteen-year-old Palestinian American Liyana Abboud must learn to fit into a new world and understand the political conflicts when her family moves from St. Louis to Jerusalem.

Pattou, Edith. *East*. 2003.

Rose journeys to a land "east of the sun and west of the moon" to break the curse of the Troll Queen.

Philbrick, Rodman. *The Last Book in the Universe*. 2000.

In this futuristic urban dystopia, a chance meeting between an epileptic gang member and a genetically improved girl from the ruling class causes major changes in society.

Plum-Ucci, Carol. *The Body of Christopher Creed*. 2000.

Class freak Christopher Creed is missing. What happened? Why is his small town in an uproar? Where is Chris Creed's body? A 2001 Printz Honor book.

Porter, Connie. *Imani All Mine*. 1999.

An unwed mother narrates her journey to adulthood in an increasingly violent world.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. 1996.

With the aid of friends, witches, and armored polar bears, twelve-year-old Lyra fights the evil that is stealing children and conducting horrible experiments on them.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. 1999.

Harry's third year at Hogwarts is packed with adventure, mystery, and a dangerous new enemy.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. 1998.

With only a lightning-bolt scar on his forehead as a clue to his true identity, Harry Potter, by a twist of fate, leaves his unloving foster family for a life of wizardry and celebrity.

- Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. 2000.
Esperanza and her mother are forced to flee their life of privilege in Mexico and go to a farm labor camp in California.
- Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. 1998.
Stanley Yelnats is sentenced to Camp Green Lake, where he finds a treasure and puts an end to a long-running curse on his family.
- Shusterman, Neal. *The Dark Side of Nowhere*. 1997.
Feeling trapped and bored in his normal, peaceful hometown, Jason slowly learns that he and most of the townspeople are aliens.
- Silverstein, Shel. *Falling Up*. 1996.
Poor Screamin' Millie is just one of the unforgettable characters in this wondrous new book of poems and drawings by the creator of *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic*. Here you will also meet Allison Beals and her twenty-five eels; Danny O'Dare, the dancin' bear; the Human Balloon; and Headphone Harold.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. 2000.
Stargirl, an eccentric new student, sees life from a different angle, and her nonconformist behavior changes her classmates and their perceptions of popularity.
- Tashjian, Janet. *The Gospel According to Larry*. 2001.
Things go awry for Josh, a loner who calls himself "Larry" when he espouses anticongsumerism on his Web site.
- Taylor, Mildred. *The Land*. 2001.
In a prequel to the Newbery Medal winner *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Cassie Logan's grandfather, Paul Edward, tells of his heartbreaking but ultimately triumphant struggle to acquire the land that would become the Logan family legacy. Coretta Scott King Author Award.
- Thomas, Rob. *Rats Saw God*. 1996.
"Troubled teen" Steve York reflects on his life and his relationship with his famous father.
- Thompson, Craig. *Blankets*. 2003.
This semiautobiographical graphic novel explores a boy's trials and tribulations as an outcast at a zealous youth Bible camp where he meets the girl of his dreams.
- Vande Velde, Vivian. *Companions of the Night*. 1995.
Is Ethan really just an innocent college student kidnapped by vampire-hunting crazies? Sixteen-year-old Kerry, who saves him and loves him, finds that the allure of the vampire is alive and well.
- Voigt, Cynthia. *When She Hollers*. 1994.
Tish takes a knife and her destiny in hand on the day she decides to stop her father from sexually abusing her.
- Wallace, Rich. *Wrestling Sturbridge*. 1996.
Living in Sturbridge, Pennsylvania, where wrestling is king, high-school senior Benny must compete against his best friend for a spot on the team.
- Werlin, Nancy. *The Killer's Cousin*. 1998.
After David is acquitted of murder and moves in with his aunt and uncle, he finds his new home to be less safe and secure than he'd hoped.
- Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*. 2000.
A thirteen-year-old girl living in modern India is forced into an arranged marriage with a dying boy. As a teenage widow, she finds herself abandoned in a strange city.
- White, Ellen E. *The Road Home*. 1995.
Lt. Rebecca Phillips, who served as a combat nurse in Vietnam, comes to terms with what she experienced there as she tries to readjust to life in the United States.
- Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Like Sisters on the Homefront*. 1995.
When Gayle, a streetwise mother of fourteen, becomes pregnant again, she is sent south to stay with relatives.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love*. 1999.
Sixteen-year-old John meets fellow zine writer Marisol and falls in love with her, even though he knows she can't love him back. A 2000 Printz Honor Book.
- Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *True Believer*. 2001.
In this poetic sequel to *Make Lemonade*, LaVaughn finds that her changing goals and relationships bring both pain and joy. Michael L. Printz Honor Book.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. 1995.
Melanin Sun finds being a teenager is hard enough without learning that his mother's new boyfriend is a woman.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*. 1994.
Marie and Lena become friends despite race and class differences, but can their friendship protect Lena from the terrifying secret she is forced to keep?
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *If You Come Softly*. 1998.
Jeremiah, who is white, and Ellie, who is African-American, feel an immediate connection and then must cope with the reactions to their relationship by the people around them.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *Miracle's Boys*. 2000.
Three brothers grieve for their mother and try to remain a family after her death.

Nonfiction

- Alexander, Caroline. *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*. 1998.
How do twenty-eight men survive two years stranded in the Antarctic Ocean? Guts, luck, and an incredible leader. Fantastic photos!
- Bitton-Jackson, Livia. *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*. 1997.
Thirteen when she and her family were sent to Auschwitz, Bitton-Jackson vividly describes the horrors they faced.
- Calabro, Marian. *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party*. 1999.
A well-researched documentary of the famous Donner party, with special focus on the young people who were participants. Excellent photographs.
- Carlson, Lori M. (ed.). *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*. 1994.
Party times, hard times, memories, and dreams come to life in these English, Spanish, and Spanglish poems by twenty-nine Latino writers.

Colman, Penny. *Corpses, Coffins, and Crypts: A History of Burial*. 1997.

Colman's well-researched account of death and burial answers questions for the curious and satisfies a taste for the morbid.

Crowe, Chris. *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*. 2003.

Using archival photographs and primary sources, Crowe describes how the Mississippi murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till contributed to the civil rights movement.

Feelings, Tom. *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*. 1995.

Feelings' heartrending illustrations

document the horrific journey of slaves from Africa to America.

Fleischman, John. *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science*. 2002.

Phineas is never the same after a metal rod enters his head at the chin and comes out his forehead.

Gantos, Jack. *Hole in My Life*. 2002.

Gantos reveals how his involvement with drugs and his stint in prison led him to writing. A 2003 Printz Honor Book and a 2003 Sibert Honor Book.

Junger, Sebastian. *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men against the Sea*. 1997.

In 1991, as Halloween nears, a cold front

moves south from Canada, a hurricane swirls over Bermuda, and an intense storm builds over the Great Lakes. These forces converge to create the cruelest holiday trick of all, a one-hundred-year tempest that catches the North Atlantic fishing fleet off guard and unprotected.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. 1996.

Leaving a comfortable life behind for an adventurous one, Chris McCandless dies on a poorly planned hike in the Alaskan wilderness.

Murphy, Jim. *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*. 2003.

"A great first effort and an excellent product. Reluctant readers should find this a cinematic introduction to the graphic novel form, and a gateway to the world of reading. My students and I will look forward to seeing future adaptations."

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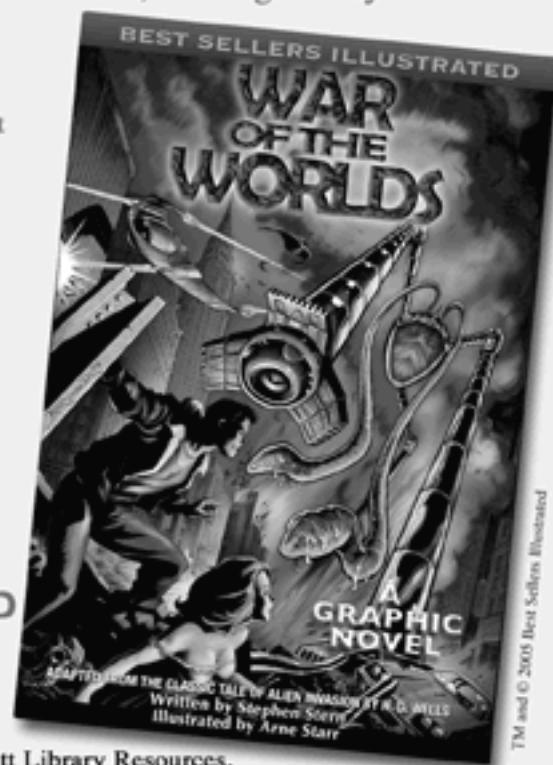
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In this gripping account, Murphy explores how yellow fever disrupted the federal government, divided the medical establishment, and destroyed the lives of thousands of Philadelphians. The 2004 Robert F. Sibert Medal winner and a Newbery Honor Book.

Nelson, Peter. *Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis*. 2002.

A school project eventually leads to the truth about the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis, the U.S. Navy's cover-up, and the court martial of the captain.

Opdyke, Irene Gut. *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Survivor*. 1999.

A Catholic girl forced to work as a housekeeper to a German officer in occupied Poland risks her life to hide and rescue Jewish workers during World War II.

Paulsen, Gary. *Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Running the Iditarod*. 1994.

Vividly bringing to life the Alaskan Iditarod, a dogsled race requiring intensive training, skill, endurance, and the ability to survive subzero temperatures, Paulsen highlights the dogs who made it possible for him to make it to the finish line.

Roach, Mary. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*. 2003.

Roach examines the afterlife of human cadavers in this humorous, touching, and

respectful look at how scientists utilize the human body.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Something Permanent*. 1994.

Rylant reinterprets Walker Evans' well-known Depression-era photographs in poetry that is as unforgettable as that extraordinary time in history.

Winick, Judd. *Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned*. 2000.

Told in graphic-novel form, cartoonist Winick's book chronicles his friendship with AIDS educator Pedro Zamora and their time on MTV's *Real World*. **YALS**

Guidelines for Authors

Young Adult Library Services is the official publication of the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association.

Young Adult Library Services is a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with young adults (ages twelve through eighteen) that showcases

current research and practice relating to teen services and spotlights significant activities and programs of the division.

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